THE CONTOURS OF AMERICA:
LATIN AMERICA AND THE BORDERS OF MODERNIST LITERATURE
IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

ARAM SHEPHERD: The Contours of America: Latin America and the Borders of Modernist Literature in the United States
(Under the direction of María DeGuzmán)

This study examines how modernist authors in the 1920s and early 1930s used representations of Latin America to support constructions of “America” and U.S. national space. Following the Spanish-American War of 1898, the United States emerged as a global power on the world stage. This era saw improving communication technologies and transportation, increasing international connections between artists, and a shift in the dominant form of imperialism as the age of U.S. territorial expansion came to an end. I examine the work of authors Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, John Dos Passos, and José Juan Tablada in responding to these rapid transformations. Although writing from a variety of locations and for a variety of purposes, each at crucial moments in their texts relies on images of Latin American peoples, nations, and cultures to consider the place of the United States as a nation and their own artistic production in an increasingly interconnected world. Reading these authors in a transnational perspective while situating them in a specific historical context shows how national space and borders were imagined in ways that increasingly recognized transnational possibilities even as they sought to limit the influence of such cultural connections.

The project is structured around four geographical foci: Europe, the Southwest, Mexico, and New York. I use Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* to consider how the
idea of South America and the U.S. frontier helps to structure European expatriate geography. I then analyze how Cather’s engagement with the Southwest shows the desire to incorporate elements of Mexican culture to invigorate U.S. national culture while simultaneously excluding a living transnational presence within U.S. borders. I follow by connecting Dos Passos’s Latin American experiences and his anti-imperialism to a retreat to frontier nostalgia in the U.S.A. trilogy. Porter’s engagement with Mexico reveals complex cultural circulations between the United States and Mexico that form the international context of the development of Mexican national culture in the post-Revolutionary period. Finally, I explore Mexican poet Tablada’s New York writing as it extends connections across borders in an attempt to represent Mexico to readers in the United States and the United States to audiences in Mexico.
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In the second chapter of Ernest Hemingway’s classic modernist novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), one expatriate writer from the United States living in Paris, Robert Cohn, asks another, Jake Barnes, to accompany him on a trip to South America. The conversation, which continues for several pages as Robert entreats and Jake demurs, brings Latin America into the circulation of places associated with modernism.\(^1\) Although the appearance of Latin America in the novel is brief and the characters do not take the proposed trip, this moment suggests that a geographic imagination stretching beyond the dominant modernist New York-Paris-London axis figured, if not prominently, significantly in the works of U.S. writers of the 1920s and 1930s. Representations of Latin America appear at key moments during this period in the works of expatriate writers living in cosmopolitan European cities, as Hemingway was when he wrote *The Sun Also Rises*, and in the works of writers primarily based in the United States. Other modernist writers of this period went to Latin America, some for short visits and others

\(^1\) I define Latin America to include Mexico, the nations of Central and South America, and the Caribbean. This broad definition follows the most common usage in the United States during the period I am studying and suggests the ways the countries to the south of the United States were linked from the perspective of the dominant culture in the United States, particularly through the lens of the Monroe Doctrine’s claims of U.S. hemispheric privilege.
for longer stays. At the same time, Latin American writers working and publishing in the United States negotiated this same field of representation in depicting Latin American people, cultures, and nations for audiences in the United States. This study examines modernist writers in each of these positions to consider the ways representations of Latin America in the literature of the period contributed to reconfiguring the borders of national identity and culture at the time the U.S. was ending its era of territorial expansion and establishing itself as a global power.

Since the late 1990s, literary scholars have been exploring new approaches to the subject of U.S. literature and culture within the framework of transnational or border studies, which situates U.S. culture in a context that extends beyond the nation’s borders. 2 This much-needed perspective has challenged the national orientation of previous American Studies scholarship that focused on America as the United States and the United States as a delimited area of study. The transnational turn has yielded impressive and exciting scholarship that reveals previously unnoticed interconnections and flows of peoples, ideas, and cultural artifacts across, around, and under national boundaries. Among the most important developments has been, as Amy Kaplan has written, “to redress the conceptual limits of the frontier, by displacing it with the site of ‘the borderlands’” (16). While the frontier has continued to play a significant role in the U.S.

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2 The expansion of American Studies has been led by the work of scholars such as Ramon Saldívar, Gloria Anzaldúa, Kristin Silva Gruez, Amy Kaplan, John Carlos Rowe, and Doris Sommer. The influence of a transnational perspective has been a subject of much discussion within the American Studies Association as suggested by the number of recent presidential addresses at the association’s annual conference that have addressed the subject: in 1998, Janice Radway’s address “What’s in a Name?”; in 2003, Amy Kaplan’s “Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today”; in 2004, Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies”; and in 2007, Emory Elliott’s “Diversity in the United States and Abroad: What Does It Mean When American Studies Is Transnational?”
imagination and has been central to much scholarship on U.S. literature, to see border scholarship, which emerged in the 1980s and gained prominence in the 1990s, as displacing the frontier overlooks the ways in which modernism itself sought to challenge the place of the frontier in the U.S. imagination. The project of transnational scholarship, as it seeks to replace definitions of culture delimited by national boundaries, shares with modernist writers of the 1920s a rejection of the perceived provincialism of the United States. Modernist writers, like theorists of the borderland, saw the frontier mythology as exhausted or stifling. This is not to suggest that modernist writers engaged in the same critical examination of the frontier as contemporary critics have undertaken. Rather, this connection points to ways transnational scholarship’s interest in looking beyond borders has led it to overlook the way borders were created and maintained in the modernist period.

Whereas today the project of transnational scholarship is most often concerned with the ways borders are destabilized, writers in the 1920s were responding to increasing global interconnections across continents by creating or reformulating the borders of both national space and U.S. identity. U.S. modernist writers produced a range of responses to changes in the role of the frontier, including rejection of frontier mythology, replication of the frontier in different locations, and nostalgic mourning for its loss. In reconsidering the frontier, these writers were deeply concerned with issues central to transnational studies, such as mapping and remapping, borders, border crossing, and interconnectivity. The differing responses of modernist writers to the exhaustion of the frontier mythology are linked by a shared reconsideration of the national identity of the United States reflecting a devaluation of Manifest Destiny and territorial expansionism as structuring
elements of U.S. identity. I argue that the idea of the border as an essential element in the representation of the U.S. as a nation emerges in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the works of modernist authors in this period the evolving reactions to an increasingly interconnected world produce a desire to invigorate culture while trying to both expand and contain, to incorporate and exclude, to bring together and hold distant. Tensions between and within these perspectives are revealed in representations of Latin America. Modernist writers, frequently of the political left, moved away from a mode of U.S. imperialism associated with Manifest Destiny in depicting Latin America. In its place emerged a conception of nation that sustained national identity within the globalization of U.S. artistic production. The new representational structures that support this, while claiming to recognize national cultures and national sovereignty, continued to support the exercise of U.S. imperial power. The readings I put forward in this study show that modernism was not removed from the concerns of imperialism and national identity but rather participated in shifting conceptions of U.S. identity as the U.S. established itself as a global power in the 1920s.

Defining modernism is a notoriously fraught undertaking but generally agreed upon characteristics include the desire to break away from established authority and tradition, a questioning of humanity’s position in the universe, and advances in form and style, particularly experiments with fragmentation. All of these traits are reflected in the negotiation among local, national, and international. One conventional narrative of expatriate modernism, established by modernists themselves, is that artists needed to leave the United States in order to escape what they saw as a provincial country lacking in artistic culture. In this story of modernism, Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein led the way
for the “Lost Generation” of expatriates who went to Europe to live and write. As the
conventional description of modernism explains, expatriate “writers left the United States
because they found the country lacking in a tradition of high culture and indifferent, if not
downright hostile, to artistic achievement. They also believed that a national culture
could never be more than parochial” (Baym 1187). As I will discuss in the coming
chapters, the desire to escape from the parochial was often described in terms explicitly
linked to the frontier and national space, such as Malcolm Cowley’s referring to “the fatal
tradition of the pioneer” (Exile’s Return 94). Moving outside a parochial frame of
reference destabilized the previously accepted U.S. identity and presented authors from
the United States with the issue of what “American” identity could mean as part of an
increasingly interconnected world in which the direct ties of writers, writing, and
publishing to national space were increasingly breaking down.

The expansive geography of U.S. modernists in both their lives and their works
was, I will argue, directly linked to the development of U.S. global power. This is not to
suggest that these authors deliberately or consciously wrote to further U.S. imperialism.
The opposite was more often the case; some, such as Dos Passos and Tablada, wrote
directly against U.S. imperialism. Others such as Porter spoke more generally against
exploitation in Latin America by U.S. commercial interests. Yet these writers were
linked to U.S. imperialism and the global reach of U.S. power through the economics of
writing and publishing, and also by the culture of modernism itself at the level of form
and content. Where anti-imperialism at the turn of the century in the United States was
linked to isolationism and nativism or framed as a choice between a democratic republic
or imperialism, the end of territorial expansionism and the solidification of the national
borders of the continental United States brought together the ideas of nation and empire. In 1900 one prominent member of the Anti-Imperialist League asked, “We have come as a people to the parting of the ways. Which shall it be: Nation or Empire?” (Croker 18). During the 1920s, the question of nation or empire had largely disappeared as a matter of ongoing political debate. The Anti-Imperialist League, for example, disbanded in 1921. Increasingly in the 1920s, the answer to the question of “nation or empire” was “nation and empire.” National identity was maintained by defining and defending national borders while the U.S. simultaneously extended economic and political power beyond those borders. This empire without conquest followed the international movements of capital across sovereign borders and allowed the exercise of political power through indirect or covert means while maintaining the appearance of national sovereignty. In representing Latin America, modernist writers enacted a parallel defense of the nation and cultural expansion. They redefined and solidified the concept of U.S. national identity and national space. While doing this, they extended their cultural reach outside of U.S. national borders through imaging the possibility of cultural resource extraction from outside the United States that did not threaten U.S. national identity.

To consider these issues, each chapter in this study focuses on representations of Latin America and the borders of the United States in relation to specific geographies: Europe in the work of Hemingway, the Southwest in the work of Cather, circulations between the United States and Mexico in the work of Dos Passos, Porter, and Tablada. These varied perspectives and positions, while not exhaustive of writers during the modernist period who engaged Latin America in their fiction, represents broadly encompassing views. They show that the idea of Latin America and the boundaries of
the nation were important not just for writers on the border but even in works not primarily set in Latin America and written by authors not located in physical proximity to the borders of the United States. At the same time, the multiple perspectives allow for the exploration of differences among writers and consideration of different ways in which geographies and borders are represented.

In this study, I focus on a relatively limited time period, examining works written during the 1920s. I also include some works from the 1930s in cases where those texts represent the completion of journeys begun in the 1920s. Dos Passos’s U.S.A. trilogy was published between 1930 and 1938 but had its origins in a trip Dos Passos took to Mexico in 1926. Katherine Anne Porter’s short story “Hacienda,” the last of her Mexican stories, was published in 1932 and republished in a revised, now standard, version in 1934. These exceptions aside, the period of the study is delimited by the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Great Depression. The end of the First World War prompted thinking about nations and internationalism and also allowed increasing civilian travel. At the other end of my study, the Great Depression brought increased attention to domestic concerns and, as the 1930s progressed, attention was directed to the growing threat of war in Europe. Between these two events was the moment of the development of a widespread culture of expatriation and sojourning among writers from the United States.3

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3 Focusing on the 1920s means leaving out later works by the authors in this study that have connections to Latin America. Hemingway is strongly associated with his time in Cuba from 1939-1959 and the novels The Old Man and the Sea and To Have and to Have Not. In 1962, Porter published Ship of Fools, a novel partly based on her experiences in Mexico more than three decades earlier. Dos Passos wrote a nonfiction work on Brazil in 1963. Each of these works is worthy of consideration for the ways it depicts Latin America, but falls outside the specific historical moment on which I focus.
Depicting Latin America

In representing Latin America, the writers included in this study engaged in a process fundamental to the making of culture. Homi Bhabha observes that “The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of ‘otherness’” (17). Such creation of identity through contrast with created otherness has been part of the history of the Americas since the arrival of Europeans. As Edmundo O’Gorman and more recently Walter Mignolo have persuasively argued, the “discovery” of the Americas was constituent to the development of Western modernity. Mignolo observes that Latin America has provided representational basis for the creation of the “ideas” of Europe and the United States that underlie those continents’ place in the world system. As he suggests, Latin America has been particularly fertile ground as a field of representations. Following this idea, Ricardo Salvatore writes of the power of representations in the United States’ relationship with South America, “Toda la experiencia estadounidense en America del Sur... se concibió, organizó y ejecutó a través de representaciones (13). [“The entire U.S. experience in South America … was conceived, organized, and executed by means of representations” (my translation)]. Within this larger historical framework, Latin America and the nations and people that comprise it have been an essential touchstone in the creation of U.S. identity. Ramon Saldívar argues that Anglo-America consistently has used Mexican Americans “as its contrasting personality, idea, and experience” (4). Echoing the same idea more confrontationally, Gloria Anzaldúa has called on those she refers to as “white” U.S. Americans to, “Admit that Mexico is your double, that she exists in the shadow of
this country, that we are irrevocably tied to her. Gringo, accept the doppelganger in your psyche” (108). What Saldivar says of Mexican-Americas, and Anzaldúa of Mexico, applies broadly to the citizens and nations of the Americas. Representations of Latin America haunt the U.S. mind.4

Within the history of the idea of Latin America, the period of the first decades of the twentieth century includes several significant developments. This period saw increased development of economic, political, scholarly, and military intervention with Latin America. Economic interconnection and trade expanded rapidly: “US trade with Latin America grew by 750 percent between 1900 and 1929, direct investments in approximately the same period shot up by 1,200 percent, from $320 million to $5.2 billion” (O’Brien 33). Economic development was accompanied by increased political connections, such as the establishment of the first U.S. embassies in many Latin American countries. Investments and political connections were part of U.S. economic and cultural penetration in Latin America that in many ways replicated Manifest Destiny southward but with the significant difference that the U.S. did not seek territorial conquest and eschewed direct political control and open military intervention in favor of political and economic pressure and covert military intervention.

4The most extensive study of representations of Latin America, Fredrick Pike’s The United States and Latin America (1992), offers excellent coverage of the attitudes held by U.S. Americans toward Latin Americans from the late eighteen century through the 1980s. My work builds on his by focusing more deeply on a specific period and offering extended readings of Latin America in relevant authors’ works. A number of historians of international relations, such as Eldon Kenworthy, Martha Cottam, and James Park have examined the U.S. relationship with Latin America in terms of perception and myth. Cottam for example finds that U.S. policy has been shaped by “double images” of Latin America as “the dependent and the enemy” (11). Kenworthy describes what he calls the “America/Américas myth,” which finds that rather than defining Latin Americans as “Other,” U.S. Americans have seen Latin Americans in terms of similarity and then punished them when they failed to hold to this standard. These works that address the question of representations of Latin America inform my study. They differ from my project, in that they do not turn the gaze back on the United States to address the way images of Latin America shape definitions of U.S. identity.
Accompanying U.S. economic and political development in Latin America, the first decades of the twentieth century saw acceleration and institutionalization of Latin America as a site of knowledge for U.S. examination. As Román de la Campa and others have observed, Latin America Studies has been a discipline established and sustained from within the United States. The formation of the field has its origins at the beginning of the century when the United States’ growing economic connections increased general interest in Latin America. By the 1920s, courses in Latin American history were widely offered in U.S. colleges and universities (Deplar, *Looking* 49). Textbooks on Latin America began to appear. Archeological excavation in Latin America also expanded, such as that of Machu Picchu by Yale scholar Hiram Bingham in the 1910s. The taking of artifacts from Latin America for research in the United States by Bingham and others performed a type of resource extraction that paralleled the exploitation of oil and other natural resources from the region by U.S. businesses. The relationship between resource extraction and cultural extraction appears in various ways in the authors in this study, from the economics of the Hemingway character Jake Barnes’ life in Europe to the appearance of the mineralogist and archeologist William Niven, who was active in the Southwest and Mexico from the 1890s through the 1920s, in a lightly fictionalized version in Porter’s short story “María Concepción.”

As these economic and cultural links suggest, the 1920s was a significant transitional moment when Latin America was increasingly becoming “known” in the United States. Rather than the land to the south of the United States being seen as empty territory or territory occupied by uncivilized peoples, Latin America was the subject of increasing examination and flows of information. The necessities of capitalist business
interests in understanding the geography, natural resources, and culture of Latin America required new structures of knowledge and power. What developed was a representation of Latin America that could account for the material reality and history of the region while maintaining U.S. hegemonic power and U.S. identity as distinct from Latin American.

In its exploration of the ways writers in the U.S. maintained U.S. identity during a period of shifting constructions of the nation, this study can be read as considering different modes of repression of Latin America voices. Following Gayatri Spivak’s theorization of the limiting of subaltern speech and John Beverley’s application of these ideas specifically to Latin America, this study considers the representational structures of knowledge that maintained power and privilege in the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century. My project then is complementary to but distinct from work such as Walter Mignolo’s *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* in which he seeks out localized knowledge and enunciating text acts in Latin America to explore their power within what he terms the “subalternization of knowledge” (12). My project also differs from work such as Kirsten Silva Gruesz’s *Ambassadors of Culture: the Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* in which she explores nineteenth century writers who fostered a hemispheric consciousness and set out oppositional stances to U.S. expansionist rhetoric. Unlike these works, my focus is not on uncovering alternative voices but rather on examining the way power and structures of national identity were maintained when faced with destabilizing transnational forces.
The changing structure of the relationship between the U.S. and Latin America in the 1920s was marked by a change in the common terminology used in the United States to refer to Latin America. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites 1890 as the first appearance of the term “Latin America” in English (in a government trade document). By the 1920s “Latin America” had replaced “Spanish America” as the primary English-language term for territory south of the United States. This change in terminology marked a conceptual shift by creating a single term that encompassed both the former colonies of Spain and non-Spanish speaking countries such as Brazil and Haiti, thereby establishing what in practice functioned as a single identity for all of the Americas other than the U.S. and Canada. Thus, the introduction of the term “Latin America” served to create a binary opposition between the U.S. and the rest of the Americas (with Canada being ignored or implicitly grouped with the US).

Writing on European literature, Fredric Jameson has suggested that modernist aesthetics are directly connected to empire and the perception of national space. He argues that the inability to represent the imperial system stretching beyond the nation is

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5 Columbia professor William R. Shepherd’s work of popular history *Latin America* (1914) suggests that introduction of the term “Latin America” served to link the Americas (other than the U.S and Canada) to a common identity. Shepherd defines Latin America as composed of twenty countries (among them Brazil and Haiti) of which he observes, “Their points of resemblance are greater . . . than their points of difference” (1). The book’s division in sections that treat common subjects (“National Development”; “Industry”) reinforces this perspective by emphasizing the essential commonality of Latin American countries while allowing the author to point to specific differences. Acknowledging difference between Latin American countries only in the context of emphasizing their greater similarities continues to be the standard U.S. approach to the history of Latin America. Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith’s *Modern Latin America*, the basic undergraduate textbook for Latin American Studies, sees Latin America as a region that “resists facile categorization [and is] rich in paradox” (4). In the text, difference and paradox emerge as the traits which come to be the defining features of Latin America. In this way, while the authors address regional difference, it comes to be a difference that serves as the basis for an essential unity that itself enables the existence of Latin America and therefore allows for the production of knowledge within the discourse of Latin American Studies.
reflected in a “mutation in literary and artistic language” that seeks to subsume that which it cannot otherwise contain:

For colonialism means that a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the home country, in colonies over the water whose own life experience and life world—very different from that of the imperial power—remain unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power, whatever social class they may belong to. Such spatial disjunction has as its immediate consequence the inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole. (51)

This passage usefully suggests a link between modernist aesthetics and imperialism.

European imperialism, specifically the British colonialism to which Jameson’s words refer, differs significantly from U.S. imperialism of the 1920s. Rather than being “over the water,” U.S. imperialism was immediately approximate in the case of Mexico and only 100 miles from Cuba. Rather than being “unknowable,” the United States and its sphere of empire in the Americas shared increasingly close links that included rapidly expanding production of knowledge about Latin America.

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6 The essays in Modernism and Empire, in spite of the broad scope suggested by its title, provides another example of the tendency in modernist studies to consider empire in a European context (Nigel Rigby and Howard J. Booth. Eds. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000).

7 James William Park has shown that the 1920s saw “an expanding flow of information on the region that was of better quality, more evenhanded, and more reflective of the Latin American point of view” (100). The increasing presence of Latin American views within the United States, although still limited and hardly incorporating perspectives representative of the diversity of the region, nonetheless made Latin America more prominent in the U.S. culture.
Improved communication allowed greater and faster distribution of information to locations outside of U.S. national space. As Anthony L. Geist and José B. Monléon observe in the introduction to their 1999 collection *Modernism and its Margins*, “Given the invention of new communication technologies and the increasing globalization of capital following World War I, the avant-garde movements appeared simultaneously in the margins and the center. No longer can one speak of culture ‘arriving late’ to the far-flung removes of the empire” (xxx). The new communication technology allowed modernism to be the first artistic movement that occurred across continents with near simultaneity. Writers in Mexico City, New York, and Paris could read each other’s works and respond to them in a time frame that had not been possible a generation earlier. In this sense, the 1920s saw not only a change in the relationship between center and periphery but a change in the relationship between metropoles. American expatriates in Mexico City or Paris could still be in near constant contact with fellow writers in New York, Mexico City, and Paris. Dos Passos traveling in Mexico in 1926 (when he was in the initial stages of developing what would become the *U.S.A.* trilogy) was able to correspond with Hemingway, who was in Paris, about Hemingway’s recently published novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. While writers in different locations were embedded in distinct cultural, economic, and political circumstances, they could increasingly be engaged in ongoing cultural exchange.

These new communication technologies meant that for writers like Hemingway and Dos Passos, being outside the United States did not mean being removed from U.S. art and culture. Both writers considered themselves Americans (that is, U.S. Americans) and both consciously worked in the literary tradition of the United States, yet this was
increasingly possible to do from outside of U.S. national space. Writers were not only able to be in contact with each other; improvements in travel and communication allowed sojourning and expatriate artists to maintain connections to national culture in ways that were not previously possible. After the First World War, the ability to read news from the United States, presented from the perspective of U.S. journalists, increasingly extended across national borders. By the 1910s, rapidly improving telegraphic cable and wireless technology meant global simultaneous communication was widely available. In the 1920s, wireless technology allowed even travelers at sea to receive daily newspapers.\(^8\)

Recently published books were increasingly available shortly after their publication in New York. In Dos Passos’s *The 42\(^{nd}\) Parallel*, Mac, living in Mexico City, does a brisk business selling international publications to the foreign community. Journalists like Hemingway (and the character of Jack Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises*) could live in Europe but write articles that appeared in domestic newspapers. The potential to separate national culture from national space led to a reconsideration of the nation and, as I will argue, a reconceptualization of U.S. national identity.

**Modernism, Transnational, and Internationalism**

The interrelations between nation, the international, and the transnational form a central part of this project. Understanding modernism in the transnational context of the early twentieth century presents several problems of terminology. In particular a distinction needs to be made between internationalism, a term that has long been associated with modernism, and transnationalism, which has only in the last decade

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become part of the critical discourse on modernism. Contemporary use of
internationalism and transnationalism varies but generally transnationalism refers to
connections between peoples and cultures that deny the primacy of nations or otherwise
contest and destabilize national borders. Internationalism, in contrast, refers to
connections between people, cultures, or institutions that stretch beyond the national
borders but acknowledge or affirm the centrality of the national to law, identity, and
culture. Contemporary scholars have shown that transnationalism and internationalism in
the period I am studying cannot be easily separated. As Daniel Laqua has written, in the
inter-war period “internationalism often relied on transnational structures and movements
– and that, in turn, transnational action was driven by particular understandings of
internationalism” (xii). Yet such precise descriptions that draw clear distinctions between
the transnational and international even as they show the interworking of the two
concepts, tend to mask a general uncertainty about emerging global connections that
existed in the 1920s. During this period the terminology related to internationalism and
transnationalism was in flux and contested.

The struggle of defining the place of the United States in an increasingly
interconnected world in which U.S. power and culture spread outside the nation can be
seen in issues of terminology. During the 1910s and 1920s, supporters of the League of
Nations, Communists, capitalist corporations, and organized labor all staked claims to
internationalism. Significantly, the term “transnational” first came into use in the United
States in 1916, in an article by Randolph Bourne, a leading intellectual whose essays
attacked genteel culture and protested against the First World War. In the piece, “Trans-
national America,” Bourne argues for pluralistic nationalism to replace metaphors of “the
melting pot.” Bourne’s transnationalism sought to reject both progressive arguments for assimilation and the nativism he saw threatening the vibrancy of the United States. The community Bourne advocates embraces national difference yet through a sense of fraternity preserves a core cultural unity in the nation. Bourne’s “transnationalism” can perhaps best be described as a type of culturally inclusive nationalism opposed to the xenophobia of patriotic nationalism. While his focus on the national identity and domestic culture of the United States distinguishes Bourne’s “transnational” from the current use of the term, his transnationalism, grounded in the idea of the nation, simultaneously seeks to extend the nation beyond the nation. This definition leads to the paradoxical terminology in the essay, through which he tries to reconcile the national and the international: “international nation” (95) and “cosmopolitan America” (97). Bourne’s early twentieth-century transnationalism attempts to stage a preliminary working out of the tensions between globally expanding culture and the nation, tensions which appear in various forms in the works I will examine.

As Bourne exemplifies in his use of “cosmopolitan America” and “cosmopolitan spirit” (95), cosmopolitanism was frequently used in the modernist period to consider the relationship of the individual to global culture. Cosmopolitanism, an important subject in literary studies generally, has had particular prominence in studies of modernism. Among these, Tom Lutz’s argument that incompleteness functions as an anti-parochial strategy in U.S. regionalist fiction is particularly relevant. I will argue in a reading of Cather’s representations of Mexico that Lutz overlooks the way that incompleteness in the United States is maintained through creating a bordered national space that separates the United States from Latin America. Other important studies include the work of
Rebecca Walkowitz’s *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* argues for replacing the concept of “international modernism” with a “critical cosmopolitanism.” My project follows hers in a desire to reconsider terms such as “international modernism” and an understanding that “modernist writers troubled the distinction between local and global” (6). Where Walkowitz’s study focuses on writers connected to Britain (her principal subjects are Joyce, Conrad, and Woolf and later writers Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro, and W. G. Sebald), my focus on the United States and Latin America finds writers more embedded in political and cultural relationships of identity and power rather than the reflective “critical cosmopolitism” she identifies as central in the works she considers.

Camilla Fojas’s invaluable study of twentieth century cosmopolitanism in the Americas has called attention to cosmopolitanism’s influence in North and South relationships in the Americas:

> Cosmopolitanism at the turn of the century was a lost dream, a promise and an ideal never fulfilled. Integration across the Americas promised the equality of free trade, freedom of movement, and security. Instead, by the mid-twentieth century, the economic penetration of the North into the South, the restructuring of local cultures on the model of U.S. mass culture, and the unstable political economies of the South had become the realities of cosmopolitanism. (137)

Foja’s work points to the problem of cosmopolitanism’s appeal to universal values causing the overwriting of the local. The problems of cosmopolitanism’s claims to a global citizenship can be seen in the term’s competing definitions and scholars’ frequent
adding of modifying terms such as “rooted,” “actually existing,” “vernacular,” and “critical”9. Such efforts to salvage cosmopolitan values by grounding its universal claims in specificity point to the problems of power raised by Fojas. Understood in this context, the discussions of cosmopolitanism in the twentieth century can be seen as a symptom of the problems raised by increasing global interconnections as much as a means of resolving them.

Power relations are important to consider at a moment when modernist studies is expanding its critical gaze beyond the United States and Europe. In a recent article describing the emerging field of New Modernism, Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz observe that “modernist studies is undergoing a transnational turn” (738). In this, modernist studies is not alone; a general move toward transnational perspectives has occurred in literary scholarship across the board. As Mao and Walkowitz note, this is not an entirely new direction for modernist studies. In fact, connections across borders have been much cited elements of modernism. In earlier studies of modernism, however, terms such as “internationalism” or “cosmopolitanism,” rather than “transnationalism,” provided the conceptual framework for exploring ways modernists deemphasized or

rejected national boundaries. Such critical investigations of internationalism most often focused exclusively on the United States and Europe, as opposed to the much more global emphasis of contemporary transnational scholarship.

The international character of modernism has consistently been recognized; scholars, from the earliest chroniclers of modernism such as Edmund Wilson and Malcolm Cowley to such later institutionalizing figures as Hugh Kenner, have made geography central to their histories of modernism. Yet the internationalism in these critics’ scholarly accounts of modernism focuses almost exclusively on European and North American locations, whether in the international sweep of modernism emphasized by Wilson, the more Paris-centered focus of Cowley, or Kenner’s “supranational” internationalism. This European and Anglo-American internationalism remains the dominant critical portrayal of modernism, of which Peter Nicholls’ observations of the “richness of international contact” in his study Modernisms: A Literary Guide serves as a useful example. Nicholls’ account of modernism is both poly-lingual and poly-cultural in scope: it spans the languages and cultures of continental Europe, England and the United States. Locations and cultures beyond this “terrain,” to use a world Nicholls appropriately foregrounds, are mentioned only in passing, however. The dominant portrayal of modernism continues to emphasize the expansive and border crossing nature of modernism yet limits this “internationalism” to a geography that does not include Latin America. Work that expands this geography by incorporating alternative voices into the discussion of modernism serves a vital function.¹⁰ These efforts need to be accompanied by an awareness of the layers of the exclusion that were part of modernist

¹⁰ Examples include Tace Hedrick’s Mestizo Modernism and Laura Lomas’s Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American.
writing. My argument in this study is that exclusion was not solely caused by prejudice or oversight of modernist scholars (although both certainly contributed) but that modernists from the United States drew boundaries and established lines of demarcation that consistently set Latin America apart from the United States.

The creation of borders and boundaries in the 1920s involved the simmering tensions that ran between internationalism and nationalism. In the first decades of the twentieth century, nationalism and internationalism were most often seen as opposed. Isolationists opposed what they saw as the internationalist intervention in WWI and, after the War, U.S. participation in the League of Nations. As Senator Henry Cabot Lodge argued in 1919 speaking against the formation of the League of Nations “I have never had but one allegiance. I cannot divide it now. I have loved but one flag….Internationalism…is to me repulsive” (qtd. in Torricelli 55). Such issues were connected to the racism and nativism of the period, exemplified in the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. Legislation in 1924 reduced the number of U.S. immigration visas and allocated them based on national origin. U.S. American nativism of the 1920s arose in the context of international immigration and imperial power as the global economic system became increasingly integrated. Some of these events have been discussed in modernist studies but this scholarship often does not include the way the representations of the Southern borders and Latin America nations are shaped and shape these issues.

Tensions between “nation” and “internationalism” are reflected in the culture of the 1920s in the United States. At the time the United States was becoming a global power, extending its cultural, political, and military influence beyond its borders.
International power relations provide a significant historical backdrop to the literary works of the period. The United States emerged as an economic, political, and military power after World War I, having suffered severe casualties yet ones dwarfed by the loss of life and destruction suffered by European nations. WWI gave a generation of young men and many women experience abroad, experiences that in some cases destabilized identities (as explored in fictional works such as Hemingway’s stories and Faulkner’s character of Darl in *As I Lay Dying*). As the WWI era song put it, “How ya gonna keep ‘em down on the farm, now that they’ve seen Paree.” The worldliness produced by the experiences of war directly threatened previous constructions of U.S. identity. By the 1920s, the United States was a nation more aware of being in the world, which resulted in tension between national identity and global power and between national space and transnational connections.

The contours of U.S. modernism were linked to the borders of the nation and U.S. national identity. Writers used representations of Latin America to engage, contest, and reconstruct issues of U.S. American identity, national culture, and the place of the United States in the world. For U.S. writers who worked primarily in the United States and expatriates writing in Europe, the representations of Latin America define the contours of the United States and the basis of cultural identity. Writers as diverse as U.S. expatriates living in Europe, Anglo-American writers in New York and the Southwest, Mexican immigrants, and sojourning Cubans participated in this transition. An awareness of the way such writers use geography in their works allows reconsideration of the role of place and borders in modernism.
**Shifting Frontiers, Shifting Borders**

Priscilla Wald has written perceptively about the cultural anxiety that attended nineteenth and early twentieth century U.S. writers as they explored the “internalized frontiers that constituted them as Americans” (11), particularly how the presence of African-Americans and Indians within the national space was central to the psychological formation of U.S. American identity. This study builds on her work but resists reading the frontier primarily in psychological terms. Shifting, frequently controversial depictions of the borders of the United States and the nation’s relation to neighboring countries, suggest the need for a psychological reading to be complemented by attention to the geographic presence of the border both in its political existence and metaphoric use. The changing legal, political, and cultural definitions of the frontier during the early twentieth century shaped and were shaped by modernist writing. Literal, figurative, and psychological borders are all at stake in representations of Latin America and it is the intersection of these that is under consideration in this project.

The end of the frontier as the moment when the westward progress of the United States came to an end has received considerable attention. The most enduring description of this is Frederick Jackson Turner’s Frontier Thesis. Put forward in Turner’s 1893 essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” the theory received little initial attention but steadily attracted interest and came to be widely recognized by the time it was collected in Turner’s Pulitzer Prize winning *The Frontier in American History* published in 1920. Turner argued that the frontier had provided a distinguishing feature of American life. He saw a celebration of frontier life in its ability to create democratic American individuals. For the United States to continue to develop, the nation would
need to create new frontiers: “He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise. But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves” (37).

Modernists in many cases shared Turner’s view of the role of the frontier in creating an American identity but where Turner sought to extend the frontier as a continuing formative principle in American life, modernists saw exhaustion. The solution was not to find new versions of “free land,” such as the overseas expansionism that Turner supported, but to find a new tradition. The movement toward Europe and away from the United States was tied to dissatisfaction with a U.S. culture that was linked to ideas of the past. Modernists frequently saw the nation as parochial and limited. This attitude led to writers searching for what Van Wyck Brooks termed a “usable past” (327). Brooks renders the failure of history in special terms: “the American writer floats in that void because the past that survives in the common mind of the present is a past without living value” (339). Turner’s “free land” that had been the space for creating the American individual has been replaced in Brooks’ by an empty space of history that must be filled. Both, however, express the problem of U.S. culture as being in some way newly confined. In filling this void, as I will argue, modernist writers do not escape from the boundaries of culture and nation. As writers looked outside the United States, they remained attached to ideas of national identity, which produced an animating tension in their work between challenging constructions of U.S. identity and a desire to create a sense of “Americanness” for themselves and their work. Thus in addressing the end of
the frontier and “free land,” writers struggled to negotiate new cultural relationships that defined the boundaries of American identity.

Earlier searchers for cultural development looked to the future and to territorial expansion rather than to Europe. Robert Abrams has described this sense in Thoreau and other mid-nineteenth century authors as the rejection of traditional cartographies for “a sense of indefinite existential promise” that comes from “its relationship to the unmapped sublime.” In “The Young American” (1844), Ralph Waldo Emerson echoes the rhetoric of continental expansion declaring that America “is the country of the Future.” This visionary language was directly tied to geography: “To men legislating for the vast area betwixt two oceans, between the snows and the tropics, somewhat of the gravity and grandeur of nature will infuse itself into the [American] code” (217). Whitman likewise saw the power of extending American territory: December 1847 in the Brooklyn Eagle: “It is for the interest of mankind that [American] power and territory should be extended. . . . We claim those lands . . . by a law superior to parchment and dry diplomatic rules” (370). In Whitman and Emerson, the universalizing of “American,” that is Anglo-American, imperial ideology is inexorably linked to territorial expansion. “America” values are not presented as an idea to be shared with the peoples of the world, as commonly presented in neoliberal political rhetoric, but as something written on the land through territorial conquest. This rhetoric of nineteenth century expansionism was accompanied by a clear sense of movement from east to west, as in Thoreau’s description of the direction of cultural influence:

We go eastward to realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future, with a
spirit of enterprise and adventure. The Atlantic is a Lethean stream, in our passage over which we have had an opportunity to forget the Old World and its institutions. If we do not succeed this time, there is perhaps one more chance for the race left before it arrives on the banks of the Styx; and that is in the Lethe of the Pacific, which is three times as wide. (qtd. in Cabanas 187)

Thoreau expressed similar sentiments regarding the pull westward in the posthumously published “Walking” (1862): “I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe. And that way the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progress [sic] from east to west” (234).

In considering these representations of the nation and national space, it is useful to turn to Benedict Anderson’s well-known conception of nation as an “imagined political community [that is] imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). Anderson’s useful if problematic definition, which holds that the idea of the nation is necessarily limited by having “finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations,” does not fit with the flow of cultural thought in the nineteenth century (7). The possibility of expansion and renewal afforded by Manifest Destiny and westward expansion contained within them the anxiety of the border. Almost from the birth of the United States, the question of where the nation’s borders would finally be drawn troubled expansionists. Jefferson, negotiator of the Louisiana Purchase, argued that the nation should end at Cuba, proposing in a letter to James Madison that he “would immediately erect a column on the Southernmost limit of Cuba and inscribe on it a Ne plus ultra” [go no further] (qtd. in Onuf 53). The view of unending expansionism was parodied by Herman Melville in
Moby Dick: “Let America add Mexico to Texas, and pile Cuba upon Canada” (64). Yet such rhetoric ran through the nineteenth century. Josiah Strong in Our Country published in 1885 could imagine that “the powerful race [Anglo-Saxons] will move down upon Mexico, down upon Central and South America, out upon the islands of the sea, over upon Africa and beyond” (qtd. in Thomas 285). Such arguments for continued expansionism carried on into the twentieth century as vocal proponents of U.S. imperialism, such as Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana (whose appearance in Dos Passos’s The 42nd Parallel I discuss in Chapter 4), argued for the United States to maintain control of the territory the nation had acquired after the Spanish-American War.

By the 1920s, for the first time in U.S. history, no significant constituency was advocating for continued territorial expansion. This shift, however, did not eliminate the frontier and expansionism from the U.S. imagination. Such images lived on in popular culture, most prominently in the genre of the Western, and the rhetoric of the frontier was redeployed by politicians after WWII as the United States engaged in the Cold War space race. Neither did the 1920s mark the end of U.S. imperialism or military intervention in Latin America or elsewhere in the world. However, the changes in the representation of national space that came as modernist writers imagined the replacement of the frontier with a border between the United States and Latin America, were part of the establishment of a world of largely fixed national boundaries. The writers I examine engage in reconceptualizing the nation and national identity at the beginning of the era of territorial integrity.
The Establishment of Territorial Integrity

Essential to my argument about the relationship of the authors I study to Latin America, nation, and place is the development and codification of the principle of territorial integrity, the concept in international law that nation-states must recognize borders of other nation-states and must not promote changes to those borders. Theorists like Anderson posit fixed borders as a fundamental element of nations, but before the First World War national borders often were loosely regulated, inconsistently mapped, and regarded as possibly, even readily, subject to change as a result of war or other forms of expansion, as seen in the continuous growth of the United States throughout the nineteenth century. As Melville in the well-known “loose fish” passage in *Moby Dick* memorably describes in terms of a whaling analogy, in the nineteenth century and earlier, territory was available for the taking by stronger nations:

> What was America in 1492 but a Loose-Fish, in which Columbus struck the Spanish standard by way of wailing it for his royal master and mistress? What was Poland to the Czar? What Greece to the Turk? What India to England? What at last will Mexico be to the United States? All Loose-Fish. (398)

In the twentieth century, in spite of inconsistent enforcement, being subject to various forms of manipulation, and significant exceptions, territory was no longer primarily seen in terms of loose fish to be captured.

As a legal principle territorial integrity has roots back to at least the 1684 Peace of Westphalia, but it gained widespread recognition and codification only following the
First World War. Woodrow Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” speech in 1918 argued for “specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.” The subsequent incorporation of the principle of territorial integrity in the Covenant of the League of Nations (1918) marked a significant change in the legal basis of international relations. Before the League of Nations set out the norms of territorial integrity, the practice and conventions of international law held that “a state that had won a war could annex territory either through occupation or peace treaty” (Elden 142). Despite the failure of the League of Nations, the norms of territorial integrity remained fundamental elements of international law and international relations, confirmed in such documents as the Atlantic Charter and The Charter of the United Nations.

The value of Wilson’s initial idealistic declarations of respect for territorial integrity can well be questioned, given that when he spoke in 1918 the United States occupied Haiti, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and the Philippines, not to mention Wilson’s having engaged in military intervention in Mexico in 1914. The recognition of territorial integrity in the Americas was codified as part of The Good Neighbor Policy enacted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt after his election in 1932. While scholars have often understood The Good Neighbor Policy as the beginning of a more positive U.S. policy in Latin America, it can also be seen as being in many ways another face of U.S. imperialism in which U.S. power and control in Latin America was maintained through

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11 Territorial integrity was a long standing issue in the Americas, having first been raised at the Inter-American Conference in Panama in 1826. Proposals for recognition of territorial integrity were proposed at subsequent inter-American meetings in the nineteenth century. Various interests, the United States chief among them, but also Latin American nations such as Chile, blocked implementation of any such proposals.
claims of “integrity” that were superficial at best and in many cases served to conceal U.S. influence in the region.\(^\text{12}\)

While The Good Neighbor Policy did not end U.S. imperialism in Latin America, it did mark a significant shift in the means through which the United States exercised influence. An inter-American conference in 1933 produced the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, whose signatories (including the United States) affirmed the principles of nonintervention and territorial integrity in the Western Hemisphere. Roosevelt ended the U.S. occupations of Haiti and Nicaragua (the occupation of the Dominican Republic had ended in 1924) and sought to change the tenor of relations between the United States and Latin American nations through cultural exchange and cooperation. The Good Neighbor Policy and recognition of territorial integrity did not mean that the United States adopted a policy of nonintervention, either globally or in Latin America. However, the change did herald an important shift in the logic, rhetoric, and appearance of this intervention. Direct military intervention was no longer a primary tool for the exercise of U.S. power. From the Good Neighbor Period to Ronald Reagan’s increasing use of U.S. troops in the 1980s, U.S. foreign policy moved away from open, direct intervention against existing national governments, relying instead on less transparent means of influence including covert military action and the use of economic and political pressure. In the five decades from the 1930s to the beginning of the 1980s, the rhetoric, if not the practice, of U.S. diplomacy and foreign policy focused on nonintervention and the recognition of existing nation-states and

governments. Major military actions were explained in terms of supporting national sovereignty against outside actors (Korea, World War II, Vietnam). The contrast in policies before and after 1932 is seen in the decline in the number of U.S. military actions in Latin America. Between 1890 and 1933, U.S. troops intervened in Latin America on 42 occasions, primarily in official announced actions. From 1934 to 1980, the United States engaged in direct, open acts of military intervention in Latin America on only three occasions. The reduction in direct intervention does not mean that the United States eliminated or necessarily reduced its exercise of power over Latin American nations, however. The government denied interventionism by using CIA backed covert operations such as the 1954 Guatemalan coup d’état against the democratically-elected President of Guatemala, the Bay of Pigs Invasion in Cuba in 1961, and participation in the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973.

The Good Neighbor Policy’s recognition of territorial integrity and the increased rhetoric of independent nationhood were accompanied by the development of individually differentiated national identities of Latin American nations in the popular and literary culture of the United States. Covert actions and economic imperialism, as opposed to direct colonialism, allowed the recognition of nations and national identities in Latin America. This recognition included support for brutal dictatorships, which

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13 These numbers come from the Congressional Research Report “Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798-2009” produced by Richard F. Grimmett and updated January 27, 2010. The use of differing criteria, as well as in some cases factual disagreements leads other sources to include more or fewer incidents. These sources do, however, support the general conclusion that instances of direct U.S. intervention in Latin America declined significantly after 1932.

14 Beginning in the 1980s under the Reagan administration, the United States returned to engaging in frequent open intervention in Latin America that harkened back to the first decades of the twentieth century.
suggests the double-edged nature of policies of territorial integrity. The Good Neighbor Policies of the 1930s and 40s were receptive to certain Latin American interests, particularly the sensibilities of elite groups in those nations. The foreign policy shifts were joined by increasing tourism and cultural exchange between the United States and Latin America. Films such as Disney’s 1942 animated feature *Saludos Amigos* recognize the cultural and national identity of individual Latin American nations, although only through the use of reductive stereotypes. One segment of *Saludos Amigos* features Donald Duck as a tourist from the United States visiting Lake Titicaca while another revolves around a newly created character José Carioca, a parrot with stereotypical Brazilian traits, who introduces Donald to samba. Other segments of the film feature similar portrayals of Chile and Argentina. However limited and stereotypical such depictions of Latin America were, they served to present distinct national identities. As Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart observed in their groundbreaking polemical critique of the imperialist ideology at the core of Disney comics, *How to Read Donald Duck* (1971), which depict “a world already colonized” in which the inhabitants of each country rendered as distinct types that are also made to fit in the mold of a capitalist-imperialist Disney mold (48). This is, in other words, a world of territorial integrity in which the power of the United States is not engaged in territorial colonization but in maintaining power through the ideology of patriarchal, white supremacist capitalism.

In the period before and after WWII, Disney was not alone in depicting Latin America as composed of distinct nations through the use of particular stereotypical qualities. In the 1930s and 40s the Mexican actress Dolores del Rio frequently played the role of the sultry exotic, appearing variously as a Mexican, Brazilian, Native American,
or Pacific Islander. Such casting points to an underlying sense of interchangeability among people, particularly women, from such foreign locales. Nonetheless, the differences in costume and characteristics exhibited by del Rio, while blatantly stereotypical and generally offering only minimally characterized representations of the locations, do point to the importance of national differences in the minds of the audiences. Each film relies and plays on the expectation that national characters differ and each nation has a specific identity. In much the same way, the films of Carmen Miranda in the 1940s cast her in roles not only as a Brazilian but also as an Argentine and a Cuban.

Hollywood films such as *Flying Down to Rio* (1933), *Down Argentine Way* (1940), and *Now, Voyager* (1942) generally portrayed such locations as exotic, frequently feminized, stereotypical and often as locations of escape. But where such locations were previously removed from the fictional space or remained generally undifferentiated, an increased particularity developed in the representations, almost always based on national images. Such films included advisors who sought to portray the local culture in a positive light, generally whitening the local population, showing locations such as Rio de Janeiro as modern cities. These efforts supported a variety of ends. U.S. airlines sought to market Latin American locations as travel destinations for tourists from the United States. The close ties between Hollywood and airlines such as Pan American led to planes prominently bearing the Pan Am logo receiving significant screen time.15

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15 The links between Hollywood and the Aviation industry, both of which established themselves in Southern California in the 1920s, reflect the connections between two mutually reinforcing images of modernity. Figures such as Howard Hughes point to the cross pollination between the two industries. For more on the relationship of Hollywood and the aviation industry, see Robert Wohl’s *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1920-1950*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2005. In a book chapter on the representations of Brazil in U.S. films, Lisa Shaw and
Additionally, Hollywood looked increasingly to Latin America as a market for its products, which required producing images of Latin America that would be palatable to viewers in those countries. The Good Neighbor Policy also encouraged political alliances between the United States and Latin America, something the State Department encouraged through positive representations of Latin America in Hollywood films. This type of propaganda became increasingly important with the rising threat of Nazi Germany and the competition by the United States and Germany for Latin American support and resources. \(^\text{16}\)

The closing of the frontier brought about debates regarding the closing of U.S. nation space. The Spanish-American War resulted in the incorporation of Hawaii into the national body, the rejection of Cuba and the incomplete incorporation of Puerto Rico as a territorial possession whose uncertain status remains an issue today. The Immigration Act of 1907 created the Mexican Border District to stem the flow of immigrants into the United States. The continental borders have remained fixed since statehood was granted to New Mexico and Arizona in 1912, an act that attempted to settle what territory was and was not “American.” As Amy Kaplan has argued, the early twentieth century was a period in which U.S. imperialism shifted from the territorial expansionism of the

Maite Conde point out the shared interests and frequently close economic relationships between the airlines and Hollywood during this period, exemplified in figures such as RKO chief Merian Cooper, who was a founding member of the Board of Directors of Pan American Airlines. Shaw and Conde's work is useful for its exploration of the complex, intertwined relationship of marketing, exoticism, and national identity in Hollywood’s depictions of Brazil (“Brazil through Hollywood’s Gaze: From the Silent Screen to the Good Neighbor Policy Era.” Latin American Cinema: Essays on Modernity, Gender and National Identity. Ed. Lisa Shaw and Stephanie Dennison. Jefferson, NC: McFarland P, 2005. 180-200.)

nineteenth century to regulating the actions of other nations while maintaining and insisting upon these nations’ national identities. As described above, during the 1910s and 1920s, U.S. troops occupied Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic, yet incorporation of this territory into U.S. domestic space was not part of the national debates as had been the case two decades earlier in relation to Cuba and Puerto Rico after the Spanish American War. U.S. territorial expansionism in the Americas, which was the nation’s primary foreign policy in the nineteenth century and an issue of significant national debate in 1898, was no longer a significant possibility by the 1920s, because of what I will argue was the closing of the national space.
CHAPTER 2

EXPATRIATE GEOGRAPHY:
LOCATING SOUTH AMERICA IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY’S THE SUN ALSO RISES

In Ernest Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises, the novel’s expatriate locales in France and Spain seem far removed from Latin America. The European setting, however, does not mean the novel is unconcerned with a broader post-World War I cultural geography that includes the United States and South America. As many critics have discussed, Hemingway’s works often seek to recreate the idealized space of the U.S. frontier in various foreign locations, most notably in Spain, Cuba, and Africa. In The Sun Also Rises, Hemingway’s engagement with frontier mythology intersects with the European expatriate scene of the 1920s. The novel considers the frontier in the context of cultural and physical distance from the national space of United States. Rather than abandoning U.S. American identity to adopt a purely cosmopolitan position that rejects

the significance of the national, Hemingway remains concerned with national identities. In recreating the frontier in the context of early twentieth-century expatriation, *The Sun Also Rises* includes South America in its geographic imagination as Hemingway seeks to distinguish his modernist version of the frontier from nineteenth-century models of frontier expansionism and colonial conquest. In doing so, Hemingway’s expatriate modernism participates in reshaping cultural relationships that respond to the emergence of U.S. political, economic, and military power in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The expatriates who left the United States for Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century were frequently concerned with what they saw as the parochial culture within the United States. In 1912 in the essay “Patria Mia,” Ezra Pound issued what might be called the expatriate modernist call to action: “[I]f you have any vital interest in art and letters, and happen to like talking about them, you sooner or later leave the country” (*Selected Prose* 122). The direct influence Pound had in causing writers to leave the United States is questionable, but he gave voice to a broad feeling of dissatisfaction with U.S. culture that was shared by many of the writers who went to Europe in the following years. In the first line of the essay, Pound invokes the legacy of Manifest Destiny; he writes, “America, my country, is almost a continent and hardly yet a nation” (*Selected Writings* 101).

For U.S. writers who went to Europe, their relationship to place was often influenced by constructions of the Old World versus the New World along with ideas of continental expansion, Manifest Destiny and the frontier. In 1934, Malcolm Cowley looking back on the 1920s in his memoir *Exile’s Return* wrote that expatriates shared a
belief that “Art and ideas were products manufactured under a European patent; all we could furnish toward them was raw talent destined usually to be wasted. Everywhere, in every department of cultural life, Europe offered the models to be imitated…indeed, some doubted that this country [the United States] was even a nation; it had no traditions except the fatal tradition of the pioneer” (94). The passage focuses on the European influence on American culture, but to explain the turn to Europe, Cowley refers to a specific narrative of U.S. history.

Similar references to the frontier appear in a wide variety of expatriate writing. In F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender is the Night*, Dick Diver arrives in Europe in 1917 believing in the national myth of the frontier: he carries “illusions of a nation, the lies of generations of frontier mothers who had to croon falsely, that there were no wolves outside the cabin door” (132). The estrangement and alienation of modernists cannot be reduced to one specific cause but the failure of the frontier myth, what Fitzgerald labels a “false” story and an “illusion,” recurs in early twentieth century descriptions of the need to rejuvenate cultural and artistic U.S. forms. Matthew Josephson, a U.S. expatriate writer and editor, wrote in *The New Republic* in 1931 that “the phenomena of frontier life, although they played a decisive part in the American social development, did so in a sense that was inimical to artistic production” (77). The need of finding a replacement for the frontier as a source of U.S. culture is also suggested in Waldo Frank’s 1919 argument that his was “the first generation of Americans consciously engaged in spiritual pioneering” (9). Where Cowley replaces the West as a source of cultural renewal with Europe, Frank in a visionary mode looks to inner life. Both writers, however, share a
belief that the mythology of the pioneer and the frontier, which was often seen as a productive site of U.S. culture, was no longer useful.

Much of the scholarship on modernism emphasizes the role of expatriates and exile, as in the field-defining work of critics Raymond Williams, Hugh Kenner, and Donald Pizer. For these critics, writers who did not leave their native country are less fully modernist, although most do not go so far as Kenner, who excludes figures such as Wallace Stevens, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner from the ranks of modernists. Kenner explains as follows: “I account for it [Wallace Stevens’ absence] by his inassimilability into the only story that I find has adequate explanatory power: a story of capitals, from which he was absent. Like Virginia Woolf of Bloomsbury or Faulkner of Oxford, he seems a voice from a province, quirkily enabled by the International Modernism of which he was never a part” (373). Accounts such as Kenner’s that authors whose primary geographic scope was their own nation seem arbitrary and leave little space for issues such as race and national identity in studies of modernism.

Beginning in the 1980s modernist scholarship began to address issues of national identity as scholars undertook the much needed task of moving away from narrow definitions of modernism as a strictly international phenomenon unconcerned with nations.18 Yet one result of the scholarly emphasis on national issues, and in particular the focus on race and ethnicity, has been a tendency to set aside the international context of modernism. For example, in Our America Walter Benn Michaels draws a distinction between what he terms “nativist modernism” and “international modernism” by arguing for “the irrelevance of nationality to international modernism” (108). In this formulation,

18 See, for example, Astradur Eysteinsson’s critique of Kenner in The Concept of Modernism (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990), particularly Chapter 3, “Modernism in Literary History.”
writers such as Pound and Eliot are designated as belonging to international modernism, while Faulkner and Fitzgerald are among the representatives of nativist modernism. This construction of modernism inverts the relative importance Kenner had given to the national and the international but still renders them as separate, inassimilable categories. Surprisingly, in Michaels’s formulation, Hemingway, expatriate par excellence, and his novel *The Sun Also Rises*, a text set in Europe and filled with expatriate characters, are placed in the category of nativist modernism. As I will discuss below, *The Sun Also Rises* is markedly concerned with U.S. national identity as Michaels argues, but the issue of what national identity means is situated in an international context that brings together nationalism and internationalism in ways that challenge a nativist reading of the novel. 19

Issues of geography, culture, and artistic production are not unique to the modernist period, of course, but improved means of communication and travel, along with the increasing prosperity of the United States, allowed unprecedented opportunities for geographic movement. What developed was a strong expatriate culture, based primarily in Europe, in which large numbers of U.S. writers wrote from and about locations outside the national space of the United States. This cultural production outside of the United States challenged conventional definitions of a native U.S. literary tradition, which had frequently turned to geographic and environmental arguments to claim a unique national identity. At the same time, writers who “stayed at home” often defined their artistic projects in opposition to expatriate writing; among these were figures as different as H. L. Mencken and William Carlos Williams. Many writers, both those who

19 Similar diminution of expatriate experience occurs in other groundbreaking and indispensable texts of modernist scholarship such as Michael Soto’s *Modernist Nation* and Ann Douglas’s *Terrible Honesty*. 40
left the United States and those who remained, saw a need for U.S. cultural renewal — what Pound termed an “American Risorgimento” (*Selected Writings* 111). In seeking this cultural renewal, in some sense a nationalist project, the issues of nationalism and internationalism came to the fore. Thus, significantly, Pound saw himself participating in American culture even while calling for writers to leave the country. In his poem “A Pact,” written in 1913 and subsequently published in 1916, Pound addresses Walt Whitman and the America tradition he represented, “It was you that broke the new wood, / Now is a time for carving” (*Early Writings* 74). The image of breaking the new wood echoes the metaphors of geographic determinism that frequently were used during the nineteenth century to argue that the United States, because of its particular natural environment, could and should produce a literature distinct from the European traditions from which it was seen as having emerged. The “carving” that Pound imagines, combined with his calls for expatriation and his own position writing in Europe, suggests the possibility that writers could work in the American tradition while not being tied to the environment or the national space of the country.

In seeking to challenge or reimagine the frontier narrative from outside the United States, modernist writers were confronting what by the 1920s had become the dominant account of U.S. national development. Frederick Jackson Turner’s Frontier Thesis imaged the frontier as a space of “Americanization” and placed expansionism at the core of the American spirit. 20 For Roosevelt and other like-minded expansionists, colonial spaces, particularly the Philippines and Cuba, became new locations to continue to enact

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20 Although Turner first presented the Frontier Thesis at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago its influence grew gradually.
the frontier mythology of U.S. strength, virtue, and progress. By declaring the cultural failure of expansionism as a mode of renewal, Cowley, Frank, and Pound implicitly align themselves against Roosevelt’s imperialist narrative and suggest the need to realign the United States’ position in the world as part of their projects of cultural renewal.

To consider a specific example of how such a realignment shapes the relationships between the United States and Latin America, in the remainder of this chapter I read Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*; I explore the way he structures modernist space in Europe and the United States and addresses the tension between the international and national by using a brief but crucial reference to South America. Directing attention to the inclusion of South America in the geography of the novel reveals the way Hemingway’s internationalism creates a sense of what I term “national cosmopolitanism,” a structuring of cultural relationships that maintains a fixed sense of national identity and bordered national space as it projects U.S. power outward beyond the nation. This position negotiates between the internationalism of the characters (along with that of the novel and its author) and an investment in U.S. identity and tradition, by insisting upon the prominence and maintenance of national identities beyond the physical borders of the nation. In making this argument I use “cosmopolitanism” in the sense it is most often applied to modernism: to recognize a culture that prizes artistic or bohemian values, social deviance, and urban mobility, but I also use the term to suggest Marx’s use

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of cosmopolitanism to describe the inherently expansive nature of capitalism. However, rather than being a force that breaks down national structures as in Marx’s cosmopolitanism, I argue Hemingway reinforces national identities in a broadening cosmopolitan geography that expands out from the nation. In this way, Hemingway’s national cosmopolitanism creates an alternative version of closed national space that replaces a geography understood in terms of the frontier and Manifest Destiny with one that recognizes national boundaries but projects U.S. culture and political power globally.

Beyond the Space of Modernism: Where Not to Go

Among expatriate modernist writers from the United States, individuals decidedly inclined toward travel and writing from multiple locations, Hemingway stands out as a particularly expansive geographical writer. Numerous countries appear in Hemingway’s fiction: a partial list includes such diverse locations as France, Spain, Italy, Kenya and Cuba, as well as various locations in the United States. As this list suggests, place figures centrally in Hemingway’s fiction. Not only do the works describe and engage specific settings, the fiction insistently presents the world of travel and the crossing of international boundaries; Hemingway’s characters almost always are coming from, or going to, some place.

Nowhere are these qualities more in evidence than in Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises. Often regarded as the classic novel of U.S. expatriate modernism for its portrayal

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of life in Paris in the 1920s, *The Sun Also Rises* chronicles life outside the United States in a cultural milieu that mythologized a combination of artistic ambition, bohemian values, and a separation from mainstream culture. In doing so, *The Sun Also Rises* presents expatriate life in Paris and Spain while also referring to the United States, Italy, and England. The novel with its many international characters and geographic range takes an instructional tone on where one should go, a quality immediately noted by Hemingway’s early readers. Hemingway’s friend, the novelist Nathan Asch, after reading a draft, remarked that it was more a travel book than a novel (Plimpton 26). Identifying the same quality in the text, F. Scott Fitzgerald described *The Sun Also Rises* as “a romance and a guidebook” (qtd. in Field 29). A guidebook both literally attempts to help locate the reader through directions and maps while also undertaking to fix the reader in place by situating particular locations in historical and cultural context. A guidebook does this while, importantly, telling the reader the right places to go. Cowley observed “It was a good novel and became a craze – young men tried to get as imperturbably drunk as the hero, young women of good families took a succession of lovers in the same heartbroken fashion as the heroine, they all talked like Hemingway characters” (3). And, of course, the novel created romantic images of Paris and Spain that attracted young people seeking to have the types of experiences Cowley describes. This power continues today as Parisian cafes and trips to bullfights in Spain remain an essential part of the Hemingway mythology as well as important tourist destinations.

Yet, among the many places to which *The Sun Also Rises* directs its readers, one location, South America, appears as a place not to go. In the second chapter of the novel, Cohn asks Jake to accompany him on a trip to South America. The conversation
continues for several pages as Robert entreats and Jake demurs. María DeGuzmán, in her examination of Hemingway’s use of Spain in *The Sun Also Rises*, points out that Robert’s invitation and Jake’s refusal invokes the presence of Latin America only immediately to deny the region’s significance. This interchange casts Paris and subsequently Spain as the proper place for expatriates, while writing South America out of the novel. DeGuzmán observes that “while South America is consigned the realm of romance and escapism, Spain is made to occupy the proving ground of really living and living truly” (212). To develop and explore the insight that Hemingway makes Spain the right place to go and South America the wrong place, the remainder of the chapter looks to the shifting U.S. geographic imagination caused by the end of U.S. territorial expansionism and increased U.S. economic and military power.

The geographic imagination of *The Sun Also Rises* unfolds through Jake, the novel’s narrator and Hemingway surrogate, who functions as a guide to the right and wrong way of living. Significantly, Jake’s objection to going to South America seemingly runs counter to the travel- and adventure-loving persona of the author he closely resembles. Hemingway, of course, is associated in the popular imagination with Latin America through his time living in Cuba and the novels *To Have and Have Not*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, and the posthumously published *Islands in the Stream*. While Hemingway was later connected to Cuba, *The Sun Also Rises* was published two years before he first visited the island (during a brief stopover while traveling between the United States and Europe) and thirteen years before he bought Finca Vigia, the home in Cuba that was his primary residence from 1939 to 1960. However, Hemingway’s interest in Latin America can be traced back to his teenage years. In 1915, a sixteen-year-old
Hemingway wrote, and signed, a promise to himself: “I desire to do pioneering or exploring work in the 3 last great frontiers Africa, central south America or the country around and north of Hudson Bay” (qtd. in Reynolds 29). Hemingway’s adventurous life, particularly his travels in Africa, can be seen as fulfilling the spirit of this pledge. Yet the depiction of South America as a place not to go in The Sun Also Rises presents a curious midpoint between this teenage desire to go to South America and the time Hemingway later spent living in Cuba and writing about the Americas to the south of the United States.23 While one could engage in a psychological interpretation of Hemingway’s rejection of a childhood dream, instead I will read it in relation to specific cultural changes that occurred between his childhood and his writing of The Sun Also Rises, changes that are both represented by Hemingway’s life and engaged in his fiction.

The conversation in which South America appears takes place early in The Sun Also Rises as Hemingway develops the characters of Jake and Cohn. As several critics have observed, Jake Barnes and Robert Cohn are more similar than they are different: both are expatriate American writers, they play tennis and box, and, most importantly, both are interested in Lady Brett Ashley. The novel, however, uses these similarities to heighten the differences between the two characters: in a series of oppositions, Jake is seen as doing things the right way and Cohn the wrong. Among these oppositions are Jake’s and Cohn’s perspectives about a trip to South America. In the conversation

23 Hemingway never fulfilled his youthful desire to go to South America. His experiences in Latin America were limited to his time in Cuba and short trips to Mexico. It is unclear how closely Hemingway linked Cuba with South America. While the two share the influence of Spain and the Spanish Language, and in the twentieth century were often grouped together under the increasingly prevalent term “Latin American,” Hemingway may have been more inclined to view them separately. His interests, not least his devotion to fishing and sailing, made him more attentive to Caribbean interconnections than broader links within the Americas.
previously mentioned between Jake and Cohn, Hemingway’s typical terse dialogue, particularly Jake’s stark “no” in response to Cohn’s invitation, serves to distinguish between Jake and Cohn. For Jake, it may be argued, what makes South America the wrong place to go is simply that it is where Cohn wants to go. However, in a novel as deeply concerned with place as *The Sun Also Rises*, the question of where one chooses to go cannot be so easily dismissed. Thus, while Jake claims that “going to another country doesn’t make any difference” (19), the force of the novel, with its qualities of a guidebook and its focus on specific locations suggests that where one goes matters greatly. And Jake, despite his claim, places great importance on going to Spain. For Jake, and for the reader, going to Europe seems natural, proper, and inevitable. South America, however, remains on the margin of the novel’s geographic imagination.

In addition to escapism, for Jake going to South America is associated with inauthenticity, as DeGuzmán has pointed out. In the conversation about South America, Jake dismisses Cohn’s tastes, which include both a dislike of Paris and a desire to go to South America. Jake finds Cohn’s ideas unoriginal and inauthentic because they come from books; as he says, Cohn “got the first idea out of a book, and I suppose the second one came out of a book too” (18). This comment must be read with a certain irony given the way Hemingway’s book functions as a guidebook (and one that has led thousands of tourists to Pamplona and other locations mentioned in the novel). The need to distinguish between Jake and Cohn and the association of South America with escapism, inauthenticity, and a place not to go is not idle however. The reference to South America locates issues of real living and authenticity in the framework of particular geographies and geographic relationships. The reference to South America fits in a larger pattern of
geographic and national representations that are revealing of Hemingway’s understanding of identity and culture.

The conversation between Jake and Cohn does not end after Jake’s initial refusal to go to South America. Cohn continues entreating Jake to make the trip with him, offering to pay, pointing out that Jake speaks Spanish, and arguing that it would be more fun to go together. Jake refuses. Hemingway, via Jake, frames the conversation by having Jake observe that Cohn had been reading W. H. Hudson’s *The Purple Land* and identifying this novel as the source of Cohn’s desire to go to South America. Cohn, we are told, had not only read *The Purple Land*, but had “read it and reread it” (17). Hemingway, through Jake, describes *The Purple Land* as follows:

“The Purple Land” is a very sinister book if read too late in life. It recounts splendid imaginary amorous adventures of a perfect English gentleman in an intensely romantic land, the scenery of which is very well described. For a man to take it at thirty-four as a guide-book to what life holds is about as safe as it would be for a man of the same age to enter Wall Street direct from a French convent, equipped with a complete set of the more practical Alger books. Cohn, I believe, took every word of ‘The Purple Land’ as literally as though it had been an R. G. Dun report. (17)

This description of *The Purple Land* as romantic fantasy, which Cohn takes as a “guide-book,” follows the emphasis in *The Sun Also Rises* on living the right type of life. If *The Sun Also Rises* is a guidebook to the right type of living, *The Purple Land* is a negative example that should not be followed. In analyzing the conversation between Jake and Cohn, critics have largely overlooked the significance of the content of *The Purple Land*. 
The standard interpretation of the scene sees Cohn’s appreciation of The Purple Land as an example of his tendency to live inauthentically in contrast to the Hemingway hero, who as a hardened realist engages the world through authentic experience. As H. R. Stoneback puts it, Cohn’s interest in the novel shows that “to be always longing for romantic adventure in some faraway place is to risk not living one’s life where one is” (21). A related interpretation argues that the reference to Hudson’s novel points the reader to the “right” kind of writing: the realism and ironic detachment of The Sun Also Rises as opposed to escapism and naïve literalism, or even the aesthetic failure of writing the proper type of prose. Stoneback, for example, links the title of The Purple Land to purple prose. While the text of The Sun Also Rises makes clear that The Purple Land is the wrong type of literature, aesthetic and formal qualities are not the only significant elements of the book. Indeed, the aesthetics and form of Hudson’s novel are directly tied to the content of the novel, which is deeply immersed in colonial conquest. Considering

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24 In a similar vein, Daniel Fuchs describes Hemingway as “ridiculing The Purple Land” (449). Reading the presence of The Purple Land in The Sun Also Rises as Hemingway simply putting forth an example of bad prose and the wrong aesthetics is complicated by the fact that Hemingway greatly admired Hudson. In 1935, Hemingway included another of Hudson’s works, Long Ago and Far Away, on a list of indispensable reading for aspiring writers, alongside works by authors such as Stendhal, Joyce, Tolstoy, Twain, and James (“Monologue” 218). Although based on real events, the memoir Long Ago and Far Away contains similar nostalgia and rural adventure to that in The Purple Land, although not in as exaggerated a form. Significantly, Hemingway admired Hudson’s prose style. As Hemingway commented in a letter, “Hudson writes the best of anyone” (qtd. in Reynolds 139). Given this interest in Hudson, it is not then surprising that Hemingway’s son Patrick has stated that his father’s style owes greatly to Hudson (P. Hemingway). This is not to argue that Hemingway necessarily venerated The Purple Land; one may speculate that Hemingway distinguished between Hudson’s nonfiction and his fiction, appreciating the former while rejecting the later. Or that Hemingway, well known for artistic rivalries, uses a dismissal of The Purple Land to address what Harold Bloom would describe as anxiety of influence. In any case, Hemingway’s reference to Hudson’s work is not idle and merits in-depth consideration.
the relationship of *The Purple Land* to the history of colonialism in the Americas suggests that it is a more complex reference, and a revealing one.\(^{25}\)

**Cohn, Roosevelt, Colonialism, and *The Purple Land***

*The Purple Land*, set in Argentina and Uruguay, depicts the picaresque adventures of one Richard Lamb. The protagonist was born in Argentina to English parents and is culturally English, identifying as such against the native population. When he marries a teenage Argentine girl without her parents’ permission, the couple flees to Uruguay to escape her disapproving father. After a brief stay in Montevideo, the protagonist leaves his wife in the home of an aunt and sets out into the interior of the country to look for work. He encounters ranchers, revolutionaries, and several beautiful young women. These encounters have elements of romance and adventure, but they are not mere escapism.

One of the critics to consider the function of *The Purple Land* in *The Sun Also Rises*, Robert McIlvaine provides a helpful but brief treatment of the relationship between the two novels. McIlvaine draws on Carlos Baker’s observation that Harold Loeb, Hemingway’s acquaintance who served as a model for Cohn, while an admirer of Hudson, preferred *Green Mansions*, a novel more deeply invested in escapism, to *The Purple Land*.\(^{26}\) The use of *The Purple Land*, McIlvaine argues, highlights Cohn’s desire

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\(^{25}\) In “A Very Sinister Book: *The Sun Also Rises* As Critique of Pastoral” David Savola, reading from the perspective of ecocriticism, argues, “*The Purple Land* ignores the reality of history, unlike *The Sun Also Rises*” (38). While the two works do share elements of the pastoral, *The Purple Land* is deeply invested in history, specifically the late nineteenth century colonization and civilizing narratives directed from the West to “undeveloped” peoples.

\(^{26}\) Harold Loeb was not alone in admiring Hudson. Although *The Purple Land* was a critical and commercial failure on its publication in 1885, it attracted significant interest when it was reissued
for sexual conquests that mirror Richard Lamb’s romantic adventures. Yet, while the romance and romantic relations connect *The Purple Land* to *The Sun Also Rises* in important ways, McIlvaine does not address the context in which the adventures take place. The plot does not merely recount romantic escapades; it is a novel about European colonialism and nostalgia for imperialist conquest.

The desire for colonization is captured in the title under which the first edition of the novel was published: *The Purple Land That England Lost*. Although the title was changed for the 1904 edition and all subsequent publications, the desire for conquest suggested in the original title remains in the novel. More than a simple desire for the imperial conquest of territory, the novel imagines colonization of a particularly brutal type. As Ilan Stavans has observed, “violence . . . is the *sine qua non*” of *The Purple Land* (xiii). And this violence is specifically colonialist. At one point Lamb looks down from a hill to the country below, causing him to lament that England abandoned its claims to the land. This realization leads him to experience an intense nostalgia for bloody battles:

[N]ever was there a holier crusade undertaken, never a nobler conquest planned, than that which had for its object the wresting of this fair country from unworthy hands, to make it for all time part of the mighty English kingdom. . . . And to think that it was won for England, not treacherously,

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In 1904, Hudson himself had considerable currency among modernist writers in the early decades of the twentieth century, and he is generally regarded as a significant if slightly peripheral figure who was taken up by modernists for the anti-civilization tendencies in his work. During his later years, Hudson published in the same journals as Hemingway and the members of his circle. Ford Madox Ford was an admirer of Hudson, as was Joseph Conrad. In Ezra Pound’s *Pisan Cantos*, Hudson is mentioned in passing as part of the expatriate milieu in London (Canto 74.296).
or bought with gold, but in the old Saxon fashion with hard blows, and climbing over heaps of slain defenders. (Hudson 9)

As these descriptions suggest, the adventures Cohn would have imagined after reading *The Purple Land* are not simply innocent escapism but part of colonial desire. The “purple” in the title directly reflects colonial violence: the land derives its color from the blood spilled in attempted colonial conquest: “I will call my book *The Purple Land*; for what more suitable name can one find for a country so stained with the blood of her children?” (234). This colonial violence frames the romantic adventures of *The Purple Land* with images of the violence to conquer native peoples that reach the point of taking pleasure in killing and bloodshed. In *The Purple Land* violent conquest and amorous adventure are interrelated parts of colonialism. These elements of the novel are central to its function in *The Sun Also Rises*. Cohn’s desire to go to South America can be read not in purely aesthetic terms; the aesthetics of Hudson’s novel are part of the mythology of frontier engagement that enacts idealized forms of colonial violence.

The significance of *The Purple Land* in *The Sun Also Rises* is illuminated by Hemingway’s reference to Hudson in another work, “A Natural History of the Dead” (1933). In the story, an unidentified narratorial voice adopts the perspective of an eighteen or nineteenth-century naturalist to ask “Can we not hope to furnish the reader with a few rational and interesting facts about the dead? I hope so” (335). While

27 In addition to *The Sun Also Rises* and “A Natural History of the Dead,” Hudson’s work appears a third time in Hemingway’s fiction. In the posthumously published novel, *The Garden of Eden*, the married protagonists David and Catherine share an appreciation of Hudson’s work: “the books of W. H. Hudson made him [David] feel rich and when he told Catherine this she was very pleased” (95).

28 Critics have debated the appropriate genre classification for “A Natural History of the Dead.” For a discussion of this issue see Charles Stetler and Gerald Locklin’s “‘Natural History of the
maintaining the matter-of-fact tone of a naturalist, the story proceeds to describe dead bodies in various forms of decay, including bloating corpses, defecation after death, and picking body parts from barbed wire. These gruesome details, many of which were drawn from Hemingway’s experiences on the Italian front in 1918, parody the intentions of early naturalists to look to the natural world to instill in the reader “faith, love, and hope” (335). In the story, the narrator specifically compares his undertaking to accounts written by three prominent naturalists, one of whom is W. H. Hudson (Reverend Gilbert White and Bishop Stanley are the others). Hemingway challenges the optimism and simplicity of these early naturalists, particularly their faith in finding divinity in the natural world, by showing the failure of their studies to recognize humanity’s capacity for violence and brutality.

As Mary Louise Pratt has shown persuasively in Imperial Eyes, eighteenth and nineteenth-century European exploration, naturalism, and colonialism were intimately linked. The scientific discourse of naturalists frequently served to enable Western imperialism. The connections between these activities are suggested by the presence in “A Natural History of the Dead,” of Mungo Park, the Scottish explorer and representative figure of European colonialism. In “A Natural History of the Dead,” the narrator writes, “One wonders what that persevering traveller, Mungo Park, would have seen on a battlefield in hot weather to restore his confidence” (338). The values that animated Western ideology have no response when confronted by the brutal realities of World War

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I. Hemingway describes Hudson’s work as “charming and sound accounts,” the positive yet dismissive evaluation that echoes the description of *The Purple Land* in *The Sun Also Rises*. Hemingway suggests that the prose itself is not at fault but rather the discourse that produces the prose fails to address essential points of significance. The presence of Hudson’s *The Purple Land* forms part of a broad critique of Western values in light of the realities of World War I.

The associations between naturalist writing and colonialism that are central to Hemingway’s use of Hudson are embodied by Theodore Roosevelt, an adventurer, explorer, colonizer, naturalist, and politician. It is not surprising then that Roosevelt was a great admirer of Hudson’s writing. The edition of *The Purple Land* with which Hemingway most likely would have been familiar was published in 1916 by the New York firm E. P. Dutton and Company. This edition, with a purple cover and gold lettering, includes a two-page introduction written by Roosevelt in which he effusively praises the author of *The Purple Land*: “Hudson’s work is of great and permanent value…. His writings come in that very small class of books which deserve the title of literature” (ix). Roosevelt observes that the novel is filled with the “adventurous” and the “picturesque” and he notes the “fierce and bloody lawlessness of revolutionary strife” contained in the novel. But what gives the novel its great merit for Roosevelt is that the author “combines the priceless gift of seeing with the priceless gift of so vividly setting forth what he has seen that others likewise may see it” (ix). Through the repetition of the phrases “we see” and Hudson “brings before for us,” Roosevelt emphasizes that the novel’s value lies in its ability to capture successfully, and present directly, life in South America. In thus reading *The Purple Land* as a literal representation, Roosevelt
construes the text in precisely the way that Jake believes Cohn does. Both Cohn and Roosevelt read the novel as an accurate representation of South America by taking “every word of ‘The Purple Land’ as literally as though it had been an R. G. Dun report” (17). As the example of Roosevelt suggests, Cohn’s misguided reading of *The Purple Land* can be seen not only as a personal failing but also as an example of a general cultural tendency to understand Latin America in terms of romanticized colonialism.

Roosevelt’s relationship to writings about South America goes beyond his praise and promotion of *The Purple Land*. Roosevelt, who took great pride in being a naturalist and outdoorsman, undertook the type of South American adventure Cohn desires. In 1913, having lost a bid for a third presidential term the previous year, Roosevelt co-led the Roosevelt-Rondon Scientific Expedition in the Brazilian jungle. The group traveled down the previously unmapped River of Doubt (subsequently renamed in honor of Roosevelt), an adventure Roosevelt recounted in his popular book *Through the Brazilian Wilderness* (1914). The book combines naturalist writing with exotic adventure. As Roosevelt writes, “The true wilderness wanderer . . . must be a man of action as well as of observation” (173). True to this belief, alongside extended descriptions of native plants and animals, the book recounts confrontations with deadly animals, exploits of physical prowess, life-threatening illness, and the murder of one of the party’s cabaneras. Adventures such as Roosevelt’s in South America are directly linked to colonial interventionism. During Roosevelt’s presidency, his Big Stick policy, which was expressed in the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, understood Latin America as territory open to U.S. domination. These policies were an extension of the image Roosevelt had carefully cultivated: his exploits in the Spanish-American War of
1898 and, just as significantly, his self-promotion, earned him an image as a heroic, conquering warrior. The future president’s famous charge up San Juan Hill on July 1, 1898 reflects the type of colonizing adventure described in *The Purple Land*, including taking pleasure in violently engaging the enemy. On returning to the United States from Cuba, Roosevelt announced to the eager spectators and press, “We have had a bully fight!” (“Rough Riders Land at Montauk” 2). Elsewhere he wrote, “The charge itself was great fun” (qtd. in C. Roosevelt 136).

The influence of Roosevelt on Hemingway has been well documented, particularly by Michael Reynolds. Living what Roosevelt called the “strenuous life” was an essential part of Hemingway’s ideal of manliness, which he incorporated in his own life through participation in such sports as boxing, tennis, and, most especially, hunting. This ideal of individual and self-sufficient manliness developed in Hemingway from childhood, partly from following Roosevelt as a model of masculinity. As Reynolds describes, at twelve Hemingway, dressed in a hunting outfit, went with his father to hear Roosevelt speak during a whistle stop tour. In these actions, Hemingway reflected the popular appeal of Roosevelt and the mythology he propagated.

While Roosevelt’s ideals of manliness and individual resourcefulness appear throughout Hemingway’s work, after Hemingway’s World War I experience his view of Roosevelt changed significantly. Although Hemingway never fully gave up Roosevelt’s masculinist code, as Reynolds has observed after the war Hemingway “understood the failure of the old ideals” that he associated with Roosevelt (233). This change found

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expression in Hemingway’s first published book, *Three Stories & Ten Poems* (1923), in which the ironic poem “Roosevelt” challenges the popular image of the former president:

Workingmen believed

He busted trusts,

And put his picture in their windows.

“What he’d have done in France!”

They said.

Perhaps he would—

He could have died

Perhaps,

Though generals rarely die except in bed,

As he did finally.

And all the legends that he started in his life

Live on and prosper,

Unhampered now by his existence. (*Complete Poems* 45)

Hemingway portrays Roosevelt as belonging to an earlier time and place. His constructed image as a hero comes undone when contrasted with the realities of the Great War. Tension between the human reality of the individual and the legend drives the poem, and the depiction of Roosevelt as image over substance resonates with the themes of *The Sun Also Rises*. World War I created a rupture that drove the power to look beyond mythologized images to authentic experience. Roosevelt, passing from living person to legend, moved away, like Cohn, from authentic experience. To believe a
legend, or to make oneself a legend as in the case of Roosevelt’s self-promotion, is to commit the same mistake as Cohn: to take legend or fiction literally.

The links between Cohn and Roosevelt point to Hemingway’s rejection of a set of values associated with nineteenth century colonial conquests. Although it seems a great distance from Roosevelt, the son of an old New York-Dutch family, to the Jewish-American Cohn whose religion makes him an outcast at Princeton, the two are linked to South America though *The Purple Land* and their desire for colonial adventure. Critics have seen Cohn’s actions as an attempt to enact a model of masculinity, what Ron Berman has described as Cohn’s “false chivalry” and his acting as a “fake gentleman” (44). Cohn’s need to invent a powerful masculine identity as a form of compensation for his Jewishness forms only one part of what the novel portrays as his misguided quest for identity.31 In depicting Cohn’s efforts at achieving masculinity, Hemingway participates in this convention. But Cohn’s efforts to be a gentleman do not fail only because they are inadequate to overcome his Jewishness. Cohn’s attempts to be a gentleman are driven by having been made an outcast because of his Jewishness, but his efforts to be a chivalrous gentleman fail to earn him a position of what the novel presents as a proper masculine identity in part because he has chosen an outmoded model of masculine bravado embodied by Roosevelt.32

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32 Daniel S. Traber specifically sees Cohn’s attempts to compensate for his Jewishness in his “maneuvering to affiliate himself with an elitist Anglo-Saxonism through the likes of Brett and Mike (the holders of ‘true’ Anglo-Saxon ‘blood’) that will give him further access to all the privileges and abuses the upper class enjoy” (244). This reading reinforces the link between Cohn and Hudson’s appeal to “the old Saxon fashion” of colonialism in *The Purple Land*. 
From the first sentence of *The Sun Also Rises*, in which the reader learns that Cohn was “once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton” (3), Cohn is associated with violence. Unlike the Spanish bullfighters who display a native, elegant violence, Cohn meanly beats people up. The distinction between these two types of violence plays out dramatically when Cohn beats up the bullfighter Romero. Although Romero displays his indomitable character by refusing to stay down despite repeated blows, as one character reports, Cohn “massacred the poor, bloody bull-fighter…. [H]e nearly killed the poor, bloody bull-fighter” (205). The description of extreme violence here links Cohn’s attempted chivalry to domination through violence. In the trip to Spain, Cohn in a sense gets his colonial romantic adventure, enacting the type of colonial massacre on a native population that Richard Lamb imagines. The violence of this colonial adventure is complemented by amorous adventure, Cohn’s pursuit of Brett. As *The Purple Land’s* Richard Lamb chases beautiful women and imagines “climbing over heaps of slain defenders,” Cohn in defending Brett (in Cohn’s eyes at least) and beating up Romero has the opportunity to enact his idealized and romantic version of heroism through violence directed at a figure represented as primitive.

Cohn’s attempts to attain masculinity through chivalry or enacting a fantasy of colonial conquest are subject to derision both by the characters in the novel and by Hemingway. The values Cohn adopts belong to a time before World War I; once they might have been appropriate but in the post-War reality that Hemingway depicts, imitating these outdated constructions of masculinity becomes a subject of ridicule. Like the workingmen in Hemingway’s poem “Roosevelt,” Cohn “believes” in an image that belongs to a time before World War I. When Hemingway attributes to Cohn a need to
compensate for his Jewish identity by being more American, he also suggests that there is a wrong way to be American. The postwar-American ideal depicted in *The Sun Also Rises* is not Jewish but neither is it the romantic colonizer engaged in conquest of native peoples. In denying Cohn a claim to the “correct” form of masculinity, this negative example allows Hemingway to present the development of an alternative national identity. While indebted to frontier ideals and Roosevelt’s “strenuous life,” the mode of U.S. identity embodied by Jake responds to the increasing global power of the United States and the expansive nature of expatriate modernism to imagine a sense of national identity that is not tied to national space.

“Americans Are Always in America”: The Consolidation of National Identity

In depicting the wrong place to go, the wrong way of thinking of travel, the wrong type of aesthetic appreciation, and the wrong model of masculinity, *The Sun Also Rises* presents a series of negative possibilities; what then for Hemingway is the appropriate model of postwar U.S. identity and cultural interaction? While Cohn attempts to pattern his life on incorrect models of U.S. identity, places outside of the United States, specifically Paris and Spain are depicted as appropriate locations for a writer from the United States. In Spain, Jake enacts a fantasy of engagement with the natural, primitive world but one that is different from the colonial conquest associated with Cohn’s proposed trip to South America. Unlike the romantic adventure that Cohn desires, Jake seeks cultural contact and nourishment. DeGuzmán terms this ‘visionary colonialism’ because it is “‘colonialist’ in its insistence on justified insider status and ‘visionary’ in its utopian appreciation for the country it so desires to appropriate” (239). The move from
the direct act of conquering to cultural appreciation forms part of the restructuring of geographic relationships and U.S. national identity in the first decades of the twentieth century.

As DeGuzmán observes, Hemingway “treated Spain as a frontier, as a proving ground for experience and artistic practice” (236). Traveling to Spain allows the U.S. frontier to be recreated and redefined outside the United States. With the closing of the frontier, Turner questioned where the creation of U.S. identity would occur. And since the closing of the frontier was linked to the absence of space for continued westward expansion, Turner considered that a natural result would be U.S. overseas expansion. The “visionary colonialism” of *The Sun Also Rises* represents one version of this by making Spain a site of U.S. cultural renewal. Yet while it recreates some elements of the U.S. frontier, in seeking to appropriate cultural elements from outside U.S. national space, the element of Americanization that was a fundamental part of the frontier mythology is no longer present. Jake’s version of colonial fantasy, in drawing on native cultures and spaces outside the United States for cultural and physical rejuvenation, presents a threat to U.S. national identity.

In finding U.S. culture to be provincial and the frontier myth to be exhausted, expatriate modernists turned to Europe. In doing so, their relationship to U.S. national culture came into question, a tension Hemingway invokes in *The Sun Also Rises*. When Jake criticizes Cohn, Jake notes that not only does Cohn’s desire to go to South America come from a book, his failure to appreciate Paris comes from a literary source as well, specifically H. L. Mencken. Jake states, “Mencken hates Paris, I believe. So many young men get their likes and dislikes from Mencken” (49). Although Hemingway had multiple
reasons for criticizing followers of Mencken, not least because Mencken as editor of American Mercury rejected several of Hemingway’s stories, when writing this passage Hemingway was most likely thinking about an article Mencken wrote attacking U.S. writers who had flocked to France. This article, published in April 1925, was part of a running debate in the pages of the Paris Tribune that coincided with Hemingway’s writing of The Sun Also Rises. While too iconoclastic to be a true nativist or cultural nationalist, Mencken nonetheless strongly criticized expatriate writers, “Artists, indeed, usually suffer damage when they are transplanted. The emigres who flock to Paris, seeking to escape the horrors of the Puritan kultur, find only impotence and oblivion there; not one of them has written a line worth reading” (qtd. in “The Sun in Its Time” 62). The question of whether or not Europe could be a productive location for U.S. writers reverberates in The Sun Also Rises, a text that is concerned with distinguishing between the right and the wrong places to go.

The issue of U.S. writers of living and working outside the U.S. comes up again in the novel. Bill Gorton, a U.S. writer visiting Jake in Europe, jokes with Jake by mocking the language of cultural nationalism, “You’re an expatriate. You’ve lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see? You hang around cafés” (120). In this effective parody of the language of Mencken and cultural nationalism, the reference to “soil” particularly captures a recurring trope in U.S. literature of land and the environment as

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the basis for national culture. In joking about these issues it is clear that Jake and Bill (and through them, Hemingway) do not accept the notion that leaving U.S. soil harms writers. Yet the joke also suggests anxiety about the possibility of being corrupted by expatriation.

Contact with foreign soil, particularly Spanish soil, nourishes the expatriate artist but that nourishment means taking in something that is not “American.” For Turner and other proponents of the frontier myth, the active engagement with the frontier produced authentic experience and allowed personal development but just as importantly was specifically associated with Americanization. In recreating Spain as a frontier, Jake may gain access to authentic, masculine experience; however, since the frontier is not in the United States, Jake risks becoming something other than “American.” In separating the frontier mythology of authenticity from a connection to U.S. soil and Americanization, Hemingway challenges prominent conceptions of U.S. identity. Like Turner, Theodore Roosevelt was a proponent of a similar frontier thesis. Both used the rhetoric of open spaces to depict the absence or irrelevance of native cultures. Where Turner speaks of “free land,” Roosevelt wrote in rather less diplomatic language in his four-volume history of the frontier, *The Winning of the West* (1889–1896); he repeatedly uses the phrase “waste spaces” to refer to areas inhabited by native peoples. For both Turner and Roosevelt, the end of continental expansion presented a crisis of U.S. identity, although where Turner considered the possibility of the continuation of U.S. expansionism

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34 For example, in the first lines of the first volume of *The Winning of the West*, Roosevelt writes: “During the past three centuries the spread of English speaking peoples over the world’s waste spaces has been not only the most striking feature in the world’s history but also the event of all others most far-reaching in its effects” (1).
extending overseas, Roosevelt actively sought to replicate the frontier through colonial projects.

Roosevelt is concerned with national identity but the engagement with the frontier in Roosevelt’s work (and Turner’s) functions to Americanize the immigrant. The national identities that are constantly reinforced in *The Sun Also Rises* stand out when compared to earlier representations of identity. Roosevelt’s “version of the Frontier Myth heralded immigrants as the archetypical heroes of American history” (48). His concern with the possibility of making immigrants into “Americans” focuses on “races” and “peoples.” Examples include “Moslem over Christian” “Teutonic conquests” “Turk” “Boer” “Zulu” “Cossack” “Tartar” “Maori”, their “red, black, and yellow aboriginal.” National groups including “Americans” are treated as “a people” thereby associated more closely with a race than a modern national identity based on the nation-state and characterized by citizenship. The strenuous life and engagement with the frontier allowed the transformation of immigrants into “Americans.” Where Turner imagined that the U.S. frontier transformed those who came in contact with it by “Americanizing” them, Spain as a frontier offers the expatriate the opportunity to participate in a different culture what lies on the other side of the frontier in *The Sun Also Rises* is not “free land” but a bordered, bounded national culture.

Travel across borders appears repeatedly in *The Sun Also Rises*, including specific references to passports and luggage inspections. In the 1920s, frequent border checks of the type Hemingway describes were seen as specifically modern nuisances. The late nineteenth century had been a time of comparatively great, loosely regulated freedom of movement in Europe. During World War I, passport requirements and other identity
measures were implemented as war-time necessities. However, as John Torpey writes in his history of passports, “The generalized anxiety about borders that existed during the war did not subside with its end. Instead, the ‘temporary’ measures implemented to control access to and departure from the territories of European states persisted into the shallow, fragile peace that was the interwar period” (116). At the end of the First World War, a League of Nations conferences in 1920 sought to standardize passport and travel procedures, yet such impositions remained a subject of contention and were frequently looked on with annoyance by travelers.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, border crossing reinforces the importance of national identities and national boundaries. When Jake crosses the “Spanish frontier” (98) going from France to Spain, the description does not reflect the mythical “free land” associated with the U.S. frontier but a space highly regulated by the power of the state: “There was a little stream and a bridge, and Spanish carabineers, with patent-leather Bonaparte hats, and short guns on their backs, on one side, and on the other fat Frenchmen in kepis and mustaches” (98). The demarcation of national space is depicted in the two sets of border guards: the Spanish paramilitary carabineers on one side and the French guards on the other side, wearing kepi, the traditional hat of the French army and police. These national divisions are reinforced by the description of events at the crossing: the guards “took the passports and looked at them. . . . The chauffeur had to go in and fill out some papers about the car” (98). While these actions seem innocuous, when Jake reenters Spain at the end of the novel, Hemingway again describes the specific details of the border crossing. Jake and the other travelers have to “show passports” and Jake has to open his bag for the custom officials (237). The minutia of border crossing described in the novel reflects
space that has been organized in national partitions; it also shows the complex and
evolved apparatus of the state that exists to enforce the borders. The “frontier” in The
Sun Also Rises is the opposite of the lawless, open, and unregulated space depicted in the
myth of the American frontier. The closed frontier between Spain and France represents
both the closing of the U.S. frontier and the division of the world into nations. Turner
wrote that the frontier in the United States “is not the European frontier—a fortified
boundary line running through dense populations. The most significant thing about it is
that it lies at the hither edge of free land” (3). Unlike the U.S. frontier, European frontiers
for Hemingway, like Turner, exist between nations. In The Sun Also Rises, rather than
offering a space of Americanization, a frontier is a line one crosses to gain access to a
different culture.

The border crossing is one of several ways the novel emphasizes national space
and national identity. On returning to France after the fiesta in Spain, Jake remarks: “It
felt comfortable to be in a country where it is so simple to make people happy. You can
never tell whether a Spanish waiter will thank you. Everything is on such a clear financial
basis in France. It is the simplest country to live in” which Jake follows with the
affirmation “I was back in France” (236). Rather than the specific attributes that Jake
associates with each nation, the significance lies in countries being clearly distinguished
from each other. Like the border guards who mark a clear line of separation between
nations, culture and custom are subject to the same type of rigid national divisions.
Similarly, the novel uses adjectives of nationality such as “Spanish town” (96) and
“Spanish churches” (96) that reinforce nationality as a fundamental element of
representation and identity. To an overwhelming extent, the world in The Sun Also Rises
is seen and described through the terms of nationality, including its descriptions of the natural environment: “We all got in the car and it started up the white dusty road into Spain. For a while the country was much as it had been; then climbing all the time, we crossed the top of a Col, the road winding back and forth on itself, and then it was really Spain” (99). In the novel, nationality marks even the natural landscape and is essential to understanding and describing the world.

As places are marked by national identity, national identities are central to the descriptions of characters in *The Sun Also Rises*. Throughout the text characters are identified in terms of their nationality: Jake and Cohn are American, Brett is English, Count Mippipopolous is Greek. In the tight economy of Hemingway’s prose, reference to specific nationalities provides much of the limited information the reader is given about characters. One representative example is Harris, whom Jake and Bill meet while fishing in the Irati River. The character is introduced in terms of national identity, “In the evenings we played three-handed bridge with an Englishman named Harris” (130). Subsequently Harris’s national identity is reinforced when Jake narrates that “One morning I went down to breakfast and the Englishman, Harris, was already at the table” (131). Only when Bill and Jake separate from Harris does the reader, along with Bill and Jake, discover that Harris’s name is actually Wilson-Harris (“With a hyphen, you know” (134)); that, along with a few miscellaneous facts, “he talked Spanish quite well” (133), that he ties his own flies, that he is a member of a club and lives in London, these facts are the total of the specific information the reader is given. For minor characters like Harris or the “German maître d’hôtel” (213) who is subsequently referred to simply as
“the German,” national identities are not just a part of their character; national identity serves as the defining feature of their character.

The link between identity and nationality is not limited to minor characters; no character in *The Sun Also Rises* is more marked by national identity than Jake. From the beginning of the novel the reader understands that Jake is an expatriate writer from the United States. However beyond this general description the novel depicts national identity as inescapable for Jake. Twice Jake and Bill are recognized as Americans and both times it occurs in nearly identical language: while traveling on a train a fellow U.S. traveler asks them “I suppose you’re Americans, aren’t you?” (91); later in the Basque region one of local men asks, “You’re Americans? (112). National identity here is an inescapable social construction. Jake is American not because national identity is an innate characteristic but because he is recognized as such. The recognition of identity is both social and political in *The Sun Also Rises*. Passports and border crossing serve as reminders of how nation-states affix and regulate national identity.35

Instead of imagining national culture as something one could lose by traveling or living abroad, Hemingway imagines national identity as something the individual cannot escape. In a letter to Sherwood Anderson, written as Hemingway was submitting the proof of *The Sun Also Rises*, he describes being American as a burden and the cause of his recurring insomnia:

35 Once in the novel Jake’s nationality is misidentified, an event that shows the centrality of national identification even when the labels are mistakenly ascribed. In a flashback to Jake’s war injury, an Italian colonel takes Jake to be English: to the colonel “any foreigner was an Englishman” (39). The colonel’s need to privilege national identity and insist on national classifications, however inaccurate, suggests the importance of affixing national identity onto subjects. A person cannot just be different (i.e., “foreign”); that difference must be registered in terms of nationality. The doctor’s mistake only reinforces the importance of national identity.
You can put enough weight on a horse so he can’t have a chance of winning and in America (and Americans are always in America—no matter whether they call it Paris or Paname) we all carry enough weight to kill a horse—let alone have him run under it. I’ve been living this side of bughouse with the old insomnia for about eight months now. And it’s something you can take with you to any country but I’m glad that I was built on the tough side and maybe it will all work out. (Selected Letters 218)

Hemingway’s unstable mental health comes to the fore in this letter but the national terms in which he expresses his struggles provide perspective on his thinking about national identity. The way Hemingway presents “American” identity forestalls the arguments made by cultural nationalists against expatriation. Rather than national identity being something that can be lost by the expatriate, national identity is inescapable. That “Americans are always in America – no matter whether they call it Paris or Paname” separates national identity from national space. Being on foreign “soil” does not make one less American. Americans are always engaged with the nation and always subject to and participating in Americanness. The analogy of the horse which carries an external weight indicates that Hemingway is not thinking of national identity as natural or innate. The innate part of his being, that he is “built on the tough side,” must withstand the pressure of being American, which burdens it. Thus, American identity marks individual subjects, and those subjects cannot escape participation in particular national social and cultural constructions, that is “Americanness.” Reading Jake’s often cited response to Cohn, that “going to another country doesn’t make any difference” (19) in the context of
the letter above, suggests the comment can be read not only as making a general statement about the impossibility of escaping oneself by traveling, (i.e., one brings one’s issues with him) but suggesting that one cannot escape one’s national culture even by leaving national space. National culture cannot be separated from the individual: the individual always inhabits his national culture no matter where he goes.

In fixing national culture to the individual, Hemingway challenges associations between national culture and the environment, represented variously by land, soil, and most important in the 1920s, the frontier. The Spanish frontier in *The Sun Also Rises* allows an engagement with the soil, but the generative possibilities of this type of environmental engagement are directed to a different purpose. Rather than addressing the problem of Americanization, the Spanish territory functions to address the problem of cultural renewal that is separated from national identity. As a result, to lack a national identity is to be excluded from the modern world. This is a crucial divide that distinguishes Jake and Cohn. While Cohn is from the United States, the novel denies him the privilege of national identity. Unlike Jake, he is never referred to as an American; instead he is repeatedly identified both symbolically and directly as a “Jew” (seven times) or as “Jewish” (six times).

The meaning and the rhetorical force that Hemingway draws upon by emphasizing Cohn’s ethnic/religious identity over his nationality follows the way Hemingway plays national identity against ethnic identity elsewhere in his work. In

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36 In the same way that crossing the Spanish frontier in *The Sun Also Rises* involves making Jake more American, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* the American hero-protagonist Jordon connects to Spain’s soil. *The Last Wonderful Country* (the working title of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*) is able to reimagine the frontier myth’s engagement with the land only after having territorialized that land as part of a national system.
*Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison observes that in *To Have and Have Not* there are both black and not black characters from Cuba, all of whom are in a technical sense Cuban. The novel, however, divides these characters into two categories: those who are “Cuban,” which is applied exclusively to non-black Cubans, and the black Cubans, who are referred to as “niggers.”37 National designation is a mark of privilege and modernity, while those who are seen as primitive, ethnic, or racial are outside the national system. To be modern one must have a national identity. A national identity is not sufficient to allow one to meet Hemingway’s code but it is necessary and having a national identity does distinguish one from the most abject characters.

In *The Sun Also Rises* national identity is required to participate in the modern world system, which is shown in the scene in which Jake crosses the border from France to Spain. When a Basque peasant is turned away at the border, the guard tells Jake, “he hasn’t got any passport.... [H]e’ll just wade across the river” (98). The peasant’s ability to move outside the system of nations and national boundaries suggests the artificial nature of the system of national political structures. The geographic feature of the river is real but the border is a human creation imposed on the land and on those who participate in a system of nations. Thus, while the novel recognizes borders and national citizenship as artificial constructions, to participate in the modern world nonetheless requires participation in a system of nations. The characters who participate in modernity must take part in the fiction of nationality or become an anachronism. Cohn is caught in a

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37 In making the distinction between “whites” and “non-whites,” Hemingway follows the black-white binary that has been pervasive in U.S. racial thought. For a discussion of the black-white binary, see Juan F. Perea’s “The Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race: The ‘Normal Science’ of American Racial Thought” (*California Law Review* 85.5 (Oct, 1997). 1213-1258).
position between Jake and the peasant: neither having a national identity nor able to move outside of the national system.

To escape from this system, “to go back in the country in South America” (18) as Cohn desires, would be a return to the anachronistic world of the peasant and the colonizer. “Country” plays on the word’s two meanings. South America is not “a country” in the sense of being a nation but does represent going to an expanse of undeveloped land, thus “the country.” These two meanings of country represent two different types of travel: the colonialist adventure that takes place on “free land” and is associated with Cohn and Roosevelt, and the expatriate, represented by Jake, who moves across the recognized political boundaries in a system of nation-states. Cohn makes the mistake of misreading the historical moment by trying to escape from the system of nations to enter a pre-national world.

The paradoxical relation between national identification and cosmopolitanism creates a sustained tension in the novel. Even as Jake is marked as American, he tries to distinguish himself from Americans. The narrative is, to use Jake’s description of a Parisian restaurant, “crowded with Americans” (82). A restaurant previously described in a guidebook as “untouched by Americans” is now filled with Americans, which forces Jake and his friends to wait forty-five minutes for a table in spite of the fact that they had eaten at the restaurant before it became fashionable. The Americans here “touching” a different culture hints at an imposition against the foreign body that, while milder than the violence of Cohn’s punches, nonetheless mars its object. In taking this position Jake attempts to distance himself from the American throngs, as he does later in the novel when confronted with crowds of Americans on a train. Here he and Bill use humor to
effectively distance themselves from their fellow “Americans” by joking that the tourists are a “gang of Pilgrim Fathers” (92). This joke reverses the direction of Pilgrim immigration, which is seen as now moving from the United States to Europe. Yet however much disdain Jake has for the guidebook travelers in the restaurant and the Americans on the train, he cannot escape being identified, like them, as American.

A desire to assume other cultural positions pervades The Sun Also Rises. For the expatriate modernist writer the view that an American is always in America creates the possibility of writing the United States from outside the country yet it also limits the writer to being American. Because Cohn takes his ideas from books and wants to play the romantic hero, he fails to attain an authentic identity. Cohn’s proposed trip to South America, closely resembles Jake’s summer trip to Spain. But where Cohn’s ideas about South America come from a book, Jake’s trip is distinguished by his aficion.38 The novel emphasizes both the possibility of cultural exchange and its limits. Jake appreciates the bullfights and the bullfighters, which the novel situates as related to the issues of national identity: “it amused them [the Spanish bullfight aficionados] very much that I should be an American. Somehow it was taken for granted that an American could not have aficion. He might simulate it or confuse it with excitement, but he could not really have it” (137). This statement suggests that one can transcend national identity to take on the qualities of another culture. In gaining the acceptance of the Spanish bullfighting aficionados (by passing “a sort of oral spiritual examination”) Jake’s individual identity (as an

38 Throughout the chapter, I write “afición” as it appears in Hemingway’s text rather than as it would be written in standard Spanish, “afición.” Arguably Hemingway’s choice represents the transfer of a Spanish word to English rather than a Spanish word used in an English sentence. In any case, as the discussion here is of the term as it is used in The Sun Also Rises, I follow Hemingway’s usage.
aficionado) seemingly can be distinct from his national identity (as an American). Where Cohn’s attempts to enact a role of masculinity are shown to be misguided and false, Jake’s aficion is remarkable for its authenticity. Yet while the aficionados’ acceptance of Jake creates an idealized moment of cultural border crossing, the novel goes on to deny the possibility of maintaining such a position. Even authenticity, the novel’s and Hemingway’s prized virtue, is not enough to remove the indelible mark of national identity.

Jake’s position as both an aficionado and an American leads to a conversation that foreshadows Jake’s losing the aficionados’ respect. Montoya, the Spanish hotel proprietor and bullfight aficionado, turns to Jake to decide how to handle a message the American ambassador has sent inviting Romero to a party at the Grand Hotel. When Jake tells Montoya “Don’t give Romero the message,” he has given the right answer: “Montoya was very pleased” (176). By giving the appropriate answer, Jake further establishes that he is worthy of being an aficionado. The American, specifically the Anglo-American, seemingly can cross over from outsider to insider; however the novel makes this a temporary position for Jake rather than one that can be maintained. Montoya solicits Jake’s advice not only because Jake is an aficionado but because, as Montoya says, “I wanted to ask you because you were an American” (176). This language echoes the marking of Jake as an American that occurs at other points in the novel. Here Jake seemingly participates in both cultures: he understands the corrupting threat of the invitation, which demonstrates that he is an aficionado, and he is an American; therefore he is able to understand that perspective as well.
Jake and Montoya in their initial conversation accept that Jake can cross these cultural boundaries but this moment of cultural border crossing reads ironically when taken in the context of Brett’s eventual affair with Romero. The initial conversation with Montoya includes two references to specific sources of corruption to the bull-fighters. The first is the American ambassador and his invitation to the party. The second is also American: Jake observes, “There’s one American woman down here now that collects bull-fighters” (176). As with the Ambassador’s invitation, the corruption of the bull-fighter is seen in terms of national culture: both the threatening influences are American. Jake’s comment foreshadows Brett’s relationship with Romero, which Jake enables. First, however, Jake plays the role of the ambassador by participating as Romero drinks with a group of foreigners in the hotel. As Jake narrates, Montoya “came into the room. He started to smile at me, then he saw Pedro Romero with a big glass of cognac in his hand, sitting laughing between me and a woman with bare shoulders, at a table full of drunks. He did not even nod” (180-181). This breach of trust is followed by Jake’s enabling the affair between Brett and Romero. Jake sits with Romero and Brett and then leaves them, tacitly allowing the affair to occur. As Jake leaves, he narrates, “the hard-eyed people at the bull-fighter table watched me go. It was not pleasant” (191). The sexual encounter echoes the corrupting influence of the “American woman.” That the agent of the corruption is Brett, an Englishwoman rather than an American, presents a case of slippage between national identities. As is the case for the Italian colonel who identifies all foreigners as English, the logic of the novel insists on the importance of national identity, even if it is applied inaccurately.
Jake loses the respect of the aficionados by participating in both types of corruption that he had previously sought to help Romero avoid. This forces a reconsideration of Montoya’s statement seeking Jake’s assistance. Rather than reading the moment as a point of cultural border crossing that makes Jake both aficionado and American, Montoya’s statement, “I wanted to ask you because you were an American,” foreshadows Jake’s failure to maintain the aficionado code. In the end, Jake acts like an American, not like an aficionado. Or rather, even though he is both an American and an aficionado, national identity trumps his seemingly innate “spiritual” identity. Jake fails to maintain his position among the aficionados not because his aficion is inauthentic – he is neither “faking” nor “simulating” it – but due to the national culture that marks him. Identified by strangers as an American, the disapproval of the aficionados aligns Jake with the forces that corrupt bullfighters, the American ambassador and the American woman who collects bullfighters. This is to say, Jake is an American. Aficion or no, what counts in the end is his national identity.

**U.S. Power: The Passport and the Ambassador**

Cultural appropriation by modernists was supported by and implicated in the development of U.S. economic and political power in the first decades of the twentieth century. Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* emerges from a moment when U.S. territorial expansionism and colonial conquest transitioned to economic imperialism supported by military actions that claimed to support sovereign governments. *The Sun Also Rises* exemplifies the transition from the ideals of frontier expansionism and colonial conquest to a rhetorical position that claimed to recognize sovereignty and to engage only in what
President Wilson will referred to as “peaceful conquest” (280). Where in *The Sun Also Rises* Spain and France are depicted as highly defined national spaces, South America resembles Turner’s “free land” and Roosevelt’s “waste spaces,” places without recognized national sovereignty. In rejecting Cohn’s desire for a colonial adventure in South America, rather than endorsing this understanding of political space, Hemingway suggests an end to the type of imperial adventures that dominated U.S. activity in Latin America from the 1890s to the 1932 beginning of the Good Neighbor period.

Going to South America as Cohn envisions is not wrong simply because of the location but because he wants to go in the mode of colonial conqueror rather than as an economic and cultural imperialist who respects national sovereignty. Thus while *The Sun Also Rises* leaves Latin America undifferentiated and unexplored, particularly in terms of national identity, the right places to go, namely France and Spain, are articulated through representational structures that reinforce national identities. The depiction of national boundaries and national space in the novel aligns itself with the economic and political position of the United States after the First World War. Where in previous generations, expatriatism without dependence on a local economy was possible only for those who held an economic position which freed them from the need to work, the expatriates of the modernist era frequently remained tied to markets in the United States. These circumstances are reflected in *The Sun Also Rises*, a novel deeply concerned with money and work. In the novel, these economic issues are bound with personal identity through the financial situation of the traveler abroad.

Casting South America as outside of the system of nations denies the possibility of the region and its people having a historical perspective or agency. This denial of a
South American reality forms a part of the larger circulation of power in the novel. Rather than direct violence, power in the novel is exercised through privilege. To reconfigure Edward Said’s well known observation that in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* wealth derived from the colonial plantation is “what sustains . . . life materially” on the English estate (85), what sustains life materially for the U.S. expatriates living in Europe is access to U.S. markets and, less directly but just as significantly, U.S. power. The events of the novel are only possible because of the money obtained from publishing in the United States, along with Cohn’s allowance which also comes from the United States. Bill and Jake earn their livings as writers who publish in the United States and thus have the money to summer in Spain. Cohn’s money allows him, Brett, and Michael to travel to Spain. These activities are all possible because of rising U.S. wealth and the post-World War I strength of the dollar. Not incidentally then, along with Jake and Cohn, the character who is most often seen paying for things in the novel is the Greek Count Mippipopolous, whose wealth also is linked directly to the United States. As Brett reports, the Count, “[o]wns a chain of sweetshops in the States” (40). Nearly exclusively then, the economic power of the United States creates the financial prosperity that enables expatriate modernism in *The Sun Also Rises*.

39 In “Yes, That Is a Roll of Bills in My Pocket: The Economy of Masculinity in *The Sun Also Rises*,” Jacob Michael Leland argues that “Jake Barnes depends upon earning and spending practices to establish an American, male expatriate identity in Paris (37). This argument is largely compatible with the one I make here. However, Leland sees Jake as participating fully in the European circulation of money by both working and spending in Europe. Leland states, “Jake makes money in Europe that he will spend there, which classifies him as an expatriate writer and not a tourist” (38). This argument fails to address the fact that although Jake works in Europe his earnings come from the United States. Jake’s transnational economic position is also suggested by the fact that his bank account is in dollars not francs. For further discussion of money in *The Sun Also Rises*, see Michael S. Reynolds’s *The Sun Also Rises: A Novel of the Twenties*. 
Along with economic prosperity in the United States, the unprecedented geographic diffusion of writers from the United States in the post-War period was supported by technological advances. Although writers from the United States could and did travel to Europe before World War I, increased communication facilitated writers living abroad selling to the U.S. markets. Whether through transatlantic cables such as those used by Jake to publish his newspaper articles in the United States or traveling to meet with publishers, as Cohn does in crossing the Atlantic from Paris to New York to arrange the publication of his novel, the increasing speed of communication and travel allowed writers to remain connected with the publishing industry in the United States, which paid in dollars. As much as for expatriate artists as for tourists, the power and prosperity of the United States creates a Europe that is “crowded with Americans.”

The economic position of the United States and its national power remains largely masked in *The Sun Also Rises*, as the colony is in English fiction of empire. Thus, as Latin America is invoked but absent in *The Sun Also Rises*, the United States too is absent from the novel, although less obviously so. The novel begins with Jake’s narration of events in the United States as he recounts Cohn’s life in various geographic locations: Princeton, California, Massachusetts, and New York. Jake subsequently narrates Cohn’s brief return to the United States, where his novel is accepted by a publisher. These places are invoked yet remain absent from the action proper, instead remaining an oblique presence in the novel, only appearing through Jake’s narration of events at which he was not present. The distancing of the United States itself, the center of power and privilege in the novel, affords an image of equality and equivalence between nations and national subjects.
The interconnected world of travel and exchange between the United States and Europe reflects the economic system behind expatriates and national identities. Rather than the core-periphery model of colonial imperialism, such as that in place in Austen’s England, the national system in *The Sun Also Rises* suggests developments associated with the rise of transnational capitalism. In place of the binary relationships of colonialism, transnational capitalism allows for crossing of borders, but only at certain times and by certain actors, while maintaining the theoretical sovereignty of national states. Those with the freedom of movement between nations, represented by Jake, enjoy the privilege and profit of choice. Jake can choose where to go and where not to go: to Latin America or Spain, to Spain or France, to go fishing or go to the bullfights. This relates also to the guidebook quality of the novel, which suggests the increasing power and leisure greater numbers of Americans had in choosing where to go and what to do. Guidebooks are markers of privilege as they speak to those with the wealth and position to travel. When Hemingway writes that “Americans are always in America – no matter whether they call it Paris or Paname” he is thinking of a select group of Americans, those that have the choice to be in Paris or Paname. Such choice is not limited to those from the United States. Brett and Mike can cross borders freely but rely on U.S. wealth. The Greek count, while not from the U.S. can extract wealth across borders.

But while *The Sun Also Rises* insists on the importance of national identity for the majority of characters, not all these individuals share the ability to choose where to go. There are those who are tied to a national culture and geography, such as the bull fight aficionados. Unlike Jake, who can choose to go to Spain and can pass as an aficionado, they remain in a national culture. They are bound to a specific space: in the logic of the
novel the reader cannot imagine Montoya or Romero in Paris. Or if they were there, it would be a mark of their corruption, their no longer being authentic representations of a national culture. These national subjects are equally members of the national system in that they, like Jake, are marked by national identity but unlike Jake who moves freely, they are bound by national space and culture.

Finally, a third potential position is represented in the figure of the border-crossing peasant. Unlike Jake who has the necessary papers to cross the border between Spain and France, the Spanish peasant lacks a passport and therefore is denied permission to cross. Yet, as the border guard tells Jake, “he’ll just wade across the river,” to reach France. In some sense the peasant is cosmopolitan; he is a “citizen of the world” in that he belongs to no nation. By moving outside the system of nations and national boundaries the peasant is a forerunner of the issue of immigration as it developed in the twentieth-century. The primacy of the nation state leads to increasingly policed borders which only a privileged group is allowed to cross freely (capital too enjoys increasingly free movement between nations). Those on the outside of the system become the undocumented immigrants positioned on the vulnerable margins of the system.

As the example of the peasant suggests, the power of national identity and the United States radiates beyond the borders of the national space through a privilege that conceals power. In the novel the two symbols of this power are the passport and the ambassador. Both are emblems and manifestations of national power that allow increasing cultural contact while maintaining national power. The passport and the ambassador facilitate contact and exchange between nations even as they set the terms.

40 Not incidentally border controls and immigration restrictions in the United States were greatly expanded in the 1920s by the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and The Immigration Act of 1924.
and limit such interactions. Unlike the development of “free land” and the violence of colonial imperialism, the cultural contact of the U.S. expatriates does not imagine conquering territory or directly imposing U.S. culture. Rather than the logic of the “white man’s burden” that Rudyard Kipling used to justify the civilizing mission of U.S. colonial conquest in the Philippines, the logic of the aficionado imagines cultural contact that allows the outsider to appreciate the other’s culture. Instead of civilizing the primitive culture it values native culture for the possibilities it offers for rejuvenating and supporting the more powerful notational culture.

Power in this relationship is concealed rather than manifest in the direct act of violence. The figure of the ambassador represents this cultural relationship in that an exchange of ambassadors recognizes the sovereignty of each nation and their equality as nations while serving to enable the differences in power between the nations. As discussed above, the presence of the American ambassador is mentioned in a conversation between Jake and Montoya. The ambassador is mentioned a second time when his presence at the bullfights is noted by Montoya. When Montoya asks Jake if he knows the American ambassador, Jake responds, “Everybody knows the American ambassador.... Everybody’s seen them” (175). Even while representing the presence and influence of the ambassador, Jake’s phrasing, “everybody knows” them, suggests that Jake has no special relationship to the ambassador. The ambassador and the passport together represent a system of national power that moves beyond the borders of national space. Against the position of the ambassador, Jake privileges his own position as a knowledgeable and appropriate consumer of Spanish culture. Jake, a person associated with art and letters versus the politician, who seems passive and less able to appreciate
true beauty, immediately recognizes the grace of Pedro but the ambassador comes to
what the book makes an inevitable realization only belatedly. Jake may be more
appreciative of the Spanish culture, but the difference between him and the ambassador is
one of type rather than kind. While Jake clearly would like to distinguish between the
position he occupies and the ambassador’s, Jake cannot maintain his place with the
aficionados. The repeated references to Jake as an “American” inextricably link him to
the ambassador. As they watch the bullfight, both Jake and the ambassador are
ultimately both spectators, passive consumers of a foreign culture, occupying privileged
positions by virtue of the economic and political power of the United States which
sustains them.

Rather than being removed from the politics and culture of the United States,
expatriate modernism participated in the changing relationships between the United
States and the world during a period of rapid economic, political, and cultural change.
The cultural possibilities of expatriation from the United States in the first decades of the
twentieth century presented a sustained tension between leaving the national space of the
United States and participating in the national culture. In setting expatriatism’s cultural
engagement apart from the space of the U.S. frontier while seeking cultural
reinvigoration in Spain, *The Sun Also Rises* indicates the extent to which the geography
of modernism, even in works written in and set in Europe, participates in reshaping U.S.
national space and cultural relationships in the Americas. The presence of South
America in Hemingway’s novel acknowledges that depictions of Latin America shape
and define expressions of U.S. national identity. The failure of the U.S. frontier to
provide a space of cultural renewal was not simply the loss of a mythology but directly
related to the economic and political position of the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century. In *The Sun Also Rises* the loss of the U.S. frontier leads to the rejection of direct colonial conquest and the development of new mythologies of cultural exchange that conceal U.S. power even as they are sustained by the economic and political power of the United States.
In the previous chapter, I argued that even though Hemingway’s modernist novel *The Sun Also Rises* is set in Europe and is populated primarily with characters from the United States and Europe, its geographic imagination nonetheless encompasses Latin America. While Hemingway’s characters remain at a remove from the physical space of the Americas, the novel, through its representation of Latin America, evinces a concern with fixing the physical and cultural borders of the United States. In contrast to Hemingway’s European setting, in this chapter I consider the work of Willa Cather, much of whose writing is situated in the Southwest and on the border between the United States and Mexico. Cather displays a fascination with the border and a constant awareness of the presence of Latin America, specifically Mexico, on the other side of a political boundary from the United States. Yet, while Mexicans and Mexico appear in nearly all of Cather’s major works, Cather limits and often actively resists the possibilities of cross-border connections.

In both including and resisting the influence of Mexico and Mexicans on U.S. culture and drawing lines of demarcation between the two nations, Cather’s work follows complex patterns of incorporation and exclusion. Through her incorporation of elements from Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, she seeks to expand the culture of the
United States and draw on diversity to enliven her work and the broader culture of the United States. Her work simultaneously limits the influence and living presence of alternative cultures to render them as safe artifacts capable of invigorating U.S. culture but not fundamentally destabilizing it. Through these patterns of inclusion and exclusion Cather participates in the marking of boundaries, both cultural and territorial, between the United States and Mexico during and immediately after the United States incorporated territorial lands into the national domestic body through statehood, most significantly that of Arizona and New Mexico in 1912, which marked the completion of the continental boundaries of the United States.

The geography of Cather’s fiction, particularly its focus on the Midwest and Southwest, has received considerable critical attention, yet the presence of the border, and specifically the possibilities of border crossing and the formation of cultural borders between the United States and Mexico has received comparatively little scholarly interest. Cather’s focus on locations away from the European centers that have most often been associated with modernism led to her being relegated for a time to the ranks of “regional writers.” Her work, however, has been the subject of much critical reevaluation since the 1980s by feminist critics, multiculturalists, and queer theorists.41 A central element of this reevaluation has been to recognize the expansive geographic connections in her work and the multiple cultures that she depicts. In observing that Cather expands the cultural horizon in her novels while remaining true to the local, Tom Lutz argues that

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41 Joan Acocella’s account of the history of Cather criticism has been influential not just in Cather Studies but in the wider debate about the function of criticism (Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2000). For discussion of Cather criticism, see also Anna Wilson’s “Canonical Relations: Willa Cather, America, and The Professor’s House” (Texas Studies in Literature and Language 47.1 (2005). 61-74).
her work is marked by what he terms “literary cosmopolitanism” which he defines as “an ethos of representational inclusiveness, of the widest possible affiliation, and concurrently one of aesthetic discrimination and therefore exclusivity” (3). Although Lutz draws attention to the significant tension between the local and the cosmopolitan that runs through Cather’s work, which he identifies as a fundamental aspect of U.S. American identity, he does not consider Cather’s depictions of Mexico, which complicates an understanding of both exclusion and inclusion.

Cosmopolitanism, a term that suggests the breaking of national boundaries, was one frame that Cather used to think of her work. In language that echoes Randolph Bourne’s call for a cosmopolitan America, Cather, in her 1923 essay “Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle,” finds a richness and diversity in the Midwest that inverts the conventional locations of cosmopolitanism and provincialism: “It is in that great cosmopolitan country known as the Middle West that we may hope to see the hard molds of American provincialism broken up; that we may hope to find young talent which will challenge the pale proprieties, the insincere, conventional optimism of our art and thought” (238). As I have discussed in previous chapters, this desire to free U.S. American identity from the limits of Anglo-Saxon parochialism was common to modernist writers. Cather’s cosmopolitanism, in responding to expatriate modernists such as Hemingway who left the United States, favors a broader sense of European-white “American” identity that can be realized through the recognition of the diversity of the many European immigrant cultures of the United States. In making the Midwest (and later the Southwest) a site of cosmopolitanism, Cather refigures the geography of modernism. Joseph Urgo reads Cather as engaging “a transnational, American empire”
(42) while Guy Reynolds argues that Cather “offers a pluralistic range of Americas by taking the whole of North America (from Canada to Arizona and Mexico, via Virginia and Nebraska) as her subject” (23). Evelyn Funda sees Cather as locating the American West “in a world context” (43) that is distinguished from the work of other Western writers “because she moves from an us/them, East/West dichotomy… to this theme of finding a ‘voice’ in a larger world” (44). As these critics point out, Cather is not simply a regionalist as some earlier critics took her to be.

The broadening of the world, very much a part of Cather’s writing, comes with notable limits, however. Most of Cather’s novels include references to Mexico; trips or events across the Mexican border frequently figure in the plots. Yet in an important sense the works do not “take in the whole of North America,” as Reynolds says they do. Although Mexico is present in Cather’s novels, it is consistently held at a remove. While characters take trips in Mexico, as happens in O Pioneers!, Song of the Lark, The Professor’s House, and Death Comes for the Archbishop, the narratives always draw a line at the border. The novels consistently avoid entering the physical space of Mexico. Events that take place in Mexico are mentioned only in passing, presented indirectly, or are left to be inferred by the reader. As I discuss below, the lack of direct depictions of Mexico reflects her desire to include Mexico as a cosmopolitan influence on the Midwest and Southwest settings of the novels, while also suggesting Cather’s discomfort with cultural hybridity. Her works simultaneously are invested in a transnational depiction of culture even as they also try to maintain a separation between Mexican and U.S. national space.

In 1908 Cather, 34 years old and a successful journalist and editor, began to
devote herself fully to writing fiction. At this time she wrote to her friend and mentor Sarah Orne Jewett describing the importance of the Spanish history of the United States to her literary vision. As Sharon O’Brien summarizes, in the letter Cather “referred to the Spanish influence informing the imagination of anyone who had grown up in the West: Spanish words, legends, and history were part of her cultural heritage” (405). This history provided Cather with a usable past which she could claim as her own and which could support her creative work. In My Ántonia, the novel’s protagonist, Jim, relates a story of finding a sword with a Spanish inscription. For Jim this proves that Coronado’s expedition had gone farther than was commonly thought: “At school we were taught that he had not got so far north as Nebraska, but had given up his quest and turned back somewhere in Kansas” (236). The story of the sword allows Cather to connect the Nebraska territory to Spanish history. Cather’s references to the Spanish history of the United States are not then incidental to her fiction but form an essential theme that challenged prevailing narratives of U.S. culture that focused on the Northeast and a cultural heritage focused on England.

Attending to the presence of Mexico and Mexicans in Cather’s novels reveals the nuances and limits of her cultural depictions. Among the many cultural groups that appear in Cather’s works—which include recent European immigrants, Anglo-Americans, Jews, Indians—Mexico and Mexicans repeatedly function as liminal cases that reveal boundaries of U.S. identity. The issues of geography and cultural diversity

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42 Paraphrase is used for Cather’s letters owing to a prohibition set out in Cather’s will on publishing her letters, either in whole or in part.

43 Critics have taken a variety of positions on Cather’s depiction of race. Christopher Schedler sees Cather as a “modernist ethnographer whose work shows the ‘relation of creatures or objects to each other’” (85). Among the number of critics who have charged Cather with racist tendencies,
in Cather’s works have been discussed in relation to the broad cultural issues of assimilation and immigration that were prominent in the 1910s and 1920s. In particular, Walter Benn Michaels sees Cather as having a “commitment to the purified ontology of nativist identity” (81). Such critics fail to see and identify the disruptive patterns of inclusion and exclusion that are at work in Cather’s fiction. Nativism relies on a principle of difference and exclusion. The presence of both racism and cross-cultural engagement in the novels, while broadly related to the immigration and cultural debates that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century, can be more fully understood in the specific context of U.S. territorial incorporation, the period when Midwestern and Southwestern areas that had been territories were granted statehood.

On February 14, 1912, President Taft signed the Arizona Statehood Act, which officially admitted Arizona as the 48th state in the union. A month earlier, on January 6, New Mexico had been granted statehood. These acts marked the completion of the United States’ continental expansion that had begun with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Throughout the nineteenth century the government added land to the continental space of the United States, first by designating these lands as territories and then gradually granting the territories statehood. As the final state to be added to the continental body, Arizona marked the completion of national space, creating a border that encircled the United States with all the land within given equal legal status.

Elizabeth Ammons takes perhaps the strongest position when she argues that Cather’s work “is deeply racist and ethnocentric. Even as Cather wrote about white women’s struggles against discrimination, including those of immigrants, she ignored living Native Americans in favor of celebrating dead ones, rendered Mexican women invisible, and caricatured African Americans” (280). Ammons’s view is shared by critics such as Mike Fischer and Janis Stout.
Two months after the granting of statehood in April of 1912, Cather first visited the Southwest when she traveled to Arizona to visit her brother Douglas, who worked for the railroad. That Cather undertook this trip in the same year as Arizona became a state was coincidental, yet the year forms a significant line of demarcation. Cather’s life covered the integration of the territory of the continental United States into states. In 1883 a ten-year-old Cather moved with her family from Virginia, where she was born, to Nebraska, eventually settling in the town of Red Cloud where she would grow up. When Cather arrived, Nebraska had been a state for 16 years and neighboring Colorado had achieved statehood seven years before. Wyoming and South Dakota, two other territories bordering Nebraska, would not become states until 1890 and 1889 respectively.

Cather’s novels are most often set in the period of continental expansion but written after its end. The locations of her great fictional works, *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), *My Ántonia* (1918), *The Professor’s House* (1925), and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) use locations in Colorado, New Mexico, and Nebraska to situate the characters at the edge of civilization. As Cather was aware, the process of statehood was a significant step in transforming what was seen as frontier territory into full-fledged parts of the national body. Writing of Nebraska, Cather observed that it “is a newer State than Kansas. It was a State before there were people in it” (236).\(^4\) This sense of the relative newness of the former territories was also marked by a feeling of an era coming to an end: “In Nebraska, as in so many other States, we must face the fact that the splendid story of the pioneers is finished” (238). Significantly, writing in 1907 in declaring the end to the frontier in Nebraska she seems to leave open the possibility that

\(^4\) Describing Nebraska before statehood as being without people, shows Cather omits the Indian history of the land when it suits her.
in some states the pioneer story in not finished. While she does not specifically refer to
the then ongoing statehood debates, her writing reflects the belief that the changing of the
territories to statehood represented a significant moment of development of the United States. This transitional period reshaped internal boundaries and political organization
within U.S. national space while also transforming the border between the United States and Mexico. With the former territories no longer a liminal place seen as not fully part of
the United States, Mexico was drawn into closer proximity to the domestic body of the
United States. In responding to these shifting borders through her representations of
Mexico and Mexicans, Cather participated in writing the boundaries of U.S. national
identity and national space.

**Border Transgressions in “The Dance at Chevalier’s”**

Before discussing the highly demarcated presence of the border and the related
patterns of incorporation and exclusion that appear in Cather’s novels, I will consider
border transgressions in “The Dance at Chevalier’s,” an early Cather story that presents a
diverse though stereotypical group of characters in a frontier setting. Rather than
depicting clear lines of demarcation between the United States and Mexico, the story,
although formulaic in many respects and lacking the descriptive power that characterized
Cather’s later work, presents a sense of the open frontier. The plot turns on the undefined
limits of space and the absence of a clear border, a perspective Cather no longer held in
her mature novels.

Cather published “The Dance at Chevalier’s” in 1900 in the short-lived, Pittsburg-
based *Library* magazine under the pseudonym Henry Nicklemann. Set in Oklahoma
“cattle country” (547, 555), the story takes place on the ranch of Jean Chevalier, a comparatively wealthy French cattle rancher who is hosting a dance that “is attended by all the French for miles around” (550). The story’s plot, which I will briefly summarize, is not particularly original. Before the dance, Denis and Signor, two cattle hands, Irish and Mexican respectively, play cards. When Denis catches Signor cheating and cuts his hand, Burns, a newspaperman from the East, warns Denis that Signor is treacherous. Later when Signor finds that the Chevalier daughter, Severine, has a relationship with Denis, Signor plots revenge against Denis. Signor blackmauls Severine into promising to kiss him that evening. Later, after the dance has begun, Signor gives Denis a poison cocktail and tells him that Severine has been secretly seeing them both. Although Denis does not believe him, Signor promises that if Denis looks out the window in a short while, he will have proof. A little later, Denis sees Signor and Severine kiss, and shortly thereafter Denis dies from poison, by which time Signor has fled.

The characters in the story are in many ways stock stereotypes. Denis, often called “the Irishman,” is boastful, a drinker, and not too bright. The French are passionate. The Eastern reporter displays his education by making literary references. The crudest stereotypes are saved for Signor, who plays the role of the conniving Mexican villain. He cheats at cards; he commits blackmail and murder. He utters stereotypical phrases of a villain such as “Ah, love is sweet, but sweeter is revenge. It is the saying of my people” (550). He is described in phrases such as “the Mexican’s greasy hand” (548); “The swarthy little Signor” (549); “narrow, snaky eyes” (553). In short, he is the stereotypical Mexican villain, who seemingly could have been lifted from any one of countless dime novels.
The crude stereotypes that dominate the story are complicated by moments of cultural mixing. Although the narratorial voice at first refers to the attendees of the dance as “French” it later elaborates on their racial origins by observing their cultural hybridity:

They were not of pure French blood, of course; most of them had been crossed and recrossed with Canadians and Indians, and they spoke a vile patois which no Christian man could understand. Almost the only traces they retained of their original nationality were their names, and their old French songs, and their grace in the dance…. Ah, that old hot, imperious blood of the Latins! It is never quite lost. These women had long since forgotten the wit of their mother land, they were dull of mind and slow of tongue; but in the eyes, on the lips, in the temperament was the old, ineffaceable stamp. The Latin blood was there. (551)

The terms in which Cather describes hybridity in the story are generally negative, and the cultural references play on fairly crude stereotypes, but few places in Cather’s work speak so directly to cultural mixing. Not only does the Chevaliers’ daughter have mixed blood, she has been subject to further cultural influences: “she could speak the French of France” (551) and she had “been sent two years to a convent school in Toronto” (551). This stretches the scope of the story to Canada and makes the daughter a remarkably cosmopolitan figure.

In addition to the hybridity of the French characters, the story shows an expansive geographic imagination that extends the story beyond its rural setting. Burns, the Eastern newspaper man, has been to Mexico. One musician at the dance is an “old Bohemian … [who] had played in a theatre in Prague (550). The poison used by Signor has a
transnational origin: “An old, withered Negro from the gold coast of Guinea had told him [Signor] how to make it, down in Mexico.” Even Signor himself, although strongly and repeatedly identified as Mexican, is associated with slippage between racial and national boundaries: “What his real name was, heaven only knows, but we called him ‘The Signor,’ as if he had been Italian instead of Mexican” (547). Unlike what we will see to be the case in Cather’s novels, the connections between the locations in this story are left open rather than being resolved into clearly delimited identities.

One of the few critics to consider “The Dance at Chevalier’s,” Catherine Downs, has written that after this early story Cather came “back to the immigrant in her fiction, each time becoming more sympathetic and complex in her treatment” (87). While this observation is true for the European immigrants who are the richly developed protagonists of Cather’s novels, this does not hold true for the Mexican characters. The overt racism in the portrayal of the Mexican Signor in “The Dance at Chevalier’s” is replaced in her later works by a paternalism that could be said to be more sympathetic in some respects but is not more complex. Most significantly, the Signor, while lacking depth (as could be said of all the characters in the story), does have intelligence and agency. Unlike the marginal presence of Mexicans relegated to supporting roles in the later novels, Signor is the clear protagonist of “The Dance at Chevalier’s.” As Janis Stout has observed, “the brown skinned Mexican…carries the plot, providing the only dramatic interest in sight” (“Brown and White” 38).

The use of stereotypes in the story, while never fully overcoming thecrudeness of their depictions, has transgressive elements. On first reading, the plot seems to endorse the opinion of Burns, who tries to warn Denis of Signor’s potential for treachery. In
making his point Burns invokes the most prominent and negative Mexican racial stereotypes:

They are a nasty lot, those Greasers. I’ve known them down in Old Mexico. They’ll knife you in the dark, any one of them. It’s the only country I could never feel comfortable in. Everything is dangerous—the climate, the sun, the men, and most of all the women. The very flowers are poisonous. (548)

To this assessment Denis responds:

Oh, he’s a good hand enough, and a first-rate man with the cattle. I don’t like Greasers myself, they’re all sneaks. Not many of ’em ever come up in this country, and they’ve always got into some sort of trouble and had to light out. The Signor has kept pretty straight around the place, though, and as long as he behaves himself he can hold his job. (548)

The plot goes on to support Burns’ and Denis’s assessments of Mexicans. In particular Burns’ comments on poisonous flowers in Mexico foreshadow Signor’s use of poison and just as Denis says about Mexicans, Signor turns out to be a “sneak” and he gets “into trouble and [has] to light out” (548).

However, unlike the majority of conventional Western narratives of the 1890s and early 1900s, such as those found in dime novels or early Hollywood films, in “The Dance at Chevalier’s” the Mexican “villain” gets away with the crime and is noticeably clever and effective in the execution of his revenge. The story ends with Denis dead on the dance floor while “The Signor had been in his saddle half an hour, speeding across the plains, on the swiftest horse in the cattle country” (555). In Cather’s novels, acts of
violence, such as the killing of Emil and Marie in *O Pioneers!*, lead to stable, moral resolutions, whereas “The Dance at Chevalier’s” lacks a resolution. In “The Dance at Chevalier’s,” Signor escapes and remains at large. Stout and Susan Rosowski have separately argued that Cather’s novels contribute to “shattering the Western code” (Rosowski 67). For example, as Stout observes, “In *My Ántonia* Cather sets up a model of the conventional Western (in the form of the Jesse James novel young Jim reads on the train going west) and shows it to be false” (*Picturing* 201). While these two critics focus their arguments, rightly I believe, on Cather’s representations of gender and violence, to this I would add that Cather’s representation of space is distinct from Western novels. Western novels depict the West and the border specifically as regions of chaos and instability. In the conventional Western, fear of hybridity, foreign cultures, and transnationality is rendered through the use of heightened violence and sexuality. It then falls to the white, Anglo hero to restore order. The space in which these events take place is untamed space where the lack of law and government foster violence which is often resolved with the appointing of a sheriff. Borders in their role of both separating and joining are dynamic, unstable, potentially chaotic spaces filled with contradiction and multiple (overlapping) identities.

Signor’s escape is directly tied to the story’s presentation of open and undefined space. The setting of the story occupies a space of the unincorporated territory. The only reference to the location of the story comes when it is mentioned that Burns, the newspaperman, had “come to live in Oklahoma because of his lungs” (547). It is interesting to speculate on the choice since David Stouck has reported that during her childhood in Nebraska Cather would have known French-Canadians similar to those in
“The Dance at Chevalier’s” (8-9). Thus locating the story in Oklahoma seems to be a deliberate choice to go against the historical basis for the story. One possible explanation is that in 1900 Oklahoma was still a territory while Nebraska had been a state since 1867.

As one of only three continental territories still seeking statehood, Oklahoma was often grouped with the other two, Arizona and New Mexico, as an outlying region and represented a part of the United States that was still untamed (fig. 1). Laura Gómez points to the cartoon on the left, with its depiction of an Indian representing Arizona and a Mexican representing New Mexico, both of whom are firing guns, and a comparatively civil white cowboy, as an example of the popular view that “Mexicans and Indians were too wild and irresponsible, and until they could be tamed, they were unfit for state citizenship” (77). Such racial attitudes toward Arizona and New Mexico were central to
Oklahoma being granted statehood before the other two territories. Yet the cartoon on the right, in which Oklahoma is depicted with Mexican features, suggests that Oklahoma was not free of racial taint. Moreover, the cartoons associate the unincorporated territories with chaos and lack of control. Although not as marked by otherness as Arizona and New Mexico, the Oklahoma Territory at the time Cather wrote “The Dance at Chevalier’s” remained not fully incorporated into the national body and was seen as still untamed space.

The instability of the setting is reinforced by the story’s repeated ambiguous references to “country.” The first line of the story refers to the events of the story taking place in what the narrator calls “our country” (547). Here “country” seemingly refers to a specific region rather than the nation, but given the different national identities that are present in the story the idea of “our country” is intriguing. Rather than defining a specific area in which the action takes place, it highlights the unstable, amorphous geography and multiple identities in the story. The story goes on to make repeated references to “cattle country.” The story also uses “country” in the sense of the national. Burns refers to Mexico as a “country” (548) and describes Thomas Moore as Denis’s “countryman” (548). When Denis says, referring to Mexicans that “Not many of ’em ever come up in this country” he could mean either “cattle country” or the United States.

The narrator does not make any distinction in these terms either; saying only that Signor was “a little Mexican who had strayed up into the cattle country” (547), which seems to set up an opposition between the United States and Mexico. But by saying “cattle country” instead of the United States, the story avoids presenting fixed borders and firmly demarcated space in the way that to say the United States and Mexico suggests a
Cather’s use of terms that convey open space echoes the language used elsewhere in the story to describe the Bohemian musician and his family who “had crossed the ocean and drifted out into the cattle country” (551). Space remains nebulous, like the undefined borders of “cattle country” and in this space characters “stray” or “drift.” Unbordered territory plays a crucial role in the story as it is into that space which Signor escapes in the story’s final line, which has Signor “speeding across the plains, on the swiftest horse in the cattle country” (555). The open territory not yet incorporated into the nation provides the space in which the transgressive figure of the outlaw can exist.

Signor’s successful escape is only one of the ways the story plays against the conventions of the Western story and its stereotypes. That the gullible Denis should fail in the role of white hero by being outfoxed by a Mexican does as much to confirm stereotypes about the Irish as say anything about Mexicans. Yet while Denis’s failure to recognize the Mexican’s plan does not significantly break convention, the story hints that the true fool is not Denis but the newspaperman Burns. At the beginning of the story, as Burns sketches a group of card players, the narrator describes that “he kept busily filling in his picture, which was really a picture of Denis, the Mexican being merely indicated by a few careless strokes” (547). The narration continues, explaining that it was Burns’ “business to be interested in people, and practice had made his eye quick to pick out a man from whom unusual things might be expected” (547) but Burns pays attention to Denis rather than Signor. Burns’ inability to correctly read the situation suggests the reader should also question the accuracy of his racist comments. In spite of knowing Mexicans to be “dangerous,” a stereotype which turns out to be justified in the case of
Signor, Burns fails to take any effective action. As Denis dies, Burns finally takes action: “Harry Burns sprang to his feet. ‘It’s that damned Mexican. Where is he?’” (555). At the point when Burns acts, the moment has already passed. Signor has fled. Burns, the knowing Eastern reporter, acts ineffectually and ironically fails to see what happens in front of him.

Critics have described “The Dance at Chevalier’s” as “a poor story” and “strained and artificial” (Woodress 146; O’Brien 269). While these are reasonable as overall assessments, the story has an interest for its presentation of significant transgressive elements in the depiction of its Mexican protagonist. In proposing a reading that focuses on the Eastern journalist’s inability to recognize the way his vision is shaped by racism, I am not suggesting that the story does more than gesture toward a critique of racist stereotypes: the force of the racist images overpowers any subversion of racism. In this early story while Cather is concerned with interactions among diverse cultures within the United States, the instability associated with the Mexican character and U.S. national space presents an alternative to the demarked, bordered lines Cather draws between Mexico and the United States in her mature novels.

**The Prairie Trilogy’s Mexican Lacunae**

Whereas in “The Dance at Chevalier’s” borders are undefined, in Cather’s later novels Mexico and the United States become clearly differentiated. In depicting Mexico as a type of “other” space, Cather suggests the presence and importance of a border between the United States and Mexico as a line of demarcation whose transgression is associated with illicit activity. Moments of border hybridity are effaced through death.
Mexican culture and Mexicans are depicted in the United States, but the national space of Mexico is beyond the representational imagination of the novels. In spite of several characters going to Mexico these events are only present through inference or indirect means. The space inside Mexico remains largely an abstraction.

This sense of bounded national space runs through Cather’s “prairie trilogy”: *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Ántonia* (1918). In presenting the development of the frontier, the depiction of space in these works contrasts with the nineteenth century representation of open, expansive space. The difference can be seen comparing Cather’s work to Walt Whitman’s paean to westward expansion, “Pioneers, O Pioneers!” (1865), from which Cather took the title of her novel. Whitman, like Cather, champions a rugged frontier spirit but Whitman’s poem is filled with unbounded movement: “For we cannot tarry here,/We must march my darlings” (5-6). The limitless sense of motion and progress is carried through the poem in the frequent use of present participles:

> We primeval forests felling,
> We the rivers stemming, vexing we and piercing deep the mines within,
> We the surface broad surveying, we the virgin soil upheaving,
> Pioneers! O pioneers! (25-28)

Activity in the poem depicts an engagement with land and nature but place remains open and unbounded. For most of the poem, Whitman avoids proper nouns of location favoring generic references such as those in the stanza above. The poem’s frontier spirit and action can be linked to a process of Americanization (“All the past we leave behind,” 17), the transformation on the land and the immigrant into a new type (“Fresh and strong
the world we seize,” 19). Process and act form the basis of American identity; place itself, rather than being the means of transformation, becomes secondary.

Where Whitman’s vision of pioneering is expansive and open, Cather’s is grounded in place, as seen in the first lines of Cather’s “O Pioneers!”: One January day, thirty years ago, the little town of Hanover, anchored on a windy Nebraska tableland, was trying not to be blown away. A mist of fine snowflakes was curling and eddying about the cluster of low drab buildings huddled on the gray prairie, under a gray sky. The dwelling-houses were set about haphazard on the tough prairie sod; some of them looked as if they had been moved in overnight, and others as if they were straying off by themselves, headed straight for the open plain. None of them had any appearance of permanence, and the howling wind blew under them as well as over them. (11)

Both Whitman and Cather identify work and determination as central to pioneers but in this passage, unlike in Whitman, motion is a threat. Movement is destructive rather than productive. Moreover, the “anchored” houses suggest an attachment to the land, the only thing that prevents the seemingly imminent possibility of the complete erasure of the town. In the repetition of terms that refer to the land (“tableland,” “tough prairie sod,” “open plain,” “gray prairie”), the passage sets out one of the central themes of Cather’s work: will civilization take hold and make the land into a place, or will nature take hold and return the land to being empty space?

The bounded space of the “prairie trilogy” appears in relation to Western and Southwestern themes, locations, and people. Each novel includes a broad range of
characters and is filled with movement and travel. Each includes references to Mexico, Mexicans, and the Spanish history of the Southwest. As I will explore below, the representations of a Mexican and Spanish presence in the United States, and particularly Cather’s use of Mexico, are primarily associated with men, male sexuality, illegal activity, escape, and absence. By connecting these negative qualities to Mexico and then removing them from the national space of the United States, Cather stabilizes the potentially chaotic geography, cultural and social norms, and diversity in the novel.

In *O Pioneers!* Emil, in love with the married Marie, goes to Mexico in an attempt to escape his desire for her. Before going, he thinks of “the reckless life he meant to live in Mexico” but the reader learns nothing definite about this time there. Emil leaves for Mexico and returns a year later, his experiences in Mexico only briefly mentioned secondhand in the letters he writes home. This leaves Mexico as an absent space into which the character disappears, the first of several such lacunae associated with Mexico in Cather’s works. While the reader does not know much about what happened during Emil’s time in Mexico, he returns transformed by Mexican influences. Before going to Mexico he has been the American ideal of second-generation immigrant progress: tall, handsome, and a success at the state college. After his return, his sister Alexandra describes his change, “You won’t know him. He is a man now, sure enough. I have no boy left” (193). While initially seeming to refer to positive maturation, as Alexandra continues she shows what has taken place is not a positive development but a form of corruption: “He smokes terrible-smelling Mexican cigarettes and talks Spanish” (193). Mexico is the space of sin and corruption that transforms and corrupts the young All-American boy.
Not only is Emil’s smell and speech marked by Mexico but, encouraged by his sister, he dresses for a church picnic in “the Mexican costume he had brought home in his trunk” (190). Wearing this costume he becomes “a strikingly exotic figure in a tall Mexican hat, a silk sash, and a black velvet jacket sewn with silver buttons” (190). While his sister is “proud” of him in his Mexican costume (190) and thinks that after his return Emil gradually becomes “more like himself” (213), the force of the text suggests that Emil has gone from being an ideal of young American manhood to a character marked by the stench of the Mexican “Other” and its association with sexuality, the exotic, and the unknown. Not quite the disreputable “Latin lover,” but nonetheless no longer able to master his passion, Emil eventually succumbs to his desire with the willing Marie. This affair leads to Marie’s husband killing both her and Emil. Nothing in the text suggests that Mexico is the direct cause of these events; Emil’s desire (and Marie’s) precedes his trip to Mexico; but Mexico represents the uncontrolled, sexual, and ultimately destructive part of Emil’s personality. Moreover, the death of Emil allows the positive resolution of the novel for Alexandra. She is able to claim the land and marry, both of which had been impeded by the presence of her brother. The evil associated with Mexico becomes a way of showing male corruption and allowing the female Alexandra to realize her own place independent of her brothers.

A similar case of expelling Mexican influence occurs in Cather’s *The Song of the Lark*. Set in the 1890s in the fictional Colorado town of Moonstone, the novel follows the life of Thea Kornberg, as she grows up and leaves her hometown to go to Chicago and then New York where she realizes her ambition to be an opera star. The novel generally presents a sympathetic though paternalistic and stereotypical portrayal of Mexicans. The
town of Moonstone includes a Mexican Town. Where the other townspeople in Moonstone are racist and uncaring, Thea and her family reject this racism. A crude display of racism directed at a Mexican character who refuses to respond to an insult prompts the narratorial voice to comment, “A Mexican learns to dive below insults or soar above them, after he crosses the border” (336). The narration itself at times presents detailed and sympathetic portrayals of the life of the residents of Mexican Town but at others the narratorial voice slips into conventional stereotypes. During one of Thea’s visits to Mexican Town, the instantaneous appreciation of a white skin by two young Mexicans reinforces the hierarchy of skin color: “The Ramas boys thought Thea dazzlingly beautiful. They had never seen a Scandinavian girl before, and her hair and fair skin bewitched them. “Blanco y oro, semejante la Pascua” (White and gold, like Easter!) they exclaimed to each other” [translation in original] (494).

Moonstone’s Mexican Town provides Thea her first opportunities to display her talent as a singer and to appreciate what is depicted as a pure, communal love of music. There Spanish Johnny, a drunken wanderer, sings Mexican folk songs, whose vitality and passion provide Thea one of the essential elements she incorporates in her art. Spanish Johnny is described in stereotypical terms as “a grey-haired little Mexican, withered and bright as a string of peppers beside an adobe door, [who] kept praying and cursing under his breath” (698). At the end of the novel, he is in the balcony as Thea gives her triumphant performance in New York. Cather uses Johnny to include a Mexican element in Thea’s U.S. American identity, an example of the use of a minority culture to invigorate the art of the dominant White culture.

The incorporation of Spanish Johnny is contrasted to the exclusion of more
threatening and destabilizing cross-border connections between the United States and Mexico. While in *The Song of the Lark* the depictions of Mexicans living in the United States are generally positive, if limited and tending toward stereotypes, border crossing between the United States and Mexico has negative associations. *Mexican Town* represents a source of freedom and allows cultural inspiration. Mexico is associated with illicit activity and death. A former sheepherder and current railroad worker, Ray Kennedy is associated with Mexico and a transnational life that is not lived only on one side of the border: “Thea liked him for reasons that had to do with the adventurous life he had led in Mexico and the Southwest, rather than for anything very personal” (334). A subsequent description reveals that not only has Ray crossed the border, he grew up partially in Mexico:

Thea often thought that the nicest thing about Ray was his love for Mexico and the Mexicans, who had been kind to him when he drifted, a homeless boy, over the border. In Mexico, Ray was Señior Ken-áy-dy, and when he answered to that name he was somehow a different fellow. He spoke Spanish fluently, and the sunny warmth of that tongue kept him from being quite as hard as his chin, or as narrow as his popular science. (*Lark* 338-39)

Notably, the description of Ray could hardly be more positive in relation to Mexico: the Mexican people had shown compassion and kindness to a child in need, Thea values Ray for his appreciation of Mexican culture, and speaking Spanish brings out the best in Ray’s personality. Further, while Mexico is an intriguing and inviting space that has nurtured Ray and in turn attracts Thea to him, the novel establishes that while Ray loves Thea and hopes to marry her, he is a poor match for the ambitious artist. The solution Cather
devises to resolve this problem is to have Ray die in a railroad accident. Ray leaves Thea the money that allows her to go to Chicago to study music, where her artistic rise begins. In using Ray’s death to direct Thea on the proper course, Cather moves the plot away from the border and any sense of national border crossing. Thea can cross the border to Mexican Town and incorporate Mexican culture in her art but Ray’s death writes national border crossing out of the novel.

The death of Ray sends Thea on a trajectory away from the border and to Chicago, although the border between the United States and Mexico returns later to the novel. In Chicago, Thea meets the wealthy Fred Ottenburg who befriends her, helps her career, and invites her to spend the summer at his ranch in Arizona. In Arizona, Fred and Thea begin a relationship and Fred persuades Thea to travel with him in Mexico. Unknown to Thea, Fred is already married. When Fred invites Thea to travel with him in Mexico, Thea looks forward to the possibilities that await her: “‘Things have closed behind me. I can’t go back, so I am going on — to Mexico?’ She lifted her face with an eager, questioning smile” (585). Mexico seems to hold promise but the narrative does not go to Mexico. One chapter ends with the line above as Thea and Fred are on a train heading for Mexico; the next begins with Thea’s father figure, Dr. Archie, receiving a letter from Thea sent from New York requesting his help. When Dr. Archie travels to New York, it is revealed that Thea, having found out about Fred’s wife, is committed to leaving him. The details of what happened are left untold, remaining in the murky penumbra of Mexico. As in *O Pioneers!* Mexico is strongly associated with illicit and socially inappropriate male sexuality.

Thea’s story of artistic development follows a particularly American arc. Her
development takes place through the diverse U.S. geographies of Colorado, Chicago, Arizona, and New York, each of which offers a particular contribution to her development. The direction of this development involves the turning away from the Mexican border: when Thea imagines herself going “I am going on — to Mexico” it suggests the continental expansion of the United States. Previously in the novel Thea has been told by a guide that when the first telegraph wires crossed the Missouri River the initial message was “Westward the course of Empire takes it way” (341). Going to Mexico is a dead end, however; after the failure of the trip to Mexico, Thea goes to Germany where her artistic development continues. In The Song of the Lark, Thea’s growth finds expression in geographical terms: hers is a “personality that carried across big spaces and expanded among big things” (566). She not only incorporates the Mexican influence she learned during her childhood, she studies in Europe, thus bringing together oppositions such as high and folk culture, Old and New World, in an idealized U.S. American identity. But the incorporation of the Mexican elements that are essential to this, rely on the exclusion of Mexico itself. The space on the other side of the border from the U.S. is excluded from the text, producing a safe Mexican culture that can be incorporated into Thea’s notably white body that represents an idealized U.S. identity. The exclusion of active bordercrossing allows this identity to be separated from the potentially destabilizing, transgressive threats of the borderlands’ hybrid cultures.

The final book in Cather’s “prairie trilogy,” My Ántonia, contains only a brief reference to Mexico but continues Cather’s pattern of leaving Mexico mostly unrepresented and associated with male sexuality. Ántonia’s disreputable fiancé Larry Donovan disappears leaving her to imagine his whereabouts: “I guess he’s gone to Old
Mexico. The conductors get rich down there, collecting half-fares off the natives and robbing the company” (304). Here again Mexico is a place into which characters escape and disappear (in this case not to return). While Donovan’s disappearance leaves Ántonia jilted, it ultimately allows Ántonia’s marriage to a fellow Bohemian, with whom she has many children and a satisfying if difficult life. As Stout has observed, Cather’s women, such as Ántonia, challenge the gender types of the conventional Western. Stout notes that the plots involve “the ruining of masculine adventure by the arrival of genteel femininity” (Picturing 200). A primary way Cather does this is by associating Mexico with negative male behavior, which establishes the power of females and female norms within the United States. Rather than having the Anglo, male hero vanquish Mexican corruption, the men associated with Mexico represent a threat to domesticity and female sexuality that must be removed from the novel.

**Cultural as Artifact in The Professor’s House**

As I noted previously, since the mid-1990s critics have considerably widened the scope of study of Cather’s works, particularly by including discussions of race and empire. These critics have focused primarily on The Professor’s House and Death Comes for the Archbishop, the two novels I will turn to now. Whereas in the novels that came before, Mexico was a relatively minor presence, in these two novels of the 1920s the Southwest is a prominent location where the U.S.-Mexican border and connections between the two countries appear throughout. In spite of this, critics have left representations of Mexico largely unexplored. An example of the absence of Mexico in critical studies on Cather is seen in Deborah Karush’s “Bringing Outland Inland in The
Surprisingly given the article’s topic, Karush does not specifically mention Mexico. The article provides an insightful reading of the place of U.S. imperialism in *The Professor’s House* and repeatedly refers to “U.S. borders” but treats them only in a general sense, decontextualized from the physical presence of Mexico and the history of the U.S.-Mexico border. Similarly two valuable book length studies, Urgo’s *Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration* and Reynolds’ *Willa Cather in Context: Progress, Race, Empire* discuss the U.S. frontier, Manifest Destiny, immigration, and empire without directly addressing the presence of Mexico in Cather’s works. I attribute the absence of attention to Mexico in such scholarly works to the fact that Cather makes the border between the United States and Mexico seem natural and to how fixed thinking about the U.S. border has been and remains (in spite of the considerable advances Border Theory has made). Both *The Professor’s House* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* seek to draw a firm border between the United States and Mexico through complex patterns of inclusion and exclusion that structure the presence of Mexico, Mexicans, and Mexican culture in the texts.

In *The Professor’s House*, Cather returns to the Southwest setting she used in *The Song of the Lark*. In *The Song of the Lark* the Southwest appears in a brief interlude as one location that contributes to Thea’s cultural development; in *The Professor’s House* the Southwest is paradoxically more central, while still remaining peripheral. In the first and third sections of the novel’s three parts, a domestic drama about the middle-aged Godfrey St. Peter unfolds. St. Peter, a professor of history at an unnamed university on the shore of Lake Michigan, muses on his career, his married life, his daughters.
Rosamund and Kathleen and his sons-in-law, and the family’s move from home that contains St. Peter’s beloved study. The animating force of the novel, however, is the presence of Tom Outland, a brilliant student, scientist, and amateur archaeologist mentored by St. Peter. Outland, raised in New Mexico, arrives at the university and enters into the lives of the St. Peter family. He revives St. Peter’s enthusiasm for his work and becomes engaged to Rosamund. Although Outland is killed in World War I, his presence is still felt in both the memories of St. Peter and through the money from the rights to his invention, the Outland vacuum, which he willed to Rosamund.

The second section of the novel, “Tom Outland’s Story,” recounts Outland’s discovery of the ruins of an ancient cliff-dwelling civilization on the Blue Mesa in New Mexico where he was raised. While the first and third sections are set in the period roughly contemporaneous with the writing of the novel in 1923 and 1924, the middle section, “Tom Outland’s Story” takes place around 1903 or 1904. This is the period during which Arizona and New Mexico were being incorporated into the United States, with the two achieving statehood in 1912. Reading the novel as an effort to bridge these two historical periods, the time of an open country and the era of a bordered nation, shows Cather’s efforts to use history and artifacts to establish transnational historical connections while maintaining a sense of U.S. national identity.

The importance of incorporation in The Professor’s House has been explored by

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45 In 1936 in the introduction to her essay collection Not Under Forty, Cather wrote that for her “the world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts” (v). The significance of this date has been the subject of discussion among Cather scholars. The year has been linked to literary developments (the publication of The Waste Land and Ulysses), the end of World War I, and events in Cather’s life (the publication and poor reception of One of Ours). In addition, 1922 also separates the era of open frontier and national expansion from a period in which Cather suggests the United States had become a bordered, domesticated nation.
Guy Reynolds. He argues that Cather “having rejected a hegemonic ideology…found herself amidst a multilayered, proliferating series of ideal ‘Americas’” which she seeks to bring order to through an “incorporating, unifying discourse” (Context 149). In making this argument Reynolds links The Professor’s House to the emergence of national museums, the development of business professionalization and institutionalization, and the creation of new historiographical narratives, all of which provided structures that allowed the incorporation of diverse cultures in an interconnected American identity. While I largely agree with Reynolds’s insights, his focus on incorporation in celebrating the coming together of heterogeneous elements ignores the role that exclusion plays in creating unified narratives of America.

“Tom Outland’s Story” seeks to both include and exclude representations of Mexico. In recounting Outland’s discovery and exploration of the Blue Mesa, Cather uses modernist narrative strategies that incorporate a multiplicity of voices. Although the section is written in the first person in Outland’s voice, the writing suggests that the text before the reader is filtered through St. Peter’s struggles to annotate the diary and write an introduction. Outland’s story is thus incorporated into the domestic space of the St. Peter house and into the space of the novel. Yet the layering of narratives provides distancing mechanisms that set the material reality of the borderlands and the region’s cultural mixing at a remove. The space is represented in highly mediated ways.

This middle section is essentially ethnographic, recounting Outland’s investigation of the cliff dwellings and his cataloging of the artifacts he finds. It reflects the development of archeology at the beginning of the twentieth century and the fascination with Native American culture. These elements stand apart from the other
sections of the novel, juxtaposed to the contemporary culture depicted in the other sections. The Southwest being held distant allows it to be idealized by being remote in a way similar to the distance that stands between Outland and the ancient civilization he investigates. Both the events of Outland’s archeological investigations and the civilization on the Blue Mesa itself represent something wonderful that has been lost of which only incomplete artifacts remain.

Outland’s story and Outland himself become artifacts that are incorporated into the contemporary domestic space of the novel; against this stands the exclusion of Outland’s living presence in the novel. By rendering Outland as an artifact, Cather enacts a symbolic incorporation of the Southwest into the established national space of the United States while rendering threats to national identity from the transgressive presence of the borderlands inert. As his name suggests, Outland is a child of the frontier who, orphaned in Kansas as his family traveled to the West, was raised in the Southwest. He represents the figure of the self-made individual, a synthesis of the cowboy and the scholar. In this sense he is an idealized American figure, one common to the Western genre.

Yet Outland overflows the boundaries of the United States at multiple points in the novel when he is associated with Mexico. When St. Peter first quizzes Outland about his background, Outland reveals that he speaks “Mexican Spanish” (112). Later his knowledge of the territory where he grew up proves invaluable to St. Peter in writing his histories. Outland has “training and insight resulting from a very curious experience”: that is, he was orphaned and grew up in the Southwest. As a result, Outland carries “in his pocket the secrets which old trails and stones and water-courses tell only to
adolescence” (259). This intimate knowledge of the land extends beyond the border of the United States. Outland not only plays the role of guide during one summer in which he and St. Peter explore the U.S. side of the border, he also is a guide for a second summer in which they travel to “Old Mexico” (256). When Tom is sick he is cared for by his friend, Rodney Blake, and Rodney’s landlord, an “old Mexican woman” (184). The description of Blake as a father figure casts the Mexican woman as a type of mother. The association between Tom and Mexico is further reinforced by the “Mexican blanket” that becomes for St. Peter a type of talisman of Outland after his death (128).

Outland’s position as a border figure marks him as something that is in excess and is uncontrollable in U.S. society. Unlike St. Peter’s Spanish histories, which privilege a safe form of intellectual European-American confluence, Outland represents active border crossing that challenges the national space of the United States. His association with Mexico and the open frontier suggests the lines between the United States and Mexico are not absolute. In his ability to guide St. Peter on both sides of the border, he represents the living continuation of Spanish exploration that St. Peter only engages in his books. Even though the Indian culture has been dead for generations, Tom as a figure of the borderlands is still able to make a direct connection to the ancient tribe of the Blue Mesa. As Julianne Newmark argues “The Cliff City does allow Outland, even though only imaginatively, to envision an America more broad and deep, where he, as an archetypal ‘American son,’ might ‘commingle and communicate’ with human and nonhuman others and visualize ‘who we shall become together’” (104). Outland, however, is excluded from the full possibilities of this coming together. As in Cather’s other works, such connections to Mexico can seem positive, but mark Outland as a type
of other who will eventually be expelled from the text.

The ambiguous national space of the borderlands becomes safe and incorporated through Outland’s death. Conventionally, the marriage plot is used to integrate the outside to establish a multifaceted American identity. A national unification narrative binding the frontier to the Midwest is imagined in the novel through Outland’s engagement to St. Peter’s daughter, Rosamond. Their marriage would represent the unification between the Midwestern values represented by St. Peter and Outland’s Southwestern identity. Outland’s death, however, prevents this narrative from reaching completion. As a result, the novel avoids the tension of incorporating the Southwest into the Midwest. Instead of marrying Outland Rosamond marries the Jewish Marsellus. His religion sets up a tension as he is integrated into the Gentile St. Peter family. Scott, the brother-in-law, blackballs Marsellus from membership in the Arts and Letters club and St. Peter has a distant relationship with Marcellus unlike his close connection to Outland. The somewhat grudging incorporation of Marsellus, however, can cause readers to overlook that he becomes a member of the St. Peter family while Outland is not. On one level the novel clearly reads this as a loss, the idealized figure of Outland seemed to be a perfect addition to the family. Yet in denying Outland and the reader this union, the plotting of The Professor’s House repeats the pattern in Cather’s work of killing off

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47 The connections between Outland and Marsellus have been considered by a number of critics, most notably Walter Benn Michaels. Michaels in his study of nativism in the modernist period has argued that the Jewish Marsellus represents a threat to the racial purity of the family, a point supported by the well-documented moments of anti-Semitism in Cather’s work. However, Susan Meyer in “On the Front and at Home: Wharton, Cather, the Jews, and the First World War” has pointed out that Cather’s depiction of Marsellus mixes anti-Semitic stereotypes with redeeming qualities. Marsellus is generous and kind to the point that he wins the respect of St. Peter.
characters associated with Mexico, such as Emile in *O Pioneers!* and Ray in *The Song of the Lark*. In Outland’s death, the figure that represents the open space of the frontier is removed from the novel, which allows Cather to mourn the loss of the frontier and also imagine the physical and cultural national borders of the United States.

Outland and his border identity, rather than being a living presence in the novel, are translated into artifacts: the Mexican blanket, the house Marsellus and Rosamond name after him, the Southwestern pottery and jewelry he has given to St. Peter’s family, and his diaries. Each of these allows for Outland to be included in the Midwest, the U.S. American space of the novel, without the direct threat of a destabilized border identity that seemingly is not fully “American.” The artifacts represent a rich history that can animate U.S. culture but, as non-living objects, they do not present the problem that Cather seeks repeatedly to avoid of having the space of the United States opened to an active exchange across the border with Mexico. In becoming commemorated and represented by artifacts, Outland occupies the cultural space of the ancient tribe that lived on the Blue Mesa whose memory has been claimed as history in service of the present. The separation of Outland from the St. Peter family is mirrored structurally in the novel as Outland’s voice and the key elements of his story are isolated in the middle section of the novel.

Outland’s death provokes St. Peter’s melancholy, which dominates the final section of the novel. Faced with the loss of his beloved student, St. Peter feels nostalgia for the lost frontier and his youth. The Midwestern life that the professor leads seems poor in comparison to the adventures of the frontier. St. Peter’s beloved garden, a labor of twenty years, is not more than “a tidy half-acre” surrounded by a stucco wall (15). For
all its beauty, it is a domestic garden compared to the untamed space of the frontier. The garden, having been made in the French style, is also linked to St. Peter’s time in France and his regret at not being able to show Outland the Luxemburg Gardens (256). St. Peter represents the civilized, cultured European elements of Americanization. Without the frontier they seem to lack animating force, as St. Peter loses his desire to live.

The name Outland suggests the contrast with the domestic space inhabited by St. Peter, most of all his study where he writes his history. Although his research takes him to Spain, the American Southwest, Mexico, and France, he completes the writing itself in his study. As the narrator recounts, “the notes and the records and the ideas always came back to this room. It was here they were digested and sorted, and woven into their proper place in his history” (16). The move from Outland’s personal knowledge of the Southwest-Mexico borderlands to St. Peter’s written history represents the domestication of the marginal territory at the edge of the United States. St. Peter’s internalization of Outland’s adventures represents a continuation of his life’s work, an eight-volume history entitled *The Spanish Adventurers in North America*.

Outland, as an amateur archeologist and historian, belongs to nineteenth century history. The discovery of Mesa Verde took place in 1888. Outland is also linked to historians of an earlier period. The nineteenth century historians of Spanish America, among them Adolph Bandelier, William H. Prescott, Hubert Bancroft, and John Lloyd Stephens, were not academics in the sense of being based at a university and responsible for teaching. Rather, they were largely self-trained and, while in some cases they received institutional support, their research was primarily financed by sales of their
writings, their personal wealth, or support from benefactors.\textsuperscript{48} In creating the character of Godfrey St. Peter, a professor whose subject is the Spanish history of North America, Cather describes a type of historian that had just come on the scene. As the novel’s title makes clear and the text reinforces, St. Peter is very much an academic not an adventurer-historian. He is concerned with departmental issues, teaching classes, and his own scholarship. While he engages in travel to conduct research, it is for relatively brief periods: over the course of fifteen years he has had “the two Sabbatical years when he was in Spain studying records, two summers in the Southwest on the trail of his adventurers, another in Old Mexico” (26). As an academic based in the Midwest, St. Peter is removed from the frontier and the borderlands. His work on Spanish history represents the institutionalization and incorporation of the Southwest in U.S. culture.

In St. Peter, Cather depicts a specific type of historian that emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century. St. Peter, rather than being a historian in the nineteenth century mode, belongs to the first generation of academic historians to study Spanish influences in the Americas. Among the most prominent was Herbert E. Bolton, author of \textit{The Spanish Borderlands} (1921).\textsuperscript{49} While in some ways Bolton’s study of the borderlands can be considered a forerunner of later twentieth-century border scholarship, Bolton’s focus was largely on Spanish development. This broadened the study of U.S. 


\textsuperscript{49} Bolton, who had been a student of Frederick Jackson Turner at Wisconsin, went on to receive a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1899. Bolton taught briefly at the University of Texas before settling in Berkeley at the University of California, where he built on Turner’s analysis of westward expansion to consider the Southwest. In 1917, Bolton described a role he sought to fill: “for him who interprets, with Turner’s insight, the methods and the significance of the Spanish-American frontier, there awaits recognition not less marked or less deserved” (189).
history beyond the Anglo-American perspectives that dominated scholarship at the time, but Bolton’s history gave little attention to native peoples and those of mixed race; when they were mentioned they were primarily seen as impediments to civilization. In connecting St. Peter to historians such as Bolton, *The Professor’s House* shows a transitional moment in which the scope of U.S. history expanded even as it solidified the centrality of the United States and European origins in a narrative of a history of the Americas.

In addition to the depiction of St. Peter as an academic historian, in *The Professor’s House* history is also linked to the statehood debates. The research on the Spanish conquerors which Cather depicts St. Peter as engaged in, reflects one of the key approaches used by advocates of New Mexican statehood to counteract racial prejudice that had caused the failure of repeated efforts to secure statehood. As Laura Gómez describes, Lebaron Bradford Prince, a territorial governor of New Mexico who is often regarded as the father of statehood, emphasized the Spanish heritage of New Mexico as a progressive alternative to the Anglo-American racism associated with terms such as “Mexican.” Emphasizing the elite status of Spaniards and drawing a parallel between the British landing in the East and the Spanish conquest of the Southwest, Prince sought to elevate the perception of New Mexican culture as a means of gaining statehood. Prince’s *Concise History of New Mexico* created an origin myth based on the Spanish discovery of the region. Although the details of St. Peter’s history are not revealed in the novel, his research in Spain and the title of his history, *The Spanish Adventurers in North America*, suggest a perspective that emphasizes the Spanish history. Moreover, St. Peter is described as appearing to take on Spanish characteristics. The hybrid, mixed identity of
St. Peter offers an acceptable form of cultural diversity that is incorporated into the domestic space of the house as a living presence, while Mexico itself is excluded.

Outland’s authentic relationship to the Southwest gives St. Peter access to a connection to the land that goes beyond what St. Peter can find in the archives:

If the last four volumes of “The Spanish Adventurers” were more simple and inevitable than those that went before, it was largely because of Outland. When St. Peter first began his work, he realized that his great drawback was the lack of early association, the fact that he had not spent his youth in the great dazzling South-west country which was the scene of his explorers’ adventures. (259)

While St. Peter is older, Outland has access to the earlier historical moment St. Peter seeks to document. The Southwest belongs to an earlier time that is fast disappearing and Outland represents what the last generation connected to the open frontier. Such temporal unevenness suggests Turner’s theory that constant westward expansion offered renewed connections to the frontier’s cultural rejuvenation. In Cather the key moment is not the closing of the frontier in the 1880s but a later moment in which the territories were granted statehood, removing the intermediate space between the national body of the United States and Mexico. Outland provides a direct connection to the borderlands territory. With his ability to cross the border, he can serve equally well as a guide in Mexico as he can in the United States, which makes him a threat to a stable, unified U.S. American identity.

The incorporation and exclusion of Mexico is tied to the expansionism inherent in imperialism. Deborah Karush has argued that Marsellus represents a new stage in U.S.
imperialism: “The irrepressible engineer, with his international connections and his money-making talent, supersedes the cowboy explorer of the Blue Mesa. Marsellus becomes a figure for the United States’ shift from continental to overseas expansion” (149). Karush supports this observation astutely citing that Marsellus has “acquaintances . . . from the Soudan to Alaska” (27) and that he knows “conditions in the Orient” (26). To this reading I would add the international circulations of goods and people. In discussing international exchange, Karush does not mention the numerous transactions across the US-Mexico border in the novel. These transactions remind the reader of the presence of national space and national boundaries.

In addition to depictions of international travel and transactions, the text includes multiple references to prohibition, which distinguishes the United States from other countries. When the topic of prohibition comes up, Marsellus declares, “Oh, It’s nothing to us! We’re going to France for the summer…and drink Burgundy, Burgundy, Burgundy!” (107). This and similar references establish an international context for the novel, in which various national systems are juxtaposed. The novel also contains several references to paying duty on shipping goods across borders. At one point prohibition and shipping are mentioned together when we learn St. Peter had fortuitously brought a large quantity of sherry back with him from Europe before prohibition took effect and that “He came home by the City of Mexico and got the wine through without duty” (97). Later in the novel, Marsellus plans to import furniture from Europe to the United States through Mexico City to circumvent import taxes. Such references to prohibition and duty reinforce the presence of national borders and the regulations around national space in an interconnected world.
Circulation from Europe to the United States through Mexico is reversed when Rodney sells the Mesa Verde artifacts to a German collector: “Fechtig took the stuff right along with him, chartered a freight car, and travelled in the car with it. I reckon it’s on the water by now. He took it straight through into Old Mexico, and was to load it on a French boat. Seems he was afraid of having trouble getting curiosities out of the United States ports. You know you can take anything out of the City of Mexico” (238). Fechtig, then, like Marsellus, belongs to world of borders; although they largely try to circumvent them, they understand the system of a bordered world in which national lines demarcate the global. Mexico forms part of this system of nations but one that allows for slippage of the laws. In other words, Mexico is a state but at least a partially lawless one. Mexico as an unstable, unsecure country is also reflected in Rodney’s experience in going to “Old Mexico” where he “let his friends put all his savings into an oil well, and they skinned him” (184).

History in *The Professor’s House* is linked to the particular moment of the early twentieth century. St. Peter, while imagining himself to be against the modern age, writes histories that are implicated in his era’s modernity. While he may be troubled by the materialism of 1920s culture, his own work is removed from an authentic connection to place. Unlike Outland, who acts as something of a native informant, and who has access to a spiritual connection to the tribes of the past, St. Peter remains at a remove in his study. The analogous character is the German collector Fechtig. Both are engaged in excavating the past.

Deborah Karush has noted that Cather compared the effect of “Tom Outland’s Story” to Dutch paintings of interiors that included a window that opened the room and
the painting to the world: Through the window “one saw the masts of ships, or a stretch of grey sea. The feeling that one got through those square windows was remarkable, and gave me a sense of the fleets of Dutch ships that ply quietly in all the waters of the globe” (qtd. in Karush 144). Yet as much as it opens space up to distant vistas, the novel forecloses the possibilities of an open window. While Cather reaches beyond the cultural confines of the United States to include diverse cultural influences that stretch the definition of American national culture beyond a Northeastern Anglo history, her incorporation of these diverse elements relies on a closing of the national space. The generative problem of St. Peter in writing without Outland, and indeed living without him, dramatizes a personal struggle of the loss of a great companion but it also reflects the situation of closing off the world into distinct national spaces.

**Incorporation and Americanization in *Death Comes for the Archbishop***

In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather gives the Southwest and its racial complexities her most developed exploration. Unlike the novels of the “prairie trilogy” and *The Professor’s House*, the border and the borderlands between the United States and Mexico is the primary setting of the novel. Published in 1927, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is historical fiction that moves further back in the past from the “Tom Outland’s Story” section of *The Professor’s House*. Cather sets the novel at the moment of the U.S. takeover of the Southwest following the Mexican-American War (1846-1848). Historical events provide the source material for the chronicle of the lives of two nineteenth-century French priests, Father Latour and his longtime friend Father Vaillant who are charged with reforming and growing the Catholic Church in the newly acquired
U.S. territory. Latour is based on Jean Baptiste Lamy (1814-1888), the first bishop and later archbishop of the Diocese of Santa Fe. Other historical figures, such as Kit Carson, appear in the novel under their own names. In putting history to work in the novel, Cather uses the episodic, nearly plotless narrative to explore the historical development of the Southwest through engaging the multiple origins of Southwestern culture and the presence of diverse peoples in the borderlands.

The dominant thrust of the narrative may be reduced to a story of imperial conquest and pacification, although Cather pushes important elements of this into the background. Most significantly, the Mexican-American War, which sets the events of the novel in motion, is not mentioned directly. Instead it is left for the reader to recognize the significance of the date 1848, which is mentioned in the novel’s first line. Using this date as the starting point for the novel, allows Cather to push the reality of conquest off stage. U.S. territorial conquest is later referred to obliquely and with the guise of passivity; the New Mexico territory that Latour is to oversee is described as “a part of North America recently annexed to the United States” (5). This language serves to foreground the legalistic act of “annexation” while hiding the history of military conquest. It is this newly annexed territory that Latour is charged with shepherding and Americanizing, as the authority for the territory has been transferred from the Mexican church to that of the United States. While the novel follows historical fact in depicting the transfer of authority for the New Mexico territory Cather emphasizes this separation by describing Latour making a trip into Mexico to formally establish his authority in his new territory.

Cather presents the civilizing priests as an alternative to violent conquest. Although the Mexican-American War itself is not mentioned, the continued presence of
the United States military is frequently invoked through multiple references to the fort. Its presence suggests the role of the military in controlling and ordering the territory but nonmilitary pacification is the primary focus of the novel. Latour claims that “The Church can do more than the Fort to make these poor Mexicans ‘good Americans’” (37). The need to bring order to a land that has lapsed under what the novel presents as Mexican (mis)governance falls to Latour. The fastidious French missionary exhibits the proper obsession with order for the role he has been given. When at the end of the novel, Latour dies having built a cathedral in the French style, the triumph of Western European values in the Southwest desert is complete. At Latour’s funeral, when the “Mexican population of Santa Fé fell upon their knees” in recognition of place in the community, the proper order has been reestablished (315). The authority has been transferred from the Mexican and Spanish authorities to the figure representing Americanization.

The processes of Americanization and colonization of the Southwest in the novel is complicated by the desire to incorporate elements of Mexican culture into the United States. Within the narrative of colonial territorial incorporation, Cather imagines a United States that accommodates differences in language, national origins, cultures, and classes. But she does so using the representation of a demarcated physical and imagined border with Mexico. In order to create a harmonious, pluralist America and to secure the safe incorporation of Indian and Mexican culture, Cather uses borders that exclude threats to her idealized racial harmony.

*Death Comes for the Archbishop* begins with a prologue that establishes a multinational and multilingual frame to the novel. In 1848 three Cardinals, Spanish, Italian, and French, meet in Rome with a missionary Bishop from the United States. The
conversation provides the background for the appointment of Latour to the newly created Vicarate in New Mexico. The remoteness of the territory of New Mexico from the church and the Cardinals’ lavish lifestyle, such as rich food and champagne, contrasts with the deprivation that the newly appointed bishop will experience in New Mexico. The French Cardinal takes only a superficial interest in the United States as he says, “I see your redskins through Fenimore Cooper, and I like them so” (14). The lack of knowledge about the territory reflects a distance that produces competing representations of the New World, among which Cooper’s literary narrative is one. “This new territory was vague to all of them, even to the missionary Bishop. The Italian and French Cardinals spoke of it as Le Mexique, and the Spanish host referred to it as ‘New Spain’” (5).

The problem of naming and the many signifiers which refer to the territory (“New World,” “New Spain,” “Le Mexique,” “New Mexico”) contrast with the stability and history of European nationality. Throughout the Prologue there is precise identification of the European characters through the physical traits associated with national or regional identities. Father Ferrand is “Irish by birth, French by ancestry” (4). The nationality of the Spanish Cardinal is marked on his “long Spanish face, that looked out from so many canvases in his ancestral portrait gallery” yet his appearance is “much modified through his English mother” (5). These descriptions of nationality suggest a type of hybridity that retains national classification. In contrast to the “vague” ideas of the New World territory which lack a stable classification, the ethnographic eye of the novel can precisely describe each of the Catholic functionaries. Cather’s narration reveals hybridity that runs through the European characters in the prologue. Hybridity here does not, as Homi Bhabha and other theorists have argued, subvert the narratives of colonial power and
dominant cultures. Rather, hybridity allows the mixed system of ideas to interact within a
classified system of identity shaped around European power.

*Death Comes for the Archbishop*’s prologue places European tradition and
decadence in opposition to an inchoate and undefined New World. While the qualities of
the New World are valued they are also the problem of the novel. The multiple names
given to the New Mexico territory by the Cardinals in Rome give way to an undefined
landscape where “New Mexico lay in the middle of the dark continent” (20). New
Mexico is depicted as exotic, unknown, and distant. The placement “in the middle of the
dark continent” puts New Mexico in a natural rather than political or geographic content.
Later in the novel, when Vaillant moves to a church in Colorado, the territory that is
unknown is again spoken of in relation to the continent: “That congested heaping up of
the Rocky Mountain chain about Pike’s Peak was a blank space on the continent at this
time” (257). Territory in the novel that is undefined becomes associated with continents
rather than nations. Continents can be regarded as constructed entities imposed on
natural landscape, but here they represent something closer to a natural division of land
onto which mapped territory and political borders are written.

The “blank space” of the newly annexed territory presents the problem of being
inhabited. Following the Prologue, the first chapter of the novel begins with a long
paragraph describing “a solitary horseman,” who is later revealed to be Latour, riding
through the New Mexican desert. At first the landscape is described in natural terms, “As
far as he could see, on every side, the landscape was heaped up into monotonous red
sand-hills, not much larger than haycocks, and very much the shape of haycocks” without
any mention of a human presence (16). The narrator goes through multiple formulations
in searching for the language to describe the hills, finally deciding that “they were, more
the shape of Mexican ovens than haycocks—yes, exactly the shape of Mexican ovens”
(17). The narration, in describing the land in terms of a Mexican presence, suggests not
only a link between the local population and the land, but the fundamental problem of the
novel: the land is not empty space, what Turner calls “free land.” The land that at first
seems to be a natural, uninhabited wonder, can for the narrator best be described in terms
of a cultural product of the people who live there. This indirect acknowledgement of the
inhabitants of the land, suggests the novel’s need to include the non-American presence
in the Southwest as an animating force that gives meaning to the landscape.

As the recognition of the landscape’s resemblance to “Mexican ovens” gives
meaning to the landscape, the presence of Mexicans gives value and interest to the
narrative. Throughout the novel, the Mexican myths and legends provide the interest that
animates the episodic structure of the novel. The novel incorporates multiple stories and
heterogeneous discourses: Mexican and Indian legends including the story of the Virgin
of Guadalupe, historical details about the Southwest, and anthropological anecdotes about
Mexican and Indian life. Latour has been sent to reform and Americanize the former
Mexican territory. Yet it is that same cultural presence he intends to tame that enlivens
that land and the novel. The novel seeks to keep the stories alive but incorporate them
into an “American” history.

Significantly, what is at stake for Latour is not first conquest but recovery. The
characters are faced with a history that presents an additional remove to the historical
fiction that is presented to the reader. As Latour rides through the desert when first
traveling to New Mexico the problem that awaits him is “how to recover a Bishopric”
The problem of newness has already been introduced in the Prologue when Bishop Ferrand says that the Bishop who is appointed to go to the recently annexed territory “will direct the beginning of momentous things” (6). The Venetian Cardinal replies, “Beginnings …there have been so many” (6) because the land has become corrupt by the Spanish and Mexican misrule that has allowed a lax form of Catholicism to take hold:

The old grandfather had shown him arrow-heads and corroded medals, and a sword hilt, evidently Spanish, that he had found in the earth near the water-head. This spot had been a refuge for humanity long before these Mexicans had come upon it. It was older than history, like those well-heads in his own country where the Roman settlers had set up the image of a river goddess, and later the Christian priests had planted a cross. This settlement was his Bishopric in miniature; hundreds of square miles of thirsty desert, then a spring, a village, old men trying to remember their catechism to teach their grandchildren. The Faith planted by the Spanish friars and watered with their blood was not dead; it awaited only the toil of the husbandman. (33)

The Spanish sword, the echo of the sword in My Ántonia, rather than being a historical curiosity, forms the basis for the development of the West.

The process of defining the “dark continent” falls to the Catholic missionaries. Latour finds that the government has not charted the territory: “Does anyone know the extent of this diocese, or of this territory? The Commandant at the Fort seems as much in the dark as I” (42). Only the frontier traders have a general sense of the landscape, “The great country of desert and mountain ranges between Santa Fe and the Pacific coast was
not yet mapped or chartered; the most reliable map of it was in Kit Carson’s brain” (82). These descriptions of the territory ignore the traditional sense of space of the indigenous and existing Mexican communities that lived on the land. The question of mapping and creating borders that seems a fundamental problem in the novel takes the perspective of the Western cartographic imagination.

History, as one of the types of stories within the novel, gives significance to even the seemingly mundane elements of life on the Southwestern frontier but it also presents a problem of how to incorporate that history into a narrative that is concerned with Americanization. History pervades the novel; for Latour even eating soup suggests a thousand year history behind the meal (41). The length of history pushes the frame of reference beyond the borders of the United States. In a scene much discussed by critics, Latour reflects on the use of Angelus bells in the Catholic tradition. He explains that “the Spaniards knew nothing about working silver except as they learned it from the Moors” and that what he and contemporary Catholics practice “is really an adaptation of a Moslem custom” (48). Father Vaillant, set up as a foil to Latour, finds this fact “belittling” (48). Latour, in contrast, embraces this type of intercultural connection and is pleased to think that “The Spaniards handed on their skill to the Mexicans and the Mexicans have taught the Navajo to work the silver; but it all came from the Moors” (Archbishop 48). Guy Reynolds has argued, “cultural archaeology finds a cosmopolitan mix of races behind the manufacture of the bell. Cather frequently interprets events through a multiracial or multicultural stencil” (9). Along similar lines, Melba Cuddy-Keane, in arguing that the bell represents modernism’s awareness of globalization, describes “the way an ordinary artifact embodies the complexities and contradictions of
cultural crossings, here encoding the paradoxical entanglements of hostilities and indebtedness that define our relations in the globe” (553). While the inanimate object represents a cultural mix, this account of the passing of knowledge from group to group obscures and actually denies a history of cultural hybridity.

The bell in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* globalizes the narrative but simultaneously represents a fear of transnational cultural connections that are brought about through globalization. In creating a lineage of the knowledge that produced the bell, Latour reduces history to a smooth, peaceful set of transitions between distinct groups of people. His history of the bell presents the Spanish and the Mexicans as two distinct groups, such that the Spanish can “hand” the knowledge to the Mexicans. This avoids the complicated history of racial and cultural mixture that occurred in the formation of a Mexican people. As the narrative describes it, the Mexicans are a distinct people, rather than a group that is formed partly out of Spanish conquest. The simplicity of the verb “hand” removes the messiness and complexity of cultural formation. Neither did Mexicans simply “teach” the Navajos. While there were certainly pure blooded Indians, to think of Mexicans and Navajos as two distinct groups denies the history of cultural mixing as well as the historical conflicts between the two groups.

Throughout the novel, Cather follows the pattern set out in the discussion of the Angelus bell: people and groups are not shown to have hybridity while Cather locates the generative power of hybridity to form new cultural types in objects. Mexicans may always be Mexicans but the cultural artifacts they produce are not purely Mexican. Rather than presenting the contemporary world as globalized, Cather locates transnational interconnections in the past. For example, an old priest, Padre Jesus de
Baca, explains the pueblo Indians’ fascination with parrots to Latour: “Even before the Spaniards came, the pueblos of northern New Mexico used to send explorers along the dangerous and difficult trade routes down into tropical Mexico to bring back upon their bodies a cargo of parrot feathers” (90-91). The connections that allow for the presence of the parrots and that speak to the broad forms of cultural exchange that take place are pushed back in the past. Cather emphasizes the depth of this history by having de Baca say that a carved parrot that Latour admires is “probably the oldest thing in the pueblo — older than the pueblo itself” (90). Latour’s interest in the parrots and their history is meant to be shared by the reader; this incident is one of the many examples of stories incorporated for the purpose of entertaining and edifying the reader with stories of exotic people and cultures. Yet, as is the case with all these examples, by locating the origins of the story in the distant past, Cather keeps the stories from being a destabilizing threat to the borders of the United States that Latour is charged with enforcing through his efforts at Americanization.

A similar example occurs when a priest returning from a pilgrimage in Mexico tells Latour and Vaillant of visiting the shrine of Guadalupe. The narrative devotes several pages to the retelling of the story. This leads to a one of the few moments in the novel in which connection to Mexico seems possible: “Father Vaillant was deeply stirred by the priest’s recital, and after the old man had gone he declared to the Bishop that he meant himself to make a pilgrimage to this shrine at the earliest opportunity” (53). The pilgrimage is not mentioned again in the novel. Indeed the purpose of the incident has been accomplished in the telling of the story. The telling of the story points to the length that Cather goes to include such stories. The novel, as has been widely noted, lacks a
conventional plot. The episodic nature of the story, particularly in the first half of the novel, revolves primarily around recounting incidents and legends of the territory.

The patterns of incorporation and exclusion form the novel’s relationship to Mexican cultural artifacts. Latour is fascinated by the santos that he finds in native houses, an experience the reader is invited to share through the novel’s detailed descriptions of the figures:

[The Virgin Mary] was dressed in black, with a white apron, and a black reboso over her head, like a Mexican woman of the poor. At her right was St. Joseph, and at her left a fierce little equestrian figure, a saint wearing the costume of a Mexican ranchero, velvet trousers richly embroidered and wide at the ankle, velvet jacket and silk shirt, and a high-crowned, broad-brimmed Mexican sombrero. (29)

The symbolism of the different clothes points clearly to the multiple cultural forms that belief can take. Latour discusses the different names saints are given in different languages. In addition to the cultural pluralism, the santos section is noteworthy for its handling of history. The narrator states that the santos “had come in the ox-carts from Chihuahua nearly sixty years ago” (28). Mary Chinary notes, “Though the santos emerged from old Mexico and New Mexico, there was a particular hold on the tradition in the rugged northern part of New Mexico and in southern Colorado” (99). Chinary also observes that the “santos thrived in what has been called a classic period, from about 1790 until 1860, though that style continued until around 1907” (99). Cather deliberately moves the time of production of the santos from the period in which the primary action of the novel takes place. She moves the location of production to outside the United States.
when the works could have plausibly and perhaps more accurately been created in the United States at the time Latour was in the Southwest. This move by Cather denies the presence of an active folk tradition that exists on both sides of the border after the U.S. annexation of New Mexico. Cather’s inclusion in the novel of the santos, Chinary argues, shows the value Cather places on Mexican culture: “Cather unobtrusively weaves folk art into her novel of fine art, showing a clear understanding of the history and context of the santos” (107). Yet this appreciation and understanding, limits the inclusion of the santos tradition by framing it to fit within a comfortably delimited national space.

Cather’s depiction of the santo tradition, in removing agency from the hands of the contemporary Mexican characters, comes from and enables the novel’s paternalism toward living Mexican characters. Mexican characters are repeatedly described as childlike. Among the many examples in the novel, Father Vaillant gives the most direct expression to this sentiment: “The more I work with the Mexicans, the more I believe it was people like them our Saviour bore in mind when He said, Unless ye become as little children” (215). Cather also deploys crude Mexican stereotypes. Martinez is twice referred to as “swarthy” (154, 157). He is depicted as lecherous, uncivilized, and dirty:

The Padre snored like an enraged bull, until the Bishop decided to go forth and find his door and close it. He arose, lit his candle, and opened his own door in half-hearted resolution. As the night wind blew into the room, a little dark shadow fluttered from the wall across the floor; a mouse, perhaps. But no, it was a bunch of woman’s hair that had been indolently tossed into a corner when some slovenly female toilet was made in this room. This discovery annoyed the Bishop exceedingly. (156-57)
The negative portrayal of Martinez represents the Mexican influence that must be expelled from the United States.

For many scholars, Cather’s New Mexico is a “mixed up space… in which the kind of racial and ethnic categories that form the boundaries of Latour’s mental diocese are so destabilized that the grounds for making a statement such as ‘the Mexicans were always Mexican, the Indians were always Indians’ disappear” (Lindemann 127). For Walter Benn Michaels, who cites Latour’s statement that “the Mexicans were always Mexican, the Indians were always Indians” the novel supports the “maintenance of identity” (79). Neither of these positions provides a satisfactory account of the depictions of ethnic and racial identities in the novel. Rather than the nativist position that holds against ethnic or racial miscegenation, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* presents multiple positive forms of cultural exchange. But the novel does not allow for fully destabilized identities.

The novel displays a particular unease with cultural mixing when it is located in people rather than cultural artifacts. A standard reading of the novel is that the celibacy of Latour and Valliant provides Cather with means to avoid the problems of reproduction. However, Marilee Lindemann has argued that the novel “is untroubled by marriages across ethnic lines” (128). She observes that Kit Carson is married to a Mexican woman and Dona Isabella, described in the novel as “a Kentucky girl who had grown up among her relatives in Louisiana” (184) is married to Don Olivares, a Mexican native of Santa Fé. These successful inter-ethnic marriages suggest Cather’s desire to show the possibilities cultural harmony but a close reading shows that the narrative is troubled by the possibilities of racial mixing that such marriages raise. The novel avoids the full
consequences of cross cultural marriage by limiting the couples’ reproduction. The
Olivares have one child, a daughter of whom the reader learns that “it was generally
understood that she would never marry. Though she had not taken the veil, her life was
that of a nun” (187). By desexualizing and making the daughter the end of the family
line, Cather avoids the problems of ongoing racial mixing. Cather does not need to
address the daughter’s cultural position; the daughter’s status as an ethnic hybrid is
elided.

Similar, though more complex, is the depiction of Kit Carson’s daughter. The
daughter appears only in a single sentence buried within a description of a party at the
Olivares’s:

But that night the future troubled nobody; the house was full of light and
music, the air warm with that simple hospitality of the frontier, where
people dwell in exile, far from their kindred, where they lead rough lives
and seldom meet together for pleasure. Kit Carson, who greatly admired
Madame Olivares, had come the two days’ journey from Taos to be
present that night, and brought along his gentle half-breed daughter, lately
home from a convent school in St. Louis. On this occasion he wore a
handsome buckskin coat, embroidered in silver, with brown velvet cuffs
and collar. The officers from the Fort were in dress uniform, the host as
usual wore a broadcloth frock-coat. His wife was in a hoop-skirt, a French
dress from New Orleans, all covered with little garlands of pink satin
roses. The military ladies came out to the Olivares place in an army
wagon, to keep their satin shoes from the mud. The Bishop had put on his
violet vest, which he seldom wore, and Father Vaillant had donned a fresh new cassock, made by the loving hands of his sister Philomène, in Riom. (189)

The scene depicts an idealized version of frontier cosmopolitanism. In contrast to the moments of conflict that occupy much of the novel, such as Latour’s efforts to remove the corrupt priests, the party offers a space of racial and ethnic harmony. Those in attendance include the Mexican host and his Southern wife, the Army officers (one of whom is Irish and at least some of whom presumably are Anglo-Americans), and the French priests. Rounding out this diverse mix is Carson’s daughter. As a “half breed,” Carson’s daughter allows Cather to include a Native American presence at the party, thereby bringing together all of the racial and ethnic groups that populate the novel. Yet, the inclusion of Carson’s daughter is balanced by her exclusion from significance as she is mentioned alongside clothes that were worn. She is another accoutrement that shows the cosmopolitan nature of the party like the “French dress from New Orleans.”

The brief appearance of Carson’s daughter offers further insight into Cather’s handling of history and the limits of Cather’s inclusive vision. The presence of the “half breed” relies on Cather excluding historical facts about Kit Carson. Because Cather gives no context for how Carson came to have this daughter, a reader could well assume that “the gentle half breed” is a reference to a child of Carson and his wife Mexican wife Josefa, who is minor character in the novel. However, although the historical Carson and Josefa had seven or eight children according to different accounts, Cather never mentions
these offspring, even though she sets scenes in the Carson house.\textsuperscript{50} Although Cather does not explain it to the reader, the ‘half breed’ is Carson’s daughter Adaline, who he had with his first wife, Waanibe, a member of the Arapaho tribe.\textsuperscript{51} This is supported by details such as Adaline having been educated at a convent in St. Louis. The brief mention of the daughter fulfills Cather’s desire to include a Native American presence and expand the cosmopolitan scope of the scene but avoiding any further reference to the daughter, or any reference to Carson’s marriage to an Indian woman, allows Cather to avoid complex questions of racial and ethnic identity.

The possibilities and limits of incorporation and assimilation can be seen in the French priest Latour. As he describes his life in the Southwest, he has a U.S. American identity and a French identity. Yet, while he acknowledges them both he keeps them separate:

We missionaries wear a frock-coat and wide-brimmed hat all day, you know, and look like American traders. What a pleasure to come home at night and put on my old cassock! I feel more like a priest then—for so much of the day I must be a ‘business man’!—and, for some reason, more like a Frenchman. All day I am an American in speech and thought—yes, in heart, too. (37)

Latour is able to be fully American, even “in heart,” while also being French. He

\textsuperscript{50} Thomas Dunlay’s \textit{Kit Carson and the Indians} (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2000) and David Remley’s \textit{Kit Carson: The Life of an American Border Man} (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 2011) provide the most reliable information on Carson’s life.

\textsuperscript{51} The novel uses “half-breed” one other time in \textit{Death Comes for the Archbishop}, referring to characters as “Mexican half-breeds” (40). Using the term to apply to mestizo characters but modifying it with “Mexican,” Cather reserves it specifically for a mix of any European blood with native peoples.
presents a model that combines assimilation and essentialism. At other points in the novel, Cather follows a similar pattern of using clothes to show transformation while retaining a sense of core identity. Dona Oliver “had done much to Europeanize” her Mexican husband leading to “the refinement of his dress and manners” (184). The dress of the santos figures mentioned above also fits this pattern. The descriptions of such events suggest they are more than just the act of putting on a costume. In each case the clothes symbolize a larger transformation that has been part of a long process. Such moments allow for the characters to assume a different identity but not to in some sense lose their essential nature.

Latour’s Americanization is not simply an act of putting on clothes. When he first is in New Mexico he longs for European civilization: “He was on a naked rock in the desert, in the stone age, a prey to homesickness for his own kind, his own epoch, for European man and his glorious history of desire and dreams” (109). When, at the end of the novel, he retires, Latour chooses to remain in New Mexico rather than returning to France. Going to France “seemed the natural thing to do” and his choice surprises “his relatives at home, and his friends in New Mexico” (286). Latour’s transformation follows the pattern of inclusion by incorporation that occurs throughout the novel although unlike the Mexicans who became part of the United States after the Mexican-American War, Latour’s Americanization is a choice. The novel nonetheless holds him up as a model of retaining identity while also assimilating. In his final days Latour “spoke only French to those about him,” a relaxation of a rule that he had strictly followed to only speak the local language (281). Even as he becomes at home in the United States, he retains some core French identity. Latour’s comment that “The
Mexicans were always Mexicans, the Indians were always Indians” then can apply to him as well (300). He will always be French even if he is American.

What for Cather makes this assimilation and essentialism possible is the bordered national space of the United States. If the United States is the United States rather than the undefined territory with multiple names that appears in the Prologue, then the mixed identities of the people inside of that national space are less of a threat to the nation. The nativist fear of having an internal “foreign” minority is not allowed to exist. Once the initial process of establishing the borders and removing those elements resistant to them is complete, that which may seem foreign becomes material to be incorporated into the nation.

In Cather’s article “Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle,” which I discussed at the beginning of the chapter, she wrote about the end the legacy of continental expansion: “In Nebraska, as in so many other States, we must face the fact that the splendid story of the pioneers is finished, and that no new story worthy to take its place has yet begun” (238). Cather developed in her novels The Professor’s House and Death Comes for the Archbishop a “new story” by returning to the history of the Southwest. In doing so, these novels build on the representations of Mexico and Mexicans that appeared in her earlier novels and which had drawn lines between the United States and Mexico in using Mexico primarily as a gendered plot device. Cultural excavation and the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that appear in her novels of the 1920s represent a significant development in the depictions of the United States and Mexico. While shifting focus away from territorial conquest, Cather depicts U.S. American culture being sustained and enlivened by the legacy of non-Anglo-Saxon peoples even as she seeks to draw firm boundaries that
delimit the lines of U.S. national space to suppress ongoing cross-border cultural influence.
CHAPTER 4

MODERNISTS ACROSS BORDERS:
JOHN DOS PASSOS AND KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

In the previous chapters, I discussed the ways in which Ernest Hemingway and Willa Cather present South America and Mexico respectively as part of the geographic imaginations of their fiction. They use the idea of these places to the south of the United States to develop the contours of U.S. identity even as the narratives avoid directly entering Latin American space. This chapter considers the experiences of John Dos Passos and Katherine Anne Porter, two modernist writers who crossed the border between the United States and Mexico in the 1920s. These two writers present complex commentaries on the possibilities of crossing national borders and Mexico as a site of artistic production.

For U.S. writers who went to Mexico in the 1920s, the country offered an alternative space. Mexico was peripheral and central, modern and primitive, a part of the New World and attached to the Old World through its Spanish traditions. During the Mexican Revolution, Mexico seized the imagination of readers in the United States yet was considered to play only a minor role in the international affairs of the early twentieth century. Its proximity to the United States made it an intriguing destination and improved travel routes made it increasingly accessible, yet its attraction was most often portrayed in terms of remoteness and exoticism; Mexico City was simultaneously a
metropolis on the order of European capitals and a peripheral outpost. Mexico was a land of culture and a land of chaos, the Revolution seen as both an artistic flowering and a destructive failure. How these multiple, often contradictory currents were presented and negotiated, reproduced and challenged is the subject of this chapter.

In this chapter I use the term “circulations” to explore the links and exchanges between the United States and Mexico (and other global locations). Circulation emphasizes the movement that was central to modernism and particularly significant in the flow of people, ideas, and art between the United States and Mexico in the 1920s. In contrast to “borderlands” or Mary Louise Pratt’s term “contact zones,” both of which describe a specific space where cultures meet, circulation suggests a diffuse geography across which human and cultural connections are made. The work of Dos Passos and Porter was shaped not just by contact with Mexico but by the interconnections between the two countries, most notably the routes between New York and Mexico through which they both moved.

Circulation not only serves to represent the expansive elements of modernism; exploring the limits of circulation, the places people choose not to go and the locations ideas or goods do not reach, reveals boundaries that shape discourse and culture. In a recent manuscript, Rachel Adams argues for situating Porter as part of “a modernist cohort that is best labeled as ‘trans-American,’ in that its themes and circuits of travel were continental in scope” (106). This perspective rightly challenges the critical tendency to read primarily within limiting national frameworks; however, emphasizing the continental scope, as Adams does, can obscure the role of circulations that were contained within national boundaries. Even as Dos Passos and Porter moved between
and through multiple locations, they wrote primarily for national audiences. In their fiction and nonfiction Dos Passos and Porter depicted Mexico for audiences in the United States. Participating in national and transnational circulations and negotiating between them becomes a central theme in their work.

The tensions between the transnational and the national are heightened because of the proximity of the United States to Mexico and the ongoing history of U.S. imperialism. Dos Passos and Porter challenge U.S. imperialism of the early twentieth century but they do so in distinct ways that reflect their different positions and relationships to U.S. culture. Their circulations are also marked by their relative affluence and privilege. Notably, their engagement with Mexico and the United States either did not take them to the borderlands between the countries or when they passed through the region they gave it little attention. As a result, issues such as the large Mexican immigration into the United States from 1910 to 1929 and the forced repatriation of Mexicans after 1929 are not present in their fiction or nonfiction. In producing works that emerge from transnational circulations yet avoid other transnational connections, and in writing that is concerned with and in some ways bound by national ideas and borders even as it depicts an increasingly interconnected world, these authors present complex representations of Mexico and the United States that respond to the historical moment of the 1920s.

\[52\] In making this claim, I do not suggest that the lines of national circulation were absolute. In particular, Dos Passos’s work had a significant influence internationally, including in Latin American. However, as I will discuss, he thought of himself as participating in and developing an “American” tradition.
The Nineteenth Century Background of Representations of Mexico

Recent scholarship on nineteenth century U.S. literature has revealed the history of hemispheric cultural circulation in the Americas. The work of Anna Brickhouse and Kirsten Silva Gruesz has shown that writers such as Maria Gowan Brooks, María del Occidente, William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, José María Heredia, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Walt Whitman engaged with ideas and influences that stretched beyond the borders of the United States. Brickhouse, for example, uncovers the complex “Mexican genealogies” that underlie the writing of Hawthorne’s “Rappaccini’s Daughter” although, as she observes, the story “eschews its own transamericanism” (184). Transnational connections had significant influence in the development of specific literary works and the shaping of literary culture but because such connections were often hidden, overlooked, or deliberately obscured they had limited influence on popular perceptions of Latin America.

More influential on popular perceptions was the romance that colored much nineteenth century U.S. writing on Mexico and the former lands of the Spanish empire. As Michael Davitt Bell argues, romance invokes a “misty history” that blends history with the poetic (639). Because depictions of Spanish influence in the Americas occupied a space between history and fiction, they denied actuality to the nations of Latin America. This position is seen in Edgar Allen Poe’s 1835 review of a nonfiction work on the Spanish conquest of Florida: “There is so much of romance in the details of Spanish conquests in America, that a history of any one of the numerous expeditions for discovery and conquest, possesses the charm of the most elaborate fiction, even while it bears the marks of general truth” (8:37). Technically on the other side of the
fiction/history divide are Robert Montgomery Bird’s novels *Calavar; or The Knight of Conquest* (1834) and *The Infidel; or The Fall of Mexico* (1835). These fictional works grounded in the history of Spanish conquistadores in Mexico show how romance as the primary lens for representing Mexico consigns the nation to the realm of the not fully real. In addition, as Gretchen Murphy observes, “US-authored historical romances set in Mexico offer… sympathetic portrayals of indigenous Americans beset by cruel Spanish conquistadors, supporting for U.S. readers the black legend of unjust Spanish conquest and identification with New World liberation from Spain” (557). At the same time such depictions offered an explanation for U.S. perceptions of Latin American underdevelopment, which was then used to justify U.S. intervention in the region.54

During the nineteenth century transnational literary circulation played a significant part in the works of many U.S. writers but direct contact with Mexico was limited. In the early nineteenth century, the burgeoning genre of travel writing produced a number of accounts of Mexico and Latin America but for most of the public, these locations remained unknown and exotic in the first half of the century. The Annexation of Texas (1845) and the Mexican–American War (1846-1848) produced considerable interest in the border regions. As Robert Walter Johannsen describes in his history of representations of the Mexican-American War in the U.S. imagination, soldiers produced a mass of accounts in both private letters and published accounts that offered substantial

53 For more on the Black Legend’s influence in the U.S., see Maria DeGuzman’s *Spain’s Long Shadow* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2005).

54 See also Jesse Alemán’s discussion of *Calavar* in “The Other Country: Mexico, the United States, and the Gothic History of Conquest” (*American Literary History* (2006) 18(3): 406-426). Alemán persuasively argues that Mexico stands “as the US’s uncanny imperial other because the continental proximity of the two countries and their shared revolutionary histories make them estranged national neighbors” (409).
information to the U.S. domestic audience. In Johannsen’s words “Mexico, a terra
incognita, was to be opened to the gaze of Americans” (146). Soldiers’ accounts were
often marked by romanticism and patriotism that prefigured the development of the
imperial attitudes exhibited by Theodore Roosevelt in the Spanish-American War. In
spite of Mexico falling under the gaze of U.S. writers, it remained primarily a stage for
Anglo-American action.

While the War itself and the period immediately following produced an abundant
amount of writing on Mexico and the newly acquired territories, interest quickly faded.
As Arthur Pettit and Dennis Showalter write, “The Southwest, so much in the public eye
during the Mexican War, was all but forgotten by most Americans during the last half of
the nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth centuries” (83). Turning attention away
from the southern border also reduced interest in Mexico and Latin America as the
California Gold Rush turned attention to domestic development. Soon the slavery
question and the Civil War focused the national discourse on domestic issues. As a
result, Richard Slotkin observes, “In the two decades after the war itself, very little
literary fiction appeared featuring Mexican War settings—only a few popular books and
dime novels, and no ‘serious’ hardbound fiction of the historical romance type” (191).
Depictions of Mexico in popular literature did not disappear entirely at the end of the
Mexican-American War. In particular, Mexican and border settings were staples of the
adventure and Western genres. Noteworthy examples include Beadle’s Dime Novel
series (1860-1920s), Wild West Weekly (1902-1928), Buffalo Bill Stories (1905-1912).

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55 For a comprehensive history of these and other popular depictions of Mexico see Arthur Pettit
and Dennis Showalter’s Images of the Mexican American in Fiction and Film (College Station:
Texas A&M UP, 1980).
Such depictions relied on highly formulaic plots presenting villainous Mexican men and exotic Mexican women who marry the Anglo hero.

In the 1880s through the 1910s, Mexico appeared infrequently in U.S. literary fiction. Stephen Crane was the most prominent literary writer to set fiction in Mexico during this period. Crane traveled to Mexico in 1895 and wrote a series of short stories published shortly thereafter. Although he presented Mexico in greater detail than had other writers, he did so largely by recasting in a more literary style the formulas and stereotypes of genre fiction. Michael Robertson observes that Crane’s Mexican short stories are “rigidly formulaic…. In each a white American male is the innocent target of unprovoked Mexican threats. The Mexicans are blustering, sneaky, and aggressive, but they are also cowardly, afraid of even the implication of Anglo violence” (121). The Mexican characters give the Anglo protagonists a justified occasion for establishing their masculinity through violence. Raymond Paredes’s survey of Crane’s work finds, “There are few characterizations of the Mexican in serious American literature less flattering than Crane’s. His Mexicans perpetuate a traditional Yankee stereotype; they are wicked, drunken and cowardly” (qtd. in Robertson122).

Other writers in this period used Mexico in their plots as a place for characters to escape from the law or societal conventions. These novels have limited descriptions of the country itself or avoid depicting entirely. In Frank Norris’s McTeague (1899), for example, the eponymous protagonist attempts to flee to Mexico after killing his wife but dies before crossing the border. In the novel, McTeague suggests the lack of attention given to Mexico when he says, “‘Mexico,’ he muttered to himself. ‘Mexico, that’s the place. They’ll watch the coast and they’ll watch the Eastern trains, but they won’t think
of Mexico”” (298). Helen Hunt Jackson’s *Ramona* (1884) also uses Mexico as a place of escape for U.S. characters but she does so in a more positive fashion. The novel, set in Southern California shortly after the Mexican-American War, presents a variety of characters including Californios who became citizens of the United States following the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo but still consider themselves to be Mexican. While the novel presents a wide though sentimentalized and simplified picture of cultural diversity, Mexico is largely absent from the novel until the final pages. The novel ends with Ramona marrying the son of Californios and the couple moving to Mexico where they live a relatively happy domestic life. Although the novel goes across the border to imagine the characters having a life in Mexico, Jackson’s novel depicts nothing of the actual country, neither the land nor the people.

**General Interest in Mexico in the 1910s and 1920s**

In the 1910s, as the Mexican Revolution captured the attention of Americans, Mexico began to occupy a larger space in the consciousness of the popular press in the United States. As one writer in *Century* put it in 1914, relations with Mexico were as common a topic of conversation as “the tariff, currency legislation, the business outlook, and the weather” (Shuster 593). In dime novels, Hollywood films, and Western genre fiction, the Mexican Revolution became a new context for restaging tropes about Mexico that were common during the late nineteenth century. In Zane Grey’s *Desert Gold* (1913), a character’s description of Mexico captures how upheaval in the country

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56 *Ramona* has a notable hemispheric afterlife in a Spanish translation by José Martí. See Laura Lomas’s discussion in *Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities* (Durham: Duke UP, 2008).
provided an exciting backdrop for fiction narratives: “Say, old boy, there’s something doing in Mexico. The United States in general doesn’t realize it. But across that line there are crazy revolutionists, ill-paid soldiers, guerrilla leaders, raiders, robbers, outlaws, bandits galore, starving peons by the thousand, girls and women in terror. Mexico is like some of her volcanoes—ready to erupt fire and hell!” (27).

In the first decades of the twentieth century, cinema became a primary means for creating popular impressions of Mexico. As Carlos Cortés observes in a review of the history of Hollywood portrayals of Mexico, “By the late 1910s, then, two views of Mexico has become solidified in the pantheon of Hollywood clichés. On an individual level stood the Mexican greaser, a most convenient villain. On the national level stood revolutionary Mexico, a land of chaos and menace” (98). Cortés goes on to note that “Geographically, Hollywood’s Mexico consists of the US-Mexican border as a specific region and the rest of Mexico as an undifferentiated mass” (94). Such limited depictions continued in popular culture through the early part of the twentieth century and to some extent remain common today, but by the 1920s tourism and interest in the Mexican Revolution had begun to create more varied representations of Mexico. As Delpar describes, “frequent tension and mutual disdain between the United States and Mexico” would give way to “a flowering of cultural relations in the 1920s” (Vogue 7).

When in Dos Passos’s The 42nd Parallel the character Mac decides to go to Mexico to see the revolution, it is significant that the novel shows the possibility of taking an interest in Mexico for the purpose of seeing Mexico. He goes not as part of a military campaign, not in pursuit of profit, and not simply as a tourist or adventure seeker. Although Mac’s travel to Mexico is partly motivated by a desire to escape the
United States, which I will subsequently examine in my analysis of the novel, he evinces an interest in seeing Mexico because of what is happening there.

In the 1920s, U.S. interest in Mexico extended across a broad spectrum of groups. Committed leftists, including communists and socialists of various stripes, artists and intellectuals, and capitalist businesses all had interest in the events taking place in Mexico. As one critic describes it, “In 1923 Mexico City teemed with fanatics, bohemians, idealists, radicals, and visionaries. Intellectuals who had once looked to Europe for cultural revelation now turned their backs upon the old continent, embracing instead the genius of peasants and indigenous peoples whose inclusion in the Mexican community promised to bring forth the ‘regeneration and exaltation of the national spirit’” (Albers 115). Porter’s and Dos Passos’s interest in Mexico stemmed from a similar attraction to the combination of political and cultural change that had as a fundamental part of its vision a place for art and artists.

In addition to Dos Passos and Porter, other artists, writers, and intellectuals from the United States who went to Mexico in the 1920s and early 1930s included Langston Hughes, Waldo Frank, Aaron Copland, Archibald MacLeish, John Dewey, Edward Weston, and Hart Crane. Mexico also attracted the interest of such international figures as D.H. Lawrence, André Breton, Antonin Artaud, Sergei Eisenstein and Leon Trotsky, all of whom went to Mexico during the 1920s. Mexican artists increasingly moved across borders as well. The three most famous Mexican artists of the period, muralists Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros all spent time in the United States in the late 1920s or early 1930s during the height of the “Mexican Invasion.” Their prominence developed from articles and exhibitions celebrating
Mexico’s pre-Columbian heritage, its folk arts, and its artistic renaissance, including the first international show of Mexican art, held in Los Angeles in 1922, which Porter helped organize. The circulations between Mexico and the United States in the 1920s reflected the diverse, complex, and contradictory connections between the two countries. Dos Passos and Porter present different responses that remake and reinscribe national identities, consider the significance of transnational connections, and develop national histories during a moment of burgeoning literary and artistic exchange between the two nations.

Dos Passos’s *U.S.A. and the End of U.S. Expansionism*

To observe that the idea of the United States as a nation is central to the three novels that comprise Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.* trilogy, one need look no further than the title, which was given to the works when they were first published in a single volume in 1938. The three novels, *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932), and *The Big Money* (1936), follow through on the ambitious pronouncement of the trilogy’s title by undertaking an expansive portrayal of the nation. The trilogy ranges in time, space, and subject covering the history of the United States from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1929, encompassing a geography that includes diverse locations in the United States and extending through the Caribbean, Argentina, Mexico, and several countries in Europe, following twelve central protagonists and many more secondary characters. Since the publication of the trilogy, critics have consistently seen the scope as the most notable feature of the work and an essential part of Dos Passos’s achievement.\(^{57}\)

\(^{57}\)“Scope” specifically is a word critics have made repeated use of in describing *U.S.A.*: Cowley praised the novel’s “scope and richness” (*New Republic*, LXXXIII (Sept. 9, 1936), 132); more
Yet the ambition of Dos Passos’s undertaking and the scope of the resulting novels have led many readers and critics to fail to notice the trilogy’s limits. As much as the title *U.S.A.* sets out an expansive subject, it also delimits an area of focus. Useful and representative is an observation by Malcolm Cowley, one of the trilogy’s earliest and most insightful readers. He identified the trilogy as a “collective novel . . . of which the real protagonist is a social group” (“The End of the Trilogy” 140). Cowley goes on to say, “In this case the social group is almost the largest possible: it is the United States from the Spanish War to the crash of 1929, a whole nation during thirty years of its history” (140). “Almost” is a revealing word here because it acknowledges that the trilogy is not all encompassing, even as Cowley seems to minimize that very point. Attending to the “almost” in Cowley’s quote points to the issue of how the novel draws boundaries and constructs limits to its field of representation.

That the idea of nation provides a structure that delimits the scope of the novel may be obvious; as a result critics have paid scant attention to the boundaries and borders of the trilogy. Instead they have focused on issues such as language, class, and power in the context of internal U.S. national debates of the 1920s. This focus on aspects of national culture leaves unconsidered the trilogy’s transnational connections. In 1942 in *On Native Grounds*, Alfred Kazin called it “a national epic, the first great national epic of its kind in the modern American novel” (353). More recently Donald Pizer argued that recent critiques include phrases such as “vaultingly ambitious scope” (Nanney, Lisa. *John Dos Passos Revisited*. New York: Twayne, 1998. 170); “the trilogy’s scope is vastly ambitious” (Browder, Laura. *Rousing the Nation: Radical Culture in Depression America*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998. 39); “Panoramic in scope” (Minter, David. *A Cultural History of the American Novel: Henry James to William Faulkner*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 132). This is only a selection of critics who have made similar observations a starting point for their analysis of the novel.
“the final test of its value and centrality in twentieth-century art lies in its nature and quality as a modernistic epic American novel” (184). While critics such as Kazin and Pizer celebrate the way U.S.A. represents “America,” they leave unexamined its relation to space and cultures outside the borders of the United States.

Although the trilogy’s central characters are all from the United States, the three novels reflect the increasing global circulations of the twentieth century. The interconnected structure of the novel, in which characters’ lives repeatedly intersect across time and space, is only possible with the mobility allowed by transportation technology that was developing in the early twentieth century. The plotting that makes characters repeatedly cross paths throughout the United States and in Mexico and Europe may feel forced at times, but a story set a generation earlier that included such international interconnections would not have been possible: at that time people did not travel as widely, rapidly, or frequently.

Technology also connects to the structure of U.S.A. in Dos Passos’s adaptation of cinematic techniques in his writing. As many critics have observed, the trilogy’s heterogeneous discourse was influenced by film, particularly Sergei Eisenstein’s theory of montage. The use of a montage style in the trilogy to incorporate disparate elements makes interconnections essential to the work’s form. To make the trilogy focus on the United States, Dos Passos has to draw borders that work against the formal structure of the novel. In creating these borders, Dos Passos seeks to locate the national in an

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increasingly interconnected world.

Dos Passos’s own cosmopolitan background and personal interests enrich the analysis of the relationship between the national and the transnational in his fiction. John R. Dos Passos, the novelist’s father, was from a modest background but rose to wealth and social prominence. The son of a Portuguese immigrant cobbler, he became one of the most successful corporate attorneys in the United States, representing the large trusts his son would later attack. The elder Dos Passos also was active in politics and an advocate of U.S. imperialism, writing several prominent articles in support of President McKinley’s overseas ambitions. Linked to the elder Dos Passos’s support for imperialism was his belief that, in spite of his own heritage, the United States should maintain and promote Anglo-Saxon values. In 1903 the elder Dos Passos published *The Anglo-Saxon Century and the Unification of the English-Speaking People*, which proposed an Anglo-American alliance (and the annexation of Canada to the United States) to unify the Anglo-Saxon race. Significantly, the elder Dos Passos frames the proposals as being motivated by the changes recent exploration and advances in technology have brought to geographic relationships:

The opening of the twentieth century reveals two great conditions which must deeply and powerfully affect the acts of individuals and nations, and compress events, which ordinarily would take ages to mature, into a few years. First, there are no more worlds to discover, and territorial

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59 For an example of John Randolph Dos Passos’s support of McKinley’s imperialism see “Defense of Mr. M’Kinley; Mr. Dos Passos Answers Charges of Anti-Imperialists.” *New York Times*. October 14, 1900. Further discussion of the elder Dos Passos in relation to his son’s work can be found in “John R. Dos Passos: His Influence on the Novelist’s Early Political Development” Melvin Landsberg. *American Quarterly*, 16.3 (Autumn, 1964), 473-485.
absorption by purchase or force of arms is the sole means by which the most powerful nations can add to their possessions. Diplomatic eyes now look inward and not outward. Second, all nations have become near neighbours to each other; and the achievements of science, conquering space and time, enable the newspapers, among other things, to present each morning a full picture of the doings of the whole world on the preceding day. (IX-X)

Perhaps not coincidently, *U.S.A.* begins with the dawn of the twentieth century. More significantly, the younger Dos Passos’s trilogy adopts a similar understanding of the changed relationship of place and territory in the early twentieth century. Although he draws different conclusions, like his father, Dos Passos considers the implications of a world that no longer contains territory to be discovered and in which technology creates an increasing interconnected world.

In “Dos Passos, Anglo-Saxon,” Jon Smith argues that in *U.S.A.* Dos Passos forges an Anglo-Saxon U.S. identity based on racist assumptions and veneration of English over non-English languages. As Smith notes, Barbara Foley has made the important observation that “throughout Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.*, which purports to represent the totality of American society through its spectrum of typical fictional characters, not a single black (or other non-white) character is featured as a protagonist” (193-194). Race does appear as an issue at points in the novel: certain passages show considerable racism while others critique white characters’ racism. These are the exceptions, however; overall the trilogy presents whiteness as normative. Dos Passos, not to his credit, largely elides the issue of black-white racial relations. By minimizing issues of race, Dos Passos shows his
concerns are unlike those of Thomas Dixon and others to whom Smith compares him. For Dos Passos, race is not an active threat that he feels he must engage. In addition, Dos Passos’s valorization of immigrants such as anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti points to an embrace of “whiteness” rather than a narrower Anglo-Saxonism which Smith argues Dos Passos promotes. Smith cites Dos Passos’s reference to Vanzetti as “this fishpeddler you have in Charlestown Jail is one of your founders Massachusetts” to show Dos Passos favors Anglo-Americanism because “the highest compliment he can think to pay this Italian-American anarchist is to compare him to a Pilgrim” (299). The confrontational tone of the passage suggests Dos Passos’s intention is the opposite: he wants to challenge the reader to see the immigrant Vanzetti as being as “American” and to unsettle confortable histories of the nation’s founding.

In contrast to Smith, Kenneth Price argues that in *U.S.A.* Dos Passos makes a “calculated revision of his father’s *The Anglo-Saxon Century*” and rejects the elder Dos Passos’s celebration of U.S. imperial conquest (74). Price sees in *U.S.A.* the novelist’s “hostility toward his father and his turn toward Whitman,” who represents a just, democratic, inclusive United States. While I agree that Dos Passos adopts an anti-imperialist position in *U.S.A.*, Price’s reading fails to account for the imperialism that underlies Whitman’s exuberant vision of the United States. Expansionism and Manifest Destiny were fundamental to Whitman’s writing. As I will show, because Dos Passos rejects expansionism he is unable to recreate Whitman’s national vision in the twentieth century. *U.S.A.* does not create a nation that expands out as does Whitman’s United States. Dos Passos establishes a transnational context that reflects the increasingly interconnected twentieth-century world, but he ultimately rejects transnationalism in a
retreat to U.S national space and national culture. Dos Passos’s inability or unwillingness to create alternatives to imperialism and transnationalism leads him to imagine an imprisoning U.S. culture that produces the stasis that pervades the end of the trilogy.

**Dos Passos’s Americanism**

From the time Dos Passos started writing fiction as a student at Harvard, he sought an “American” tradition. In “Against American Literature” an essay published in 1916, the year he graduated from college, Dos Passos despaired at the state of American literature. Like Van Wyck Brooks and other prominent writers of the time, Dos Passos expressed this in terms of a “lack” caused by the foreign sources of American literature. The literature of the United States had failed to develop a national identity, primarily caused by “rootlessness”:

> In other countries literature is the result of long evolution, based on primitive folklore, on the first joy and terror of man in the presence of the trees and scented meadowlands and dimpled whirling rivers, interwoven with the moulding fabric of old dead civilizations, and with threads of fiery new gold from incoming races” (Travel Writing 588).

Much of the essay uses the soil metaphors of the nineteenth century that linked contact with the land to literary production: “American literature is a rootless product, a cutting from England’s sturdy well branched oak tree, nurtured in the arid soil of New England colonies, and recently transplanted to the broad lands of the Middle West” (588). Such rhetoric connects the land to culture in ways that allow for the explanation of a European inheritance but create a place for a distinct, rooted U.S. cultural identity tied to national
A decade later as the idea for *The 42nd Parallel* was germinating, Dos Passos expressed similar sentiments about creating a U.S. tradition. In a 1926 article in the first issue of the *New Masses*, Dos Passos describes his vision for the magazine by calling for writers from the United States to take more interest in “exploring America” (“The *New Masses* I’d Like” 20). He repeatedly imagines cultural development with analogies to the legacy of Western exploration; “Why shouldn’t the New Masses be setting out on a prospecting trip, drilling in unexpected places, following unsuspected veins, bringing home specimens as yet unclassified” (20). Later in the essay, he writes, “Ever since Columbus, imported systems have been the curse of this continent. Why not develop our own brand?” (20).

In addition to evoking the history of New World exploration, Dos Passos’s call to “explore America” also suggests the increasing U.S. interest in international travel. In the 1920s, not only were artists increasingly traveling outside the United States, middle-class citizens of the United States were traveling abroad in growing numbers. The vast expansion of international tourism led to the national boosterism expressed in the See America First campaign, which encouraged Americans to visit locations in the United States rather than going to Europe or other foreign destinations. Using slogans such as “See Europe if you will but see America first” the See America First campaign reflects a cultural and economic nationalism that specifically responded to the an increasingly interconnected world that offered greater possibilities for travel outside national borders. Dos Passos’s argument for “exploring America” points to a desire to reject the historical influence of Europe and respond to increasing internationalization. However, as I will
discuss at the conclusion of my analysis of *U.S.A.*, the language of exploration returns in *U.S.A.* to describe a failed search for a vibrant U.S. identity, because Dos Passos is unable to imagine a national or international space in which exploration can occur.

Dos Passos’s interest in developing American literature took a considerable time to be realized. As Linda Wagner-Martin has observed, “Enthusiastic as Dos Passos was about being the ‘chronicler’ of American life, his early writing revealed little of that eventual interest. Nearly all his stories published in *The Harvard Monthly* had foreign settings, as did his poems and his first two published novels, *One Man’s Initiation: 1917* and *Three Soldiers*” (xii). In the essays Dos Passos published before writing *U.S.A.*, he sought to find an American voice and American themes but he remained bound to the European influences. This conflict is on particular display in the essay “Against American Literature,” in which Dos Passos refers to both the national soul and the “âme nationale” (587), the use of the French term suggesting the influence of his study of languages at Harvard and the still powerful influence of foreign sources that marks his early writing. The United States as the supreme subject of his fiction only began to take firm shape with the publication of *Manhattan Transfer* in 1925, to be realized fully in the *U.S.A.* trilogy. This interest in America continued through the rest of his career, in works such as the *District of Columbia* trilogy (*Adventures of a Young Man*, 1939; *Number One*, 1943; *The Grand Design*, 1949) and the posthumously published *Century’s Ebb* (1975). But it is in *U.S.A.* that Dos Passos most fully considers the place of the United States in an international context and explores the increasing transnational connections between the United States and the world.
Mexico and the Transnational Origin of *U.S.A.*

Although it was while traveling in Mexico that Dos Passos conceived the idea for what became *U.S.A.*, few critics have examined the representations of Mexico and Latin America in Dos Passos’s work. That Dos Passos took four trips to Mexico during the 1920s and 30s, the period in which he was writing *U.S.A.*, most critics note only in passing, if at all.

Dos Passos became interested in Mexico while at Harvard when he read John Reed’s *Insurgent Mexico* and published a review of the book for the *Harvard Monthly*. He planned for some time to travel there, writing in 1924 that he was “looking lustfully towards Mexico” (qtd. in Carr 201), a phrasing noteworthy for its expression of imperial desire and colonial fantasy. It was only in 1926 that Dos Passos set off for his first, and what would be his longest, trip to Mexico. In a letter he wrote to Hemingway, Dos Passos described three reasons for traveling to Mexico: to relax, to write, and to see the cultural revolution taking place there. Of these, relaxation seems to have figured most prominently: “People who give up all their time to a hobby go sour or crazy or both. I’m going down to Mexico to forget” (qtd. in Carr 224). In this Dos Passos seems to have been successful as he subsequently described his experience in terms common to tourists on holiday. Mexico, he wrote, had prevented him from having “caved in from sheer depression….The sun’s hot and the air’s cold and there’s all sorts of fantastic food and drinks, and the people—particularly the women of Indian blood—are like stone idols” (quoted in Carr 224). Although tourist pleasures were a significant part of the trip, Dos Passos did follow through on his desire to write and see Mexican culture.

Among the few works that consider Dos Passos’s writing in connection to Mexico
is Rubén Gallo’s “John Dos Passos in Mexico,” which provides a useful if brief treatment of Dos Passos’s interactions with Mexican writers during his 1926-27 trip. As Rubén Gallo recounts, Dos Passos’s trip to the countryside near Puebla with the avant-garde poet Salvador Novo was primarily notable for revealing how little the two writers had in common. They had different literary tastes, different politics, and different dispositions. The trip seems to have been productive for Novo at least; he published two essays in which he parodied Dos Passos’s style and wrote satirically of foreigners’ taste for the exotic. More productive for Dos Passos was his meeting with Maples Arce, which led to Dos Passos translating Arce’s poem *Urbe* and seeing it published in the United States. Gallo concludes that other than completing the translation, Dos Passos’s interactions with Mexican writers did not lead to lasting friendships or artistic connections.

The influence of Dos Passos’s experiences and impressions of Mexico during his 1926-27 trip can perhaps best be seen in a series of articles published in *New Masses*. These three nonfiction works, all of which appeared in 1927, are “Paint the Revolution!” in March, “Relief Map of Mexico” in April, and “Zapata’s Ghost Walks” in September.

In these articles, Dos Passos wrote enthusiastically about Diego Rivera and the post-Revolution art scene, condemned American business and military involvement in

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60) In addition to Gallo’s article on Dos Passos and Mexico, Hector Pérez in an unpublished dissertation provides a consideration of Mexico in *U.S.A.* (*Radical Discourse and Cultural Interdependencies Between the United States and Mexico*. Diss. The University of Texas at Austin, 1994). This work provides excellent coverage of the many references to Mexico in *U.S.A.* and was helpful in the creation of my views. However, where Pérez understands Dos Passos’s representations of Mexico as generally positive and used primarily to critique the United States, I find Dos Passos’s relationship to Mexico (and Latin America) much more conflicted.

61) When Dos Passos collected his Mexican writing in his collection of travel writing, “In All Countries,” the date of February, 1926 was given to “Relief Map of Mexico.” However, Dos Passos did not travel to Mexico until December 1926 and he returned to the United States in March 1927. “Relief Map of Mexico” was published in *New Masses* in April 1927. Presumably, Dos Passos simply confused the years when compiling “In All Countries.”
Mexico, and voiced support for the revolution in the state of Morelos.

The first of Dos Passos’s Mexican articles, “Paint the Revolution!” shows considerable enthusiasm for the work of the Mexican muralists. The piece concludes, “If it isn’t a revolution in Mexico, I’d like to know what it is” (599). Yet while Dos Passos was clearly excited by the art he saw, throughout the article he uses a comparative mode in which he repeatedly turns the reader’s attention from Mexico, the ostensible subject of his essay, to the United States. Dos Passos praises Mexican art to condemn the failure of the United States to produce a comparable new artistic movement. Rather than trying to engage Mexican culture or make cultural connections, Dos Passos is interested in using Mexico as a means of evaluating the United States.

Dos Passos’s other two articles focus on political questions. In “Relief Map of Mexico,” Dos Passos takes a strong position against business interests from the United States, which he refers to as “Yanquilandia” (315, 316) and “the inconceivably powerful financial bloody juggernaut of the Colossus of the North” (Travel Books 317). Yet Mexico and its inhabitants remain undeveloped. Dos Passos describes Mexico City through an accumulation of images:

Mexico City stretches out its gridiron of streets, the green squares full of flowers, the low red vaults, and the towers leaning this way and that, of dusty colonial buildings. On the streets old men with spectacles, young girls, young women in shawls, barefoot children sell lottery tickets, candied cactus and sweet potatoes, chiclets, cigarettes, lottery tickets, chiclets, lottery tickets, chiclets. In the stores the storekeepers, Gallegos, Catalans, Jews, Germans, Frenchmen, shake their heads over the
morning’s paper. *(Travel Books 315)*

The description creates a vivid portrait but there is only observation; Dos Passos does not get beyond sensory perceptions in engaging Mexico and its inhabitants. He refers to the plight of “Ten million Mexican peasants and workmen” (317) but when he tries to personalize this mass he creates a composite figure, “Juan Sin Tierra” that is a rhetorical device, not a human being. Dos Passos ends the article by asking, “Which side are you on, on the side of the dollar, omnipotent god, or on the side of the silent dark man (he has lice, he drinks too much pulque when he can get it, he has spasms of sudden ferocious cruelty), Juan Sin Tierra, with his eyes on the ground?” (317).

For the readership of the *New Masses*, being on the side of the Mexican Indian and the peasant, and against the large business interests of the petroleum industry and U.S. corporations, was a standard position. Such political positions were much in keeping with the editorial position of *New Masses*, which at the time was “the principal organ of the American cultural left” (Foley 65). Contributors in the 20s and 30s included literary figures Upton Sinclair, Ernest Hemingway, Carl Sandburg, Ezra Pound, Claude McKay, Waldo Frank and Eugene O’Neill. From its first issue, the *New Masses* consistently featured articles that challenged U.S. military intervention in Latin American and attacked U.S. business interests for their roles in undermining the Mexican Revolution. The cover of the February 1926 issue, for example, featured the question “Is Oil Thicker Than Blood?” superimposed on an outline map of Central America. In conforming to these views, Dos Passos’s Mexican nonfiction challenges U.S. imperialism but his articles do not encourage substantive engagement with Mexico.
Mac and Mexico in *U.S.A.*

In striving to present a broad depiction of the United States, Dos Passos’s *U.S.A.* rejects traditional fictional unities. The trilogy’s heterogeneous discourse alternates between four modes (fictional narrative sections, Newsreels, Biographies, and Camera Eye). References to Mexico and other nations to the south of the United States appear in all four. The most prominent depictions of Latin America are in the narrative sections of *The 42nd Parallel* focusing on Mac, a socialist whose interest in the Revolution leads him to Mexico. The Mac-Mexico sections are particularly significant because they relate to the germination of the trilogy. It was during Dos Passos’s 1926-27 trip to Mexico that he began developing the idea for the project that grew into *U.S.A.* In his memoir, *The Best Times*, Dos Passos recalls returning to New York and “trying to organize some of these stories I had picked up in Mexico into the intertwined narratives that later became *The 42nd Parallel*” (171).

The importance of Mexico in the development of the trilogy is suggested by the focus on Mac in the first part of *The 42nd Parallel*. Each narrative section in the trilogy is named for a specific character, whose story is the focus of that section. Mac is the featured character in the first seven narrative sections of *The 42nd Parallel* but is only featured once more in the remaining thirteen narrative parts of the novel, and he does not appear in the trilogy’s final two books. Other than Mac, no character is the subject of more than two consecutive narrative sections, except Charley Anderson who is featured in the first four narrative sections of *The Big Money*. The initial focus on Mac is particularly noteworthy because, where other characters make repeated appearances in the novel, often in the narratives of other characters, after the last Mac section, he
disappears from the novel.

Mac’s significance in *U.S.A.* makes his story worth summarizing. The child of a poor Scotch-Irish family, Mac lives a rootless childhood, moving from the small mill town where he was born to Chicago. From there he becomes an apprentice to a traveling salesman, the beginning of a period of wandering across the country working a variety of jobs. He eventually meets a woman, Maisie, whom he gets pregnant and marries. The couple settles into a domestic life in Southern California. There Mac learns of the Revolution taking place in Mexico when he visits a Los Angeles restaurant where a group of Mexican anarchists are meeting to discuss the expected downfall of the Diaz regime in Mexico. Hearing talk of “revolution and foreign places” excites Mac and a friend proposes that they “go to Mexico and see if there’s anything in this revolosion talk” (110). Although the trip with the friend does not happen, Mac becomes increasingly dissatisfied with domestic life and heads to Mexico by himself. He travels first to El Paso, where he hears talk of the chaos in Mexico, and from there he crosses the border to Ciudad Juárez. In Juárez, Mac is introduced to a group of anarchists and IWW members. When rebels take Juárez, Mac heads to Mexico City with vague ideas of joining the Zapatistas. Instead Mac takes a printing job and settles down with a Mexican woman, Concha. When chaos breaks out in Mexico City as the revolutionaries approach, Mac sells his property and flees by train with Concha to her sister’s house in Veracruz. There Mac considers leaving Concha and returning to the United States but he chooses to stay, seemingly destined to lead a domestic life. At this point Mac disappears from the trilogy.

Dos Passos’s knowledge of Mexico is evident in some of the descriptions of Mexican settings in the Mac section. The narrative, however, does not focus on
presenting a robust picture of Mexico. One of the few specific references to Mexican culture occurs while Mac is being given a tour of Juarez and he hears a corrido sung on the street. Other than this brief scene, however, Dos Passos does not mention the artistic elements of the Revolution that he wrote about in New Masses. This omission can be attributed in part to the Mac sections being set in the period before World War I, before the flourishing of the Revolution’s artistic elements in the 1920s. Yet it is also the case that the events in Mexico largely serve as a backdrop for presenting the stories of the U.S. characters. In forming this background picture, historical and political events of the Revolution are referred to repeatedly but mostly serve to suggest chaos and instability, not to present a nuanced picture of Mexico.62

In addition to Mac, a number of characters from the U.S. appear in the Mac-Mexico sections. These include Ben Stowell, an oil promoter who becomes friends with Mac; Eustace, an oil prospector from the United States Mac talks with in a bar; and three characters that play significant roles elsewhere in the trilogy: the newspaper reporter G. H. Barrow, the public relations man J. Ward Moorehouse, and his secretary Janey Williams, who is mentioned only in passing in the Mexico sections.

The actions of the U.S. characters that appear in the Mac-Mexico sections show the racism, violence, greed, and sexual fantasies that shape U.S. views of Mexico. Moorehouse, still early in his career as a fast-rising public-relations man, gives voice to the role of business interests in Mexico. As Moorehouse describes, he has gone to

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62 While Dos Passos includes references to key events in the Revolution, he does not get all the information correct. As Drewey Gunn has pointed out, in the Mexico sections Dos Passos “made a number of factual errors, the most glaring being that of having Carranza’s death occur at the same time as the United States enters World War I” (93). Whether these inaccuracies were mistakes or fictional license, their presence in the text suggests that Dos Passos was more interested in shaping the narrative than in presenting a historically accurate depiction of Mexico.
Mexico in an “unofficial capacity… to find out what the situation was and just what there was behind Carranza’s stubborn opposition to American investors” (276). In addition to the desire for wealth, Mexico is a location for enacting other types of fantasy. The reporter Barrow, who voices sympathy for the Revolution, goes to Mexico to build connections between labor groups there and in the United States. His primary interest, however, is to see “the backside of Mexico,” specifically the brothel he asks Mac to show him (271). Eustace, the man in the bar, displays crude racist attitudes. He proclaims that Mexico “ain’t no place for a white man….These bandits’ll be on the town any day…. It’ll be horrible, I tell you. There won’t be a white man left alive” [ellipses in original] (305-306). Eustace calls for U.S. military intervention and says, “It’s a hell of a fine country but there’s not one of these damn greasers worth the powder and shot to shoot’em” (306). Through these characters Dos Passos gives a forceful critique of U.S. attitudes toward Mexico. He shows the characters to be projecting their own fantasies, ambitions, and beliefs onto Mexico. Dos Passos fails to recognize that he uses the country in a similar way: Mexico provides him an opportunity to highlight the failings of the United States but he is uninterested in substantively engaging Mexico.

Dos Passos’s method of challenging U.S. power, racism, and fantasies about Mexico through negative depictions of U.S. characters rather than positive representations of Mexico or Mexicans is consistent with his handling of race and ethnicity throughout the trilogy. In “Camera Eye 3,” Dos Passos critiques the casual indifference and racism of the wealthy in the United States toward Mexicans. In the section, the narrator is a young child traveling on a train with his mother. When the boy asks who works in the factories he sees out the window, his mother responds,
“Workingmen and people like that laborers travaileurs greasers” (30). The mother then tells a story about traveling in Mexico in a private train car. During the trip she is frightened when shots are heard but says, “it was allright turned out to be nothing but a little shooting they’d been only shooting a greaser that was all” (30). In the two stories Dos Passos emphasizes the mother’s inhumanity in having no interest in the lives of workers or Mexicans. The mother’s lack of attention, however, is mirrored by the novel’s unwillingness to explore the lives of Mexican characters, in Mexico or the United States.

Another notable depiction of racism focuses on Anne Elizabeth Trent, a character from the narrative sections, who has moved from Texas to New York. After touring an immigrant neighborhood in New York, she remarks: “we oughtn’t to let all these foreigners come over and mess up our country…they’re not white people and they never will be. They’re just like Mexicans or somethin’, or niggers (585). Here, as elsewhere in the trilogy, Dos Passos adeptly shows how the construction of U.S. racial attitudes. He does not, however, develop non-white characters, so the critique remains detached and intellectual.

In spite of the focus on characters from the U.S., transnationalism manifests itself on a few occasions in the Mac section, although often through subtle references. The presence of U.S. business interests in Mexico is the most prominent connection linking the United States and Mexico. More interesting is Mac meeting Mexican revolutionaries in Los Angeles, which suggests the flow between the two countries is not unidirectional. A “young blonde fellow with blue eyes” Mac meets in the restaurant, who Mac “was surprised to find out …was a Mexican” (110) presents the blurring of the borders of identity that accompanies the national borders. A passing reference is also made to
Samuel Gompers, the head of the America Federation of Labor having an interest in making connections in Mexico.⁶³ Such moments of transnational connection suggest a direction the trilogy could have taken; however, Dos Passos leaves these references to cross border connections undeveloped.

The only Mexican character that is more than an outline is Concha, although she is very little developed herself. She is moderate, a realist, and supportive of Mac. Unlike Maisie, Concha is tolerant of Mac’s radicalism even as she is dismissive of the durability of such beliefs. As she comments, “Every poor man a socialista…a como no? But when you get rich, quick you all very much capitalista” (268). This aligns her with a view critical of socialists who sell out their ideals that Dos Passos repeatedly puts forward in the novel. In this way Concha seems to be wiser than the other characters. She also shrewdly advises Mac to buy at distressed prices the possessions of business men who are fleeing to the United States. Where all in Mexico is chaos, Concha’s equilibrium is suggested by the names of her cats, Porfirio and Venustiano. Presumably the pets are named for Porfirio Diaz, Mexico’s dictatorial, capitalist president who was overthrown by the revolution, and Venustiano Carranza, a moderate President of the post-

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⁶³ Dos Passos mentions Gompers’ interest in making connections with Mexican labor which fits with the timeline of the narrative. Gompers took a significant interest in labor issues in Mexico during this period leading to the 1918 founding of the Pan-American Federation of Labor. Although it lasted only until 1934 and was not an effective organizing vehicle, the Pan-American Federation included significant transnational symbolism and sought, with limited success, to expand throughout the Americas. Gompers’ interest in international labor connections was largely a response to the international rise of the IWW, particularly in Mexico. According to Harvey Levenstein, Gompers’ position “reveals some of the basic hypocrisy and blindness that underlay American attitudes towards the Mexican Revolution and Latin American in general. It presents the spectacle of the archapostle of nonintervention and of a ‘hands off’ policy on the part of the government attempting, nevertheless, to intervene in Mexican affairs in a field in which his interest were concerned” (155). For more on Gompers and Mexico see Levenstein’s “Samuel Gompers and the Mexican Labor Movement.” (The Wisconsin Magazine of History 51.2 (Winter, 1967-1968). 155-163). See also Gonzalez, Gilbert G. Mexican Consuls and Labor Organizing: Imperial Politics in the American Southwest (Austin: U of Texas P, 1999).
revolutionary period who assumed office in 1914. The pairing evokes equilibrium and Concha’s ability to go in whatever direction the unstable political situation may move.

The depictions of Mexico in the Mac sections allow Dos Passos to bring the theme of U.S. desire for Mexico, which is part of his broader challenge to U.S. imperialism that runs through the trilogy. Mac’s narrative is central to Dos Passos’s critique. Critics have most often read the Mac narrative as an example of personal failure (Mac being unable to live up to his ideals) or as representative of the general failings of socialist idealism. Lisa Nanny, for example, finds that Mac “finally succumbed to the ease of petit bourgeois involvement in the benefits of capitalism” (180), while for Pizer, Mac experienced “the death of the self that is the self-betrayal of the best part of one’s nature” (121). In this context, the question of what becomes of Mac after he disappears from the novel has been of interest since the publication of the novel. As Wagner-Martin recounts, “In 1932, when Malcolm Cowley wrote to ask where Mac as character had gone in 1919, Dos Passos replied, with perhaps more condensation than was appropriate, ‘Mac stayed on in Mexico and died there some years ago of heart failure while playing hearts with a small party of friends’” (94). This answer is in keeping with what is implied in the text but it does not answer the question of why Mac is written out of the trilogy.

While Mac’s story represents a personal failure to live up to ideals of political commitment and the failure of socialist activism to achieve its goal of a just society, writing Mac out of the novel can be seen also a failure of incipient transnationalism. Mac’s wanderings and particularly the progression of his journey from east to west, suggests the pattern of Manifest Destiny. Michael Denning has observed that Mac’s
setting out on the road reflects a long tradition in U.S. literature (186), exemplified by Huck Finn’s decision “to light out to the Territory.” As Denning explains “the novel of the road and the drifting migrant could not imagine a domestic space that was not a prison” (189). To this reading that associates domestic space with home, can be added domestic space in its meaning as national space. Huck’s escape from the domestic world of Aunt Sally’s house requires a space to which he can escape, the open space of the frontier that is not fully incorporated into national (domestic) space. While the rootless Mac sets out on an escape similar to Huck’s, the absence of a frontier created by the bordered national space of the United States leaves him nowhere to go. Where a character like Mac in an earlier generation might have become a pioneer setting out to the West (or at least that is the way such a character would have been depicted in fiction), in the West of the 1910s the frontier is gone. In the United States, Mac can only move between locations finding much the same conditions and problems throughout the nation. Because Mac does not find a frontier space within the borders of the United States, he follows the path of expansionism in going to Mexico. To go to Mexico offers Mac one final alternative to replicate the frontier he has been unable to find. Yet this journey, once undertaken, is a possibility from which the novel retreats. The Mac section points to the way the novel works to establish a transnational context but ultimately rejects transnationalism.

**Imagining Latin America: Limits of Transnationalism in *U.S.A***

Although the Mac sections of *The 42nd Parallel* present the most extended and fully developed portrayal of Latin America in *U.S.A*, the nations to the south of the
United States make brief appearances throughout the trilogy and appear in each of the four modes. In particular, the place of the United States and its role as an imperial power occupies a place of prominence at the beginning of the trilogy. *U.S.A* is generally considered to begin with the preface titled “U.S.A” that Dos Passos wrote in 1938 for the publication of the three novels in a single volume. Since that time it has been standard practice to include the preface at the beginning of *The 42nd Parallel*. Reading the preface focuses attention on the national elements of the text, in ways I will discuss further below, but reading “Newsreel 1,” which was the opening of the original edition of *The 42nd Parallel* and which follows the “U.S.A.” preface in current editions, emphasizes not national space but the United States’ place in the world.

As with all the Newsreel sections, “Newsreel 1” involves the mixing of disparate sources that address a variety of issues, which produce what Donald Pizer terms “miscellanies” (79) or “pastiche” (82). While the Newsreel sections never focus exclusively on a single subject, many do have a dominant theme. “Newsreel 1” establishes the time and context for the novels by focusing on the beginning of the twentieth-century. In the section, headlines blare “LABOR GREETS NEW CENTURY” and “NATION GREETS CENTURY’S DAWN” (12). Although these references to the new century play an important role in establishing the temporal setting of the novel, the dominant theme of the section is U.S. imperialism and expansionism. Of the 22 items in the Newsreel, 11 refer to U.S. imperialism, which makes it one of the most thematically unified Newsreels in the trilogy.

“Newsreel 1” is structured around snatches of lyrics from “There’s Many a Man Been Murdered in Luzon,” a military song that refers to the Philippines during the
Spanish-American War. Lyrics from the song appear six times in the Newsreel, including at the beginning and the end. The first lyrics Dos Passos quotes invoke the image of U.S. soldiers gamely entering into battle against a foreign enemy:

\[
\begin{align*}
    & It was that emancipated race \\
    & That was chargin up the hill \\
    & Up to where them insurrectos \\
    & Was afightin fit to kill (11)
\end{align*}
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The second set of lines from the song describes the company commander as he fearlessly leads the charge: “Of them bullets took no heed” (110). This bravado comes to seem at least ill-advised if not foolish in the remaining lyrics Dos Passos quotes, which are variations of the lines “There’s been many a good man murdered in the Philippines/Lies sleeping in some lonesome grave” (13). By repeating these lines Dos Passos reminds the reader that military victories and U.S. expansionism have been possible only at the cost of many lives.

In the Newsreel, the image of dead soldiers in the lyrics is juxtaposed with other items that depict triumphalist political rhetoric hailing U.S. power and imperialism. Two turn-of-the-century expansionists are prominent: Congressman Francis Posey and Senator Albert Beveridge. The item referring to Posey innocuously states, in full, “Hamilton Club Listens to Oratory by Ex-Congressman Posey of Indiana” (12). The item’s source, a January 12, 1900 article in the Chicago Tribune, reveals the connection to expansionism.\(^{64}\) The article, titled “Fete of Hamilton Club,” recounts a speech given by Posey at the event. The oration praising expansionism, according to the article, was

\[^{64}\text{In Donald Pizer’s John Dos Passos’s U.S.A.: A Documentary Volume, which identifies the source of the Posey item, is an invaluable resource for reading U.S.A.}\]
enthusiastically received: “The audience loudly applauded every statement which referred to American ownership of the Philippines” (5).

In “Newsreel 1” Senator Beveridge declares, “The twentieth century will be American. American thought shall dominate it. American progress will give it color and direction” (12). Elsewhere in the Newsreel a headline declares a colonial vision of permanent conquest: “CLAIMS ISLANDS FOR ALL TIME” (12). While Dos Passos does not explicitly link the headline to Beveridge, it expresses the expansionist rhetoric for which he was known. In a widely noted speech made on the Senate floor in 1900, Beveridge stated:

The Philippines are ours forever. And just beyond the Philippines are China’s illimitable markets. We will not retreat from either. We will not repudiate our duty in the archipelago. We will not abandon our opportunity in the Orient. We will not renounce our part in the mission of our race, trustee, under God, of the civilization of the world. And we will move forward to our work with gratitude and thanksgiving to Almighty God that He has marked us as His chosen people, henceforth to lead in the regeneration of the world. (23)

Beveridge’s expansionism, in linking military might, white racial superiority, religion, and economic opportunity, bears the hallmarks of much American exceptionalism, both before and since. But territorial expansionism, a particular expression of American exceptionalism, was nearing its end at the turn of the century, which Beveridge himself suggests in his senate speech. In pressing the importance of U.S. control of the Philippines, Beveridge argued that “This island empire is the last land left in all the
Although he conveniently overlooks the recently fought war with Spain, to say nothing of the inhabitants of the Philippines, to suggest that the islands are available to be claimed by the United States, Beveridge’s words reflect the general feeling shared by Dos Passos’s father that expansionism and the U.S. position in the world would be forced to change because there was no territory left to conquer.

Several other references to expansionism appear in “Newsreel I.” Former president Benjamin Harrison, a member of the Anti-Imperialism League, states that although he has “no argument to make here or anywhere against territorial expansion” he proposes that resource development is a better path to national development (12). Another item, “Mr. McKinley is hard at work in his office when the new year begins” (12), does not present a directly link to the imperialism but overseas conquest was generally regarded as the most significant issue of McKinley’s presidency. For Dos Passos the association between McKinley and imperialism would likely have been particularly strong because, as noted above, Dos Passos’s father had given speeches and written articles in support of McKinley’s imperialist policies.

In another item in “Newsreel 1,” Dos Passos undercuts imperialist and expansionist rhetoric in a brief vignette depicting General Nelson Miles. The vignette depicts Miles falling from his horse while watching a military parade, which satirizes the grandiosity and pomposity of U.S. martial power. Although Dos Passos does not give the reader information about Miles’s biography, the choice of Miles as subject links the reference to imperialism. Miles, a veteran of the Civil War and various campaigns against the Indians, served as Commanding General of the United States Army during the Spanish-America War. He personally led the invasion of Puerto Rico and subsequently
served as the military governor of the island.

David Seed has observed that the “Newsreel” sections “define and develop themes” which are explored in the other modes (189). The prominence of “Newsreel I” suggests that its themes have a particularly important relationship to The 42nd Parallel and the entire trilogy. Imperialism’s centrality in Dos Passos’s writing of U.S.A. is seen in the manuscript titles for the three novels: Course of Empire, New Nation, and New Era. The titles suggest that the progression and development of the “new” nation that Dos Passos depicts is one in which U.S. national ideals have become corrupted. Among the many ways this corruption is shown to have taken over the U.S. culture none is more prominent than expansionism and imperialism. The issues that are set out in “Newsreel I” appear throughout the different modes of the trilogy.

Dos Passos uses many of the Biographies to depict aspects of expansionism. As Peter Christensen has observed, “The people described in the 1919 biographies belong to three clearly defined groups: the expansionists, the speakers of the good clean words who expose them for what they are, and the victims of the imperialistic first group” (201). The biographies of Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson show the history of U.S. imperialism in Latin America. The Roosevelt Biography, titled “The Happy Warrior,” points out that Roosevelt “engineered the Panama revolution” and that in spite of his reputation as a trust buster he worked “to make Cuba cosy for the Sugar Trust” (483). As in Hemingway’s poem “Roosevelt,” which I discussed in Chapter 2, Dos Passos contrasts the reality of Roosevelt’s life with the self-created legend. The famous charge up San Juan Hill in the Spanish-American War is presented as a publicity stunt: “It was too bad that the regulars had gotten up San Juan Hill first from the other side, that there was no
need to get up San Juan Hill at all” (482.) The item states that Roosevelt “engineered the Panama revolution” and that in spite of his reputation as a trust buster he worked “to make Cuba cosy for the Sugar Trust” (483). In the “Meester Veelson” biography Wilson’s non-interventionist declarations are depicted as empty words: “I wish to take this occasion to say that the United States will never again seek one additional foot of territory by conquest; / and he landed the marines at Vera Cruz” (567).

Biographies in the trilogy’s other novels also make reference to Latin America in showing the history of U.S. imperialism. The “Emperor of the Caribbean” biography of Minor Keith contains the most elaborate exploration of imperialism. The biography recounts that Keith’s uncle, a “capitalista yanqui,” made a fortune in Chile by “juggl[ing] figures, railroads, armies, the politics of the local caciques and politicos” (212). As a founder of the United Fruit Company, Dos Passos depicts the nephew as following in his uncle’s footsteps. Dos Passos concludes with a description of the building of the railroads and planting of banana plantations by observing, “that is the history of the American empire in the Caribbean, / and the Panama canal and the future Nicaragua canal and the marines and the battleships and the bayonets” (214). In the Biography of William Randolph Hearst, Dos Passos notes his role in instigating the Spanish-American War and further emphasizes the role of yellow journalism in U.S. relations within Latin America in explaining that “In spite of enormous expenditures on forged documents he failed to bring about war with Mexico” (1168).

Dos Passos uses items in the Newsreels to reinforce the Biography’s descriptions of U.S. imperialism in Latin America. Brief references to imperialism appear in Newsreels throughout the trilogy. Some of the items have direct connections to the
Biographies: for example, “ROOSEVELT TELLS FIRST TIME HOW US GOT PANAMA” (151). Many focus on U.S. military intervention, as do the two following examples: “the opinion prevails in Washington that while it might be irksome to the American public to send troops to Asia Minor people would be more willing to use an army to establish order south of the Rio Grande” (701), “AMERICAN MARINES LAND IN NICARAGUA TO PROTECT ALIENS” (930).

While the representations of Latin America in the Biographies and Newsreels focus on imperialism, a pattern of escape to and from Latin America recurs in the narrative sections. In addition to the Mac sections, the narratives of three other protagonists take them to Latin America: Joe Williams goes to Argentina, Mary French to Trinidad, and Margo Dowling to Cuba. These sections are relatively brief: the longest is the nine-page Mary section, while the Margo Dowling section is just over a page. The three narratives follow a common pattern: the characters face a serious problem that makes them want to escape from the United States. Once in Latin America the characters want to escape back to the United States.

The trilogy’s middle novel, 1919, is largely patterned around Joe Williams’ aimless wanderings. The novel’s first narrative section finds the character in Buenos Aires after having deserted from the Navy. The section describes a single afternoon during which Williams attempts to obtain forged sailor’s papers so he can get a job on a ship in order to leave the nation. The setting does not take on a presence other than being a place from which Joe Williams want to escape. The city is referred to only as B.A. and

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65 While strict definitions of Latin America do not include Trinidad among the countries in the region, informal usage often does include Caribbean nations. I choose the broader definition here because, as I argue, Dos Passos’s depiction of the country follows a pattern he applies generally to countries to the south of the United States.
then only in the last sentence of the passage (“time sure would drag all right till he got out of B.A.” (368). Dos Passos provides only a few other clues to identify the setting: Argentine slang, “ché” (Dos Passos uses the accent although this is not standard practice), a passing reference to a street named for an Argentine president (“Rivadavia” 367) and a reference to the “River Plate” (364), an literal English translation used in Argentina for Rio de la Plata.

In *Big Money* Margo Dowling marries Tony, a young Cuban, and briefly lives with him in Havana. The marriage is her opportunity to escape from her home, where she has been raped by her stepmother’s husband and where she feels like “she’d throw herself in the river if she had to go on living in the room with Agnes and Frank Mandeville” (922). Cuba, in contrast to Margo’s expectations and Tony’s promises, is distinctly unappealing. Once in Cuba, Margo finds that Tony is not rich as he had claimed. Moreover, Margo is repulsed by local conditions: “she hated going to the market that was so filthy and rancidsmelling and jammed with sweaty jostling negroes and chinamen” (973). While these impressions represent Margo’s subjective view and could be considered Dos Passos attempt to critique the way travelers from the U.S. respond to foreign locations, Margo’s negative feelings are to a significant extent justified by the plot. Margo gives birth to a baby who is born blind and then dies, both conditions are the result of a venereal disease she contacted from Tony, whose promiscuous homosexuality is part of the homophobia that runs through the trilogy. This child’s death links deviance, disease, and death, all of which the novel associates with Tony and the Cuban body. When Margo flees back to the United States, the message seems to be that however bad the United States may be, Cuba is worse.
The pattern of escape to and escape from Latin America is again repeated in the story of Mary French, whose family both seeks refuge in Trinidad and finds itself escaping from the country. The family moves to Trinidad after an investment goes bad. They then leave the country because, as a native teacher puts it, “I was born and bred here, but Trinidad’s no place to bring up a sweet clean little American girl” (858). By putting words of condemnation of Trinidad in the mouth of a Trinidadian, Dos Passos perhaps suggests the way imperialist views can be internalized. The novel, however, turns away from Trinidad after this brief passage, in effect following the advice to leave Trinidad.

The scenes in Argentina, Cuba, and Trinidad share what is common to many of the passing references to Latin American in the narrative sections of U.S.A.: the association of these locations with escape and the unsavory. In 42nd Parallel, Grassi, an Italian who Charley Anderson befriends, goes to South America to avoid service in the coming World War (“When I get Buenos Aires goodby and no more war” (342)). Similarly, Ben Compton considers going to Mexico after being sentenced to twenty years in prison for his political activities (“I might make it across the Mexican border . . . other guys have.” [ellipse in original] (739). For Margo Dowling, Latin America represents the threat of kidnapping, as comes out in her joking banter when she meets Charley Anderson: “If I step into your car and wake up in Buenos Aires it’ll be my bad luck” (1037).

Taken together the many references to Latin America in the narrative sections of U.S.A. lead the reader to a conclusion similar to that in Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises: Latin America is a place not to go. Where Hemingway turns to Spain, Dos Passos denies
the possibility of a productive transnational culture. With no new territory to explore and connections with Latin America leading only to escape back to the United States, Dos Passos is left unable to imagine cultural renewal. In the stream of conscious prose poem in Camera Eye (49) the authorial voice says, “for three hundred years the immigrants toiled into the west / and now today” (1134). At this point the line ends, the thought left unfinished. Dos Passos is unable to articulate a vision to replace expansionism.

**Pioneering Nostalgia: The Longing for Expansionism**

While *U.S.A.* presents a strong critique of U.S. expansionism, the novels exhibit nostalgia for continental expansion. Overseas expansionism continued the course of Manifest Destiny by seeking land to conquer and exploit for its economic potential. Throughout the trilogy as Dos Passos critiques the history of overseas imperialism, he returns to the rhetoric of continental expansionism when he tries to imagine a productive national culture. In a preface written for a 1937 edition of *The 42nd Parallel*, Dos Passos uses the language of the frontier to describe the role of the writer: “like the pioneers who had to move west into the prairie as soon as the farm they’d just cleared could grow a good crop of corn, writers who want to do primary inventive work will have to keep moving forward into the wilderness” (*Prose* 179). Similar references occur throughout the trilogy. When Dos Passos wants to express admiration for the historical figures he presents as heroes, he repeatedly turns to the language of exploration and territorial expansionism. Thorstein Veblen, arguably the foremost hero of *U.S.A.*, “lived pioneerfashion” (850). Praising Paxton Hibben’s search for social justice, Dos Passos describes him as someone who “believed in the new world” (515). Vanzetti is described
as an “immigrant worker hater of oppression who wanted a world unfenced” (1135). The ideas of U.S. social development are so tightly bound to the myths of exploration and expansion that Dos Passos’s quest for cultural renewal falls back on these terms.

At the end of *The Big Money*, Dos Passos declares that the powerful interests have “bought the laws and fenced off the meadows and cut the woods” (1157). What the expansionists have, and Dos Passos’s powerless characters lack, is a space in which to express their hope, energy, and desire. As a result, *The Big Money* largely depicts images of stagnation. Robert James Butler observes, “The narrative patterns which dominate this novel are essentially static and claustrophobic in nature” (86). Butler and other critics associate motion (and its failure or absence) in the trilogy with technological innovations and changes in U.S. society, but reading in a transnational context suggests the stagnation also results from Dos Passos’s pioneer nostalgia. Because he sees national culture as tied to the land and exploration, the end of expansionism causes the fencing of the world. Dos Passos’s inability to embrace transnational connections or diversity within the United States leaves the novel and its characters caught between the U.S. dream of endless progress and the rejection of continued expansionism.

**The “U.S.A.” Preface: A Disparate and Unified Nation**

“U.S.A.,” the preface that begins the trilogy, has been read as the key to the work. As the last part of the trilogy to be published, it can be seen as a coda or summation as much as an introduction. Read in this way, it answers a question the rejection of expansionism in “Newsreel I” raises: what is the place of the United States if the nation is not defined by expansionism and the course of empire? Critics have focused on the last
line of the section, “But mostly U. S. A. is the speech of the people” (3). Language here is seen as being the impetus for writing the novel; the “young man” character in the preface is associated with the novelist: the act of bringing together multiple voices has a clear relationship to the multitude of voices that are heard in the trilogy.

Yet the idea of nation that is constructed in these passages merits attention of its own. Significantly, not until the middle of the section does the idea of the nation begin to take shape. In the first half of the preface an unnamed “young man” moves through an urban landscape first with a crowd, presumably during the evening rush home, and then he is by himself as the crowd thins out. The scene is filled with the marks of the modern urban landscape: subways, streetcars, trains, planes, elevators. No national or other geographic identifiers are used so the “young man” seems to be a universal figure belonging to the modern world.

The universality of the image quickly shifts however after the midpoint of the section as Dos Passos begins a list of the places through which the young man has traveled: “Allentown,” “Seattle,” “Washington City,” “Market Street,” “San Diego,” “New Orleans,” “Michigan Avenue,” “Yellowstone,” and “Quinnipiack.” The seemingly diverse and disparate locations, because they excluded any places outside of U.S. national space, present a construction of U.S. identity. The list of places leads into the final paragraph of the section, which is constructed out of six parallel sentences, each beginning “U.S.A. is” and ending “But mostly U.S.A. is the speech of the people.” This second list serves to further reinforce the particularity of the national identity and establish the subject of the novel. The passage is both a creative act of bringing these disparate places together to form a whole and an act which closes off the whole from the
world. Even though U.S.A. goes beyond U.S. borders, this list of places does not. The figure that might be a universal type becomes explicitly “American.”

Epilogue: The National Narcissism of the Open Road

Near the end of The Big Money in “Camera Eye 50,” Dos Passos imagines the possibility of cultural renewal even as he declares, “we stand defeated America” (1158). He responds to this nadir by accepting that “all right we are two nations” (1157), referring to the powerful interests and the people they oppress. The description of the United States as two nations enacts a narcissistic rejection of transnationalism as the nation stands only in relation to itself. The international or transnational connections have been written out of the trilogy. Possibilities of connections across borders, such as those explored in Mac’s narrative and the lives of other characters that go to the south of the United States, are no longer presented as relevant. As the trilogy has represented Latin America as a place to either escape from or a place to express the false and corrupt desires of the expansionists, the trilogy completes the inward turn that begins when Mac is written out of the novel.

The final iteration of this solipsistic representation of the nation occurs in the “Vag” epilogue that closes the trilogy. This section presents the “two nations” in the form of passengers on a transcontinental flight and the figure of the “Vag” a wanderer who moves through the margins of society. Critics have read the final “Vag” section of the trilogy in terms of the despair and isolation of the Vag figure. As Caren Irr writes, the end of the trilogy registers a “sense of deflation” (62). This feeling occurs in part because the passage represents a turning inward and a closing off. The energy of expansionism,
while strongly criticized, has been one of the chief animating forces in the novel from “Newsreel 1.” The pioneering spirit is a potential regenerative force but never finally is more than impotent nostalgia.

In the “Vag” coda, technology has made crossing the continent effortless but the act of traveling has no meaning. The explorers who “discovered” the continent and the pioneers who settled the land in the mythological narrative of Manifest Destiny have been replaced by the privileged class of “transcontinental passengers” who fly from New York to Los Angeles. They have conquered the “mighty continent between Atlantic and Pacific” but are hardly aware of their travel, absorbed in thoughts of “contracts, profits, vacationtrips” (1240). When they reach their destination, in spite of having crossed the continent, they will simply find more of what they left; the fliers who vomit “the food they ate in New York” will find “plenty of restaurants in LA” (1240). The homogenized nation Dos Passos depicts results from a national space that has become closed and bordered.

The final lines of the novel appropriately feature movement: “The young man waits on the side of the road; the plane has gone; thumb moves in a small arc when a car tears down the road. Eyes seek the driver’s eyes. A hundred miles down the road” (1240). The road in the Vag section draws on a long history of the open road in the U.S. imagination. However Dos Passos depicts, not an open road, but a road that is enclosed within the confines of national space. The open road Dos Passos desires can be found in Whitman’s poem “Song of the Open Road.” As Dos Passos describes in his memoir, he read Whitman’s poem as he was preparing to go to Europe as an ambulance driver during WWI and the poem made him “frantic to be gone” (The Best Times 229). The opening
lines of “Song of the Open Road” capture an exuberant revelry of the possibilities offered by the open road:

Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,

Healthy, free, the world before me,

The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose. (297)

Later in the poem Whitman expands on the sense of boundless space that he associates with the open road:

From this hour I ordain myself loos’d of limits and imaginary lines,

Going where I list, my own master, total and absolute, Listening to others, and considering well what they say,

Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating,

Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me.

I inhale great draughts of space,

The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.

(299-300)

Whitman’s depictions of expanding U.S. national space makes him, as Henry Nash Smith observed in Virgin Land “the poet who gave final imaginative expression to the theme of manifest destiny” (44). Whitman’s exuberance invites the reader to share in the glories of expansion.

Unlike Whitman who encourages the reader to join him in exploration on the open road, Dos Passos in the “Vag” section presents a road constrained by national space.
This conclusion to *U.S.A.* reinforces Dos Passos’s portrait of the United States as a nation divided by its failure to realize its ideals of democratic equality. To support this, Dos Passos shows that the U.S. discourse that sustains the national character reverberates with greed, racism, and colonial expansionism and economic imperialism. While Dos Passos seeks to challenge the rhetorical foundations and the ideological assumptions that create inequality and oppression in the United States, his efforts to represent these issues while depicting an increasingly interconnected world leads to the limits of cultural nationalism. By placing nation at the center of his trilogy and of his analysis, Dos Passos creates a narcissistic critique of the United States. As a result he rejects imperialism but cannot imagine productive transnational connections. Instead his desire to return to an “unfenced” world is only frontier nostalgia. Because Dos Passos explores but rejects the possibility of connections outside the nation to Mexico and Latin America, the novel ends with a sense of cultural and physical stagnation. The trilogy recreates the borders of the United States in a world that was increasingly interconnected and points to the way U.S. national identity came to be defined in the twentieth century.

**National and Transnational Circulations in Porter’s Mexican Writing**

Dos Passos’s engagement with and retreat from Mexico and Latin America in *U.S.A.* reflect a tension between interest in the region to the south of the United States and the desire to maintain U.S. national identity in an increasingly interconnected world. Despite a personal interest in Mexico and Mexican culture, Dos Passos depicts circulations of characters that travel outside the United States but he uses these representations to reject the possibilities of maintaining cultural connections beyond the
borders of the U.S. Like Dos Passos, Porter traveled to Mexico in the 1920s out of an interest in the cultural developments taking place there. Like Dos Passos, she wrote both nonfiction and fiction based on her Mexican experiences. Porter’s Mexican writing, however, represents a more extended encounter with Mexico that attempts, not always successfully, to engage Mexico in ways that do not simply set it in opposition to the United States or use it as a stage to enact U.S. fantasies.

In 1920 Porter traveled to Mexico, which became the setting for her first mature fiction. This trip was the first of four extended visits she made to the country over a decade before she left Mexico for Europe in 1931. During this period when she traveled back and forth between Mexico and the United States, she went from a little known journalist to a widely read and respected author of short stories, essays, journalism, and book reviews, many of which dealt with Mexico and Mexican culture. Examining Porter’s writing reveals the complex exchanges and cultural representations between the United States and Mexico in the 1920s. Porter’s travels in Mexico and the short stories she produced based on her experiences there suggest patterns of circulation between the United States and Mexico rather than a binary framework of colonizer and colonized that has sometimes been applied to her work. An imperialist paradigm of colonizer and colonized presents power as unidirectional, which obscures cultural dynamics of exchange and circulation that involve multiple sites and types of power. Situating Porter in the context of circulations between the United States and Mexico (and other international locations) that contain multiple loci of power reveals how Mexican national culture and Porter’s Mexican writing in the 1920s emerged out of cultural exchange. Recognizing the transnational circulations in Porter’s life and in the production of her
writing, allows her Mexicans stories to be seen as part of a modernist engagement with an increasingly interconnected world that is distinct from nineteenth century representations of Mexico and that sets itself apart from frontier and border narratives.

Circulations also suggest the modernist sense of movement and connections between places while being distinguished from borderland connections between the United States and Mexico. Unlike the borderlands, which emphasize culture mixing in a location, circulations draw attention to the relationships between specific locations and the movements between them. Janis Stout describes Porter as a “borderlands” writer whose “imagination was one of doubleness and crossing” (494). In some respects applying borderland theory (Stout draws extensively on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa) to Porter captures the different spaces and cultures that were part of her life and work. Porter, who was born in Indian Creek, Texas and raised in a number of cities in the state, held an ambivalent attitude toward her Texas upbringing. She felt constrained by her family, which she associated with Texas, and the state’s culture, both of which she found hostile to her creativity. While she grew up in poverty, Texas’s culture in some respects gave her access to a family history of Southern gentility, which she explored later in her career in her “Miranda” stories. Her Texas childhood also meant growing up on the border of Mexico. She was brought in contact with this border through the presence of Mexican-Americans and Mexican-American culture, particularly during the short time her family lived in San Antonio. In addition, years before she was born her father had worked in Mexico. These various geographies and their related perspectives suggest the complexities of representations of Mexico that Porter negotiates in her fiction.
Yet as Stout notes, Porter did not have the ethnic double consciousness or split national identity generally associated with the “borderlands.” In spite of this lack, given Porter’s Texas upbringing, it is tempting to read Porter in the framework of the borderlands, particularly given her interest in Mexico and the time she spent there. Porter herself provides a strong case for making this argument. In “Why I Write About Mexico,” a letter to the editor published in 1923 in Century, the magazine where most of her Mexican fiction appeared, Porter defended herself against charges that her stories indulged in exoticism. She wrote, “I write about Mexico because that is my familiar country. I was born near San Antonio, Texas. My father lived part of his youth in Mexico, and told me enchanting stories of his life there; therefore the land did not seem strange to me even at my first sight of it” (Collected Essays 356). Her self-defense continued by highlighting multi-national, multi-ethnic diversity in the United States:

I have been accused by Americans of a taste for the exotic, for foreign flavors. Maybe so, for New York is the most foreign place I know, and I like it very much. But in my childhood I knew the French-Spanish people in New Orleans and the strange “Cajans” in small Louisiana towns, with their curious songs and customs and blurred patois; the German colonists in Texas and the Mexicans of the San Antonio country, until it seemed to me that all my life I had lived among people who spoke broken, laboring tongues, who put on with terrible difficulty, yet with such good faith, the ways of the dominant race about them. This is true here in New York also, I know: but I have never thought of these people as any other than American. Literally speaking, I have never been out of America; but my
America has been a borderland of strange tongues and commingled races, and if they are not American, I am fearfully mistaken. The artist can do no more than deal with familiar and beloved things, from which he could not, and, above all, would not escape. So I claim that I write of things native to me, that part of America to which I belong by birth and association and temperament, which is as much the province of our native literature as Chicago or New York or San Francisco. All the things I write of I have first known, and they are real to me. (*Collected Essays* 356)

In spite of this powerful articulation of the nation’s diversity, the possibilities Porter sets out for “borderland” connections and a diverse U.S. literature find only limited representation in her fiction. With respect to Mexican characters in the United States, José Limón observes that Porter, “who was so concerned about social justice, who was raised in South Central Texas, and who came to know Mexico first by way of Mexicans in Texas—never wrote Mexican-Americans or Mexican immigrants into her fiction about that place” (68). By only writing about Mexicans in Mexico, Porter keeps them at a remove from the national space of the United States. In her fiction connections between Mexico and the United States are not situated in the borderlands between the two nations but are part of modernist international networks, particularly the circulations of people and ideas between New York and Mexico.

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66 In noting the absence of Mexicans within the United States in Porter’s fiction, Limón intriguingly speculates that the Swedish immigrant Olaf Helton in Porter’s story “Noon Wine” is a repressed representation of the Mexican immigrants that Porter will not allow herself to portray directly.
The Colonial Gaze and Transnational Circulation

Several critics have linked Porter’s Mexican writing to U.S. imperialist attitudes toward Mexico. Stout describes Porter’s Mexican writings (alongside those of Evelyn Scott, who went to and wrote about Brazil in the same period) as “texts impelled by the gaze of imperial eyes” (16). A passage from her study is worth quoting at length:

However much travelers from the metropolis may wish to write as individualistic rebels, the act of travel is unavoidably contextualized by a history of imperialism, and they themselves are steeped in a culture which assumes its innate historical superiority and its expansive mission. The traces in the mentality of the traveler are inevitable, even when they are resisted. Thus both Scott and Porter, employing what [Mary Louise] Pratt calls “strategies of innocence” formulated in relation to “older imperial rhetorics of conquest” constitute themselves as essentially unwitting participants in a process of American imperialism.

Porter, in one sense, fits Stout’s description of “a writer from the metropolis,” coming to Mexico from New York. This simple dichotomy of center and periphery overlooks the circulations behind Porter’s Mexican experiences.

In arguing that circulations between the United States and Mexico are the appropriate context for understanding Porter’s relationship with Mexico, I am not suggesting that Porter and her work have no relationship to colonialism. In significant ways, Porter is directly linked to U.S. economic imperialism in Mexico. Porter’s politics were generally of the left and in her early writing she makes consistent although brief statements against the power of U.S. political and economic intervention in Mexico.
Nonetheless, Porter was the editor and primary writer of the short-lived *Magazine of Mexico*, which published its only two issues in 1921. The cultural magazine, backed by wealthy U.S. bankers (Givner 147) exemplified the link between U.S. cultural interest in Mexico and the desire to exploit economic opportunities there. This connection is clearly shown on the cover of the first issue, which announces the magazine is “Devoted to Mexico’s attractions and opportunities” including “Current events,” “History and Customs,” “Investments,” and “Natural Resources.” Given that elsewhere Porter condemned U.S. capitalist business interests in Mexico, her work for *Magazine of Mexico* could be attributed to naivety, ambivalence, or perhaps even the hypocrisy of a writer looking for work to support her travel to Mexico. Whatever personal judgments one may make about Porter’s connection to the magazine, her involvement represents the significant role that the United States and U.S. figures played in the 1920s in the development of a Mexican national art.

Porter went to Mexico from the artistic circles of Greenwich Village. She had moved to New York in 1919 after having worked as a film extra in Chicago and a journalist in Fort Worth and Denver. In New York, Porter supported herself through ghostwriting, writing children’s stories and doing publicity work for a motion picture company (Hendrick 5). She associated with radicals and artists. Mexican artists, like U.S. writers including Porter, were attracted to New York for its economic and cultural possibilities. Among her circle were two Mexicans, artist Adolfo Best Maugard and musician Tata Macho, who encouraged her to visit Mexico. Porter’s connection to Best Maugard was particularly significant. As Rick López has shown, “Mexico’s national culture did not flow inevitably out of Mexico’s historical experience, as is generally
assumed, but instead resulted from a distinct movement led by cosmopolitan nationalists (23). Best Maugard exemplifies this type of cosmopolitan nationalism. He played a leading role in 1920s Mexican culture as a close ally of Mexican Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos, who sought to make “indigenismo” a unifying force at the center of Mexican national culture. Such theories rejected European aesthetics in favor of ones rooted in the spirit of Mexican nationalism. Best Maugard’s cultural views were strongly influenced by his studies with the anthropologist Franz Boas (as was Manuel Gamio, another formative presence in Mexican national culture of the 1920s, a man Porter would meet and become close friends with in Mexico). The influence of the German-born Boas, who lived in the United States and taught at Columbia, exemplifies the influence of the U.S. and international connections on the intellectual development of mexicanidad in the post-Revolutionary period.

In New York, Best Maugard was working on Ballet Mexicana, “a simple romance set in Xochimilco and based on three of the most attractive Mexican dances” (Givner 147). In addition to the ballet being developed in New York, its transnational connections extended to Anna Pavlova, the Russian ballerina who was to star in the work. As Porter’s biographer Joan Givner records, Best Maugard asked Porter to write the libretto for the work and Porter spent long hours watching Best Maugard design the scenery while the two discussed theories of art. In the end, the ballet was not performed in New York because the scenery was deemed a fire hazard but it did become a regular part of Pavlova’s repertoire that she performed in international cities, including a performance in Mexico City in 1923. Porter’s interaction with Best Maugard shows her participation in
Mexican culture before she traveled to Mexico and the transnational interconnections that led her to the country.

On Porter’s arrival in Mexico in 1920, she emphasized these transnational connections. *El Heraldo de Mexico* reported “Miss Katherine Anne Porter, a young writer of much charm and promise, has just arrived in Mexico from New York. She is here to study, and to gather material for a book and a great pageant-play on the stirring history of this romantic land” (qtd. in Walsh 14). The article also noted Porter’s collaboration with Best Maugard in the production of “several Aztec-Mexican pantomimes” (qtd. in Walsh 14). While this article overstates Porter’s accomplishments, it points to the interconnected circulations of Mexican national culture and international modernism. And, as shown by the notice’s publication in a Mexican newspaper, these ideas of international connections were received positively and promoted in Mexico.

Porter’s *Magazine of Mexico* can be seen as a forerunner to other publications connected to the United States which served as venues for developing, theorizing, and promoting Mexican arts. The bilingual magazine *Mexican Folkways*, subsidized by the Mexican government and published between 1925 and 1937, was founded by Frances Toor, an anthropology student from the United States. The magazine contained contributions from Mexican and U.S. artists and writers including Best Maugard, Gamio, Salvador Novo, Diego Rivera, Robert Redfield, and Edward Weston. 67 (*Mexican Folkways* was not one of Porter’s primary publishing venues although she did contribute a translation of a folk song she reported collecting from the State of Hidalgo.) As López

points out, *Mexican Folkways* was “the first comprehensive cross-disciplinary journal to promote rural aesthetics as part of the nation’s proud heritage rather than as embarrassing evidence of backwardness” (142). Another work in English, Anita Brenner’s *Idols Behind Altars*, (1929) has been described as “the first consistent apologia for postrevolutionary Mexican Painting (González Mello 29). 68

In “Laughing Best: Competing Correlatives in the Art of Katherine Anne Porter and Diego Rivera,” Jeraldine Kraver analyzes Porter’s complex relationship with Diego Rivera but does not consider the multiple circulations and types of power active in relations between the United States and Mexico that were part of the development and promotion of Mexican arts in the 1920s. Kraver focuses on two stories Porter wrote in 1923, ‘The Martyr” and ‘The Lovely Legend.” Both stories fictionalize Rivera’s relationship with his first wife, Lupe Marin, and critics generally agree that the works attack Rivera’s treatment of women and his political commitment. While I follow Kraver and the critical consensus in finding that the works target Rivera, I believe Kraver mistakenly argues that Porter, in criticizing Rivera, acts as a colonial oppressor and that Rivera acts as the resisting subject by fighting back against this repression in his art. Kraver cites Caren Kaplan’s warning in *Questions of Travel* of the danger of travelers’ desire “to merge with the periphery ... that one’s power has established” (qtd. in “Competing Correlatives” 57). Porter was from the United States and in certain ways connected to the U.S. colonialism but to focus primarily on this ignores that Rivera was

older, male, and a more celebrated artist who had his own connections to the United States.

Kraver describes Porter as expressing her frustrations with Mexico and disillusionment in the Revolution in her attacks on Rivera. Kraver notes that at the same time Porter wrote the two stories, she and Rivera also collaborated on two interviews. “The Guild Spirit in Mexican Art” by Diego Rivera, “as told to Katherine Anne Porter” appeared in Survey graphic in 1924. In January 1925, Porter’s interview “Diego Rivera: From a Mexican Painter’s Notebook” was published in The Arts. Kraver sees the publication of these interviews as reflecting negatively on Porter: “The fact that Porter could collaborate with the artist while indicting him in her fiction is indicative, perhaps, of Porter’s cold-bloodedness where Rivera was concerned” (“Competing Correlatives” 58). Porter was known to be at times harsh and unkind to friends and enemies alike. Moreover, Porter and Rivera had a complex association, including the possibility that they may have had a sexual relationship.69 What interests me is Porter’s dedicated promotion of Rivera as an artist and Mexican art generally, which is only more remarkable if Porter were personally attacking Rivera in her stories.

As described above, the development and promotion of Mexican national arts in the 1920s involved transnational connections between the United States and Mexico. Among the most significant events promoting Mexican art outside of Mexico was a 1922 exhibition organized by Porter, Best Maugard, and the painter Xavier Guerrero. With the support of Gamio and the Mexican government, and the participation of numerous Mexican collaborators including Rivera, thousands of pieces dating from the pre-

69 Darlene Unrue addresses the possibility of a sexual relationship between Porter and Rivera by saying “If there ever was an intimate relationship, it did not last long” (108).
Columbian era to the contemporary period were assembled. The group planned to mount the exhibition at prominent museums throughout the United States but was prevented from doing so by U.S. political antagonism toward Mexico. At the time, the United States did not recognize the Obregón government, which led to the exhibit being deemed political propaganda. As a result the pieces were held by customs and only eventually able to enter the United States as goods for sale rather than as cultural objects for display. This allowed the exhibition to be held in Los Angeles, where it was a great success, but also caused the collection to be broken up and sold off, preventing further shows, much to the disappointment of Porter and the other organizers.

Porter wrote an essay for the exhibition’s catalogue, which was published as *Outline of Mexican Popular Arts and Crafts* (1922). In the essay, Porter expressed views that could be taken as describing the gaze of U.S. eyes on the exotic Other: “there is no self-consciousness, no sophisticated striving after simplicity. The artists are one with a people simple as nature is simple: that is to say, direct and savage, beautiful and terrible, full of harshness and love, divinely gentle, appallingly honest (Outline 165).” Lopez, however, observes that “Porter’s presentation of Mexico’s culture and arts was not a foreign-imposed reading but a synthesis of the interpretations put forward by Manuel Gamio, Xavier Guerrero, Adolfo Best Maugard, Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Moisés Sáenz, Jorge Enciso, Roberto Montenegro and others, who themselves drew on transnational intellectual shifts tied to cultural relativism, nationalism, authenticity, and the collective unconscious” (*Crafting Mexico* 100).

Porter later claimed that “All the tremendous interest in Mexican art in the United States stemmed from that [show]” (Conversations 126). While this may be something of
an exaggeration, the exhibition laid the groundwork for subsequent Mexican art exhibitions in the United States, which were instrumental in building the popularity of Mexican art in the United States. Porter’s participation in the show also highlights the important role women, including herself, Toor and Brenner, played in promoting Mexican art.

In her analysis of the Porter-Rivera relationship, Kraver draws attention to Rivera’s 1936 mural for the Hotel Reforma in Mexico City. She identifies one of the figures in the mural as Porter in arguing that in the mural “Rivera confronts her [Porter] as the colonized Other who rebels against colonialism” (“Competing Correlatives” 69). Rivera described the panel in question, titled “Folklore and Tourist Mexico,” as designed as a burlesque of “the Mexico of the tourists and lady folklorists-desiccated urban types whose imbecile pretensions were satirized by asses’ ears sprouting from their heads” (qtd. in Kraver, “Competing Correlatives” 68). Ironically, given that gender is the central theme in the two Porter stories Kraver analyzes, she fails to observe Rivera’s misogyny. Kraver’s description of a relationship between the painter Ruben and his model in “The Martyr” aptly applies: “Ruben fails to recognize Rosita’s humanity; she is merely a tool for his art” (“Competing Correlatives” 55). As Ruben does not recognize his model’s contribution to his art, Rivera failed to recognize the way women such as Toor, Brenner, and Porter promoted Mexican art and played significant roles in his achieving the fame he enjoyed in the United States. In this light, Porter’s critique of Rivera in the stories seems justified and prescient. Just as significantly, by denying the role of foreign women in the creation of Mexican national culture, Rivera’s mural masks transnational circulations between the United States and Mexico in the 1920s.
The Multiple Locations of Power in “María Concepción”

To this point I have focused on Porter’s circulations between the United States and Mexico. I turn now to her fiction to consider how her Mexican stories challenge Anglo-American audiences in the United States to recognize the multiple loci of power in Mexico, including the role of U.S. imperialism. In writing about Mexico for audiences in the United States, Porter’s work evinces patterns of circulation that negotiate between the strange and the familiar. Kraver, arguing along similar lines as Stout, concludes that Porter’s “colonial gaze” led to an “insurmountable” distance between the writer and Mexicans. This led to her withdrawal from the colonial situation and to give up trying to change the system (60). “Colonial gaze” points out significant power imbalances between the United States and Mexico and Porter does frequently present Mexico as strange or exotic in the eyes of Anglo-Americans but she also challenges the reader to see through these descriptions, often in subtle ways that critics have overlooked. Porter’s Mexican fiction complicates the broad geographical generalizations that were the hallmark of earlier U.S. writing about Mexico. Her writing goes beyond the depictions of the borderlands, seen in popular literature and Hollywood films as a zone of violence and instability, and images of a primitive, rural Mexico idealized by many artists and tourists. Porter shows multiple locations and circulations within Mexico, which reveals the country to have competing internal networks of power and recognizes that the national body includes multiple positions and perspectives.

My examination of Porter’s Mexican fiction focuses on three short stories that are particularly concerned with transnational connections and multiple loci of power: “María
Concepción,” her first Mexican story, “Hacienda” her last Mexican story, and “The Leaning Tower,” a story set in Europe that was the first story she began writing after leaving Mexico (her notoriously slow writing process caused her to take nearly a decade to finish the work, which was published in 1941). The first story Porter wrote about Mexico, “María Concepción,” was completed in her Greenwich Village apartment after she returned from her first trip there and is generally regarded as her first mature work of fiction. The story was published in 1922 in Century magazine, a New York publication that had a history of publishing stories about Mexico and Mexicans, including Stephen Crane’s 1897 “Man and Some Others,” the story of Anglo-Mexican confrontation and violence on the frontier, and Mexican exile María Cristina Mena’s stories in the 1910s. By the time Porter was writing Carl Van Doren had become Century’s literary editor and had taken the magazine in the direction of modernism. In “María Concepción” Porter uses associations of Mexican with the primitive and with violence to explore power relations. Critics have read the exotic elements of the story at the expense of the political discourse that challenges Anglo-American readers’ identification with order and safety.

In “María Concepción,” the title character, a young indigenous woman in Mexico, discovers that her husband Juan is unfaithful with María Rosa. After María Concepción learns of their relationship, Juan and María Rosa join the revolutionary forces. The two later desert; upon their return, María Concepción kills María Rosa and claims both Juan and the couple’s baby as her own. At the end of the story María Concepción avoids arrest for the killing because the Indian community refuses to speak against her. The story is a remarkable character study, which, as Mary Titus argues, “stages Porter’s ambivalent, critical vision of primitivism as a resource for the reimagining of female identity” (42).
Critics such as Willene and George Hendrick and Robert Brinkmeyer see María Concepción as the spirit of indigenous Mexico and an indigenous goddess who enacts her own justice (W. and G. Hendrick 19, Brinkmeyer 47). Such readings emphasize the exotic and the foreignness of the story but do not address the way Porter challenges assumptions about the Indian community and presents a complex portrait of power differences in Mexico. While the story engages the primitive, it provides a more considered and complex exploration of the interactions of complex, overlapping webs of identity and power within Mexico, that include the presence of U.S. influences.

María Concepción begins with markers that establish the story as set in a location outside the Anglo-American United States. Both the title and the first words of the story mark foreignness and difference from Anglo-American readers, a difference emphasized by the accent marks that appear in María Concepción’s first and last names. Throughout Porter’s fiction of the 1920s she uses names to mark the foreignness of her Mexican characters. The first word in nearly all of Porter’s stories from this period is either the name of a character or a pronoun that refers to a character. When the character is Anglo-American, the character is introduced with an indefinite pronoun, such as “he” or “she.” Only later in the story does the reader learn the character’s name. Stories that begin by introducing a character that is not Anglo-American follow the example of “María Concepción” in using the name of a character rather than a pronoun. The names Rubén in “The Martyr,” Violeta in “Virgin Violeta,” and Braggioni in “Flowering Judas” are the first words of the stories, each of which mark the characters ethnic difference.

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70 Difference also appears in the language of the story. Porter incorporated Spanish words into the original version of the story published in Century, most of which were translated into English when published in Porter’s Collected Stories (Walsh 74).
from the Anglo-American reader. This pattern also holds in “Magic,” a story set in New Orleans that begins with the name Madame Blanchard. These usages show that Porter assumes a normative Anglo-American identity that links the characters represented by pronouns and Anglo-American readers in the United States. In opposition to this identity, characters that are not Anglo-American are seen in terms of their divergence from this normative identity. Such contrasts, however, are not the ending point of Porter’s fiction.

While Porter begins the stories by engaging the readers either through familiarity or by setting out cultural difference, the stories challenge simple binary oppositions. Porter often reinforces the foreignness of the settings of the Mexican stories with references to specific physical descriptions of the landscape, a method she employs in the first paragraph of “María Concepción”:

María Concepción walked carefully, keeping to the middle of the white dusty road, where the maguey thorns and the treacherous curved spines of organ cactus had not gathered so profusely. She would have enjoyed resting for a moment in the dark shade by the roadside, but she had no time to waste drawing cactus needles from her feet. (3)

For Porter’s Anglo-American readers, María Concepción’s name and the thorns and the cactus establish the landscape as exotic and threatening. The passage sets the reader up for such reactions, but it goes on to challenge simple oppositions. In the first sentence the “white dusty road” represents relative safety from the “treacherous” cactus on the roadside but the second sentence recontextualizes these relationships. The roadside that threatens María Concepción also can be a space of relief: “dark shade of the roadside.” The plants with their “thorns” and “spines” also provide shade. The general association
of “white” as positive is inverted as the “dark” shade represents something better than the “white” road.

The play between expectations and resistance to simple classification continues throughout the story. María Concepción’s husband Juan, along with other members of the Indian community, works at the excavation site of U.S. archeologist Givens. María Concepción serves as Givens’ cook. The narration describes Givens from María Concepción’s perspective: “A mysterious man, undoubtedly rich, and Juan’s chief, therefore to be respected, to be placated” (7). To explicate Givens’ presence in the story, Stout cites Mary Pratt’s argument that “to revive indigenous history and culture as archeology is to revive them as dead” (qtd. in Stout 24). This reading leads Stout to the conclusion that “to the extent that Porter viewed the cultural achievements of Mexico as relics of a past greatness she could view them as distinct from the culture she saw around her” (24). Porter in fact brings U.S. fetishizing of cultural artifacts into the story to critique it; watching Givens excavate pottery, the Indians observe that “they themselves could make better ones, perfectly stout and new, which they took to town and peddled to foreigners for real money” (6-7). Stout understands these lines to show that the “present day descendants are like foolish children in their inability to value the evidence [of their ancestor’s great civilization]” (24). Rather than being “foolish children,” Porter shows the Indians successfully adapting as best they can to the presence of archeologists and

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71 Porter based the character Givens on William Niven, a Scottish-born U.S. archaeologist and mineralogist who was active in the Southwest and Mexico from before the turn of the century into the 1930s. As Niven’s biographers Robert S. Wicks and Roland H. Harrison describe, “Niven’s collections and excavations were a required stop for the casual tourist and cultural pilgrim alike” (xiii). During Porter’s 1920-1921 trip, she visited Niven’s excavation and spent time with him talking about Mexico’s history. In addition to Niven being the model for Givens in “María Concepción,” Porter depicts a fictionalized version of him in the unnamed protagonist of “The Charmed Life” (1942).
tourists. While Porter herself certainly valued artifacts of the type that Givens unearths, she recognizes that subsistence and survival are more pressing concerns for the Indian community. The Indian’s view also indicts the U.S. perspective of focusing on a dead culture, while failing to observe the living culture in front of them.

Ruth Alvarez, among others already noted, frames her reading of the story in terms of national identities when she argues that “Porter uses María Concepción to represent the indigenous population of Mexico” and that the story depicts “the resurrection of the ancient indigenous religion and spirit of Mexico” (97). María Concepción is, as Alvarez emphasizes, Mexican and indigenous but Porter shows that the character has a more specific identity. When Givens remarks on María Concepción’s notable prowess in butchering animals, she announces “My home country is Guadalajara” to explain how she acquired her ability (7). Where Givens sees something exotic, a woman who is unafraid to kill and clean animals, María Concepción grounds her ability in a specific regional culture. The story does not develop or explain the culture of Guadalajara but Porter shows María Concepción to be capable of asserting her own identity. Further, the exchange suggests that the Anglo-American reader, like Givens, lacks an understanding of the nuances of Mexican culture and regions.

Porter encourages the play of identities by avoiding the use of broad identity categories, in contrast to the tendency of many U.S. expatriate modernists to represent characters in terms of national identities (represented by Hemingway’s practice in The Sun Also Rises discussed in Chapter 2). In “María Concepción,” “Indian” is used only when the narration adopts the perspective of the U.S. archeologist Givens: for example, “Givens liked his Indians best when he could feel a fatherly indulgence for their primitive
ways” (7). While Givens is once referred to as the “American archeologist” (6), no other reference to other broad identity categories appears in the story. The text contains numerous markers that suggest Mexican identity, such as María Concepción making “tortillas,” but by avoiding words such as “Mexican” or “Mexico” Porter leaves identity categories open to allow for multiple perspectives. The story does not insist on making María Concepción exclusively Mexican, Indian, or Guadalajaran.

While I have given considerable attention to Givens, the character remains a secondary presence in the story; he plays an important role in the plot but he is never the focus of the narration. This usage allows Porter to present a U.S. presence in Mexico and develop a critique of foreign paternalism without making the United States the subject of the story. Although Porter did write stories set in Mexico in which U.S. characters play leading roles, such as “That Tree” and “Flowering Judas,” by not focusing exclusively on U.S. protagonists, as in “María Concepción,” Porter depicts the influence of the United States as part of the Mexican scene but encourages Anglo-America readers to avoid thinking that Mexico and Mexicans exist primarily in relation to the U.S. gaze.

While Givens represents the U.S. power that the Indians must confront, the Mexican government represents another powerful threat to the community. The narration explains that Givens tells “comic stories of Juan’s escapades, of how often he had saved him in the past five years from going to jail, and even from being shot, for his varied and always unexpected misdeeds” (7-8). This example of Givens’ paternalism also reveals the power of male solidarity and the absence of justice in the community. That Givens can free Juan, as he does later in the story when Juan is to be shot as a military deserter, shows that the legal system is capricious and answers to power rather than law or justice.
This context is significant when considering María Concepción’s fear that she will be “dragged away between two gendarmes...to spend the rest of her days in Belén Prison” (15). Although María Concepción is guilty of the murder, by emphasizing her fear of arrest Porter points to her relative powerlessness. Men and foreigners have the power to circumvent the justice system. Juan, in spite of his many misdeeds, need not fear the legal system; María Concepción does. The references to “gendarmes” and “Belén Prison,” also ground the story in a specific historical and geographic context. Belén prison, located in Mexico City, was notorious for its conditions. The gendarmes would have been based in Mexico City and were well-known at the time for their corruption. By establishing that power comes from outside the community, Porter sets up the moment later in the story when the Indian community stands in solidarity with María Concepción.

In “Violence and Death: Their Interpretation by K.A. Porter and Eudora Welty,” Anna Carnati claims that the Indian community’s refusal to tell the police who killed

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72 A traveler from the United States offered the following account of Belén Prison in 1916:

The comandante of notorious old Belen prison in the capital spoke English fluently, but he did not show pleasure at my visit. An under official led me to the flat roof, with a bird’s eye view of the miserable rambling old stone building. Its large patios were literally packed with peon prisoners. The life within was an almost exact replica of that on the streets of the capital, even to hawkers of sweets, fruit vendors, and the rest, while up from them rose a decaying stench as from the steerage quarters of old transatlantic liners. Those who choose, work at their trade within as outside. By night the prisoners are herded together in hundreds from six to six in the wretched old dungeon like rooms. Nothing apparently is prohibited and prisoners may indulge with impunity in anything from cigarettes to adultery, for which they can get the raw materials. (Franck 203)

73 Pablo Piccato reports that on May 3, 1922 Obregón disbanded the gendarmes as a response to police corruption (185). While Porter was unlikely to be aware of this at the time she was back in Greenwich Village writing “María Concepcion,” the issue of police corruption generally and specifically relating to the gendarmes would have been part of the public conversation during her 1920-1921 trip.
María Rosa “is an expression of their primitive consciousness, which lies submerged in their unconscious, suppressed by a superimposed alien culture, but is bound to come to surface again in moments of crisis in which a choice is made imperative” (45). I, however, find that Porter shows the opposite: the act is not an expression of a “primitive consciousness” but is a conscious choice that shows members of the Indian community responding to multiple forms of oppression. This intent is made clear in the reason one member of the Indian community gives for not revealing María Concepción’s guilt to the authorities: “She could have ruined that María Concepción with a word, but it was even sweeter to make fools of these gendarmes who went about spying on honest people” (19).

Oppression at the hands of the Mexican authorities, who are outsiders to the Indian community, leads to the community standing together. The choice not to inform, rather than exemplifying the mind of a “primitive consciousness” or an “unconscious” decision, is a deliberate political act.

The language Porter uses to describe the incident reinforces that the Indian community’s solidarity should not be viewed simply as “primitive.” Porter writes, “María Concepción suddenly felt herself guarded, surrounded, upborne by her faithful friends…Their eyes gave back reassurance, understanding, a secret and mighty sympathy” (20). While “a secret and mighty sympathy” could perhaps suggest primitivism and distance from the Anglo-American reader, “friends” is a revealing word: rather than a term that suggests primitivism or tribalism, the word would have been common and familiar among Anglo-American readers. At a key moment in the story, Porter depicts Indian community solidarity through language to which her Anglo-American audience could relate. From the distance that the name María Concepción
initially connotes, Porter moves the reader to sympathy with the protagonist and the native community.

“Hacienda” and the Modernist Scene in Mexico

Porter’s most complete development of the circulations within and through Mexico occurs in her final Mexican short story, “Hacienda.” The story is a fictionalized reworking of an essay Porter wrote describing her experience visiting the filming of Sergei Eisenstein’s *Qué Viva Mexico!*74 In Porter’s story an unnamed narrator recounts a visit to a Mexican hacienda where Russian filmmakers, working under a U.S. producer, are in the midst of shooting an epic history of Mexico. Porter’s work explores the racial, cultural, and national hierarchies of the 1920s by engaging multiple forms of circulations. While not free from reproducing certain stereotypes of Mexican Indians, Porter presents a complex world within Mexico as the story describes the tension between modernity and tradition, technology and agrarian labor.

Porter’s handling of these familiar modernist themes is distinguished by her avoidance of creating an opposition between the United States and Mexico. Mexico is not made primarily to stand in relation to the United States. Rather she creates a more complex and layered consideration of the modern that allows for internal differentiation within Mexico and among Mexicans. Porter’s treatment of these themes in “Hacienda,” relies on the idea of a “scene.” The word appears throughout the story, sometimes in

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74 Eisenstein ran out of money before completing *Qué Viva Mexico!* In 1979 Grigori Aleksandrov, who was Eisenstein’s assistant director, edited and released a version of the film following a general outline from Eisenstein’s notes. For more on Eisenstein’s time in Mexico see Masha Salazkina’s informative *In Excess: Sergei Eisenstein’s Mexico* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009.)
relation to the filming but Porter extends its use to reflect on the coming together of people, technology, and ideas in a single place.

Porter’s disillusionment with the Revolution has been well documented, although critics continue to disagree on whether this feeling set in only months after her initial arrival in Mexico or developed more gradually. In either case the disappointment was full-blown by the time she visited the hacienda. Critics have read the story in the context of Porter’s biography and personal relationship to Mexico, focusing on the story as Porter’s farewell to Mexico and a mark of her final disillusionment with the Revolution. However, “Hacienda” can be seen not as a rejection of an early adulation of Mexico but as a culminating development of a position in relation to the production of art outside the national space.

The story opens at a train station, where the U.S. writer is joined by the U.S. producer, Kennerly, and one of the Russian filmmakers, Andreyev. The train, a space that brings together people of widely different origins, is the site for Porter’s commentary on U.S. ideas about Mexico and its people. The story’s first sentence ironically comments on the U.S. producer’s sense of superiority among the Mexicans: “It was worth the price of a ticket to see Kennerly take possession of the railway station among a dark inferior people. Andreyev and I trailed without plan in the wake of his gigantic progress” (184). In physically separating the other characters from Kennerly, Porter signals her own ideological distance from the view of Mexicans as an inferior people. In Kennerly’s experience, the Mexican train porters are “bandits” with “filthy paws,” ready to steal one’s possessions: “Eight months spent as business manager for three Russian moving-picture men in Mexico had about finished him off. . . . ‘It’s these Mexicans,’ he said as if
it were an outrage to find them in Mexico. ‘They would drive any man crazy in no time’” (190). Kennerly’s view of Mexicans as a “dark inferior people” draws upon an earlier imperialist view of Africa. The narrator, in a sentiment attributable to Kennerly, states that “it was a miracle they hadn’t all died or had their throats cut. Why it was worse than Africa” (191). By invoking Africa and the racist views associated with colonization of that continent Porter places the racial hierarchies in a larger historical and global perspective.

Although the critique of Kennerly and U.S. attitudes toward Mexico is where Porter chooses to begin the story, it is not the work’s dominant theme. Like Givens in “María Concepción,” Kennerly is not the focus of the story. U.S. influence is only one part of the broader panorama of Mexico that Porter presents to the reader. By opening the story at a train station, Porter also emphasizes movement and modernity. The description of Kennerly on the train is complemented by Porter’s illustration of how the train’s three different classes reveal the failure of the Revolution to eliminate Mexico’s class system. The narrator thinks, as they pass through a second-class coach: “Now that the true revolution of blessed memory has come and gone in Mexico, the names of many things are changed, nearly always with the view to an appearance of heightened well-being for all creatures” (223). Porter shows the Revolution’s promises of class equality have not been realized; it only changed labels and words rather than producing meaningful change in the lives of the Indians. Porter does not suggest that Kennerly or U.S. imperialism more generally is a cause of the class hierarchy on the train. Instead she shows overlapping and reinforcing systems of power. Kennerly’s wealth, social position,
and attitudes support the class divisions in Mexico but Mexico has its own hierarchies
and systems of exploitation.

In the middle of the section on the train that begins the story, Porter includes a
passage that focuses on the perspective of the Indian passengers. Unlike the disruptive,
brash Kennerly, the Indians travel in “quiet ecstasy,” because the train, its “engine,
mysteriously and powerfully animated, draws them lightly over the miles they have so
often counted step by step” (136). The passage continues,

And they are not troubled by the noisy white man because, by now, they
are accustomed to him. White men look all much alike to the Indians, and
they had seen this maddened fellow with light eyes and leather-colored
hair battling his way desperately through their coach many times before.
There is always one of him on every train. They watch his performance
with as much attention as they can spare from their own always absorbing
business; he is part of the scene of travel. (136)

The ambiguity of this passage is seen in the repeated pronoun “they”: it speaks to the
narrator’s distance from the Indians and is linked to the use of the stereotype of the
superstitious Indian. “They” also shows an attempt to present the Indians’ perspective.
The Indians’ inability to distinguish white faces can be seen as a stereotype or an ironic
comment on whites’ inability to see Indians as individuals. Because the Indians’ view is
filtered through the narrator, it is uncertain whether the Indians recognize Kennerly’s
actions as a performance. Whether not they do, the passage makes Kennerly into the
exotic spectacle that the narrator holds up to examination while the Indians are knowing
insiders.
Porter uses the description of the class hierarchy on the train to foreshadow the narrator’s experience at the hacienda, where the pre-Revolutionary economic exploitation of Indian labor continues. At the pulque plantation, Porter emphasizes the overlapping Mexican and international circulations and the power structures that exist within Mexico. The story makes the reader aware of multiple power centers: the United States (particularly Hollywood), Moscow, Mexico, Mexico City and the national space of Mexico.

Circulation and repetition characterize the process of making pulque as well as the economics of its distribution. The Indians laboring on the hacienda experience repetition: “It was just another day’s work, another day’s weariness” (271). Porter describes pulque production as a cycle:

The white flood of pulque flowed without pause; all over Mexico the Indians would drink the corpse-white liquor, swallow forgetfulness and ease by the riverful, and the money would flow silver-white into the government treasury; don Genaro and his fellow-hacendados would fret and curse, the Agrarians would raid, and ambitious politicians in the capital would be stealing right and left enough to buy such haciendas for themselves. It was all arranged. (280-281)

The pulque pacifies the Mexican Indians and their appeasement keeps them trapped in the laboring cycle.

Porter presents a modern technological twist on these cycles. When Andreyev shows the narrator photographs he has taken of the pulque hacienda, the narrator notes: “The camera had seen this unchanged world as a landscape with figures, but figures
under a doom imposed by the landscape. The closed dark faces were full of instinctive suffering, without individual memory, or only the kind of memory animals may have, who when they feel the whip know they suffer but do not know why and cannot imagine a remedy” (236). Rather than the camera’s being an instrument of positive modernization, Porter suggests that modernity and technology do not offer solutions to the cycle of exploitation and death. The picture captured and frozen by the camera becomes another symbol of perpetuation and continuation of exploitation.

The filmmakers not only represent the advent of new technology: the film, financed in the U.S. and made by Russians, shows the international circulations of globalization reaching Mexico. Before the narrator arrives at the hacienda, Justino, an Indian peon who is also acting in the film, has shot his sister (perhaps accidently or perhaps in a jealous rage: the full circumstances are not revealed). Kennerly laments that the shooting and death were not caught on film since the same participants were to enact the same events in the film, which Kennerly feels would have been a considerable benefit to the much delayed production because the scene was particularly difficult to shoot. Kennerly’s response reflects his basic inhumanity but Porter also explores the way film enacts a type of reality: acts that take place in front of the camera are real even when they are staged. The film reproduces the cycles of violence and exploitation.

While the filmmakers represent the modern and the Indians represent tradition, don Genaro, the hacienda owner, embodies a tension between the past and the present in Mexico. The filmmakers have selected the hacienda because “it was really an old-fashioned feudal estate” that has not changed. Genaro claims feudal dominion over the workers on the hacienda which he expresses when refusing to pay the bribe demanded by
a local judge to release Justino: “I told him, Justino is my peon, his family has lived for three hundred years on our hacienda” (155). At the same time Genaro drives a “powerful car” (170) and considers buying an airplane. Betancourt describes Genaro’s love of speed and endorses this position in commenting that “Speed… was ‘modern and it was everyone’s duty to be as modern as one’s means allowed” (154).

Genaro’s love of speed and technological facilitates his movement between Mexico City and the hacienda, and the text suggests that power also flows along these routes. While Genaro claims dominion over the hacienda, when confronted with the judge’s demand for a bribe he turns to the power located in Mexico City: Velarde, “the most powerful and successful revolutionist in Mexico” (156) is seen as a person that the judge will be forced to listen to. Another power, the Censorship Board in Mexico City, must approve the filmmakers’ work and has sent a representative, Betancourt, to the hacienda to ensure that nothing unfavorable is included in the film.

At the end of the story the guests at the hacienda “drift back to town, by train by automobile” (170). Don Juana encourages the narrator to stay by saying that tomorrow [t]hey are going to do some of the best scenes over again” (170). Reshooting the scenes presents a modern version of the cycles of repetition that dominate the hacienda and the story. In imagining her departure from Mexico the narrator desires escape from the repeating cycles of Mexican circulation. The narrator imagines going to a different location, what may be in the story’s terms a different scene. These U.S. characters have greater possibilities of movement that extend beyond the boundaries of nations. They enjoy a privileged position in the globalizing world. The types of intersections that Porter captures where characters can have the ability to quickly move between locations,
the idea of “drifting to town” rather than undertaking a journey points to the way geographic distance collapses. The mention of speed and particularly the airplane points to the advent of even faster and more distant connections between distant geographic locations. The political and economic power also extends over distances. The international collaboration between the Russian filmmakers and the U.S. financers, the cultures of Mexico City, provincial areas, Hollywood, and Moscow, Indians, and all intersect at the hacienda. The story’s emphasis on the scene points to Porter’s interest in the moments and locations where these circulations intersect.

Modernist Transnationalism in “The Leaning Tower”

Porter’s story “The Leaning Tower,” which she began writing in Berlin after leaving Mexico, considers the issue of identifying the appropriate geographic location for the production of modernist art. The protagonist, Charles Upton, aspires to be a painter. Pursuing this ambition, he has traveled to Berlin based on stories he heard during his childhood in Texas from a friend whose German family returned to their native country every other summer. Set in 1931, the story focuses on the political and economic turmoil in Germany and Charles’s disillusionment with his ideals. My interest here is confined primarily to two lists in the story that bring together issues of travel, location, and artistic production.

Early in the story, Charles finds himself disappointed in Berlin, causing him to question his decision to go there. He thinks that if had not been for his friendship and the stories he heard, “I would have gone to Paris, or to Madrid. Maybe I should have gone to Mexico. That’s a good place for painters” (440). The geographic possibilities
international travel offers to an artist from the United States reveals the universalizing and classifying tendencies of modernism. Different national locations are seen as suitable locations for the modernist artist. At the same time, the list emphasizes national differences: Charles considering different places points to an assumption that nations offer different experiences that can be identified and evaluated. Malcolm Cowley, in his reflection on modernism, *Exiles Return*, views Porter’s travels through the same prism. He writes “Mexico City was her Paris and Taxco was her south of France” (291).

The list of international cities Charles imagines as locations for his art is complemented by a second list, which describes the nationalities of the residents of Texas town where Charles grew up:

They [Charles and his friend Kuno] had lived and had gone to school together in an old small city in Texas settled early by the Spaniards. Mexicans, Spaniards, Germans, and Americans mostly from Kentucky had mingled there more or less comfortably for several generations, and though they were all equally citizens, the Spaniards, who were mainly rich and showy, went back to visit Spain from time to time. The Germans went back to Germany and the Mexicans, who lived mostly by themselves in the old quarter, went back to Mexico when they could afford it. Only the Kentuckians stayed where they were, rarely did any of them even go back to Kentucky, and though Charles heard them talk about the place often and lovingly, it seemed farther away and less desirable than Germany, because Kuno went there with his parents. (437)
This list is the closest Porter comes in her fiction to her description in “Why I Write About Mexico” of the United States as a multi-ethnic borderland. Porter’s focus puts cultures in proximity to one another but, in making each group readily identifiable by specific traits or locations, avoids showing cultural mixing (Porter’s description of the diversity in the Texas town recalls Cather’s cosmopolitan Midwest discussed in Chapter 3).

The two lists are noteworthy for the way they overlap but ultimately cannot be reconciled. Both lists show the possibilities of travel and the movement of people in the early twentieth century. Both lists present similar geographies that focus on Western Europe and North America. Together the lists represent a dilemma of modernist travel: the artist who claims geographic freedom of travel yet desires an authentic connection to place. The meaning of place is not the same for Charles as it is for Kuno. This difference leads to Charles’s attempt to reconcile the possibilities of the two lists by adopting the authentic experiences of his friend. Charles’s use of his friend’s experience is remarkably similar to Porter’s claim of authenticity when describing Mexico as her “familiar country” based on the stories her father told her and the presence of Mexicans in the area where she grew up. This connection between the lists and Porter’s life suggests her uncertainty about the place of the artist in an interconnected world that offers increasing opportunities for travel beyond national space.

Porter’s position in writing her Mexican fiction is one of observation and more specifically alienation. Porter is able to show power structures and circulations within Mexico that move her stories away from binary oppositions between Mexico and the United States. Porter’s work represents transnational circulations between the United
States and Mexico and she challenges Anglo-American readers to consider Mexico in a context that reveals the country to be diverse and heterogeneous with multiple internal and external layers of power. But nowhere in her Mexican stories does Porter articulate a positive vision of creation or transnationalism identity. For Porter, the modernist artist acts as alienated observer who stands outside of culture. Being “familiar” allows her to comment on culture; but her characters are never successful producers of it. She is unable to imagine a space for developing a productive transnationalism.
 CHAPTER 5

México en New York:
José Juan Tablada as Cultural Ambassador

José Juan Tablada came to the United States in 1914 at the age of 43 as an exile from the Mexican Revolution. His first stay in the United States lasted four years before he left to serve in diplomatic posts in Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador. In 1920 he returned to New York, where he would reside until 1936. He left again, this time for Mexico, and returned again to New York where he spent a year before his death in 1945. Tablada has been called a “strident cultural nationalist” (Indych-López xx) and “an ardent nationalist” who launched a “holy crusade on behalf of Mexican culture in the United States (Delpar, Vogue 41). To describe Tablada as a Mexican cultural nationalist is not wrong, indeed as we shall see he referred to himself as a political and cultural propagandist. One does note, however, that this side of Tablada is particularly emphasized by English-language critics. And in their work it generally goes unremarked how unusual it is that such a description can be applied not only to an expatriate living in New York, but a Mexican who wrote Japanese Haiku in Spanish (and occasionally French) while living in Colombia and New York. And this is only suggestive rather than exhaustive of the many threads that ran through Tablada’s life. He wrote “Misa Negra” (1893), a poem whose use of religious iconography to describe erotic love provoked something of a scandal in the Mexico of the Porfiriato. His work was connected to French
symbolism (he spent 1912-1913 in Paris). He experimented with ideograms and other forms of visual poetry. He wrote hundreds of crónicas, articles in English about Mexican art, a novel, a manuscript on Mexican art, a book on the edible mushrooms.

The eclecticism of Tablada’s poetry and his experimentation with different styles has made him difficult to classify in any one school but his work marked as it is by experimentation and curiosity was an inspiration to many younger Mexican poets who were able to find in it a variety of models. Among those who were influenced by Tablada was Octavio Paz, who on the older poet’s death in 1945 described his work thus:

[L]a obra de José Juan Tablada es una pequeña caja de sorpresas de la que surgen, en aparente desorden, plumas de avestruz, diamantes modernistas, marfiles chinos, idolillos aztecas, dibujos japoneses, una calavera de azúcar, una baraja para decir la buena ventura, un grabado de “La Moda de 1900”, el retrato de Lupe Vélez cuando bailaba en el Teatro Lírico, un lampadario, una receta de las monjas de San Jerónimo que declara cómo se hace la conserva de tejocotes, el arco de Arjuna—fragmentos de ciudades, de paisajes, de cielos, de mares, de épocas. (315)

Tablada is of interest to me as a tireless promoter of Mexican art who brought together through his writing and his actions many of the transnational circulations between the United States in the early twentieth century. He brought the borders of Mexico to the

75 “[T]he work of Jose Juan Tablada is a little box of surprises, from which, in apparent disorder, come ostrich plumes, Modernist diamonds, Chinese ivories, little Aztec idols, Japanese prints, a sugar-candy skull, a pack of fortuneteller’s cards, a drawing of “Fashion in 1900,” a picture of Lupe Velez when she danced at the Lyric Theater, a chandelier, a recipe by the nuns of San Geronimo for hawthorn conserves, Arjuna’s bow—fragments of cities, of landscapes, of skies, of seas, of epics” (The Siren & the Seashell 59)
United States by increasing awareness of the nation in terms that resisted the stereotypes that were common in the writing of U.S. authors. It is in this context that I will first examine the contribution of Tablada to the development and promotion of Mexican art in the United States. I will then analyze his crónicas to consider how they create transnational cultural connections between the United States even as they remain grounded in national culture and oppositions between the United States and Mexico.

In *Ambassadors of Culture*, Kirsten Silva Gruesz terms the protagonists of nineteenth-century Spanish-language print culture in the United States “ambassadors” because playing such a role “involves reporting and representing, but not enforcing, the authority of that idealized realm of prestige knowledge in a place where it does not rule… The rhetoric of ambassadorship insists on literature’s place within a public sphere, where definitions of citizenship, identity, and policy are debated” (18). While Gruesz uses the term ambassadors in a borrowing from diplomatic vocabulary, she notes that many Spanish American writers in the United States occupied official government positions. Tablada participates in this tradition, established by figures such as José María Heredia, Rafael Pombo, Isabel Prieto, and José Martí.

In the United States, Tablada occupied a semi-official position as a cultural promoter working for the Mexican Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores. In a 1919 letter to Mexican President Venustiano Carranza, Tablada enumerates specific articles he has published and talks he has given promoting Mexican culture, and he describes his efforts: “Desde que salí de México como miembro de la misión de que formo parte, trabajé sin
descanso en la propaganda política y cultural” (*Intimidad* 120).\(^{76}\) In his letters, Tablada constantly describes his efforts in giving talks at universities and conferences, and he frequently mentions his need for resources: for example, in 1921 Tablada writes, “Como estas últimas conferencias serán varias (tres o cuatro), quiero imprimir otros tanto folletos ilustrados en inglés y español para hacer más extensa y durable la propaganda cultural” (*Cartas* 5).\(^{77}\)

As a cultural propagandist, Tablada enjoyed considerable success in promoting Mexican arts in the United States. In 1923, Tablada, who had known Diego Rivera in Paris in 1911-12 and also subsequently in Mexico, published in *The Arts* the first English-language review of the painter’s work. Tablada’s approach to presenting Mexican artists to U.S. readers can be seen in a comparison between his article on Rivera and Frederic Leighton’s “Rivera’s Mural Painting” which appeared in *International Studio* a year after Tablada’s. (Tablada had published an article, “Mexican Painting of Today,” in *International Studio* in 1923.) Both articles focus on Rivera’s murals at the National Preparatory School at the University of Mexico, which had been commissioned by the Mexican government in 1922. Tablada’s and Leighton’s articles both describe Rivera’s time in Europe and present his return to Mexico in terms of a commitment to creating a national art. Both articles refer to many Mexicans’ failure to appreciate

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\(^{76}\)“Since I left Mexico as member of the delegation of which I am a part, I have been working nonstop on cultural and political propaganda.” [Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.]

\(^{77}\)“As there will be a number of upcoming conferences (three or four), I want to print more illustrated brochures in English and Spanish to make the cultural propaganda more thorough and lasting.”
Rivera’s art, and suggest that Indians and other unsophisticated viewers have a greater natural appreciation of his work.

Around the similarities in the articles, Tablada crafts a depiction of a sophisticated Mexican art that differs significantly from the one Leighton would produce a year later. While Leighton discusses Rivera’s time in Europe, he sees it as a possible impediment:

For a Mexican painter, if he paints what he feels and sees in his own land and does not learn his art entirely through the traditions of the Spanish conquest and the European milieu and so copy classic models and church canvases, reproduces the rich and striking colors, the tropical and desert flora, the copper skins and the indigenous faces of his Indian compatriots.

(378)

Tablada includes a detailed account of Rivera’s time in Europe that presents him as developing through engagement with different European traditions which he masters and incorporates in his own work. The difference in the articles is also seen in the images that accompany them. The Leighton article selects scenes from the Preparatory School murals that depict “traditional” Indians, as captured in the titles the article gives them: “Indian peasants waiting for the harvest” and “Zapoteca Indians harvesting sugar cane.” In contrast, Tablada’s article does not present any “traditional” Indian scenes. The images from the Preparatory School mural focus on men laboring in a mine and factory. Other images include studies of faces along with an early cubist work and a portrait of Adolfo Best Maugard dressed as a dandy with a modern industrial landscape in the background. Leighton limits Rivera by focusing on connecting his work to the land, nature, and indigenous people of Mexico. Tablada sets terms for the U.S. reader’s
engagement of Mexican art by situating Rivera in a modern context in which the Mexican elements of his art come out of a sophisticated modernism, rather than a retreat to the past.

In contrast to Tablada’s Spanish articles which are frequently expressive, ironic, and playful, in his writing for English language readers, Tablada takes an approach that focuses almost exclusively on promoting Mexican culture rather than critiquing U.S. social or cultural issues. His tone is academic; he speaks as a scholar introducing a pupil to a new subject. He makes almost no references to himself and makes few strong statements. In his letters, Tablada recounts his efforts and frequent disappointments in finding English language publications that are interested Mexican art. With this in mind it seems the style and approach Tablada uses reflects what U.S. editors were willing to publish. The comparison with Leighton shows that within these constraints, Tablada sought to present his version of Mexican national culture.

When Tablada returned to New York in 1920 he opened Librería de los Latinos on Madison Avenue.\(^{78}\) While the bookstore was short lived, it encapsulates Tablada’s project: promoting Mexican national art and culture, supporting a Latino culture and

\(^{78}\) Considerable confusion exists as to the dates the bookstore was in business, its location, and its success. Adriana Williams locates the bookstore on Fifth Avenue and describes it as “the creative center for Latinos in the city” (14). Esther Hernández Palacios states, “En 1921 abrió su Librería de los Latinos en el 8 Este de la Calle 28, pero cerró el negocio apenas unos meses después” (461). Still another source, Guillermo Sheridan places the bookstore at 118 East 28\(^{th}\) Street. José Juan Tablada en la Intimidad, a biography written by Tablada’s wife after his death, would seem to provide a reliable source to resolve the discrepancies; however, it creates further confusion. In the body of the text, the bookstore’s address is given as 118 East 28\(^{th}\) Street (73). This information appears to conflict with a photograph reproduced in the book of Tablada in front of the bookstore. Visible above him is an address on Madison Avenue (the street number is not legible). Regina Galasso in an unpublished dissertation reprints an advertisement for the bookstore that ran in La Prensa on November 5, 1920. The address given is 33\(^{rd}\) St. and Madison. This seems to confirm the bookstore was located on Madison but perhaps for a time it operated at a second location. Research remains to be done to answer this question and to investigate the bookstore’s role in the community.
providing connections and support for Mexican artists in the United States, and encouraging cultural connections between the United States and Mexico.

**Boxing across Borders: Hemispheric Culture and Politics**

The same goals of supporting Mexican natural culture while forging transnational connections that are evident in Tablada’s life are seen in his crónicas. In these newspaper writings Tablada sought to interpret the United States for readers in Mexico. New York, which Tablada referred to as Iron Babylon, represented a space of artistic and social possibility, which he saw as both positive and potentially corrupting. As Tablada negotiated between his own complex cultural position and that of his audience, he enacted a struggle between urban cosmopolitanism and cultural nationalism that offers a significant perspective on early twentieth century cultural circulations between Mexico and the United States.

Tablada’s 1923 crónica “La última gigantomaquia” captures the common tropes and complexities of his writing about the United States. The article, published in Mexico City’s *Excélsior*, is a first person account of a boxing match held in New York’s Madison Square Garden between Argentine Luis Ángel Firpo and U.S. fighter Bill Brennan. Tablada uses the fight to comment on Latin American fraternity, U.S.-Latin American oppositions, culture and violence, and race and ethnicity. An exploration of how Tablada positions himself and the readers in the crónica shows Tablada uses the form to subtly revise binary oppositions between the United States in an incipient transnationalism that connects the culture of New York to Mexico and puts readers in Mexico in the culture of New York.
The transnational politics and culture behind the article are present in the article’s first sentence as Tablada sets out several of the key themes he will develop:

Mientras México honra el pensamiento argentino en la persona ilustre de Alfredo Palacios, cuyo mensaje de fraternidad latinoamericana responde tan justamente al anhelo de una patria mayor, cada vez más firme en el pensamiento y en el corazón de la humanidad presente, aquí en Nueva York se habla también de la Argentina, aunque por motivos diversos.

(306)79

Mexico and the United States are put in opposition. As the reader will learn, while Mexico honors an Argentine intellectual, the newspapers in the United States talk about an Argentine boxer. Tablada also points to Latin American solidarity, which also implies an opposition between the United States and Latin America.

In addition to oppositions between the United States and Latin America, the first sentence contains a significant political subtext. Tablada uses positive but generic language to describe Palacios which conceals the significance of Palacios’s connection to Mexico and hemispheric politics in the Americas. Knowing why Palacios was being honored in Mexico, as Tablada’s readers would have, provides essential context for understanding how Tablada positions himself. When the Obregón government took office in 1920 it sought to reduce Mexico’s isolation from Latin America. The distance between Mexico and Latin America stretched back to the Diaz regime’s orientation toward the United States and Mexico’s isolation had increased during the instability of...

79 “While Mexico honors Argentine thought in the illustrious person of Alfredo Palacios, whose message of Latin American fraternity answers so precisely to the desire for a better country, one growing more established in the thought and the heart of humanity, here in New York people also speak of Argentina, although for different reasons.”
the Revolutionary period. Seeking to remedy this, in 1922 José Vasconcelos, at the time
the Mexican Secretary of Public Education, attended the Brazilian World Fair and then
traveled to Argentina and other Latin American countries to forge hemispheric
connections. In Buenos Aires a dinner was held in Vasconcelos’s honor attended by a
group of politicians and intellectuals, among them Palacios and Argentine writer and
sociologist José Ingenieros, who is also mentioned in Tablada’s article. At the dinner,
Ingenieros gave a speech in which he renounced Pan-Americanism, which he linked to
U.S. domination of supposedly cooperative initiatives in the Americas (Biagini 101). The
speech led to Palacios and Ingenieros founding the Unión Latino Americana in 1925, a
student political organization dedicated to Latin American solidarity and resistance to
U.S. imperialism and pan-Americanism.80

Between Ingenieros’s speech and the founding of the Unión Latino Americana, in
March 1923, the month of the Firpo-Brennan fight, Palacios traveled to Mexico at the
invitation of the government. The trip, which included time in Mexico City and the
Yucatán State, was intended to establish a closer relationship between Mexico and
Argentina. As Palacios described, he intended to counter U.S. influence using “los
medios más eficaces que existen, los del intercambio y conocimiento de la clase
estudiantil e intelectual únicas que pueden acercar nuestros países” (qtd. in Yankelevich
302).81 Palacios saw establishing political links between the United States and Mexico as

80 Alexandra Pita González provides a complete account of the Unión Latino Americana in La
Unión Latino Americana y el Boletín Renovación: redes intelectuales y revistas culturales en la

81 “In that beautiful Constitution you have launched the proclamation of the great rights of the
masses [...] you have said it was necessary to nationalize the subsoil as South America has yet to
do, giving away oil to the Colossus of the North without noticing that the international conflict of
essential for resisting U.S. imperialism. In Mexico City, Palacios gave a speech in the Cámara de Diputados in which he strongly voiced his anti-imperialism:

En esa hermosa Constitución habéis lanzado la proclamación de los grandes derechos de la plebe… habéis dicho que era necesario nacionalizar el subsuelo que todavía en el sur de América, no quieren realizar entregando el petróleo al Coloso del Norte, sin tener en cuenta que hoy el conflicto internacional del mando gira alrededor de la lucha entre dos grandes capitalismo, el capitalismo yanqui y el capitalismo inglés.

(qtd. in Yankelevich 302)

Tablada notably chooses not to bring into the article the specific political issues of imperialism that Palacios raised throughout his trip to Mexico. This context would have been known to Tablada’s readers as Palacio’s trip was widely covered in Mexico, as Tablada observes. The larger political context would have been present for Tablada’s readers but Tablada sets up a dichotomy between Latin America and the U.S. that is based on more general cultural identification rather than specific political and material claims. This difference between Palacios’ political activity and Tablada’s cultural concerns shows two views of hemispheric relations in Americas.

Tablada’s crónicas necessarily invoke comparison with those of José Martí, the Cuban poet and revolutionary, who wrote Spanish crónicas during his New York exile in the 1880s. In his crónicas and other works, notably Nuestra América, he advocated Latin power today revolves around the fight between two great capitalisms, Yankee capitalism and British capitalism.”

82 “the most efficient means that exist, those of the exchange and the sharing of knowledge among students and intellectuals, the only ones that can make our countries become closer.”
American solidarity against U.S. imperialism, a legacy the founders of Palacios and Ingenieros specifically invoked in the founding of the Unión Latino Americana. Julio Ramos, in an analysis of Martí’s Coney Island crónica, observes the binary oppositions that Martí presents between “nuestros pueblos hispanoamericanos,” and “norteamericanos.” The crónica includes Martí’s often cited comparison “Aquellas gentes comen cantidad; nosotros clase” (38). Ramos identifies these oppositions as “the grounding gesture of Latin-Americanism” (211). In establishing these relationships, Martí casts himself as an observer of the U.S., whose position as cronista merges with his Latin American readers to form a “we” that stands in opposition to the “they” of the norteamericanos that he describes.

In “La última gigantomaquia,” Tablada refers to his own position as cronista as inextricably tied to Latin American identity. Tablada writes, “Creo que este asunto, por inusitado y por grato para nosotros los latinoamericanos, merece que, como fiel cronista, insista yo en él” (307). In identifying himself as part of the “we” of Latin Americans, Tablada establishes his own fidelity to a Latin American identity in spite of his writing from New York. In this gesture Tablada suggests he occupies a position equivalent to that of Martí in his crónicas.

83 “these people eat quantity; we, quality”

84 For a discussion of the problems defining the crónica genre, see Sara Sefchovich’s “Para definir la crónica” (Chasqui Revista de literatura latinoamericana. 38.1 (May 2009). 125-150).

85 “I believe this topic, being unusual and gratifying for us Latin Americans, deserves that I, as a faithful chronicler, talk about it.”
In contrast to Martí, Tablada does not maintain a firm opposition between Latin America and the United States throughout the crónica. In building up to a description of the fight itself, Tablada seems to reinforce the distinctions between north and south:

Llegué a Madison Square cuando doce mil espectadores allí congregados esperaban con ansia aquel violento episodio en que dos seres humanos, uno del extremo Norte, otro del extremo Sur del mismo continente, iban a dirimir una supremacía... ¿Cuál supremacía? ¿La de la Ciencia? ¿La del Arte? ¿La de la Moral? ¿La de la Verdad? ¿La de la Belleza? ¿La del Bien?... No, no! Mil veces no! [...] Todos los que estamos aquí en este recinto, en cuya atmósfera hay un relente de Circo Romano, de bestias feroces [...] nos congregamos para saber quién, entre dos hombres [...] es capaz de producir el más contundente puñetazo. (De Coyoacán 308)  

The two cultures are separated along the lines of Arielism: the United States is associated with violence and barbarism while the series of questions associates the readers with intellectual issues that are not of interest to the U.S. spectators. Tablada neatly inverts the stereotypical depictions in the United States of Mexico as a land of violence. The writing, in its playful exaggeration and repetition, hints that the distinctions are not to be taken completely seriously. In contrast to the description in the first sentence of that suggests Mexico is interested in intellectual matters while the United States concerns

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86 “I arrived at Madison Square where twelve thousand spectators were gathered looking forward to that violent episode in which two humans, one from the far North, another from the extreme South of the same continent, were going to settle supremacy... What supremacy? That of Science? That of Art? That of Morality? That of Truth? That of Beauty? That of the Good? ... No, no! A thousand times no! [...] All of us here in this building, whose atmosphere has the dew of the Roman Circus, of wild beasts [...] we gather to see who, between two men [...] is capable of producing the strongest punch.”
itself with vulgar sport, Tablada reveals that his readers have an interest in the fight: “El primer round? Os lo diré en detalle” (310). The question, which recalls the list of intellectual questions Tablada posed previously, shows that the Mexican reader does in fact have an interest in the fight. Tablada follows on his promise to prove a detailed description of the fight: he gives a blow by blow account.

Tablada also disrupts oppositions between Latin America and the United States as he goes from an observer to a participant in the event. In the middle of the fight, with Firpo bleeding profusely and seemingly headed to defeat, Tablada bets on the Argentine (at ten to one odds) out of Latin American solidarity: “por sostener la ‘negra honrilla’ latinoamericana” (310). Tablada’s bet reflects his identification as Latin American but ironically the act makes him a part of the spectacle. The act of betting in its dual symbolism marks Tablada as a member of the U.S. community and a participant in U.S. culture even as he maintains a Latin American identity.

**Writing the City Across Borders**

As a genre the crónica has been associated with the formation and exploration of national identity. Carlos Monsivais and Linda Egan, among others, understand one of the central tasks of the Mexican chronicle to be “to underline national idiosyncrasies and define national identity” (Long 181). During the 1920s, many Mexican cronistas were active in the United States, although unlike Tablada they wrote primarily for Spanish

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87 “The first round? I will tell you about it in detail.”

88 “to support Latin America as a point of pride”
speaking communities in the U.S. rather than readers in Mexico. As Nicolás Kanellos reports, cronistas writing in the Southwest and California wrote “to fan the flames of nationalism and to enforce the ideology of ‘Mexico de afuera’…. [T]he cronistas were literally whipping and stinging the community into conformity, for example commenting on or simply poking fun at the common folks’ mixing of Spanish and English and becoming overly impressed with Yankee ingenuity” (116). In New York, cronistas were not as strictly nationalist owing to the more diverse origins of the city’s Spanish speaking population but like their counterparts in the West and Southwest they “labored to unify the Hispanic community” (118).

Tablada’s crónicas, in contrast, forge transnational connection while maintaining a shared national culture. Not only did Tablada write for an audience in Mexico, his work while evincing strong national pride and a cultural nationalism, nonetheless embraced many aspects of U.S. culture. Most notably, in his crónicas Tablada delights in using English words. In “La última gigantomaquia” boxing terms such as “ring” “round” “match” “uppercut” appear in English. A sample of English words Tablada uses in other crónicas includes “shell shock,” “Broadway racketeers,” “Jazz band,” “confidence man,” “sucker,” “flapper,” “girls,” “to get excited,” and “cold cream.” As this list suggests, Tablada was not just interested in the words but the modern culture of 1920s New York.

Tablada’s interest in the latest developments in the city can be illuminated by considering it in relation to the urban sketch, a genre that has European roots but flourished in the United States in the mid nineteenth century. The urban sketch, short nonfiction works (or at least works that represented themselves as such), occupy a similar literary space to the crónica between newspaper reporting and longer nonfiction. Like the
crónica, urban sketches most often are first person accounts written in a literary style designed to entertain the reader. In connecting Tablada to the urban sketch I do not suggest that he had the genre in mind or even that he necessarily was familiar with it (although as a great admirer of Poe, who tried his hand at the genre, Tablada might well have been).

The urban sketch’s prominence in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century owed much to the relationship between the new urban spaces and a reading public hungry for information about them. As Stuart Blumin explains, the urban sketch exemplified by George G. Foster’s *New York by Gas-Light*, took as its task “explaining the new metropolis to a society that was in so many ways affected by its development” (11). Tourism and business brought increasing numbers of visitors to New York but even for those who were unlikely to ever travel to the city, the metropolis’s influence was increasingly felt economically and culturally as well as symbolically as the city became a national center. For example, New York became a center for publishing, which had previously largely been local or regional businesses. The urban sketch satisfied readers’ voyeuristic desires while playing on their anxieties about the moral and cultural changes taking place in the city. The reader of the urban sketches occupies an ambivalent position. In the sketches the reader is invariably cast an outsider to whom life in the city must be explained. At the same time, the author relies on the reader’s proprietary relation to the culture. The reader is assumed to be a member of the same broad culture, although occupying a rather distinct station. With the mid nineteenth century emergence of New York as a national center whose influence extended throughout the nation, Mexico City in the 1920s was increasingly connected to New
York. As New York became a national center in the nineteenth century, Tablada’s writing shows New York becoming an international center in the early twentieth century.

Beginning in 1910 the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution caused many Mexicans to come to the United States. Although the wave of immigration was concentrated in the Southwest and Midwest, some like Tablada reached New York. Historian David Badillo observes that “Mexican settlement in New York…dates to the early twentieth century,” and he points out that in the city “distinct [Mexican] communities formed during the late 1920s and early 1930s, though they later dissipated in the absence of a sustained influx” (110). Approximately three thousand Mexicans lived in New York City by 1930. In July and August of 1926, Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio identified almost five hundred money orders sent from New York to points in Mexico (Badillo 110). Businesses, art, and tourism also brought Mexicans to New York and U.S. citizens from New York increasingly traveled to Mexico.

The influence of U.S. culture was also felt in Mexico through Hollywood films. By the middle of the 1920s, U.S. films accounted for over ninety-five percent of what was shown in Mexican theaters (Delpar, Vogue 187). Nicholas Bloom, in a study of tourism in Mexico explains that “Mexico City had long been referred to in travel diaries as the ‘Paris of the New World’ for its elegance and timeless beauty. But by the 1920s, as nightlife became popular in major cities such as New York, Havana, Paris, Berlin, and Hollywood, Mexico City offered patrons little of what was en vogue: floor shows, supper clubs, dancing, and provocative cabaret acts” (14). Tablada does not explore as far into the steamy side of New York as did some authors of urban sketches. Where works such as Foster’s urban sketches nationalized New York’s urban culture as shared among even
distant members of the nation who did not travel to the city, Tablada’s depictions of New York for readers in Mexico make the U.S. metropolis a part of transnational culture.

As a cosmopolitan assimilator of cultures, Tablada embraced the diversity of New York: “Sí, Nueva York, eres en verdad la urbe innumerable y múltiple! Para conocerte a fondo no bastan los años, y los lustros son apenas suficientes” (Babilonia 205).89 This sense of limitless possibilities fits Tablada’s interest in discovery and fascination with new things but was also important for someone who had a regular column to fill. Tablada describes New York in animalistic or savage terms that invert the stereotypes of Mexico as uncivilized while suggesting Arielist north/south opposition. Rodó’s presence is suggested at the end of “La última gigantomaquia.” As Tablada again asks for forgiveness from Argentine intellectuals for writing about boxing, he refers to the match taking place in “en las bárbaras arenas de Madison Square Garden” (311).90 In another crónica, Tablada describes “supercabarets,” Tablada’s term for the wilder, unregulated clubs that took the place of the regulated ones closed due to prohibition. He writes “Los instintos más imperiosos se desencadenan; las almas civilizadas regresan a las selvas primitivas, en una especie de tregua a las convenciones sociales, y en los rostros sin máscara, mas impúdicos por esa misma desnudez, puede leerse el ímpetu licencioso de los carnavales antiguos” (304).91 Rodó and civilization and barbarism are never far from Tablada’s mind as he writes of New York in his crónicas but even as he gestures toward

89 “Yes, New York, you truly are a metropolis innumerable and multiple. There are not enough years to know you completely, decades are hardly sufficient.”

90 “in the barbaric arena of Madison Square Garden”

91 “The most urgent instincts are triggered; the civilized souls return to the primitive jungles in a kind of truce with social conventions, and in the faces without masks, but shameless for that very nudity, the licentious energy of the old carnivals can be seen.”
immorality of the behaviors, like the urban sketch artist, he shares with the reader the excitement and titillation of seeing inside the world of New York.

Tablada was not an apologist for U.S. imperialism. In a 1931 column, Tablada uses the release of a film adaptation of Moby Dick to reflect on U.S. literature. He finds the nation’s nineteenth century literature replete with violent nation building:

“Longfellow escribió *Hiawatha* para idealizar al indio después de su sistemático exterminio: *Dead indian good indian* en la boca de los *pioneers* y en la boca de sus rifles” (*Crítica Literaria* 445). Of Walt Whitman, Tablada, writes, “no es tampoco desinteresado ni abstracto; su universalismo es ‘jingoísta’; su cosmología está aprisionada entre las barras y las estrellas de la bandera nacional” (*Crítica Literaria* 445). In his description of the imperialism at the center of nineteenth century U.S. literature, Tablada indicts the broad political history of the United States in the nation’s blindness to violent imperialism he finds so clearly represented in the nation’s literature.

Mientras los extraños sacan partido de nuestras riquezas vamos a continuar tirando cohetes y gritando “Viva México!”...? Entramos en un período de reconstrucción nacional; pero como la misma palabra lo implica, la acción exige con urgencia hechos prácticos y realidades tangibles. Todo programa, por elocuente que fuera, resultaría irrisorio y sarcástico, como una conferencia de

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92 “Longfellow wrote *Hiawatha* to idealize the Indians after their systematic extermination: *Dead indian good indian* in the mouth of the pioneers and in the mouths of their rifles.”

93 On Whitman and Martí see the chapter “Walt Whitman’s Occult Artistry” in Laura Lomas’s *Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities*. 177-215.
As Mary Long explains, “Tablada turns the tension between spirit and the modern world into an issue of supply and demand” (“Writing Home” 31).

Tablada’s critique and sometimes strong criticism of the United States appears in Spanish language writings published in Mexico. While seeming to addressing an audience in the U.S. they were written in Spanish and published only for a Mexican audience.

Ya, por fin, no se habla sólo de México como de la Treasure House llena de riquezas materiales, sino que dejando aquilatar éstas a la minoría de Wall Street, el pueblo americano contempla por fin al mexicano y descubriendo en él poderosas virtudes de creador de belleza, lo invita a cooperar en su cultura, ofreciéndoles los beneficios que de una y otra parte implica toda cooperación! (Babilonia 257)

Tablada ends “La última gigantomaquia” by asking for forgiveness from three noteworthy Argentine intellectuals for writing about a vulgar topic such as boxing.

Por eso pedí perdón a los númenes de Lugones, de Alfredo Palacios, de Ingenieros, por ocuparme de Luis Ángel Firpo en esta crónica, y lo

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94 “While outsiders take advantage of our resources, are we going to continue shooting rockets and shouting ‘Long live Mexico!’...? We are entering a period of national reconstruction, but as the term implies, action urgently requires practical steps and tangible facts. Any program, no matter how eloquent, would be as ridiculous and sarcastic as a lecture on hygiene at the bedside of a dying man, as a dissertation on the weather during a storm and shipwreck.”

95 “Finally people do not speak of Mexico only as the Treasure House full of material wealth, they leave this to be appraised by the minority on Wall Street; the American people finally consider the Mexican and, discovering in him the powerful virtues of the maker of beauty, invites him to contribute to their culture, offering the benefits that for both sides are part of all cooperation!”
impetro de todos aquellos ilustres latinoamericanos a quienes de seguro
desconocen los doce millares de espectadores que aclamaron rabiosamente
al púgil latino vencedor del sajón en las bárbaras arenas de Madison
Square Garden. (311) 96

While holding up the writers as intellectual figures, Tablada also has raised the possibility
of an alternative type of culture affiliation. The fight and the emotions associated with it
became a moment of ethnic pride for Tablada but they also show the power of sport to
cross a racial divide. New York is a transnational community whose culture and
inhabitants cannot be as readily defined in opposition to Latin America. The
transnational culture of boxing that can instill racial pride can also break down racial
barriers. Tablada does not make any sweeping claims for boxing or sport in general but
he positions himself and the reader to be affiliated with U.S. culture rather than in
opposition to it. The borders of a national culture, both in the United States and in
Mexico are not as clearly demarcated as when Tablada begins the crónica. Tablada does
not propose that national identities are insignificant, as shown by their prominence in the
article. But he does show that national affiliation and oppositions between the United
States and Mexico (and Latin America) are part of complex patterns of circulation that
respond to the increasing connections between nations in the early twentieth century.

Tablada saw the promotion of Mexican culture as a solution that would benefit
both the United States and Mexico. He explicitly imagines that U.S. economic imperial
exploitation can be replaced by U.S. extraction of Mexican cultural resources. Artistic

96 “For this I apologized to the deities of Lugones, of Alfredo Palacios and of Ingenieros, for
focusing on Luis Angel Firpo in this chronicle, and I beg pardon of all those famous Latin
Americans who surely are not aware of the twelve thousand spectators who wildly cheered the
Latino boxer who defeated the Saxon in the barbaric arena of Madison Square Garden.”
production is imagined as a commodity available for extraction like petroleum or silver ore. He proposes that México become the resource of an artistic development of the United States, that the treasures of México be used to promote cultural awareness. This solution is imagined to benefit both nations by allowing Mexico economic independence from the U.S. and having Mexico spirituality fill a lack in U.S. culture. In this use of culture, Tablada followed Mexico’s post-revolutionary regime’s campaign to appropriate popular culture for its political ends.

Aside from the important aesthetic role played by representations of Mexican culture at a moment of avant-garde experimentation, they also exemplified “a marriage of convenience” between Mexican artists and officials and U.S. artists and entrepreneurs. These exhibits gave the new “revolutionary family” wonderful opportunities to consolidate the international image of the nation. For Mexican artists, they were invaluable sources of fame and financial support. For U.S. entrepreneurs, these types of cultural interactions reflected long-lasting interest in Mexico. For U.S. artists, this Mexican season was part of a larger intellectual and social phenomenon marked by their presence throughout the “primitive world,” the growth of cultural anthropology, and the discovery of the U.S. Southwest. The image of Mexico was being refashioned with U.S. and Mexican artists alike playing indispensable parts.

Thus, Tablada’s representations of Mexican culture can be seen as one part of a larger circulation of representations of Mexico. Tracing this circulation back to New York, the irony then of Tablada’s cultural propaganda is that even as he questioned the materialism of the U.S. and wrote about the spiritual lack of the nation, seeking to infuse the spirit of the United States with Mexican culture, he chose the United States as his site
of cultural production. In so doing, Tablada separates the physical location of the production of literature culture and its imagined cultural origins. Whereas the expatriate writer, who goes to a foreign land to experience the primitive culture as a source of inspiration in a type of romantic fantasy, enacts an association between a physical location and artistic production, often through the medium of the body of indigenous peoples, for Tablada, the location of culture is separated from the physical location of itself. This act rests on the assumption that the geographies of reception and influence are not bounded by political borders while culture itself remains unified and national. His cosmopolitanism avoids romanticizing native peoples at a time when both in the United States and Mexico artists and writers turned toward indigenous people to define national identity.

Tablada’s cultural project in the 1920s and 30s as man-of-letters and cultural ambassador as a writer of newspaper columns and magazine articles has been largely forgotten. His nationalism and his concern for national culture in his writings on the United States and on Mexico are representative of a moment in US-Mexican relations. Whatever their eventual success in promoting Mexican culture and the viability of cultural exchange replacing capital extraction, Tablada’s crónicas testify to a noteworthy transnational literary project of the early twentieth century.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION:
READING AND WRITING BORDERS

If asked to picture the United States the image that likely comes to mind is that of the 48 continental states. This common representation of the United States appears on the walls of elementary school classrooms, in weather maps, and on patriotic knickknacks ranging from mugs to t-shirts. The map of the contiguous states represents the solidity and completeness of the national body. It seems to reaffirm strength and testify to enduring stability. The now iconic image of the 48 continental states, of course, has not existed throughout the history of the United States. Rapidly shifting borders characterized the nation’s development during the nineteenth century as its territory increased through purchase and conquest. Yet the image of the continental national body in its present form stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific can be dated to the beginning of the nineteenth century when territory of the nation extended only to the Rockies. In 1816, John Melish, among the most prominent cartographer of the time, produced a map showing the United States extending to the Pacific Ocean. His original plan was to draw the map to the Rockies but he decided to extend the map to cover

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97 Alaska and Hawaii sometimes are left out and sometimes appear as an inset. Puerto Rico and U.S. territories are rarely included.
territory that would not be part of the United States for more than 30 years, because, as he explained,

Part of this territory unquestionably belongs to the United States. To present a picture of it was desirable in every point of view. The map so constructed, shows at a glance the whole extent of the United States territory from sea to sea; and in tracing the probable expansion of the human race from east to west, the mind finds an agreeable resting place on its western limits. (qtd. in Short 135)

The geographic extent of the United States that Melish proposed as inevitable in 1816 largely became and remains the national body. In spite of the vast changes in the nation in the two centuries since that time, the image of the bordered nation endures, in many ways more fixed than ever, even in an age of globalization.

Although the borders of the United States are often represented as fixed, they are also contested space that has been characterized by shifting depictions of their meaning and significance. The southern border of the United States has since the founding of the nation been the center of particular political and cultural attention. That Melish could depict territory that was then controlled by the Spanish Empire as part of the United States suggests the intersection of power and expansion that characterized Manifest Destiny, although that term would not be coined for nearly thirty years. U.S.-Latin American relations have taken place under the shadow of the Monroe Doctrine and the asymmetrical power relations between the United States and the other nations of the Americas. As I have argued, the first decades of the twentieth century represented a significant moment in the imaginative construction of the borders of the United States.
The territory within the national space was incorporated into the national body through statehood and the overseas expansionism came to an end. My study has explored how borders were imagined and deployed by writers of the era living and working in very different relationship to the borders and yet reflecting the increasing global connections and the changing place of the United States in the world.

Recent literary and cultural scholarship has been particularly concerned with looking for ways borders were contested, challenged, and circumvented. Transnational scholarship seeks to work against a monolithic hegemonic Anglo-American culture yet this transformation often takes the form of supplementing the existing body of works. This is not to say that important interrogation of the conventional or traditional canonical works is not taking place. These theories of the transnational, transculturation, hybridity, and engagement, generally represent the idea of encounters and intermixing between different cultures and the differences in position, subjectivity, and power between peoples or individuals in relation to culture. These theories are both appealing and productive, as evinced by the wealth of scholarly material they have engendered.

The exploration of transnational interconnections in canonical works remains important as is the recovery of lost, overlooked, and marginalized texts by writers who worked outside of narrow definitions of “American” literature. While racism and cultural centrism by Anglo-American elites explains much of this, a more nuanced history of the culture that produced a bounded sense of national space provides a needed complement to recovery and transnational scholarship. The authors I have examined in this study reveal the ambivalence of U.S. writing in depicting Latin America. Alternately fascinated and repelled by the nations to the south of the United States, the authors’ representations
engage Latin America while seeking to define and use it to invigorate, define, and explain U.S. national culture. Their work shows the desire to explore and engage Latin America and to incorporate elements of its culture as an alternative to the perceived limitation of the United States, while also seeking to distinguish the United States from its hemispheric neighbors. Through their writing of the borders, the authors secure a place for themselves and their work in the intersections of the transnational and the national.

In calling for an expansive, hemispheric American Studies Carolyn Porter in 1994 described “an idealized cultural nationalism” that dominated U.S. American Studies during the twentieth century (470). Writing in 2007, Mark Rifkin observes:

The past fifteen years has seen the proliferation of figures of betweenness—such as the borderlands and mestizaje, the middle ground, the Black Atlantic, the contact zone, transculturation, encounter, and hybridity. While referring to differently configured formations, these concepts mark a broad-based attempt to develop a language of mixture and migration capable of decentering idealized visions of the United States constellated around an image of it as geographically and culturally enclosed. (23)

The proliferation of terms relating to betweenness suggests the critical interest in theorizing the liminal and marginal space. Anglo-American authors even as they have challenged some elements of U.S. culture and relationships with Latin America have continued to define the United States in ways that re-inscribe power and privilege while marginalizing Latin America. As scholarship has developed under the hemispheric turn, national space and the borders of national culture remain contested sites. The
constructions of borders in literary texts reveal geographic imaginations that create, reflect, sustain, and sometimes challenge the borders of the United States and the nation’s relationship to Latin America.
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