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# "Every Shrub Seemed Pregnant with Her Charms": A Woman, Her Wonder, and the Ohio Country in Gilbert Imlay's *The Emigrants*

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Résumé de l'article

Gilbert Imlay's 1793 epistolary novel *The Emigrants*, which dramatizes several characters' journey across the Alleghenies to occupy and develop a tract in the Ohio country, features the use of allusions and commonplaces that illuminate this fiction's provocative campaign to conciliate physiocracy, proto-feminism, and the new philosophy with the expulsion of indigenous people in the region. Imlay uses Pope, Sterne and Thomson to justify and eroticize U.S. expansiveness. The heroine Caroline T—n embodies, especially, the wondering, wonderful vindication of a world-historical land-grab. Comparisons with contemporary stories by Chateaubriand, Blake, Radcliffe, and the Seneca leader known as the Cornplanter highlight ways in which Imlay—partaking of a rhetorical repertoire demonstrably familiar to his peers—mutes history, religion, appropriation, and aggression in favour of erotic appeal, a series of emblematic, excusatory metonymies, and the picturesque language of an early phase of the North American real estate pitch.

# "Every Shrub Seemed Pregnant with Her Charms": A Woman, Her Wonder, and the Ohio Country in Gilbert Imlay's *The Emigrants*

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## The Pioneers of Human Progress

In the winter of 1789, the Seneca chief known as the Cornplanter (1740?–1836) received two thousand dollars for the sale of eight hundred thousand acres to the United States of America.[1] The government claimed that this deal extinguished indigenous rights to the soil. This belief was shared by Governor Thomas Mifflin, and in the spring of 1794, he claimed the tract, called the Erie Triangle, for Pennsylvania. Other leaders of the Six Nations, to which the Cornplanter belonged, had dissented from the original sale, in which they had no say. The Cornplanter himself, robbed three times in the trek from Fort Harmar to his home at Buffalo Creek, came to rue the transaction. He even entertained overtures from Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe of Upper Canada, after the British representative began to make them in 1794. But at least the entity with which the unlucky Cornplanter had

1. John Graves Simcoe consistently calls the Seneca leader "the Cornplanter," rather than "Cornplanter" (see, for example, E.A. Cruikshank, ed. *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe* [Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1923], vol. 1: 1789–1793, 308 and 317). In *The Legends of the Iroquois Told by "the Cornplanter"* (New York: A. Wessels, 1902), William W. Canfield likewise calls the leader "the Cornplanter." The Haldimand Tract along the Grand River in present-day Ontario, bestowed on Six Nations Loyalists in 1784, comprised almost as much land as the Erie Triangle: 786,000 acres (see Lois M. Huey and Bonnie Pulis, *Molly Brant: A Legacy of Her Own* [Youngstown, NY: Old Fort Niagara, 1997], 127).

negotiated enjoyed the status of an actual nation.[2] Much American land was engrossed, sold, and resold during this period with less colour of legality. Among the equivocal real estate agents of the time numbered the self-styled "Captain" Gilbert Imlay (1754?–1828?).[3]

As early, perhaps, as 1783, Imlay had fled the same Ohio River Valley he depicts ten years later, in his epistolary novel *The Emigrants*, as the perfect place for a physiocratic paradise. (The doctrine of physiocracy assumes that commercial exploitation of natural resources necessarily conduces to liberty.) Perhaps unaware that he had escaped the U.S. as a wanted man, the Scioto Land Company of Ohio employed Imlay as its agent in the revolutionary Paris of the 1790s. This organization was hallucinatory in its claims, charlatanic in its practices. It had little title to the variously 3.5 to 4.5 million acres that it purported to manage.[4] The dispossession of indigenous residents accompanied the duping of bedazzled investors. Imlay was even known to have swindled the "Indian fighter" Daniel Boone of ten thousand acres. In Pennsylvania, Kentucky, New York, Rhode Island, and North Carolina, sheriffs dispensed summonses and courts issued writs for the defaulting future novelist. Daring to go half shares in a ninety-ton slave barque, *The Industry*, Imlay had not enriched himself.[5] In 1794, however, this U.S. expatriate succeeded in securing Mary Wollstonecraft's safety when—as danger to foreigners in France, including even Thomas Paine, escalated—he registered her as "Mrs. Imlay" with the American consul. While Imlay's business history has affected his reputation, his later abandonment of Wollstonecraft and their daughter Fanny has ensured his notoriety.

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2. Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 284.

3. W.M. Verhoeven and Amanda Gilroy claim, in their introduction to Imlay's *The Emigrants* (London: Penguin, 1998), that the author never advanced beyond First Lieutenant in Forman's Continental Regiment, in which he served between 1777 and 1778 (x–xi). All further references to *The Emigrants* are from this edition and will be provided parenthetically in the article.

4. The title to Scioto's land offerings actually belonged to the Ohio Company. Indigenous representatives continued to dispute the Ohio Company's claims. See R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest 1720–1830* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 190. Speculators such as the judge John Cleves Symmes sold land they did not own—then sold it all over again (160–64).

5. Wil Verhoeven, "Gilbert Imlay and the Triangular Trade," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (Oct. 2006): 827–42, especially 835–36.

Not wholly reducible to a huckster and a cad, Imlay has left behind the means of construing his idea of a wonderful woman in the figure of Caroline T—n, heroine of his novel *The Emigrants*. In fact, to ponder the sixteen-year-old Caroline T—n is to contemplate some outstanding uses of wonder and of womanhood in the late eighteenth century. Imlay's book deploys the voice and vicissitudes of its heroine to vindicate the rights of women—and to extenuate, through one woman's sensibility and adventures, a deed of awe-inspiring collective usurpation: the taking of the Ohio River country. Publishing *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America* in 1792, Imlay promoted himself as the celebrant of "the simple manners, and rational life of the Americans, in [the] back settlements."[6] Perhaps remembering Imlay and his proneness to merge the realization of philosophical ideals with immigration to the "Western Territory," Emma Goldman in 1911 chose the image of a bird to point her encomium of Wollstonecraft: "The Pioneers of human progress are like the Seagulls, they behold new coasts, new spheres of daring thought, when their co-voyagers see only the endless stretch of water. They send joyous greetings to the distant lands…. [T]he sharp ears of the harbingers of life discern from the maddening roar of the waves, the new message, the new symbol for humanity."[7] Goldman's Willa Cather-like invocation of the "pioneer" (an ideal only typical of her epoch) suits the fact that Wollstonecraft bore the child of a man who presented himself not just as a frontiersman, but as a begetter of this "new message … for humanity."

To articulate "new spheres of daring thought," Imlay the novelist orchestrates accents from James Thomson, Alexander Pope, Edmund Burke, and Laurence Sterne. Different modes of wonder inflect these sources: Thomson contributes the theme of nature's intractable instinct to love; Pope an imposing vision of the truly great men of all history; Burke the concept of the sublime; and Sterne the all-dissolving power of pathos. Infused with a real residuum of amazement at North American actualities—illimitable hills and forests—Imlay's fiction

6. Gilbert Imlay, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America* (London: J. Debrett, 1792), 1.

7. Emma Goldman, "Mary Wollstonecraft, Her Tragic Life and Her Passionate Struggle for Freedom," in *Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Jane Moore (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 9.

resembles a pair of works contemporary with *The Emigrants*: William Blake's poem "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" (1793) and François-René de Chateaubriand's novella *Atala* (1801). These works did not influence Imlay, but they do share a core repertoire of commonplaces with *The Emigrants*, and they impart to these commonplaces differing—and therefore instructive—emphases. Each writer favours a young heroine—a medium of virginal wonder—and imagines America as a brave new world. Ann Radcliffe and the Cornplanter—an English novelist and an aboriginal leader who was also a master storyteller—afford mutually illuminating perspectives on Imlay's decision to incorporate a scene of abduction into his plot. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) provides grounds to show the congruency of Continental Gothic thrills with the American captivity narrative. The Cornplanter's version of "The Sacrifice of Aliquipiso"—a story collected in the early nineteenth century—reflects contemporary indigenous views on invasion, nature, wonder, and women that clarify the behaviour and role of Imlay's central figure Caroline T—n: again, without supposing influence.[8] In sum, Imlay synthesizes sensibility, a captivity anecdote, fashionable natural history, and the picturesque to endorse his characters' ultimate idyll of humane homesteading on a 256-square-mile tract beside the Ohio River. This imaginary tract approximates, on a modest scale, the Cornplanter and Governor Mifflin's Erie Triangle.[9] Shaken by their Parisian experience—though still professing progressive sentiments—Wollstonecraft and Imlay themselves discussed settling in North America. Given his past, Imlay's sincerity must have been doubtful.

In light of that past, Wollstonecraft's 1794 child with Imlay, Frances (or Fanny Godwin, as she became known), can assume spectral siblinghood with Caroline T—n. All births on this planet compound vice with virtue, fraudulence with candour, cynicism with idealism, exploitation with emancipation. Despairing over her future, Fanny wrote in October 1816: "I have long determined that the best thing I could do was to put an end to the existence of a being whose birth

8. Canfield includes this story in his 1902 *The Legends of the Iroquois Told by "the Cornplanter,"* cited above, 99–102.

9. 256 square miles equals 163,840 acres.

was unfortunate."[10] Having checked into a Swansea hotel, she used laudanum to kill herself at the age of twenty-one.[11] She died just a few years older than her fictional sister, Caroline T—n of *The Emigrants*, whom we contrastingly leave forgetting "former distresses" in "a land of freedom and love" (248) at the conclusion of Imlay's novel. Often called a "Jacobin novel," Imlay's appealing story would excuse a world-historical land-grab on a moral, a democratic, and an aesthetic basis. Unlike Blake's, Chateaubriand's, and the Cornplanter's fictions, Imlay's fantasy constitutes and defends through the cadences of advertising the very object of its sales pitch: territory. Advertising, too, seeks to evoke wonder, while at the same time it amplifies a self-absolving cupidity. Caroline T—n's responses to the landscape, to indigenous characters, to an exemplary plant, and to a unique bird show how she becomes the wondering, wonderful, wondrously progressive pretext for expropriating vast ancestral territories, to the implied benefit of those (such as the Scioto Land Company) who would hasten, or seem to hasten, on a continental scale, the process of pre-emption and speculation.

## Yes, Eliza, He Rescued Me

Imlay never outright assimilates Caroline T—n to the landscape that her ingenuous energy engrosses. Rather, a woman's presence and her appreciation—her wonder—transform the countryside. Her own nubility renders pointless such unhistorical concepts as "virgin" forest. Instead, Caroline re-envisages Ohio as proto-feminist terrain. Here we will find none of "that tyranny which the caprices of men in the European hemisphere inflict upon unprotected women" (248). "The hospitality of the country" (248), moreover, affords an opportunity for physical liberation into the depths and distances of the pleasing and challenging picturesque. Wollstonecraft would approve such indulgence of a young woman's "animal spirits, which make both mind and body shoot out, and unfold the tender blossoms of hope."[12] A Louisville

10. Fanny Godwin cited by William St Clair in *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991 [1989]), 411.

11. For an account of Fanny Godwin's suicide, see St Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, 411–13.

12. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Verso, 2010), 225.

correspondent of Caroline's, the aged P.P., writes: "Ah Caroline, my friend! When I contemplate the spontaneous sweets that spring up under our feet, and decorate the fragrant groves … and hear the melodious songs of the feathered creation tuned to love and nature, and then contrast them, with the mutilated pleasures of man, how poignant is the anguish which I feel" (159–60).[13] These phrases echo the presiding bard of Imlay's novel, James Thomson. His poem "Spring" imputes an amatory impetus to birdsong: "'Tis Love creates their Melody and all / This Waste of Music is the Voice of Love" (l. 614–15).[14] "Spring," and its ecstatic excursus on the avian breeding cycle ("*the Passion of the Groves*," l. 581[15]), furnish Imlay with a recurrent vocabulary and an attitude. The Scottish poet's wondering union of erotic motifs with images of *storgè* (or parental affection) inflects the courtship plots of *The Emigrants*.[16] Imlay adds to the themes of love and parenthood advocacy of the perfect locality in which to consummate love and raise children: namely, the Ohio country and its "fragrant groves." P.P.'s adjective "spontaneous," derived from the Latin *sua sponte*, means "of their free will," or "willingly." The sweets of Ohio emerge willingly. But

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13. Friedrich Hölderlin, in his epistolary novel *Hyperion, oder der Eremit von Griechenland* (1797), framed a complaint like P.P.'s. The present constitution of society—in William Godwin's phrasing, "things as they are"—dismembers our integrity. Hyperion complains to his friend Bellarmin: "Handwerker siehst du, … aber keine Menschen, Priester, aber keine Menschen, Herrn und Knechte … aber keine Menschen—ist das nicht, wie ein Schlachtfeld, wo Hände und Arme und alle Glieder zerstückelt untereinander liegen, indessen das vergossne Lebensblut im Sande zerrinnt." [You see manual labourers … but no men: priests, but no men: gentlemen and yeomen … but no men. Doesn't it look like a battlefield where hands and arms and every limb lie amputated, while the gushing life-blood drains away into the sand?] See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Werke*, ed. Friedrich Beißner and Jochen Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1986), 3.147; my translation.

14. I rely on the 1746 version of James Thomson's poem "Spring," reproduced in *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, ed. David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 226.

15. Ibid.

16. The relevant passage from James Thomson's "Spring" (1726–1744) begins at line 576. A whole chapter of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) bears the title "Parental Affection." Her assumption of the centrality of this drive supports her argument for universal education. A mother must be well instructed in order to impart the lineaments of good citizenship to her offspring. *Storgè* is Aristotle's name for the love that binds father and mother to their young. Gilbert White celebrates it often in *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789), and reproaches the cuckoo for failing to display proper parental feeling.

freedom—the "free"—remains ambiguous. Nature and Caroline T—n may be free and loving. The land itself is priceless. And free-spirited Caroline will transiently lose her liberty to a party of "savages." Her restoration to freedom will expedite her marriage to Captain Arl—ton.

Less than a decade later (1801), Chateaubriand imagines awe, love, danger, and America similarly coinciding in a vision of intense eros. Chactas the Natchez, sitting with his beloved Atala on his knees, feels "happier than the new bride who for the first time feels the child stir in her womb."[17] Nevertheless, Chateaubriand's tale addresses chronic displacement—the perplexity of exile and flight—rather than the opportunity of settling with assurance anywhere. Atala's vow of virginity, imposed on her by her mother, deflects the reader's wonder from dreams of sex and real estate to reveries over wild nature, eternity, and irremediable grief. When Atala dies of poison, a miraculous light fills her Catholic preceptor Père Aubry's cave: a Christian wonder. A vow like Atala's constrains liberty, disciplines spontaneity, and alerts us to the power of renunciation. When a baby does appear in Chateaubriand's text, it is dead and its bereaved indigenous mother—a refugee from encroaching white settlement—sets its corpse amid the branches of a tree near Niagara Falls. The practice of arboreal burial pleases the unnamed narrator for its association with nesting birds, but even this rite is interrupted by the urgency with which the mother's harried people must move on.[18]

Chateaubriand's *Atala* focuses on the evacuation of besieged and occupied homelands. "Oh! What tears are shed, when our native soil is abandoned" exclaims the novel's "Epilogue."[19] In Imlay's text, the imagination of a woman of sensibility does not bewail "deserted fields,"[20] but rather instantly improves the countryside, justifying its invasion by those who defend the beachhead that her superior refinement has already procured. Caroline T—n undertakes, in the footsteps of actual scouts and surveyors, a species of aesthetic reconnaissance and claiming. Imlay (or, rather, his imaginary correspondent "Mr.

17. François-René de Chateaubriand, *Atala*, trans. Rayner Heppenstall (Richmond, VA: Alma Classics, 2004), 34.

18. The narrator praises how "touching" an "aerial tomb" is: the corpse occupies "the abode of little birds" (ibid., 73).

19. Ibid., 79.

20. Ibid.

Il—ray") explains the process clearly. When she experiences a landscape, Caroline's "soft faltering voice, betray[s] the symptoms of that very interesting scene" (164). Her speech infuses an imported loco-descriptive mode with a pathos that lays indisputable, enchanting, sexualized rights to whatever topography moves it.[21] The epistolary method of the novel itself supports the seeming spontaneity of such performances. The interchange of letters becomes a mode of settlement—a kind of map inked in by the improvisations of possessive wonder.[22]

Imlay uses a variation on the captivity narrative to impart a Gothic frisson to his plot. As his correspondent Mrs. F— succinctly reports, "Caroline is taken prisoner by the barbarous Indians!—Caroline is massacred—Caroline is dead" (161). However, the offending indigenes, though they have seized the teenager, turn out to be mild-mannered, conforming in their gentle demeanour to accounts of such abductions all the way back to the 1675 memoir of Mary Rowlandson, who reported that "not one of [her captors] offered the least imaginable miscarriage to [her]."[23] As Wendy Lucas Castro has recently phrased the case, their former captives quite consistently represented "Indians" as "both kind and savage."[24] Sexual assault plays hardly any part in these stories. Yet their kidnapping of an expressive virgin aligns Imlay's indigenous people with the male tyrants of unreconstructed Europe, who analogously (though differently) control the lives of women. A utopia of genuinely free human beings cannot exist until it is established in the present moment of *The Emigrants*—far from brutish England, safe on the banks of an Ohio River duly purged of meddlesome autochthones. Despite (even because of) her ordeal, Caroline T—n reinforces the political imperative behind the real estate scheme of Imlay's plot.

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21. Whereas Atala's beautiful example impresses the pagan Chactas with the sublimity of Catholicism, the faith of a New France that was substantially defunct by Chateaubriand's time.

22. Decades before Imlay's fiction, Frances Brooke's *History of Emily Montague* (1769) uses the extemporaneous illusion of the epistolary mode to coordinate courtship and friendship with the intent to colonize—or re-colonize—North America in the wake of the Seven Years' War.

23. Mary Rowlandson quoted by Wendy Lucas Castro in "Stripped: Clothing and Identity in Colonial Captivity Narratives," *Early American Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 106.

24. Castro, "Stripped: Clothing and Identity in Colonial Captivity Narratives," 106.

Captain Arl—ton, her passionate liberator, reports that "[s]he was sitting upon the bank of the river half harassed to death when [he] arrived, which from the horrors of a wilderness was converted into elysium" (198).[25]

Caroline's value, grievously infringed upon by her abductors, is the vision of the landscape that she conveys as both object and subject. Her mere presence imparadises both a wasteland and her male witness. The aboriginal band that seizes her—though it treats "her the whole time," we are told, "with the most distant respect, and scrupulous delicacy" (203)—provides sufficient rationale for its expulsion. Its rival spontaneity and freedom obstruct the interests of settlers. Who would dare to appropriate such a connoisseur of landscape? In some ways, the episode parallels Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), in which, with designs upon her hereditary estate, Count Montoni abducts Caroline's age-mate Emily St. Aubert—another wondrous, wondering sixteen-year-old. In *The Emigrants*, it is not machinating aristocrats but aboriginal people who would disrupt the course of enlightened romance and land transfer. Emily's aesthetic training (verse, music, painting) allows her to palliate the fear and dreariness of captivity in Venice and the Apennines. Although Caroline T—n writes decent letters, her true telos is willing reproduction—the peopling of America. Adopting the accents of nature's dearest votary, she embodies maidenhood aching for maternity, a Thomsonian eros ready to topple into *storgè* once it has secured not an ancestral La Vallée, but what her yearning alone justifies: a new seat, Bellefont, to be developed in Ohio.

Caroline does not confide "Reader, I married him." Instead, she assures her sister, "Yes, Eliza, he rescued me from the savages" (216). Absconding with Imlay's heroine, "savages" briefly suspend her facility for vindicating—by the lovely union of athleticism, sex appeal, democratic hope, and picturesque palaver—the annexation of territory. Captain Il—ray lets slip the logic of what is, however incrementally, a campaign of ethnic cleansing: "we are bound to demand that Caroline shall be given up; otherwise the whole race of savages, must expiate with their lives the robbery they have committed" (194). Deprived though they are of their land, aboriginal people are cast as the thieves.

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25. The "harassment," here, has to do with the rigours of an involuntary march overland, whether as hostage or adoptee.

An eloquent and attractive teenage girl is worth the existence of every last one of them.

Soon after Captain Arl—ton recovers her, he gloats over Caroline's body while she sleeps ("a bosom more transparent than the effulgence of Aurora," 200). In this disposition he does precisely what her indigenous captors did not. To her inamorato, Caroline both incarnates and articulates a peculiarly sensuous apprehension of assets. She is wondrous, and her own wonder—reported from various vantages (her own and the other characters')—converts Ohio into a saleable proposition: a commodity conforming picturesque real estate to political liberalization and the promise of innocent yet passionate sexuality. Given her promotional role, Caroline T—n can discover only "chaste regions of innocence and joy" where nature appears "to unbosom and display her every charm" (216), even as she herself likes to sit "half unzoned" under a breezy marquee (186). She recalls, in her loveable naïveté, some figures in Blake's 1789 *Songs of Innocence*, who in good faith recite the teachings of despotism ("So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm," l. 24).[26] Caroline's interpretative exuberance and beauty do not dissimulate their relation to the application of collective violence; Imlay does not let them even glimpse the violence of which they are, in the end, not the least part.

## What A Sublime Imagery

Caroline's first view of aboriginal people, which transpires in a pass of the Allegheny Mountains, associates them with "a chasm in the rock which resembles the cell of a hermit" (48). In 1770, Thomas Whateley's "Observations on Modern Gardening" reminds its reader that "[a] hermitage is the habitation of a recluse."[27] This eremitical receptacle disgorges two men and a woman, at which vision (so discrepant from the prior projection of a pious anchorite) Caroline screams and then faints. The cave, supposed to be occupied by a devout and abstemious figment, turns out to harbour living people. Here Caroline's playful indulgence of picturesque wonder precipitates into terror. A hermitage

26. William Blake, "The Chimney Sweeper," in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor, 1988), 10.

27. John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, eds., *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden, 1620–1820* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), 306.

is more Catholic than Protestant, and by 1792 it would have been an anachronism suitable to adorn an aristocratic park. Elements of an indigenous clan, incorporating both sexes, displace the fantasy of an issueless Christian ascetic. Imlay implies that the age-old lords of American soil now occupy a literal niche that befits, in a parallel to the case of hermits, their historical supersession. Though "savages" later abduct Caroline T—n, these breathing anachronisms offer no overt violence; but the immigrant abductee responds to their apparition as to the sight of foreigners—intruders. They trespass on a reverie, a mental passage of wonderment. In the United Kingdom, meanwhile, the hermit has devolved into a mere mood-enhancing relic. Chateaubriand's *Atala*, contrastingly, animates powerfully the figure of the grotto-dwelling solitaire.[28] Père Aubry has tenanted a cave for twenty-two years during his ministry to local indigenous people. This priest combines an ascetic regimen with the pursuit of pastoral duty to a village of "savages." Chateaubriand celebrates this synthesis or *métissage*, but (like Imlay) sets it in an irrecoverable past. The man of peace Père Aubry dies in a massacre.

For the "sublime imagery" that the Alleghenies "afford" Caroline T—n as she crosses the divide, a cosmopolitan allusion is provided: "if Pope had ever travelled this road … he must have had the center division [or pass] in his imagination, when he so beautifully described his temple of Fame" (25). Caroline thus imposes the building celebrated in Alexander Pope's 1715 "Temple of Fame" onto the contours of the mountains. Pope's neo-Chaucerian tour de force depicts a structure that aspires to the most liberal inclusiveness. It hosts Brahmins, Zoroaster, Confucius, Aurelius, Sappho, and Socrates, among others. As though anticipating North American hospitality to the generality of immigrants, "all the Nations, summon'd at the Call, / From diff'rent Quarters fill the crowded Hall" (l. 278–79).[29] North American indigenes, however, have no place among the inductees. Their exclusion in Imlay's context mutes the force of their mythopoetic as well as proprietorial energy. What avails to displace the history of autochthones

28. The Vicomte de Chateaubriand's novellas *Atala* (1801) and *René* (1802) serve to revive a sense of the long bond between Catholic faith and some native peoples.

29. Alexander Pope, "The Temple of Fame," in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 172–88 (lines quoted from p. 182).

is the aesthetic power of a teenager that, in the double glamour of its freshness and dependency, conspires to acquit and absolve mature and acquisitive men of every crime. Caroline loves Captain Arl—ton, and she loves the land; he loves the land and takes it as theirs in a special aesthetic key, as he is affected by her attractive power. Picturesque theory, in which Caroline has been educated, always professes that the thing in front of our eyes resembles something else. The Allegheny Mountains suggest "the form and figure of a superb mosque" (25) to her wondering eye. Just as the bereaved, young, and melancholy-mad Maria of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey in France and Italy* proves to the questing Yorick that he does have a soul, so Caroline's vibrant fancy manifests the destiny of America—and gives her wooer Captain Arl—ton the title, at last, to Bellefont in Ohio.[30] Zest of imagination, beginning by the building of minarets in the Allegheny air, legitimates ownership of the country. But ownership under whose definition? The shady Scioto Company, for which Imlay acted, collapsed in 1790, but not before it succeeded in passing off 150,000 acres: just about the size of the tract where, amid 163,840 acres, the fictional Captain Arl—ton eventually sets up house with his bride.[31]

Confronting the glories of the Allegheny range, Caroline wonders: "[W]hat a sublime imagery does it afford?" (25). The question that a reader may prefer to pose at this juncture is: "What claim did settlers of goodwill and decency have to the lands of the Ohio River Valley?" The Six Nations ceded some of this land in the 1750s. Other indigenous peoples such as the Shawnee disputed that transaction. The Royal Proclamation of October 1763 forbade settlers and speculators to negotiate independently of the Crown west of the Appalachian Mountains, but the new American republic—appealing to the right of

30. Imlay stages a version of the scene at Moulines, where Yorick and Maria exchange a tear-sodden handkerchief. Displaying the narrative energy Sterne's distraught Maria cannot, Caroline herself reports, "my feelings were in unison with [the aged P.P.'s], he took his handkerchief, and after having dryed my eyes; said he, Caroline, my friend, we have met in these regions of innocence" (*The Emigrants*, 170). America discloses itself as a region of "innocence" to Caroline. In Sterne's novel, Maria's material exudation, her tears, substantiate an impalpable thing—the human soul; in Imlay's text, Caroline's sensibility provides the ethereal excuse for material action—the conquest of Ohio.

31. See Archer Butler Hulbert, "The Methods and Operations of the Scioto Group of Speculators," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 1, no. 4 (March 1915), 502–15.

conquest—did not feel bound to honour this agreement in the wake of the Treaty of Paris of 1783. Benjamin Logan's expedition put the Shawnee towns of Maycockey and Wakatomica to the torch in 1786. Brigadier General Josiah Harmer burned Miami villages in 1791. In November of the same year, Little Turtle's mixed indigenous forces overcame General Arthur Sinclair's army on the banks of the Wabash. In January 1792, as Imlay sat down to write *The Emigrants*, Delaware and Wendat fighters surprised the garrison of the settler blockhouse at Big Bottom along the Muskingum River, killing eight and capturing five. The Shawnee organized their defiance from headquarters at Old Chilcote until 1795. Jerry E. Clark notes: "Depredations against the Shawnee were numerous and cruel. Between 1779 and 1790 the Shawnee village of Chillicothe on the Little Miami River was attacked five times and completely destroyed on four of those occasions. Shawnee victims were often scalped by American soldiers."[32] Late in 1794, the United Indian Nations of the Ohio Valley made a stand at Fallen Timbers—they were defeated by the American Legion led by General "Mad" Anthony Wayne, a veteran (like Imlay) of the War of Independence.

## Honeysuckle

The title of William W. Canfield's 1902 collection, *The Legends of the Iroquois Told by "the Cornplanter,"* credits the book's version of the tale of the courageous Aliquipiso to the Seneca chief who, in 1789, sold the land comprising the Erie Triangle to the U.S. "The Sacrifice of Aliquipiso" tells how a youthful Oneida woman saves her people from invasion by hostile Mingoes. Under the pretence of betraying the whereabouts of her fellow Oneidas, she leads the enemy under a granite cliff. Her confederates, concealed on the heights, precipitate a rockslide that buries the Mingoes and, with them, Aliquipiso. From her remains springs the honeysuckle, forever afterward known as "the blood of brave women."[33] In this myth, Aliquipiso acts as a

32. Jerry E. Clark, *The Shawnee* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 88. Other details are derived from Robert S. Allen, *His Majesty's Indian Allies: British Indian Policy in the Defence of Canada, 1774–1815* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1992), 65 and 74–76.

33. Canfield, *The Legends of the Iroquois Told by "the Cornplanter,"* 101.

female champion of her nation. The Cornplanter says: "The warriors and sachems listened to the unfolding of [her] plan with wonder."[34] Interestingly, the Cornplanter's own mother was named Aliquipiso. Caroline T—n qualifies, in Imlay's narrative, as the heroine of a successful campaign of territorial expansion—but, unlike his precursor, the novelist dissembles the aggression inherent in her role.

Caroline T—n's virtuosity and intensity of perception is not a gift shared by all Imlay's characters. Her charismatic example, however, can teach others, even those of her own sex, how to respond to American nature. Miss W— writes from Pittsburgh: "I confess, though I had been highly delighted with the romantic and sublime scenes … still I did not receive a just impression of their various beauties, untill this amiable girl depicted them in such glowing colours as made me think I must have been stupid not to have noticed them" (23). The same Miss W—, patrolling the bounds of behaviour permissible to women, nevertheless goes on to observe, "when a person has become a wife and mother, I think it is much more material to confine herself to real and substantial matters" (23). Young Caroline receives and transmits the landscape in picturesque terms. Contrary to Miss W—'s argument, Caroline T—n's vivid responses consolidate rather than obstruct the "material" and "substantial" realization of a settlement on the Ohio River. The young woman invites both its development and her own. Imlay apportions to Caroline the special delectation of some splendid natural objects. Her grace as she encounters such symbolic things excuses the insistent westering of her cohort. In a striking scene, she gathers honeysuckle.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's influential accounts of botanizing appeared posthumously in his *Lettres* élémentaires *sur la botanique* (1782). Erasmus Darwin's erotic "Loves of the Plants," which personifies the genital features of blossoms, came out in 1789 with Wollstonecraft's publisher Joseph Johnson. It is thus not surprising that Imlay incorporates some fashionable botany into *The Emigrants*. By acting the part of a collector, Caroline T—n distinguishes herself from "the smiling flowers that only adorn the land."[35] Captain Arl—ton reports his won-

34. Ibid., 100.

35. Wollstonecraft despises "the false system of female manners … which robs the whole sex of its dignity" by comparing women as a matter of routine to sweet and delicate flowers (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. cited, 71). She opens her

der at witnessing her efforts to secure a honeysuckle, Aliquipiso's flower:

> [W]hen you say that enchantment seems to spring up where e'er she treads, I feel the full force of all her charms…. She has not only all the symmetry of form, the softness of love, and the enchantment of a goddess; but she can assume an animation and that surprizing activity of motion, that while you are suspended in the transports of astonishment, you are lost in admiration at the gracefulness with which she moves—I have seen her bound over a rock, and pluck a wild honey-suckle, that grew upon the side of a precipice, and while I stood gazing at her in amazement, she has brought it as a trophy of her exertions. (172–173)

In this passage, Captain Arl—ton's unnamed goddess is probably Flora. Tradition informs us that flowers spring up under her step. Nevertheless, Caroline is no Flora. She does not produce flowers—she culls them, rather, as her natural-born right. The Englishwoman, now a proto-American, uninhibitedly snatches "a wild honey-suckle." We are unlikely to object. Her unabashed physicality would please Wollstonecraft who wrote: "I find that strength of mind has, in most cases, been accompanied by superior strength of body."[36] That the plant is "wild" should link it to the sphere of indigenes, but the effect is to forget them in the appealing vision of a woman engaging in an act of symbolic—sensual and consensual—defloration. Evoking Captain Arl—ton's "admiration"—his wonder—Caroline casually balances the beautiful (the little "trophy" of a blossom) against the sublime (a threatening cliff). Her agility in this habitat allows her to suggest but ultimately supplant unmentioned autochthonous predecessors.

Like the Cornplanter, William Blake offers a heroine to compare and to contrast with Caroline T—n. While Imlay was finishing his 1793 novel, Blake invented Oothoon, a character as besotted with America as Caroline. At the beginning of his prophetic book *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, she too would gain intimacy with a wondrous plant:

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polemic by promising "to avoid that flowery diction which has slided from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversation" (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 13).

36. Ibid., 50.

> For the soft soul of America, Oothoon wanderd in woe,
> Along the vales of Leutha seeking flowers to comfort her;
> And thus she spoke to the bright Marygold of Leutha's vale
> Art thou a flower! Art thou a nymph! I see thee now a flower;
> Now a nymph! I dare not pluck thee from thy dewy bed!
> The Golden nymph replied; pluck thou my flower Oothoon the mild
> Another flower shall spring, because the soul of sweet delight
> Can never pass away. she ceas'd & closd her golden shrine. (l. 3–10)[37]

The reader learns a couple of lines later that Blake's tyrant Bromion rapes Oothoon as—the "Marygold" tucked between her breasts—she wings her way toward her beloved, Theotormon. Bromion brags that America's landscape belongs to him, along with everything and everyone else. In *The Emigrants*, Imlay reliably differentiates Caroline from the land that her wonder usefully transforms into tasteful real estate. The brutal Bromion would, by contrast, rhetorically assimilate Oothoon completely to his landscape: "Thy soft American plains are mine, and mine thy north & south" (l. 20).[38] The female "Marygold" that Oothoon plucks just before Bromion attacks her pledges an ideal of reciprocality—permission-asking, regenerative virginity: "the soul of sweet delight / Can never pass away." "Sweet delight" lives in a state of uncorrupted, imperishable wonder. Blake's spelling ("Marygold") may seek to evoke Wollstonecraft's proper name. Oothoon is the female champion of imaginative renewal.

Chateaubriand surmises that the encounter of Christianity with indigeneity must disclose how untenable is any human effort to colonize this vale of tears, the immemorial earth. For her part, Radcliffe explores the idea of art as a woman's resource for survival under paternalistic oppression. The Cornplanter offers the tale of a nation's delivery from persecutors by a young woman's self-sacrifice. Affirming her deed, natural magic makes the honeysuckle "the blood of brave women."[39] Measured against Chateaubriand, Imlay's Caroline tarries in the sphere of aesthetics more than she dares venture into the realm of religion. Her captors are indigenous, unlike the conniving aristocrats that beset Radcliffe's Emily St. Aubert. Caroline T—n's impulses

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37. William Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, cited above, 45–46.

38. Ibid., 46.

39. Canfield, *The Legends of the Iroquois Told by "the Cornplanter,"* 101.

to artistic wonder are not deployed, for the most part, in the service of self-preservation. Rather, they help to license, and are recruited to, a grand real estate development. When the reader sets Caroline T—n's world beside Oothoon's, Imlay's heroine seems to blend the mindset of Blake's despot Bromion with that of the free spirit Oothoon. In effect, Imlay attempts to advance through her a mixture of Bromion's authoritarianism and Oothoon's ethos of liberty. Her plucking of an aboriginal blossom—Aliquipiso's own honeysuckle—is the pretty metonymy for a momentous robbery from which, like a decoy, it may distract us: the harrying and removal of Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Ohio indigenes.

## Hummingbird

After Captain Arl—ton has recaptured Caroline from the "savages" without slaying any one of them, the relieved suitor informs his correspondent Mr. Il—ray of another case of imprisonment and its resolution. The episode deliberately recalls the precedent of Laurence Sterne's caged starling.[40] In *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768), Mr. Yorick, Sterne's peripatetic hero, hears at his Parisian hotel a caged bird that can only repeat "I can't get out."[41] Himself lacking a passport and fearing imprisonment, Mr. Yorick addresses the captive starling: "God help thee! said I, but I'll let thee out, cost what it will; so I turn'd about the cage to get to the door; it was twisted and double twisted so fast with wire, there was no getting it open without pulling the cage to pieces—I took both hands to it."[42] Yorick is in France. In Ohio, some decades later, Captain Arl—ton happens upon what Imlay's narrative may argue is now an anachronistic representative of *La Nouvelle France*. The anecdote refracts in dreamlike fashion the longer history of the Ohio country:

> Caroline has this moment entered with a humming bird that a little French lad caught and gave to her;—behold, said she … and look at the

40. Laurence Sterne, "The Passport, The Hotel at Paris," "The Captive, Paris," and "The Starling, Road to Versailles," in *"A Sentimental Journey" and Other Writings*, ed. Ian Jack and Tim Parnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 58–63.

41. Ibid., 60.

42. Ibid.

> little captive, how sad it looks, because it has lost its mate—and was you sad, my Caroline, said I, taking hold of her hand and tenderly pressing it, when you was hurried a prisoner from your friends? … Ah! Il—ray … go thou little innocent thing, said she to the bird … you shall not be a moment longer confined, for perhaps, already I have I robbed thee of joys, which the exertions of my whole life could not repay—Ah! Caroline, said I, and who is to restore to us the rapturous pleasures of which we have been robbed?—or shall we find, my charming girl, a compensation for such a sequestration in our future endearments? (201–2)

The plight of the hummingbird argues, by indirection, the justice of contemporaneous geopolitics: English-speaking U.S. ascendancy in Ohio. French claim to this part of America dates to 1682—the epoch of Sieur Robert de la Salle (1643–1687). The Virginians asked the French to leave the Ohio River Valley as early as 1753. The fall of New France, sealed at the end of the Seven Years' War (the occasion of Yorick's predicament), hastened the waning of this demographic. The French child's tribute to Caroline combines gallantry—a salute to her beauty so fresh that Sterne and Rousseau would approve it—with a judgement upon the rival power of which he is the latest avatar. Although the youth has good taste (Caroline deserves everything she gets), he makes a critical mistake. The hummingbird deserves freedom. What kind? Erotic liberty, the right to choose—like Caroline. On the case of her glittering, miniature captive she lavishes Yorick-like "generous joys and generous cares" (98).

Whereas Sterne's traveller fails to liberate his starling, Caroline easily releases the hummingbird. Just as the insensible "savages" held Caroline against her will, so the infatuated child would have detained, in her behalf, a perfect avian metonymy for beautiful Ohio. Why "perfect"? The exotic hummingbird, resident only of the Americas, epitomizes, from a settler's vantage, Ohio nature. Through Imlay's lovely ruse, Caroline may become the saviour of an aboriginal wonder—the smallest genus of bird in the world. Displaced from the "savages" who "stole" her, the idea of the endemic finds a new centre in a tiny embodiment of the beautiful—which inspires, as Burke's 1757 *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* prepares us to perceive, pity and love. Caroline even assumes that such feeling throbs in the hummingbird. Who is to say it does not? "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an

immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?"—poignantly asks Blake in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell."[43] But the bird serves a political end at last. Caroline proves herself a proper chatelaine of the wonders of North America. What belongs to whom is the essence of this episode. Eerily, the ability to let a bird go is the proof of the right to own the whole of its natural breeding range. Imlay advertises the probity and integrity of settlers coming to Ohio by this act of tiny largesse. And hummingbirds love honeysuckle; Caroline T—n loves both honeysuckle and hummingbirds. She fits in Ohio as naturally as either of them.

The lovers banter about the hummingbird. Symptomatically, businessmen's language erupts into their flirtatious dialogue. They allude to payment, repayment, getting compensation—principles rather overlooked in consideration of indigenous people in the region as well as of investors in Scioto Company properties. What is the item of theft in this interesting incident of the captive hummingbird? Time: to be precise, time to relish "joys." Caroline raises the topic earlier in the narrative. She recounts her first flirtation with Captain Arl—ton as they climbed the pass through the Alleghany hills. She recites lines from Torquato Tasso to her companion. The theme is *carpe diem*, or more precisely, *carpe florem*: "Then crop the morning rose, the time improve, / And while to love 'tis given, indulge in love" (40).[44]

An amorous, inexperienced, articulate girl in possession of a gem-like hummingbird does make a picture difficult to resist, especially because she wants to release the exquisite creature. French and indigenous destinies adhere in the details, but the glamour of the English Caroline T—n outfaces and outshines them.[45] Imlay implies

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43. William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 35.

44. In her 1792 *Diary*, Elizabeth Simcoe alludes to the sixteenth-century Italian poet Torquato Tasso while wandering in the forest near Kingston, Upper Canada. Flouting the twenty-five-year-old Miss W—'s opinion that mothers and wives should not waste their energy on "the wonderful display of beauty with which the œconomy of nature every where abounds" (*The Emigrants*, 23), Simcoe painted dozens of Canadian scenes and transcribed their prose equivalents into her journal. See Elizabeth Simcoe, *Mrs. Simcoe's Diary*, ed. Mary Quayle Innis (Toronto: Dundurn, 2007), entry for 7 July 1792, 102–3.

45. The Cornplanter's aunt was named Chit-ti-aw-dunk, which signifies Hummingbird.

a further dimension—a Wollstonecraft-like dimension. If marriage often imprisons a woman, then this Ohio courtship has found a "new symbol." It is not Emma Goldman's pioneering gull or Sterne's celibate starling complaining in a cage. Instead, Imlay offers the whirring bird on the wing, wooing an elective partner *en plein air*.[46] Once married, Caroline and Captain Arl—ton give a French name to their Ohio estate: Bellefont. Depriving history of weight—it weighs as much, now, as a hummingbird—they try to convert it into aesthetics.

A late passing subplot introduced by Mr. Il—ray suggests how Caroline and Captain Arl—ton's language of wonderment, real estate, progress, and love can be abused. A con man, identified only as H.W., flees England. He settles into the French hotel run by a certain Mrs. Knowles, herself a confirmed fraudster. H.W. deploys on this duplicitous businesswoman the very amatory rhetoric attaching to and issuing from the figure of Caroline in Ohio: "I must assure you, that I think it is impossible, where ever you preside, should not be all elysium" (227). Beguiled by the handsome parasite, Mrs. Knowles supplies H.W. with lodging, clothing, and anything else he requests. Once he has exhausted his credulous mistress's resources, H.W. defects from Mrs. Knowles's side. English authorities arrest, try, and transport him for seven years to Botany Bay, Australia. This awful story contrasts with Imlay's myth-making about Ohio, the settlement of which is represented as a voluntary rather than compulsory process. Imlay knows, moreover, that political dissidents as well as con men such as H.W. have helped to populate Australia. The citation of the infamous Botany Bay could evoke, with some irony, Caroline's happy honeysuckle-gathering, or the sugar maples and sycamores that flourish at Bellefont. In practice, British justice of the period elides swindlers and thieves with artists and idealists, insofar as it metes out to them an identical punishment—

46. Actual jail—debtors' prison—figures in Imlay's tale. Caroline's boorish brother George languishes in the institution, emancipated from it by the largesse of another character who despises debtors' prison as much as Samuel Johnson does, though for less carefully argued reasons. Debtors' prison becomes a "Tartarus to [Great Britain's] citizens" (*The Emigrants*, 215)—the opposite of the heaven Caroline finds in, and makes of, America. Immigrating to the U.S., George takes on the lineaments of an indigene—but not an American "savage": "His understanding has not only been regenerated but his person has already become robust, and he now has more the appearance of an Ancient Briton" (*The Emigrants*, 255–56).

antipodean exile. Imlay's own career fuses—or confuses—the same categories.[47]

The last glance of this essay should take in the description of the Ohio estate that Caroline and Captain Arl—ton develop together. The newly-wed Caroline reports that Flora need not be propitiated here. Instead, "Pomona reigns": the goddess of fruit, not of flowers; of mothers, not maidens; of *storgè* more than eros. Quoting a final time from Thomson's "Spring"—"young-ey'd Health exalts" (l. 893)[48]—Caroline continues: "Nearly in the center of one of these lots, is a fountain, I have called *Bellefont*, from whence the name of our seat is taken" (246). As business language of payment and repayment expresses Caroline's concern for the hummingbird's time lost while imprisoned, so it courses through her topographic description of Bellefont: "The water steals off in several directions, and in their meandering course moistens the flowery banks, which, as if to return the loan, spread their blooming sweets on every side" (246). The language fantasizes a fair bargain: irrigation swapped for blossoms. Creditor and debtor are satisfied. What may amuse a reader apprised of Imlay's fiscal adventures is the connotative halo attending the verb "steals off." Imlay fled from where wonderful Caroline settles. Writing in 1792, the year of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the aforementioned Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe—himself hardly blameless in transactions with indigenous nations—saw clearly what was happening south of his province: "the Right of Preemption, or Speculation, two words of great Swindling Extent … prove that the United States are rapacious to Seize upon the Indian Lands and to annihilate the whole race of those unfortunate People!"[49] Yet, by virtue of Imlay's personal bad faith or (to name it positively) his imaginativeness, the novelist incurred, perhaps, less culpability in this regard than the more conscientious among his colleagues. Bellefont (unreal estate of the mind) exists nowhere—except in fiction.

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47. In *The Godwins and the Shelleys*, St Clair describes how two reformers, Thomas Muir and Thomas Palmer, undergoing "unfair trials" in 1793, were found guilty of sedition and transported to Botany Bay for fourteen and seven years respectively (109).

48. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Fairer and Gerrard, 232.

49. Quoted by Taylor in *The Divided Ground*, 269.