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Rewriting American Identity The Eighteenth-Century Americanizations of George Fisher's *Instructor* and Sarah Trimmer's *Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature*

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Abstract

Before and after the American Revolution, revised imprints of British works claiming to be adapted for American audiences appeared in the British North American colonies. The essay suggests that collating 'Americanized' reprints against their source texts can be a useful metric for determining how Anglo-Americans perceived themselves to be different from counterparts in Great Britain, as well as how these beliefs evolved over time. This is addressed through case studies of reprints of George Fisher's *Instructor* and Sarah Trimmer's *Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature*, both popular instructional texts. Finally, the essay attempts to reimagine revised reprints as translations of national and local culture, if not of language.

Keywords: American Identity, Gender, Reprints, Science, Translation

1. Introduction

In the preface to the 1748 Philadelphia edition of *The American Instructor: or Young Man's Best Companion*, an anonymous editor explained why George Fisher's work had been printed locally rather than imported from overseas: 'In the *British* Edition of this Book, there were many Things of little or no Use in these Parts of the World: In this Edition those Things are omitted, and in their Room many other Matters inserted, more immediately useful to us *Americans*' (Fisher 1748b, v).¹ The book, published

¹ The author wishes to thank Robert A. Gross for his comments on a very early version of this research, and for thinking it interesting enough at the time to integrate examples into his introduction to *The History of the Book in*

by Benjamin Franklin and David Hall, revised and expanded a London edition of George Fisher's *Instructor: or Young Man's Best Companion*, a handbook for letter writing that additionally offered advice useful to young tradesmen and families.² The sentiment expressed by the American editor, Benjamin Franklin himself, became common over the course of the eighteenth century: this was the notion that, despite acknowledgment of continuity and connection, there was something ideologically or culturally distinct about British citizens living in the American colonies. For some eighteenth-century colonists, this perception of difference may have helped precipitate a revolution. But, for a handful of colonial printers and publishers, this perception necessitated curating content that bridged these cultural gaps. Claims that a book was more suited for an American audience appeared in both original works and reprints of European books. In this case, the title page of *The American Instructor* and its newspaper advertisements beseeched potential customers to note that the Franklin and Hall imprint was 'better adapted to these American colonies, than any other book of the like kind' ('Advertisement' 1748; Fisher 1748b, title page). But did this statement constitute anything meaningful, particularly in this early period? While some have suggested that these claims of American suitability were insincere or precocious, it seems plausible, at least in the case of revised reprints, that we might compare editions to gauge what this curious exchange of 'Matters' for 'Things' looked like. I propose this because *if* the contents of eighteenth-century reprints claiming to be adapted for Anglo-American audiences were altered in significant ways, an analysis of edits may offer a way to track how eighteenth-century people perceived American identity as it was evolving.

2. Reprints, Claims of 'Americanness', and American Content

Thanks to Meredith McGill, reprints now play a vital role in our understanding of national identity and American literature in the nineteenth century. Both antebellum readers and twentieth-century scholars had imagined reprinted European texts as an obstacle to the emergence of American literature, partly because they created competition for native publications (McGill 2007, 108). In *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*, McGill reconceived reprinting's role in cultivating an American literature through materiality and function. As she argues, the 1834 copyright case, *Wheaton v. Peters*, declared all printed works to be 'copies' of manuscript books, and the ensuing adjudication ultimately prioritized the public's right to access print over authors' control of their work. In the long term, this incubated a system of publication centered on reprinting that was American in purpose and design. Printers claimed that the cheaper materials and space-saving format characteristic of reprinted books enabled ideas that would otherwise be subject to authorial or editorial control to disseminate freely and inexpensively (93-94). Thus,

America, Volume II. Two anonymous readers and James N. Green provided feedback on the current text, for which the author is likewise grateful. Georgina Wilson and Zachary Lesser offered excellent editorial advice and support throughout the process. Elizabeth Pope at the American Antiquarian Society assisted with research inquiries.

² Identifying the book's source was complicated, as letter writing manuals tended to borrow content from each other. Both the eighth and ninth London editions were probable candidates based on textual similarities, but Franklin's correspondence indicates that he was revising the book in 1747, making the eighth London edition the most likely candidate. William Lingelbach believes that Cotton Mather's *Young Man's Companion* may be the source, but the Philadelphia edition's visual layout most closely approximates the London editions attributed to Fisher (Lingelbach 1952; see also Bannet 2005 for a general overview of letter writing manuals in this period). Some rare book catalogue entries for this title mistakenly identify 'Vale and Fruere' (which appears at the close of the explanatory preface) as the names of the editors, but it means 'Farewell and Enjoy' in Latin and appears to be borrowed from earlier (London) editions of Fisher's instructor.

McGill argues that the practice ‘embodied a central tenet of Jacksonian political philosophy – the commitment to the decentralization of power as the mark of national difference’ (108). Notably, what is ‘American’ about reprints in this context is how they circulate in the world.

Scholarship seeking to understand the emergence of an identifiable body of American literature tends to deal more specifically with the expression of American identity in printed works, insofar as American identity has traditionally been understood to be a necessary precursor to this project. Despite printers’ postrevolutionary calls to produce a national literature, some scholars have assessed the efforts of eighteenth-century printers to be a failed or delayed initiative, partly because a sense of national identity seemingly had yet to coalesce more generally (see Warner 1992, 119). For many years, the desire to emulate European values and structures was imagined as precluding the expression of ‘Americanness’. Other scholars have taken a less oppositional approach. Cathy Davidson’s seminal *Revolution and the Word*, sought to establish the early American novel as a ‘definable, distinctive literary form, but also *as a genre*’ despite claims that American works plagiarized European texts. Claiming that the desire to ‘ape the imperial language’ was a hallmark of seeking legitimacy in a postrevolutionary world and thus should not be grounds for dismissing these works as derivative, Davidson instead convincingly demonstrated that these novels ‘played a significant role in shaping provincial and parochial identities and communities of the postrevolutionary era into the evolving entity that would become the United States of America’ through analysis of texts, their uses, and their reception (2004, 4). These novels became sites for exploring citizenship’s gray areas, including class differences and gender roles (see Davidson 2004, ch. 6). Leonard Tennenhouse’s *The Importance of Feeling English* reimagined early American identity as an English diasporic identity. Tennenhouse suggests that the political break with England did not translate into a full cultural break, and Americans instead defined their identity in print as one in which they were more ‘English than their English counterparts’ (2007, 17). Scholars vary on how, or the degree to which, difference or distancing from England or Europe played a role in defining early American identity. While this essay focuses on tracking American perceptions of cultural difference in revised reprints, these authors demonstrate that it is important to remember that difference co-existed alongside and was constructed through ideological, cultural and literary continuities.

Other scholars have wondered if printed claims of Americanness were vested in content at all. In *The Letters of the Republic*, Michael Warner argued that eighteenth-century original works that declared their American qualities ‘merely solicit[ed] patrons’ encouragement of the domestic trade’ by informing the purchaser that the book was a local imprint. Essentially, Warner argued that what was American about these books was the potential for doing civic good through investing in the local economy (1992, 120). Like McGill, Warner was interested in the function of the object rather than its literary content, which is surely part of the larger story – but did content truly have nothing to do with it?

Warner’s conclusions partly derive from an analysis of subscription proposals for a 1793 epistolary novel, *The Hapless Orphan, or Innocent Victim of Revenge*, written by an ‘American Lady’. Warner concludes that the claims of Americanness in advertisements for the *The Hapless Orphan* conveyed cultural values that were ‘not particularly American at all’, arguing that the content of *The Hapless Orphan* resembled Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* and other early British novels in plot structure and basic sentiment (*ibid.*). Davidson’s scholarship suggests we should resist this conclusion, because ‘early American novelists borrowed plot as the structure to hang their own adaptations, translations, co-optations, somethings writing new endings, often undermining the class assumptions of their progenitors’ (2004, 3). The resolution of *The Hapless Orphan* is brought about by the discovery of a grave robbery perpetrated by medical

students, such that the heroine's corpse is rescued in the nick of time from being dissected by a Philadelphia physician (American Lady 1793, 231). Might the setting and events of the book convey anything particular about the burgeoning culture of science in the early republic?

But there are other reasons to assume that advertising for *The Hapless Orphan* and other books claiming to possess American qualities could be about content. Adrian Johns' study of the printing industry in early modern England, *The Nature of the Book* (2000), demonstrates that a complex culture of trust shaped a publisher's ability to succeed in early modern Europe.³ Making empty promises about an imprint could cultivate disappointment and mistrust in a publisher or printer. Presumably, consumers tempted to purchase a book on the grounds that it was somehow 'American' could assess whether it was through the act of reading – and if not satisfied, would this not discourage them from making future purchases? Not only did exaggerating overmuch potentially undermine a publisher's reputation, but we furthermore have evidence that editors silently edited moral sentiment in novels to suit American audiences, as was the case with the 1772 Philadelphia edition of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (see Fliegelman 1985, 83–88). Although the alterations are not advertised openly as 'American', they are nonetheless there, and what enables us to assess this is the ability to compare a reprint against its source text.

I am not alone in wanting to use altered content to think about regional or national differences in ideology. In *Empire of Letters*, Eve Tavor Bannet argued that early-eighteenth-century secretary guides often contained proto-nationalist sentiment, and general attempts to 'Anglicize' letter writing went hand in hand with local exceptionalism in America (2005, 106). By the end of the eighteenth century, studies have suggested that reprints emphasized political difference between the United States and Great Britain, as one might anticipate. In the case of Mathew Carey's 1794 Philadelphia reprinting of *Guthrie's Geography*, Richard Sher found that the work was revised to reflect Carey's negative attitudes toward Britain, transforming, as Sher puts it, the original 'Whiggish ethos into something altogether more radical and controversial' (2006, 578). Though much more attention has been given to the American qualities of early novels, instructional and non-fiction works also claimed to contain altered American content.

Further text-to-text comparisons will allow scholars to assess what, more specifically, 'American' or 'adapted for America' claims really meant. More importantly, deciphering cultural difference via reprints will allow us to flesh out a metric of values that will allow us to revisit and re-evaluate the content of original American imprints like *The Hapless Orphan*. While the present essay cannot comprehensively survey the revisions made to all these texts, it does present case studies that demonstrate the utility of this approach while ultimately reframing eighteenth-century reprinting as an act of translation. I examine a text with a long history of reprinting and adaptation in America before 1800: George Fisher's *The Instructor: or Young Man's Companion*. The 1748 Philadelphia edition (1748b) was one of the first American imprints to claim to be adapted for the 'colonies', with later editions being adapted for the American 'states'. In this case, because claims of 'adaption' occur before and after the American Revolution, it can help us to understand how claims to 'American' content evolved over a period when ideologies are diverging and shifting. Some of the more ambitious post-revolutionary revisions of *The Instructor* were executed by Isaiah Thomas, the famous Worcester, Massachusetts printer and bookseller. Attuned to the political climate, Thomas' imprints became increasingly anti-monarchical with each subsequent edition. I also examine a more obscure reprint from 1796, a Boston edition of Sarah Trimmer's *An Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature*, which was remarkable for

³ See particularly his argument regarding credibility in the chapter entitled 'Literary Life: The Culture and Credibility of the Printed Book in Early Modern London'.

the character of the changes related to gender made therein. Because these were titles with clear educational aims, the act of tailoring ideologies to suit the needs of future citizens may be particularly palpable.

3. *Adapted for the Colonies*: The American Instructor: or, Young Man's Best Companion

On September 7, 1747, James Parker wrote to Benjamin Franklin and asked 'if the Young Man's Companion be almost done?'.⁴ At the time, Franklin was preparing the book that, in 1748, would be published as *The American Instructor, or, Young Man's Best Companion*, which revised an imprint by George Fisher, who was billed an 'accountant'. It is worth giving a brief history of this endeavour, for the sake of clarifying the source text, as well as to demonstrate the longer history of localized imprints. Advertisements in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* indicate that Franklin was selling a book by this title (*Young Man's Companion*) as early as 1741 (Miller 1974, 237). It is unclear if Franklin stocked an import of the popular secretary's guide by William Mather, or a reprint-revision of the Mather text published by William and Andrew Bradford. Mather's work had appeared in print for the first time in 1681 in London as *A very Useful Manual, Or, The Young Mans Companion*, and subsequently under other titles, but was usually abbreviated as *The Young Man's Companion*. In America, William and Andrew Bradford began printing a work known as *The Young Man's Companion*, or, alternately, *The Secretary's Guide* early in the eighteenth century (see McMickle 1984). An imperfect, surviving copy of the 1710 (second) New York edition suggests a missing first edition based mostly on a London edition of William Mather's book that may have been augmented by content taken from other sources. It is unfortunate that many of the Bradford editions are missing and that extant editions are mutilated (making it hard to track revisions), because Andrew Bradford in a preface indicated that the work would be useful to Americans:

I being sensible of the want of a small Book of this Nature in these American parts, concluded it might be of Service to the Country to Collect and compile out of several larger Volumns this small Manuel, entituled, *The Young Man's Companion* ... And the general Reception that the first Impression met with, has encouraged us to make some Additions ... I will adventure to Recommend it as Useful & Profitable in these American parts, where Books of this Nature are not always to be got ... (Anonymous 1710, n.p.).⁵

Other American-printed letter-writing manuals and secretary's guides circulating before 1720 made similar overtures. Editions of *The Young Secretary's Guide* printed in Boston in the early eighteenth century claimed it was 'made suitable to the People of *New-England*' (Hill 1713, title page), and the Bradfords went even broader, though practically the work was most likely circulating in the mid-Atlantic.⁶ Perhaps this sentiment ultimately inspired Franklin to revise his own edition when the need arose. The Bradfords published new editions from time to time, with the last known published by Andrew in Philadelphia in 1739.⁷ By 1742, Andrew Brad-

⁴ James Parker to Benjamin Franklin, 7 September 1747, *Benjamin Franklin Papers Online*, <<https://franklin-papers.org/framedVolumes.jsp?vol=3&page=172b>>, accessed 1 December 2024.

⁵ See the section at the front of the book with the heading 'To the Reader'.

⁶ The 1750 (24th) edition says that '*but with a small Alteration, [it] may suit all Parts of America*' (Hill 1750, title page).

⁷ While it is not included in Evans' bibliography, nor is it at the American Antiquarian Society (AAS), the AAS catalog notes a Philadelphia edition as late as 1739. This is *The Secretary's Guide, or Young Man's Companion* (1739), Philadelphia, Andrew Bradford. See catalog entry: <<https://catalog.mwa.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=351348>>, accessed 1 December 2024.

ford was dead and, not long after, William retired. Consequently, by 1745, perhaps the title was in demand but no longer printed locally. Franklin sought out London editions of Mather; he wrote to William Strahan requesting three dozen copies of William Mather's *Young Man's Companion* to sell at his bookstore (Miller 1974, 237). He additionally may have made plans to prepare a new Philadelphia edition based on the newest London edition of Mather; and this may have been a pivotal moment where Franklin received George Fisher's *The Instructor; or Young Man's Best Companion* instead. Fisher's work was similar in scope to Mather's, with about seven editions in print by the time of Franklin's request. It also likely was written to compete with Mather's work, as indicated by the moniker of '*Best Companion*'. An eighth London edition appeared in 1746, and likely was the copytext for Franklin's work.⁸ Franklin identified *The American Instructor, or Young Man's Best Companion*, printed in Philadelphia in 1748, as the ninth edition of Fisher's work. According to advertisements in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the book was available for purchase as early as July (Miller 1974, 237).⁹

Scholars have been interested in how Franklin revised this text, particularly as it contains the earliest printing of Franklin's original essay, *Advice to a Young Tradesman*. To some extent, works such as this required revision for the locality; there was practical need to update content related to a locality's laws, climate, and exchange rates. But letter-writing manuals and secretary's guides modeled good behavior and morals through the content of their example letters, and Bannet suggests that these were often revised in ways that conveyed British identity, and on the peripheries, local identity. To expand Fisher's offerings for an Anglo-American audience, Franklin furthermore included advice about the role of industry and frugality in running a business and his friend Joseph Breintnall's system of ciphering.¹⁰ Several illustrations of writing hands appear in the work, and both Stanley Morrison (Nash 1943, 8) and William Lingelbach (1952, 375) have previously argued that the copperplate engraving illustrating the round hand may have been an invention of Franklin's. Thus, Franklin made a range of changes to the work which are worth revisiting in the context of the claim of the revised work being more appropriate for an American audience. Some of these changes are admittedly minor or linguistic, and reflected Franklin's personal aesthetics.¹¹ For example, the 1748 *American Instructor* does not deviate much from the original source in the section on letter writing, though it occasionally changes a name. 'Henry Hearty' (Fisher 1748a, 49; Fisher 1748b, 49) in Fisher's eighth edition becomes 'James Canter' (Fisher 1746, 49) in Franklin's – and as the fictional names for the letter writers tended to gesture to the sentiment of the letter, perhaps Franklin thought this was a better fit for a brother writing to explain a delay in visiting a sister, who soon plans to travel.

⁸ Franklin identified his work as the ninth edition, which might have indicated that he saw his work as a new edition based on the eighth, or was reprinting the ninth. Since he was preparing the work as early as 1747, it is likely to be the former case, as ninth London editions appear in 1748 as well. I have compared against all probable candidates throughout.

⁹ Historically, there has been some confusion about what Franklin was reprinting. This is due to competing titles with similar names, and confusion over authorship. Scholars have sometimes assumed 'George Fisher' was a pseudonym for Ann Fisher Slack (based on revisions made to London editions of *The Instructor*) or Franklin himself (based on his request for Mather's work), and there may be overlap between Mather's work and Fisher's work due to the works competing with each other in the London market. A 1747 London edition of Mather's *Young Man's Companion* exists, but as it is the 'seventeenth' edition, it is inconsistent with Franklin's numbering. Also, there are significant differences regarding the title, the attribution (Fisher vs. Mather), and other content-related differences.

¹⁰ For the first appearance of 'Advice to a young Tradesman, written by an old One' see Fisher 1748b, 375–377; Breintnall's ciphers appear on 377–378, and conclude the work.

¹¹ Lingelbach suggests (1952, 381) that Franklin liked to capitalize certain nouns for emphasis, which may explain many of the capitalization changes in the American edition.

Other changes, like the inclusion of *Advice to a Young Tradesman*, are more substantial, but many of these larger insertions borrow from other English works. The eighth London edition contained a monthly gardener's calendar with tips for what to sow; monthly headings for this section included zodiac signs (Fisher 1746, 307 and 310-311). This is replaced in the Franklin edition by 'A short, but Comprehensive Account of All Arts and Sciences' (Fisher 1748b, 296). The substitution, in this case, may be explained in part by Franklin's definition of Astrology: 'ASTROLOGY, is that foolish Science which pretends to foretel future Events from the Motions of the heavenly Bodies and their Aspects one to another; or from some imaginary, hidden Qualities, which the weak Admirers of this Cheat will have to be in the stars' (297). After this, Franklin inserted several sections related to history and literature: 'Of the Seven Wonders of the World', 'Of the Muses', 'Of Hercules', 'A short Historical Table of the most remarkable Events, that happened in the World', and 'A short Abstract of the History of England' (303-330). The text of these sections originally appeared in *The Universal Pocket Book* (Anonymous 1745), a London imprint.¹² This amalgamation of texts may simply convey Franklin's desire for an educated rather than superstitious citizenry, but while in this moment Anglo-American colonists saw themselves as part of the history of England, they are largely not depicted as historical actors in these insertions. Indeed, the only mention of the colonies in this lengthy insert simply says that 'Sir Walter Raleigh first discovered Virginia', that it was named for Queen Elizabeth, and that they had found tobacco there (Fisher 1748b, 327). Thus 'A short Account of the British Plantations' is a further addition, probably distilled by Franklin from an edition of Thomas Salmon's *Modern History: Or, the Present State of All Nations*, but it is separated from the history of England by gardening receipts, beginning with a section headed 'To innoculate FRUIT-TREES', which, along with sections on grafting and pruning, was taken from *The Universal Pocket Book* (330-334).¹³ Which is to say, excerpts from the *Pocket Book* are grouped together, but inserted historical information about British territory is not grouped together. Information from and about America is, because at the very end of the inserted gardening receipts (the section before 'British Plantations') we finally pivot back to America, with a receipt for apple molasses taken from the Royal Society's *Philosophical Transactions*, submitted by Paul Dudley of New England. In this case only, Franklin provides a citation for the reader (Fisher 1748b, 333).

Thus, the history of Anglo-American colonies provided by the 'short Account of the British Plantations' is oddly detached from a longer account of England, but one should not read too much into the meaning of this, given that it may be an artifact of how the work was compiled. The inclusion of this information in a discrete section, however, may have underscored that American history shared a loosely connected but distinct trajectory from England. But Franklin also favored his immediate locality; among inserted profiles of colonies that contained demographic and geographic details, Pennsylvania was simply described as: 'Pennsylvania, One of the happiest Countries at this Time in the World. God grant it may long so continue' (335). Or perhaps he imagined his work primarily circulating in Pennsylvania where local demographics and geography could be omitted.

Franklin frequently rebranded content for his imagined audience, which becomes clearer in changes made to later sections of the book. The eighth London edition of *The Instructor* adver-

¹² Compare Fisher 1748 to Anonymous 1745, beginning on page 154.

¹³ Also, see for example Salmon 1744-1746, for similarities in describing Hudson's Bay as a 'cold inhospitable country but thinly peopled with Indians...' (vol. 3, 526). Other similarities in describing colonies appear throughout this volume.

tises a section called 'The Family's Best Companion' on the title page (Fisher 1746, title page). Franklin excluded this from the title page of *The American Instructor*, advertising instead 'The Poor Planter's Physician', but using the description for 'The Family's Best Companion'. While the title page indicates a receipt 'for Marking on Linnen', a guide for embroidering letters on cloth for young women, that to some extent mirrored the handwriting plates for young men, this has been omitted from the 1748 edition (Fisher 1748b, 337). The eighth London edition prefaced this receipt by indicating what the 'Family's Best Companion' was for women: 'As many Things have been spoken to, for the Information of the younger Sort of the Male-kind, so it may not be amiss to say some small Matter in relation to the Instruction and benefit of the Female-kind' (Fisher 1746, 311). Franklin left the remainder of 'The Family's Best Companion', a record of medicinal and culinary recipes, largely intact, but made other additions to repurpose this section for young men.¹⁴ To complete the masculinization of this section, he greatly augmented the medicinal recipes with 'Every Man his own DOCTOR: the Poor Planter's Physician', which was written by a gentleman in Virginia, and thus also a significant addition of American-generated content (Fisher 1748b, 344). In the aftermath of overturning *Roe v. Wade*, popular media has highlighted the receipt to relieve 'SUPPRESSION OF THE COURSES' (363), essentially, menses stopped by unplanned pregnancy, as a 'feminist' statement, but this does not necessarily mean the intention was to include or be generous to women readers, as unplanned pregnancies also forced unwanted marriages in this time period. A section on curing the vapours (hysteria), a gendered affliction, suggests that women patients be 'whipp'd with smart little Rods', which the author indicates will 'brace the Nerves, and rouze the sluggish Spirits (as some grave Gentlemen find, when they try it for a merrier Purpose)' (362). Titillating references such as this tend to suggest that the target was a male reader. Franklin may have also imagined his audience as more middling in their wealth, as he also removed 'The Gentleman's New Guide; with Good Advice to a Groom', which provided advice about caring for horses in addition to articulating the relationship between gentlemen and their servants (Fisher 1746, 324).

The differences between the two editions, in aggregate, seem to reflect Franklin's personal ethos, which to some extent presents a complication insofar as Franklin himself would later try to codify his values as American ones through his autobiography and other works. The revisions (additions or omissions) generally suggest that Anglo-American *men* were relatively poorer but practical individuals within a larger British Empire. The average American individual (or clerk) was perhaps more interested in learning science, medicine, arts, and history than his London counterpart. Though one could still imagine a young woman reading this work, Franklin may have tried to focus readership by editing out certain content. America itself was comprised of different geographic areas with a range of local advantages and disadvantages, though something about Pennsylvania stood apart from the other colonies. So, while Franklin's alterations suggest how he believed the colonies differed from the metropole, we also have the sense that Franklin thought (in this moment) the colonies differed from each other as well.

4. *Isaiah Thomas'* Instructor, or American Young Man's Best Companion

Franklin may have produced the first Americanized edition of Fisher's *Instructor*, but he was not the last. Franklin and Hall printed another 'American' edition in 1753 (10th, Philadelphia), Hugh Gainé produced two known in 1760 and 1770 (12th and 14th, New York, respectively), John Dunlap also in 1770 (15th, Philadelphia), and John Boyle and J.D. M'Dougall published

¹⁴ Cathy Davidson reviewed extant copies of *The American Instructor* and its later iterations in the American Colonies and found 53 provenance marks, which were nearly exclusively made by male owners (2004, 64-65).

another in 1779 (no edition given, Boston), which, given the progression of the American Revolution, updated the title page claim to read '*The whole better adapted to these American States, than any other book of the like Kind*' (Fisher 1779, title page). At the same time, editions printed in Great Britain continued to be revised and expanded.

The United States became recognized as a sovereign country in 1784, upon the ratification of the 1783 Treaty of Paris. The first Americanized edition to appear after this event was Isaiah Thomas' revised *Instructor*, in 1785. While the title page no longer makes the claim to be adapted for an American audience, Thomas' title indicates that this is *The American Young Man's Best Companion*. It furthermore claimed to be the 'Thirtieth Edition, Revised, Corrected, ENLARGED, and Improved' (Fisher 1785, title page). The end of the preface, like its predecessors, retains the claim that work has been adapted for an American audience, however: 'On the whole, this Edition is corrected from the numerous Errours of former Editions, and such Additions made, as will make it more Useful to the Youth of the United States, than any other Volume of its kind' (v).

Thomas was likely aware of the various copies of *The American Instructor* circulating, but he seems to have composed his edition from a London edition of Fisher's *Instructor*, rather than an earlier Americanized edition. Some of the dates in the book suggest that the source may be a London edition from 1784. Like Franklin, Thomas greatly augments the scientific and mathematical content of his *American Young Man's Best Companion*, though he does so by taking information from later British editions of *The Instructor*. The 'Compendium of Sciences of Geography and Astronomy' that appeared in Thomas' work had appeared in revised British editions. Thomas' edition likewise restored the instructions for 'Marking on Linnen', its respective plate, and the indication that the section was for women. Thomas' edition therefore did not include the 'Poor Planter's Physician', which had appeared as late as the 1779 Boston edition of *The American Instructor* (Fisher 1785, 373). Unlike the Franklin edition, which had a clear candidate for the copytext, Thomas' editions require checking against multiple predecessors in England and America. Nonetheless, there are still numerous changes unique to the Worcester editions that can be isolated and analyzed.

The first mention of *The American Young Man's Best Companion* in Thomas' correspondence appears in an April 12, 1786 letter to the firm of Hudson & Goodwin in Hartford, Connecticut. In this letter, Thomas mentioned that he had recently published *The American Young Man's Best Companion*, likely referring to the first Worcester edition printed in late 1785, though Thomas also reissued the work in 1786. The work is listed among a number of books he is willing to supply bound copies of in exchange for debt owed and the possibility of receiving copies of Noah Webster's most recent publication.¹⁵ Hudson & Goodwin expressed interest in the *Companion*, inquiring about the price on May 2. Thomas responded that he would only sell them to Hudson & Goodwin for two pence more than he sold the London imprint. At his own bookstore, Thomas offered the Worcester imprint in two different bindings, and sold them both at higher prices than the imported London edition. Despite this, Thomas claimed that he had 'retailed only two copies of the English [edition]' since printing his version, and that 'Mr. Patton has had a number, and has lately wrote for more'.¹⁶ Thomas printed a third edition of the *American Young Man's Best Companion* in 1794. In a 1793 agreement with David West and Ebenezer Larkin, Thomas promised to deliver 3,000 copies of the book 'as speedy as is in my power'. In

¹⁵ Isaiah Thomas to Hudson & Goodwin, April 13, 1786, Isaiah Thomas Papers (1748-1874), Box 1, Folder 7 (1786), American Antiquarian Society (copy of original held at New-York Historical Society).

¹⁶ Isaiah Thomas to Hudson & Goodwin, May 8, 1786, Isaiah Thomas Papers (1748-1874), Box 1, Folder 7 (1786), American Antiquarian Society (copy of original held at New-York Historical Society).

return, Thomas expected to receive one shilling and six pence per copy, totaling 750 dollars in all.¹⁷ What made these Worcester editions so popular? Why, as Thomas observed, did potential buyers prefer a 'more expensive', domestic imprint over the cheaper, English version?

The answer may lie in the changes to the content within. Some changes were minor, but clearly marked the audience as American. For example, recipes in 'Family's Best Companion' claim to include 'instructions for making divers sorts of wines of *American* growth'. This section superficially updated place names in a section headed 'Of the making of sundry Sorts of *English* Wines' in London editions. In a concluding section called 'Family Medicines', Thomas felt compelled to justify its inclusion: '*The following recipes are inserted because they are in the British Editions, and it is supposed the chief of them are best calculated for British constitutions*' (Fisher 1785, 381). This is difficult to parse from the 1785 edition alone, because it could mean that Thomas included these recipes because they appeared in the source text, although are more suited for British, not American, people. It could also mean that he imagined the audience to have 'British constitutions'. The 1786 Worcester edition omits this caveat and updates the receipts, clarifying Thomas' note. For example, the cure for 'Ague' is changed from: 'Drink the Decoction (that is, the boiling of a Herb) of Camomile[sic], and sweeten it with Treacle; which drink when warm in Bed, and sweat two Hours. Or, to the Wrists apply a mixture of Rue, Mustard, and Chimney Soot, by way of Plaister' to

FIRST vomit the sick person, by giving half a drachm of the powder of ipecacoanha[sic], and work it off with chamomile tea; then let the sick person take the following powder: Of the best Peruvian bark powdered, one ounce; of Virginia snake root, and salt of wormwood, one drachm; mix these well together, and divide them into eight doses, one paper to be taken every two hours in a glass of any liquid. (compare Fisher 1785, 382 and 1786, 381)

Receipts in the 1786 edition become more detailed and measurable, and include ingredients found in the Americas. This suggests that Thomas thought the original recipes inadequate, and perhaps that he believed Anglo-Americans, despite their ancestry, had become differently-bodied.

More importantly, unlike other editions of *The Instructor, American Young Man's Best Companion* contained anti-monarchical content that demonstrated a basic, but fundamental difference between the American States and their former 'parent'. This simple distinction might have been appealing and reassuring to Anglo-Americans seeking to educate their children in an American fashion. References that argued for deference to kings were systematically removed from the text. All American editions of *The Instructor* printed prior to 1800 contain a section on penmanship that provides the reader with lines to be copied out. Most American editions printed prior to 1800 contain a line that says 'Honour the King'.¹⁸ The 1785, 1786 and 1794 Worcester editions have been revised to say 'Honour your rulers' (Fisher 1785, 2, 1786, 2 and 1794, 2). Similarly, the handwriting sample for 'German Font' has been revised from 'Fear God and Honour the King', to 'Fear God and Honour your Country' (Fisher 1785, plate inserted after 52). By the third Worcester edition, a section on 'how to subscribe, and how to direct' letters had been transformed from a list of Kings, Queens, and Temporal Lords to the proper

¹⁷ 'Copy of 2 obligations respecting Young Man's Companion' between Isaiah Thomas and West & Larkin, August 3, 1793, Isaiah Thomas Papers (1748-1874), Box 2, Folder 14 (1793, Jul - Aug), American Antiquarian Society.

¹⁸ The American editions of *The Instructor* printed before Fisher 1785 that contain the phrase 'Honor the King' are: Fisher 1748b, a second Franklin & Hall edition printed in 1753, a 'twelfth' New York edition printed by H. Gaine in 1760, another Gaine edition in 1770, a Philadelphia 'fifteenth' edition by John Dunlap printed in 1770, and Fisher 1779.

titles for Presidents, Governors, as well as lay men and women (compare Fisher 1785, 66 and 1794, 65-66). These subscriptions and directions are listed hierarchically, with the highest ranking individual listed first. English subscriptions also appear in the 1794 edition, presumably for reference's sake, but only after all American citizens have been listed. Thus, the King's importance, though at the top of English hierarchy, came only after all of America.

British editions of Fisher's *Instructor* meanwhile had been updated to include descriptions of European geography. Thomas' edition instead examines colonial holdings in America by various European powers, and of the United States. Thomas carefully explains the extent of the country's borders, as well as propositions for several new states including 'Sylvania', 'Cheroneus', 'Assenisipia', 'Metropotamia', and 'Polipotamia', among others that never manifested after representatives from Southern states rejected the Ordinance of 1784. Thomas' descriptions of the then-current thirteen American states were more developed than Franklin's descriptions of the American colonies, naming major towns, counties and borders (Fisher 1785, 301-304). While Franklin focused on the different nationalities of inhabitants and structures of government (apart from Pennsylvania) in describing colonies, Thomas' inhabitants are mere demographic statistics, and local government is presumably omitted to emphasize the importance of federal government. Instead, Thomas focused on educational opportunities, indicating seminaries and colleges in each state (Fisher 1785, 304-313). Thomas' somewhat more statistical-oriented descriptions do not address cultural differences in states, but emphasize stability, organization and growth, as well as education.

By 1794, *The American Young Man's Best Companion* had transformed into a text that, like Franklin's *American Instructor*, suggested that individual Anglo-Americans sought education in the arts and sciences, but were also citizens who, regardless of state residency, shared a common political outlook (even if it was only fully articulated as rejecting monarchy). Furthermore, Anglo-Americans residing in the United States had different medical needs than British citizens, and ingredients found in the Americas perhaps offered more robust treatment. While information intended for women was restored to Thomas' editions, it is still not clear whether or how they were intended to share in this sense of 'American-ness'. As in the British editions, the instructions explicitly addressed to 'young ladies' are limited to a few pages buried within hundreds. Was it simply that with regard to women, Anglo-Americans drew less difference, or no difference, between them and their British sisters? For a more explicit exploration of Americanized gender roles, we must turn to a Boston edition of Sarah Trimmer's *Easy Introduction of the Knowledge of Nature*.

5. *Good Government for Roast Beef: Sarah Trimmer's An Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature*

In 1796, Boston printers William Manning and James Loring produced the first American edition of Sarah Trimmer's *An Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature* for David West, a local publisher and bookseller. As was previously mentioned, West had been interested in the Isaiah Thomas' *American Young Man's Best Companion*, and perhaps was seeking out Americanized editions of books. This, in turn, suggests there was a market for them, at least in Boston. Newspaper advertisements and the book's title page indicated that this children's natural history text had been 'revised, corrected, and greatly augmented, and adapted to the United States of America' ('Advertisement' 1795, 3; see also Trimmer 1796, title page). Indeed, the book underwent a number of significant revisions from the eighth London edition (1793), ranging from minor grammatical alterations to the insertion or omission of entire pages and paragraphs. While it is not evident

who was responsible for the various changes to this text, it is clear that the editor believed he had transformed Sarah Trimmer's work into something suitably American, and consequently, vastly improved. The preface openly boasted that 'the superiority of this [the American revision] over the English edition will be obvious upon comparing them together' (1796, iv).

Eight British editions of Sarah Trimmer's *An Easy Introduction to Nature and the Holy Scriptures* were available when the editor of the Boston imprint began to revise the content. By the 1790s, Trimmer, a British national, was a popular children's author at home and in the United States, famous for her religious and natural histories.¹⁹ *An Easy Introduction* followed a dialogue format, which was intended to make studying natural history more pleasurable for young children (Trimmer 1793, ix-x). Reading more like a story than a textbook, the book conveyed scientific knowledge via the perspective of a mother instructing her two children, Henry and Charlotte, as they took nature walks and learned to use scientific tools, such as microscopes and globes. Henry, Charlotte and their mother are identifiably British citizens in the eighth London edition, but the editor of the Boston edition decided to transform the merry Englanders into New Englanders for an American audience, so 'England' is changed to 'New-England' (compare Trimmer 1793, 100 and 1796, 71). In addition to transposing the location of the lessons and the identity of the characters, the editor revised the dialogue to make the narrator and her children behave like Americans.

Much of the text's Americanized content underscores the superiority of American life and values. Like Thomas' *American Young Man's Best Companion*, this particularly focused on elevating American government and eschewing monarchy. The editor did his best to expunge evidence of monarchies whenever he could, repeatedly removing the generic use of the word 'kingdoms' to mean nations and substituting in the less politically charged 'countries' whenever possible (compare Trimmer 1793, 92 and 1796, 65). One interesting edit preserves 'kingdom' but revises 'This place is Great Britain, the kingdom we live in', to 'This place is Britain, the kingdom in which the English live' (compare Trimmer 1796, 68 and 1793, 96). While on one hand the edit transposes the location of the speaker, it also seems to purposely avoid calling Britain, a kingdom, 'Great'.

Other edits more explicitly praise American government. A passage addressed to Henry by the mother character, common to both the 1793 London and 1796 Boston editions, encouraged him to travel when older. At the end of her dialogue, the mother in the London edition reminded Henry that he was 'an Englishman, and so . . . must love England the best' and thus must eventually return home (1793, 104). In the Boston edition, the mother character echoes this wisdom about travel, and of course substitutes 'America' for 'England' (1796, 75). Why should each child love their country? Each mother explained why their home was the greatest of them all. The London edition emphasized that England was self-sustaining, and could satisfy Henry's material needs, but particularly England had 'the best roast beef in world' (1793, 104-105). The Boston edition made similar claims about America, but altered the passage to reflect that America has the 'best government in the world'. Additional revised content in this section asserted that 'no people enjoy so much liberty, both civil and religious' as Americans did (1796, 76).

This revision may seem comical to modern readers, but it must have posed ethical problems for the Boston editor. Such claims were inconsistent with passages from the London edition that condemned slavery and criticized its legitimization by the state. The 1793 edition explained: 'Negroes are black people; many persons in England, have them for servants. Abroad they toil

¹⁹ See Trimmer 1825, 47-49, for an example specifically related to the book in question, but see more examples of praise for her work throughout the book. Advertisements for Trimmer's works appear in a variety of American newspapers in the 1780s and 90s. An early example appears in *The Connecticut Journal*, 17 November 1784, 2.

like horses, and are frequently much worse used, which is an exceeding barbarous thing, for they are *men* as well as their masters ...'. The narrator lamented that Englishmen, particularly in colonial territories, owned slaves, while admitting that the institution is 'authorized by our own [English] laws' (1793, 116 and 117). It is possible that the Boston editor was somewhat sympathetic of this view, because he chose to edit these statements rather than omitting the passage outright. However, the editor was also entirely unwilling to acknowledge American involvement in such practices. A simple substitution of 'this country' for 'England' was made in the first line, but this also disingenuously suggested that Africans were 'servants' rather than slaves. Additionally, the line about barbarous behavior taking place 'abroad', essentially implying not in America, was preserved. Unlike the British narrator, the American narrator did not condemn her own country's actions. According to the American author, the 'dreadful situation' of slavery was perpetuated by the 'English and other Christian nations, and even authorized by their own laws!' (1796, 84). In this instance, the 'Americanization' of the text reflects an inability to reconcile claims of enlightened government with entrenched, systematic racism and structural oppression in America.²⁰

The most interesting edits to the text relate to gender. Unlike the various Americanized editions of Fisher's *Instructor*, the Boston preface of *An Easy Introduction* claims that the book would be useful to 'young persons of both sexes in the United States of America' (1796, [iii]). In the original version, various objects, such as the sun and the moon, were gendered as 'he' and 'she', while in the American edition they became a neutral 'it' (compare 1793, 135-136 and 1796, 96-97). The American editor also removed gendered passages about the human characters. For example, when the reader is introduced to Henry for the first time in the London edition, the narrator notes that he is 'now ... dressed like a man', implying that he has recently graduated from androgynous childhood garments to pants. Furthermore, Henry relates that he considers himself a man because he was capable of reading, spelling, spinning a top, and catching a ball (1793, 14). Later, the narrator anticipated that Henry would cross a stile first, because he is a gentleman who wanted to help his older sister Charlotte over (127). These references are removed in the American edition, disassociating Henry and his actions from categorizations of manhood and masculinity.

Charlotte's character, too, is subject to changes that diminish traditional gender expectations for girls. A passage in the British edition encouraged her to study natural philosophy, but warned that she would be disappointed if she pursued it too fervently, since certain books would not be available to her as a girl (134). A footnote in the American edition clarified that the reason such books were not available was because there actually were no books on natural philosophy that were 'true and adapted to the capacities of youth' (1796, 96). Thus, the emphasis on Charlotte being unable to read certain books was subtly shifted from gender constraints to there simply not being a sufficient body of literature available to *any* child. In general, the American edits appear to downplay gender distinctions in childhood, while preserving adult ones. Charlotte was still not permitted to be a silk-merchant when she grew up because too many silkworms were deemed unwholesome for women to own, and she was also expected to remain at home while Henry traveled (63 and 103).

One significant exception to this observation concerns the mother-narrator and her role as a scientific educator. To expand the scientific content of the text, a lengthy commentary

²⁰ Instances in which the editor is hesitant to localize material also suggests this. One passage claims that Henry would need a book to know that 'some people in the world are black, others have complexions of a copper-colour ...'. This is presumably referring to Africans and Native Americans, and it seems unlikely that Henry, situated in New England, would need to consult a book in this instance (see 1796, 75 and 1793, 104).

on Moses was omitted from the Boston edition. The official reasoning for this omission (as perhaps the original text was not unknown to an American audience) was that Sarah Trimmer intended to abridge her religious histories in a separate volume (1796, iv). The reduction of religious content prompted the removal of 'and the Holy Scriptures' from the title of the Boston edition. Perhaps the editor objected to Trimmer's high-Anglican affinity; perhaps, as discussed earlier, he was concerned about the lack of reliable scientific texts available to young people. Rather than being a one-for-one substitution of science for religion, perhaps the aim was to Americanize the mother's commitment to her children. By the 1790s, Republican Motherhood, the idea that women were indirectly engaged with politics through the raising of good citizens, was beginning to justify expanded education for women so that they might educate their children, particularly their sons. Sometimes, the Boston editor would substitute a more sophisticated scientific term for a vague one, but more often added entire paragraphs to flesh out scientific teachings. The most significant addition in this vein included extended commentary on astronomy, largely for the benefit of Charlotte (see additions between 1796, 102-125). The Boston edition plagiarized passages from various British imprints, including John Bonnycastle's *An Introduction to Astronomy*, and James Ferguson's *Astronomy explained upon Sir Isaac Newton's principles*.²¹ The end result was, that, upon comparison, the American mother was able to provide more complex and extensive commentary to her children about various scientific subjects. In contrast, her British counterpart openly admitted the limitation of her knowledge, else deferred to a schoolmaster who would teach them more advanced science in the future. Notably, the editor of the Boston edition often removed these lines, simply inserting the relevant information, or altering the text to explain that the mother herself would teach more advanced lessons at a later date (compare, for example, 1796, 88 and 1793, 123). And although the scientific information came from British sources, the 'Americanization' of the mother-narrator resided in her behavior and authority rather than her words. Essentially, what has been 'Americanized' was the mother's capacity to learn and articulate complicated scientific views for her children's benefit. The text suggests that it was acceptable for American women to pursue science in ways English women could not.

6. Concluding Thoughts

The present examination of the Americanization of Fisher's *Instructor* and Trimmer's *Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature* reveals surprising and unsurprising results. That late eighteenth-century texts were revised to emphasize political difference, particularly after the American Revolution, aligns with chronologies we are all familiar with. What may be more surprising is that the editors of the *Instructor* (Franklin and Thomas) as well as the editor of Trimmer's *Easy Introduction*, augmented the scientific and medical information for American readers, and in various ways, tried to emphasize individual or local innovation. In Franklin's *American Instructor*, the inclusion of the Virginia-written 'Poor Planter's Physician', as well as his stripping of the zodiac and highlighting of the New England author's receipt in *Royal Transactions*, points to local ingenuity while reminding the reader that he too can possess medical authority. Thomas' *American Young Man's Best Companion* uses 1780s-era British editions as the

²¹ Plagiarized sources that appear in Trimmer 1796: on 96 and 102 from Anonymous, *Analysis of certain parts of a compendious view of natural philosophy* (1796); on 111, 118-120 and 124-125 from John Bonnycastle, *An Introduction to Astronomy* (1786); on 118 and 122 from James Ferguson, *Astronomy explained upon Sir Isaac Newton's principles* (1764).

copytext, augmenting content about astronomy and ultimately updating medical receipts to be more measurable and precise, while integrating American ingredients. The Boston edition of Trimmer's *Easy Introduction to the Knowledge of Nature* radically reimagines the limits of women's scientific knowledge. If Anglo-Americans understood science as important to their cultural identity, would unethical scientific practices (such as corpse theft) diminish this? Perhaps the reader of *A Hapless Orphan* is meant to understand the stakes of the ending in this context. By examining more Americanized reprints and using their changes as a metric, we may uncover other unexpected themes and values buried in original American works.

Though I have focused on reprints with 'American' claims to content, revision was not a one-sided endeavor. British versions of these reprints were often updated to reflect changed political relationships and values as well. For example, Eve Bannet has shown that in letter-writing manuals published prior to the Revolution, an economic relationship with Americans was portrayed as patriotic, but afterwards, a financial burden (2005, 204). Future work might survey British revisions to various titles circulating in America, to see how adaptation practices in both nations collaboratively constructed difference. Furthermore, while the editors of these works made significant changes to the text, they also left much of it intact. If changes to the book reflect the editor's 'Americanizations' and perception of difference, deliberately unchanged text may reflect perceived commonalities with British culture and society. If our goal is to determine what American identity was as well as how it was changing, we must have a thorough sense of what values Anglo-Americans rejected, and what values they continued to share with Britain.

But there is something about calling these books 'reprints' that has detracted at times from scholars considering the possibility of American content or qualities, because a reprint suggests, at heart, that it is a copy of another work, not an original intervention. I want to consider this strange practice of altering content for regional audiences (at any scale) as an act of translation instead. In common parlance we may think of translation as the process of converting one language to another, but historically, translation was more complicated. Paula Findlen (1995) has pointed out that women authors in early modern Italy translated scientific texts for patriotic purposes. This manifested in several ways. When a woman translated a work, her locality could then claim the fame of hosting an educated woman. Through the act of translating, women underscored their residence and regional values by making revisions and annotations according to local taste. Once the translator had imprinted the values of her hometown upon the book, it would recognizably belong to that locale. Findlen's documentation of early modern translation practices is strikingly similar to the revisions made to Fisher's *Instructor* and Trimmer's *Easy Introduction* in America. In these cases, since the works were already written in the vernacular, the editor translated cultural incongruities rather than language – and to recall Franklin's claims from *The American Instructor*, the curious exchange of 'Matters' for 'Things' was essentially an exercise in working through what distinguished local and national aspects of American identity.

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