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Crocodylian Transmission:
Correspondence Networks
in William Bartram and
Thomas De Quincey

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ABSTRACT: This essay brings William Bartram's 1791 *Travels* and Thomas De Quincey's 1849 "The English Mail-Coach" into productive conversation with each other, focusing on crocodylians as a central point of connection. As both physical and semiotic specimens in correspondence networks, crocodylians become a medium of exchange through which Bartram and De Quincey confront the limits of personal identity and imperial expansion. By bringing together these two writers, the essay shows how crocodylians, as a medium of exchange, shift from physical, material specimens to abstract, imaginary symbols, and how natural history's correspondence networks facilitate an abstraction and effacement of animals.

In nineteenth-century British culture, the crocodile was, according to Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surrige, "anthropomorphic and orientalized, standing for the monstrous, the cannibal, the false, and finally for the subjugated, . . . a figure of quintessential otherness . . . the beast functions culturally as a sign of excessive appetite, hypocrisy, violence, and, most predominantly, alterity."¹ By the nineteenth century, the crocodile was understood as a symbol, as a monstrous beast powerfully linked to the East or the Orient:

1. Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surrige, "The Empire Bites Back: The Racialized Crocodile of the Nineteenth Century," in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 249–270, quote on p. 249.

“the crocodile stood not only for Egypt and the Nile but for cultural otherness more broadly, including that of Africa and India.”² Leighton and Surridge’s argument can be enriched by looking westward to North America and how American visual and textual figurations of crocodilians helped shape and influence nineteenth-century British ideas about *crocodilians* (the general term for all members of the order *Crocodylia*).³ Looking at the crocodilian in North America rather than Africa or India provides a new opportunity to consider the importance of the crocodilian as a symbol of “monstrosity” and “alterity.” For British culture, North America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was not alien or foreign in the same way as Asia or Africa, but it was still full of uncharted wilderness and unknown animal species. The discipline of natural history increased British knowledge of the American natural world by providing information about both plants and animals, including crocodilians. Ideas about crocodilians found in American natural history texts have had a greater impact on the nineteenth-century British literary imagination than previous scholars have acknowledged. A prime example of this influence can be seen in two seemingly disparate texts from the Romantic period in which crocodilians figure prominently: William Bartram’s 1791 natural history text *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, and East and West Florida* and Thomas De Quincey’s 1849 essay “The English Mail-Coach, or the Glory of Motion.”⁴

Previous scholars have discussed the influence that Bartram’s *Travels* has had on Romantic poets, namely Wordsworth and Coleridge.⁵ Yet, no one has extended his influence to De Quincey. Despite there being no record of De Quincey having read or cited Bartram’s text,

2. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

3. See Dan Wylie, *Crocodile* (London: Reaktion, 2013), p. 7. Wylie points out that crocodilians include all members of the order *Crocodylia*, including “not only what are sometimes called ‘true crocodiles,’ but the closely related species of alligators, caimans and gharials. The latter are not ‘false crocodiles,’ but equally respectable members of the same family.”

4. William Bartram (1739–1823) was an American naturalist and son of John Bartram, a noted early American botanist and correspondent of Carl Linnaeus. Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859) was an English essayist best known for his work *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, published in 1821, which draws on his experience of opium addiction, an experience that De Quincey would also draw on in “The English Mail-Coach.”

5. See Ashton Nichols, “Roaring Alligators and Burning Tygers: Poetry and Science from William Bartram to Charles Darwin,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149:3 (2005): 304–315, esp. pp. 305–306; and Mark Van Doren, “Editor’s Note,” in William Bartram, *Travels of William Bartram* (New York: Dover, 1955), pp. 5–6.

such an extension seems a natural progression, given the influence that Wordsworth and Coleridge had on De Quincey. Similarly, critics have talked about the connection between De Quincey's writing and natural history texts about Asia, Africa, and South America,⁶ but no one has looked at Bartram's North American writings in connection with De Quincey. Correcting this oversight, I bring *Travels* and "The English Mail-Coach" into productive conversation with each other, focusing on crocodilians as a central point of connection. The presence of crocodilians in both texts coincides with an emphasis on how correspondence networks are used to construct personal and national identity. The crocodilians become a medium of exchange through which Bartram and De Quincey confront the limits of personal identity and imperial expansion. By bringing together Bartram and De Quincey, I show how crocodilians, as a medium of exchange, shift from physical, material specimens to abstract, imaginary symbols, and how natural history's correspondence networks facilitate an abstraction and effacement of animals.

Crocodilians as a Medium of Exchange in Natural History Correspondence

While correspondence networks are clearly visible in De Quincey's "The English Mail-Coach," they also play a vital role in the natural history discourse during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Natural history, as a discipline, was conducted primarily through transatlantic correspondence. People in North America would collect and record observations of the natural world (both actual specimens and verbal and visual descriptions); this collected material was sent most frequently to London and the Royal Society, the preeminent society for scientists and naturalists, who then codified and legitimated the raw data from North America and sent it back in the form of published books and pamphlets. In her discussion of correspondence's importance to the work of natural history, Ellen Valle argues that

[t]hese exchanges can be seen as performing the work of natural history, in two ways. The first involves observing, reporting, interpreting and discussing occurrences in nature; the intended end result is the creation of codified, reliable knowledge about nature, which can be incorporated into written documents (chiefly books) and becomes the collective property of the knowledge community. The second is the concrete, physical redistribution of species,

6. See Leighton and Surridge, "The Empire Bites Back" (above, n. 1), pp. 261–262; and Grevel Lindop, "De Quincey and the Cursed Crocodile," *Essays in Criticism* 45:2 (1995): 121–140, esp. pp. 129–134.

more particularly the transfer of North American plant and animal species to Europe, where they are appropriated in various ways.⁷

Valle goes on to distinguish between two forms of the appropriation of nature: “as tangible property (which also serves to enhance the proprietor’s social status), and as immaterial property, i.e. scientific knowledge, which in theory at least belongs to the entire community. The latter can then be re-exported to the periphery, in the form of information and books.”⁸ Within the natural history discourse, natural specimens, including crocodilians, become both tangible and immaterial property, both actual physical specimens and abstract sets of facts and observations about those animals.

This dual appropriation becomes more complicated when considered in conjunction with Susan Scott Parrish’s argument that “the letter and the shipped specimens” as the “mediums of transatlantic natural history” functioned as stand-ins for colonial naturalists, “[reflecting] rhetorics of self-presentation.”⁹ Parrish introduces the possibility that natural specimens also maintain, in addition to Valle’s proposed tangible and immaterial property, an abstract personal property in which the specimen acts as a surrogate for the naturalist. This relation of the natural specimen to the personal, interiorized self reflects a broader trend in travel writing of the Romantic Period. Robin Jarvis argues that a “transvaluation” of travel writing occurred during this time in which “the journey ceased to be regarded as an uncomfortable and possibly dangerous means to an end, and was appreciated instead as an expression of personal freedom and a route to re-definition of the self.”¹⁰ As I will show, both Bartram’s *Travels* and De Quincey’s “The English Mail-Coach” participate in this kind of transvaluation in which their literal journeys become a way for them to explore their personal identities and negotiate their doubts, fears, and anxieties. The crocodilians they each encounter in their texts serve as a principal medium for this exploration and negotiation.

Within the discourses of natural history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, carnivorous wild animals in general trou-

7. Ellen Valle, “‘The Pleasure of Receiving Your Favour’: The Colonial Exchange in Eighteenth-Century Natural History,” *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 5:2 (2004): 313–336, quote on p. 322.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 107.

10. Robin Jarvis, “The Glory of Motion: De Quincey, Travel, and Romanticism,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 34 (2004): 74–87, quote on p. 84.

bled the British imagination. Natural history texts during this time viewed predatory animals, Harriet Ritvo argues, “as both dangerous and depraved, like alien or socially excluded human groups who would not acknowledge the authority of their superiors.”¹¹ Yet, out of the wide array of natural specimens, crocodilians, with their previously mentioned associations with monstrosity and alterity, appear particularly well-suited as figures through which to explore natural history correspondence networks and their influence on literature. Rajani Sudan argues that crocodiles are “crossover creatures (in the sense that they are both real and fantastic animals) . . . ; they function as both material creatures and monsters. . . . They give material shape to abstract fears about boundaries, about what lies beyond, and about the increasingly destabilized position with which England had to contend in the face of its continual accrual of colonial territories.”¹² In Bartram’s and De Quincey’s texts, crocodilians give material shape to borders both physical and imaginary, as well as to the anxiety and fear surrounding those borders. The material shape that the crocodilians give to these borders is enabled or made possible through the correspondence networks of natural history.

In these networks, crocodilians function as a medium of exchange, which I define as any object, entity, or figure invested with meaning and value (both symbolic and economic) that is traded or exchanged via correspondence networks. In discussing mediums of exchange and correspondence networks, I draw inspiration from Marshall McLuhan’s assertion that “all media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms.”¹³ As a medium of exchange, crocodilians function as active metaphors that translate firsthand experience with and knowledge of crocodilians, which can then be transmitted across natural history correspondence networks. Moreover, this process of translation and transmission can be viewed as an early prototype of the linking of animals and technology that Akira Mizuta Lippit argues takes place with the advent of cinema. He contends that at the turn of the twentieth century, “while animals were disappearing from the immediate world, they were reappearing in the mediated world of technological reproduction. Undying, animals seemed to fuel the phantom thermodynamic engines

11. Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 25.

12. Rajani Sudan, *Fair Exotics: Xenophobic Subjects in English Literature, 1720–1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 70.

13. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 57.

that would run perpetually."¹⁴ Lippit further argues that "because animals are unable to achieve the finitude of death, they are also destined to remain 'live,' like electrical wires, along the transferential tracks. Unable to die, they move constantly from one body to another, one system to another."¹⁵ A similar process occurs with crocodilians in natural history correspondence networks. As I will show, the crocodilians in De Quincey's "The English Mail-Coach" lack the grounding in the real, flesh-and-blood crocodilians that Bartram comes into frequent contact with in *Travels*. Crocodilians disappear from the immediate material world of De Quincey's text and reappear in the mediated world of correspondence networks, which themselves become imbued with a kind of animal life. While this process is fully realized in De Quincey's text, the beginnings of it can be discerned in Bartram's writings about crocodilians.

Yet, my argument also emphasizes the underlying reality of flesh-and-blood crocodilians on which the mediated crocodilians are founded. While this emphasis is partly informed by Friedrich Kittler's media materialism that insists on paying attention to the material instantiation of media,¹⁶ I also draw from Nicole Shukin's theory of animal capital. Shukin deploys her theory, which "simultaneously notates the semiotic currency of animal signs *and* the carnal traffic in animal substances," to critique Lippit's portrayal of undying animal specters in technological media, arguing that such "promise[s] of virtual 'touch'" elide the real animal bodies that materially underpin such discorporative fantasies.¹⁷ As a medium of exchange that circulates through correspondence networks, crocodilians possess semiotic currency as abstract symbols; the crocodilians have seemingly transcended their physical embodiments and, like Lippit's "undying" specters, are free to move across correspondence networks. Yet, underwriting this disembodied crocodilian transmission are the real, physical crocodilians, whose bodies are the foundation for the crocodilian both as an abstract symbol and real material to be traded across natural history correspondence networks. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the symbolic value of crocodilians transforms into an economic value as well, both in terms

14. Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 25.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

16. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer, with Chris Cullens (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 369–370.

17. Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), pp. 7, 149 (emphasis in original).

of the demand for stuffed, preserved crocodylian specimens and for crocodylian skin products, which was first recorded around 1800, but peaked in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁸

Without the correspondence networks of natural history, the figure of the crocodylian, both as specimen and abstract symbol, would not have achieved as wide and powerful an influence on Britain's cultural imagination by the time De Quincey wrote "The English Mail-Coach." While there are other texts on crocodylians that circulated through natural history correspondence networks, such as John James Audubon's letter that records his observations of American alligators published in 1827 in the *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal* (published by the Royal Society of Edinburgh),¹⁹ which certainly warrant consideration and study in the future, I have chosen in this essay to focus solely on Bartram's and De Quincey's texts for two reasons: first, I contend that, despite the lack of evidence of Bartram's direct influence on De Quincey, the two texts are connected through their similar engagement with crocodylians as a way of confronting issues of personal and national identity; second, they exemplify how correspondence networks transmitted crocodylians across the Atlantic and into Britain's cultural imagination, shifting crocodylians from physical, material specimens to abstract imaginary symbols. Bringing together Bartram's *Travels* and De Quincey's "The English Mail-Coach" highlights this process of transmission, as the crocodylians that Bartram introduces enter into the same network from which De Quincey would draw inspiration fifty-eight years later.

Escaping Alligators in Bartram's *Travels*

In *Travels*, readers are presented with both an account of Bartram's literal journey through the southern territories of what would become the United States and a metaphor of his self-doubt and questioning of identity, both personal and national. *Travels*, the product of Bartram's four years of travels (1773–1777) through the swamps of these southern territories, features extensive accounts of the flora

18. See Leighton and SurrIDGE, "The Empire Bites Back" (above, n. 1), p. 259; Karlheinz H. P. Fuchs et al., "Crocodile-Skin Products," in *Crocodyles and Alligators*, ed. Charles A. Ross (New York: Facts on File, 1989), pp. 188–195; and Ted Joanen et al., "The Commercial Consumptive Use of the Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) in Louisiana: Its Effects on Conservation," in *Harvesting Wild Species: Implications for Biodiversity Conservation*, ed. Curtis H. Freese (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 465–506.

19. John James Audubon, "Observations on the Natural History of the Alligator," *Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal* 2 (1827): 270–280.

and fauna he observed and recorded on his journey—early examples of Romantic descriptions of nature—and reflections of his beliefs as a Quaker in the spiritual harmony of the natural world.²⁰ In part 2, chapter 5, Bartram, while traveling alone through the Florida swamp, encounters a nearly endless series of crocodilians, specifically alligators. These alligators become his antagonists, threatening not just his life, but also his identity as a competent naturalist exploring the wilderness of the North American south. Previous critics have addressed the psychological component to Bartram's journey into the Florida swamplands. Thomas Hallock describes how Bartram, through his solitary wanderings in a hostile wilderness, "forges an identity for himself" as he moves across a "difficult psychological landscape."²¹ This hostile wilderness is epitomized by the alligator, an animal frequently depicted as monstrous, terrifying, and horrific. The alligator's horrific quality centers largely on its mouth and the possibility that humans can become prey for it. Such emphasis on crocodilians' mouths leads Rod Giblett to argue that "the typecasting of the alligator and the crocodile as orally sadistic monsters is a projection of human desires and fears on to these non-human beings."²² His argument that humans project the idea of monstrosity onto these animals is crucial to my reading of Bartram's encounters with the alligators. The way in which Bartram regards and discusses the alligators reflects his interior psychological state. When isolated, Bartram's doubts and fears color and shape his encounters with the alligators; when integrated into society, he returns to his more characteristic desire to depict alligators as sentient beings. In both cases, the alligators give material shape to Bartram's doubts and fears. Specific anxieties become externalized in and projected on the alligator and thus can be transmitted more easily across transatlantic correspondence networks.

Bartram's extended encounter with crocodilians begins with him witnessing a fight between two alligators, which alarms him greatly: "It was obvious that every delay would but tend to increase my dangers and difficulties, as the sun was near setting, and the alligators

20. Michael P. Branch, *Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing before Walden* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p. 184.

21. Thomas Hallock, "'On the Borders of a New World': Ecology, Frontier Plots, and Imperial Elegy in William Bartram's *Travels*," *South Atlantic Review* 66:4 (2001): 109–133, quotes on pp. 116, 122.

22. Rod Giblett, "Alligators, Crocodiles, and the Monstrous Uncanny," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 20:3 (2006): 299–312, quote on p. 300.

gathered around my harbour from all quarters."²³ He quickly moves from the position of spectator of crocodilian violence to victim of their attacks. Much of the following ten pages feature accounts of close calls where Bartram finds himself repeatedly assaulted by alligators, against which he struggles to defend himself. In these assaults, his depictions of the terrifying alligators focus on their heads and jaws:

I was attacked on all sides, several endeavouring to overset the canoe. My situation now became precarious to the last degree: two very large ones attacked me closely, at the same instant, rushing up with their heads and part of their bodies above the water, roaring terribly and belching floods of water over me. They struck their jaws together so close to my ears, as almost to stun me, and I expected every moment to be dragged out of the boat and instantly devoured. But I applied my weapons so effectually about me, though at random, that I was so successful as to beat them off a little; when, finding that they designed to renew the battle, I made for the shore, as the only means left to me for my preservation.²⁴

The alligators in this passage clearly embody Giblett's concept of "orally sadistic monsters." Horribly loud noises and deluges of water issue out of the jaws of the alligators, and Bartram worries that those same jaws will drag him out of the boat and consume him. Although he narrowly and rather luckily escapes, he senses that the alligators "designed to renew the battle," a conjecture that proves true as the chapter progresses.

On the surface, each of these crocodilian assaults might appear in isolation to be simple illustrations of the hackneyed "man vs. nature" scenario and therefore not symptomatic of a deeper psychological journey in which Bartram's fears and anxieties are displaced onto the natural world, allowing him to simultaneously travel through physical and mental space. The assaults, however, occur in a wilderness that effectively isolates Bartram from civilization, leaving him stuck with the alligators. After setting up camp in the safest possible spot he could find, Bartram explores his surroundings and concludes that "there was no other retreat for me, in case of attack, but by either ascending one of the large oaks, or pushing off with my boat."²⁵ The physical isolation in the swamps, coupled with the continual threat of being eaten by alligators, mentally

23. William Bartram, *Travels of William Bartram*, ed. Mark Van Doren (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 115.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

exhausts him. His language evokes dread and uncertainty that speaks both to his perilous physical condition and the psychological crisis he endures. These feelings manifest themselves in a concern for accurately representing and reporting the vast number of alligators he encounters in the swamp:

How shall I express myself so as to convey an adequate idea of it to the reader, and at the same time avoid raising suspicions of my veracity? Should I say . . . the alligators were in such incredible numbers, and so close together from shore to shore, that it would have been easy to have walked across on their heads, had the animals been harmless? What expressions can sufficiently declare the shocking scene that for some minutes continued, whilst this mighty army of fish were forcing the pass?²⁶

This awareness of an audience introduces an additional level of doubt and uncertainty that compounds Bartram's experience of dread in his interaction with the alligators. He worries that readers will doubt the veracity of his account, possibly believing that his experience alone in the swamps resulted in exaggerated claims. Such accusations would be damaging to a naturalist because they run counter to natural history's status as a scientific discipline built on the collecting and reporting of objective, empirical observations and data.

In-between accounts of beings attacked and pursued by alligators, Bartram shifts into a series of empirical observations by which he attempts to contain and control the monstrous, unwieldy crocodiles through codified systems of knowledge. In doing so, he participates in the conception of natural history that Ritvo describes as "a human struggle against the chaotic and unfathomable variety of nature" and "an expression of human domination."²⁷ Bartram reports on the alligator, offering readers a general description of the animal. As with his concern about readers believing his narrative, this section displays an awareness of audience, which reveals that Bartram is conscious that his writing will be distributed to and read by others, both in America and across the Atlantic. Although he strives for a distanced, learned discourse, Bartram still returns to the language of monstrosity to describe the alligators: "The alligator when full grown is a very large and terrible creature, and of prodigious strength, activity and swiftness in the water. I have seen them twenty feet in length, and some are supposed to be twenty-two or twenty-three feet. Their body is as large as that of a horse; their shape

26. Ibid.

27. Ritvo, *The Animal Estate* (above, n. 11), pp. 11, 14.

exactly resembles that of a lizard."²⁸ The alligator is monstrous because Bartram describes the "very large and terrible creature" as possessing physical qualities of numerous animals, evoking the idea of monsters as hybrid creatures that blur distinctions among species. His description of alligators further engages in this blurring of distinct categories when he describes their "loud and terrifying roar": "It most resembles very heavy distant thunder, not only shaking the air and waters, but causing the earth to tremble; and when hundreds and thousands are roaring at the same time, you can scarcely be persuaded, but that the whole globe is violently and dangerously agitate."²⁹ As Giblett notes, "[t]he alligator mixes the elements of earth, air, water and fire (thunder and lightning are the fire in the sky) just as the wetland does more generally. . . . Instead of these elements staying put in their proper place, the alligator and the wetland mix them up and violate the order of things that assigns them to a fixed and stable category."³⁰ The monstrous specter of the alligator as a creature that violates traditional boundaries of species and elements persists throughout Bartram's attempts to offer empirical observations about the animal.

The alligator's obfuscation and violation of the order of things, I argue, creates a productive tension in Bartram's writing; his attempts to codify and legitimate knowledge about the alligator are stymied by the inherent disruptive quality of the monstrous alligator. Even the fact that Bartram vacillates between "crocodile" and "alligator" to refer to the animals attests to their power as monstrous "crossover creatures." In a footnote, Bartram explains that "I have made use of the terms alligator and crocodile indiscriminately for this animal, alligator being the country name."³¹ Such confusion was not restricted to Bartram, but indicative, rather, of an eighteenth-century taxonomic ambiguity surrounding crocodilians. As Dan Wylie observes: "In his pioneering taxonomic system of 1758, Linnaeus lumped almost all crocodilians under one composite species, *Lacerta crocodiles*. A decade later, J. N. Laurenti proposed four species in the genus *Crocodylus* (a spelling more recently revived), but these were based on vague and derivative drawings executed by one Albertus Seba in 1734."³² This confusion and ambiguity in Bartram's text not

28. Bartram, *Travels* (above, n. 23), p. 122.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

30. Giblett, "Alligators, Crocodiles, and the Monstrous Uncanny" (above, n. 22), p. 306.

31. Bartram, *Travels* (above, n. 23), p. 94.

32. Wylie, *Crocodile* (above, n. 3), p. 23.

only marks a still-developing taxonomy, but serves as a reminder that, in Michael Gaudio's words, "natural history is Bartram's natural language, and the doubts he raises about it are doubts about his own ability to set a coherent identity before the common sense of the world."³³ Gaudio connects this doubt back to the alligator: "Bartram's fear of being devoured puts his own identity into the interplay of visibility and invisibility: it is a fear of not becoming self-evident, a fear of being swallowed into shadows, of not making oneself legible in an emerging social order that demands absolute legibility."³⁴ Bartram's fear of being eaten by alligators becomes a metaphor for his fear of losing his identity as a public figure in the discourse of natural history. This threat to his identity comes not just from the possibility of being eaten, but also by being unable to legibly and accurately account for and describe his encounters with the alligators. While Bartram's *Travels* was well-received in Europe,³⁵ the sense of fear and uncertainty in the text indicates that a positive reception was not necessarily a foregone conclusion at the time of its composition.

The same threat of illegibility and loss of identity can also be seen as a wider concern about American national identity. American naturalists at this time were concerned about being at the periphery of knowledge-making, taking a back seat to London as a center of scientific knowledge. Valle notes that, although correspondence networks between American naturalists and European scientists strove to be "equitable and fair" to both parties, "the only area in which there is a serious lack of balance is the cultural one of centre vs. periphery."³⁶ Moreover, Joyce Chaplin draws an important distinction between American naturalists before and after the American Revolution in which a deference to "European-defined theories of nature" and British power was replaced by a struggle to overcome that colonial framework by using natural history's "descriptive methods of study to argue for their nation's distinctiveness."³⁷ If Bartram had been unable to hold up his end of the correspondence network in *Travels*, he would have become even more peripheral

33. Michael Gaudio, "Swallowing the Evidence: William Bartram and the Limits of Enlightenment," *Winterthur Portfolio* 36:1 (2001): 1–17, quote on p. 11.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

35. Joyce E. Chaplin, "Nature and Nation: Natural History in Context," in *Stuffing Birds, Pressing Plants, Shaping Knowledge: Natural History in North America, 1730–1860*, ed. Sue Ann Price (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2003), pp. 75–96.

36. Valle, "The Pleasure of Receiving Your Favour" (above, n. 7), p. 321.

37. Chaplin, "Nature and Nation" (above, n. 35), p. 76.

and marginal to the center of knowledge-making than he would be otherwise. Fortunately, Bartram's writing was well-received across the Atlantic, and Chaplin notes that "Bartram's emphasis on nature's ineffable qualities was strikingly different from the focus in Britain (and western Europe generally) on science as an instrument of authority over nature. This difference was an indication of the distinctive national character that natural history had acquired in the United States as citizens of the republic sought to redefine their relation to the natural world and to Old World culture."³⁸

The threat to identity in *Travels* also speaks to ideas about American expansion and exploration. Bartram was increasing European Americans' knowledge of the North American continent, suggesting the possibility of Western civilization expanding further into the wilderness of the North American south. At the same time, however, Bartram also sought to respect and preserve both the natural ecosystems and Native American settlements he encounters. These competing interests, according to Hallock, lead him to "[establish] an identity that is fully attached to neither Anglo nor Native American societies but somehow capable of embodying them both."³⁹ The alligator-filled swamp is a perfect location for exploring this dual embodiment that Hallock describes. Giblett has noted how alligators in Bartram's *Travels* function "as figures for the British colonial and American cultural unconscious. Florida and the American South more generally with its swamps have been repressed in the collective psyche of the American North and have functioned as a figure of the primitive and backward. . . . In Bartram's case he is returned to this repressed [area] only to try to continue to repress it."⁴⁰ Yet, Bartram does not so much repress the alligator and the swamp as wrestle with competing desires to repress and liberate the alligator. His dichotomous representation of national and natural interests is embodied in his conflicted interactions with the alligators. These conflicted interactions also reflect the tension between the alligator as a physical, material specimen and the alligator as an abstract symbol.

In addition to Bartram's previously discussed encounters with alligators in the isolation of the swamps, he encounters crocodilians later in the text after he has returned to society. Two particular instances exhibit his conflicted interactions with crocodilians and

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77.

39. Hallock, "On the Borders of a New World" (above, n. 21), p. 120.

40. Giblett, "Alligators, Crocodiles, and the Monstrous Uncanny" (above, n. 22), p. 307.

how they mirror larger national anxieties. Following a hurricane, Bartram emerges from the swamp and reconnects with other people at a plantation; this change in society alters his perception of crocodilians. Shortly after returning to civilization, Bartram, while exploring around the plantation, observes crocodilians (in this passage, he refers to them as “crocodiles”) as part of a peaceful, idyllic water scene: “This amazing and delightful scene, though real, appears at first but as a piece of excellent painting; there seems no medium; you imagine the picture to be within a few inches of your eyes, and that you may without the least difficulty touch any one of the fish, or put your finger upon the crocodile’s eye, when it really is twenty or thirty feet under water.”⁴¹ His sudden return to the safety of society gives the illusion of complete transparency and artificiality. The crocodilians are no longer threatening to eat him, but can be observed at a safe distance; paradoxically, this safe distance allows for imagining “the picture to be within a few inches of your eyes.” In discussing this passage, Christoph Irmscher comments on this illusion of closeness and distance: “The reader becomes a museum visitor; putting her finger on the eye of the alligator, she relishes the illusion of proximity and tangibility suggested by specimens that appear to be ‘within a few inches’ of her eyes yet are ‘really’ beyond her reach, ‘twenty or thirty feet’ away.”⁴² Irmscher’s point about the illusion of closeness and the reality of distance proves relevant to a consideration of the crocodilian as a medium of exchange. As a medium of exchange, the crocodilian can be figured as an immediate threat to identity while the actual animal is far removed from the scene, if not entirely forgotten. While the crocodilian gives material shape to fears and anxieties, readers remain free from the imminent threat of bodily harm that Bartram experienced. In this scene, however, Bartram is still conscious of the reality of the animals he observes; he acknowledges that the only reason the scene he witnesses is peaceful is because the clearness and transparency of the water has necessarily altered the conduct of the animals:

And although this paradise of fish may seem to exhibit a just representation of the peaceable and happy state of nature which existed before the fall, yet in reality it is a mere representation; for the nature of the fish is the same as if they were in Lake George or the river; here the water or element in which they live and move, is so perfectly clear and transparent, it places them all on an

41. Bartram, *Travels* (above, n. 23), p. 151.

42. Christoph Irmscher, *The Poetics of Natural History: From John Bartram to William James* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), p. 41.

equality with regard to their ability to injure or escape from one another . . . here is no covert, no ambush; here the trout freely passes by the very nose of the alligator, and laughs in his face.⁴³

While this scene emphasizes the natural world, it also reveals how Bartram uses nature to construct and reflect a vision of democracy in American society. In examining his blending of natural history observation and political discussion, Douglas Anderson argues that the remoteness of nature in Bartram's text "enables Bartram to place his own eventful times in a context wide enough to provide a basis for measured skepticism as a corrective for patriotic fervor."⁴⁴ Furthermore, this idyllic scene conveys its own sense of monstrosity, of disturbance, because it does not fit with the earlier encounters that Bartram described in the preceding pages; readers are left with the challenge of determining which image should be given more weight. The paradise of fish exemplifies both a harmonious, pastoral view of nature that does not threaten human society and a model of an idealized democratic citizenry; the earlier encounters with alligators suggest a threatening natural world that humans would be wise to conquer and subjugate. By presenting readers with these competing visions, Bartram calls attention to the interplay between the reality of physical, material animals in real nature, and animals as abstract symbols of human society. In turn, this interplay is inherent in the natural history correspondence networks that Bartram participates in, networks that depend on nature's dual role as specimen and symbol.

In the second instance of a conflicted crocodylian encounter, Bartram, as part of a group of travelers, comes upon an alligator. During this encounter, he does not emphasize his individual terror and uncertainty in the face of the monstrous alligator, but rather the cruel treatment of the alligator by humans. As an alligator threatens the travelers' camp, Bartram watches as the other men taunt and torture the alligator before killing him:

It was a rare piece of sport. Some took fire-brands and cast them at his head, whilst others formed javelins of saplings, pointed and hardened with fire; these they thrust down his throat into his bowels, which cause the monster to roar and bellow hideously. . . . Some were for putting an end to his life and sufferings with a rifle ball, but the majority thought this would too soon deprive them of the diversion and pleasure of exercising their various inventions

43. Bartram, *Travels* (above, n. 23), p. 151.

44. Douglas Anderson, "Bartram's *Travels* and the Politics of Nature," *Early American Literature* 25:1 (1990): 3–17, quote on p. 5.

of torture: they at length however grew tired, and agreed in one opinion, that he had suffered sufficiently; and put an end to his existence.⁴⁵

This scene differs markedly from Bartram's earlier descriptions of alligators invading his camp when he was alone in the swamps. In the earlier scenes, the emphasis was on his survival, not on the violence inflicted on the alligator. This discrepancy reflects Bartram's larger distaste for humans killing animals, a distaste that readers are first conscious of in the introduction, where Bartram expresses his sadness when one of his companions shoots and kills a mother bear and her cub.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the discrepancy supports my argument that his early solitary encounters with alligators were closely linked with his personal, psychological journey. He was so consumed with his own interior experiences that he fails to comprehend fully the alligators' existence as sentient beings. In the scenes with Bartram alone with the alligators, the alligators become abstract symbols of his doubts and anxieties. In this later scene, when Bartram, in company with travelers, meets an alligator, he is able to acknowledge the physical animal and not the monstrous abstraction. Yet, by recounting his experience in *Travels*, Bartram transforms the real crocodilian into a medium of exchange; in other words, the crocodilian is no longer merely an animal, but an object invested with symbolic and economic value that is traded across the transatlantic correspondence networks of natural history.

In recording his experiences with crocodilians (both his narrative accounts and empirical observations), Bartram turns representations of crocodilians into a medium of exchange, which he can distribute via the correspondence network of natural history discourse. Hallock remarks that "with the publication of *Travels* in 1791, Bartram presents what began as a private journey for public consumption."⁴⁷ His encounters with crocodilians would become a memorable and vivid component of his private journey made public. According to Gaudio, Bartram's battles with alligators in *Travels* serve "as a testament to his triumph over these fears. It was a book that announced more than the self-evidence of nature to an American public; it was also an announcement of Bartram's own self-evidence as a naturalist.

45. Bartram, *Travels* (above, n. 23), p. 210.

46. Ibid., p. 22; Kerry S. Walters, "The 'Peaceable Disposition' of Animals: William Bartram on the Moral Sensibility of Brute Creation," *Pennsylvania History* 56:3 (1989): 157-176. In discussing Bartram's attitudes toward animals, Walters writes that Bartram "is horrified at the human disregard for animal life and well-being exemplified in the wasteful bloodsport so popular among his contemporaries."

47. Hallock, "On the Borders of a New World" (above, n. 21), p. 112.

As a public declaration of self, . . . it was indeed the result of a long struggle to establish a professional identity for himself."⁴⁸ Although Bartram may indeed have triumphed over the alligators by avoiding injury or death, the fears and doubt he expresses about the alligator would become a dominant and enduring image of crocodilians. Despite his later attempts in *Travels* to recoup alligators and paint them as quasi-sympathetic victims of human cruelty, their representation as "orally sadistic monsters" that plague his psychological journey becomes the enduring image proliferated in transatlantic correspondence networks. A prime example of this is Bartram's drawing "Alegator of St. Johns," which depicts two alligators eating fish in the St. Johns River. Gaudio describes the alligators in this drawing "as dragonlike creatures straight from a bad dream."⁴⁹ The power of this image of "dragonlike" crocodilians overpowers Bartram's other, less monstrous depictions of them. With the publication and circulation of Bartram's *Travels*, these verbal and visual images of crocodilians enter into the body of knowledge and cultural ideas about the crocodilian that De Quincey would eventually draw from in "The English Mail-Coach."

Imagining Crocodiles in De Quincey's "The English Mail-Coach"

Although published fifty-eight years after *Travels* and toward the end of the Romantic period, De Quincey's "The English Mail-Coach," with its emphasis on correspondence networks and a seemingly inexplicable appearance of crocodiles in the middle of the essay, is indebted and linked to Bartram's text. Originally appearing in *Blackwood's* in two parts in 1849, "The English Mail-Coach" depicts the experience of riding on the mail coach in Britain as it delivers news and correspondence during the Napoleonic wars, an experience in which, as Robert Morrison explains, "autobiographical episodes and engaging conversational banter gradually give way to nightmare worlds of personal tragedy and apocalypse played out with horrifying repetitiveness in the tortured mind of the dreamer."⁵⁰ In "The English Mail-Coach," De Quincey's monstrous crocodiles are hallucinations that spring forth from his consideration of the coachmen. Unlike the crocodilians in Bartram's *Travels*, the crocodilian

48. Gaudio, "Swallowing the Evidence" (above, n. 33), p. 13.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

50. Robert Morrison, ed., "Introduction to 'The English Mail-Coach, or the Glory of Motion,'" in *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, vol. 16 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), pp. 401–408, quote on p. 401.

has become purely imaginative, removed from the actual physical animal. Such an abstraction of the crocodilian reflects a larger trend in Romantic understandings of nature. Ashton Nichols argues that, in Romantic thought, "Nature . . . gradually came to be seen as a reflection of the minds of humans. Such an increasingly psychological emphasis—nature reflects the inner states of individual human beings—is countered by an increasing tendency to see nature, as alien, cold, and mechanistic, even at the same time that it is being touted as a source of aesthetic pleasure and emotional satisfaction."⁵¹ In "The English Mail-Coach," the crocodilian reflects De Quincey's inner state, but rather than cast nature as "alien, cold, and mechanistic," he invests the cold and mechanistic mail coach with an organic, animal presence. The physical body of the crocodilian has been removed, casting the crocodilian as an abstract symbol, and the inanimate mail coach has been imbued with animal life. In doing so, De Quincey sets up a tension between the organic and inorganic, the natural and mechanical. Anne Frey argues that the inorganic and mechanical ultimately is privileged in the essay:

Even when De Quincey insists that passengers can only feel their "imperial nature" through animal nerves rather than mechanical technologies, he still relies on technological structures to authorize his position. In other words, even if De Quincey prefers that the mail's messages travel through human and animal nerves, he still requires the centralized bureaucracy of the mail system to direct the flow of information across these nerves to the waiting English people.⁵²

Yet, in "The English Mail-Coach," the flow of information directed by the mail system's centralized bureaucracy is figured in terms of animal life, and the information itself includes the crocodilian, which has become a medium for communicating ideas about monstrosity, fear, and anxiety. The distinction between animal nerves and mechanical technologies is a false one; the two are interwoven and inseparable in De Quincey's essay.

Although the crocodilian has been removed from its body, its monstrous image still persists in "The English Mail-Coach" in a way similar to the crocodilians in Bartram's *Travels*. But while Bartram attempts to present objective, scientific facts, De Quincey does not put himself under a similar constraint. For example, his discussion of

51. Ashton Nichols, ed., "Introduction," in *Romantic Natural Histories* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), pp. 1–20, quote on pp. 7–8.

52. Anne Frey, "De Quincey's Imperial Systems," *Studies in Romanticism* 44:1 (2005): 41–61, quote on p. 47.

crocodilians in natural history texts reflects an imaginative, dream-like quality. When alluding to the English naturalist Charles Waterton's writings about caymans in South America, included in Waterton's 1825 book *Wanderings in South America*, De Quincey writes: "Mr Waterton tells me that the crocodile does *not* change—that a cayman, in fact, or an alligator, is just as good for riding upon as he was in the time of the Pharaohs. *That* may be; but the reason is, that the crocodile does not live fast—he is a slow coach. I believe it is generally understood amongst naturalists, that the crocodile is a blockhead."⁵³ Reminiscent of Bartram, De Quincey switches terms from crocodile, to cayman, to alligator, then back to crocodile; the distinction between the three species has been replaced by a generalized image of the crocodilian in which the abstract monster is more important than the physical animal. Furthermore, De Quincey's assertion—"I believe it is generally understood amongst naturalists, that the crocodile is a blockhead"—reveals that he is not so much concerned with scientific accuracy, but with how he can use the figure of the crocodilian to serve his purposes in his essay.

This passage also reflects a change in Romantic writers' approach to travel writing. Jarvis explains that "while it may have been the achievement of Romantic writers to have interiorized the observational methods of travel writing, in De Quincey's writing travel is so thoroughly interiorized that he largely abdicates the travel writer's duty of passing on some knowledge of the world."⁵⁴ Whereas Bartram attempted to offer his readers factual information about the crocodilian, De Quincey focuses on relating the story of Waterton wrestling with and riding a cayman: "Mr Waterton changed the relations between the animals. The mode of escaping from the reptile he showed to be, not by running away, but by leaping on its back, booted and spurred. The two animals had misunderstood each other."⁵⁵ As Michelle Henning notes, Waterton's contemporaries regarded him as an eccentric, in part because of "his commitment to providing a safe haven for wildlife, his outspoken criticisms of his peers, as well as his refusal to conform to the conventions of his time," and his satirical and quasi-anthropomorphic taxidermy creations that reflected his "tolerance toward the disorderliness and

53. Thomas De Quincey, "The English Mail-Coach, or the Glory of Motion," in *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, vol. 16, ed. Robert Morrison (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), pp. 408–428, quote on p. 420 (emphasis in original).

54. Jarvis, "The Glory of Motion" (above, n. 10), p. 87.

55. De Quincey, "The English Mail-Coach" (above, n. 53), p. 420.

interdependence of ‘creeping’ nature.”⁵⁶ De Quincey’s decision to reference Waterton instead of another naturalist, such as Bartram, complements the imaginative, dream-like quality of “The English Mail-Coach.” For De Quincey, crocodilians offer the opportunity for him to confront his fears and anxieties, riding them as Waterton rode the cayman. Like Bartram, De Quincey uses the symbol of the crocodilian to give material shape to his abstract fears. Yet, unlike Bartram’s crocodilians, the crocodilians of De Quincey’s text are entirely removed from any firsthand experience with the real animals.

But while De Quincey cites Waterton and not Bartram, his engagement with the crocodilian as an abstract symbol bears more similarities to Bartram’s solitary encounters with alligators than with Waterton’s wrestling of a cayman. Images of crocodilians come almost unbidden as De Quincey’s thoughts move from the Bath road, to Fanny, to Fanny’s grandfather, to the crocodile who “awakens a dreadful host of wild semi-legendary animals—griffins, dragons, basilisks, sphinxes.”⁵⁷ Sudan has remarked on De Quincey’s apparent lack of control over his visions of monstrous animals: “if De Quincey displays a curious lack of agency in relation to these exotic monsters (he has, after all, conjured them in the first place), he also plainly welcomes them, even into the most recessive (if mundane) domestic spheres.”⁵⁸ De Quincey is powerless to stop the influx of the crocodilian as a medium of exchange; however, in a sense, he has not conjured these animals at all; rather, De Quincey simply allows them to enter into his consciousness, displaying a seemingly incongruous complacency in the face of what he refers to as the “horrid inoculation . . . of incompatible natures.”⁵⁹ The crocodilians arise organically from De Quincey’s imagination, appearing almost on their own accord, as opposed to being deliberately conjured. Instead of suppressing them, he uses the crocodilians as a starting point for an extended meditation on “horrid inoculation,” a meditation facilitated by the inoculation of his mind by the monstrous imaginary crocodilians.

As with Bartram’s alligators, the crocodilians in “The English Mail-Coach” are monstrous and frightening; they also are used as a medium through which to explore anxieties, both personal and

56. Michelle Henning, “Anthropomorphic Taxidermy and the Death of Nature: The Curious Art of Hermann Ploucquet, Walter Potter, and Charles Waterton,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35:2 (2007): 663–678, quotes on pp. 671–672, 676.

57. De Quincey, “The English Mail-Coach” (above, n. 53), p. 421.

58. Sudan, *Fair Exotics* (above, n. 12), pp. 67–68.

59. De Quincey, “The English Mail-Coach” (above, n. 53), p. 422.

national. While Leighton and Surridge analyze how “the crocodile functions in many nineteenth-century texts simply to mark the frontier of otherness, the border between us and them, home and away,”⁶⁰ they do not consider how this frontier or border is already necessarily permeated by the correspondence networks that have brought the figure of the crocodilian to the British literary imagination. The influence of correspondence networks suggests a reduction in agency and selfhood both for humans and crocodilians in the face of the correspondence network, which does, in fact, become an active agent. In “The English Mail-Coach,” the crocodile prompts De Quincey to consider the potential for the “horrid inoculation . . . of incompatible natures”: “That gaiety, for instance, (for such at first it was,) in the dreaming faculty, by which one principal point of resemblance to a crocodile in the mail-coachman was soon made to clothe him with the form of a crocodile . . . passed rapidly into a further development, no longer gay or playful, but terrific, the most terrific that besieges dreams, viz.—the horrid inoculation upon each other of incompatible natures.”⁶¹ This “horrid inoculation . . . of incompatible natures” that he refers to represents both a threat to the self and threat to the nation.

In regards to how crocodilians embody a threat to personal identity, De Quincey raises the possibility of “some horrid alien nature” that can reside within a person:

How, again, if not one alien nature, but two, but three, but four, but five, are introduced within what once he thought the inviolable sanctuary of himself? These, however, are horrors from the kingdoms of anarchy and darkness, which, by their very intensity, challenge the sanctity of concealment, and gloomily retire from exposition. Yet it was necessary to mention them, because the first introduction to such appearances (whether causal, or merely casual) lay in the heraldic monsters, which monsters were themselves introduced (though playfully) by the transfigured coachman of the Bath mail.⁶²

For De Quincey, it does not matter if the appearance of the crocodile in the transfigured coachman is causal or casual; this indeterminacy reflects the fluid, liminal quality of the crocodilians that have been abstracted from their physical embodiment. The disembodied crocodilians can slip and slither between representations and ideas. In his analysis of De Quincey’s use of crocodiles, Grevel Lindop argues that his crocodiles represent “the dreadful possibility that separation

60. Leighton and Surridge, “The Empire Bites Back” (above, n. 1), p. 254.

61. De Quincey, “The English Mail-Coach” (above, n. 53), p. 422.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 423.

may not be possible. . . . Nothing *human* is alien to him; but what if within human beings, 'alien natures' are inoculated upon one another? The crocodile symbolises the possibility that the human may somehow be fundamentally conjoined with what is *not* human."⁶³ Lindop connects this representation of the crocodile more broadly to De Quincey's "reflection on an inner tension, of 'mighty discords' and 'antagonist forces' within the mind, from which there is no escape."⁶⁴ While Lindop's analysis is astute, it does not explore how this inner tension, represented by the symbol of the crocodilian, is founded on correspondence networks that have removed the crocodilian from its original material state and transformed it into an abstract figure. This foundation is crucial because it allows readers to connect a text like "The English Mail-Coach" with an American text like *Travels*; it brings readers back to the physical crocodilian, and shows how the desire to appropriate the monstrous crocodilian alienates people from real crocodilians and creates a false sense of discord and antagonism. This alienation drives a rift between the real, physical animals and their imaginary abstractions that can have potentially dangerous consequences for real crocodilians.⁶⁵

Along with embodying the inner tension with the self, the alien natures threatening the dreamer's sense of self can also be read as alien or foreign cultures that threaten the purity and greatness of British culture. The crocodilian then becomes a symbol of British imperialism and colonialism, reflecting the xenophobia that runs throughout "The English Mail-Coach." The crocodile also links De Quincey's essay and its focus on the Napoleonic wars with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 in which Napoleon was depicted by British caricaturists as an insatiable crocodile.⁶⁶ While De Quincey recognizes that this consideration of alien natures arose from the transfigured coachmen, he does not recognize the horror from within that comes from representations of crocodilians in North American natural history texts like Bartram's *Travels*. Correspondingly, the critical conversation about De Quincey focuses on Africa and Asia, to the exclusion of North America. Leighton and SurrIDGE posit that crocodiles "came to represent the fear of colonial treachery, uprising, or sneak attack—something lurking, as it were, almost

63. Lindop, "De Quincey and the Cursed Crocodile" (see above, n. 6), p. 138 (emphasis in original).

64. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

65. See Wylie, *Crocodile* (above, n. 3), pp. 196–198. Wylie discusses crocodilians' vulnerability to human predation, exploitation, and environmental damage.

66. Leighton and SurrIDGE, "The Empire Bites Back" (above, n. 1), p. 251.

invisibly under the surface of empire. And because the crocodile's habitat crossed continents (Africa, India, Asia) and lines of imperial demarcation, it came to stand for generalized imperial anxieties rather than those of one particular continent or colony."⁶⁷ By excluding North America from their consideration of crocodilians, Leighton and Surridge ignore the influence of Bartram's alligators that Nichols, Hallock, Gaudio, and Giblett, among others, have pointed out (although none of them connect this influence to De Quincey). Similarly, John Barrell argues that in De Quincey's writing, "[t]he fear and hatred projected on to the East kept threatening to return; and it is against these that De Quincey inoculates himself, taking something of the East into himself, and projecting whatever he could not acknowledge as his out into a farther East, an East *beyond* the East. . . . The process of inoculation involves simultaneously protecting someone against a disease and infecting them with it."⁶⁸ But if crocodilians are the horrid monsters representing the East, what does it mean to have them residing in North America, populating the Florida swamps of Bartram's *Travels*? Extending Barrell's argument beyond the East to include North America, I want to suggest that the process of inoculation against the East is ultimately futile because De Quincey's British Atlantic world is already infected with horrid alien natures that reside within it.

This prior, already-infected state is why focusing on representations of crocodilians in *Travels* is so productive in a consideration of "The English Mail-Coach." Although North America is not quite foreign or alien in the same way as Asia or Africa, Bartram's text makes clear that the horrid, monstrous crocodilians already reside in, indeed have "infected," North America—and, by extension, Great Britain. This "infection" has been transmitted by correspondence networks. Sudan's argument reflects how Bartram's crocodilians are found at the edges of the known North American wilderness and then passed through correspondence networks to the English literary imagination. She argues that "De Quincey's romantic writing invokes western-created monsters in order to signal the expanse and limits of imperial territorialization. They are invented at the edges of known spaces and then brought home to roost, so to speak, within the defining boundaries of domesticity."⁶⁹ Yet, I challenge Sudan's assertion that they are "western-created monsters," which implies

67. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

68. John Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 16 (emphasis in original).

69. Sudan, *Fair Exotics* (above, n. 12), p. 74.

that they spring forth entirely from human imagination. While De Quincey's crocodilians might indeed be created, they are founded on very real animals, such as those Bartram encounters in Florida. The monstrous crocodilians are not so much western-created, as created through the transatlantic correspondence networks of natural history that efface real animals in favor of abstraction.

De Quincey's exploration of the anxiety of inoculation by alien and incompatible natures is built on the figure of the monstrous crocodilian, who has become a medium through which to express this anxiety. The transmission of the crocodilian as a medium of exchange is facilitated by correspondence networks. Such networks were crucial to the work of natural history. While natural history correspondence increased scientific knowledge of the natural world, it also introduced a host of new figures to capture and shape the human imagination. Bartram's vivid encounters with crocodilians show how an experience rooted in real interactions between physical animals becomes metaphorized; in being passed through correspondence networks, the crocodilians shift from physical, material specimens to abstract, imaginary symbols. This initial shift can be seen in Bartram's *Travels* as his encounters with real crocodilians become invested with symbolic meaning. De Quincey's "The English Mail-Coach" reveals how crocodilians, once established as mediums of exchange in earlier transatlantic natural history correspondence networks, can be divorced completely from the physical animals or specimens and exist as abstract symbols haunted by their former embodiment. Thus, natural history's correspondence networks facilitate an abstraction and effacement of animals, removing the actual animal and leaving behind the horrid monster.