

ESSAY

Four Theses on the Real and Imaginary British Empire, 1697–1829

ALEXANDER SHERMAN 

In struggles against colonialism, one major contribution of humanists has been analyzing how the cultural and material manifestations of colonial power are entangled. The focus has been, and must be, not on splitting the two but on figuring out how the stuff of imperial imagination—culture, symbols, art, language, tropes—and of imperial reality—conquest, territory, enslavement, exploitation—define each other.¹ I term this the problem of the imperial imaginary and imperial reality. These concepts cannot be separated: the imaginary is not necessarily imaginary and reality is not necessarily real. The variations of imperial imaginaries and realities with time, location, historical situation, and critical conjuncture (Scott 11, 55) make it hard to approach them conceptually. But an apt place to begin might be Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*, which insistently connects imaginary and real empire as, respectively, “structures of attitude and reference” and “control and conquest” (52, 53). Yet Said hesitates to define their exact relation: “We are not yet at the stage where we can say whether these globally integral structures are preparations for imperial control and conquest, or whether they accompany such enterprises, or whether in some reflective or careless way they are a result of empire” (53). I do not propose to resolve Said’s uncertainties on this point in general. My goal here is instead to address a pivotal case—the expanding geography of the maritime eighteenth-century British empire—with a novel approach, comparing counts of place-names in a midsize corpus selected from the period’s maritime literature with thousands of ships’ itineraries.

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Along with insights on the relations of imaginary and real empire to nationalism, racial capitalism, and the marine environment, this method suggests a stronger line on Said's question: the geography of imaginary empire, if not definitively "preparations for imperial control and conquest," anticipates the geography of later real empire. As Said argues in his discussion of decolonization, culture leads imperialism, at least in this case (209). While I offer in my conclusion that my findings bolster Said's more tenuous position, I do not frame this essay as a conclusive quantitative demonstration of it. Embracing "pluralism" in visualizing and analyzing textual data (D'Ignazio and Klein 130), I am more interested in the plethora of hypotheses and questions that emerge from my methods. Just as Said writes that he thinks of his own reading of "domestic imperialist culture" in *Mansfield Park* as "completing or complementing others, not discounting or displacing them," counting place-names is an option for complementing—and, as it turns out, amplifying—his and others' interpretations of imperial geography (*Culture* 95). Even as the limited size of my corpus makes it possible to attend to individual texts, just as Said does, my method breaks with his insistence on "reading . . . in full" to find "discriminating and subtle" articulations of empire (95, 76). Instead, I study the unsubtle power of written place-names as a bridge between real and imaginary geography, showing how their patterns of usage chart imperial spaces. I present this study as an example of how digital methods, even on a relatively small scale, can enrich human reading, providing alternative ways to formulate and evaluate speculations about how empire works: another beginning, not one end.

Eighteenth-century British maritime empire is an important case for attempts "to explain the arrangements of international power and revenue extraction that characterized modern empires, and to do so (in part) with a view to explain the continuing overlaps between imperialism and neo imperialism" (Kaul, "How to Write Postcolonial Histories" 326). It was notable for its global reach, consolidating control of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, expanding into the Pacific, and

anticipating the post-World War II American empire's grip on the world's oceans (Campling and Colás 104–05). It encompassed the deadliest years of the transatlantic slave trade, the British East India Company's subjugation of the Indian subcontinent, and the European charting and colonization of Oceania and Australia. It also marked the heyday of maritime literature, situated at the nexus of imperial imaginaries and realities. John Hawkesworth, an editor and hack "moral writer" (Edwards 84), received £6,000 (over £1,000,000 today)—the most paid for a British book in the entire century—to prepare an account of James Cook's *Endeavour* voyage, then used £2,000 to buy a directorship of the East India Company (85). The genre birthed enduring imperial topoi: Robinson Crusoe's island, the Caribbean pirate, the Pacific paradise. The literature of the sea also shaped the European novel, as Margaret Cohen has argued, underlining how that literary form that also went on to colonize the planet owes much to this chapter of maritime British empire. Imperial reality and fantasy were inextricable in this empire, most notably in the South Sea Bubble of 1719–20, a "founding moment in 'racial capitalism' in the English-speaking world" (Moore 2), when British dreams of South American slave-trading wealth, fueled by voyage narratives (Lamb, *Preserving* 51), led to a dizzying stock market rise and collapse.

Geography, in turn, was and is a crucial prism for understanding this empire. British imperial self-representations foregrounded spatial sprawl across the seas. Indeed, the Mercator projection, that fixture of classroom walls that shrinks the tropics and makes the North dwarf the South, became popular during this period, as mariners increasingly recognized its usefulness in sailing (Monmonier 122). British readers sought out books enabling armchair travel overseas. Daniel Defoe's *The Compleat English Gentleman* valorizes such reading as a route to imperial mastery: the reader "may make himself master of the geography of the Universe in the maps, atlases, and measurements of our mathematicians. . . . He may make all distant places near to him in his reviewing the voiaiges of those that

saw them” (225). Anne M. Thell reads this as Defoe’s *ars poetica*, his writing seeking “to make more of the planet—especially those potentially lucrative regions of the South Seas and South America that so attracted his interest—available for assessment, speculation, and future action” (115). Said, centuries later, also reads geographically to see how imperial culture collaborates with material domination: he interprets *Mansfield Park* as encoding a British imperial “map of the world” that served to “validate . . . distant imperial rule” (*Culture* 81–82). Focusing on the relation between real and imaginary imperial geographies in the maritime British empire of the eighteenth century—since both Defoe and Said, to diametrically opposed ends, center geography—provides a way of seeing how “structures of attitude and reference” are linked with “imperial control and conquest.”

I propose that one way to delineate the imaginary geography of this phase of British empire is by counting mentions of place-names. Tracking mentions of locations in the texts of maritime literature can help trace imaginary geography: structures of reference can reveal structures of attitude. But I reject the usual trade-off of close reading one text for computationally analyzing many texts, instead showing that such quantitative methods need not be bound to huge corpora. For theoretical and technical reasons, I use a hand-selected corpus of maritime literature that enables analytically rich comparative claims about imperial imagination and reality. My theses are thus backed not by massive bodies of text but by a tight focus on a major tool of imaginary geography, the place-name, which itself couples texts to real imperial geographies. As for real geography, the period maps and atlases of Defoe are themselves fantasies of uniform imperial sovereignty and thus the wrong place to look (Benton 2). A better option is to examine records of ships’ movements, the maritime empire’s own working representations of its lifelines. Such an approach draws from Elaine Freedgood and Cannon Schmitt’s “denotative reading” (e.g., 3). A place-name like “Madras” not only connotes a symbolic association but denotes a real navigational location, especially in maritime literature. Place-names

thus provide one way to relate imaginary and real imperial geographies: comparing places mentioned in maritime literature with the recorded ports and paths of British ships.

Corpora and Methods

My corpora are made up of imperial self-representations that show how the maritime British empire of this period represented itself to itself in both real and imaginary terms. The emphasis on self-representation draws from Said’s study of *Orientalism*, with the clarification that the “real” geography here is not like the “brute reality” of the Orient that Said carefully brackets off, but instead consists of the British empire’s own records of its real overseas power (*Orientalism* 5, 21). The underlying goal is to examine the power that shaped these representations of the world, using them not as windows on the planet they claim to show but rather as indices of how the “matrix of domination” behind these representations framed that planet, practically and imaginatively (D’Ignazio and Klein 47). My primary method of comparing imaginary and real geographies is to generate maps of the movements of British vessels (the real empire) and the distribution of place-names in maritime literature (the imaginary empire); I then enumerate the number of voyages and of mentioned place-names in tables to fine-tune the insights that emerge from the maps. These maps and tables together suggest four theses on how imaginary and real empire converge and diverge.

Two databases offer self-representations of the real maritime empire. The *Climatological Database for the World’s Oceans, 1750–1850* (CLIWOC) includes ships’ logbooks from the East India Company and the Royal Navy.² Though assembled by climatologists and oceanographers to study weather at sea, and therefore not necessarily a cross section of all British voyages, CLIWOC provides a vantage on the official empire of the British state and its monopolies. Likely the most organized and comprehensive collection of digitized British logbooks from this period, it contains 670 logbooks from British ships that together

record 94,859 days at sea from 1750 to 1829. The second database, *Slave Voyages* (slavevoyages.org), documents the itineraries of (almost exclusively) transatlantic slave-trading voyages. It offers disturbing coverage of the British slave trade, claiming to account for “more than 95 percent of all voyages that left British ports”—a total of 12,014 voyages, including some illegal ones after abolition (Eltis). As such, *Slave Voyages* shows a less-official, though very much state-protected, side of real empire.

Aligning such databases with real empire (and even using them) may seem, at best, uncritical; at worst, it rehearses colonial violence. *Slave Voyages* is grounded in the perspective of slave traders, “the lists, ledgers, and commodities of slavery” (McKittrick, “Mathematics” 22). Katherine McKittrick, discussing a two-minute animation based on the database, describes it as “nauseating,” a compressed display of “centuries of racial violence” that “disappear[s] black life” (*Dear Science* 181, 180). The same might apply to the maps below. But while McKittrick criticizes the use of *Slave Voyages* to “map the black diaspora” (181), these maps from it are intended instead to chart the “racial violence” of British empire. They trace how British slave traders “disappear black life” into the geographic data of shipping itineraries, a self-representation of the British empire’s anti-Black violence: they document how the British empire charted its real geographic practices.³ I frame the logbooks of *CLIWOC*, too, as self-representations of real colonial violence. At a planetary scale, *CLIWOC* records how the ships of the British empire represented their forays in their own working geography, the destinations and coordinates of the logbook. Further, the regular writing of the logbook was a disciplinary ritual of shipboard “hydrarchy” (especially in the Royal Navy), where latitude and longitude calculations were written alongside the number of lashes sailors received, tying these records to the violence of British empire at the scale of the ship (Linebaugh and Rediker 160; cf. McKittrick, “Mathematics” 22). Finally, these databases show how empire maneuvered around material environmental-bodily pressures,

like scurvy, that were often bypassed in the imaginary empire of the period.

The geography of the imaginary empire, on the other hand, is visible in the patterns of place-names that occur in period texts. While counting place-names to index geographic imaginaries is an established digital humanities method, especially in the work of Elizabeth Evans and Matthew Wilkens, I break from them in using a smaller, hand-selected corpus rather than the massive corpora generally associated with digital scholarship. Wilkens poses corpus size as the *raison d’être* of such projects: “We now have methods by which to work with large bodies of text and to extract at least some types of spatial information from them,” with size taking precedence over “spatial information” and justifying shortcomings of resolution (804). But a smaller corpus can prove just as capacious analytically because it enables greater attention to individual texts, exceptional cases, and finer-grained “spatial information,” while still giving a sense of larger geographic patterns in the real-imaginary relation—especially when that limited corpus had an outsize presence in libraries and imaginaries. A smaller corpus also enables a finer-tuned model to identify place-names, a necessity for the obscurities and archaisms of eighteenth-century maritime literature. Digital methods should not be bound to huge scales; instead, this essay exemplifies how they can illuminate smaller corpora, complementing, not replacing, human reading.⁴

That said, a smaller corpus further begs the question of how much counting place-names can really tell us, especially as it runs directly counter to Said’s insistence on reading texts “in full.” Beyond once again emphasizing that this digital method of reading works to complement fuller readings like Said’s, I want to pinpoint why patterns of place-names merit specific focus. Methodologically, place-names are a major intersection of imagined and real geographic representations, where a text’s imaginary grips onto a real geographic order (Anderson and Loxley 58). Said’s own more subtle analysis of the spatial orders in *Mansfield Park* is anchored in the name “Antigua,” which yokes the novel’s movements to transatlantic slavery and

empire (*Culture* 85). Materially, place-names themselves—their creation, enshrinement, and repetition—are a primary tool in establishing colonial power over space, especially “governmentality,” by enabling the “denotation” of places with a stable written referent, making and controlling space through the very act of naming—and that is even before accounting for the colonial “connotation” of many of these names (Rose-Redwood et al. 461). Synthesizing these points in a study of real and imaginary geographies in maritime British empire, where names circulated among navy logbooks, Lloyd’s Register and parliamentary records of the slave trade, nonfiction, and fiction in irregular forms, further shows how the denotative colonial power of place-names is not wholly a top-down, state-led imposition, but instead arises from a more complex interchange of the state, the market, navigators, and authors (and shows the ambiguities of those categories). Place-names, in short, are a nexus where real and imaginary geographies shape each other. Their sustained, specific enumeration as an index of those geographies’ relations can complement more holistic readings of colonial geography.

In selecting a corpus of texts to map the British imperial imaginary, I again follow the principle of examining imperial self-representations to understand how imperial power imagined its world, and so I begin with the hugely popular body of period maritime nonfiction.⁵ I chose representative texts of major subgenres that would set up comparative mappings: not maritime literature in one corpus, but a sketch of landmarks in the maritime literary field. First are book-length voyage narratives, the tentpoles of the maritime imperial imaginary (recall Hawkesworth’s advance); next, the voyage collections that attempted to organize this sprawling field; and, finally, pirate literature, a much-read counterpoint to official maritime imaginaries. While focusing on published texts whose circulation gave them a larger role in shaping the imperial imaginary, I include some unpublished journals from Cook’s first voyage that were Hawkesworth’s sources, which allow me to compare the imaginaries of sea-level practitioners with those of armchair imperialists.

Any examination of the maritime imperial imaginary in its self-representations would be incomplete without sea fiction. Differentiating maritime fiction and nonfiction is notoriously difficult, as nonfictional voyages “were broadly regarded as lies” (Lamb, *Preserving* 6). The editor of the putatively nonfictional *General History of the Pyrates* admits that the accounts of the female pirates Mary Read and Anne Bonny have “a little the Air of a *Novel*” (C. Johnson 6). I nonetheless keep nonfiction separate because, as the analysis of *Pirates* below shows, its geographies sometimes aligned with that of real empire in ways no novels did. To decide which fictions to include, I followed Cohen’s lead and worked outward from a central text, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Cohen argues that *Crusoe* forged “a new poetics of adventure out of the mariner’s craft,” which “quickly inspired other writers” to make a “subgenre of sea adventure fiction” (60). My corpus similarly conceptualizes sea fiction as a *Crusoe*-spurred development within the larger arena of maritime literature, beginning with *Crusoe* and its successors, then reworking other genres, like pirate and voyage narratives. It is fair to object that I give too much space to Defoe, who makes up roughly half the corpus’s fiction, attenuating my claims about the imperial imaginary writ large. Defoe’s outsize presence, however, reflects *Crusoe*’s importance in eighteenth-century sea fiction and in British imperial imaginaries, as attested by Said’s claims for *Crusoe*’s pivotal importance in the history of fiction and the history of empire (*Culture* 69–70). A different project, focused on how imaginary imperial geographies found their way into putatively less imperialist genres, like domestic fiction, would devote less space to Defoe. But my method here, which approaches the real and imaginary British empire through self-representations thereof, requires a focus on sea fiction, where *Crusoe*’s shadow hangs heavy.⁶

The resulting corpus (table 1) is not very large in terms of the number of titles (17) or word count (about 6 million). The limited size is not necessarily a drawback, because it goes against a tendency to approach digital corpora as representative wholes.

Table 1. Corpus

Fiction
Daniel Defoe, <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> (1719)
Defoe, <i>Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe</i> (1719)
William Rufus Chetwood, <i>Richard Falconer</i> (1719) ⁷
Defoe, <i>Captain Singleton</i> (1720)
Defoe (?), <i>A New Voyage round the World, by a Course Never Sailed Before</i> (1725) ⁸
Jonathan Swift, <i>Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World (Gulliver's Travels)</i> (1726)
Tobias Smollett, <i>Roderick Random</i> (1748)
Nonfiction
William Dampier, <i>A New Voyage round the World</i> (1697) ⁹
Charles Johnson (?), <i>A General History of the Pyrates</i> (1724) ¹⁰
John Green, editor, <i>New General Collection of Voyages</i> (1744) ¹¹
George Anson, <i>A Voyage round the World</i> , edited by Richard Walter (1748) ¹²
Tobias Smollett, editor (?), <i>A Compendium of Authentic and Entertaining Voyages</i> (1756)
John Hawkesworth, <i>An Account of the Voyages for Making Discoveries . . .</i> (1773)
Sydney Parkinson, <i>A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas</i> (1773) ¹³
Abbé Raynal, <i>A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade . . .</i> , translated by John Justamond (1776) ¹⁴
Joseph Banks, journal of <i>Endeavour</i> voyage and description of places (1768–71)
James Cook, journal of <i>Endeavour</i> voyage and description of places (1768–71) ¹⁵

Instead, I place a “scholarly edition” of the “literary system” of maritime literature alongside a cross section of imperial reality to investigate, not adjudicate, how the two relate (Bode 98). Further, while limited in terms of the number of titles, this corpus is massive in terms of editions, translations, and cultural impact. *Crusoe* alone was a “steady best-seller” throughout the eighteenth century (St Clair 119) and has been reissued, translated, or adapted at least 700 times (Watt 95).

Finally, the time spans of *CLIWOC* (1750–1829) and *Slave Voyages* (ending in 1809 with the last slave ship that sailed under a British flag) offer an analytic possibility relative to this corpus.¹⁶ After thirty years as a leading genre, new sea fiction became rare during the decades between the publication of Tobias Smollett’s *The Adventures of*

Roderick Random in 1748 and James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Pilot* in 1824 (Cohen 100).¹⁷ The 1719–48 flow and subsequent ebb of sea fiction enables a rough experiment on the chronological relationships between the imaginary empire of novels and real empire. *CLIWOC* picks up when sea fiction recedes, and I included only post-1750 voyages registered in *Slave Voyages* (7,169 voyages); this time frame helps reveal how this slice of imaginary empire relates to later patterns in the real empire. I find that fictional empire shares later real empire’s focus on Britain (albeit with a nationalist focus on “England”) and a fungible model of colonial geography, that it bypasses bodily and environmental restraints, and that it prepares the fringes of empire for imagined future conquest. However, anything approaching a complete study of these relations would need to consider ship movements prior to 1719 and during the 1719–48 window, and so my theses on imaginary-real relations remain preliminary.

To find and count place-names in these texts, I trained a custom Stanford Named Entity Recognition (NER) model (Finkel et al.),¹⁸ then manually associated each name it found with a latitude, longitude, and other features: land or sea, specific or vague.¹⁹ This model identified 37,652 references to 1,189 unique locations denoted by 2,916 names. My method maps discourse rather than story, unlike, say, mapping the plots of Jane Austen’s novels (Moretti 12, 19, 21, 23). For example, although most of *Crusoe*’s story unfolds on an island in the Orinoco River (a specific sea place), the discourse barely mentions this river, but it mentions England (a vague land place) more than any other. *Crusoe*, in other words, has a story largely set in the Americas but an England-centric discourse—like all the corpus’s novels, in fact.

The maps themselves present epistemological dangers. Cartography is “particularly fraught terrain,” Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues, because its illusion of “unmediated vision” is “deeply allied with the colonization of the Americas and the exploitation of American land, indigenous peoples, and African labor,” and thus maps of empire often reenact the “coloniality of representation” (143).

Dillon’s warning is doubly relevant here. The maps of imaginary empire show counts of place-names pulled from texts, a God’s-eye view of an algorithm’s reading of quantifiable geographic references; and the maps of real empire, especially those from the *Slave Voyages* database, are grounded in colonial violence. Vincent Brown mulled similar problems in his digitized mapping of the 1760–61 Jamaican slave revolts: “cartography presumes the natural existence of points on a grid much as history naturalizes the timeline, though these are ultimately folkways for representing space and time that have more in common with slaveholders’ epistemes than with those of their slaves” (137–38). Brown’s invocation of “slaveholders’ epistemes” recalls Defoe’s advice that “the maps, atlases, and measurements of our mathematicians” help the British man make “himself master of the geography of the Universe,” underscoring how digital cartographies share the tools of imperial power and knowledge. But Brown holds that mapping can be worth the risk when the novel “design” of maps like his enables a more creative renarration than that provided by archival sources like Defoe’s atlases: “Rather than representing reified artifacts, historical visualizations can narrate a humanistic interpretation” (139). I attempt such a humanistic interpretation by reading these maps critically, not just setting them out as the truth about British empire. Interactive versions of them, inspired by Brown’s cartographic animations, are also available online for re-creating, remixing, and remodeling, although even the static visual maps here can help renarrate the geographic structure of the imperial archive’s imaginary. By reflecting the “measurements of our mathematicians” back on Defoe and his ilk, mapping self-representations of empire to chart *its* real and imaginary geographies, I hope to short-circuit the imperial archive’s epistemic grip on geography.

As an initial illustration of how this method helps to see imaginary-real geographic relations, consider the maps of *CLIWOC* (fig. 1), *Slave Voyages* (fig. 2), and the place-names in *Pyrates* (fig. 3) and sea fiction (fig. 4). The locations are

sized by their “counts,” and various names for each location (e.g., “Brazils” and “Brazil”) are combined (table 2). In *CLIWOC*, the count equals the total number of days traveling to or from a location across all voyages; in *Slave Voyages*, the number of voyages to or from it; and in the texts, the number of references. The largest node of each map has the same size, regardless of the absolute count, showing the relative geographic importance of its places. The tables show the absolute counts used to make the maps, and it bears emphasizing that these numbers are not directly comparable across *CLIWOC*, *Slave Voyages*, and place-names mentioned in texts. Note that the Mercator projection distorts the nodes’ size, making equatorial places wrongly seem less important. Finally, while the print version of this article includes grayscale reproductions of the first four maps, I encourage readers to consult the supplement for color versions and for the other maps referenced in this article.

How do the *CLIWOC* and *Slave Voyages* maps of real empire correspond to these texts’ visions of imaginary empire? Unexpectedly, a map combining the *CLIWOC* and *Slave Voyages* data would not be dissimilar to that of *Pyrates*. There is more of British North America and less of the mid-Atlantic islands and South Asia in *Pyrates* (although its India-China ratio reflects the real empire more than most texts). But a Caribbean centered on Jamaica matches *Slave Voyages* and (less so) *CLIWOC*; an Africa consisting mostly of “Africa” plus some locations along the western coast is consistent with *Slave Voyages*; some mentions of Brazil but few of other places in South America meshes with *CLIWOC*; and a thoroughly Atlantic world extending into the Indian Ocean, but not the Pacific, corresponds with both. Fictional geography resembles that of the real British empire far less, and I consider its divergences below. That any text should approximate the real empire surprises—let alone *Pyrates*, which admits its affinities with novels. The comparison here demonstrates that maritime fiction and nonfiction *are* different, at least geographically, and that nonfiction is not so fantastic as alleged. It also shows that these texts cannot all

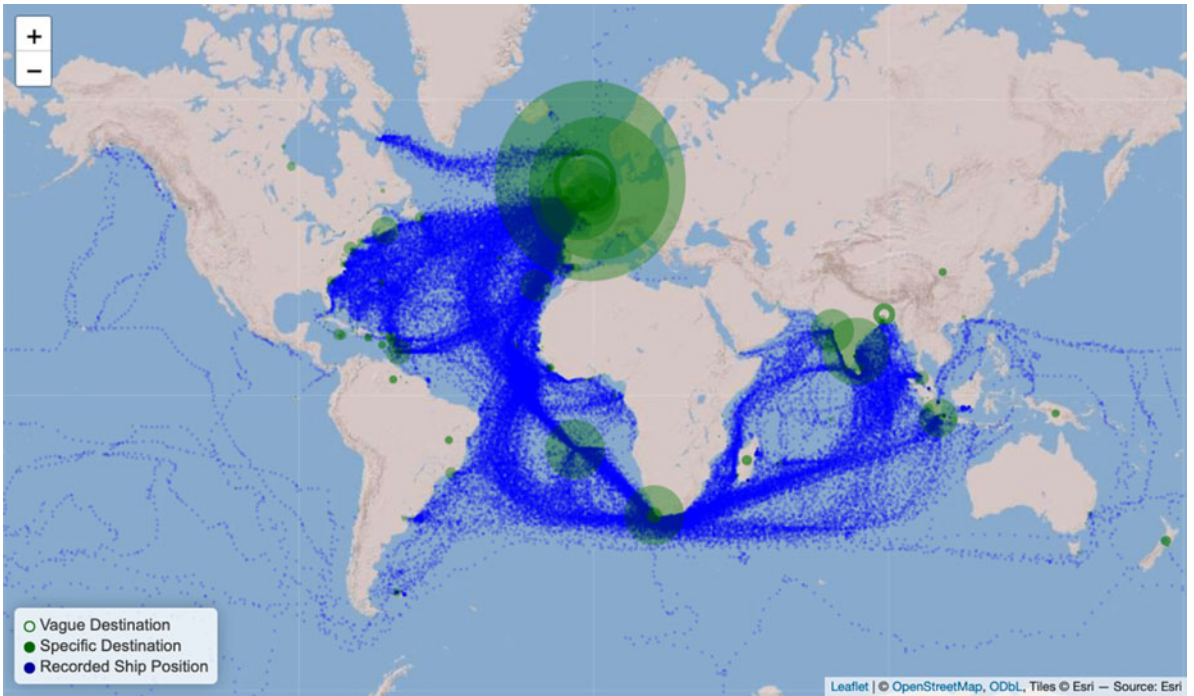


FIG. 1. CLIWOC (British, 1750–1829).



FIG. 2. Slave Voyages (British, post-1750).

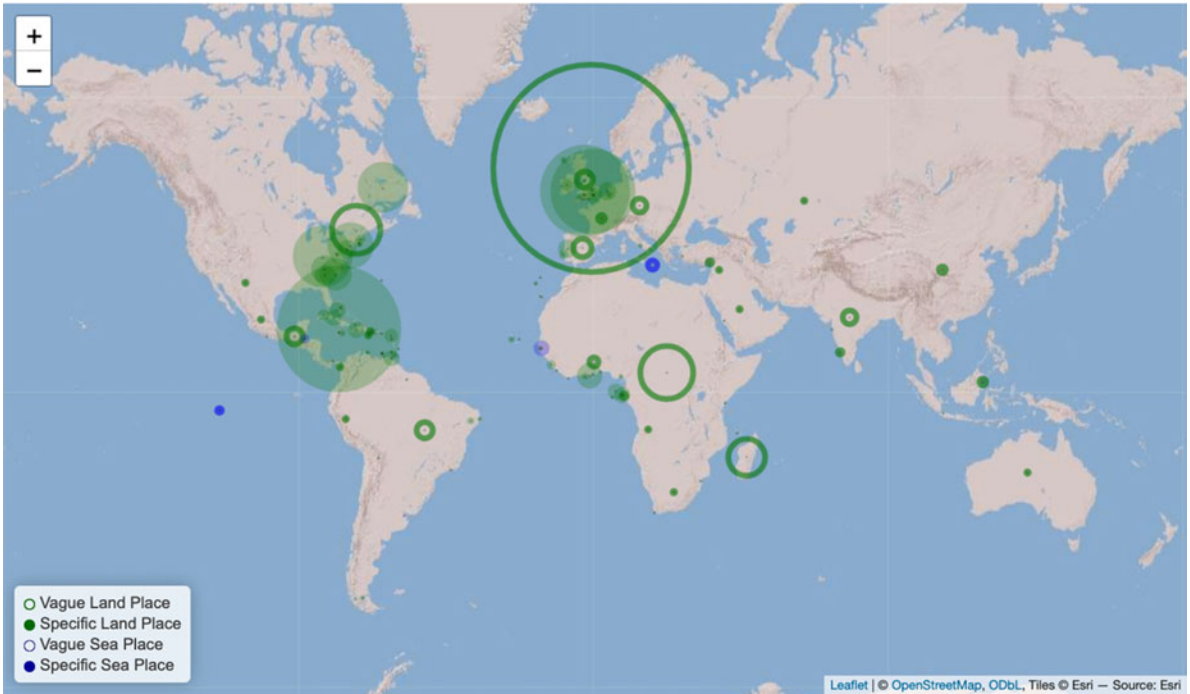


FIG. 3. *A General History of the Pyrates.*

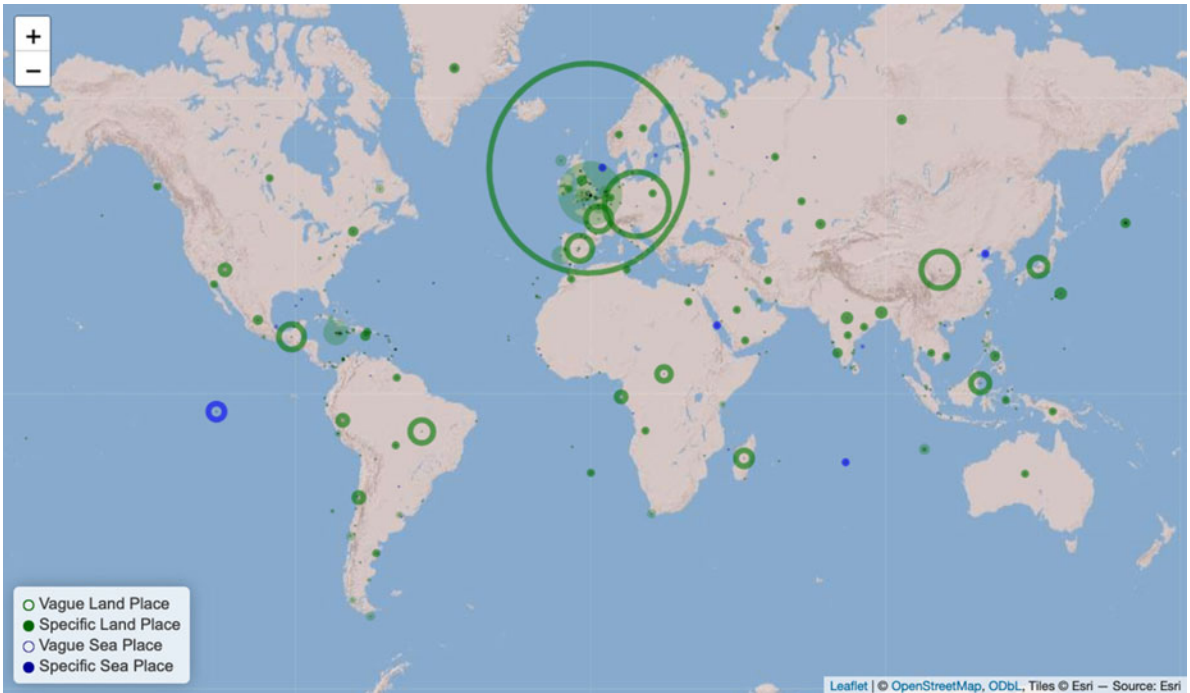


FIG. 4. *Sea Fiction (Defoe, Chetwood, Swift, Smollett).*

Table 2. Top Ten Locations in *CLIWOC*, *Slave Voyages*, *Pirates*, and Sea Fiction

<i>CLIWOC</i>		<i>Slave Voyages</i>		Johnson (?), <i>Pirates</i>		Sea Fiction	
Spithead	17,003	Liverpool	4,378	Jamaica	86	England	312
Downs	12,463	Kingston	1,179	England	85	Europe	110
Madras	9,449	London (1122), Londontowne (1)	1,123	Bristol	41	London	105
St Helena	8,363	Africa., port unspecified	1,029	Africa (38); London (38)	38	China	82
Plymouth	7,314	Bristol	885	Virginia	35	Jamaica (62); America (62); Brazil (22), Brazils (40)	62
Table Bay	7,194	Bonny	874	Madagascar	26	Spain (49), Old Spain (4)	53
Bombay	5,917	Barbados, port unspecified	695	New-England	25	East Indies (45), East-India (1)	46
Java Head	5,704	Jamaica, port unspecified	634	New-York (22); Newfoundland (22)	22	France	45
Portsmouth	4,841	Grenada, port unspecified	529	Carolina	20	South Seas (30), South Sea (7), South Sea, ²⁰ (2), South-Sea (1); Madagascar (40)	40
UK	4,744	Windward + Ivory + Gold + Benin (24), West Central Africa and St. Helena, port unspecified (486)	510	Cape Corso (4), Cape _ Corso (8), Cape-Corso (2), Cape _ Corso-Castle (4), Cape-Corso-Castle (1)	19	Africa (39); Japan (39)	39

be collapsed together: mapping imaginary empire across texts requires cautious attention to genre differences. Maps serve not as distillations of literary history—imaginary empire in one map—but as complementary texts themselves, hermeneutic accretions that offer possible vantages on the imperial imaginary-real relationship. Multiple maps of real and imaginary geographies underline the multiple interpretive possibilities of this method (D’Ignazio and Klein 130). I set out four initial theses on the patterns of convergence and divergence of imaginary and real geographies in the maritime British empire of the eighteenth century, including a claim for how the imaginary shapes the real.

Convergence I: Multiple Layers of Empire—Environmental, Commercial, National, and Navigational—Overlap in the Imperial Core (England)

Britain—specifically, England—is unsurprisingly the center of the two visions of the real British empire and, with few exceptions, its imaginaries. But while the imperial center remains within England, it does shift across these maps, with four centers corresponding to distinct layers of maritime empire (table 3): environmental in *CLIWOC* (fig. 5), commercial in *Slave Voyages* (fig. 6), national in sea fiction (fig. 7), and navigational in Cook’s journal (fig. 8).²¹

In *CLIWOC*, England is primarily sheltered near-shore roadsteads. Spithead was by the “naval establishments of Portsmouth” and only open to southeast wind (Bartholomew 736). The Downs, near the mouth of the Thames, has high sand bars that protect against North Sea storms (Harding 61–64). Note that both places blur first and second nature: sand bars, navy works, rivers, and cities. *CLIWOC*’s England shows the environmental affordances at the bedrock of maritime empire.

For *Slave Voyages*, in contrast, England is mostly one city—Liverpool. This city on the English main lurks behind the imperial roadsteads of *CLIWOC*, its plunder protected by the British navy—a British Atlantic premonition of the American Pacific empire’s capital, Los Angeles, and its perimeter of military bases mapped by Edward Soja (225–27). Unlike the more dispersed environmental geography of *CLIWOC*, the commercial geography of the slave trade revolved around a single port city, “a capital of the long eighteenth century” (Baucom 9). The concentration of commercial empire in the transatlantic slave trade, with its violent accumulation flowing toward one point, distinguishes it not only locationally but structurally from *CLIWOC*’s environmental geography.

Sea fiction’s imaginary empire breaks from both these visions of the real empire to foreground a nationalist geography. The most common place-name in sea fiction by a wide margin is “England” (table 2), projecting a specifically English nation. Austen, too, limited her novels to England, “a much smaller space than the United Kingdom” (Moretti 13), but the novel-nation bond here predates Austen, occurs in a very different genre, and elevates the name “England” itself. The only sea fictions to put another place-name over “England” are Smollett’s *Roderick Random*, the only work by a Scottish author in the corpus, which foregrounds “London” (yet still mentions “England” more than “Scotland”), and Defoe’s *Further Adventures*, which barely prefers “China.” “England” even becomes the geographic marker of the genre of the novel: these texts share little geographically except the ubiquity of “England” (table 4).²²

While the novel-nation connection is not surprising, the strength of this signal is noteworthy, especially in sea fiction. While novel and nation going hand-in-hand has been a critical commonplace at least since Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, the link here is strikingly direct: simply checking whether “England” is the most common place-name in a text can identify it as a British novel. Furthermore, this link is counterintuitive for sea fiction. One might expect it to deemphasize the nation given the “rambling disposition” of the maritime picaresque that “pulls it outward” (Cohen 103), a centrifugalism borne out in mentions of non-British places. Their stories also unfold outside the nation’s borders. *Captain Singleton*’s story leaves England after a few pages, stops back for less than four sentences, and returns for the final two sentences—yet the text mentions “England” more than anywhere else. That sea fiction still foregrounds “England” suggests that British sea fiction’s anational stories of maritime adventure remain within the novel’s nationalist discourse. Digital methods here do not just show what we already know.

Not all maritime texts participated in this nationalist imaginary. One of the strangest maps is from Cook’s *Endeavour* journal, a practicing mariner’s view of the empire that deemphasizes the nation. This map contains a giant node over Greenwich, while the rest of the world barely registers: Greenwich, in various forms, occurs 330 times and all non-Greenwich places combined 624 times, which means that Greenwich accounts for about 35% of all references. These references come exclusively from longitude readings, revealing a navigational empire of abstract meridians and points, not nations. Greenwich’s literal centrality still indexes the British empire’s power, as the state-backed Royal Observatory there was the reference point for the lunar distance tables used to calculate longitude (Sobel and Andrewes 197–99). However, Greenwich itself lacks significance for Cook, since other places can function as bearings:

[T]aking several observations of the Sun and Moon the mean result of which gave 207°.56’ West

**Table 3. Environmental, Commercial, National, and Navigational Imperial Cores:
Top Five British Locations**

<i>CLIWOC</i>		<i>Slave Voyages</i>		Sea Fiction		Cook's Journal	
Spithead	17,003	Liverpool	4,378	England	312	Greenwich (242), Greenwch (2), Greenwich Bearing (31), Greenw (3), Greenwh (52)	330
Downs	12,463	London	1123	London	105	England	17
Plymouth	7,314	Bristol	885	Bristol (19), Brifiol (3)	22	London	9
Portsmouth	4,841	Lancaster	123	Scotland	15	Deptford	2
UK	4,744	Whitehaven	58	Bridewell	8		

Longitude from the Meridion of Greenwich, from these observations the Longitude of the Ship at Noon was 207°..58' and by the Log 208°..20' the difference being only 22' and this error may as well lay in the one as the other, our Latitude at noon was 39°..36' So and Longde made from Cape Farewell 22°..22' Wt. (17 Apr. 1770)

The multiplicity of bearings here—the lunar distance longitude from Greenwich, the same based on logbook runs, and the longitude from Cape Farewell (in Aotearoa / New Zealand) computed with the run from there—shows that Cook has no special faith in the astronomical measurement centered on the Royal Observatory (“this error may as well lay in the one as the other”). He cross validates the readings because the ship’s survival depends on an accurate positional fix. Cook’s using both a standardized reference point (Greenwich) and one chosen by the mariner (Cape Farewell) speaks to how the mariner’s craft balances technical procedures with necessary improvisation, or, as Cohen terms them, “Protocol” and “Jury-Rigging” (21, 30). The two capacities work in concert just as multiple bearings here corroborate the ship’s position.

But one reference system is enough for the armchair sailor. Hawkesworth’s revision of Cook omits “Greenwich” in the lunar distance longitudes and cuts the corroborating bearings, casting England as the unquestioned center of the world.

Hawkesworth’s simplified bearings show a split between the geographies of the practicing mariner, who needs specific points of relative reference because they cannot take their bearings for granted, and the armchair sailor, who welcomes an absolute England-centered geography like sea fiction’s.

Convergence II: The Empire Seeks Fungible Geographies of Power (Africa and China)

One key site of overlap between the real and imaginary empires is Africa, where *Slave Voyages* (fig. 9) and many texts, both nonfictional (figs. 10 and 11) and fictional (fig. 12), prefer vague, large-scale African locations over specific places (table 5). That similarity evinces an underlying imperial geography of fungibility—opportunistic violence, flexible trading, slippery signification—which was also a model for imagined future conquest, particularly of China.

All these maps emphasize the vague place “Africa,” along with terms like “Guinea” or “Windward Coast” that denote vast zones rather than particular places. It is perhaps unsurprising that the imaginary empire in text, especially fiction, deploys vague place-names in order to other, exoticize, and despecify. But that the top place of embarkation in *Slave Voyages* is also “Africa (port unspecified)” —for slave traders would just write

Table 4. England and Other Places: Top Five Locations in Sea Fictions

Defoe, <i>Robinson Crusoe</i>		Defoe, <i>Further Adventures</i>		Chetwood, <i>Richard Falconer</i>		Defoe, <i>Captain Singleton</i>		Defoe, <i>New Voyage</i>		Swift, <i>Gulliver's Travels</i>		Smollett, <i>Roderick Random</i>	
England	42	China	45	England	69	England	35	England	46	England; Europe	44	London	46
Brazil (7), Brazils (29)	36	England	44	Jamaica	39	Madagascar	25	America	33	Blefuscu	30	England	29
Lisbon	17	Japan	14	Bristol (13), Brifiol (3)	16	Africa	23	South Seas (26), South Sea (4), South Sea, ²³ (2)	32	Lilliput	17	Scotland	13
London; Africa	11	Bengal; East Indies; Europe	13	Isle of Cuba (1), Cuba island (1), Cuba (10), Island of Cuba (2)	14	China	16	Spain (23), Old Spain (3)	26	Luggnagg	15	Jamaica; France	12
Guinea	10	Muscovy (4), Moscow (7)	11	London (12); Spain (11), Old Spain (1)	12	Malabar; Europe	13	Peru	23	Japan	14	Europe	11

“Africa” on official papers, making it a functional place in the transatlantic slave trade (Eltis)—evinces a more pernicious vagueness uniting real and imaginary empires.

Aligning the “Africa (port unspecified)” of *Slave Voyages*, the “Guinea” and “Africa” of John Green, and the “Africa” of *Pyrates* and Defoe reveals an underlying connection: fungibility.²⁴ The concept from Black studies derives from Hortense Spillers’s work on the representational flexibility of Black bodies under white domination (though Spillers does not use the term *fungibility*), especially how bodies “become a territory of cultural and political maneuver” (67). Subsequent studies have discussed how fungibility turns Black bodies into exchangeable (economic, discursive, symbolic) commodities (Hartman, *Scenes*), linking this abstracting movement to global capitalism past and present (Winnubst). Tiffany Lethabo King argues further that fungibility is a fundamentally spatial practice: “Under slavery and conquest . . . Blackness is the raw dimensionality (symbol, matter, kinetic energy) used to make space” (“Labor” 1028–29). Empire, armed with spatial fungibility, produces spaces through the “maneuver” of territorial conquest, bodily enslavement, and symbolization

thereof. The hollow circles marking vague African places in these maps index the open space of fungibility in imperial geography.

Fungibility binds the real and imaginary empires because it fuses economic and representational flexibility. Slave traders ruthlessly exploited the “flexible commercial system[s]” of West Africa, where they used numerous intermediaries for buying enslaved people (Getz 81) and sites of sale large and small (Baucom 11–14). Those roving maneuvers resemble how textual place-names created open spaces for unverifiable adventures. *Captain Singleton*’s lack of specific African places frees Defoe to fill this “Africa” with ferocious beasts, vast deserts, and gold deposits. Slave traders’ many specific sites of embarkation within the larger space of “Africa (port unspecified)” further parallels how, in texts, vague names like “Africa” can link specific place-names: “The Pyrates . . . sail’d for the Main of Africa, and put in at a little Place called Delagoa, near the River de Spiritu Sancto, on the Coast of Monomotapa” (C. Johnson 132). Fungibility is how empire navigated, materially and symbolically.

Nor was fungibility limited to Africa. The British imperial imaginary dreamed especially of making China, the most mentioned non-European place in

sea fiction, a fungible space. Green's collection exemplifies the Africa-China fungibility link: it mentions "China" in various forms 1,479 times, more than any other place, followed by "Guinea" (table 6), and the map of China in Green's collection (fig. 13) resembles that of Africa (fig. 10), with a vague "China" dominating specific places. Historically, eighteenth-century British merchants were frustrated by the Chinese government's control of trade, which limited all European trade to strict terms at a single port, Canton (modern-day Guangzhou). Although this Canton trade was lucrative for European merchants, they chafed at the restrictions of the so-called golden ghetto (Downs 4). The British geographic imaginary, in contrast, envisioned a Chinese space as fungible as Africa's, where a single vague place-name would enable flexible (one-sided) commerce and representation.

The difference from Africa is that the maps of the real empire do not share this China focus—*CLIWOC* shows British ships barely passing the straits of Malacca—implying that British armchair imperialists imagined that China's future geography would resemble Africa's present.²⁵ Their dreams of "China (port unspecified)" basically came to pass with post-Opium War "unequal treaties" that opened China to "free trade," making its coast a jumble of European concessions and treaty ports (Bracken 168). The fungible imaginary geography of China, absent real imperial British power there, indicates how fungibility is a portable framework for colonial spatial power.

Divergence I: The Imaginary Empire Bypasses Environmental Restraint (the Mid-Atlantic)

While my first two theses highlight convergences between imaginary and real British maritime imperial geographies, my last two consider divergences: the imaginary empire's lack of environmental restraint and its anticipatory character.

CLIWOC accords great weight to mid-Atlantic islands (fig. 14). Saint Helena is the biggest non-British destination after Chennai (Madras) (table 2). Madeira, despite not being a British possession (although it was occupied by Britain during the

Napoleonic wars within the *CLIWOC* timespan), is a bigger destination (3,908 voyages) than any place in the Americas (first among which is Barbados with 3,560 voyages). One methodological reason for their prominence is their small size, which means that all voyages there list the same destination, concentrating their footprint. Contrast how the Cape of Good Hope's multiple destinations—Table Bay (7,194), Simon's Bay (2,001), and the Cape itself (1,732)—dilute its size; consolidating them would make it the biggest non-British location in *CLIWOC*. Still, *CLIWOC*'s emphasis on the mid-Atlantic islands signals their significance in the real British empire.

That importance emerged from the interplay between their environmental uniqueness and mariners' bodily limits. Saint Helena was important in imperial geography not because of its trading opportunities, but because it sits atop a hot spot in the Earth's mantle that made a landmass large enough to collect fresh rainwater, support plants and animals, and provide safe harbors (O'Connor and le Roex). Of course, Saint Helena entered the Anthropocene with colonization, and its environmental affordances, like Spithead and the Downs, fuse first and second nature: species introduced by Europeans, notably the goats brought by the Portuguese in 1502, have displaced endemic vegetation and animals, and the forests have been greatly reduced (Gosse 4, 18, 125, 128). These islands' fresh food was vital because preserved food caused scurvy after about three months (Lamb, *Scurvy* 6), making them and the Cape common stops on the important Britain–South Asia route (fig. 1). (As such, their size here also indexes the outsize importance of South Asia in the real empire's geography, as my next thesis argues.) Although scurvy's exact etiology, vitamin C deficiency, was unknown until the twentieth century, mariners had long recognized that fresh food prevented and cured it (29). The mid-Atlantic islands were thus geographic anti-scorbutics whose environmental features ameliorated the deficiencies of empire's working bodies at sea. Their importance in *CLIWOC* shows how empire maneuvered around environmental-physiological constraints (101–02 and 64–108), using mid-Atlantic footholds to extend its reach.

Table 5. Vagueness and Fungibility: Top Five Locations in Africa

<i>Slave Voyages</i>		<i>Green, Collection</i>		<i>Johnson (?), Pyrates</i>		<i>Defoe, Captain Singleton</i>	
Africa., port unspecified	1,029	Guinea (976), Guinea Coast (5), Guineai (4), Guina (5), Gabon (4)	994	Africa	38	Madagascar	25
Bonny	874	Africa (427), Inland Parts of Africa (9)	436	Madagascar	26	Africa	23
Windward + Ivory + Gold + Benin (24), West Central Africa and St. Helena, port unspecified (486)	510	Gambra (56), Gambia (329), River Gambra (5), River Gambia, or Gambia (2), Ganmbra (10)	402	Cape Corso (4), Cape _ Corso (8), Cape-Corso (2), Cape _ Corso-Castle (4), Cape-Corso-Castle (1)	19	Cape de Bona Speranza (4), Cape of Good Hope (8)	12
Windward Coast, port unspecified (340), Windward Coast (Nunez - Assini) (99)	439	Congo (353), Congo River (6), River Zaire (24), Zayri (10)	393	Cape _ Lopez (11), Cape Lopez (1)	12	Congo	7
Calabar	421	River Sanaga (22), Sanaga (335)	357	Gambia; St. Thome (1), Island of St. _ Thomas (4), St. _ Thomas (3), St. _ Thome (3)	11	Angola; Mozambique; Rio Grande ²⁶	6

But the mid-Atlantic islands are notably absent from the imaginary empire of sea fiction (fig. 15). “St. Helena” and its various forms get 6 mentions across all sea fiction; “Madeira,” 5; the “Canary Islands,” 9. Nonfictional texts also downplay them, if less dramatically (fig. 16).²⁷ The marginal mid-Atlantic of these texts suggests a crucial difference between imaginary and real imperial geographies: the imaginary appears largely indifferent to the spatial-bodily challenges the marine environment posed. That finding is somewhat surprising. While some scholars have bemoaned the preponderant modern indifference to marine materiality, even in contemporary transnational histories that center oceans (Steinberg), and argued that accounts of scurvy-stricken voyages refused to acknowledge the disease just as historians sidestep its epistemological challenges (Lamb, *Scurvy* 30–31), others have recovered in maritime literature a “fluid network of human and nonhuman actants” (Duckert 56) and an ethos of craft that coupled the human mind and body to environmental dangers and affordances (Cohen 20–21). I stress, then, that this

is a finding about geography, not necessarily about the whole maritime imaginary. While body-environment relations are important in maritime literature, these maps hint that they are explored more through episodes in distant places (e.g., Cook’s encounter with the Great Barrier Reef [Cohen 15–58]) than through the pit stops undergirding survival at sea. The erasure of the mid-Atlantic implies that empire imagined the sea as a scalar expander, while maps of imperial reality show a Janus-faced maritime space that expands while imposing limits. The imaginary empire’s lack of environmental spatial restraint corresponds with Schmitt’s reading of *Heart of Darkness* as a critique of unrestrained “imperial acquisitiveness,” symbolized by “Kurtz as an all-consuming mouth” (25) and contrasted with the “restraint” imposed by the tide framing the narrative (22–29). But the disjunction between *CLIWOC* and these textual maps in the mid-Atlantic qualifies Schmitt’s theory of imperial unrestraint: real empire did shape itself around environmental constraints, but imaginary empire

Table 6. Imagining a Fungible China: Top Five Locations in Green's *New General Collection*

China (1420), Clina (7), CHINA, ²⁸ (21), China (12), Ckina (16), Cathay (3)	1,479
Guinea (976), Guinea Coast (5), Guineai (4), Guina (5), Gabon (4)	994
Europe (442), Eu rope (11), Europa (4)	457
England (448), Englandyy (3)	451
Africa (427), Inland Parts of Africa (9)	436

acknowledged them far less, instead envisioning a geography of limitless expansion.

Divergence II: The Imaginary Empire Is Far Ahead of the Real Empire (the Indian and Atlantic Oceans versus the Pacific)

The imaginary empire's lack of environmental restraint accords with its general neglect of real imperial territories in favor of the unconquered fringe. The imaginary empire pushes beyond, and sometimes even anticipates, the real empire, suggesting imaginary attention may prepare for real conquest. Specifically, the imaginary empire fixates more on lands bordering the Pacific Ocean (China, western South America) than those on the Indian and Atlantic (colonies in South Asia and the Caribbean), despite the real empire's near-complete absence from the former and concentration in the latter.

The most remarkable discrepancy of this study is the marginal position of South Asia in both fictional and nonfictional imaginary geographies despite its centrality in the *CLIWOC* map of real empire. Across all sea fiction, India, the most mentioned place in South Asia, occurs only 15 times, half as often as Blefuscu (from *Gulliver's Travels*). China, as noted above, is the most discussed place outside Europe, with 82 mentions. In the case of fiction, this imbalance might be blamed on the corpus—specifically, on Defoe's "obsession" with criticizing China (Markley 192)—even if *Singleton* is the only fiction here whose most mentioned non-British place (Madagascar) is in the Indian Ocean (table 4). It is unclear, too, why Defoe's

opposition to the "East India trade" writ large, which included a campaign to ban "calicoes" from South Asia, should in his fiction revolve so much more around East Asia (Starr 438). Besides, the same pattern holds in the compendia of voyages: Green mentions India 271 times, but China in various forms 1,479; Smollett's *Compendium* has a closer but still unbalanced proportion (56 to 84). Two exceptions are Hawkesworth's edition of the *Endeavour* voyage (29 to 12) and Cook's own journal (9 to 2), but those texts obviously contain many more references to Pacific places, and the immense popularity of Hawkesworth's text itself demonstrates British imaginary interest in the Pacific.

That interest was wholly out of proportion to real British geography. In the Navy and East India Company voyages documented by *CLIWOC*, the most common destination outside Britain is Chennai (Madras) (9,449), with Mumbai (Bombay) not far behind (5,917), while the biggest Chinese location, Guangzhou (Canton), barely registers in comparison (650). In *CLIWOC*, real British ships cover the Indian Ocean but hardly make it east of Java Head, let alone to China (fig. 17), unlike imaginary geographies that bypass South Asia for China and the Pacific (figs. 18 and 19). The texts systematically minimize the importance of South Asia in the British empire. The lack of imaginary attention to the Indian Ocean and subcontinent compared with the Pacific and especially China—in a period when the East Indian Company consolidated power over India, Britain's largest imperial possession, and disfigured the Indian Ocean world by militarizing the seas (Ghosh 288)—is a striking case of how the imaginary empire pushed far beyond the real.

Why does imperial writing rush ahead to the Pacific? Said argues that novels "fill gaps in an incomplete world" and thus fulfill an "appetite . . . for modifying reality—as if from the beginning" which perhaps manifests in a geographic orientation toward empire's open edges (*Beginnings* 82). But South Asian places are scarce in nonfiction, too. The underlying issue might be that, as Joseph Conrad puts it, "[t]he conquest of the earth,

which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much” (107). Places where empire is establishing itself, like eighteenth-century South Asia, are not friendly imaginary harbors for armchair sailors. It is more tasteful, following Simon Gikandi, to ignore the material base of colonial wealth, and instead imagine the frontiers of empire in innocent narratives of exploration as “anti-conquest” (Pratt 37–66).

Another possible reason, since Europeans had not charted much of the Pacific at this time, might be the “powerful pleasure” of “curiosity,” “adventure,” and “danger and destruction” at “the Edge of knowledge,” as Cohen terms it (52). But the places of interest in British fiction are defined in *national* terms as the edge of the British empire, not necessarily of European knowledge, for the British imperial imaginary also fixed on places controlled by other empires. British interest in the western coast of the Americas, dating back at least to Francis Drake’s attacks in the 1570s, demonstrates this nationalist acquisitiveness (Andrews). *CLIWOC* shows no more than four British landings on this coast, but it is disproportionately important in sea fiction—Peru gets 28 mentions; Chile, 19; and Lima, 19. Many of these occur in *A New Voyage round the World, by A Course Never Sailed Before* (fig. 20), a text that “at times seems to have little more purpose than to promote one of Defoe’s favorite projects, creating an English colony on the tip of South America” (Todd viii). Note, too, the popularity of the nonfictional 1744 account of Anson’s voyage to attack Spanish colonies there (fig. 21). Such attention to western South America shows the imaginary British empire’s omnivorous spatial appetite, which overleaps the real not just by pushing European empire across the planet but by pushing into the spheres of other European powers, ultimately seeking (in line with my first thesis) British aggrandizement relative to national rivals.

Abbé Raynal’s *History* corroborates this finding by providing a view of the British empire from France: the British empire shows up more in

this French text, evincing a transnational pattern of imperial covetousness. His references to South Asia (fig. 22), where the East India Company had largely seized French holdings before Raynal’s 1776 publication, partially support the pattern: Raynal mentions “India” 226 times and “China” only 159 times. Further, Raynal’s most mentioned South Asian locations are “Bengal” (65), the longest-colonized British territory, followed by “Malabar” (61) and “Coromandel” (61). Smollett’s *Compendium*, one of the few texts to focus much on South Asia (fig. 23), somewhat inverts Raynal, with more interest in “Malabar” (39) than “Bengal” (9), though Smollett shows little interest in French possessions in “Coromandel” (10). But that Raynal’s *History* should mention Indian locations more than any other text in the corpus, and specifically “Bengal,” hints that the nationalist ambitions of imaginary empire were shared by Britain’s main imperial rival.

The asymmetry of Indian and Pacific Ocean locations across the real and imaginary empires suggests a provocative thesis. At least in the case of British maritime literature, the imperial imaginary paved the way for real future conquest at the expense of attention to the existing real empire. The basic structure of attitude indicated by the structure of reference in these texts is an emphasis on the imperial core and far fringes, with a gap in the middle. Said claimed that it is an oversimplification to argue that earlier literature “caused” later imperialism. But complementing Said’s subtle reading with an unsubtle enumeration, as these maps of place-names do, suggests we should be more open to that possibility (*Culture* 81). British imaginary interest in China is the strongest evidence of imperial imagination as real preparation, since it anticipated future domination, which took the same geographic form as that imaginary vision—namely, the fungible trade zone. In South America, although a projected British settler colony did not materialize and there were not “military footholds and formal territory,” Britain later developed an “informal empire” that foreshadowed twentieth-century neocolonialism (Reeder 6–8), the imaginary again anticipating the real.

I must qualify this thesis. First, a longer and more detailed chronological survey of British imaginary and real empire would be necessary to see whether, for example, there was an earlier wave of imaginary interest in South Asia. Second, fiction is not created *ex nihilo* but pulls from and transforms existing texts. For example, the fictionalized western South America of *New Voyage round the World, by a Course Never Sailed Before* drew heavily on William Dampier's nonfictional *New Voyage round the World*. Comparing these two works illuminates how fictional imaginary geography modifies the nonfictional to anticipate real empire. The fiction simplifies Dampier's geography by using fewer and vaguer place-names: accounting for length, Dampier mentions places 2.6 times more frequently, but vague places only 40% as often. Contrast Dampier's tangle of specific references (fig. 24) with the fiction's sparser vague references, which also ignore British colonies like Jamaica (fig. 20). These revisions suggest that fiction anticipated real empire by refining nonfiction, a honing of the imaginary to focus on new regions of potential conquest. Fictional geography is not the sole preparation for real imperial maneuver, but these comparisons point to its importance in steering the imaginary and ultimately the real empire.

The implications of the imaginary empire zooming ahead of the real, casting its eyes to the Pacific when the British were still consolidating power over the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, deserve an essay of their own reflecting on its significance for the relationship between material realities and textual imaginaries. Contrast Mary Louise Pratt's "strong methodological assumption" in using literature to study history: "important historical transitions alter the way people write, because they alter people's experiences and the way people imagine, feel and think about the world they live in. The shifts in writing, then, will tell you something about the nature of the changes" (4). Arguments for the converse, that literature shapes future reality, generally concede, as Said does, that literature is also mimetic. Said does strongly argue, however, that "culture is in advance of politics, military history, or economic process" when it comes to

decolonization: "The slow and often bitterly disputed recovery of geographical territory which is at the heart of decolonization is preceded—as empire had been—by the charting of cultural territory" (*Culture* 200, 209). These maps affirm that the "charting of cultural territory" preceded colonization and not just decolonization, emboldening Said's claim. Culture, at least on the real and imaginary seas of the British empire, was the front line of imperialism.

NOTES

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1. Of the vast body of scholarship resisting colonialism that foregrounds the imaginary-real relationship, I draw primarily on Said's *Culture and Imperialism*. Other foundational texts include Fanon; Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*; Hulme; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; Morrison; Spivak; and Ngũgĩ. Notable recent work on this topic includes Aboul-Ela; Cheng; Elias; Gikandi; Lamb, *Scurvy*; Lowe; McKittrick, *Dear Science*; Mignolo; Sharpe; So; and Taylor.

2. For a description of the database, see "Logbooks."

3. For a nonexhaustive overview of historians' debates on *Slave Voyages*, see Kelley.

4. Other digital humanists who have turned away from the massive corpus include Algee-Hewitt and McGurl; Booth; Gavin and Gidal; and Manshel.

5. My project opens up the question of how other representations of empire might be embedded in different geographic imaginaries—specifically, how later anticolonial texts might deploy place-names differently. While beyond the conceptual purview of this article, I did check the outputs of my named entity recognition (NER) model for some of these writings. Some were strikingly similar, at least in their distribution, to my colonial corpus. M. NourbeSe Philips's *Zong!*, for example, mentions England most frequently (12 mentions) and Jamaica second (8), a pattern similar to that of William Rufus Chetwood's *Richard Falconer* (see table 4)—although many of these place-names in *Zong!* come in the reprinted court case, not the poem cycle. That distinction shows, not surprisingly, that such texts have a "black sense of place" (McKittrick, *Dear Science* 106–08) away from my colonial corpus. What does surprise is that these texts' sense of place can still be registered, in a very different way, by NER. For example, while the most common place-name it detects

in Dionne Brand's *Map to the Door of No Return* is "Africa" (35 mentions), the runner-up is "No Return" (28 mentions)—a place-name, perhaps, but one quite unlike the place-names detected in British maritime literature that easily map onto cartographic points. This finding suggests a future version of this project that could use NER as a path beyond colonial naming norms and cartography.

6. Alternative corpora of eighteenth-century British empire might shift this project's emphases, whether by incorporating other period genres, such as sentimental literature, abolitionist texts, and slave narratives (Festa); poetry (Kaul, *Poems*); and theater (Orr) or by including a variety of texts concerned with empire (Aravamudan; Carroll; Kaul, *Eighteenth-Century British Literature*). Beyond the interest of seeing how imperial imaginaries were contested and fractured across genres, such analogous corpora would open up more questions about empire's gendered geographies, given the largely masculine stories of maritime writing. More lacunae emerge in considering how this project's basic framework would radically change if it prioritized not self-representations of empire but representations positioned against or outside it, which could make delimiting concepts like "British," "1697–1829," and "writing" dissolve. Studies of the diasporic Indian Ocean world (Aiyar; C. Anderson; Desai; Ghosh; Gopinath; Hofmeyr, *Dockside Reading* and "Universalizing"; Jaffer; Lahiri; Varisco), the transpacific (DeLoughrey, "Toward a Critical Ocean Studies" and *Routes*; Hoskins and Nguyen; Jetñil-Kijiner et al.; Jones and Wanhalla; Lee et al.; Looser; Shigematsu and Camacho; Suzuki; Yoneyama), and the Black Atlantic (Arabindan-Kesson; Barson; Figueroa-Vásquez; Gilroy, "Between the Blues"; Hall; Hartman, "Venus"; J. Johnson; King, *Black Shoals*; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; Sharpe) work "outside colonial scripts" (McKittrick, *Dear Science* 52) very literally, challenging the spatiotemporal bounds and textuality of colonial archives to trace the mobile solidarities of people surviving and struggling against maritime empire. Instead of following these counterhistories and countertheories, this project stresses the tools of imperial geography—ledgers, coordinates, enumerated place-names—to dissect empire's persistent operations.

7. *Richard Falconer* is largely forgotten today, but the six editions recorded in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* attest to its past popularity.

8. The attribution of this text to Defoe is highly dubious (Marshall 222–28).

9. This text set off "the flood-tide of eighteenth-century voyage literature" (Edwards 17).

10. While Johnson was once thought to be Defoe's pseudonym, there is no external evidence for Defoe's authorship of *Pyrates*, it is inconsistent with his other works on piracy (Furbank and Owens 100–21), and there is more evidence for another author, Nathaniel Mist (Bialuschewski).

11. Also known as the Astley collection, after the publisher, this work was the basis of Abbé Prevost's collection of voyages.

12. This was a much-anticipated and widely read voyage narrative, running to five editions within a year and quickly translated into German, French, Dutch, and Russian (Williams 302).

13. Sydney Parkinson was an artist employed by the botanist Joseph Banks as part of the *Endeavour* voyage, which he did not survive. Sydney's brother, Stanfield Parkinson, prepared his journal and published it separately from Banks's and Cook's.

14. The first translation into English of Abbé Raynal's widely read *Histoire des deux Indes* was a popular protoencyclopedia combining voyages, history, and philosophical essays (Kaufman 50, 122) that helps map the nation-empire link.

15. Digitized versions of the journals were taken from the National Library of Australia's *South Seas* website (southseas.nla.gov.au/index_voyaging.html).

16. The British slave trade did not end in 1809, as slavers kept sailing under false flags after the trade's 1807 abolition, though "these cases probably account for less than 1 percent of the ships included in the [*Slave Voyages*] data set" (Eltis).

17. Cohen observes that the paucity of sea adventure fiction during this period "is a puzzle, and it may be that there are collections I have overlooked" (100). In assembling a corpus for this project, I searched through Gale's *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* for literature mentioning "voyage" and "sea" and found the same gap, substantiating Cohen's account.

18. I made a training set from the corpus, as explained in the Stanford NER CRF FAQ, to detect place-names in the texts. This new "place-name" entity was not trained on any of Stanford NER's existing classes. In a test set of sentences with place-names, my model caught 69% of the place-names (recall) and 83% of its guesses were correct (precision). These figures are significantly better than the default Stanford NER's performance on the test set and slightly better than Wilkens's on his corpus of American fiction from 1851 to 1875. For context, human annotators only agree in identifying named locations 80%–90% of the time (Leidner 10). More technical information, instructions for replication, and all relevant files can be found at github.com/alexander-j-sherman/MappingBritishEmpire. An interactive map-maker, which lets users re-create the maps here or generate new maps from the databases and texts of this corpus, is available at alexshermanstanford.shinyapps.io/MappingBritishEmpire_Final/.

19. Locations were pulled from *CLIWOC* and *Slave Voyages* directly and from the texts using Stanford NER. I differentiated specific land and sea locations (cities, islands, capes, provinces; bays, straits, rivers) from vague locations (nations, empires, continents, archipelagos; oceans, seas) according to my judgment of what might be specific enough to be navigationally useful to a mariner. I manually associated locations with latitudes and longitudes in a main list and marked a rough center for vague locations.

20. This comma is part of the name as recognized by Stanford NER.

21. Figures 5 through 24 are available in the supplement (<https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812924000634>).

22. Analyses of novels outside the corpus also show a novel-"England" link. The model finds that the top place-names in Chetwood's *The Voyages and Adventures of Robert Boyle* are "England" (30), "Spain" (25), and "Lima" (20), in line with the Pacific fixation of my fourth thesis; in Peter Longueville's *The English Hermit; or, The Unparallell'd and Surprizing Adventures*

of *One Philip Quarll*, “London” (15), “England” (14), and “Mexico” (9); and in Penelope Aubin’s less Anglocentric but still nation-oriented *The Strange Adventures of Count de Vinevil*, “France” (17), “Constantinople” (8), and “Venice” (4).

23. This comma is part of the name as recognized by Stanford NER.

24. My explication of fungibility follows King’s.

25. The near absence of Chinese locations in *CLIWOC* was cause for concern. I searched for mentions of Chinese trading ports in Adam Matthew’s database of East India Company archives in the same period but found surprisingly few mentions of them there as well. So while a database of other British merchant ship movements would likely reveal more trade with China, it seems the comparative paucity of British ships east of Malacca before 1829 may not be far off the historical mark.

26. This refers to the Rio Grande de Buba in present-day Guinea-Bissau; no text in the corpus refers to the Rio Grande in present-day Mexico and the United States.

27. The Cape of Good Hope region, which also served an anti-scorbutic function, is similarly marginal in the imaginary empire, meriting only 22 mentions.

28. This comma is part of the name as recognized by Stanford NER.

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Abstract: The entanglement of colonial power's cultural and material manifestations has been an important topic in anticolonial thinking. I tentatively term this the problem of relating the imperial imaginary and imperial reality. This essay focuses on the imaginary and real geographies of the eighteenth-century British maritime empire, using digital methods (custom named entity recognition and mapping) to compare place-names mentioned in maritime fiction and nonfiction with the movements of British ships. In Edward Said's terms, structures of reference are used to see the structures of attitude underpinning the material power of an increasingly global empire. I present four theses on the convergences and divergences between the imaginary empire of texts and real empire of ships: on the centrality of England in both, a shared colonial geography of fungibility, the imaginary's erasure of environmental and bodily restraints, and the imaginary empire's anticipation of, and even preparation for, real imperial domination.

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