Essay

Narration in the Key of *We*: The Voyage and the Grammar of Identity

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The narrative genre of the ocean voyage, from accounts of circumnavigations and voyages of exploration to tales of shipwreck, contains the largest body of first-person-plural narration in the Western textual tradition. This pattern is present from some of the earliest manuscript texts, like Álvaro Velho's account of Vasco da Gama's first voyage to India in 1497, which begins, "Partimos de Restello huum sabado" ("We departed from Restelo one Saturday"; 1; my trans.) and continues in the *we* until the end, with—by my count—just ten first-person singular words voiced by the narrator in the entire text.

The *we* of these texts often shares space with a writer's *I*, and there are notable exceptions, such as the monomaniacal *yo* of the letters of Christopher Columbus. Yet the phenomenon of plural narration occurred across national traditions and remained a persistent feature of the genre for centuries. Two hundred years after Gama's voyage, when William Dampier describes his crew's journey across Darien, he writes, "[W]e saw great tracks which were made by the peccaries . . . we thought ourselves past danger. . . . We saw many wooden crosses . . . which created some Jealousy in us, that here were some Spaniards" ([2020] 29–30). In the space of a paragraph, the group appears to engage in collective action, perception, thought, and feeling.

This pattern of narration contrasts markedly with the forms of print production that have long been the cultural archive of histories of the modern self: visual art, novels, and lyric poems from Europe and the colonial world that seem to articulate unique, individual selfhood and a sense of psychological interiority. As Nancy Armstrong

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writes, "[T]he history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite literally, one and the same" (3). This "modern subject" in turn becomes both the protagonist of cultural history and the object of its critique. Literary and cultural historians trace the rise of the novelistic protagonist as novels discipline unruly selves, converting them into *citizens* who are subject to control (51); they interrogate the post-Romantic idea that the "lyric" is, in John Stuart Mill's words, "feeling confessing itself to itself" (65), a "radically internalized" seclusion in which the reader finds the self (Jackson 129). These histories in turn influence those of national communities, especially where national identity has been seen as tied to individual political agency—the "horizontal comradeship" described by Benedict Anderson, for example, in which all citizens are imagined to be on an equal footing (7).

Literary and cultural historians have also emphasized that "the possibility of thinking otherwise" (Armstrong 10)—or, in Andrea K. Henderson's words, "a diversity of models for understanding subjectivity" (3)—long existed alongside the model of the individual self with interior depth. Deidre Lynch describes an eighteenth-century "economy of character" in which the common coin of recognizable types (47) coexists with the psychological complexity of novels' "character appreciation" (135); Dror Wahrman examines flexible, performative ways of imagining the self in what he calls the "*ancien régime* of identity" (164). Virginia Jackson traces a "madness" for public, political poems enduring well into the nineteenth century (9). Yet these alternative presentations of selfhood and the texts that purveyed them are often imagined as "misfits" (Nandrea), crowded out by dominant genres like the novel, which "marginalized contrary forms" (Armstrong 10n13).

The voyage narrative, however, was far from a misfit form. Its cultural status rivaled that of the novel, as did its popularity in the print marketplace (Kelly 158–59; Edwards 1–3). As a result, I argue, accounts of voyages offered one way of "thinking otherwise" that persisted relatively unaltered from the early modern period into the nineteenth century, enabling collective modes of imagining the self. Their influence echoes in texts from other genres, including ones seemingly paradigmatic of individualism, from the novels of Daniel Defoe to William Cowper's lyric poem "The Castaway." Beyond merely offering an alternative paradigm, accounts of maritime travel and the books in which they were printed staged material practices of identity. They served as a site for readers to imagine national, racial, and gendered selfhood anchored not in Enlightenment ideas or in notions of social, economic, or affective individualism but in the maritime travel book's long history of collectivity. Some readers found in them visions of collective supremacy; others, room to imagine more equitable social worlds.

The emphasis on collective endeavor in the literature of maritime travel has not gone unremarked. Historians of the Atlantic world, such as Marcus Rediker, have described a solidarity among sailors that crossed divides of race and of national identity (see also Kazanjian 38). Scholars of voyage narratives have pointed out that they were often collectively authored, compiled from the work of multiple hands. As Adriana Craciun puts it, authors "were understood to rely on ghostwriters, compilers, and collaborators—Dampier unabashedly, Cook controversially" ("What" 31). Margaret Cohen has attended to the "collectivity of craft" that the texts depict (34, 88), and Janet Sorensen to the perception of a national "common end" that made maritime jargon English (237). Srinivas Aravamudan even finds hints of a "collectively inspired subject" in the articles of self-rule signed by privateer and pirate crews (84).

Yet there has been no sustained scholarly account of the formal marker of this collectivity across the genre of maritime travel books: the predominance of the first-person plural. In fact, until recently, the speaking subject of such texts tended to be described as the singular agent of imperial power. Mary Baine Campbell, for example, describes the rise in the sixteenth century of an eyewitness narrator, whose "particularity is the very sign of his authority to speak" (*Witness* 262). This narrator, she claims, offers a "single author-protagonist in whom the reader can contain and possess the

imagined world" (though the passage Campbell cites is in the first-person plural; *Wonder* 52). Jonathan Lamb follows this author-protagonist into the eighteenth century, tracing an "emphasis on the personal heroism and enterprise of the navigator" from the 1589–1600 *Principal Navigations* of Richard Hakluyt to the 1773 *Voyages* of John Hawkesworth (*Preserving* 53–55). In Lamb's account, readers hoped to find in such texts a common cause between the singular traveler and the nation. Yet this bond broke down in the face of the harsh realities of Pacific voyaging. "The civil selves of seaborne individuals degrade," Lamb writes ("Eye-witnessing" 206), and their unreliability led to tension between the "singular, atypical individuals" at sea and the public they were destined to serve (*Preserving* 202).

The prevailing presence of the first-person plural stands in striking contrast to the solitary subjecthood these scholars describe. Yet the few writers who have discussed the collective voice of voyage texts have not noted this contradiction. In fact, they have tended to treat the *we* as if it were merely a localized phenomenon. Most have examined it in the context of accounts published by privateers at the beginning of the eighteenth century, such as those of Dampier and Edmund Cooke. Anna Neill claims these writers obscure their singularity (and, for privateers, potential criminality) in order to represent themselves as members in good standing of the social world (33). Jason Pearl finds utopian possibilities in these texts' collectivity (*Utopian Geographies* 103).

Others have read collective narration as an epistemological strategy. As Lamb and Philip Edwards have pointed out, by the seventeenth century eyewitness travelers faced a crisis of credibility: their unreliability became proverbial, and readers understood that they might "lie by authority."[1] Voyagers' collaborations with the Royal Society standardized the genre's form, prioritizing detailed, systematic description and enabling travelers to "present themselves as coolly detached" practitioners of "patient and sure-footed observation" (Pearl, "Geography" 76).[2] Yet the result—a mix of narrative and description popularized by Dampier's *New Voyage* (Pearl, "Geography" 81; Thell 77)—made for a peculiarly unstable combination.

In *Minds in Motion*, Anne Thell reads the first-person plural in Dampier as a response to this epistemological crisis, part of "a self-conscious effort to turn away from a subjective, first-person narrative . . . toward the detailed documentation of observable particulars" (85). The result, she argues, is a reality effect that preserves the immediacy of the first person while lending it a sense of objectivity. Both Thell and Lamb see a similar effect in Hawkesworth's account of James Cook's *Endeavour* voyage, resulting in this case from Hawkesworth's ventriloquy of the journals he combines under a single "composite voice" (Lamb, "Circumstances" 102). In this narration, Thell and Julia Schleck find a precursor to what Lorraine Daston has described as an "aperspectival objectivity" that emerged in the early nineteenth century (597; see Thell 76–79; Schleck 54–55).

Yet Dampier's *we* was nothing new. Its history can be traced to the earliest European accounts of maritime exploration, including those gathered by Hakluyt in his best-selling collection a century before. As Mary C. Fuller writes, Hakluyt's texts "frequently speak in a collective voice, using the perspective of the group as a whole rather than that of a single person." Often, the text contains "no instance of an individuated 'I,' but instead describes the experience of an absolutely undifferentiated 'we'" (*Experiments* 16). And, while editors at times moved the narrative voice into the third person when they retold voyage tales, they frequently—from Hakluyt to Hawkesworth—ventriloquized or simply reproduced the *we*.

The navigating *we* is also hardly consonant with a transition to objective documentation. In Dampier's texts, as in most others, *we* and *I* alike drop away in passages of documentary description. The use of *we* is primarily a *narrative* phenomenon. In fact, as Thell argues in discussing Hawkesworth's *Endeavour* voyage account, the *we* is used to inspire readers' vicarious participation (22). Both Lamb and Thell note that the resulting composite voice had precisely the opposite effect of empirical detachment: it tempts Hawkesworth to "identify with the original first person" (Lamb, "Circumstances" 102–03) and absorbs his readers, who "*felt* so strongly" that they were driven to "histrionic" responses (Thell 177).

The phenomenon of first-person-plural narration thus merits examination not as a localized device to establish epistemological certainty but as a persistent element of one of the most prominent genres in the literary culture of the early colonial period. Such an investigation is first and foremost a narratological study. It is also inevitably a study of how readers used books. Maritime travel accounts, after all, were the primary textual sources Europeans had for learning about other parts of the world and, by extension, for imagining what it meant to be European, or racially "white," or nationally English or Portuguese, or women or men. As a result, the genre was critical to emerging constructions of identity and racial, national, and gendered affiliations.

Recently, in examining Hakluyt's use of the *we*, Fuller has noted its prevalence in the genre at large, calling it "the maritime 'we'" and noting that "voyage narratives commonly employ the first-person plural" (*Lines* 300, 390). Fuller gives sustained attention to the *we*, tracing its inclusions and exclusions and demonstrating its prevalence in the tales Hakluyt collects. Yet Fuller's emphasis is often on disentangling an authorial *I* from the collective voice; "attentive readers," she notes, may "track distinct elements of the collective," enabling them to come to conclusions "about whose story it was" (294). This is part of Fuller's larger critique of the status of Hakluyt's work as an urtext of nationalism (20, 409), an idea widely accepted since James Froude's description of *Principal Navigations* in 1888 as the "prose epic of the English nation" (361). By contrast, Fuller finds no unified or coherent sense of the national collective in Hakluyt's text. Even within the collective of the crew itself, she argues, "the image of the whole exhibits seams and tensions between its parts," including on voyages that "were relatively harmonious in execution" (399–400, 400).

Though Hakluyt's sense of English national identity may not have been systematic or stable, the fact that Froude reads it as if it were is a reminder that readers persistently sought and found, in the *we* of the voyage genre, collectives larger than those aboard the ship itself. It is worth taking those practices of reading seriously, both in Froude's era, when the British Empire's global reach was near its height, and in earlier periods, when such an outcome was far from certain. What might be learned about seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British practices of reading, and about collective national and racial identity in the period, by taking the first-person plural as an interpretive starting point? We may find readers gazing at the coastline of distant continents not through the perspective of a specific, concrete, individual sailor but through a kind of multiply embodied point of view: one that enables them to trace imagined communities through moments of collective vision, reaching for collective recognition.

A Narratology of Collective Identification

The narratological phenomenon of the navigating *we* itself is not surprising. The maritime travel narrative is, after all, a story of a group of people moving from place to place. Throughout the colonial period, travel at sea involved the collective labor of many "hands," a metonym that invokes the whole body of the sailor but also the collective body of the crew. Ships were places of tight social community in which passengers and crew crowded together in cramped quarters. Every decision and almost every action required coordinated effort. These collective quotidian practices were reflected in the social world of the ship.

The travel book's collectivity was also often rooted in a collective labor of inscription. Both official and unofficial narratives of voyages relied on the ship's log, which reported the observations and experiences of whatever crew members were on duty. Often, in the case of eighteenth-century British exploration voyages, multiple journals were used as source material for a published account. On Cook's voyage on the *Endeavour*, at least eleven crew members and three passengers kept journals (Beaglehole ccxxvii–ccxlii). Those kept by crew were "uniform in style and content, copied . . . from each other and from the ship's log" (O'Sullivan 56).[3] Cook consulted all and borrowed from most. Nor did editors or publishers maintain distinctions. Hawkesworth's official

narrative of the *Endeavor* voyage used the first person despite the fact that he was weaving together at least eight different journals and had not been on the voyage himself (see Thell 157; Lamb, "Circumstances" 102). In the words of Cohen, "[P]ublication criteria emphasized collectivity over originality" (36).

This dynamic of collective action and inscription affects the syntactic texture of accounts of voyages. In a weakly inflected language like English, this is primarily visible in patterns of pronoun usage. A quantitative analysis reveals the predominance of the collective mode. In Dampier's 1697 *New Voyage around the World*, to take just subject pronouns as a test case, *we* is used more than twice as frequently as *I*—by a ratio of 2,661 to 1,295. Seventy-six years later, Cook's journals show an even greater preponderance of the plural. The 1773 Hawkesworth edition contains the pronoun *we* 4,055 times, while *I* appears only 1,395 times, outnumbered nearly three to one. Of the eighteenth-century texts for which corrected digital transcriptions are available, the one with the most striking pattern of collective narration is the 1748 account of George Anson's voyage, in which *we* outnumbers *I* by more than five to one: 1,867 to 349. The predominance of the *we* is sustained over the course of the text (see fig. 1; for Dampier and Cook, see figs. 2 and 3). Sections where the first-person plural drops off are generally those in which the narrative has halted: often, passages of geographic or ethnographic description. There is no extended section of the text in which the narration shifts from *we* to *I*.

The predominance of the plural increases when object pronouns are included, rising to a ratio of 6.6 to 1 (2,450 to 372) in the account of Anson's voyage. (Aggregated, all plural first-person pronouns, including possessives, outnumber singular by 3,734 to 391, or nearly ten to one.) The difference between singular and plural possessive pronouns is the most dramatic: *our* outnumbers *my* by 1,284 to 19. This is characteristic of the genre. Dampier's *our* outnumbers *my* 1,184 to 189, and in Hawkesworth's Cook, the ratio is 1,262 to 157. This near-total eclipse of singular possessives by plural ones highlights the relational nature of collective identity. As narrators speak of relationships to the group itself, to other people, to places and spaces, to material things, to moments of departure and arrival, and even to time itself, they shift into the collective mode.

Uri Margolin offers a term useful for describing the acting collectives in narrative texts: a "collective narrative agent" ("Telling in the Plural" 592). Either an individual or a collective, he suggests, can fill the argument position in the argument-predicate units that make up a narrative. Often, the collective serves as the story's narrator, resulting in first-person-plural narration (or alternation between the plural and the singular), which Margolin conceptualizes as "I + others" ("Telling Our Story" 117). I call this kind of narrative voice "narration in the key of *we*." Like a musical key, the first-person plural entails not a single mode but a range of possibilities, including multiple combinations and arrangements of persons as well as thematically significant shifts.

Amit Marcus notes the semantic fluidity of this *we*. The witnessing *I*, which may or may not speak on behalf of the group at large, also may or may not have participated in any of its actions. *We* is thus constituted contingently each time it is used, allowing different factors to influence its inclusions and exclusions and individual actors to slip in and out of the group (2). But because of the inherent ambiguity of the *we*, this writerly speech act is always incomplete. In order for its meaning to be made, it requires a corresponding readerly practice of gathering. Its inclusions and exclusions must be inferred from context, defined by an act of interpretation.

At times, the first-person plural allows the narrator to imply they have experienced things that they have not. Edwards notes this effect in Dampier's *New Voyage*, in which the ambiguity of the plural sustains a "deliberate vagueness about his status" in the crew (24). Was he a leader or a subordinate? The *we* yields few clues. Cook uses the plural to similar effect. One striking example occurs in his journal of the 1772–75 voyage of the *Resolution* and *Adventure*. When a Tahitian man called Oediddee expresses shock at seeing New Zealanders eating human flesh, Cook writes, "it

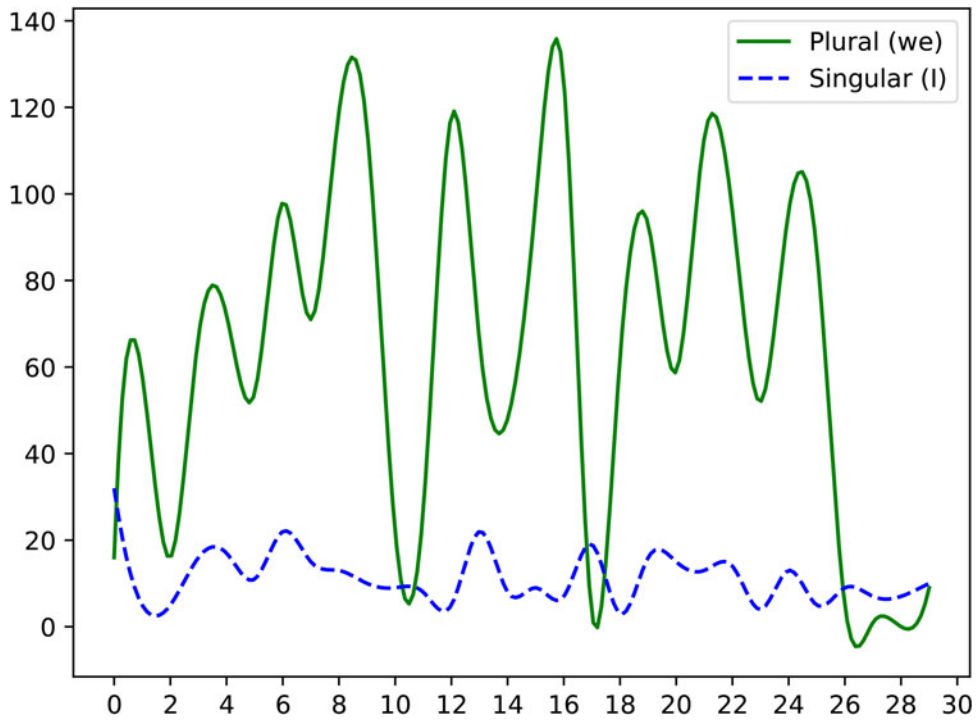

Fig. 1. Instances of *we* (green, solid line) and *I* (blue, dotted line) in Richard Walter's 1748 account of George Anson's 1740–44 circumnavigation, divided into thirty segments of equal length (x-axis) in order to show change over the course of the text in instances of each pronoun per segment (y-axis)

is, utterly impossible for Art to depict that passion with half the force that it appeared in his Countenance. When roused from this state by some of us, he burst into tears" (*Voyage* 293). As Dan O'Sullivan has noted (63–64), this was copied almost verbatim from the journal of the passenger William Wales: "it is, I believe, utterly impossible for Art to depict that passion with half the force that it appeared in his Countenance. He continued in this situation untill some of us roused him out of it by talking to him, and then burst into Tears" (Wales 819). Here, coming to Wales's "I believe," Cook's copying hand stops and he skips ahead, eliminating the *I* and using the flexible plural ("some of us") to describe the scene as if he had recorded it himself. By grammatically gathering himself with the crew in this way, Cook claims an authoritative collective author-function. As Craciun has argued, this position is not the idealized role of an individual "explorer" but rather that of the mouthpiece or compiler of the experiences of the crew ("What" 31). The vestigial comma, however, remains ("it is, utterly"), an artifact of the missing phrase and of the subtle change of first persons created by the borrowing.

A closer look at the case in which the phenomenon of plural narration is most pronounced—Anson's voyage—will show the range of effects this ambiguity can achieve. The authorship of the text is itself uncertain. According to the book's title page, the narrative was reconstructed from Anson's papers by Richard Walter, the chaplain of the squadron's flagship (the *Centurion*), but external evidence suggests that it was compiled from multiple journals. The narrative voice is Walter's, but the *I* sometimes engages in actions unlikely for a ship's chaplain, showing traces of Walter's borrowings, such as "the Master and myself undertaking the management of the helm"—that is, steering the ship (Walter and Anson 109 [1974]). As Glyndwr

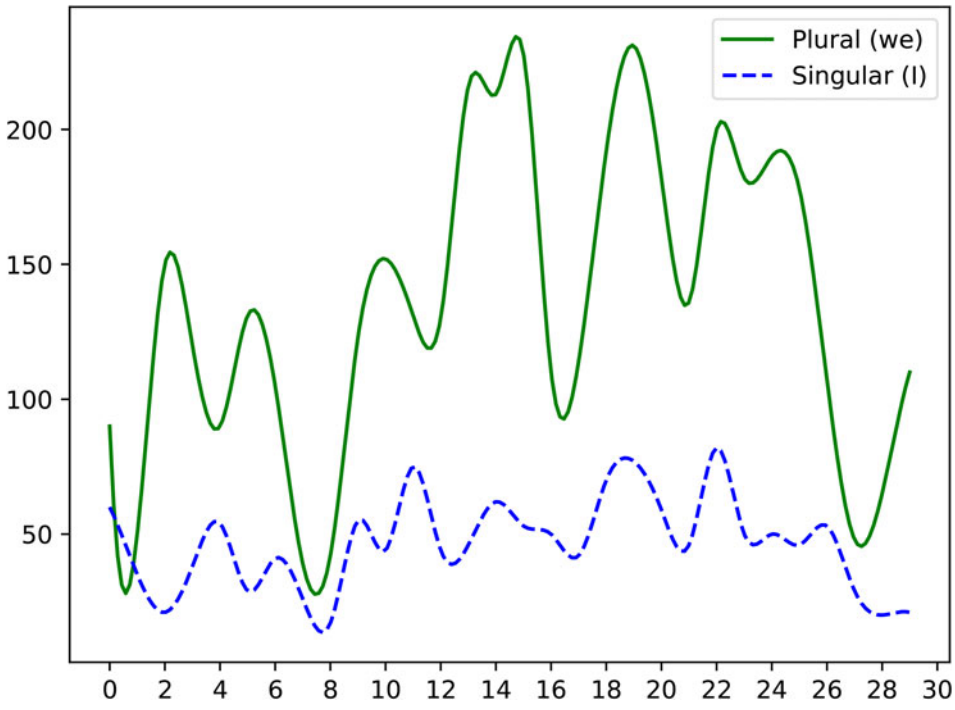

Fig. 2. Instances of *we* (green, solid line) and *I* (blue, dotted line) in the 1773 Hawkesworth account of James Cook's *Endeavour* voyage, divided into thirty segments of equal length (x-axis) in order to show change over the course of the text in instances of each pronoun per segment (y-axis).

Williams has noted, the text was likely ghostwritten by the mathematician Benjamin Robins, who was not on the voyage at all.

A few examples reveal the remarkable fluidity of the *we*. Walter's composite voice slides, over a few sentences, through collaborative actions that must have been performed by different members of the crew. In one passage, for example, which begins, "We ourselves immediately handed the top sails, bunted the main-sail, and lay to" (68), the *we* swings in a single sentence from the labor of the sailors aloft in the rigging ("handed the top sails") to those below ("bunted the main-sail") and to the ship itself ("lay to . . ."), followed by an act of collective recognition: "and we soon discovered all the ships of the squadron." In the next paragraph, the *we* shifts to the ship's officers, engaged in navigational decision-making ("we were not satisfied in deducing [the current] from the error in our reckoning, but we actually tried it more than once") before landing among the men on deck in an act of collective attention, making soundings (i.e., taking depth measurements and sediment samples) "more frequently . . . and with more attention, than I believe had been done before us" (69). In each case, the group is constituted in an inverse metonymy: the actions, decisions, and labor of a few are attributed to the whole.

This fluid plural voice does not merely gather the speaker and the crew. It embraces the Royal Navy and even the nation: "our naval affairs . . . our seamen" (49). In Anson's case, this reflects a formal institutional relationship: a commission from the navy. Yet the *we* also gathers national community in other ways. This sometimes occurs in moments of description, invoking community around shared geography: "pheasants . . . inferior in taste to those we have in *England*" (56). Elsewhere, it reflects a collective colonial endeavor or encounter with a collective other, such as when, in Walter's proposal to incite Indigenous peoples ("whom we have formerly mentioned") to

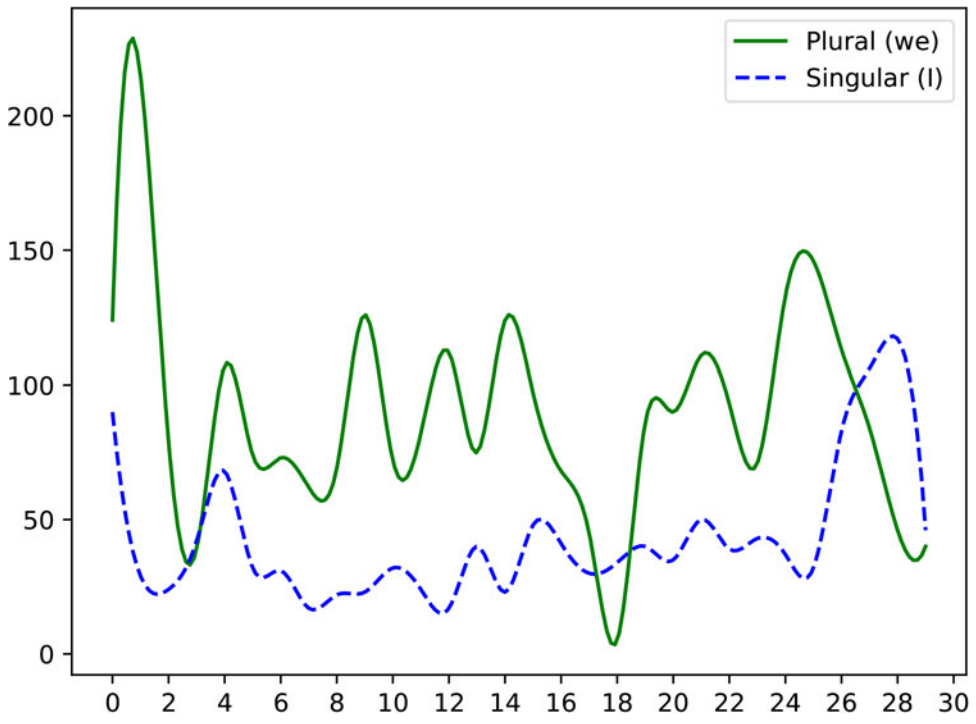

Fig. 3. Instances of *we* (green, solid line) and *I* (blue, dotted line) in William Dampier's 1697 *New Voyage around the World*, divided into thirty segments of equal length (x-axis) in order to show change over the course of the text in instances of each pronoun per segment (y-axis).

rebel against Spain ("were we disposed to aim at the utter subversion of *Spanish* power"), there is a shift in adjacent sentences between a narrating *we* and the *we* of the British nation (77). In referencing that nation, Walter's *we* does remarkable political work. It links collectives that coexisted uneasily, slipping in the course of a few pages between political community ("the Public" [96]), imperial state ("*Great-Britain*" [96]), national polity ("this Nation" [97]), and the ethnicity invoked as the shared identity of the national group ("the *English*" [98]) despite that category's history of violent and contested imposition.

The *we* of Walter's text thus works by a logic of conscription, gathering the crew, the navy, and Britain itself into the group. It is also, however, often constituted by practices of exclusion, contrasting the group it gathers with a racial or national other. At times its language is explicitly racist, as it is in reference to Indigenous peoples when Walter speculates about the potential "alliance of those savages . . . to the *English* Nation" (98). In relation to the Spanish empire, Britain's competitor in the colonial endeavor, the terms of exclusion might seem less overtly racializing; they are said to "thirst for conquest and tyranny," their wealth "mischievously lavished" by their rulers "in the pursuit of universal Monarchy" (98–99). Yet Walter writes that since Spanish settlers in the Americas are "awkward in the management" of arms, "we should in some degree have had the same advantages, which the *Spaniards* themselves had, in . . . this country, against its naked and unarmed inhabitants" (262). Even when the language of race is not used, then, the rhetoric of the text often betrays a racializing logic.

Walter's most extended invective is reserved for the Chinese merchants and officials the crew meets on its visits to Canton (Guangzhou). In contrast to the positive image conveyed in "the legendary accounts of the *Roman* Missionaries," Walter describes a Chinese "Nation" whose motives are

"beyond the reach of a Foreigner's penetration" (351, 351–52), characterized by "artifice, falsehood, and an attachment to all kinds of lucre" (351). This description has been seen as a key origin point for persistent stereotypes as well as for a fraught political history between Britain and China (Williams xv). One may hear echoes of it in later descriptions of Chinese people as mercenary and "inscrutable," "the cross-ethnic stereotype par excellence" (Chow 73).

In its conscription of a national group to set against these national and racial others, the text's capacious *we* extends again and again to include its readers. This might occur by implication for English readers in Walter's "*English*" *we*. Yet it is also direct. After all, as Marcus points out, some speech in the key of *we* includes not just the "I + others" that Margolin describes but also the listener: someone reading the *we* (7). At any time, the speaker may include this reader in the *we*, making it a second-person address: to expand on Margolin's formulation, I + others + you. The inclusion is only identifiable from context. The reader thus must make an interpretive decision about their own inclusion in the group each time the *we* occurs. This requires the exercise of the imagination: it is an act of readerly identification.

At times, Walter's text promotes this effect through a reference to the collective journey that occurs when any narrative is followed by a reader: "let us return from this . . . digression" (50 [1974]). The sense that readers are included is often amplified by a shift into the present tense, as when Walter writes of the "bay of St. *Julian*, where we are now at anchor" (72). At other times, a shared readerly work of navigation is implied in parallel with that of the crew: "Dr. *Halley*, in his account, tells us, that . . . there is generally a fresh gale . . . we found considerable variations from it" (47). The cognitive work of the reader as virtual witness in the production of knowledge is made explicit when Walter concludes that "we may, I believe, establish, as incontestable, these matters of fact" (94–95).

Thell has described this kind of readerly identification as "ideal presence," borrowing a term from Henry Home. She claims that readers of Defoe's fictional voyage tales and Hawkesworth's *Voyages* are inclined to identify with the collective's "open subjectivities": "we easily fall into line with this large, anonymous group" (128). Thell argues that while Defoe uses the first-person plural in his fiction as an aid to the imagination, Hawkesworth uses it in the interest of empirical witness, allowing readers "more thoroughgoing access to an experiential scene" (22). Walter seems to use the key of *we* here in both senses: as a narratological device to bring his readers along, and also as a means to establish "matters of fact."

Walter's *we*, however, moves beyond a purely epistemological function to offer the experience of contagious affects, as readers imaginatively insert themselves into the group. Later in the narrative, after the *Centurion* reaches Macao, Walter leaves the ship, and his narration switches to the third-person *they*, following the crew he has left. (This accounts for the disappearance of the *we* from the final ten percent of the text; see fig. 1.) But at a moment of heightened suspense, Walter writes, "No better idea can be given of their great eagerness on this occasion, than by copying a few paragraphs from the journal of an officer . . . on board." The journal entries are in the first-person plural: "June 13. The wind . . . gives us great expectations of seeing the galeons soon" (337). Walter here invites readers to access the collective "eagerness" and "expectation" of the third-person-plural crew, the *they*, by inhabiting the *we* subject position of an anonymous crew member—by vicariously experiencing the common feeling of the group.

At least one reader takes the hint. A few pages later, in a copy of the *Voyage* held at Houghton Library, a man named William Jackson writes in the margin: "During the burning of the netting our Fire ceased that the Spaniards might save the Ship" (Walter and Anson [1748] 379). Though his other notes suggest that he is reading the text fifty years later, in 1797, and was not on the voyage himself, Jackson imagines the action of the third-person-plural crew (*they*) through a first-person-plural subject position (*we*) and includes himself in the deictic field of the possessive pronoun (*our*), making himself grammatically present on the ship.

Jackson's sense of group affiliation appears to increase as he reads. A few pages later, as Anson threatens the Chinese port authorities in order to secure supplies, Jackson writes, "The Chinese that we have Transactions with at Canton are undoubtedly a knavish People—if they are upbraided with dishonesty & they tell you that they do not want you to come there, that your Business is to serve yourselves & not them, & if you do not like your Treatment the sooner you leave the country the better" (398). In the shifting syntax of this sentence, Jackson begins by expanding the *we* of his previous note to include not just the crew and himself but "the Nation" (he uses this term in a note on the previous page [385]). Then, inspired to invective by an imagined hostile encounter (and perhaps by the text's own racial rhetoric), he shifts to the second-person plural: *you*. Having traveled vicariously with the crew of the ship, he turns, as it were, to the nation itself— constituted through his readers' imagined affiliations—with the air of an experienced traveler. In so doing, he sets up the stakes of conflict, imagining and gathering a national group defined through contrast with a racial other. Strikingly, however, he does so echoing the imagined Chinese people's own challenge: "your Business is to serve yourselves."

In both these marginal inscriptions, Jackson's collective identification intensifies in response to a felt threat to the ship and crew. This is not merely a readerly phenomenon: *we* is used more frequently in the text itself in moments of danger, such as when the crew faces disease or the possibility of shipwreck. As soon as the ships pass Cape Horn, for example, they are separated by violent storms. The crew is affected by collective feeling: "Full of . . . dejected thoughts and gloomy presages, we stood away," "we were . . . alarmed with fears" ([1974] 90, 107). In the worst of the storm, the shifting deixis of the *we* seems to merge the crew with the body of the ship itself: "we received a furious shock from a sea which broke upon our larboard quarter" (88). Later, the *Centurion* limps up the Chilean coast to an island of what is now the Juan Fernández archipelago, its crew decimated by scurvy (nearly ninety percent of Anson's crew perished on the voyage). The disease grammatically slips across bodies both sick and well: "we were . . . reduced to so helpless a condition that . . . we could not muster hands enough to work the ship" (111). It saps the strength of the collective body: "we mustered all the strength we could . . . yet the capstan was . . . weakly manned" (113). And, as they near the island, Walter writes, "it is scarce credible with what eagerness and transport we viewed the shore." The crew members are overwhelmed with collective "emotion": "distressed" and "longing" for the fresh vegetables and water for which scurvy has stirred bodily desire (112).

Lamb identifies this moment as one of the most singularizing in the text, based on the incommunicability implied by Walter's "scarce credible." For the sufferer of scurvy, Lamb writes, "'we' stands for a discrete collocation of individuals each possessed by an unparalleled emotion . . . [it] is really 'I' multiplied: a crowd, as Thomas Hobbes would say, but not a community" (*Scurvy* 18). Yet incommunicability here certainly obtains only between navigator and shore-dweller. In the syntax of Walter's narration, privation and helplessness blur the boundaries between bodies at sea, melding them (and the ship) together.

Perhaps the most striking moment of collective narration in Walter's text occurs amid the storms off Cape Horn, as the crew "man the foreshrouds"—literally, going aloft into the rigging so their bodies catch the wind.[4] In this moment, as the text grafts together ship and crew, one man falls overboard:

> [N]otwithstanding the prodigious agitation of the waves, we perceived that he swam very strong, and it was with the utmost concern that we found ourselves incapable of assisting him; and we were the more grieved at his unhappy fate, since we lost sight of him struggling with the waves, and conceived from the manner in which he swam, that he might continue sensible for a considerable time longer, of the horror attending his irretrievable situation. (Walter and Anson [1974] 87)

If, as Lamb argues, there is something individuating about the dangers of the voyage, this is the moment at which it is most concretely realized: one man, cut off irrevocably from the group. Yet

the reaction of the crew immediately answers a singularizing crisis with a collective response. As they watch—collective perception—they move from concern to grief—experiencing collective feeling—and they participate with the drowning man in his horror by a collective act of the imagination.

The Lyric Subject and the Collective Imagination

Popular in homes and libraries across Britain, the maritime travel narrative with its plural protagonist and its practices of collective identification reached a broad range of readers. It also influenced other genres of its day. Yet scholars of that influence long saw the voyage narrator as a prototype for individualism. This is particularly true in the case of the genre of the novel. Scholars have argued that it inherits the individual protagonist (McKeon 90–106), the first-person narrative self (Campbell, *Wonder* 49–50), and the imperial "sovereign subject" (Azim 36–42) from the maritime travel book. Those who do recognize the voyage's collectivity often read novels as erasing it; thus Cohen finds that Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* transforms the collective voice into the first-person singular, giving a "countenance of individual capacity to the collectivity of the sea" (71). Similarly, Pearl finds that early novels reject the utopian potential of distant lands, focusing on "interior space" instead (*Utopian Geographies* 11).

Recent scholarship on the novel, from Aravamudan's and Jody Greene's readings of Defoe's *Captain Singleton* to Thell's reading of Defoe's *New Voyage round the World*, has revised this history (Aravamudan 84; Thell 128). But the novel is not the only literary genre that has been read as drawing individualism from the maritime travel book. Carl Thompson, for example, finds the influence of accounts of voyages on the Romantic lyric subject in the self-absorbed figure of the suffering traveler, which he traces in William Wordsworth, George Gordon Byron, and others. Like the "ancient Mariner" of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1798 *Rime*, this suffering traveler sees himself as "the central protagonist of all that has unfolded, the sole intended recipient of God's corrective anger" (104).

The most extreme example of such watery singularity might be William Cowper's poem "The Castaway," which tells the story of the sailor who drowns in the passage from Anson's voyage that I describe above. Cowper wrote the poem in March of 1799, while his friend John Johnson was reading Anson's *Voyage* aloud to him (see Newey 276, 276n9). The drowning man is terminally alone, a figure for an existential condition of isolation, and the poem—which Charles Ryskamp calls Cowper's "supreme lyric" (2)—would seem to capture perfectly the "feeling confessing itself to itself" that Mill described as the essence of the lyric. It has helped cement Cowper's reputation as a poet of individual interiority; in Vincent Newey's words, "no poet occupies the prison-house of the self more habitually" (282). And Lamb identifies the singularizing crises of the voyage as the source of this isolation: "William Cowper in 'The Castaway' impersonated the exceptionalism . . . of scurvy" (*Scurvy* 147). A closer look at the poem, however, reveals its lyric moment suspended between the one and the many, the near and the far, narrative movement and the timeless moment.

Identifying with the drowning sailor, Cowper retells the story in a hymn of eleven six-line stanzas, the swaying ballad meter of their first four lines ballasted by the beat of the closing tetrameter couplets. The first stanza sets the scene:

> Obscurest night involved the sky,
> Th' Atlantic billows roar'd,
> When such a destin'd wretch as I
> Wash'd headlong from on board
> Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
> His floating home forever left. (15)[5]

By ending the third line on a personal pronoun—which he will do three more times—Cowper foregrounds the lyric subject's complexity: the subject of the sentence (the "wretch") is named only by way of his relationship to the poem's *I*. Exposed, as it were, as the heart of the stanza, the *I* hangs suspended at the line break before the verb comes rushing in, sweeping the poem into action. Cowper thus appears to set the stage for a

profoundly individualistic poem. The *he* of this poem is irrevocably cut off from his floating home, from England (figured as "Albion"), from his captain, and from his friends.

As the ship turns away after its futile attempt at saving him ("pitiless perforce, / They left their outcast mate behind"), the poem grants a vision of interiority:

> Nor, cruel as it seem'd, could He
> their haste, himself, condemn,
> Aware that flight in such a sea
> Alone could rescue them;
> Yet bitter felt it still to die
> Deserted, and his friends so nigh. (16)

While the enjambed final *I* of the third line framed the complexity of the poem's lyric subject, the enjambed *He* of the sixth stanza here frames its primary character in his own right. In an emphatic separation from Anson's narrating *we*, however, the *He* and *I* are brought into stark contrast with a *them*, likewise enjambed: the collective of the ship's crew. In the Norfolk manuscript, now held at Princeton University Library, which is the earliest source for the poem, *them*—positioned at the midpoint, the fulcrum of the poem—is underlined.[6] It is the poem's only emphasized word.

After a stanza of struggle, the sailor dies and takes his place in the pages of the travel book:

> No poet wept him, but the page
> Of narrative sincere
> That tells his name, his worth, his age,
> Is wet with Anson's tear. (16)

Then, in the tenth stanza, the poet's *I* returns, making the act of reading and the work of the poem explicit. "I, therefore, purpose not or dream / Descanting on his fate," Cowper writes, "But mis'ry still delights to trace / Its semblance in another's case" (17). The poem thus refuses the call of sympathy and the public, epideictic function of elegy: it will not be an attempt to "immortalize" the sailor. Anson's tear has already done all that need be done. Nor does the poem affirm commitment to success for the national group. The love of "Albion's coast" has been "in vain" (15).

It is a shock, then, in the final stanza of "The Castaway," when the first-person plural finally appears, after an enjambed line break, opening the line. In one tantalizing instant it unites the speaker and the sailor, only to crush them with the verb:

> No voice divine the storm allay'd,
> No light propitious shone;
> When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
> We perish'd, each, alone;
> But I, beneath a rougher sea,
> And whelm'd in deeper gulphs than he. (17)

The *I* then returns in the next line, opening the poem's final tetrameter couplet. Newey finds "a note of triumph" in this moment, "a proud feeling of uniqueness" (276). Lamb has seen this as a moment of "solipsism" illustrative of a failure of sympathy (*Scurvy* 147), since "the sympathizing first person ends up competing with the man lost overboard" (*Preserving* 254). I would argue that—in keeping with the hymn form of this poem—Cowper is merely making a distinction between material and spiritual vulnerability: between the sailor's imminent death and his own conviction that he was predestined to Hell (as he suggests in a letter dated 11 April 1799 [*Letters* 4: 466]). Nonetheless, his act of identification here is profoundly isolating. The poet sees himself reflected not in the metonymically charged space of the "floating home" but in the drowning man at sea.

Cowper had not always responded to narratives of voyages with such a sense of isolation. In a letter dated 20 October 1783, he uses the first-person plural as he describes sitting in his home in Olney, reading Cook's *Endeavour* voyage aloud to friends: "There is hardly to be found upon the earth, I suppose, so snug a creature as an Englishman by his fire-side in the Winter. . . . I have two Ladies to read to. . . . At present we are circumnavigating the globe" (*Letters* 2: 172). These warm scenes of reading are depicted in book 4 of Cowper's 1785 poem *The Task*.

Yet by 1799, many of Cowper's most treasured companions had died. His mental health in tatters, he was living with Johnson, who had moved him from Olney to East Dereham. Cowper's pride in his country was also at low ebb. England had not realized the projects of reform in which Cowper, a passionate abolitionist, so strongly believed. Daniel O'Quinn finds Cowper's disappointment reflected in other late poems like "Yardley Oak," with its sense of the nation's alienation from God (366), and Suvir Kaul notes Cowper's "condemnation . . . of national corruption" (240). Whether because of his personal depression or because of frustration with his country, Cowper's reaction to Anson's Pacific shores is far different from his response in 1783 to those of Cook.

The success of the poem thus comes precisely from its frustration of the conventions of genre of the maritime travel book whose reading it enacts. In a poem whose intense feeling hinges on the power of its changing pronouns, explicitly preoccupied with national belonging, Cowper rejects the impulse to gather, placing himself firmly outside the group.

Cowper's double comma, however, introduces a final note of ambiguity into this poem. Holding "each" between two possible syntactic functions, the line leaves not the situation or cause but the *singularity* of death an open question. If read "We perish'd, each alone," the line is balanced with a relentless symmetry. Here "each" functions as a singular pronoun, creating a syntactic unit that splits the *we* asunder to separately and individually apply the final isolation of "alone" to each member of the group. The moment of tenuous readerly connection shatters; Cowper and the sailor are separated not only from England and their fellows but, finally and completely, from each other.

The second comma (elided in the poem's posthumous appearance in print in 1803 [217] and in subsequent editions) reverses this effect. In "We perish'd each, alone" the hyperbaton that separates "each" from "We" emphasizes the former's adverbial function. It acknowledges, that is, the different conditions and situation of Cowper's and the sailor's perishing. It does not, however, finally sunder them. The adjective "alone" modifies not "each" but "We," and, paradoxically, there is now one way in which, at last, the two men are *not* alone. Syntactically—and by virtue of a final act of readerly gathering—their solitude has come to be shared.

Cowper's ambiguous syntax never closes this double possibility. In the Norfolk manuscript, both commas are clearly marked. Perhaps Cowper was undecided on where to put the comma; perhaps he liked the sonorous tolling that the double pause lends to the line, accentuating the falling cadence of its vowels; or perhaps he meant to preserve intact the ambiguity of the sentence. Whatever the reason, Cowper refuses at the end to either affirm the readerly bond of identification or sunder it completely. Instead, the lyric moment trembles suspended at the brink, between the solitary individual and the imagined collectives gathered by the travel book. The bounds of the subject prove to be unexpectedly porous, as Walter's slippages of grammar invite the poet to the act of gathering.

Considering Cowper's "supreme lyric" in this way, alongside the voyage it cites, might not necessarily refute any particular theory of the Romantic lyric. "The Castaway" does work as a self-producing act, transforming the social act of reading Walter's book aloud into a handwritten expression of personal emotion. Such a process appears so consonant with ideas of the modern subject and of the lyric (such as, perhaps, the "archaic moment of handwritten composition and personal encounter" that Virginia Jackson shows twentieth-century readers imagining in Emily Dickinson's verse) that it might pass without interrogation (10). Yet the poem offers a vision of a self that is perpetually reconfigured as it slips in and out of the ambiguous deictic field of the first-person plural. What is more, it offers a key glimpse of the maritime travel book's practices of collective identity seemingly provoking a writer of another genre to consider the contingency of the selfhood that his works construct.

The Maritime Travel Book and the Practice of Identity

The speaking subject that emerges from the maritime travel book is neither stable nor consistent. Writers of voyages, after all, may have resorted to the first-person plural for any number of reasons. Perhaps they did so to conceal their own idiosyncratic selfhood, whether to avoid legal culpability, as Neill suggests, or to project a detached objectivity, as Pearl, Schleck, Lamb, and Thell have argued. Perhaps they did so for personal aggrandizement, concealing their status as subordinate, as Dampier does, or claiming to have witnessed things they did not, like Cook. Perhaps, as Thell claims of Hawkesworth and Defoe, they even recognized the power of the collective voice to enable vicarious experience. Or perhaps they wrote in the key of *we* simply because that is how events were recorded in the log, its narration shaped by the social practices of the ship.

Similarly, readers might indeed (and often did, as Lamb, Campbell, and others have pointed out), draw the *I* of a national hero out of the *we* (Cook and Anson, certainly, were both memorialized as such) or the *I* of a sympathetic leader, as Neill has proposed: an "impartial spectator" whose fellow-feeling and compassion is tempered by reason and restraint (159). (This is, after all, what Cowper seems to see in Anson's imagined tear.) They may have sought the authoritative voice of an impartial expert observer, like many critical readers Lamb and other scholars have noted.

Yet, as William Jackson's and Cowper's reading practices suggest, readers also found in the *we* a capacious space in which to stage the elaboration of identity. This reading practice in turn opens possibilities for imagining social worlds, as readers gather along multiple axes of perceived affiliation. In the maritime travel book, such fictions of identity are structured by relationships of metonymy not unlike the construction "we steered," in which the actions of a few become attributed to the whole. That whole—institutional, professional, national, racial, or gendered (sailors, after all, were often depicted as exclusively men)—is neither preexisting nor self-evident. Instead, like the plural pronoun, it is constituted iteratively and particularly in each speech act that names it by each reader that imagines it. The crew thus comes to stand in for the collective through multiple particular acts of interpretation. And, as Cowper's reading of Anson suggests, the *we* in turn—perhaps unexpectedly—offers a framework for imagining personal identity: selfhood not so much erased as made fluid, merging into or withdrawing from the collectives that these reading practices gather. Its boundaries disappear and are reconfigured; it slips in and out of the *we* as readers travel vicariously along.

It is likely that such readerly practices were especially important where identities were imaginatively constructed at sea, as was the case for Gama's Portugal or the early United States (as Hester Blum has suggested), but perhaps most strangely of all for eighteenth-century "Great Britain," a term that brought England, Scotland, Wales, and settlements in Ireland and the Americas uneasily together. The ship not only connected Britain's oceanic empire; its wooden world also held the idea of Britain itself. N. A. M. Rodger describes the ship as a "microcosm of British society" (346); Sorensen has shown that sailors and their language were seen as paradoxically both idiosyncratic and quintessentially British. These visions of Britain appear in cultural production, from James Thomson's popular "Rule, Britannia! Rule the waves" to the work of the novelist and journalist Eliza Haywood, who writes of Britannia's "Empire over the Seas" (97).[7] It was the travel book, however, that brought this maritime nation home, influencing all manner of cultural production.

Yet the selfhood constructed through the voyage narrative is not defined by the imagined collective of the nation. Though it sometimes merges with the communities represented by the flag the ship flies, it also seeks collectivities both within and beyond the nation. Whether ashore in Brazil thinking of the pheasants of England or at home with the author in a writerly present, readers' axes of affiliation are ever shifting. In the case of "The Castaway," the self even refuses national affiliation altogether as it gathers with another based on common vulnerability. Characterized not so much by

interiority as by affectability and connectivity, such a self is perpetually in flux.

Of course, no ship is necessary for this practice of the imagination. Any discrete group can become metonymic of collective identity. For some political philosophers, the patriarchal family unit, with its relationships of filiation and hierarchies of status, was the condition of possibility for imagining the nation.[8] But the ship's crew is physically proximate, interdependent, and united in the pursuit of a "common end." As such, it is a perfect site for the inscription of collective identity—as Michel Foucault puts it, the "heterotopia *par excellence*" (336). It makes room for kinships that the paradigm of the patriarchal family rules out: patterns of affiliation, not filiation, contingent and open to change. Ships' crews, often polyglot and multiracial, were a "forcing-house of internationalism"(Linebaugh and Rediker 151), forming, in the words of Paul Gilroy, "a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion" (4). As William Jackson's reading of Anson's clash with Chinese authorities suggests, they troubled national and racial categories—even when readers tried to use them to establish these categories.

In discussing the diverse models of subjectivity that Henderson describes in the Romantic period, Wahrman writes that these "roads not taken" "turn[ed] out to be dead ends" and "remain largely invisible, so far off the Romantic beaten track that their very existence has been effectively occluded" (292). Virginia Jackson finds a similar shift in the latter half of the nineteenth century in which poetic subgenres "collapse" and "disappear" (7) to make way for a "poetics of the single ego" (129). Perhaps many models of selfhood diverging from the bounded individual subject did indeed become dead ends as the eighteenth century drew to a close. Yet the examples I draw from Anson's journey, and from William Jackson's and Cowper's readings of it fifty years later, suggest the remarkable staying power of the maritime travel narrative's practices of collective identification, which continue to be performed as the book is bought, sold, read, lent, and borrowed from one generation to the next.

Notes

The transcribed text of the Dampier and Anson voyages was taken from *Project Gutenberg*; though these are early-twentieth-century editions of the texts (1937 and 1911, respectively) I have not noted any alterations of the narrative voice of the original text. I am grateful to Paul Turnbull of the University of Tasmania for sharing with me his corrected transcription of the Hawkesworth account of Cook's *Endeavor* voyage, hosted online by the National Library of Australia. Pronoun usage was tracked using *spaCy* natural-language-processing models in *Python*, and all figures were made in *Python*.

1. See Adams for a discussion of this common conceit; see also Lamb, "Eye-witnessing" 202 and *Preserving* 80–83; Thell 8; Carey.

2. See Carey for an account of the Royal Society's campaign to standardize such narratives.

3. On the case of Cook, see Murray, esp. 64–67; for a broader discussion, see Craciun, "Oceanic Voyages."

4. See the note to 87 in the 1974 edition.

5. References are to *The Castaway*, edited by Ryskamp (1963).

6. The Norfolk manuscript is reproduced in facsimile in Ryskamp's 1963 edition.

7. On Thomson's poem, see McLean.

8. Hobbes, for example, writes in *De Cive*, "[A] great family is a kingdom, and a little kingdom a family" (trans. in Schochet 429).

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Abstract: This article asks what might be learned about early modern and modern cultural practices of imagining the self by examining accounts of maritime travel and exploration that (in contrast to the lyric poems, novels, and paintings so often examined by histories of modern selfhood) are narrated in the first-person plural. I use a series of best-selling eighteenth-century British narratives, focusing on the 1748 account of George Anson's voyage, to consider this kind of collective narration. I then turn to William Cowper's 1799 poem "The Castaway" as an example of a text in a genre often imagined as paradigmatically focused on the individual—the lyric—that engages with the maritime narrative tradition and uses it to explore the possibilities of a more fluid and contingent sense of the self.