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## Introduction. From Bradstreet to Poe

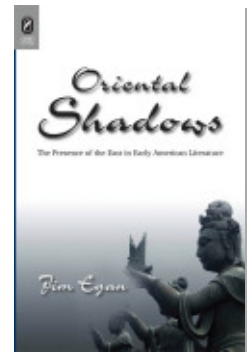
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## INTRODUCTION

### From Bradstreet to Poe

The specter of the East haunts the literature of America and the new United States from the pamphlets to the most aesthetically sophisticated of the American Renaissance. Take, for instance, the writer hailed as the author of “the first American book.”<sup>1</sup> He has virtually all parts of the known world in his quest, first Muslims, and, then, to help subdue New World Native Americans. He calls out “Cathay and Chyna” as “the most famous Kingdoms.” Or let us choose another beginning point, the poetry of England Puritan Anne Bradstreet, labeled the “first American poet” by one critic and identified by another as “the first American poet.”<sup>2</sup> Let us

the most renowned manuscript of her age. She made the most complete account of the human soul's most elemental forms as a “China” poem, then in another uses the very same figure of a “China” to represent the beauty of God's creation. In the most popular book of the Bible in seventeenth-century New England, a book whose title was “The

over a century, Michael Wigglesworth tells his readers how “The *Eastern Conquerour* was said to weep, / When he the *Indian Ocean* did view.”<sup>6</sup>

Lest we think those closer to the founding of the United States lost their appetite for the East, we find, quite the contrary, that the men and

women who put their very lives on the line to help bring the United States into being turned Eastward just as much as, if not more than, America's first British colonists. In the same month the Declaration of Independence was signed, no less a figure than Benjamin Franklin compared the British Empire itself to "a fine and noble China Vase." Apparently, Franklin quite liked the phrase; he repeated it seven years later in a letter to an English correspondent who was worried that the new "confederation [of states] may be annihilated" by dissension from within. Franklin sought to assuage his correspondent's fears by assuring him that "there is sense enough in America to take care of their own china vase." Figures of the Orient leave their mark long after the Revolution, too, even—and perhaps especially—among those writers who have traditionally been cast as the founders of a distinctively American literary tradition. Take, for instance, Washington Irving. While we know Irving as the author of the *Sketchbook*, we tend to forget those works devoted exclusively to the East that were enormously popular among nineteenth-century readers, including *A Conquest of Granada* and *Tales of the Alhambra*. We need look no further than Nathaniel Hawthorne's hypercanonical *Scarlet Letter* to find another instance among many other possible examples of the presence of the East in the very period during which the nation's literature came of age. For Hawthorne characterizes Hester Prynne, that most American of creations in his most penetrating examination of American history and culture, as having "in her nature a rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic."<sup>7</sup>

Figures of the East served important rhetorical functions for American writers not only in radically different historical periods but also from remarkably different—indeed, sometimes even combative or contradictory—ideological, regional, religious, political, and personal perspectives. Those who advocated colonization for the sake of empire, those who saw it as part of the Lord's work, and those who envisioned it as a way to wealth all turn Eastward to make their case. British American writers in Massachusetts call on these figures, as do writers in Pennsylvania and the staple colonies such as Virginia and Georgia in the South. Male writers use these figures, but then so, too, do female writers. Figures of the East appear in the most celebrated of works from the period by the most widely praised of authors, and they appear just as often in works known only to the most well-read specialists in the field. These figures can be found in those works popular in the period, and they can be found in those works passed over by contemporary audiences.

The extraordinary interest in the people, places, and things of the East shown by British American readers and writers from the sixteenth well into

the nineteenth centuries should hardly surprise us. After all, Europeans recognized the landmass that would come to be called “America” only after countless ships sailed west in Christopher Columbus’s wake in hopes they might locate a quicker route to the riches of the East. Even after Europeans and people of European descent living in America realized the glaring flaws in their geographical knowledge by acknowledging the existence of a considerable body of land separating them from the East Indies, these very same people continued to invest enormous amounts of money, time, and labor, not to mention the lives of many a sailor, searching for a Northwest Passage that would accomplish what had eluded those earlier voyages, but this time with an ironic twist. Those who sought a Northwest Passage after the European recognition of America sought not just a quicker route to the East, but also, it is important to point out, a quicker route to the East that specifically avoided the New World as much as possible.<sup>8</sup>

For many in Europe and America, then, the New World was as much an obstacle as an opportunity. Scholars long ago established that many Europeans and Anglo-Americans before 1800 viewed North America as the home of unparalleled possibilities for the less fortunate and potential profit for all. We have focused significantly less attention on the implications of the determined effort on both sides of the Atlantic, on the one hand, to find a Northwest Passage but also, at the same time, to produce Eastern goods in America. This effort cast America’s chief value in terms of the place that Europeans had wanted America to be but was not. In this way, at least, America’s value derived from its relation to the East. British American colonists as well as those who helped forge a new nation thus lived in the shadow of a land they neither occupied nor equaled. The discursive systems of the British American colonies and new nation, systems that helped give meaning to the lives of the first Anglo-Americans, came into being by establishing their value in terms of what they were not; they established their value, that is, by serving as pathways to the true object of European desire, not as communities whose value derived from what they and they alone had to offer.

If America could never be the East, British American writers and those of the new nation could, at least, use the infinitely greater cultural power granted Eastern people, places, and things in their own quest for acknowledgment as a truly civilized community by European and Creole intellectuals. Writers in the British American colonies and the early United States used these figures to ward off accusations that the people who lived in the many communities springing to life across the Eastern Seaboard of North America lacked the necessary refinement and gentility to be classified

as truly “civilized” peoples.<sup>9</sup> As I hope to demonstrate in the chapters that follow, some of the most important British American writers, in a variety of forms and for a variety of reasons, show remarkable consistency in their contention that the way early American culture could equal—and perhaps even surpass—its supposed social superiors in Europe was for American literature and culture to become more Oriental. That is, writers of what we have come to call early American literature offered the East as a solution to America’s inferior civilized status by suggesting that America become more civilized, not by becoming more European—or perhaps not only by becoming more European—but by adopting aesthetic styles and standards long associated with an East cast as superior aesthetically to both America and Europe.<sup>10</sup>

Before I lay out this argument in greater detail, though, I must first address a fundamental question of terminology on which the argument depends. It is all well and good to argue that early American writers turned to figures of the East to argue for the civilized nature of colonial culture, but such an argument depends entirely on what counts as “East.” In the chapters that follow, the case for the importance of figures of the East in early American literature has been made using definitions of the “East” contemporaneous with the writings on which each chapter focuses. Doing so leads us not only to different definitions of what counts as East and West on the globe but also to sets of assumptions about the relation between the various parts of the globe, and sets of associations attached to various parts of the globe, that differ from modern ones. It is not, in other words, simply that the writers in question divide the world differently than we do. For the most part, the writers examined in this study attached different concepts, values, and ideas to particular places and peoples on the globe than we do. Since these concepts, values, and ideas were integral to producing a text’s various meanings and implications, we must pay them special attention here. These unstated assumptions, rules, and associations constitute what I call a “symbolic spatial economy.”

I use the term “symbolic spatial economy” to indicate the unstated set of assumptions that form the complex, sometimes contradictory, system of symbols that allow the ideas, images, and concepts associated with any particular geographic space on the globe to seem only natural. Words relating to physical geography are, after all, no less figurative than words that do not refer to physical spaces on the globe where people live, work, and die. “India,” for instance, refers to the spot on the globe we have come to call “India” but not because of some inherent relationship between “India,” the signifier, and “India,” the actual place being signified.<sup>11</sup> Just like any other

word in a language, those words referring to particular spaces on the globe carry with them not only a literal meaning—the literal space on the globe to which the word refers—but also a range of connotations. Words relating to spaces on the globe, that is, carry symbolic resonance just as any other words in the language do. These symbolic associations are not random, but they do not necessarily correspond to what can be considered objectively true of the people and places of that region of the earth. They make sense only in the context of some larger signifying systems, what Foucault has famously called “discursive systems.” Words relating to physical geography, I would suggest, are the products of the subset of those signifying systems relating to geography, a subset that structures and organizes the symbolic meanings attached to physical space, a structuring system that can be likened to an economy. This system teaches us not only to associate certain parts of the globe with certain ideas, images, and concepts, but also and in the same moment teaches us so well that the very productive capacity of the system becomes invisible to us. We come to think of the associations that grow out of this economy as preexisting our way of understanding the world rather than being borne directly out of that understanding.

Of course, as integral parts of larger systems of meanings, the associations attached to any distinct space on the globe are not isolated from or unrelated to the associations linked to any other part of the globe. Indeed, they are, ultimately, dependent on one another for their meaning. In this way, if the images associated with one spot on the map are altered, other spots that are unrelated geographically might, through this change in associated imagery, also undergo a change. The symbolic spatial economy, then, represents a fluid and flexible way of organizing the world rather than a static monolith of meanings.

In order to see the symbolic spatial economy at work in the texts under investigation in this book, I have used the definition of “East” operative at the time of the work about which I am writing. This is not to say that a single, uniform definition of the “East” existed across even a single language community during the period. Not only did the “East” include different parts of the globe at different moments in British American writing over the period, but disagreements over just which parts of the globe should be classified as “East” and which as “West” occurred during the period as well. The proper category for the land and people of Greece, for instance, was a source of considerable dispute. Was it in the East or the West?<sup>12</sup> No matter what precise region one’s definition of the East included in this period, though, the “East” for all British American and early national writers included a much larger section of the map than we currently assign it,

and the discriminations we make between and among, for instance, the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and so forth, simply did not exist. The East for Anglophone writers well into the nineteenth century included both China and Persia; it included North Africa and Russia; it included Turkey and India; and sometimes it included Egypt. During the period this study covers, Jerusalem and other Christian holy lands were considered part of the Orient.<sup>13</sup> As Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen point out in *The Myth of Continents*, classifying such a vast geographic territory with an enormously diverse collection of cultures “into a single regional category was seldom questioned” until late in the 1800s.<sup>14</sup> This does not mean that writers in the period saw no difference between the people and/or products of these various locales. The “hither” East was sometimes differentiated from the “farther” East. Hegel was the first to draw “sharp and essential distinctions between different parts of Asia” when he cast “hither” and “farther” Asia as “essentially different from each other.”<sup>15</sup> Hegel, though, was the exception rather than the rule. The vast majority of European and Anglophone writers before and immediately after Hegel understood the East as a single region whose communities, however different, constituted a distinct part of the globe whose peoples shared certain fundamental characteristics and features.

At least until the middle of the nineteenth century, then, the “East” not only covered an enormous portion of the globe but also cast as a single unit groups of people with very different institutions, beliefs, body types, and customs. While the people who inhabited this region were not cast as identical to one another, the logic that allows for these different peoples and places to be categorized together, as a single though diverse unit, gives some sense of how, at times and in important ways, these differences could be overlooked in favor of what were understood to be fundamental similarities. That the figure of the “East” could be understood to include all these different peoples tells us something about the way British American and early national writers organized the world in which they lived. At least at the level of the figure, the similarities between what we consider disparate places on the map exerted more power than those differences that, at least from the perspective of the discursive system in operation at the time, were of secondary significance.<sup>16</sup>

The geographic “East” signified in the figures this study investigates was hardly an empty space, though; nor were its inhabitants utterly powerless in the process of social construction. Quite the contrary. As I note above, a diverse and rich group of peoples and cultures lived in the enormous geographic area classified as “East” by Americans before 1860, and many of



these communities played crucial roles, in some cases, even the dominant roles, in the world's economy in this period.<sup>17</sup> Given this study's specific focus on figures of the East in the discursive system of British America and the early United States, though, I have largely avoided discussion of the role played in the production of those meanings attached to figures of the East during this historical period by those who lived in the East at the time or, for that matter, by individuals from Asia who travelled to or lived in Europe or British America in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. The absence of such people and/or groups of people from this study should not be taken as an implicit argument that they had absolutely no impact on the implications of the figures under investigation. Compared with the impact of more local practices of book production, distribution, and readership, though, the influence of Oriental peoples on the meanings of the figures I consider was small enough that it need not be treated in detail here.

The binary division of the globe by peoples of European descent into the different regions of "East" and "West," with their attendant symbolic associations, is, itself, a social production rather than an unmediated representation of a preexistent physical geography, a production whose emergence can be witnessed at the very beginning of the period this book covers. The dominant modern meanings of "East" and "West" were forged during the early modern period.<sup>18</sup> As Jerry Brotton demonstrates, "Geographical antecedents of the geographers of the early modern world lacked any perception of a directional 'east,' or even of the very distinction between the geographical and symbolic concepts of 'west' and 'east.'"<sup>19</sup> Brotton goes on to argue that while "no . . . geographical or imaginative line of demarcation firmly existed between a political East and West in the early modern world," such a conception developed only gradually from the 1500s through the 1700s when "Europe as a geographical and political entity" began to emerge.<sup>20</sup> Instead, up through the late seventeenth century—the very period when Bradstreet produced her poetry and when it was published in Boston—"the east was not a separate, mysterious space antithetical to the developing ideals of European civilization," Brotton shows, but, on the contrary, a space "filled with myriad territories from which early modern scholars imbibed spiritual, intellectual, and material sustenance."<sup>21</sup>

In examining works of American literature in relation to geographic space, I am not treading new ground but following in footsteps that begin at the field's very roots. Scholars in the 1920s who succeeded in legitimating American literature as a worthwhile field of academic study used Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" as the basic structuring element in the development of a distinctly American literature.<sup>22</sup> A cursory glance at the



titles of some of the most important works of scholarship on American literature before 1860—from *Virgin Land* to *The Fatal Environment* to *The Lay of the Land* to *American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent*—shows how geographic figures have helped shape the way we understand writing classified as American.<sup>23</sup> More recently, the field has witnessed a resurgence of interest in the problem of space, especially in relation to writing before 1900. Ralph Bauer's *The Cultural Geography of Colonial American Literature* insists, "We must place literary history in the context not only of the historical but also of the spatial dialectics that were foundational in the making of modernity," while Martin Brückner's *The Geographic Revolution in Early America* investigates the importance of geographic space by examining the way in which "the construction of the American subject was grounded in the textual experience of geography."<sup>24</sup> Such works have enabled my very ability to reconstruct the symbolic spatial economy of the period so that I can see the many figures of the East appearing right before my eyes as I read through the archive of British American and early national writings.<sup>25</sup>

Just as I am hardly the first scholar to investigate American literature in relation to matters relating to space, so, too, have previous analyses directed our attention toward various aspects of the Orient in early America. Before Edward Said's *Orientalism*, scholars generally took references to the Orient in early America as evidence of the diversity and open-mindedness of the canonical figures of America's literary tradition. As examples of this trend, I would point to Frederic Ives Carpenter's *Emerson and Asia* in 1930 and Arthur E. Christy's *The Orient in American Transcendentalism* two years later, as well as Dorothee Metlitsky Finkelstein's *Melville's Orienda* in 1961 and David Reynolds's discussion in *Faith in Fiction* (1981) of the Oriental tale in America before 1830. More recent works such as A. Owen Aldridge's 1993 *The Dragon and the Eagle: The Presence of China in the American Enlightenment* follows in this tradition, as does Arthur Versluis's *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religion*, also from 1993, which offers without question the most detailed study of Orientalism in nineteenth-century American literature. While conceding Said's point that Transcendentalist writers practice some intellectual colonialism in their adaptation of Oriental materials for their purposes, Versluis adheres more closely to the perspective established by Christy. Versluis reads American Transcendentalists' use of Asian religions not primarily as an instance of the kind of Orientalism Said identified but, instead, as evidence of the willingness of these writers to embrace even the most "esoteric" ideas. While I argue that figures of the East played a key role in the way early American authors sought to present

themselves as part of a civilized culture, Versluis argues that engagement with Oriental religious materials was “at the center of the entire American Transcendentalist movement.”<sup>26</sup>

Scholars writing in the wake of Said and in the fields of postcolonial and colonial discourse studies that grew exponentially after *Orientalism* have, first of all, pushed their inquiries even further back into America’s colonial history, directing attention to pre-Revolutionary writings as well as those of the nineteenth century. These scholars’ reexamination of the influence of the Orient in pre-Revolutionary British America has led them to point out the sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit links between various forms of power inherent in representations of the Orient as well as the relation these representations—and the various powers they invoke and produce—have with questions of imperialism and empire in particular. So Hilton Obenzinger argues in *American Palestine* (1999) that representations of the Holy Land by nineteenth-century American writers can best be understood through the lens of theorists of settler colonialism, while Malini Schueller’s *U.S. Orientalisms* (1998) adapts Said’s Orientalist model to show what she identifies as various kinds of Orientalism in American literature from the Revolutionary period to approximately 1890. While these Orientalisms, Schueller shows, do not cohere into a single narrative, collectively they illustrate how images of the Orient were crucial to the formation of notions of U.S. nationhood. Timothy S. Marr and Fuad Sha’ban take us further back into the American past than Schueller does in examining seventeenth-century materials in their demonstrations, in *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (2006) and *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought* (1991), of the connection of Islam to American identity.<sup>27</sup>

In some ways the most relevant predecessor to *Oriental Shadows* can be found in an essay not specifically devoted to an examination of the East at all, Michael Warner’s provocative “What’s Colonial about Colonial America?” Toward the end of his piece, Warner argues that the “spatial imagination of colonial culture has tended to be ignored” by scholars. In order to make his case, he points out that “England’s movement into America was in most ways parallel with its movement into India,” a fact of which Warner reminds us with examples from contemporary writings well known to British Americans of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>28</sup> This observation leads Warner to remark that “it is surprising how invisible India has been in the history of Anglo-American colonialism.”<sup>29</sup> Warner contends that our focus on the incipient nationalism of explicitly nonnational colonial writing blinds us to the spatial imagination that would understand India and America as fundamentally connected. I think he is absolutely correct in this. American

nationalism provides its own symbolic spatial economy that serves its own interests. In paying close attention to figures of the East in early American writing, I hope to expose the workings of a prenatalist spatial imagination—what I am calling a symbolic spatial economy—that, partly through the very writings investigated in the rest of this book, helps produce the distinctively modern way we in the United States tend to understand the people and places on the globe and their relation to one another.

Scholarship has played its role, too, as Warner notes, in teaching us how to imagine the relation between different spaces on the map. We can see such instruction in the work of those very scholars who were crucial in establishing the unstated assumptions that would help provide the intellectual foundations for the study of early American literary studies. Perhaps the most distinguished and certainly one of the most influential of those scholars, Perry Miller, acknowledges the fascination for all things Oriental expressed by American writers of the 1830s, 40s, and 50s, but in order to establish what he considers the native Americanness of American literature, Miller acknowledges the Oriental influence only to suggest its lack of true importance.<sup>30</sup> In what would become one of his most influential pieces, Miller asks in “From Edwards to Emerson” whether “New England’s transcendentalism [was] wholly Germanic or Hindu in origin.”<sup>31</sup> Miller concedes the point that the literary theories espoused by nineteenth-century American writers “were importations, not native American growths, . . . extracted from imperfect translations of the Hindu scriptures.”<sup>32</sup> He concedes, in other words, that a superficial reading of nineteenth-century American literature shows that these writings owe a substantial debt to ideas imported—however imperfectly—from the Orient. Miller wants us to see that what he calls “a deeper reading” will reveal what seems counterintuitive: that the Pantheistic writings of nineteenth-century American writers who were openly hostile to traditional Christianity owe their greatest intellectual debt to the staunchly, unflinchingly Calvinist writings of the American Puritans who brooked no dissent when it came to matters of God.

We have yet to find a fully satisfactory answer—and we never will—to the problem of continuity at the core of “From Edwards to Emerson.”<sup>33</sup> What relationship does the writing produced by those colonists living in North America—who were, after all, a group of people who generally reacted with alarm at the slightest suggestion they had relinquished their claims to being British by living so far removed from their homeland—what relationship does writing produced by such people bear to the literature produced by the citizens of nation who fought a protracted and bloody eight-year war designed specifically to free themselves from the very state

to whom they had pledged their allegiance? By what logic, scholars have asked from the birth of scholarly interest in American literature, do we justify the yoking together of pre- and post-Revolutionary writings from the communities that would become the United States into a single, unbroken narrative? The issue of whether a continuity exists between the writings of the British American colonies and those in the United States relies itself, of course, on the questionable assumption that the writings of those colonies can be made to form a unified, coherent collective entity themselves. We might view the writing produced in Britain's American colonies instead, for instance, as constituting a series of related but distinct discursive systems. But let us say we accept the premise that an object called "colonial American literature" exists and can be studied. If, as Benedict Anderson has noted, all nationalist movements necessarily rob the graves of their ancestors in order to provide the nation with a history of its own, how, as scholars, do we understand the relationship between those whose graves are robbed and those who resurrect the corpses for their own purposes?<sup>34</sup>

Of course, such attempts to demonstrate a continuous literary tradition that extends from colonial to postcolonial times necessarily rely on a sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit theory of Americanness. The coherence of these narratives depends, in other words, on identifying some distinctively American characteristic or characteristics of American literature so that even those works that expressly announce themselves as something other than American can be included in our national narratives. Some scholars have shown how American works seem to bear distinctive stylistic features that differentiate them from, for instance, the literature of other nations written in English. Scholars often point to the shaping power of experience to produce a distinctly American brand of writing. We have learned a great deal over the years about what appear to be thematic concerns that seem to be peculiarly if not exclusively American. Much work has been done to identify those genres and/or formal structures whose origins can be traced to the colonies or the new nation. Others have taken a different tack by trying to tie together the various strands of America's literary history by using the place of a work's publication, where the author was born or where he or she lived during a crucial period of his or her life, or some complex combination of these criteria, as the basis for a unified story of America's literary heritages. Still others have pointed out ideological commonalities among those works that have achieved canonical status that serve, along with the critical presuppositions that are used to interpret those works, to maintain the very notion of a unified American literary tradition in spite of much evidence to the contrary.

I do not propose in the space of this introduction, or, for that matter, even in the rest of the book, to solve the problem of continuity that has haunted the field of early American studies since its inception and that will, we can be confident, continue to bedevil scholars for as long as such a field exists within the discipline. The use of figures of the East by those writers we have labeled as “American” represents simply another important and, heretofore, overlooked way of understanding the relationship between pre- and post-Revolutionary American writing. Figures of the East in early American literature provide no more of a master narrative that defines all of early American literature than did figures of the wilderness or the frontier. These figures of the East in colonial British American and early national writing do reveal a distinctive tradition of figurative language that begins in the formative years of colonization and continues unabated through what has been called the “flowering of narrative” in the middle of the nineteenth century. Put differently, one of the many ways the works I examine in what follows and, I would also suggest, any work produced during the period of this study mark themselves as American can be seen in the work done by the figures of the East used in the text. In the complex set of characteristics that distinguish the literary tradition of what we have come to call American literature, they share a bond in the way they represent the relationship between what they cast as the “East” and “West.”

We can see one way in which American writers’ relation to figures of the East would have been different when we look at some of the work done on figures of the East by scholars of British literature of the same period. So, for instance, Ros Ballaster convincingly demonstrates in *Fabulous Orient*s that we should read fictions of the Orient published in England from the late seventeenth through the eighteenth centuries in relation to the burgeoning expansion of Britain’s empire in India and the East more broadly. Our interpretation of these tales, Ballaster insists, must take into account England’s status in the world community as a tiny island nation bent on extending its power across the globe to ever-more-distant communities. If Oriental tales published in Great Britain helped British readers imagine their own relation to empire differently, then those readers whose relation to empire was different before they even picked up the magazine and began to read would have necessarily taken different meanings from those very same words. For representations of the “East” must have born at least some subtle trace, for British American and early national readers, of the commercial, political, military, and economic interests those in Great Britain, British America, and the United States harbored in this region of the globe. But the expansion of the empire looked very different, and indeed, meant

something very different, to readers in London than to readers in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and, to be sure, the even more remote outposts of Great Britain's empire in North America. The relation of these British American readers to the most basic laws and liberties associated with Great Britain differed from those of readers in London, Oxford, or Exeter simply because of where they lived. If where you were on the globe helped define your status within Great Britain, then where you were on the globe necessarily defined your relation to even those imaginary representations of every other place on the globe.<sup>35</sup>

British American and even early national readers thus occupied a triangulated relationship to figures of the East. Figures of the Orient would have been read in British America and the early United States in relation to Europe's position to the Orient. A wide range of recent scholarship demonstrates British American writers' "cultural dependence," to use Lawrence Buell's term, on standards of taste drawn from Britain in particular and Europe in general.<sup>36</sup> British America's cultural dependence on Great Britain has been cited by Leonard Tennenhouse as one piece of evidence illustrating American literature's fundamentally diasporic nature; it has been used to demonstrate the distortion of a related literary tradition by Paul Giles; and Buell takes this dependence as evidence that America produces the world's very first postcolonial literature.<sup>37</sup> However one explains this dependence, though, scholars from a wide variety of methodological approaches agree that British American writers kept their glance firmly fixed on the mother country across the Atlantic for guidance on cultural and aesthetic matters, even if they often claimed to reject what the Old World had to offer. Their relation to the figure of the Orient, then, was necessarily triangulated by Europe's relation with the Orient, a triangulation that marked British Americans as necessarily different from those in Europe whom they sought to emulate. The works examined in the chapters that follow, then, are American—at least in part—because of the way they ask their readers to imagine themselves in relation to the figurative category of the geographical "East," and, in this way, these figures of the East provide one significant foundation among many for a distinctly American literary tradition. The "Eastern imaginary," the sometimes contradictory but nevertheless systematic ways in which the East was imagined, was different, in other words, in British America during the years of this study than in Great Britain.

This triangulated relation to an East invested with great cultural power did more than simply help British American writers address their fear of provinciality, their fear that those in Europe were absolutely right that America had no legitimate claims to civilized status. Their use of these

figures in the hopes of establishing their own cultural *bona fides* offered readers in the colonies and early United States—and even, in some cases, England and the rest of Europe—new ways of imagining the relation between East and West. This new way of organizing the world, this new way of organizing the set of figures that constituted the symbolic spatial economy of the period, offered a new shape to economy that cast Europe as the cultural, economic, and political center of the globe. For America to gain in status, the East must be downgraded in stature. In becoming more like the East to please its so-called betters in Europe, America drains power from the East as Europe becomes even more firmly situated in the center of global power and prestige. For Europe and America to become more important in the symbolic spatial economy, the East must be displaced. All things, in this new symbolic universe, emanated from a European center. Europe occupied the center of a globe rather than its former position at the very edge of relevance and power.

Given the extraordinary number of such figures contained in the archive of British American and early national writing, I make no claims that this study represents a comprehensive description of the varied uses of figures related to the East in the period. Nor do I aim to map out a linear narrative of historical development in the use of what is an extraordinary variety of figures carrying a wide range of associations that extends approximately one hundred and fifty years. Instead, I offer case studies of four especially provocative uses of figures of the East that, upon close, textual analysis, harbor important implications for our understanding of the formation of a distinctly American literature within what we commonly recognize as American culture. I will discuss the implications in more detail in the epilogue, but, for now, suffice it to say that close attention to figures of the East in these instances forces us to rethink just how seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and even nineteenth-century American writers sought to demonstrate the significance of American social environments. From the start, they looked to the East, rather than simply either to the land before them or to hallmarks of European refinement, for the terms through which they should be judged. American writers' sense of themselves as members of a distinct community grows as much, in other words, out of the use of figures of the East as it does out of any encounters with the environment, real or imagined, or any effort to adapt European models of cultural refinement. The East, in other words, plays a key role in the story of the emergence of a distinctively American set of literary traditions.

I have chosen to offer case studies of four provocative instances rather than offer a catalog that neatly divides the use of such figures into discrete



categories for several reasons. First of all, such a comprehensive approach would be virtually impossible for one scholar to accomplish given the extraordinary number of figures in the archive. Part of the goal of my book is to demonstrate to scholars that such figures exist in the first place and are important. Second, I believe the best way to interest literary scholars—as opposed to, say, historians—in this archive is to demonstrate the figurative richness of the material and its relevance to important issues in the study of American literature. This simply cannot be done in an “inventory.”

Each chapter thus makes its case by marshalling evidence drawn primarily from a close reading of the language of the text under analysis. These close readings of literary texts, though, occur only after first situating the specific work in the context of its production, distribution, imagined audience, and/or genre, historical factors that scholars working on the history of the book in the early modern Atlantic world have taught us are particularly important in understanding texts of the period. My decision to employ a methodology that relies primarily if not exclusively on figurative rather than more traditional “historical” evidence grows out of my conviction that, in the words of Henri Lefebvre, “[r]epresentations of space . . . have a substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space.”<sup>38</sup> Far from ignoring or dismissing the historical, though, such an approach takes literature—and all practices of representation—as a crucial component in the production of history rather than as merely reflective of the political, social, economic, and other so-called historical events and phenomena. For such an emphasis on figurative analysis allows us to see the birth of the very categories historical actors developed to understand the world around them. “If,” to return to Lefebvre, “space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with *history*.”<sup>39</sup> Historical events such as the Navigation Acts passed by Britain’s Parliament in the eighteenth century, for instance, or the dramatic political and social events that occurred in India in the centuries covered by this study play an important role as well in the production of those categories colonial British Americans used to experience their world. When the evidence has indicated that historical events played a role in the way the writers discussed in this book figured what they considered the “East,” such events have been included in the analysis.

Each of my four chapters focuses on a single author’s use of figures relating to places, peoples, and things understood as Eastern at the time of the literary work’s production and/or circulation. The four authors whose work I have chosen to analyze—Anne Bradstreet, James Kirkpatrick, Benjamin Franklin, and Edgar Allan Poe—offer glimpses into important historical periods, geographic regions, cultural formations, and aesthetic

developments that are encompassed by an object of study, American literature before 1850, that not only includes many disparate regions but also spans the very historical period that gave birth to distinctly modern ways of organizing the world. These authors include a female member of the highest ranks of seventeenth-century New England society, a devout Christian, whom critics have labeled the first American author; a writer of relatively modest social background living in the staple colonies who wrote poems celebrating Britain's use of the colonies for commercial gain before returning to England to gain fame as a physician; a businessman from the mid-Atlantic whose work as a printer served as a prelude to his crucial role in British America's Revolution for independence; and an author born in Boston, and raised in Virginia, who would challenge efforts to evaluate literature using nationalist standards during the period of America's first great literary productions. While these authors are drawn from a range of geographic regions and historical periods, and while their works cover a variety of topics and genres, the work of three of these four has come to play a prominent role in the way we tell the story of America's literary history. I have chosen to focus so much attention on such canonical authors from some of the most important periods in early American literary history in order to demonstrate how figures of the East—so long neglected in our study of this literature—in fact serve vital literary functions in writings by authors who have come to be understood as crucial to the emergence of a distinctly American literature.

Chapter 1 focuses on the New England poet Anne Bradstreet (c. 1612–72). Bradstreet's writings demonstrate more clearly than those of any other colonial British American writer how references to the East in early American writing have been hiding in plain sight. Bradstreet wrote far more about the East than she did about any other topic, yet figures of the East in her poetry have received virtually no scholarly attention. Careful attention to two of her poems, "The Four Monarchies" and "An Elegie Upon that Honourable and Renowned Knight Sir Philip Sidney," shows how Bradstreet ties colonial British Americans to the East and, in so doing, brings colonial British America into the realm of civilized nations. Bradstreet rests the colonists' claims to civilized status on the bodily ties her poems establish between Alexander the Great and colonial British Americans. As part of the same imagined body as the great conqueror, Britain's American colonists share in the exalted social status Alexander gains from his Eastern conquests.

In order to demonstrate that figures of the East played a role in writing from the colonies to New England's south, we turn our attention to

commercial images associated with the East that can be found in materials relating to the promotion of Georgia in the 1730s and early 1740s. Chapter 2 focuses primarily on “An Address to James Oglethorpe, Esq” (first published in 1732–33), written by James Kirkpatrick (c. 1700–1770) in support of the new colony’s efforts to paint itself as a rich source of commercial goods that were associated with China and India. In its vision of a Georgia overflowing with Eastern goods, Kirkpatrick’s poem collapses the very distinction between the geographic East and West. The collapse elevates, the chapter argues, what British America has to offer the world, for it suggests that America gains its value by helping Britain look more civilized by allowing it to look more “Eastern. The East occupies the position in this poem of the place to be emulated, of the transcendent signified that seems to provide the ultimate source of value, and the poem quite pointedly and explicitly asks us to imagine America’s value in relation to what it classifies as “Chinese” and/or “Eastern” standards and objects rather than in terms, either, of the distinctive products to be found in the American environment or of some resemblance to the mother country of Great Britain.

While the first two chapters investigate writings from colonial British America, the third chapter focuses on late-eighteenth-century literature in circulation at the moment of the United States’ birth as a political entity by examining the Oriental tales written by Benjamin Franklin. Franklin’s “Eastern tales” use the ideas, images, and conceptions linked to the category of the “East” to define the “human” itself, a “human” that is understood in opposition to one of the key terms of the Enlightenment with which Franklin is so often associated: reason. Franklin suggests that the notion of “reason” on which Americans operate has the curious effect of leading to uncivilized behavior, and he offers a model of civilized behavior for Americans to emulate drawn from a specifically Orientalized East. Thus the truly civilized human in Franklin’s Oriental tales is an Eastern man.

The final chapter suggests one way in which figures of the East provide the glue that binds America’s colonial and national periods of literary production together. Focusing on Edgar Allan Poe’s spoof of *The Arabian Nights*, “The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade,” the chapter argues that Poe casts what he considers an Eastern aesthetic as superior to aesthetic theories trumpeted by American literary nationalists. Scheherazade’s aesthetic theory becomes the model for American literature to emulate, a model that, if followed, would allow American aesthetic products to be considered in the same breath as those of more civilized communities. In suggesting that this superior, Orientalized vision of literature could serve as a model for the United States, Poe’s story offers a way for American cul-

ture to be included in the category of civilized nations by having American aesthetic theory become more Oriental.<sup>40</sup>



BY WAY OF concluding these introductory remarks, let me briefly return to Perry Miller's attempts to cleanse America's seemingly most American nineteenth-century writers of their Oriental influences. Miller's generation of scholars sought to create a space for American literature in the university, a place that would be valuable in its own right, as derivative of traditions to be found nowhere else in the world. Miller asks us to ignore the Oriental influence on American Transcendentalism as a way of establishing a continuity between pre- and post-Revolutionary literature that allows for American literature to stand, as it were, on its own. A careful examination of the archives of British American writing tells us that Miller—and those who wrote in support of his project—had it backwards. A close examination of the writings of this field demonstrates the need to highlight rather than ignore references to what the colonists and citizens of the new nation would have called the "East." In place of Miller's trajectory of Edwards to Emerson, then, I offer an alternate line of descent in American literary history. At least for the pages of this book, I would like us to imagine American literature flowing from Bradstreet to Poe—from, that is, the poetry produced by one of seventeenth-century New England's most orthodox Puritan thinkers, for whom poetry served as a means of glorifying God, to the nineteenth-century writings of a man who championed the production of art for art's sake amidst accusations of insanity, ill-mannered behavior, drug abuse, and atheism. These two writers share a common figurative bond that stretches across the centuries and ideologies, and they stand as representatives of a bond that can be found in the literature of the period in general.