One of the Boys:

Jerome's Fabulous Frontier Masculinity

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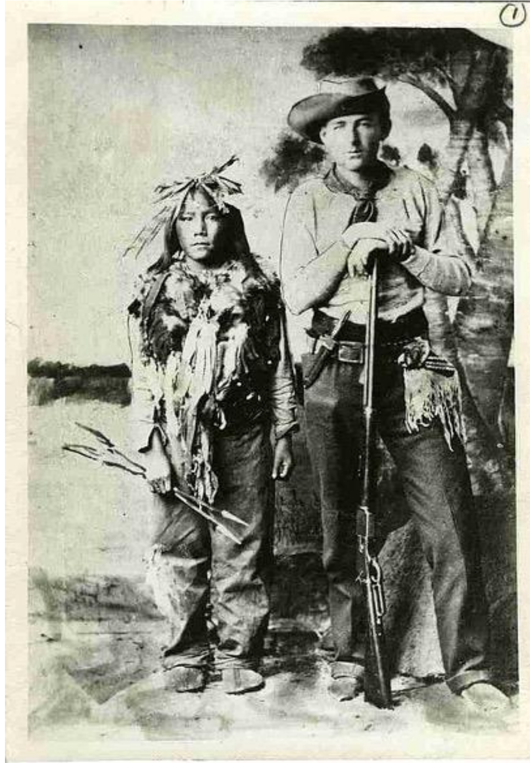

1: Horsechild and Cameron, 1885

2: St. Jerome, by Vincenzo Foppa, 15th century

Abstract

At the dawn of imperial Roman Christianity, Jerome was a "man on the make."[1] He portrayed himself to potential patrons as an ascetic, a desert-dweller, a biblical exegete, a conduit of the Greek Christian tradition, a fluent Hebrew speaker, and a Holy Land monk. His self-promotion relied on declarations of identities considered frontier and exotic by the fourth-century imperial centre of power. This article employs a decolonizing, aware-settler hermeneutic (Anderson 2019) to analyze these claims as specific strategies by which Jerome tried to cement his influence and establish his authority as a Roman elite male (Conway 2019; Gleason 1995).

Keywords: Jerome, masculinity studies, aware-settler, frontier

[1] I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for *The Bible and Critical Theory* for their time and scholarly attention. Their thoughtful and constructive comments on the manuscript greatly improved the piece.

> The story is a plain one and it will be told plainly. And if the dramatic setting, the romantic atmosphere of a wild and lonely land, the smoke of teepees and the native eloquence of men, naked and brown as leaves in autumn, do not invite the seeker of the sensational and melodramatic in literature, the tale is not for him (Cameron 1970, xi).

> Come, and come quickly. Do not think of old ties—the desert loves the naked—do not be deterred by the hardships…. The day will come later when you shall return in triumph to your true country, when, crowned as a man of might, you shall walk the streets of the heavenly Jerusalem. Then you shall share with Paul the franchise of that city…. Yes, and for me also you shall intercede, who urged you on to victory" (Jerome *Letters* XIV, 29).[2]

Introduction

I first proposed an aware-settler lens to examine biblical texts and their reception—for instance, in re-reading the so-called "Great Commission" of Matthew 28:25-28 (Anderson 2019, 56-60). In reading Jerome's letters, however, it soon became clear that an aware-settler hermeneutic also offered insights into his attempts to stake claims from a "frontier periphery" to perform virility for, and seek recognition and patronage from, an imperial audience.

Aware-settler approaches listen to and learn from Indigenous scholarship.[3] The above photograph taken in 1885 in the Canadian west, even without the text with which I've paired it, aptly illustrates how settler identity is worked out in a complex mutuality with and dependence on Indigeneity, despite the settler goal of displacing Indigenous people and presence (Bell 2014, 3). An aware-settler lens also identifies and analyzes settler attempts to construct narratives of heroic virtue, evident in the "wild west" costumes of Cameron's photograph. Applied to Jerome, this lens helps us focus on his physical and literary location in an ancient "contact zone" (Pratt 1992, 6-7).[4] Jerome used literary narratives and images typical of frontier masculinity to advance himself,[5] despite frontier masculinity being a form of what Homi Bhabha has called "fetishized colonial culture" (Bhabha 1984, 131), with its attendant queer undertones.[6] The eventual acceptance and reification of Jerome's self-promotion in his reception is witnessed by the common representation of him and his setting we see in Vincenzo Foppa's 15th century painting (the second image). In Jerome beating his breast outside a cave, history reproduces what Burrus

[2] All English translations of Jerome's *Letters* are from Wright (1933).
[3] Among the many Indigenous scholars who have influenced my work are Margaret Kovach (2009), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), Chris Andersen (2009), and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015).
[4] For Indigenous perspectives on contact zones, see Donaldson (2002, 97-98) and Simpson (2009, chapter 9).
[5] I use the term "frontier masculinity" as shorthand for the hypermasculinity of many first-person colonial narratives, (and the later myths where such "pioneers" are portrayed). These stories often cast the land itself as an othered, female, presence that "requires" control, domination, or "civilizing." See Coleman (2006).
[6] On queerness and positionality, Chris Greenough's *Queer Theology: The Basics* (2020, 25-26) is helpful.

has called "the queerly feminized and darkly exoticized literary persona of his [Jerome's] own construction" (Burrus 2001, 443-44).

Important queer examinations of Jerome's masculinity have contributed to our understanding by focusing on his fascinating non-normative behaviours (Burrus 2004; Cox Miller 1993 and 1996). However, Jerome's "queer failure" (Halberstam 2011, 87-88),[7] that is, his inability in his lifetime to achieve the esteem and influence necessary to obtain the coveted position of the Roman imperial *vir,* or male, arises directly from his seeking such normative status.[8] Jerome was not unique in the ways in which his "rhetorical praxis and gender identity [were] parts of an interconnected whole" (Gleason 1995, xxvi). In his letters, hagiographies, commentaries and other writings, Jerome wanted to be seen as exemplifying the masculine traits of *virtus* (a reputation for authoritative moral valour and virtue) and *imperium* (domination, or control). He did this by declaring his mastery over textual, ecclesiastical, and physical territory, with an eye to securing and maintaining patronage, especially from a powerful network of elite Roman Christian women.

It is only in recent decades, and under the influence of feminist thinkers, that masculinity as a construction of "cultural representations and social practices" has received much attention (Marchal 2014, 267). Since then, there have been many examinations of masculine identity construction through literary self-presentation in early texts such as Paul's letters (Ehrensperger 2020; Larson 2004; Emmett 2021), and in later Christian writings such as the Church Fathers. In her work '*Begotten, Not Made': Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity*, Virginia Burrus focused on the construction of elite Christian masculinity in the context of the great theological debates of the Christianizing empire. She concludes that the "fourth-century doctrine of a transcendent God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was inextricably intertwined with the particular late-antique claims for masculinity" (Burrus 2000). Jerome's carnal asceticism represented an extreme position in that development. Here I argue that his marginal position and his attempts to profit from that position by casting himself in his writings as master of a frontier both alluring and potentially deadly, form an important part of the evolution of elite masculine identity construction in late antiquity. "So I read, so I am written, so I write, reluctant to make an end of it" (Burrus 2000, 193). Burrus's words were not specifically about Jerome but could easily form his epitaph.

I want to identify four actions typical of a settler-colonist (Veracini 2010) in Jerome's work: 1) a declaration of *terra nullius* or "empty land" in certain key areas where he wished to assert ownership; 2) a proclamation of precedence by which he stated himself to be the first from the imperial centre to assert sovereignty over those

[7] Note that unlike Halberstam's prototype, Jerome never "quietly lost" his cause on his way to imagining "other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being" (Halberstam 2011, 88). For another example of queer failure, see Favorinus (Gleason 1995, 20).

[8] The fact that ancient masculinity was performed did not necessarily mean either that the individual had free agency in choosing what to perform, or that their performances were successful, as Jerome is example. See Sullivan (2003, 89).

domains; 3) the commodification and trading of the resources of the physical or reputational territory, which necessarily meant the suppression and further delegitimization of those who first 'inhabited' those territories; and finally 4) the construction and retelling of a settler imaginary, a mythic narrative of heroic labour and pioneer virtue which reinforced his *virtus* and *imperium*.

Maude Gleason writes of the first century CE orator Favorinus that "Like every great sophist, [he] lived his life in fierce pursuit of international recognition and immortal fame" (Gleason 1995, 8). Jerome's works show that he likewise intended his self-promotion to extend to his legacy (Cain 2009a, 3). Through his preserved works, his "queer failure" was overcome, and he achieved the reputation he had so desired. As evidenced in the painting by Foppa, Christian tradition eventually incorporated, mythologized, and even celebrated aspects of Jerome's non-normative masculinity. That reception finally gave him the pride of place he had worked diligently to obtain in the narrative of Western Christianity's history (Vessey 2009, 235).

Jerome's Identity Performance as Settler Colonialism

Jerome's standing in the shifting theatre of early imperial Christianity was always contested. His posthumous status as an authoritative translator and scholar of scripture, a champion of Nicene orthodoxy, and a heroic ascetic was never granted in his own lifetime. Instead, Jerome's writings show him competing for aristocratic patronage hampered by a reputation often in doubt and occasionally in tatters. He preferred to present his travails as the sufferings of the unjustly persecuted: "it is not surprising," he wrote, "if we…offend very many when we try to strip away their vices" (Jerome *Letters* XL, 2).

Through his writings from Antioch and Bethlehem, Jerome performed his identity for an elite audience in his "true country," patrician Christian Rome, "a city where the people once was the world" (Jerome *Letters* CXXVII, 3). Jerome sought to insert himself as a key player in the evolving state church.[9] He took part in what has been called the late fourth century's "ascetic transformation of the imperial elite" (Coon 1997, 76) led by a group of patrician Christian women and their clients. After initial successes, including a likely stint as a secretary to Pope Damasus (Rebenich 2002, 31-33), Jerome experienced significant setbacks. Mid-career, he left Italy in haste following an episcopal court's verdict against him on charges of "clerical misconduct stemming from allegations of legacy hunting and sexual impropriety" (Cain 2010b, 108).[10] In his correspondence, he presented himself as one of Judah's exiles, dragged from Jerusalem to Babylon. He begged for prayers he might soon

[9] Cain (2009a, 198), notes that "Jerome notoriously went to great lengths to create the impression that he was the spiritual and scholarly centre of gravity of the late antique church."

[10] Also Cain (2009a, 99). See also *Letters* XLV, 2, p 181: "Nothing is laid to my charge except my sex, and that only when Paula is likely to set out for Jerusalem." This was possibly the second time Jerome was forced to leave his home because of scandal (Steinmann 1959, 30-31; Kelly 1975, 34).

return to his "Mount Sion" (Jerome, *Letters* XLV, 6). His bitterness, but also his tactics, are evident: "Let Rome keep her bustle for herself, the fury of the arena, the madness of the circus, the profligacy of the theatre, and—for I must not forget our Christian friends—the daily meetings of the matron's senate" (Jerome, *Letters* XLIII, 3).

Given that almost all of what we know about Jerome comes from his self-presentations, it's easy to become distracted by their thickets of gossip, reproach, fantasy, sexuality, appropriation, and erudition. There we encounter the full queerness of Jerome's masculinity. The importance he attached to celibacy, virginity, and chastity as superior to sexual relations, marriage, and child raising was typical of the Church Fathers (Kuefler 2015, 244). Jerome, however, went further. Even in his day, he was judged for how he took Christian celibate eros (Clark 2008, 9) to a fever pitch.[11] For instance, he portrays one of his fictional Christian martyrs tortured by burning metal. When the young man overcomes that, he is tormented instead by garlands of flowers and the embraces of a beautiful woman:

> [H]er arms [were] around his neck in tender embraces, and then-oh, sinful even to relate-[she] began to caress him wantonly, in order that she might force him to yield to her shameless advances. What should a soldier of Christ do? Where could he turn? Lust was on the point of overcoming him whom torture could not conquer. At last, inspired from heaven, he bit off a piece of his tongue and spat it into her face as she kissed him. Ensuing pain prevailed over lustful passion (*Life of Paul the Hermit*, 226-227).[12]

It is easy to be distracted by the scandal and strangeness of such a piece. If we are, we lose sight of the competitive literary goals Jerome sought by writing such scenes: to upstage Athanasius and the public success of his *Life of Anthony*, and to seduce certain readers—the elite Christian women of Rome (Burrus 2001, 451). Perhaps distraction was a part of Jerome's strategy, but in this he was not successful. Such saintly erotica, together with Jerome's extreme views on asceticism (Clark 1989, 31-32), and his dubious actions regarding the noblewoman ascetic Paula and her family, kept him in exile. What Burrus calls his "all-too-carnal theologizing" and the sister-wife pairing he cultivated with Paula—or she with him—led to his disgrace (Burrus 2004, 67). Typically, however, Jerome turns his readers' attention away through gossip: "It wearies me to tell how many virgins fall daily," he sighs (*Letters*, XXII, 13).

Simmering scandals, hyperbolic attacks, fantastic creativities, and queer sexualities all tend to blind us to how Jerome's actions were in many ways *typical* of

[11] Cox Miller notes Jerome's valuation of desire in the act of his devaluation of body, and how his writings constitute "an erotics of asceticism that will be applicable not only to women but also to men" (Cox Miller 1993, 26).

[12] For a reading of this story from the woman's point of view, see Burrus (2004, 50-51).

a Roman seeking to prove his manliness. With his aristocratic patrons firmly in mind, Jerome sought to turn his marginalized location to his benefit. I make the following arguments: firstly, that an aware-settler lens applied to Jerome's masculinity helps explain his particular use of the empire's margins to display Roman male values of *virtus* and *imperium*.[13] Secondly, Jerome's moves to declare *terra nullius*, to establish sovereignty claims against other Latin Christian writers, to commodify and traffic in the resources of the frontier for the purpose of seeking patrons and patronage, and finally to invent for himself a narrative of pioneer *virtus*, or virtue, are all evidence of what I am here calling a frontier masculinity.

I am not the first to suggest a decolonizing lens. While not specifically applying this to Jerome, Virginia Burrus has pointed to and problematized a colonial and post-colonial perspective for examining ancient conceptions of virginity (Burrus 2005). Andrew S. Jacobs noted Jerome's extractive interactions with Palestinian Jews and his attempts to exercise control over the burgeoning practice of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land (Jacobs 2007, 112-115). Here I add to their work by pointing out how Jerome sought to build his aspirational identity and his reputation in ways typical of frontier men.

Jerome's first "desert" sojourn near Syrian Antioch and his later permanent move to Bethlehem, were both prompted by some sort of expulsion, first from Aquileia and later from Rome (Rebenich 2002, 12). In both cases Jerome's writings show him trying to turn exile to his advantage. My contention is that Jerome's method of appropriating the resources of the places to which he had taken flight show that he was not just an agent of an imperial religion (the more typical focus of decolonizing approaches). Additionally, Jerome was a settler.[14] Like his character Malchus the Monk, Jerome built a life and a literature at the edge of empire, in Pratt's "contact zone" (Pratt 1992, 6-7).

For Christians and Jews, the desert is a particular *kind* of contact zone, rich in biblical narrative and image. Not only biblical characters, but angels, saints, and fantastical creatures make it home.[15] From his first time in the east in the early 370s, Jerome began to extract value from this notional desert. Even while enjoying the richness of Syrian Antioch, residence of the emperor Valens and known for its urban pleasures, Jerome peppered his letters with references to solitude, desert, and wilderness (*eremus*). He depicted himself to Rome as a Jacob, a Moses, and true-life incarnation of his fictional Malchus (Rebenich 2002, 16). He writes himself to be near-naked, persecuted, a shepherd in intent if not profession, virtuous although troubled by the presence of women, and living in solitude.[16] After a brief illness

[13] On the importance of specific land, see Anderson (2019, 53).

[14] On the utility of using colonialism as a lens to study the ancient world see Heng (2015).

[15] Aline Canellis (2013, 27) notes Jerome considered it «un endroit dépeuplé d'habitants mais assiégé par les troupes de saints» ("a place empty of inhabitants but besieged by saints," translation mine). On the desert and its mythical creatures see Cox Miller (1996, 221).

[16] See especially chapter 5, "Malchus' Life Among the Saracens," in Jerome, *Vita Malchi*. Trans. Christa Gray, 185. Halberstam (2011, 120), was not thinking of Jerome's novelistic hagiographies, but her observations on the characteristics of queer fairy tales nonetheless seem applicable here.

during his stint in the Antiochian suburbs, he writes that he himself "was caught up in the spirit and dragged before the Judge's judgement seat: and here the light was so dazzling, and the brightness shining from those who stood around so radiant, that I flung myself on the ground and did not dare to look up" (*Letters*, XXII, 30). Thus he added mystic to his other exotic qualifications. As Burrus notes, in Jerome "ascetic fantasy quickly overwhelms historical description" (Burrus 2004, 19).

The desert life, and asceticism in general, had developed remarkable caché amongst the literate elite of Christian Rome because of the recently translated *Life of Anthony*. Jerome took advantage of the trend, writing hagiographies almost as autobiographical fictions that placed him firmly in a notional wilderness. In them, he blurred the lines between himself, the monk Paul of Thebes, the apostle Paul, Isaiah, and John of Revelation. "All of a sudden, riders on horses and camels, Ishmaelites, rushed up with hairy and beribboned heads and half-naked bodies," he writes in the novelistic *Vita Malchi* (83).

I refer to the zones Jerome occupied by the term "frontiers." Frontier is a value-laden and imperial word. Just as "civilized" requires its opposite in "savage," the word frontier is given meaning by the colonizing center behind it, and the wilderness depicted beyond. Jerome takes his place amongst those border people—almost entirely men—who as much in the Roman empire as in the Victorian age traded narratives of "frontier" experience for reputation and authority, *virtus* and *imperium*.[17] From his stint in Syrian Antioch to his final days in Bethlehem, from Paul the Monk to Malchus, Jerome is obsessed with periphery and center. "[Your] letter was handed to me by the saintly Evagrius in that part of the desert which forms a broad boundary line between the Syrians and the Saracens," Jerome wrote in one of his earliest letters (*Letters*, XLIV).

Performed self-identity must, of course, be performed for someone or a group of someones. The fourth-century Roman equivalent of investors were the Christian elite, whose patronage meant success or failure for ambitious clerics such as Jerome, Rufinus, Damasus, Augustine, and Evagrius.[18] "You send us gifts," Jerome wrote unselfconsciously in 385 to Marcella, and "we send you back letters of thanks" (*Letters*, XLIV).[19] Jerome's memory of his first encounters with his patrons is telling:

> When the needs of the Church brought me also to Rome, in company with the holy pontiffs Paulinus and Epiphanius…I in my modesty was inclined to avoid the gaze of ladies of rank. But Marcella was so urgent both in season and out of season, as the apostle says, that her persistence overcame my timidity. At the time I had some repute as a student of the Scriptures. (*Letters*, CXXVII, 7).

[17] Cameron's autobiographical *Blood Red the Sun* is only one example among very many in this genre.
[18] Considerable variation existed in the relations between elite women and their client men within this grouping (Clark 1989, 43). Also page 34: "Whereas 34 percent of Jerome's letters and 23 percent of Chrysostom's are addressed to women, only 7 percent of Augustine's are so designated."
[19] On Roman women's patronage, see Osiek (2005, esp. 352-354).

Narrative was a particularly powerful tool in the hands of a rhetorician, hagiographer, letter writer, biblical commentator, and spinner of romances like Jerome.[20] However, while the ascetic may have promiscuously employed and even invented different literary forms,[21] he remained remarkably constant in his literary goals. In service of his *virtus*, Jerome employed the same techniques he describes in his letter eulogizing Nepotianus: "The rhetorician's rule," Jerome wrote, "is [to] go back to the ancestors of the man you have to praise, and first recount their glorious deeds. Then gradually you will come to your hero, making him the more illustrious by the virtues of his forefathers" (*Letters*, LX, 8).[22] It explains why Jerome made himself the climax of his Lives of Illustrious Men.

Positionality, Place, and Frontier-language

Body Nêhiyaw (Cree) scholar Margaret Kovach writes that "our knowledges are bound to place" (Kovach 2009, 37). She goes on to note that "introducing Indigenous knowledges into any form of academic discourse (research or otherwise) must ethically include the influence of the colonial relationships" (Kovach 2009, 30). Kovach and other Indigenous scholars emphasize the importance of land, story, relation, and community good, to the researcher's position and inquiry (Kovach 2009, 48). For that reason I turn to my own place and positionality.

There is a reason I recognize the settler in Jerome. I am a second-generation European-background Canadian. My paternal grandfather emigrated from Norway to take up so-called free land. The area where both my paternal and maternal families took root had been cleared of its millennia-long presence of Lakota, Nakota, Anihšināpēk (Saulteaux), nêhiyawak (Cree), and Niisitapi peoples only fifty years or so before my grandparents' arrival. That clearing took place through government facilitated starvation and cynical treaty-making (Daschuk 2013). As a Canadian, and the grandchild of homesteaders on Indigenous land, I recognize familiar narratives in Jerome's writing. Many settlers were ill-fitted or unsuccessful in their countries of origin (Bhabha 1984, 128). Not a few, reminiscent of Jerome in 385, fled scandal. Most carried their "old countries" with them. Despite the substantial differences between fourth century Rome's borders and settler-colonialism fifteen centuries later, I grew up surrounded by often-repeated narratives of self-described heroism. There were men's self-congratulatory tales of arriving in a harsh and unwelcoming wilderness with nothing in their pockets and yet somehow "making good." Such stories, like Jerome's, often work to hide or diminish the significant financial resources invested by others to ensure success (McLain 2017).

[20] Vessey notes that "Generic inventiveness is the keynote of Jerome's writings" (Vessey 2004, 321).
[21] On Jerome's invention of the Christian genre of "illustrious biographies" see Wood (2012, 615-616).
[22] See also Wood (2012, 617): Wood points out how Jerome used his literary invention of biography, his *Lives of Illustrious Men*, for declaring which of his predecessors really "counted."

Both William Bleasdell Cameron and Jerome came from marginal positions within the empires they represented, making them what Bhabha calls "mimic men" (Bhabha 1984, 128). Bleasdell Cameron was in fact a lowly clerk in the Hudson's Bay Company, a chartered British corporation which—without consultation with Indigenous peoples—was for a time "granted" by the English crown much of the territory of modern-day Canada. Cameron gained a certain stardom when he survived being taken captive during the calamitous 1885 Métis resistance in what became western Canada. Because of this he went on to write a book about his adventures and was briefly editor of the American magazine *Field and Stream*. The photo at the outset of the article was taken in 1885 of a twenty-six-year-old William Bleasdell Cameron together with the twelve-year-old Mistatim Awâsis (the nêhiyawak or Cree name for "Horse Child"). Mistatim Awâsis was the son of the nêhiyaw leader Mistahi-maskwa (Big Bear). It is not a mistake that Cameron's most famous photo is with Mistatim Awâsis. It was Cameron's relationship to the boy's father that gave him his limited fame.[23]

Jerome's birthplace, Stridon was a provincial town, and while Jerome was not poor, neither was he among the empire's elite.[24] Like Cameron, it was Jerome's self-storied encounters with Indigenous spaces and peoples (Eastern Greek Christians, ascetic hermits, and Palestinian Jews) that he used in service of his notoriety. "Oh, how often," Jerome wrote, "when I was living in the desert, in that lonely waste, scorched by the burning sun, which affords to hermits a savage dwelling place, how often did I fancy myself surrounded by the pleasures of Rome!" (*Letters* XXII, 7). Estimates as to factual truth of Jerome's account vary. Perhaps influenced by art such as Foppa's, his biographer Kelly proposed that Jerome found a cleft in the rock and stayed a couple of years (Kelly 1975, 48). Contemporary scholars believe Jerome simply camped out at a country estate called *Maronia* (Rebenich 2002, 16). The point is that both men built their reputations on exaggerations of "frontier" experiences. "Filled with stiff anger against myself," wrote Jerome, "I would make my way alone into the desert; and when I came upon some hollow valley or rough mountain or precipitous cliff, there I would set up my oratory, and make that spot a place of torture for my unhappy flesh" (*Letters*, XXII, 7). Aware-settler approaches see such compelling *stories*, or myths, as an ideological mechanism, a tool by which settlers both suppress and perform indigeneity, performing their "mastery" of the frontier (Anderson 2019; Bell 2014, 11; Bhabha 1984, 132; Starblanket and Hunt 2020).

[23] The photo was taken in Regina Saskatchewan during the trial of Mistahi-Maskwa and others. Remarkably (and showing the "entanglements" typical of colonialism), there is another photo of Cameron and Mistatim Awâsis, taken sixty-two years later in 1947: http://digital.scaa.sk.ca/ourlegacy/solr?query=ID%3A28301&start=0&rows=10&mode=view&pos=0&page=1

[24] In *Letters*, LII, 6, 207, Jerome is as usual exaggerating when he writes that he "was born in a humble home…and once could scarcely get enough millet and course bread to satisfy the howlings of [his] stomach."

Virtus, *Imperium*, and Frontier Masculinity

A migrant joins an existing society intending to adapt themselves to that society—a colonist intends to supplant it. Settlement is permanent. It displaces. In Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *The White Possessive*, she notes that "possession is the foundation of property; it requires physical occupation and the will and desire to possess" (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 132). Whatever his actual successes in hagiography, orthodoxy, ascetic authority, translation, and exegesis, they were inscribed by Jerome himself not only as triumphs, but as *firsts*, accomplishments allowing him to claim ownership: "I have therefore determined to write a few words about the beginning of Paul's eremitical life and about his death…because the account has never been written" (*Life of Paul the Hermit*, 225–226; see also Vessey 2004, 321–322). Just as he takes pains to make Athanasius's Anthony bow before his literary Paul of Thebes—whom critics even in his own day doubted was ever a real person (Kelly 1975, 61), Jerome defines the exegetical, ecclesiastical, ascetic, and other reputational territories he wishes to claim as empty of meaningful, that is, *Latin*, precedent.[25]

The reputations of both the frontiersman and the ancient Roman man depended on the shaky foundation of public opinion. Jerome knew very well how in such arenas, as Maude Gleason has pointed out, "rhetoric was a calisthenics of manhood" (Gleason 1995, xx). He wrote and compiled his letters accordingly. Because ancient masculinity was competitively performed rather than biologically assumed, the public status of a Roman man was rare, contested and constantly in danger of being lost (Ehrensperger 2020, 67-69). One man's masculinity could be gained, or held, at the expense of another's.[26] The purpose of a public insult was to emasculate the other; thus Jerome snidely compares Rufinus's education to his own: "If you had studied letters, the jar of your little genius would still have the odor" (*Against Rufinus*, 100). Unfortunately for him, Jerome was more often on the receiving end. Shortly after his flight from Rome he wrote: "I a scandal, I a slippery turncoat, I a liar using Satan's art to deceive! Which shows the greater subtlety, I wonder, to believe these charges (perhaps even to invent them about an innocent man), or to say: "I do not wish to believe them even though he is guilty'?" Here Jerome publicly challenges, taunts, and defends; but typically, leaves the crucial questions unanswered.

To combat the inevitable parries of others, elite Roman men sought to display *vir* and *virtus*, the traits of valor and virtue (Williams 2010, 145). "*Virtus*," writes Craig Williams, "is an eminently praiseworthy quality, whether in a male (who should naturally have it), or a female (who may, exceptionally, attain to it)" (Williams 2010, 146). Readers of Jerome will recognize how his rhetorical constructions, for

[25] For a narrative analysis using Jerome's hagiographical *Life of Paul*, see Goldberg (2013).

[26] Gleason (1995, 61), states that Ambrose refused to "receive a priest whose gait showed signs of arrogance." In this context note that Jerome defends his walk, which he says others criticized (*Letters* XLV, 2).

instance his eulogy for Paula (*Letters* 108), are structured to emphasize just this type of *virtus* (Lamprecht 2017). As elsewhere in the ancient world (e.g., Origen *Homily on Joshua* 9:69; Gospel of Thomas *Logion* 114; Nag Hammadi Codex 8.1; 1 Clement 55:3; Josephus, *War*, 159; Porphyry *Letter to Marcella* 33; etc.), the greatest honor Jerome gave a woman was that she somehow "overcame" her gender, and became a man. Nevertheless, Jerome reserved his highest praise for himself:

> Before I became acquainted with the households of the saintly Paula, all Rome was enthusiastic about me. Almost everyone concurred in judging me worthy of the highest office in the Church. My words were always on the lips of Damasus of blessed memory. Men called me saintly; men called me humble, and eloquent (*Letters*, XLV, 3).

Virtus worked best to support masculinity when paired with the other performative characteristic of elite Roman manliness: *imperium*. *Imperium* was defined as control, over oneself at the least—which is where stoicism helped attenuate it (Glancy 2010, 28)—but ideally also over others.[27] Here it is worth noting that Jerome's often-noted cantankerousness has been shown to be related more often to his epistolary rhetoric than to his personality (Cain 2006, 503). Nonetheless, Jerome often seemed to fail to demonstrate control, whether over his own reactions, or more importantly, over the theological and political winds of late antique Rome. His attempts led him to adopt four strategies characteristic of settler-colonial frontiersmen. I turn to these now.

Jerome's Declarations of *Terra Nullius*

In the Americas, settler-colonial states declared the places they wished to exploit as *terra nullius*, that is, legally unoccupied territory. That such territories were manifestly not unoccupied was the reason they needed a declaration (Mackey 2016, 47-49).

Ultimately, European powers decided that it was enough to declare a lack of legal occupation if existing inhabitants could be declared as not human, or at least, not worthily human. In speaking of how this legality was applied in North America, Mackey shows how settlers redefined the land as "empty of people and societies *that mattered* (emphasis added)" (Mackey 2016, 48). Applied to an anchorite cave in Syria or a pre-existing commentary on Ephesians, Jerome's various claims of *terra nullius* likewise depended on precedents being considered savage, insufficient, or in a particularly useful fourth century twist, heretical. Foucault (1980, 63) speaks of place being fundamental to any exercise of power. Like other male settlers, Jerome

[27] Williams (2010, 148) notes: "The status of being a Roman man is associated with dominion or imperium ('ut tibi imperes'), and the incarnations of the opposing principles are slaves and women."

must be understood by the use he made of place, and how he tried to demonstrate mastery while negotiating with Indigenous precedence.

The first recorded European on the North American plains was Henry Kelsey, an early 17th-century trader. He was guided every step by nêhiyawak, Nakota, and others who made sure the young Englishman lost neither his way nor his life. Yet Kelsey's journals make little mention of the locals. Where he does, he characterizes the very people on whom he depended as perverse, uncivilized, and unreliable—terms that could almost be lifted from some of Jerome's letters from the east. Kelsey—and Jerome—illustrate the attitude of the settler colonist. For the purpose of dispossession and/or assimilation, frontier epistemology either delegitimizes existing inhabitants and their work, or valorizes and romanticizes them, but places them firmly in the past. While he of course never uses the phrase, Jerome makes the *terra nullius* argument throughout his writing. He *over*writes earlier accounts, both hagiographical and exegetical. For instance, he begins his introduction to the Galatians commentary: "I shall undertake a work that no Latin writer before me has attempted and that hardly any among the Greeks have executed in a manner worthy of the exalted nature of the subject matter" (*Commentary on Galatians*, Book 1).

Jerome's adoption of a *terra nullius* strategy is particularly evident in his about-face on Origen's orthodoxy, even while making extensive use of Origen's work.[28] It was well known that Jerome owed much to Origen (Brown 1989, 42). Jerome's advocacy of asceticism, the way he tied ascetic life to the translation of scripture from its original languages, especially Hebrew, and his time in Palestine—all were strategies seemingly adapted from the earlier Greek Church Father (Williams 2006, 29; Vessey 2004, 321). Origen also provided significant source material that Jerome sometimes translated nearly verbatim into his own Latin commentaries (Cain 2010a, 27). This was not necessarily unusual in the ancient world. However, that Jerome should then pronounce Origen heretical owes both to the power politics of the moment and to Jerome's convoluted relationship with his one-time intimate Rufinus, who had embarked on much the same settler-colonial path with Origen, but earlier, and with more success (Vessey 2004, 323; Ayres 2004, 454).[29]

Jerome and Rufinus were engaged in rival efforts to exploit the resources of the long-Christian Greek east for the imperial audiences of a newly attentive Catholic west. Jerome's turn on Origen, what Vessey calls his "panicky sale of stock," is proof that to Jerome the resources of the Christian east were just that: resources. Similarly, Jerome's contacts among the rabbis appear in his rhetoric as little more to him than living reference manuals for translation (Jacobs 2007, 112). It must be remembered that the fourth-century imperial Christian building of shrines in Palestine was also a displacement of whatever Jewish population was in those centers, and a

[28] For an alternate view that gives more weight to Jerome's theology of asceticism, see Clark (1987).
[29] See Jerome, in *Against Rufinus,* 159: "Your Origen, and (lest perchance you complain that you have been touched keenly by this fictive praise) our Origen (I call him ours for the excellence of his genius, not for the truth of his doctrines) explains and expounds in all his books the translations of the Jews."

monumentalizing of supersessionism (Irshai 1994, 265). In terms of Jerome's practice, a focus on *resource* over *relation* is settler-colonialism distilled to its essence.

We can picture both Jerome and his contemporary Rufinus in the settler-colonial garb of competing traders like William Bleasdell Cameron. "In your old age," Jerome writes, "you concoct stories about another old man which a cutthroat would not tell about a thief (Against Rufinus)," and relates that Rufinus has accused him of bribing scribes to obtain Rufinus's rough drafts. We are so often distracted by the late fourth-century intricacies of Nicene theology that we don't recognize settler-colonialism during this period. From its angle, the battle of letters between Jerome and Rufinus essentially marked a trade war (Brown 1989, 380).

Jerome's working principle of *terra nullius* is also evident in his treatment of the Syrian anchorites. He ended his time in Antioch complaining bitterly about the hermits whom he groused would not leave him "so much as a corner of the desert" (Cain 2009a, 31). However, he realized his claims to ascetic authority required that he appear no less rigorous. He had to present himself to his Roman interlocutors as the very "model of eremitic holiness" (Cain 2009a, 25). Although Jerome intimated that he was constantly hungry and alone, his "limbs worn away with fasting on the bare ground" (*Letters*, XIV, 10), Rebenich points out how he "must have lived in quite a spacious hollow to store his expanding collection of codices and to supervise young assistants, or protégés, who were copying manuscripts there" (Rebenich 2002, 14). Typically, Jerome forestalled criticism by levelling accusations at others: "I myself have seen some men who after they had renounced the world—in garb, at least… but not in reality—changed nothing of their former mode of life. [Meanwhile]…amidst crowds of servants swarming round them they claim the name of hermit" (*Letters*, CXXV, 16).

Were Jerome's cancellations of his predecessors and his terra nullius claims successful? Not in his lifetime. Yet the image of Jerome alone in a cave is typical of how he was eventually remembered. In most visual representations, as in his own fictive hagiographies, Jerome enjoys a virtuous solitude, having tamed the "savage," the lion so symbolic of the frontier "other," sleeping peacefully at his feet.[30]

Jerome's Flag-planting: Claims of Sovereignty

[30] On Jerome's use of real or fantastical animal imagery in his writings, see Cox Miller (1996, 209-233). While there is not space here to pursue this inquiry, it seems suggestive that in Jerome's fantastical *Life of Paul*, Anthony encounters a centaur and a satyr in the desert. As Cox Miller points out, both creatures represented hyper-sexuality, fluid gender, and uncontrolled desire. As elsewhere in this article, I suggest these symbols and their representations are intersectional. The centaur, with its "barbarous sounds rather than lucid speech" also represents the barbarian. Given that Jerome was in the process of extracting value from a frontier area peopled by "barbarians" and Jews, it may be that his image of the satyr is his anti-Judaic or perhaps anti-Nazorean caricature of people from whom he was learning Hebrew and borrowing ancient texts. This identification would underline Cox Miller's point that "the satyr was, like the centaur, a guardian of undeciphered secrets (1996, 223)." See also Goldberg (2013, 626). On Jerome and the Nazoreans see Boer (1998, 239-262).

Tightly bound with declaring physical or expert territories as *terra nullius*, and their inhabitants as savage or heretical, is a parallel move intrinsic to frontier masculinity: proclaiming ownership. *Terra nullius* always works in tandem with some sort of "planting of the flag." This is where settler-colonial behaviour meets Roman *imperium*. Where *terra nullius* is aimed at existing inhabitants, "flag-planting" is undertaken with an eye to competition from the imperial center. Throughout his writing we see how often Jerome mentions his competition and posits his precedence. In the last section we saw how competition helps explain his correspondence with Rufinus. Jerome wrote: "he who is now my enemy, cannot call me a heretic, whom he declared a short while ago not to be at variance with his own faith" (*Against Rufinus*). In the fourth century, the borders of heresy moved fast.

Jerome's life, as well as his hagiographies, are remarkable for the frequent reporting of pairs. Even the lions who dig Paul of Thebes' grave in Jerome's hagiography are paired. In his youth, Jerome did not go to Trier alone to make his fortune, but with Bonosius. In Aquileia if not before, Jerome's fast friend Rufinus was attracted to asceticism with him. Melania the Elder, of Roman senatorial class, became the female patron of Rufinus, while Jerome sought out the patronage of Paula. Melania and Rufinus set up a Latin Christian monastic community at the Mount of Olives; a few years later Jerome and Paula set up a Latin Christian monastic community in Bethlehem. Rufinus translated Origen; so did Jerome.

Despite the often-clear evidence to the contrary, in each case Jerome presented himself as the greater member of the pair. Bonosius may have gone to an island in the Adriatic as a hermit, but later he, Jerome, was the first to embrace asceticism; while he "sits in the safe retreat of his island…I lie in the tomb of my sins" (*Letters*, VII, 3). The *Life of Anthony* may have been popular, but Jerome's hagiography concerned the greater hermit. Gregory of Nyssa wrote possibly the first female Vita in the *Life of Macrina*, but Jerome's *Vita for Paula* was better, and about a more worthy subject (Burrus 2004, 12, 65). Gaius Marius Victorinus may have produced commentaries, but somehow Jerome in *his* commentary on Paul still undertook "a work … no Latin writer before me has attempted" (*Commentary on Galatians*, Book 1).

This one-upmanship has long been recognized. I propose that such a concern with status is typical of a frontier man. Jerome stated in his *Vita* that Hilarion was the first monk of Palestine, neatly displacing Rufinus, since he himself couldn't (Cain 2009b, 56, n. 59). Or perhaps he could: "Which one of us fulfilled all that is expected of him in the name of the monk?" he taunted Rufinus later (*Against Rufinus*). Burrus describes Jerome's sleight of hand in claiming his *Life of Paul* (written about 374) as the first hagiography, when clearly the *Life of Anthony* had been written some fifteen years earlier by Athanasius, and was already immensely popular in the Latin version translated by the same Evagrius whose patronage Jerome enjoyed in Antioch.[31] Burrus argues that Jerome tried to void Athanasius's

[31] For more on Jerome and Evagrius see Williams (2006, 39).

(and Evagrius's) priority in two ways: firstly by claiming that his subject, Paul, was in fact the first but *secret* desert hermit. Secondly, Jerome stated that the *Life of Anthony* was not really a hagiography, but a "source," making his own book the first of the genre (Burrus 2004, 22-23).

Jerome's Commodification and Trade of the "Exotic"

The third move of settler-colonialism is its real goal: the commodification and advantageous trading of the resources (in this case, the reputation, writings, and languages) of the colonized periphery to the imperial center. As a displaced settler in the east, Jerome sought to trade ideas and texts from those colonized areas toward the centre of Roman Christian power in exchange for support and status. Whether seeking the sponsorship of Valerian, Damasus, Marcellus, or Paula, Jerome's letters illustrate the extent to which, in Curran's words, the "major theological disputes of the period were themselves coloured by an upper-class social agenda" behind which sat the undeniable levers of patronage (Curran 1997, 218).

The type of capital sought by an ambitious Christian like Jerome aspiring to *vir*-hood included the ecclesiastical patronage of bishops, popes, and occasionally emperors, especially during the battle for power between Nicene and other groups. Jerome's patrons came from a group of more informal powerbrokers. Especially important in Jerome's lifetime were elite Christian ascetic widows including the notables Marcella (*Letters* CXXVII), Melania, Asella (Cain 2009b, 47-57), Fabiola (*Letters* LXXVII, 7), and Paula (Cain 2010b). "Why should I go back to ancient times and quote instances of female virtue from books?" Jerome writes to Furia, "Before your own eyes in Rome… you have many women whom you might well choose for your model" (*Letters* LIV, 18). Model for *her*, patron for *him*. "Was I ever attracted by silk dresses, flashing jewels, painted faces, display of gold?" he writes. "No other matron in Rome could dominate my mind but one who mourned and fasted, who was squalid with dirt, almost blinded by weeping" (*Letters* XLV, 3).

Like ancient masculinity, and in relation to it, Jerome's access to elite Christian female patronage was constantly under negotiation and threat.[32] To hold it, Jerome marshalled resources such as, firstly, the claim to speak for the explosive new-to-the-west monastic and ascetic movements, secondly, the claim to own the heritage of the apostles, especially Paul, via new Latin commentaries, third, the claim to privileged access to more ancient Christian and Jewish tradition via Greek Christian interpreters and the ability to read and translate Hebrew,[33] and finally, but not least, the claim to manage the increasingly fashionable travel of elite persons to the holy sites in Palestine.[34]

[32] On ancient elite women's patronage (and differences between patronage and commerce) see Matthews 1999, 213).
[33] On the unlikely facticity of the claim to have learned Hebrew as a youth: Williams (2006, 27).
[34] Kelly (1975, 225-226) reads into Jerome's later writings that Jerome was anxious to gain financial support for the monasteries from travellers. Jas Elsner writes: "the monasteries provided the principal

Jerome's voluminous attempts to correspond with elite Roman Christian women are echoed in his criticism of others who, as he complained, "devote their whole life and all their energies to finding out about the names, the households, and the characters of married ladies" (*Letters*, XXII, 28). Jerome warned his letters' recipients constantly against the ecclesiastical flatterers with curled hair that "still shows traces of the tongs," whom he depicted as scurrying from house to house (*Letters* XXII, 28). Stuck in Bethlehem, it was a circumambulation *he* was forced make via his correspondence.

Elite Latin women like Melania, Marcellus, Paula, and others had begun to Christianize patrician society via a movement of courtly monasticism, characterized by chastity, charity, intense biblical studies, and theological debate. Jerome saw himself as their "natural" mentor. He wrote: "I praise wedlock, I praise marriage; but it is because they produce me virgins. I gather the rose from the thorn, the gold from the earth, the pearl from the oyster" (*Letters*, XXII, 20).

Jerome knew his "brand" depended on location. Just as Syrian Antioch was his claim to ascetic authority, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and their environs supported his claims (parallel to Origen's, earlier) to proper biblical translation and commentary. Cain notes how Jerome "recalibrated how excellence in biblical scholarship was to be measured in the west and obtruded himself as being better equipped than any of his Latin forebears or contemporaries to unlock the mysteries of the Bible and especially of the Old Testament" (Cain 2009a, 198). Being "on site" was all-important.[35] As with so many of his identity claims, Jerome's job description for the ideal exegete of scriptures happened to line up precisely with himself (Burrus 2004, 22).

The criterion of location also helps explain Jerome's oft-noted grumpiness to the fashion of elite Latin pilgrimage to the Holy Land: if exotic location was for him a type of currency, it was devalued by so many visitors (Stephens Falcasantos 2017, 107–108; Rebenich 2002, 41). This was true unless Jerome himself could orchestrate the travel of potential elite patrons and the associated benefits that arrived with them (Cain 2010b, 113). "Blessed Jesus," he brags of Fabiola's brief visit, "with what fervour and zeal did she study the sacred volumes! In her eagerness to satisfy her hunger, she ran through the prophets, the gospels, and the psalms; she suggested questions and stored up my answers in her heart's repository" (*Letters*, LXXVII, 7).

As I demonstrate in "Aware-Settler Biblical Studies: Breaking Claims of Textual Ownership," one's position as a settler-descended academic can encourage certain readings of ancient text (Anderson 2019, 57). My position makes me particularly aware of another dynamic of Jerome's writing. Specifically, Jerome linked the real Holy Land of his residence and the fictive Holy Land of his correspondence with a real and fictive frontier territory. He did so to stake his claim during the renewed

tour guides, hostels, and in some cases even the central attractions (in the form of living saints or the relics of departed ones) for the practice of Palestinian pilgrimage" (Elsner and Rutherford 2010, 429).

[35] Vessey (2004, 322) notes: ""astonishingly, [Jerome was] able for a time to make the town of Christ's nativity the centre of the Latin-reading Christian world."

interest in the Christian sites that began with Helena and gathered momentum throughout the fourth century.

During a much later European expansion this strong linking of biblical territory, imperial interest, and frontier would become an important ideological rationalization for colonialism, with each new "frontier" of settlement declared a repristinated Holy Land. Examples abound, but those that touched my family in particular were the immigration posters from the very early 20th century for the Canadian west that call it a "land of milk and honey." As with the accounts of Joshua, a local population was seen to stand in the way of each new "Holy Land" reaching its full potential (Warrior 1989). And as with Jerome, literary and epistolary images from the scriptures served to sanctify the drive toward commodification of each new Holy Land.

Jerome's Pioneer Narrative: The Invention of a Settler Imaginary

The fourth settler-colonial strategy I identify in Jerome is his construction of an ideological narrative, or a settler imaginary (Bell 2014, 11). This is where Jerome excels.[36] Cain (2009a, 17) has called Jerome's earliest letter collection "a tightly knit bundle of interlocking propagandistic pieces." Jerome's entire oeuvre can be seen through this lens. Certainly, his letters, his disputations with Rufinus and others, his *Lives of Illustrious Men*, and even tangential comments in his biblical commentaries work to bolster his self-presentation. Cain (2009a, 6) points out the "often underappreciated but fundamentally propagandistic nature" of Jerome's letters. The sheer volume of Jerome's correspondence contradicts his complaint that "Every stroke of my secretary's pen is so much loss of life for me (Letters LX, 19)." Rather, those pen-strokes ended up constituting his life, as he clearly hoped they would.

Jerome's pioneer narrative was complicated by his own multiple, nested identities. In part, this is what Jacobs (2007, 112-114) and others refer to as his "imperial hybridity." Jerome was not from the capital. He was an ambitious provincial from Stridon, first seeking his fortune in Trier.[37] Cameron, the Hudson's Bay clerk, was also a provincial, raised in small-town Ontario before heading west. Frontier masculinity is always a nuanced, messy affair: we need to question hard-edged polarities, especially when the settler-colonist is themself from the imperial margin (Whitmarsh 2002, 20). Jerome's settlement took place during a time when the Roman empire was convulsed by migration, refugee movements, and settlement from those outside its boundaries.

In any case, it is not actual historical individuals, such as the Jewish convert in Antioch whom Jerome mentions as his tutor (*Letters*, CXXV, 12), nor the Syrian hermits with whom he argued, or even Origen or Athanasius, who are most

[36] Although Heng (2015, 360) does not include Jerome in her list of "early literatures of colonization," I believe his letters have all the earmarks of this genre.

[37] Reading Jerome's letters, I was reminded of Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*, where the protagonist chooses a career in the church over the army after evaluating which might better reward his ambition.

important to this analysis. What was functionally crucial for Jerome's stories were the identities he appropriated. Asceticism interested Jerome, but always asceticism in its links to ecclesiastical and exegetical authority. Similarly, Jerome does not foreground Hebrew speakers or texts, but *his* translations. We are dealing in Jerome's writings with "idealized reifications rather than self-evident subjectivities" (Whitmarsh 2002, 20).

The colonized do not represent a simple, oppressed, mirror to the colonizer.[38] Such distinctions deny them agency (Smith 2012, 24). Jerome is evidence of what Jacobs calls "the double-faced, hybrid quality of imperial identity" (Jacobs 2007, 114; see also Bhabha 1984, 132). Nowhere is this more evident than in Jerome's self-descriptions, especially his hagiographies. In Jacobs' work on Simeon Stylites, in which he applies contemporary celebrity theory to ancient hagiography, he observes: "the writing of a saint's life transforms a person into a sign, which can then be interpreted, circulated, and recapitulated in multiple forms" (Jacobs 2020, 161). Jerome used his semi-autobiographical hagiographies[39] to seek celebrity. Coon lists among hagiographies' purposes "biblical *topoi*, literary invention, and moral imperative" (Coon 1997, 143). Jerome shows how conveniently they also worked as settler imaginaries of self-promotion.

At the same time, Jerome's epistolary abilities allowed him to make up for what may have been a less-than-commanding physical presence. Here we must exercise double caution: added to the usual dangers of taking Jerome's rhetorical self-descriptions at face value are the ways in which this particular dichotomy of "weak in body, strong in written word" lines up so neatly with similar expressions in Paul's letters. In any case, once he was established in Bethlehem, Jerome's impressive letter writing allowed him to practice what Cain has termed his "textual presence-in-absence" (Cain 2009a, 10) among the elite circle of women he ascetically courted.

Conclusion: Frontier Masculinity and Jerome's Successful Afterlives

I have shown how an aware-settler lens reveals four interlocking rhetorical manoeuvres Jerome employed: firstly, a declaration of *terra nullius* in certain key territories where he wished to assert ownership; second, a proclamation of precedence claiming he was the first from the imperial centre to assert sovereignty or masculine *imperium* over a certain domain; third, a typically settler-colonial commerce in the resources of the colonized territory, and finally; the construction and retelling of a settler imaginary, a masculine myth of heroic labour and pioneer virtue which reinforced his *virtus*.

An aware-settler approach also helps solve the recurring problem of the "reality-rhetoric divide" in Jerome's writings (Jacobs 2007, 105). From the hippocentaurs

[38] Burrus reminds us to look for "diverse intertextual strategies of appropriation, fragmentation, recombination, and parody" (Burrus 2005, 29).
[39] Beginning with his novelistic hagiography of an unnamed women in his earliest letters. See Coppieters, Praet, Bossu, and Taveime 2014, 384-408).

and she-wolves "panting with thirst" with which he populates the desert of his Life of Paul, to the sexual double-entendres of some of his letters,[40] it is a risk to take Jerome too literally. If we have to impose contemporary categories, Jerome was more novelist than historical autobiographer. Some biographies, especially Kelly's,[41] and Steinmann's (1959) works, but even Rebenich's,[42] fail to resolve this tension. Faced with the problem of having to say something about the historical Jerome, these biographers tend to report many of his embellished or invented details as fact, even while noting his inventiveness.

In his study *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Lorenzo Varacini repeats an observation that might help explain why Jerome's greatest triumph is to forever be pictured as a gaunt and naked ascetic in a Bethlehem cave. Varacini notes that the goal of settler colonialism has always been two-fold. The first goal, ably accomplished by a self-styled ascetic exegete, is to suppress actual locals (Veracini 2010, 95). Compare Jerome, writing about his time in the desert, to the very real but fractious Syrian anchorites whom he anathemizes as quarrelsome, pretentious, and gluttonous (*Letters*, XXII, 34). Meanwhile, the local rabbis, and an unnamed Jewish convert, whose language he disdains as full of "hissing and breath-demanding words" (Rebenich 2002, 15) he dismisses in the same breath with which he claims Hebrew as his own new tongue (*Against Rufinus*), and champions the exegetical principle of *Hebraica veritas* (*Commentary on Galatians*, translator's Introduction, 36; see also Rebenich 1993, 50-77; Jacobs 2007, 112). Jerome's supersessionism is in curious contrast to the importance he attaches to the sources, until we understand his concerns as motivated by a commodification of Hebrew: "I put myself in the hands of one of the brethren who had been a Hebrew before his conversion, and asked him to teach me his language. Thus, after having studied the pointed style of Quintilian, the fluency of Cicero, the weightiness of Fronto, and the gentleness of Pliny, I now began to learn the alphabet again and practice harsh and guttural words" (*Letters*, CXXV, 12). Like Origen, Jerome was quick both to appropriate and to subvert Jewish learning from the location of the Holy Land (Jacobs 2007, 111). (By so doing, he replicated in Christian literary tradition the physical appropriation of Jewish space that Constantine's building program had begun.)

This leads to Varacini's second goal of settler colonialism, which is the performance of one's own indigenization (Veracini 2010, 95). Witness Jerome's fanciful self-descriptions of desert living. During his short stay in a semi-urban estate, Jerome rhapsodizes the "wilderness bright with Christ's spring flowers," and the "desert rejoicing in God's familiar presence" (*Letters*, XIV, 10). He allows that his skin "through long neglect had become rough and black as an Ethiopian's." In

[40] There certainly may be not-so-hidden penile references in *Letters* XIV, 9, 49.
[41] For instance, in an older biography, Kelly reports as fact Jerome's regular and friendly correspondence with Marcella in Rome (Kelly 1975, 179). This despite the evidence for this detail existing only in Jerome's letters, and despite ample reason for Jerome to exaggerate such a point.
[42] Rebenich (2002) calls his first chapter "Between Career and Conversion," masking over the fact that for Jerome these two were the same.

whatever brief time he actually had as an anchorite, he states his only companions were "scorpions and wild beasts" (*Letters*, XXII, 7). He fails to include the numerous secretaries whom he complains about elsewhere, wrinkling their brows and fidgeting when he slows his dictation (*Commentary on Galatians*, Book Three). Jerome even claims he has nearly forgotten his native Latin because of his familiarity with the "barbarous jargon" (*Letters*, VII, 2 and CXXV, 12) of eastern lands. In his famous but much-doubted Ciceronian conversion account he states that doctors pronounced him near death from his fasting: "It may sound incredible," he pretends to confide, "but the ravages…brought on my unhappy frame were so persistent that…my bones scarcely held together" (*Letters*, XXII, 30). Burrus remarks that "Jerome is…a master of romance but a lousy historian" (Burrus 2001, 445).

Contemporary scholarship varies from those who guardedly take some of Jerome's self-descriptions as fact, through to Burrus who writes of "dancing" or "playing" with him (Burrus 2004, 49-52). It seems obvious that Jerome's rhetoric clearly trumps historical reality. However, the aware-settler lens asks a different historical question. What was the historical *effect* Jerome's rhetoric intended? That is, what was the history his writing *created*? Were what Burrus calls the "genre-shattering repetitions" (Burrus 2004, 48) of his hagiographies also *gender*-shattering instances of imaginative writing and self-promotion?

The fact is that Jerome never permanently returned to Rome. This alone should remind us that in his lifetime he was not successful at his goal of exercising *imperium* at the centre of imperial Christianity. Despite his relative gains, in his lifetime Jerome never achieved the reputational status his writings so clearly portray him as seeking.[43] However, he did succeed at other goals: "Jerome, the Christian *litteratus*, wanted to make himself the spiritual leader of wealthy Christian intellectuals, who in their turn were able to support Jerome's ambitious literary projects and ascetic community in Bethlehem" (Rebenich 1993, 60). In these more modest goals he succeeded.

But Jerome was never modest. "Many years ago for the sake of the kingdom of heaven I cut myself off from home, parents, sister, relations, and, what was harder, from the dainty food to which I had been used. But even when I was on my way to Jerusalem to fight the good fight there, I could not bring myself to forego the library which with great care and labour I had got together at Rome" (*Letters*, XXII, 30). The basic ingredients of Jerome's self-presentation mirror ancient masculinity: virtues exemplified by asceticism, while never leaving behind the *imperium* gained by impeccable classical learning. Through them Jerome sought his status in a hierarchy of holiness and reward that he believed existed both in this life and in the hereafter (Clark 1987, 166).

Over the longer term, then, was Jerome's performance of masculine *virtus* and *imperium* successful? His ascetic approach, while never fully embraced, marked the borders of the west's future practice. His emphasis on texts and original languages

[43] On Jerome's posthumous rise in reputation see Vessey (2009 235) and Cain (2009b, 47-49).

set the course of biblical studies to this day (Cain 2010a, 37). Most certainly he would have approved of his biographer Steinmann's description of his legacy, written in prose almost as florid as his own: "In the days when the savages swept all before them, [Jerome] saved the heritage of faith and of learning" (Steinmann 1959, 321) Like most paintings of Jerome, that is the fabulous story taken at face value. Frontiersman Jerome would have been proud.

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