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Atlantic Cosmopolitanism in John Steffler's *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*

> In the black space of this cabin the water is still and dead, the same water as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago.
> —J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*

> Those little walks . . . exist on the hinge of translation between place and its otherwise, with the flow going both ways, rooting me in place while they simultaneously open—always with that sense of danger, that pre-echo of oblivion—into wilderness.
> —Don McKay, *Deactivated West 100*

In the fall of 2015, an exhibit was held in London, England, entitled "Cotton to Gold: Extraordinary Collections of the Industrial Northwest." It featured artworks collected by nineteenth-century British industrialists. These men channelled their immense fortunes, acquired through the production of English cotton, into "gold"—the actual gold used to commission and purchase artworks, and, as the title implies, a more public, philanthropic form of wealth, which can be shared. The exhibit included an 1822 watercolour by Romantic painter J. M. W. Turner, entitled "Tynemouth Priory," which depicts a pair of sailing vessels in rough seas off the Northumbrian coast. In Turner's painting, the sailing vessels in the foreground, listing in the rolling North Sea, are thrown into sharp relief against the pale, sun-washed background, where the ruins of the two-thousand-year-old priory rise above the sea on imposing cliffs. The painting evinces Turner's enduring fascination with English seascapes, implying, as they do, England's boundedness as an island nation but also its constant communication and interconnection with other locales. Interestingly, the "Cotton to Gold" exhibit makes explicit what Turner's painting only implies. The industrialists who made their fortunes in

the cotton industry relied on both a cheap labour force in northern England, and on raw cotton supplied from plantations in the Southern United States. Seen in this light, then, Turner's painting emerges as a cultural object that is enmeshed in a distinctly circum-*Atlantic* history of trade, labour, and slavery.

The networks that the "Cotton to Gold" exhibit illuminates can also help us to understand a text that originated on the other side of the Atlantic—John Steffler's 1992 novel *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*, a postmodern refashioning of British explorer George Cartwright's historical journals. Just as Turner's painting simultaneously references a national history and international trade, Steffler's Cartwright emerges from the late-eighteenth-century English gentry to become a kind of ideal Atlantic cosmopolitan traveller, voyaging, over the course of the text, to Rio, Cape Town, Madras, Minorca, Newfoundland, Labrador, and back again to England. Much of the novel takes place on water, in ships, which, as Paul Gilroy has pointed out, were the "living means by which points on the Atlantic world were joined" and should therefore be conceived as "cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of triangular trade" (16). The land itself is frequently depicted as aqueous in *Afterlife*, further evincing how the national and imperial spaces Cartwright visits are being inextricably drawn into an Atlantic world. Such interconnections destabilize distinctions, not only between water and land, but also between national and transnational spaces. While Steffler's Cartwright tries to adopt a cosmopolitan identity, he is continually challenged by different versions of nation-state politics, including an incumbent form of American power that foreshadows its eventual rise as a global superpower.

Because Cartwright is an explorer and colonizer whose actions result in the deaths and dispossession of an Inuit community in Labrador, critics have been rightly interested in exploring his status as a kind of proto-Canadian, whose past actions and ghostly guilt are analogous to contemporary settlers' ambivalence toward our origins on this land.[1] For example, Cynthia Sugars argues that Steffler's novel "enacts an inconclusive process of mourning," which should "enable a working through to some kind of reassessment of the nation's colonial history" (694). Nicola Renger is even more enthusiastic about the novel's recuperative potential, contending that it "provides a postcolonial revisioning of Canada's past" (69). Marlene Goldman's analysis takes in wider histories of eighteenth-century imperialism, yet still frames *Afterlife* in the context of "the clash between European and Native peoples in the New World" (63).[2]

This article builds upon these critiques through a different frame, specifically in terms of transatlantic studies and Atlantic world history. Here, I follow scholars such as Paul Gilroy, Jace Weaver, and Ian Baucom in viewing the Atlantic Ocean as a distinct historic space, with its own epistemological genealogies and a unique set of metaphorical investments. Theorists of transatlanticism—as well as literary authors such as Toni Morrison, Derek Walcott, and Marlene NourbeSe Philip—have demonstrated how triangular trade was not only fundamental to the development of the modern world economic system, but also required and generated its own knowledge system, what Ian Baucom terms an "Atlantic cosmopolitanism" (312). While these analyses have often focused on key nodes in the Caribbean, West Africa, and the British Isles, I am interested in examining how Steffler's novel portrays Labrador's participation—as a colony and future Canadian territory—in this epistemological Atlantic network.

The central events of *Afterlife*'s plot occur between 1750 and 1779, a period during which, as Baucom discusses, the British Empire was transitioning from its second to its third stage, on the cusp of losing its American colonies while asserting more power over the Indian subcontinent and rapidly increasing triangular trade traffic in sugar, textiles, and slaves (5). Throughout *Afterlife,* Cartwright is involved in a series of imperialist-nationalist conflicts, primarily between France and Britain but also involving other European nations and the emergent American state. Edward Said defines this period according to two interrelated contests: the "battle for strategic gains abroad—in India, in the Niger Delta, in the Western hemisphere—and the battle for a triumphant nationality" (83). As a military captain, Cartwright is affected by and an agent within these contests, which were both battles for access to trade routes and also ideological assertions of particularly modern forms of national identity. As an officer in the military, Cartwright was sent to India during the Carnatic Wars (which lasted from 1746 to 1763), which were part of a longstanding conflict with France over access to the subcontinent's resources. He later served in Germany during the Seven Years War (1756-1763), a battle England joined, as the novel's narrator states, out of "intense sympathy for Frederick the Great of Prussia, who, in an effort to carve out a nation for himself, was waging war against France, Austria, Russia, Sweden, and Saxony" (64). While Cartwright eventually repudiates the army and the nationalist ideals it represents, he nevertheless cannot avoid becoming entangled in nation-state conflicts, since his Labrador business is later ruined after a raid by a rebel privateer during the American

Revolution (1775-1783). Throughout *Afterlife,* Cartwright spends much of his time in transnational, fluid spaces, both at sea and on land. As such, the nation-state in this text is treated as an ambivalent category, one that does not fulfill Cartwright's need for self-realization, but which nevertheless remains a powerful means of organizing human knowledge and experience.

The nationalist conflicts of the late-eighteenth century also influenced an emergent discourse of cosmopolitanism, specifically that advanced by Immanuel Kant in *Perpetual Peace* (1795). Kant's formulation of cosmopolitanism in terms of hospitality—that "the *right to visit*, to associate, belongs to all men by virtue of their common ownership of the earth's surface"—was economically driven since the "right to the earth's surface that belongs in common to the totality of men makes commerce possible" (118). The period in which Kant wrote, and in which the historical Cartwright conducted his Labrador voyages, was also, as Pheng Cheah has noted, the "cusp between feudal and capitalist modes of production" ("Introduction" 23). Cheah underscores how for Kant, the "material conditions for fostering" a world community existed in "international commerce and an emerging universal culture" (23). Early modern cosmopolitanism is thus intimately linked to the rise of imperial trade in the late-eighteenth century, as it occurred alongside the shift from feudal to capitalist modes of production. Steffler dramatizes this historical shift, and reveals its resonances in the present, by depicting Cartwright as caught between two economic and epistemological systems. As a second son who has been forcibly barred from the aristocracy's system of primogeniture inheritance, Cartwright is ideally positioned to exploit the emergent forms of finance capital that were coming to dominate the British imperial economy in the latter half of the eighteenth century. As Baucom has argued, the economic system that emerged at this time—and the "universal culture" that Kant heralded—was distinctly Atlantic in character. Because of the length of time and risks involved with sea travel, transatlantic trade deals took a long time to complete, and required participants to enter into business with people they had never seen. Baucom argues that these new temporal and spatial factors necessitated a new theory of knowledge in order for the system to operate properly. In this economy founded on "time and distance," value did not "follow, but precede[d] exchange" (17). This, Baucom proposes, was a system premised on "imaginary values" where a particular object (or person) could be suitably exchanged for a general type. Furthermore, this new theory of knowledge also underpinned contemporaneous discourses of cosmopolitanism like

those put forth by Kant. What Baucom terms disinterested, liberal, impartial cosmopolitanism is therefore the "secret-sharer" of modern speculative finance capital (45). The implication of this, of course, is that the figure of the deracinated, sophisticated cosmopolitan intellectual and that of the slave trader operate on similar premises of violence and exploitation, and that both originate as "types" in the late eighteenth century.[3]

Throughout the novel, Cartwright is caught between conflicting desires: he wishes to remain rooted in place, yet at the same time yearns to occupy a cosmopolitan sensibility that is removed from local attachments, to exercise a form of "hybrid cultural agency" which consists in "physical freedom from being tied to the earth" (Cheah, "Given Culture" 301). This oscillation is revealed through Cartwright's constant movement across land and seascapes and his consistent efforts to gain a vantage point which is situated above, rather than embedded in, the landscapes he travels through. A moment late in the novel exemplifies these efforts. Directly after Mrs. Selby—Cartwright's mistress and housekeeper—has given birth to another man's child, Cartwright walks to the top of Lookout Hill, the highest point in his Labrador settlement. He observes, on the "face of the frozen sea, a single dark vein of water" that meanders "as far east as he could see, parting the ice. Toward the horizon it was a sparkling thread of light" (262). This brief moment typifies the contradictions Cartwright occupies in both life and death. His vantage on Lookout Hill offers him a fleeting visual mastery over the landscape, but his perspective nevertheless remains oriented eastward, fixed on a horizon that reaches toward the light of England (262). Cartwright appears to desire an experience of the land below him which is unclouded by local or nationalist attachments. However, his experience remains couched in the language of the material—specifically in the terms of commodity exchange. The water which flows toward the horizon indicates the breakup of winter sea ice and the renewal of trade relations with other points around the Atlantic. Near the shore, the water is corporeal: the sea is a frozen "face" upon which meanders a single "vein" of water. As the spring melt flows onward toward Europe it turns into a "thread" of light, evoking the textiles which flow back and forth between Europe, Africa, and the New World through triangular trade routes. Even as Cartwright grasps for a form of epistemological mastery, the language through which his struggle is represented suggests that this knowledge is always constituted by an inherently violent system of commodity exchange. This contradiction recurs consistently throughout *Afterlife* and reaches its full force in the novel's

conclusion, when Cartwright is released from his purgatory and flies *over* the Atlantic before achieving an ecstatic second death at the hands of a polar bear.

While Steffler's Cartwright is born into a landed family, the fact that he is a second son means that his position within his family, and the aristocracy as a whole, is tenuous. This was also true of the historical Cartwright. In the preface to his 1792 journals, the historical Cartwright writes of his childhood, "Not being the eldest son, and my father having but a moderate estate and nine other children, it was not in his power to do much for me" (iv). Goldman's analysis of *Afterlife* reveals how Cartwright was denied access to his family's wealth by the English law of primogeniture, which sought to preserve Old World aristocratic land bases by decreeing that only first sons could inherit land. Eighteenth-century political theorists characterized the law as "both uncanny and *unnatural* because it create[d] a painful and arbitrary distinction where none existed before" (Goldman 69). Primogeniture created excess, in that it required second and later sons to find occupations beyond aristocratic families' land bases in England. Imperialism—in its commercial and military forms—provided a productive outlet for the surplus human capital that primogeniture created. Baucom discusses the emergence, in the late-eighteenth century, of "a new social person no longer 'anchored in the land' but attached instead to a series of negotiable promises, calculations, and speculations; a person no longer readable through reference to a table of inherited status but only as legible as the entire complex system itself" (66). As Baucom argues, by the end of the eighteenth century, the economically constitutive principles of land and inheritance had been displaced by a system of credit, debt, and mobility. An interconnected network of transatlantic shipping ports, which trafficked in slaves, goods, and gold, formed the central nodes in this system. The dispossessed son was the ideal "type" for this kind of network because, due to British laws of inheritance, he did not have a historical claim to the now-archaic system of landed capital (66).

In *Afterlife*, Cartwright's father encourages him to embark on a career in the military. He initially embraces the new social personality that emergent forms of law, credit, and trade have funnelled him into, and approaches his first deployment to India in 1754 through the lens of "romantic nationalism" (Goldman 74), viewing the subcontinent as the "door by which [he] would come into wealth and honour and discover [his] character as a man" (Steffler 23). When he first sees the East Indiaman *Dodington*, which will transport him and his fellow recruits to Madras, Cartwright admires the ship's "superb

spirit" and her ability to rise above the "foul harbour water in which she was moored" (26). He is "eager to get to sea where such ships and such men as himself belonged" (26). Once at sea, however, Cartwright and his peers experience the extreme physical and ontological violence inherent not only to a six-month sea voyage, but to speculative finance and cosmopolitanism as well. The voyage to Madras is depicted as one where subjects of every kind are stripped of their territorial attachments and reformed as general types to be used in service of capital. For instance, Cartwright sees black slaves in Rio, chained up for transport, and is "mesmerized by their naked pliable-looking limbs, their amazing apathy. It was as though their souls had flown out of their captured bodies. . . . Bodies awaiting the will of their new owners" (32). This passage implies that spectral subjects are the natural and necessary result of an Atlantic voyage. Both the slaves and the blank-eyed convicts and paupers who make up the recruits onboard the *Dodington* are dehumanized by the ocean passage. As the *Dodington* approaches the African Cape, passengers and crew begin to die in large numbers, and are "dropped in the sea in their clothes" (35). Ultimately the ship itself becomes a phantom: it sails on "in a kind of delirium" (35) and enters the harbour at Bahia resembling a "ghost ship" (32). At the same time, the journey prepares Cartwright and his peers to participate in transnational forms of trade and imperialism. After several months, Cartwright reaches a "kind of equilibrium, brown, skinny, pleased with himself in spite of his weariness, as though he could sail on forever" (35). His ability to survive the voyage, as well as his changed physical experience, implies that Cartwright is now more at home at sea than on land.

While the passage to India constitutes a process wherein individual subjectivities are broken down and remade, it also permanently changes Cartwright's relationship to British space. While at sea, he is "stunned by the size of the earth" and comes to doubt "his memories of the land" (31). Water invades every mental image he carries with him of life at home: the hills above his family estate at Marnham are "merely painted on silk, a thin layer swaying over bottomless depths" (31). This "vision of the English countryside painted on imported cloth" not only "indicates an ambivalence, an uncertainty as to the source of" colonial authority, as Kathleen McConnell has argued (94); it also points to the ways in which English space can no longer be experienced as purely autonomous. The hills above Marnham no longer represent a rooted form of identity for Cartwright. Instead they are composed of a commodity object thinly layered over a body of water.

Cartwright's altered memories of his family's estate convey how imperialism irrevocably draws national spaces into interdependent relationships with other locales. This connection between national space, land, and textiles is one that Steffler returns to continuously throughout the novel.

Cartwright's sea voyage aboard the *Dodington* marks his separation from a British system of inheritance and his subsequent insertion into a British-dominated global trade network. He enters what Baucom has elsewhere termed a "representational economy of exchange," wherein the value of a commodity is not seen to be inherent in the object, but arises out of a belatedly proven agreement on its value (46). While in India, he briefly tries gambling, and joins the "many officers" who "bought and traded small gems, won them and lost them at cards, hoping through shrewd deals and good fortune to work their holding up to a few fine stones that would make them rich in England" (36). The British army's imperial activities allow individual officers to increase their fortunes at home—and thus subvert the constraints of inheritance laws—by speculating on the value of gems in India. Cartwright does not initially understand this system. He buys a very small diamond, which he is assured is of good quality, although "to him it looked like a piece of salt" (37). He is unable to see that the value of the diamond rests in its capacity for exchange, and not in the object itself. Cartwright stakes his diamond in a card game, but loses it. He repeats this process several times, before tiring of the "huddled showing of prizes, the fussy tension around private trunks and hiding places" (37). Cartwright's gambling ventures in Madras underscore that he has been separated from tangible, land-based forms of exchange and is now caught up in an emergent economy of trade and speculation.

Cartwright's tenure in India does not lead to the personal transformation that he envisioned. In contrast to the mobility and equilibrium that he experiences at sea, India is defined by stasis and confinement. This, the novel implies, is because India, for Cartwright, is already over-determined by imperialist and nationalist politics. Cartwright loathes the way that English mores have been transported to the colony in Madras, and, like the stiff "braid-loaded coat" he is forced to wear outside the army barracks, he finds the circuit of parties and gambling confining and wishes instead to escape into the hills west of Madras to hunt (40). In an experience of stopped time that echoes the stasis of his ghostly English purgatory, he lies on his cot during the hot afternoons and finds that cicadas have the "power to bring time to a standstill, the power even to turn it back" (44). This enduring sense

of confinement also affects Cartwright's experiences of the land. Gazing upon the Madras harbour from a ship as he departs for Ireland, Cartwright observes the "coast spread out gradually, the background hills rising into view, the same sight as when he arrived, but now articulate with names and associations in every feature. And yet aloof. The whole place awhirl with its own affairs, its feuds and imperatives. None of it paused to watch him go" (57). For Cartwright, the landscape of the Madras coast is unknowable, revealing a misalignment between the projects of individual self-realization and colonial success.

Cartwright's view of the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador, and, later, his experiences of the land in the emergent colonies, is substantially different. After his first visit to Newfoundland in 1766, the landscape rearranges the "contents of Cartwright's brain" (90); in his view, its stark cliffs and glacial fjords surpass both the hills of Scotland and "India, with its thousands of princes and villages" (91). The Labrador coastline is even freer of political definition to him and, as such, more alluring to Cartwright; it strikes him as "prehistoric . . . the very beginning or the end of things" (110). Labrador represents the same kind of transnational, politically fluid space as the ocean. In fact, the Labradorian landscape is consistently described as an extension of the ocean. During his first winter in Labrador, Cartwright thinks of his cabin on the Charles River as a "ship, and the land and everything else open sea" (137). He seals cracks in the walls the way a "shipwright would caulk a hull," and marvels at Attuiock and his family as "people with gills who could live under water" (137). After their first winter in Labrador, Cartwright feels "as though he and his people were the ones who'd been on the ship, traveling for almost eight months, and had just now come ashore" (173). In viewing the land as a politically fluid, oceanic space, Cartwright ignores the local attachments and political inflections that the land carries for the Inuit people—but he views the land more as an *aqua nullius* than as a *terra nullius,* which, in the world of the novel, places Labrador within the same network that includes other nodes on the Atlantic. This experience of the land-as-sea appeals to Cartwright's newly mobile, cosmopolitan identity. Just as he achieved a kind of "equilibrium" aboard the *Dodington* (35), he enjoys the "juggling act" of making it through the harsh Labrador winters "like a sport," and feels that "those who came to Labrador and lacked this skill didn't deserve to survive" (245).

While the fluidity that Cartwright perceives in the Labradorian landscape allow him to develop a cosmopolitan sensibility, the language used to

describe his experiences on the land underscores how the territory is being drawn into networks of transnational trade. This process of entanglement is exemplified when Cartwright goes hunting after his first winter in Labrador. Luxuriating in the fecund, springtime landscape, Cartwright watches as the air "rippled quick rivers across the top of the land. Water and hills, water and hills, rising in tiers. Mirage. It was like being at sea again. The weave in the cloth of his trousers was the same, the thread-hairs gleaming prismatically, the pores and beaded seams in his hands" (178). Cartwright's experience of the land as distinctly aqueous speaks to the way in which its fluidity appeals to him and allows him to move through it with ease, in contrast to the confinement he has felt in previous, politically overdetermined spaces. But the fact that the plateau also resembles the "weave in the cloth of his trousers" recalls the connection between textile and landscape introduced during his voyage aboard the *Dodington*. On the one hand, the land is an extension of the ocean. On the other, it resembles a textile, and so is drawn into a metaphorical language of commodity exchange. This speaks to the literal ways in which Cartwright is, at this point in the novel, bringing both the Inuit people he trades with and their land into transatlantic trade networks. In order to pay their debts, during his first winter in Labrador, Cartwright's business partner Francis Lucas uses their ship to transport fish to Portugal, and wine and cloth to the Caribbean, before returning to Labrador with sugar and rum (123). The passage referenced above emphasizes that Cartwright's ecstatic experiences of the land in Labrador are, in fact, underpinned by triangular trade.

Despite his initial success in Labrador, Steffler's Cartwright proves unable to escape nation-state politics and is ultimately defeated by an emergent form of American power, which, the novel suggests, is both viable and reproducible, in contrast to declining British power. Steffler illustrates this at the level of both plot and metaphor by representing Cartwright's financial ruin at the hands of American privateers,[4] and by depicting Mrs. Selby as a symbol of American republicanism. Cartwright is initially drawn to Mrs. Selby because, like him, she wishes to cut ties with England. However, unlike Cartwright, Mrs. Selby is even less invested in systems of landed capital and seeks to escape the predetermined roles that English society has laid out for her. "A woman is either married or a governess or a burdensome spinster," she tells him (104). When Cartwright looks into her eyes, he sees "something as plain as water around rocks at the edge of a lake. Something sufficient in itself with which he could do nothing" (10). Perhaps due to

her lack of investment in the British system, Mrs. Selby takes to commerce in Labrador even more readily than Cartwright does; he discovers that she is highly effective at trading with the Inuit people and succeeds in multiplying her earnings several times (177). Mrs. Selby begins to echo the ideals of American republicanism when she urges Cartwright to cut "ties with England, with investors and estates" (191). Later, her growing, pregnant body is explicitly linked to the nascent American republic. Her pregnancy falls directly after the privateers' invasion, and Cartwright views the two events as intimately connected: "She was business, fortune, family, estate, all in herself, all in her swelling middle. Her self-containment annoyed him; what she was harbouring filled him with dread. It was another defeat for him, another loss added to all his losses, his debts, his entrapments and obligations." (259). Mrs. Selby embodies, in her "swelling middle," the ideals of the American Revolution, which was premised foremost on the extinguishment of aristocratic privilege. Her pregnant body also represents, for Cartwright, a more personal defeat, since he soon learns that the child is not his, but belongs to Daubeny, his headman. While this first child does not survive, Cartwright learns, after his return to England, that Mrs. Selby and Daubeny have returned to America and had two more children together (276). In contrast, Mrs. Selby and Cartwright have no children together throughout the course of their long affair. This is ostensibly due to Cartwright's use of a sheath, which Steffler describes in comically elaborate detail (160), but it also suggests that Cartwright is incapable of continuing his family line. Mrs. Selby's character, which embodies a certain form of republican nationalism premised on speculation that can effectively be reproduced, implies both the potential impotence of British aristocratic feudalism and the viability of the American state as a political project. As such, the novel does not dispense with the idea of nationalism entirely. However, the events of the novel's conclusion, as well as Cartwright's experiences as a ghost, suggest that nationalist conceptions of territoriality are always underpinned by outside forces.

Along with the rise of American power, the novel implies that what leads to Cartwright's defeat in Labrador is his unwillingness to completely cut ties with a British system of landed capital premised on family inheritance. In essence, while he tries to take on a cosmopolitan identity in the fluid, transnational space of the Labradorian landscape, he remains tied to his family estate. Writing in his journal as a ghost, he reflects: "In a way my life was a continuous effort to earn the estate at Marnham and restore the old

family" (71). At the same time, the British authority he relies on is shown to be largely impotent in the latter half of the novel. This is demonstrated by two scenes wherein Cartwright puts on a military uniform only to discover that instead of transmitting an image of authority, it conveys only its opposite. When he court-martials Daubeny and Mrs. Selby after discovering their affair, he dons an old soldier's coat, a wig, and boots. As Renée Hulan proposes in her afterword to the novel, Cartwright's "shabbiness [in this scene] gives the proceedings a ridiculous, makeshift air and emphasizes its futility," while the "defiance of the lovers demonstrates the ironic impotence of British custom and law" in Labrador (292). After his return to England, having lost his claim to military and imperial forms of power, Cartwright joins the Nottinghamshire militia, and begins to *perform* British authority rather than really inhabit it. "I became almost florid, almost theatrical, with my uniform and my fine voice," he recalls (276). And yet he also understands that this performance carries nothing underneath it; that British authority has decayed and is now premised on the fiction of its own existence. "I was a piece of human regalia, a mascot, a ceremonial mace" (276). When contrasted to the emergent form of American power symbolized by Mrs. Selby, the empty form of British authority that Cartwright embodies demonstrates that *Afterlife* surpasses Britain's imperial century by foreshadowing the American global dominance that would coalesce in the years following World War I and reach its apex in the 1990s. In this sense, then, the novel depicts what Baucom describes as the "long twentieth century" (22), wherein the late-twentieth century repeats the late-eighteenth.

This historical time lag, wherein American hegemony of the late-twentieth century bypasses the British authority of the nineteenth, is repeated in Cartwright's afterlife. In the novel, Cartwright's unwillingness to fully detach himself from his landed British roots results in his being confined to a static, hyperlocalized present. The landscape through which Cartwright hunts is "fragrant, dizzy with bees," and redolent with sparrows splashing in "puddled wagon tracks," surrounded by endless empty pastures replete with game (1). This is an afterlife that Cartwright finds relentlessly boring, primarily because it is characterized by unchanging weather, which is "forever perfect, at the peak of May" (72). Cartwright's fictional journal entries from Labrador note the variability of the weather there—"N.W. moderate" (164), "S.E. strong" (165)—while the monotony of his afterlife is marked by the same date and conditions in each entry: "1819. May. Wednesday 19. Wind S.W. Light" (23). Cartwright misses weather primarily because it signifies

change and movement. "It's the language of the past that speaks directly to our minds without our even knowing it," he writes, "it's a traveller, more familiar than any uncle, any brother or friend. It's always gathering as it goes. Always eager to leave, to see something beyond, to have an effect" (72). Weather, in short, conforms to Cartwright's best idea of himself: it is closer to him than kin, and it represents his lifelong desire to explore, to be uprooted, to see new locales. The lack of weather he experiences in his afterlife more closely resembles the hot, static afternoons he experienced in Madras (44) than the "the air bursting with nerves, the ocean above, all that has ever lived condensed in a wind" which distinguished the weather in Labrador and which Cartwright comes to crave as a ghost (72).

At the same time, Cartwright's ghostly experiences of the English countryside solidify the connections between land, sea, and textile that are present during his lifetime travels in a more attenuated form. While he is confined to a stylized and uncanny version of the local, Cartwright experiences this local, quintessentially English space as dependent on the same trade networks that encompassed Madras, Minorca, and Rio. While the forest and fields of his purgatory are superficially perfect, the landscape also appears hostile. The pastures before him have an "annoying emptiness, a posed neutrality, like camouflage, like the backs of hands concealing a face" (94). This anthropomorphized scenery recalls the "aloof" hills of Madras (57) and Labrador's coast, which reminds Cartwright of "creatures huddled and hiding their faces" (110). This is a profoundly different experience of the English landscape than, for example, that described by Susanna Moodie when she laments having to leave England just as "the glory of May was upon the earth" with woods "bursting into leaf" and "every grove and copsewood echoed to the warblings of birds and the humming of bees" (48). The "posed neutrality" of the landscape is also occasionally shown to be concealing overtly sinister forces of industrialization. Cartwright sees "black plumes" of smoke from "coal mines, cloth mills, [and] breweries" (20) in the skies above the pastures where he hunts. These "glimpsed billows and skeins often seem to detach themselves from their settings and come after him" and transform into "faces of shapeless banshee women, black rags streaming" (20), which echo Cartwright's sea-voyage recollection of the "hills above Marnham" being merely "painted on silk, a thin layer swaying over bottomless depths" (31). Whereas the latter image, of painted silks, implies that British space is not entirely autonomous, the former, of billows of smoke that turn into streaming black rags, exemplifies the way in which British space

has become degraded within the isolated contemporary moment in which Cartwright now operates.

While Cartwright's afterlife contains occasional ruptures that reveal the pastoral landscape's degradation at the hands of global industrialisation, it also contains the seeds of an ethical stance to history. In short, *Afterlife* shows an investment in series of oceanic images that connect Cartwright's purgatory to a counter-discourse of cosmopolitanism, which recognizes the Atlantic as the "alluvial bed of modernity" (Baucom 318). Steffler draws on this metaphoric Atlantic economy when depicting the surfacing of the repressed memory of the novel's central traumatic event. In 1773, the historical Cartwright took an Inuit family to England.[5] They each caught smallpox, and the only survivor was a woman named Caubvik. In *Afterlife*, Caubvik returns to Labrador with Cartwright and spreads the illness to her community, to catastrophic effect. Cartwright believes the source of this illness to be Caubvik's "pestilent hair," which he tries to throw into the sea on their return voyage (20). As a ghost, Cartwright dreams of this event in language that resonates with Baucom's interested, Atlantic form of cosmopolitanism, an ethico-political posture that links a "global philosophy of temporal accumulation" to distinct images: the "image of the slave ship" and the "image of the drowning slave" (321). The language used to describe Cartwright's vision of Caubvik appears to reference such images. Fearing that he has condemned Caubvik to a "watery jail," Cartwright pictures her "confronting him, under water, in a blackish green light, her hair longer than ever, floating out from her colourless face, her grin already devouring him before they had touched. Her hands, broken, her fingers lopped off and bleeding as she reached for him" (170). Caubvik's condemnation to a "watery jail" echoes several other postcolonial texts that draw on the Atlantic as a source of trauma and metaphor, including the "black space" of the undersea ship's cabin found in J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (156), as well as Lawrence Hill's *The Book of Negroes* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Instead of being a "Canadian settler ghost," as Sugars contends he is (712), Cartwright is rather an Atlantic cosmopolitan ghost, who is himself haunted by the specters of slavery and Indigenous dispossession. In this moment, then, the text gestures to the ways in which the Inuit people have also been drawn into and affected by Atlantic modernity.

The novel displays the connection between transatlantic trade, violence, and national space by drawing on an Atlantic language of historical trauma. Ultimately, however, *Afterlife* affirms a different kind of speculative

cosmopolitanism by relieving Cartwright from his purgatory in bounded territoriality. This is shown through Cartwright's power of vision, which grows stronger and stronger as the novel progresses. As a ghost, Cartwright is a kind of animal-human hybrid, and is able to occupy his hawk's body and fly above the English landscape where he hunts. For most of his afterlife, his vision is confined to Nottinghamshire (10), which fits in with his imprisonment within local space. Eventually, as he continues to reflect on his life, he is able to see more of the English countryside—"Crewe, Chester, the Cambrian mountains"—and beyond, to the Atlantic and the spruce forests of Newfoundland (95). Finally, at the end of the novel, he rises up into the sky and flies over the Atlantic, back to Labrador.

While the novel's final scene, wherein Cartwright dies, again, after being eaten by a polar bear, has been the focus of much critical attention,[6] the means by which Cartwright arrives at this second death is equally significant. His passage across the Atlantic finally affords him the power of vision that he has been longing for throughout the course of his life and death:

> To the west are the Gannet Islands, the black humps of Labrador. He has never seen them like this before. Sandwich Bay and the Lookout are right below him, Maria's grave, the small cairn just as they'd left it, the roof of Caribou Castle . . . across the bay the mouth of the Eagle River opens and he glides up its valley, strangely, without Thoroton now, the river passing like a black silk scarf shot with white thread. (285)

From his vantage point high above the land, Cartwright is afforded a panoptic vision of England, the Atlantic, and Labrador that surpasses even the ecstatic encounters he had with the land while alive. Importantly, however, the way he experiences this vision recalls his prior experiences that underscored the land's interconnection with other places and forces. The river which passes below him "like a black silk scarf shot with white thread" echoes the multiple connections throughout the novel between land and textiles, compromising the purity of this disinterested power of vision. McConnell argues that here Cartwright is still "trying to impose a technological order on the wilderness," but that in the death scene which follows he finally stops "trying to fill the wilderness with reason" and achieves a genuine form of release (107). However, this moment is also highly constructed. Cartwright is not so much devoured as painted *out* of the scene, as the bear that eats him paints "the river, the glittering trees in" (286). So even as the novel struggles towards a disinterested view-from-without, it consistently undercuts this and shows it to be a fantasy. The fantasy of a cosmopolitanism that is distinct

from economic ties and national attachments, the experience of a pure deracination, the novel implies, will always remain exactly that.

To return to the preoccupations that opened this paper: what, then, are the wider methodological implications of reading Steffler's novel transnationally? Tracking Cartwright's travel, his desire for a deracinated experience of land, and, finally, the novel's ultimate refusal to give in to such a desire, reorients the Labradorian (and, by extension, Canadian) landscape in Steffler's novel and Cartwright's position within it. Contrary to Northrop Frye's famous assertion that Canada has no "Atlantic seaboard" and is thus divorced from the "English-speaking community of the North Atlantic that had London and Edinburgh on one side of it and Boston and Philadelphia on the other" (219), Steffler's novel shows how the national imaginary—and the literary landscapes found within it—is implicated in transatlantic networks of trade, capital, and speculation. Just as the "Cotton to Gold" exhibit referenced at the start of this essay unwittingly made plain the ways in which Turner's seascapes are implicated in Atlantic histories of speculation and dispossession, Steffler's novel shows the ways that the historical Cartwright's journals are unavoidably situated in those same networks. Cartwright's experience of an enduring present and its foreshadowing of American hegemony at the end of the eighteenth century underscores how these networks continue to shape contemporary discourses of cosmopolitanism. These anxieties can be contextualized in terms of *Afterlife*'s publication in 1992, in the midst of national debates about the North American Free Trade Agreement (which was ratified in 1994) and Canadian sovereignty in the face of American cultural and economic dominance. In this sense, Cartwright's final flight across the Atlantic is expressive of a desire for a cosmopolitan future in which, as Jonathan Rée puts it, "people could interpret themselves without any reference to the idea that their nation is their self" (88), and a concomitant awareness of Atlantic modernity's enduring networks and attachments. As the novel's final image suggests, if the fantasy of such detachment persists throughout the long twentieth century, so too do its underlying structures of speculative violence.

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NOTES

1 I use the first-person plural pronoun because I approach this text as a settler, as do many of the critics I cite here. For more on *Afterlife*'s intended readership, see Sugars (714).

2 This framing of Steffler's text in Canadian nationalist terms has also largely influenced whether critics condemn or celebrate it. Joan Strong argues that Steffler inserts a critical voice within his fictional depiction of Cartwright's journals in the form of Mrs. Selby and thus places the reader too easily outside the difficult questions of "locating the colonizer-creature within ourselves" (113). Herb Wyile also finds the novel troublesome, concluding that it "inscribes the desire to reverse history, to paint the colonizer out of the scene both literally as well as figuratively" (186).

3 Marlene Goldman addresses the legacy of slavery in Steffler's novel, and argues that the figure of the "slave plagues Cartwright's imagination and Steffler's text as a whole" (75). My analysis departs from hers, however, in asserting that Steffler's text investigates how specific forms of knowledge legitimized both cosmopolitanism and slavery.

4 In 1778, during the American Revolution, privateers from Boston raided the Sandwich Bay settlement and stole 14,000 pounds worth of goods. While this was a devastating loss for Cartwright, it did not ruin him financially, since he returned to Labrador several more times before retiring permanently in 1788 (see Kennedy 88-93). However, in Steffler's novel, the American raid effectively ends Cartwright's operation, suggesting that this event carries more symbolic weight for *Afterlife* than it did historically.

5 As one reviewer of this essay pointed out, Cartwright brings Attuiock's family with him to use them as leverage with the Board of Trade in London; he anticipates that the "attention he'd win with the Inuit's company would make him the leading figure in Labrador trade" (194).

6 Some critics, such as Robert Stacey, critique this scene for being historically revisionist (723), while others, like Sugars, focus on its more stylized aspects to demonstrate why it is an example of colonial ambivalence (715).

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