

On August 2, 2007, a Russian submarine descended 14,000 feet at the North Pole and planted a titanium flag on the Arctic seafloor, a move that one press report described as effectively “fir[ing] the starting gun on the world’s last colonial scramble.”¹ Rich in oil and gas, the Arctic and its resources have become increasingly accessible as the polar ice caps melt, and Russia’s actions were designed to lay the groundwork for its claim to 460,000 square miles of submerged land. The flag planting, however symbolic, sparked consternation from other nations presuming rights to Arctic territory, including the United States, Canada, Norway, and Denmark. “This isn’t the 15th century,” the foreign minister of Canada, Peter McKay, said in response to Russia’s move. “You can’t go around the world and just plant flags and say: ‘We’re claiming this territory.’”² The Canadian minister’s objection to Russia’s claim is striking considering how often in the past six centuries states have followed up symbolic possessive gestures with material ones; claiming resources both on and under the surface has ever been a central project of empire.

The language of colonial expansion cited by the Canadian foreign minister casts the incident in ethical and political terms that are compelling, if somewhat misleading. The usual forms of economically grounded colonialism presume a drive to accumulate resources under the aegis of claiming territory. But in the geophysical spaces of the poles, such colonialism is not only more hypothetical but in fact virtual, predicated on an economy of return that lies in the realm of the speculative (much as it was in the nineteenth century, as I will discuss in what follows). The circumpolar regions, that is, have not to

date offered up any significant products—much less goods—for use or exchange beyond the spheres of scientific research and the imagination. One year after the Russian claim, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) released a report that noted, “A large portion of the remaining global endowment of oil and gas resources has long been *thought* to exist in the high northern latitudes of Russia, Norway, Greenland, United States, and Canada” (emphasis mine). These speculative resources—including diamonds and gold, mainstays of colonial interest—are deemed “technically recoverable” by the USGS, with no guaranteed return.³

While the titanium Russian flag on the Arctic seafloor does indeed make a statement, this statement cannot possibly compel a response by an indigenous population. Even though there are peoples who have for centuries lived north of the Arctic Circle, the absence of land at the North Pole itself means that Russia’s move claimed, above the seabed substrate, only water or ice rather than territory or citizens. The condemnation of Russia’s imperial act was made by rival nations, not by the subjected territory itself. What is more, the flag remains at an invisible remove from the world, seen only through the undersea video taken by expedition members. In the footage, the claw of a robotic arm embeds the flag in the seafloor. The video still that illustrated many media reports of the claim staking was taken through a rounded camera lens, bounded by black, so the North Pole in its view resembles a sphere seen from space. “It’s like putting a flag on the moon,” a Russian official proclaimed, and the comparison is pointed: the submersible that planted the flag was named *Mir 1*, just as Russia’s now-decommissioned space station was named *Mir*, after the Russian word meaning *peace* or *world*.⁴

These various contexts frame how Russia’s claim to the Arctic was intended: a self-consciously imperialist gesture relying on symbolic territorial demarcations whose history, as the Canadian foreign minister reminds us, extends for centuries. The stakes of this flag planting (both figurative and titanium) are planetary: both Russia’s act and the response to it emerge from a late capitalist tendency to pursue economic ends as if independent of political means. The Russian claim staking constituted a gesture of economic expansion in the realm of potential natural resources, rather than an act of political expansion based on territorial acquisition. The distinction between this form of economic expansion and colonialism’s usually coextensive political

expansion lies less in how the various raw materials (whether mineral, vegetable, animal, or human) are exploited than in how the very existence of such raw materials can be measured. Instead of producing displacement of (or violence to) indigenous populations, Russia's move invites questions about the fate of resources in the polar regions and, by extension, throughout the planet. In marking the end of the earth, and doing so at the verge of invisibility, Russia also marks the finitude of our resources. In many ways Russia's claim and the objections to it both by invested states and by environmentalists help to illuminate the critical distinction between the globe and the planet as units of analysis. If, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has suggested, globalist discourse presumes the presence of capital exchange systems, then a planetary understanding might instead place ecological, geological, or environmental systems at the center of inquiry.⁵

In this essay my interest in the polar regions is oriented toward the vision of the early nineteenth-century theorist John Cleves Symmes (1779–1829), an American War of 1812 veteran who believed the earth was hollow, open at the North and South Poles, and habitable inside. Symmes dedicated his life to his theory of concentric spheres, which had some surprising traction amid general ridicule; he advocated his thesis in newspaper missives and on the lecture circuit. His protégé, Jeremiah Reynolds, became a successful advocate for polar exploration and for Charles Wilkes's United States Exploring Expedition, as well as a literary inspiration for Edgar Allan Poe. Symmes's theories are also known today through their expression in hollow-earth fiction: originally, and most provocatively, in *Symzonia* (1820), a parodic fictional narrative that describes an expedition (after Symmes's "sublime theory")⁶ to the earth's core via the South Pole. The public response both to Symmes's lecture appearances and to *Symzonia* presumes—even stipulates—an imperial drive to polar exploration; this nationalist focus is widely seen in Anglo-American polar exploration and literary culture.

But as I have begun to suggest, the polar regions never fully resonate in the register of the nation, as Symmes himself recognized. His theories and their deployment invite us instead to imagine what this field of resonance might look like: not the traffic and imperial competition between nation-states but the extranational zones of material and imaginative resources, which Symmes referred to as the planetary space of the *verge*. The verge is a spatial concept Symmes repeat-

edly invoked to describe the circumpolar regions; for him, the verge is the indeterminate, transitional space between the external and internal worlds—a polar version of the littoral. *Verge* is a term that can accommodate a variety of meanings: in addition to its familiar sense as a boundary, an edging limit or precinct, the word can also refer to a rod or pole, a wand of authority (*OED*). Throughout his writings Symmes's use of the term keeps both senses in play: fixed cartographic pole and expansive horizon of potential, as in Russia's recent imperial ambition. A planetary notion of the verge, in this context, can identify speculative economies whose circulation does not proceed along clearly demarcated routes of exchange between states, or rest on guaranteed returns, but is instead organized around shifting extra-national spheres of material and imaginative resources, the convergence point of various elements. This is precisely the critical challenge presented by the polar regions in their abstraction from national or global systems, their persistent exteriority to networks of human exchange.⁷

But theories of planetarity—whether those of today or of Symmes's nineteenth-century vision, as I will discuss below—still have a historical specificity. My interest is in structuring a conversation about planetarity around a polar-derived notion of resources that can encompass more than, for example, the oil or gas sought by Russia under the North Pole or, for that matter, the long history of science-based polar exploration. From the ancient Greek notion of Ultima Thule forward, the polar regions have been gravitational points for the imagination, both for their atmospheric and geophysical particularities and because the early histories of their exploration had demonstrated that the polar regions would offer comparatively few material resources relative to the usual expectations of colonialism. As a result, polar voyaging has always been speculative, has always verged on extremity. Symmes's vision of a hollow earth composed of concentric spheres, accessible through the poles, bisected the plane of modernity's polar imaginaries. Reading Symmes reminds us that the polar regions can refract conversations about planetarity along unexpected trajectories. And in suggesting how “superficial” our planetary imaginations have been, in both playful and potentially resonant ways, Symmes's theories invite us to reorient the loci of critical attention to humans and resources on the globe. The polar regions hold our interest not just as environments that have been unresponsive to usual manners of

occupancy, locomotion, and development, but also as imaginative and critical resources for visionary reorientation. What Symmes's vision of polar exploration offers is a caution that new frontiers for exploration—whether motivated by political, economic, environmental, scientific, or literary imperatives—are not just situated on a broadening planar field; like the “great northern trap door” facetiously invoked in a contemporary response to Symmes, we might understand the objects of literary critical study to be found in a new dimension.⁸

State-sponsored interest in the Arctic, as well as in Antarctica, has not tended to follow the traditional arcs of colonial or imperial expansion. Science has been the primary organizing force for polar exploration in the past 250 years, although of course scientific expeditions were organized by states that took a nationalist interest in the results. The North and South Poles have captivated popular attention in Europe and the United States ever since early modern attempts to find a Northwest Passage and the voyages south that followed in the wake of James Cook's 1772–75 circumnavigation of Antarctica. Although the poles themselves were flagged in the early twentieth century (the North by Robert Peary in 1909, although his claims are now discredited; the South by Roald Amundsen in 1911), the force of this imaginative and imperial attention was felt most keenly in the nineteenth century, when dozens of polar missions were launched. And still polar travel continues to hold a claim on the imagination and on research agendas today. The urgency of climate change has compelled all the more awareness of the polar regions as environmental barometers, material resources, and political stakes. Academic attention to polar exploration, and to the writing produced by polar voyagers themselves, has focused on the ways in which the natural antagonism of polar conditions has been rendered in figurative language. Literary scholars have marked the persistence of polar metaphors in fiction, with special emphasis on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), and Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), the plots of which draw explicitly from the narratives and circumstances of the polar missions launched during the time of the novels' publications.⁹ More recently, some scholars have approached the Arctic and Antarctic as physical and imaginative spaces responsive to methodologies adapted from other critical conversations.¹⁰

But as I have begun to suggest, we should be cautious about applying current models of empire, colonialism, or capital exchange to polar

exploration and its literature. There are incompatibilities analogous to the representational and historical unsuitability of the titanium Russian flag on the Arctic seafloor: both mark the point where the hostilities and histories of nature and nation-states meet, but the environment there is inhospitable to such inscriptions, despite the real resources potentially at stake. Too cold, remote, inaccessible, and sparsely inhabited, the poles have offered an inadequate harbor for colonialist missions and scholarly exploration alike. As I propose in this essay, we might derive new critical approaches from the outlandishness—in theory and in fact—of the Arctic and Antarctic regions.

My interest is in exploring the difference in resources, both material and critical, presented by polar spaces. By resources I refer both to the ecological substance of the polar regions, in their remove from predictable routes and terms of exchange, and to the imaginative and literary outcomes of polar exploration, which themselves did not follow recognizable circuits. Although scholars have reoriented nation-based nineteenth-century studies along hemispheric or oceanic axes, such transnational work has not yet extended to the polar regions. My aim is not to designate the poles as the final frontier of US Americanist research; such a claim would constitute an unintended replication of nineteenth-century teleology. The abstraction of the polar regions from geopolitical business as usual suggests the ecological and critical possibilities inherent in taking a nonproprietary attitude toward resources, one that echoes recent calls to reorganize critical thinking from a planetary perspective.

In the exceptional barrenness that has been described as the polar “wastes,” a littoral space absent the people, land, commerce, or states that constitute the usual interests of Americanists, there is an opportunity to test the limits of the terms and theories brought to bear in transnational work. The face of blankness seemingly presented to the world by the North and South Poles should not be perceived as metaphorical (as it has been, for example, in analyses of the baffling ending of Poe’s *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*) but as a geophysical given. In considering the cultural and economic status of global exchange at the ends of the earth—and in the face of a resurgence of Northwest Passage discourse today—I argue that we should interrogate what constitutes *resources* in a planetary order.

Symmes's Hole

Symmes maintained that the earth was hollow and composed of concentric spheres that opened at the North and South Poles to reveal a habitable core. He first detailed his ideas in an 1818 manifesto distributed to five hundred institutions of learning and widely reprinted in newspapers, and he advocated polar exploration until his death. Although Symmes was commonly ridiculed—the phrase *Symmes's Hole* became a nineteenth-century synonym for a folly—some of his theories were tested by Arctic explorers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly the belief in a warm, open polar sea. The circular in which Symmes first detailed his ideas appeared in US newspapers in April 1818 and was addressed “TO ALL THE WORLD!” Symmes’s language in his first brief manifesto relies more on the rhetoric of personal conviction than on that of scientific theory or even scientific speculation; it also appeals more to cosmopolitan affiliations than to national ones: “I declare the earth is hollow,” Symmes writes in the circular. “I pledge my life in support of this truth, and am ready to explore the hollow, if the world will support and aid me in the undertaking.” The planned exploration, he continues, should involve “one hundred brave companions, well equipped, [who will] start from Siberia in the fall season, with Reindeer and slays, on the ice of the frozen sea. . . . I engage we find warm and rich land, stocked with thrifty vegetables and animals if not men” (see fig. 1).¹¹ Symmes’s description of the potential resources to be found on the expedition as “thrifty” indicates, in his now-rare usage of the word, that they are flourishing rather than parsimonious. He imagines a “rich” core, “stocked” with living reserves. But unlike other Edenic-minded voyages of “discovery,” Symmes’s proposed mission is explicitly collaborative and planetary in scope. The “WORLD” addressed in his manifesto is not being put on notice that the United States will seek to claim such resources (indeed, the names *America* and *United States* do not even appear in the statement); rather, the world is invited to back the endeavor in common.

Symmes’s early career did not necessarily predict his global interests and theoretical orientation. Although he was born in New Jersey, he lived most of his life on the frontier near the Ohio River valley; at one point in 1816 he maintained a garrison in St. Louis, Missouri, that traded with the Fox Indians. He had served as an officer in the War of 1812 and retained the honorific of “Captain” throughout his polar writ-

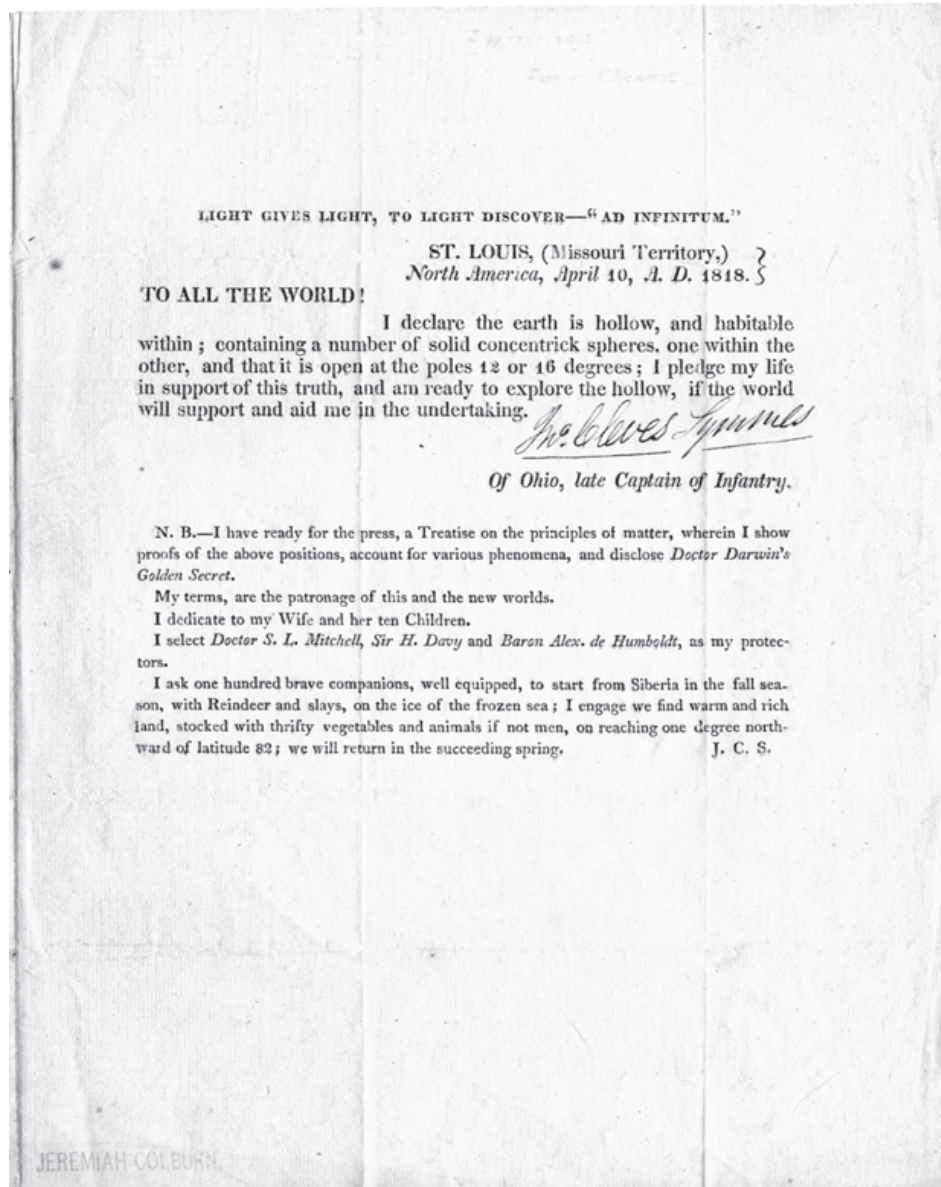


Figure 1 John Cleves Symmes's initial circular, *Light Gives Light, to Light Discover—"Ad Infinitum"* (St. Louis, MO: self-published, 1818.) Courtesy American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA.

ings. At the time he began issuing his missives Symmes was living in Newport, Kentucky—a town of 413 people in 1810, far from scientific and political centers. Nevertheless, he found sympathetic friends at home and an audience in Washington. (In part this may be attributed to family connections; Symmes was a nephew of the Ohioan by

the same name who owned the Miami Purchase and had founded Cincinnati, and his cousin married the future president William Henry Harrison.) Several petitions on his behalf were submitted to Congress between 1822 and 1824, urging an expedition to the “icy hoop” that ringed the poles. As one such proposal affirmed, “Captain John Cleves Symmes, late of the United States Army, who professes to have originated a new theory of the earth, which may be verified by a voyage to the North, will be a suitable person (assisted by men of science and experience) to be intrusted with the conduct of such an expedition. . . . There appear to be many extraordinary circumstances, or phenomena, pervading the Arctic and Antarctic regions, which strongly indicate something beyond the Polar circles worthy of our attention and research.”¹² Symmes himself did not invoke national pride or competition in the early years of his agitation for a polar mission, yet Congress and the press recognized how such a venture could speak to both “national honor and public interest”; one summary of the congressional debate saw in Symmes’s theory the potential “not only of making new discoveries, in Geography, Natural History, Geology, and Astronomy, but of opening new sources of trade and commerce.”¹³ Indeed, part of the congressional debate centered on whether the motion should be referred to the Committee of Foreign Relations or to the Committee on Commerce. These petitions were tabled, but Symmes’s evocative image of a distant polar world stayed in circulation through literary and commercial interest in polar voyaging.

In his subsequent manifestos and newspaper writings Symmes continued to eschew nationalist language. In calling for the “support and aid” of “ALL THE WORLD” in his initial proclamation and thereafter, in fact, he professes interest in a cooperative venture to the earth’s hollow core. Practitioners of hemispheric American studies should note that the dateline location for his initial circular is specified, in fact, as “North America.” Symmes asks the world to endorse his venture, and in planning a departure point in Siberia rather than in North America, he displays the supranational vision he would maintain in lectures and writings in support of his theories. In one such newspaper letter widely published in 1819, Symmes writes that he relies on the hope of patronage from abroad: “I calculate on the good offices of G. Britain and France, for they nurse and patronize the sciences with ardor. . . . From the Emperor of Russia, so well known as a patron of scientific enterprize, I flatter myself with much support.”¹⁴ His embrace

of international sponsorship was likely due, in part, to a lack of support from his domestic audience. But it is notable that throughout his writings (which come to us directly only from these newspaper missives, as he never himself collected the theories into a book), Symmes preserved a planetary outlook. Literally, in most of his writing: his missives were largely scientific reflections on the physical properties of the earth and the polar verge more specifically, as the hortatory rhetoric of the initial manifesto was followed up by essays on the internal world's spherical properties, geometry, and weather, and—of primary concern to the theory's skeptics—how it would receive light.¹⁵

The scientific work of an international trio of luminaries would support him in his venture, Symmes avers in his circular, writing, "I select *Doctor S. L. Mitchell, Sir H. Davy and Baron Alex. de Humboldt*, as my protectors."¹⁶ He refers here to Prussian Alexander von Humboldt, the famous scientific geographer and traveler; Humphrey Davy, the eminent English chemist (and proponent of the scientific method); and Samuel L. Mitchill (whose name Symmes misspells), a well-known American naturalist. In the manifesto Symmes also cites Dr. Erasmus Darwin, the naturalist grandfather of Charles whose work inspired many of the British Romantic poets. In doing so, Symmes echoes the opening pages of *Frankenstein*, which was also published in 1818, a few months before he circulated his first manifesto.¹⁷ The opening line of Shelley's preface mentions Erasmus Darwin's theories of electromagnetism, and the novel's frame narrative features sea captain Robert Walton, who is himself on a polar mission to seek a warm, open sea at the North Pole. He tries "in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to [Walton's] imagination as the region of beauty and delight."¹⁸ If Symmes shared with Shelley an interest in Darwin's ideas of electromagnetism, he, like Walton, rejected the Creature's conclusion that the North Pole was a place of bleakness and waste; both thought the warm, open polar sea would generate bounty both material and imaginative.

Symmes appealed to other scientists as well, sending updates and asking for responses to his theories. In a draft letter to the geologists of the American Philosophical Society in 1821 Symmes writes, "I earnestly request and desire the geologists of the day (in whatever quarter of the world) to declare publicly for or against my new Theory relative to the Earth, & other planets."¹⁹ Of the worldwide scientific men to whom he appealed, Symmes seems to have been publicly

endorsed by only his countryman Samuel Mitchill, who responded to this call with a tolerantly supportive letter circulated to the newspapers: “How rare and extraordinary would it be to converse with you, on your reappearance from the internal worlds! I told Capt. Lewis and Capt. Riley, on the return of the former from the northwest coast of America, and the latter from the frightful deserts of Africa, that I beheld them as, in some sort, visitors from another sphere.”²⁰ Mitchill here invokes Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and James Riley, an American sea captain whose memoir of slavery on the African Barbary Coast was a best seller. His stress is on the otherworldliness of their travels, not their political outcome; Mitchill too grasps the planetary possibilities in visiting “another sphere,” returning from the verge of global exile.

Mitchill’s new-world vision was picked up by others as well. In Symmes’s persistent belief in a supposedly fantastic inner world, many of his contemporaries saw an analogy to Christopher Columbus. This comparison registers in several dimensions that are not as wholly aligned with a colonialist comparison as we might expect. Like Columbus, Symmes is supposed to be in grave error, although some saw his preparation as more thorough than the Genoan’s: “Every one who hears of Capt. Symmes,” one observer wrote, “will readily acknowledge that he has collected a greater mass of facts to support his theory than Columbus had when he propagated the doctrine of the existence of another continent.”²¹ Symmes also shares with him a need for financial support: like Columbus, he is a man “of the greatest genius and enterprise” who has “generally at last come to want.”²² But also as with Columbus, some observers believed that his irrational and visionary obsession had the potential to afford access to a new sphere and its resources. As Symmes’s case was being made in Congress, the *City Gazette* of Charleston editorialized:

Capt. Symmes may still discover something. In seeking for the ends of the earth, which the British have been seeking for years past, he may, perhaps, find some of its features never before seen by mortal eye. In chasing a phantom he may hit upon a reality. In searching for the *unknowable* (to use a term of Bacon’s) he may discover what has been hitherto *unknown*; some new Island, some undiscovered Sea, some Northwest-by-North Passage or Inlet, some Phenomena of Nature, some inhabitants of the Polar Regions, nay even the Poles

themselves. Let us not adhere so closely to the sordid doctrine—“all for Gain and nothing for Grace.”—Look at past enterprizes: Columbus went in search of a short passage to the East Indies; he found it not—but he discovered a NEW WORLD. If capt. Symmes should sally forth, 'tis true he may fail, but the discomfiture will be his own: his sanguine imagination will have deceived him,—but if he succeed in enlarging the boundaries of Geographical knowledge, the glory will belong to the American Government and Nation.²³

Even though the *City Gazette* eventually arrives at the prospects for US glory to be found in polar exploration, much of the promise of Symmes's ideas is seen to lie in its potential expansion of knowledge, in all forms. By not striving “all for Gain,” the paper suggests, we might chance to perceive the “*unknown*.”

One of the more trenchant comparisons to Columbus came from those who noted that neither Symmes nor the Genoan had the support of his own people. As one newspaper pointed out, “Columbus' project met with no countenance from his own countrymen, and it was by the assistance of other countries that he was enabled to prosecute it to a glorious result. Who knows but Capt. Symmes' project may terminate in a similar manner under foreign patronage?”²⁴ We see here that the opportunity for national glory was of topmost appeal to most observers, despite Symmes's own lack of interest in such a state-based spur to polar exploration. Whereas his lectures presented his evidence in the form of a “mass of facts,” he left it to his critics to draw the conclusions. One report extrapolated from Symmes's data that the advantages of a polar expedition would include “the discovery of unknown Islands, and the better knowledge of those already laid down in maps, besides the opening of new channels for commercial pursuits in fur; a trade which yields a considerable revenue to the government.”²⁵ Within the context of three prominent British Arctic exploration ventures that had been initiated in that period (those led by John Ross [1818], William Parry [1819], and John Franklin [1819]), such proprietary interest is a predictable response—but again, it is not one to which Symmes himself made reference. When he did cite the Ross, Parry, or Franklin expeditions, he noted their climactic and geological observations in order to support his theory of the open water at the polar verge.

Yet few in Symmes's American audience received his call in a planetary spirit. Polar expeditions in subsequent decades were largely

nationalist in their missions, attending to his geographical theories while failing to heed his call to “ALL THE WORLD.” Symmes was so identified with national potentialities, in fact, that he was nominated for president in 1824—a surprising (and perhaps satirical) circumstance given the general mockery with which his work was received, and a historical footnote not previously remarked by scholars. This nomination emerged from “some remote part of—Virginia”;²⁶ the caucus in Kenhawa country produced the following resolution: “*Resolved*, That this meeting have full confidence in the talents, virtue, and integrity of CAPTAIN JOHN CLEVES SYMMES, as a philosopher, an explorer, a soldier and a scholar; as a friend to *useful* discoveries; and that we will use every honourable exertion to promote him to the Presidential chair.”²⁷ Some reports noted this nomination with bemusement—Symmes would of course be “decidedly friendly to *internal* improvement,” the *New-Hampshire Patriot* joked—but the nomination gained little traction.²⁸ (The “remote” Virginia delegates ended up throwing their support to Henry Clay.) The emphasis on the potential usefulness of Symmes’s discoveries keeps alive his commitment to theoretical inquiry even as it acknowledges the primacy of the resources that exploration might offer.

While Symmes himself never published his theories in book form or produced writing for the public other than his missives, several disciples did so, including his contemporary James McBride, a fellow Ohioan. McBride compiled his newspaper writings (with added commentary) in *Symmes’s Theory of Concentric Spheres* (1826). He also crafted a wooden globe that displayed the open polar verge; this globe was on the podium at some of Symmes’s lectures in his final years. McBride’s editorial matter in the volume showcased a worry—again, one not present in Symmes’s own writing—that Americans will “remain idle and inactive” while “the English, the Russians, and the French, are making great exertions for the purpose of discovery, and the advancement of science.”²⁹ More visibly, a subscriber to Symmes’s theories—Reynolds, another Ohioan—became instrumental in promoting the nationalist possibilities of the hollow-earth theory for US polar exploration. Reynolds partnered with Symmes on the lecture circuit for several years, helping the older man when his health began to fail in the mid-1820s; his advocacy found eventual success in helping to launch Wilkes’s Exploring Expedition, the surveying mission that reached part of Antarctica. Reynolds’s influence also extended

to Poe, whose *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* reflects Symmes's and Reynolds's ideas.³⁰

Whereas Symmes was widely acknowledged to be a poor public speaker, Reynolds was charismatic and eloquent. Yet Symmes's inarticulateness was seen by audiences as an endorsement of his sincerity: "Never was there a man so little fitted for an imposter as Capt. Symmes. He has neither the graces of person, the charms of eloquence, the subtleties of genius or the depths of science, which are often pressed into the service of the impostor, and give plausibility to absurdities."³¹ Reynolds quickly eclipsed his mentor on the circuit as the elder man's health declined. The two men broke with each other a year or so before Symmes's death in 1829, Reynolds taking the lead in advocating polar exploration—but in very different terms than Symmes had originally laid out. Reynolds increasingly focused on the scientific advantage to be gained by polar voyaging, and he trumpeted these advantages in nationalist terms while simultaneously backing away from Symmes's hollow-earth claims.³² In a letter published widely in newspapers around the time of their falling-out, Reynolds clarified: "It is true, I formerly amused an audience, by an exposition of that novel doctrine, to the *authorship* of which I make no pretension, but have long since laid aside all speculative theories, and directed my energies and humble powers, to bring before Congress the importance of an enterprise, directly national in its character, practical in its views, and to be put solely under the direction of Government."³³ In the elevation of the "directly national," all possibilities for the "speculative" resources to be theorized at the poles are consigned by Reynolds to the realm of mere amusement.

Symmes's vision of a planetary understanding of the potential resources in the polar regions would die with him, for Reynolds continued to press a state-specific use for a warm, open polar sea. Writing in the *American Quarterly Review*, Reynolds imagined that at the South Pole an "anchor might be cast on the axis of the earth, our *eagle* and *star-spangled* banner unfurled and planted, and left to wave on the very pole itself."³⁴ The durability of British colonial strategies of flag planting and place naming were not lost on Reynolds, who continued: "The British have long taken the lead, in maritime discovery; the rivers, bays, promontories, and capes, of the North, bear the names of their Lords, their Dukes, and Admirals: Are there no discoveries to be made by Americans, that shall perpetuate the names and memo-

ries of our own distinguished citizens, statesmen, patriots, sages, and heroes?”³⁵ This was a rejection not just of Symmes’s extranational vision of collaboration but also of his geophysical theories: Symmes’s polar verge, open to the earth’s hollow, could present no fixed axis on which to plant a flag or star-spangled anchor.

Decades after Symmes’s death in 1829, his son Americus Vespuccius Symmes—whose name itself testifies to Symmes’s dedication to reproducing global exploration—helped to keep his father’s theories circulating among an increasingly derisive public. Interest in Symmes’s theories would revive in the 1870s, and in the 1880s Americus (by then a man in his seventies) would publish his own distillation of the holes-in-the-poles thesis, still characterized by an indeterminate geological verge (see fig. 2).³⁶ This resurgence can largely be attributed to the ongoing Arctic and Antarctic exploration projects launched every few years throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The nationalist focus of the late nineteenth-century expeditions was much sharper, and Americus Symmes’s own patriotic fervor likely reflects his historical moment.

For Americus, there was no doubt about the ends of his father’s proposed polar voyage. The elder Symmes, he argued, wished “to penetrate the girdle of everlasting ice which surrounds the pole, to sail into the interior of the earth, and to take possession of the glorious country to be found there, in the name of the United States.” Even though John Symmes’s initial circular called for the expedition to depart from Siberia, Americus insists on the statist ambition of his father’s theories: “He was full of patriotic desire that his own beloved country should have the glory and profit of the grand discoveries, which he never doubted would some day be made. He was so enthused with this love of country that when Russia tendered him the command of an expedition he declined, because he felt that it would be successful, and the glory thereof redound to that country and be denied to the United States.”³⁷ The claim that Symmes declined such an offer is not supported by any evidence that I have located and is contradicted by many newspaper reports in 1825.³⁸ An article published in the *New-Hampshire Republican* and elsewhere announced, “What has been often recommended has at length occurred—Capt. Symmes, who believes the earth contains an inhabited cavity, has been invited to join a European expedition for polar discoveries.—Captain Symmes has been invited by Count Romanzoff, of Russia, to join a North Pole expedition which the Count

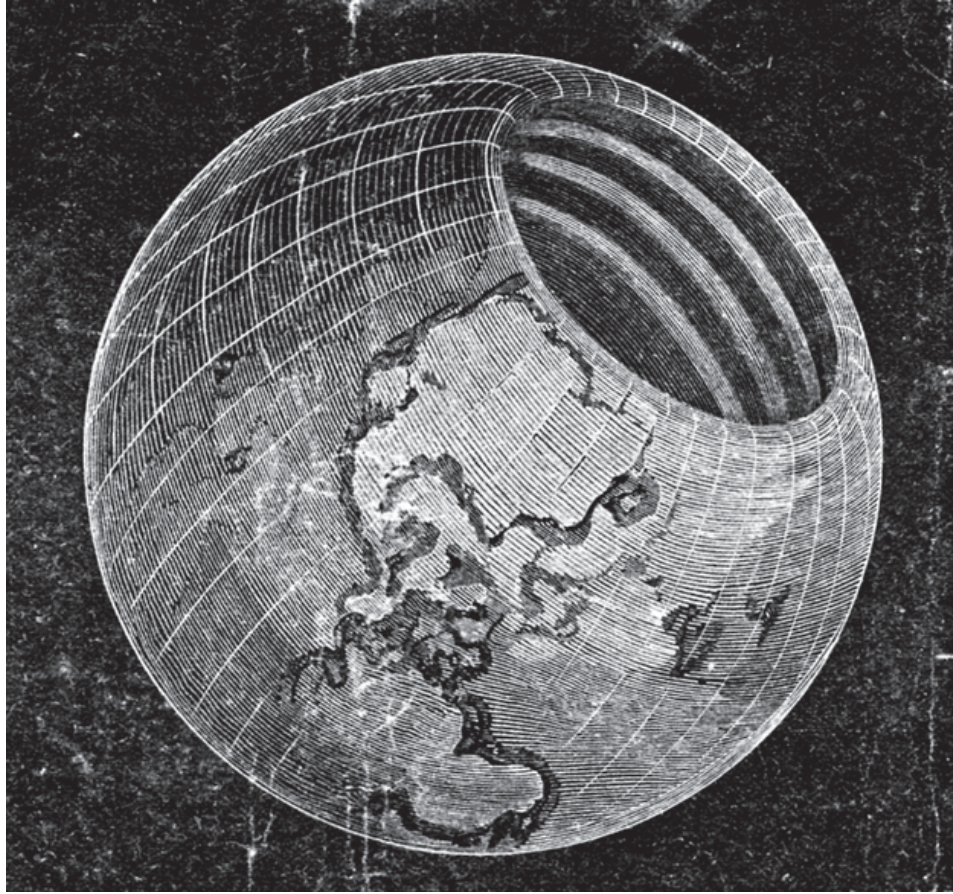


Figure 2 Americus Symmes, *The Symmes Theory of Concentric Spheres: Demonstrating That the Earth Is Hollow, Habitable within, and Widely Open about the Poles* (Louisville, KY: Bradley and Gilbert, 1878), 68. Courtesy American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

is projecting; the Captain has accepted the invitation.”³⁹ He was unable to join the Russian expedition, however, because he lacked funding for a polar outfit. Financial considerations had hampered Symmes’s ambitions earlier in his career as well; he had confessed in the *Cincinnati National Intelligencer* in 1819 that “if the world, or some national governments, do not furnish the means to explore, as I have asked, I can proceed but slowly with my investigations, for my pecuniary concerns have been so much neglected lately, that I shall have to lay aside, for a time, several new memoirs in a progressive state.”⁴⁰ In distinguishing the “world” from the “national governments” that might underwrite his planetary ambitions, Symmes marks the real-world limitations that his vision encounters in trying to move away from state-based endorse-

ments of the theoretical resources to be found in the speculative spaces beyond the verge of settlement or colony.

In imagining the earth to be hollow—a space on which conventional claims would not register—Symmes’s writings can be seen to propose a reorientation of his contemporaries’ understanding of the relationship between nation and exploration. Reading the literature of Arctic expeditions as well as hollow-earth fictions through Symmes offers a new dimension for understanding how the spaces of the Arctic have been appropriated in the service of nations. Symmes’s vision keeps alive the potentialities of polar resources in the service of planetary ends, and does so while still being mindful of the threat of state-sponsored, proprietary claims to the polar regions.

Beyond the Verge

Hollow-earth fiction traces its genealogy at least to the early modern period, and earlier if we include the underworlds of classical epics; its zenith, however, coincided with the polar expeditions launched in the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Strikingly, nearly all hollow-earth fictions set the North and/or South Poles as the entry points for the inner world. The earth’s core is accessible by way of an imagined warm, open polar sea beyond the ice caps. This was a widely held theory throughout the nineteenth century and was the presumption behind many polar expeditions. (One line of reasoning was that sea ice could form only in proximity to land—a theory itself later disproved—and as the North Pole was far from land, it therefore could not be ice-bound.) Three particularly well-known circumpolar missions were contemporaneous with Symmes’s early lectures and the publication of the fictional narrative *Symzonia*: the British Arctic/Northwest Passage explorations launched by Ross, Parry, and Franklin, the latter two of which produced popular narratives of the expeditions. They were acting under the orders of Sir John Barrow of the British Admiralty, who promoted exploration throughout his career and was himself a believer in an open polar sea beyond the ice.

Familiar works of nineteenth-century hollow-earth fiction include Poe’s *Narrative* and various of his short stories; Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864); Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Coming Race* (1870); James De Mille’s *Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (1888); and Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *At the Earth’s Core* (1914).⁴¹

The notion of a hollow earth is one of the constitutive tenets of Mormonism; Joseph Smith believed that the Lost Israelites were located in a balmy land at the North Pole, beyond the reach of ice. Some late nineteenth-century explorers, in fact, claimed the native inhabitants they encountered in northern Canada spoke Hebrew. In addition to Smith's writings, there are several nineteenth-century hollow-earth novels by Mormon Elders, including *The Inner World* (1886) by Frederick Culmer and *Beyond the Verge* (1896) by DeWitt Chipman. The majority of these fictions use Symmes's idea of "the verge" to describe the indeterminate space that forms the entrance to the earth's interior. For the most part, the line between external and internal—verge as boundary or outer limit, and verge as pole—is not sharply defined in these novels. Voyagers to the inner earth might notice less direct sunlight, or a change in vegetation or sea color; the line of demarcation is not clear.

The first of these hollow-earth fictions appeared two years after the publication of Symmes's first manifesto. *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (1820) is a first-person account that describes an imaginary voyage to the lands at the earth's core in explicit fulfillment of Symmes's ambitions. In many ways *Symzonia* takes the form of a typical sea narrative, a popular form whose appeal grew in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. In the narrative, Captain Adam Seaborn (to whose authorship the text is credited) assembles a crew on the pretense of a sealing expedition to the South Seas. He powers his ship by steam, decades before steam travel was practicable for long sea passages; surmounts the "icy hoop" near the South Pole (see fig. 3), finding warm seas beyond; and discovers a land inside the core ruled by a "Best Man" under the advisement of "the Good, the Wise, and the Useful." Seaborn names this land Symzonia, after the "sublime theory" of Symmes. The Symzonians have blinding white skin and make Seaborn and his American crewmen look "dark and hideous" by comparison; "I was not a white man," Seaborn writes, "compared with [them]" (107, 110).⁴² He is expelled by the Symzonians (or "Internals," as the "External" Seaborn calls them) when his expedition's commercial greed is revealed, and ultimately loses his cargo and all evidence of Symzonia once he returns to the External world.

Although the book has been misread as a "dull and earnest" narrative version of the holes-in-the-poles theory,⁴³ most critics now recognize that the author of *Symzonia* is engaged in an extended burlesque

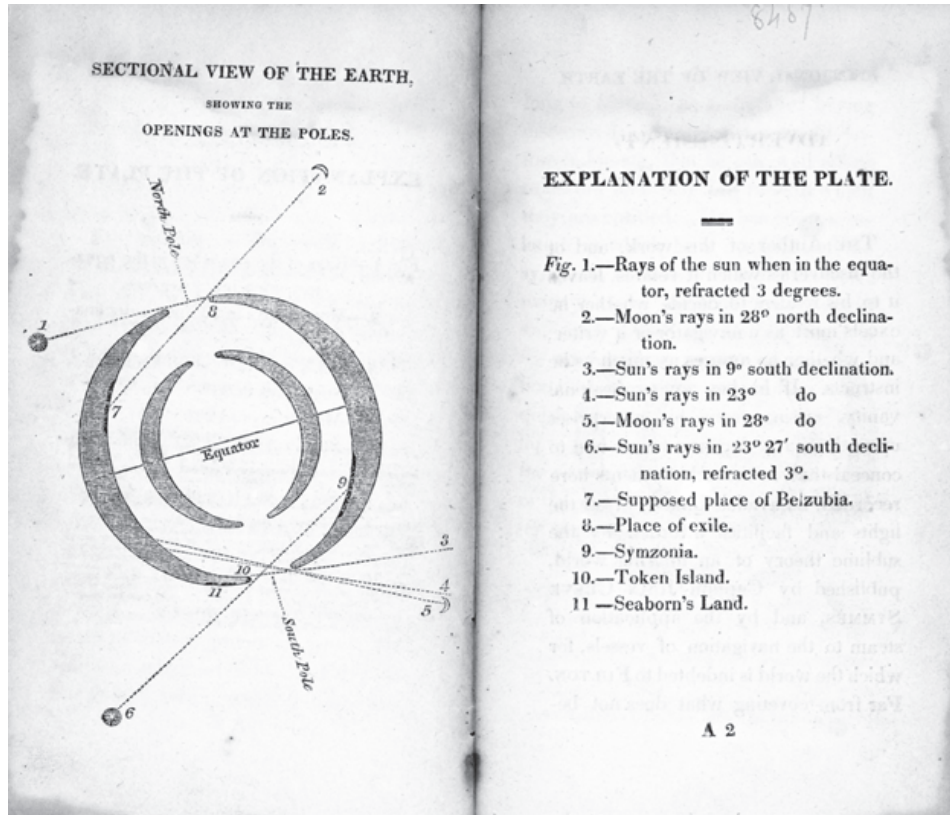


Figure 3 Sectional View of the Earth. Showing the Openings at the Poles. Adam Seaborn, *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (New York: J. Seymour, 1820). Courtesy Library Company of Philadelphia.

of the polar theories of Symmes and others; as Gretchen Murphy points out, the targets of the novel's satire are various and mobile.⁴⁴ The fictional narrative *Symzonia* is parodic, yes, but not of the outlandishness of Symmes's theories themselves. Instead, I argue, the novel critiques the manner in which Captain Seaborn translates Symmes's theories into the stale terms of imperialism. The result is a hollow misrecognition of the weird, expansive promise of thinking of holes at the poles, as Seaborn's actions throughout the narrative demonstrate. *Symzonia* is a critique of US and British imperialism and, to any reader of the genre of travel and exploration narratives of the nineteenth century, a jape at the genre of writing produced by imperial ventures. *Symzonia* mocks the universalist claims of science and the scientific revolution's promise of identifiable truth, as well as the cultivation of infinite resources. In undertaking his voyage of discovery, Seaborn

writes at the start of the narrative, he hopes to open “new fields” for “enterprise . . . , since the resources of the known world have been exhausted by research, its wealth monopolized, its wonders of curiosity explored, its every thing investigated and understood!” (13). This sense of the “exhaustion” of worldly resources has been a common trope both in Protestant eschatology and, even more relevantly, in the rhetoric of discovery and expansion. Concern over the exhaustion of the planet’s resources is all the more urgent in our present moment; it was of course the impetus for Russia’s North Pole claim in 2007 and its attendant geopolitical reverberations.

Symzonia reveals Seaborn to be well trained in the art of imperial possession, having mastered the doctrine of discovery, by which Christian nations claimed the right to ownership of the lands of non-Christian peoples. On discovering a new southern continent at the entrance to the South Pole, Seaborn draws up a manifesto of ownership. To ensure the deed’s visibility he orders it engraved on a sheet of copper—only to later bury the sheet, away from sight, under a boulder. To this land claim Seaborn appends a remarkable emblem, which he describes as follows: “a spread eagle at the top, and at the bottom a bank, with 100 dollar bills tumbling out of the doors and windows, to denote the amazing quantity and solidity of the wealth of my country” (74). In an age of bank failure, *Symzonia*’s contemporary readers would likely be skeptical of the image of a bank that bleeds overvalued notes. In fact, later in the narrative we learn that a Symzonian who had proposed a banking system analogous to that of the United States found himself condemned for contriving “to cheat the people, by causing perpetual fluctuations in the nominal price of things” (190). But Seaborn’s ceremony of imperial possession is not finished: after erecting a Liberty Pole and hoisting the American flag, Seaborn orders “a salute to be fired of one gun for every State.” At this command, his men are flummoxed, noting that new states “came so fast [they] could not keep the run of them.” Seaborn solves the problem by “telling them to fire away till they were tired of it, and finish off with a few squibs for the half-made States.” The sailors then proceed to get drunk, and Seaborn notes with satisfaction that they had “thus established the title of the United States to this newly discovered country, in the most incontestable manner, and strictly according to rule” (75).

While the narrative’s parodic aping of imperialism seems clear here, the few present-day scholars other than Murphy who have taken up

the narrative have been more interested in its influence on Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*—a different kind of appropriation. *Symzonia*'s contemporary readers, however, identified its satiric form, even when it was found to be unsuccessfully executed, as in a notice from the *Literary Gazette*: "It is, upon the whole, dull and uninteresting. A great deal might have been made out of the subject, for there is at least as much to satirize as in the age of Swift."⁴⁵ The *North American Review*, on the other hand, found that "the adventures of the worthy captain have a pleasing Gulliverian cast; and in point of authenticity will compare to great advantage with Sinbad the Sailor, [and] Robinson Crusoe."⁴⁶ The same review playfully ventriloquized the tone of *Symzonia*. Regretting that the "superficial taste of men" has caused most people to focus on the globe's surface rather than its interior, the *North American Review* is glad that these fertile "bottom" lands have been acquired in the name of the United States. The review appreciates how nationalist "discovery" works, noting, "It is well known that . . . all nations, for the first time discovered, are heathen, savage, and barbarous; of course wholly without right or claim to the land on which they live, of which the property immediately vests in fee simple and unqualified sovereignty in the discoverer;—who becomes authorized, to use an expressive phrase, to 'extinguish the Indian title,' in which process it commonly happens that the Indian is extinguished with it." But there may be reason to keep the so-called Internals around for a while, the *Review* concedes, if only to serve as a promising new market. "There is no reason to believe that the Internals will not be glad to eat flour, and wear Waltham shirtings, and smoke tobacco," the review reasons, for "it was ever a main feature of the benignant colonial policy, that the colony should feed and clothe itself from the mother country."⁴⁷ The *Review* finds the potential colonialist outcome of polar exploration to be as absurd in theory as in narrative practice; in this, Murphy sees a caution, finding that the *Review*'s "emphatic past tense evokes an indignant memory of American colonial dependence. . . . The US might unfortunately, in the eyes of this critic, follow in the footsteps of the mother country."⁴⁸

Indeed, *Symzonia* devotes a good deal of its middle third to casting the US government as an object of ridicule for the Symzonians. Seaborn finds himself repeatedly lying to the "Best Man" and his other hosts concerning the honesty and moral character of the men running the External world. Seaborn is ashamed not of the actual structure of

US government, but of its abuses, particularly “the means resorted to to obtain preferment” (148). The greed of his countrymen is a source of embarrassment to Seaborn, although this discomfort does not prevent him from calculating the External value of the products he finds in the Internal world. These products include a novel engine of war; clothing made from pressed spiderwebs; and an abundance of pearls, which are not valued by the Symzonians. Seaborn even secretly loads his pockets with pearls, in violation of the understanding he has reached with the Best Man not to disturb the resources of the Internal world.

But when Seaborn’s cupidity is revealed to the Symzonians, he and his crewmen are permanently banished. The Best Man lists the Americans’ offenses, among which he finds, Seaborn writes, “that we were guilty of enslaving our fellow-men for the purpose of procuring the means of gratifying our sensual appetites; that we were inordinately addicted to traffic, and sent out our people to the extreme parts of the external world to procure, by exchange, or fraud, or force, things pernicious to the health and morals of those who receive them” (196). The Symzonians’ critique is based on the Americans’ exploitative promulgation of an international commerce that proves inherently unequal. Globalizing trade, the Symzonians observe, provides benefits only to the Externals, in a sense that resonates with Spivak’s rejection of globalization as a planetary metaphor. Indeed, America had recently shrugged off the mantle of colonial governance imposed by Britain—the External had itself become Internal.

As it turns out, the Symzonians glean the particulars of US global commerce through an analysis of the books that Seaborn has brought with him, which include the works of Shakespeare and Milton. But these books so damning to the Externals’ cause, protests Seaborn, are the “works of the islanders”—that is, the British—and “they were only re-printed in my country as they had been in his” (199). The relationship of colonialism to literary production is arresting. In fact, later in the nineteenth century it becomes a source of irony for critics of Americus Symmes’s promotion of his father’s theories. A notice of Americus’s lectures on polar exploration in the *Boston Evening Transcript* agrees that new territory needs to be identified for imperial and literary use: “Within the next ten years we shall have drawn out, so to speak, the entire balance of unexplored wealth still left in the great African bank, and we shall then have put it out of our power to ever

again experience the pleasure of reading a new volume of geographical exploration.”⁴⁹ However sardonic in its thrust, the *Evening Transcript* recognizes that travel narratives, even fanciful ones, are perhaps the most enduring product of colonialist activity. This point had been made by John Cleves Symmes’s contemporaries as well; some encouraged his expedition on the logic that “a volume of his travels and adventures, would be the most popular book in the world—more so than ‘*Lalla Rookh*,’ or ‘*Childe Harold*.’”⁵⁰ The polar wastes never refused to yield literary bounty.

Yet neither *Symzonia* nor its playful reviewers distinguish the nationalist language of the novel from the explicitly planetary vision of Symmes’s manifestos. The *North American Review* notice of *Symzonia* comes glancingly close to perceiving the reorientation of vision that Symmes’s theories might promise; it cites, with application to Symmes, Samuel Johnson’s observation about Shakespeare, who “exhausted worlds, and then imagined new.”⁵¹ If Captain Seaborn’s vision of the internal world is limited by his encounter with beings recognizable in form and practice, then the new world of Symmes’s theoretical imaginings is still unrealized potential. In *Symzonia* the most promising resources of (and in) the planet, as represented by Best Man and the Internals, subscribe neither to the logic of imperialism nor to that of anti-imperialism. The unrealized space—the hole at the pole—that we are left with invites speculation in ways that might lead us to imagine alternative modes of inhabiting our environment that go beyond the economic or geopolitical. Symmes offers a vision of a planetarity derived from the polar regions. Not interested in the benefits speculatively inherent in national possession of polar resources, he instead locates the ends of theoretical and spherical polar inquiry in their potential for broader planetary attention to the spaces akin to the verge, those littoral resources whose borders are mobile and fragile. The *end* for Symmes is not planetary attention but the very conservation of potential itself. That is, the speculative and the virtual are resources only by remaining so: on and of the verge.

The idea that the “balance” of exploration’s promise is low—that depletion and finitude characterize the state of nature in terms of its desirability for colonial or other attention—is still alive, in somewhat altered terms, in our current planetary concern over the environment and its rapidly consumed resources. And this same sense of limitation or exhaustion characterizes, I argue, the critical apparatuses brought

to bear on Arctic and Antarctic exploration and the literature that invokes polar wastes. I have in mind Lawrence Buell's notion of an "ecoglobalist affect," by which we might radically reorient ourselves in relation to the world; he defines it as

an emotion-laden preoccupation with a finite, near-at-hand physical environment defined, at least in part, by an imagined inextricable linkage of some sort between that specific site and a context of planetary reach. . . . Ecoglobalist affect entails a widening of the customary aperture of vision as unsettling as it is epiphanic in a positive sense, and a perception of raised stakes as to the significance of whatever is transpiring locally in the here and now that tends to bring with it either a fatalistic sense of the inexorable or a daunting sense of responsibility as the price of prophetic vision.⁵²

The kind of prophetic vision that allows for a glimpse into the earth's core might be reincarnated today as a perspective on the world from a polar vantage point, one not sustained by familiar referents such as people, goods, and emblems.

Symmes's planetary perspective, which was co-opted and distorted by both his followers and his deriders, offers new promise for polar explorers and their critics alike. It suggests a way to think about material resources: not those that have already been impressed within a trade nexus, but those so-called natural resources that exist in terms of potentiality and exhaustion. Symmes's followers in the realm of fiction don't seem to be able to imagine these concepts in purely spatial or geophysical terms, which is why they people the poles, the internal earth. Exploitation and nonexploitation of resources cease to be opposites under the speculative logic of the verge (unlike that of territory claiming, as the example of Russia's Arctic bid demonstrates). But to suggest an economy of return inherent in Symmes's notion of the verge is to confront the field of US literary studies with the all-too-overdetermined notions of potentiality and exhaustion in ways that uncouple them from the histories and logics of colonialism and exchange. Not just an environmental or ecoglobalist sense of planarity, Symmes's vision of an internal world reminds us that a planetary imagination must be speculative, accommodating the indeterminate state of resources at what we might no longer consider to be the ends of the earth.

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Notes

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- 1 Adrian Blomfield, "Russia Claims North Pole with Arctic Flag Stunt," *Telegraph* (London), August 3, 2007, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1559165/Russia-claims-North-Pole-with-Arctic-flag-stunt.html.
- 2 Quoted in Tom Parfitt, "Russia Plants Flag on North Pole Seabed," *Guardian* (Manchester), August 2, 2007, www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/aug/02/russia.arctic.
 A comedy routine by the British performer Eddie Izzard dramatizes a similar response to such imperialist moves. In *Dress to Kill* (1999), Izzard focuses on Britain's activities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: "We stole countries with the cunning use of flags. Just sail around the world and stick a flag in. 'I claim India for Britain!' And they're going, 'You can't claim us, we live here! There's five hundred million of us!' — 'Do you have a flag?' — 'We don't need a bloody flag, this is our country, you bastard!' — 'No flag, no country! You can't have one! That's the rules, that I've just made up. And I'm backing it up with this gun'" (transcript of *Dress to Kill* from *Cake or Death: An Eddie Izzard Site*, www.auntiemomo.com/cakeordeath/d2ktranscription.html#history [accessed April 1, 2011]).
- 3 "90 Billion Barrels of Oil and 1,670 Trillion Cubic Feet of Natural Gas Assessed in the Arctic," press release, US Geological Survey, July 23, 2008, www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=1980.
- 4 Parfitt, "Russia Plants Flag on North Pole Seabed."
- 5 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2003), 71–102.
- 6 Adam Seaborn, *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (New York: J. Seymour, 1820), vi. Further references to *Symzonia* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- 7 In deriving a critical approach to polar resources from Symmes's hypotheses, I am mindful of the invitations issued by Wai Chee Dimock and by Spivak to imagine a sense of *deep time*, in Dimock's terms, or *planetarity*, to cite the term of Spivak's I have adapted above. Like recent practition-

- ers of hemispheric and transnational studies, Dimock and Spivak find the borders of the nation-state to be arbitrary and misleading as structures for the study of literary or intellectual power relations. Yet turning to a globalist orientation is insufficient as well, Spivak writes, for one effect of globalization is “the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere.” She proposes instead that a notion of the “planet” as a unit of analysis—which should be understood as a form of “unexamined environmentalism,” an undifferentiated, nonpolitical space—should replace or “overwrite,” in her suggestive term, the “globe.” In Dimock’s terms this allows us to “rethink the shape of literature against the history and habitat of the human species” (Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006], 3–6; and Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*, 71–102).
- 8 “From the N.Y. Commercial Advertiser,” *Hartford Connecticut Mirror*, March 4, 1822.
 - 9 Examples of such critical works include Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); William E. Lenz, *The Poetics of the Antarctic* (New York: Garland, 1995); Lisa Gitelman, “Arthur Gordon Pym and the Novel Narrative of Edgar Allan Poe,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 47 (December 1992): 349–61; Eric G. Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science, and the Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Jen Hill, *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (New York: State Univ. of New York Press, 2007).
 - 10 On the gendered dynamics and postcolonial implications of polar discovery see “Gender on Ice,” special issue, *S & F Online* 7, ed. Lisa Bloom, Elena Glasberg, and Laura Kay (fall 2008), barnard.edu/sfonline/ice/; on the US cultural manifestations of Arctic exploration, see Michael F. Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006).
 - 11 John Cleves Symmes, *Light Gives Light, to Light Discover—“Ad Infinitum”* (St. Louis, MO: self-published, 1818), American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA.
 - 12 “Symmes’s Theory,” *Annals of Congress*, 17th Cong., 2d Sess. (January 1823), 697–98.
 - 13 *Washington (DC) Daily National Intelligencer*, January 28, 1823.
 - 14 John Cleves Symmes, “Arctic Memoir,” *National Intelligencer*, April 17, 1819.
 - 15 Symmes explains the problem of light reaching the earth’s interior in the missive *On Light between the Spheres*: “A small hole through a window shutter admits a large space of sunshine on the opposite wall. I thence conclude that the N. polar opening, estimated at about 1000 miles in diameter—although I now find reason to believe it much wider—is sufficiently wide to admit a space of sunshine that would extend within the

spheres from side to side, at the internal equator; provided the sun was sufficiently high, & provided an inner sphere would not, in any degree, intercept the progress of his rays across towards the concave equator of an outer one. The south polar opening, being probably 2000 miles in diameter, must admit strong light much beyond the equator. . . .

“I have heard many say that they would believe my theory of the earth, could I satisfy them that the concave, or the inner spheres, could receive light from the sun, or be lighted by any other means. I trust this memoir will clear up all such difficulties” (*On Light between the Spheres*, broadside 689, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia).

- 16 Symmes, *Light Gives Light*.
- 17 *Frankenstein* was not published in the United States until 1834, and the British edition did not circulate widely in Britain, much less abroad—there was only one review of *Frankenstein* in the United States in 1818, a reprint of a British notice that appeared months after Symmes’s first manifestos. Therefore the resonance of *Frankenstein* with Symmes’s writings reflects the general Anglo-American interest in polar exploration rather than a direct relationship.
- 18 Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818; reprint, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), 9.
- 19 John Cleves Symmes, Letter to “Geologists,” August 1, 1821, Mss. Miscellaneous, American Philosophical Society.
- 20 “Letter from Dr. S. L. Mitchell to Capt. J. C. Symmes,” *American Beacon*, November 9, 1818.
- 21 “Capt. Symmes and His New Theory of the Earth,” *Boston Commercial Gazette*, May 22, 1826.
- 22 Letter to the editor, *Patron of Industry*, November 29, 1820.
- 23 “Interior of the Earth,” *Charleston (SC) City Gazette and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, March 16, 1822.
- 24 *Enquirer*, April 19, 1825.
- 25 *Middlesex (CT) Gazette*, February 6, 1828.
- 26 *Portland (ME) Advertiser*, March 13, 1824.
- 27 “Another Caucus in Virginia,” *New London Connecticut Gazette*, March 17, 1824.
- 28 *Concord New-Hampshire Patriot*, August 23, 1824.
- 29 [James McBride], *Symmes’s Theory of Concentric Spheres; demonstrating that the earth is hollow, habitable within, and widely open about the poles. By a citizen of the United States* (Cincinnati: Morgan, Lodge and Fisher, 1826), 135. McBride presents the case in terms that anticipate the twentieth-century space race: “Ross, and Parry have visited the arctic regions; and Parry now is out on his third voyage, as though there were some hidden mystery there, which the English government is anxious to develop. It is not likely that they would have fitted out, and dispatched four successive expeditions, merely to view Ice-bergs and Esquimaux Indians” (142).

- 30 In the *Southern Literary Messenger* Poe favorably reviewed a speech Reynolds gave to the House of Representatives on the subject of polar exploration, and is even reported to have cried his name on his deathbed. The interest Poe took in Symmes's theories, in fact, has been the reason for the majority of critical attention paid to Symmes to date. See in particular Gretchen Murphy, "Symzonia, Typee, and the Dream of US Global Isolation," *ESQ* 49, no. 4 (2003): 249–83; Jared Gardner, *Master Plots: Race and the Founding of an American Literature, 1787–1845* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998), 116–19; and Lenz, *Poetics of the Antarctic*, 43–46.
- 31 "Capt. Symmes and His New Theory of the Earth." Another account described his "deficiencies" similarly: "He is, no doubt, aware that the style of the lectures is not very eloquent, and that the singularity of his broad western dialect sounds somewhat uncouthly to our New-England ears.—The modesty of his apology for deficiencies in education, and perseverance with which he has pursued, and still pursues his object, ought to shield him against the weapons of ridicule or reproach" ("Capt. Symmes and the New Theory," *Bennington Vermont Gazette*, June 13, 1826).
- 32 Murphy calls this Reynolds's "mobile will-to-progress" ("*Symzonia, Typee, and the Dream of US Global Isolation*," 256).
- 33 Jeremiah Reynolds, *Philadelphia (PA) National Gazette*, April 22, 1828.
- 34 J[eremiah]. N. Reynolds, *Remarks on a Review of Symmes' Theory, which Appeared in the American Quarterly Review / by a "Citizen of the United States"* (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1827), 72.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 73.
- 36 Americus Symmes, *The Symmes Theory of Concentric Spheres: Demonstrating that the Earth is Hollow, Habitable Within, and Widely Open about the Poles* (Louisville, KY: Bradley and Gilbert, 1878).
- 37 "Symmes's Hole in the Earth," *Baltimore (MD) Sun*, December 6, 1875.
- 38 Newspapers widely reported Symmes's engagement with the Russian expedition: "The Hamilton Advertiser, published in Ohio, of the 6th instant, says, that their fellow citizen, Colonel John C. Symmes, has accepted the offer of the Emperor of Russia, made through Count Romanzoff, inviting him to take a North Polar Expedition, under the patronage of that enlightened monarch. The editor of the Hamilton Advertiser remarks, 'should this expedition prove successful, what reflections may be justly cast upon our government.' Whether our countryman Symmes will be able to find those underground folks he has so enthusiastically spoken of in his several essays, time will determine" ("John C. Symmes," *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 27, 1825). Another example: "He has made an engagement with the Russian Government, to accompany a polar expedition they have projected, and has been requested to hold

- himself in readiness to set out some time this winter" ("Capt. Symmes' Theory," *Middletown (CT) American Sentinel*, November 16, 1825).
- 39 *Dover New-Hampshire Republican*, April 19, 1825. Even in the 1870s this report was still alive; the following appeared in 1871: "The Russian Government, which had taken great interest in polar discoveries, was fitting out an expedition, at great expense, under the direction of Count Romannoff, a distinguished patron of science. Captain Symmes applied, through our minister at the Court of St. Petersburg, for permission to accompany the expedition. The application was cheerfully granted, but he was unable to procure a proper outfit, and had to abandon the project" ("Captain John Cleves Symmes," *Ladies' Repository* [August 1871]: 136).
- 40 "Miscellany," *National Intelligencer*, January 18, 1818.
- 41 For a lively if uneven history of hollow-earth theories and fictions, see David Standish, *Hollow Earth: The Long and Curious History of Imagining Strange Lands, Fantastical Creatures, Advanced Civilizations, and Marvelous Machines below the Earth's Surface* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2006); and Peter Fitting, *Subterranean Worlds: A Critical Anthology* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 2004).
- 42 For Gardner, the Internal world represents "a fantasy of a world of perfect whiteness" (*Master Plots*, 150).
- 43 See J. O. Bailey, introduction to *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (1820; reprint, New York: J. Seymour, 1965). Several critics have unquestioningly adopted the untenable presumption that "Adam Seaborn" is a pseudonym for Symmes himself. See Gardner, *Master Plots*; and Victoria Nelson, "Symmes Hole; or, The South Polar Romance," *Raritan* 17 (fall 1997): 136–66. Hans-Joachim Lang and Benjamin Lease credit the popular naval memoirist Nathaniel Ames with authorship of the narrative in "The Authorship of *Symzonia*: The Case for Nathaniel Ames," *New England Quarterly* 48 (June 1975): 241–52.
- 44 See Murphy, "Symzonia, Typee, and the Dream of US Global Isolation."
- 45 "Symzonia; a Voyage of Discovery," *Literary Gazette*, January 6, 1821.
- 46 "A Voyage to the Internal World," *North American Review* 13 (July 1821): 139.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 134, 139, 140.
- 48 Murphy, "Symzonia, Typee, and the Dream of US Global Isolation," 255.
- 49 "Symmes's Hole," *Boston Evening Transcript*, December 30, 1875.
- 50 *New-York Daily Advertiser*, June 23, 1818.
- 51 From Johnson's poem "At the Opening of the Theater Royal, Drury Lane, 1747"; quoted in "A Voyage to the Internal World," 141.
- 52 Lawrence Buell, "Ecoglobalist Affects: The Emergence of US Environmental Imagination on a Planetary Scale," in *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, ed. Wai Chee Dimock and Buell (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007), 232.