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Cultivating Citizens: Ecology and Nationality in U.S. Immigrant Literature

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Abstract

“Cultivating Citizens: Ecology and Nationality in U.S. Immigrant Literature,” explores how and why American ecosystems became objects of appreciation, intervention, and attachment within immigration literature published during the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century. Fictional and nonfictional stories about US-bound immigrants represented naturalization and nationality as materializing through interactions within human/nonhuman assemblages—what we now call ecosystems. Novels and guidebooks by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Charles Sealsfield, Mary Anne Sadlier, and Jacob Riis incorporated nonfictional nature-centric genres, including natural history and travel writing, to frame national belonging through their characters’ knowledge of and conduct toward the environment. These immigrant writers interlaced environmental and civic discourses in their naturalization narratives, I argue, to imagine extralegal, cultural forms of citizenship that were cultivated by interacting with nature rather than acquired through formalized naturalization procedures. Combining insights from literary studies, immigration history, political theory, and new materialism, “Cultivating Citizens” foregrounds the imaginative dynamics of naturalization to illustrate how immigrant characters’ feelings of civic agency and national belonging emerged from their entanglements with American ecosystems. By analyzing stories about how immigrant characters become naturalized, “Cultivating Citizens” prioritizes cultural imaginaries over federal laws to reimagine the political and ecological histories of citizenship in American culture.

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Chapter One

Introduction:

The Political Ecology of Naturalization Narratives

“1. The action of admitting a foreigner or immigrant to the position and rights of citizenship, or of investing with the privileges of a native-born subject; the fact of being so admitted or invested.”

“2.b. The introduction of a plant or animal to a place where it is not indigenous, but where it can thrive and reproduce freely; (also) the process by which such a plant or animal subsequently becomes established.”

—“Naturalization,” *Oxford English Dictionary*

When answering the question, “What is an American?” in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, a French-born American farmer, capitalizes on the semantic plasticity of “naturalization” through his metaphor of “transplantation”:

Here they are become men: in Europe they were as so many useless plants, wanting vegetative mould and refreshing showers; they withered, and were mowed down by want, hunger, and war, but now, by the power of transplantation, like all other plants they have taken root and flourished! Formerly they were not numbered in any civil lists of their country, except in those of the poor; here they rank as citizens. (*Letters* 69)

Crèvecoeur’s botanical metaphor combines the political and biological valences of naturalization by locating it simultaneously within civic and environmental realms of being. When becoming an American, climates and soils matter just as much as civil institutions. Although Crèvecoeur

does not use the word “naturalization,” his description of becoming a citizen accords more with that term than “transplantation.” While transplantation and naturalization both referred to the relocation of people, plants, and animals to new countries, only naturalization carries the political connotations of becoming a citizen.¹ Crèvecoeur’s sense of American civic personhood combines environmental elements with social arrangements like “the air we breathe, the climate we inhabit, the government we obey, the system of religion we profess, and the nature of our employment” (71). Stressing that civic subjectivities are embedded within vast, interconnecting networks of human and nonhuman factors, Crèvecoeur presents naturalization, and the forms of citizenship it engenders, as being intimately linked to the enmeshment of European immigrants with the natural world.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, fictional and nonfictional stories by and about immigrants depicted naturalization through characters’ entanglements with the material environment. Stories about becoming American, or what I call “naturalization narratives,” transmitted scientific information and cultural ideas about the climates, soils, rivers, plants, and animals of the U.S. within and across national borders. Crèvecoeur portrayed the cultivation of coastal wetlands as an act of civic virtue in his sketches about immigrants who become Americans. Immigrant guidebook authors distinguished the soils and climates that were conducive to becoming an American from those that were not. Charles Sealsfield, an Austro-American sojourner and novelist, outlined how to counterbalance the environmental threats to the plantation and slave systems in the South. The immensely popular Irish-Canadian-American writer, Mary Anne Sadlier instructed her readers to eradicate urban slums and nativist xenophobia by relocating to the bucolic prairies of Iowa. Jacob Riis, a Danish immigrant and

¹ See “transplantation” in *Oxford English Dictionary*.

muckraking journalist, advocated razing the slums and replacing them with parks that would bring sunlight, fresh air, and flowers to immigrant populations and improve their civic character. This particular constellation of immigrant writers empowered prospective citizens to imagine numerous strategies for becoming naturalized, politically and environmentally, to the United States. By incorporating nature-centered discourses into their naturalization narratives, these writers represented virtuous citizenship through their immigrant characters' knowledge of and conduct toward the material world.

An investigation into the cultural and political functions of immigrant writing, "Cultivating Citizens: Ecology and Nationality in U.S. Immigrant Literature" argues that this understudied genre of literature imagines feelings of civic agency and national belonging—or citizenship—as emerging out of ecological entanglements during the "open door era." Marked roughly by the Naturalization Act of 1790 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the open door era is a metaphorical term that immigration scholars use to describe the hundred-year period when less restrictive federal naturalization laws bestowed citizenship to "any alien, being a free white person," and his wife and children.² Legal-centered analyses of naturalization necessarily concentrate on human subjects and, in so doing, miss the ecological implications of becoming a citizen. My analysis of immigrant offers a more kaleidoscopic view of naturalization by

² The temporal markers of the open door era vary across immigration scholarship. Although most historians agree that the period commences with the passage of the first naturalization act, some choose to end it with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act and others extend it as far as the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. On the periodization of U.S. immigration history, see Michael LeMay's *Guarding the Gates* (2006) and Ronald Schultz's "'Allegiance and land go together'" (2011). For studies that problematize this metaphor and develop strong alternatives to it, see Susan F. Martin's *A Nation of Immigrants* (2011) and Aristide Zolberg's *A Nation by Design* (2006).

reconsidering the presumption that it was automatic, perfunctory, and unremarkable during this period.³

When studying naturalization during the open door era, scholars have relied on Congressional debates, court battles, and naturalization laws and have largely forgotten about the novels and guidebooks produced by and for immigrants.⁴ Such top-down historiographic methods understandably invest more in the legal aspects of naturalization and less in its cultural and material forms. But because of this, they tend to regard naturalization as an exceptional event between an immigrant and the state, as something that occurs only once through a formal process codified in federal and state laws.⁵ Instead, immigrant literature represents naturalization as a reiterative series of everyday interactions that occur between immigrants, American citizens, Native Americans, Black Americans, and the ecosystems they inhabit that prospective citizens should practice in their own lives. As Crèvecoeur's botanical metaphor insinuates, naturalization is fundamentally mediated by social and ecological factors. It is not a monolithic citizen-making project but one that varies state-by-state, nationality-by-nationality, race-by-race, and ecosystem-by-ecosystem.

³ For law-centered studies of naturalization that assert it was unremarkable or perfunctory, see John Higham's "Integrating America" (1981), Michael LeMay's *Guarding the Gates* (2006), and Ronald Schultz's "'Allegiance and Land Go Together'" (2011).

⁴ See Roger Daniels's *Coming to America* (2001), Desmond King's *Making Americans* (2002), Susan Martin's *A Nation of Immigrants* (2011), or Rogers Smith's *Civic Ideals* (1997). For important bottom-up histories, see James Bergquist's *Daily Life in Immigrant America, 1820-1870* (2009) or Aristide Zolberg's *A Nation by Design* (2006).

⁵ On the history of early American naturalization laws, see Douglas Bradburn's *The Citizenship Revolution* (2009), Gerald L. Neuman's "Lost Century of American Immigration Law (1776-1875)" (1993), James E. Pfander and Theresa R. Wardon's "Reclaiming the Immigration Constitution of the Early Republic: Prospectivity, Uniformity, And Transparency" (2010), Smith's *Civic Ideals* (1997), and Siobhan Somerville's "Notes toward a Queer History of Naturalization" (2005).

The open door metaphor can generate somewhat inaccurate presumptions about nineteenth-century naturalization that my examination of immigrant literature begins to correct. According to historian John Higham, Americans worried very little about the sociocultural effects of their laissez-faire naturalization laws in the nineteenth century because “[a]ssimilation was either taken for granted or viewed as inconceivable” depending on a person’s race (“Integrating America” 7). Following Higham’s example, Ronald Schultz minimizes the cultural aspects of assimilation in favor of federal policies to argue that naturalization was a “simple procedure, less time-consuming and complicated than acquiring a driver’s license today” (149). Importantly though, he does not reduce naturalization to mere legal procedures, remarking “it was an automatic process guaranteed by the sedentary and dispersed nature of family farming” (157). By explicitly connecting naturalization to farming, Schultz implicitly identifies an environmental substrate to naturalization practices in the open door era—one that he does not explore at any depth. “Cultivating Citizens” takes this “sedentary and dispersed nature family farming” as its point of departure and use immigrant literature to show how writers represent naturalization as something cultivated, not automatic.

After all, if naturalization is connected to farming, as Schultz claims, then naturalization is intimately connected to particular kinds of relationships with the environment, as my dissertation proves. By focusing on stories by and about immigrants, “Cultivating Citizens” emphasizes the lived anxieties about the physiological effects of migrating to a new country and a new climate—anxieties that animate the plots of naturalization narratives. Despite acknowledging how “open-door policy” is an “agrarian-based system,” Schultz does not consider how environmental factors could prevent immigrants from participating in an agrarian-based naturalization system. Stories by immigrants do. If naturalization is an automatic process that

results from farming, then is farming unremarkable and easy? Stories by immigrants say, no. However, neither his nor Higham's approaches to naturalization account for its material aspects and, consequently, miss things that immigrant writers readily associated with becoming American during the nineteenth century: climates, rivers, lakes, soils, minerals, miasmas, insects, birds, plants, prairies, and bodies. Rather than treat naturalization as a discrete, straightforward process that occurs once in a formal situation through codified procedures, my analysis of immigrant writing examines how feelings of civic personhood, or citizenship, materialize in part from human/nonhuman assemblages that are composed of living and nonliving matter—what we now call ecosystems.⁶

My ecocritical approach to studying naturalization narratives shifts the emphasis in U.S. citizenship studies from federal laws to literary imaginaries.⁷ Although naturalization symbolizes “the transformative agency—the alchemy—of the state,” as Priscilla Wald contends, we must not lose sight of how immigrant literature explores extralegal forms of citizenship when narrating stories about becoming American. Attention to the forms, the aesthetics, and the circulation of naturalization narratives is critical because, as literary historian Cathy Schlund-Vials argues, the “tenets [of naturalization] give rise to plots, characterizations, and conflicts that intimately relate immigrant experiences through dominant nationhood, state-authorized selfhood, and affective belonging” (xviii). Immigrant literature introduces multivalent notions of Americanness that

⁶ My understanding of “ecosystem” and “ecology” is informed by Monique Allewaert's *Ariel's Ecology* (2013), Bruno Latour's *Politics of Nature* (2004), and Dana Phillips's *The Truth of Ecology* (2003).

⁷ My literary approach to naturalization, and the forms of citizenship it engenders, is influenced by Carrie Hyde's work on the extralegal histories of citizenship in the early United States. As Hyde argues, in the absence of fixed legal definitions of citizenship, antebellum Americans frequently turned to the cultural fabrications of citizenship that were articulated in more speculative genres such as literature, theology, and political philosophy. For my work, I add nature writing to this list. See Hyde's *Civic Longing* (2018).

cannot be detected by researching the law alone. As Schlund-Vials observes, naturalization is “a multi-sited” mechanism that incorporates “alien material” into social, racial, and political communities and “configure[s] different types of citizenship” (17). As I will show, naturalization narratives also incorporate immigrants into the nonhuman communities of living beings and nonliving matter that constitute the U.S. as a country. Privileging literature over law, “Cultivating Citizens” decenters human-to-state and human-to-human interactions in order to dissect the nature-centered modes of civic belonging that suffused immigrant writing during the open door era.

“Cultivating Citizens” brings attention to the imaginative, extralegal dimensions of naturalization by applying insights from ecocriticism, feminist science studies, critical race theory, and political theory to immigrant literature. It complements Monique Allewaert’s ecocritical genealogy of a minoritarian, or anticolonial, concept of personhood which was not equivalent to the metropolitan idea of the discrete, albeit abstracted, citizen-subject that formed through participation in print culture.⁸ Focusing on the dissolution, dissipation, and dismemberment of the bodies of slaves, maroons, and white travelers, Allewaert theorizes what she calls “ecological personhood,” or the state of being in which humans, particularly African Americans, found new forms of agency through their interrelations with nonhuman forces in the plantations of the American tropics (*Ariel’s Ecology* 10-17). A similar ontology subtends

⁸ In *The Letters of the Republic* (1990), Michael Warner posits that eighteenth-century Americans grounded their ideas of republican citizenship in the cultural formations of public and printed discourses. In short, the practice of reading and writing made a person legible as a citizen-subject. Allewaert develops an alternative to this model by focusing on the ecological entanglements that give rise to forms of personhood that are not reducible to the citizen-subject that Warner envisions. In turn, “Cultivating Citizens” examines how immigrant writers and readers used their ideas about their ecological entanglements to participate in American print culture, and thus I synthesize Allewaert and Warner to present a form of ecological citizenship.

nineteenth-century immigrant literature, but, rather than inhibiting the entry of immigrants into an American public, their entanglements with nature facilitate it! As “Cultivating Citizens” shows, an intimate knowledge about humans’ relationship to nature empowers immigrants to participate in American and transatlantic public culture as ecological citizens through a mode of literary discourse that I call “immigrant nature writing.”

—IMMIGRANT NATURE WRITING

From Germany, Ireland, England, France, and other European countries, millions of people migrated to the United States during the open door era.⁹ Whether alone, in small groups, or as entire communities, Europeans braved the dangerous passage across the Atlantic for different reasons, including economic necessity, religious freedom, political asylum, scientific discovery, or rip-roaring adventure. The term “immigrant” had yet to gain prevalence in American discourse prior to the Civil War. Instead, Americans spoke of European newcomers as “emigrants.”¹⁰ “Emigrant” did not refer to a person who was leaving the U.S., as it does now, but to any person who was migrating from one location to another, whether within or across national boundaries. This more capacious usage of “emigrant” covers a multitude of migratory

⁹ The exact number is difficult to determine because the United States did not begin tracking the number of immigrants until the 1820s. See *The Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (2008). These numbers do not reflect the African peoples who were forcibly brought here during the postrevolutionary period and illegally after 1808.

¹⁰ In “Nation of Immigrants: Do Words Matter?” Donna R. Gabaccia discusses the transition from “emigrants” to “immigrants” and its relationship to American myths that present the U.S. as “the nation of immigrants.” I do not find much reason to persist in using “emigrant” when my interest is primarily about U.S.-bound Europeans. I sometimes find the term “emigrant” to muddy the waters a bit. When studying novels and guidebooks, one must be careful to differentiate between emigrants who move across national borders and those who move within them. Rather than distinguish “internal emigrants” from “external emigrants” throughout the dissertation, I use contemporary terminology for concision and clarity.

experiences, including voluntary newcomers (people who choose to settle in another country permanently), exiles (people who are forced out of their native country because of political changes), asylum seekers (people who are fleeing from oppression), sojourners (people who plan long but not permanent visits), and refugees (masses of people who must leave their country as a matter of survival). Concerned about the realities of life in the United States, European immigrants worried about their actual prospects in the United States, despite the rosy veneer of exceptionalist mythologies that promised an inexhaustibly fertile land where everyone succeeded. Regardless of national origin, practical questions dominated their decision-making processes. Who should immigrate? Where? What should they bring with them? How much will it cost? Are there economic opportunities? Is the climate healthy?

Prospective immigrants gathered information about the United States, its cultural traditions, political norms, economic prospects, and environmental realities by consulting letters, pamphlets, guidebooks, poems, and novels. Immigrant literature circulated across the Atlantic, encouraging *and* discouraging migration to the United States. An extensive body of personal and professional writing that encompasses multiple literary genres and national traditions, immigrant literature refers, quite broadly, to fictional and nonfictional stories by or about people who move from one country to another.¹¹ Such a capacious definition allows me to bring together an

¹¹ My sense of immigrant writing is closely associated with what Eve Tavor Bannet and Juliet Shields call “migratory fiction.” Focusing on the literary exchange between Britain and America in the late eighteenth century, Bannet charts the movement of stories that “were about the transatlantic experiences of ordinary people and in the sense that they were reprinted on both sides of the Atlantic—preferably multiple times” (3). Defining “migratory fictions” similarly, Shields develops an “archipelagic” mode of criticism to demonstrate how definitions of Britishness emerge in relationship to the United States as English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish immigrants removed there. Together, their work signals the importance of turning to the complex transatlantic formations of national cultures during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See

assortment of novels, guidebooks, and other ephemeral texts about immigrant characters who move between countries, cultures, and climates.

Nineteenth-century immigrant literature was widely read in the United States and Europe. In fact, each of the writers on whom I focus was popular, often in multiple countries. Crèvecoeur's works were published in England, Ireland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States. Guidebooks, such as Gilbert Imlay's *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America* (1792) or Morris Birkbeck's *Letters from Illinois* (1818), ran through multiple editions before being falling into obscurity. Charles Sealsfield was so admired that many of his German-language novels were pirated and translated into English, French, and other languages. Mary Anne Sadlier was a bestseller in the Anglophonic Atlantic and had her works sold in the U.S., Canada, Ireland, and Great Britain. With the exception of Crèvecoeur, these writers have failed to make a lasting impression on the field of American literature, even after its transnational turn.¹² By recovering these and other immigrant authors' works, I am not making a claim for their canonicity but a case for their importance in understanding the transatlantic formation of environmental and civic imaginaries about the United States.

An underappreciated, yet fertile, body of environmental discourse, immigrant literature broadens our understanding of what typically constitutes American nature writing within literary criticism.¹³ Focusing on formal features and generic conventions, literary scholars typically

Bannet's *Transatlantic Stories and the History of Reading, 1720-1810* (2011) and Shields's *Nation and Migration* (2016).

¹² On the transnational turn in American studies, see Ralph Bauer's "Of Turns and Paradigm Shifts," Shelly Fisher Fishkin's "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies," Paul Giles's *Virtual Americas* (2002), and Donald Pease and Robyn Wiegman's *The Futures of American Studies* (2002).

¹³ Representations of nature in immigrant literature largely conform to Lawrence Buell's criteria for defining an "environmental text." Immigrant nature writing conjoins human history with

characterize nature writing as a nonfictional prose essay about the first-person narrator's excursion into nonhuman spaces where she has a transcendent emotional experience before returning home.¹⁴ Immigrant writers during the open door era rarely conformed to such criteria, which are derived from the writings of Henry David Thoreau. They relied on much more flexible models that were influenced by natural history, travelogues, pastoral literature, gothic stories, and picturesque sketches. My understanding of nature writings therefore diverges from its usual definitions and resonates more with Michael Branch's. Foregrounding the vibrancy and variety of early American literature, Branch expands nature writing to include "literary or nonliterary prose that substantially engages landscape, plants, animals, weather, or other natural phenomena, including human ideas about, responses to, and experiences within nature" (xxix). Branch's capacious sense of nature writing enables scholars to recognize more readily its plasticity within immigrant literature.

As "Cultivating Citizens" demonstrates, immigrant nature writing functions as a literary discourse and a material practice, both of which revolve around immigrants' aesthetic and ethical encounters with the environment. To be clear, I do not want to imply that immigrant nature writing only takes the form of printed material, even though I largely study it through printed naturalization narratives. Reducing nature writing to print can marginalize people who do not necessarily speak the same language but are still active citizens within a democratic polity such as the United States. Rather, immigrant nature writing translates the environment itself into a text

natural history. It details the responsibilities that humans have to their environment, even if these responsibilities are sometimes destructive. Finally, it characterizes the environment "*as a process rather than as a constant or a given*" (8). See *The Environmental Imagination* (1995).

¹⁴ On the (somewhat restrictive) parameters of American nature writing in ecocritical thought, see Thomas J. Lyon's *This Incomparable Land* (2001) and Dana Phillips's *The Truth of Ecology* (2003), 185-239.

that can be read and understood regardless of language. It transforms the interactions between humans and nonhumans into meaningful set of symbols that can be interpreted through cultural frameworks. Living on a farm or maintaining a garden, for example, can make immigrants legible as Americans within the public sphere even if they speak another language. Immigrants are not passive victims to either state or environmental pressures but active collaborators who shape and reshape the nation and its environments.

Cultivating a sense of place mattered a great deal for people writing for and about immigrants. J.H. Colton's *The Emigrant's Hand-book, or, A Directory and Guide for Persons Emigrating to the United States of America* (1848) begins by foregrounding the environment's significance for prospective immigrants: "A PERSON about to emigrate to, or visit a foreign country, naturally feels desirous of becoming acquainted with its geography and resources, and the condition and habits of the people among whom he is about to take up his residence" (3).¹⁵ Joining a vast body of immigrant guidebooks and novels, *The Emigrant's Hand-Book* stitches together details about the particularities of each state and territory as a way of helping Europeans imagine the ecosystems of the U.S. as well as its social customs, political institutions, and economic principles. Guidebooks, novels, and other forms of immigrant writing instructed immigrants on where to settle and how to avoid the potential environmental dangers that they would encounter in a new climate. Learning about their entanglements with new plants, animals, weather patterns, and people was crucial to their survival and their becoming American. In short,

¹⁵ *The Emigrant's Hand-book* was written and published by the New York mapmaker, J.H. Colton. Written for newly arrived European immigrants, it contained excerpts from other works, including Crèvecoeur's *Letters* and the U.S. Constitution. Colton's work primarily encouraged immigrants to go west to the Mississippi Valley where the climate was more suitable for their constitutions.

becoming American required an environmental vocabulary and set of practices that could be learned from fictional and nonfictional books.

In the same year as *The Emigrant's Hand-Book*, the popular German novelist and travel writer, Friedrich Gerstäcker dramatized the necessity of cultivating a sense of place in his first immigration novel, *Der deutschen Auswanderer Fahrten und Schicksale* (1848) [trans. *The Fortune and Wanderings of Some German Emigrants*, 1848]. His German characters are easily tricked into purchasing unhealthy, barren swamplands in western Tennessee because they know nothing about the location or its climate. Once in their fever-infested wasteland, the Germans cultivate ways of making sense of their environmental surroundings through familiar literary genres such as the pastoral and the gothic. Before departing for healthier settlements in Arkansas, Gerstäcker's immigrants employ literary modes—the pastoral and gothic—to ascertain their ecological entanglements and how these influence their feelings of belonging. Together, this English guidebook and German novel convey the nonliterary and literary modes of discourse through which immigrant nature writing cultivated ecological sensibilities.

Immigrant writers developed and disseminated ecological sensibilities, or ways of perceiving and understanding the interrelationship between human bodies and the nonhuman world in ways that are culturally meaningful. By synthesizing literary and scientific discourses, ecological sensibilities promote familiarity with the interconnected but aleatory systems of living beings and nonliving matter that people experience through their senses *and* imaginations. In his 1770 sketch, "Snow Storm as it affects the American Farmer," Crèvecoeur illustrates these feelings, writing: "No man of the Least Degree of Sensibility can Journey through any number of Years in whatever Climate, without often being Compelled to make many usefull observations

on the different Phenomenums of Nature which Surrounds him.”¹⁶ Unmoored from its associations with human-to-human emotional exchanges and moral sentiment, sensibility here indicates an acute responsiveness to and appreciation of nature and humans’ connections to it. Through ecological sensibilities, immigrants can recognize the embeddedness of humanity within natural and built spaces that are composed of plants, animals, miasmas, minerals, rocks, and climates, or what Jane Bennett would call “vibrant matter.”¹⁷ Cultivating ecological sensibilities enabled readers to identify how immigrant characters interpret and interact with nonhuman communities that are composed of living organisms and nonliving matter as they become naturalized.

Writers of naturalization narratives incorporated ecological sensibilities to teach immigrants how to read U.S. ecosystems as texts—that is, as a collection of symbols that signify. Adapting Serenella Iovino’s and Serpil Oppermann’s method for practicing material ecocriticism, I contend that immigrant nature writing illuminates how humans and nonhumans are knotted “in a vast network of agencies, which can be ‘read’ and interpreted as forming narratives, stories” that, for immigrants, reveal forms of belonging.¹⁸ However, without a

¹⁶ *More Letters from an American Farmer*, 142. See Denis Moore’s volume of Crèvecoeur’s unpublished English sketches as they were originally written.

¹⁷ Jane Bennett’s political ecology of things has been tremendously influential in how I theorize the emergence of citizenship in immigrant nature writing. Her term “vibrant matter” captures the imminent power of things to act in the world and very much resembles the feelings of nineteenth-century immigrants about the transformative power of nature. See Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* (2013). *Vibrant Matter* joins a much larger body of scholarship about materialism and the formation of agency, to which my dissertation contributes. See also Allewaert’s *Ariel’s Ecology* (2013), Diana Coole and Samantha Frost’s *New Materialisms* (2010), Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann’s *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), and Michael Ziser’s *Environmental Practice and Early American Literature* (2013).

¹⁸ See Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann’s *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), 1. Their essays “Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity” (2012) and “Theorizing Material Ecocriticism: A Diptych” (2012) have been influential in shaping the contours of

hermeneutic, knowing how to interpret an environment that is foreign to you is incredibly difficult and, for immigrant characters, dangerous. Therefore, writers of naturalization narratives included strategies for becoming more *sensible* the significance of the interactions between immigrants and nonhumans through easily consumable stories.

By cultivating ecological sensibilities through fictional and nonfictional genres, immigrant nature writers encouraged their readers to *read* and *interpret* their entanglements with nature in order to recognize the material danger to their bodies during naturalization. Identifying ecological sensibilities in immigrant writing requires what Timothy Sweet calls as a “biogeographical perspective.” A transnational approach for examining the continuities and discontinuities of American environmental writing, a biogeographical perspective emphasizes “the movements of persons in relation to ecosystems and the ongoing transformations of these ecosystems through new associations of human and nonhuman agents” (410). Sweet’s approach stresses the dialogic relationship between human bodies and ecosystems. It does not presuppose that ecosystems exist in a delicate balance that humans’ exploitative actions disrupt but, instead, posits that ecosystems are always in flux to some degree because of the migratory activities of both humans and nonhumans.

Concerns about the effects of these new associations inform the advice of guidebooks to prospective immigrants and the naturalization plots of immigrant novels throughout the open door era. The popular anti-immigration British guidebook *Look Before You Leap* (1796), for instance, warns English immigrants that American climates are “unfriendly to health and longevity; that the multifarious disorders arising from uncultivated and uncleared lands,

materialist ecocriticism, broadly and in my own work. Also see Iovino’s sole-authored essay, “Material Ecocriticism: Matter, Text, and Posthuman Ethics” (2012).

frequently prove fatal to the European fortune hunter” (xviii). By agitating uncultivated soils through plowing, immigrants release miasmatic matter into the air where it freely circulates in the wind infecting Europeans with bilious fevers. Three decades later in his pro-immigration guidebook, *Bericht über eine Reise nach den westlichen Staaten Nordamerikas* (1829) [*Report of a Journey to the Western States of North America*], Gottfried Duden similarly cautions his German readers that, when cultivating the lands, immigrants must be careful not to stir up the soils or else they will release miasmatic effluvia and spread diseases such as malaria or ague. Although oriented toward opposite goals, the British and German guidebooks both concentrate on the interactions between mobile human and nonhuman agents. Because unforeseen nonhuman forces can disrupt or destroy human life, immigrants must develop sensibilities that perceive and anticipate environmental risks as well as rewards.

Fostering different kinds of knowledge, ecological sensibilities found within immigrant literature correspond, in part, to emerging technologies that generate new ways of knowing, controlling, and surviving nonhuman organisms and worlds that otherwise seem ‘alien,’ ‘savage,’ or ‘risky.’ They often anticipate what Ursula Heise calls “the risk perspective”: a late-twentieth-century standpoint through which people perceive that “crises are already underway all around, and while their consequences can be mitigated, a future without their impact has become impossible to envision” (*Sense of Planet* 124). Culturally embedded modes of evaluating dangerous situations, risk perspectives combine scientific information about threats with popular narrative genres to disseminate this information easily and to prepare readers for danger.¹⁹

¹⁹ For more on risk and environmental literature, see the essays in *The Anticipation of Catastrophe: Environmental Risk in North American Literature and Culture* (2014), particularly those by Christine Gerhardt, Sylvia Mayer, Alexa Mehnert, and Alexa Weik von Mossner.

Rather than being purely objective metrics, risk-oriented ecological sensibilities can resist or reify narratives of American subjectivity that sanction ecological degradation, settler colonialism, slavery, and nativism, as my chapters will demonstrate. Within nineteenth-century naturalization, understanding risk was a constitutive element of a person's ecological sensibility because knowing how to identify danger helped a prospective citizen overcome moments of everyday environmental crisis (i.e. crop failures, heat waves, epidemics, droughts, wildfires, tornados, or pollution) that could otherwise result in death. For instance, Sealsfield's representation of the Southern swamps as gothic hellscapes not only familiarized his reader with dangers associated with this environment, but it also illustrated strategies for conquering these terrifying environments. Knowing how to cultivate a gothic swamp into a pastoral plantation made risky scenarios less horrifying and, therefore, more manageable, hence why they appear in some fashion in every text I analyze.

Through risk-based ecological sensibilities, immigrant nature writers constantly draw and redraw the nation's borders—the literal and figurative boundaries of what belongs and what does not—within and across human and nonhuman populations and spaces. They plot the networks of interdependencies and interrelations between humans, other organisms, and their material environments within a grid of intelligibility that is, I argue, delimited by topophobia (“fear of place”) and topophilia (“love of place”) and xenophobia (“fear of the foreign”) and xenophilia (“love of the foreign”). These affective categories streamline immigrant characters' phenomenological experiences of nature in the United States, aligning their ecological sensibilities (such as fear of swamps) with national norms (such as the cultivated farm). While ecocritics and cultural geographers have recognized how the cultivation of a sense of place revolves around affective relationships with space, my analysis of immigrant nature writing adds

another axis of analysis: attitudes toward foreignness.²⁰ This methodological turn exposes how immigration politics and environmental attitudes intersect within naturalization narratives, and it allows me to clarify how imagining national communities encompass vast networks of people, places, and nonhumans.

Immigrant nature writing puts some pressure on Benedict Anderson's famous argument that print capitalism served as the mechanism that made possible imagining one's self as belonging to a community of strangers who are connected through their simultaneous consumption of printed materials. "Cultivating Citizens" recasts Anderson's notion of imagined community in more ecocritical terms by concentrating on how people based their sense of belonging on shared natural environments as well—a move that Anderson's discussion of creole nationalism facilitates. Creole nationalism refers to the imagined communities of European settlers who colonized the Americas but were viewed as different from metropolitan citizens because of their births in foreign climates because, as Anderson states, "climate and 'ecology' had a constitutive impact on culture and character" (60).²¹ If creole nationalism was the precursor to modern American nationalities as Anderson argues, then our examinations of U.S. national belonging ought to consider how rocks, soils, climates, plants, rivers, animals, and other natural phenomena are used to foster the creation of imagined communities to which immigrants can become naturalized.

²⁰ By this, I mean that a person's love or fear of a place is informed by their perception of whether or not it is foreign. Moreover, this could also mean that this love or fear might also be influenced by the presence or absence of people who seem foreign—that is, as being an alien interloper in the national population.

²¹ See Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, 47-65. See also Egan's essay, "The 'Long'd-for Aera' of an 'Other Race,'" which discusses how English colonialists attempted to retain their English identities in the American colonials.

—THE CULTIVATION OF CITIZENSHIP

In order to theorize the co-production of environmental and civic imaginations during the open door era, I consider how immigrant writers imagined extralegal, cultural forms of citizenship that were cultivated through interacting with the material environment rather than acquired through formalized naturalization procedures.²² I use the phrases “cultivation of citizenship” and “cultivating citizenship” interchangeably to refer to the everyday activities that make immigrants and their environment culturally and politically legible as “American.” From Crèvecoeur to guidebook writers to Sealsfield to Sadlier, immigrant nature writers represent U.S. citizenship, in part, as a constellation of normative and normalizing environmental attitudes, behaviors, and duties that are supposed to optimize the biological, political, and economic security of both immigrants and the U.S. These writers’ naturalization narratives offer a rich archive for investigating the environmental contingencies that accompanied ideas about citizenship in the nineteenth century when very few citizenship laws were passed. Because so few laws were passed, literature about naturalization gives us new avenues for exploring the histories of American citizenship, especially before the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Stories about naturalization become particularly important for examining the dynamics of citizenship because, as Bonnie Honig argues in *Democracy and the Foreigner* (2003), immigrants are often imagined as either patriotic supercitizens or as unassimilable menaces. Immigrant characters discursively reveal what a national population ought to be and what it cannot be, who belongs and who does not, as Ali Behdad similarly argues in *Forgetful Nation* (2005). In immigrant nature writing, these politics of inclusion and exclusion extend beyond

²² On extralegal notions of American citizenship, see Berlant’s *The Anatomy of a National Fantasy* (1991) and *The Queen of America* (1997) as well as Hyde’s *Civic Longings* (2018).

human characters to include plants, animals, minerals, and climates. The interactions between immigrant characters and nature illustrate how feelings of citizenship are cultivated. The cultivation of citizenship reflects immigrant characters' ability (and inability) to govern themselves and, by extension, their environments. From Crèvecoeur's army of immigrants to Sealsfield's French noblemen to Sadlier's Irish peasants, immigrant characters symbolically become American by manipulating nature to conform to national norms.

When examining the intersections of immigration and the environment in U.S. history, recent scholarship in literary studies, environmental history, and political theory has fixated on xenophobic narratives that disparage immigrants for being what Sarah Jaquette Ray terms "ecological others."²³ Ecological others are people who seemingly neither know nor care about the health or longevity of the "nation as ecosystem," because they are perceived to lack the capacity or desire to assimilate their environmental conduct to predominant American norms.²⁴ For immigrants in the open door era, this otherness could manifest by not cultivating swamps or by living in tenement houses. Failure to appreciate the exceptional beauty of American landscapes could also mark an immigrant as a potential threat.²⁵ Anti-immigrant nativist

²³ On ecological nativism, see Peter Coates's *American Perceptions of Immigrant and Invasive Species* (2006), John Hultgren's *The Border Wall Gone Green* (2015), Sarah Jaquette Ray's *The Ecological Other* (2013), and Adam Rome's "Nature Wars, Culture Wars: Immigration and Environmental Reform in the Progressive Era" (2008).

²⁴ In explaining forms of environmental exclusion in American culture, Ray borrows the term "nation as ecosystem" from Priscilla Wald's *Contagious* (2008). As Wald states, this term helps "to imagine the nation as a discrete ecosystem with its own biological as well as social connections" (23). Ray applies this insight to formulate a corporeal ecocriticism, arguing that if the nation is an ecosystem then it is composed of material bodies. My own sense of cultivating citizenship emerges from these considerations of how nature and nation converge in American culture.

²⁵ See Adam Rome's "Nature Wars, Culture Wars: Immigration and Environmental Reform in the Progressive Era" (2008). Attending the use of the environment as a method of exclusion in the early twentieth century, Rome discusses how nativist groups imagined immigrants as being

movements have been quick to reiterate and disseminate these xenophobic narratives to justify restrictionist policies, but immigrant writers have been just as quick to discredit and subvert them, as “Cultivating Citizens” proves. While these xenophobic narratives about immigrants are important for understanding how the environment functions as an exclusionary apparatus, what interests me more are the more inclusionary representations of immigrants whose environmental conduct confirms their membership within U.S. communities.

Immigrant nature writing reconfigures naturalization as a process that cultivates ecological citizens—that is, white, middle-class men for whom the environment is an organizing component of their everyday thinking, behaving, imagining, and being. Definitions of ecological citizenship are highly contested and constantly in flux as literary scholars, political theorists, historians, and environmental activists debate its contours.²⁶ My analysis of ecological citizenship in immigrant naturalization narratives foregrounds issues of belonging, care, risk, appreciation, and eradication, while resisting the impulse to impose normative twenty-first-century standards of what constitutes good ecological citizenship onto nineteenth-century nature writing. I do not judge immigrants on whether or not they act to conserve or preserve nature—such would be unfairly anachronistic. Instead, I examine how they imagine the significance of their interactions with nature, how they imagine themselves as changing nature and nature changing them. To achieve this, I recognize how the cultivation of citizenship derives its import

incapable of appreciating American environments because they were too close to nature (read: animalistic/primitive). This same racializing concern was, as I will demonstrate, active in the nineteenth century as well. Together, Rome’s work and mine highlight how environmental sensibilities have long been part of American citizenship.

²⁶ On environmental subjectivities, see Allewaert’s *Ariel’s Ecologies*, Arun Argawal’s *Environmentality* (2005), Buell’s *Writing for an Endangered Planet*, Andrew Dobson’s *Citizenship and the Environment* (2003), and Sherilyn MacGregor’s *Beyond Mothering Earth* (2007).

from a widespread American phenomenon that Cecelia Tichi terms “environmental reform.”

According to Tichi, the modification of American environments exemplified the nation’s spiritual and political development and inscribed “transcendent meaning to dammed streams, cleared woodland, drained swamps, etc.” (viii).

Focused on how aesthetic forms influenced regimes of environmental reform, Tichi carefully constructs the literary and historical scaffoldings for analyzing the convergence of civic and environmental imaginaries within early American culture. Within naturalization narratives, cultivated and uncultivated ecosystems operate as hermeneutical proxies through which the “Americanness” of immigrants can be deciphered. The cultivation of citizenship is similar to environmental reform insofar as it is also an epistemology (a way of knowing nature), an aesthetic (a way of sensing and appreciating nature), and an ethic (a way of behaving toward nature) that enables immigrants to know and to appreciate the interconnected assemblages of human and nonhuman matter (ecosystems) that shape their civic responsibilities to their communities.

The cultivation of citizenship deals less with inalienable rights that individuals possess and more with the responsibilities that citizens have to themselves, their community, and their environment. To varying degrees of specificity, immigrant nature writers depicted cultivating citizenship as an ethics of care—care for the self, care for the environment, and care for the nation—that people nurtured through experiences and stories rather than acquired at birth. For contemporary environmentalists, ecocritics, and political ecologists, ethics of care have been vital to theorizing new notions of citizenship during times of environmental crises. Some of these approaches identify environmental care as a political tactic that promotes democracy and justice while tackling the material effects of climate change. These twentieth- and twenty-first-century

environmentalist standards collapse, however, when read in relation to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century immigrant nature writing which frequently championed draining swamps, culling biodiversity, felling forests, and changing climates. To say that these immigrants did not care about the environment is anachronistic, however. They did care, but their sense of care encompassed acts of preservation along with acts of modification and management. Their acts of care may be centered on their own bodies, but these necessarily encompass the plants, animals, and climates that sustain their biological health and political identity. Thus, in Sealsfield's naturalization narratives about Louisiana, for instance, his characters "care" for plantations by destroying the swamps that jeopardize the political and environmental supremacy of the plantation form.

Varying according to geographic location, an ethics of care entail recognizing and counterbalancing everyday environmental crises, including soil exhaustion and pollution, which otherwise obstructed immigrants' naturalization to the United States. In this sense, care closely corresponds to language of "cultivation" and "improvement" found in Jeffersonian agrarian discourses that regarded civic virtue as emanating from independent farmers' conduct and as the basis for republican citizenship. If cultivating uncultivated lands is an act of civic virtue that manifests in the materiality of the landscape itself, then the modification of chaotic swamps and forests into well-regulated, orderly farms and plantations illustrates the cultivation of citizenship by immigrants. Performing certain forms of environmental modification demonstrate an immigrant's civic virtue—that is, their capacity to practice republican citizenship. The relationship between the cultivation of the earth and the cultivation of citizenship shows how environmental imaginaries and civic virtue are not only interconnected but exist in a dialogical

relationship where they inform each other. In this way, the ethics of environmental care become intertwined with political discourses on immigrants' ability to become republican citizens.

Cultivating citizenship expands upon the legal understandings of naturalization by foregrounding the configurations of human/nonhuman collectives. In order to grapple with these ecological factors within naturalization narratives, my dissertation elaborates an ecocritical framework that complements rather than subverts legalistic ones. My ecocritical conception of naturalization underscores three components of citizenship that legalistic models undervalue but are nevertheless central to immigrant nature writing: the distributive, performative, and corporeal dynamics of American citizenship.

A distributive analysis of U.S. citizenship requires investigating the collaborations and competitions between humans and nonhuman beings that unfold in relation to geophysical objects (rocks, rivers, mountains), ecosystemic phenomena (weather, climate, miasma), and cultural institutions (government, society, literature). A distributive notion of citizenship disrupts the ideologies of individualism that were rooted in the materiality of the American continent and requires Americanists to think about how citizenship is dispersed across human/nonhuman communities. In *American Incarnation* (1986), Myra Jehlen famously argues that ideas of "America" and "the American" arise from the material realities of the continent rather than from abstract political ideas, claiming it is through the land that "the American man acquired an individualist substance" (13). However, if this individualist substance only emerges through the vast, interlocked assemblages of living and nonliving matter, as immigrant nature writing suggests, then this American substance isn't individualistic per se but collective. From Crèvecoeur to Sealsfield to Sadlier to the countless guidebook writers, immigrant nature writers were acutely aware that humans are enmeshed in ecosystemic flows that affect their everyday

lives. These flows signal the relational processes that animate these entanglements, revealing the imagined parameters of membership for human and nonhumans alike. These relational processes, in turn, expose the ongoing nature of naturalization that legalistic methods cannot easily capture.

If naturalization is a reiterative, relational process, then citizenship is necessarily enacted through everyday performances that are not necessarily codified in law but are ubiquitous in narratives about planting crops, cultivating swamps, fertilizing soils, modifying climates, and sanitizing cities.²⁷ Each of these practices assumes political weight in naturalization narratives as these modes of environmental conduct become associated with virtuous republican citizenship during the open door era. If immigrants' interactions with nature indicate their capacity to govern themselves according to national norms, then these issues cannot be purely discursive, especially when viewed through the cultivation of citizenship. Representations and modes of environmental conduct matter because these literally and figuratively reconfigure the natural environment of the country. Immigrant nature writing implores its readers to interact with the environment in particular ways that transform it as it, in turn, transforms prospective immigrants. In short, naturalization is not a fixed procedure but an iterative, interactive performance of becoming

²⁷ My attention to the performative aspects of naturalization is indebted to Cathy Schlund-Vials's examination of how "U.S. selfhood is performed, enacted, idealized, and challenged in Jewish American and Asian American cultural productions" (xiii). Attentive to the narrative strategies that model citizenship, Schlund-Vials does not examine the materialist or ecological aspects of naturalization's "task of domesticating the foreign" (xviii), focusing instead on the racial and cultural politics of performance. Her brilliant work on naturalization tropes in the twentieth century joins Lauren Berlant's work in pushing literary critics and cultural historians to grapple more intensely with the intimate, everyday, and private practices of citizenship. See Berlant's *The Queen of America* (1997) and Schlund-Vials's *Modeling Citizenship* (2011).

American. Immigrants and the environment operate in a dialogical relationship wherein Americanness materializes for both through their everyday intra-actions.²⁸

The distributive and performative dimensions of naturalization profoundly affect the bodies of immigrants. Rather than envisioning potential citizens as abstract, disembodied individuals who voluntarily associate themselves with the state through legal procedures, naturalization narratives fixate on the porousness and the malleability of the immigrant body. Across immigrant guidebooks and novels, the body is imagined to be incredibly porous insofar as it is affected by temperature fluctuations, air quality, soil composition, water flows, and climatic conditions. European immigrants believed their health, their longevity, their fertility, their complexion, their body, their manners, and their customs would necessarily change according to climatic pressure.²⁹

Influenced by geohumoral medical theories about human bodies' susceptibility to external forces, immigrant nature writers reiterated longstanding racial anxieties about the effects

²⁸ In order to capture the vibrancy of naturalization, I turn to Karen Barad's account of posthumanist performativity to illustrate how American bodies are enacted through the intra-actions between discourse and matter—the configuration I have been calling immigrant nature writing. As Barad argues, “discursive practices are not human-based activities but specific material (re)configurings of the world through which boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted. And matter is not a fixed essence; rather, matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing” (183).

²⁹ The climate plays a crucial role in the European colonization of North and South America, as Jim Egan argues. English writers “contended that one risked losing one's national identity or even one's life by moving to a new climate” (“The ‘Long'd-for Aera’ of an ‘Other Race’” 189). The climate would change everything about a person for their skin color to their beliefs. In *Transformable Race* (2015), Katy Chiles compares early American literature with natural historical discourses on race to argue that Americans understood race “an exterior bodily trait, incrementally produced by environmental factors (such as climate, food, and mode of living) and continuously subject to change” (2). Much like Egan, Chiles work demonstrates how Americans imagined their subjectivity to be tied to nature, making way for me to consider how nationality functions in this mode of analysis.

of American climates on Europeans throughout the nineteenth century.³⁰ Some feared that American climates would degenerate their bodies and leave them sickly, infirm, or dead. Others hoped that the climate would regenerate them, making them healthier and happier than Europe had. Others worried that the environments would change their complexion, making them appear darker or yellower. Throughout naturalization narratives, the immigrant body disrupts the nature/culture binary by foregrounding the interconnectivity between humans and nonhumans.³¹ The sensitivity of immigrants to their place in interlocking material, economic, political, and cultural systems invites us to prioritize the corporeal experiences of citizenship so as to correct any proposition that naturalization was easy, automatic, or unremarkable.

Each chapter explores how ecological sensibilities influenced the cultivation of citizenship in immigrant nature writing during the open door era. In “Cultivating Citizens,” I analyze novels written by both native- and foreign-born authors, supplementing these fictional texts with nonfictional guidebooks written by and for immigrants. Through these works, I examine the interactions between civic and environmental imaginaries in U.S. and transatlantic

³⁰ Susan Scott Parrish associates the fear of physiological change with discourses on the humoral body that connected the climate (understood as a latitudinal location) to the national character. The humoral body is fragile and porous—subject to the vicissitudes of its environment. As she argues, English colonialists feared that American climates were unhealthy and would need to be improved to safeguard their whiteness. See *American Curiosity*, 77-102. These attitudes persist well into the nineteenth century as Conevery Bolton Valenčius has shown. In *The Health of the Country* (2003), she connects racial and environmental belonging in antebellum Arkansas and Missouri by explaining how the “[c]limate, with all its myriad meanings, insinuated its ways into every element of personhood, determining racial belonging as well as personal well-being” (235).

³¹ My understanding of the “immigrant body” is heavily influenced by Stacy Alaimo’s theory of “trans-corporeality.” Pushing against dematerializing tendencies in academic theory, Alaimo resituates the human body within complex assemblages of nonhuman forces and processes. Trans-corporeality “marks a profound shift in subjectivity” (20) by refusing to disentangle the human body from the cultural, economic, political, and ecological systems that compose it. See *Bodily Natures* (2010).

contexts to demonstrate how political and environmental subjectivities converged. Comparing immigrant novels and guidebooks written by or for French, English, Scottish, Irish, and German immigrants, “Cultivating Citizens” advances an ecocritical model of American naturalization in which citizenship materializes through interconnected assemblages of living beings and nonliving matter.

Naturalization unfolds as a highly dynamic practice that accompanies interactions with material environments as I demonstrate in chapter 2, “Crèvecoeur’s Cultivators: Swamps and Citizens in Early American Naturalization Narratives.” I identify how two organizing myths of American identity—the nation of immigrants and the nation of cultivators—shaped early naturalization narratives by comparing Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), *Lettres d’un cultivateur américain* (1784/87), and *Voyage dans la Haute-Pennsylvanie et dans l’état de New York* (1801) to pro- and anti-immigration tracts, such as Gilbert Imlay’s *Topographical Description* (1792) or the anonymously penned *Look before You Leap* (1796). Pro-immigration tracts often endorsed agrarian myths by celebrating the fertility of the soil, the salubrity of the climate, and the republican conduct of American yeomen. Anti-immigration tracts, however, recapitulated degenerative theories about how the American climate would deteriorate the physical constitution of European immigrants. In both corpuses, an immigrant’s successful integration into American life cannot be disassociated from natural environments, particularly swamps, bogs, and marshes. Representations of swamp cultivation in Crèvecoeur’s immigrant sketches and in immigration tracts reveal a constitutive connection between American citizenship and the environment. Entering into transatlantic discourses about the characteristics and duties of Americans, Crèvecoeur’s immigrant sketches portray Americans as environmental

citizens (almost invariably married, middle-class white men) whose enmeshment within human and nonhuman networks empowers their sense of civic belonging.

Building on these insights, chapter 3, “Seeing like a Citizen: Immigrant Guidebooks and the Nationalization of Ecological Sensibilities,” refines this ecologically oriented version of citizenship by analyzing the forms of nature writing that recur throughout guidebooks written for or by U.S.-bound immigrants. Providing a much-needed literary history of guidebooks, this chapter details how these nonfictional texts participated in the formation of environmental imaginaries about the United States. In an effort to familiarize their readers with the environmental circumstances of America, guidebook writers offered strategies for interpreting the materiality of the continent. By combining literary and scientific forms of environmental discourse, guidebooks prepared immigrants to imagine the nation’s ecosystems and their relationship to them as American citizens might.

Guidebooks published in England, Ireland, and the United States between 1790 and 1830 not only helped to align prospective citizens’ ecological sensibilities with national norms, but they also naturalized American settler colonialism by advocating for the social and environmental conquest of the continent. Alluding to “virgin soils” and “uncultivated climates,” guidebooks violently erased Native American populations through nature writing, which justified their removal to lands west of the Mississippi. If the cultivation of nature is a prerequisite for becoming an American, then the dismissal Native Americans’ agriculture and horticulture manufactures their alterity. The racialized connections between living and nonliving matter and humans become politically charged in guidebooks as these relations delineate the social and ecological composition of American communities.

Whereas my first two chapters are largely focused on the North and old Northwest, chapter 4, “Plantation Management: The Nature of Race and Risk in Charles Sealsfield’s Immigrant Writing,” attends to the South by analyzing the intersections of naturalization, plantation ecologies, and slavery in *The Americans as They Are* (1828) and *Lebensbilder aus der westlichen Hemisphäre* (1835-37) [trans. *Life in the New World* (1844)]. Most immigrant guidebook authors disqualify the South and its plantation-based economy as too expensive, too unhealthy, and too reliant on slave labor, but not Charles Sealsfield. Recovering the nearly forgotten literary history of the German diaspora to the South during the 1830s and 40s, I argue that Sealsfield explores the limits of human agency, especially planter sovereignty and white supremacy, through his depictions of the environments associated with the South’s climate: plantations and swamps. He uses pastoral and gothic modes of literary discourse to cultivate ecological sensibilities that are predisposed to celebrate plantations and to condemn swamps as horrifying, risky spaces that endanger to white lives and, therefore, must be eradicated through slave labor. Combining ecocritical theories of risk narratives and racial formation, this chapter examines how the cultivation of citizenship transforms into a form of plantation management. Plantation management turns all Southern environments into objects of surveillance and management. It involves the daily practice of identifying and eliminating the endemic dangers to the plantation *through* slave labor. Racial and environment violence converge, forming the bedrock of naturalization in the South. *The Americans as They Are* and *Lebensbilder* are unique naturalization narratives due to their focus on the South, but the intimate connection between nature and American nationality in them continued to solidify in the closing decades of the antebellum.

My fifth and final chapter, “Miasmatic Metropolises: Ecological Nativism and the Materiality of National Belonging,” analyzes how, during the 1840s and 50s, xenophobic nativists more regularly located foreign-seeming environments in the nation’s urban centers—its slums—where foreign-born populations were crowded. Across their novels, speeches, and political treatises, nativists conflated immigrants with the unwholesome miasmas of overpopulated cities and native U.S. citizens with the healthy climates of the country. Such xenophobic logic ensnared immigrants in cycles of urban poverty and slow death as the internationally popular Irish-Canadian-American author, Mary Anne Sadlier, insinuated. In *Con O’Regan; Or, Emigrant Life in the New World* (1863), Sadlier fictionalizes the environmental dimensions of immigration, urbanization, and public health that were intensified by the xenophobic activism of antebellum nativists. An outright, unabashed piece of propaganda literature, *Con O’Regan* invokes “safety valve” rhetoric to implore Irish immigrants to settle rural communities in Midwestern states where they can nurture the “home virtues” that urban slums and xenophobia stifle. Sadlier’s prairies resemble Ireland and, therefore, enable her immigrant characters to align their native environmental patriotism with American sensibilities. Their patriotic attachment to rural life in Ireland motivates them to forsake urban life in the United States. Rather than endangering national security, their affection for their Irish homeland safeguards it.

I conclude by briefly examining the role of nature within immigrant writing at the end of the open door era. Beginning with the anti-slum activist work of Jacob Riis in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), I show how he invests sunlight, fresh air, and flowers with the power to transform immigrants into virtuous American citizens. *How the Other Half Lives* combines elements from Crèvecoeur, Sealsfield, and Sadlier and highlights how ideas about cultivating

citizenship changes in the twentieth century. This change seems necessary as I show in my discussion of Frederick Jackson Turner's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893). Turner recapitulates the plots of naturalization narratives to characterize the frontier as the space of Americanization, as the space where Europeans are transformed into Americans. The closing of the frontier leaves open the question of how nature and naturalization move forward into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Altogether, these texts give scholars in literary studies, environmental humanities, political theory, and cultural studies radically new insights in the literary and ecological formations of civic personhood in the United States during the open door era. Beyond the political, cultural, racial, or economic qualities that scholars have addressed, immigrant writers from across Western Europe conceived of U.S. citizenship through the intimate interactions between humans and nonhumans that coinhabit a mutable ecosystem. As a literary discourse and a material practice, immigrant nature writing emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's self and one's community as being enmeshed within mobile matrices of human and nonhuman, living and nonliving bodies. Imaginative and flexible, these associations change according to new experiences and new relationships that constantly redefine the responsibilities that Americans have to themselves, to their communities, and to their environments. Bonds with natural environments are constitutive parts of naturalization and cannot be ignored when considering the cultivation of citizenship within immigrant nature writing. As naturalization narratives make clear, U.S. citizenship is not just a political phenomenon but is also something profoundly ecological too.

Chapter Two

Crèvecoeur's Cultivators:

Swamps and Citizenship in Early American Immigrant Literature

“The Americans were once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared, and which will hereafter become distinct by the power of the different climates they inhabit.”

—J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782)

“Whatever American crimps may aver to the contrary, it is an indubitable fact, that even the seasoned inhabitants of that continent, with a surprizing degree of uniformity, fall early victims to the unwholesome effluvia, which arises from uncleared soil and a foul atmosphere.”

—*Look before You Leap* (1796)

In the decades following the War of Independence, hundreds of thousands of European immigrants flocked to the United States, a newly formed republic with some of the most liberal naturalization laws in the world. From England, Germany, Ireland, France, and other nations, Europeans departed for the U.S. in hopes of improving themselves, socially and economically. However, immigrants viewed their removal not only as a social change but also as a profoundly ecological experience that connected them to new climates and new assemblages of flora and fauna that would, in turn, affect their physiological constitution. They believed their health, longevity, fertility, complexion, body, manners, and customs would become naturalized to the

material realities of their new environment.¹ Worried about who should immigrate, where they should settle, and how they should acclimate, prospective citizens turned to immigration tracts for information about how to survive, politically and physically, in the United States.

Whether as novels, pamphlets, tracts, or travelogues, these cheap transatlantic publications tackle a hotly debated topic: is the American climate healthy or not? Answers varied, of course. Using the climate to deter would-be immigrants from leaving their native countries, anti-immigration tracts magnify the deleterious effects of the American environment to portray emigration as being unnecessarily risky. Anti-immigration tracts decry America's sodden, fetid climates where mosquitos and poisonous plants thrive, where decaying vegetable matter releases putrid vapors into the atmosphere. These tracts depict the American continent as an immense swamp, reproducing eighteenth-century degeneration theories that assert the inimical climate of the Americas weakened and enfeebled animal life. Whereas anti-immigration tracts cast America as a terrifying, marshy continent of death and decay, pro-immigration tracts portray it as a vibrant land of life and regeneration. Embracing what scholars might now call an environmentally oriented vein of American exceptionalism, pro-immigration tracts glorify America as an asylum for Europeans where the combination of the fertile soil and the wholesome atmosphere yields the healthiest, most virtuous citizens on Earth. Rather than compromising the health of European immigrants, American ecosystems fortify it. Advertising the United States as an inexhaustibly fertile nation populated by virtuous, republican cultivators of the earth, pro-immigrant tract writers conflate the cultivation of swamps, bogs, and marshes with the cultivation of American citizenship.

¹ On the role the climate plays in the colonization of North and South America and the formation of British Creole subjectivity, see Jim Egan. On the influence of geohumoral medical theories on European colonization, see Susan Scott Parrish.

The intertwined cultivation of swamps and citizenship has some of its earliest and richest elaborations in the works of the most famous early American immigrant writer, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. Born in France in 1735 to the *petit noblesse*, Crèvecoeur settled a 371-acre farm called “Pine Hill” in New York, where he became a naturalized citizen in 1765. His bucolic bliss lasted until 1779 when the American Revolution forced him to flee his homestead and return to France without his wife, Mehitable Tippet, or his three children.² Between 1765 and 1779, Crèvecoeur composed the twelve sketches that would become his most famous work, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). He returned to France in 1782 after being imprisoned by the British for three months, shipwrecked in Ireland, and offered a contract for *Letters* in London by Thomas Davies and Lockyer Davis. He continued to move back and forth between his native and adopted countries as a French consul until his death in 1813, publishing three more fictional books about life in America.

As critics have noted, the tone and the themes of his books reflect major events that happened to him, including his time at Pine Hill, his imprisonment by the British army, and his involvement in Madame d’Houdetot’s salon. But the literary impact of one major event in Crèvecoeur’s life has yet to receive critical attention: his role as a manager for the Crommeline’s Creek Meadow Company. In March 1772, the colonial legislature of New York passed a “drainage act” and authorized him to drain the swamps and bog meadows, “which are frequently drowned and rendered unfit for use by the overflowing of the Creek called Crommeline’s Creek” (*Colonial Laws of New York* 429). The experience must have made quite an impression on Crèvecoeur, who incorporated swamp cultivation into his semifictional accounts of American

² Unfortunately when Crèvecoeur returned to New York, he discovered that his wife was dead and his children were being housed in Boston. Crèvecoeur reunited with them and lived with them as he aged. See Allen and Assineau’s biography *St. John de Crèvecoeur*.

life in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain* (1784/87), and *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l'état de New-York* (1801).³

Although Crèvecoeur personally benefitted from drainage acts, his fictionalized sketches about immigrants depict a range of swamp sensibilities that are oriented toward both cultivation and conservation. When I speak of a swamp sensibility, I am referring to a sensitivity to or an appreciation of the real and imaginary interrelationships between human communities and wetland ecosystems. These sensibilities emerge by cultivating an intimate knowledge of how swamps function, what effects they have on human populations, and what effects human populations can have on them. Naturalization takes on a distinctly ecological character as Crèvecoeur's immigrant characters learn how to negotiate the interconnected webs of organic and inorganic matter that constitute swamps.

When Crèvecoeur composed *Letters*, *Lettres*, and *Voyage*, environmental attitudes and duties were already influencing extralegal, cultural notions of citizenship.⁴ The representations of swamps in his works offer unique perspectives through which to investigate the relationship between the land, the climate, and the American character because, as literary scholar Michele Currie Navakas discerns, “the perceived physical properties and geographical position of land influenced early American conceptions of the citizen” (93). American citizenship materializes, as this chapter argues, through attitudes about and responsibilities toward swamp ecosystems that are intimate, situational, and communal.

³ I cite them as *Letters*, *Lettres*, and *Voyage* respectively in text. *Lettres* and *Voyage* are woefully understudied despite the canonical status of *Letters*. According to Ed White, critics must engage with Crèvecoeur's lesser-studied works through a “mosaic theory” of reading that accentuates their “contradictions and tensions” and highlights their encyclopedic scope (397). Through this approach, I craft a more capacious view of his attitudes about swamps that cannot be discerned from reading *Letters* alone.

⁴ See Albertone, Behdad, Navakas, Looby, and Tichi.

By comparing the swamp sensibilities found in four immigrant sketches, I argue that Crèvecoeur imagines immigrants to be environmental subjects, or people—almost invariably white, middle-class men—whose embeddedness within interconnecting networks of human and nonhuman life animates their sense of civic agency and belonging.⁵ This chapter excavates a broad range of attitudes about swamps that influence the civic responsibilities of Crèvecoeur’s immigrant characters to American communities.⁶ Scholars have long recognized the intermingling of Crèvecoeur’s environmental and political imaginations, but they have tended to emphasize his adherence to Montesquieu’s theory that the climate determines a person’s and a nation’s political identity. In their recent examinations of Crèvecoeur’s climatic theories and racialization, both Katy Chiles and Juliet Shields advance a deterministic model of Americanization that transfers immigrants’ power to environmental factors.⁷ While ample textual evidence across Crèvecoeur’s works supports their arguments, his immigrant sketches present a less deterministic and more dialogic relationship, in which humans modify nature as much as nature modifies humans, as the basis for understanding American civic identities.

⁵ Recognizing that no unified concept of U.S. citizenship existed prior to the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, my essay contributes to the growing body of scholarship on the literary traditions that shaped early debates about the contours of American citizenship. See Hyde.

⁶ Critics are divided when it comes to assessing Crèvecoeur’s environmental thought. Critics, including Lu and Sarver, view him as a proto-environmentalist who used his scientific knowledge to advocate for environmental concerns. Others, such as Bishop, argue that Crèvecoeur “never achieves the kind of sustained devotion to place” that would enable him to develop an “intimate relationship with the land” (372-3). My essay mediates these approaches by demonstrating that Crèvecoeur’s immigrant characters cultivate intimate relationships with swamps even if they are not always geared toward conservation.

⁷ Stressing the transformative capacity of climate on human bodies in early American literature, Chiles bypasses how Crèvecoeur’s characters transform nature to conform to aesthetic and economic norms that privilege farms over forests. Shields similarly elides their agency, stating, “An immigrant does not so much make himself anew as allow himself to be made anew by the environment in which he finds himself” (74).

To emphasize the transformative power of immigrants, I read Crèvecoeur's conceptions of early American citizenship through Monique Allewaert's theory of "ecological personhood," or a mode of being in which humans, particularly African American slaves and maroons, gained new forms of power through their interrelations with nonhuman forces in the plantation zones of the American tropics that were otherwise denied to them by whites. For Allewaert, ecological personhood is *explicitly not* reducible to the "citizen-subject" position that was made possible by participating in metropolitan print cultures. As this chapter illustrates, however, these two forms of being clash *and* converge in Crèvecoeur's sketches about immigrants who become naturalized citizens.

Since Leo Marx's influential reading of *Letters* as a mythopoeic iteration of Jeffersonian agrarianism, critics have grappled with the relationship between the cultivation of dry land and republican citizenship.⁸ By associating the cultivation of dry land in *Letters* with the cultivation of civic identities, critics have investigated how this form of belonging excludes Native Americans, Black Americans, and women. These approaches have illuminated the sociality of citizenship without seriously investigating its materiality, its embodiedness. In most of these studies, the environment figures as an abstract, static, and determinative force upon which Crèvecoeur projects cultural fantasies about the political and economic independence of white men. Wil Verhoeven, for example, weds republicanism and agrarianism in *Letters* by defining Crèvecoeur's cultivator as an archetype for "free and sovereign *citizenship*, not of national

⁸ Since the mid-twentieth century, critics have remained split on whether to read *Letters* as an optimistic endorsement of Jeffersonian agrarianism, Lockean individualism, and physiocratic doctrines or as a critique of the inherent contradictions in Enlightenment ideologies of liberalism, rationality, and fraternity that reinforce exceptionalist fantasies of American subjectivity. In addition to Marx, see Albertone and Verhoeven for examples of optimistic readings of *Letters*. For more pessimistic perspectives, see Goddu, Iannini, and Sweet.

(American) identity” (107), which arises through a restorative “bond with nature” that is predicated upon labor (103). Despite acknowledging nature’s role in the formation of a civic identity, Verhoeven contends that citizenship is “a category of political subjectivity” (107)—a conclusion that leaves open the question of exactly how bonds with nature operate. What forms do these bonds assume in *Lettres* and *Voyage* where swamps play a much more significant role? How do wetlands produce different bonds with nature than dry lands? What kind of political subjectivities result from these swampy bonds? If bonds with nature are so foundational, then is citizenship also a category of ecological subjectivity?

Crèvecoeur’s sketches about immigrants begin to answer these questions, even if the answers that they offer are sometimes contradictory. His most famous immigrant, Andrew the Hebridean wages war against the swamps, carefully cultivating them into meadows and fields without regard for the nonhuman lives that he extirpates. While learning about a fictionalized John Bartram’s “art of banking,” or draining wetlands), Ivan Al—z, a Russian man of science and a prospective American, celebrates the cultivation of swamps as a civic virtue that sustains the community’s economic and physiological health. In elaborating the mechanics of the art of banking, Crèvecoeur does not address the long-term consequences of swamp cultivation, but, in the sketch about Nadowisky in *Voyage*, he does. An exploration into the limitations of swamp cultivation, this sketch suggests that the total eradication of swamps is unsustainable. Crèvecoeur acknowledges the importance of swamps to an agrarian republic and imagines a more custodial sensibility that we see operating in the sketch about John de Bragansa (also in *Voyage*). The vicissitudes of Crèvecoeur’s swamp sensibilities reveal more complicated understandings of the significance of wetlands, which that invites us to reassess our assumptions about early American citizenship and its environmental undercurrents.

Between the publications of *Letters* and *Voyage*, a chorus of calls to drain swamplands reverberated throughout the transatlantic world, inciting people to reclaim wetlands by construing the practice as an act benefitting the public good. In agricultural manuals, immigration tracts, and American legislatures, swamps were demonized for being infectious, unruly environments that jeopardized the health of Euroamerican communities and violated their aesthetic and economic norms. The anonymous author of *American Husbandry* (1773), for example, classifies swamps, bogs, and marshes as insalubrious, unwholesome environments that need to be either avoided or cultivated. Addressing the problem of the swamps, colonial and State legislatures passed drainage acts in Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. By building dams, dikes, and levees, Americans modified these environments according to the neoclassical norms of the late-eighteenth century. “In draining swamps,” Myra Jehlen avers, “the American farmer saw himself not so much as (re)claiming the landscape as implementing in it the natural harmony of the wild and the cultivated” (72). Due to the ideological dominance of swamp cultivation, Jehlen continues, one either “must drain [swamps], or rise to global dissent in order to argue that they are intended not to be drained” (73). As I will show, Crèvecoeur’s immigrant sketches do both, outlining competing models of ecological citizenship in the process.

—A NATURAL HISTORY OF IMMIGRANT WRITING

Over thirty immigrant sketches appear in *Letters*, *Lettres*, and *Voyage*. Some are whole chapters dedicated to narrating the extralegal processes of becoming an American (such as the four I discuss). Others are merely a couple of sentences or a paragraph or two here and there that touch on the subject. Regardless of their length, each one provides valuable insights into

American life at the end of the eighteenth century by blurring the line between fact and fiction. Semifictional, semihistorical, and semiscientific vignettes, Crèvecoeur's immigrant sketches examine a wide range of topics, including naturalization, republican virtue, agriculture, the Revolutionary war, European politics, territorial expansion, slavery, botany, and swamp cultivation. Exploring why people immigrate to America and what happens to them when they arrive, Crèvecoeur integrates natural historical methodologies into the composition of these sketches insofar as he describes humans as they become acclimate to new environments.⁹ His natural historical literary practices structure his immigrant sketches at a foundational level because these stories highlight how Europeans are transformed into a new identity category: the American. Imitating a naturalist, Crèvecoeur observes, notes, and tracks the changes that immigrants undergo in their new climates, cataloguing the traits of those who succeed and those who do not. His immigrants are specimens through which he can document and evaluate naturalization practices as they unfold in new social and natural environments.

Playing with the political and environmental meanings of *naturalize* through botanical metaphors, Crèvecoeur writes, "Every industrious European who transports himself here may be compared to a sprout growing at the foot of a great tree; it enjoys and draws but a little portion of sap; wrench it from the parent roots, transplant it, and it will become a tree bearing fruit also" (*Letters* 80). Botanical metaphors such as this situate the immigrant sketches in *Letters*, *Lettres*, and *Voyage* in transatlantic discussions about whether Europeans could become naturalized to American climates. Appreciating the relationship of Crèvecoeur's immigrant sketches to this

⁹ On the influence of natural history on Crèvecoeur's mode of literary production, see Ralph Bauer, Katy Chiles, Helen Cowie and Kathryn Gray, Christopher Iannini, and Pamela Regis. My understanding of eighteenth-century natural history is also heavily influenced by Michel Foucault.

body of transnational literature is crucial to understand why no singular naturalization narrative emerges—even though certain elements, such as swamp cultivation, may appear in multiple sketches. Instead, studying naturalization in Crèvecoeur’s writing demands that we adopt what Ed White has called a mosaic theory of reading that foregrounds the discontinuities and contradictions across *Letters*, *Lettres*, and *Voyage*. Through White’s mosaic theory, I can better identify the multivalencies of Americanization, enabling me to overcome the abstractness with which Crèvecoeur critics tend to discuss naturalization.¹⁰

Crèvecoeur’s critics typically read his stories about immigration as subtextual support for a naively pastoral vision of American exceptionalism that whitewashes the raced, classed, and gendered dynamics of agrarian citizenship.¹¹ Darker, more pessimistic elements are difficult to perceive in his anecdotes about naturalization but are nevertheless present. “Out of twelve families of emigrants of each country,” Crèvecoeur estimates, “generally seven Scotch will succeed, nine German, and four Irish” (*Letters* 84-5). This admission does not mention the prospects of the forty-five percent of immigrants who do not succeed, ergo who do not become Americans. Likewise, it utterly erases the Africans who were imported as slaves to ensure the success of commercial agriculture and the Native Americans who were either killed or dispossessed of their land by European immigrants.

Such critical empiricism unsettles fantasies about the ease of naturalization. Crèvecoeur’s cold statistics register the failures of naturalization practices, undermining the exceptionalism at

¹⁰ On naturalization and Americanization in Crèvecoeur’s fiction, see Ali Behdad, Doreen Alvarez Saar, and Edward Larkin. While these studies are useful for examining the social dynamics of becoming American, they do not address the environmental anxieties and fantasies that structure Crèvecoeur’s naturalization narratives as my work does.

¹¹ For more on the whitewashing of American racism, classism, and sexism in Crèvecoeur, see Goddu, Osborne, and Rucker. For studies that explicitly investigate the role immigration plays in this whitewashing, see Behdad, Castillo, Saar, and Winston.

work in the botanical metaphors by emphasizing the everyday realities of becoming politically and environmentally integrated into the country. Naturalization myths lose their potency with the realization that nearly half of white immigrants will not take root and flourish in their new climate. Immigrants fail, in Crèvecoeur's estimation, not because they possess any innate inferiority but because they do not know how govern themselves or their environment like Americans do. They lack what Crèvecoeur calls "American knowledge."

Under the rubric of "American knowledge," Crèvecoeur solidifies the link between the natural world and national citizenship. According to Crèvecoeur, Americans can look at a tree and "conceive how it is to be felled, cut up, and split into rails and posts" (*Letters* 86).

Americans know how to hunt bees. They can judge the soil by studying the trees. They learn how to find medicinal plants, bark, and roots in the woods and in the swamps. They can defend themselves against destructive insects and animals like caterpillars, mosquitoes, grasshoppers, squirrels, crows, wolves, foxes, and bears. They know how to fell forests and to drain swamps. They possess an entire repertoire of technical and specialized knowledge that they glean from their early engagement and intimacy with the natural world.

American knowledge generates particular forms of sociality that are contingent upon interconnections between humans, nonhumans, and climatic forces. Due to this contingency, American knowledge not only explains how to survive in America, but it also delineates the kinds of beings that belong and those that must be excluded and why. It is a way of isolating and disqualifying certain beings (mosquitos, grasshoppers, trees) or collections of beings (forests, swamps) from American communities in order to privilege others (cows, orchards, farms). As much as it is a material practice, American knowledge is crucially an imaginative process that is situational and flexible. Crèvecoeur's immigration sketches illustrate that cultivating an intimate

ecological sensibility is a conduit for successful naturalization—a theme that was hotly debated across eighteenth-century immigration tracts.

A handful of eighteenth-century critics admonished *Letters* for deceiving impressionable readers in order to encourage them to immigrate. In the infamous *Remarks on the Letters from an American Farmer; or a Detection of the Errors of Mr. J. Hector St. John* (1783), Samuel Ayscough, a librarian at the British Library, unrelentingly lambasts *Letters* as a pro-immigration tract that ignores the material difficulties of agrarian citizenship. Calling Crèvecoeur an imposter, he demands *Letters* be formally censored for relying “on disqualification rather than experience and facts” to encourage “foreigners to emigrate and settle in America” (23). Afraid of the consequences of a mass emigration from the British Isles, Ayscough accuses Crèvecoeur of marginalizing not only the socioeconomic misfortunes of unlucky, albeit industrious, immigrants but also of downplaying, if not outright ignoring, the environmental risks that Europeans immigrants face:

Our farmer, who is fond of making reflection on nature and nature’s laws, and doubtless being a judge of the fertility of the country, might have discovered, had the recital of truth been his object, that the barrenness of the soil, and fogginess of the atmosphere, had been at all times the real obstructions to the population of a country, which, though it has been praised by philosophers, had been always avoided by settlers. (24-5)

Although fogginess may signify very little to contemporary readers, eighteenth-century audiences associated it with insalubrious air that were charged with miasmatic particles—that is, invisible, indeed imaginary, matter that emanated from decaying plants and animals and spread disease. The pamphlet exploits already existing anxieties about the degenerative impact of American ecosystems to discredit Crèvecoeur’s integrity and, more centrally, to discourage

immigration. To Ayscough's credit, however, many immigration tracts were citing Crèvecoeur's *Letters* and *Lettres* as authoritative, if perhaps a bit embellished, accounts of an immigrant's experience in America.

While gauging the direct effects of Crèvecoeur's writing on individual people's decision to migrate is quite difficult, pro-immigration tracts on both sides of the Atlantic frequently excerpted his books throughout the 1780s and 90s without acknowledging them as fiction. In an effort to provide useful information "to those who have any thoughts of removing to America," a Unitarian minister and British émigré, Harry Toulmin intersperses extracts of "On the Situation, Feelings, and Pleasures of an American Farmer," "What is an American," and "History of Andrew" throughout his 1792 pamphlets, *Thoughts on Emigration* and *A Description of Kentucky*. Using selective pieces of "*The American Farmer's Letters* by Hector St. John," Toulmin characterizes immigration as a difficult but ultimately rewarding experience that hinges on a person's knowledge of their future settlement, its climate, its soils, its government, and its customs.

To supply this valuable information to his reader, he splices Crèvecoeur's stories about immigrants with extracts from other prominent men of science, including Thomas Jefferson, Jedidiah Morse, Brissot de Warville, and William Bartram. Weaving together discourses of natural history, meteorology, geography, botany, agronomy, and climatology, his patchwork account of American life blurs the boundaries of fiction and nonfiction much like *Letters*, *Lettres*, and *Voyage*. Crèvecoeur's and Toulmin's genre mixing is not unique but a common feature of immigration tracts, such as John Filson's *The Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucke* (1784), Gilbert Imlay's *Topographical Description* (1792), Thomas Cooper's *Some Information Regarding America* (1794). These and other pro-immigration tracts mythologize the

United States as an agrarian republic that was composed of virtuous yeomen whose intimate knowledge of their climate and their soil ensure the not only socioeconomic stability of the nation but also the biological health of its agrarian citizenry.

Crèvecoeur gestures toward this idea in *Letters* by accentuating how olfactory experiences of nature correspond to material changes in the mind and body. In the introductory letter of *Letters*, James's minister remarks, "as we silently till the ground and muse along the odoriferous furrows of our lowlands, uninterrupted either by stones or stumps; it is there that the salubrious effluvia of the earth animate our spirits and serve to inspire us" (47). Playing on the environmental-medical discourses surrounding immigration debates, Crèvecoeur completely inverts the dominant perception of the American lowlands which typically were flooded or contained pools of stagnant water. In the Euroamerican cultural and scientific imagination, this sodden condition rendered these spaces unwholesome and dangerous to immigrants. Here, however, their rich soils emit pleasant-smelling vapors that enrich and invigorate their cultivators physically and spiritually. This depiction of the smell of lowlands is laudatory but not consistent throughout Crèvecoeur's writing. What is important here is how Crèvecoeur imagines agricultural labor as a practice that releases salubrious particles into the atmosphere and restores the health of Americans. Crèvecoeur's characters improve themselves and transform the landscape by combining with invisible matter. They operate in a dialogic, or interactional, relationship that reveals the porousness of human bodies and transformative power of inorganic matter to affect those bodies.

Equally attuned to the interconnections between human bodies and nature, other immigration tracts were much more cautious about their reports of North America's waterlogged lowlands, including the renowned Philadelphia-based physician, Benjamin Rush. In *Information*

to *Europeans Who Are Disposed to Migrate to the United States* (1790), Rush advises the prospective immigrant “to drain and cultivate his low grounds, as soon as they are cleared, or to leave a body of trees between his dwelling house, and the spots from whence the morbid effluvia are derived.” Those who follow this piece of wisdom rarely suffer “from such diseases as arise from damp or putrid exhalations” (6). Rush offers concrete ways of manipulating the environment that offset the detrimental consequences of cultivating wetlands.

Anti-immigration tracts refute Crèvecoeur’s and Rush’s assessments, presenting the cultivation of lowlands as a path to an early grave. For example, in a series of five letters to a friend who was considering immigrating, John Hodgkinson, having recently returned to England, dismisses any desire to go to the United States “where the vapours exhaling from a new damp soil, now for the first time exposed to the influence of the sun, are certain of entailing on the cultivators, agues, and other enervating disorders” (*Letters on Emigration* 3). Plowing the uncultivated soil stirs up long-dormant putrid matter which enervates the bodies of otherwise healthy white Europeans. Anti-immigration tracts categorically challenge celebratory depictions of America’s natural environment. “Good God! What a country! What a climate! The thick fogs, that rise with the morning, scatter disease and death far and wide,” an anonymous author alleges in his invective against immigration, *A Plain Letter to the Common People of Great Britain and Ireland* (1783). *A Plain Letter* is a piece of pro-British propaganda inspired by a fear of the depopulation of the British Isles in the aftermath of the American Revolutionary War.¹²

This pamphlet joins a cadre of other anti-immigration tracts that express fear for Europeans in the American climate such as *Look Before You Leap; or a Few Hints to Such Artizans, Mechanics, Farmers, Labourers, and Others, who are desirous of Emigrating to the*

¹² On the social and political histories of British anti-immigration tracts, see Verhoeven.

Continent of America (1796). In the preface to this popular tract, which is composed of letters written by disaffected immigrants, the anonymous author warns that the American climates “were unfriendly to health and longevity; that the multifarious disorders arising from uncultivated and uncleared lands frequently prove fatal to the European fortune hunter” (xviii). The author takes the preservation of European life as his primary method of discouraging immigration by juxtaposing “England’s moderate climate” with America’s “unwholesome effluvia, which arises from uncleared soil and a foul atmosphere.”

Anti-immigration tracts, such as these, generally accept that diseases arise from exposure to bad air or rapid weather fluctuations and that America’s environments are particularly pernicious. Throughout *Look Before You Leap* and other anti-immigration tracts, the disillusioned immigrants bemoan the noxious, “stagnate waters in the swamps” that cause “the ague and fever, and also the flux” (56). Emphasizing the terrors of the American climate as they manifest across a variety of immigrant experiences in Washington D.C. and Virginia, *Look Before You Leap* hopes to discourage “persons who are inoculated with the desire of deserting their native country, and of transporting themselves to drain the unwholesome bogs, and cultivate the rank lands of America” (xiii).

Pro- and anti-immigration tracts reiterate debates among European naturalists, geographers, and philosophers about the supposedly degenerative climates of the Americas.¹³ The French naturalist, Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon first promulgated these “degeneration theories” in the *Histoire Naturelle* (1749) by before they were taken up in the works of the Danish geographer Cornelius de Pauw and the French encyclopedist Abbé Raynal.

¹³ For an in-depth exploration of degeneration theorists and their descriptions of the deleterious effects of the sodden American climate, see Antonio Gerbi. For an exploration of how immigration tracts rely on these debates, see Wil Verhoeven.

Degeneration theorists claimed that living beings in America are smaller, weaker, and more enfeebled when compared to their European counterparts. Such inferiority results, in theory, from America's sodden soils and fetid atmosphere, which originates from the prodigious number of wetlands. Buffon distinguishes America from Europe, Africa, and Asia by arguing that "America may be said to be but one continued morass, throughout all its plains" (39). According to degeneration theories, America's swampy climates dissipate the vitality of European animals and humans through miasmatic particles that are released by the putrefaction of decomposing vegetable matter. These men popularized the idea that North America was, in essence, a massive swamp—an image anti-immigration tracts stressed. However, they also insisted that these swampy ecosystems could be and should be drained and cultivated—an idea pro-immigration tracts championed.

The antipathy towards wetlands is unsurprising when considering the place of swamps within transatlantic scientific and cultural imaginaries; however, drainage alleviated both the material and ideological concerns evinced by prospective immigrants. By building dams, dikes, and levees, Americans could reclaim this foreign-seeming environment. They could modify it according to the emerging environmental norms of their day. Americans engaged in an all-out assault against swamps without necessarily viewing their actions as violent or destructive. Pro-immigration tract writers incite their readers to reclaim the hostile wetlands by construing such a practice as an act benefitting the public good, as an act of citizenship. Draining swamps converts foreign-seeming spaces into culturally and economically legible farms while also transforming foreign-born people into culturally and politically legible American citizens. At least, this seems to be a take-away lesson from Crèvecoeur's most well known immigrant sketch: "History of Andrew, the Hebridean."

“History of Andrew” tells the story of how a “spademan of Barra was become the tiller of American soil” (*Letters* 103). Born in the “inhospitable climate” of the northern Scottish isles, Andrew uproots his wife and son to escape the bitter poverty brought on by the sterility of the soil. Disembarking in Philadelphia in 1770, Andrew has no immediate prospects for either employment or housing. By chance, he encounters Farmer James who has an affinity for helping newly arrived Europeans assimilate. For three weeks, James instructs Andrew on the proper use of an axe—a skill any successful farmer needs to master—before sending him to work for Mr. P.R., an exceedingly virtuous and generous farmer. After his yearlong apprenticeship, Andrew asks James to help him procure his own freehold, to which James happily consents. James’s efforts to secure a hundred-acre tract of land from Mr. A.V., a wealthy landowner, ultimately fail in *Letters*. Unwilling to sell his land, Mr. A.V. proposes leasing one hundred acres to Andrew for thirty years on the condition that he plants fifty apple trees within three years and clears an acre of swampland per year for seven years. Agreeing to these stipulations, Andrew immediately begins draining the swamps and planting crops. The vignette then flashes forward four years, during which time Andrew has overseen the building of a road and has served “on two petty juries, performing as a citizen all the duties required of him” (104). Without ever owning a freehold farm, Andrew becomes a naturalized citizen.

Mindful of the story’s placement at the end of “What is an American,” critics often consider “History of Andrew” to be Crèvecoeur’s consummate statement on how an immigrant becomes a citizen, but they do not fully engage with the environmental elements of Andrew’s naturalization.¹⁴ To become a citizen, Andrew must drain swamps and kill beavers, replacing

¹⁴ For key examples of this tendency to overinvest in “History of Andrew,” see David Eisermann, Stephen Fender, and Robert Winston. While each of these critics refers to the

them with farms and livestock. He must cultivate swamps to correspond to the economic and aesthetic values of his community—a widespread activity that Cecelia Tichi labels “environmental reform,” or the modification of the landscape according to ideological norms. Acknowledging “History of Andrew” to be “indispensable to the processes of environmental reform in a vital America,” Tichi calls Andrew “Crèvecoeur’s political symbol for the continuation of American civilization” (102-3). If Andrew is a future-oriented political symbol, then the continuation of American civilization is contingent upon the cultivation of swamps.

Although Crèvecoeur focuses on Andrew, he is not the only immigrant in the sketch, at least in the English edition. A nameless European appears just before Andrew arrives in Philadelphia and, to some degree, foreshadows his assimilation story. James leases this honest man “a farm to till for himself, rent free, provided he clears an acre of swamp every year and that he quits it whenever my daughter shall marry” (*Letters* 92). Like Andrew, this European immigrant learns how to cultivate the land under the guidance of an established farmer, improving James’s land for its future occupants without himself becoming a freehold farmer. Possessive ownership seems less important than swamp cultivation in this sketch. Crèvecoeur reimagines the qualifications for civic participation in the late colonial and early national era, during which time citizenship was restricted to property-owning white men.¹⁵ While this model of naturalization broadens citizenship to include more white men, their inclusion within a community comes at the expense of swamp flora and fauna.

importance of the climate, none fully engage with its centrality in Crèvecoeur’s immigrant sketches. Instead, Cecelia Tichi comes the closest in *Environmental Reform*, but ultimately suggests that Crèvecoeur focuses less on the effects of environmental reform and more on the character of the reformer. My work on Crèvecoeur emphasizes how the actual interactions between the reformer character and the environment structure naturalization narratives.

¹⁵ On the evolution of naturalization laws in America’s late colonial and early national eras, see James H. Kettner and Rogers Smith.

Written in the same year as “History of Andrew,” Crèvecoeur’s “Thoughts of an American Farmer on Various Rural Subjects” nationalizes swamp sensibilities by listing the natural enemies of the American farmer. In this unpublished sketch, everything in nature conspires against the American farmer: the climate, the soil, the plants, the insects, even the rocks. Crèvecoeur’s farmer-narrator warns his friend who is considering relocating to America that the American farmer “has many more enemies to defend himself from than you have in Europe” (*Sketches* 269). Describing a war against nature that American farmers wage in order to survive, this letter writes some ecosystems out of an emerging national community. Swamps, in particular, emerge as de facto un-American environments because they endanger the health and well-being of American farmers. Aside from the voracious mosquitoes which “breed in ponds, lakes, rivers, and swamps,” most wetlands harbor “poisonous vegetables almost as much to be dreaded as the snakes” (286, 288). By clearing the woods and swamps where destructive insects and plants reside, the farmer “has acted his part as a good American ought to do” (275). By framing swamp cultivation as an American duty, his sketch elevates swamp cultivation into a patriotic activity that makes it possible to imagine oneself as an American. In its own way, “History of Andrew” rehearses the effects that cultivating swamps have by demonstrating how this patriotic duty integrates certain nonhuman populations (e.g. livestock and crops) into a community at the expense of others (e.g. poisonous vegetables, mosquitos, and snakes).

As it unfolds in Crèvecoeur’s immigrant sketches, swamp cultivation gives scholars a new point of departure for studying the everyday dynamics of becoming a virtuous American citizen in the eighteenth century without defaulting to environmental determinism, or the belief that the climate is solely responsible for human character. While Crèvecoeur was undeniably influenced by theories about the climate’s transformative effects on people, he also imbues his

immigrant characters with a tremendous amount of power to modify the environment. They are not merely passive subjects to its forces. As acts of swamp cultivation in Crèvecoeur's fiction make very clear, they have the potential to change the climates themselves to better suit their own agrocaptalist endeavors. Andrew's swamp cultivation demonstrates that Americans possess an intimate knowledge about their environment that enables them to modify it to their own desires and to national norms—in this case, farms. While this is a subtextual theme in "History of Andrew," Crèvecoeur expounds upon the day-to-day mechanics of swamp cultivation more fully in the penultimate letter of *Letters*, "From Mr. Iw-n Al-z, a Russian Gentleman, Describing the Visit He Paid at My Request to Mr. John Bertram, the Celebrated Pennsylvanian Botanist" or "Iwan's Letter."

—THE ART OF BANKING

Told from the perspective of a well-educated Russian traveler, "Iwan's Letter" endorses the semifictional character "John Bertram" and his husbandry, especially his irrigation and drainage techniques, as epitomes of American virtue.¹⁶ Aside from discussions on botany, slavery, and Quaker beliefs, the letter details how Bertram, through a series of dikes and levees and with help from the Pennsylvania legislature, reclaims the wetlands that surround him. First written around 1770 before being revised for *Lettres* in 1782 and again for *Lettres* in 1784, "Iwan's Letter" and its French counterpart, which I will simply call "Ivan's Letter," illustrate

¹⁶ Although Crèvecoeur knew John Bartram, this story is entirely fictional and does not necessarily reflect Bartram's beliefs. To distinguish the fictional character from the historical person, I use Crèvecoeur's alternative spelling of Bartram: "Bertram."

Crèvecoeur's lifelong fascination with swamps and the meadow companies that drained them.¹⁷

Despite the significance of swamp cultivation in this letter, critics have either overlooked the sustained discussion of it or treated it like a minor plot point rather than as an organizing theme.¹⁸ If Bertram personifies civic virtue for Crèvecoeur, as critics have argued, then swamp cultivation is a practice through which civic virtue is established and sustained, especially in "Ivan's Letter."

Bertram's dikes, ditches, and reservoirs captivate his Russian visitor's political imagination just as much as his botanical expertise. In *Letters*, Iwan compares feudal and republican organizations of society, lamenting that the distribution of lands in Russia prevents such inventive agricultural improvements. In *Lettres*, Bertram's husbandry pushes Ivan one step farther. It inspires him to become a new man, a citizen of Pennsylvania: "as of today, I cease being Russian and European, becoming your compatriot and an American" (*Lettres* 160). Celebrating the "rare and precious acquisition" of "a citizen so virtuous and so respectable," Bertram takes Ivan's hand and promises, "at the first meeting of our Assembly, we will see your name inscribed on the list of our inhabitants as it already is on my heart" (160). No longer the story of an inquisitive sojourner who temporarily fills in for an increasingly disillusioned James,

¹⁷ In *Lettres*, Crèvecoeur makes some minor changes that magnify the importance of swamp cultivation. Most noticeably, Crèvecoeur brings "Iwan's Letter" from the end of the book to the beginning, making it the sixth chapter out of sixty-three. "Ivan's Letter" and "Histoire d'André, l'Hébridéen" are separated by only one other vignette about an American farmer who migrates to the continent's interior. When brought into such proximity, their shared interest in swamp cultivation and naturalization becomes even more pronounced. All translation of "Ivan's Letter" are my own and come from the 1784 edition of *Lettres* but have been cross-referenced with the 1787 edition.

¹⁸ Since Pamela Regis's seminal rereading of "Iwan's Letter" as the culmination of natural history in *Letters*, critics have tended to analyze this sketch through natural historical frameworks in order to make sense of the letter's placement, its concerns with the natural world, and the kinds of sociality it makes possible. See, in particular, Manuela Albertone, Katy Chiles, Helen Cowie and Kathryn Gray, and Christine Holbo.

“Ivan’s Letter” is a sentimental naturalization narrative that illustrates how to cultivate agrarian virtue through what Crèvecoeur calls “the art of banking” or “l’art de faire ces digues.”

An act of environmental reform, the art of banking broadly refers to the draining and diking of swamps and marshes in order to reclaim them for crops and livestock, to reduce the likelihood of disease, and to beautify the landscape. “It is by this simple expedient so many acres of meadow, which formerly were only infectious marshes are now dried, firmed,” Bertram remarks to Ivan, “becoming, for our city, a great source of wealth and adornment” (*Lettres* 143-44). Aside from alleviating local medical concerns, the art of banking makes swamps economically productive and aesthetically pleasing by imposing neoclassical values of order, regularity, and beauty onto an otherwise hostile landscape. Seen as an act of public good, it inscribes the community’s values onto the land itself.

The art of banking operates as a literal kind of landscape writing that reconfigures the boundaries between wet and dry land, between unhealthy and healthy, between waste and wealth. It transforms the chaotic, disorderly wetlands into aesthetically beautiful and economically productive farmlands. According to Edward Cahill, Crèvecoeur projected a national destiny of future glory onto the natural environment through his depiction of beautiful farms and sublime wildernesses. Wetlands are neither beautiful nor sublime; they are chaotic—an aesthetic quality that justifies their cultivation. As spaces of disease and disorder, they materially endanger the sustainability of the pastoral farm as a symbol for the nation’s futurity. The art of banking expands Cahill’s suggestion that Crèvecoeur’s characters must “internalize virtue and enjoy the mental pleasure of cultivation” (136), revealing how they must also externalize virtue—that is, write it onto the landscape itself—through the material practice of draining swamps and erecting dams.

Such a monumental task is expensive, strenuous, and impossible to do alone, as Crèvecoeur acknowledges. From atop a freshly made embankment, Bertram discloses to Ivan how “the proprietors of these swamps are brought together and associated by an act of *our Assembly*. Each year we elect a Treasurer and pay him a sum proportionate to the number of acres that each possesses: the damage, which can occur to these lands, is repaired at the expense of the treasurer” (*Lettres* 143). Dated October 12, 1769, “Ivan’s Letter” is set approximately eight months after the Pennsylvania Assembly passed a “drainage act” on February 18 which renewed the charter for two meadow companies in Kingsess, where the real John Bartram lived.¹⁹ Throughout the eighteenth century, drainage acts such as this one established meadow companies to oversee the day-to-day management of wetlands within a specified district of farmers. Composed of treasurers, inspectors, and managers, meadow companies held a variety of responsibilities such as surveying wetlands, raising funds to construct dikes, and repairing drainage ditches that cut through multiple people’s property. An early kind of insurance policy, meadow companies protected farmers from being bankrupted by natural disasters or wild animals. Crèvecoeur acknowledges these naturally occurring threats when Bertram thanks God that “our capital became superior to the damages that are caused by floods and muskrats” (143).

Although agrarian myths of the freehold concept extol the political and economic independence of farmers, Crèvecoeur’s illustration that meadow companies are state-sponsored, communal endeavors complicates American investments in individualism that are associated

¹⁹ See “An Act to Enable the Owners and Possessors of the Northern District of Kingsess Meadow Land, in the County of Philadelphia, to Keep the Banks, Dams, Sluices and Floodgates in Repair, and to Raise a Fund to Defray the Expenses thereof,” *The Statutes of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1801*, 244-259.

with Jeffersonian agrarianism.²⁰ When considering swamps in “Ivan’s Letter,” the self-reliant, politically and economically independent yeoman figure of the Jeffersonian myth vanishes as quickly as it appears. First, Bertram’s success is dependent upon the shared responsibilities of the meadow company—the corporation of farmers and laborers who collaborate to improve all of their properties. Second, the success of the meadow company is contingent upon nonhuman forces as well. Even if a farmer refused to participate in a meadow company, then his susceptibility to muskrats and floods would nevertheless persist. For Crèvecoeur, the farmer can never be a fully atomized individual because of his entanglements with human and nonhuman actors. Importantly, Crèvecoeur’s entangled farmers and their art of banking also gesture toward a corporate model of agrarian citizenship, in which citizens cooperate to modify the natural environment specifically wetlands.

When Ivan first meets Bertram, he is erecting “a newly made bank, which seemed to confine greatly the bed of [the Schuylkill’s] stream” with the help of nine hired laborers (*Lettres* 139). Although no legislative act ever named John Bartram as a meadow company manager, Crèvecoeur makes a strategic choice to do so. Lacking the prestige to present himself as an expert on managing a meadow company, he capitalizes on the real Bartram’s authority as a botanist and redirects some of that expertise into the drainage practices with which he was familiar. Through the semifictionalized persona of “John Bertram,” Crèvecoeur magnifies his own authority to document the civic responsibilities that accompanied being a manager of a meadow company. If he were a manager of the Kingsess meadow company, as Crèvecoeur

²⁰ On the yeoman figure in *Letters*, see Albertone, 11-16 and Verhoeven, 97-111. On the yeoman figure more broadly, see Chester Eisinger and Henry Nash Smith. Betsy Erkkila also complicates Jefferson’s idea of the independent yeoman in *Mixed Bloods*, observing that those “who toil in the earth” are the slaves rather than the “virtuous” slaveholders such as Jefferson himself.

suggests, then Bertram would be required to inspect the wetlands at least four times a year, to scour drains, to mow ditches, to hire laborers, to ensure that his fellow farmers maintained their dikes, and to exterminate any vermin that may compromise the integrity of the embankments. He would be required to cultivate a knowledge of how to interact with and understand the nonhuman beings and nonliving matter that compose the swamps—that is, a swamp sensibility.

Through the character of Bertram, Crèvecoeur reveals how the swamp sensibility of a meadow company manager is not necessarily reducible to a natural historian's view of nature. As scholars have noted, eighteenth-century naturalists generally regarded nature as an orderly Great Chain of Being without gaps or discontinuities that could be classified according to morphological differences that were determined by environmental and climatic factors. Even when their empirical observations suggested something different, early American naturalists stressed the immutability of the natural world, conceiving of it as a relatively stable and harmonious collection of living beings that could be classified taxonomically. When Christine Holbo says that “the ‘nature’ this letter assumes is an orderly, rational, and moral one, following universally comprehensible and applicable laws” (50), she accurately detects the natural historical undercurrents in the story, but this view of nature does not comport with the way meadow companies perceived their swampy environments, even within “Ivan’s Letter.”

Meadow companies viewed their swamps as chaotic, disorderly, deadly, and, most importantly, mutable. When describing the Schuylkill’s flood plain, Crèvecoeur introduces eighteenth-century pathogenic theories on miasmas to justify the art of banking. Together with his meadow company, Bertram reclaims the “putrid swampy soil, useless either for the plough or for the scythe” (*Letters* 190). Beyond being economic wastes, these “putrid” spaces incubate biological dangers such as malaria (literally “bad air”) and bilious fevers. Although these

medical concerns are present in the English edition, the French editions more clearly highlight the epidemiological risk these lowlands pose to cultivators: “our highest tides were sometimes going several miles in distance, flooding the lowlands which infected the air of the neighborhood and was good for nothing” (*Lettres* 143). Only through the meadow company’s art of banking are these infectious environments brought under control. As Bertram’s meadow company and his art of banking make clear, the climate is neither as determinative nor as static as Crèvecoeur’s scholars have assumed. If it were, then the shores of the Schuylkill would be populated by degenerated Europeans whose health had dissipated due to the noxious vapors arising from their flooded lowlands. Instead, by investing his characters with the power to change these insalubrious swamps into wholesome fields through voluntary associations, Crèvecoeur elevates the art of banking into a community-building practice.

Because the two occupations offer seemingly conflicting notions about nature and the communities formed around it, Bertram’s status as a meadow company manager is as important as his reputation as a naturalist. According to Holbo, Crèvecoeur’s use of natural history in “Ivan’s Letter” facilitates the formation of an intellectual, transatlantic community of learned men that challenges the reification of national identities. Meadow companies in “Ivan’s Letter,” however, facilitate the formation of local communities of farmers, which accelerates the realization of proto-national civic subjectivities, or citizenship. Less concerned with abstract ideas about nature and its taxonomic order, meadow companies yielded communities that were intimately familiar with an environment that was perceived to be antagonistic to white lives.

Unlike naturalists who may have known each other only through the medium of print, members of American meadow companies were neighbors.²¹

Crèvecoeur does not let the hyper-localness of meadow companies upset the potential for imagining even larger networks of associated strangers. When explaining the formation of meadow companies to Ivan, Bertram admits, “Our brothers from Salem in New Jersey have pushed the art of banking much farther than we” (*Lettres* 144). By calling the residents of Salem “brothers,” Bertram fabricates a familial bond that unites strangers into a kind of fictive kinship through the art of banking rather than a republic of letters.²² Crèvecoeur treats the art of banking as a quasi-sentimental practice that constitutes a “we.”

While, in this particular moment, “we” explicitly applies to human communities, Crèvecoeur implicitly extends “we” to certain nonhumans and not to others. Taking his Ivan “to revisit the new dike, which seemed to be his favorite object” (*Lettres* 148), Bertram describes the methods by which he makes the land hospitable for his livestock, for his crops, and for the curious plants in his garden. Within a few hours of being embanked, the land undergoes a radical transformation from wetland to pasture. Freshly exposed to the air and the sun, the soft, sodden soil is “dried and already covered in herbage” that will feed his horses and cattle (148). Showing little concern for the nonhuman species that he loves to observe and catalogue, Bertram routinely

²¹ Drainage acts tended to demarcate a meadow company’s jurisdiction not through latitudinal or longitudinal coordinates but through a combination of farmers’ properties and natural landmarks. These jurisdictions would be relatively inscrutable to people from outside the immediate vicinity. However, for the farmers living in that township, these would have been perfectly legible. For an example of this, see the preamble and section I of the “Kingsess Meadow Company Act” in *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*.

²² The English edition undersells the ubiquity of meadow companies when Iwan claims to have never heard of “any such association in any other parts of the continent” (*Letters* 190), but Crèvecoeur removes this assertion in the French editions. Additionally, Iwan remarks that Virginia would be greatly improved if it practiced the art of banking—a claim that is again removed from *Lettres*.

destroys their habitat. The livestock, crops, orchards, and botanical gardens of white European and American colonists displace the indigenous collections of living beings that constitute American wetlands. Not questioning the rationality of this violent environmental modification, Ivan praises the art of banking as a civic virtue. “What pleasure for a good citizen,” Ivan announces while touring the freshly consolidated fields, “going from a miry swamp to walking on rich and fertile soil! what a lesson of industry for infinitely older Nations” (148). Absent in the English edition, these enthusiastic interjections are not just rhetorical flourishes but examples of a sensibility wherein swamps register as firmly un-American spaces.

This swamp sensibility establishes a normative ethical orientation for the art of banking. Crèvecoeur envisions the art of banking as an ethics of care that virtuous citizens enact in order to protect the well-being of the collectives of human and nonhuman lives that comprise the community—that is, white men and women, their livestock, and their crops. As an ethics of care, the art of banking entails a whole set of ideas, associations, and responsibilities that Americans have in relation to themselves, to their communities, and to their marshy environments. When surveying Bertram’s “consolidated and firmed lands, which, a few years before, were submerged by the waters of the river,” Ivan proclaims, “everything announced the best husbandry and the most assiduous *care*” or “*les soins les plus assidus*” (*Lettres* 148; emphasis added). Hedges are planted at right angles. Clover is blooming. Fences are well-maintained. Rather than being a disorderly, infectious wetland, the landscape conforms to the vision of nature endorsed by American naturalists: orderly and beautiful.

Almost antithetical to its connotations in current environmental politics, care in “Ivan’s Letter” does not refer to the conservation of natural ecosystems from exploitation or eradication but to their cultivation for capitalist markets. In French, *soin* encompasses a range of closely

associated activities that turn something into the object of one's care, one's concern, one's attention, or one's custody in order to improve or to protect it from harm. In and of itself, *soin* is neither wholly benevolent nor wholly negative but situational and flexible. Depending on its orientation, it can be used to destroy environments or, as I will shortly show, to conserve them. Understanding this nebulous concept of *soin* (care) is crucial to understanding the vicissitudes of Crèvecoeur's swamp sensibility across his writing, particularly in *Voyage*.

—UNSUSTAINABLE CITIZENSHIP

Swamps are front and center in *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l'état de New-York*, a fictionalized travel narrative based on notes Crèvecoeur kept while living in New York. Published in 1801 and translated into German in 1802, *Voyage* never managed to achieve the same level of international popularity or scholarly importance as *Letters* or *Lettres*, even after its translation into English in 1964.²³ A loosely organized set of vignettes, *Voyage* has neither a unifying plot nor a linear chronology—narrative features that caused twentieth-century critics to dismiss it as a sign of Crèvecoeur's diminishing literary talents.²⁴ Styled as a water-damaged manuscript rescued from a shipwrecked vessel by a Copenhagen customs house and, as the title page claims, given to the author of *Lettres d'un cultivateur américain* for translation, *Voyage* follows a series of journeys undertaken by the enigmatic narrator, "S.J.D.C." and Gustave Herman, his impressionable German companion, across the American backwoods during the late 1780s and early 1790s. Together they attend an Onondaga tribal council in the first volume. In

²³ I cite from Clarissa Spencer Bostelmann's excellent 1964 translation of *Voyage*, and I have compared each citation with *Voyage dans la Haute Pensylvanie et dans l'état de New-York*. Vols. 1-3. Paris: Maradan, 1801.

²⁴ For more on the dismissive treatment of *Voyage* in the twentieth century, see Peter G. Adams, 152-68; and Thomas Philbrick, 144-60.

the second, they venture to Niagara Falls, while the third volume is an assortment of trips and reports from other travelers. Crèvecoeur supplements these socioliterary vignettes with nonfictional footnotes that give detailed information on a host of topics such as population growth, Native Americans, smallpox, bees, Hessian flies, the Great Lakes, woolly mammoths, swamps, and more. More encyclopedic than novelistic in content and form, *Voyage* is of great documentary and historical value for the wide range of perspectives it presents about the relationships between humans and nonhumans in the United States, particularly between immigrants and swamps.²⁵

From Sweden, Poland, Scotland, Portugal, and elsewhere, immigrants come to the marshy American backwoods to secure happiness, health, and prosperity. Each sketch provides insights into the environmental activities that ensured their successful Americanization. For instance, Swiss immigrants, Frederic Hazen and his nameless brother “excel in the art of irrigation,” having filled the “waste lands” with mulberry, acacia, plane, and hickory trees (*Journey* 444). Seeking to improve his health in New York, an unnamed Anglo-Jamaican Creole prefers “to make over a new land that becomes dearer through the works it exacts, to fell from it the useless trees that encumber it, to plant on it fine, useful ones, to dam up and guide waters wherever necessary, to cultivate and plant the new and rich soil” (83) rather than endure the horrors of African slavery or the diseases endemic to Jamaica’s oppressively hot climate. Along with the host of other immigrants who fill the pages of *Voyage*, each of these men possess environmental sensibilities that foreigners can learn to replicate as they become Americans.

²⁵ Thomas Philbrick judges *Voyage* to be “of unquestionable documentary value” with “its great mass of information and its maps and statistical tables” (*St. John de Crèvecoeur* 149-50). Despite this, he warns that *Voyage* is “a difficult and demanding” book that is “too long by far, repetitious and slow in its development” with a burdensomely “ornate and sometimes windy style” (160).

Although optimism guides these prospective Americans as they learn how to girdle trees, mow undergrowth, drain swamps, and irrigate fields, a critical pessimism still lingers. Despite the “universal desire” of Americans to cultivate the earth, S.J.D.C. warns Mr. Herman that “all the colonists do not succeed: here, as elsewhere, success does not crown all enterprises, for man is exposed to the dangers of accidents, to bad seasons, and to the caprice of fate. Everyone does not bring with him the necessary temperament, customs, nor the intelligence which this new way of life demands” (*Journey* 32-3). Crèvecoeur situates agricultural failure within a web of ecological factors that can exacerbate a farmer’s individual shortcomings. If American citizenship is predicated upon the cultivation of a farm, then it is dispersed across a range of human and nonhuman actors. It does not reside within the body of a rational person but emerges from their enmeshments with living and nonliving beings that comprise American ecosystems. Although these enmeshments are potent in the cultivation of a political subjectivity, they are not as deterministic as some eighteenth-century natural historians might presuppose.

Excited about minimizing the deleterious effects of the climate, one American-born farmer in Tioga County mentions that most swamplands “will soon disappear altogether” thanks to local drainage acts, which elsewhere “produced very healthful results” (*Journey* 44). To improve the quality of life for Americans, these drainage acts “forced land-owners to drain their swamplands (Bog Meadows), opening the streams formerly choked by beaver dams, and also to surround their grants with deep ditches” (44). To assist the New York legislature, this ambitious farmer compiles a list of wetlands that can be embanked and drained. Swamps have no value, aesthetic or scientific, except in their commodification. They are merely sites of timber, fertilizer, and unused land. Calling their draining “more important than that of a sugar island or a new business enterprise” (44), he dreams about the fertility of the loose, silt-enriched soil that

lies beneath one million eight hundred thousand acres of shallow water. Optimistic about the future of his farm and the American nation, the farmer opines, “how desirable it would be if these drainage laws should become universal!” (44).

His anti-swamp national fantasy might seem rational and beneficial, if not for the precautionary sensibility of Mr. Nadowisky, the naturalized Polish-American farmer from the preceding chapter. An anti-utopian meditation on the state of American husbandry, Nadowisky’s chapter is a pessimistic interlude wherein Crèvecoeur questions the sustainability of the agrarian project. A surgeon by trade, Nadowisky clandestinely flees Poland when Russia annexes his native province. Arriving in America, he carefully studies the political and environmental foundations of his adopted country under the guidance of his German father-in-law, Mr. Mulhausen. To succeed, Mulhausen informs him that an immigrant “must also have knowledge of this new way of life. Farm work being composed of several branches, everything pertaining to work, supervision, and precaution must be concomitantly the objects of your daily care” (*Journey* 36). He teaches him how to uproot trees, how to judge the quality of soil, how to doctor sick livestock, how to fence orchards, how to build barns and houses, and how to preserve his and his family’s health. In narrating Nadowisky’s transformation from Polish doctor to American farmer, Crèvecoeur addresses the consequences wrought by the intensification of ecosystemic violence to American wetlands.

Like Bertram and Andrew, Nadowisky personifies a virtuous republican farmer who reclaims land from the swamp, but he is far more critical of the practice than Crèvecoeur’s other characters. Although Nadowisky admittedly prefers draining swamps to plowing the earth, he acknowledges the unintended effects his actions engender. “The creek is drying up gradually as the land clearing increases,” Nadowisky laments, “I know some people, who, not realizing that

their stream sources were from swamps, constructed mills which today are of course, useless” (39).

His knowledge of water shortages undermines the anonymous American farmer’s unqualified endorsement of universal drainage laws. Forecasting significant diminishment in his crop outputs, especially from his beloved orchard, Nadowisky concedes, “if ever this creek dries up, it will be an irreparable loss for me, for it is difficult to understand, if one has not actually seen it, the effect of irrigation on the growth of vegetation and trees” (39). What were once the enemies of farmers and the antitheses of the agrarian order are now recognized to be the sources of its lifeblood. Whereas Bertram and Ivan simply delight in the disappearance of swamps and consider the shrinking of the Schuylkill flood plain to be a sign of national pride and progress, Nadowisky does not. If his compatriots see swamps as obstacles to physical health and economic success, then Nadowisky sees their existence as essential to his family’s and his country’s future.

Without cultivating a more sympathetic, more precautionary swamp sensibility, ecological citizenship falls into crisis as Crèvecoeur forewarns in the chapter’s fourth footnote:

The drying up of the streams which do not come from high terrain, the entire disappearance of a great number of them, are the effect of the drying up of the swamps and the clearing of lands. This decrease is even beginning to be felt in the large rivers, such as the Delaware, the Mohawk, and the Potawmack. I have seen ruins of mills in the midst of fields, where twenty years ago fat streams swelled. But even now, our water supply is greater than Europe’s. But what will it be in a century or two? (*Journey* 182)²⁶

²⁶ Crèvecoeur originally wrote this paragraph in the mid-1770s in an unpublished sketch called “Fifth Letter,” which was finally published in 1925 as “Various Rural Subjects.” The original composition date of this footnote highlights the fact that Crèvecoeur did not move from a

The environmental violence that sustains an agrarian-based nation-building project breaks forth as an increasingly exhausted environment shows material signs of overuse and exploitation. The eradication of swamps desiccates the land. It makes the soil less moist and crops more prone to accidents. With over half of the swamps already cleared, water evaporates more quickly. This rapid evaporation, in turn, intensifies spring and summer droughts that exhaust the streams, creeks, and wells that irrigate farms. Rather than simply diminishing the frequency of life-threatening risks such as disease, swamp cultivation introduces a new, unforeseen ecological danger: water exhaustion. Within this easily overlooked footnote, Crèvecoeur recalibrates the national importance of swamps. They become spaces that virtuous Americans must also conserve rather than just eradicate.

Nadowisky exhibits a swamp sensibility that differs *methodologically* from the nameless Tioga farmer's or from John Bertram's. Although he hopes to reclaim more swampland to increase the value of his property, he treats it as a discrete object of inquiry rather than as a chaotic collection of plants and animals. Nadowisky maps the webs of interrelation and interdependence between humans, nonhuman organisms, and the physical environment they coinhabit. Departing from the scientific models established by the natural historians of his day, Nadowisky does not merely describe and classify flora and fauna according to morphological differences so much as he monitors the ecosystemic changes in wetlands in relation to human activity, specifically to agricultural development.

Nadowisky's attentive concern for swamps transforms him into a kind of proto-ecologist, scientifically and politically. Nadowisky continues to drain swamps to increase his wealth, but he

procultivation sensibility to an anticultivation one as he aged but rather that he possessed both concurrently throughout his life.

does so while cultivating an intimate knowledge of their everyday vicissitudes. Stephanie Sarver suggests this intimacy with swamps betrays Crèvecoeur's nascent "understanding of ecological balance" (14).²⁷ Rather than present wetlands as relatively immutable collections of living beings, Crèvecoeur treats them as complex systems of life and death that affect humans and nonhumans. Ecosystems are not balanced, closed, or self-sustaining collections of living beings that are arranged according to some universal order that only enlightened natural historians can detect if they catalogue enough species into a taxonomy. Nature is a product of human culture as much as human culture is a product of nature. Although this sensibility is certainly not unique to Nadowisky, his acknowledgment of human-caused catastrophes and everyday ecological crises distinguishes him from almost all of Crèvecoeur's other immigrants.

Through Nadowisky, Crèvecoeur reimagines how American farmers understand their relationship to their wetlands. Rather than classifying wetlands as radically un-American environments that endanger the health of the nation's citizens, Nadowisky's swamp sensibility indicates that America's survival depends upon them in unexpected ways. His intimate knowledge about swamps causes him to advocate on their behalf against their unregulated, universal eradication by overzealous farmers who do not consider the short- or long-term consequences of their actions. Recognizing that nothing is perfectible, he tries to strike a balance between the desires of farmers and the limitations of swamps. Despite his precautionary

²⁷ Sarver is not alone in identifying Crèvecoeur's ecological tendencies. The Crèvecoeur biographers, Gay Wilson Allen and Roger Assineau suggest that Crèvecoeur exhibits ecological thinking. While associating Crèvecoeur's attitudes with ecology can be anachronistic, as I have demonstrated with regard to other scholars, the scientific concept of "ecology"—the study of macro-systems of life—can clarify Crèvecoeur's awareness of or sensitivity to humans' embeddedness within interconnecting webs of living organisms and nonliving matter.

sensibility, Nadowisky does not fully commit to preserving his wetlands. However, John de Bragansa does.

—THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BEAVERS

The antepenultimate chapter of the second volume of *Voyage*, the sketch of John de Bragansa tells the story of how an immigrant becomes “a citizen of a country... where the writs of naturalization are easily obtained; where the farmer’s status is one of the most respectable; a place finally, whose laws are based on the eternal principles of reason, justice, and liberty” (*Journey* 357). Aside from being an unabashed paean to American exceptionalism, this list directly responds to the abuses Bragansa faced in Portugal, Brazil, and Nicaragua. Bragansa, also known as John Brinker, is an itinerant man whose strategic and provisional identities help him to move safely across national borders until he settles on the Junius River in present-day West Virginia and becomes a naturalized American in 1773.²⁸ While the events of Bragansa’s various migrations revolve primarily around political and religious conflicts, the environment consistently mediates his immigration experience. As a gardener, farmer, cartographer, and botanist, Bragansa possesses multiple ways of knowing about and interacting with the natural environment, but none of them stand out quite like his atypical stance toward swamps. What

²⁸ In *Fatal Revolutions* (2012), Christopher Iannini traces Crèvecoeur’s consuming investment in “a particular form of enlightened cosmopolitanism” (134) to argue that, as an itinerant man, he has no singular national affiliation but multiple, provisional ones. Iannini recognizes this itinerancy informs the cosmopolitan outlook found in many of Crèvecoeur’s unpublished sketches. Attentive to large-scale geopolitical conflicts and their effects on individual people, John de Bragansa’s sketch narrates itinerancy more clearly than any other immigrant sketch even though it ends with the cultivation of a fixed, American civic identity.

begins as an appreciation for beavers grows into a radical refusal to cultivate some of his swamplands. Bragansa's respect for beavers is centrifugal. It radiates outward to encompass even larger assortments of nonhuman lives over which he acts as a custodian.

A dedicated student of nature, John de Bragansa examines climates and environments as he moves from country to country, from hemisphere to hemisphere. "What a contrast between the two climates!" he exclaims upon arriving in Portugal where he juxtaposes its warm air and verdant vegetation against the cooler, more dismal climates of Holland where he was raised. Attentive to the effects that these climates have on humans, Crèvecoeur details the affective responses that Portugal's cloudless skies, its blisteringly hot days, its refreshingly cool nights, and its profusion of orange, almond, and palm trees elicit from Bragansa. While his experiences of nature are relayed in subjective terms in Europe, his observations become increasingly scientific once he moves to North America. Stating that a person "could make a very interesting collection of the flowers that grow wild" in the Indiana province where he resides, he notifies S.J.D.C. that "I am at work on a *Flora Indianica* that you will probably hear about some day" (358).

Although John de Bragansa resembles John Bertram as a virtuous naturalist-farmer, Bragansa's treatment of swamps diverges dramatically from the renowned botanist's. Upon settling his land, Bragansa has "the good fortune to find in one of my swamps the remains of a colony of beavers" (357). During the late eighteenth century, beaver pelts were in high demand in the transatlantic marketplace, and beaver hunting decimated their populations. So, of course, it would literally be a "good fortune" to find such an easy source of income on one's newly purchased land. Crèvecoeur upsets the literal meaning, suggesting that the presence of beavers is in and of itself a good fortune because of the pleasure they bring to Bragansa. Rather than killing

and commodifying the beavers, he promises them “the most inviolable hospitality” (358). His extension of hospitality to the beavers guarantees them certain protections. It recognizes them as members of a community in ways that other sketches do not. It grants them rights as the original inhabitants of the land and to the swampy ecosystems on which they depend for shelter and for food. Bragansa pledges: “As long as I live, the dam on which they have built their dwellings will be respected, and this swamp will never be dried up” (358).

Through this bold declaration, Crèvecoeur distinguishes John de Bragansa’s swamp sensibility from that of Andrew, the Hebridean, even though both characters become equally active participants in American civic life. In the French editions of “History of Andrew,” Crèvecoeur explicitly connects André Crawford’s successful Americanization to the destruction of beaver dams. André’s homestead contains over twenty acres of swamps, but little concern is given for this land “which will easily be dried out as soon as you have torn down some beaver dams” (*Lettres* 97).

In order to secure his future as an agrarian citizen, André must wage war against beavers and the wetland habitats that they create and inhabit. André dispossesses them of their habitat and converts their homes into grazing meadows for his livestock. Thus, whereas André’s swamp sensibilities are predicated upon domination and violence, John de Bragansa’s are rooted in respect and stewardship. Their divergent swamp sensibilities may, perhaps, be attributed to their socioeconomic class. André works for three years to afford a one hundred-acre farm, while John de Bragansa purchases a vast 2,600-acre estate. For this reason alone, different restrictions would be placed on their capacity to relate to beavers and swamps. Much like Nadowisky’s, André’s success as a farmer depends upon increasing the limited availability of arable land. Bragansa has no similar constraint, having over four square miles of land. However, Crèvecoeur

never offers any clarification as to why these men possess radically different attitudes toward swamps, and, while such may be incredibly enlightening, it in no way changes the fact that Crèvecoeur imagines each of them to be virtuous citizens, socially and ecologically.

Crèvecoeur's immigrant sketches are unexpectedly rich sources of information about his conflicting attitudes toward swamps. His swamp sensibilities are riddled with discrepancies, contradictions, and discontinuities that converge with and diverge from his contemporaries'. Replicating the predominant ideologies about the inimical influence of these environments on humans, "History of Andrew" and "Ivan's Letter" represent swamps and marshes as infectious, chaotic, and worthless wastelands that need to be cultivated by virtuous farmers. These two sketches share a similar narrative trajectory. In both, swamps are drained, and immigrants are naturalized. If the swamp sensibility that emerges in these two sketches are oriented toward domination, then Crèvecoeur outlines an alternative one in *Voyage* that is rooted in stewardship. Through his observations that the eradication of swamps depletes rivers, springs, wells, and other sources of water, Mr. Nadowisky revises the importance of swamps to the United States and its future. John de Bragansa goes farther than any of the other three, pledging to never drain his swamps out of respect for the beavers that inhabit it. Altogether, these immigrant sketches do not necessarily congeal to form a unified narrative about Americanization so much as they offer a kaleidoscopic view into political and ecological dynamics of naturalization during the late eighteenth century.

Crèvecoeur's immigrant sketches elaborate an ecologically oriented vision of American citizenship, opening a space for reconsidering the relationship between nature and civics in the early national era more broadly. Beyond the political, cultural, racial, or economic qualities that scholars have addressed, Crèvecoeur conceives of citizenship through relationships between

humans and nonhumans that coinhabit a shared, yet mutable, ecosystem to which Americans have particular responsibilities that require them to cultivate an intimate familiarity with it. These sketches emphasize the importance of recognizing one's self and one's community as being enmeshed within networks of humans and nonhumans. Imaginative and flexible, these associations change according to new experiences and new relationships that constantly redefine the responsibilities that Americans have to themselves, to their communities, and to their environments. Bonds with natural environments, whether they are wetlands or dry lands, are a constitutive part of naturalization narratives and cannot be ignored when considering the parameters of civic participation and belonging in *Letters*, *Lettres*, and *Voyage*. As these sketches make clear, early American notions of citizenship are deeply entangled with ideas about how immigrants interact with the transformative power of nature—a theme that informs immigrant guidebooks well into the nineteenth century.

Chapter Three

Seeing like a Citizen:

Immigrant Guidebooks and the Nationalization of Ecological Sensibilities

“The want of knowledge, hath in many cases been the cause of ruin and distress to those, who deceived by interested and designing persons, have been conveyed to regions where the rigor of the climate, sterility of the soil, and the arbitrary form of the government, have made them regret their old homes, and in many instances they have been compelled to retrace their long, wearisome, and expensive journey...”

—John Noble, *Noble’s Instructions to Emigrants* (1819)

“Emigrants from England, or any part of Europe, to America, may well be supposed to wish to know *where* and *what sort of country* America is. And although there is little danger, that such persons would frequently embark for *India* by mistake, yet it does sometimes happen that emigrants know little of the geography of the country, to which they are going.”

—Calvin Colton, *A Manual for Emigrants to America* (1832)

Immigrants from the United Kingdom came by the tens of thousands to the United States between 1790 and 1830, urged on by myths about a fertile Promised Land.¹ Immigration became a full-blown culture industry as land agents, utopian philosophers, and publishers exploited the

¹ On English immigration to the U.S. during this period, see Erickson’s *Invisible Immigrants* and *Leaving England*. On their literary productions during this time, see Fender’s *Sea Changes* and Verhoeven’s *Americomania*.

desire of prospective immigrants for information about the United States.² These actors fashioned a genre of literature that explicitly catered to this demand: the immigrant guidebook. Immigrant guidebooks jockeyed for prominence in an emerging literary market by promising to provide the most accurate information about the political institutions, economic opportunities, and environmental conditions of the U.S. The preface to one guidebook advertised itself as a cheap method for “acquiring a correct knowledge of the state, climate, soil, productions, manners, government and laws of the provinces composed in the general term of America” (Noble v). Another guidebook similarly promoted itself as “comprising real practical information” (Blowe 5), while another announced its commitment to citing only authors with “an accurate knowledge of its natural and political advantages” (Knight 3). The concern with “correct” or “accurate knowledge” within these prefaces satiated the desire for “practical information” about how to become naturalized to American ecosystems. In the process, guidebooks transmitted a notion of naturalization in which knowing about the American environment and becoming American converge.

Immigrant guidebooks comprise a genre that is invested in describing both being *and* becoming American. They discuss not only “Americanness” (what is American) but also “Americanization” (how to become American). Filled with practical information, they help prospective European immigrants make decisions about whether to migrate, where to settle, what to bring, how to adapt to American social customs, and how to acclimate to a foreign environment. These nonfictional books dwell on the dangers of changing from one climate to

² As the voluntary movement of Europeans across the Atlantic accelerated so too did the literature about them. The immigration industry and its cultural counterpart converged and fueled each other’s profits. On immigration as an industry, see Cohn’s *Mass Migration*. For its cultural counterpart, see Verhoeven’s *Americomania*.

another and offer tangible strategies for becoming naturalized to American environments while also diminishing the presence of Indigenous people. Whether as letters, directories, or miscellanies, immigrant guidebooks interweave the elements of naturalization narratives—the story of becoming an American—into their lists, tables, charts, maps, and other forms of environmental writing. Guidebooks lack the standard linear plot of fictional naturalization narratives, but they contain a similar understanding of naturalization as a dynamic, ongoing process that occurs in both political and environmental arenas of life. This idea about naturalization, in part, sustains guidebooks as a genre throughout the open door era. To successfully become acclimated to life in the U.S., immigrants require up-to-date information that will help them find healthy and affordable land. This desire for information results in the near constant production of guidebooks across Europe and the United States. Focused on the dissemination of information about the U.S. via guidebooks, I argue that these didactic, transatlantic books cultivate a specifically American ecological sensibility that teaches prospective immigrants how to see nature like a citizen.

Cultivating an ecological sensibility was of the utmost importance for prospective immigrants in the early open door era. Take, for example, Daniel Blowe's 700-plus-page guidebook: *A Geographical, Historical, Commercial, and Agricultural View of the United States of America; Forming a Complete Emigrant's Directory through Every Part of the Republic* (referred to as simply *Emigrant's Directory*).³ Published in London and Liverpool in 1820,

³ Not much is known about Daniel Blowe. His guidebook is the only text attributed to him. According to genealogical research, he was born in 1764 in Northern Ireland. He married his wife, Nancy, in 1805, and they had four children. Blowe worked in publishing houses his entire life variously as a compositor and editor. Having never visited the U.S., Blowe clearly compiled his guidebook from other sources rather than firsthand accounts. Of course, this was standard

Emigrant's Directory forms a dense, encyclopedic handbook that prospective English immigrants could consult in order to develop an ecological sensibility of the United States through the “minute and comprehensive description of the soil, productions, climate, and aspect of the country” (6). According to the preface, the guidebook contains

an accurate description of the boundaries, situation, and extent; lakes, rivers, and canals; climate and diseases; mountains; minerals, animal and vegetable productions; settlements and population; Indians; antiquities; extent and navigable waters; prices current; expenses of housekeeping and travelling; together with copious and useful directions to Emigrants, &c. &c. (6)

Organizing every chapter around these topics, Blowe defines each state in the nation by its geographical boundaries, its lakes and rivers, its minerals and topography, its climate, its soils, its flora, and its fauna as well as its civil divisions, political institutions, and social histories. Each chapter maps the relationships between nonliving living matter (soils, rivers) and living beings (plants, animals, people) within civil (government, social customs) and natural (climate, topography) realms. Guidebooks, such as *Emigrant's Directory*, elevate knowing about the character of the climate, the composition of the soil, and the habitats of animals and plants into a constitutive facet of becoming American. Throughout guidebooks, naturalization is not simply about consuming American cultural forms or participating in civic institutions; it also entails appreciating how the combined interactions of living beings and nonliving matter affected the everyday lives of European immigrants.

practice for publishing houses, which were more concerned with profit than a first-hand knowledge of the United States.

Focused on the relationship between nature and culture, immigrant guidebooks represent “the United States of America” as a dynamic assemblage of humans and nonhumans rather than as a static geopolitical entity that exists purely because of legal institutions. Building on Jane Bennett’s work on the political agency of nonhumans, this chapter outlines an ecocritical theory of nationality by examining how guidebooks encouraged prospective immigrants to imagine the U.S. as the emergent product of interconnecting political institutions, cultural practices, and environmental systems.⁴ As a genre, antebellum immigrant guidebooks actively encourage their readers to cultivate ecological sensibilities that would germinate feelings of belonging to America. These ecological sensibilities provide ways of “knowing nature through nationality,” to borrow Peter Coates’s phrase, and ways of knowing nationality through nature (to add my own). According to Coates, knowing nature through nationality refers to the cultural practice of appropriating of “certain landforms, places, and creatures... to help create a sense of national identity” (3). Knowing nationality through nature is a similar imaginative process but one that defines national belonging through environmental knowledge. In this formulation, knowing about nature attaches people to the nation.⁵

⁴ See *Vibrant Matter*. Bennett argues that agency is not inherent in a solitary actor but that it is the distributed across multiple actors who work together to make changes in the world. According to Bennett and other new materialists, actancy (the ability to act), the neologism to redescribe agency, is immanent in human and nonhuman forms of being. In this chapter, I apply the insights of Bennett and other new materialists to examine how immigrant writers distributed Americanness across political institutions, cultural practices, and ecosystems.

⁵ My nature-centered notion of nationality diverges a bit from Benedict Anderson’s print-centered notion of “imagined community,” but not entirely. Guidebooks continue to participate in alternative ideas about nationality that emerge from enlightenment theories of climatic determinism, but they also translate those ideas into printed material that immigrants can read to imagine themselves within a community that also encompasses nonhuman agents.

As this chapter illustrates, guidebooks translate the United States into a “textual ecosystem,” or what I call the discursive recreation of the ongoing, everyday interactions between human and nonhuman matter that materially and symbolically constitute the nation. By treating the U.S. as a textual ecosystem, guidebooks teach immigrants how to read nature like a text—that is, a collection of signs that work together to signify in such a way as to render them legible to those who know how to interpret them. This chapter combines recent theoretical insights from new materialism and ecocriticism to analyze how matter and meaning come together in the nature writing of guidebooks.⁶ As Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman argue in *Material Ecocriticism* (2014), nonhuman forms of matter “intra-act with each other and with the human dimension, producing configurations of meanings and discourses that we can interpret as stories” (7). In short, matter has meaning. Guidebooks inscribe nonhuman forms—rivers, soils, plants, animals, and climates—with cultural meanings that resonate with nationalist ideologies.

In my first section, for example, I dissect the discursive strategies that guidebooks use to teach prospective immigrants how to read the rivers, soils, plants, and animals of the continent through a nationalizing lens. My second section turns to a much larger, more abstract phenomenon—the climate—to explore how guidebooks not only prepare immigrants to read nature as a text but also to rewrite, or modify, the climate to accord with national norms. With the right knowledge, they could change the climate. They could become American with it. The cultivation of nature corresponds with a cultivation of self—both becoming more legible as American in the process. In other words, not only do guidebooks teach immigrants how to become American, but they also reimagine a contested continent as U.S. space. Thus, the

⁶ On the new material turn in ecocriticism, see especially the combined works of Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, as well as those by Monique Allewaert and Michael Ziser.

nationalizing representations of nature in guidebooks necessarily obscure the devastating systems of social and ecological violence that enabled European immigrants to become Americans in the nineteenth century.

By representing the United States as a textual ecosystem, guidebooks recode the materiality of the continent as distinctly American spaces. They marginalize the presence of Native American populations who maintained their sovereignty over these lands—a topic my final section explores in depth. My chapter joins studies of settler colonialism that have explored how official and popular narratives disavow and disallow alternative, Indigenous geographies in order to naturalize the legal geography of the United States.⁷ In *Manifesting America* (2009), for instance, Mark Rifkin opens the door, so to speak, for my nation-centered investigation of nature writing in guidebooks by demonstrating how the imperial political structures of the antebellum period encode “land formerly beyond the purview of U.S. governance as intimately embedded in national space” (6). While Rifkin concentrates on how Native American *land*—the territories that are culturally and legally marked as Indigenous—become intimately tied to national space, I explore how North American *ecosystems* become constitutive of U.S. space. Combining ecocritical and settler colonial theories, this chapter contends that guidebooks imagine an American polity *and* subjectivity as emerging through interconnecting webs of human and nonhuman beings which live within geophysical spaces that are composed of living and nonliving matter.

Before beginning my analysis of nature writing in guidebooks, a brief history of the genre is needed, especially because few of the books I examine in this chapter will be familiar to literary scholars. During the turn of the nineteenth century, the immigrant guidebook diverged

⁷ See studies by Mark Rifkin, Leonardo Veracini, and Patrick Wolfe.

from its parent genre, the travel guidebook, and merged with the immigration tract, a cheap document that promoted European migration to the Americas. An ancient genre with roots in Greco-Roman literary traditions, travel guidebooks compile “practical information on routes, mileages, journey times and the price of post-horses with more expansive advice (on inns, money and measures) as well as sociological and touristic observations on populations or ‘curiosities,’” (Parsons 142). Travel guidebooks differ quite markedly from immigrant guidebooks insofar as they lack the elements of naturalization narratives. Unlike the latter, the writers of the former presuppose that the traveler is a tourist who will return home improved by the journey.

Movement is circular, and the information provided is meant for short excursions rather than long-term settlement or assimilation. Immigrant guidebooks follow the teleology of immigration tracts wherein resettlement and integration into a new community are the goals. Movement is less circular and more linear. Readers do not return home; they find new ones.

These information-rich texts prepare prospective immigrants for life in the U.S. by encouraging them to imagine its social, political, economic, and environmental contours. In this way, the naturalization narrative is immanent within the form of the guidebook itself. The deluge of facts about the United States introduce prospective immigrants to the situations of different parts of the country and allow them imagine themselves as acclimating to it. Influenced by a range of literary traditions, such as travelogues, natural histories, epistolaries, and encyclopedias, immigrant guidebooks are heterogeneous books. They are also an incredibly intertextual genre in which writers freely extracted from other guidebooks without citation. This network of citations makes it sometimes difficult to distinguish one guidebook writer from another, especially since biographical information on many of the writers has been lost. Regardless of their form or authorship, however, guidebooks are defined by their distillation of copious amounts of facts or

impressions that shaped the attitudes of Europeans about migrating and their attitudes about what the United States is.

—NATURALIZING THE NATION

Flush with observations about the water, soils, plants, and animals of the United States, immigrant guidebooks recreate the material environments of the United States through maps, lists, and other nonfictional forms of nature writing. Without accurate information about the quality of the soil or the availability of navigable and potable waters, immigrants would not be able to become naturalized—if they managed to survive at all. Guidebooks implore their readers to settle in rural areas and, thus, normalize an agrarian-based model for becoming American that is highly reminiscent of Crèvecoeur’s immigrant sketches. Throughout antebellum guidebooks, knowing about the nation’s environments proves to be as important for prospective immigrants as learning about its political and economic systems. In *The Emigrant’s Guide to the United States of America* (1829), for example, S.H. Collins, an immigrant from Hull, England, advises his readers to familiarize themselves with the geography of the U.S. as well as its political institutions and economic opportunities.⁸ Before providing a “correct account” of manufacturing, agriculture, and commerce in the United States, *The Emigrant’s Guide* furnishes information about its “Climate, Soil, Natural History, Laws, Character, Manners and Customs, and Religion”

⁸ Published in Hull, England by Joseph Noble in 1829, Collins’s *The Emigrant’s Guide* plagiarizes heavily from *Noble’s Instructions to Emigrants* by John Noble (who lived in Boston). The preface to *Emigrant’s Guide* describes the text as a “new and enlarged edition” that is based on a now out of print first edition. To some extent, the first edition seems to potentially refer to *Noble’s Instructions*, although this is conjecture as I have not located a first edition of Collins’s book. Despite its heavy citation from *Noble’s Instructions*, *Emigrant’s Guide* is a different enough text that it deserves its own treatment as a literary artifact, especially since it went through at least four editions in its own right.

(iii). It commences with an abbreviated examination of the country, describing its boundaries, rivers and lakes, mountains, soils, and climates through various lists. *The Emigrant's Guide* emulates the panoramic descriptions of nature found in other guidebooks of this period, including Gilbert Imlay's *Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America* (1792), John Noble's *Noble's Instructions to Emigrants* (1819), and Blowe's *Emigrant's Directory* (1820).⁹ Through nonfictional forms of nature writing, these guidebooks encourage prospective immigrants to cultivate ecological sensibilities through which the nation and its citizens materialize.

Immigrant guidebooks represent the United States as a vibrant nation that is defined as much by its natural environments as it is by its social customs, economic practices, and abstract political ideals. In doing such, they participate in nation-building discourses by reifying the nationalist narratives found in the eighteenth-century landscape writing, such as Imlay's, that influenced them. According to literary critic Edward Cahill, landscape writing engenders "an emergent sense of the United States as a nation of connected natural spaces, defining it into existence through compelling representations of its territorial possessions" (104). Concentrating on natural history during the same period, Christopher Looby explores the exchanges between environmental imaginaries and civic subjectivities within postrevolutionary American thought, observing that "knowledge of the names and qualities of the beings in nature was not only the

⁹ The identities of most guidebook writers will not be familiar to most readers. However, Gilbert Imlay is a remarkable figure who served as a land agent in Kentucky before moving to London where he composed *Topographical Description* (1792) and its companion novel, *The Emigrants* (1793). Additionally, he became most well known for his illicit, tumultuous affair with Mary Wollstonecraft, which resulted in the birth of Fanny Imlay. Eventually abandoning Wollstonecraft and their daughter, Imlay vanished from the historical record after the French Revolution. Collins, Noble, and Blowe are more enigmatic figures. Little to no biographical information exists about them.

basis of the American's control over his environment, but might also be, in some sense, the foundation of the collective life of the new nation of which he was a member" ("Constitution" 252). In short, knowledge of nature fostered the imaginative formation of a national subjectivity. This ecologically mediated vector of American identity flourished throughout the open door era, and immigrant guidebooks revised and naturalized these early republican notions of citizenship through their descriptions of rivers, soils, plants, and animals.

While these may seem to reflect proto-romantic sensibilities, most of the descriptions of nature in guidebooks tend to be more neoclassical in form. In guidebooks, nature writing often assumes a descriptive, utilitarian style that privileges order, cultivated beauty, and security over the sublime, wild landscapes that captured the imaginations of the Romantic period. Descriptions of nature in guidebooks very rarely send their readers into flights of imaginative fancy that explore emotional response to "untouched" landscapes. Instead, they list information about the political, economic, social, and environmental elements of the United States in order to orient their readers to the human and nonhuman composition of the fledgling nation. Lists are a crucial form within immigrant guidebooks because they structure information about the nation in a clear and concise manner. These lists were overtly utilitarian insofar as they provided practical information about rivers, roads, plants, or Native Americans. Unlike naturalization narratives, readers would not have to skim through story to find information about the climate of Pennsylvania but could find it by consulting either the table of contents, index, or chapter headings. Rather than being the product of an individual genius, guidebooks used lists from other texts to authorize themselves. Guidebooks borrow heavily from other guidebooks, reorganizing lists in new configurations to provide new ways of imagining the United States.

The lists in guidebooks are important for understanding how immigrants imagined the nation but also how they imagined their relationship to it. They give ways of knowing the nation through nature and knowing nature through the nation to prospective citizens. They help make sense of new environment that immigrants will encounter. As historians of science have noted, lists can vary in scope “from organizing the self to ordering the cosmos” (Delbourgo and Müller-Wille 710). The information listed in guidebooks helps to imagine the self as an American through one’s knowledge of American rivers, soils, plants, and animals. Lists introduce immigrants to the rivers, soils, plants, and animals that constituted the nation at a material level. Guidebooks not only attempt to naturalize immigrants to the ecosystems they will encounter, but they also naturalize the existence of the United States by defining its contours through lists about rivers, soils, plants, and animals. In this way, lists are not merely documentary but are also nation-building forms.

Perhaps no other natural feature underscores the convergence of national ideologies and nature writing in guidebooks like rivers and lakes. Maps in guidebooks, such as *The Emigrant’s Guide*, often depict the United States as a nation of interconnected hydraulic systems (Figure 1). Collins’s map omits the standard geopolitical boundaries of the country and instead favors its numerous rivers, lakes, and other aquatic landscapes, such as Niagara Falls or the “Akenianogo” (now called the Okefenokee) swamp. Although the names of American states and Indigenous nations appear on the map, they are not marked by geopolitical lines but written across and within these aquatic topographies. As literary critics have argued, rivers became enmeshed

within the early U.S. national imaginary as American writers and politicians projected desires for national unity and for imperial expansion onto these nonliving, nonhuman systems.¹⁰

Forms of river-centered nationalism had some of their origins in Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the States of Virginia* (1785), which served as source material for guidebooks well into the nineteenth century. In "Query II," Jefferson organizes the major river systems such as the Potomac, the Missouri, and the Mississippi into a list. This list records the length and depth of the rivers, their tributaries, their navigability, their marine life, and other geographical facts that would give François Marbois (secretary of the French legation to the United States) a richer perspective on the economic, political, and cultural significance of the fledgling nation.

¹⁰ See Seelye's *Beautiful Machine* (1991) and Smith's *River of Dreams* (2007).



(Figure 1: S.H. Collins's Map of the United States [1829])

Lists of rivers and lakes energize the national narratives found in guidebooks, particularly Blowe's *Emigrant's Directory*. Expanding upon Jefferson's list of rivers and lakes to include bodies of water located across the continent, *Emigrant's Directory* attributes the possibility of the nation to these interconnected natural features: "The United States seem to have been formed by nature for the most intimate union; no part of the world being so well water with springs, rivers, rivulets, and lakes.—By means of these various streams and bodies of water, the whole country is chequered into islands and peninsulas" (26). Copied from the 1819 entry on "America" in *The Cyclopædia: or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, this

characterization of the republic validates the existence of the United States through the interconnectivity and intimacy of these aquatic landscapes.

This nationalization of North American river systems likewise links Blowe's guidebook to John Jay's nature-centered description of the United States in *The Federalist Papers*. In Federalist No. 2, "Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence" (1787), Jay advances a centralized form of government by insisting that a "succession of navigable waters forms a kind of chain round its borders, as if to bind it together" (91). For both Blowe and Jay, rivers act like thread, stitching the states and their populations together into a national union.

If navigable waterways define the geopolitical configuration of the nation as Jay suggests, then Blowe greatly exaggerates the extent of the country's borders through his lists of rivers. According to him, the Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest, the Rio del Norte (or Rio Grande), and the St. Lawrence River form "the outskirts, as it were, of the United States' Territory" (22). According to Blowe's description of the "outskirts" of the U.S., rivers move the boundaries of the United States into the territories of European and Native American powers, erasing these geopolitical actors. The practical information about these natural features serves as a conduit for expansionist ideologies of American exceptionalism, or the belief that the United States is uniquely extraordinary and destined to occupy the entire continent.

Emigrant's Directory as well as countless other immigrant guidebooks praise American aquatic topographies for being the most economically advantageous, the most beautiful, and the most navigable in the entire world—a major draw for prospective immigrants. Despite containing useful information about the location of American water systems, their currents, their depths, their tributaries, and their marine life, Blowe's list of rivers also cultivates feelings of national pride. According to Blowe, the magnitude and number of rivers distinguish the United

States from European nations, which have less extensive river systems. Of course, the erasure of European rivers, like the Thames, Danube, or Rhine, is largely an ideological maneuver to praise the United States. Unlike the European nations that Blowe disparages, many states are “remarkably well watered,” including Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, Georgia, and Louisiana. Awash in rivers, these landscapes provide aesthetic, as well as economic, value to the young country. The Ohio River Valley, for example, “contains the most pleasing part of its scenery and the most fertile of its shores. It is in reality difficult to conceive of any river in the world winding through any more rich in the bounties of nature, or more elegantly chequered with hill and dale; and many charming islands contribute not a little to the beauty of the scene” (516).

These aesthetic moments of nature writing may seem less important than the lists of scientific information about rivers, but they are not. They are just as didactic. They instruct immigrants on how to consume the visible landscape in ways that conform to national narratives about the grandeur and majesty of nature. They teach prospective readers how to read nonliving, nonhuman matter through cultural templates (i.e. American exceptionalism) that simultaneously educate and indoctrinate immigrant readers.

Beyond rivers, guidebooks relay numerous techniques for how to read the quality of the soil. Much like with rivers, iterations of American exceptionalism pervade these accounts, which greatly exaggerate the inexhaustibility of the soil in order to promote particular settlements. Between 1818 and 1824, for instance, the Illinois territory dominated English immigrant guidebooks after the smashing success of Morris Birkbeck’s *Letters from Illinois*.¹¹ To

¹¹ Morris Birkbeck (1764-1825) was an English farmer turned immigrant who purchased a large settlement of land in Illinois and encouraged English immigrants to relocate there. He was perhaps the most influential writer of an English guidebook in the antebellum period. His works on the United States were best sellers in England, even if they did not convince many British

encourage British immigrants to settle his estate in Albion, Illinois, Birkbeck praises the soil as being “rich, a fine black mould, inclining to sand, from one to three or four foot deep, lying on sandstone or clayey loam; so easy of tillage as to reduce the expense of cultivation below that of the land I have been accustomed to in England...” (17).

In *The Emigrant’s Best Instructor*, John Knight admittedly follows Birkbeck’s example and characterizes the soil of the Illinois territory as being “inexhaustibly fertile” (56). The following year, John Melish (a famous Scottish immigrant and Philadelphia-based cartographer) similarly advertises Birkbeck’s settlement, promising “in point of *soil* and *climate*, and *natural advantages*, it stands almost unrivalled” (52).¹² Both Knight and Melish advance a soil-based vein of American exceptionalism, as it were, that Birkbeck attributes to the class of western cultivators who lacked any “idea of exhausting the soil by cropping” (18). These hyperbolic descriptions of the fecundity of the soil exempt America from the metabolic nutrient cycles that keep soils healthy.¹³

Since the composition of soil was not always immediately discernible, guidebooks encourage prospective immigrants to learn about the relationship between the earth and plants, particularly trees, through lists. The alluvial soils of Illinois were distinguishable not only by their location at the confluence of rivers but also by the presence of “sycamore, cotton wood,

people to migrate to Illinois. On the history of his English settlement and the publications surrounding it, see Eaton’s “New Albion in New America,” Hurt’s “Reality and the Picture of Imagination,” and Wolfe’s “Travelling Representations.”

¹² John Melish (1771-1822) was a Scottish mapmaker who settled in Philadelphia in 1811 after traveling between the United Kingdom and the U.S. for years. He is primarily remembered for creating the first map of the U.S. to extend to the Pacific Ocean, but he also translated his cartographic skills into a travelogue in 1811 and a guidebook in 1820.

¹³ See Foster, Clark, and York’s *The Ecological Rift* for more on the disruption of soil nutrient cycles.

water-maple, water-ash, elm, willow oak, willow, &c.” (Blowe 573). Common in guidebooks, lists of trees furnish a richer picture of the nation’s soils by indicating what kinds of vegetable life they could sustain. Before describing the loamy, sandy, clayey, and gravelly lands of Ohio in *The Emigrant’s Best Instructor*, Knight catalogues the arboreal composition of the state with its white, black and red oak; red, white and slippery elm; hickory, black walnut and beech; maple and cucumber tree; red, white, blue and black ash; whitepine, spruce, hemlock, larch, sycamore, wild cherry, dogwood, honey-locusts, aspin [sic], black poplar, birch, spice wood, sassafras, crab-apple, plum, red mulberry, service tree, horn beam, and cotton tree. (46)

On its surface, this list seems practically useless to anyone who is not a naturalist, but it relays important information about the soil and its productivity. First and foremost, the presence and absence of certain trees signals its fertility or lack thereof. According to Knight, lands rich with maple and beech trees are known for their fecundity, unlike the pine barrens, or lands that are populated entirely with pine trees. The species of tree likewise clue immigrants in to the potential composition of the soil. Certain trees, such as cypress, flourish in partially flooded, swampy soils. Spruce and hemlock trees indicate a thin, cold soil. Lands with white oak are hard and stony, while those with pitch pine are dry and sandy. By learning to “read” the trees, prospective immigrants could interpret the nation’s soil at a distance thanks to guidebooks.

As arboreal lists intimate, cultivating an awareness of American biodiversity is a crucial component of the ecological sensibilities formulated in guidebooks. Heavily influenced by natural histories, guidebook writers began incorporating lists of American plants and animals in the late eighteenth century to refute degeneration theories and to acquaint immigrants with the variety of floral and faunal life. Following the example of Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of*

Virginia, Imlay offers a biodiversity lists in an effort to introduce nonhuman life in Kentucky to his English readers. Over the course of the tenth letter of *Topographical Description*, he names and describes a plethora of domesticated and wild plants and animals to celebrate its magnitude. Imlay's lists efface traditional taxonomic relationships because they are organized according to anthropocentric utility rather than morphological similarities.

Other guidebooks structure their biodiversity lists around geographical location, but still contain similar kinds of information. In his *Guide for Emigrants Containing Sketches of Illinois, Missouri, and the Adjacent Parts* (1831), the American-born Baptist Minister John Peck compares the biodiversity in the Lower and Upper Mississippi Valley. In the Lower Valley, semi-tropical plants, such as the "china-tree, catalpa, fig, pomegranate, banana, and orange" (47) flourish alongside alligators, snakes, mosquitos, dragon flies, and a variety of birds, including pelicans, parakeets, "[g]eese, ducks, swans, and other water fowl" (50). The Upper Valley contains commercial crops, including oats, barley, tobacco, corn, and hemp, along with numerous species of grasses and animals. Wolves, panthers, deer, rabbits, horses, "[f]oxes, rackoons [sic], opossums, gophars [sic], and squirrels are also numerous, as are musk-rats, otters, and occasionally beaver, about our rivers and lakes" (163). These lists introduce prospective immigrants to the magnitude of nonhuman life in the United States.

If biodiversity lists cultivate awareness for the plants and animals that live within the geopolitical boundaries of the U.S., they also outline a demographic overview of the nation's nonhuman populations. Blowe's *Emigrant's Directory*, for example, lists the "vegetable and animal productions" to which Americans are indebted for their own survival and for the survival of the nation. Culinary roots and plants, including "carrots, parsnips, turnips, radishes, beets, beans, peas, cabbages, cauliflowers, celery, lettuce, asparagus, leeks, onions, angelica,

peppergrass, cucumbers, watermelons, muskmelons, cantelopes [sic], pumpkins, mandrakes, squashes, &c. &c.,” thrive alongside medicinal plants, “such as elecampane, or starwort, spikenard, sarsaparilla, ginseng, snakeroot, liquorice, solomon’s-seal, devil’s-bit, horse-radish, gold thread, blood root, &c. &c.” (44). Fruits likewise flourish throughout the states, supplying Americans with apples, “pears, cherries, plums, grapes, peaches, apricots, quinces, nectarines, currants, gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries, mulberries, blackberries, cranberries, whortleberries, bilberries, &c.” Wild animals also prosper, including “the buffalo, elk, moose, carrabou [sic], tiger, porcupine, mountain cat, shunk [sic], carcajou, wood chuck, beaver, opossum, raccoon, deer, wolf, panther, bear, fox, lynx, hare, rabbit, squirrel, weasel, ermine, marten, otter, seal, rat, mouse, bat, minx, &c. &c.” (46). Beyond these land and sea creatures, “upwards of 130 American birds have been enumerated” (51) as well as thirty species of snake and “an immense variety of insects” (53). Nonhuman species proliferate in the Americas as the repeated use of “&c.” implies. The “&c.” infuses these lists with limitless possibilities, making room for yet undiscovered plants and animals. These lists of plants and animals participate in the imagination of a nation, just like the lists of rivers and soils. They give a more concrete reality to the order of nature within the United States, while also making these plants and animals appear as if they are constitutive element of imagining the nation.

Like the lists of soils and rivers in other guidebooks, these lists of animals and plants incite prospective immigrants to envision the United States as a composition of nonhuman populations by mapping their distribution according to latitude. When it comes to apples and pears, for example, those located “south of 33 deg north lat. become not worth the ground they occupy,” and, conversely, “[f]igs, pomegranates, oranges, and lemons, are not natural to any state north of the Carolinas” (Blowe 45). The distribution of fruits helps prospective immigrants

imagine the United States as being divided into various climatic zones that are legible according to the nonhumans within them. The majority of guidebooks agreed that the preferred climates for Europeans were between 29° and 44° north latitude, which were also where the greatest variety of plant species grew. Knowing the habitat ranges of plants helped to make the climatic configurations of the country clearer, and it was this interest in the climate—that is, an assemblage of living and nonliving matter that create long-term weather patterns—that seemed to occupy the attention of prospective immigrants the most.

—READING CLIMATES, CHANGING CLIMATES

Perhaps no environmental factor fascinated European immigrants quite like American climates. “Nor is the article of Climate unimportant,” Thomas Cooper, a British immigrant, land agent, and chemistry professor, observes in *Some Information Respecting America* (1794) before warning his readers that “any sudden or violent change should, if possible, be avoided” (6-7).¹⁴ Written to promote migration to the Susquehanna area of Pennsylvania, Cooper’s tract charts the atmospheric conditions of various states, detailing the effects of the climates on the physiological constitutions of migratory Europeans. Two years previously, Imlay, a rival land agent, encouraged English immigrants to relocate to Kentucky where “the inhaled air gives a voluptuous glow of health and vigour” (28).¹⁵ Much like Cooper, Imlay presumes that an

¹⁴ Thomas Cooper (1759-1839) was an Anglo-American political philosopher and professor of chemistry who came to America in 1794 after epousing Jacobins politics and materialist science in England. Upon arriving in the U.S., Cooper participated in a utopian land scheme to attract British radicals to Pennsylvania. Thus, his descriptions of the United States tend toward the positive, especially Pennsylvania. When this failed, he turned to a career in academics. Notably, Cooper was an avowed Jeffersonian Democratic-Republican and was sued under the Alien and Sedition Acts.

¹⁵ On the Imlay/Cooper rivalry, see Verhoeven’s *Americomania*.

individual's "animal system" is subject to the vicissitudes of the climate, predicting that a "nation which migrates to a different climate will, in time, be impressed with the characters of its new state" (225).¹⁶ Influenced by theories of environmental determinism, Europeans worried about their ability to naturalize themselves to American climates, a concern that guidebooks addressed well into the nineteenth century. In so doing, guidebooks distributed a climate-oriented model of naturalization that emphasized the interconnectedness of humans and the nation's material environments.

Immigrant guidebooks reiterate prevailing medical theories about how European bodies were particularly susceptible to the inimical influences of new climates.¹⁷ In *The Emigrant's Best Instructor* (1818), John Knight lists the precautions that immigrants need to follow when moving to a new climate, noting that "the change of situation, exercise, diet, air &c. often produce such changes in the body, as, without a judicious use of these kinds of medicines, might be highly injurious to the health, if not fatal" (8). As historians and literary critics have argued, Europeans and Americans perceived their bodies to be organized, porous systems that could be disrupted by external influences such as the weather or invisible atmospheric particles called effluvia or miasmas.¹⁸

Each interaction with nature mattered. Dramatic temperature fluctuations between hot and cold enervated the body. Cultivating the earth exposed soil to the sunlight and released miasmas and other agents of contagion into the atmosphere where they could spread ague and

¹⁶ Imlay here quotes from Samuel Stanhope Smith's *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (1787).

¹⁷ On climate- and environment-based medical theories about European bodies, see Sargent's *Hippocratic Heritage*, Valenčius's *Health of the Climate*, and Wisecup's *Medical Encounters*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

bilious fevers to those people who were not yet acclimated. In her examination of medical discourse in guidebooks, Conevery Bolton Valenčius implores us to recognize the dominance of the idea that “[c]hange was perilous” because, as Euroamericans believed, “[v]ariation and sudden transformation within the natural world called forth alternation within the human form” (90). As a result of the transformative power of the atmosphere, prospective citizens needed to recognize how naturalization was a corporeal process about adapting to a foreign climate in addition to being a legal procedure about the acquisition of rights.

If climatic phenomena conspired to jeopardize the physiological security of immigrants, then, as guidebooks promised, immigrants could become naturalized to them. Having heard “much of the agues and bilious fevers,” Morris Birkbeck insists, “strangers are said to be generally naturalized or seasoned to these new countries” (*Notes* 69). Naturalization here assumes a distinctly ecological character because Birkbeck situates the survival of immigrants within atmospheric flows of nonliving particles. Within this framework, naturalization occurs more through everyday interactions between nonhuman matter and immigrants and less through formalized procedures that were administered by the state. After all, in order to naturalize themselves corporeally, immigrants needed to know which climates were healthy and which were fatal. They needed to know when the seasons changed and how this affected diseases. They needed to know how to modify the environment to improve the climate, and guidebooks offered no shortage of advice on how to read the climate.

The climate was not understood to be simply a matter of seasonal temperature changes, weather patterns, and latitudinal locations. Guidebooks presented the climate as an emergent product of collections of living beings and nonliving matter, such as forests, swamps, or

prairies.¹⁹ Birkbeck points toward this dynamic understanding of the climate when reminding the readers of his *Notes on a Journey in America* (1818) that lowlands near bodies of water “are the most unhealthy, and wet prairies the next; that dry soils and elevated situations are more healthy than those that are low or wet; and that mill-ponds are frequently noxious to settlers in their vicinity” (69). Birkbeck’s medical topography centers scientific theories about the entanglements of human health and the climate within the environmental imaginations of prospective immigrants. And, of course, his works were not alone. When describing North Carolina, Blowe’s *Emigrant’s Directory* similarly cautions that the climate was often unhealthy in autumn months because “the exhalations from the decaying vegetable matter in the marshes and swamps are very injurious to health” while the lands away from swamps remained “healthy and agreeable” (477). Both guidebooks construct the climate as a dynamic web of living and nonliving matter in such a way that immigrants could easily learn to interpret its constitution for themselves.

By reading guidebooks, prospective immigrants can learn to interpret the climate. Its composition of invisible particulates, its movements and flows, and its aromas are invested with meanings that guidebooks communicate to their readers. As *Emigrant’s Directory* illustrates when describing Delaware, the “climate is much influenced by the face of the country; for the land being low and flat, occasions the waters to stagnate, and the consequence is, that the inhabitants are subject to intermittent fevers and argues” (434), while further south in the state the “moist atmosphere” is “foggy and unwholesome” (434). The elevation of the earth, the

¹⁹ According to Valenčius, the climate “encompassed temperature, seasonal changes, and weather events, but also implied a broad connection between all the varied aspects of terrain” (97). Guidebooks advance an interactional, or dynamic, rather than latitudinal (or static) model of the climate. This interactional model focuses on the movements, patterns, and relationships within malleable systems of migratory human and nonhuman agents. See Valenčius, 97-132.

movement of water, and the humidity of the air here signify not the promise of health and longevity but the threat of disease and death.

If the natural environment failed to give sufficient information, then the constitution of the climate could be read in the bodies of the population. Henry Bradshaw Fearon does just this in *Sketches from America* (1818).²⁰ Born in Ireland, Fearon was employed by a group of English farmers in Essex to travel to the U.S. to decide whether or not they should immigrate, specifically to Birkbeck's settlement. To determine the healthiness of the U.S., he imagines American bodies as texts upon which the environment impresses meaning. Using conventional medical wisdom, he judges the physical features of Americans to estimate "the character of the climate" and to determine whether it is "congenial to the well-being of the human as that of England" (169-70). Other guidebooks follow suit, describing the robust, ruddy-cheeked populations living within a healthy climate and the decrepit, sallow bodies of people in an unhealthy one. Through these various analytical techniques, prospective immigrants could estimate how the various climates of the United States might affect their body.

According to most guidebooks, the U.S. encompassed the full range of climatic zone, possessing traits associated with the frigid, temperate, and torrid zones.²¹ Knowing about the

²⁰ Henry Bradshaw Fearon (1793-1842) came to England in 1804 and worked as a linen draper before traveling to the U.S. in 1817. While Fearon ultimately advised against immigrating, the farmers who employed him immigrated anyway. As a result, he published *Sketches*. Fearon's guidebook is particularly unique because, as Eaton notes, Fearon was an "Americaphile before his trip" but his experiences made disgusted at American society, especially in Illinois (23-5).

²¹ The discovery and exploration of the Americas challenged climatological models that had operated in European geography since antiquity. Geographical writers divided the world into "klima", or torrid, temperate, and frigid zones, based on their latitudinal position. Temperate zones are the klima where human life and civilization thrive and where European countries are, not coincidentally, located. The colder temperatures of North America confused these models and initiated a scientific and cultural reconsideration of what the climate is, how it forms and functions, and what humans' relationship to it is. On the history of the climate, see Gerbi's

condition of each state helped immigrants to find salubrious, moderate climates. In *Noble's Instructions to Emigrants* (1819), John Noble presents a geographical sketch of North America that divides the U.S. into four regions that share overlapping natural and political histories: the eastern, middle, southern, and western states. Through these one to two paragraph long sketches, prospective immigrants quickly gleaned important information about the character of the climate for each state and how it related to the others. For example, Rhode Island is described as having a "pleasant and highly salubrious" climate (15), a trait also found, unsurprisingly, in Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, and other eastern states. As Noble moves south toward Georgia, the temperature increases so that "[t]he climate in the lower part of the Carolinas, is hot, damp and unhealthy, producing in the autumn a regular and certain appearance of bilious and malignant fevers" (22). He portrays the western states as having salubrious and delightful climates except for select low-lying lands, particularly those of Tennessee and Louisiana, that are "unhealthy and dangerous to the constitution of Europeans" (27). Climatic topographies such as Noble's were common throughout guidebooks of this time period, appearing in some form in Darby's *The Emigrant's Guide*, Fearon's *Sketches of America*, Blowe's *Emigrant Directory*, and Melish's *Information and Advice*. Their prevalence not only reflects the widespread anxiety about the climate. It also reveals the climate-centered epistemologies of becoming American and American exceptionalism.

Dispute of the New World, Kupperman's "The Puzzle of the American Climate in the Early Colonial Period" and "Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience," Osborne's "Acclimatizing the World," and Zilberstein's *A Temperate Empire*.

Across numerous guidebooks, the descriptions of the climate are infused with elements of American exceptionalism.²² Noble's climatic topography demonstrates Europe's environmental inferiority to North America where "the salubrity of the whole of the United States far surpasses in the aggregate that of Europe" (12). In *Information and Advice to Emigrants* (1819), Melish includes a politically charged panorama of the nation's climates, dividing the U.S. into roughly the same four climatic-regional categories as Noble. The northeastern states must contend "with short but productive summers, and cold long winters," while the south endured "hot and sultry" summers before enjoying "mild and agreeable" winters (2). Although the middle states were "delightful, both as to soil and climate," Melish exalts the western land between the Alleghany and Rocky Mountains that "contains a body of the finest land in the universe, and enjoy, upon the whole, one of the finest climates in the world" (3). Noble's and Melish's atmospheric variants on American exceptionalism reinforce myths that the United States is, at an ecosystemic scale, a Promised Land where, with some exceptions, the air rejuvenates Europeans because it is imagined to be suffused with restorative particles.

These descriptions surely shaped the ecological sensibilities of prospective immigrants in very particular ways, but they also fostered strategies for imagining foreign climates through comparisons with more familiar European locations. According to Melish, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana each "possess a much better soil, and much better climate than Britain; and have local advantages equaled by few countries in the world" (5). Shifting from comparative to superlative claims, Melish flattens the environmental particularities of each state in order to exalt American soils and climates and to diminish those of England and other parts of Europe.

²² See Billington's *Promised Land Savage Land*, Buell's *Environmental Imagination*, Hallock's *From the Fallen Tree*, and Kolodny's *Lay of the Land*.

This atmospheric dimension of American exceptionalism furnishes prospective immigrants with an imaginative purchase on the risks and rewards of American climates by equating them with more familiar ones. In one of the many letters printed in *Noble's Instructions for Emigrants*, a British immigrant to Cincinnati, Ohio, (dated July 22, 1816) promises “the climate is much the same in England” and that his health has never been better thanks to the “very pleasant” weather (46). Another letter from Brooklyn, New York, (December 12, 1816) proposes resettling in Ohio, which reportedly possesses “a mild climate more like that of England than any other state in America” (55). However, not all letters radiated such enthusiastic praise for the climate. A letter from Georgetown in the District of Columbia (September 18, 1818) notifies its recipient that the climate is not “so well adapted for health as England” because it “is exceedingly variable, beyond what I had formed any conception of, and new comers (in particular) should be cautious in guarding from the effects of it” (73).

The comparative model also compared the states and territories that the United States claimed. *Emigrant's Directory* catalogues the entire United States and dedicates considerable space to comparing the climate of each state and territory. For example, prospective immigrants could read how the climate of Connecticut was “extremely romantic and pleasant” despite being subject “to many and sudden changes” in temperatures (349) or that the climate of Pennsylvania “differs nothing from that of Connecticut” and is “upon the whole extremely healthy” (405). Alternatively, prospective British immigrants might have been more interested to learn that “there is no part of North America where the climate would be more congenial to a British constitution” (459) than the western parts of Virginia where fevers and agues are unknown except near pools of stagnant water—as an knowledgeable immigrant would expect.

As Blowe's allusion to wetlands suggests, prospective immigrants were eager to learn

how climates were rendered unwholesome by “the exhalations from the decaying vegetable matter in the marshes and swamps [which] are very injurious to health” (477). What distinguished these swampy locations from healthier climates, in their mind, was the presence of invisible, indeed imaginary, particles in the atmosphere—known as miasmas or effluvia—that penetrated the human body and caused diseases.²³ In order to counterbalance, if not avoid, these unhealthy climates, immigrants needed to know how miasmas formed and how they could be arrested—a topic which Maryland-born John Lorain expounds upon in his anti-Birkbeck text, *Hints to Emigrants* (1819). Attentive to the relationship between climate and human health, Lorain’s *Hints to Emigrants* posits that “the matters floating in the atmosphere, which are destructive to human life, generally furnish nutriment for plants, and that trees, and other plants, have been organized not only to arrest these matters, but also to consume or apply them to the purposes of vegetable life” (20-1). A natural part of cycles of life and death, miasmas arise from the putrefying remains of dead plants and animals, and, under normal circumstances, plants consume this matter, fortifying themselves. The cultivation of the earth however disrupts natural miasmatic cycles and causes dangerous spots of concentration to amass. By documenting nature’s miasmatic cycles, *Hints to Emigrants* envisions the American climate to be a fluctuating assortment of gaseous effluvia that interacts with floral and faunal life at the most basic levels of existence. The atmospheric flows of the climate bind humans and nonhumans together in new, dynamic forms of community.

When discussing American climates, many guidebooks concentrate on their malleability as much as their deterministic effects. Attentive to the transformative power of the nonliving

²³ On miasmatic theories of disease, see Sargent’s *Hippocratic Heritage*, and Valenčius’s *Health of the Country*.

particles and nonhuman beings, Lorain advises his reader to practice methods of cultivation that disperse miasmas. *Hints to Emigrants* reports that farmers who build on hills and leave a “belt of planting,” such a trees or crops, between their residence and lowlands can “arrest the poisonous matters, arising from the putrid substances in the bottoms” (19). Knowledge about manipulating the atmosphere through the cultivation of plants aids the prospective immigrant who can change the climate to “greatly preserve the health of the family” (19).

Lorain’s description of miasmatic climates distributes transformative power across interconnected networks of nonhuman beings and nonliving things with which humans interact every day. Despite investing nature with a tremendous amount of power however, *Hints to Emigrants* shows how humans needed to enroll nonhuman forms of life (“belt of planting”) in their agricultural techniques to guarantee their own survival. The ability of Europeans to acclimate and to modify the insalubrious atmosphere is contingent upon their knowledge of plants. Lorain recognizes that plants have the capacity to act and make changes in the world that humans do not. Although humans cannot process miasmas, their affiliation with plants engender symbiotic, albeit asymmetrical, relationships that counterbalance *and* change unhealthy climates. By cultivating particular arrangements of plants in particular locations, immigrants could stop the natural occurrence of miasmas that had been magnified by cultivation practices. With the right knowledge, they could change the climate. They could become American with it.

Like Crèvecoeur’s immigrant sketches from the 1780s, immigrant guidebooks assured their readers that the cultivation of the earth improved the climate. According to Imlay’s *Topographical Description*, clearing the land of trees enabled more solar rays to reach the ground and to warm the air, a thermodynamic cycle which “moderate[s] the climate generally upon the Atlantic sea” (140). Since the North American climate was presumed to be colder than

Europe, this continental warming effect alleviated environmental obstacles to the migration of Europeans. In the early nineteenth century, the assumption that the climate was changing persisted. This information appears to be common sense in Birkbeck's *Notes on a Journey in America*: "There are a few facts on which all agree:—that the country becomes more healthy as it is more cleared and cultivated" (69). Two years later, Blowe similarly naturalized the belief that the North American climate was undergoing a human-caused transformation, remarking how "it appears from attentive [sic] observation, and judicious experiments, that in proportion to the increase of cultivation, the seasons become more moderate" (36). According to Blowe, the "severity of the cold has been found gradually to decrease," which is evinced by the "great diminution of snow in all the oldest cultivated parts of the country" (36). Temperatures rise. Snowfall decreases. Rivers thaw earlier in the year. The transformation of the climate has been so stark that the "temperature of the air" in some parts of Massachusetts have "been improved, by the cultivation of the country, from ten to twelve degrees" (37).

The cultivation of the climate and the cultivation of citizenship converged in immigrant guidebooks as notions of environmental reform and civic virtue became increasingly conjoined in American culture.²⁴ The Americanization of unhealthy climates and the Americanization of immigrants often occurred simultaneously in guidebooks. Becoming an American required cultivating the landscape so that it more closely corresponded to national narratives about the constitution of the atmosphere. Exceptionalist narratives operated not only as exaggerated depictions of composition of American air, but they also provided templates for creating idealized ecosystems. They became models for what the climate should be like and how

²⁴ For more on environmental modification and early American nationalist narratives, see Cahill's *Liberty of the Imagination* (ch. 3), Looby's "Constitution of Nature," and Tichi's *New World, New Earth*.

immigrants should interact with them. Guidebooks fostered an ecological sensibility in which ideas about manifest destiny and American exceptionalism encompass the air. That is, Americans and European immigrants imagined themselves to be “improving” unhealthy climates by cultivating them into an extraordinary atmosphere that suddenly becomes the healthiest, most restorative air in the world. If cultivating the climate was a constitutive part of the American character as so many immigrant guidebooks suggested, then it was also a nationalizing discourse that marginalized Native Americans.

—AMERICANIZING INDIGENOUS TOPOGRAPHIES

Immigrant guidebooks worked the climate into “wilderness” discourses to construct North America as a barely inhabited wasteland with a virgin soil and an unwholesome climate that had the potential to be the greatest environment on earth. As postcolonial scholars and ecocritics have noted, wilderness discourses are narrative techniques of colonial powers that figuratively depopulate the landscape of human inhabitants in order to legitimate the literal extermination of Indigenous people and the seizure of their lands.²⁵ The concept of “wilderness” is often associated with a cluster of interrelated words that obfuscate the presence of human life: “deserted,” “savage,” “desolate,” “barren,” “virgin soil,” “uncultivated,” or “waste.”²⁶ The term did not and does not describe an actual material environment but a culturally constructed notion of place that became synonymous with Native Americans in North America within transatlantic

²⁵ Recognizing that “wilderness commonly meant land before white settlement,” Thomas Hallock traces the colonial roots of “wilderness” in early American nationalist discourses in *From the Fallen Tree*. For more on the colonial and nationalist genealogies of wilderness discourses in American culture, see Cronon’s *Land and Uncommon Ground*, Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind*, and Smith’s *Virgin Land*.

²⁶ Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 70

imaginaries. Immigrant guidebooks facilitated this association of American Indians with wilderness in order to present them as vanishing or vulnerable. As Brian Dippie glosses in *The Vanishing Americans* (1982), American writers expressed the “vanishing American myth” (stories about the inevitable extinction of indigenous Americans) through “images drawn from nature” (13). In these highly romanticized configurations, Native Americans were compared metaphorically to the sunset, to melting snow, and to other ephemeral aspects of nature. Rather than take this symbolic approach, immigrant guidebooks write the vanishing American myth onto the landscape itself.

Avid consumers of frontier and captivity narratives, Europeans knew that the lands of the United States already had occupants, and prospective immigrants consulted guidebooks to learn about them and where they lived.²⁷ For example, at the end of his popular tract, *The Discovery, Settlement, and Present State of Kentucke* (1784), John Filson appends an appendix entitled “Of the Indians,” which is a four-part topographical description and natural history of the Indigenous peoples who inhabited Kentucky and its vicinities. It begins by listing the locations of “twenty-eight different nations of Indians” before documenting their appearance, their habits and customs, and their religious beliefs in three subsequent sections. Through Filson’s topographical description of Native Americans, prospective immigrants could learn rather basic geographical facts about them:

The Hurons live six miles from the Gibbaways, towards Lake Huron, and on the same side of the river.

²⁷ Billington discusses how European consumption of print culture shaped their perceptions of Native Americans throughout the nineteenth century. As he illustrates, indigenous characters change in relationship to policy changes and aesthetic movements, but these very much influence how Europeans imagine them.

The Tawaws are found eighteen miles up the Mawmee or Omee River, which runs into Lake Erie.

There is a small tribe of Tawas settled at a place called the Rapids, some distance higher up the river than the former.

The Mawmee Indians live two hundred and forty miles up this river, at a place called Rosedebeau. (69)

This topographical list engenders an alternative map of Kentucky, one that centers on non-European American communities and competes with Filson's other maps which foreground American settlements and geopolitical boundaries. By spatializing Indigenous tribes in such a way, his list also restricts their territory to small, discrete areas and obliterates the extent of their lands.²⁸ It recapitulates wilderness discourses by insinuating that most of the land in North America is, in fact, either unoccupied or barely occupied. Moreover, it furthers particularly Eurocentric definitions of occupation that justify the dispossession of Native lands by American and European settler colonists.

Topographical lists about Native Americans proliferated in subsequent guidebooks and focused more intently on population. Although Imlay includes Filson's "Of the Indians" in the 1797 edition of *Topographical Description*, his own topography of Native Americans in the 1792 edition incorporates statistical information to manufacture a perception of their demographic precarity:

²⁸ Mark Rifkin argues that recognition of Native American lands in the antebellum period while still disavowing alternative, Indigenous cartographies. This legal-discursive project restricts Native American territories into smaller and smaller reservations, while recoding their lands as American space that has been granted consensually. Guidebooks translate this practice into popular, easy to read forms to circulate this colonial mindset among prospective immigrants. See *Manifesting America*.

Lezars, between the mouth of the Ohio and Wabash, 300.

Piankishas, Vermilions, and Mascontins, between the Wasbash and Illinois, 600.

Illinois, near Cahokia, 260.

Kaskaskias, near Kaskaskia, 250.

Pianrias, upon the Illinois river, 400.

Skakies, near fort Oniatonon, upon the Wash, 170. (290)

Over the course of four pages, over eighty tribes are listed, but Imlay's demographic topography affords little information, offering no insight into the social customs, habits, or religious practices of Native Americans. Instead, his list concludes with an affirmation of the vanishing Indian myth by entreating white settlers, "if possible, to civilize them; and if not, to confine them to particular districts" (295). In short, Imlay advocates for the ethnic cleansing of Indigeneity from the continent in order to Americanize it—a process already begun by the content and form of the list itself.

Topographical Description naturalizes the annihilation of the Native Americans as part of American destiny. Imlay reassures prospective immigrants that "we shall soon establish a permanent security against savage invasions and massacres; for though we have not acted entirely like Hercules, who destroyed the serpents while an infant in his cradle, still, I presume we shall do it in our approach to maturity" (295). His guidebook writes genocide into the national narrative, insisting that Native Americans "laid the foundation of their own *extinction*" (296) without clarifying what that foundation might be. Even as Imlay's topographical list recognizes the presence of Indigenous people, it depicts them as a vanishing population by

constructing them as an expendable national Other that is always already dying.²⁹ This statistical turn in topographical descriptions in guidebooks is infused with an aura of ghostliness that presents Natives as either absent or dead. If “the ghosting of Indians is a technique of removal” (5), as Renée Bergland argues, then these demographic topographies discursively empty the continent of its Indigenous populations.

The subtle and overt overtures to the vanishing Indian myth reverberate throughout the Indigenous topographies that flourish in nineteenth-century guidebooks, such as *Emigrant’s Directory*. Pasting together excerpts about American Indians from a variety of sources, Blowe slightly innovates on the topographical form of the list when discussing Ohio:

The following statement shows the number of Indians, of all ages and sexes, within the limits of the state of Ohio, in 1816, viz.

Wyandots, on Sandusky river and its waters	695
Shawanese, on the head of the Auglaize river, and on the upper waters of the Miami-of-the-Ohio; principal village, Wapagakonetta, twenty-seven miles north of Piqua	840
Delawares in Ohio, on the head waters of the Sandusky and Muskingum	161
Senecas, who reside between Upper and Lower Sandusky, at and near Seneca town	450
Senecas, Munseys, and Delawares, on the head waters of the Miami-of-the-Ohio, at and near Lewis-town, thirty miles north-east of Piqua	434
Ortowsas, who inhabit the south shores of lake Erie, about Miami Bay, near fort Meigs, and on the Auglaize river; numbers not stationary; about	450
Total	3,030

(Figure 2: Daniel Blowe’s Table of Indigenous Populations [1820])

The same information that Imlay and Filson included is configured in such a way as to make it easy to calculate quickly the total number of Native Americans within a given area. Indeed, the recognition of Indigenous peoples in Blowe’s list also positions them in a state of demographic vulnerability—that is, as having a low enough population density that their sovereignty

²⁹ On literature and Native American/Euro-American relations, see Bergland’s *National Uncanny*, Dippie’s *The Vanishing American*, and Maddox’s *Removals*.

dissipates.³⁰ Indigenous demographic vulnerability figuratively empties the land of its inhabitants, transforming already occupied lands into “wilderness” within the imaginations of prospective immigrants.

Even while Blowe’s list acknowledges the presence of Native Americans, it conceals the extent of their territorial sovereignty and the duplicitous conduct of Americans. It instead stresses strong local ties of these tribes to relatively small plots of land that exist “within the limits of the state of Ohio” (550). American Indians are, at once, within the United States and outside of it—indigenous yet foreign. This list also emphasizes the dwindling numbers of Indigenous people, claiming to count tribes to the very person. In this way, Native American topographical descriptions supplement expansionist narratives that justified removal and relocation policies because of the low populations of American Indians, even as it acknowledges their sovereignty over small pieces of their former territory. According to Blowe, the desire to depopulate Indigenous lands, literally and symbolically, stimulated removal policies in the new state of Indiana where nearly “two-thirds of the territorial surface is yet in the hands of the Indians, a temporary evil that a short time will remedy” (569). Even as the guidebook acknowledges Native American territorially sovereignty, it translates the annexation of non-U.S. lands into a moral issue for the nation and, thus, obfuscates the horrific treatment of Indigenous people by Americans. It rewrites the history of American settler colonialism as a moral mission to rid of the continent of its ‘evil’ Indigenous inhabitants. It decidedly forgets the violent, genocidal practices by which white settlers wrestled the continent away from Native Americans.

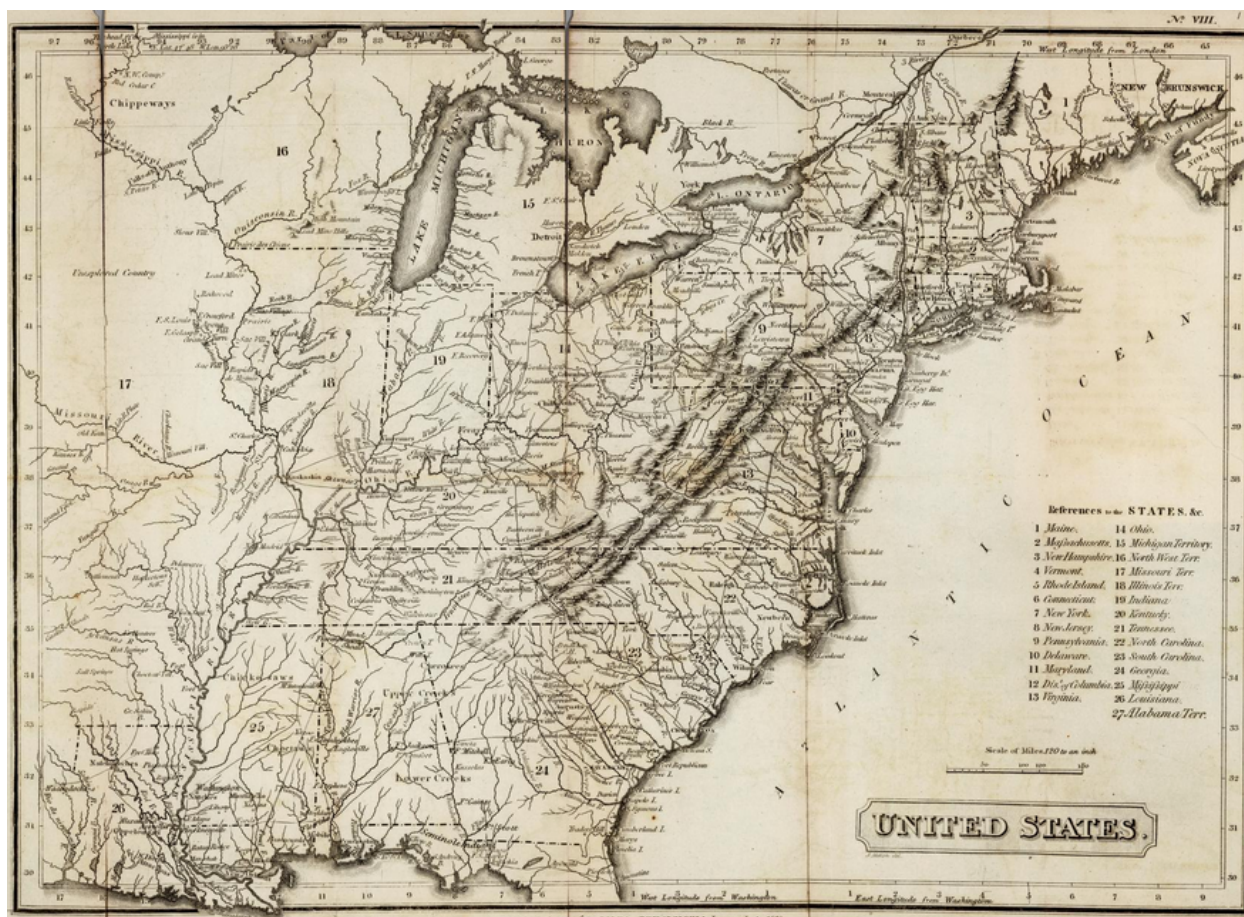
Other guidebooks relied on cartographical forms to empty Native American spaces of

³⁰ On demographic vulnerability in settler colonial enterprises, see Veracini’s “Imagined Geographies of Settler Colonialism” in *Making Settler Colonial Space*.

people for prospective immigrants. The Scottish immigrant and mapmaker, John Melish included a 26 x 33 centimeter map of the U.S. in *Information and Advice to Emigrants to the United States* (1819) (Figure 3). An updated draft of his 1816 map of the United States, this sizable foldout encourages its viewers to imagine the United States as a place, as a series of geopolitical borders that contain a constellation of cities connected by interstate trails and rivers. It also acknowledges the presence of the Creek, Sac, Sioux, and Seminole nations. Their sovereign dominions cut across the Congressionally approved boundaries of the states. The Upper and Lower Creeks straddle the line dividing the Alabama territory for Georgia while the Seminole people define the edges of northern Florida and the “Chippeway” the edges of Canada. Sioux and Sac villages dot the Mississippi River where it forms the western border of Illinois. Like the lists and tables of other guidebooks, Melish’s map casts Native Americans as being in a somewhat liminal geopolitical category. Notably, these communities do not get geopolitical lines drawn around them in a way that would formally denote the full extent of their territory. Instead, their homelands become circumscribed within U.S. space. They are located within the states and territories of the U.S and, once again, enter into a paradoxical state of being indigenous yet foreign.³¹ This is the actual legal status of Native American peoples, a liminal position that can reinforce their colonized status even while the state recognizes (but perhaps does not respect) their sovereignty. It refuses to grant them the rights of citizens while also refusing to grant them the respect of European nation-states. In this way, the landscape symbolically mirrors the indigenous-yet-foreign legal limbo into which the United States forces Native Americans to this

³¹ See Veracini for a theoretical introduction to how settler colonial regimes unmake and remake indigenous places. See Hallock for how the U.S. government transformed Indigenous lands into private property through cartographic texts. Immigrant guidebooks reveal how these state practices are popularized through easy to consume forms of nature writing that depopulate the continent.

day in an effort to undermine their sovereignty.



(Figure 3: John Melish's Map of the United States [1819])

This unmaking of Indigenous space also manifests in the map through the erasure of many more tribes who were represented in the much larger 1816 edition. The Winnebago, the Huron, the Wyandot, the Fox, the Shawnees, and the Osage nations vanish from the edition of the map in the guidebook. Melish's omissions falsely present these lands as ceded and uncontested when they were not.³² The changes between the 1816 and 1819 maps translate the

³² On the history of dispossession in the "Northwestern" territories of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin, see Bowes's *Land Too Good for Indians* and Stockwell's *Other Trail of Tears*.

vanishing American myth into a cartographic form. If the maps within guidebooks helped cultivate immigrants' geographical consciousness of the nation, then this geographical knowledge is oriented, quite overtly, toward ideologies of conquest and native dispossession.

Melish's cartographic omissions mirror the few references to Native Americans in his guidebook, references which are about the lands "not yet purchased from the Indians" (29). The adverbial phrase "not yet" naturalizes American expansion and the resulting dispossession of Native Americans within capitalist terms ("purchased").³³ By configuring dispossession as a transactional process, Melish prefigures manifest destiny while effacing its devastating systems of social and ecological violence. Moreover, he presents the disappearance of Native land rights as a foregone conclusion—as an inevitable eventuality—even as Indigenous people were contesting their colonization across the continent. However, the very grammar of the sentence assures prospective immigrants that Native Americans will soon be (but are "not yet") purged from the territory of the U.S., quelling their fears of frontier violence or captivity. Through the combination of its map and its references to Native Americans, Melish's guidebook encourages immigrants to view Indigenous land cessions to the United States as the norm. It acknowledges the sovereignty of Native Americans, but it also teaches prospective citizens to view that sovereignty as ephemeral.

The normalization of land cession recurred throughout multiple guidebooks, even ones written primarily for U.S.-based audiences. Samuel R. Brown's *The Western Gazetteer; or*

³³ By framing the dispossession in transactional terms, Melish's guidebook frames American expansion in terms of the "preemptive discovery doctrine." According to David E. Wilkins and K. Tsianina Lomawaima's *Uneven Ground*, the preemptive discovery doctrine afforded Euro-American settlers the "preemptive right to purchase Indian land, if a tribe agreed to sell any of its territory" (12). However, Melish reinforces Harvey Rosenthal's observation that "the American right to buy always superseded the Indian right not to sell" ("Indian Claims and the American Conscience" 36).

Emigrant's Directory, Containing A Geographical Description of the Western States and

Territories (1817) records the history of land seizures by the United States and maps the

expanding boundaries of nation in sections titled either "INDIAN CESSIONS" or "INDIANS."

In the section on the expropriation of lands in the Alabama territory, for instance, Brown

delineates the extent of the Creek's territory before mentioning how it was ceded in a treaty with

Andrew Jackson. The violence of Jackson's wars vanishes, and the gruesome histories of Indian

displacement are condensed and suppressed. The asymmetry of these exchanges becomes

profoundly salient in the section on ceded lands in the Michigan and Missouri territories. As

Brown notes, "the United States have about four millions of acre at their disposal" after coercing

the Pottawattamie, Ottawa, Wyandot, and Chippawa onto tiny reserves that range from less than

one square mile (the smallest) to twelve square miles (the largest) (164-5). Although large-scale

federal Indian removal policies were years away, Brown exaggerates the extent of cession to

extinguish the concerns of prospective immigrants about captivity or frontier violence. Beyond

this immediate anxiety for immigrants, Brown's accounts of land cession also draw the

constantly shifting national borders of the United States as it made and broke treaties.

Like the guidebooks of Imlay, Filson, Melish, and Blowe, *The Western Gazetteer*

spatializes the nation by representing the frontier as having a geographical reality.³⁴ The

guidebook defines the "line between the whites and the Indians" as beginning "at the mouth of

the Kansas, in lat 39 deg. 5 minutes north" and extending north to "the head of the little river

Platte" and east "over naked sterile ridges" (203). Certain rivers, mountains, and other geological

features demarcate American spaces from Indigenous places. These natural elements of the

continental topography symbolically materialize not only the continuation of Indigenous

³⁴ On the spatialization of race and the racialization of space, see Mills's *The Racial Contract*.

sovereignty but also its erosion by the U.S. government, American citizens, and prospective immigrants. Topographical lists, maps, and other forms of nature writing in guidebooks worked to introduce prospective immigrants to the United States, but they did so by ethnically cleansing the environment, materially and symbolically, of Native Americans. With these spaces “cleared” of Native Americans, immigrants are free to occupy them without guilt or fear. Guidebooks absolve the consciousness of immigrants by obfuscating their own role in the colonization of Native American lands. Instead, this process seems like an inevitable fact of history when it is any but. Additionally, it quells any fear that Europeans may have of being captured or scalped—fears that were inspired by Europeans love of frontier stories and captivity narratives.

In the end, immigrant guidebooks used multiple forms of nature writing to Americanize the material environments of North America while simultaneously teaching immigrants about them. Through descriptions of the rivers, soils, flora, fauna, climates, and Native Americans of the United States, guidebooks not only familiarized prospective immigrants with the contours of the nation but also established what qualified as American and what did not. As I have argued in this chapter, guidebooks organized their representations of the United States around nature writing, rooting conceptions of the nation in discourses about the material world. Knowledge of the climates, soils, plants, and animals helped to consolidate feelings of nationality, and guidebooks instructed immigrants to imagine themselves as becoming part of this assemblage (from which Native Americans were largely excluded). Blowe’s *Emigrant’s Directory* routinely used nature writing as an outlet for nationalist ideologies about America’s ecological exceptionalism. His writing praised certain kinds of climates, certain kinds of landmarks, certain kinds of plants and animals, and certain kinds of agricultural practices as exemplifying national excellence. As this guidebook intimates over the course of its 700 pages, to become an American

means being able to recognize and appreciate the interconnected social and environmental systems that constitute and sustain the United States. In short, it means cultivating an American ecological sensibility wherein the continent has been emptied of its Indigenous inhabitants and is open for European immigrants to cultivate.

Immigrant guidebooks matter in the history of environmental literature because these popular texts encouraged prospective immigrants to enact their advice in their everyday life by coding it as a path toward successful naturalization. Imagining and interacting with nature according to national norms Americanized immigrants and their environments. Aside from describing the environment, guidebooks regulated their readers' environmental conduct—their interactions with nonhumans—in order to align with national norms. Immigrants were advised to fell trees, to avoid lowlands, to wear particular clothes, to avoid being outside at particular times of day, to eat certain kinds of food, and a whole host of other ordinary activities that Americanize not only the immigrant but also the environment itself. In this way, Americanization applies as much to nonhuman forms of matter as to human populations. After all, throughout the open door era, immigrant guidebooks implored their readers to modify the climate by cultivating the earth, by cutting down trees, and by draining swamps. They instructed them on how to manipulate the landscape in order to augment their own feelings of belonging to an American community. Immigrant guidebook participated in environmentally oriented forms of settler colonialism that erased Indigenous populations and made white immigrants appear natural(ized) to the American continent.

The connection between nature and nation continued to animate the immigrant guidebooks that were published during the open door era. By focusing on this relatively small, albeit representative, cross-section of the genre, this chapter has illustrated how and why

immigrant guidebooks characterized the United States not only as a political entity but also as a dynamic and contested assemblage of human/nonhuman beings and living/nonliving matter. Although the nation and its states have definite geographical and political borders in guidebooks, these fictive boundaries teem with rocks and minerals, with wild and domesticated life, with rivers and lakes as well as burgeoning cities, developing markets, and emerging political institutions. Across these informative, transatlantic books, the United States materializes as interlacing constellation of cultural, political, economic, and environmental systems. Even as guidebooks provided information about the constitution of the American environment, existential concerns about the climate and naturalization persisted, especially when considering the South.

Chapter Four

Plantation Management:

The Nature of Race and Risk in Charles Sealsfield's Immigrant Writing

“One can only be seasoned by degrees to the climate of Louisiana. To force the march of time and habit, is impossible. The more stout and healthy the person, the greater the risk. People who, allured by the prospect of wealth, would attempt to work in this climate as they were used to do in the north, would fall sick and die, without having provided for their children, who are then forced upon the charity of strangers.”

—Charles Sealsfield, *The Americans as They Are* (1828)

“The slave states, especially those in the extreme south, or below the line of 36°30' north latitude, offer inducements only to the capitalist, who has sufficient [means] to purchase both lands and slaves. There the climate is unsuited to the European constitution. Neither are the soil or staples of agriculture there grown, such as the European has been accustomed to. To raise cotton, tobacco, sugar and other tropical products, is the peculiar employment of the African, and could not be attempted by those indigenous to temperate regions.”

—J.H. Colton, *The Emigrant's Hand-Book* (1848)

Guidebooks alerted immigrants to the climatic dangers that they would encounter in the southern United States throughout the antebellum period. Calvin Colton's *A Manual for Emigrants to America* (1832), for example, warns prospective immigrants that countless sojourners fatally contract “indigenous or endemic diseases” or simply die attempting “to inure

themselves to the influences of the climate” (91). For Colton and many other pro-immigration writers, the ecosystems of the South encumbered the capacity of European immigrants to become naturalized by cultivating the land. “For the purposes of agriculture,” Colton cautiously avers that only white American-born men “can manage plantations to advantage, which are worked by slaves” (72). Most immigrant guidebooks dismissed the South and its plantation-based economy for being too expensive, too unhealthy, and too reliant on slave labor. The South’s subtropical climate enervated the vitality of white immigrants. Its insatiable insects and noxious vapors made the already hot, humid climate more debilitating for them. The South harbored a multitude of nonhuman risks to the survival of immigrants: malaria, yellow fever, poisonous plants, voracious alligators, labyrinthine cypress forests, tornados, and wildfires. Even if they possessed the enormous capital to build a plantation, European immigrants were often thought to lack the ecological sensibilities and bodily constitutions needed to cultivate the chaotic, swampy climates of the South without dying.

However, the internationally popular Austro-American writer, Charles Sealsfield refutes these semi-xenophobic conclusions about the prospects of immigrants. In his guidebooks and plantation novels, he sketches three principles about the swampy ecosystems of the American South. First, they are dangerous environments and need to be mastered. Second, mastery involves developing an ecological sensibility that is attuned to perceiving risks to the plantation form. Third, this ecological sensibility justifies slavery. The environmental risks of the South may compromise the naturalization of immigrants, but, as Sealsfield suggests, they also can anticipate some of these aleatory events and counterbalance them (through slave labor), if they know how. In *Americans as They Are* (1828), a nonfictional guidebook about the Mississippi Valley, Sealsfield explains how to recognize and avoid these risks, a topic which he elaborates

more fully in a five-part series of plantation novels called *Lebensbilder aus der westlichen Hemisphäre* (1834-37) [translated as *Life in the New World* (1844)]. Together, these two pieces of immigrant nature writing illustrate how European characters become naturalized, or “seasoned,” to the subtropical climates of the South through plantation management.¹

Little is known about Charles Sealsfield, or who was born Karl Postl. Born to a farmer in Poppitz, Austria in 1793, Sealsfield joined a strict monastic order near Prague before clandestinely fleeing the oppressive Metternich regime by immigrating to the United States in 1823.² Upon entering New York harbor, his passport listed his name as “Charles Sealsfield,” the moniker that he adopted for personal and professional use until his death in Switzerland in 1864. While living in the United States between 1823 and 1830, Sealsfield traveled extensively throughout the country gathering the information that would constitute the subject matter for his fictional and nonfictional books, which were published anonymously in the vein of Sir Walter Scott. While almost all of Sealsfield’s works were written and published in German, they dealt with North American settings, plots, characters, and themes.³ The national hybridity of his

¹ The term “seasoned” was a term used to describe the process of becoming acclimated to a foreign climate. Thus, it carries similar connotations to naturalize during this time, and one will frequently see the terms (along with acclimate) used interchangeably. However, it does not carry the political connotations of “naturalize.”

² On the biography of Charles Sealsfield, see Walter Grünzweig, *Charles Sealsfield* (1985) and Jeffrey Sammons, *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy* (1998).

³ Although Charles Sealsfield’s literary career was relatively brief, he wrote and published a number of fictional and nonfictional works about North America in both English and German. For some of his major works, see *Austria as it is: Or, Sketches of Continental Courts* (1828); *Tokeah; or the White Rose* (1828), which was translated into German as *Der Legitime und die Republikaner* (1833); *Der Virey und die Aristokraten oder Mexiko im Jahre 1812* [*The Viceroy and the aristocrats, or Mexico in the year 1812*] (1835); *Die große Tour* [*The Grand Tour*] (1835); *Das Cajütenbuch, oder Nationale Charakteristiken* [*The Cabin Book; Or National Characteristics*] (1841); *Süden und Norden* [*South and North*] (1842–1843). As this small cross-section of a rich archive of American writing testifies, a tremendous amount of work remains to be done on Sealsfield. Since the 1980s, little new research has been conducted on Sealsfield, at

novels and his identity puzzled literary scholars for most of the twentieth century as they disputed Sealsfield's precarious placement within German and American literary traditions.⁴

Reading Sealsfield within and across these national traditions, I consider *The Americans as They Are* and *Lebensbilder* to be examples of "immigrant writing," or stories by or about immigrants and their experience of naturalization or becoming American.⁵

Through Sealsfield's nearly forgotten immigrant writing, this chapter recovers the interconnected environmental and racial discourses that animated nineteenth-century naturalization narratives about the South—an aspect of American immigration and environmental history that has yet to be explored. When studying European immigration, scholars largely overlook this region, even though New Orleans was one of the busiest entry points for immigrants before the Civil War. I re-examine American immigration history through the South in this chapter to interrogate the assimilative capacities, or homogenizing impulses, of the plantation on both immigrant characters and their environments. That is, I investigate how conceptions of becoming American are bound up with the ascendancy of the plantation, for

least by American scholars. Although his works are dense, difficult, and unabashedly racist, they can widen scholarly perspectives on the American South in an American and transatlantic contexts.

⁴ Quite exhausted at this point, this line of inquiry has stimulated research into Sealsfield's works since he revealed his authorship with his eighteen volume *Gesammelte Werke* [*Completed Works*] published between 1843-46. See also Karl J.R. Arndt, "Charles Sealsfield, 'The Greatest American Author,'" 249-59; Nanette Ashby, "Charles Sealsfield: 'The Greatest American Author'" (1939/1980); Grünzweig, *Charles Sealsfield* (1985); Alexander Ritter, "Charles Sealsfield (1793-1864): German and American Novelist of the Nineteenth Century," 633-44; Sammons, *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy* (1998); and Jerry Schuchalter, *Frontier and Utopia in the Fiction of Charles Sealsfield* (1986).

⁵ German Americanists, Walter Grünzweig and Jerry Schuchalter bridged this divide in their scholarship during the 1980s by classifying Sealsfield's writings under the tradition of ethnic and immigrant literature. See Grünzweig's *Charles Sealsfield* (1985) and Schuchalter's *Frontier and Utopia* (1986).

humans and nonhumans alike. Blending together previous studies of the plantation as a political institution, an economic framework, and a race-making situation, I conceive of the plantation as an *ecological phenomenon*.⁶ My sense of the plantation as such emerges, in part, from ecocritic Monique Allewaert's materialist conception of the plantation as an economic and political structure that is located in tropical/subtropical spaces where the entanglements between humans, animals, plants, and climate reveal "an assemblage of interpenetrating forces that [she] call[s] an ecology" (30). *The Americans as They Are* and *Lebensbilder* demonstrate how plantations are not just economic and political systems but also ecosystems, or interconnecting webs of living beings and nonliving matter that become entrenched in racializing practices and discourses. In this chapter, I analyze Sealsfield's guidebook and novels through ecocritical theories about risk and race to develop an account of Southern citizenship that materializes through plantation management, or the everyday activities which requires an ecological sensibility wherein swamps register as risky, foreign-seeming spaces of death that must be cultivated into plantations by Black bodies in order to protect white lives from nature.

Unpacking how Sealsfield's cultivates a distinctly Southern form of U.S. citizenship through nature writing, I identify the environmental anxieties about *whiteness* that drive the plots of the naturalization narratives in his immigrant writing. As critical race scholars and immigration historians have noted, the whiteness of European immigrants was somewhat precarious throughout the nineteenth century as ideas about racial subjectivity were deeply

⁶ Research on the plantation form as an ecology is not necessarily a new development but has received renewed attention in recent years with Monique Allewaert's monograph *Ariel's Ecology* (2013) and Frank Uekötter's edited volume *Comparing Apples, Oranges, and Cotton* (2014). For more on the plantation as a political institution, see Edgar Thompson's *The Plantation* (2012); as an economic framework, see Philip Curtin's *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex* (2002); as a race-making situation, see Edgar Thompson's "The Plantation as a Race-Making Situation." For a work that combines all three, see Katherine McKittrick's "Plantation Futures."

connected to ideas about the climate.⁷ The torrid, marshy climates of the American South were imagined to be hostile to the physiological constitutions of white folks but not of Black people—a belief fueled proslavery ideologies until the Civil War.⁸ Because of the endemic environmental dangers to whiteness, prospective immigrants needed to establish a plantation where they could escape the inimical realities of the climate by manufacturing a new ecosystem. These theories about race and climate structure the plots of Sealsfield's naturalization narratives in *The Americans as They Are* and *Lebensbilder* and provide new contexts for understanding the imaginative formations of whiteness in the antebellum South. Rather than imagining whiteness as a fixed property of the body, Sealsfield envisions it as a malleable product of interactions between humans and their environments.

To contextualize the literary and political implications of nature in Sealsfield's immigrant writing, my first section briefly recovers the literary history of German immigration (or *Auswanderung*) to the United States, highlighting how Sealsfield contributes to its fictional and nonfictional representations of life on plantations during the 1830s and 40s. I dive more deeply into Sealsfield's nature writing in the second section to examine how he depicts the riskiness of the climate through literary modes of discourse such as the pastoral and the gothic. By pastoral, I am referring to the literary mode that imagines the natural environment as being an orderly, beautiful rural utopia where the complexity of life becomes simplified. The gothic, on the other hand, exposes the dark underbelly of society by emphasizing the social and environmental factors that terrify readers. Whereas the pastoral makes plantation seem like relatively secure

⁷ On the connection between race and climate in early American thought, see Conevery Valenčius Bolton, *The Health of the Country* (2001), Katy Chiles, *Transformable Race* (2014), and Mart Stewart, "Let Us Begin with the Weather," 240-56.

⁸ On the relationship between the climate and proslavery ideologies in the antebellum South, see Stewart, "Let Us Begin with the Weather," 240-56.

spaces that revitalize white people, the gothic transforms swamps and bayous into risky spaces of death. Sealsfield's oscillation between pastoral and the gothic modes of nature writing also reveals how literary discourses about race and climate are entangled, as I show in the third section. I conclude this chapter by explicating how the aesthetic representations of nature, as either secure/white or risky/nonwhite, dictate what constitutes ethical behavior in the torrid climate of South. By defining the parameters of plantation management, I aim to demonstrate that Sealsfield's guidebook and novels offer blueprints of how to naturalize to the South through fictionalized representations of plantation life.

—*AUSWANDERUNG*, THE SOUTH, AND SEALSFIELD

With New Orleans being one of the busiest immigration ports in the antebellum period, the South matters more for immigration history than scholars traditionally recognize. Beginning with Charles Sealsfield's writing, the Southern states became major focal points in German immigrant novels and guidebooks throughout the middle of the nineteenth century.⁹ German-American literature is especially important for recovering the position of the South in antebellum naturalization narratives. German immigrants not only entered this port more than any other national group during this time, but they also produced a tremendous amount of fictional and nonfictional writing about their experiences in the plantation zones of the U.S. This body of literature sought to familiarize its readers with the social customs, the economic conditions, the

⁹ On German immigration novels in the nineteenth century, see Preston A. Barba, "Emigration to America Reflected in German Fiction," 193-227, and Barbara Lang, *The Process of Immigration in German-American Literature from 1850 to 1900* (1988). Both Barba and Lang outline a typology of the transformations in German-American literature that contextualizes the relationship between literary form and social utility in this body of fiction. However, neither Barba nor Lang consider how the plantation novel, as an emergent literary genre in the antebellum, influenced German-American literature.

political structures, and the material ecologies of the South—often in an attempt to reveal the difficulties of immigrating there and the horrors of slavery.¹⁰ For instance, Emil Klauprecht’s *Cincinnati: The Mysteries of the West* (1856) includes a subplot about the depravity of white masters’ violent treatment of slaves on the plantations. Baron Ludwig von Reizenstein’s *The Mysteries of New Orleans* (1854-55) imagines a Black messiah who ushers in an apocalyptic revenge on the plantation system. While these overtly abolitionist novels dissuaded Germans away from settling in the South, other immigrant novels depicted the ecologies of the plantation in a more positive light, even if they were still antislavery in orientation. The popular novelist and travel writer, Friedrich Gerstäcker celebrated the splendor of plantation landscapes in his first immigrant novel, *Der deutschen Auswanderer Fahrten und Schicksale* (1848) [trans. *The Wandering and Fortunes of Some German Immigrants* (1849)].¹¹ A story about a company of Germans relocating to an insalubrious settlement on the banks of the Hatchie River in Tennessee, *Der deutschen Auswanderer* enumerates the ecological factors that immigrants must consider to be successful in the South.¹² Miasmas, or the invisible particles of decaying matter, arise from the swampy lowlands and infect the German characters with disease. Despite being an abolitionist, Gerstäcker identifies plantations as the environmental norm and swamps as risky, deadly ecosystems that need to be cultivated—a pattern popularized by Sealsfield’s writing.

¹⁰ See Lang for her study on how narrative genres fulfill different political functions and reveal different social patterns at work in German immigration discourse.

¹¹ In addition to Sealsfield, Gerstäcker wrote frequently about the South in his immigration novels. See Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau, “Friedrich Gerstäcker Writes, ‘Let’s go to America,’” 42-53; Irene S. Di Maio, “Unity and Diversity in Friedrich Gerstäcker’s Novels of North American Immigration,” 113-33; and Jeffrey Sammons, *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy* (1998).

¹² On Gerstäcker and the South, the Irene Di Maio’s “Introduction” in *Gerstäcker’s Louisiana: Fiction and Travel Sketches from Antebellum Times through Reconstruction* (2006).

Altogether, these novels do not present a solitary or unitary vision of life in the South, except that it is difficult, dangerous, and organized around the plantation.

These immigration novels responded directly to concerns raised throughout immigrant guidebooks about the environmental realities of everyday life in America. Although Germans tended to distrust these commercial works (preferring letters from people from their villages), guidebooks proliferated in the German confederation between 1820 and 1850.¹³ Hundreds were published, but Gottfried Duden's *Bericht über eine Reise nach den westlichen Staaten Nordamerikas* [*Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America*] (1829) was the single most influential immigrant guidebook of the nineteenth century. A collection of thirty-five letters written between 1825 and 1828, *Bericht* documents information about the social customs, political institutions, climates, soils, wildlife, and natural disasters endemic to Missouri where he resided. While Duden ultimately delivers a positive prognosis for immigration, he warns that the "southern regions of the United States are not suitable for German settlers. If they do not want to sacrifice health and body and mind to the climate, they must abstain from raising sugar, indigo, coffee, and so on" (106).

Historians often argue that Duden overlooked the dangers of immigration to America, but he did not.¹⁴ Instead, he located them in particular regions and particular environments, namely the South. The ecological dimensions of plantation life proved too dangerous for Germans since they required a rapid change in climates: "the farmer who suddenly changes from the German farm life to the work of tropical plantations without intermediate stages exposes his physical

¹³ On German immigrants and transatlantic letter writing, see Walter D. Kamphoefner and Wolfgang Helbich, *News from the Land of Freedom* (1991).

¹⁴ See James W. Goodrich's "Introduction" in *Report on a Journey to the Western States of North America*, and Jerry Schuchalter, "'Geld' And 'Geist' In The Writings Of Gottfried Duden, Nikolaus Lenau, And Charles Sealsfield," 49-73.

constitution to the most dangerous disturbances” (146). With its hot, humid climate, the South was imagined to be an undesirable spot for settlement. Whereas the Midwest symbolized life and regeneration through agricultural labor in a salubrious climate, the South exemplified an environment of death. Not all immigrant guidebook writers agreed however. In fact, Sealsfield promoted the South in his first guidebook, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika*, which Duden cited within *Bericht*.

Under the pseudonym of “C. Sidons, a Citizen of the United States,” Sealsfield published his first book-length manuscript in Stuttgart in 1827. A two-volume travelogue and guidebook, *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika: nach ihrem politischen, religiösen und gesellschaftlichen verhältnisse betrachtet* [*The United States of North America: Considered according to Its Political, Religious, and Social Conditions*] was translated into English but was divided into two different books and printed by two different publishers but still shared the same preface. The second volume of *Die Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika*, retitled *The Americans as They Are; Described in a Tour through the Valley of the Mississippi*, was printed semi-anonymously and attributed to “the author of *Austria as It Is*”—Sealsfield’s second book which critiqued Austrian society. Published in 1828 in London, *The Americans as They Are* recounts Sealsfield’s travels through the western United States between 1823 and 1826. Advertised as offering practical observations, *The Americans as They Are* aims “to represent social intercourse and prevailing habits in such a manner as to enable the future immigrant to follow the prescribed track, and to settle with security and advantage to himself and to his new country” (v). *The Americans as They Are* offers a panoramic view of life in the Upper and Lower Mississippi Valley with a clear bias toward the latter: “Louisiana and the valley of the

Mississippi have hitherto been the refuge of all classes of foreigners, good and bad, who sought here an asylum from oppression and poverty” (213).

Situating Louisiana at the center of an American immigration mythology, Sealsfield’s guidebook departs from the advice about the South found in contemporary guidebooks. Rather than portraying it monolithically as a land of death, he distinguishes its good environments from its bad—that is, the plantations from the swamps. This binary suffuses his nature writing and demarcates where immigrants should settle and where they should avoid. Sealsfield’s nature writing glorifies the pastoral splendor of plantations and their monocultural ecologies while maligning indigenous environments for being unhealthy and risky to immigrants. According to Alexander Ritter, Sealsfield organizes *The Americans as They Are* around utopic visions of Louisiana by representing it as a “spiritual paradise” and a “political ideal” (“Louisiana” 62). Ritter’s treatment of Louisiana as a metaphysical laboratory highlights how Sealsfield imagines it to be the paradigm for the future of American democracy, but it minimizes the importance of Louisiana as a *material environment*—that is, as a physical space where interconnected webs of humans and nonhumans affect the spiritual and political realities of everyday life. As the economic, political, racial, and ecological center of Southern culture, the plantation performs an assimilative function that polices the border between inclusion and exclusion. Keen to the homogenizing impulses of the plantation form, Ritter discerns that Sealsfield conceives of plantation owners “as the sociological, political, and moral exemplars for the recommended framework of an aristocratic-democratic southern society” (65). This maneuver effectively excludes Black slaves, poor whites (both native- and foreign-born), and Native Americans from becoming political or cultural citizens, as he notes, but what Ritter does not acknowledge is that the elevation of the planter class and the plantation form necessarily excludes certain ecosystems,

such as swamps and bayous, as well. In fact, the exclusion of people and ecosystems are often interconnected.

Sealsfield elaborates this theme more fully in his five-part, serialized plantation novel about Louisiana: *Lebensbilder aus der westlichen Hemisphäre*. Published in German between 1834 and 1837 and translated into English in 1844 as *Life in the New World; or, Sketches of American Society*, *Lebensbilder* is a series of loosely interlocking novels that place the plantation at the center of naturalization narratives.¹⁵ Any analysis of Sealsfield's immigrant writing would be incomplete without a thorough investigation of the influence of the plantation on his depiction of life in the U.S. and on his literary form, since, as Jerry Schuchalter concludes, the plantation house is the organizing symbol in *Lebensbilder*.¹⁶ *George Howard's, Esq. Brautfahrt* [*The Courtship of George Howard, Esq.*] (1834) begins the pentalogy by recounting the eponymous character's search for a wife during his return to his plantation on the Red River in Louisiana. In the second installment, *Ralph Doughby's, Esq. Brautfahrt* (1835), Howard learns to appreciate plantations with his new wife while his Jacksonian friend Ralph Doughby struggles to find a

¹⁵ The transnational print history of *Lebensbilder* is incredibly complicated but deserves some attention. As a collection, *Lebensbilder* was originally entitled *Lebensbilder aus beiden Hemisphäre* [*Pictures of Life in Both Hemispheres*]. The first novel, *George Howard*, was published as a part of *Transatlantische Reiseskizzen*. The second (and fragmentary) novel, *Der Große Tour* [*The Grand Tour*] (1835), takes place in Europe, narrating the misadventures of Morton who is bankrupted after a shipwreck and goes begins a mysterious adventure in London on behalf of a Philadelphia financier. The final four novels were published in quick succession. In the early 1840s, Sealsfield reworked *Lebensbilder* for its final, authorized publication as part of his collected works. Removing *Der Große Tour* and publishing as a stand-alone novel, he changed the collection's title to its current iteration. It was this edition that the publisher at New World Press in New York used for his pirated English translation, *Life in the New World; Or Sketches of American Society*. *Life in the New World* was printed serially as an insert to the popular literary journal, *New World*, which included reprints of foreign novels in supplements. Between April and June, 1844, *Life in the New World* was published in seven parts before being bound and sold as a novel later that year. No known copies of these inserts exist.

¹⁶ See Schuchalter, *Frontier and Utopia*, 216.

woman who can tolerate his hyper masculinity. Sealsfield outlines what kind of person a planter must be and how he must govern his slaves in order to sustain his plantation in the third novel, *Das Pflanzerleben I & II* [*The Planter's Life I & II*] (1836). Sealsfield minimizes the brutality of the plantation system by participating in a “plantation paternalism” wherein slave owners are presented as benevolent masters who treat their slaves like perpetual children because they are incapable of governing themselves.¹⁷ The final two installments, *Die Farbigen* [*The Colored Ones*] (1836) and *Nathan, oder der Squatter-Regulator* (1837), which were translated into French in 1853, narrate the Americanization of the Count de Rossignolles, a French nobleman who immigrates to Louisiana to escape the French Revolution.¹⁸ Like Howard, Rossignolles must, as Schuchalter observes, “learn the skills necessary to manage a plantation, which primary include the production and sale of cotton and the supervision of slaves, with all the political, economic, and social privileges attendant upon this mode of life” (274). But what about the ecological dynamics of plantation management in *Lebensbilder*? How does the materiality of the South affect Sealsfield’s representations of Americanness?

Although scholars have peripherally addressed the importance of nature in Sealsfield’s political thought, none have taken his nature writing to be a central component of his nationalist narratives. Despite the bulk of his work is fictional, his critics have read him as a political theorist of sorts, analyzing his representations of democracy, slavery, westward expansion,

¹⁷ On planter paternalism in Sealsfield’s work, see Sammons, *Ideology, Mimesis, and Fantasy* and Schuchalter, *Frontier and Utopia*.

¹⁸ The final two novels, *Die Farbigen* and *Nathan, oder der Squatter-Regulator*, were translated into French and published as *Les Émigrés dans Louisiane* (1853).

Federalism, Native Americans, and urban corruption in relation to Jacksonian politics.¹⁹ An avowed advocate for President Andrew Jackson and Jacksonian ideologies, Sealsfield has been called “one of the most systematically and programmatically democratic German-language writers in the entire nineteenth-century” (*Ideology* 37) by Germanist critic Jeffrey Sammons. However, Sealsfield’s conception of democracy—or freedom from tyranny—applies only to white men. Democracy emanates from the sovereign planter who governs over himself, his family, his slaves, and his environments. For Sealsfield, it cannot exist without slavery or the cultivation of swamps into plantations. According to Jerry Schuchalter, Sealsfield outlines a new model of agrarian society based less on a Jeffersonian republicanism and more on the planter’s “quasi-feudal privilege.” An archetype of patriarchal authority, the planter governs his wife, his children, and his slaves so that his plantation embodies “such classical ideals of harmony, balance, and order” (219). As *Lebensbilder* and *The Americans as They Are* highlight, plantation governance is not just limited to planters’ social networks but radiates outward to encompass plants and animals as well. In addition to slaves and overseers, swamps, cotton, tobacco, orchards, alligators, mosquitos, flowers, and other nonhuman features the antebellum South fall under the jurisdiction of the planter-citizen who governs over them and rearranges them into configurations that reinforce his whiteness by minimizing the human and nonhuman risks to its existence.

—THE NATURE OF RISK

¹⁹ See Hugh Ridley, *Relations Stop Nowhere* (2007), 178-85; Alexander Ritter, “Charles Sealsfield (1793-1864),” 633-44; Jeffrey Sammons, “Charles Sealsfield’s ‘Images of Life from Both Hemispheres,’” 66-72; and Sammons, *Ideology, Mimesis, Fantasy* (1998), 1-70.

Cultivating a familiarity with danger proves to be a constituent act of acclimating oneself to the political, economic, cultural, and ecological dynamics of life in the plantation South. In *Lebensbilder*, Sealsfield writes, the “daily and hourly danger of being either choked in a swamp or drowned in a bayou—of being devoured by an alligator, or torn to pieces by a bear—should at length acquire that familiarity with what is generally called danger, which naturally produces a change in [one’s] manners, language, and whole existence” (*Life* 269). Environmental factors and social customs collide, highlighting how nature and culture coproduce each other through risk. Listing the potential dangers that newcomers to the swampy ecosystems of the South encounter, Sealsfield acknowledges, albeit negatively, the transformative power of nature—that is, its ability to suddenly destroy the human and nonhuman lives that enable plantation ecologies to persist. Naturalization “naturally” unfolds in Sealsfield’s writing through this antagonistic relationship between nature and immigrants. As demonstrated in *Lebensbilder*, risk becomes incorporated into ecological sensibilities of immigrants in order to help them recognize the dangers of the swamps, to negotiate the power of the natural environment, and to survive. Despite the ubiquity of environmental threats in the subtropical climate, Sealsfield’s characters do not perceive themselves to be wholly powerless against environmental risks. Instead, they mobilize their “familiarity with danger” to cultivate a sense of security and to assert their mastery over nonhumans and humans alike.

Addressing concerns about the environmental dangers endemic to the South, *Lebensbilder* and *The Americans as They Are* both resemble what scholars now call “risk narratives,” or fictional or semifictional stories that disseminate scientific information about environmental hazards through conventional literary modes to make risks easier to imagine and

negotiate.²⁰ Attentive to the everyday ecological dangers associated with immigrating to the South, Sealsfield adopts what Ursula Heise calls “a risk perspective,” wherein “crises are already underway all around, and while their consequences can be mitigated, a future without their impact has become impossible to envision” (*Sense of Planet* 142). Linking sociological theories on risk to narrative theory, Heise suggests that literary genres are pivotal “for organizing information about risks into intelligible and meaningful stories” that shape how people imagine nature and their embeddedness within it (138). Narrative modes of storytelling enable readers to synthesize otherwise abstract information about their entanglements with nature and imagine them in readily familiar literary genres, the conventions of which readers would have recognized. For Sealsfield, risk perspectives filter medical and scientific discourse about the swamps and plantations of the South through the gothic and the pastoral, respectively, to shape the affective responses of his readers to the South’s subtropical climates.

Through gothic and pastoral modes of literary discourse, Sealsfield divides the geographies of the South into risky spaces of death (swamps) and secure spaces of life (plantations). *Lebensbilder* and *The Americans as They Are* collaborate to position pastoral plantations as the environmental norm to which virtuous American citizens aspire. On the other hand, threats to the pastoral plantation are imagined as terrifying, horrific, and risky. Across Sealsfield’s writing, swamps materialize as gothic spaces that imperil plantation ecologies. The inimical influences of the swamps transform the South into what might be called a “riskscape,” or a territorialized location or set of locations in which the anticipation of (an environmental) crisis structures the everyday social, political, economic, and cultural practices of the

²⁰ On risk narratives, see Sylvia Mayer and Alexa Weik von Mossner, *The Anticipation of Catastrophe* (2014).

community.²¹ With its alligators, its miasmas, its mosquitoes, its hurricanes, its oppressive heat, its endemic diseases, its wildfires, and its poisonous plants, the South is suffused with ecological risks that white immigrants must anticipate to survive throughout Sealsfield's works.

The nature writing within *The Americans as They Are* and *Lebensbilder* resonates with a group of guidebooks that represent the environments of the South as both paradise and hell. These guidebooks carefully detail the topography of Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and Arkansas (i.e. their climates, rivers, soils, flora, fauna, towns, and inhabitants) but rarely in value neutral vocabularies. Plantations and swamps emerge as two antagonistic ends of an environmental spectrum. Nowhere is this binary more succinctly articulated than in William Bullock's travelogue and guidebook, *Sketch of a Journey through the Western States of North America* (1827). An English immigrant and travel writer, Bullock describes how the plantations that line the Mississippi River "exhibited rich pasture lands, with comfortable farm-houses, surrounded with gardens, orchards, and vineyards" (xv). These luxuriant, well-cultivated landscapes informed the immigrant that "he had left the regions of swamps and marshes, fevers and agues, and arrived at those of hill and dale, pasturage and health" (xv). In *Emigrant's Guide to the Western and Southwestern States and Territories* (1818), William Darby (a popular American geographer) describes the swamplands of Louisiana as a "laboratory of disease," continuing that, in the "lifeless and dreary" bayous, "you almost imagine yourself to have passed the last verge of terrestrial existence" (17). The guidebooks of

²¹ I am slightly redefining the term "riscscape" coined by Antonia Mehnert in order to emphasize the material entanglements of danger in Sealsfield's writing. Mehnert describes riscscapes as being characterized by the ongoing anticipation of crisis "in which territorial distinctions decline in importance and socio-cultural practices are disembedded from place" (61). However, in the case of Sealsfield's nature writing, risk is very much territorialized and embedded in the ecologies of the swamps.

Bullock and Darby reflect a pervasive tendency within transatlantic immigrant writing to vilify swampy, subtropical climates as being dangerous to the health of the white immigrants.

The Americans as They Are enumerates the environmental risks that prospective immigrants will experience when they relocate to Louisiana. Threats from hurricanes, alligators, and miasmatic diseases constantly loom in Sealsfield's imagination as these existential dangers imperil the establishment of white immigrant communities in the South. The penultimate chapter, "Hints for Emigrants to Louisiana," opens with a warning that the southern climate changes the physical constitutions of immigrants, that it thins their blood, and that it propagates bilious fevers. Considering the power of climate to affect humans at the most fundamental levels of their being, Sealsfield appears to give the natural environment a greater degree of power than human populations, particularly white planters. To counterbalance the transformative power of nature, Sealsfield grants immigrants the ability to overcome the hostile climate through seemingly trivial environmental practices. In addition to leaving Louisiana every May to avoid the sick season, planters can plant sunflowers in the rear of the plantation and around the house "to preserve his slaves from the morning and night exhalations of the swamps; a measure which, trifling as it may seem, will have an incredible effect in improving the air" (200). With these small measures, Sealsfield's planters modify the climate and eliminate the environmental risks to themselves and their community. Rather than envisioning either human or nonhuman forces as overly deterministic, Sealsfield places planters in an antagonistic relationship with the nonhuman forces of the swamps that hold the plantation in a constant state of precarity.

The Americans as They Are demonizes swamps for being unhealthy, risky spaces that defy the aesthetic and economic norms of the plantation: "That a country, the fourth part of which consists of marshes, stagnant waters, rivers, and lakes, and which is so near the torrid

zone, cannot be altogether healthy, is not to be denied” (189). Their rotting, decomposing vegetable matter releases noxious fumes that infect the air during the summer months and spread fatal diseases to those who have yet to become naturalized to the sultry climate.²² Attributing yellow fever, malaria, and bilious fever to “the pestilential miasmata which rise from the swamps and marshes,” Sealsfield reports that these vapors “infect the air to a degree which is difficult to describe” (193). Although Sealsfield defers to scientific understanding of the invisible miasmatic particles that charge the atmosphere with disease, his sense of environmental risk is entirely imaginative because not only is risk an anticipated event but miasmas are also imaginary particles.²³ The swampy ecosystems of the South expose the possibilities and the limitations of literary discourse in ways that plantations do not. The absence of objective information about miasmas actually accentuates the sense of risk. It elevates the sense of uncertainty and dread that readers might already feel toward swamps. Without an exact actuarial report of the danger of acquiring a disease, the reader is free to imagine the worst possible scenarios.

Sealsfield’s account of swamp miasmas accords with ecocritic Anthony Wilson’s description of swamps as a mixture of “physical fact” (xii) and “imaginative creation” (40) in the antebellum South.²⁴ Swamps are physical facts because they have direct effects on the

²² Although scholars have recognized how Sealsfield’s environmental imagination is indebted to Jacksonian politics, it should be recognized that geohumoral theories about miasmas are equally important to his nature writing. No study of Sealsfield can ignore his indebtedness to Jacksonian politics, and critics have long been attuned to how Sealsfield’s plots, his characters, and his themes reinforce a Jacksonian ideology socially, politically, and economically. On Sealsfield and the environment, see Sammons’s *Ideology* and Schuchalter’s *Frontier and Utopia*. While both discuss the importance of nature in his works, no sustained ecocritical analysis of Sealsfield’s works has been attempted in English.

²³ On risk as an imaginary faculty, see Mayer and Weik von Messner, “The Anticipation of Catastrophe,” 7-18.

²⁴ By calling Sealsfield’s swamps “imaginative creations,” neither Wilson nor myself mean to undermine the actual concerns of people who believed that these environments were inimical to

populations inhabiting them: disease. Even these physical facts cannot escape the gravitational pull of the imagination because they invite readers to imagine future risks.²⁵ Swamps are imaginative creations because people's experiences of them become mediated through cultural templates that orient their ecological sensibilities toward particular affective outcomes. In his investigation of the role of swamps in the formation of a Southern identity, Wilson emphasizes that swamps are demonized because they are liminal environments that defy the economic and aesthetic norms of the plantation. With the ascendancy of the plantation in the early nineteenth century, swamps became "more clearly opposed, both figuratively and practically, to prevailing ideals of white Southern society, which emphasized racial and cultural purity and ironclad class distinctions" (xvii). Chaotic, uncultivated environments where runaway slaves could escape, swamps resist easy incorporation into the plantation economy of the South so that, as Wilson argues, the "effort to transform its natural state into the pastoral garden, however, transforms the swamp into a deadly and intractable foe" (40).

Like in *The Americans as They Are*, *Lebensbilder* arouses antipathies for swamps through medical theories about miasmas that very much represent wetlands as deadly and intractable foes.²⁶ Again and again, wetlands become synonymous with miasmas, effluvia, and other noxious vapors that infect to atmosphere with contagious particles. Coming to a "verdant, poisonous swamp" during the alligator-breeding season, Howard fears that he has "entered the head-quarters of death—who sends out his arrows in the shape of a thousand fevers" (*Life* 44).

human health but to stress how these legitimate concerns become disseminated and discussed within literary discourses inside and outside of the United States. On the role of the swamp in cultural imaginaries, see also Allewaert, Cowen, and Miller.

²⁵ See Sylvia Mayer, "Explorations of the Controversially Real," 21-37.

²⁶ See Frederick Sargent, *Hippocratic Heritage* and Ann Vileisis, *Unknown Landscape*.

Sealsfield infuses miasmatic theories of disease transmission with a gothic aura and projects feelings of disgust and terror onto the landscape. The stark difference between the “poisonous” swamps and the neat, orderly plantations accentuates the alterity of the indigenous wetlands of Louisiana in Sealsfield’s writing because the gothic exaggerates their riskiness to white immigrants. These chaotic, disease-ridden environments harbor the most dangerous forms of nonhuman and human life. Dead and decaying plants release pestilential, noxious vapors that poison the atmosphere. Swarms of mosquitos gorge on human blood. Alligators stalk their prey beneath the muddy, vegetable-covered waters. Impenetrable cypress forests shelter outlaws, cannibals, and murderers from justice. The confluence of rivers within bayous disorients travelers, leaving them unsure how to navigate their out. The immense biodiversity that comprises the swamps defy the environmental norms of the plantation South. Swamps do not possess any of the features that would make them legible as Americanized environments—that is, as a well-regulated and productive farm where a white man and woman raise their children in pastoral bliss.

Characters throughout *Lebensbilder* discover that, in order to protect and propagate the plantation form, swamps must be eradicated, which is an incredibly risky endeavor for unprepared European immigrants. Sealsfield illustrates the dangers of migrating to a tropical climate during a poignant daydream of George Howard (the protagonist of the first three novels). While sailing with his French creole wife, Louise Menou, Howard watches will-o-wisps illuminate the “groups of orange and citron-trees” littering the plantation-lined banks of the Mississippi (*Life* 66). This splendid sight reminds him that these “smiling shores” of the German coast (a region north of New Orleans) were once bog and slime. The Germans “imported under the command of some Swedish or Dutch baron, to populate the new dukedom of Arkansas”

failed to naturalize to this hostile climate. Their colonial project collapsed when nine-tenths of the population “died in the forests, and on the way down the Mississippi” (66). The surviving one-tenth, afraid for their physical and social survival, go to war “with the floods, alligators and vermin” so “their children and grand-children reaped the fruits of their labor, and live in peace and plenty under the aegis of liberty” (67). Sealsfield celebrates the “creating spirit” that enabled these immigrants to withstand “a terrible solitude, a watery desert—to struggle with nature, with the wilderness, heat, cold, and the floods—to persevere in a strife, which no trumpets of fame proclaim to posterity” (67). The imminent risk of collective death pushes immigrants into a perpetual state of warfare against nature wherein planters must constantly identify and eliminate any risks to their plantation.

The ecologies of the plantations—the fields, the orchards, the gardens—cannot survive without racial violence. Westward expansion and slavery sustain the mass production of cotton, sugar cane, tobacco, indigo, and other commercial crops that distinguish the Southern landscape from its Northern counterparts. “In this climate,” he warns in *The Americans as They Are*, “no white person could stand the labor; the act of emancipation itself, treacherous and barbarous as the slaves are, would subject their former masters to certain destruction and death” (177). In dissipating white life, the natural environment necessitates the enslavement of Black people who are imagined as being less susceptible to the harsh climate. The natural ecosystems of the South are imagined as being so risky Sealsfield that his racist attitudes and his proslavery stances have their roots in ideas about the climate and its transformative power.²⁷ He argues, “The fatigue and labor in these hot and sultry climates, can only be borne by slaves; a white man who should

²⁷ See Stewart, “Let Us Begin with the Weather.”

attempt the same labour which kept him stout and hearty in the north, would soon be overcome by the heat of the climate” (140-1).

Slavery eschews the risk of collective white death from swamp ecosystems and, in this way, becomes a perverse form of risk management. Even mundane moments of ecological crisis threaten to delay and disrupt the naturalization process throughout *Lebensbilder*. Upon meeting the French émigré Count Rossignolles, George Howard wonders, “Whatever might have been the reasons which influence him in preferring the evergreen meadows and orange-groves of Attakapas, to the brilliant ante-chambers of the Tuilleries [sic]” (206). Of course, Rossignolles happily explains why—not to satisfy Howard’s curiosity but to defend slavery. Rossignolles cannot and will not disentangle his naturalization from slavery because his multiple brushes with death throughout his sojourn in the swamps reconcile him to slave labor. For his first five weeks in the Attakapas, he tries to cultivate the earth through his own labor. However, he soon realizes “that only constant, light work, in this enervating climate, could protect us against the putrid fever with which we found the good Attakapas more or less infected” (288-9). The climate itself becomes the source of everyday risks that threaten “to overtake us with those touches of sour, bilious temper” (289). Death haunts Sealsfield’s immigrants not only because of their ignorance of the environment but also because of the fragility of whiteness. This fragility is performative because white characters can *and* do cultivate the swamps, but this imagined fragility reflects Sealsfield’s reliance on medical theories about the climate to materialize race through risk.

—RACIALIZING ENVIRONMENTS

More than objective or scientific heuristics, risk perspectives within *The Americans as They Are* and *Lebensbilder* encode race onto ecosystems of the South through literary modes of

discourse.²⁸ The pastoral and the gothic do more than help make environmental risks and rewards legible to European readers. They also illustrate how ideas about race were bound up in ideas about the environment. Environmental aesthetics (how people perceive and appreciate nature) shaped environmental ethics (how people interact with nature) in ways that racialize humans and nonhumans. In *The Americans as They Are*, for instance, Sealsfield explains how almost all of the clearing is done by slaves rather than by a white planter who “cannot work in person without exposing himself to a bilious fever” (136). “The fatigue and labor in these hot and sultry climates,” he warns, “can only be borne by slaves; a white man who should attempt the same labour which kept him stout and hearty in the north, would soon be overcome by the heat of the climate” (140-1). *Lebensbilder* replicates this theory of climatic racialization in the form of a plantation novel that argues, quite explicitly, that the successful elimination of the environmental risks to the pastoral plantation depends upon slaves who cultivate the gothic swamps of the South.

Discourses about risky climates are also discourses about racial identities and anxieties in *The Americans as They Are* and *Lebensbilder*.²⁹ Sealsfield’s discussions of the climate in his novels and guidebook exemplify how whiteness and blackness materialize on the body through

²⁸ In antebellum American literature, racial meanings co-developed, as Ian Finseth argues in *Shades of Green* (2009), alongside forms of nature writing. Together, they privileged particular kinds of nature, particular ways of interacting with it, and particular ways of imagining it. On race and nature writing in the United States, see Gerhardt, “The Greening of African American Literary Landscapes, 515-33 and Outka, *Race and Nature* (2008).

²⁹ Literary scholars and historians have recently reexamined the relationship between race and nature in the U.S. during the nineteenth century. In her examination of guidebooks to Missouri and Arkansas, Conevery Valenčius Bolton charts how the “[c]limate, with all its myriad meanings, insinuated its way into every element of personhood, determining racial belonging as well as personal well-being” (235). Combining Finseth’s and Bolton’s insights, this section highlights how Enlightenment era thinking about the effect of the climate on humans continued to shape the formation of political and personal subjectivities in Sealsfield’s writing.

the interactions between human and nonhuman beings, between organic and inorganic matter, and between natural and built environments. Heavily influenced by climatic theories of medicine, Sealsfield portrays human bodies as being incredibly porous and, thus, susceptible to transformation by living and nonliving nonhuman agents. As he notes in *The Americans as They Are*, “Whoever emigrates from a northern to a southern climate, experiences more or less a change in his constitution; his blood is thinned, and in a state of greater effervescence, and his frame weakened in consequence” (198). However, as *Lebensbilder* makes clear, eradicating gothic swamps and replacing them with pastoral plantations can minimize this constitutional change—this naturalization—by making the climate more hospitable to white immigrants.

Sealsfield litters the pages of *Lebensbilder* with highly romanticized depictions of plantations where white lives flourish. From George Howard to Count de Rossignolles to Monsieur Menou (Howard’s creole father-in-law), plantations enchant everyone with their well-manicured lawns, their symmetrical houses, their beautiful orchards, and their bountiful fields. One “delightful evening” on his father-in-law’s estate, Howard mythologizes the majesty of plantation ecologies: “To the west of the plantation the forest glows like a sea of fire. Flaming through the plaquemines, cherry-trees, pawpaws, and peccans, the rays of the setting sun illumine the landscape gloriously, giving the *tout ensemble* the enchanting aspect of the gardens of Hesperides!” (193). Even while the heat of the summer sun and the swarms of mosquitoes oppress Sealsfield’s white planter-citizens, plantations offer a space of retreat, of escape, where white lives flourish thanks to their monocultural cash crops. Pleasurable assemblages of tobacco, cotton, sugarcane, bananas, figs, tulips, and oranges, plantations exemplify pastoral ideals of order, beauty, security, leisure, and *whiteness* for Sealsfield.

Although Sealsfield's guidebooks and novels were largely aimed at European, particularly German, audiences, Sealsfield joined a cohort of antebellum U.S. novelists in constructing a white Southern identity that centered on the pastoral beauty of the plantation. Throughout the 1830s and 40s, fiction writers, such as John Pendleton Kennedy and William Gilmore Simms, rewrote American national narrative to focus on the plantation economies and ecologies of the South rather than the small independent farms of the North.³⁰ These writers repurposed the pastoral motifs and symbols of agrarian narratives as a means to popularize the political aspirations and the racialized economies of the South to a broad American and European audience. As Finseth observes, the plantation form modified pastoral aesthetics in Southern literature, reflecting a range of ideological commitments and desires such as a "deference to aristocratic order, a wish to escape the inexorable march of time, a reverence for nature, and, predictably, a belief in the supposedly docile nature of African Americans" (227). While these elements are clearly legible within *The Americans as They Are* and *Lebensbilder*, the pastoral elements of Sealsfield's also exemplify white mastery over the natural world in ways that reinforce Paul Outka's suggestion in *Race and Nature* (2008) that whiteness and the pastoral are closely allied within American fiction. According to Outka, the cultivation of pastoral landscapes symbolically justified the social and environmental colonization of the American continent by white American settlers while also "functioning simultaneously, and contradictorily, as the origin of whiteness and the result of it" (32). Pastoral plantations are very much the product and source of white supremacy for the vast majority of Sealsfield's characters.

³⁰ On the role of the Plantation South in the formation of an American literary nationalism, see Jennifer Rae Greeson, *Our South* (2010), J. Gerald Kennedy, *Strange Nation* (2016), Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady* (1980), and Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land* (1950).

Enshrining the plantation pastoral as a normative horizon for his immigrant characters, Sealsfield manufactures feelings of social harmony and natural order that obscure, even erase, the violent, interconnected histories of chattel slavery and environmental destruction.

Aesthetic beauty and violence fuse, manifesting and vanishing in the neoclassical splendor of plantation ecologies.³¹ Environmental and racial violence manifests and disappears in the pastoral beauty of plantation ecologies. When describing the splendor of his father-in-law's property, George Howard marvels at how "trees and bushes, orange and lemon-groves, wind along the southwest and east, from Seeche toward the negro village, waving gracefully in the awakening breeze. The negro huts, with their small gardens, appear and vanish in the scintillating atmosphere" (*Life* 193). Even when the huts are not visible, the highly cultivated groves and fields signal the ongoing presence of slavery. As a space of pastoral beauty, the plantation naturalizes slavery into the ecology of the South. When passing by an ordinary plantation, Howard admires the manorial house "with its twenty huts, buried in a forest of China, tulip, orange, fig, and lemon-trees" (33). Slavery becomes so co-extensive with floral and citrus forests that the built structures of the plantation blur with the environment. Without slavery, plantation ecologies cannot and do not survive, reverting instead to the chaotic, unruly swamps from which they were cultivated.

Across *The Americans as They Are* and *Lebensbilder*, the swamp emerges as the gothic other to the plantation. Sealsfield frames wetlands as terrifying spaces that inspire disgust because their chaotic arrangement of living and nonliving beings defy the pastoral norm of American literary nationalism. Their plants, animals, and miasmas threaten to destroy white

³¹ On the relationship between aesthetic beauty and physical violence, see Russ Castronovo, *Beautiful Democracy* (2007). Michel Foucault also gestures toward this relationship in his discussion of splendor and police in *Security, Territory, Population* (2004).

lives. Whereas the plantations exemplify white colonial mastery over the natural world, swamps signal the failure. This fear of swamps arises from the uncertainty and the terror associated with nature and its ability to disrupt the economic and racial hierarchies of plantation society. After all, swamps, bayous, and other wetland ecosystems offered refuge for runaway slaves, white squatters, mosquitos, alligators, cypress trees, and poison ivy—the people, animals, and plants that thrive at the peripheries of the plantation. In *The Slave in the Swamp* (2005), William Tynes Cowan tracks the swamp through African American writing, arguing that slaves found new modes of power through their movement through places in and around the plantation that were otherwise denied them by white people. Maroons, runaway slaves, and their offspring established semisecret communities throughout swamps in the South where they would build houses that were difficult to locate. Some planted crops and created a self-sustaining community. Some stole livestock and food from the plantations from which they had escaped. Either way, these people enhanced their ability to act in the world through their interactions with wetlands.³²

These liminal figures terrify Sealsfield so much that he incorporates them into his fiction to warn his readers about the precarity of whiteness in the swampy ecosystems of the South. Early in *Lebensbilder*, he toys with the idea that swamps can serve as spaces of semi-autonomous Black society. On a hot June day, while touring a bog at the confluence of the Tensaw, White, and Red Rivers, George Howard encounters a “tallow-faced” white squatter, his “ugly negress” wife, and their two “dark-brown imps” (*Life* 45). While the near-dead squatter’s jaundiced skin shows signs of chronic malaria from exposure to swamp miasmas, his biracial children exhibit excellent health: “born in this poisonous atmosphere, used to these pestilential

³² On the relationship between agency, wetlands, and African Americans in plantation zones, see also Allewaert, *Ariel’s Ecologies* (2013).

vapors in early childhood, they are already acclimated, and they grow up like the swamp-rose amid the venomous animals and plants, to transmit good health to their children and grandchildren” (44). The precarity of the squatter’s whiteness emerges through his sexual relationship with his Black wife and through his and his children’s interactions with the swamp. His yellowed body visibly displays the racializing effects of the nonhuman particles that contaminate the atmosphere of the swamp. Whiteness is not a fixed property of bodies, but, as this character intimates, a product of interconnected social and environmental factors. Sealsfield cements the link between climate and racial terror in the figures of squatter’s children. Having been inoculated to the pestilential vapors of the swamp, the children personify alternative social and environmental futures for the United States that are not organized around the plantation—futures which are designed to horrify and disgust Sealsfield’s white audiences.

Sealsfield portrays swamps as literal and figurative hells, as hyper-foreign places that endanger the plantation form and the future of the white race. When Count Rossignolles first enters the Attakapas swamps, he “imagines himself sailing on the waters of the Styx or Acheron; feels agitated, oppressed, and frightened in these gloomy, ominous regions” (*Life* 225). A range of environmental factors stimulates these feelings of estrangement, terror, and disgust. Aside from the pestilential miasmas, “the roar of thousands of alligators and bull-frogs” and “the horrible laughter and groans of the great Mississippi owl” utterly terrify and bewilder newcomers (225). The wildlife haunts the darkness like demonic specters, but the threat that these animals pose is almost entirely imaginary. What terrifies the Count is their potential, not actual, danger. The proliferation of gothic descriptors engenders a particular negative ecological sensibility whereby every aspect of the swamp seems monstrous and, paradoxically, unnatural. As gothic

spaces of terror, swamps invert naturalization narratives about the regenerative capacity of the American environment by making the country seem like hell on earth, like a land of death.

Death constantly stalks Sealsfield's immigrants throughout the Attakapas swamps in *Pflanzerleben II*, *Die Farbigen*, and *Nathan*. Aghast at the networks of "bogs, mires, and swamps—these thousands of rotting logs—these immense shoals of alligators—these terrible clouds of mosquitoes [sic]—this entire chaos," Count Rossignolles doubts the viability of cultivating such land so thoroughly "that even the terrors of slavery disappeared—nay, in a degree became justified in my sight" (*Life* 207). Sealsfield's gothic mode of nature writing transforms the swamps into chaotic death worlds, or spaces where living beings are considered to be already dead or to be the source of death.³³ As death worlds, swamps and their nonhuman inhabitants lose any claim to positive recognition or representation and can thus be extirpated as a rational means of self-preservation and racial preservation. As a potent aesthetic mode in American literary history and environmental politics, the gothic influences the ethical obligations of Sealsfield's white characters toward nonwhite people and environments for the worse.³⁴ The feelings of horror or disgust generated by gothic nature writing encourage and justify the cultivation of swamps through slave labor in an effort to modify the climate to protect white lives.

³³ I'm appropriating the term "death world" from Achille Mbembe, who describes them as "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" ("Necropolitics" 40). Mbembe applies the term to study "the subjugation of life to the power of death" over humans on plantations and in colonies. The term extends to nonhuman populations insofar as they are conferred the status of *living dead*—something that can be or must be killed. I want to push the term just a little to suggest that death worlds are also imagined as wielding death, as having the capacity to kill white lives. Thus, death worlds are not only dying, but they also emit death to other spaces.

³⁴ On the recent turn in ecocriticism toward the gothic, see Simon Estok, "Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness," 203-225; Tom Hillard, "Deep Into That Dark Peering," 685-95; and Matthew Wynn Sivils, "American Gothic and the Environment, 1800-Present," 121-30.

In this way, Sealsfield's gothic nature writing functions as a climate-centered application of biopolitical discourse that racializes nature by distinguishing what must live and what can die. Sealsfield's naturalization narratives extend the applications of biopolitics (that management of the political and biological lives of humans) to nonhuman species and spaces. When introducing the concept of biopolitics, Michel Foucault introduces racism as the power to wield death, or the power to kill so as not to expose citizens to the risk of death or disease. For Foucault, racism subdivides the human species into a superrace and subrace, in which the former is recognized as having a right to live and the latter as a being an existential threat to life.³⁵ In short, biopower is a politics of calculating risks to safeguard the ascendancy and survival of the "superrace," or, more accurately, *whiteness*.³⁶ According Giorgio Agamben, modern biopolitics "redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside" (131), or as he clarifies, the "threshold of indiscernibility between exteriority and interiority" which identifies "life that does not deserve to be lived" (136-7). Even though Foucault and Agamben focus almost exclusively on human life, biopolitics necessarily come to encompass the management of *all* living and nonliving things in Sealsfield's naturalization narratives. In *Lebensbilder*, literary modes of discourse clarify and police the biopolitical threshold of belonging by associating the forms of nonhuman life that "deserve" to live with the pastoral and with the plantation.

The gothic mode identifies those species and spaces that do not deserve to live because of the terror and fear that they engender in white Americans. The gothic characterizes certain nonhumans as things, such as swamps, that should be exterminated so that white race and its plantation-based ecosystems can live. Sealsfield's gothic nature writing enumerates the endemic

³⁵ See Foucault, "*Society Must be Defended*" (2003).

³⁶ On biopolitics and racism, see Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002) and Alexander Weheliye, *Habeus Viscus* (2014).

environmental risks to the plantation order and elucidates how to anticipate, to assess, and to nullify them—a narrative strategy that connects every installment of *Lebensbilder* to *The Americans as They Are*. The successful elimination of environmental risks depends “entirely on the blacks,” as Count Rossignolles insists after concluding “the white man, left to himself, could never succeed in cultivating this country” because of the constant threat of death (207). If the overwhelming horror of the Attakapas catapults Sealsfield’s immigrants into new arenas of environmental consciousness, then these are geared toward the preservation of plantations through the biopolitical management of Black lives and environmental risks.

—PLANTATION MANAGEMENT

The precarity of whiteness in the tropical ecosystems of the South constantly imperils the feelings of mastery for Sealsfield’s planter characters. Their susceptibility to the living and nonliving beings of the swamps translate the master/slave dialectic at work in the texts into an explicitly environmental realm. In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argues the “master” and the “slave” are locked in a “life-and-death struggle” (a dialectic) through which the master fabricates a sense of independence and the slave one of dependence. At the same time however, the master recognizes in the slave the instability of the relationship and the possibility of his own enslavement. While Hegel’s master/slave dialectic operates largely in a cognitive domain as an ideological abstraction, Sealsfield grounds this relationship in the materiality of the world. His white master characters see the limitations of their sovereignty not only in moments of slave rebellion but also in moments of environmental crisis. The swamps and their miasmas illustrate the fictive quality of the independence of George Howard and Count Rossignolles by repositioning their life-and-death struggles within climatic frameworks. Howard

recognizes how his sovereignty as a planter is as much threatened by the climate of the South as by slave revolts. The tension between the gothic swamps and the pastoral plantations transplants the logics of the master/slave dialectic onto the environment and dictates how the characters interact with nature in order to reproduce the racial subjectivities upon which southern society depended. The materiality of the master/slave dialectic transforms the aesthetics of nature writing into an ethics of plantation management—that is, ways of imagining nature become ways of interacting with nature.

Plantation management requires some degree of theatricality, or performativity, to sustain its social and its ecological asymmetries. In *Lebensbilder*, a planter's sovereignty over his wife, his children, his slaves, his livestock, and his crops results from particular kinds of managerial performances that are designed to enact, or cultivate, authority over human and nonhuman populations. Cultivating plantation sovereignty is an ongoing source of pleasure for Sealsfield's white characters who find "something vastly pleasant in thus playing the sovereign" (105). The French naturalist, Constantin François de Chassebœuf, comte de Volney, observed a similar performative quality when visiting Thomas Jefferson at his plantation, Monticello. Examining Volney's reaction to Jefferson's attempts to act like a master, Betsy Erkkila characterizes his plantation "as a kind of theater of the absurd in which the white master and his Black slaves appear to 'play' the roles of master and slave suggests the instability—the literally performed nature—of racial identity" (214n39). Erkkila's insights into the theatricality of the plantation exposes how racial identity is not a fixed property of the body but the result of ongoing interactions—that is, how race is not a biological category but a social construct. While Volney explores moments of human-to-human performativity, the performed nature of racial identity in Sealsfield's works also applies to human-to-nonhuman interactions that organize the day-to-day

lives of his characters as well—that is, racial identity is not just a social construction but is also an ecological phenomenon.

Plantation management begins with the cultivation of an anti-swamp ecological sensibility in *Lebensbilder*. When navigating through the bayou la Fourche or the bayou Plaquemine, the Count warns, “These bayous are crossed by so many rivers, standing-waters and swamps, that even with an exact knowledge of them it is only with the greatest care that a course through this labyrinth can be found” (*Life* 225). Even as the complexity of Louisianan wetlands pushes at the boundaries of knowability, immigrants must familiarize themselves with the terrain in order to survive and to master them. Mastery over nature means knowing how to modify the swamps to reproduce the plantation form, even though such actions are socially and ecologically violent. Nathan Strong, an American squatter who is Sealsfield’s procultivation revision of Natty Bumppo, exemplifies this when he saves Rossignolles from the jaws of a moss-covered alligator with a bullet to its left eye. Familiar with the flora and fauna of swamps and how to overpower them, Nathan and his band of white squatters fell cypress and cedar trees, constructing a makeshift bridge across the swamp in just thirty minutes. The incredible ease with which Nathan fearlessly penetrates and modifies the swamps awakens in the Count “something of the well-known adventurous American spirit” (*Life* 278). Inspired by the squatter’s control of the swamp, the Count desires “to become, with his assistance, the founder of my own plantation—and to escape, in this manner, the idle life of Creoles in the Attakapas” (279).

The figure of the squatter is complicated when thinking about the histories of cultivating citizenship. The squatter is a liminal figure who does not fit into the traditional national narrative of independent farmers. Instead, squatters do not own the land. They occupy it until chased off by the legal owners, but, in the process, begin the process of cultivation that later white

occupants can exploit. As it were, squatters serve a specific function in settler colonial societies: they continually push the frontier further and further. Sealsfield lionizes them for this. Through the figure of Nathan Strong, he turns them into the personification of rugged individualism, even if he seems suspicious of their morality (they cannibalize people in one horrifying scene). While squatters possess tremendous amounts of environmental knowledge that enable Sealsfield's immigrant characters to cultivate the swamps, they do not represent suitable pathways to become citizens. Instead, they symbolize a transformative spirit in the American character that Sealsfield deems to be necessary to cultivate Southern swamps into plantations. They represent the potential to belong to the planter class, so that at the end of *Lebensbilder*, even Nathan has purchased a plantation. In this way, Sealsfield continues to place the plantation at the center of Southern society, using these ecosystems as a means of judging a white man's ability to govern himself and his environment.

In the process of detailing the micro- and macroscopic concerns of the planter class, Sealsfield gives numerous examples of well-run plantations and poorly managed ones. The exact contours of what qualifies as good management unfolds in the minute, uninteresting details of Count Rossignolles's and George Howard's assimilation to life in Louisiana. These banal moments of adaptation are crucial because, as Edgar A. Thompson contends, "the plantation is a powerful agent of assimilation and acculturation" (*Plantation* 4). The plantation is less an agent, in and of itself, than it is a norm in Sealsfield's writing. Rather than viewing the plantation as an institution, as Thompson does, I see it in the everyday interactions between humans and nonhumans that constitute it. The plantation is a form of conduct—a way of behaving, of being, of becoming. Its acculturative potential rests in the sets of knowledges and practices that govern a planter's conduct toward his estate, toward his overseers and his slaves, toward his environs.

Where plantation management differs from other forms of cultivating citizens is in the direction interaction planters have with land. Whereas cultivating swamps in *Crèvecoeur* demonstrates good conduct, in *Sealsfield*, managing slaves who then cultivate swamps signals a planter's mastery over himself, his slaves, and his environment. As an acculturating practice, plantation management organizes the otherwise disparate, episodic plots of *Lebensbilder* as characters learn how to manage slave populations, how to cultivate cash crops, how to recover from natural disasters, how to participate in social life, and how to avoid the deleterious effects of the climate.

Unaccustomed to the demands of plantation life, Count Rossignolles recognizes that he must find a tutor who can teach him the skills and techniques that will enable him to cultivate a plantation in the Attakapas swamp. Nathan shows him “the rudiments—the A B C of squatter life—in the clearings, in the woodland, and in the live-oaks” (*Life* 327). He teaches Rossignolles how to grow tobacco and cotton, how to manage slaves, and how to manipulate swamplands. The Count's power as a planter-citizen is contingent upon developing a familiarity with nature: “Here, on this second plantation, I found the thing I had so long searched for in vain elsewhere—the guide capable of conducting me to desired gaol [sic]—a sort of A B C—the spelling-book and dictionary, which first set me to learning that difficult art of getting along among the backwoodsmen” (327). The environment itself figuratively becomes a text—more specifically, a primer. *Sealsfield* likens the “cultivated fields,” the “rude and artless dwellings,” the “live-oaks,” and the livestock to spelling-books, dictionaries, and ancient manuscripts that Rossignolles can use “as gradually and as systematically as little children, in learning to read and write” (327). Learning plantation management quickly evolves into an all-consuming task for the Count as he anxiously moves from “the stables, to the gardens, to the fresh land and cultivated fields” without concern for eating, sleeping, or drinking. Basic necessities recede in importance as the

plantation form reorganizes the Count's life, his personal ambitions, his political affiliations, and his moral sensibilities.

Although its plantations and planters are entirely fictional, *Lebensbilder* novelizes popular discourses on good plantation management that circulated widely in the antebellum period.³⁷ As abolitionist pressures began to mount and as soils became increasingly exhausted from exploitative misuse in the 1830s and 40s, southern-based agricultural periodicals sought to defend the plantation form from internal and external forces. Through letters and articles written by planters, these periodicals discuss pressing issues such as plowing and treating the soil, planting seeds, keeping insects and other pests at bay, overseeing overseers, disciplining slaves, and avoiding endemic diseases. These publications shed light on how planters understood their responsibilities to their plantations. In the July 1831 edition of *Southern Agriculturalist and Register of Rural Affairs*, for example, W.W. Hazzard shared his philosophy on how to make a plantation a success: "I endeavor to employ those means in conducting the internal or domestic police of the plantation, which in my judgment is deemed best calculated to promote the comfort and contentment, and suit the condition of the subjects over whom they are intended to operate, and at the same time, secure subordination and good order." Police here refers to the creation of order through ongoing activities that identify and correct risks to social or environmental security. The police of the plantation constantly occupies the foreground of *Lebensbilder* and *The*

³⁷ Examining two prominent, book-length examples of these, environmental historian Mart Stewart outlines an ethics of stewardship—a "green paternalism"—that responds to the pressures of abolition and soil exhaustion. Through these letters, articles, and books, planters circulated ideas about slave management, crop cultivation, and fertilization "with the goal of diversifying southern agriculture and making it more efficient and restoring depleted lands" ("Plantations, Agroecology" 34). These planters intensified their supervision of their plantation. They improved managerial systems to maintain order and efficiency, keeping and sharing detailed records of their practices.

Americans as They Are as Sealsfield explores the forms of conduct that secure the health and longevity of plantation ecologies.

In *Lebensbilder*, political power as a planter-citizen cannot be estranged from the nonhuman lives that make it viable. Plantation management is a series of regulatory activities through which white men exert their sovereignty over networks of human and nonhuman life. It turns the natural environment into a space of constant surveillance, discipline, and regulation and transforms the South into a place of constant negotiation between planters' desires, slaves' agency, and environmental realities. Plantation management is a set of calculated and self-reflexive techniques that attempt to modify the landscape and climate to conform to biopolitical norms.³⁸ Simultaneously an act of racial preservation and environmental governance, it exterminates everything that imperils the aesthetic, economic, or political norms of the plantations. The aesthetics of risk and race congeal into an ethics that involves the daily identification and neutralization of risks to whiteness through cash crop cultivation *and* slave labor.

Cultivation and slavery dominate the naturalization narrative found in the final half of *Nathan, oder der Squatter-Regulator*. First, Sealsfield highlights the difficulty of growing unfamiliar crops in an unfamiliar land through the Count's painful realization that he erroneously underestimated hardships of building a plantation from scratch. Nathan invites the Count and his three French compatriots to apprentice under him so that they might learn to master the cultivation of tobacco. "For a whole week we were engaged in this occupation;" the Count says, "and very soon we had learned the art of cultivating tobacco as well as a son of the Old

³⁸ On governmentality, see Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*. On its environmental characteristics, see Arun Agrawal, *Environmentality*.

Dominion” (335). Knowing how to cultivate this cash crop would enable, as Nathan suggests, the Count to increase his wealth ten fold in ten years, making it possible to establish a comfortable life for his wife. Through this apprenticeship, the Count and his French compatriots become ingrained within the squatter community, soon becoming “the favorites of the community” (336). Knowledge of how to manage nature, how to navigate through swamps, and how to work the land to produce tobacco and cotton are entry points into a squatter community, which is a rehearsal for the Count’s entrance into the upper echelon of Southern life: the planter class. As a means of becoming part of a community, plantation management polices the boundary of inclusion and exclusion. It delineates the populations that are assimilable to American life (white immigrants who can govern their conduct to correspond to plantation norms) and those who are excluded from political life but are nevertheless consubstantial with its existence: slaves.

Like the essays on good plantation management, *Lebensbilder* accepts slavery to be “a necessary evil” for the continuation of Southern society but one that can be ameliorated through the “good” governmentality of planters. Through Rossignolles’s conduct toward the African people whom he purchases, Sealsfield recapitulates the racist fantasy of planter paternalism, or the patriarchal belief that planters are supposed to govern their estates like fathers because slaves, like children, are imagined to be incapable of governing themselves. To exaggerate Rossignolles’s paternalistic benevolence, Sealsfield characterizes the experience of slavery in ghastly terms. When the Count first enters the slave ship, an overpowering stench pervades the air as twenty-five Africans slowly die in squalor beneath the deck after having survived the passage from the West African coast to the shores of the Mississippi. Compounding the suffocating smell, the sight of these humans stuns the Count. A mother whose “dark flesh, where

it was not covered with filth, wore the appearance of death” captivates the Count as he watches her struggle to feed her “almost lifeless infant” (339).

Rather than serving as an outright critique of the horrors of slavery and of the Middle Passage, this sentimental tableau illustrates the Count’s perverse magnanimity, or his willingness to assume the “white man’s burden” of “caring” for Black people by enslaving them. The Count buys beds, blankets, medicine, and refreshments for his recently purchased humans, restoring seventeen to health. However, caring for these people makes them seem more inhuman to the Count. He accuses the Africans of having “orang-outang skulls,” of lacking instincts or memories, of “possessing so little of human nature, and being more bestial than even the beasts” (340). If he had any empathy at all for the misery of the slaves, then it sublimates as soon as he begins managing them. Through Rossignolles’s slave management, Sealsfield attempts to resolve his lingering anxieties about whiteness by locating racial difference between white and Black people in their physiognomy—a shift that reflects the ascendancy of more biological iterations of scientific racism for which the nineteenth century is famous. These fictive, anatomical differences naturalize the racial hierarchy of the South by transforming it into biological necessity that is presented as benefiting both races. Of course, this form of plantation paternalism obfuscates the social and physical violence upon which the continued enslavement of Black people depended. The erasure of violence through these paternalistic vignettes enables Sealsfield’s characters to identify more easily with the planter class, which facilitates their naturalization.

Plantation management not only secures the foundations of Rossignolles’s plantation but also catalyzes a shift in his national attachments. Alert to the existential risks endemic to the Louisiana bayous yet now aware of methods to mitigate them, the Count can think of nothing but

his new plantation not even his “beloved France, its sufferings and its glory—all, all were forgotten” (*Life* 338). His newly acquired knowledge allows him to Americanize both the foreign-seeming environment and himself. He cultivates one of the most successful plantations in the Attakapas. He manages to cultivate citizenship by transforming the terrifying, chaotic swampland into a pleasant, well-managed plantation. In short, he exerts his own white sovereignty onto the nonhuman and human populations of the South and, in turn, becomes naturalized to the land and to the country. Throughout each installment of *Lebensbilder*, Americans and immigrants perform their republican virtuosity through the management of their slaves who toil in the fields and in the bayous.

As it crystalizes in the final volume of *Lebensbilder*, plantation management supports an the ecosystemic conception of political power and racial belonging that Sealsfield elaborates ten years before in *The Americans as They Are*. Despite its orientations toward mastery, Sealsfield’s narratives about plantation management very much demonstrate that naturalization is a product of interconnecting, overlapping assemblages of humans, nonhumans, geography, and climate. The survival of the plantation ecosystem—the bananas, cotton, tobacco, sugarcane, tulips—is contingent upon the survival of white supremacy, which is contingent upon the produce of the plantations ecosystems, which survive because of the labor of Black slaves who cultivate the swampy landscapes that threaten to infect white populations with fatal diseases. Assimilating to Southern life requires learning about and entering into this intricate, overlapping web of domination and dependence. As the Count laments, “there was no living in Louisiana without this necessary evil. To cultivate our fields, for any length of time, without slave labor was impossible. To do without slaves would ruin us, and be productive of no benefit to the Black race” (338). Of course, life does exist in Louisiana without slavery—just not for white planters—

and Black people do benefit from not being enslaved, as the biracial children of the swamps demonstrate.

In the end, Sealsfield's fictional depictions of plantation management provide a blueprint for would-be German immigrants. *Lebensbilder* is a didactic set of novels that fictionalize a nature-centered conception of how to become an American citizen. Sealsfield outlines a distinctive brand of citizenship in *The Americans as They Are* that diverges from the standard model of naturalization narratives in the open door era by focusing on Louisiana and the South. His guidebook and novels complement each other, blurring the lines between fact and fiction in immigrant experiences of the antebellum South. The interactions that Count Rossignolles and George Howard have with their physical environment exemplify virtuous modes of conduct that Americanize both immigrants and the climate of the South. The emphatic endorsements of plantation management in Sealsfield's writing distinguish him from his contemporaries insofar as he champions a distinctly Southern mode of naturalization through which white people can become seasoned to the climate. The pervasive inclusion of nature writing in his naturalization narratives highlights the intimate associations between nature and nationality in his imagination.

Chapter Five

Miasmatic Metropolises:

Ecological Nativism and the Materiality of National Belonging

“Miserable, miserable, indeed, is the condition of the foreign population of this great city! To go through the streets and along the wharves on either side of the Island, knee deep in filth and suffocating with poisonous odors, to examine the damp and gloomy cellars where so many hundreds of them are huddled together, writhing like loathsome reptiles, in a pestilential and noxious atmosphere, to witness the drunken revels and midnight orgies with which these unhappy wretches solace themselves for the starvation and shivering despair of their daily existence,—is to make one’s self familiar with a gigantic moral phenomenon whose proportions strike terror to the soul, and whose shadow blots the sunshine of hope from the heart.”

—George Foster, *New York Naked* (1850)

“Again I say, *we cannot change our nature. Naturalization is therefore an impossibility. Indeed, when I call to mind the world-wide difference which exists between our native born American population and the Roman Catholic emigrants to these shores, I almost wonder that they can breathe our atmosphere and live.*”

—“Nobody Knows Who,” *To Those Born on the Soil, who Know Nothing but the Advancement of their Country’s Good* (1854)

To Those Born on the Soil, who Know Nothing but the Advancement of their Country’s Good, a five-cent, eight-page pamphlet, first appeared in Brooklyn on May 10, 1854 with the

edict “READ ME” stamped across its rear cover. In it, the anonymous author, “Nobody Knows Who,” denounces naturalization as a “moral and natural impossibility” (5). A rather popular piece of nativist propaganda, *To Those Born on the Soil* advocates for the repeal of naturalization laws and for the passage of more rigid ones in order to protect the nation from the influx of immigrants, particularly Roman Catholics. Almost immediately the pamphlet peddles conspiratorial fantasies about the Catholic Church being an existential, worldwide threat to democracy: “Like the fabled upas tree it is her office to destroy every healthy organization which exists within the sphere of her pestiferous influences” (2). Claiming that foreigners *cannot* “mix and amalgamate with our citizens,” “Nobody Knows Who” portrays them as pollutants who befoul the purity of the American republic.¹

An alluvial metaphor unfolds, in which unrestricted immigration becomes a “turbid tributary” that combines muddy, sediment-laden waters “with the purer stream into which it flows.” The metaphor unites those born on the soil in a national mission against the contaminating quality of immigrants: “We cannot suffer the filth and slime brought with it from its putrid bed, to pollute the depths of a transparent stream” (3). Despite his professed lack of literary refinement, the author deftly advances his nativist agenda through these hyperbolic metaphors that resituate debates about immigration, naturalization, and nationality within explicitly environmental frameworks. Analyzing the political valences of nature writing in nativist *and* immigrant literature, this chapter contends that the material environments of the U.S.

¹ The word “amalgamate” presents immigrants and Americans as racially distinction. Throughout the nineteenth century, “amalgamate” and “miscegenation” were interchangeable, thus “Nobody Knows Who” suggests that sexual reproduction between immigrants and American is impossible and can not assimilate foreigners.

functioned as spaces for imagining and evaluating the national belonging of immigrants during the antebellum period.

As an organized political *and* literary movement, American nativism began, in earnest, in the mid-1840s with the establishment of the Order of the Star Spangled Banner and the Order of United Americans in New York.² Merging with other organizations to form the national Know Nothing party in 1854, anti-immigration groups wrote speeches, pamphlets, treatises, periodicals, novels, and poems that advocated not only for more restrictive naturalization policies but also for more unified feelings of nationality among the “sons of the soil.” An ostentatiously secretive organization, the Know Nothing party campaigned for raising the residency requirements for naturalization from five to twenty-one years, even though many of their publications called for the total repeal of naturalization laws. The proposed policies were designed to exclude immigrants from participating in civic life and to discourage them, more generally, from coming to the United States.³ Against the specter of immigration, they affirmed xenophobia as a legitimate form of patriotic expression that solidified white American men’s position within an imagined community. The nativist movement sought to remake American nationality over in its own image, which is why its cultural productions are so important.

By and large, historians and literary critics have underappreciated, or outright ignored, the political importance of nature in xenophobic antebellum literature and its formulations of

² For histories on the rise of nativism in the United States, see Bennett, *The Party of Fear* (1988) and Zolberg, *A Nation by Design* (2006).

³ On the nativist political platform in the 1850s, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* (1992), Behdad, *Forgetful Nation*, and Curran, *Immigration and Xenophobia, 1820-1930* (1976), and Knobel, *America for Americans and Paddy and the Republic*.

American nationality.⁴ However, as this chapter shows, anti-immigrant activists and writers devised a nature-centered model of xenophobia that justified the exclusion of foreigners—an intersection now called “ecological nativism” or “econativism.”⁵ A mode of defensive nationalism that advocates excluding foreign populations, American econativism racializes immigrant populations as immediate threats to the biological and political security of the nation, as my first sections elucidates.⁶ While historians coined this term recently, American nativist movements have incorporated environmental themes into their xenophobic ideologies since their inception in the antebellum period. Throughout the 1840s and 50s, self-described nativists decried American cities for becoming foreign-seeming cesspools of civic decay that were overrun by immigrants. The squalor of urban tenant houses reflected the failure of immigrants to govern themselves and their environments like native-born Americans. Like immigrant writers such as Crèvecoeur or Sealsfield, nativists were committed to the idea that the environment shaped a person’s political character and patriotic conduct, and urban slums signified the unfitness of immigrants for American citizenship. Moreover, American nativists insisted that immigrants remained permanently attached to their native lands and could never cultivate the kind of patriotic sensibilities needed to appreciate American environments. These recurring,

⁴ On the ethnocentrism of antebellum nativism, see Behdad, *Forgetful Nation* (2003), Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (1999), and Knobel, *America for the Americans* (1996) and *Paddy and the Republic* (1986).

⁵ Since the publication of Peter Coates’s *American Perceptions of Immigrant and Invasive Species* (2006), studies of econativism, or the advocacy of excluding immigrants on environmentalist grounds, have grown across a range of disciplines including history, literary criticism, and political science. See also Rome, “Nature Wares, Cultures Wars,” Ray, *The Ecological Other*, and Hultgren, *Border Wall Gone Green*.

⁶ As political theorist John Hultgren explains, “econativism functions through a biopolitical register in which the ‘primary’ strategy is to save ‘the nation’ from ‘our’ population emergency and any coercive interventions or racialized implications of this strategy are positioned as mere effects of this natural logic” (86).

intertwining rhetorical maneuvers symbolically disqualified immigrants from *ever* becoming Americans because of their intimate interactions with the miasmatic materiality of America's metropolises.

Literary scholars, environmental historians, and political theorists have grappled with the discursive engagements with nature by American nativist movements in the twentieth century but have not explored the antebellum period during which time the nature/nativism nexus first germinated. In the antebellum period, as I show, the political investments of nativists fixated on how the environmental practices of urban-dwelling immigrants produced miasmas that spread diseases to "American" parts of the city. This form of xenophobia accentuates the interactions and exchanges between nonhumans and immigrants more than the legal interactions between immigrants and the state. It justifies exclusionary naturalization policies by treating immigrants as "ecological others," or the people, both real and fictitious, who are imagined to be dangerous to environmental stability of the nation because of their non-normative conduct toward nature. Antebellum nativist propaganda advanced a biopolitical agenda by contending that the unsanitary conditions of the nation's miasmatic metropolises were the products of the un-American environmental conduct of immigrant bodies. Concerns about the unhealthy relationship between foreign bodies and nonhuman matter rendered immigrants unfit for U.S. citizenship within the nativist imaginary. Nature and nationality coincided, distinguishing which kinds of environmental attitudes and behaviors qualify as American from those that do not.

To account for the relationship between nature and nationality in nativist cultural productions, I first examine A.J.H. Duganne's sentimental city-mystery novel, *The Tenant-House* (1857), and his report to the New York Assembly on the conditions of urban tenements in New York City. *The Tenant-House* and the report are representative examples of how antebellum

econativist discourses construct urban dwelling foreigners as ecological others whose conduct generates and spreads miasmatic matter. Duganne's literary and political texts work together to naturalize the idea that immigrants contaminated the nation and threatened the health of its citizens. In the novel, Duganne advocates razing the slums and building new public housing, but, in the report to the New York Assembly, he recommends banning immigration to the state. Either way, Duganne reproduces a dominant nativist narrative: immigrants make cities into foreign-seeming environments. As my second section highlights, nativist activists and authors praised rural environments as safety-valves for American citizens to escape foreign influence. They co-opted debates about homesteading bills to argue that only native-born Americans deserved to be allocated public land to farm. Even as nativists failed to codify their xenophobic ideologies in the Homestead Acts, they advanced the idea that a person's intimacy with urban environments made them seem foreign and thus compromised their Americanness, their national belonging.

Stories written by immigrants, on the other hand, attempt to reimagine these xenophobic anti-naturalization narratives to affirm the national belonging of their foreign characters, as my final section demonstrates. The Irish-Canadian-American author, Mary Anne Sadlier does just this in her popular novel, *Con O'Regan: Or, the Emigrant's Life in the New World* (1856/1864). The story of Irish immigrants leaving the city for Iowan prairies, *Con O'Regan* incorporates econativist ideas about the attachments of immigrants to their native country, the conditions of urban slums, and the value of homesteads to portray the Irish immigrant, Con O'Regan, as a "supercitizen"—that is, as an idealized archetype of the sober, industrious farmer who cultivates civic virtue by cultivating the earth à la Crèvecoeur's immigrants. Con's attachments to the rural environments of Ireland foster a deep antipathy to the miasmatic conditions of the urban slums of

Boston where he and his friends are forced to reside. Whereas econativist narratives denounced immigrants for remaining attached to their native climates and thus failing to Americanize themselves, Sadlier invests her Irish characters with the capacity to acquire American ecological sensibilities without ever fully surrendering their love for Ireland. Subverting the tenets of econativism in this manner, *Con O'Regan* explores, I argue, the possibilities of possessing multiple attachments to multiple environments and multiple countries simultaneously.

In Duganne's and Sadlier's politicized fiction, what defines membership within a national community is informed less by the space that people occupy and more through their relationships to the other material agents that also compose that space. Their conduct matters because it is through their everyday practices that the nation's environments materialize as either healthy or unhealthy, as American or un-American. By charting the exchanges between human/nonhuman, living/nonliving characters in these texts, I examine the urban/rural binary that structured naturalization and anti-naturalization narratives throughout the two decades before the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868. What I uncover by concentrating on these literary debates about citizenship and nationality is an ecological undercurrent that engenders feelings of national belonging through the everyday interactions between immigrants and their environments.

—IMMIGRANTS IN THE URBAN WILDERNESS

Immigration to the United States boomed in the decades prior to the Civil War. Between 1840 and 1860, nearly five million immigrants entered the country—most coming from Ireland, Germany, and Great Britain.⁷ Social revolutions, economic upheavals, and natural disasters

⁷ On immigration statistics, broken down by country of last residence, see "Immigration," in *Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition*.

pushed people out of their native countries, and stories of a Promised Land attracted them to the U.S. The rapid increase of European immigrants accompanied an abrupt growth in urban populations. American cities struggled to keep up with the infrastructural demands of urbanization.⁸ Housing shortages gave rise to ethnic enclaves and tenant houses where people were crowded together in overpriced hovels. Precursors to what we now call slums, these dilapidated, dirty spaces exposed people to pollution, disease, unclean water, and poor air circulation. In response, sanitation movements formed and aspired to clean up the city by reforming these miasmatic hotbeds or by intervening in immigration. As issues of immigration, urbanization, and sanitation collided, immigrants themselves became associated with the miasmatic conditions of urban slums throughout nativist writing.

In *Immigration: Its Evil and Its Consequences* (1856), for example, the nativist physician Samuel C. Busey explicitly links European immigrants who live in urban enclaves to murder, rape, prostitution, gambling, alcoholism, pauperism, and beggary. Aside from these crimes and vices that degrade the moral fabric of the U.S., Busey also blames urban immigrants for spreading diseases: “In the cities, those direful and pestilential diseases, ship fever, yellow fever, and small pox, are almost exclusively confined to the filthy alleys, lanes, and streets, and low, damp, filthy, and ill-ventilated haunts, which are exclusively tenanted by *foreigners*” (125). Defined by anxieties about immigrants and public health, urban slums materialize for Busey as noxious, foreign-seeming milieus that endanger the biological and political health of the nation because of the un-American conduct of Europeans. His econativist attitude toward immigrants and toward urban environments resonates across antebellum xenophobic literature as a potent

⁸ On the historical relationships between urbanization, immigration, and slums, see Ward, *Poverty, Ethnicity, and the American City, 1840-1925*.

way to illustrate the biopolitical jeopardy that foreign-born populations pose to national public health.⁹

The interlocking biopolitical and ecological alterity of immigrants and urban slums structures the plot of A.J.H. Duganne's fifth, and most popular, city-mystery novel: *The Tenant-House; Or, Embers from Poverty's Hearthstone* (1857).¹⁰ A poet, novelist, journalist, legislator, Union army lieutenant, and abolitionist, Duganne was a Renaissance man from New England who advanced a "combination of nativism, anti-slavery beliefs, and anti-imperialism" that reinforced feelings of white egalitarianism among working class American men through sensationalist narratives, as Shelley Streeby has argued.¹¹ Streeby acknowledges the messiness of Duganne's social politics, but his ideas about the nation are inextricably bound up in environmental concerns, as I explain. A crucial contribution to Duganne's nation-building projects, *The Tenant-House* is not merely an object of dispassionate consumption or apolitical enjoyment but a *roman à thèse*—that is, a book with a political mission. Written in conjunction with a report on tenant houses for the New York State Assembly, *The Tenant-House* condemns urban ecologies through horrific portrayals of tenement life.

⁹ On materiality and biopolitics, see Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Chen, *Animacies*; and Hultgren, *Border Wall*.

¹⁰ On Duganne's other city-mysteries, see Helwig, "Race, Nativism, and the Making of Class in Antebellum City-Mysteries." On the city-mystery genre more broadly, see Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance* and Streeby, *American Sensations*.

¹¹ See Streeby 21. Biographical details about Duganne are relatively scarce despite the longevity of his public life. On Duganne's life, see Helwig, "Race, Nativism, and the Making of Class in Antebellum City-Mysteries," 126.

Antebellum critics praised the novel, noting its ability to rouse feelings of sympathy for the impoverished characters and to encourage its readers to intervene on their behalf.¹² The secretary for the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, Robert Milham Hartley applauded Duganne's portrayal of "his characters and incidents, as to present almost every phase of tenant-house life, in a light at once so clear and vivid, as can scarcely fail to excite the horror whilst it awakens the sympathy of the reader."¹³ According to another contemporary review in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, Duganne's "excellent" novel seeks "to excite public sentiment with reference to the sufferings of the poor of New York City" by narrating "horrors very far surpassing the inventions of Mrs. Stowe concerning Southern Slavery."¹⁴ In narrating an antipathy toward urban slums and sympathy for those people who inhabit them, *The Tenant-House* blurs the generic boundaries between sensationalism and sentimentalism, exposing an intimate relationship between materiality and morality in Duganne's depiction of tenant houses.¹⁵

Without even reading *The Tenant-House*, the connections between the tenant houses and a public health crisis are evident. The illustration on the title page portrays the tenant house as a

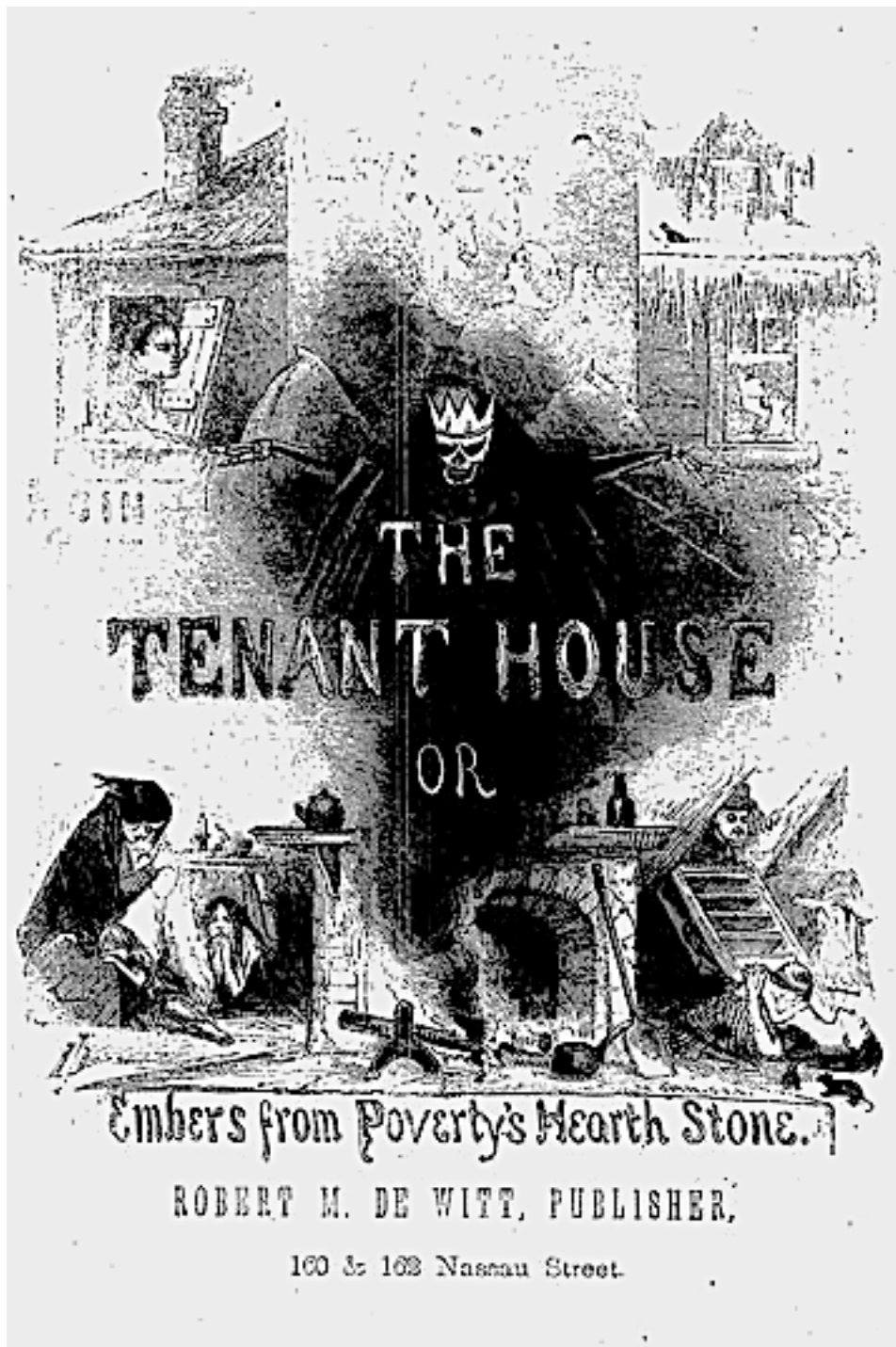
¹² Duganne included snippets of reviews from newspapers and magazines from across the country alongside those from preeminent reverends in the *Camps and Prisons: Twenty Months in the Department of the Gulf* (1865). These reviews give us a window into the reception of *The Tenant-House* and its intended audiences. The reviews suggest that this city-mystery was not aimed at its traditional working class audiences but at more middle-class, evangelical ones.

¹³ "The City Poor." *The Independent*. 2 Dec 1858, 10.522: 3.

¹⁴ "The Tenant-House." *The Southern Literary Messenger*. 18 June 1859, 28: 80.

¹⁵ In her examination of the "culture of sensation" in the U.S., Streeby identifies both sensationalism and sentimentalism as structures of feeling in which "sentimentalism generally emphasizes refinement and transcendence, whereas sensationalism emphasizes materiality and corporality" (31). *The Tenant-House* troubles this distinction a bit insofar as its depictions of the degradation of human bodies is in service of stimulating transcendent feelings. Instead of treating sentimentalism and sensationalism as antipodal, Duganne makes them complementary.

space of poverty, vice, addiction, disease, and death (Figure 4.1). On the center of the page, Death arises from the embers of the hearth with the words “THE TENANT HOUSE” emblazoned on its chest. Visual cues abound to signal how tenant houses endanger the lives of those who inhabit them. To Death’s left, two women pray in horror while the youngest girl clutches her the oldest woman’s skirt. On the right, an emaciated child clings to his lifeless mother as mice gather around her body and a well-dressed man (perhaps, signifying the slum tourist) peeps into her home to witness the squalor with a slight grin. While these sensationalist clues are still legible to twenty-first-century readers, one aspect of the illustration would have clearly indicated the danger posed by tenant houses to nineteenth-century audiences: Death is miasmatic. A large, black splotch of ink that dissolves into the whiteness of the page, it originates in the filth of the slum but dissipates into the atmosphere of the city. It is a material phenomenon that can be traced back to the noxious vapors produced in the slums. It is an assemblage of agentic forces that expands beyond the fixity of its origins. By connecting the deathly miasmas to tenant houses, Duganne visually crystallizes the urgency with which the slums needed to be addressed.



(Figure 4: Title Page of *The Tenant-House* (1857); Illustrated by Nathaniel Orr)

The ill effects of the tenant houses are not localized. If Death is miasmatic, then the slums are mobile. They move along air currents. They pass through human bodies. They imperceptibly incorporate themselves into the material flows of the urban ecologies much like immigrants. In

the concluding paragraphs of the prologue, Duganne takes readers out of the tenant houses and escorts them along the wide avenues where “long rows of princely mansions, with gardens and conservatories, lofty ceilings, and broad casements, permit the balmy evening air to penetrate every room, and disperse and aroma of luxury” (14). They pose an immediate biological threat not only to those who inhabit them but also to the entire population of the city. Examinations of antebellum nativism must recognize that it is informed by a biopolitical impulse to manage immigrant populations via representations of their relationship to nature, specifically urban ecosystems. Nativist publications, such as Duganne’s and Busey’s, are flush with information about the environmental conduct of immigrants that stigmatizes foreign populations because of their interactions with nonhuman matter, their environmental conduct. These nativist publications defer to environmental conduct of immigrant slum-dwellers to signal the inability of all immigrants to govern themselves and to cultivate citizenship. As Duganne’s allusion to a mobile, miasmatic Death demonstrates, a rich vein of materialist thought emerges that clarifies how a variety of living and nonliving forms affect the management of non-American populations within antebellum nativist politics.

Duganne employs sight and smell to give a biopolitical texture to the material geography of the city. Sight and smell are not just aesthetic experiences but ways of collecting empirical information about the healthiness of the environment and those who live within it. The spatial arrangement of the avenues and the height of the ceilings in bourgeois areas enable air to circulate in ways that it cannot in the overcrowded, windowless tenant houses. The fresh floral aromas from the gardens and conservatories cleanse the air of the fetid zymotic particles that were thought to infect people with cholera, typhus, smallpox, and other diseases associated with the slums. In the slums, sight and smell cooperate to reveal how the architectures of the tenant

house nurture disease, but, in more affluent neighborhoods, these two senses can fatally work against each. The fleecy cloud that gives the sunset violet hues “arose from the exhalations of disease in the Tenant-House, and was wafted by summer zephyrs over squares and gardens, to descend, loaded with pestilence, upon the mansion of luxury and love” (15). Inside the mansion, every native-born American is dead or dying from disease. The exhaled particles of the slums indiscriminately permeate the atmosphere of New York City, killing American citizens.

Insofar as it calls attention to the interrelationships between living (humans) and non-living (miasmas) matter, *The Tenant-House* possesses a materialist undercurrent that exposes vast, interfolding assemblages that encompasses everything from people, plants, animals, dirt, air, stagnate water, trash, buildings, and excrement. In order to understand the materialist biopolitics of belonging, I think about the movement of miasmas in Duganne’s work through Heather Sullivan’s “dirt theory,” which explores how dirty environments are “always with us as a part of ongoing interactions among all kinds of material agents” (516). Sullivan emphasizes the importance of the movement of dirty matter to argue that place is not a set geographic location but is enacted through interactions between human and nonhuman matter. While Sullivan’s discussions of dirt refer to contemporary cities, Duganne’s miasmatic theory of disease attends to the ongoing exchanges between human/nonhuman collectives that produce and disseminate disease through air, bodies, and water in antebellum slums. Donald J. McNutt’s recognition that Duganne depicts urban cellars “as distinctive ecologies inseparable from larger biosocial webs” likewise brings us closer to appreciating not only the “environmental web in which non-human conditions dramatically affect the human world” (370-1) in *The Tenant-House*, but also how these biosocial webs demarcate national belonging for humans and nonhumans alike. What

defines membership within a community is less defined by the space that people occupy and more on their relationship to the other material agents that also compose that place.

As its title suggests, *The Tenant-House* is the story of the interactions between human beings and nonhuman matter within a place or, more accurately, a collection of New York City tenements: Foley's Barracks, Kolephat's College, and Rag-Picker's Paradise. The plot is loosely organized around three orphaned children— Robert Morrison (a.k.a. Bob the Weasel), Emily Marvin, and Fanny—and the evangelical reformers who save them from the pernicious effects of tenant houses. Although many villainous people reside in urban slums, the novel's true antagonist is the tenant house itself:

Built of rotten brick, barely held together by cheap mortar, the sand of which was continually crumbling out of gaps between the rickety layers; pierced by narrow, dark, and dilapidated entries, extending to a brick court in the rear; ascended roofward by wooden-paneled staircases, not two feet wide, crooked and steep, and lighted only by such daylight as might penetrate to the landings through dingy casements, at the end of each... encompassed and pervaded by foetid smells, the effluvia of noxious gases, generated in stagnant water, decaying matter, and unchanging malaria; crowded with poor people, the bed and the good, the old and the young, the hopeful and the repining...: in all things, a veritable tenant-house, and, under that distinction, the abode of wretchedness, vice, want, and despair. (*TTH* 172-3)

An immense cast of characters populates the overcrowded, dilapidated apartments of the tenements, and Duganne documents their struggles with starvation, disease, addiction, promiscuity, poverty, and pollution. Duganne's characters must navigate the material and moral decay of the slums.

Neither the composition nor the interpretation of *The Tenant-House* can be divorced from Duganne's tour of the slums on behalf of the New York State Assembly. In March 1856, over the course of a week, Duganne along with John Reed, Eli Curtis, William Shea, and Samuel Brevoort met in New York City and began collecting information through police-escorted inspections of tenant houses, interviews with landlords and property managers, and eyewitness reports that were published in local newspapers. In March of the following year, the committee delivered their findings to the Assembly in the "Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Examine into the Conditions of Tenant Houses in New-York and Brooklyn" which Duganne, as the committee secretary, drafted.

Divided into three distinction sections, "Report" sought to educate the Assembly about slums, to air the abuses that tenants endured, and to attribute the nation's "moral malaria" to the environmental conduct of immigrants who resided in tenant houses. Cataloguing the similarities and differences among tenant houses found throughout the city, Duganne classifies them into four categories: the "reconstructed" tenant house, the "rag-gatherer and bone-picker" tenant house, the "specially made" tenant house, and the "model" tenant house. Despite their architectural differences, not a single kind is suitable for human habitation. Each type suffers from want of air, water, room, light, cleanliness, and planning, as the second half of "Report" documents. Hidden in narrow, muddy, and unventilated alleyways, reconstructed tenant houses were "scarce fit for dog kennels" and were sometimes only detectable by the noxious effluvia that they produced. In terms of smell, nothing surpassed the nauseating conditions of the rag-gatherer and bone-picker tenant houses where Germans released "fetid exhalations" and "deadly particles" into the atmosphere—a scene Duganne incorporated into *The Tenant-House*. Overall, Duganne declares the tenant houses to be "laboratories of poison" (31) where "Gases generated

by heat, odors exhaled from decay, personal accumulations of filth, and domestic habits of indecency and indulgence, combine to produce their sure and destructive effects” (43-4).

With their gratuitous glimpses into the moral and material decay of urban spaces, *The Tenant-House* and “Report” are pioneering works not only of econativism but also of slum tourism. Popularized by Charles Dickens’ scenes of the seedy side of life in New York in *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842), slum tourism, as a literary genre, “took the rhetorical tone of address of a vicarious tour guide, leading readers through previously unknown territory and warning them about the dangers—and thrills—they would encounter in these spaces” (Merrill 641). Offering a moral and material geography of the city, slum tourist narratives map the areas of the city where marginalized populations live, where crimes are committed, and where diseases are incubated. These stories stimulate intense affective responses that range from fear to love, from animosity to sympathy, through voyeuristic narratives that profit from subaltern people’s poverty, pain, and death. Duganne’s tenant houses are likewise cosmopolitan environments where Irish, French, English, Italian, Swiss, and German immigrants live alongside poor black and white Americans amid the rat-infested buildings that ooze muck from their rotting walls.¹⁶ Horrified by moments of racial mixture and miscegenation, Duganne portrays the slums as foreign-seeming places of ongoing, interfolding sociological and ecological crises that constantly imperil the political and biological security of the nation.

For this reason, I am skeptical of Donald McNutt’s assessment that *The Tenant-House* offers less xenophobic, more nuanced depictions of immigrants in slums than many of his

¹⁶ Slums were “often regarded as ‘promiscuous’ spaces” where racial mixing happened in the public venues of the dance halls and taverns and in the privacy in the tenements. On slums as spaces of racial mixing, see Merrill, “Amalgamation, More Geography, and ‘Slum Tourism.’”

contemporaries.¹⁷ While I agree with him that Duganne contextualizes urban poverty within larger webs of structural oppression, I cannot help but notice how *The Tenant-House* continually connects immigrants to the production and dissemination of trash, miasmas, and disease. In the densely populated bone-pickers tenant-house, for example, German immigrants dwell in “filth and malaria that would seem to be deadly to all human existence” surrounded by bleaching bones, boiling rags, and “piles of garbage dragged from sink and sewer” (329). The entanglements with filth racialize foreigners and implicitly eject Germans from the category of the human in Duganne’s formulation.

If miasmas *are* deadly to human existence, then how is it that the Germans are able to survive them? Are these “poison-proof denizens” truly human, if these effluvial particles apparently do not affect them? If not, what are they? Duganne suggests that they might be agents of contagion, not because of any innate uncleanness but because of their own environmental conduct in the tenant house. Confined in small, unventilated apartments where they boil bones and rags, these inhabitants inhale putrid gases all day and night in order to eke out a meager living. The daily combination of sleeping, eating, boiling bones, and washing rags produces “an atmosphere of foetid steam, densifying in cold air, or brooding above their roofs in clouds charged with venomous matter” (330). Duganne’s portrayal of the German bone-pickers and rag-gatherers may announce itself as a sentimental design to elicit feelings of sympathy for these abjectly destitute people, but it surreptitiously opens the door for sensationalized feelings of

¹⁷ McNutt’s suggestion that “*The Tenant-House* reflects the trend toward increasingly nuanced depictions of urban immigrants” (371) ignores how the relationality of immigrant characters to the noxious environs of tenant houses can be construed as a justification for their exclusion. Without reading *The Tenant-House* in conjunction with “Report,” the subtle connections between materiality and xenophobia are more difficult to detect because Duganne minimizes his nativist ideologies to appeal to wider audiences, particularly middle class ones.

xenophobic terror. The wind catches “their diseased and infectious exhalation to bear it away to other neighborhoods, depositing continually the seeds of slow decline or quick, unsparing disease” (330). Foreigners are not only victims of miasmatic disease; they are its sources. Incubating diseased particles through their daily conduct, they threaten to infect and to kill the nation.

Although nativists reiterated this xenophobic narrative throughout their writings, not all urban fiction scapegoated immigrants for the presence of the slums. Some even imagined their immigrant characters as agents of sanitation and hygiene who integrated themselves into the social and civic fabric of American life. For example, in his novella, *Life and Adventures of Jack Engle: An Autobiography* (1842), Walt Whitman inverts this vein of econativist discourse by including Irish characters who participate in sanitation movements: Nancy and Barney Fox.¹⁸ Employed as a maid and mother of seven children, Nancy is a “tidy, industrious Irish woman” who wears “a snowy cap and clean check apron” (285) and is “the tidiest dame in the land” (291). Barney, on the other hand, primarily works as a brick carrier but “at a pinch, even took a place under government as a street-sweeper” (285). His dedication to the cause initiates his composition of a letter to a candidate for office on behalf of a committee of street sweepers. Concerned about the economic and medical conditions of street sweepers, Barney inquires

What is your opinyun of de street-sweepin masheens?

Are you in favur of rasin sweeper’s wages to ten shillings a day?

¹⁸ On anti-Irish stereotypes in antebellum America, see Fanning’s *Irish Voice in America* and Knobel’s *Paddy and the Republic*. The figure of the “Paddy” is typically apish, belligerent, drunk, and incapable of conducting himself like an American. Whitman’s Irish characters invert these entrenched archetypes by presenting Nancy and Barney Fox as sharing qualities associated with Americans. On the Irish in Whitman’s works, see Krieg’s *Whitman and the Irish*.

Will you pledge yourself to vote for a law furnishin sweepers wid a new broom gratis, for nothin?

Are you in favor of rainy days bein paid for, and men not made to work out in the nasty mud, to the deanger of their hellth?

Sur, many of your fellow-sitizens is deeply interested in your opinyunns on these vitally important subjecks.

Please inform us of your vus on these subjecks at an urly day.

Wid grate respeck,

On behalf of de Committea,

BARNEY FOX.

Whereas Nancy's clean white clothes symbolize her domestic eradication of dirt, Barney's letter ventures outside of the domestic sphere to eliminate the dirt of New York City. Barney and Nancy's sanitation plot does not contribute significantly to the novella's overall trajectory, but it highlights how antebellum discourses about national cleanliness and hygiene often revolved around immigrant characters and their interactions with dirt. The sanitary conduct of Whitman's Irish immigrants pre-emptively defies the coalescing narratives of econativism that define the literary and political work of Duganne and other nativists.

While Duganne proffers a nuanced variation on his econativism in *Tenant-House*, in the final subsection of "Report" entitled "IMMIGRANT TENANTS," he blatantly reveals the xenophobia that inspires not only the report itself but the novel that it becomes.¹⁹ Blaming immigrants for cultivating a "moral malaria" in the slums, he accuses them of having "none of

¹⁹ Shortly after his tour, Duganne fictionalized the information he gathered and produced *The Tenant-House*. Because of this, the report and novel cannot be separated during critical analysis. However, I am the first two analyze them together.

the American element in them, whatever it may be; they are destitute, dispirited, sick, ignorant, abject” (50). The social and economic situations that render them un-American are indistinguishable from the environmental conditions of the tenant house.

The problem of the slums is also a problem of immigration. Moral deterioration commences not only through the presence of slums but “through the operation of influences connected with the influx of foreigners, without corresponding precautions to counteract them” (49). Place and person converge when Duganne warns the Assembly that foreigners “swarm in filthy localities, engendering disease, and enduring every species of suffering” (51). In order to solve the problem of the slums, the report advises the Assembly to pass laws that reduce foreign influences by restricting immigration to New York State. In scapegoating immigrants for the urban crises around him, Duganne erases all distinctions between them. He advances the total restriction of all immigration to New York as the crucial element for reforming the tenant houses.

If “Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Examine into the Conditions of Tenant Houses in New-York and Brooklyn” proposes arresting immigration as the solution to the tenant house crisis, *The Tenant-House* posits a less xenophobic but equally impractical one. In the penultimate chapter, the novel’s social reformist and political theorist, Walter (a mouthpiece for Duganne’s ideas) publicly condemns the tenant house for being “a laboratory of disease, of vice, and of their kindred evils” that will persist as long as “the capitalist, rearing his cheap edifices of brick and mortar, is allowed to crowd them with human beings, debarred from the air of heaven, the light of day, the purity of nature” (461). As the crowd listens to Walter’s anti-capitalist case for sanitation reform, the fanatical Italian Catholic villain, Monna Maria, attempts to suffocate Mordecai Kolephat’s kidnapped daughter with the smoke from a coal fire in order to save her

from Judaism. The fire quickly grows out of control, and Kolephat's College erupts into flames, consuming Monna Maria. In the ashes of the tenant house, Walter's social reform can be realized: housing "that will be fit for human beings to enter—a habitation and a HOME for tenants" (489).

A notion of home sentiment, or an emotional attachment to the place where you live, enters into tenant house reform, illustrating how the materiality of urban slums disrupts the possibility of cultivating a sense of home—a feeling of strong attachment to the U.S. The novel concludes with a fictional example of the kind of tenant house that would inspire feelings of home sentiment. In the place of Kolephat's College arises a new building where "there are allowed to be no damp and dark cellars; no confined passage-ways; no steep staircases; no gloomy, unventilated bedrooms; no inflammable partitions; no crowding together of hundreds in an area scarce capable of accommodating scores" (490). Noticeably, the fictive tenant house is defined negatively. Its specifics are unknown, and, thus, what makes a place feel like home is the absence of the slums. As an idealized model for social reform, this negative catalogue identifies concrete areas of intervention. Each piece of the list is an aspect that can be regulated by state and federal governments in order to cultivate a sense of home among the nation's urban populations. Additionally, the list clarifies the linkages between feelings of home and the materiality of urban ecologies. So important in nativist narratives, home sentiments are forestalled by the living and nonliving matter that constitutes the slums. With slum ecosystems excluded or regulated, the denizens of the tenant houses can more easily fashion themselves into hygienic members of the nation.

—HOME(STEAD) SENTIMENT

The remedies to the tenant house crisis that Duganne proposes in *The Tenant-House* and “Report” differ markedly from the solution he poeticized in *The Iron Harp* (1847). Known as the “Poet of Land Reform,” Duganne wrote numerous poems about public lands and how the government should allocate them. These politically charged poems found eager audiences in land and labor reform periodicals such as *Young America* and *Working Man’s Advocate*. Duganne’s poetic embrace of the land reform movement tested the extent of his xenophobic ideologies in *The Iron Harp*. Even while other poems extol explicitly anti-Catholic and anti-foreigner sentiments, these feelings dissipate into an unexpected sympathy for dispossessed people in the fifth stanza of “Who Owneth the Soil?”:

To these must the soil belong:

To these men of all climes whose souls are true—

Or Pagan, or Christian, or Turk, or Jew;

To the men who will hallow our glorious soil—

The millions who hope, and the millions who toil

For the Right against the Wrong:

To these shall the soil be given

To these, to these—by Heaven (33-40)

Gifted to all humans regardless of race, religion, and nationality, public lands transcend identity. This radical cosmopolitanism diametrically contradicts predominating nativist narratives about the role of public lands with regard to the interwoven immigrant and urban crises.

This discordance in Duganne’s nativist ideology can be attributed to his indebtedness to George Henry Evans’s influential land reform movement, which advocated partitioning 160-acre

parcels of public land, or homesteads, to white men.²⁰ Although the land reform movement was primarily seen as a solution to the uncertainty of working class factory and industrial jobs, the movement intersected with naturalization debates. Noting Duganne's deviations from his compatriots in the land reform movement, Shelley Streeby observes that "land reformers more often insisted that their program would make it possible to absorb many more immigrants into the nation" (180). Land reformists envisioned the west to be a safety valve for Americans and non-Americans alike just as in Duganne's poem. Mid-century safety valve rhetoric proposed that the redistribution of government land in the west could mitigate social and economic unrest in the east by keeping urban population density uniformly small across the nation. According to Henry Nash Smith in *Virgin Land* (1950), safety valve rhetoric incorporated an ethical component as a matter of national self-definition, arguing that this sense of "American nationalism embraced the humanitarian conception of the West as a refuge for the oppressed of all the world" (203).

Of course, this was not the nationalism embraced by nativists. For nativists, public lands were safety valves where native U.S. citizens *alone* could escape from the corrosive influence of the foreign-seeming cities and their slums. Nativists and land reformers were not alone in seeing the intimate connections between public land and immigration policies.²¹ In the Belgian immigrant guidebook, *Les Recherches sur la situation des emigrants aux Etats-Unis de l'Amerique du Nord* (1846), Baron Auguste Gabriel van der Straten Ponthoz observes that "to try

²⁰ On land reform movements in the antebellum period, see Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience*. A transatlantic comparison between the English Chartist movement with the American National Reform movement, *Land Reform* finds that both movements relied on safety valve rhetoric to protect factory workers, artisans, and others who lost their livelihoods with the mechanization of labor.

²¹ On the relationship between nativists and homestead bills, see Zolberg, *Nation by Design*, 150-51.

restricting the invasion of immigrants, Americans must modify the law regulating their uncultivated lands” (24). While the Baron van der Straten Ponthoz’s guidebook encouraged immigrants to take advantage of the material benefits of living in the U.S., nativist activists saw public land reform as a potential threat to national security.

Opposition to the homestead bills of the 1850s suffused nativist literature. Any version of the bill that included a provision to grant immigrants land was automatically and categorically indefensible. A short-lived periodical, *The Republic: A Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Politics, and Art* (1851-52), was particularly aggressive in its opposition to redistributing public lands so long as any of these lands went to foreigners. Its editor, Thomas R. Whitney, the intellectual architect of antebellum xenophobia, disparaged the homestead bills as weak-brained, shortsighted land robbery schemes that masqueraded as philanthropy. If America should be ruled by Americans, as nativists demanded, then American lands should be occupied by U.S. citizens, notwithstanding the Native American peoples who very much still occupied them.²² Like guidebook writers, Whitney reimagines Native American land as distinctly U.S. national space. Whereas guidebooks suggest that the land would help to acculturate immigrants, the articles in *The Republic* argue the opposition.

Terrified that the passage of these bills would increase European immigration to the U.S. tenfold, Whitney derided them for being acts of madness that squandered one of America’s most

²² On the relationship between Native Americans and Whitney, see Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic*, 157-60, and “Beyond America for Americans,” 17-18. According to Knobel, nativists not only adopted faux Native American symbols for its officers but also gave a platform for George Copway, a Chippewa who wanted to establish a Native American State in the republic. During the Kansas-Nebraska and Homestead debates, Whitney defended Native Americans rights to their land, arguing that they had the same attachment to their lands as white Americans! However, at the same time, nativists largely subscribed to Vanishing American myths and presupposed that their claims to the land were fleeting.

prized natural resources and one of its largest sources of revenue: the land. In Whitney's paranoid and xenophobic imagination, the homestead bills were part of a vast, two-stage conspiracy to increase the power of the Papacy in the Mississippi and to undermine democratic republicanism. In "The Public Land Scheme," a short editorial published in July 1851, he advanced his unsubstantiated conviction that Papal powers have avowed "their intention to establish their political head in the great and *fertile valley of the West*" (85, emphasis original). To be sure, this is utter nonsense. Regardless of its veracity, this xenophobic fiction animated restrictionist efforts and enabled nativists to construct a nationalist worldview that was increasingly divorced from reality.

Crafting and circulating such xenophobic fictions transforms "the immigrant" into a national other in multiple ways that are politically convenient. As a national other, the immigrant undermines the strength of the republic from the inside out, corrupting the nation's political infrastructure, its moral character, its economic base, and its physiological health while syphoning the nation's natural resources from native-born citizens. In "The Public Land Scheme," Whitney pushes against the claims of land reformers that peopling the west with white immigrants would strengthen the American empire, arguing that, through this course of action, the United States "would become hopelessly weak—fostering in its bosom the elements of its own annihilation" (85). As in Duganne's "Report" and *The Tenant-House*, immigrants are imagined as existential threats to the nation. Whitney's solution for this problem is not only to restrict naturalization but also to populate the "vast prairies of the West" with "the natural and legal heirs, the *American* people" (85). The erasure of Native Americans naturalizes settler colonialism and westward expansion but only so long as the "vast wilderness" was always already understood to be *American* land. In this way, nativist writers very much embrace one of

the primary purposes of nature writing in guidebooks: to make the continent into U.S. national space.

In his political treatise and magnum opus, *A Defence of the American Policy* (1856), Whitney marshals similar econativist sentiments to define naturalization as “one of the most *unnatural* of all proceedings” (135). According to Whitney, “*home sentiment*” (his phrase) cannot be reproduced through the formal procedures demanded by federal naturalization laws, if at all: “You cannot make him *natural* to the soil, institutions, customs, or government, or fuse into his mind the patriotic sentiment of those born on the soil” (135). Dispersed across environmental, social, and political factors, patriotism encompasses everyday acts that are inscribed onto a person (almost always gendered male) from birth. If home sentiments are indelible aspects of personal identity, then the oath of allegiance required by naturalization laws simply cannot be an effective manner through which people dispense with them. Whitney condemns naturalization for being “a moral fraud—a subterfuge by which men are inveigled through the promptings of personal interest, to compromise their noblest instincts” (139).²³

Other nativist pamphlets were no less insistent upon framing the impossibility of naturalization through environmentally mediated conceptions of “home.” Virulently anti-Catholic and intensely nationalistic, *The Know Nothing Almanac and True Americans’ Manual for 1855* infused a profound hatred for Catholics along with “a strong dash of devotion to one’s native soil” into the American population (9). The almanac muses freely yet unsystematically about the relationship between nationality and nature across its pages but emphasizes the

²³ Whitney calls for repealing all naturalization laws and replacing them with a system of affiliation that would identify “respectable” immigrants as participants within “the *social family*, but not the *political family* of the country” (140)—a distinction that grants certain rights to immigrants while keeping them as distinctively second-class citizens.

impossibilities of naturalization in the article “Our Native Land.” It begins with the supposition that an immigrant can never fully divest himself of “the old home [that] lurks in his bosom. The tendrils of affection which bind him to other climes are not broken” (36). By making the climate a metonym for the nation, the almanac fuses patriotism with environmental affection through floral metaphors. National attachment materializes as an attachment to nature that animates feelings of patriotic love.

Much like the essays and treatise of Whitney, *The Know Nothing Almanac* exercises environmental patriotism as a political tool to bar immigrants from naturalizing in two ways. First, if these patriotic affections are truly ingrained, then immigrants can never renounce their allegiance to their native country. Second, sinister descriptions characterize those who do undergo the oath: “If it were possible that he could forget as well as forswear his native land, he were unworthy [of] citizenship in any country. He should be classed with those destitute of human love and natural sympathy, upon whom divine wisdom pronounces a curse” (36). Beyond just being categorized as unfit for citizenship, naturalized immigrants forfeit their membership to any political community as well as their membership in the human race.

Identifying the west as a distinctly American space, *The Know Nothing Almanac* encourages its American readership to imagine the withholding of public lands for native-born Americans as a natural, albeit bolder, extension of their restrictive naturalization policies. If revised to disqualify foreign-born people, then the homestead bill is a “sublime idea of *deliverance from foreign influence*” (21). *The Know Nothing Almanac* appropriates the safety valve rhetoric of the land reform movement to imagine immigrants as threats to national security. Public lands symbolically safeguard white working class Americans from “competition of pauper laborers from the Old World” (21), even though they do not liberate them from the

caprices of the capitalist marketplace and do not truly offer the social and economic independence Americans had invested in it since Crèvecoeur. The almanac frames the passage of the homestead bill in this amended form as a matter of urgency. It advocates partitioning a 160-acre parcel of land to native-born white men so “that it may not be seized by the swarms of aliens, who are hastening to secure possession of our heritage” (21). The availability of public lands enables native-born citizens to establish a home on a farm and to “abandon the cities for ever to the foreign hordes now pouring in upon us in a continuous stream” (*Know Nothing Almanac* 21). In their resistance to homestead bills, nativist writers and activists argue for concentrating immigrants in urban slums.

Stories by immigrants imagine an alternative to econativist narratives by rewriting the allocation of public lands to foreigners as a mechanism that fosters naturalization, both socially and ecologically. A self-published pamphlet written by an unidentified, naturalized immigrant who had lived in the U.S. for thirteen years, *Emigration, Emigrants, and Know-Nothings* (1854) proposes appropriating 50 to 100 acres of government land to immigrant families “according to their means and power of cultivating and improving it” (11). Advising immigrants to avoid cities and uncultivated areas that generate agues and bilious fevers, the pamphlet articulates a form of citizenship that is sustained by cultivating “forests, sluggish rivers and streams, small lakes, swamps, moors, prairies, mountains, hills, and luxuriant valleys” (18). Compulsory agrarianism is imagined to solve, or at least alleviate, the social “evils” of unrestricted immigration and urban slums according to the author.

Like Duganne’s land reform poetry and his city-mysteries, *Emigration, Emigrants, and Know-Nothings* normalizes the pastoral homestead as the environmental ideal of the nation. However, unlike nativist literature, this pamphlet encourages immigrants to orient their desires

and behaviors toward this norm, if they hope to become Americans. Despite their antipodal ways of imagining naturalization, both nativist and immigrant nature writing rely on the concept of home sentiment to embrace rural ecologies as national norms while vilifying urban ones. Farming attaches immigrants to the U.S. in ways that cities do not. Compulsory agrarianism begets feelings of belonging—a naturalization narrative rehearsed at length by Mary Anne Sadler in *Con O'Regan*.

—NEGOTIATING ECONATIVISM

Born on New Year's Eve in 1820 in Cootehill, County Cavan, Ireland, Mary Anne (née Madden) Sadler was the daughter of a merchant who could afford to have her educated. After her father's death in 1844, she immigrated to Montreal, avoiding the ravages of the Great Famine altogether. In Montreal, she published her first book, *The Literary Garland* (1845), before marrying James Sadler who co-owned one of the foremost Catholic publishing houses in North America with his brother, Denis. Her marriage to James gave Sadler the opportunity to publish tremendous amounts of work, but she was by no means dependent upon him despite publishing her works under the moniker "Mrs. J. Sadler."²⁴ Sadler's access to periodicals and publishing houses greatly expanded her influence among Irish immigrants and enabled her to share her bourgeois vision of Irish-American acculturation throughout the Anglophonic North Atlantic.²⁵ During her lifetime, Sadler had her works published in the United States, Canada, Ireland, and England, but her novels were not the only things moving across national borders. In 1860, the

²⁴ For an in-depth analysis of Sadler's publication history, see Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America*, 114-140.

²⁵ On Sadler's use of sentimental fiction to popularize a bourgeois sensibility for her Irish readers, see Howes.

Sadliers immigrated to New York City where she held salons with leading figures of Irish-American life, including Bishop John Hughes, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, and Patrick Donahoe. After her husband's death in 1869, Sadlier returned to Montreal where she continued writing until her death in 1903. A mobile figure whose wealth and prestige enabled her and her works to move across national borders, Sadlier was an exceptional immigrant who nevertheless depicted the social *and* environmental pressures ordinary Irish refugees faced across the transatlantic world during and after the Great Famine, as evidenced by *Con O'Regan*.

In *Con O'Regan: Or, Emigrant Life in the New World* (1856/1864), Sadlier exploits xenophobic ideas about environmental patriotism to justify homesteading as a mechanism that acculturates Irish immigrants to life in the United States. Combining the notion of home sentiment with her distinctive brand of bourgeois Catholicism, *Con O'Regan* eviscerates American nativism by affirming that Irish immigrants' love for their Irish homeland can be transferred to Iowan prairies. First printed in Thomas D'Arcy McGee's *American Celt* in 1856 and reserialized in *New York Tablet* in 1863 before being published by D. & J. Sadlier (her husband's firm) as a monograph in 1864 (and reprinted again in 1888), *Con O'Regan* was one of Sadlier's most popular works but is now one of her less studied immigrant romances. Incredibly prolific, Sadlier produced upwards of sixty original and translated works, ranging from novels to plays to catechisms to short stories. In *Types of Canadian Women* (1903), Henry J. Morgan divides her works into three categories: (1) historical Irish romances, (2) religious and didactic works, and (3) immigrant romances. Although her works were popular during her lifetime, only Sadlier's immigrant romances have generated any sustained scholarly interest because, as Majorie Howes indicates, these "do not merely reflect transatlantic experience or culture; they seek to theorize it, to intervene in it, to constitute it" (142).

As one of the most read Irish authors in mid-century North American literature, Mary Anne Sadlier's absence from contemporary Americanist scholarship is startling, especially when considering its recent transnational and hemispheric turns.²⁶ While most of Sadlier's immigrant romances portray a tension between maintaining an Irish Catholic identity and assimilating to American values, as critics have argued, *Con O'Regan* strikes a middle ground through its opposition to nativism and its articulations of Irish immigrant acculturation, as I will argue.²⁷ Although Sadlier's scholars tend to emphasize her resistance to U.S. assimilation politics in her immigrant romances, my approach to *Con O'Regan* resonates with Michael Böss's view that Sadlier's fiction facilitates acculturation because "to her, Irishness was a spiritual and cultural category that was compatible with American citizenship and loyalty to the Republic" (79-80). Irishness and Americanness are not merely spiritual and cultural subjectivities but are also environmental ones as *Con O'Regan* illustrates. Throughout *Con O'Regan*, Sadlier imagines national belonging through the affective and aesthetic responses of her immigrant characters to places, namely Ireland's fields, Boston's slums, and Iowa's prairies. Inverting nativist discourses about nature and nationality, Sadlier implores Irish immigrants to resettle in Midwestern states

²⁶ This can perhaps be attributed to her association with Canadian literature. However, while she lived, wrote, and published in Canada, many of her works were set in the U.S. (and Ireland). For this reason, she very much transcends the boundaries of national literary traditions.

²⁷ On Sadlier's resistance to assimilation politics, see Lacombe, "Frying-Pans and Deadlier Weapons," 96-116, and O'Keefe, "Passports and Prayers," 151-61. Both Lacombe and O'Keefe concentrate on how the linkage of Catholicism and Irish identity in Sadlier's novels requires that Irish immigrants retain their allegiance to Ireland. See Howes's "Discipline, Sentiment, and the Irish-American Public" for a discussion on how this ethno-religious linkage also has a class component that forms "a disciplinary project that encouraged Irish assimilation into American capitalism and political culture" (168-9). Whereas Lacombe, O'Keefe, and Howe concentrate on the social dynamics of Sadlier's fiction, my chapter resituates these issues of identity politics within their environmental contexts.

where they can reproduce the “home virtues” (her phrase) that urban slums and xenophobia stifle.

Set in 1844, *Con O'Regan* centers on the immigration and acculturation of the eponymous character (Con), his sister (Winny), and their Irish compatriots, (Paul and Nora Bergan). Once in the slums of Boston, these Irish immigrants increasingly feel themselves exiled from their homelands as they struggle to retain their Catholic and Irish values in their urban slums. Leaving his wife and two children in Ballymullen until he saves enough money to send for them, Con works for nativist bosses (Mr. Pims and Mr. Dutton) who harass him and refuse to acknowledge his merits. Winny faces similar discrimination as a servant for Mrs. Prudence Coulter, who can best be described as a xenophobic version of Marie St. Clare from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851). A drunkard at the novel's outset, Paul Bergan drinks away his economic woes until he mistakenly gives gin to one of his sons—an error that kills the child. Paul Bergan's other son, Patrick or Patsy, has turned into a disrespectful street urchin due to his friendship with American children who corrupt the home virtues of the Irish.

The configuration of urban slums, discrimination, drunkenness, and destitution makes Sadlier's characters yearn for Ireland. The social pressures and forces outside of their control inhibit their ability to find gainful employment, to resist the temptation of alcohol, to escape the morally corrupting influences of the city. Part temperance novel, part sentimental novel, and part immigrant romance, *Con O'Regan* combines popular literary genres with social reform movements in order to advance a family-centered, bourgeois Irish-American Catholic identity that immigrants could mimic and that appealed to U.S. reading publics, particularly middle class women. Much like Sadlier's other immigrant romances and Duganne's *The Tenant-House*, *Con*

O'Regan has a mission: to save Irish immigrants from the morally and materially corrupting influences of U.S. urban environments.

Con O'Regan is an unabashed piece of literary propaganda aimed directly at Irish immigrants. The 1864 preface contextualizes the conception of and the initial serialization of the novel, acknowledging that Sadlier wrote it to bolster the goals of Thomas McGee's Irish Catholic Colonization Convention. Convened in February 1856 in Buffalo, NY, the Convention was organized by the Irish Emigrant Aid Committee to help establish agrarian communities in Iowa, Missouri, and other Midwestern states or in Canada.²⁸ It sought to redistribute the population of Irish immigrants in order to preserve the Catholic faith and feelings of an Irish ethnicity by developing Irish townships. Proponents, like Sadlier, resolved to remove them from the slums of "overcrowded cities of our Atlantic seaboard to the *safer, calmer, and more healthful* pursuits of agricultural life, whether on the smiling prairies of the West, or by the great waters of the North" (iii; emphasis added). The Buffalo Convention, unlike her novel, failed due to lack of public support. To save the goals of the Convention from the abyss of cultural amnesia, the republications of *Con O'Regan* resurrect "the noble effort that was once made to turn the tide of emigration into a safe and saving channel" (vi). Although the immediate concerns of the Buffalo Convention were religious and nationalist, Sadlier's preface reframes both its mission and the immigrant experience, more broadly, in materialist terms that underscore the differences not only between cities and prairies but also the relationship between those ecosystems and human populations.

When Con O'Regan arrives in the "Puritan City," the slums dash his fantasy of the United States as an economic and political asylum for Europe's oppressed. His sister, Winny,

²⁸ On the Buffalo Convention, see Jones, *American Immigration*, 104-5.

though employed, is literally and metaphorically homeless. In addition to having no personal residence, she has no sense of belonging until Con arrives after their mother's death. The remittances she sends to Ireland from her already puny wages prevent her from caring for herself physically but not spiritually. If Winny's situation does not emphasize the unsuitability of city dwelling for rural Irish immigrants enough, Sadlier amplifies it through Paul and Nora Bergan who live ten-feet underground in a dark, dank cellar.²⁹ Upon seeing the degraded condition of his sister and his friends, Con candidly informs his sister, "I don't like [the United States] at all. If that's the way men live here, the sooner I'm home again in Ballymullen, it'll be all the better for me" (27). After all, Con came to America to farm!

Con represents an ideal prospective American to the point that he is almost a cardboard cutout of Crèvecoeur's agrarian citizen. He is industrious. He is sober. He governs himself rationally. He despises urban life and factory work. His greatest desire is to become an independent farmer who can provide for his wife and two sons. After learning about the poor prospects for finding agricultural work or affordable land in the vicinity of the city, Con complains:

Isn't it a hard fate to be toiling forever for other people, and never be putting anything by for the time to come? If a body had a bit of land now—ever so little—that he could call his own—then there would be some use in working—then every day's work we did would be so much laid up for ourselves and our families. Isn't it a queer thing all out that so many shut themselves up in towns this way, where most of them never rise higher than day-laborers, and them all—one might say—used to a country-life at home! Well now, I

²⁹ On the representations of cellar dwelling in American antebellum fiction, see McNutt. His study does not discuss Sadlier, however.

declare, that must be the great reason that they don't do well. If God would only give me the chance of gettin' settled on a farm, I think I'd be a happy man! (93-4)

By calling Irish immigrants' congregation into overcrowded urban areas "queer," Sadlier establishes country-living as a normative part of Irish identity, even in diaspora. Making no distinction between an Irish peasant farmer and an American yeoman, she transforms farming, or the desire to be a farmer, into an incredibly plastic point of cultural contact. Con emerges not as a threat to national security but as a bulwark—a fact that could be extended to other Irish immigrants. After all, if *all* Irish immigrants lived country-lives, as Sadlier contends, then Ireland is also a nation of farmers or, to borrow Crèvecoeur's words, a "race of cultivators."

Through Con's "queer" experiences in Boston, Sadlier co-opts standard American agrarian national narratives, recasting the U.S. as an inhospitable, unhealthy, urban nation where slums corrupt the moral and physical health of Irish immigrants. Sadlier's immigrants waste away in cities by spending their money as quickly as they can earn it. Poverty forces them to crowd into hovels, cellars, garrets, and other rooms barely fit to inhabit. Informing Con that there are as many poor Irishmen living in the slums of Boston as Ireland itself, Paul Bergan laments, "Why there's houses in this very city, Con, where there's ten or twelve Irish families in one house, an' not a very big house either" (*Con* 92). Like Duganne and nativist writers, Sadlier identifies a dialogic relationship between the materiality of the space and the morality of the people. These cramped living conditions exaggerate the "drinkin' and boozin' and fightin'" (92). The rooms are pitch black, tiny, and dangerous. Sick people of all ages slowly die in these spaces from illness and starvation. The thread between death and life in *Con O'Regan* is as thin as in *The Tenant-House*. Rather than eliciting sympathy through voyeuristic depictions of dying

working-class immigrants to discriminate against Catholic immigrants as Duganne does, Sadlier uses these environments to critique the U.S.

After hearing about the horrific realities of these places, Con decides that immigrants would “be better pleased to starve at home than in a strange country” (*Con* 102). Written after the Great Famine decimated Ireland’s population through either death or migration, *Con O’Regan* raises the specter of starvation and death to disrupt narratives of American exceptionalism wherein the U.S. is a fertile Promised Land. Instead, a pre-famine Ireland fulfills that role. With the famine so close in recent memory, Sadlier’s assertion is stunning. By suggesting that Irish immigrants will starve in the U.S., Sadlier transforms famine into a transatlantic phenomenon that is attributable not only to ecological factors but also to anti-Irish attitudes more broadly. However, as much as this is a warning to potential Irish immigrants, Sadlier directs this stark comparison to American audiences as well in order for them to realize the urgency of the problem of the tenant houses.

The slums typify everything that is antithetical to Sadlier’s vision of a bourgeois, Catholic Irish identity in the U.S. They are precarious places where the mortal lives and immortal souls of Irish immigrants are in constant jeopardy. Con’s benefactor and friend, Mr. Coulter (Prudence’s anti-nativist husband) escorts him to Hope Street where Winny resides after his wife fires her. Seeing Hope Street for the first time, he exclaims “what a population there is here—a population fit for anything! here they are, living by hundreds in squalid poverty, scarce knowing to-day how they may live tomorrow!” (*Con* 119). His stunned horror betrays his sympathy for the Irish and his failure to grasp the structural forces that segregate the Irish into this urban enclave. However, his visceral anger transforms into philanthropic actions, at least for Con and his sister.

Mr. Coulter's plan for the Irish is the same as Con's and as the Buffalo Convention's: go west! Iowa's extensive prairies become the panacea to both moral degradation and to nativist discrimination in the novel. Although the lands around New England have been purchased and cultivated for centuries, "there are millions of broad acres within the territory of this Republic, awaiting the woodman's axe and the tiller's space—lands which could be had for a very small purchase" (*Con* 119). As Charles Fanning has argued, Sadlier had no clear idea how to make the goals of the Buffalo Convention a reality. Mr. Coulter's donation of \$400 (about \$10,000 in 2017) to Con may move the plot toward its conclusion, but it makes the pragmatism of relocating Irish immigrants seem even more suspect.³⁰ While this shortcoming could easily be read as a demonstration of Sadlier's limited knowledge about the project, I want to propose a slightly more generous interpretation than does Fanning. Sadlier's lack of a concrete plan pushes us to read *Con O'Regan* less as a static endorsement of the Buffalo Convention and more as a dynamic assault against nativism and its environmental tenets.

Con O'Regan illustrates how nativism ensnares immigrants in cycles of urban poverty and slow death.³¹ Frustrated with the dearth of agricultural employment, Paul Bergan acquaints Con with latent forms of nativism: "The farms all round here belong to Americans, and wherever they can get their own to work for them, they'll not have others" (92). Yankee farmers are no less xenophobic than the city dwellers who crowd foreigners into densely packed, costly apartments. Their exclusionary hiring practices fertilize the slums with immigrant bodies. Again and again, nativist antics inhibit immigrants from leaving the city. Peter Whelan, an Irish immigrant and Con's casual acquaintance, saves the money to purchase a farm and relocate his

³⁰ See Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America*, 128.

³¹ On slow violence, see Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011).

family to the prairies, but his bank fails when its boisterous Know Nothing owners, Pims and Dutton, speculate wildly. Self-professed Protestant ambassadors to “Jews, Pagans, Romanists, and all other such unrighteous folk” (*Con* 281), Pims and Dutton withhold their “Christian” charity from Whelan and other immigrants. Although caught “in the act of violating both the spirit and the letter of that Gospel” (282), the American public absolves them of blame and allows them to reopen another bank. Restored to positions of wealth and privilege, Pims and Dutton adamantly refuse to refund Whelan his savings and banish him back to the slums. Sadlier’s nativist characters either have no awareness of their destructive actions, or they do not care. Either way, such callous disregard for human life convinces Con to hasten “forth to breathe the pure air of the country as a tiller of the soil” where he can cultivate a sense of “home” (274).

Cultivating a sense of home propels the plot of *Con O’Regan* forward, but what exactly constitutes “home” for Sadlier? In “Home is Where the Heart Is,” Yvonne O’Keefe traces the complex remaking of kinship networks in Sadlier’s immigrant romances by studying her concerns about the destruction of the Irish Catholic family structure in diaspora. Out of the wreckage of a traditional filial frameworks, O’Keefe identifies an alternative family structure at work in Sadlier’s fiction: “a ‘family of emigration,’ which consisted of a mixture of family types, i.e. stem, lineal, and fully-extended families, cocooned in an overarching community filled with remnants of extinct family types and manifested in the newly created Irish-American neighbourhoods” (40). When Con and Winny leave the city, they do not migrate alone. Nora, Paul, and Patsy Bergen join them. The attempt to restore diasporic kinship networks determines their choice of settlement. They relocate to Dubuque, Iowa because Paul Bergan’s brother, Felix, lives there and invites them. The restoration of the family of emigration is completed when Con’s wife and sons arrive in the novel’s final chapters. While O’Keefe’s understanding of

“home” as a flexible arrangement of family and friends brilliantly illuminates the social dynamics of the nineteenth-century Irish diaspora, her approach also dematerializes “home” by overlooking the centrality of physical spaces in Sadlier’s story.

Home is very much a material place in *Con O’Regan*. If we apply O’Keefe’s “family of emigration” model to *Con O’Regan*, then we must seriously consider how material elements—fresh air, sunlight, pollution, typhus, fungi, shamrocks—shape feelings of belonging, locally, nationally, and transnationally. The pressures of the tenant houses bring the O’Regans and the Bergens closer together. Their shared desire to breath a purer air brings them closer together. Their attachment to rural landscapes and antipathy for urban ones brings them closer together. When Sadlier’s Irish characters finally arrive in Iowa, they immediately feel a sense of “home” that was explicitly not experienced in Boston:

The undulating surface of the prairie was covered with the delicate herbage of Spring, green and soft as that which carpets the valleys of the Emerald Isle. The fairest and brightest-tinted flowers were scattered around in rich profusion, and altogether the scene had that pastoral character which belongs to a high state of cultivation. At the northern extremity of the two farms was a grove of considerable extent, its strangely-mingled foliage presenting one mass of freshest verdure of every shade and tint. In addition to this there was a small clump of trees on Con’s farm, and where their shade fell deepest across the plain, his fertile imagination instantly reared a smiling cottage, the future home of all he loved on earth. (333)

The material conditions of the prairie—its herbage, its flowers, its trees—enable Con to imagine a “future home” for the first time since arriving in the U.S. This assemblage of nonhuman lives makes it possible for Con to imagine reuniting with his wife and two sons. Wishing to see more

Irish immigrants in Iowa, Con affirms, “This is the place for them, and not the smoky, dirty suburbs of the cities, where they’re smothered for the want of pure air” (335-6). Iowa’s landscape symbolically rematerializes the conditions that make “home” possible for Sadlier’s Irish characters.

Sanitized, pastoral visions of agricultural life reinforce Sadlier’s anti-nativist project as much as her attempt to popularize relocating to Midwestern states. Scholars have noted the political overtones to Sadlier’s use of pastoralism but have yet to examine it in relationship to nativist discourse. Marguérite Corporaal rightly argues that pastoral representations of Ireland in Famine era fiction “come to signify a unique, uniform Irish identity that transcends the New World politics of assimilation” (333), but what about pastoral representations of the United States that draw a correspondence between the two nations? What is the significance of Con’s suggestion that Iowa’s undulating fields mirror the Emerald Isle? By connecting the United States to Ireland through their similar landscapes, Sadlier does not transcend assimilationist politics so much as she reimagines them. The immigrants in *Con O’Regan* neither forego their Irish heritage nor Americanize themselves completely, but instead, bring the Irishness and Americanness together through similar pastoral sentiments. Their Irishness is an asset, not a liability. It primes them to be virtuous agrarian citizens regardless of their religion, which ceases to be an issue once they arrive in the Catholic friendly town of Dubuque, Iowa.

As a literary mode and a political tactic, pastoralism is crucial to deciphering the acculturation of Sadlier’s characters. In the United States, as Lawrence Buell observes, the pastoral suffuses narratives of national self-definition by coupling “American cultural identity and exurban and preindustrial spaces” (*Environmental Imagination* 56). A similar sense of the pastoral animated Irish diasporic literature of the Famine Era, in which pastoral representations

of Ireland became a way of “reconstruct[ing] a sense of Irishness in exile” (Corporaal 331). In *Con O’Regan*, the pastoral becomes unmoored from its Irish contexts and becomes transplanted in Iowa. It becomes a point of cultural transference wherein Irish immigrants can leverage their attachments to the rural landscapes of Ireland to cultivate attachments to the environments of Iowa. In other words, Sadlier co-opts these nationalized pastoral traditions to assault the xenophobic conflation of immigrants with urban areas as well as the concentration of foreign populations in these spaces. Instead, suggesting that the pastoral sentiments of Irish immigrants are transferrable to U.S. contexts. As Con and his friends demonstrate, immigrants share markedly similar pastoral sentiments that typify antebellum American culture because of their love for the pastoral environments of Ireland.

Pastoralism allows Con and his compatriots to transfer their national attachments as they transplant Irish traditions and flora in Iowan soil. The final three chapters flash-forward three years after Con has cultivated his estate, and his wife, Bidy, has joined him, bringing with her “shamrock root all the way from Ireland” (*Con* 364). With Con’s permission, she plants this invasive species, which “spread considerably, and wore as bright a green as though it were still on some Irish hill-side” (364). The naturalization of the shamrock symbolizes the naturalization of the immigrant characters. The rapid growth of the shamrock mirrors their adjustment to life in the U.S., while, much like the immigrants, retaining its connections to Ireland. It is a metonym that highlights how the naturalization of a plant to a new environment resembles the naturalization of people to a new country. This metonym recalls Crèvecoeur’s botanical metaphors and similes in *Letters from an American Farmer*. By imaginatively connecting immigrants and plants, Sadlier plays with the political and scientific senses of naturalization, thus locating it simultaneously in civic and material realms of being.

Naturalization in *Con O'Regan* is not a zero sum game. It happens in fits and starts. It happens in certain material environments and not others. It does not demand a complete renunciation of one's native identity. Instead, environmental attachments enable national identifications to proliferate. Rather than endangering the United States, they strengthen it. Calling Iowa a "little Ireland," Sadlier's immigrants cultivate a flexible "home sentiment" even in diaspora. The material and pastoral conditions of the prairies enable them to fashion transatlantic, transnational senses of belonging without nativists' exclusionary interference. No longer surrounded by drunken licentiousness or polluted tenements, Con and his compatriots finish the novel living in "an atmosphere of peace and purity where nothing was strange or uncongenial, but all was home-like and natural" (402).

In *Con O'Regan*, environments function as material realities and as points of cultural transference. Urban environments endanger the lives of immigrants, inhibiting their ability to acclimate to life in the United States. Exposure to putrefying wastes in the dirty, narrow tenant houses of Boston prevents Sadlier's characters from developing any attachments to their adopted country. Rural environments, however, overcome this limitation. They empower her immigrants to cultivate intimate attachments to the United States. The environmental similarities between Iowa and Ireland accelerate the cultivation of a feeling of belonging for her characters. The assemblages of verdant grasses and imported shamrock open up a cultural exchange whereby foreigners can transfer their feelings toward their Irish environment to their American one. Naturalizing a nascent iteration of hyphenated subjectivity through her characters, Sadlier incorporates nativist ideas about nature in order to proliferate the possibilities of national belonging. The potentiality for cultivating attachments to multiple natures and multiple nations undoes the logics of nativist opposition to naturalization and immigration in nineteenth-century

America. If nativists feared that the attachments of immigrants to other countries threatened the security of the United States, then Sadlier illustrates the exact opposite to be true.

To be sure, naturalization is not a natural impossibility, *but* it is circumscribed by environmental factors that nativist policies exacerbate. Immigrants do not incubate or spread diseases because of their inability to govern themselves or their environments. U.S. citizens are not endangered by the allocation of public lands to immigrants as Con's successful acculturation emphasizes. Pushing for a more compulsory agrarian notion of acculturation, *Con O'Regan* narrates how immigrants become ecological citizens, or people who care about nature in ways that incorporate them into imaginary communities. *Con O'Regan* inverts the ecological strands of nativism to illustrate how the Irish became imagined as U.S. citizens through their relationship with rural environments. In describing how Irish immigrants enter into American life, Sadlier examines how feelings of national belonging are enmeshed in networks of organic and inorganic matter much like Crèvecoeur's immigrant sketches or Sealsfield's *Lebensbilder*. Urban ecologies estrange Sadlier's characters from cultivating citizenship, but these obstacles are not insurmountable or essential. After all, Con personifies an American supercitizen—that is an industrious white male who governs himself and his environs soberly and rationally. Sadlier's model for Irish acculturation may not be viable in real life, but *Con O'Regan* nevertheless gives Irish and American readers a cultural narrative that inspires its readers to imagine multiple ways of becoming and being American.

Like the metonym of the shamrock, nature and nationality converge at multiple points throughout the numerous pro- and anti-immigration pamphlets, periodicals, and novels of the mid-nineteenth century. While not all of them addressed the environment as extensively as Sadlier and Duganne, many of them measure nationality through a sense of place as I have

shown with just a few representative examples. An intimate sense of rootedness to a particular place or set of places is a crucial feature of how both pro- and anti-immigration publics articulated their ideas about American nationality and citizenship. While both publics have differing attitudes about the assimilation of immigrants, their shared indebtedness to the materiality of American ecosystems persists throughout immigration debates in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These obscure, mostly forgotten nineteenth-century publications may seem inconsequential to today's debate about immigration or environmentalism in the United States. However, they may have more to say about the political and ecological realities of our present historical moments than we might initially imagine.

Conclusion

Nature and Naturalization Reconsidered

“Let him take into a tenement block a handful of flowers from the fields and watch the brightened faces, the sudden abandonment of play and fight that go ever hand in hand where there is no elbow-room, the wild entreaty for ‘posies,’ the eager love with which the little messengers of peace are shielded, once possessed; then let him change his mind. I have seen an armful of daisies keep the peace of a block better than a policeman and his club, seen instincts awaken under their gentle appeal, whose very existence the soil in which they grew made seem a mockery.”

—Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890)

“The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization.”

—Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893)

A Danish immigrant who came to the United States in 1870, Jacob Riis championed razing the slums and replacing them with urban parks that would allow sunlight, fresh air, and green landscapes to improve the civic mindset of impoverished immigrants. Throughout his pioneering work of muckraking journalism, *How the Other Half Lives*, Riis recounted and photographed the sordid conditions of the tenements in New York. *How the Other Half Lives* vilifies the filthy conditions of the slums for producing bad citizens because “all life eventually accommodates itself to its environment, and human life is no exception” (123). When discussing the future of the children of the tenements, Riis argues that flowers do more social good than

police officers. Flowers possess no small degree of civic power in Riis's mind insofar as they transform disruptive and unruly children into peaceful, law-abiding subjects. Flowers are also crucial in fostering order in German immigrant populations, as Riis explains. He praises Germans for their "strong love of flowers" because this love does not represent "any high moral principle in the man; rather the capacity for it" (124). In other words, Germans love of flowers and gardening illustrates their ability to cultivate moral virtue and to bestow onto their neighborhoods "a more orderly character" (124).

Riis's anti-slum activism rests on an assumed connection between nature and American citizenship that recycles the environmental dimensions of the naturalization narratives that I have examined. Written at the end of the open door era, *How the Other Half Lives* reiterates nationalist fantasies about how the interactions between immigrants and their environment affect their becoming Americans. Riis identifies in flowers, public parks, sunlight, and fresh air a transformative power to make immigrants into civic-minded subjects who uphold law and order. Nature mediates the civic conduct of immigrants, thus making their citizenship into an irreducibly ecological phenomenon.¹ Like J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Daniel Blowe, Charles Sealsfield, Mary Ann Sadlier, and other immigrant writers, Riis imagines naturalization—the process of becoming an American citizen—as occurring in both civic and environmental realms, often simultaneously so. At the core of Riis's activism and writing is a commitment to creating "a good soil for citizenship to grow in."² Rather than locating good citizenship as an outgrowth of immigrants' interactions with the state, Riis carries forward an

¹ Castronovo examines how Riis builds a theory of ethical citizenship through the aesthetic beauty of urban parks. See *Beautiful Democracy*, 27-64.

² Riis, *Ten Tears' War with the Slums*, 36. Riis continued his campaign against the slums throughout his career.

extralegal notion of citizenship that is possible through immigrants' intimate relationships with their environment.

Riis joins Crèvecoeur, Sealsfield, Sadlier, and guidebook writers in outlining a nature-centered model for cultivating American citizenship. His advocacy for razing slums and building urban parks to benefit immigrants ironically most closely resembles A.J.H. Duganne's urban reform plan in *The Tenant-House*. Riis's activism also resonates with Sadlier's call for removing immigrants from the morally corrupting influence of slum ecosystems. It simultaneously recalls Crèvecoeur's depiction of virtuous American citizenship as being grounded in immigrants' entanglements with nature. Finally, it echoes Sealsfield's concerns that an immigrant acclimates to the environment, whether good or bad. Altogether, these different examples of immigrant literature illustrate how ideas about nature, naturalization, and citizenship become intertwined during the open door era and beyond. Rather than reading nature writing within immigrant literature as a minor or superfluous theme, we must recognize how it structures naturalization as an imagined and lived practice for immigrant writers. Indeed, Riis's commitment to bringing civic virtue to urban-dwelling immigrants resulted in the razing of the Mulberry Bend slums and replacing them with the Columbus Park in 1897. This model of nature-centered citizenship insists that virtuous civic conduct—that is, acting for the public good—cannot be achieved without the influence of sunlight and fresh air. When read in relationship to these earlier immigrant authors, Riis's realist work of muckraking journalism transforms the notion of cultivating citizenship to account for the new environmental pressures that immigrants faced in urban spaces.

Riis's ideas about urban reform and nature's influence on citizenship influenced other activists and immigrant writers well into the 1920s. For instance, the New York *Tribune* created

Fresh Air Funds, which provided free country vacations to immigrants wherein they would be able to spend one to two weeks in the countryside. As much as this charity was a philanthropic effort, it was just as much about disciplining and assimilating immigrants, as the Jewish-American author Anzia Yezierska suggests in her short story “The Free Vacation House.” Published in *Hungry Hearts and Other Stories* (1920), “The Free Vacation House” is a first-person tale of an Eastern European Jewish mother who goes on a country vacation with her children. The unnamed narrator initially has a positive affective response to being in the country, noting “how grand I felt, just on the sky to look! Ah, how grand I felt just to see the green grass—and the free-spaces—and no houses!” (105). Her revelry is cut short when she learns the copious rules that restrict her from walking on the grass, sitting on the front porch, lounging under trees, and seeing her children for the entire day. Instead of feeling like an American, she feels like a prisoner who is merely a set piece for charity workers to show off to wealthy donors.

Other writers were less critical of these nature-centered models of assimilating immigrants. In book twelve of his rags-to-riches assimilation novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), Abraham Cahan sends his eponymous protagonist out of the city and into the country where Levinsky immediately feels a material difference in the atmosphere: “It was so full of ozone, so full of health-giving balm, it was almost overpowering. I was inhaling it in deep, intoxicating gulps. It gave me a pleasure so keen it seemed to verge on pain. It was so unlike the air I had left up in the sweltering city that the place seemed to belong to another planet” (280). These intoxicating feelings of otherworldliness grow into strong feelings of attachment to the United States, which manifest quite clearly when all the Jewish immigrants begin weepily singing “My Country” at a banquet. Rather than constraining Levinsky, this country excursion revitalizes his wearied soul. Of course, unlike Yezierska’s mother-narrator, Levinsky is quite

wealthy and pays his own way. These two stories highlight that the path to citizenship via nature was not as guaranteed or straightforward as Riis asserted. They reveal how anxieties about urban ecologies stymied the cultivation of citizenship persisted, perhaps even intensified in the early decades of the twentieth century. The connections between nature and naturalization that I have articulated throughout “Cultivating Citizens” mattered a great deal, even as immigration demographics changed and urbanization intensified.

Three years after the publication of *How the Other Half Lives*, Frederick Jackson Turner forecasted a change in Americanization practices with the closing of the frontier. On July 12, 1893, Turner delivered his seminal essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” to the American Historical Association, which famously argued that the closing of the frontier marked the end of the colonization of the American West—the end of the first period of American history. In the early pages of the essay, Turner explicitly connects this moment to immigration history by remarking how “Our early history is the study of European germs developing in an American environment” (3). He explains that European immigrants pushed the frontier ever westward, contending that the transformation of the wilderness likewise transformed Europeans into a “new product that is American” (4). The environment and the European immigrant live in a dialogical symbiosis wherein they both Americanize each other. After all, as Turner summarizes, “In the settlement of America we have to observe how European life entered the continent, and how America modified and developed that life and reacted on Europe” (3). For Turner, just like for Riis and others, nature and Americanization were inextricably bound together in ways that were under threat in the late nineteenth century. However, unlike the others, Turner sees this process at its conclusion without articulating

alternatives to continue to integrate European immigrants into American society. Thus, in a way, the closing of the frontier marks the closing of the open door era.

Across the pages of “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” Turner recapitulates the plot of nineteenth-century naturalization narratives to identify the relationship between Europeans and the environments of the ‘frontier’ as the locus for Americanization. As he argues, “in the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics” (23). Without citing Crèvecoeur anywhere in the essay, Turner very much naturalizes Crèvecoeur’s idea that Europeans would be “melted into a new race of men” (*Letters* 70) by adapting to American climates. However, whereas Crèvecoeur’s formulation does not posit any limitation to the possibility of becoming American, Turner’s does. How can immigrants become Americanized if the frontier has ceased to exist? Based on Turner’s confidence that the cultivation of the environment on the frontier is inextricably bound up with American, the answer seems to be: they can’t.

In this way, Turner differs from Riis, who more closely follows the models offered by Crèvecoeur, Sealsfield, Sadlier, and guidebook writers, such as Gilbert Imlay, John Filson, and Daniel Darby (whom Turner actually cites). Turner’s focus on the frontier as an environmental reality rather than a settler colonial construct restricts the possibilities of cultivating citizenship to places where an imaginary line separates ‘wilderness’ and ‘civilization.’ Without the frontier, there can seemingly be no Americanization—a position that Riis’s activism and Cahan’s fiction clearly reject. Riis instead invests the environment with the transformative power to Americanize immigrants in ways that are more similar to nineteenth-century attitudes. Despite this differing attitude toward the future of naturalization, both Turner and Riis are the inheritors of the logics

of nineteenth-century naturalization narratives. By recovering these stories about becoming American, we can recognize how American immigration history is also the history of the environment and vice versa. Both Riis and Turner recognized this as they began to rethink Americanization while the open doors were beginning to close.

Throughout “Cultivating Citizens,” I have examined how immigrant guidebooks and novels incorporated nature writing into their stories about becoming American to reimagine naturalization as an ongoing, environmental practice. From Crèvecoeur to Riis, immigrant writers interlaced environmental and civic discourses in their naturalization narratives, I have argued, to imagine extralegal, cultural forms of citizenship that were cultivated by interacting with nature rather than acquired through formalized naturalization procedures. “Cultivating Citizens” places much needed attention to the imaginative dynamics of naturalization to explore the intersection of civic and environmental identities within American literary history—a topic that has long captivated Americanist scholars. In his seminal work on American environmental imagination, for instance, Lawrence Buell examines the discursive constructions of nature within American literature to show how articulations of the pastoral have supported European and American colonial regimes. Harkening to Henry Smith’s work in *Virgin Land*, Buell pinpoints “a bond between American cultural identity and exurban and preindustrial spaces” (*Environmental Imagination* 56) that is mythologized within the national imaginary in the personified figure of the virtuous freehold farmer.

To be sure, immigrant nature writers frequently incorporated elements of these agrarian myths of American exceptionalism into their naturalization narratives, but they also elaborated other forms of American identity that were predicated upon bonds that produced places rather than upon the places themselves. In other words, American cultural identity arises not from

exurban or preindustrial spaces per se but from the ways in which people interact with the forms of existence that constitute these spaces. While writers such as Crèvecoeur and Sadlier praise rural ecosystems for facilitating virtuous conduct, Riis very clearly illustrates how it is the relationship with sunlight, fresh air, and green life that matters. Of course, it is clear that the relationship between humans and nonhumans very much influences earlier naturalization narratives as well. While these relationships often crystallize in the image of the farm in nineteenth-century immigrant nature writing, what naturalizes immigrant characters is their connection to the climates, soils, plants, and animals of the United States.

Moving forward, we need to reconsider more carefully the political, cultural, and ecological importance of naturalization narratives particularly before the Civil War. Naturalization narratives within immigrant literature offer Americanist scholars an archive for examining the long and complicated history of U.S. citizenship before and after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment.³ Historians and literary critics alike have designated the Fourteenth Amendment as a watershed moment in U.S. legal history because it guaranteed citizenship to “all persons born or naturalized in the United States or the jurisdiction thereof.”⁴ While the Fourteenth Amendment granted the rights of civic personhood to all persons born within the U.S., issues of national citizenship reached back to the Naturalization Act of 1790 for immigrants, which granted citizenship to “any alien being a free white person.” The Naturalization Act of 1790 and the Fourteenth Amendment provide windows into the legal domains of citizenship—that is, they help reveal how interactions between the state and

³ My dissertation joins Carrie Hyde’s important *Civic Longings* in recovering the imaginative “prehistories” of U.S. citizenship. As Hyde argues, fiction and speculative literature offered ways of imagining what constituted a U.S. citizen prior to the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment.

⁴ On the importance of the Fourteenth Amendment in the history of U.S. citizenship, see Berlant, Hyde, and Rogers Smith.

individuals bestow the rights of citizenship to people under the law. However, alternative notions of citizenship were at work in the imaginative works written by immigrants and circulated across the transatlantic. As “Cultivating Citizens” has shown, this definition of citizenship took on many forms as immigrant writers explored the possibilities and limitations of becoming American through fiction and nonfiction.

While I have given special attention to works by Crèvecoeur, Sealsfield, Sadlier, Duganne, and guidebook writers like Imlay or Blowe, a vast body of immigrant writing still exists and highlights alternative modes of becoming American. In particular, more work needs to be done on the role of women within this history. As is painfully clear, the cultivation of citizenship seems like an undertaking by men; however, immigrant women play crucial roles within naturalization narratives. Some naturalization narratives do discuss how women cultivate citizenship in a time when they were largely excluded from the civic arena, but these trajectories are far more complicated than stories about white men tend to be. Rather than casting them as powerless people, writers, like Rebecca Harding Davis, examine how immigrant women brave the hardships of the American environment to maintain the domestic sphere. In “Life in the Iron Mills,” Davis recounts the story of Deb and Hugh Wolfe, two Welsh immigrants in a hellish industrial town where pollution blackens every part of their existence. While the story is largely about Hugh trying to convince middle-class audiences to care about the plight of the working class, Deb’s story is a kind of feminine naturalization narrative. While she begins the short story living in a basement that is “low, damp,—earthen floor covered with a green slimy moss,—a fetid air smothering their breath” (16), she ends “Iron Mills” living in a Quaker community where there “the light is the warmest, the air freest” (63). While she begins the story as an outsider within American communities, she ends the story “much loved by these silent, restful

people” (63). Deb’s movement from a polluted environment to a pure environment is concomitant with her transition from outsider to belonging, even though she does never cultivate the earth herself. Instead, Davis’s story begs us to consider how do women’s interactions with nature reshape the cultivation of citizenship. Furthermore, it invites us to rewrite the histories of naturalization from women’s perspectives, thus enabling us to discover alternative forms of citizenship. Finally, it reveals a social and literary history that produces Riis’s activist and journalistic work.

On the other hand, the stories of those who do not become naturalized citizens or who reject the cultivation of citizenship need to be explored. In antebellum stories, these can provide alternative frameworks that move outside of the Crèvecoeurian model that is adapted by Sealsfield and Sadlier. Take for example the most famous ‘anti-naturalization’ narrative of the antebellum period: Henry David Thoreau’s encounter with the Irishman John Field in *Walden* (1854). During a rainstorm, Thoreau runs to what he thought was an abandon hut where he finds John Field, his wife, and their several children. Sitting together to wait out the storm, they converse about life and livelihood while chickens strut about the room. When Thoreau learns that John Field “worked ‘bogging’ for a neighboring farmer, turning up a meadow with a shade or bog hoe at the rate of ten dollars acre and the use of the land with manure for one year” (140), he encourages the Irishman to forego this life and pursue one closer to Thoreau’s squatting. John Field’s life in the U.S. very much echoes that of Andrew, the Hebridean, from Crèvecoeur’s famous story. However, Thoreau completely subverts the desirability of this plot in which Andrew rents land and drains his landlord’s swamps. Rather than becoming naturalized to the land, Thoreau encourages John Field to unrooted himself and his family and become permanent wanderers and migrants who live deliberately. Going even one step further in this scene, Thoreau

remarks that he “should be glad if all the meadows on the earth were left in a wild state, if that were the consequence of men’s beginning to redeem themselves” (140). In the end, Thoreau’s encounter with an Irish immigrant leaves the standard trajectory of cultivating citizenship inverted, if not totally shattered. He outlines alternative modes of being that are still deeply and intimately bound up with nature but are not the same as those advocated by Crèvecoeur, Sealsfield, or Sadlier.

“Cultivating Citizens” just begins to scratch the surface of a long literary history of the relationship between immigration and the environment in American culture that begins before the Revolution and continues on to today. In her examinations of environmental risk in North American poetry about migration in the twentieth century, Christine Gerhardt isolates narrative patterns that, as I have shown, are similarly present in open door era naturalization narratives. According to Gerhardt, this body of poetry casts nature as a transformative force that possesses the capacity to modify and to end human lives. In similar ways, immigrant nature writers invested the natural world (particularly the climate) with tremendous amounts of power to alter human and nonhuman lives. When describing how Europeans become Americans, Crèvecoeur suggests that Americans “become distinct by the power of the different climates they inhabit” (*Letters* 70). In addition to evoking “nature’s potential agency” (Gerhardt 146), both twentieth-century poems *and* nineteenth-century immigrant nature writing acknowledge how human movements directly affect the dynamic systems of life and death in which they live. Through the symbolic entanglements, “a precarious form of existence” (148) is elaborated that reminds readers of the constant threat of sudden, collective death brought on by changing climates. The fear of changing climates—literally moving from one climate to another—preoccupied immigrant writing throughout the open door era as well. As each chapter has shown, immigrant

novels and guidebooks took pains to warn immigrants about the fatal consequences of moving from one climate to another by disseminating scientific information about disease and the environment through consumable stories. If the attention to nature's transformative power and states of existential precarity in twentieth-century migration poems fosters an environmental consciousness that rotates around "a fundamental epistemological uncertainty in terms of how to relate to the natural world" (151), as Gerhardt brilliantly argues, then this consciousness has antecedents in earlier naturalization narratives, as "Cultivating Citizens" makes clear.

In conclusion, "Cultivating Citizens" not only calls upon scholars to think about the extralegal forms of naturalization in the U.S., but it also opens new doors for exploring the materiality of citizenship. Indeed, my dissertation illustrates why we can not rely on twentieth and twenty-first-century understandings of ecological citizenship, which typically refers who uses their political power to preserve and conserve natural spaces while also minimizing people's exposure to natural disasters or toxins. Instead, we must recognize how European immigrants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries imagined themselves as being entangled with vast, interconnected human/nonhuman assemblages that they could modify and that, in turn, modified them. We must recognize how ideas about the climate shaped cultural representations of becoming American across the transatlantic through easy to consume stories by and about immigrants. Moreover, it is important to recognize how ideas about citizenship, Americanness, and nature continue to influence naturalization narratives into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In the history of American naturalization, nature matters.

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