Introduction: scales of identification

While Thomas Cole was making plans for his magisterial series, *The Course of Empire* (1834–1836), he painted *Titan's Goblet* (1833; see Figure 0.1), a smaller (19 $\frac{3}{8}$ inch by 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ inch), whimsical composition that exemplifies the disorienting effects of scale enlargement.[1] Whereas *The Course of Empire* warns the USA of the dangers of imperial overextension by presenting an enlarged temporal scale – the *longue durée* in which an empire is built, peaks, and crumbles into a state of desolation – *Titan's Goblet* enlarges geographical scale. *Titan's Goblet* stages an allegory of the tension between the classical (or neoclassical, Republican) *polis* and vaster world-historical spaces that transcend it and make it obsolete. The painting seems to pit the wilderness against the Republican ideal of modest agrarian settlements, dramatizing Kant's dictum: "That is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small."[2] Cole's emphasis is not primarily on the temporal priority of the Titans to Greek civilization, but on the striking comparison between the sublime, sparsely settled landscape and the intimate, middle-class space of the still life.[3] If still life conventionally includes a visual *memento mori* reminding viewers of the passage of time, Cole's painting offers a spatial allegory about mortality and *vanitas*: not the evanescence but the geographically circumscribed scope of human experience. *Titan's Goblet* expresses anxieties about place-based identity brought on by the awareness of their interconnectedness with larger geographical scales.

This book considers how nineteenth-century authors responded to the encroachment of vast, external spaces allegorized by Cole's painting. Like Cole, nineteenth-century authors often engaged in marked shifts in point of view to make cognitive and emotional sense of the vast geographical transformations of their era. My argument is that literary texts responded to the unsettling transnational connections brought on by territorial and commercial expansion by moving readers to identify with spatial scales such as the home, region, city, nation, and globe. This book puts American studies scholarship that has documented the emergence of literary nationalism as

Figure 0.1 Thomas Cole, *Titan's Goblet* (1833), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

well as various forms of transnational consciousness into conversation with cultural geography's theoretical accounts of how different spatial scales are produced, contested, and transformed across time. By focusing on prominent subgenres – Gothic novels, detective stories, domestic fiction, global epics, and regionalism – that were grounded in particular spatial scales, I show how writers drew on literary tools such as rhetoric, setting, and point of view to mediate between individuals and different kinds of spaces. This

introductory chapter develops a theoretical framework for understanding scale production in US literature by considering three interrelated topics. First, it examines feelings of geographical belonging in nineteenth-century texts and the problems introduced by competing loyalties to different national, transnational, and subnational spaces. Next, it introduces the concept of scale, which has attracted considerable attention from cultural geographers interested in how economic, geopolitical, and technological developments intersect with different kinds of spaces. The chapter concludes by bringing the analysis of spatial scales to bear on literary history, arguing that formal, thematic, and intertextual aspects of nineteenth-century literature reflected – and helped produce – readers' identifications with domestic, urban, regional, national, and global spaces.

SPATIAL FEELING

> The movements of the heavenly bodies, space (an awesome, unimaginable infinity of space), and the landscape itself all were to become repositories of emotions formerly reserved for a majestic God.[4]

In the era of its exploration and settlement, writes Myra Jehlen, "America did not connote society or history, but [...] geography."[5] A list of prominent authors and public figures who worked as surveyors or wrote geography textbooks indicates the importance of spatial representation in the colonial and antebellum periods: John Smith, William Byrd, Jonathan Edwards, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Charles Brockden Brown, Royall Tyler, Susanna Rowson, Henry David Thoreau, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. As Martin Brückner has noted, literacy was taught in tandem with geography, and geography textbooks were among the bestselling publications of the antebellum period.[6] Beyond actually practicing geography, writers incorporated maps into their texts as frontispieces, props, metaphors, or formal elements. The northward and transatlantic trajectories of slave narratives, Ahab's global charts of whale sightings, Walt Whitman's extensive catalogues of placenames, and Sarah Orne Jewett's coastal Maine sketches are just a few examples of the ways in which literary works drew on geographical practices for both form and content. From Brown's detailed landscape descriptions to Henry James's psychological explorations of the "international theme," US literature both reflected and reproduced a widespread cultural fascination with spaces that changed constantly as explorers, merchants, soldiers, and settlers transformed them in both representation and reality. Under

such circumstances, Emerson argued, the task of US literature was simply to give voice to the New World's hitherto "unsung" spaces: "America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres."[7]

What "dazzle[d]" the imagination most during this period was the ongoing transformation of both domestic and foreign spaces. In a century shaped by events such as the Louisiana Purchase, the Mexican–American War, the "opening" of Japan, the annexation of Hawaii, and the War of 1898, Americans felt that they were literally witnessing the emergence of new spaces, the gradual manifestation of their nation's geographical destiny. During the nineteenth century, immense territories were acquired and explored; metropolitan centers grew at unprecedented rates; people and commodities arrived from all over the world; railroads and steamships intensified "the annihilation of space by time"[8]; some colonies were settled, others were anticipated.

This fascination with geographical topics has given rise to exceptionalist discourses that misleadingly frame American history in terms of the nation's expansion across a continental space imagined as vacant of both history and prior inhabitants. Even when they are critical of exceptionalist thinking, scholars have often reproduced its assumptions by emphasizing figures of spatial homogeneity such as "virgin land," "the hero in space," and "democratic social space."[9] In a willfully celebratory account of American literature as a manifestation of "the culture of creative destruction," Philip Fisher suggests that US democracy is grounded in "a Cartesian social space, one that is identical from point to point and potentially unlimited in extent."[10] Such accounts risk fetishizing space as an expansive but homogeneous field, a mere abstraction that erases historical, subjective, and geographical distinctions. The rhetoric of manifest destiny falsely propagates the fantasy of an empty, unpeopled land, framing "America" as an abstraction whose expanding boundaries erase other modes of belonging.

In the past two decades, scholarship focusing on transnational and imperialist lineages of US culture has deepened our understanding of the material relations occluded by metaphors of flat and empty space. Influenced by hemispheric, diasporic, and cosmopolitan accounts of cultural history, critics have developed transnational frameworks previously eclipsed by an overemphasis on literary nationalism.[11] Feminist scholarship has moved beyond the model of separate spheres, demonstrating how subnational spaces such as the household and the region colluded with larger discourses of nationalism and imperialism.[12] The circulation of literary texts

and influences beyond and beneath the national print public sphere has also been the focus of groundbreaking comparative work.[13] By investigating geographically inflected topics that are distinct from – though articulated with – the nation-state, these scholars suggest that nineteenth-century US literature consists in multiple, overlapping, and often competing spaces of literary circulation and readerly identification.

Edward Everett Hale's nationalist parable, "The Man without a Country" (1863), dramatizes both the affective appeal of the nation's geography and various extranational and sectional loyalties that threatened the nation's integrity. Hale's story – whose iconic set pieces and sentimental plot made it one of the most popular and widely reprinted works to come out of the Civil War[14] – aims to inculcate patriotic sentiment in its readers through the cautionary tale of Philip Nolan, an officer sentenced to indefinite exile aboard naval ships for cursing the USA at his court martial. A wall map featured in the story's climactic scene illustrates how the vagueness of the nation's shifting boundaries "dazzle[d] the imagination" of nineteenth-century audiences. On his deathbed after decades spent "without a country" in international waters, Nolan convinces a young sailor to tell him the names of all the states added since his 1807 court-martial. The sailor reports that

> I told him the names in as good order as I could, and he bade me take down his beautiful map and draw them in as best I could with my pencil. He was wild with delight about Texas, told me how his cousin died there; he had marked a gold cross near where he supposed his grave was; and he had guessed at Texas. Then he was delighted as he saw California and Oregon; – that, he said, he had suspected partly, because he had never been permitted to land on that shore. […] And he drank it in and enjoyed it as I cannot tell you.[15]

During this deathbed geography lesson, Nolan imbibes the contours of his identity as the boundaries of his nation expand before his eyes. Nolan's impassioned speculations about newly acquired states – along with his wild delight at having these guesses confirmed – dramatize the emotional involvement of Americans watching territories and states added to a tantalizingly unfinished national map. As Anne Baker observes, this "attempt to map the nation without any access to empirical data" served as an apt and emotionally appealing analog to readers' "own attempts to make sense of the nation's size and shape."[16] Nolan paradoxically comes to love his country all the more in its absence, as shared geographical fantasies erode the social and affective barriers that separate him from his compatriots. Moreover, the country that Nolan loves and with which he identifies is volatile in both

shape and size: its boundaries have changed dramatically, and his map is imperfectly "drawn […] from memory" and hastily corrected by the young sailor's pencil. Nolan's fascinating map registered the shifting scope of the nation's boundaries as foreign spaces were incorporated into the Union through purchase, diplomacy, and war.

The national map, however, represents only one aspect of spatial identification. In fact, the story's plot traverses a range of spaces situated beyond or beneath the nation's boundaries. Captain David Porter's attempted annexation of Nukuhiva, the Scottish nationalism of Sir Walter Scott, and a shipload of Africans rescued from a Portuguese slave ship all contribute to Nolan's character development even as they raise questions about the relation between nationalism and imperialism. Moreover, Nolan's initial crime consisted of his involvement with Aaron Burr's 1805–1807 conspiracy to conquer sections of New Spain – a conspiracy that in some ways anticipated the Mexican–American War (about which Burr reportedly remarked, "What was treason in me thirty years ago is patriotism today!"[17]). In 1898, Hale himself would reverse the story's implicit lesson about expansionism, proclaiming in an updated preface that any anti-imperialist who opposes the USA's campaign to "rescue" the Spanish empire is "to all purposes 'A Man without a Country.'"[18]

Nolan's identity is attached not only to these transnational spaces but also to spaces much smaller than the nation. At times, the exiled officer seems unclear as to whether he mourns the loss of his homeland or the loss of a *home*. "Youngster," he tells the narrator,

> let that show you what it is to be without a family, without a home, and without a country. And if you are ever tempted to say a word or to do a thing that shall put a bar between you and your family, your home, and your country, pray God in his mercy to take you that instant home to his own heaven. Stick by your family, boy; forget you have a self, while you do everything for them. ("MWC," p. 675)

Here, Hale blends several scales – the self, the single-family home, the USA, and the Christian soul's universal, cosmic "home" – to metaphorically highlight different aspects of national identity. Writing in response to the national crisis of the Civil War, Hale fashions a scenario in which religious, familial, and moral identity all seem coterminous with the fate of the nation-state.

However, domestic, regional, and global spaces are not always so easily subsumed by patriotic feelings. The very instability of national boundaries can in part be attributed to the overlapping spatial scales situated within or beyond those boundaries. The relations between print culture,

novel-reading, and nation-building have been well studied by scholars influenced by Benedict Anderson's classic study of *Imagined Communities;* yet the nation is not the only scale at which communities are imagined.[19] As cultural geographer David Harvey writes, "Those who live in any place (be it Guilford or Guatemala…), who have pretensions to create an institutionalized locus of social and political power, have to find or invent an imaginary sufficient to achieve some level of social cohesion, solidarity, and institutionalized order."[20] Whereas "The Man without a Country" prioritizes national loyalties, a broader account of the nineteenth century would include geographically jarring events oriented by transnational coordinates – such as the Louisiana Purchase, the Mexican–American War, and the War of 1898 – as well as marked changes in family life, regional identities, and the size of US cities.

Major nineteenth-century subgenres represented and reproduced emotional investments in a range of scales: diaries, letters, and lyric poetry were grounded in individual voices; the discourse of domesticity emphasized the moral education which only a well-ordered home could provide; detective fictions policed the variegated surfaces of urban life; regionalist sketches described (or invented) local communities; writings by immigrants, slaves, and their descendants often explored international or diasporic ties; transcendentalists and travel writers meditated upon cosmopolitan themes. To the extent that these forms were spatially scaled, their readers cannot help performing the work of cultural geography: my aim is to articulate the causes and consequences of the geographical identifications already implicit in nineteenth-century texts. The subgenres examined in this book register the volatility of the scales of the nation, the agrarian household, the economically organized region, and the bourgeois apartment suddenly perceived to be enmeshed in larger, unfamiliar spaces associated with territorial and commercial expansion.

What does it mean to identify not with a fixed national space but with a panoply of changing and contested spaces? This question calls for interdisciplinary analysis that combines the theoretical insights of cultural geography with the formal analysis of literary texts that play a profound role in producing feelings of spatial belonging. Before turning to the formal techniques that authors developed to explore and instill different scales of identification, it is necessary to consider how spatial scales function to ground and organize economic, social, and political processes. The following section draws on concepts from cultural geography to clarify the relations between different scales in the nineteenth century, as the USA expanded its territory and influence to keep pace with the capitalist world

market. Specifically, I will discuss two concepts – the *production of space* and the role of spatial *scale* – that help situate literary texts within specific material and geographical contexts.

THE PRODUCTION OF SCALE

> For not only does capital produce space in general, it produces the real spatial scales that give uneven development its coherence.[21]

In shifting focus from Americans' fascination with the abstract space of manifest destiny to heterogeneous spaces shaped by economic, political, and affective forces, I wish to complicate critical accounts of spatial feeling. Psychoanalytic accounts of spatial identification, environmentalist discussions of "eco-centrism," and human geographers' inquiries into "topophilia" have been profoundly influential in theorizing alternatives to the liberal individualist subject.[22] In practice, however, we do not identify with "space" itself but with multiple and differently scaled spaces.[23] Instead of "space" in the abstract, nineteenth-century writers and readers were attracted to the affective and spiritual fulfillment provided by a well-ordered household; the nation both in its existing and continually expanding forms; the mobility and attractions of the emergent metropolis; and the exotic cultural forms associated with foreign nations. At times, they imagined communities that cut across even these diverse and unstable spaces: hemispheric ties to Latin America and the Caribbean; "Black Atlantic," transpacific, and other diasporic affiliations; regions imagined as foreign to the nation-state; and households that promised to multiply throughout the world.[24] While literary historians have produced rich analyses of spatial allegiances at particular scales – such as national fantasy, local autochthonous experience, or household management – a comprehensive understanding of how scales are produced requires an analysis that encompasses all these units of space in their various interactions. In this section, I draw on recent work in the field of cultural geography to develop a framework for understanding the relations between differently scaled spaces in nineteenth-century US culture.[25]

By placing subjective spatial relations under scrutiny, cultural geography offers an important corrective to positivist trends in cartography, demographics, and related social sciences. Yi-Fu Tuan, for example, offers an important response to abstract "objectal" geography in his influential study of *Topophilia*, which focuses on "the affective bond between people and place or setting."[26] But while Tuan correctly notes that subjectivity

precedes and partially determines how different spaces are experienced and felt, his humanistic focus de-emphasizes the extent to which subjectivity itself is constructed by social, cultural, and spatial factors. Without an analysis of the social production of both space and subjectivity, human geography risks reducing space and feeling to anthropocentric terms. Commenting on the "scale of human perception," Tuan suggests that empathy is profoundly narcissistic – that we can only care about objects that approximate our physical and perceptual size:

> The objects we perceive are commensurate with the size of our body, the acuity and range of our perceptual apparatus, and purpose. […] Neither the very small nor the very large come into our purview in the course of day-to-day living. […] The emotional bond between man and animal seldom holds below a certain size – the size of the goldfish in the bowl and of small turtles that children play with. Bacteria and insects are beyond our ordinary perceptual range, and well beyond the human capacity to empathize. […] No matter how often one has traversed the breadth of the United States, it is not possible to see it in one's mind's eye as other than a shape, a small-scaled map.[27]

In constraining empathy to "our ordinary perceptual range," Tuan overlooks the variations that result from technological advances, such as cinematic close-ups on insects[28] or the photographic image of the earth as seen from the moon that has become an icon of global culture since 1968.[29] Moreover, Tuan's claim that the USA can only be envisioned as a small-scaled map underestimates the intense emotions that Hale's story invests in Nolan's bedside map. Supposedly abstract objects such as flags and anthems inspire intense feelings of loyalty and collective desire, as well as military "sacrifices which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community."[30] Other human geographers, concerned about "the disappearance of the human agent as a thinking, feeling subject from the geographical conversation,"[31] have joined Tuan in asserting an anthropocentric position: as Denis Wood puts it, "the real world is accessible only to each of us alone."[32] An overemphasis on the proper, "human" scale of everyday experience risks repeating the error that human geographers have critiqued in positivist "scientific" geography: the imposition of a homogeneous space, this time grounded not in abstract units of measurement (miles, kilometers, or acres) but in universal, dehistoricized "human" standards. Among other things, such an individualistic approach to geography overlooks subjective, shared experiences that lie beyond the scope of "each of us alone."

Instead of taking the human body as "the measure of all things," Harvey urges geographers to "consider how transitions in the definitions of space

and time through changing social processes are effecting changing conceptions of the body and consequently of identity, particularities, and where the human body resides in the scale of things."[33] This dialectical line of inquiry draws on Henri Lefebvre's magisterial study, *The Production of Space* (1974) – a sweeping analysis of how space functions to reproduce relations of production. Arguing that global capitalism increasingly depends upon the production of space itself – not just "the production of things in space" – Lefebvre illuminates the process of reciprocal causation in which produced spaces shape subjectivity and social relations.[34]

> Though a *product* to be used, to be consumed, [social space] is also a *means of production*; networks of exchange and flows of raw materials and energy fashion space and are determined by it. Thus this means of production, produced as such, cannot be separated either from the productive forces, including technology and knowledge, or from the social division of labour which shapes it, or from the state and the superstructures of society. (*PS*, p. 85)

He goes on to explain that social space is not homogeneous (though it often appears to be), but heterogeneous: with the expansion of the capitalist market, "We are confronted not by one social space but by many – indeed, by an unlimited multiplicity or unaccountable set of social spaces which we refer to generically as 'social space.' No space disappears in the course of growth and development: the *worldwide does not abolish the local*" (*PS*, p. 86).

This "unaccountable set of social spaces" is diverse, overlapping, and hierarchically structured – "with a structure far more reminiscent of flaky *mille-feuille* pastry than of the homogeneous and isotropic space of classical (Euclidean/Cartesian) mathematics" (*PS*, p. 86). The ambivalence of social space – its capacity to appear homogeneous even when, in fact, it is heterogeneous and hierarchized – is mediated by privileged scales such as home, region, city, nation, and globe. The very term "scale" can connote both equilibrium (as in the scales of justice) and hierarchy (as in scaling a ladder). The geographical term derives from the second usage, which is related to the Latin verb "to climb" (*scandere*): first, "A succession or series of steps or degrees," then, "Relative or proportionate size," and finally, "A standard of measurement, calculation, or estimation."[35] The term encompasses both horizontal breadth and vertical hierarchy, movement as well as measurement, control as well as observation ("to measure or regulate by scale"). These counterposed definitions push us to conceptualize "scale" dialectically in terms of a hierarchized equilibrium – as verticality made to appear flat.