READING REGIONS: AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY, 1865–1925

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Reading Regions: American Literature and Cultural Geography, 1865–1925

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Reading Regions combines literary, historical, and computational analysis to argue that the emergence of a nationally-incorporated cultural field after the Civil War galvanized regional differences rather than subsuming them. Americans relied on the concept of regions to make sense of geographic disparities in social, economic, and aesthetic practices. Noting the postbellum centralization of publishing and integration of transportation, scholars have taken attentiveness to regional particularity as the hallmark of a single “regionalism” that consolidated national taste around the consumption of imagined folk pasts. My project, however, illuminates extensive regional patterns of divergence in the local practices of reading and reprinting that underwrote national circulation. Americans read differently in different parts of the country, and catering to these differences shaped the dominant literary styles and media formats of the period. Tracing this dynamic relationship between reception and production demonstrates that literature not only described regional cultures but played a crucial mediating role in the process by which they were reproduced. Regions have continued to matter because meaning transforms as it travels, and in doing so etches furrows and valleys into the terrain of popular taste.
DEDICATION

To my grandparents.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In his February 1886 “Editor’s Study” column for Harper’s Monthly Magazine William Dean Howells confessed amazement that “in a thousand newspapers, scattered over the whole country, [critics] utter so vast an amount of fresh and independent impression that every part of an author’s work is touched.” As Howells knew, the newspaper was the primary source of both literary news and literature itself in the broadest sense. To understand the newspaper was to have a finger on the pulse of literary taste in America. The country had “a literary centre distributed almost as widely as the Presidential patronage,” he continued, but the fact that “there is no critical leadership among us” did not mean that literature was subject to the kind of entropic reception that Wilkie Collins had once called the “unknown public.” Cultural geography, which Howells had often turned to in discerning patterns in literary production, was the key to discerning patterns in reception as well. “Chicago frankly differs from Boston about a book, and St. Louis can not do less than differ from Chicago; San Francisco has no superstition about the opinions of New York; Buffalo and New Orleans have each its own point of view. Comment is almost co-extensive with reading in our country.”

The conclusion was all the more striking because it came from the very core of the American literary field—the “Dean of American Letters” writing in one of the most popular and critically-acclaimed magazines of the day, itself owned by one of the largest publishers in New York, the epicenter of American trade and periodical publishing. Americans not only read different periodicals and books in different regions; they read differently.

This phenomenon of regional reading, far from being the lingering half-life of an earlier era of more limited print circulation, continued to thrive over the subsequent decades. In 1912 critic and translator Grace Isabel Colbron extended Howells’ assessment in an article titled “The Reading Zones of the United States.” Surveying the divergence in reading

1. William Dean Howells, “Editor’s Study,” Harper’s New Monthly Magazine 72, no. 3 (February 1886): 487.
habits from one part of the country to the next, Colbron suggested that “the great size of our country, with its wide diversities of social conditions and types, would [seem to] defeat an attempt to portray a strictly national type as much through the diversity of taste among the reading public as from any other cause.” Colbron seems to have recognized the consequence of Howells’ observations. The differences in Americans’ reading practices did not simply arise from their regions’ pre-existing cultural or socio-economic conditions but in fact produced those conditions. By reading regionally – especially when reading about regional difference, as they frequently did – Americans engaged in the process of reading regional diversity into existence.

The struggle to conceptualize the significance of the region concept has to do with the fact that the postbellum decades witnessed the rapid centralization of capital and integration of communication. The expansion of America’s geographical borders into Indian Territory and west to the Pacific consolidated the country’s land mass. An explosion in rail infrastructure after the Civil War expedited the transition from the local and regional production of goods to a national system of distribution. The corresponding growth of urban centers across the country replaced the Southern plantation economy and the Midwestern agrarian economy with the industrial mode of production already emergent in the Mid-Atlantic. In the process, the more resource-efficient corporate model became commonplace in business and helped give birth to a new professional proto-middle class of consumers. *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) brought about the nationalization of Jim Crow and the reductive consolidation of racial categories. Scholars have argued that these developments and many others like them produced a national cultural field in which Americans increasingly read the same news, participated in the same mass cultural fads, purchased the same products, and imagined themselves as belonging to a unified national populace on this basis.

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in this light, the politico-cultural conflicts that periodically erupted between regions – such as those over Southern Reconstruction or Midwestern Populism – appear as outliers.

Narratives of national incorporation, however, overstate the conditions on the ground. Take, for example, one of the most striking instances of consolidation in the history of the media industry: that of newspaper syndication. Syndicates fueled the rapid growth of the American press after the Civil War by supplying cheap content – news, literature, entertainment, general information, and illustrations – to fledgling editors and to newspapers in communities that otherwise would have been too small to sustain one. They exerted profound influence on the format itself and on what millions of Americans read, especially in rural areas. Critics and competitors complained that these purveyors of “patent insides” (sheets printed on only one side, corresponding to pages 2 and 3, so that editors only had to print pages 1 and 4) and “boiler plate” (precast plates of features that could be sawed and inserted as desired) were corner-cutting reproductions disconnected from the circumstances of their readers. Yet newspaper syndicates remained regional in scope through the early twentieth century, and individual syndicates themselves organized their clients into varying semi-independent geographically-delineated “lists” that offered a variety of regionally-tailored content for editors to choose from (Figure 0.1).

For the authors whose dissemination benefited considerably from newsprint – almost every major writer of poetry or short fiction in the period – these divergences in institutional networks and local choices could produce significantly different reputations. Paul Laurence Dunbar was a Midwestern author in one region and a plantation tradition author in another; Mary Murfree was prized as a landscape writer in one and an anthropological writer in another; Bret Harte was an authentic Westerner in one and a sell-out in another.

As with print infrastructure and periodical formats, so with reading choice and volume formats. The advent of the bestseller phenomenon, one of the most seemingly compelling indicators of a nationally unified literary culture, provides another instructive example. The monumental success of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852 heralded the

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end of the system of regional reprinting that had characterized the preceding decades and ushered in the era of rail distribution. It took until the 1890s for this system to become sufficiently rapid, penetrating, and cheap for the term “bestseller” to enter common usage to describe the sense that the entire country seemed to be reading certain newly-published books at the same time. \[5\]

Even in the early twentieth century among this class of the most universally read books, however, there were significant disparities in the temporality and degree of readership. While New York published the lion’s share of bestsellers and made many books into bestsellers, cities in other regions were frequent bestseller trendsetters as well (Figure 0.2). \[6\]

Whether Augusta Jane Evans’ sentimental romances, William Dean Howells’ realism, or Frank Norris’ naturalism, the place in which Americans read a popular book often determined when they read it and what they read it alongside. Evans may have

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6. Data transcribed, corrected, and compiled from the “Sales of Books During the Month” column at the end of each issue of the Bookman (New York).
been a source of fantasy for New England readers, but Southerners found the sentiment in her novels realistic. Mid-Atlantic reviewers considered Howells part of an international realism opposed to romance, but Midwesterners came to his novels later and read them alongside romance novels set in the Mid-Atlantic. These cases were not irregularities or exceptions. Regional patterns of divergence in local practices of reading and reprinting underwrote national circulation, and they constituted the regular operation of the literary marketplace.

![Trendsetter cities for bestsellers. The number of times a top-30 bestselling novel in any year from 1895-1909 appeared first on each city’s bestseller list and no more than one other city’s list. Source: The Bookman.](image)

It is the main argument of this dissertation that, paradoxically, the emergence of a nationally-incorporated cultural field after the Civil War galvanized regional differences by putting them into wider circulation. As Americans more regularly encountered other regions as distinctive in print they reproduced those differences by reflexively seeing themselves as distinctive too. This was one of literature’s primary functions in the period for writers and readers alike. Authors and editors focused on cultural geography because they understood that it made a difference in not only where their writing would be read but how it would be read, why it would be read, and which associations it would generate. Writing for region, like reading for region, was an exercise in exploring the ways in which social relations
reach across space and communal beliefs map onto geography. The experimental blends of literary forms and genres that distinguish postbellum cultural production – the grafting of local correspondence, booster sloganeering, travel narratives, and ethnographic detail into journalism, poetry, and fiction – attempt to model the process by which circulation produced rather than erased difference. By tracing the relationship between reception and production, this dissertation demonstrates that authors not only described regional cultures in their work but that their reception played a crucial mediating role in the process by which they were reproduced. Regions have continued to matter in America because meaning transforms as it travels, and in doing so etches furrows and valleys into the terrain of popular taste.

What is a Region?

More precisely, then, a region is the accumulation of social, economic, political, and aesthetic practices as they unfold spatially and align with one another. This definition draws on the body of scholarship that has been called “critical regionalism” or the “relational” approach to cultural geography, but it differs in its emphasis on physical movement and aggregation. As a unit of intermediary scale, region differs from units of larger, encompassing scales like the nation or hemisphere as well as those of smaller, concentric scales like the locale or state. Unlike many other cultural geographic entities, regions are not produced by administration. They do not have official borders or governing bodies. Unlike highways or lakes, regions are concepts that require reflective explication. Unlike political parties, regions have no meaning independent from the specific geography they inhabit. Regions take shape – both their distinguishing characteristics and their geographic borders – through practices of circulation: that is, through the dialectic between cultural products and their reception across space. They are the physical instantiation of discursive articulation. This

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intrinsic identity between what a region is and where it is distinguishes regions from other kinds of publics or print communities, such as those based on common interests or beliefs. And yet the explanatory power of region as a concept, in the nineteenth century and today, stems from the fact that publics and print communities of all kinds can form or subdivide regionally.

This definition has two important consequences. The first is that regions are always if gradually in flux. This means that regions’ distinguishing characteristics and boundaries are both capable of change over time (as in the case of Ohio, parts of which have belonged at different times to the West, the Midwest, and the mid-Atlantic); they can sometimes even merge or divide (as in the case of Appalachia, which became distinguished from the South and the Mid-Atlantic). This also means that regions are blurry around the edges, as we know to be true of all cultural entities even in the presence of artificially drawn official boundaries like national borders. Accordingly, literature does not just represent regional difference: in its circulation across space, nineteenth century literature was one of the primary mediums by which Americans’ everyday practices of reading and reprinting negotiated regional differences and regional borders.

The second consequence is that regions, like genres, are productive generalizations: they are aggregations of local instances over time into broader patterns. Thinking in terms of aggregation is vital because it forces us to remember that units of cultural geography are always related. Just as certain cultural or socio-economic associations accrue at certain scales rather than others, certain phenomena are better investigated at certain scales than others. Broader scales have become a popular frame in literary scholarship in recent decades with the rise of hemispheric or transnational cultural studies and digital humanities. While these scales enable certain insights, they can obscure others that are no less significant in the aggregate despite occurring at smaller scales. Five regionally-circulating magazines with 30,000 subscribers each have approximately the same collective footprint as a nationally-circulating magazine with 150,000; the latter is not inherently more significant than the former. Aggregating seemingly-merely-local instances of reading or reprinting – in library checkout accounts, regional magazines, editorial correspondence, club minutes, publisher records, and newspapers – illuminates broader patterns at intermediary scales like
region, frequently revealing that the aesthetic styles or authorial reputations now regarded as national were not. Region was a structuring principle of the literary field: a form of material difference that shaped all stages of production and circulation as well as a frame of cultural interpretation that authors, editors, and readers used to understand what literature meant, what it did, and why it mattered.

Why “Region”?

“Region” is not the only intermediate scale unit of cultural geography, and it is not necessarily the only name for the particular scale I’ve described. Among the most commonly invoked intermediary units is the “province.” A province is typically distinguished by its subsidiary relation to a dominant exterior metropole, region, or nation, a usage dating to the provincia of the Roman Empire. Direct administrative control is not a defining characteristic of a province, however: the newly-independent American states continued to have a provincial relationship with England through the early nineteenth century with regard to their dependency on English industrial and cultural production. The distinction between province and region can become slippery because interdependence is a matter of degrees. In the scholarly discussion of postbellum regional-ism, for example, this overlap has often been taken for granted. But while the centralization of publishing in the Mid-Atlantic promoted certain economic relations and aesthetic practices that rendered other regions as provinces, flourishing networks of production and patterns of reception in other parts of the country resoundingly disprove the idea that the thing we call “region” in the postbellum period was essentially a province.

Another commonly-invoked intermediary unit of cultural geography is the “section.” This term is most familiar as it pertains to the “sectionalism” preceding the Civil War. In this sense, a section is often understood to possess enough clout to threaten the coherence of the larger body to which it belongs; it implies difference to the degree of antagonism and the capacity for independence. But “section” was not categorically a dirty word in the way

“sectionalism” was. In fact, it was often used in a manner interchangeable with “region.” If I revised this dissertation as ”Reading Sections” and gave it to an assistant editor at the Century in the 1880s, they would understand it to mean roughly the same thing. Sometimes “territory” was used in the same way as well, reflecting the prehistories of some regions as loose administrative groupings. “Old Northwest Territory” was used as a common name for what we now call “the Midwest” prior to the widespread adoption of its immediate precursor, “the Middle West.” Using “region” in lieu of “section” or “territory,” however, avoids confusion with those names’ more standard associations. It also taps into a long and fruitful history of doing so. “Region” is the most expressive of the stable of possible names available for describing the same kind of intermediary unit of cultural geography.

What are the Regions?

This question, which can seem the most straightforward, is in some ways the most ambiguous. There is no single authoritative set of regions, but this should not surprise anyone who has discussed regional differences. When debating niceness manners with my Alabaman colleague, ”the Midwest” and ”the South” are the most appropriate geographic delineations for articulating our differences. When discussing hotdish recipes with my colleague from Omaha (who calls them “casseroles”), however, the finer distinction between ”Upper Midwest” and ”Great Plains” becomes salient. For nineteenth century Americans, the regions in play varied similarly depending on the application at hand. A card game like Columbia: A Geographical Game (1885), in which ”sections” are suits and a ”head section” is trump, sticks to what we might call the cardinal regions of North, South, East, and West (Figure 0.4).

A directory of newspapers and periodicals like Pettingill’s (1878) might instead deploy an equally common classification into ”Southern,” ”New England,” ”Middle” (Mid-Atlantic), ”Western” (Midwest), and ”Pacific” regions (Figure 0.3). Colbron found it useful to introduce further distinctions, as between the “Northwest Coast” and “Southern California”

or the Atlantic Coast South and the Inland South. None of these breakdowns preclude the others; they are all recognizable because they have contextual utility.

This mutual inclusivity is a direct consequence of the fact that regions are aggregations. "The Midwest" sticks because it describes the spatial unfolding of a great number of circulatory practices. By sacrificing some of that breadth we can define a more specific set - and space - of practices. Internal differentiation is, after all, an inherent property of groups. We could continue breaking down our units of cultural geography in this fashion, but we would quickly sacrifice region’s utility as a unit of intermediary scale and enter different scales of cultural geography altogether. Similarly, border cases are not contradictions but fundamental to this understanding of region. When we disagree over whether central Missouri is part of the Midwest or the South, as postbellum Americans did, what we actually observe is the fact that Missouri participates in some circulatory practices or networks that are characteristic of the Midwest and some that are characteristic of the South. If one such grey area develops enough of its own distinctive circulatory practices over a large enough space, observers begin to recognize it as a new region. This is precisely what happened when postbellum Americans began to call Missouri, Arkansas, southern Illinois, and western Kentucky by the name “Pike Country.” Should these circulatory patterns diminish in volume or space, the region itself will cease to exist as such. This is why we don’t talk about “Pike Country” much anymore, despite the fact that it may still describe a culturally coherent space in some respects. The list of recognized regions in the period, though,
was not infinite: there were not many more than the ones mentioned in the course of this introduction.

The flexibility of the region concept was one of its most interpretively and aesthetically useful qualities for these very reasons. Nineteenth-century Americans were especially good at – or at least extremely fond of – using geography to categorize patterns in speech, behavior, and values. To study region requires taking into account these nineteenth-century classifications as authors brought them into and readers in turn borrowed them from literary writing. It also requires taking into account formations that nineteenth-century Americans were not able to articulate, which sometimes call into doubt the ones they did. Accordingly, the primary concern when answering “what are the regions?” is “what is the frame
of inquiry?” In all cases, this requires attending to the regional formations named by the discourse in question. It also requires adapting methodology accordingly, integrating literary, historical, and quantitative analysis. Popular discourses that deploy broader categories like authorial reputations or the cardinal regions are especially amenable to quantification and large datasets, whereas discourses that articulate comparatively more specific categories regions like “the Gulf Coast” and “Appalachia” with nuanced shifts in usage over time are especially amenable to middle-distance reading. Some ideas about regional distinctiveness in literature and life are explored best through literary analysis of authors who expressed them, while computational approaches can yield better insight into modes of regionally-distinctive print engagement that remained largely implicit or taken for granted. Understanding what region meant for literature is a matter of understanding the relation between these various discourses and practices.

Why Not ”Regionalism”?

Scholars have used several frames for interpreting postbellum writing about regions; of these, “regionalism” has had the most profound impact on our study of the period. This is purely a contemporary critical category, and I treat it exclusively as such by designating it with quotation marks or hyphenation. Under the rubric of regional-ism, scholars have argued that depictions of regional particularity either represented localized resistance to sexist, elitist, nationalizing norms or instead propagated national elite mores by mitigating more threatening alterity. This primary debate has led to varying assessments on the cultural cache and market position of the texts associated with regional-ism and even the authors included under that label. Nonetheless, scholars have tended to agree on a core

set of defining features, which include the use of painstaking attention to local cultural practices, participant-observer narrators, nostalgic tone, and the sketch form or other short formats. As a movement to improve our understanding of the breadth of postbellum literary production and expand the canon to recover important work by women authors, the designation of a regional-ism has been an invaluable success. And yet it has been a recovery with a difference: in two of the earliest scholarly accounts of postbellum literature, Fred Lewis Pattee’s *A History of American Literature since 1870* (1915) and the *Cambridge History of English and American Literature* (1907-21), region acts as a frame for writing across literary genres.¹²

For all its benefits, the scholarly framework of regional-ism fails to capture most of what made regions conceptually vital and vibrant to postbellum Americans as a means of understanding cultural difference. First, it overlooks pervasive regional differences in literary reception. Existing definitions of regional-ism are largely unable to distinguish authors who were read disproportionately in a particular region, let alone why some authors lacked popularity in the region they wrote about while other authors were disproportionately popular in certain regions despite not ostensibly writing about them (chapter one). The prioritization of national publishing has been a self-fulfilling prophecy that omits the disparate practices of circulation found in abundant regional literary magazines and local libraries (chapter three) or bookstores (chapter five). Second, regional-ism gives a narrow view of the relationship between geography and genre. There was no single regional-ism: all genres were imagined to bear a particular relationship to cultural geography in the leading magazines (chapter two), and genres we regularly oppose to regional-ism today, like “high” realism, were often treated as regional (chapter three). Third, regional-ism underrepresents the capacity of postbellum writing about regions to shape cultural identity. Participation in discourse about region enabled black authors to be understood – and black readers to understand themselves – according to regional belonging rather than racial alterity even at the height of Jim Crow (chapter four).

More recent critics have turned away from “region” in order to avoid some of these limitations, instead emphasizing either to theorizations of space and place or to international aesthetic trends less interested with geography than dislocation and perspective. This work has produced valuable insights into the diversity of geographic imaginaries and alternative networks of influence beyond the terrain typically identified as regional-ism. But looking past region risks losing a baby with the bathwater, not simply because writers and readers in the period thought region was important but because it enables a more comprehensive account of the complex system of the print marketplace and literature’s movement within it. To understand the postbellum cultural field, especially as it was experienced outside the upper classes of the urban Northeast, it is necessary to follow the cultural work of region across the hierarchy of media formats and the geographic diversity of literary practice unhindered by regional-ism.

Trajectory

I begin with newspapers, readers’ first and foremost source of literature and literary news. Mining a dataset of thousands of newspapers, I aggregate references to some of the most popular authors of the decades after the Civil War to reveal geographic patterns of disproportionate attention: what I call regional reputations. Some authors, like Augusta Jane Evans and Joaquin Miller, were more discussed in the region they wrote about; others, like Walt Whitman, were more discussed in certain regions despite not writing about any particular place; still others, like Bret Harte, wrote primarily about a single region but received no more attention there than elsewhere. Geographic divergences in readership were thus neither inherent nor exclusive to literature emphasizing regional setting or culture. Authors

with regional reputations weren’t necessarily more authentic, however. I argue that Miller received more attention from Western readers than Harte and Whitman precisely because his work facilitated more debate over the question of its regional authenticity and, in the process, over what distinguished the West as a region. Differences in regional reputations arose from the confluence of the formal capacities of literary texts and the historical conditions of readers’ geographic position. Understanding what made an author regional thereby sheds light on the process of region formation itself.

Monthly magazines at the top of the literary hierarchy, such as the *Atlantic* and *Harper’s*, responded to these persistent regional divergences in readership by cultivating a genre ecosystem that figured American cultural difference as geographic distance. Until now, most scholarship has associated regional writing with a particular genre and type of writer: short stories predominantly by women. Based on a broader survey of magazine contents, however, my second chapter argues that there was no single regional-ism: in literary monthlies all genres were regionalized, from local color sketches to ethnography to business journalism. Editors and authors construed different genres as corresponding to different distances between the places they depicted and the readers they addressed. In doing so they pursued national circulation not by imagining national synthesis but by representing each region separately to each other region. To attain critical and popular success while these magazines acted as cultural gatekeepers authors had to master multiple genres, and as authors navigated this publishing system they began writing multigeneric novels that internalized its form. Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) has long been celebrated as unique for shifting between humor sketch, travel writing, and adventure fiction, but I show that it belongs beside equally-accomplished novels by George W. Cable and Mary Murfree.

The literary monthlies’ claim to represent all the nation’s regions, however, was itself regionally motivated. Mid-Atlantic writers and editors uniquely imagined the Mid-Atlantic as the cosmopolitan region that encompassed all others. My third chapter explores this attitude’s relation to the centralizing publishing industry through William Dean Howells’ novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). But readers elsewhere didn’t simply accept these curated versions of their places and manners; countervailing circulatory practices indicate a
more conflicted relationship between readers and centralized literary authority. Avowedly regional mid-prestige magazines like the Atlanta *Sunny South*, Chicago *Current*, and San Francisco *Argonaut* arose in other print centers to reinforce alternative cultural geographies and practices of reading Mid-Atlantic publications. These magazines, I show, sustained regional literary networks built on hundreds of contributors, tens of thousands of subscribers, and frequent availability at public libraries. Library checkout records for Howells novels in Muncie, Indiana – the home of *A Hazard of New Fortunes*’ representative Midwestern transplants – exhibit these alternative reading practices. I argue that literary forms now treated as national and more prestigious, like Howells’ realism, registered as regional and were thus subject to reassessment and re-classification as they crossed cultural space.

My fourth chapter brings these insights to the relationship between race and region through the career of the famous black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. Race was always regionalized in America, primarily to augment racism: for example, plantation fiction’s belittling of African Americans relied on specifically Southern stereotypes. I argue that Dunbar countered this trend by utilizing the Midwest as an alternative site for black expression and cultural identification. Writing in Midwestern dialects and tropes, Dunbar was able to become widely recognized as a Midwestern writer, and in doing so compel white readers to place regional belonging over racial alterity as a framework for interpreting cultural difference even at the height of Jim Crow. Furthermore, Dunbar intermixed established regional conventions with racial ones, leveraging their commonalities to depict a black Midwest. I argue that interacting with these works entangled readers in the same process. For white readers in the Midwest, this meant considering that regional identity could be multiracial. For a newly-emerging wave of black Midwestern writers and reading communities, Dunbar became a pivotal model of the possibilities of black Midwestern cultural life. Reading Dunbar regionally illuminates a more dynamic relationship between popular conceptions of race and of region, rich with possible alternative aesthetic affinities and circulatory potential.

Chapter five shows how American writers and readers in the early twentieth century came to understand region and regional affiliation primarily through the frame of repatriation – by place of origin rather than by place of residence. I trace the rise of repatriation as mechanic of both literary writing and the literary marketplace across three key sites. First
is the emergence of what I call local color journalism, a subset of yellow journalism that emerged as newspapers sought new ways of figuring geographic distinctiveness in order to protect their market niche amid accelerations in distribution infrastructure. Focusing on Theodore Dreiser and Edith Maude Eaton, better known by the pen name Sui Sin Far, I show how local color journalism located regional uniqueness in what an outsider would identify as distinctive but an insider would be able to explain. Second is the transformation of book retail that resulted from the advent of the bestseller list and an unprecedented geographic diffusion of booksellers. Based on regional clustering in city bestseller trends, I argue that in these years trade books underwent their own form of repatriation as their popularity depended on a publicized cycle in which regionally-distinctive purchasing fed into national bestseller status that nonetheless reinforced regionally-distinctive purchasing. Third is the centrality of the repatriation plot to American modernism in the late 1910s and 1920s. Thematizing changes in the literary marketplace, authors such as Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert Frost, and Jean Toomer animated their texts by locating identity geographically via the cyclical movement from distant other to distant origin.
CHAPTER 1
REGIONAL REPUTATIONS; OR, THE CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY OF RECEPTION

What makes an object of cultural production regional? Postbellum American writers and readers relied on the concept of region – a productive generalization of persistent geographic alignments of social, political, economic, environmental, and artistic differences – to classify and interpret all manners of cultural difference. But what did this concept actually refer to, and what cultural work did it carry out? According to the standard historical narrative, the postbellum period was characterized by the incorporation of national networks of transportation and communication that facilitated the consolidation of capital and political power. This shift had an undeniable impact on the cultural field. The outburst of American writing about regions after the Civil War corresponded to the demise of the regional centers of production and systems of exchange that had characterized the American literary marketplace until the 1850s.¹ Increasingly, the bulk of the nation’s book and periodical publishing was shaped by a select number of growing firms in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.² Emphasizing this shift, Alan Trachtenberg and others have influentially


2. For what remains the seminal account of postbellum publishing, see Donald Henry Sheehan, *This Was Publishing: A Chronicle of the Book Trade in the Gilded Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1952); see also John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States. Volume II: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1975); The foremost publishers of the postbellum period included Harper & Brothers of New York, which ran *Harper’s Monthly*, Houghton Mifflin of Boston, which ran the *Atlantic*, Charles Scribner’s Sons of New York, which ran two incarnations of *Scribner’s*, and J. B. Lippincott & Co. of Philadelphia, which ran *Lippincott’s*. By the 1870s, publishers relied on wholesalers, the largest of which were also based in New York, to distribute by rail. The rapid expansion of auxiliary literary professions such as advertising agencies, literary agents, and house readers forged a centralized population of literary workers in these same cities; see George Haven Putnam and John Bishop Putnam, *Authors and Publishers: A Manual of Suggestions for Beginners in Literature* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1888).
argued that a concomitant incorporation of the American cultural field took place over these decades as well.\[3\]

Using the contemporary critical rubric of regionalism, scholars have argued on this basis that postbellum literature’s attentiveness to local settings and customs belies its material dependence on centralized publishing houses and editorial gatekeepers, national distribution networks, the touristic tastes of an entrenched coastal upper-class elite readership, and transnational aesthetic styles or trends. For Richard Brodhead, literature about regions became important not because it depicted realities of cultural geography but because it afforded writers access to an upper-class, elite readership; for Amy Kaplan, because it imagined nostalgic pastoral fantasies that reinforced bourgeois mores by mitigating the perceived threat of more radical cultural difference; for Nancy Glazener, because it served a broader program of literary realism espoused by the editors and commentators of nationally-circulating magazines; for Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, because it describes a grounded resistance to dominant patriarchal and heteronormative discourse; for Brad Evans, because regional works were quickly dissociated from actual places and transformed into largely-interchangeable, aestheticized commodities in an art market that was international in scope; for Tom Lutz, because the idea of the local came to manifest a relation between the particular and the universal intrinsic to all art.\[4\] Despite these interpretive differences, scholars have generally agreed that what made a literary depiction regional had only superficial connection to regions.

By prioritizing supra-regional archives and scales of analysis, however, scholarship risks mischaracterizing the geographical heterogeneity of the cultural field and the profound impact this heterogeneity had on the ways that Americans encountered or read texts within it. Publishing and distribution did become increasingly centralized in the postbellum period,

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3. Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* for an account starting slightly later, see Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century*.
but the various local intermediaries through which most American readers encountered literature—newspapers, libraries, lectures, general stores—remained fervently local in their selection and presentation of print material even when relying on broader systems like print syndicates, professional organizations, or wider popular consensus. Accounting for these distinct stages and scales of reception is important because, as I argued in the introduction to this dissertation, region is both the set of ideas about a particular space and the space of a particular set of ideas, both a concept in circulation and the circulation of that concept. More precisely, region is a space of cultural identification sustained through the dialectic between geographic imaginaries and conditions of reception: between textual representations of cultural geography and the way those texts traversed actual geography.

What if we based our understanding of region in literature, and thereby also what counts as regional, not just on textual representations and their conditions of production but on the ways that textual representations of regions circulated through geographic space? To do so requires an expansion of both archives and methods: a simultaneous shift towards more local sites of print consumption and towards tools for more nuanced quantification of patterns across those local instances. Newspapers—nineteenth-century Americans’ first and foremost source of literature and literary news—provide the optimal avenue of approach. Postbellum newspapers were fundamentally local: they were edited and partly authored by locals for local readership with attention to local social, cultural, economic, and political conditions. Accordingly, newspapers entailed less hermeneutic distance between production and reception than most other literary print formats in the period. As collaborative texts chronicling community, they were sites of reception in their own right. National circulation was underwritten by these local acts of reading and reprinting that necessarily reflected the local interests of writers and readers.

To map the resulting heterogeneity in the cultural geography of reception, this chapter employs computational analysis of over 2.5 million pages of newsprint. This approach has been made possible by major institutional efforts over the last decade to create public databases of digitized historical newspapers, efforts which scholars such as Ryan Cordell, Matthew Wilkens, Robert K. Nelson, and others have already utilized to revise our understanding of reprinting, geographic reference, and topic discourse in nineteenth-century
The dataset for this chapter, spanning from 1865 to 1889, is drawn from Chronicling America and the California Digital Newspaper Collection. Because newspapers focused on authors more than individual works, I track references to a stable of authors varying in style and popularity, some whose work was strongly associated with a particular region and others whose work was not. By quantifying the manner and frequency of reference, it is possible to obtain a measure of the degree to which readers in particular locales would have been able to recognize an author’s name as meaningful. Aggregating and comparing these references across space can thereby illuminate broader geographic patterns of difference in how authors were understood, which I refer to as regional reputations.

My main contention in this chapter is that readers in different parts of the country engaged literary texts differently in postbellum America: that the period’s emergent nationally-integrated field of circulation galvanized regional divergences through literary reception rather than erasing them. The regional patterns that emerge from quantifying individual local instances of selection and presentation in newsprint reveal that readers in some areas discussed certain authors much more than readers elsewhere did. This was the case not only for authors who wrote regularly about the same region, such as the popular poet Joaquin Miller, but also authors whose work is not typically associated with a region, such as Walt Whitman. Conversely, not all authors who wrote about their home region had regional reputations – as was the case for the acclaimed poet and short story writer Bret Harte, whose career was otherwise so analogous to Miller’s. Together these findings indicate that geographic divergences in readership were neither inherent nor exclusive to representations of regions in the forms scholars typically have designated as “regionalism.” Regional reputations arose from unique combinations of the formal capacities of literary texts and the historical conditions of cultural geography enveloping their readers. Understanding what makes an author regional – through a hybrid method that encompasses quantitative and


6. These databases can be found online at https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ and https://cdnc.ucr.edu/. The dataset used here contains all papers included in these databases as of November 1, 2018.
qualitative, historical and formal, production and reception – thereby sheds light on the process by which particular geographic locales become and remain part of a region.

In the first section, I argue that the much-documented transformation of the newspaper industry after the Civil War also made them more fundamentally local and thereby more indexical of reception. On this basis of this historical grounding, in the second section I use quantitative analysis of references to authors in newspapers in order to contest ideas of nationally-homogeneous circulation. Regional differences in reception suggests a meaningful distinction between authors seemingly dependent upon the same national systems of production and distribution. This is not to merely substitute one version of authenticity (authorial) for another (readerly). In the third section, I instead argue that much of the newspaper discourse around Miller centered on the question of authenticity itself, a fact which distinguishes his Western reception from Harte's and Whitman's: Miller wasn’t referenced more frequently because Westerners believed him more authentic but because they were uncertain about his authenticity and thus drawn into the very question of what constituted being Western. In the fourth section I analyze works by Harte and Miller in order to argue that Miller received more attention from Westerners than Harte because his work more readily facilitated these debates for Western readers. This amenability between Miller’s writings and Western readers is precisely what makes them regional: the tendency of Miller’s texts to provoke questions of regional identity for Western readers where other texts do not and the tendency of Western readers to pursue questions of region and regional identity in Miller where other readers take them for granted.

1. Locating the News

American publishing underwent a significant transformation in the middle of the nineteenth century. For most of the antebellum period, the publishing industry was subject to the disparate regional networks of production and circulation that characterized American politics, economics, and culture. Beginning in the 1850s, however, it became increasingly centralized
in tandem with the emergence of a nationally-integrated field of circulation. This transformation was due to a combination of interrelated processes that included technological developments allowing for faster printing and transportation, accumulation of capital in the urban Northeast after the Civil War, and the cultural elite’s push for professionalization and gatekeeping amid an increasingly crowded cultural field. The result was that most forms and formats of print – from magazines to dime novels to intellectual nonfiction – were predominantly produced in the Northeastern cities of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia by a select group of vertically-integrated companies including, most notably for literary publishing, Harper Brothers, Houghton Mifflin, and Scribner’s.

Nineteenth-century America was indeed flush with print, the volume of which continued to increase by leaps and bounds with each passing decade. An overwhelming amount of this was newsprint: as Frank Luther Mott notes, the total number of active newspapers nearly doubled to 7,000 between 1870 and 1880, a period in which the nation’s population increased by 30%. This number would nearly double again by 1890, during which time the number of pages in most issues doubled as well. In 1870 alone, William A. Dill estimates that American newspapers printed more than 1.3 billion copies in total. Yet they remained more resistant to the forces of centralization for many of the same reasons why they were so plentitudinous. Indeed, while successful literary monthly magazines like the Atlantic were listed in periodical directories next to newspapers, newspapers were largely not subject to the vertical integration characteristic of companies in the rest of the publishing industry during this period. Newspapers were undergoing their own postbellum revolution, shifting towards an industrial mode of production, a financial framework based on advertisement, and an emphasis on news gathering rather than editorializing for content. These complexly-interrelated changes have been explored by numerous scholars, but...
their impact on the production of a shifting postbellum cultural geography has received less attention.

For one, the economics of rapidly-industrializing newspaper printing left little margin for error. New technologies spurred by growing readership, including expanded telegraph service and a slew of ever-faster presses, fed an industry-wide technology creep that escalated costs of both equipment and labor. The largest urban newspapers used multiple multi-cylinder presses that required a team of men to operate and could cost well over $10,000 each, with operating costs reaching half a million dollars by 1890.\textsuperscript{11} By the same token, the low prices necessary to reach middle- and working-class readers with all these additional copies – especially in large towns or cities with many competing papers – meant that profit margins were highly volatile. In mere years a paper could go from financial success to complete collapse, and many did. Yet at the same time entry into the field was still relatively accessible in the smaller market of the country weekly. A single large cylinder press capable of 1,000 pages an hour cost $1,000 new in 1869 ($19,000 in 2018 dollars) but can be found much cheaper in used condition in any one of the many printers’ trade journals that sprang up from mid-century onward to cater to the growing industry.\textsuperscript{12} This accessibility helped fuel the massive increase in the number of newspapers in the decades following the Civil War: every county in America could sustain at least one. That these papers catered to smaller audiences, however, meant that they made little profit. By the 1890s some businessmen had begun purchasing newspapers as investments, but for the most part this first generation of investors bought newspapers as part of their local investments; similarly, some proprietors began expanding to additional newspapers, but these fledgling chains remained small and sub-regional.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{12} “R. Hoe & Co.,” \textit{Typographic Messenger} 4 (May 1869): 36. Advertisements between newspaper editors can be found throughout important publications include \textit{Printers’ Circular and Stationers’ and Publishers’ Gazette} and the \textit{Typographic Messenger}.

\textsuperscript{13} See Baldasty, \textit{The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century}, 83–84. In the 1880s the extended Scripps family was among the first to own multiple papers, though they did so under different family members, with fluctuating success, and within a focused geographic radius (one paper each in Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and St. Louis). See Ted Curtis Smythe, \textit{The Gilded Age Press, 1865-1900} (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 81–84.
The same developments in production and distribution that brought about amalgamation and centralization in other branches of the publishing industry had the opposite effect on newspapers, making them more local. New printing technology, expanded readership, and the postbellum decline of the party sponsorship press system meant that newspapers required a larger stable of stable employees. The time of the roving editor-proprietor was past even for country weeklies; as Baldasty has shown, by the 1880s newspapers came to include dedicated positions for editorship, printing, distribution, advertising, and management, all of whom were members of the community their paper addressed. Of these roles, the advent of advertising was the most institutionally and formally transformative. Many scholars have documented how the partisan press system of the antebellum period, in which the political parties subsidized newspapers in exchange for political allegiance, rapidly declined around the time of the Civil War. This system (and newspapers’ principle source of revenue) was quickly replaced by the new regime of advertising, bringing about a major reorientation Baldasty terms the commercialized press or what Barnhurst and Nerone terms the “publisher’s paper.” Yet the rise of advertising in newspapers well preceded the rise of nationally-integrated mass advertising. Even as postbellum newspapers became dependent on advertisers, as David Paul Nord has argued “their revenues depended upon local business conditions, particularly the economic health of local retail merchants, their advertisers; [as] fundamentally local businesses, newspapers had a pragmatic interest in local order.” Institutionally speaking, the shift from partisanship to commercialism made newspapers more embedded in geographic communities than, as previously, parties or classes.

At the same time, interrelated economic and circulatory factors converged to make the newspaper format itself more locally-oriented than it had been in its antebellum partisan phase (as well as its eighteenth century mercantile phase). The telegraph had changed the temporality of news distribution such that large newspapers were able to deliver breaking

15. As Richard Ohmann argues, monopoly capitalism, part and parcel with mass advertising, was in a stage of “emergence, rather than its ascendency” in 1890s and 1900s. Ohmann further argues that newspapers (unlike illustrated monthly magazines) could not bring about the advent of mass culture precisely because they weren’t broad enough. Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century*, 80.
national or international news to readers much quicker than their smaller counterparts; as Barnhurst and Nerone note, “[i]n the new era of telegraphy, editors bought and sold transmitted news as a commodity. The latest news no longer arrived free and equal through the mail. Telegraphic news cost money.” As denser rail networks allowed the major newspapers from major metropolitan centers to distribute into their surrounding hinterlands, non-metropolitan newspapers began to understand their niche in the broader print ecosystem – and their financial viability – as tied to local interests more than ever. The Post Office Act of 1851 and its successors, which made the delivery of newspapers free of charge within the county of their publication, ensured country papers’ competitiveness in this respect. So too did declining newsprint prices across the board, which led to the average family taking more than one newspaper. Despite the differences of size, even major urban newspapers conceived of their readership in terms of cultural geography; the mastheads of major urban papers and advertisements for them in trade journals like Printer’s Ink consistently defined themselves to readers by delineating the state or subregional space (i.e. “the region between St. Louis and Chicago”) that they claimed to represent. In enabling circulation beyond immediate place of publication, rail distribution highlighted the bounds of topicality and readerly community. By the 1870s locality had become, in a new way, a fundamental dimension of what the American newspaper was understood to be and do.

The material dimensions of this transformation were reciprocally related to the emergence of new literary forms and styles, which in part responded to and in part precipitated them. “Before the 1860s,” as David Russo argues, “there was very little sustained effort on the part of most American editors, at least, to report the news of their own villages or of the surrounding countryside”; from 1860 on the local news column and quickly thereafter entire local news pages became commonplace components of newspapers of all kinds and sizes across the country. Major metropolitan papers like Joseph Pulitzer’s New York

Regional Reputations

World and William Randolph Hearst’s San Francisco Examiner, flooded with reporters desperate to stand out, pioneered investigative journalism when they took to making their own news in their own backyards. Urban papers had included city reporting since the rise of the penny press in the 1840s, but after the Civil War they began to regularly include pages devoted to news from the suburbs much as their small-town counterparts began to regularly include pages devoted to news from the surrounding towns.  

Editors of papers of all sizes also increasingly sought out local correspondents to supply community content cheaply. Some of this correspondence was news in the strictly topical sense, but many of them functioned as humor, entertainment, boosterism, mere notices, or some combination thereof. The adoption of these new literary forms was uneven, but even this unevenness was tied to cultural geography. Some of the new literary forms came to be associated in the early 1870s with the elusively-defined school of “[Mid-]Western Journalism” that would soon work its way to the coasts, and lower literacy rates in the South meant its newspapers could be slower to adopt a local focus. Nonetheless, overall these developments contributed both literally and stylistically to what Barnhurst and Nerone distinguish as the multivocality of the postbellum newspaper, which stands in stark contrast to the univocality of the antebellum newspaper or the submersion of voice in the mid-twentieth-century newspaper.

In addition to their role in circulating outside information into a community, newspapers increasingly played a vital communal function by circulating information within the community. This is not to say that newspapers abated their reprinting of material that originated elsewhere. Various formats of regional or even national news syndication such as ready print, plate service, and galley proof became important sources of all kinds of content for newspapers in the postbellum period, from important news to bullet-point lists of factoids to serialized literature by the likes of Henry James, William Dean Howells, or Robert Louis Stevenson. Syndicates allowed editors to stave off encroachment from larger newspapers or magazines by giving multiple papers simultaneous access to features of a quality or by

authors they couldn’t afford individually. Charles Johanningsmeier has shown, however, that editors insisted upon and judiciously exercised the right to independently determine which syndicated materials they would print and how they would print those materials, a right recognized by syndicates in the myriad options and compromises they offered even to the smallest newspapers. And for good reason, since newspapers tied to local readership were beholden to the surrounding political, economic, and cultural conditions. The decision to reprint a widely-known author or widely-circulated piece – or to reprint one over another – was equally contingent upon local preferences. When analyzing the cultural geography of newsprint circulation (whether qualitatively or quantitatively) it is thereby necessary to evaluate not only access but selection, and not merely selection but the potential distinctiveness of selection relative to national or regional trends.

While these distinguishing characteristics of newspapers have led some literary critics to exclude them as a low or extra-literary print format in opposition to higher or literary formats, the relationship between newsprint and magazines, novels, and the literary world more generally was in fact symbiotic. Most nineteenth-century readers encountered literature first and most frequently in newspapers. By the 1870s this encounter took several conventional forms within the emergent standard newspaper organizational structure, in which different kinds of content were delegated to particular pages. Literary news and gossip often appears amid the news stories on the front page and the more wide-ranging news on the second page. These pieces range from extended biographic profiles of up-and-coming authors to brief blurbs of social gossip to announcements of speaking tours. The page(s) devoted to local news, often organized by neighborhood or town, are rife with reports of local literary engagements: minutes of literary club meetings, books given as prizes in school contests, upcoming recitals of songs and poems, new library acquisitions, and more. In editions with six or more pages, the entertainment and culture page(s) can contain reviews of new works or author profiles, but more frequently they reported on the contents of the next month’s issues of the leading periodicals, especially literary monthly magazines. Advertisements for all manners of print objects are ubiquitous. And of course,
poetry and prose excerpts pop up throughout newspapers in a variety of possible registers: as art, as news (a famous author’s newest offering), as adages or advice, as column filler, or even through the dark mirror of allusive parody.

These forms of intertextuality were central to the function of postbellum newspapers; growing institutional and textual emphasis on locality was accompanied by a corresponding transformation in the social work newspapers performed as they continued to annex roles previously fulfilled by oral forms of information circulation. This is most paradigmatically evident in newspapers’ interactions with other texts. While newspapers did print some literature they more often worked referentially, pointing towards and pulling together various other modes and sites of print engagement. Looking to their local papers, readers could identify which magazines to check out at the library, subscribe to, or borrow from friends that month; which books to check out at the library or purchase; which poems they could hear at events in the next week; which authors would be making nearby stops on lecture tour; or which poems they could talk about at the next round of club meetings. Newspapers thereby occupied a central node in the print cultures of their communities, mediating a rich web of texts and sites with which they overlapped and interrelated. Newspapers were not only imbricated in the literary field: they were essential to its operation, especially outside the major publishing centers. For many readers, any further engagement with nationally circulating texts was conditioned by the lens of their newspapers.

The postbellum newspaper, then, was a curiously multivalenced object, at once an artifact of (its local editor’s and authors’) reception, a chronicle of (local individuals’, organizations’, and audiences’) reception, a unit of (its editor’s and authors’) production, and a means of influencing future instances of (its readers’) reception. Furthermore, newspaper readership demographics simultaneously became less skewed in other categories such as class and gender as locality (and commerciality) came to the fore as a governing principle. In this respect the American newspaper of the second half of the nineteenth century differed from the early nineteenth century newspapers that Benedict Anderson theorized. Certainly both participated in the construction of imagined communities; as Anderson argues, “the arbitrariness of [contents’] inclusion and juxtaposition [...] shows that the linkage between them is imagined” by virtue of the presumption that they will be of shared interest to a com-
Yet Anderson’s account presumes significantly broader and less dense geographies of readership than those typical of newspapers from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. For Anderson, it is by virtue of the gaps newspapers circulate across – spatial, personal, etc. – that they facilitate the imagination of a community where one does not yet tangibly exist. By contrast, the postbellum newspaper – with its focus on locality, its preference for descriptive over proscriptive, and its collaborative authorship – was less oriented towards this function of transmission and more oriented towards the function of accumulating and organizing the information of readers who knew or regularly encountered many of their fellow subscribers through other shared institutions. The postbellum newspaper was not only supposed to speak to a community but also to speak already for a community, and in many material ways it did just that.

2. Aggregation and the Spatiality of Reception

In light of newspapers’ economic position and community role, what does a newspaper reference represent? The sheer volume of newsprint discourse presents difficulties to traditional literary methods of determining representativeness. This is why scholars typically have turned either to highly-canonical periodicals as evidence of general consensus or to highly-local periodicals as evidence of individual cases of disagreement. But these approaches can prove to be self-fulfilling prophecies: they inevitably obscure intermediary patterns, like regional ones, that develop organically through the accumulation of local instances over time and space. In the multivocal, multivalenced postbellum newspaper, any given reference could be meaningful to any given reader, regardless of what literary or historical significance it might possess. The original publication of a six-line poem by Bret Harte isn’t necessarily more important than a six-line announcement that the next meeting of the town’s literary society would discuss the same. Postbellum editors understood this well, and their editorial practices suggest a solution for making sense of this abundance of potentially-equivalent

information. Newspapers tried to manage the volume of print and uncertainty of interest through repetition. They did not count on readers to know the name of a specific piece of legislation, businessman, or novel but instead tried to spur remembrance with phrases like “Louisa M. Alcott’s newest novel” that hitched ephemeral references to more consistent ones. As such, the significance of references lies in their aggregation over time: in the regularity with which readers would have encountered an author’s name in print and thus their capacity to recognize that name as meaningful.

Quantification is precisely the tool for measuring this experience of the aggregation of reference. By aggregating references to authors in thousands of newspapers across the country, I track a relative measure of readers’ capacity to recognize those authors’ names as meaningful—the initial quantitative dimension of what I refer to as reputation. The authors I consider came from different regions and wrote in different genres but nonetheless meet two criteria: their careers took off shortly after the Civil War and combined broad appeal with literary influence. Because Optical Character Recognition software often errs with small print and cheap paper, it is necessary to use approximate or “fuzzy” matching to include proximate misspellings. I focus on authors rather than texts because authorship and authorial celebrity was the dominant metric for organizing information about literature in the wildly-expanding field of postbellum print production, and many forms of authorial reference that do not name specific texts – general opinions, passing jokes, or reports on their personal lives – nonetheless shaped reading practice. Thus while digital humanists like Ted Underwood and Matthew Jockers have raised important concerns about search-based inquiries’ risk of confirmation and exclusion biases, author-based searches are quite capacious given the conventions of the medium during this period. This is certainly not the

29. I use fuzzy string matching algorithms based on Levenshtein distance (the total number of insertions, deletions, or substitutions of characters to get from one character string, or word, to another), with slight differences for each author depending on the name(s) by which newspapers referred to them and the character complexity of those names (with slightly more laxity given to names more easily misrecognized by OCR software). This allows the identification of between 30-80% more references for each author than returned by conventional searches. Fuzzy string matching necessarily involves a certain margin of error: the more false negatives an algorithm is able to correctly recover, the more false positives it includes as well. I have tried to keep the ratio of false positives to false negatives at 1:10. Since this ratio still varies and since it is impossible to determine the true number of false negatives, I use standard deviation from author means as a standardized relative metric in the following paragraphs.

only way to measure reception, but postbellum newspapers’ intertextuality and referentiality makes them an effective index of other forms of literary engagement as well.

Of course, not all newspapers are equivalent. While country papers had fewer subscribers, scholars estimate that each copy was read more intensely and shared by more readers in rural areas than larger papers in the more print-glutted urban areas. The use of large datasets helps address these differences. Newspapers with more readers tended to print more pages more frequently and thus contain more references. As such, quantification is weighted towards papers with more readers. Large datasets help mitigate disproportionate influence from any single paper amid broader, cross-paper trends. The aim of quantification in this chapter is not to posit exact metrics of reception but rather to explore what the relative differences in the reception of several popular authors reveals about the cultural field and, ultimately, about how writing traversed that field.

The most clear-cut measure of divergence in reception is the presence or absence of circulation altogether. Exclusively regional authors in this sense – known to readers exclusively within a particular area – continued to play an important role in regional print cultures through the early twentieth century. The California poet Ina Coolbrith, for example, was a focal member of West coast literary circles who enjoyed a degree of recognition and popularity in the West, yet she was mentioned only a handful of times in some two million pages of newsprint east of the Rocky Mountains. Figure 1.1 maps this data. Each dot marks the location of a newspaper that mentioned Coolbrith during this quarter-century timespan, with larger dots representing a greater number of mentions. More importantly, the color shading for each state represents the frequency of reference as measured by the

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31. 185–188 Johanningsmeier, Fiction and the American Literary Marketplace: The Role of Newspaper Syndicates in America, 1860-1900; Henkin, The Postal age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America 43.
33. I have used long time-spans in the figures for this chapter, despite fluctuations in reference over time, in order to limit idiosyncrasies by maximizing the data available for use. If anything, this choice understates regional differences in the frequency of reference, which tend to decrease gradually over time. The time-spans used do not exceed (either antedate or postdate) the years in which an author was consistently referenced.
number of mentions divided by the total number of pages included in the data.\textsuperscript{34} States with insufficient data are light grey, and states for which there are no references are grey.\textsuperscript{35} These results for Coolbrith show that her reputation was primarily confined to a single region. One might infer this without quantitative methods. Even though the major publisher Houghton Mifflin brought out volumes of her poetry, Coolbrith’s publication record is relatively slim, and she never appeared in the national magazines of the period. Authors who like Coolbrith wielded regional influence while possessing little name recognition beyond their region became less common, however, as distribution infrastructure grew ever more pervasive. Thanks to the postbellum explosion in newspapers, even readers who lacked the time or income for books could access most influential authors. Focusing on reception under these circumstances necessitates discarding binary oppositions between national and regional or hegemonic and anti-hegemonic positions in the cultural field, requiring us to think instead in terms of relative frequencies, degrees of penetration, and uneven circulation.

Ina Coolbrith’s longtime friend Joaquin Miller is an instructive case. Miller was one of the most popular poets of the postbellum period – as much so as Walt Whitman, one of his influences. Miller was from Oregon and spent most his career in California writing about the West, including the collection *Songs of the Sierras* (1871) that made him famous. Any production-oriented approach would nonetheless point to Miller’s Eastern residence, celebrity status, dependence on Eastern publishing centers and nationally-circulating literary magazines, and manipulation of the 1870s international fad for all things Western. On this basis one might place Miller’s work in the prevailing scholarly narratives about regionalism and region in literature more broadly – that it “perform[s] the larger cultural service of imagining Americas different in habits, speech, and appearance from a norm [it thereby] helps render normative” or that it “comes to trade [on] the energy provoked by the

\textsuperscript{34} Because the accuracy of OCR text can vary considerably from issue to issue of the same paper let alone from paper to paper and because the standard number of words per page remained relatively stable during this period the number of pages is a more stable benchmark for comparison. See Barnhurst and Nerone, *The Form of News: A History*, Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{35} In addition, frequency is not displayed for states with fewer than 10,000 pages during the period in which an author was consistently referenced (though the locations of references are still displayed for these states).
Figure 1.1: Newspaper references to Ina Coolbrith, 1866-1889. Dots represent the number of references by location; color shading represents frequency of reference by state as references per page. Sources: Chronicling America and California Digital Newspaper Project.

dislocations of circulating culture.” Indeed, in many ways Miller fits these arguments more easily than many of the authors they typically cite. Yet quantitative analysis of newspapers suggests that Miller was referenced more frequently in Western states than elsewhere in the country (Figure 1.2). In California and Oregon, he was referenced twice as frequently as he was nationally on average, while Montana and Washington also have high frequencies of reference. As regular readers of periodical print know, even seemingly small numeric differences represent a significant difference in the experience of aggregation. The proportions between state-by-state figures remain generally consistent for Miller – and the other authors discussed here – when isolating data from urban (or rural) newspapers. This is also the case when reprints or non-unique references are excluded. There are outlier states, but


37. I determine uniqueness by measuring Levenshtein distance between the string of twenty words following each reference, where any string within a distance of forty (insertions, deletions, or substitutions) of any other string is considered a reprint. This threshold of two errors per word is very liberal.
as I will return to shortly these are much less significant than they may initially appear. A general pattern is nonetheless already identifiable: Miller is referenced less frequently in the Northeast, the South, and much of the Midwest.

![Map of Newspaper References to Joaquin Miller, 1871-1889](image)

Figure 1.2: Newspaper references to Joaquin Miller, 1871-1889. Dots represent the number of references by location; color shading represents frequency of reference by state as references per page. Sources: Chronicling America and California Digital Newspaper Project.

To appreciate this data’s geographic variegation, however, it is necessary to incorporate an understanding of the archive’s idiosyncrasies into analysis. Newspaper databases are not representative. State institutions, which make digitization decisions, prioritize selection criteria differently. This structural condition of public newspaper databases – the result of contemporary rather than nineteenth-century cultural and political geography – necessitates retaining distinctions between states. For these reasons it is essential to compare

38. Selection guidelines for Chronicling America, which serve as a standard for independent state newspaper digitization projects as well, can be found at [http://www.loc.gov/ndnp/guidelines/selection.html](http://www.loc.gov/ndnp/guidelines/selection.html) Benjamin Fagan has drawn attention in particular to the lack of racial inclusion in open-access print databases; while Chronicling America has taken steps to ensure that it becomes more diverse, it and other databases like it nonetheless remain nonrepresentative of the actual racial, religious, political, economic, and geographic demographics of newspaper production or reception. See Benjamin Fagan, “Chronicling White America,” *American Periodicals: A Journal of History & Criticism* 26, no. 1 (2016): 10–13.
state results across multiple authors too. This second form of comparison helps identify norms in state data, which in turn helps distinguish states with consistently high or low frequencies from states with meaningful deviations in frequency of reference for a particular author. Data for Maine in these decades, for example, has high frequencies of reference to all authors; the fact that it contains frequent references to any given author is thus only significant if that frequency is disproportionately higher than usual.

The conceptual claim about cultural geography here is a familiar one: that a community’s distinctiveness must be evaluated relative to trends both external and internal to that community. To identify whether a state’s frequency of reference to each author is consistent or unusual for that state, for each author I have calculated the deviation of each state’s frequency of reference from the mean of all states’ frequencies of reference. Figure 1.3 depicts the results for several illustrative states. Even though the frequencies of reference to Miller for Western states like Idaho, Nevada, and New Mexico are low relative to the frequencies of reference to Miller elsewhere, their deviation from the mean national frequency of reference to Miller are much higher, often by the order of one standard deviation or more, than those states’ figures for other authors. In other words, Miller received disproportionately more attention in Idaho, Nevada, and New Mexico newspapers than other authors did. In California, Montana, Oregon, and Washington too frequencies of reference to Miller are disproportionately higher than the mean national frequency of reference to Miller relative to the frequencies and means for other authors. By contrast, the high frequencies of reference to Miller for Eastern and Midwestern states like Maine, Ohio, and Wisconsin are merely average or below when their deviation from the national mean is compared to those states’ deviations for other authors. In other words, Miller received no more attention beyond his national average in these states than what was typical for those states’ treatment of other major authors. These adjustments sharpen the regional contours of Miller’s popularity.

39. A relative metric like standard deviation is necessary to compare authors whom newspapers referenced with different frequencies. Standard deviation is a common relative measure of the dispersion of values within any given set—in this case, the frequencies of reference for each state for a single author. It is measured by the square root of the sum of each value’s distance from their mean. I calculate national average as the mean of state frequencies because a “pure” national average would skew towards states with more data.
Figure 1.3: Relative frequencies of reference to selected authors in newspapers by state. Sources: Chronicling America and California Digital Newspaper Project.
Miller was not alone in this regard; comparison with additional authors illuminates the broader phenomenon of regional patterns of reception. Edward Eggleston, for example, had a roughly coterminal career and, like Miller, wrote about the same region in which he lived much of his life: the Midwest. Eggleston began his literary career in the late 1860s as an editor of national religious-literary periodicals, but it was *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871) that catapulted him to widespread popularity. The novel’s near-anthropological concern for representing the unique speech patterns and cultural practices of the Midwest spurred the massive growth in literary use of dialect over the next two decades. Despite this broad influence, his affiliation with national periodicals, and his eventual residence in New York, the highest frequencies of reference to Eggleston cluster in the central states of the Midwest (Figure 1.4). Eggleston’s regional reputation, like Miller’s indicates a gap in the scholarly consensus on how writing about region functioned in the postbellum cultural field. Rather than circulating indiscriminately or going under-read in the regions they wrote about, Miller and Eggleston were more often encountered in newsprint in their home regions, where readers were thereby more likely to recognize them as meaningful.

Southern states have low frequencies of reference for many of the authors included in this chapter. This in part suggests an actual tendency among Southern newspapers (like newspapers in some Western states) to discuss literary figures less than their Midwestern and New England contemporaries. But this tendency was by no means inevitable or universal, as the newspaper reception of Southern authors like Augusta Jane Evans demonstrates. Evans appealed to a wide national audience beginning with her hugely-popular sentimental romance *St. Elmo* (1866). Her reputation nonetheless remained disproportionately regional after this breakthrough: she is most frequently referenced in Southern states, all the more striking given the tendency of data from those states to have low frequencies of reference for other authors (Figure 1.5). This is significant because even though many of Evans’ novels are set in the South, scholars do not discuss her work as regional-ism because it lacks the formal qualities that have become associated with that classification: an outsider narrator, dialect, ethnographic attention to cultural practices. Yet the importance attached to Evans and her nationally-circulating work varied regionally, and this fact indicates a gap in how the scholarly framework of regionalism identifies what made a text register as regional with
readers. Interest in cultural geography wasn’t just confined to a single regional-ism; region affiliation motivated readers’ preferences in all genres.

Canonical authors sometimes imagined as national today also had uneven geographies of reception in their own time. For example, frequent references to Walt Whitman from 1865 to 1889 don’t cluster in a single region, but infrequent references do cluster in the South and the West (Figure 1.6). This pattern underscores Matt Cohen’s assertion that the spread of Whitman’s work beyond the North was uneven. Several critics have explored the negative and parodic reactions Whitman received in Southern literary periodicals as evidence of Southern familiarity with his work. Comparatively infrequent newspaper

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40. Though Whitman’s career began in the 1850s, existing data suggests that newspapers did not reference him explicitly with volume and consistency until after 1865.
reference, however, suggests that disapproving discussion in these more specialized print
venues did not translate into equivalent newspaper coverage. Whitman was recognizable
across the country, but his canonization was uneven. Readers in some areas were markedly
less invested in the “national bard” than others.

A national reputation, then, would among other things require higher-than-usual
frequencies of reference outside the Northeast and Midwest. Whitman might not have met
this threshold before 1890, but others, like Mark Twain, did. There is no clustering of states
with either high or low frequencies of reference for Twain, and no clear geographic pattern
emerges from the results (Figure 1.7). This is reinforced by the fact that several states which
tend to have lower-than-average frequencies for other authors have comparatively higher
frequencies for Twain, such as South Carolina or Tennessee in the South and Arizona or
California in the West (Figure 1.3). Importantly, there is also less variation between state
frequencies of reference for Twain overall: Twain has the lowest standard deviation of all the authors included in this chapter. State fluctuations notwithstanding, Twain received comparatively equivalent amounts of attention across the country despite the idiosyncrasies in certain areas that otherwise shaped authors’ reception.

Twain’s popularity in postbellum America was exceptional, but he was not alone in the national distribution of his popularity; the same was largely the case for his and Miller’s mutual friend, the popular California poet and short story writer Bret Harte. Harte had much in common with Miller, which makes the duo an illuminative comparison. Both authors wrote about the same region they were from. Both were savvy self-promoters and deployers of stereotypes. Like Miller, Harte’s success as a portrayer of supposedly-Western life depended on the leading publishers and publications of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, as well as the growing international popularity of all things Western and the rising aesthetic estimation of dialect. Unlike newspaper references to Miller, however,
Figure 1.7: Newspaper references to Mark Twain, 1865-1889. Dots represent the number of references by location; color shading represents frequency of reference by state as references per page. Sources: Chronicling America and California Digital Newspaper Project.

references to Harte appear more evenly distributed nationally. Harte is referenced frequently in a number of Western states, such as Arizona, California, and Montana (Figure 1.8), but he also has high frequencies of reference in several Midwestern states (Ohio, Wisconsin) and Southern states (Tennessee, Virginia). Harte’s frequencies of reference for these states, as well as others like New York, are higher relative to his national average than is the case for other authors and especially Miller. Harte’s comparatively nationally-homogeneous frequency of reference, unlike Miller’s, follows the scholarly consensus that an author’s reception was shaped by national publishing conditions rather than by the region they represented.

Quantification of newspaper references, when situated in a nexus of comparisons, thereby reveals an important distinction between authors like Harte who wrote about a particular region and authors like Miller who, additionally, were encountered more frequently in the region they wrote about. Regional patterns in the volume of reference further indi-
cate that the formal characteristics associated with the contemporary scholarly framework of postbellum regionalism were not necessarily the qualities that made regional editors and readers more interested in authors or works. Quantifications of newspaper references cannot in themselves, however, tell us why Miller had a regional reputation in the West when Harte and Whitman, in differing ways, did not. For this, a composite methodology is necessary. As Ryan Cordell argues, “patterns and models of textuality revealed through computational means return us to the archive with new questions about reprinted texts, their circulation, and the wider system of print culture.”

Limited OCR quality, short article length, and notoriously slippery tone make nineteenth-century newspapers challenging material for computational approaches like natural language processing. This is not merely a technical limit but a linguistic one: it marks the space of analysis where methods be

intimately integrated. To understand the factors driving regional differences in reception requires closer qualitative analysis of newspaper discourse.

3. Reputation and the Question of Regional Authenticity

It would be tempting to interpret regional reputation as an indication of regional authenticity, that is, as the endorsement of a regional author by the readers of the region about which that author wrote. Indeed, literary critics often contrast adherence to a nationally-hegemonic cultural formation with authenticity or even resistance: i.e., the provincial writer remains independent of a metropole-dominated national culture by embracing local or otherwise-marginalized communities and materials. With respect to the postbellum American writing about local cultures now typically called regionalism, this argument has been most fully developed by Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse as part of the broader project of recovering overlooked women authors. The lineage of this approach nonetheless includes earlier recovery movements such as those of the 1930s “New Regionalism” and the Southern Agrarians in *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930), and it continues to inform scholarly accounts of many authors and texts produced outside cultural centers. Yet authenticity alone can’t explain the regional reputations of authors like Augusta Jane Evans, Edward Eggleston, or Joaquin Miller. This is because reviewers, commentators, and responders usually endorsed representations of their region only on a specific basis and under particular conditions: authenticity was a topic of discourse – and often not even a pressing one – rather than a condition or conclusion. Miller is an especially instructive case because Westerners kept reading and discussing his work more often than readers in other regions despite largely dismissing the idea that it was authentic.

After two volumes of poetry that failed to garner much publicity, Joaquin Miller did what many a savvy antebellum American had done before him: he crossed the Atlantic and gained widespread acclaim by over-performing frontier manners for British cultural

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elite (wearing flannel! Bringing knives to parties!). With resounding endorsements from Dante Gabriel Rossetti among others, Miller’s next collection, *Songs of the Sierras* (1871), catapulted him into popularity on both sides of the Atlantic. Like most of his early poems, those in *Songs of the Sierras* are long and narrative, interspersing passages of natural description of Western settings with dramatic action and Western tropes: vengeful gunfights, Native lovers, lone prospectors, noble outlaws. In the years that followed Miller published a number of poems and short prose pieces in the leading literary monthly magazines – receiving a head-turning $2,000 from the *Overland Monthly* for his long poem “Isles of the Amazons” – as well as additional volumes of poetry brought out by the respected Boston firm of Roberts Brothers.\(^{45}\) During this time Miller’s personal history garnered considerable notoriety, a fact he exploited in his poetry as well as multiple autobiographical pieces that deftly play with the porous boundaries between fact and fiction, memory and hearsay. With varying degrees of corroboration, Miller claimed that he had been raised partly by the Modoc tribe, joined William Walker’s 1855 filibustering campaign to Nicaragua, was arrested as a horse thief in California, edited a newspaper in Oregon, and worked as a miner, Pony Express rider, and county judge in Idaho. In the late 1870s and 1880s he expanded his repertoire by writing several popular plays, travel reflections, and regular columns for the *Washington Post*. By the end of the nineteenth century, Miller had settled into a role familiar to American poets: that of the white-bearded, kindly-yet-eccentric, old man.\(^{46}\)

Miller’s meteoric rise to literary fame made him at once a representative figure of the West – that is, for readers outside the West. Non-Western newspapers printed breathless biographic articles that expound the mystique of Miller’s “turbulent, romantic, and eventful [early] years,” as in the *Washington Post*, and embellish “all the ferocious features incident to a life in the far West,” as in the Memphis Public Ledger.\(^{47}\) They also printed awed

\(^{45}\) Based in Boston, MA, Roberts Brothers published a number of critically- and popularly-acclaimed poets, including Emily Dickinson and Edith M. Thomas.
\(^{46}\) The best biography of Miller is M. Marion Marberry, *Splendid Poseur: Joaquin Miller, American Poet* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1953); see also newspaper accounts of his early life, in footnotes 47-50, Miller’s autobiographies *Life Amongst the Modocs* (1873) and *Memorie and Rime* (1884), and interspersed recollections in Joaquin Miller, *The Complete Poetical Works of Joaquin Miller* (San Francisco: Whitaker & Ray Company, 1902).
profiling interviews like Eugene Field’s in the *Chicago News* that reinforce the association between the authorial persona and his poetic imagery: “he loves the sunlight, the hills, the forests, the birds, the sea, flowers, women, and all the sweet beautiful things God has given man.”

Non-Western reviews often waxed poetic in this fashion, slipping into Miller’s own stable of tropes and cadences when describing him or his work. One New York Times correspondent likened Miller’s verse to “the fresh grand breeze of the California forests” while the *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette* fashioned Miller a prospector possessing “the proper tools and know how to use them in mining for the precious stuff” of Western romance and legend. In these reviews and articles Miller’s regional persona is projected onto his poetry and, in turn, the regional subject matter of his poetry onto his person, such that it becomes difficult to separate the two.

Non-Western newspapers’ accounts of Miller certainly were not all glowing, but when they criticized Miller they generally did so by denigrating his verse, not its Western pedigree. Despite praising *Songs of the Sierras’* “dramatic interest, intensity of feeling, [and] rhythmic mastery of language,” the *New York Times*’ three-column review of the collection criticizes its “parrot-like” repetition of imagery, “mean-souled” moral laxity, and “shriek[ed]” rhymes. Notably, though, the review begins by suggesting that Miller’s peculiar “rude” yet “inborn” facilities are intimately related to his own personal history and subject matter:

Mr. Miller sings [...] of the half-horse, half-alligator man–and woman, who within the last twenty or twenty-five years has moved westward from Old Kaintuck, and has ‘located’–if that can be said to ‘locate,’ which is never quiet physically or morally–on the purrayries [sic], and in the ca˜ nons and gulches of the Far West.


The *New York Times* review, like those in leading Mid-Atlantic magazines like the *Atlantic* and *Harper’s*, finds Miller representative of the West, or at least Western literature, precisely because of his alleged stylistic faults and performative excess. But literary qualities were often beside the point—many of Miller’s Eastern readers weren’t really reading him in the first place. A correspondent to the Washington, D.C. *National Republican*, describing a stay at an East Coast resort with Miller, lampooned the hollowness of his reputation there even as late as 1875:

Joaquin’s reputation as a poet has made him quite a seaside lion, not to say sea lion, though I very much doubt whether half the people who pay him such marked attention ever read a line of his writings. Everybody thinks everybody else has, and as all carefully refrain from referring to anything in particular which he has written but all speak in vague terms of ‘his works,’ they are safe enough. One lady certainly did let a little kitten out of the bag yesterday. ‘This man,’ she asked of me confidentially in a somewhat remote comer of the piazza ‘This man is not Buffalo Bill; Is he?’

One might be forgiven for mistaking Miller with Buffalo Bill: the two became popular at the same time and shared, among other things, the same long blonde locks. The humorous conflation described here nonetheless epitomizes Miller’s iconic function for Eastern readers. The *National Republican* testifies that the Miller phenomenon exceeded his poetry.

These tendencies are perhaps most fully voiced in an article on Western verse published in 1888, later in Miller’s career, in the *Indianapolis Journal*:

His song is a whirlwind blowing alike through tropical gardens, rich with a thousand rare perfumes, over ‘desolate sand deserts,’ across snow capped Sierras and over the mighty billows of illimitable seas. America has not yet done justice to the genius of Joaquin Miller, but his poetry is Western and pulses with the wild life and the grand possibilities of the West.

As in the various articles and reviews above, the *Indianapolis Journal* imagines Miller’s poetry as authored less by Miller the individual than by the wild genius of the West itself

pulsing through him. The exoticism that reaches a fever pitch here highlights an important aspect of all these articles and the reception of regional writers broadly: that geographically-distant readers’ conception of regional representativeness intermingled a desire for authenticity with a desire for romanticization. In the words of these reviewers, for non-Western readers Miller needed not only to have experienced the actual “turbulent, romantic, and eventful” West; he also needed to know how to “min[e] the precious stuff” into recognizable tropes and, furthermore, to imagine those “grand possibilities of the West” that had not – at least not yet – been actualized. As Nathaniel Lewis argues, Miller presented himself and his work as an “authentic reproduction,” simultaneously insisting on the credibility of his “attachment to place” and openly “assuming (and popularizing) a western type, the western backwoodsman or frontiersman,” that made him “endlessly reproducible” commercially or otherwise.\footnote{Nathaniel Lewis, “Authentic Reproduction: The Picturesque Joaquin Miller,” Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory 57, no. 2 (2001): 2, 6.} Newspaper coverage suggests that readers outside the West understood Miller in just this double manner, encountering him according to a regional essentialism that subsumed both authenticity and fantasy, real and romance.

Western newspapers, however, not only referenced Miller more frequently than their counterparts: in doing so they also referenced him differently. On the whole, Western papers did not treat Miller as regionally representative, and they spent less of their coverage of Miller on reporting his performatively-flamboyant appearance and antics. A widely-reprinted account of Miller being accidentally shot in 1888, for example, appears only once west of the Rockies in the newspapers consulted for this chapter; another widely-reprinted blurb, relating that Miller’s name in the Modoc language meant “Moon-Gazer,” does not appear west of the Rockies. Western newspapers were much less inclined to reprint articles about Miller from elsewhere, even during the swaths of time in which he resided on the East Coast or in Europe. By contrast, Eastern newspapers frequently reprinted articles about Miller from California and Oregon newspapers in entirety (especially during the early years
of his fame), trading on their Western origin as a source of authority on the poet. Miller was simply deemed newsworthy in the West more often and in a wider variety of contexts, where publication-specific single-sentence items under “Local News” columns gave updates on Miller’s professional activities often not printed elsewhere. Michael Cohen has argued that in the nineteenth century “poems facilitated actions, like reading, writing, reciting, copying, inscribing, scissoring, exchanging, or circulating, that positioned people within densely complex webs of relation […] both intellectual and affective, linking readers with their poems but also with themselves, with each other, with the dead, with authors, with the past, and with various forms of imagined community.” The webs of relation facilitated by Miller’s poems were especially dense in the West, where readers put his writing and reputation to a variety of uses.

Western newspapers critically engaged with Eastern newspapers’ coverage of Miller, and in doing so theorized the regional differences in his reputation. Western newspapers often expressed skepticism, as did the Los Angeles Daily Herald, about the fact that Miller’s “genius is so closely identified with the history of California,” gesturing towards discrepancies between attribution and actuality.

In the ‘Old World’ and the Eastern States, where sketches of this far Western country read like romance, ‘Joaquin’ Miller’s poems have elicited very commendatory criticisms, while in the West they are not so favorably regarded. Hence we infer that much of the laudation bestowed upon our poet by the press
of England and the Eastern States is made in the enthusiasm of the moment and cannot be considered the deliberate judgment of the critics.\textsuperscript{59}

The East-West opposition explicitly outlined here, characterized by geographically-distant readers’ romanticization of the Pacific Coast, implicitly underlies most Western commentary on Eastern coverage of Miller. A review in the \textit{Daily Alta California}, for instance, supposed in passing that some new “verses on Southern California, by Joaquin Miller, will probably run the round of the press throughout the civilized world, not because they are elegant poetry but because they are bold and Swinburnish.”\textsuperscript{60} By likening Miller to the taboo-flouting British poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, this review suggests that his wider popularity was primarily a matter of fashion and bombast. The fact that the same \textit{Daily Alta California} column would praise new lines by Miller only a few months later, however, indicates that its previous assessment had less to do with Miller than Eastern and British reviewers.\textsuperscript{61} For these Western reviewers, a major draw to discussing Miller’s poetry was its ability to function as a litmus test for Eastern exoticism and sensationalism, as a metric for measuring the distance between Western writing and Eastern expectation.

As the \textit{Daily Alta California} reviews demonstrate, critiquing the hype surrounding Miller did not dissuade Western newspapers from writing about Miller themselves. They instead brought a searching skepticism to his work, attempting to suss out the brilliant from the bad and the apt from the affected. Often, this involved balancing hesitant praise with critique of the very antics that garnered wider publicity. When reviewing “Isles of the Amazons” the \textit{Santa Barbara Weekly Press} noted that despite the presence of obviously self-branding lines “suggestive of the author, who has a reputation for ‘forsaking,’ and being limited by very few ‘rules’,” as whole “it is poetry, and much of it very beautiful.”\textsuperscript{62}


\textsuperscript{60} “The Overland Monthly for July,” \textit{Daily Alta California} (San Francisco), June 24, 1872, 1, https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=DAC18720624.2.16 it goes without saying that, despite its title, this is a review and not a puff. See also “A Timely Protest,” \textit{Sacramento Daily Union} (CA), January 22, 1876, 4, https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=SDU18760122.2.42.

\textsuperscript{61} “The Overland for October,” \textit{Daily Alta California} (San Francisco), September 23, 1872, 1, https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=DAC18720923.2.17.

Similarly, a correspondent to the *Daily Alta California* professed that Miller seemed to be “good-natured, kind-hearted and well-endowed” but that he was “consumed with a passion for notoriety” that manifested as public persona “full of affectations” and “shallow tricks.” Nuanced appraisals, simple as they appear, stand out in comparison to Eastern newspapers’ tendency to either fawn over Miller or simply disparage him with little in-between.

Westerners also differed from other readers in the aspects of Miller’s work they valued. Whereas Eastern newspapers often expressed preference for the “dramatic interest [and] intensity of feeling” that even the negative *New York Times* review praised in Miller’s writing, Western papers returned more often to his descriptions of Western landscapes in both prose and poetry, many of which were recognizable locations. This is likely one reason why Western newspapers discussed Miller’s popular plays of the late 1870s and 1880s less often than their Eastern counterparts, despite the fact that the plays were produced on both coasts. As the *Santa Barbara Morning Press* opined, it was “the author’s dislike of society, and his love of nature which we consider the great charm of his writings.”

Under other circumstances, Western newspapers’ critical approach to Miller entailed defending his writing against outside criticism. When the *New York Times* chided Miller for wasting too much time “trying to find a theme for a ten dollar newspaper article” instead of taking “to the skies,” a writer in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* shot back that “pity and urging are both unnecessary”: unlike “the voluptuary of the East [...] Joaquin Miller needs...

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63. Saratoga Letter, “Joaquin Miller a Bore,” *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), August 21, 1876, 2, https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=DAC18760821.2.60
64. See, for example, the commentary on Joaquin Miller, “The Stag,” in *New Northwest* (March 15, 1872), 1; Miller’s prose paean to Oregon’s Mount Hood, for one particularly apt example, was widely reprinted on the West coast. See Joaquin Miller, “Mount Hood,” *Albany Register* (OR), July 26, 1871, 5, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84022643/1872-07-26/ed-1/seq-5/; Joaquin Miller, “Mount Hood,” *New Northwest* (Portland, OR), April 26, 1872, 1, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84022673/1872-04-26/ed-1/seq-1/; Joaquin Miller, “Mount Hood,” *Russian River Flag* (CA), May 23, 1872, 1, https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=RRF18720523.2.3
65. The occasion for this statement was the fourth installment of “Isles of the Amazons.” “The Overland for December,” *Santa Barbara Morning Press* (CA), November 30, 1872, 2, https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=MP18721130.2.4
no hasheesh” for inspiration. More often though, Western defenses of Miller were more specific and more qualified. When numerous newspapers outside the Pacific Coast reprinted a short blurb about a purported poetic inaccuracy of Miller’s, the *Sacramento Daily Union* responded that

Some ignorant and envious persons accuse the poet Joaquin Miller of a gross blunder in ‘Kit Carson’s Ride.’ They say he had made Carson strip the saddle from his steed and afterward made him ‘rise in his stirrups.’ The truth is Miller made no such mistake. He did not make Carson strip off the saddle, but only the weights that encumbered his person.

The *San Francisco Bulletin* also defended “Kit Carson’s Ride” on this point, by instead explaining that it was nonetheless possible to rise in one’s stirrups without a saddle. These two barbs comprised two common themes in Western newspapers’ responses to non-Western coverage of Miller: critics farther east either were too busy fixating on his persona to read his poems or didn’t know the subject matter they were writing about. As already shown, such criticisms were not without warrant. In both cases, defenses of Miller weren’t as much an endorsement of the author as they were another means of asserting regional differences in the practices of reading him – with the corollary that Westerners were predisposed to be better readers of Miller.

The *State Rights Democrat* of Albany, Oregon took a different tack when responding to Miller’s purported inaccuracies in “Kit Carson’s Ride”: after explaining the qualms aired by other newspapers, it wryly commented that “a poet is licensed to anything, and if Miller or Bret Harte were to make water run up hill [sic], it would not stir-up any excitement.”

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69. Cited in “A Foolish Critic.”
was an important aspect of Miller’s Western reception. The same affect animates Western verse parodies of Miller. The Portland, Oregon Democratic Era printed one such poem in response to “Kit Caron’s Ride,” entitled “Ye Indignant Ghost of Kit Carson Speaketh” (Figure 1.9). The poem directly addresses Miller to tell him off for misusing the frontier hero’s legend, but it adopts Miller’s poetic style and several of his favorite tropes in order to do so in a tone that is more humored than hurt. The result is that Kit Carson critiques Miller only by becoming him. Responses like “Ye Indignant Ghost of Kit Carson Speaketh,” which was written by an Oregon newspaper poet named Stephen Maybell, indicate sustained conversation between readers, editors, and Miller’s work over time. For example, the State Rights Democrat notified readers that it would be printing “My Indian Love” one week before doing so, adding that “it’s gushing” but evidently undeterred by the fact. Four weeks after printing the poem, the State Rights Democrat printed an anonymously-penned parody of “My Indian Love” by the same name (Figure 1.10). While the parody does make fun of the original, particularly by excessively describing the titular figure’s ankles, at least half of its lines lack any marked humor: most lines simply indulge in the descriptive and sonic capacities of Miller’s style. The San Francisco publisher A. L. Bancroft in fact published an entire volume of Miller parodies, albeit of markedly lower quality, by Walking Hiller titled Songs of the Sand-Hills. In all these parody poems, Western writers take on Miller by inhabiting Miller’s voice, testing out its aptness for representing the West. Miller is considered, critiqued, and adapted rather than discarded, as a contributor in an ongoing attempt to define regional representation.

The discerning engagement that characterizes Miller’s regional reputation in the West is precisely what Walt Whitman’s reception in the West largely lacks despite the fact that the two poets had much in common. For one, a greater percentage of the references to Whitman in Western states were reprints of articles, blurbs, or reviews printed elsewhere, rather than


Figure 1.9: "Ye Indignant Ghost of Kit Carson Speaketh" by Stephen Maybell, a parodic response to Joaquin Miller's "Kit Carson's Ride." Published in the New Northwest (Portland, OR), April 5, 1872, 1.

original content. In Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Utah 44% or more of references to Whitman were reprints; in Connecticut, Delaware, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Virginia fewer than 35% of references to Whitman were reprints. Reprinted blurbs or articles were by no means inherently less meaningful, and as I’ve already argued the decision to reprint was still locally-inflected. Nonetheless, a higher percentage of reprints reflects comparatively less distinctive engagement. Many references to Whitman in the West were merely passing mentions in longer articles on other topics (oft-mocked public figures, New England preaching, bohemianism). This type of reference testifies to Whitman’s widespread recognizability but only in assigning him tertiary importance: indeed, many of

76. See note footnote 37
Figure 1.10: "My Indian Love," a parody of Joaquin Miller’s style and subject matter “My Indian Love.” Published in the *State Rights Democrat* (Albany, OR), Nov. 17, 1871, 4.

these articles mention Miller in the same breath. 78 Western newspapers did show particular

78. In addition to “Standard Objects of Abuse” and “Types from Bohemia” in the note above, see “Items of Interest,” *Daily Los Angeles Herald* (CA), February 16, 1884, 6, [https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042459/1884-02-16/ed-1/seq-6/](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042459/1884-02-16/ed-1/seq-6/)
interest in Whitman when they found him topical, as when he published an essay on slang and several pieces in poetry and prose on the Battle of the Little Bighorn. But more often, Western references to Whitman – much like Eastern references to Miller – tended to either straightforwardly fawn over him or simply disparage him. As the *Los Angeles Herald* observed, “[Whitman’s] aggressiveness seems to leave no middle ground. He is either a genius of colossal proportions or an immense wind bag.” As with Miller, lower frequency of reference in a region coincides with less-nuanced and less unique reference. Western reception of Whitman attests his national popularity but lacks the distinctive attentiveness and engagement that fueled Miller’s regional reputation there.

Miller was referenced more frequently in the West than elsewhere – and more frequently than Whitman in the West – not because readers believed him to be more accurately or representatively or authentically Western but precisely because they were uncertain about Miller’s relation to the region. This uncertainty uniquely prompted Western readers to evaluate these very categories in order to consider what made Miller Western, and by extension popular representation of the West more broadly: which manners of dress or dialect, which settings, which tropes, which historical events, which rhythms. The newspaper in its localized postbellum form enabled the discussion of Miller to become a proliferating print-mediated communal activity, in which reader-poets responded to previously-printed poems, correspondents responded to rumors, reviewers responded to widely-reprinted blurbs, etc. Engaging in these conversations also provided Western readers a particularly well-suited occasion to establish their greater discernment on matters pertaining to the West than Eastern readers and thereby to distinguish themselves regionally. Miller’s regional repu-


tation consists in the fact that this qualitative difference in print engagement drives the quantitative difference in frequency of reference.

4. Literary Form and Cultural Geographic Formation

Why, then, did a regional reputation develop around an author like Joaquin Miller and his work and not around one like Bret Harte? Career decisions did play some role. Though Miller lived outside the West for years at a time in New York, Washington D.C., England, and Italy, he repeatedly returned to the Pacific Coast, and when he did he involved himself in regional events and politics. Miller also continued to contribute to Western periodicals like the Overland and the Californian from afar even while simultaneously publishing in the more-prestigious and higher-paying literary monthly magazines of the Northeast (including Harper’s and the Atlantic). In both respects Miller differs from Harte, who neither returned to the Pacific Coast nor published there again after famously leaving San Francisco and the editorship of the Overland for an infamous $10,000 contract with the Atlantic in 1871. Miller’s residential and publishing decisions helped keep him in newsprint consistently in the West even though newspapers there were less inclined to cover his press-making antics than their Eastern counterparts. Yet persona alone could not sustain Miller’s reputation, or any artist’s, had his literary output not continued to generate critical or popular interest. The writers and readers of Western newspapers continued to consider Miller a useful subject for regional definition, even when they disagreed in their interpretations, due to specific characteristics of his poetry. In delaying formal literary analysis to this fourth and final section, I thereby aim not only to provide new interpretations in light of the material conditions of cultural geography but to show the efficacy of literary form in shaping cultural geography.

Western readers shared their preference for Miller’s descriptions of nature with the author, who frequently considered this the best aspect of his poetry. Indeed, much of Miller’s most technically proficient verse is employed in scenic description, and he obliged
Western readers by writing more of it as his career progressed. Take the opening stanza of the five-stanza poem “The Sierras from the Sea”:

Serene and satisfied! supreme! as lone
As God, they loom like God’s archangels churl’d;
They look as cold as kings upon a throne;
The mantling wings of night are crush’d and curl’d
As feathers curl. The elements are hurl’d
From off their bosoms, and are bidden go,
Like evil spirits, to an under-world.
They stretch from Cariboo to Mexico,
A line of battle-tents in everlasting snow.

As this stanza demonstrates, Miller’s work shared several qualities common to popular poetry of the nineteenth century. Miller generally remained within an accessible vocabulary in which one-syllable words abound, and he almost always wrote in either iambs or a combination (often haphazard) of iambs and anapests. But “The Sierras by the Sea” also exhibits several hallmarks of Miller’s style, the combination of which begins to indicate his own innovations that brought success with Western readers. The stanza begins by apotheosizing the mountain range familiar to Miller and his Pacific Coast readers, “as lone / As God”; it adds an apt simile without pausing or returning for further development, and it concludes by extending the image spatially “from Cariboo to Mexico.” Even under such conventional circumstances as extolling a poet’s homeland, Miller tended to avoid the archaic pronouns typical of sentimental verse. Compare Harte’s “San Francisco”: “Serene, indifferent of Fate / Thou sittest at the Western Gate.” “The Sierras from the Sea” uses a combination of end-stopped lines for emphasis, as in “cold as kings upon a throne;” and enjambed lines to extend the action of verbs across line breaks in the act of reading, as in “curl’d” and “hurl’d,” which lend added movement to an otherwise stationary scene. Miller’s treatment of Western nature, almost always in landscape rather than miniature, is akin to the flattering depictions produced by the region’s boosters, full of vast panoramas, grandiose powers, and exuberant tone: landscapes to feel proud of.

81. Miller, *The Complete Poetical Works of Joaquin Miller*, 164. All subsequent citations of this text will be parenthetical.
Miller’s landscapes were also places to feel pride being in, a fact that surely contributed to Westerners’ appreciation of them. While “The Sierras from the Sea” is exclusively about nature, Miller often embeds human agents in his natural scenes. For example, landscape and laborer are descriptively intertwined in “In the Great Emerald Land”:

A morn in Oregon! The kindled camp
Upon the mountain brow that broke below
In steep and grassy stairway to the damp
And dewy valley, snapp’d and flamed aglow
With knots of pine. Above, the peaks of snow,
With under-belts of sable forests, rose
And flash’d in sudden sunlight. To and fro
And far below, in lines and winding rows,
The herders drove their bands, and broke the deep repose. (166)

In fewer than five lines, this stanza moves swiftly and strikingly between intimate camp fire to a sweeping panorama and back to crackling pine knots. The following sentence extends the panorama even farther upward to the “peaks of snow” where sunrise pierces the horizon with a sudden blinding flash of light. In the wake of this revelatory image, a team of herders gradually come into focus clause by clause. These sudden shifts in scale generate the effect of the sublime without the expense of diminutivizing the scene’s human figures, using the full space of Miller’s characteristically-long stanzas (by the standards of contemporaneous popular poetry) to hold the human scale and the geological scale in tandem. By constantly zooming in and out, Miller renders (and flatters) his laboring Oregonians, ordinary though they may be, as equally mythic as their surroundings.

Herders and prospectors had of course already become common types in writing about the West, in no small part due to Harte’s short stories in the late 1860s, but Miller’s usage of these types varies from Harte’s in important ways. To illustrate, note Harte’s “The Mountain Heart’s-Ease,” which deploys a succinct version of the affective formula that

83. Western tropes also owed much to the traveling shows and dime novel proto-Westerns that were fast becoming some of the most popular lower-class entertainments of the postbellum decades. In their work Harte and Miller worked with this wider field of Western Americana. If, as Michael Denning argues, “the world of dime fiction was a separate world – in terms of production, reading public, and conventions, – not only from the literary fiction of the nineteenth century, but from the popular fiction of genteel culture,” Harte and Miller were uniquely able to cross this divide. Michael Denning, Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America (New York: Verso Books, 1987), 4.
made him famous. The poem addresses a heart’s-ease – another name for the wild pansy of the violet family – the sight of which inspires a miner to wistfully pause his work:

But in his eyes a mist unwonted rises,
   And for a moment clear
Some sweet home face his foolish thought surprises,
   And passes in a tear,–

Some boyish vision of his Eastern village,
   Of uneventful toil,
Where golden harvests followed quiet tillage
   Above a peaceful soil.

One moment only; for the pick, uplifting,
   Through root and fibre cleaves,
And on the muddy current slowly drifting
   Are swept by bruised leaves.

And yet, O poet, in thy homely fashion,
   Thy work thou dost fulfill,
For on the turbid current of his passion
   Thy face is shining still!

“The Mountain Heart’s-Ease” takes a Western type, the rugged prospector, and reveals a soft side (the “unwonted” tear, the “boyish vision”) in order to generate readerly sympathy. This sympathy is modeled by the titular plant, which the final stanza punningly addresses as a poet because like a poet it possesses the capacity to put the heart at ease. The flower is even anthropomorphized so that its face can shine with tears in response. Harte’s short stories are full of such scenes: the tender miners of “The Luck of the Roaring Camp,” sentimental gamblers like the recurring Jack Hamlin, and prostitutes with hearts of gold like The Duchess in “The Outcasts of Poker Flat.” But as Tara Penry insists, we mustn’t be too fast to take Harte as just a sentimental moralist or just a humorist. Penry argues that Harte’s work engages in a kind of “Western metanarrative,” simultaneously supplying heartwarming conventions – “narrative sympathy[,] mutual knowledge[,] the primacy of loyalty” – as well as their critique such that “in Harte’s Gold Rush, the nation could read its mixed feelings about the sentimental literature it had grown up with.”

85. Tara Penry, “‘Tennessee’s Partner’ as Sentimental Western Metanarrative,” American Literary Realism 36, no. 2 (2004): 161.
Regional Reputations

Mountain Heart’s-Ease” this doubleness lies in the tongue-in-cheek substitution of a flower for the sentimentalizing office of the popular poet, the poem’s subject of address. Harte is able to produce both sympathy for the miner and a laugh at the mechanism by which that sympathy is produced.

If Harte appealed broadly to readers by making Western types accessible and transparent, Miller instead asserted those types’ opacity to outsiders. Throughout his work, Miller insists on the primacy of experience and the fact that readers lacking firsthand knowledge of the West will necessarily lack in understanding. “The Heroes of My West” contains his most forceful expression of this point:

The proud and careless pass in palace car
Along the line you blazon’d white with bones;
Pass swift to people and possess and mar
Your lands with monuments and letter’d stones
Unto themselves. Thank God! this waste disowns
Their touch. His everlasting hand has drawn
A shining line around you. Wealth bemoans
The waste your splendid grave employs. Sleep on,
No hand shall touch your dust this side of God and dawn. (169-170)

Here Miller parallels the East-to-West transit of mid-century pioneers with that of postbellum tourists and investors to juxtapose the hardship and sacrifice of the former with the flippancy of the latter. Plosive consonance (“proud,” “pass,” “palace,” “people,” “possess”) heightens the disdain. The stanza’s pronoun usage reinforces the hard opposition between true Westerners and outsiders. Readers are either entitled to join the speaker in his intimate second-person relationship with the dead or roped in with the third-person plural that the desert “waste” disowns so firmly as to thrust “their touch” across a line break. “The Heroes of My West” asserts, like the possessive pronoun in its title, that the region’s provenance belongs to Westerners. Passages like this, strewn across Miller’s work, encourage regional contradistinction much like that practiced in Western newspaper responses to Eastern readings of Miller. Such passages’ insistence on the idea of regional difference suited them for conversations about regional difference.

Harte’s practice of Western metanarrative, stacking tropes and layering with irony, is once again a useful counterpoint to what one might call Miller’s practice of reforging
Western ur-narrative, paring down types to essential features. Compare “The Mountain Heart’s-Ease” to its counterpart in Miller’s corpus, the conclusion of “The Arizonian.” “The Arizonian” is a long poem about a Rip Van Winkle-like protagonist who returns East after decades prospecting in Arizona to find his one-time fiancée married to another (and a mother).

“And give no thought, or care, or labor
For maid or man, good name or neighbor;
For I gave all as the years went over—
Gave all my youth, my years and labor,
And a heart as warm as the world is cold,
For a beautiful, bright, and delusive lie:
Gave youth, gave years, gave love for gold;
Giving and getting, yet what have I?” (7)

Here as elsewhere, Miller’s men pointedly do not cry. Types are vindicated, valorized, and figured as aspirational even in their faults. The Arizonian muses stoically “For what is it all, in the words of fire, / But a vexing of soul and a vain desire?” even though he has lived with (and abandoned) another woman in the interim (7). These facts points to a more important underlying difference between the two writers: where Harte makes characters sympathetic, Miller makes situations melodramatic. Where “The Mountain Heart’s-Ease” emphasizes feeling and the moment of feeling, “The Arizonian” emphasizes converging pressures of fate, society, and nature. Such presentation crystallizes these pressures into the convenient shorthand of the type. Unlike Harte, who Harold Kolb argues used narratorial separation from characters to achieve “the distance [...] required for humor,” Miller made his poems even more conducive (and contentious) for discussing Western types by employing various

86. On the topic of men and tears, from Miller’s “Even So”:

“No, not a tear. Do men complain?
The outer wound will show a stain,
And we may shriek at idle pain;
But pierce the heart, and not a word,
Or wail, or sign, is seen or heard.” (53)
forms of first-hand narration. As in the Western reception of “Kit Carson’s Ride,” heightening situational tension and collapsing the distance between poems and their speakers made Miller’s poems more provocative for readers in the region they claimed to represent.

To these ends, Miller often turned to the historical inspirations for Western types. As already seen, Miller often located his works in specific, actually-existing Western places, such as the Sierras, San Francisco Bay, Mount Hood, and Death Valley, even when not essential to the events or descriptions contained therein. He took a similar approach with characters, frequently referencing and rewriting familiar legends and forebears of regional history. Miller wrote some of his most popular poems over the course of his career about the likes of Kit Carson, Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, George Custer, Hank Monk, Joaquin Murietta, and William Walker. In doing so, he cleverly grafted his own aspirations onto more firmly-enshrined regional figures, as Nathaniel Lewis argues, as part of a “legitimizing strategy”: “as he sought to represent the West, he also argued that the West represented him—that those associated sites emblematized his canonical condition.” Yet Miller’s direct references also served a more important, more basic function than authorial legitimation, especially since the legitimacy of Miller’s work was so often the animating question in his reception: they also expanded the range of conversations in which readers could reference Miller’s work, especially in the West. Whether or not they agreed with any given depiction, Western readers’ fluency with these places and persons made Miller’s poems easily discussable or debatable.

87. In prose, Harte’s narrators are characteristically one or more degrees removed from the events they recount: the aloof camp-member of “The Luck of the Roaring Camp,” the anonymous interloper of “Miggs,” or the second-hand reteller of “Brown of Calaveras.” Harte achieved comic separation in poetry without a narrator by writing in dialect, where the joke is almost always at the expense of the unaware dialect speaker. Tellingly, the most famous of these, “Plain Language from Truthful James” or “The Heathen Chinee,” became so in spite of its comic separation rather than because of it: readers, missing the joke, laughed with James’ racism rather than laughing at his hypocrisy. Harold H Kolb, “The Outcast of Literary Flat: Bret Harte as Humorist,” American Literary Realism, 1870-1910 23, no. 2 (1991): 56.


Lengthier narrative poems like “The Arizonian” had their benefits in the postbellum cultural field. They signaled aesthetic aspirations and, besides, literary magazines usually paid by the line. But long narrative poems also presented a hurdle for broader dissemination. Harte faced a similar hurdle. His often-comic Western poems, while shorter than Miller’s, had to be reprinted in full in order for their punchlines to land. Miller faced his dilemma more easily than Harte by making his long poems easily excerptable. His verse frequently detours into distinct ten- to thirty-line asides on such conventional subjects as landscapes, love, pioneer sacrifice, beautiful women, poetry, or death before returning to the main current of plot; even sections of action in his poems are neatly self-contained. The utility of excerptability was not lost on Miller. In fact, Miller first published three of the poems quoted above – “The Sierras from the Sea,” “In the Great Emerald Land,” and “The Heroes of My West” – as part one much longer poem, “By the Sun-Down Seas,” in *Songs of the Sun-Lands* (1873). Some of the component parts of this long poem, though undifferentiated in book format, had been previously published separately in magazines—but not all. When reprinted with new material in *The Danites and Other Choice Selections from Joaquin Miller* (1878), “By the Sun-Down Seas” and many of his other poems were subdivided differently into even shorter poems. While reviewers in Eastern periodicals criticized the drawn-out plots that could result from this practice, the quality of excerptability made Miller’s poems well-adapted for circulation in an age when newspaper editors reprinted literary snippets and readers kept commonplace books.

The excerptability of Miller’s long poems complimented the way Westerners in particular engaged with them in newspapers. Publishing newly-excerpted versions of poems promoted their recirculation. Miller’s own practice of re-dividing and reprinting his poetry encouraged editors to do the same: with at least three differently-lengthed versions of the poems

90. For example, in order for “Jack of the Tules” to be funny, one must read not only the concluding revelation that the speaker has been bluffing the entire poem but also enough of the preceding stanzas to know that the bluff has become increasingly untenable; for the punchline at the end of the dialogue poem “Artemis in Sierra” to land – that “Artemis” desires neither of her suitors – one must read through enough of the setup to know that each suitor’s estimation of his chances (and fears concerning his rival’s) is exaggerated.


92. For example, “In the Great Emerald Land” was divided into two poems, “A Morn in Oregon” and “Sunshine After the Storm,” with one stanza removed altogether. It is not clear if Miller himself or an editor made this choice.
same verses in print at the same time to choose from, they had ample models for doing so. This meant that Western editors, with their more varied readings of Miller, could easily excerpt his poems in accord with the kind of poet they or their readers felt he was or should be. By excerpting differently from whatever new Miller poem was making the rounds, Western newspapers further instigated discussion by providing multiple different versions from which readers could form opinions. Indeed, the same publication might reprint excerpts so different that they might not be recognizable as belonging to the same poem; the same reviewer or correspondent might change their evaluation of the poet after encountering a different reprinted fragment. Miller’s excerptability helped fuel debate and imaginations; it made the author malleable to the regional readers most interested in sorting, reconsidering, and reworking his poems.

The basis of Miller’s Western reception, then, lies in the particular combination of formal tendencies that characterized his work. Miller received more attention and more frequent attention than Harte from Westerners in newsprint, despite similarities in subject matter and despite Harte’s greater popularity nationally, because Miller’s work was especially conducive to exploring questions of region and regional identity in the decades immediately following the Civil War. This isn’t to say that Harte was ill-suited for Western circulation or that any given individual reader was conscious of any given aesthetic decision in either author’s work. Rather, I have tried to show how specific formal qualities made Miller’s verse uniquely well-calibrated overall for the conversations that circulated around it in the West—conversations that, like Miller’s poems, were concerned with establishing cultural geographic distinctions. Miller didn’t create this pattern of reception ex nihilo, but his work wasn’t incidental to it either. Instead, Miller’s regional reputation represents a particular amenability between a body of regional writing, united by shared formal characteristics, and a body of regional readers, united by shared interest in what that writing purported to represent. It is precisely this amenability that makes both corpus and readers together regional.

Attending more closely to how the conditions of cultural geography conditioned the relationship between reading practices, local print forms, literary texts, and authors elevates dimensions of those texts that can otherwise go overlooked. Indeed, formal and stylistic differences underlie the functional distinction I proposed above between regional fiction and regional fiction read regionally, a distinction obscured by the contemporary scholarly framework of regionalism. More importantly, the dialectic between representations of region and the reception of those representations demonstrates the active role literature and specific literary qualities – not just Miller’s but in varying ways Coolbrith’s, Eggleston’s, Evans’, and Whitman’s – played in reproducing or even defining the peculiar kind of community that was a postbellum region. The West wasn’t simply the region that read Miller differently: reading Miller differently (or Eggleston, or Evans) was one of the practices through which its readers continually became Western (or Midwestern, or Southern, respectively). Similarly, as the uncertain debate over Miller’s authenticity exemplifies, particular locales didn’t read Miller in such a way because they were in the West: they belonged in the West by virtue of the fact that they read Miller in such a way and discussed him with adjacent locales that responded likewise. Region is the spatial manifestation of the sum of these dynamics. Despite the centralizing and incorporating tendencies of the period, literary texts and the regional diversity of literary representation as a whole reinforced in these concrete ways the heterogeneous cultural geography to which they were subject. As a result, as I show in the following chapter, regional patterns in readership pressured the editors of national magazines and national publishing houses to read regionally too.
CHAPTER 2
THE GEOGRAPHY OF GENRE: LITERARY MONTHLIES AND THE REGIONAL NOVEL

The inevitability that readers in different regions would read texts differently, and might not read them at all, had wide-reaching consequences for how authors wrote and editors published texts that they hoped would circulate across these regional differences. Nowhere was this problem so pressing or a solution so successful as in the literary monthly magazines that Nancy Glazener calls “the Atlantic Monthly group.” Literary monthlies were an elite cadre of similarly-structured, widely-circulating periodicals that played a greater role in shaping the American cultural field of the 1870s and 1880s than any other institution or print form. Critically- and popularly-acclaimed, these magazines—which included Harper’s, the Atlantic, the Century, and Lippincott’s—were the primary cultural gatekeepers of the period. This influence was by no means inevitable or certain, however. To circulate across the nation, literary monthlies needed to appeal to readers from multiple regions that inclined to disagreement over the use of such fundamental literary qualities as setting, subject matter, and narrative perspective. Editors needed to promote the development and configuration of formal techniques that could navigate this terrain of interpretive divergence.

Scholarly debates over the representation of regions have been structured by two intertwined assumptions: that it took place in short texts and that it belongs to a single genre, most commonly termed “regionalism.” This is purely a contemporary critical category and in this chapter I will treat it exclusively as such, but it has had a profound impact on our understanding of the period. Scholars who define regionalism as a genre of anti-

2. While the New Regionalists of the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s (and critical commentators) used “regionalism” both to describe their work and to establish continuity with their nineteenth-century predecessors, it is widely recognized that this particular term in fact did not enter the lexicon until after 1915. See Schroeder, "The Painting of Modern Light: Local Color before Regionalism"; Lutz, Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value.
patriarchal or anti-elite literary resistance, like Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, argue that “the individual sketch constitutes its essential form” by contributing to its resistance of narrative conventions and closure. Those who instead argue with Amy Kaplan that regionalism was a genre of touristic prose that solidified “urban middle-class readership [...] as an imagined community by consuming images of rural ‘others’ as both a nostalgic point of origin and a measure of cosmopolitan development” hold shortness paradigmatic as well.

As Richard Brodhead asserts, the defining feature of regionalism is the comparative ease, owing in part to its brevity, with which an aspiring author could write (or reader read) it.

Scholars who more recently have reframed or even renamed regionalism within the history of particular transnational fin-de-siècle aesthetic trends like folklore or local color, as Brad Evans and Jonathan Schroeder have, continue to emphasize short formats. Institutional history is at play here too. Even after entering the canon as a result of the work of feminist scholars beginning in the 1970s, the secondary position generally assigned to regionalism has privileged shorter texts in producing anthologies, syllabi, and scholarship.

This long-running attempt to delineate a single, formally-homogeneous regional-ism, however, has obfuscated our ability to recognize both the pervasiveness and the generic variety with which postbellum writers represented regions. In literary monthlies, all genres are regionalized: not just travel writing and ethnography but history, romance, and business journalism, as well as longer forms like serial reportage and serial novels. By genre here I mean a configuration of subject matter, stylistic conventions, point of view, formal structure, tropes, and so on that emerge through a dynamic of repeated use and consumption over time. In depicting cultural geography the genres found in literary monthlies vary widely,


such that the same region represented as nostalgic by one or exotic by another is just as often represented as chic or familiar. Defining a regional-ism in terms of only one of these genres, as some critics have done, bestows primacy where there is none and fails to grasp the broader system; defining regional-ism as a particular amalgamation, on the other hand, elides meaningful differences between genres that remain recognizably distinct through consistent patterns of repetition across the pieces and publications over time. In place of a regional-ism, a more capacious structural view of literary monthlies and their ubiquitous influence on postbellum publishing reveals a complex genre ecosystem saturated with region, in which genres are not distinguished by whether they represent region – they all do – but how.

The format of the novel brings the issue of region and genre to a head because, inherently neither short nor formally homogeneous, it defies the assumptions that have structured scholarly debates. Much of the literature containing the features critics typically associate with contemporary critical category of regional-ism (a participant-observer narrator, attentive anthropological description, a setting at a distance from major centers of socio-economic power) and much of the literary output of the authors that critics typically associate with it appeared in novel format. Yet these novels, many of which were first published serially in literary monthlies, remain secondary in scholarship on the period if they appear at all precisely because they resist tidy classification within any specific genre; when critics do discuss novels like *The Grandissimes* (1879) or *The Squatter and the Don* (1885) as belonging to regional-ism, they treat these novels as structurally equivalent to the short stories discussed alongside them. It is this multigeneric quality, I argue, that in defying any regional-ism also distinguishes the particular kind of text I call the regional novel, one of the most successful forms of the 1870s and 1880s in its own right. Following the structure of the literary monthly, the regional novel is a piece of long-form prose containing an array of distinct genres that, unlike the realist novel more broadly, are kept recognizably separate and that, unlike the picaresque, are held together by regional setting rather than character(s). Generic variety was not only an essential component of the literary monthly and the regional novel: it was fundamentally connected to cultural geography. Postbellum authors treated region much like they did genre: as a productive generalization of an aggregate of
individual instances that emerged through a dynamic of repeated invocation and reception over time.

My main content in this chapter is that the agents of literary production in the 1870s and 1880s responded to persistent regional divergences in reading and interpretive practices by cultivating a genre ecosystem that figured American cultural difference as geographic distance. Though some genres had strong associations with a single region, such as the plantation tradition with the South, authors and editors did not take this essentialist view for most genres. Instead, they treated each individual genre as corresponding to a particular distance between the cultural geographic position of the subject matter it depicted and the cultural geographic position of the readers it addressed. In this way authors and editors construed genre as geo-hermeneutic: as expressive of and amenable to different hermeneutic relations between text and reader determined by the cultural geographic distance between them. Magazine editors, and later the novelists they fostered, pursued national circulation not by imagining national synthesis but by representing each region separately to each other region. The resulting genre ecosystem attempted to systematize and manage a cultural field it simultaneously ideated as inter-regional.

In order to resituate the short fiction typically called regional-ism, the first section of this chapter presents a radically revised account of the genre ecosystem of the literary monthly magazines that primarily published it. I argue that the defining structural principle of these periodicals was their alignment of genres with geo-hermeneutic distances, according to which each region is represented from the perspective of each region. The second section charts the emergence of the regional novel within the context of a publishing industry under the sway of the literary monthlies, focusing on George Washington Cable’s publication history in the Century. By repeating characters, scenes, and topics in multiple genres, Cable’s regional novel The Grandissimes (1880) replicates the structure of the literary monthly and represents New Orleans from a variety of perspectives, a fact that allayed the Century editors’ fears of Southern outrage despite the novel’s at times biting critique of racism. In the third section, I extend this account of the regional novel with Mary Murfree’s

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8. While the particular formations discussed in this chapter do not disappear in 1890, a number of important developments in the early 1890s did however bring about a shift in the relationship between literature and cultural geography, which I will discuss in the next chapter.
masterpiece, *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains* (1885). Murfree’s novel at once casts a wider generic net – including religious fiction, detective fiction, legal discourse, and southwest humor – and reworks many of the characteristics we have come to expect from texts about specific locations and cultures: it not only dispenses with the participant-observer narrator but radically suspends the possibility of certain knowledge about persons or places. I conclude by turning to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), a novel long celebrated as a misfit among both regional-ism and “high” realism—for the same reasons these categories have occluded the regional novel. Reading Mark Twain’s novel as a regional novel helps us better understand its place in the cultural field and the conditions that enabled its success.

1. “We are nothing if not geographical”: the Genre Ecosystem and Geo-Hermeneutics of Literary Monthlies

Literary monthly magazines faced a significant challenge in the decade and a half following the Civil War: they needed a way to appeal to readers in different parts of the country separated, up to then, by distinct networks of cultural, economic, and political circulation. The monthlies that had existed prior to and during the Civil War, like *Harper’s* (1850) and the *Atlantic* (1857), had endorsed the North, strategically ruling out any organized attempt to circulate into the war-torn and infrastructure-deprived South. Lippincott’s and the *Century* (originally “Scribner’s”), founded in 1868 and 1870 respectively, lacked this history of explicit antagonism towards the South. All four were firmly grounded in the urban Northeast seaboard at a time when much of the South remained socio-economically separated and westward migration increasingly splintered “the North” of the Civil War lon-

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9. *Harper’s* was in no hurry to make this choice and only did so once it became evident that neutrality would not help their profits. See *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

10. *Scribner’s* became the *Century* when it parted ways with the publishing house of Charles Scribner’s Sons in 1881, shortly after the rise of Charles Scribner II. The editorial staff remained largely consistent. Scribner came to regret the mistake and founded a new *Scribner’s Magazine* in 1887. To avoid confusion, I will refer to the former periodical discursively as the *Century* for the entirety of its life.
Nancy Glazener is correct in an important sense that “the North's victory in the Civil War meant that the national influence of New England culture was dramatically confirmed,” but this didn’t mean that readers in these other regions were suddenly disposed towards consuming Mid-Atlantic or New England opinions on life and letters—often the opposite. Because the infrastructural capacity for national circulation did not guarantee national circulation, literary monthlies needed to cultivate regional constituencies without slighting others or impairing their own credibility in the process.

This need was perhaps most evident in literary monthlies’ attempt to navigate the North/South divide in their nonfiction accounts of the South in the wake of the Civil War, as in long-running and highly-successful series such as Edward King’s “The Great South” in the Century (1873-5) and the Atlantic’s Jonathan Baxter Harrison’s “Studies in the South” in the Atlantic (1882-3). As Jennifer Rae Greeson observes, these series portray the South as dependent on the rest of the nation yet distinguished from it, exotic yet comfortably comprehensible to Northern eyes: an “internal other” that literary monthlies represented as at once integral to the nation and opposed to it. On this basis and citing its affinity “the basic ideological contours of British Victorian travel writing about Africa,” Greeson compellingly argues that “The Great South” envisioned “the Reconstruction South as the nation’s own private Africa—as the domestic site upon which the United States would take up the mantle of global empire.” This, however, was only one dimension of these series. Greeson focuses her analysis to how the South was imaginatively constructed for Northern consumption and ideological counter-definition. But the associate editor of the Century, Robert Underwood Johnson, later identified that one of the major aims of “The Great South” was “catering to a southern audience.”

11. The phrase “Old Northwest” was widely used by the mid-1880s to distinguish what is now known as the Midwest from the areas further west that were inheriting the moniker “the West” at the same time (the phrase “Middle West,” which would succeed “Old Northwest” with the rise of the New Regionalists, did not enter wide use until the very end of the 1890s).


the text. As Mark J. Noonan argues, “The Great South” “offers [King’s] white, middle-class southern readers cause for real pride and optimism. To his northern readers, he presents a land that has suffered much and is deserving of a bright, prosperous future.” King’s success in “The Great South” lay in his ability to depict the South in such a way as to appeal alternately to readers from multiple regions: to present, over many entries in the multi-year series, both Northern and Southern fictions about the South.

Critics have long noted that literary monthlies represent America not as a nation but as a collection of regions. Pieces that take the nation for their cultural geographic scope are no more common than pieces about any single region. Many, like Harper’s “Fifty Years of American Art” or the Century’s “The American on the Stage,” are more nostalgic or retrospective than the average piece about a single region. Yet the double, divided appeal of “The Great South” complicates the idea that the variety found in literary monthlies adhered to something like the “model of unity-in-distinctiveness” that Carrie Tirado Bramen argues characterized cultural pluralist and literary regionalist thought at the end of the nineteenth century. Literary monthlies constituted a kind of “unity” in the sense that the same textual object brought together subjects and readers from disparate parts of the country. They achieved this, however, not by promoting a national unity underlying distinctiveness but precisely by playing into disunity, distinctly addressing readers as belonging to distinct regional groups. The passages in “The Great South” that courted Southern readers are not the ones that titillated Northern ones. Contemporaneous and retroactive statements by the principal editors of these publications show that they to varying degrees understood and sought this effect, but no individual strategically designed it in advance or exercised full control over it. The literary monthly was a cultural formation that resulted from the labors and relationships of an extensive network of agents within an increasingly

professionalized culture industry: hundreds of thousands of readers, hundreds of independent authors, vested publishing houses, (increasingly) advertisers, and, at any given time at each of the half-dozen magazines, multiple editors and dozens of editorial readers.

Series like “The Great South” are representative of literary monthlies’ broader attempt to balance appeals to readers in different regions, even if they stand out as the most calculated or extended efforts. More often, literary monthlies printed short pieces that each focalized one particular cultural-geographic perspective on one particular region. To read Harper’s, the Century, the Atlantic, or Lippincott’s in the 1870s or 1880s with any regularity is to encounter a catalogue of regions. Regions were by no means the subject of only a few limited modes of representation, nor were individual regions treated uniformly; each is represented through a spectrum of genres. Individual issues of a literary monthly almost always contained at least one piece about or set in New England, another about or in the South, another about or in the Pacific West, and so on. Similarly, they almost always contained at least one piece of business journalism, one piece of travel writing, one piece of local color fiction, and so on. While new regions and genres caught on and old ones fell out of rotation, the essential relation between the two remained the same. In any given span of six to twelve months, each of the major literary monthlies published nearly every possible combination of region and genre. This interaction between cultural geography and genre was central to the literary monthlies’ structure and operation.

Over the three summer months of 1879, to focus on a useful but by no means exceptional example, Harper’s ran three unrelated pieces that each presented a distinct perspective on New England. The first of these, “Snug Hamlet and Hometown” by W. H. Gibson, is a short piece of descriptive prose narrated from the perspective of a group of wealthy, educated visitors taking pleasure in observing the “picturesque” human and natural geography of a particular locale. Left unnamed – “any one familiar with the picturesque boroughs of the Housatonic” will recognize it – the hamlet is presented as the quintessential “charming New England town.”

common genre in literary monthlies, a nonfiction equivalent to local color fiction that is primarily distinguished by its lack of a fictional plot involving locals. This genre’s primary audience likely did not belong to the demographic space it describes, as scholars have argued of regional-ism more broadly, for it depicts locations from the perspective of an outsider encountering that space as if for the first time in order to soak in the local colors before going home.20 Gibson clarifies this fact in the very first paragraph: the narrative perspective is not that of New England but of the “exodus from New York,” the Mid-Atlantic gaze funneled northward by rail.21 In so identifying its perspective, “Smug Hamlet and Hometown” identifies by region the audience to which this narrative perspective corresponds.22

The second of these three pieces, “The Draining of a Village” by George E. Warring, contributes a very different perspective on New England. The article describes a moderate engineering feat in the paper mill town of Cumberland Mills and the “comfort and welfare” this brings to residents.23 Warring uses first person narration, first recounting several of the town’s social and environmental features. The piece also has an eminently practical dimension. Printed with a number of clear diagrams and instructive explanations, “The Draining of a Village” occupies the intersection of two other mainstay genres in literary monthlies: science/technology journalism and the advice or local interest piece. The drainage process it explains is meant to be replicable in similar towns – small to medium populations, long-established, near a river, home to modest industrial works – to achieve the same results. Such a town could be anywhere, but in the 1870s this combination of conditions was most commonly found in and associated with New England. Cumberland Mills becomes a geographic synecdoche for the region. On the basis of applicability “The Draining of a Village”

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22. In the period, the area now most frequently called the Mid-Atlantic region was referred to as the “Middle States” (including Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania). This is the designation used, for example, by N. W. Ayer & Son’s *American Newspaper Annual* through the end of the nineteenth century. Literary monthlies also aggregated this geographic area into one region with relative consistency. One example, “A Peninsular Canaan” – which describes the surrounds of the Chesapeake and Delaware Bays – in fact appeared in three parts in the three issues of Harper’s immediately preceding “Smug Hamlet and Hometown.” Howard Pyle, “A Peninsular Canaan,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 58, no. 6 (May 1879): 801–818.

addresses New Englanders like those it describes as its primary readers. For these reasons, the piece operates regionally even if it does not initially appear to belong within the narrow frame scholars have become accustomed to associate with regional-ism.

Comparison with these two pieces shows how the appeal of the third, “Narragansett Pier” by Charles Carroll, functions differently. It describes a seaside resort town and the socialites who visit there, a short piece of fashionable touristic prose in the most literal sense. The piece begins by inviting readers into an act of geographic positioning: “the reader who will take the trouble to look at a state or county map of Rhode Island (they come to the same thing) will notice that Narragansett Bay[...][24] This narrative address implies that the reader is not only unfamiliar with the state of Rhode Island but has no practical reason to be otherwise, indicating that “Narragansett Pier,” like “Snug Hamlet and Hometown,” addresses its readers as non-New Englanders. But given that the article takes resort socialites as its subject matter, the readers it addresses aren’t the “New-Yorkers” and “Philadelphians” that constitute its predominant visitors either.[25] Indeed, the individuals who give Narragansett “a definite local color” belong to the same demographic as those who were looking for local color in “Snug Hamlet and Hometown.”[26] Whereas that piece focused on aesthetic practice, this one observes social practice. In addition to housing its “indigenous” New Englanders, then, the location of Narragansett is something of a displaced Mid-Atlantic colony that also stands in for that region. “Narragansett Pier” addresses readers unfamiliar with both the local scenery and such scenes of “aristocratic” outings. The piece locates its readers as culturally and geographically distant – which amounts to the same thing – from the Mid-Atlantic, somewhere West or Midwest.

Encountering a group of varied pieces about the same region in succession, as in “Snug Hamlet and Hometown,” “The Draining of a Village,” and “Narragansett Pier,” illuminates the role generic variety played in representing cultural geography in literary monthlies. Each of these pieces achieves two things. First, despite their differences, they insistently locate their particular setting and subject matter within the frame of cultural


25. Carroll 165.

geography. This is done by invoking region, either explicitly or through widely-circulating tropes, as a productive generalization of cultural space: a unit large enough to be easily recognizable to a geographically-extensive audience (unlike the Housatonic River or even Rhode Island) but small enough to identify distinctive and internally-consistent cultural practices. Region serves as an organizing concept for content, setting, tropes, and more, which is why authors so often clarified it in their opening paragraphs. Second, each of these pieces locates their reader within a regional space as well according to the same logic – not simply on one side of an insider/outsider binary but according to a sliding scale of preexisting familiarity in which greater knowledge correlates with spatial proximity. As these three pieces suggest, no single genre (or subject matter, or affect) dominates the representation of any given region for long in a literary monthly. The same regions that were depicted as retrospective or peripheral in one issue could be cutting edge or chic in the next. Taken in comparison within this context, each genre facilitates a different manner of representing region through its particular combination of not only mode of address and narrative point of view but stylistic conventions, formal structure, and subject matter as well. Furthermore, these different manners of representation are themselves consistently regionalized, that is, correlated with the perspective of different possible reader locations within cultural geography. As one piece in Harper’s appropriately declared, “we are nothing if not geographical.”


Genres in literary monthlies differ in, and thus are distinguished by, the way they locate both their subject matter and their reader within the field of cultural geography.

As Richard Brodhead, Brad Evans, Nancy Glazener, and others have shown, authors in literary monthlies often borrowed and blurred elements from the other genres that those periodicals published. Yet despite frequent stylistic similarities and shared formal techniques, these genres nonetheless remained distinct. Literary monthlies in fact printed a significantly broader array of discernible prose genres than literary scholars typically cover: in addition to what I’ve already called local color nonfiction, science/technology journalism, advice or local interest pieces, and travel writing, they published folklore, ethnographic
writing, art criticism, history, economics/business journalism, plantation fiction, humor sketches, realist fiction, and domestic romance throughout the 1870s and 1880s. The many pieces that participated in two different genres or occupied their intersection, like “The Draining of a Village,” are clearly recognizable as such because their component parts frequently appeared by themselves (or as parts in other combinations) elsewhere in literary monthlies. Spatial proximity on the material page or temporal proximity between issues can be understood as drawing attention to continuities between pieces, but these forms of proximity also facilitate juxtaposition, throwing into relief seemingly-minor differences that distinguish one kind of writing from its close relatives. It is this pull and push of genre, cross-pollination and counter-distinction, what Derrida calls “the counter-law that constitutes this very law” of genre, that made literary monthlies such an artistically fruitful space in the 1870s and 1880s. This same dynamic is what made – and continues to make – regional categories pleasurable to debate or discuss.

Local color fiction remained distinct within this broader genre ecosystem because it facilitated a distinctive manner of representing regions that the other kinds of writing appeared alongside it were less equipped to fulfill. Sarah Orne Jewett’s “An Autumn Holiday,” which appeared in Harper’s a little over a year after “Small Hamlet and Hometown,” is a representative example. Like much of Jewett’s fiction, this short sketch is set in New England. Scholars have noted the sketch for its account of Daniel/Patience Gunn, an old veteran who “would work all morning, stiddy as any of them men” and then put on a dress and cap in the evening to become “a dreadful ordinary-looking woman.” This tale, told to the narrator in the second half of “An Autumn Holiday,” is first prefaced by the narrator’s walk to meet the friends from whom she will hear it. Passing a half-hidden grave and a newly-discovered glenn, she reflects on the capacity of careful attention to reveal new details in seemingly-mastered environments: “Every walk of this kind proves itself a tour of exploration and discovery, and the fields of my own town, which I think I know so well, are always new fields. I find new ways to go, new sights to see, new friends among the things

that grow, new treasures and pleasures." These musings prepare the narrator – and the reader – to read the tale of Daniel/Patience for its significance to the Gunn family, the unnamed town, and the broader regional space it stands for.

“An Autumn Holiday” exhibits the two essential components of the local color fictional sketch. The first is a locally-situated occasion for newfound sympathy – what Fetterley and Pryse have called modeling “empathetic response.” The second is that the protagonist achieves this newfound sympathy through discerning attention to aesthetic detail, drawing on nineteenth-century theories of color, painting, and perception as Nicholas Gaskill and Jonathan Schroeder have shown. Though much writing in this genre is by or about women, it is not, as Fetterley and Pryse have argued, uniformly so. Conversely, though much writing in this genre promotes “a realist pedagogy” of “self-cultivation,” it does not promise “the individual the agency required to break free from his or her environment and become more human.” The opening walk in “An Autumn Holiday” instead suggests that it is precisely through one’s own environment that one becomes more human, that is, more perceptive and more understanding; local color fiction shows readers the region they think they know but with redoubled attention. If “An Autumn Holiday” is particularly illustrative of this fact (and uniquely well-written), it is not structurally distinctive. Within the next few issues, Harper’s printed formally equivalent stories – with locally-embedded narrators that deploy renewed attention to aesthetic detail to more sympathetically understand persons or environments – set in the South and the Midwest.

In the most basic form in which it repeatedly appeared, local color fiction in literary monthlies did not in itself include the narrative perspective of an outsider. This formal attribute in fact marks the intersection of the otherwise separable genres of local color fiction and ethnographic writing. Much of the debate over what Tom Lutz has called hegemonic versus anti-hegemonic interpretations of the writing that scholars have called

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regional-ism boils down to the fact that the two positions often correspond to two different genres, local color fiction and ethnographic local color fiction, that read as distinct on the pages of literary monthlies. Brodhead, for one, mistakenly infers that “regional writing was not produced for the cultures it was written about” because he claims that the cultures it described “were often nonliterate and always orally based” when this was more often not the case. The distinction between local color fiction and ethnographic local color fiction, however, does not inherently align with a relation to power or authorial authenticity. To be published in a leading publication inescapably constitutes a relation to power, and readers treated authenticity as a subject of discussion rather than a given quality of a text (Chapter 1). Instead, the distinction between local color fiction and ethnographic local color fiction is generic in what Tzvetan Todorov calls the functional sense; upholding this distinction is not only a matter of acknowledging a pattern of maintained formal differentiation but of recognizing two distinct functions within the publications in which they appeared. If the modeling of sympathy was the key element distinguishing the genres of local color fiction and ethnographic local color fiction from local color nonfiction and travel writing or ethnography – all four of which privilege aesthetic attention in common – the most important difference between local color fiction and ethnographic local color fiction was the readers they addressed.

Again, specific genres did not exclusively or inherently correspond with specific regions. Rather, particular genres were deployed in literary monthlies as more amenable to mediating particular distances between the cultural-geographic location of the subjects they described and the cultural-geographic location of the readers they addressed. While literary monthlies published exceptions and irregular hybrids, most of the commonest genres

35. I borrow this useful characterization from Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value.*
38. There are, nonetheless, some genres that are more closely affiliated with one regional perspective or one regional setting. Business journalism, for example, is often narrated by and addressed to Mid-Atlantic readers.
in these magazines can be classified accordingly (Figure 2.1). Ethnography, travel writing, and historical romance express geo-hermeneutic remoteness between their subjects’ and their readers’ regions. Local color fiction, domestic romance, and advice or local interest pieces predominately express geo-hermeneutic proximity between their subjects and their readers, to such a degree that these genres generally locate the two in the same region. Local color nonfiction, ethnographic local color fiction, business journalism, and “high” realism express various positions in between. They require a degree of geo-hermeneutic distance but they also depend on a certain amount of proximity: a balance between unfamiliarity and accessibility. There are of course other characteristics that could be used to classify the repeated and sustained differences between genres in literary monthlies, most notably what we might characterize as fictionality, sympathy of depiction, or empathetic distance. But these distinctions work in conjunction with cultural geography, specifying the nature of the geo-hermeneutic relationship that generally takes precedence in framing and distinguishing individual pieces. The authors and editors of literary monthlies developed a working construction of genre as a mediation that figured one particular location in cultural geography as more hermeneutically available to readers in another, and they did so by means of the conceptual generalization of region.

This is not to say that readers consumed literary monthlies exclusively through the framework of region or that readers could not make sense of pieces that addressed regions other than their own. Of course, these pieces and the genres they exemplify often also operated according to differences in class, gender, and race, as well as the rural/urban divide more generally. Indeed, the contents of literary monthlies encompassed a wider range of these other categories of difference, and this breadth helped literary monthlies

39. Genres abstaining from cultural geography aside, the humor sketch might at first seem to resist geo-hermeneutic categorization; but it is in fact an exception that proves the rule. Most humor sketches in literary monthlies are regionalized through their participation within one of the other genres that does (local color fiction, ethnographic local color, travel writing). (As I will argue in the concluding section of this chapter, this is central to Mark Twain’s fiction.) Plantation fiction is the major case of a genre that sustains two concurrent geo-hermeneutic relations. It achieves this through the structure of the frame narrative, which allows plantation fiction to double as local color for Southern readers and ethnographic local color for readers in other regions – though not necessarily all, at least not uniformly, as I show in Chapter 4. While critics have long recognized this function of plantation fiction, describing it in these terms illuminates its functional continuities with other genres in the context of literary monthlies and the structural features that contributed to its success.

appeal to a wider range of readerships much as cultural geography did. Nor does every piece in a literary monthly signal region. But of all the available frameworks for representing, organizing, and appealing to cultural difference, authors cued region the most consistently and explicitly – in no small part because they could use the concept of region conveniently as a metonymic shorthand for a flexible cluster of other political, economic, and social positions. Literary monthlies regionalized subjects and readers that were not inherently or exclusively geographic in themselves. That the authors and editors of these periodicals did so with such persistency over such an extended period of time testifies to the pervasiveness of cultural geography in the period as a means of organizing cultural production. By extension, the tendency toward regionalizing content in literary monthlies thereby testifies to the efficacy of this strategy as a means for reaching a multi-regional readership.

This genre ecosystem’s ability to sustain an array of different regional perspectives on an array of different regions emerges more clearly at a slightly longer duration of reading.
Lippincott’s spring 1881 volume provides another representative example. In April, the magazine published short ethnographic piece about life “On A California Ranch” from the perspective of a young schoolmistress from the Midwest; in June, it published a piece of business journalism about the economics of the wealthiest herders from the perspective of a privileged Mid-Atlantic visitor, “Among the Cow-Boys.”\footnote{Louis Coffin Jones, “On A California Ranch,” \textit{Lippincott’s Magazine} 27, no. 4 (April 1881): 366–375; Louis C. Bradford, “Among the Cow-Boys,” \textit{Lippincott’s Magazine} 27, no. 6 (June 1881): 565–571.} But in March Lippincott’s had published “The Kid: A Chapter of Wyoming,” a local color story narrated from a Western perspective in which a “Kid” from New York is thrown from his horse to his death instead of triumphing over the region. The story introduces its narrative perspective with a claim to Western experience – “we ‘boys’ were what four years and upward of cattle-ranching had made us” – before immediately jumping into technical terminology that it doesn’t bother to define for those readers who don’t already know it.\footnote{[Anonymous], “‘The Kid’: A Chapter of Wyoming,” \textit{Lippincott’s Magazine} 27, no. 3 (March 1881): 276.} Meanwhile, other regions underwent an equivalent generic variety of depictions. “Down the Red River of the North,” for example, is a piece of travel writing set in Minnesota and Manitoba from and for the perspective of “a visitor who has been rushed away from the whirl of an Eastern city.”\footnote{Alice Ilgenfritz, “Down the Red River of the North,” \textit{Lippincott’s Magazine} 27, no. 1 (February 1881): 121.} By contrast, two months later Lippincott’s began serializing \textit{Craque-o’-Doom}, a domestic romance novel about Midwesterners in the Midwest by Mary Hartwell Catherwood.\footnote{Catherwood largely and successfully devoted her career to this combination of region and genre. M. H. Catherwood, “Craque-o’-Doom,” \textit{Lippincott’s Magazine} 27, no. 4 (April 1881): 350–366.} In one installment of \textit{Craque-o’-Doom}, several characters briefly fantasize about escaping the cold Midwestern winter in Florida. They do not possess the resources for such a trip, but the New England protagonists of the fashionably-touristic travel story “The Occultation of a Honey-Moon” made the excursion two Lippincott’s issues previously.\footnote{Louise Stockton, “The Occultation of a Honey-Moon,” \textit{Lippincott’s Magazine} 27, no. 1 (January 1881): 74–81.} In May, however, both of these pieces got their comeuppance in the local interest piece “The Truth about Florida”: “to judge from the reports of interested people and newspapers, Florida would seem to be a sort of fairly-land, an earthly paradise, where every one [sic] lives a life of pastoral poetry [...] while, on the other hand, the story of some who ‘have been there’ conveys a dreary impression of barren sand, uncertain temperature, fogs, chills, fever,
poverty, and general forlornness.\footnote{46} In critiquing the varied biases of far-off fantasizers and fleeting travelers, “The Truth about Florida” astutely identifies the alignment of genre and geography—though Lippincott’s publication as one of numerous pieces about Florida over the years undermines any claim to singular authority.

This outline of Lippincott’s spring 1881 run helps bring together the various elements of the interaction between region and genre in literary monthlies. First, these pieces emphasize regional settings and regionally-addressed readers even when participating in genres that (outside of literary monthlies) needn’t necessarily emphasize either, as in Craque-o’-Doom and “The Occultation of a Honey-Moon” respectively. Second, as with Harper’s pieces on New England, literary monthlies represent cultural geographic positions through a variety of genres each focalized through a different regional perspective, depicting a particular region (such as the West) in a manner presented as more accessible to readers from different cultural geographic positions (the West in “The Kid’: A Chapter of Wyoming,” the Midwest in “On A California Ranch,” and the Mid-Atlantic in “Among the Cow-Boys”). Third, these genres are readily identifiable because of the regularity with which each corresponds to a particular geo-hermeneutic distance between the regions of the subjects they depict and the regions of the readers they address. Even though they are set in and addressed to different regions from one another, “The Kid’: A Chapter of Wyoming” echoes the geo-hermeneutic relation of “An Autumn Holiday,” “The Occultation of a Honey-Moon” echoes that of “Narragansett Pier,” and “A Country Tavern in Winter,” a piece of nonfiction local color set in the Mid-Atlantic that Lippincott’s also published in spring 1881, echoes that of “Snug Hamlet and Hometown.”\footnote{47} These regional and generic patterns each become distinct through the accumulation of pieces within issues and issues over time.

Considering literary monthlies from this more extended perspective – one more reflective of the reading practices engendered by the periodical form – demonstrates the direct engagement between genres and between regions from one issue to the next. Any given piece’s participation in a genre lies in its repetition of particular structural and functional features, but pieces also identified and differentiated their own genre by commenting on

\footnote{46. Louise Seymour Houghton, “The Truth about Florida,” Lippincott’s Magazine 27, no. 5 (May 1881): 508.}

\footnote{47. Mary Dean, “A Country Tavern in Winter,” Lippincott’s Magazine 27, no. 2 (February 1881): 159–165.}
the formal devices of other genres. “‘The Kid’: A Chapter of Wyoming” not only supplies an additional perspective on the West, one directed to Western readers, alongside those found in “On A California Ranch” and “Among the Cow-Boys”; it counters them and flips the generic conventions of “Among the Cow-Boys” by depicting a Mid-Atlantic would-be participant observer, not the local residents, as unusual. Scholars have recognized many such local color stories, arguing that they critique the ethnographic gaze and positions of cultural power. This may be true, but the relative frequency of this kind of cross-commentary on other genres’ representations of regions, as in “‘The Kid’: A Chapter of Wyoming” or “The Truth about Florida,” indicates that it was constitutive feature of the literary monthlies genre ecosystem rather than a disruption of that system. Because the primary function of genres in these magazines was to mediate geo-hermeneutic distances, when authors commented on a genre’s formal devices they inherently also engaged in an act of regional positioning within the field of cultural geography.

Literary monthlies represented and reproduced the boundaries of regions, which authors treated as common readerly knowledge, through the repetition of specific locations and cultural associations. The summer 1879 Harper’s assembles New England from Connecticut in “Snug Hamlet and Hometown,” Maine in “The Draining of a Village,” and Rhode Island in “Narragansett Pier,” while the spring 1881 Lippincott’s assembles the West from western Texas in “Among the Cow-Boys,” Wyoming in “‘The Kid’: A Chapter of Wyoming,” and California in “On A California Ranch.” Florida emerged as a region or sub-region in its own right as authors depicted it more specifically and as editors published pieces about it more consistently over the course of these years, not unlike the Gulf Coast already had or Appalachia was about to. Pieces about Florida, the Gulf Coast, and Appalachia still contributed to the ongoing broader representation of the South, but as the associations of these regions became regular patterns they were no longer simply subsets of the South—which other authors represented in adjacent pieces through a number of different genres.


manifest as culturally complex and at times internally subdivided through the accumulation of the different regional perspectives enabled by the genres that authors used to express them. Authors’ continual efforts at contradistinction also contributed to the codification of regions in literary monthlies, much as it did to the codification of genres. Florida plays no part in the geo-hermeneutic relation between *Craque-o’-Doom*’s setting and the readers it implicitly addresses, but for a moment, however brief, the novel redirects a Midwestern perspective that otherwise chiefly focuses on the Midwest towards Florida. In these moments of cultural geographic imagination – such as the cattle-ranchers’ incredulity towards the kid in “‘The Kid’: A Chapter of Wyoming” or the tertiary position of the resort-goers in “Narragansett Pier” – authors further proliferated the inter-regional perspectives within literary monthlies and intensified the density of the network between those perspectives.

The spring 1881 volume of *Lippincott’s*, like King’s “The Great South” in the *Century* and the summer 1879 volume of *Harper’s*, was perfectly unexceptional. The genre ecosystem at work in these examples, in which an array of genres function over time to represent every given region specifically to each given region, was the defining structural feature of literary monthlies. The literary monthlies’ success as a cultural institution is inseparable from this strategy of circulation, initially a condition of their success and later imprinted on the cultural field as a consequence of their influence. This is how we should understand the cultural field during the literary monthlies’ decades of ascendancy: not as national but as inter-regional. For this reason, the genre ecosystem of literary monthlies provides us with an important model of how individual authors could achieve geographic breadth of circulation in the 1870s and 1880s too.

2. “And so, to repeat”: Authorial Careers and Assembling *The Grandissimes*

The incredible success enjoyed by literary monthlies ensured that the genre ecosystem underwriting that success proliferated beyond the editing and assembling of material for periodical publication. It also influenced the way authors wrote, especially the generation of authors whose careers began or peaked in publications like *Harper’s*, the *Atlantic*, the *Century*, and
Lippincott’s during the 1870s and 1880s. Literary monthlies had an unprecedented capacity in these decades to publish large quantities of material and bestow cultural capital, augmented by their affiliation with leading publishing houses capable of bringing out collected volumes and novels (Harper & Brothers, Houghton Mifflin, Charles Scribner’s Sons, and J. B. Lippincott & Co., respectively). These magazines’ status and their vertical integration with the publishing industry induced authorial production towards both the variety of genres they sought and the model of generic variety they represented. This particular form – what I’m calling the regional novel – emerged from the conditions of literary production engendered by the dominance of literary monthlies. With it, authors appropriated the defining genre ecosystem and geo-hermeneutic associations of those magazines.

Though it wasn’t the only possible route to literary success in the 1870s and 1880s, publishing short pieces in a literary monthly was the surest marker of contemporary critical acclaim and future publication. Literary monthlies functioned as cultural gatekeepers. Yet despite the functional value and aesthetic valuation of the short fiction printed in literary monthlies – which Howells’ “Editor’s Study” declared to be as good as any by European authors – the value of short fiction outside these publications was relatively low. The Century gave Cable $1,500 for The Grandissimes, but it only gave him $80 in 1876 for “Café des Exilés,” his sixth and best-remunerated piece with the Century prior to The Grandissimes. Even after the popularity of Cable’s stories, Blair Scribner himself hesitated to publish the collected volume of Cable’s short stories, Old Creole Days (1879). It took three years and the urgings of three of the most influential literary figures then connected with the magazine and its publishing house, Richard Watson Gilder, Hjalmar H. Boysen, and Edward King, to induce him otherwise. This was not without reason. Short story collections fared comparatively poorly in the literary marketplace even as they flourished – and to some degree precisely because they flourished – in a number of periodical forms.

50. Though the official tie between Scribner’s and the Century ceased in 1881, friendly relations between the two businesses persisted for most of the decade; Cable’s later novels were published by Scribner’s, as were collections of poetry by Richard Watson Gilder, editor of the Century and former assistant editor of Scribner’s Magazine.
52. Lucy Leffingwell Cable Bikle, George Washington Cable: His Life and Letters (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928), 50.
Howells himself acknowledged as much in another “Editor’s Study,” asserting a general law of the literary marketplace: “for some reason or for none, the very people who liked an author’s short stories in the magazine, could not bear them, or would not buy them, when he put several of them together in a volume.”  

Many authorial careers in these decades followed the same pattern as Cable’s. Mary Murfree’s initial volume of short stories, *In the Tennessee Mountains* (1884), saw some 3,000 copies printed in its first year; just a year later her novel *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains* went through almost as many copies in its first printing alone (followed by a second within its first month). This disparity further exacerbated the difference in payments received from the magazine in which they were printed (the *Atlantic*), which likely reflected Cable’s. Similarly, the first printing of Constance Fenimore Woolson’s collection *Castle Nowhere* (1875) totaled 1,300 copies while the first printing of her novel *Anne* (1882) totaled 5,000. Though Murfree and Cable each published additional short story collections, they were only able to do so after first publishing several successful novels. Similarly, Charles Chesnutt wrote novels, despite the acclaim his short stories received, and not additional collections of short stories after those novels undersold. Yet publishers generally expected a collection of short pieces as proof of an author’s viability before they would fully back a novel. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s decision not to write in short forms inhibited the success of her novels. The catch, as Cable’s career shows, was that publishers generally were not inclined to put out volumes of collected short prose unless they wanted to use a volume as leverage for keeping an author with the house for the sake of more profitable future work. The cultural field of the 1870s and 1880s drove literary authors along this largely unidirectional career arc from short forms towards the novel.

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54. Howells’ claim here is that the sudden success of short story collections by Rudyard Kipling, Guy de Maupassant, and Hamlin Garland in the early 1890s went against the previous decades’ conventional wisdom regarding the format’s viability in the literary marketplace. William Dean Howells, “Editor’s Study,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 83, no. 4 (September 1891): 638–642.


57. *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) was published by J. B. Lippincott & Co., but *The Squatter and the Don* (1885) was brought out by the smaller San Francisco house S. Carson & Co.
Literary monthlies shaped this career arc with even greater specificity. There may be some truth in Brodhead’s claim that regional writing, even in the broader sense that I’ve been arguing for, required a comparatively low level of technical skill to produce competently. Yet the same attributes that made the short forms favored by literary monthlies accessible to new authors also made it difficult for authors to sustain careers writing in those forms alone for long. Accessibility fostered competitiveness. Furthermore, the literary monthlies’ logic of structure and circulation, in which variety of genre and setting was paramount, meant that most authors were replaceable and that even the best-known could only be printed in limited amounts. Accordingly, authors had two main pathways to choose from if they wanted to make themselves more publishable within this system over an extended period of time. The first was to write about a variety of regions – to travel to different places and ‘soak in the local color’ – as Constance Fenimore Woolson, Edward King, Sherwood Bonner, and others successfully did. The second, more common pathway was to write in multiple different genres about the same region, as did Cable, Murfree, and Sarah Orne Jewett (who was just as versed in ethnographic local color, historical romance, and travel writing as she was in local color fiction like “An Autumn Holiday”). The same conditions that rewarded the production of ethnographic local color fiction incentivized authors to develop proficiency in other genres, even those that can appear politically or formally antithetical in retrospect.

Within the context of a cultural field dominated by the literary monthlies, George Washington Cable’s short pieces of the 1870s and early 1880s each participate in one of several different genres, each modeling the corresponding geo-hermeneutic distance between their Louisiana setting and the cultural geographic position of their projected readers. In other words, Cable began his career by becoming conversant with the whole genre ecosystem. Though these stories’ book format republication in Old Creole Days emphasizes continuity of subject matter, the distinctions between them remain apparent. The story “’Tite Poulette” mainly functions as ethnographic local color, and it addresses readers primarily as geographically distant from New Orleans’ particular combination of social, racial, and economic conditions. This is not only because the story’s endorsement of interracial mar-

riage (like Cable’s later, more famous story “Madame Delphine”) would have made it more unpalatable for Southern readers. It is also because the romance plot in “‘Tite Poulette” is less a story of love than a story of the aestheticization of race: the newcomer Kristian Koppig, through an acclimating fever, learns to ignore Poulette’s race and instead value her as an aesthetic object, “‘beautiful, beautiful, beautiful! White–white like a water lily! White–like a magnolia!’”—as an exoticized emblem of the unique racial history of the Creole Gulf Coast. By contrast, “Madame Délicieuse” adheres to the conventions of romance, and the resolution of its love triangle facilitates the political reunification of General Vil-livicencio and his son Dr. Mossy, the old Louisiana and the new, rather than marrying an outsider into the community.

Though “Madame Délicieuse” includes moments of rich description of local cultural practices, such moments are subordinated to its romance plot. This register is much more central to “Café des Exilés,” most of which reads as nonfiction local color. The Café itself is essentially an exhibition of its regulars, Créoles “of Barbadoes, of Martinique, of San Domingo, and of Cuba” exiled by uprisings. These figures and their politics are made into fixtures, aestheticized into a tableau in which they are little different from the “ancient willow [...] and discolored stucco, which keeps dropping off into the garden as though the old café was stripping for the plunge into oblivion.” “‘Posson Jone’” is instead local color fiction: a locally-embedded story in which a character models renewed attention to aesthetic detail in order to more fully understand the region to which they and the story’s ideal readers alike belong. The story follows a hapless visiting preacher whose failure to understand New Orleans culture and institutions makes him the laughingstock of the city. Epistemologically, “‘Posson Jone’” trades in the insider-baseball narrative style characteristic of Cable’s “Drop Shot” columns, a regular feature that he wrote for the New Orleans Daily

60. Cable 87.
61. Cable 85.
62. 123 Johnson, Remembered Yesterdays, Scribner’s did not publish “‘Posson Jone’,,” but Cable had expected it to until Gilder buckled and declined the story on account of its depiction of drunkenness. Almost fifty years later Gilder’s associate editor, Robert Underwood Johnson recalled “with pain” that doing so was one of their greatest “literary sins.”
Picayune from 1872 to 1874 that primarily consisted of half-veiled local gossip. Full of playful suggestions and allusions but little by way of explicit identification of what exactly has happened or why, “Posson Jone”, like the “Drop Shot” columns, implies that local familiarity is necessary to discern all the valences of the episodes it details.

Cable also published pieces belonging to more explicitly nonfictional genres in the Century, especially in the years immediately after the success of The Grandissimes and preceding the serialization, also in the Century, of Dr. Sevier (Nov. 1883 - Oct. 1884). In spite of the ethnographic suggestiveness of its title, “Who Are the Creoles?” is really a piece of local color nonfiction, focusing primarily on descriptions of the land, architecture, and plantations of Louisiana. “Plotters and Pirates of Louisiana” is a somewhat sensational history of comparatively minor elements in the city’s history; “Flood and Plague in New Orleans,” by contrast, is more akin to the local interest piece in its scope, tone of address, and treatment of subject matter. Though these pieces appeared chronologically and would be republished later as a book-length collection too, the Century did not print or refer to them as a series, leaving readers to take them up individually. Cable’s diverse corpus again shows that authors’ authority to represent a region was not contingent upon writing in particular genres that were privileged as more authentic than others. Insofar as writing in multiple genres led to more consistent publication and expanded readership, doing so augmented an author’s authority to represent a region rather than suggesting inconsistency.

The editorial policies and publishing conditions that promoted generic variety also shaped the kinds of novels that authors ultimately produced when they did inevitably transition from shorter to longer forms. This is particularly evident in the way Cable reassembled disparate elements from his short pieces into The Grandissimes, remodeling, over again, the entire genre ecosystem in a single novel. Like Kristian Koppig in “Tite

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63. The New Orleans Daily Picayune is available online for the duration of these years as part of Readex’s America’s Historical Newspapers Database at [http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive?p.action=keyword&f_pubBrowse=1223BCE5B718A166](http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive?p.action=keyword&f_pubBrowse=1223BCE5B718A166) See also William H. Roberson, George Washington Cable, An Annotated Bibliography (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1982).
Poulette,” Joseph Frowenfeld in The Grandissimes is a German-American member “of that army of gentlemen who, after the purchase of Louisiana, swarmed from all parts of the commercial world, over the mountains of Franco-Spanish exclusiveness, like the Goths over the Pyrenees, and settled down in New Orleans.” Frowenfeld sets up an apothecary in town during the period of high-tempered uncertainty immediately following the United States’ acquisition of the Louisiana Territory. His naively-vocal opinions on Louisiana society, however, make him friends as well as enemies among the Grandissimes clan, the larger-than-life clan whose obsession with bloodlines exists in tension with its scion Honoré’s black half-brother Honoré, f. m. c. (“free man of color”). Important parts of the novel are focalized through Frowenfeld’s position as a participant-observer as he attempts to learn more about the region’s history and culture, and as such these parts function, like “’Tite Poulette,” as ethnographic local color.

Yet Frowenfeld’s presence, let alone his authority, is remarkably inconsistent in the text. Far from dominating the novel perspectively, stylistically, or formally, he plays little or part in many of the novel’s chapters. The love plot between Frowenfeld and Clotilde de Grapion carries out a typical ideological function of ethnographic local color by symbolizing the incorporation of the region into the nation, yet the love plot between Honoré Grandissime and Aurore de Grapion rivals this interpretation and usurps the Frowenfeld-Clotilde love plot’s place at the end of the novel. The Honoré-Aurore love plot instead parallels “Madame Délicieuse” in symbolizing the assured futurity of regional culture through the reunification of their two long-feuding families. The episode of Bras-Coupé – an embedded tale of an indomitable enslaved man who curses some of Louisiana’s highest-yielding land – draws on Cable’s political allegory “Belles Demoiselles Plantation,” extending and expanding the prophetic register of that story’s condemnation of slavery. Raoul, a Grandissime cousin who becomes a major character after Frowenfeld hires him as an assistant in the latter’s apothecary shop, echoes the comic-yet-intelligent Creole Jules St.-Ange from “Posson Jone.” The Grandissimes incorporates and adapts character types, plot structures, and stylistic elements from the different individual genres in which the short pieces participate.

Cable made his novel multigeneric by drawing on the multiple genres he had already written

67. Cable, Old Creole Days 213.
in for literary monthlies, and as such it testifies to the direct process by which the regional novel as a form developed out of the structure of the literary monthly.

Individual characters, scenes, and topics in *The Grandissimes* do not consistently correspond to a single genre, however, even when echoing short pieces by Cable in which they did. Raoul, for example, functions differently in different chapters of the novel. At times Raoul is the native informant to Frowenfeld’s participant observer, illuminating regional cultural practice through the dialectic typical of ethnographic local color: “to a student of the community he was a key, a lamp, a lexicon, a microscope, a tabulated statement, a book of heraldry, a city directory, a glass of wine, a Book of Days, a pair of wings, a comic almanac, a diving bell, a Creole veritas.” Even here Cable parodies the generic connection he deploys, for Raoul, while indeed knowledgeable, is not strictly reliable. Elsewhere Frowenfeld is removed and Raoul becomes the subject of ethnographic inquiry outright: one might say that Frowenfeld vacates his lab chair for the reader and Raoul becomes not a microscope but a slide in one. Chapter 27, “The Fête de Grandpère,” makes this shift to ethnography by rendering more exotic the features of its setting (“all have disappeared as entirely beyond recall”) and subjects: “you note the exquisite penciling of their eyebrows, here and there some heavier and more velvety, where a less vivacious expression betrays a share of Spanish blood” (158, 162). The character of Raoul plays an important role here: the chapter prints not only his untranslated song but the bars of musical notation representing its melody – common practice in ethnography or folklore but not short pieces of ethnographic local color. Yet shortly thereafter Raoul becomes the vehicle of sentimental romance through his telling of the Bras-Coupé story to the Grandissime ladies, as I will return to shortly. To attempt to consolidate these disparate instances into a single consistent character would overlook the fact that each depicts regional culture differently according to different generic norms.

In this way the regional novel maintains the distinctiveness of the genres it brings together by structure as much as by content. In *The Grandissimes* genre divisions are accentuated through correspondence with chapter divisions, most of which are no longer than

68. George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes* (New York: Penguin, 1991 [1880], 118. All subsequent citations of this text will be parenthetical.)
a short piece in a literary monthly—a fact all the more evident in the *Century*’s serialization of the novel, where many chapters can be read individually as short pieces. In addition to those already mentioned, *The Grandissimes* contains chapters that recognizably participate in most of the other major genres from literary monthlies. The extended description of an afternoon in the Place d’Armes that comprises Chapter 15, “Rolled in the Dust,” functions as nonfiction local color by virtue of its fixation on the aesthetic experience of a particular cultural scene at a particular time largely divested of plot or character and instead populated with actual historical figures. Chapter 46, “The Pique-en-Terre Loses One of Her Crew,” re-approaches New Orleans through the conventions of travel writing, this time by sea rather than over land, despite the fact that it falls three-quarters of the way into the novel. *The Grandissimes*, as a regional novel, primarily expands not by advancing plot but by cycling genre.

For this reason, plot in *The Grandissimes* is irregular and uneven. As the novel self-reflexively theorizes, “there are understandings that expand, not imperceptibly hour by hour, but as certain flowers do, by little explosive ruptures with periods of quiescence between” (102). These periods of quiescence between the little explosive ruptures of plot do most of the representational and interpretive work in *The Grandissimes*, continually repeating and reframing the events and subjects already introduced. The process begins already on the novel’s first page with the intonation “and so, to repeat” (1). The regional novel is innovative because it incorporates into a single text not merely generic variety or even a particular set of genres but a particular set of genres that are structurally self-contained without necessarily being tied to any specific content, character, or event. This is what distinguishes the multigenericness of the regional novel from that which critics since Mikhail Bakhtin have recognized as inherent to the novel form more generally. In the regional novel the same material, the same characters, scenes, topics—and in sum, the same region—are each fully re-presented through a series of different genres. In doing so, the regional novel internally replicates the structure of the literary monthly magazine in

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microcosm, representing an array of different, distinct perspectives on its particular region that are sustained as different and distinct.

When a regional novel cycles genres, then, it is not the regional subjects that change but the geo-hermeneutic distance through which those subjects are depicted. Cable sustains the associations between genres and geo-hermeneutic distances in *The Grandissimes* by repeating the thematic and stylistic features characteristic of those genres in literary monthlies, even when he omits the explicit regional addresses that short pieces in those magazines use to hail readers by region. The novel often marks these continuities, as in the early chapters of historical legend like Chapter 4, “Family Trees”: “To Frowenfeld—as it would have been to any one, except a Creole or the most thoroughly Creoleized American—his narrative, when it was done, was little more than a thick mist of strange names, places and events; yet there shone a light of romance upon it that filled it with color and populated it with phantoms” (15). The genre of history, regionalized, becomes the allotment of that region’s readers. Indeed, the *Century*’s editorial team convinced Cable to begin the novel with a bal masqué (Chapter 1, “Masked Batteries”) and ethnographic local color (Chapter 2, “The Fate of the Immigrant”) rather than the chapters of historical legend, with which earlier drafts of *The Grandissimes* began, precisely because they feared that these chapters’ density and obliqueness would discourage readers outside the gulf coast if printed first. This is not, of course, to say that readers elsewhere couldn’t enjoy chapters like “Family Trees”; the novel models the kind of pleasure they offer to geographically-distant readers by describing how “Frowenfeld’s interest rose—was allured into this mist—and there was left befogged” (15). But the important point here is that this is a markedly different kind of readerly engagement, one which the novel flags as produced by the refraction of reading one genre through the geo-hermeneutic distance of another.

These chapters in different genres, through the different geo-hermeneutic distances they articulate, question and contest each others’ accounts and conclusions. As *The Grandissimes* formally repeats the short stories of *Old Creole Days* and cycles between the familiar genres of the literary monthly, it also repeats its own plot events by rewriting them.

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into new genres. Nowhere is this clearer than in the novel’s treatment of Bras-Coupé, which brings together all the elements of the form of the regional novel discussed so far. The tale of Bras-Coupé and his curse, alluded to in chapters of all genres throughout, finally emerges in full approximately two-thirds of the way into the novel, where it is told not once but at least four times: “A very little more than eight years ago,’ began Honoré—but not only Honoré, but Raoul also; and not only they, but another, earlier on the same day,—Honoré, the f. m. c. But we shall not exactly follow the words of any one of these” (169). Passing through at least as many genres as tellings, the tale of Bras-Coupé has surprisingly little direct impact on the rest of the events of the novel even if he did, as one version of the tale alleges, instigate the white Grandissimes family’s financial troubles. In terms of plot these chapters are no more important than any others. The tale’s pivotal significance in *The Grandissimes* instead stems from the alignment of these different retellings with the genres repeated elsewhere in the novel, making Bras-Coupé something of a rosetta stone for the novel’s multigenre structure.

The primary narration of the tale of Bras-Coupé, unattached from the perspective of any character, begins as political allegory in the vein of Cable’s “Belles Demoiselles Plantation” (the same vein as the short allegories of reunification and proto-science fiction pieces sometimes published in literary monthlies). Bras-Coupé, according to an anonymous communal “they said,” was a prince in Africa until captured and sold into slavery in Louisiana (169).

Mioko-Koanga, in French Bras-Coupé, the Arm Cut Off. Truly it would have been easy to admit, had this been his meaning, that his tribe, in losing him, had lost its strong right arm close off at the shoulder; not so easy for his high-paying purchaser to allow, if this other was his intent; that the arm which might no longer shake the spear or swing the wooden sword, was no better than a useless stump never to be lifted for aught else. But whether easy to allow or not, that was his meaning. He made himself a type of all Slavery, turning into flesh and blood the truth that all Slavery is maiming. (171)

Refusing to work unless married to Palmyre, an enslaved voudou practitioner who has fallen in love with the white Honoré, Bras-Coupé hits his enslaver while drunk on the evening of the latter’s wedding and is subsequently chased into the swamps. Bras-Coupé curses the plantation, causing its crops to die and his former enslaver to fall mortally ill. As
evidenced in the passage above, allegory endows the critique of slavery with poetic force. But this proves to be a double-edged sword. Allegory risks rendering that critique aloof by aestheticizing it, by making Bras-Coupé a “type” wrapped in the linguistic puzzle of his name.

The continuation of the tale in the next chapter, though, switches into a distinctly historical mode. Bras-Coupé, finally caught, is hamstrung according to the Black Code of colonial Louisiana; on his deathbed, however, he retracts the curse in order to save the life of his deceased enslaver’s son. This chapter not only forecloses on the ahistorical possibility opened by the initial version of the tale; it also rewrites that version. We learn that Bras-Coupé’s curse happens to coincide with a cataclysmic shift in plantation ecology in the late 1790s from indigo monoculture (prompted by the devastation of the indigo worm) to sugarcane monoculture (first introduced by Jean Étienne). As Cable knew well, this shift would expand exponentially the scale and cruelty of slavery on the Gulf Coast. These historicizing details, while not supplanting the mythic and mystical elements of the story, supplement them, producing a sustained alternative version such that one neither contradicts nor conforms to the other. To make full sense of this version of the story would still require additional historical, regional knowledge about plantation agricultural practices not included in the novel itself. As with the opening historical chapters, readers needn’t have lived on the Gulf Coast in order to obtain familiarity about the region’s crop history over the previous two generations. But the simultaneous significance of this knowledge and the novel’s obliquely referential treatment of it once again renders geo-hermeneutic proximity as characteristic of this genre of history writing.

Raoul’s narration of the Bras-Coupé story produces another alternative version identified as tragic sentimental romance. *The Grandissimes* emphasizes the difference this transposition makes by reporting the reactions of Raoul’s audience:

The fair Grandissimes all agreed, at the close, that it was pitiful. Specially, that it was a great pity to have hamstrung Bras-Coupé, a man who even in his cursing had made an exception in favor of the ladies. True, they could suggest no alternative; it was undeniable that he had deserved his fate; still, it seemed a pity. They dispersed, retired and went to sleep confirmed in this sentiment. (194)
So cast, Bras-Coupé’s recapture and the pathetic (in the nineteenth-century sense of the word) nature of his acquiescence and death are inevitable, a simple matter of established nineteenth-century convention in the narrative palliation of the threat of slave resistance. In this respect it is consistent with other chapters of romanticized depictions of the slaveholding elite and their institutions. Moreover, it is consistent with the dramatic treatment of Honoré f. m. c.’s suicide due to unrequited love, also for Palmyre, a plot development that warrants critique for conveniently dispatching Honoré f. m. c. just after his financial and personal reconciliation with the rest of the Grandissimes family. This alignment of genre and geo-hermeneutic proximity is reiterated by the fact that Raoul tells the story to a Southern audience that has already heard it before and requested to hear it told again. Told (and gendered) through sentimental romance, any potential political threat in the tale of Bras-Coupé is superseded by the pleasurable exercise of pity.

Honoré f. m. c.’s narration of the Bras-Coupé story to Frowenfeld prompts yet another distinct treatment of its subjects. In Frowenfeld’s response and the conversation that follows, Bras-Coupé becomes the basis for a shift into didactic exposition:

“[Y]ou–your class–the free quadroons–are the saddest slaves of all. Your men, for a little property, and your women, for a little amorous attention, let themselves be shorn even of the virtue of discontent, and for a paltry bait of sham freedom have consented to endure a tyrannous contumely which flattens them into the dirt like grass under a slab. I would rather be a runaway in the swamps than content myself with such a freedom.” (195-6)

Honoré f. m. c. endorses Frowenfeld’s account, replying that “havery word is tru” (196). Frowenfeld’s substitution of “class” for race and “free quadroons” for slaves here effectively translates Bras-Coupé’s resistance in the swamps (by also omitting his deathbed retraction) into the post-emancipation race politics contemporary to the United States at the time of The Grandissimes’ publication. This linguistic shift and the corresponding shift in temporality – which also distinguishes other self-contained sections of the novel like Chapter 24, “Frowenfeld Makes an Argument” – effectively participates in the genre of “race problem” essay already commonplace in the nationally-circulating periodicals by 1880. Five years later Cable would make his own free-standing contributions to the genre of “race problem” essays (also in the Century), a career decision that would severely inhibit
the Southern circulation of his texts for a decade.\textsuperscript{71} Within the regional novel’s unique multigenre structure, however, this discourse produced no blowback.

This is not to say that the inclusion of passages of regionally-offending genres within \textit{The Grandissimes} went uncontested. Several passages drew the ire of Irwin Russell and Sophia Bledsoe Herrick, the two editorial readers at the \textit{Century} working with assistant editor Robert Underwood Johnson to edit Cable’s novel.\textsuperscript{72} Russell’s and Herrick’s objections, based on their own experience of the eastern states of the South, were generally of two types: what they considered inaccuracies (mistakenly, according to Cable) and what they considered affronts. Johnson, who spent all his life in cities of the Mid-Atlantic, did not object to the former, but he nonetheless backed his readers’ judgment with regard to the latter. Indeed, the magazine’s editors had already twice rejected outright Cable’s “Bibi,” the independent short story that would become the embedded tale of Bras-Coupé in \textit{The Grandissimes}, on the basis that it would offend Southern readers. When Cable refused to make these changes and excisions, however, all three editors demurred. The shared structure of the literary monthly and the regional novel explains the editorial team’s otherwise ponderous about-face. The tale of Bibi, now Bras-Coupé, could be allowed in a regional novel where it was anathema as a short story because Cable depicted it and the issue of slavery as a whole in multiple genres even within individual serial installments of \textit{The Grandissimes} – some critiquing, some romanticizing, some aestheticizing, some historicizing. So balanced across genres within the novel, the tale of Bras-Coupé no longer risked upsetting the balance of regional appeal that literary monthlies held essential. Quite the contrary, when carefully couched the tale enhanced the \textit{Century}’s regional appeal by contributing to its generic breadth. \textit{The Grandissimes} became all things to all regions. The \textit{Century} recognized this fact by giving Cable a 50\% bonus payment; the book volume publication of \textit{The Grandissimes} bore it out through remarkable inter-regional success.


3. Difference as Distance in Murfree’s Microcosm

The Grandissimes has produced a variety of compelling yet seemingly opposed scholarly readings precisely because it depicts the same characters, scenes, and topics through so many different genres. Scholars generally prioritize one or another of these genres based on the particular subject they explore. Scholars who read the novel as part of a Southern literary tradition have turned to the chapters of family lineage and historical legend; scholars who read the novel as a localization of anti-hegemonic resistance to nationally-instituted racism have turned to the chapters with political discussions between Honoré and Frowenfeld; scholars who read the novel as complicit in national homogenization have turned to the chapters of ethnographic local color; scholars who read the novel as participating in transatlantic aesthetic trends for depicting and producing difference have turned to the chapters of ethnography[73] The novel is in fact all of these things and, as I’ve tried to show, more. Scholars have formulated these positions as disagreements because each has interpreted one of The Grandissimes’s multiple genres under the name of regional-ism in order to then make a claim about regional-ism as a genre, strategy, or institution. In this respect, each stage in the history of scholarship on The Grandissimes has moved in tandem with the history of scholarship on regional writing as a whole; the brief survey above covers the four major developments since the mid-twentieth century. What distinguishes the form of The Grandissimes – the form of the regional novel – is precisely its capacity to produce all of these readings about the depiction and deployment of a region by inhabiting the genre ecosystem established in the literary monthlies.

The Grandissimes is certainly one of the most outstanding examples of the regional novel, but it is far from alone. In addition to George Washington Cable’s follow-up, Dr. Sevier (1884), other regional novels include Edward Eggleston’s The Hoosier Schoolmaster (1871) and The Circuit Rider (1874), Bret Harte’s Gabriel Conroy (1876), Albion W. Tourgée’s A Fool’s Errand (1879), Constance Fenimore Woolson’s Anne (1880), María

Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), and Sarah Orne Jewett’s *A Marsh Island* (1885), Mary Murfree’s *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains* (1885) and (comparatively late) *In the “Stranger People’s” Country* (1891), and Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), which I will return to in closing. Each of these texts follows the general formal structure of the regional novel as already outlined, in varying degrees and with varying levels of success. Contemporaneous critics may not have been able to fully delineate this form, but they certainly caught glimpses of it. The *Atlantic*’s review of Woolson’s *Anne*, for example, notes that the novel’s installments cycle from one typical magazine setting or plot to the next: “Anne inevitably suggests a series of shorter stories. The reader who may chance to have followed the fortunes of the young lady who fills the title-role, as they were disclosed in the monthly numbers of a magazine, must have felt a series of surprises that the story did not end. From time to time the lines appeared to converge, only to open again, so that when the end really came one might have been forgiven if he thought there might possibly be a new turn of the wheel next month.” With each “turn of the wheel” from local color to ethnographic local color to romance and more, *Anne* becomes a new text that places its characters in new situations. As the *Atlantic* reviewer testifies, these shifts opened new possibilities for reading in each monthly installment and remain readily identifiable in *Anne*’s publication in book format.

The American Publishing Company’s broadside advertisement for Harte’s *Gabriel Conroy* highlights that novel’s similar qualities in its call for subscription sellers (Figure 2.2). The broadside samples illustrations that emphasize with stylistic contrast the divergent sections of the novel. It also advertises the novel with excerpted newspaper reviews that reiterate and, further, regionalize this generic divergence. While the Mid-Atlantic reviews emphasize the novel’s “word-painting” and picturesque descriptions, the Midwestern reviews emphasize the novel’s “dramatic power.” What makes *Gabriel Conroy* a “great American story” is the fact that it contains the generic breadth to appeal to each region’s interests in and distance from the West individually.

Even if the regional novel was not an especially widespread form, then, its practitioners included many of the most critically- and popularly-acclaimed – not to mention well-connected and lastingly-influential – American authors of the 1870s and 1880s. For this reason, it is a significant literary form in its own right. The _Grandissimes_ and Cable’s career leading up to it usefully demonstrate how the regional novel, with its distinc-
tive form of multigenericness, emerged from the genre ecosystem of the literary monthlies. Mary Murfree expanded upon Cable’s achievement in her regional novel *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains*. In radically suspending the possibility of certain knowledge about regional places and practices, *Prophet* refracts attention onto the genres through which readers access regions and the distances from which readers view regions. For this reason, Murfree’s novel has proven even less amenable to interpretation under the rubric of regional-ism. While each of the novels listed above brings its own variations to the form of the regional novel, this heightened self-reflexivity makes *Prophet*’s innovation instructive for understanding the relationship between aesthetics and cultural geography during the 1870s and 1880s.

Almost all that is true of *The Grandissimes*’s publication history and structure is true of *Prophet*’s as well. Like Cable, Murfree achieved critical and popular acclaim as one of the most important authors of the period through publication in literary monthlies (primarily the *Atlantic* to Cable’s *Century*). She initially wrote short pieces in several different genres and later moved to serialized novels, brought out by the *Atlantic*’s publisher, Houghton Mifflin. Like *The Grandissimes*, *Prophet* first appeared serially; it too repeats and reassembles aspects of its author’s previous short pieces in different genres, like “The Star in the Valley” (1878), “Electioneerin’ on Big Injun Mounting” (1880), and “Drifting Down Lost Creek” (1884). *Prophet*’s chapters, though generally longer than in *The Grandissimes*, also delineate shifts in genre more so than particular characters or plots. The novel sold respectably, as discussed in the previous section, going through over 4,000 copies within its first week despite the fact that its prominent serialization in the *Atlantic* had only just concluded. *Prophet*’s success can also be read in the fact that it secured the transition of Murfree’s authorial career, in accord with the trajectory engendered by literary monthlies in the period, from the short pieces she had written thus far to the novels in serial and volume formats that would primarily occupy her for the next decade.

*The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains* is set in the mountains of eastern Tennessee. The novel moves between – in order of increasing elevation – a valley town that serves as county seat (roughly analogous to Murfreesboro), a mountaineer “Settlement” community, the Cayce family’s land even farther up the slopes, and finally the “bald” peak
where the titular prophet, Hiram Kelsey, alone ventures. The respective elevation of these sites becomes important to the novel’s plot and form. Hiram is widely known for his preaching and his prophetic abilities, but he secretly grapples with faith and doubt. Certain of God’s law and His presence in solitude on the bald, Hiram struggles to make sense of the divine mysteries and to feel certain of sincerity of faith the farther he descends down the mountains. It is primarily Hiram’s compassion and sensitivity that draw the admiration of Dorinda Cayce, a strong-willed young woman who looks after both house and fields while her father and brothers tend to the family’s clandestine moonshine operation in a nearby cave. The worldly Rick Tyler, Dorinda’s lover and in many ways Hiram’s opposite, becomes jealous at Dorinda’s affections for the preacher (perhaps, the novel suggests, not unwarrantedly). This is exacerbated by the fact that Rick is on the run from the law after being falsely accused of murder and as a result only able to meet Dorinda for fleeting moments. The entanglement of this not-quite love triangle drags Hiram and the Cayce family into aiding Rick’s evasion of the law, putting Hiram’s preaching and the Cayce’s moonshining in hot water with Micajah Green, a country sheriff from the valley town who is determined to prove himself during a re-election campaign. No one of these characters takes precedence in the novel; unlike Frowenfeld in *The Grandissimes*, *Prophet* doesn’t even place a character in the role of participant-observer pseudo-narrator.

Shifts in style, focalization, and tropes distinguish these plotlines from one another and organize them into established nineteenth-century genre traditions. The sections following Micajah’s electioneering and the Cayces’ counter-electioneering draw from postbellum political romance, a genre formation encompassing Midwestern bildungsromans from log cabin to legislature (a la Abraham Lincoln) and Southern narratives of Reconstruction. Rick’s resistance to the laws of men and evasion of governmental authority belong to the juvenile outlaw-hero tales often set in the West. The style and content of these sections of *Prophet*, particularly Rick’s escape from custody and the gunfight at the still, stand out from the rest of the novel as active and fast-paced, with less lingering description or metaphysical discourse. When critics have discussed Murfree, they’ve classified her as exemplifying one or another opposed genres or definitions of regional-ism according to which short stories they prioritize – Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse as an anti-patriarchal
resistant regionalist, Bill Hardwig (following Richard Brodhead) as co-opted into an exoti-
cizing hegemonic regional-ism, and Jonathan Schroeder as a writer in the tradition of local
color aesthetics. Prophet, however, encompasses all of these.

As will become even more evident in what follows, Prophet casts a wider net than The
Grandissimes and many other regional novels. The novel incorporates a number of genres
that, while possessing regional associations of their own, more often existed as freestanding
popular novels than within the genre ecosystem of the literary monthlies. In doing so,
Prophet in its original serialized format elevated and curated these additional genres for
the Atlantic. Prophet’s generic breadth also demonstrates the regional novel’s capacity to
annex new genres as a literary form in its own right and the readiness with which authors
could regionalize or transplant genres to regions other than those with which they were
originally associated. While Prophet of course can and should be read for a number of
different reasons, what ultimately unifies, organizes, and subsumes these various aspects of
the text is their shared regional setting and the formal structures of the regional novel.

As with The Grandissimes, generic difference in Prophet is not simply aligned with
color or plot. The novel also shifts generic registers as it moves up and down the
mountain. When Dorinda descends into the valley town in order to seek the aid of the
county Judge, an errand that occupies a short chapter of its own, Murfree depicts her
as uncharacteristically tragic, uncultured, helpless, and transparent. “Whether it was in
curiosity or sympathy,” the Judge “had his questions justified by her self-betrayal, and
his craft easily drew the story from her simplicity.” Dorinda has become the object of
ethnographic local color. Passages loosely focalized through Judge’s perspective, like this
one, contribute to the shift in genre, but characterization in the chapter changes before

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76. Fetterley and Pryse give the most attention, of Murfree’s work, to “The Star of the Valley” Fetterley
and Pryse, Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture, 113–122; Though it
should also be noted that Pryse edited Murfree’s novel In the “Stranger People’s” Country, her introduction
places the novel within the same framework. Bill Hardwig prioritizes editors’ accounts of Murfree, partic-
ularly of her gender and manners in Bill Hardwig, Upon Provincialism: Southern Literature and National
Periodical Culture, 1870-1900 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), Chapter 1; Schroeder
focuses on “Over on T’other Mounting.” Schroeder, “The Painting of Modern Light: Local Color before
Regionalism”

77. Charles Egbert Craddock, The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains (Boston: Houghton Mifflin,
1885), 271. All subsequent citations of this text will be parenthetical. Though Murfree’s identity was widely
known by the time of Prophet’s publication, she continued to published under her original pseudonym,
“Edward Egbert Craddock.”
Dorinda encounters him. Furthermore, though the Judge represents specialized knowledge and the Reconstruction Era regularization of legal codes, his dialect indicates that he is not an outsider. The shift in genre, in other words, is not tied to character. It is not strictly tied to plot either, for Dorinda’s quest is unmistakably noble. She seeks Hiram’s acquittal, who was arrested for aiding Rick even though Rick had been acquitted at last, and she does so despite the fact that her determined pursuit of justice came at the cost of a perhaps-decisive quarrel between her and Rick. Nonetheless, this chapter in the valley town depicts her as pathetic, and it stands in stark contrast to sections on the mountainside where she is the independent yet resolute heroine of a romance.

Shifts in genre accompany Hiram’s geographic movements as well. The novel’s narration and characters closely associate the bald with Hiram, whose trips there to pray are the only reported instances of characters at the bald in the novel. Passages on or about the bald are focalized through or associated with Hiram, and they predominantly engage metaphysical and theological questions for which other characters have little concern. Murfree freights the accompanying, syntactically-dense passages of description with allegorical significance that exceeds the typical bounds of local color:

Always enwrapped in the illusory mists, always touching the evasive clouds, the peaks of the Great Smoky Mountains are like some barren ideal, that has bartered for the vague isolations of a higher atmosphere the material values of the warm world below. Upon those mighty and majestic domes no tree strikes root, no hearth is alight; humanity is an alien thing, and utility set at naught.

(1)

Allegorical relations between these descriptive moments and the novel’s plot are clear: while on the bald Hiram experiences a spiritual clarity that eludes him amid the pettiness of everyday life and ordinary, toiling folks, but illumination comes at the cost of interhuman connection. Additional potential meanings proliferate, and in this respect such narrative meditations constitute a kind of prophecy. After all, this passage also essentially articulates the binary that Dorinda faces – represented but by no means limited to her choice between Hiram and Rick – between admirable-yet-distant idealism and passionate-yet-disappointing materialism.
Whenever Hiram descends the mountain to the Cayces’ and their neighbors’ farms or farther to the Settlement, however, he gets pressed into the conventions of popular postbellum religious fiction. Hiram finds these obligations because he considers them the mere trappings and not the substance of faith: socializing politely with hypocrites, receiving praise he feels undeserving of, deflecting speculations about his romantic life, and addressing the trifling concerns of elderly parishioners. Even worse, in the Settlement Hiram finds himself accosted by the ludicrosities of Old Southwest humor. First, he is unwillingly drawn into a comic squabble between his two uninformed grandfathers, one a Whig and the other an equally-outdated Jacksonian Democrat; later Hiram attempts to break up a gander-pulling, a cruel sport in which men on horseback attempt to pull the neck off a live, greased goose hung by its feet from a tree. Each of these episodes, each clearly delineated from the prose on either side of them, was a common scenario for Old Southwest humor sketches by authors like Augustus Baldwin Longstreet and Johnson Jones Hooper. All the way down in the valley town, where Hiram is imprisoned for a time for supposedly aiding in Rick’s escape, he has the reputation of being a slightly insane but harmless backwoods curiosity. For most of the novel either Dorinda or Hiram occupies the position of central protagonist, but in this section, when both are in the valley town, *Prophet* is without protagonist and comparatively aloof from the events and community it chronicles.

These differences in genre shape any attempt to interpret or even identify the events of the novel. They are especially pressing in the matter of Hiram’s prophetic ability, which is of essential importance in the novel because it alone bridges the expanse between the material and the ideal, the valley and the bald, the human and the divine. Yet Murfree gives the nature of this ability mutually-exclusive explanations depending on the genre and geographic position in which she depicts it. On the bald and among the mountainside farms – that is, within passages of metaphysical discourse, sentimental romance, and religious fiction – Hiram’s prophetic abilities are taken in faith as genuinely divinely inspired and therefore binding on the realm of human events. As depicted within the genres of the Settlement, such as political romance and Old Southwest humor, Hiram’s powers are instead explained

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78. Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, *Georgia Scenes* (1835); Johnson Jones Hooper, *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosa Volunteers* (1845).
as the kind of practiced attentiveness to local culture and environment redolent of local color: “So deep and incisive a knowledge of human nature had he, that this faculty was deemed supernatural, and akin to the gift of prophecy [...] his forecast was based upon observation so close and unsparing, and a power of deduction so just, that in a wider sphere it might have been called judgment” (81). The additional gesture farther outwards in the last clause of this passage – to a “wider sphere” from which Hiram’s prophecy would look like a kind of “judgment” – suggests how readers from an even farther remove might view Hiram through the lens of ethnographic local color associated with the valley town. But seen from a far enough cultural-geographic distance, as repeated at several points in the novel, Hiram is more likely to be dismissed altogether as “ignorant” or “crazy” (52).

While the cycling of genres in Prophet does not follow any sequential narrative pattern, then, it clearly does establish a geographic pattern through correlations between genres and the elevation (or distance from the bald) of what they depict. These correlations can be read mimetically, that is, as representing the varying perspectives of multiple different cultural geographic formations or forces existing within a regional space and vying for interpretive authority over it. Indeed, the approach of the “critical regionalism” practiced by Patricia Limerick, Douglas Reichert Powell, and others would be to identify varying claims to speak on behalf of the region, the relationships between them, and the groups benefitting from each. But more importantly, given that Prophet’s various parts clearly participate in generic norms and given that these parts are organized independently from the position of any particular character – in short, given that Prophet is a regional novel – we should also read this phenomenon structurally with regard to the cultural field. The novel’s system of correlations between genres and elevation essentially reproduces in microcosm the system of associations between genres and geo-hermeneutic distance that held sway in the 1870s and 1880s. Prophet not only adheres to the form of the regional novel; it articulates the genre ecosystem of the literary monthlies underlying that form by mapping it out in miniature to-scale over the Appalachian landscape.

79. See, for example, Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*; Powell, *Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape*.
In reporting various possible interpretations of events, often via dialogue or free indirect discourse, *Prophet* remains coyly uncommitted. Even when the narrative seems to state a position on the matter independent of any one character’s perspective, that position only holds until the genre of the novel shifts again. The tension between the evenly-balanced accounts of Hiram’s abilities escalates into the novel’s conclusion. The Cayces, still enraged even after Micajah’s electoral defeat and the release of their friends from prison, capture Micajah and take him to an aqueous cave for drowning. They are accompanied by Hiram, who decrises their plan and utters his terrible, final prophecy:

‘Ye’ll repent o’ yer deeds this night! An’ the jedgmint o’ the Lord will foller ye! Yer father’s grey hairs will go down in sorrow ter the grave, but his mind will die before his body. An’ some of you-uns will languish in jail, an’ know the despair o’ the bars. An’ he that is bravest ’mongst ye will mark how his shadder dogs him. [...] His eyes blazed. He had risen to his feet in the intensity of his fervour. And whether it was religion or whether it was lunacy it transfigured him. (209)

The novel holds forth both extremes and implicitly all other possibilities in between as equally possible. *Prophet* refuses to endorse any one of these interpretations and in so doing refuses to prioritize any one of its parts over the others.

In the moment of narrative climax and the pseudo-denouement that follows, *Prophet*’s calibrated ambivalence with regard to the explanatory authority of its genres escalates into outright indeterminacy about what they depict. Amid the darkness in a sudden moment of confusion that follows Hiram’s prophecy (and that the Cayces fail to comprehend until the next day), the sentence is carried out not on Micajah, who escapes, but on Hiram – probably, at least. Hiram’s prophecy immediately begins to be fulfilled, but it is unclear why or how. Did he sacrifice himself, in a sense ensuring that his own prophecy would be fulfilled? Did the Cayces make a mistake? Could Hiram even have managed to escape, given that only his hat is found and not his body? Might it be the case, as Dorinda believed, that “like the prophet of old, he had not been suffered to taste death, but was caught up into the clouds” (308)? In what manner, in the likelihood of his death, does Hiram remain in the world of the living? After all, “who shall say his sermons were ended?” (308).
In this fashion, by its final chapter *Prophet*’s indeterminacy has disrupted the typical narrative arcs and conclusions of every genre that it includes. Dorinda had earlier refused Rick because of his failure to aid Hiram, but it is not necessarily clear that this refusal is final; sentimental romance is not so much rejected as shirked. Similarly, in thereby dishonoring himself and failing to woo the novel’s heroine, Rick leaves the mantle of outlaw hero unfulfilled despite winning his freedom from the law. Much as Hiram’s intervention in the gander pulling to save the goose’s life short-circuited the operation of Old Southwest humor, the ambiguity of his death short-circuits the operation of popular religious fiction. *Prophet*’s Appalachia stops tantalizingly short of the stable formulas by which a region is supposed to become accessible to other regions: it declines the idealizing glow of romance, the valorized resistance of the outlaw, the nostalgic yet belittling humor of the Old Southwest, and the redeeming beliefs of religious fiction. Finally, the striking lack of certainty about even the most basic facts of Hiram’s death or Dorinda’s heart, both for readers and for the characters themselves, renders *Prophet* opaque to the inquiries of local color and ethnographic local color alike: aside from surface observations, it denies the possibility of further insight into regional characters, culture, or climes, whether to locals or outsiders.

*Prophet*, then, is loth to offer readily-available interpretations contingent upon the genre or geo-hermeneutic distance from which one prefers to read it. Instead, the novel’s subtle disruptions of conventions in the final accounts frustrate the expected outcomes of the genres it has otherwise consistently participated in and carefully differentiated; in other words, the novel generates expectations of the cultural-geographic interpretations typical for each of the genres it contains only to withhold them. This unexpected nonfulfillment may compel the reader to retrace plotlines or characters for details that would recuperate one of these genres and restore explanatory capacity to its particular perspective on region, but such effort is in vain. *Prophet* refracts attention from the region back onto the genres by which regions are represented, genres which it has already appropriately separated out by distance or elevation as if by a distillation column. In doing so the novel illuminates an essential underlying operation of the form of the regional novel: region becomes a means of probing genres, each distinctively but equally unable to make legible the region which exceeds them, rather than merely vice versa. All that is left are the familiar shapes of
genres, which short-circuiting has laid bare yet made strange, and the geo-hermeneutic
distances with which they are associated. In place of revealing a region, *Prophet* depicts
a scaled model of the genre ecosystem through which regions are supposed to be made
inter-regionally legible.

*Prophet*'s self-reflexivity and the conditions of the cultural field that facilitated it
bring into relief the fundamental inadequacy of approaching literary depictions of regions
as belonging to a regional-ism. Cultural geography was as much a means for constructing
literary genre – its contents, its referents, and its bounds – as literary genre was a means
for constructing cultural geography. It is the co-constituting reciprocity of this relationship
in the major postbellum literary forms that scholarly accounts miss when they posit region
as either a kind of subject matter within a particular genre, the product of a particular
ideology, or the provenance of a single -ism separable from (and secondary to) the likes of,
for example, “high” realism or naturalism. The observation with which this chapter began,
that all these approaches necessarily overlook large swaths of cultural production that rely
on the concept of region, is symptomatic of this more fundamental issue.

As I’ve been arguing, the regional organization of cultural geography in the 1870s
and 1880s profoundly shaped the way that formal characteristics accumulated into genres
and the way that those aggregations became associated with particular meaning – that is,
as representing a particular geo-hermeneutic distance. *Prophet* does more than attest to
the constructedness of this process. After all, the novel doesn’t dispute this conception of
the role and system of genres but rather calls attention to its necessity. While the novel
insists that regional cultures and regional differences in reception can never be rendered
fully transparent – or fully anticipated by the efforts of authors and editors – it nonetheless
testifies to its existence within a cultural field in which cultural difference was formulated
as geographic distance. *Prophet’s* refraction of attention onto its component genres fore-
grounds the fact that region is relational: that to encounter one region is always to do so
from another, in which process the latter’s traces are impressed into the former. The re-
gional novel demonstrates, even more pressingly than the literary monthly, that individual
locations were understood neither in isolation nor in a center-margin binary but as un-
avoidably embedded within an inter-regional geography of cultural exchange, such that any
sustained representation of region was inflected with an array of interstices from which it can be viewed. In light of the pervasiveness of these forms, region in literature was neither a (peripheral) class of subject matter nor a (peripheral) kind of genre but a vital conceptual mechanism for negotiating between the two. To do so requires that we part altogether with the idea of a postbellum regional-ism.

Coda: Canons and Capacities

The consequences of this resolution for the history of literary scholarship and its appraisal of postbellum literature are perhaps nowhere more evident than in the case of Mark Twain’s hypercanonical *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), first written over the course of the late 1870s but published in the same year as *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains*. It is widely accepted that *Huck Finn* does not belong to the contemporary critical category of regional-ism; in fact none of the scholarship cited in this chapter includes Mark Twain whatsoever. This is not without reason. Whichever definition of regional-ism one chooses, *Huck Finn* refuses to fit. It is neither short nor a sketch; far from seclusionary, it attends to broader inter-regional social, economic, and political movements and forces; it sometimes resists dominant racial, gender, class, or cultural-geographic hierarchies of the day, but at it just as frequently reproduces those hierarchies; it is neither nostalgic nor touristic – at least not for any extended length of narrative time. Indeed, these are some of the reasons why *Huck Finn* has remained a touchstone for literary scholars of all methodologies.

*Huck Finn* equally defies the narrative and stylistic continuity of the contemporaneous novel forms, like realism or naturalism, with which we are accustomed to understand the postbellum period today. It draws on a variety of influences but cannot be cordoned into any one trend or tradition. Each time the raft makes contact with land or another floating object Huck and Jim are conscripted, in neatly self-contained segments, into another genre. When Huck sneaks onto the large raft in Chapter 16 and observes the manner in which river men drink, dance, brag, and fight, the novel moves into ethnographic local color. In the Pokeville camp meeting, it reenacts one of the staple scenarios of Old Southwest
humor. Cordoned passages of banter between Huck and Jim that play on the latter’s comic misunderstanding function as minstrelsy (as in the conversation on kings and the French language in Chapter 14). Elsewhere the novel participates in romance, as in the Grangerford-Sherpherdson feud—an episode begins, pointedly, with Huck’s introduction to the melodramatic poetry of the deceased Emmeline. In each of these cases and more, *Huck Finn*’s plot, language, and characters transform, sometimes utterly. Huck is endearingly innocent one moment and dastardly the next; Jim is thoughtfully perceptive one moment and hopelessly befuddled the next.

Contradictory impulses, of course, are a vital component of what we consider complexity of character. Nonetheless, *Huck Finn* organizes these contradictions by genre. *Huck Finn* often comically undercuts or critiques its component genres, yet it fulfills their conventions and their geo-hermeneutic associations in the process. However tongue-in-cheek *Huck Finn* may treat what Twain elsewhere dubbed the peculiarly Southern “Sir Walter [Scott] disease” of “romanticism,” for example, the novel provides such readers several opportunities to take their fill all the same. And though the long sections at the end of the novel in which Huck and Tom put Jim through torturous absurdities are among the most disliked today, Twain expanded them while seeing how they were particularly successful with Midwestern audiences on speaking tour.

Despite the length and variety of their journey, Huck and Jim never actually leave the region in which they begin. The entirety of *Huck Finn* unfolds within the widely-popularized “Pike Territory,” a region comprising Missouri, Arkansas, Northern Texas, and Southern Illinois. The novel begins in a town modeled on Twain’s own home Hannibal, Missouri, located sixteen miles north of the county from which the region got its name, and it ends on the Phelps plantation in a town appropriately named Pikesville. Huck and Jim’s journey, then, does not traverse cultural geographic space so much as the various

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82. Fred Lewis Pattee, in the first scholarly account of postbellum literature (which he organized in large part by region), devotes an entire chapter to “The Discovery of Pike County” and attests to its sweeping influence on literature of the 1870s and 1880s. “Pike County,” otherwise referred to as “pike territory” after the shorthand name for people from the surrounding area, is taken as synecdoche for a region including Missouri, Arkansas, Northern Texas, and Southern Illinois. Pattee, *A History of American Literature since 1870*. 

representational configurations available for representing it in the genre ecosystem familiar to any reader of literary monthlies; rather than representing multiple cultural spaces, it represents one region from multiple geo-hermeneutic distances. The contemporary critical approach of regional-ism fails to account for *Huck Finn* for the very reasons that it fails to account for the regional novel. *Huck Finn* eludes regional-ism precisely because it is a regional novel, in the sense outlined above, engaging the entire genre ecosystem that had evolved to address the diverse cultural geography of the postbellum United States.

Again, it is far from new to observe these qualities of *Huck Finn* in themselves; the novel’s tendency to shift on a dime between these different styles, tones, and genres altogether has become a hallmark of Twain scholarship. But whereas the contemporary critical categories of regional-ism, realism, and naturalism make *Huck Finn* look like a uniquely masterful outlier by comparison, these qualities in fact constitute its continuity with the broader class of texts I’ve called regional novels and within the genre ecosystem proliferating outward from literary monthlies. We’ve long treated *Huck Finn* as a regional novel; we just haven’t appreciated the fact that it wasn’t alone, and thus we haven’t named it. Recognizing these cultural formations and *Huck Finn*’s belonging to them enables us to more adequately understand its existence in the first place. The novel’s multivariable depiction of a single region through a wide-ranging combination of generic elements was not a sudden unmatched invention but rather just one instance of such a practice in a cultural field structured to facilitate just that. One should expect nothing less from a text about Pike Country that Twain assembled from fragments tested before readers in the *Century* as well as audiences from the Midwest, the Mid-Atlantic, and New England while on a speaking tour with none other than Louisiana’s George Washington Cable. The perspectives of all these regions made their way into *Huck Finn*. If this re-evaluation detracts from the aesthetic valuation usually conferred upon Twain’s novel, it does so only in redistributing that valuation back to the still underappreciated aesthetic capacities of the cultural field in the 1870s and 1880s.

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83. Excerpts from *Huck Finn* were published in the Dec. 1884 (29, no. 2), Jan. 1885 (29, no. 3), and Feb. 1885 (29, no. 4) issues of the *Century*. See also Cardwell, *Twins of Genius*. 
CHAPTER 3

SCALES OF CIRCULATION: NATIONAL PUBLISHING, REGIONAL MAGAZINES, AND LOCAL READING

The cosmopolitan claim to represent all the nation’s regions – on which basis the genre ecosystem of the literary monthlies attempted to pose as interregional and thereby circulate interregionally – was itself regionally distinctive. It was made primarily by writers and editors of one region, it reflected one region’s dominance of the publishing industry, and its articulation specifically served that region’s continued cultural authority. The leading literary monthlies were owned by the leading publishing houses, all based in three cities of the urban northeast seaboard: New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. The literary periodical format that surpassed the literary monthlies in circulation and influence at the end of the century, the ten-cent monthly, would follow suit. The shared location was of course no accident: it reflected the accelerated centralization of the publishing industry facilitated by the incorporation of capital and networks of distribution. While this trend began, as William Chavrat shows, in the antebellum decades, it reached a decisive new stage in the 1890s following massive postbellum expansions in the breadth and density of rail infrastructure.1

As America rapidly expanded westward in size and population, additional consolidation ensured that publishing remained largely in place, further heightening geographic disparity. Instead, the role of distribution grew, and as it did it enabled the advent of new auxiliary literary industries like mass advertising and author agents that in turn further reinforced centralization and integration. For most of the country the book was increasingly an object from elsewhere with respect to its material production as a commodity. In a representative

1. Chavrat adds that literary publishing in particular led this trend. Charvat, Literary publishing in America, 1790-1850, 26.
site of small-city literary access and practice like the Muncie Public Library, 56% of all books that circulated from 1891 to 1902 had been published by New York firms.²

Seminal work in the 1980s by Any Kaplan, Alan Thrachtenberg, Benedict Anderson, and others linked postbellum literary realism to the nationalizing, incorporating, and centralizing trends that transformed the publishing industry and American socio-economic life more broadly. Economic and institutional ties abound after all. For all the generic and geographic diversity of their contents, literary monthlies gave their prime real estate to leading realists William Dean Howells and Henry James for both fiction and criticism advocating realism, culminating in Howells’ famed Editor’s Study columns in Harper’s from 1886 to 1892 (to say nothing of his earlier editorship of the Atlantic). Kaplan argues that realists aimed “to present a coherent view of a society as a whole” and that to do so they “draw boundaries and explore their limits”; this makes realism “a strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change – not just to assert a dominant power but often to assuage fears of powerlessness.”³ For Kaplan, by fulfilling this function the social construction of American realism participates in constructing a national cultural sphere. While scholars have significantly expanded this account of the realist program over the subsequent decades to emphasize the decisive influence or countervailing energies of contemporaneous race relations, internationalism, popular reading, and rising inequity, they often retain the idea that realism was a national or nationalizing form, abetting a consolidation of American taste.⁴

Regional circulatory practices reveal a more conflicted relationship between readers and centralized literary authority. When literary magazines criticized the centralization

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² New York-published books made up only 40% of the Muncie Public Library’s total catalog; this difference reflects New York publishers’ greater share of the market for fiction, by far library patrons’ favorite genre, relative to other subjects like science or theology, in which Boston and Philadelphia publishers held a larger market share. Frank Felsenstein and James J Connolly, What Middletown Read: Print Culture in an American Small City (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 87.


of publishing or the fanfare around realism, they identified these as regional rather than national phenomena, uniquely characteristic of the Mid-Atlantic. Not without reason. The rapid expansion of transportation infrastructure notwithstanding, the leading trade publishers of the Mid-Atlantic incessantly lamented that distribution lagged behind manufacturing, that they had difficulty reaching purchasers, and that readers had unpredictable tastes.\footnote{For a characteristic account, see A. G., “The Passing of the Century,” Publishers’ Weekly 58, no. 1509 (December 29, 1900): 1820; for another contemporaneous account, see Walter Hines Page, A Publisher’s Confession (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1923 [1905]).}

The book industry grew at a smaller rate than American industry as a whole in terms of sales even while cheaper print formats outpaced it (Chapter 1).\footnote{Sheehan, This Was Publishing: A Chronicle of the Book Trade in the Gilded Age, 201.} Even the eclipse of antebellum regional trade publishing is somewhat overstated insofar as many of the former regional publishing centers remained important printing centers and distribution hubs for Eastern publishing houses.\footnote{Tebb, A History of Book Publishing in the United States. Volume II: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919, 21–23.}

Avowedly regional mid-prestige magazines cropped up in these same cities – including Atlanta’s Sunny South, Chicago’s Current, San Francisco’s Argonaut, and many more – to reinforce alternative cultural geographies and practices of reading Mid-Atlantic print. Especially from the late 1880s on, these magazines sustained regional literary networks built on hundreds of contributors, tens of thousands of subscribers, and frequent availability at literary clubs and public libraries, whose rapid growth at the end of the century facilitated a major expansion of reading choices available to nonurban Americans. These were flourishing, coordinated mediums and sites of reading with a significant footprint in the broader field of literary print. If the literary monthlies were going to give preferential treatment to the Mid-Atlantic’s nation and authors, as one regional magazine remarked, “let literary ostracism be mutual.”\footnote{D. H. Pingrey, “Literary Ostracism,” St. Louis Magazine 8, no. 10 (October 1887): 499.}

The trouble is that scholars too often take authors and editors of the Mid-Atlantic metropolises at their word when it comes to geographic representation. Even scholars who argue that regional writing resisted or critiqued nationalization risk granting too much control to the Mid-Atlantic and too little attention to the publishers, press, circulation net-
works, and reading practices of other regions. For example, Carrie Tirado Bramen usefully foregrounds the spatial and cultural leveling that regional writers understood themselves to be carrying out, yet her argument that “pluralists and local colorists alike invoked sub-cultural uniqueness as a way to refashion the Union” reinscribes the priority of the nation. Critics did invoke the nation in regional debates, but they opposed subordination to it because they understood that this inevitably favored some regions over others. Nancy Glazener insightfully argues that realism was a cultural institution grounded in Northeastern bourgeois society, but her conclusion that regional periodicals internalized national formats is based on a small number of periodicals and does not take into account the way they circulated.

Tom Lutz argues compellingly that regional writing is constituted by a “doubleness – in which an appeal to local commitments [...] is coupled with a commitment to Literature as a universal, cosmopolitan, honorific category”: that its literary value lies in the cosmopolitan value of the body of regional writing as a whole. This approach explains postbellum interest in reading about other regions, countries, and ethnic groups, but it fails to account for two substantial yet overlooked currents in the ways Americans understood the geography of centralization and the geography of reading. First, readers chiefly associated cosmopolitanism, regional or otherwise, with the self-representation of a single region—the Mid-Atlantic. Second, readers nonetheless gravitated towards periodicals and novels of their own region that explicitly reinforced specific strategies for reading with region in mind.

My main contention in this chapter is that while Mid-Atlantic publishers, editors, and authors presented their region as nationally representative on the basis of centralization, alternative scales and sites of circulation like regional magazines and local libraries encouraged readers to contest this status. Realists like Howells and James only appear as major, national authors to be contrasted with ostensibly “minor,” regional ones if we assume that

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9. This is particularly evident in the designation of “regionalism” as a “minor” literature. For the most recuperative use of this designation, see Fetterley and Pryse, Writing Out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture, Chapter 2.


12. Lutz, Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value, 12. A corollary of Lutz’ argument is that interest in “the local” is an interest in localities in general and thus that “the region of literary regionalism is at most of secondary importance.” Lutz, Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value, 27.
the literary monthlies that gave realists pride of place were major and national (since sales of their books rarely outperformed those of the authors we now call “regionalist”). Yet there are reasons to doubt this designation. While literary monthlies had larger circulation in the country overall, regional literary magazines often reached as many readers in their own parts of the country, whose ranks included the pivotal figures in local literary communities. Furthermore, in accord with the writers of regional magazines, readers didn’t simply accept the curated versions of their regions that the Mid-Atlantic literary monthlies published, and they didn’t treat Mid-Atlantic authors, editors, or publishers as national. To see the scope of this discourse requires not only identifying how Mid-Atlantic texts crafted the idea of their own literary authority as national and cosmopolitan but also recovering the material circumstances that underwrote regional reading as a set of specific yet flexible practices at times conscious and at times internalized.

The first section of this chapter argues that the centralization of the publishing industry gave rise to the idea of the Mid-Atlantic as the nationally-representative region, through a reading of William Dean Howells’ realist masterpiece *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. *Hazard* is the story of a literary magazine and its regionally diverse contributors surrounded by the inequality of industrial New York; in it, Howells reflects with ambivalence on the state of publishing as well as his hand in it as a leading editor, contributor, and critic for leading literary monthlies including *Harper’s* and the *Atlantic*. The second section turns not to those periodicals but to their regional counterparts, using correspondence records and library holdings to map thriving networks of regional print production and consumption. In the third section I sketch three of these periodical formats in particular: the regional literary monthly, the regional literary weekly, and the regional literary booster. While these magazines varied in function by class and in content by region, I show that they all encouraged readers to treat Mid-Atlantic texts as regional and sought to inculcate habits of reading across genres for shared regional aesthetics and characteristics. The final section shows some of these practices at work by comparing public library checkout records for novels by Howells and his Midwestern peer Booth Tarkington in the small city of Muncie, Indiana – the model for the home of *A Hazard of New Fortunes*’ representative Midwestern transplants. From this perspective, the salient difference between Howells and Tarkington
isn’t that one is a national writer and the other a regional writer but that they represent different regions.

1. Howells’ Metropolises: Publishing Centralization in the Cosmopolitan Region

The trajectory of William Dean Howells’ career has become the stuff of academic legend, and for good reason. Howells was as keen at sensing trends as he was at influencing them - and no single individual was as influential as he from the early 1880s to the mid 1890s. Like Edgar Allan Poe in the antebellum decades, to follow Howells’ moves in the literary field is to follow the shifting centers of aesthetic and institutional gravity. In 1860 he made his way to Boston to befriend the writers of the country’s literary capital. He spent the Civil War in Italy, the next best place for American artists after Mark Twain’s and Bret Harte’s San Francisco. He returned to Boston afterwards to be remembered to the Fireside Poets as their embers cooled, accepting editorship of the *Atlantic*. Here he put his time abroad to good use tapping into the insatiable demand for travel writing in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Howells' early novels, such as *Their Wedding Journey* (1871) and *A Foregone Conclusion* (1875), are themselves essentially thinly veiled travel narratives. Working in this form, he arrived at two principles: that character doesn’t really change and that it shows forth in minor passing moments. As the popular taste for the colors and cultures of travel writing transmuted into the taste for local color as a genre in its own right, Howells acquired the final crucial element of the realism he would champion over the subsequent decade, a deep grounding in regional community mores.

Howells does not fit within existing scholarly accounts of regionalism. Yet what could be more regional than a story about a farmer whose uncouthness embarrasses his progressive children when sudden success puts them in higher society, only to find that real happiness lies rather in the simple comforts of each other’s company? What could be more regional than a story about a middle-aged woman returning to her hometown after years away to experience the awkwardness of simultaneous distaste at her town being overrun by wealthy
vacationers and disappointment at no longer being a local herself? These, of course, are the plots of *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and *Annie Kilburn* (1889), but they might just as easily be summaries of novels by Edward Eggleston or Sarah Orne Jewett. Whether the Howells novels of the 1880s invited regional reading is a question to which I will return in the fourth section of this chapter. For the present, it suffices to point out that Howells was not only a careful curator and critic of regional representation but a practitioner as well. When it seemed that Boston’s cultural authority was shifting to New York, Howells acquiesced. In 1885 Howells signed the lucrative contract with *Harper’s* that would move all his publishing to New York (having previously published with Osgood in Boston); he moved there three years later. Finally, in 1889, the metropolis would make its way into Howells’ fiction in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, his masterpiece.

Howells’ progressive movement towards New York and bundled contracts maps onto the centralization and incorporation of the publishing industry towards the end of the century. In 1890 as many as twenty of the major publishing houses were based in New York City, around half a dozen each in Boston and Philadelphia, and fewer than that in the rest of the country together. Many of these publishers owned stables of general- and special-interest periodicals, and though the vertical integration of book and periodical publishing ceased to be a driving force in literary publishing in the early twentieth century, many of the new independent periodicals of the 1890s either grew out of or spawned book publishing ventures. *Collier’s* emerged in 1888 from the successful subscription book publisher P. F. Collier & Son; *McClure’s* (founded 1893), like the *Century* before it, reversed this formula by starting a publishing house after the success of the magazine (the McClure Syndicate, which spawned the magazine, had been in operation since 1884). *McCall’s*, like its less literary predecessor the *Delineator*, was originally a publisher of sewing patterns and later expanded to include fiction. As one guide to the publishing industry noted, this integration combined with rapid growth in print production made “New York, Boston, and Philadelphia [...] the literary sifters and the literary clearing-houses of the continent. As a result of such concentration, the leading publishing houses receive each [...] from one hundred to several

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hundred manuscripts per month. The task of taking care of this mass of material is quite a considerable one, and involves no little outlay of time and money.\textsuperscript{13} The rapid expansion of these auxiliary literary professions – including publishers’ readers and copy-writers, to say nothing of the dime novel factories – induced unsuccessful or aspiring authors to the Mid-Atlantic who otherwise would have remained in their home regions: it forged a centralized population of literary workers.\textsuperscript{15}

The leading literary publishers in New York were a mix of old and new that included D. Appleton & Co. (founded in 1831), Harper & Brothers (1833), Charles Scribner’s Sons (1846), G. P. Putnam’s Sons (1848), Henry Holt & Co. (1866), E. P. Dutton & Co. (1869), and Doubleday, Page & Co. (1897, as Doubleday & McClure until 1900). In Boston, the important literary publishers were more susceptible to consolidation in the postbellum decades: Little, Brown & Co. (1837) acquired Roberts Brothers (1857) in 1898 and Houghton, Mifflin & Co. (1864 as publishers) acquired Osgood & Co., the successor of Ticknor & Fields, in 1878. J. B. Lippincott Company (1836) stood out as the leading literary publisher in Philadelphia, though, like Boston, that city had several major publishers in other segments of the trade publishing (and non-trade publishing) market(s). These were the houses among which flourished what was known as the “courtesy of the trade,” the set of tacit agreements that minimized competition over prices and author contracts as well as organized collective resistance to the incursions of wholesalers or agents.\textsuperscript{16} While new trade publishers were continually being formed and while no single publisher dominated the market, these leading houses exerted a controlling influence on the industry. To secure this position, they increasingly reorganized from family enterprises or partnerships into corporations. Lippincott did so early, in 1885, but by the turn of the century others followed in rapid succession: Appleton in 1897, Harper in 1900, Scribner in 1903, Houghton

\textsuperscript{14} Putnam and Putnam, \textit{Authors and Publishers: A Manual of Suggestions for Beginners in Literature}\textsuperscript{16}; Walter Hines Page confirmed the scope of this department of publishing two decades later in outlining the multi-reader review system, writing that “half a dozen popular writers will build a publishing house. It is, therefore, doubtful whether any other business is so carefully conducted with reference to its sources of supply.” Page was one to talk: Doubleday, Page’s early success was in large part indebted to the runaway popularity of a single author, Thomas Dixon, Jr. Page, \textit{A Publisher’s Confession} 88.

\textsuperscript{15} See Page, \textit{A Publisher’s Confession} 132–137.

\textsuperscript{16} For an example of the former, see the discussion of the “Macy’s war” in Sheehan, \textit{This Was Publishing}; \textit{A Chronicle of the Book Trade in the Gilded Age} 223; on its antebellum precedent, see Michael J. Everett, \textit{The Grand Chorus of Complaint: Authors and the Business Ethics of American Publishing} (Oxford University Press, 2011).
Mifflin in 1908\textsuperscript{17} Incorporation allowed publishers to consolidate and expand their vested capital, production technology, and labor force. As early as the mid-1870s, the leading Mid-Atlantic houses of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia formed regional trade organizations like the “Central Booksellers Association.”\textsuperscript{18} The result was a publishing industry governed by business arrangements underwritten by a closely-knit network of social relations between gentlemen-publishers linking the three metropoles.

Centralization in publishing was facilitated by the growth of intermediary industries – between authors and publishers on the one hand and publishers and readers on the other hand – that also clustered in the metropoles of the Mid-Atlantic. Over the 1870s the primary system of book distribution transitioned from trade sale auctions to the wholesaling method that already dominated periodical distribution. Three of the largest five wholesalers were based in New York: the American News Company (the analogue of the “News Company” that distributes *Every Other Week* in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*), Baker & Taylor (books), and H. B. Claffin & Co. (general), the other largest being Wanamaker (department stores) in Philadelphia and A. C. McClurg & Co. (books) in Chicago\textsuperscript{19} A book’s accessibility via bookstores, drug stores, railway stands, and news depots depended on its being brought out by a publisher in business with one such firm, each of which sold far more than just books.\textsuperscript{20} Though newspaper syndicates continued to operate regionally in scope even if not in ownership (as I argued in Chapter 1), the two leading periodical advertising agencies, Rowell’s and Ayer’s, were based in New York as well. The rise of literary agents in the second half of the century negotiated authors’ interests amid this expanding system in which ever more parties claimed – and, crucially, competed for – a share of profits. Many of these too were based in New York, including the precedent-setting Paul R. Reynolds agency (founded in 1892). Even a firm as influential as Boston’s Houghton, Mifflin had to follow the “New York rates” that burgeoned under these conditions when it came to paying


\textsuperscript{19} Sheehan, *This Was Publishing: A Chronicle of the Book Trade in the Gilded Age* 161.

authors. When these adjacent industries made incursions into trade publishers’ profits or market position, in other words, they did so under the same economic principles and thus compelled publishers to further commit to the modes of business of fin de siecle monopoly capitalism. Walter Hines Page was right to conclude in the opening decade of the new century that “all these modern commercial methods have added to the publisher’s expense or risk; and for these reasons his business has become more like any other manufacturing business.”

*A Hazard of New Fortunes* takes a new publishing venture as its point of inception precisely because that industry’s transformations epitomized broader changes in American life and culture. Yet the novel opens, tellingly, with a conversation about business that is actually a conversation about regions. When Fulkerson asks March to edit the literary section of the new magazine *Every Other Week* despite lacking any qualifications for the job, he initially jokes that the invitation stems from regional camaraderie: both men are Western transplants in the East. Shortly, however, Fulkerson provides the actual, more practical justification for offering March the job: “you know both sections, and you can make this thing go, from ocean to ocean.” It is less their place of origin than their status as transplants that matters. Throughout the novel Fulkerson lists many qualities that *Every Other Week* must have – it must have pictures, it must appeal to women – but he repeatedly returns to the concern for geographic coverage.

“New York does make or break a play; but it doesn’t make or break a book; it doesn’t make or break a magazine. The great mass of the readers are outside of New York, and the rural districts are what we have got to go for. They don’t read much in New York; they write, and talk about what they’ve written.” (86)

It is essential to have a westerner-turned-Bostonian and New Yorker-to-be like March at the helm because, like the *Century* or *Harper’s*, *Every Other Week* cannot simply be cosmopolitan in composition: in order to succeed it must be able to circulate across regionally diverse readerships. *Every Other Week* is not a literary monthly, but it is an equivalent

insofar as Fulkerson clearly has in mind the literary monthlies’ genre ecosystem. In stressing the need to represent all the regions to diverse regional tastes, Fulkerson, like the editors of that magazine class, ties stylistic or generic difference to geographic distance.

Fulkerson’s argument that Every Other Week be published from New York is also premised on the priority of inter-regional circulation. The magazine is to be conducted along “the idea of self-government in the arts,” a prospect initially outlined as something like communal ownership but practiced as something more akin to literary federalism. When March balks at why the magazine couldn’t be published in Boston, Fulkerson responds that such a thing “wouldn’t do. You might as well say St. Louis or Cincinnati. There’s only one city that belongs to the whole country, and that’s New York” (10). A periodical encompassing the geographic diversity of the nation could only be headquartered in New York because that is the only place which itself contains elements of the entire nation. As March later comes to agree, “everybody belongs more or less in New York” though “nobody has to belong here altogether” (194). The cultural authority of New York is thus based in its being at once metaphorically and materially representative of the nation. New York is not only cosmopolitan but uniquely so, and its cosmopolitanism is not merely presented as a feature but as its defining, distinguishing quality. This claim, with both metaphorical and material dimensions, is about cultural geography. In other words, it obeys the same logic applied to regions and regional cultures. This can be seen by simply rephrasing Fulkerson’s position: a periodical that represents all the regions of the nation is the natural cultural expression of New York.

The idea of a cosmopolitan region epitomized by New York was not new; it had its roots in antebellum regional conflicts over literary nationalism.24 Already in the 1840s, literary kingmaker Evert Duyckinck insisted in the influential Literary World that “we shall endeavor to keep the windows of our writing-chamber open, North, South, East, and West: and this we take to be the best province and happiest good fortune of our metropolitan position. While jealousies and heartburnings are indulged elsewhere, New York stands central.”25 The statistician Adna Ferrin Weber, himself writing from New York, would state

a similar idea in *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century* (1899): “the city is the spectrooscope of society; it analyzes and sifts the population, separating and classifying the diverse elements.”\(^{26}\) As the overarching postbellum East-West binary replaced the overarching antebellum North-South binary, however, the space corresponding to this idea began to realign as well. This was the era of the rise of the metropolis. Though all regions came to have their own metropolitan center, metropolises clustered disproportionately in one particular area: what we would now call the Mid-Atlantic. The eighteenth-century precedent for this classification, the “Middle States,” persisted in popular usage through the early twentieth century in a variety of official and unofficial discourses ranging from census reports and directories to advertisements and news articles. When writers in the 1890s used “the East” to refer to part of America they did so in this same sense, no more referring to Maine than to North Carolina.\(^{27}\) “The East” named the urbanized “Middle States” of the Atlantic seaboard whose accumulation of political, economic, and cultural authority made it the nation’s primary destination of interregional as well as international immigration – and antagonist of interregional conflicts over issues like bimetalism, racial equality, and monopoly.

What made “the East” or the Mid-Atlantic the urban, cosmopolitan region rather than simply the area with the most cosmopolitan cities was the fact that the rise of the metropolis also changed the spatial dimension of the nineteenth-century city. Cities were not envisioned as single points on the map or as exceptions to their region. As William Cronon brilliantly shows in his study of Chicago and the Midwest, heightened incorporation meant that the city and the country were more intimately interconnected than ever before.\(^{28}\) The extension of urban areas was accompanied by the birth of the proto-suburb, a development most poignantly dramatized by Booth Tarkington (I will return to Tarkington in the final section of this chapter as Howells’ inverse). Satellite industrial towns cropped up as industries left city centers for more space. Indeed, firms in both the printing and

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\(^{27}\) Weber uses “Eastern States” and “North Atlantic States” interchangeably to this end. Weber further notes that this region differs from the rest in that its urban population makes up a larger proportion of its total and concentrates in a greater number of large cities as opposed to a few large cities and many small ones. Weber, 28–31.

\(^{28}\) See Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. 
publishing industries such as Harper, Putnam’s, and Doubleday were among those moving manufacturing operations out of Manhattan in the early twentieth century, and publishers that did not do their own printing sought lower manufacturing costs outside the metropoles proper. In the region of the metropolises, urban sprawl led to coalescence. As cities grew outward and their upper classes conjoined in founding new summer homes, schools, and resorts in formerly agricultural areas, Mid-Atlantic crop prices were eclipsed by other forms of land use; urban employers claimed labor from these declining rural districts, leaving entire swaths depopulated. New York City epitomized these urbanizing forces and the spatial extension of their consequences not only because it constituted their most advanced stage but because it was geographically and conceptually adjoined to other city-hinterland spaces undergoing the same transformations.

_A Hazard of New Fortunes_ depicts these changes in the human geography of the Mid-Atlantic by exploring the same representational strategy that Fulkerson (like Duyckinck before him) attributes to New York. The novel’s cast of newly-arrived New Yorkers is conspicuously geographically balanced, and it trades heavily on established regional types. In _Hazard_ regional association is both biographical narrative fact – shaping character background, beliefs, and actions – and historical allegory, by which characters are made to represent particular alignments of political, economic, and cultural positions. Region thereby functions as the primary link between the various facets of psychology and type-casting in the novel. The South is represented in the uneasy dynamic between Colonel Woodburn and his daughter, reactionaries in opposite directions against the uncertain future of the postbellum South. The Colonel is the consummate Old South aristocrat while his daughter has the rapaciousness of the so-called New South. New England is represented by the aspiring young artist Alma and her obliging mother, each guarded yet courteous, each a familiar New England type proliferating in stories by the likes of Sarah Orne Jewett. Finally, the Dryfoos family – particularly Mr. Dryfoos’ rugged individualism and his wife’s austere presence like

29. G. P. Putnam’s Sons early on moved its printing operation, the Knickerbocker Press, from Manhattan to New Rochelle, NY in 1889; Harpers left its longtime lower Manhattan campus as part of the reorganization following its 1899 entry into receivership; Doubleday moved its headquarters, including the Country Life Press, to Garden City, NY in 1910. As Tebbel recounts, strikes led to higher prices in New York City for stages of manufacturing that required large quantities of skilled labor, such as typesetting, which made plate producing firms across the New Jersey and Connecticut state lines more economical Tebbel, _A History of Book Publishing in the United States. Volume II: The Expansion of an Industry 1865-1919_ 49.
“a little wooden meeting house in thick western woods” – stands in for the Midwest. Here too family dynamics play out a regional generational divide. The Dryfoos daughters echo the Midwestern boosterism already influentially criticized in novels like Joseph Kirkland’s *Zury* (1887), while Conrad’s budding idealism maps onto the contemporaneous expansion in that region of the Grange movement into what would become Populism. Indeed, with the significant exception of Lindau, every major character in the novel is associated with a particular region. Thus while the New Yorkers Fulkerson and Beaton play important roles in the symbolic geography of the novel, *Hazard* depicts the Mid-Atlantic via the overall variety of non-Mid-Atlantic characters it incorporates. Modeling the representative logic of the Mid-Atlantic, much like literary monthlies and *Every Other Week*, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* is national to the degree that it is cosmopolitan.

*Hazard* is keen to show that the experience of regional diversity in New York was itself distinctive, more than the sum of the experiences of its various parts. As the narrator describes,

> There was great ease there, and simplicity; and if there was not distinction, it was not for want of distinguished people, but because there seems to be some solvent in New York life that reduces all men to a common level, that touches everybody with its potent magic and brings to the surface the deeply underlying nobody. It is the spirit of the street transferred to the drawing room. (218)

This passage outlines both a general experience and a more specific quality arising from it: the absence of “distinction” results from the mass reduction of “all men to a common level.” As the novel later terms it, the “heterogeneous gaiety of New York” at the social level inevitably produces a “loss of individuality” at the personal level (278, 268). Fulkerson – fast-talking, street-savvy, flashy, yet all surface – could be described with the same phrases. He may once have come from the West, but by the novel’s start he is its consummate New Yorker. For all Beaton’s differences in personal demeanor, he shares these qualities with Fulkerson:

> When Beaton was writing, he would have agreed, up to a certain point, with anyone who said literature was his proper expression; but then, when he was painting, up to a certain point he would have maintained against the world that he was a colorist and supremely a colorist. At this certain point in either art he
was apt to break away in a frenzy of disgust and wreak himself upon some other. In these moods he sometimes designed elevations of buildings, very striking, very original, very chic, very everything but habitable. (105)

Beaton’s most salient characteristic is precisely that he possesses no quality of substance. He dabbles in all things, haphazard courtship of Alma included, without being committed or consistent to any. Mid-Atlantic cosmopolitanism is shown to be a particular characteristic rather than the capacity for inclusiveness; impossible to maintain as such, the promise of heterogeneity devolves into a particular constellation of attributes – vacuous variation.

A Hazard of New Fortunes depicts the Mid-Atlantic as a distinct region at the narrative level by recourse to tropes and formal mechanisms its readers would have readily recognized as those employed in regional writing to construct locality. Entire chapters are devoted to the kind of immersive local color sketch that March is supposed to be contributing to Every Other Week. Foremost among these is the lengthy description of gaslights in Part First, Chapter X – “the moony sheen of the electrics mixing with the reddish points and blots of gas far and near” – which, with its accompanying voyeurism, echoes the sensational 1850s genre of city ‘by gaslight’ sketches especially associated with Philadelphia and New York. The novel’s opening apartment search similarly employs the narrative device of travel writing as practiced specifically with American regional cultures: narration is focalized through an outsider touring an area whose charmingly outmoded inhabitants are sufficiently “other” to amuse but not so much as to threaten. The Marches’ ethnographic attitude encompasses alike immigrants and “natives,” whom they are often unable to distinguish. Finally, in keeping with another familiar formal mechanism of regional writing in all genres, characters articulate emotions geographically. March’s choice to hazard all beliefs and ideals in the relativism of modernity finds embodiment in the variety of churches on New York’s streets, culminating in his ecstatic embrace of them “‘all—all! And a fresh [prophet] every Sunday’” (277). Dryfoos can only conceive of his nagging remorse over his new fortunes, which seem to continue capitalizing no matter what he does, in terms of the place he sacrificed to first acquire them. He voices this tragic contradiction to his wife in the frantic realization that “‘we can’t go back!’” (210). Indeed, none of the characters seem able to “go back” to their home regions; they become as rooted to New York as the
characters of a Jewett or Murfree novel. The Mid-Atlantic’s regional characteristics and its amenability to conventions of regional depiction obfuscate the nationally representative function attributed to it.

This is precisely the conundrum faced by the editorial team of *Every Other Week* when they begin to assemble the periodical’s first number from the mass of submissions. “The heterogeneous forces did cooperate to a reality which March could not deny,” yet it is clear that the nature of the ‘reality’ produced did not really correspond to its heterogeneous parts (173). Initially confident in his and Beaton’s editorial work, March becomes increasingly suspicious that they have introduced a qualitative difference into their material:

[Beaton] handled the illustrations with such sympathy as not to destroy their individual quality and that indefinable charm which comes from good amateur work in whatever art. He rescued them from their weaknesses and errors, while he left in them the evidence of the pleasure with which a clever young man, or sensitive girl, or refined woman had done them. Inevitably from his manipulation, however, the art of the number acquired homogeneity, and there was nothing casual in its appearance. (173)

Whether intentionally or not, the editors have been unable to fulfill the professed transparency of their office. Rather than serving as the organ through which national diversity in artistic production is amplified, they have revised the submissions into uniformity of expression. Their ground for effacing heterogeneity is, ironically, their claim to encompass and comprehend it. The phrasings of Fulkerson’s and March’s arguments for the primacy of the city, cited above, illustrate the fundamental contradiction at the heart of their cosmopolitanism: does New York belong to “the whole country,” as Fulkerson professed, or is it the whole country that “belongs more or less in New York,” as March asserts? New York cannot be both the model of the nation and the model for the nation, the reflection of all regions and a region in its own right.

*Every Other Week* effaces geographic differences in the interest of commercial circulation. The Southern Colonel Woodburn’s words are excerpted and edited in order to render them a curious artifact rather than a tract; the New England Alma’s drawings are “work[ed] over” to fit commodified “shape” (173). The editorial staff routinely mock non-Northeastern accents throughout the novel by ventriloquizing them, not only Lindau’s but
Miss Woodburn’s and the Dryfoos girls’ as well. The homogeneity introduced, however unplanned, is neither coincidental nor practical but structural: it reflects the bias of region. As *Every Other Week* becomes successful, its editors shed “the idea of self-government in the arts” for the same reason that the metropolis-as-metaphor model fails: what is supposed to be inter-regionally representative instead succumbs to the (Mid-Atlantic) regional commitments upon which it was premised (191). Indeed, by the end of the novel *Every Other Week* has given up all pretenses to its “democratic” system in favor of standard top-down methods of selection and payment.

When Dryfoos holds a dinner party, however, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* presents a final attempt to assert cosmopolitanism in the face of disparate parts. The scene, given more buildup and more space in the narrative than any other, functions as the novel’s climax. The foreshadowed political conflict is yet again prefigured by a regional one, when the honor of the South is challenged. This initial danger is passed over relatively smoothly, but it introduces geographic categories to shape the discussion to come. The three positions articulated in the course of the argument, each represented by a single character, are associated with regions: the South stands for feudalism (in the person of Colonel Woodburn), the West stands for a natural resources-driven capitalism (via Dryfoos), and Lindau advocates “paternalism,” the radical alterity of which is underscored by its very lack of an embodying place. The argument, of course, remains undecidable – in large part because the characters at this point are operating almost exclusively as types – and the evening ends abruptly with its participants more divided than ever. The center has failed to hold; the occasion of New York’s cosmopolitanism fails to unite or even encompass the divergent parts. If Lindau’s outburst “‘what iss Amerigan? Dere iss no Ameriga anymore!’” decries the loss of democratic principles, in equating the “what” of an adjective with the “there” of a place it associates this lack with the geographic dissolution of the nation (287).

Where is the Mid-Atlantic in this debate? Strikingly yet tactfully silent. The regional unity promised by New York is revealed to be only the fantasy of social reconciliation; like Beaton’s daydreams of romantic understanding with Alma, the novel perpetually invokes but ultimately withholds communion. Yet in the absence of the possibility for actual incorporation, the idea of a nationally-representative region proves to be a usable fiction. The
Mid-Atlantic characters’ patient withdrawal from the heated center of the conversation is all that is required, after all, for them to get everything they want: continued funding from Dryfoos, exculpation from Lindau, and continued contributions from the rest. The rhetoric of cosmopolitanism provides only the formal pretext for unity where actual heterogeneity has proven unconquerable. This is precisely the fiction which *Every Other Week* – and the real literary periodicals it is modeled upon – commits to upholding: as Margaret observes with a marked conditional, it “makes you feel as if you did have a country after all” (220-1). And it is the absence of agreement that characterizes the novel’s treatment of the trolley car strike, a plot event that could have been the climax of the plot but instead is only depicted indirectly through the divergent perspectives of the novel’s characters. It is the absent center of centralization.

The conclusion of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* enacts the same homogenization that March was surprised to find himself carrying out in the first number of *Every Other Week*, expelling characters who failed to assimilate into the Mid-Atlantic framework for the cosmopolitan nation. The Midwestern Dryfoos clan is narratively banished from the city, fated to a Babylonian captivity as the dupes of Europe where, now deprived of the male heir Dryfoos wanted, their Western-ness will be more reliably bred out in a “generation or two” (249). The Southern Woodburns, fittingly, are divided and conquered, with the Colonel disappearing from the novel well before its close (he appears briefly at the start of Part Fifth but thereafter is only mentioned thrice in passing) and Miss Woodburn subsumed into Fulkerson, whose marriage is an impish parody of the romance of reconstruction trope and the conventions of closure. Alma and her mother are left cooped up in the equivalent of New England spinsterhood, resembling all the more the progeny-less villagers of a Jewett or Wilkens Freeman story. Margaret, whose possible marriage with Conrad might have signaled alternative political and geographic alignments, elects the life of an Anglican nun after his death.

The novel ends instead with an ascendant economic, not romantic, coupling. Having killed off a sympathetic idealist in Conrad, Howells makes an uncouth realist triumph in Fulkerson. March agrees to stay on at *Every Other Week* under Fulkerson, who has bought out Dryfoos at a bargain now that the magazine is a success and thereby removed its
awkward Midwestern attachment. In the closing chapters as the dust settles March lamely invokes the vestiges of his acquired Boston Puritan determinism (“it was forecast from the beginning of time”) to endorse the status quo (440). This is a crucial moment in the novel’s geographic representational logic. The entrenchment at Every Other Week heralds the artistic allegiance of New York and Boston (if not the latter’s annexation) before the centralizing and incorporative thrust of modernity. The narrative may be most focalized around March, but in true Howellsian form it remains bitingly critical of his perspective to the end. Whereas Beaton “knew that he was a fraud but at least he could say to himself with truth that he had not now the shame of taking Dryfoos’ money,” March possesses neither Beaton’s self-awareness nor his consolation: in sharp juxtaposition, the passages that immediately follow describe March cutting aesthetic corners to economize despite capitalizing on the Dryfoos windfall (447). Howells’ novel is ultimately ambivalent about the structural transformations and accompanying cultural logics that it depicts. If Hazard laments as inevitable the faux consolidation of American aesthetic and economic life, it is perversely sarcastic, given just how much has proven impossible over the course of the narrative, in its parting remark that “in New York you may do anything” (448).

2. Intermediary Spaces and the Regional Literary Magazine

Every Other Week, Fulkerson insisted, could only be published in New York. And yet the postbellum centralization of the publishing industry in the Mid-Atlantic has led us to underestimate the vast quantities of periodical print that continued to be published across the country, some of which resembled Fulkerson’s venture. Today we tend to distinguish between magazines (or television, or websites) primarily by subject matter (fashion, current events, sports) and by quality, in the double sense of production and prestige (tabloid, weekly, glossed pages, monthly). But a third category defined magazines into the early twentieth century: geography. Again, today we tend to think that most magazines larger than a coterie circular pursue national circulation by default. As titles, prospectuses, trade magazines, and periodical directories testify, however, postbellum editors and readers also
classified magazines by the geographic scope of their content, contributors, and circulation. These included, in addition to national magazines, whole fields of state and regional periodicals. There were several formats and classes of regional periodicals, most corresponding to national formats and classes: these included, in increasing order of prestige and decreasing order of sales, mail-order magazines, story papers and humor papers, organs for professions, ladies’ or fashion magazines, booster magazines, weekly cultural miscellanies, monthly literary magazines, and critical reviews. A few regional periodicals of each class achieved national success (and some state magazines achieved regional success), but many more achieved regional success. This scale has proven more difficult for scholars to measure. Indeed, most regional periodicals explicitly eschewed anything more, even if they also asserted the universality of art in general. It wasn’t just that every recognizable region had at least one of each of these periodicals: having these periodicals was an essential part of the cultural process by which a particular area came to be recognized as a region.

Avowedly regional literary magazines burst into existence as early as the late 1820s—indeed, postbellum magazines often invoked the lineages of forerunners like Timothy Flint’s Cincinnati Western Monthly (founded 1827) and the Richmond Southern Literary Messenger (founded 1834). But regional literary magazines became more prominent and more numerous over the late 1880s and 1890s as the literary monthlies grew increasingly highbrow in tone in response to the emergence of the new ten-cent mass-market monthlies. For all their differences, the varying classes and formats of regional magazine served a number of important shared socio-cultural functions. First, they supplied a venue for advertising regional businesses and the promotion of regional institutions more generally, such as libraries and other periodicals. Second, they constituted an outlet for regional writers, which they rightly asserted were underserved by national magazines, and they promoted writing in the region in general. Finally, they articulated a regional focus: an attempt to represent a region and cater to its tastes in ways that national magazines did not. For the purposes of this chapter I will focus on literary monthlies, weekly miscellanies, and boosters, the periodicals that were the most committed and most successful in carrying out these functions. Regional magazines’ contents largely have been dismissed because scholars have considered them too few, too niche, or too indistinctive. Before looking at the discursive work of these
magazines and how it varied by class or format, then, I want to look at the ways they moved in order to insist upon the social work they carried out.

It is true that individual regional literary magazines did not approach the subscription heights of the Century, Harper’s, or even Lippincott’s, which had 100,000 subscribers in 1885. They did nonetheless consistently reach 15,000 or more subscribers – and some much higher – matching and surpassing the Atlantic, which failed to break that threshold until the end of the century (Table 3.1). Many circulated more extensively in their own turf than did the leading literary monthlies, and taken together as a phenomenon they represented as large a circulatory footprint. Recognizing the geographic breadth of periodical print production requires shifting focus away from single publications to classes of them. Indeed, institutional legacies run counter to the scholarly lacuna. Today you can still find runs of regional magazines in public libraries in Atlanta, Minneapolis, Denver, or San Francisco for which no copies exist in major archives.

Regional literary magazines weren’t a minor league either. They published original pieces by all manner of popularly- and critically-acclaimed authors. This is true even excepting the Overland Monthly, which was and remains the best-known regional magazine in part for its exceptional contributors list. Whittaker’s Milwaukee Magazine (1871-1877) published Constance Fenimore Woolson, Ella Wheeler, and Rebecca Harding Davis; the Southern Magazine published James Lane Allen and John Fox Jr.; the Des Moines, IA Midland (1894-1898) published Hamlin Garland and Octave Thanet; Out West (Los Angeles, CA) published Sui Sin Far and Jack London. This is to say nothing of authors that were highly regarded in other literary genres less familiar to scholars today, such as travel writing or history, who these publications regularly printed as well. The number of recognizable names in any given regional literary magazine discussed in this chapter only barely lags behind the number found in any given volume of the Century or Harper’s.

30. In selecting circulation figures I chose the earliest year in a publication’s history at which it reached its highest figure, with a cut-off of 1904. I have tried to rely on a single source, Rowell’s Newspaper Directory (New York: G. P. Rowell & Co.), for consistency but looked elsewhere when unavailable or when I believe other information more reliable. This table is far from exhaustive; it is not even a selection based on highest circulation figures. It reflects rather what I believe to be a representative sample of the variety of region and format.
One reason why regional periodicals and regional literary magazines in particular have been overlooked is that they often lacked the stability of the leading periodicals based in New York, Philadelphia, and, to a lesser extent, Boston. This observation is misleading, however, in two ways. First, there are long lived and stable examples from every class and region: the Chicago, IL *Dial* (1880-1929), the Atlanta, GA *Sunny South* (1875-1907), the *St. Louis Magazine* (1878-1896), the San Francisco, CA *Argonaut* (1877-1935), the St. Paul, MN *Northwest Illustrated* (1883-1902). Second, while individual magazines tended to be short-lived, the communities of collaboration that produced them and the momentum that they generated were more lasting. Single bibliographic records often belie continuities that become visible when foregrounding places and tracing networks. The Chicago Western
Magazine (1869-1870) only ran for two years, but it was immediately rebranded as the influential *Lakeside Monthly* (1871-1874), the editor of which, Frances F. Browne, would go on to found the *Dial* in 1880, and which the Chicago *Current* (1883-1888) would later invoke as a precursor. The Louisville, KY *Southern Bivouac* (1882-1887) only ran for six years, but this was enough to entice the *Century* to purchase it for its subscription list in the hopes of expanding the *Century*’s circulation in the region. The *Southern Bivouac*’s co-editor, Basil W. Duke, would go on to co-edit George Griffin Fetter’s *Southern Magazine* (1892-1895) in the same city.

Even without direct agential links, these periodicals maintained spiritual ties to the regional precursors that helped prepare their way. Efforts were continually made, for example, to establish a regional literary magazine on the Southern seaboard, particularly in Baltimore, MD and Virginia, including most notably the *Southern Magazine* (1868-1875), the *South Atlantic* (1877-1882), and *Dixie* (1899-1900). In such cases the failure to sustain any single periodical for a lengthy period of time should not overshadow the sustained appeal of such a periodical. As *A Hazard of New Fortunes* dramatizes, longevity in a postbellum periodical depended on infusions of capital, the right personnel, and plenty of luck. In short, it required attachment to a larger corporation that could profit indirectly from footing the bill of a magazine that couldn’t break even on its own terms. The most successful postbellum magazines, whether measured by revenue, sheer circulation figures, or longevity, were owned by either publishing, syndicate, or mail-order houses, and many of these magazines went through extended periods of unprofitability. The recurrence of similar magazines in the same area, then, indicates persistent appeal among a body of potential subscribers, contributors, and publishers even where the combination of the elements necessary for longevity were lacking.

Cliques were essential for getting a regional literary magazine off the ground, a task which often involved herculean promotional efforts from a necessarily small number of point men or women. For a venture of months to become a venture of years, however, it needed to activate two wider networks: of exchanges and of contributors. Exchanges with other

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magazines and newspapers provided vital influxes of readers. In an exchange, two editors agreed to send each other complimentary copies of their respective periodical and to promote each other’s periodical. Each periodical thereby received free of charge both a source of potential content to reprint and a venue of potential advertisement. The relationship constituted by this widespread, informal practice was symbiotic. While all classes of periodicals participated in exchanges, their respective benefits varied depending on the strata of the literary marketplace they occupied. At the top of the hierarchy were nationally-circulating magazines like the literary monthlies, which rarely if ever discussed content from other periodicals but nonetheless exchanged with periodicals of other strata in order to gain promotion from being referenced or reprinted. Newspapers, at the bottom, were unlikely to be reprinted much anywhere other than fellow newspapers, but with the most space to fill, they gained the most from plenitudinous exchange. Newspapers were especially keen to reprint from literary monthlies, the contents of which had high reprint value and which were considered newsworthy in themselves (in much the same way as reporting on the month’s TV is today). The various strata of periodical print in between had reprinting-to-reprinted ratios that fell at various points between these two poles, but with a tendency to be more subject-matter-specific than either the omnivorous newspaper or the cosmopolitan leading literary monthlies.

Contributors were the second major lifeblood of a magazine. Magazines of course needed to reach a certain threshold of submissions in order to secure the variety and quality of content necessary to attract subscribers, who needed to be convinced of a periodical’s consistency. Contributors were equally important, though, to the health of a regional magazine in their unofficial (and sometimes unintentional) role as local agents. For one, they could be counted on to circulate copies among friends, and for this reason editors preferred to repay contributors in subscriptions rather than money. Because contributors were often active in local literary clubs or other voluntary associations, their friends were among a magazine’s most probable potential readers – especially if they felt there was a chance they could become future contributors too. When Kate H. Esterly of Whitewater, Wisconsin wrote

32. See Current (Chicago, IL) Correspondence, 1882-1889, Mss boxes C, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA.
the Chicago *Current* with a submission, she explained that she had been motivated to do so by the fact that the magazine had recently published two of her “intimate friends.” Contributors, to borrow a phrase from the internet age, were the super users of magazines. From these pivotal nodes new local networks of readers and subscribers could blossom.

The circulation of regional literary magazines was shaped by the fact that their networks of contributors and networks of exchanges were predominantly regional. Correspondence records from the Chicago *Current* (1883-1888) illustrate the distribution of this regional geography of collaboration (Figure 3.1). Over half of the submissions as well as half of the exchanges represented in the *Current* correspondence came from Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Calling this the Midwest wouldn’t be wrong – this is what correspondents had in mind when they referred to the *Current* by shorthand as “Western” in the decade before “Middle West” caught on – but it would be less precise than what the magazine’s correspondence data and content affords. The *Current*, following the *Lakeside Monthly*, tapped into a more specific regional space that we might call the Great Lakes or what writers in the period still called the Old Northwest. Indeed, other magazines like the *Midland* and *St. Louis Magazine* articulated a regional space that, while likewise broadly Midwestern, could more specifically be termed the Great Plains. The middle of the country, more than anywhere east of the Ohio River or west of the Rocky Mountains, was still undergoing early phases of regional formation and definition in the postbellum period. These cultural spaces emerged first in practices of circulation before acquiring a stable designation, and magazines like the *Current* or the *Midland* were at the forefront of this process.

The contents of the *Current* correspondence indicate that regional magazines of both literary and nonliterary varieties occupied a middle ground in the wider network of exchanges. They often discussed articles and reprinted from periodicals of strata both higher or more elite and lower or cheaper than their own. Even when their content and layout often more closely resembled the *Atlantic* group, regional literary magazines tended to have closer ties to newspapers within their region – all the more so because they usually lacked the *Atlantic* group’s vertical integration with publishing houses. This was no coincidence.
of proximity: magazine editors actively cultivated these relationships. W. E. Gordner, editor of the Milwaukee Evening Wisconsin (one of the most-read newspapers in the state), energetically professed that the Current was “something in which the west should have peculiar pride because it [...] reflects and illuminates the ideal western spirit, as it is to be where the grain is grown.” Editors at the Chicago Tribune and smaller newspapers in the region agreed. Periodicals within the same region were among each others’ greatest supporters, often exchanging across specialties and formats. The Current correspondence includes exchanges with neighboring literary magazines, such as the Geneva, IL Pilot, and humor papers, such as Opie Read’s (Little Rock) Arkansaw Traveler. Regional magazines sought further publicity by offering “clubbing rates,” discounted rates for individuals or institutions that subscribed to multiple newspapers or magazines from a list of affiliates. Beyond simply encouraging subscription, clubbing rates also publicized relations between periodicals.

34. Current (Chicago, IL) Correspondence, 1882-1889
The *Current* correspondence shows that contributors, inspired by a sense of regional affiliation, often took even more active roles advocating regional literary magazines. Ella A. Giles, a librarian in Madison, Wisconsin who had briefly served as an editor for *Whittaker’s Milwaukee Magazine*, both contributed to the *Current* (“A Colloquy in a Public Library”) and maintained her library’s *Current* subscription. She wrote editor Edgar L. Wakeman promising to “see what can be done about [expanding] subscription. The *Current* is very popular here, but I think purchased irregularly by readers from news-dealers.” Fr. James Keegan of St. Louis, MO professed he would “spare no endeavor to spread its circulation here” and recommended newsstands and book stores he felt best suited for selling copies. Fr. Keegan’s fervor surely was not without fruit, for a subsequent letter from J. A. Macon of the same city attested that “I find that the *Current* is very popular in critical circles here.”

Early in the *Current*’s life Charles J. O’Malley did the same in Kentucky, which would prove to be one of the magazine’s strongest sources of submissions: “Would you like to have two dozen copies of the *Current* placed for sale at Henderson, this state? A bookseller there wishes to handle it, alleging that he has had numerous calls for it.” Not every contributor was a regular reader, but where contributors clustered – especially outside the triumvirate of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia – we can be certain regular readers clustered as well.

Even authors in high demand were attracted to these magazines, despite the narrower field of circulation, by a sense of regional pride. At least one, Eugene Smalley of the *Northwest Illustrated*, turned away from a successful career as a travel writer in *Atlantic* group magazines to edit a regional magazine. Maurice Thompson, the regional and nature writer whose Indiana historical romance *Alice of Old Vincennes* (1900) would become a bestseller, replied to an offer from the *Current* by observing that “This is a lower price than I get from the Century, Atlantic, or Harper; but I really desire to appear oftener in the best Western journals.” Many other correspondents, including Ella Giles and Fr. Keegan, agreed with Sarah D. Hobart of Fall River, WI: “I am interested in the development of Western literature and I am proud of the work the *Current* is doing.” The *Current* was

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36. *Current (Chicago, IL) Correspondence, 1882-1889*
37. *Current (Chicago, IL) Correspondence, 1882-1889*
happy to return the favor. Publishing twenty three-column pages a week, the *Current*’s design was amenable to publishing many contributors as well as first-time authors, and in its first volumes it even printed facsimiles of authors’ signatures for bylines. Like many of its peers, the *Current* was committed to promoting the literary aspirations of writers in its region. Regional literary magazines wanted contributors and subscribers to feel like they were part of a community, part of a network that was at once accessible yet distinctive, proximal yet significant. Regions, characterized by its intermediate scope between the local and the national, were well-suited for this kind of print community.

*Current* correspondents from other parts of the country lacked such investment in a sense of print community. In this respect, the cluster of correspondents from the Mid-Atlantic is an exception that proves the rule. There is almost no mention of even reading the *Current* in correspondence from other regions; it seems to have had little traction outside the Midwest. Henry Tyrrell of New York City complained that “I have great difficulty in finding the *Current* regularly on sale in New York,” and the writer-naturalist Ernest Ingersoll, traveling in Virginia, reported that “No one seems to know of The Current here.” 38 Where the denser network of *Current* contributors and exchanges in the Great Lakes produced connections that made the magazine more available there, contributors and exchanges elsewhere had a more transactional relationship with the *Current* and were consequentially more isolated from its activities.

It is true that some regional magazines sought more geographically distant readers by appealing to a sense of tourism, adventure, or exoticism. Most notably, the *Overland* depended on Eastern readers who read it for a sense of curated Californian otherness. But the *Overland* was much more important to Pacific Coast readers and newspapers, who more consistently discussed it; as I showed in Chapter 1, it helped foster Joaquin Miller’s regional reputation. Eastern readers may have made the *Overland* a hit at the national scale, but the periodical relied on Pacific Coast readers in order to keep publishing. The *Kansas Magazine*’s (1872-1873) attempt to replicate the *Overland*’s success is instructive. Based in Topeka and publishing pieces primarily about the Great Plains or by writers from there, the *Kansas Magazine* received considerable and well-earned critical praise in Eastern

38. *Current (Chicago, IL) Correspondence, 1882-1889*
journals. Despite this fact, however, it struggled to gain traction in its immediate vicinity and as a result was unable to survive. In the early 1870s, the Great Plains wasn’t yet able to support a regional literary magazine—it lacked the infrastructure and the cultural self-identification that it would develop twenty years later.

To some degree, then, readers and writers of a particular demographic needed to already exist for a magazine to be successful representing them. But the inverse was also true. Regional magazines sustained regional literary networks, providing an essential link between writers, periodicals, readers, and institutions of reading. Latent demographic capacity could not become active community without a periodical to draw them into connection. Regional magazines were a necessary condition for the formation of a region: their emergence was an important component in the ongoing process by which a geographic area came to be or continued to be understood as a region. Periodicals were not mere vehicles: the materiality of their circulation and the resulting geographic traces were as much a part of this process of definition as were the assertions of the editors and authors they published.

Subscription data being as rare as it is, it remains difficult to identify who exactly read regional magazines or where. And yet we have traces that, together, can help assemble a picture of what a regional magazine’s geography of readership typically looked like. In 1897 the monthly *Midland* published a list of towns and cities to which subscriptions were sent, a list that is largely analogous to the *Current’s* geography of readership. Locations in Iowa make up almost 50% of the total, and Midwestern locations make up another 33% more.\(^{39}\) Since more of these locations would have had multiple subscribers, we can assume that the total percentage of Midwestern subscribers was higher than the combined 83% of the *Midland’s* 13,000 subscribers even though it is impossible to tell by how much. The weekly New Orleans *Harlequin* (1899-1909) occasionally published lists of newsstands and book stores at which it could be published, outlining a space that is broadly Southern and specifically Gulf Coastal: nine locations in New Orleans, plus five additional locations in Louisiana, two in Mississippi, two in Texas, and one each in Atlanta, Havanna (Cuba), Mexico City (Mexico), Chicago, and New York.\(^{40}\) A magazine’s commercial availability was

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40. “[Masthead],” *Harlequin* 1, no. 51 (June 16, 1900): 2.
of course less extensive than its distribution of contributors or readers. Regular commercial availability nonetheless marks the hotspots of circulation, where a magazine’s Fr. Keegans, Ella A. Giles, and Charles J. O’Malleys resided.

Scholars have often used advertisements as a means of estimating magazine readership demographics along lines of gender and class. The same can be done for geography, and it is sometimes useful to do so. Inferences of this sort, however, can be unreliable. For one, postbellum library holdings and operations records show broad popular demand for magazines like the leading literary monthlies whose ads might seem to imply that they were targeted at readers with upper class discretionary spending. Checkout records for the Muncie Public Library show that Harper’s, the Century, Lippincott’s, and Scribner’s all enjoyed proportions of blue collar to white collar readership generally consistent with the proportion of all library transactions – even after the rise of the wider-appealing ten-cent monthlies. These records complement publishers’ assertions that readers shared and exchanged copies of magazines extensively. After all, postbellum readers, much like contemporary readers, took pleasure in consuming advertisements aspirationally. As Ellen Gruber Garvey and others have shown, the rise of mass advertisement in the 1890s was accompanied and to some degree underwritten by a variety of modes of readerly engagement that by no means entailed making actual purchases.

Library holdings give a better measure of the geography of readership, especially because they provide more insight into the proliferation of print. Figures 2 and 3 map holdings for several regional literary magazines from the Union List of Serials in both institutional and public libraries, supplemented with numerous additional public library catalogues, rang-

41. See my discussion of reading rooms in section four as well as Felsenstein and Connolly, What Middletown Read: Print Culture in an American Small City; Christine Pawley, Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late-Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa (Amherst: Univ of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Wayne A. Wiegand, Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876-1956 (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011).

42. Data drawn from the What Middletown Read Project, https://lib.bsu.edu/wmr/; see section four. Blue collar transitions made up 36% of all transactions compared to 48.2% of Scribner’s, 36.5% of Lippincott’s, 32.7% of Harper’s, and 26.4% of the Century. See also footnote 87.

43. Authors and Publishers recorded the conventional wisdom that each copy of a leading literary monthly reached six readers Putnam and Putnam, Authors and Publishers: A Manual of Suggestions for Beginners in Literature, 46.

ing from those of urban centers to those of small cities (population < 15,000). Regional literary magazines lacked the kind of national coverage we might be tempted to equate with importance, but they were widely accessible at libraries across their respective regions. This is significant because checkout records, catalogues, and minutes all testify that magazines were consistently among the most checked-out items in postbellum libraries across the country (I will return to this point in greater detail in section four). At the same time, libraries were much more selective when it came to periodical subscriptions than books, holding several orders of magnitude more of the latter. Librarians or library committees based accession decisions for periodicals on a combination of publication esteem and patron use, a fact which makes holdings information a useful albeit imprecise index of local preferences that, in aggregate, can reveal broader regional trends. As their membership soared in the late nineteenth century, libraries became hubs not only of circulation and of immersive reading but of casual browsing and of reference reading, following up recommendations from other periodicals or friends. Individual issues of magazines transitioned over the first year of their life from prominent placement in open reading rooms to single-copy checkout availability to bound and indexed volumes, and in the process they became available to multiple forms of reading. Libraries didn’t just expand the circulation of magazines; they also extended the circulating lifespan of magazines. Looking beyond mere subscription is thus essential when considering the circulation footprint of a magazine (or classes thereof). As for contributors, exchanges, and vendors, each point on these maps should be taken as a node from which further circulation radiated outward.


46. See footnote 87 and footnote 42 for several accounts of the growing popular demand for reading room hours for periodicals access, see Wiegand, *Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876-1956*.

47. A rough estimate of the median difference between accession date and checkout date for Harper’s in the Muncie Public Library, for example, is roughly three years (1174 days). This figure is imprecise because librarians did not necessarily record the correct volume number at checkout. I calculated this estimate by excluding volumes with accession dates earlier than 1890 and obvious irregularities (such as checkout dates prior to accession dates). Librarians’ marginal transaction comments, however, corroborate this estimate.

48. Postbellum library holdings records have limits as well. Many libraries simply did not list the magazines they carried, especially if they were only available in reading rooms and not later bound into volumes. This fate would have been more likely for literary weeklies than monthlies, and even more so for cheaper weeklies, which would have been both less durable and more affordable for patron families to procure their own subscriptions. The *Sunny South*, for example, had the highest circulation of any regional literary magazine, yet holdings records for it are slim.
Library holdings further show that regional literary magazines, as a class, developed specifically regional patterns of circulation. Library holdings for the Argonaut, for example, congregate west of the Rocky Mountains, while holdings for the Midland decrease the farther one gets from Iowa (Figure 3.2). Of course, each of the selected magazines was available at libraries outside its region. But even magazines with substantial holdings elsewhere, like the Southern Bivouac or Out West, nonetheless had more holdings – and more holdings than magazines from elsewhere – within their own regions (Figure 3.3). These distributions roughly parallel the evidence drawn from the Current correspondence. As with the Current correspondence, disproportionate accession and access indicate disproportionate investment. Outlier points may be the result of touristic interest in a region or an especially voracious acquisitions department. The geographic clustering of library holdings for regional literary magazines, however, suggests that accessing those magazines was a form of participation in regional literary cultures. In choosing certain publications and declining others, readers and
institutions negotiated both regional characteristics and terrain. What these maps visualize, in other words, is the fact that accessing regional magazines was a form of regional definition in both the discursive and geographic sense: by participating in the circulation of magazines devoted to regional cultural formation, readers participated in the spatial manifestation of that culture as a region.

In the overlap of holdings for multiple magazines we see a glimpse of the accretion of circulatory processes through which regions themselves continually form over time. This is true for areas of conjuncture as well as areas of partial disjuncture. The *Midland*’s and the *Current*’s fields of circulation have considerable overlap, but where *Midland* holdings skew towards the Great Plains, the *Current* holdings and correspondence skew towards the Great Lakes; where the *Southern Bivouac* skews towards the Appalachian South, others skew towards the Old South or towards the Gulf Coast (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). The geographies of regional magazine library holdings align with those of the reputations discussed...
in Chapter 1, and they correspond to the familiar regions in the literary monthlies’ genre ecosystem discussed in Chapter 2. Certainly this is in part the result of direct links. Rather than making nostalgic back-projections, regional magazine writers saw it as their duty to articulate the regional patterns of literary discourse in newspapers. Local newspapers in turn funneled readers towards regional magazines and the local associations that helped distribute them. These interrelated processes, though, had a considerable degree of independence. Each contributes to where and what a region is: each constitutes another layer on the map, another retracing of a region’s contours and compactness. There are of course many more circulation distributions to overlay, some literary and others economic or environmental, and the more we add the closer we asymptotically approach the actuality of region, which is their sum total. Broadly literary forms of circulation – and regional magazines in particular – are nonetheless uniquely useful because they were uniquely explicit and self-referential about regional formation itself.

The postbellum literary marketplace was a complex system of always-adapting intangible hierarchies and material codependencies. The story of subscription leaders and publishing centralization is only one piece of this picture. Most of the relations comprising the postbellum literary marketplace played out at the regional level, either through the accumulation of local instances of print production and consumption or through the interchanges between regional publications. Indeed, the same claims can be made of the classes and formats of regional periodicals not touched on specifically in this chapter. Only when these various classes of periodicals and scales of geography are brought together does the system as a whole come into view. With this perspective we can recognize the discursive work of regional literary magazines and the reading practices they engendered.

3. “Let Literary Ostracism be Mutual”: Regional Mediums, Regional Modes

While regional geographies of readership relied on pre-existing networks of circulation and contribution, a magazine’s ability to traverse those networks ultimately depended on its content. In this respect the three classes of publication that I have grouped together as
regional literary magazines – monthlies, weeklies, and boosters – diverge in important yet mutually-reinforcing ways that warrant thick description. Regional monthlies will be the most familiar of these magazines to scholars today because they shared the format of the leading national magazines of the period. Focusing on shared format however, can obscure meaningful divergences in content. As I have shown with authors in Chapter 1 and genres in Chapter 2, the lack of regionally distinctive forms by no means forecloses the regionally distinctive contents or uses of those forms. With ready access to a surfeit of literary magazines from every region, the reader who subscribed to one necessarily chose it over others: analogous format, far from equivocating, makes differences between publications more salient. Regional magazines professed that they were able to better represent their geographic constituencies because regional print narrowed the distance between writer, editor, and reader. They covered topics that went untouched in national magazines and attended to the material circumstances of cultural development outside the Mid-Atlantic. Though regional literary magazines did sometimes advocate for distinctive modes of regional writing, they focused more on instructing their readers on methods for reading regionally.

Of all classes of periodicals, monthlies were the most explicit and persistent in attempting to articulate what it meant to belong to a particular region with a particular literature. By rechristening the *Bay State Monthly* as the *New England Magazine* (Boston, MA), editors theorized that the magazine, “as its name implies, attempts to express the ideas of New Englanders, and to print what will interest them.”[49] The opening issue of the *Midland* (Des Moines, IA) promised to “supply something long seen and felt to be lacking in our midland community and home life; a home magazine, affording scope for the best talent in literature and art” in “this midland region.”[50] The phrase “home magazine” doubles here, naming a magazine both intended to be read within the household and produced within the home region. The *Midland* addressed itself not only to “Lawyers and doctors, everywhere found to be lovers of good literature; business men, the most numerous of all magazine constituencies” – the presumed audience of the leading literary monthlies – but also to “farmers and farmers’ wives, with their sons and daughters, eager for the world’s

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best thought and art and keenly appreciative of all that is true to nature and life; railroad men, not alone high officials but also conductors, engineers, firemen, brakemen, mechanics in the machine shops, and clerks in offices; and, last but among the foremost in every true man’s estimation, the intelligent mechanics in our work-shops and factories, with their families.”

Region was to be a unifying ground, to inspire interest among diverse readers for the subjects and genres of other readers.

The grandiose register of these prospectuses must, of course, be taken with some salt as aspirational. It nonetheless represented the monthlies’ concerted effort to publish more pieces about their region, by their region’s writers, and for their region’s readers. Some of these articles, on topics like “Grant’s Life in the West” or “Birds of the Midland Region,” might have been equally well at home in one of the major literary monthlies. Regional literary monthlies published pieces about or in their home region much more frequently, however – often two thirds of an issue or more – than their national counterparts published about any given region. Furthermore, regional literary monthlies published pieces with distinctly regional angles that their national counterparts did not publish. In some cases this was because such pieces could stoke a kind of sectional feeling, as in the Louisville Southern Bivouac’s many Confederate-sympathetic pieces; in other cases it was because they took up topical issues of specifically regional interest, as in the Midland’s “Retired Farmers in the Middle-West.”

A regional literary monthly also needed to shed some of the dense scholarly essays published by their national counterparts; their selections presumed intelligence but not intellectualism. These magazines leveraged the prestige associated with their format to make regional matters literary, not just as part of a broader system but in their own right.

No regional literary magazine published exclusively about its home region, but the New England Magazine, with the proclivity to manifestos characteristic of a regional literary monthly, provided a standard two-part argument for why doing so posed no contradiction. The first part of this argument was that “the ideas which have made New England what it is have extended into all parts of the civilized world”; as such, any topic that touches

52. See, for example, Midland Magazine 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1894), 94.
the spirit of New England comes within the region’s purview. Region was a place as well as a state of mind cultivated by extended exposure. Importantly, material circulation was to underwrite this more diffuse conceptualization of region, which led to the second part of the argument. New Englanders had extended into all parts of the world as well, and so the New England Magazine envisions – not incorrectly – that “these lines will be read, therefore, by New Englanders on every coast, [...] in every capital,” and so on. A New Englander could be anywhere, but they needed a tangible tie to the place that grounded their “ideas,” namely, physical copies of a publication like the New England Magazine. What I want to emphasize here is the resemblance of these formulations, convenient as they were, to the regional geographies of circulation in the previous section and to the regional reputations outlined in Chapter 1. Region is a community united by shared interest or attention rather than characteristics or identity per se; rather than pre-formed, it manifests both discursively and spatially through the act of circulation.

Regional literary weeklies, by contrast, look much more like newspapers in format. Nonetheless, fewer columns, clearer print, nicer paper, better content, and higher pretensions, set them apart from both newsprint and cheaper forms of periodical print like story papers. Frank Luther Mott tends to assign such publications to one of two categories: urban weeklies or farm papers. In many cases this distinction holds well. Farm papers tended more towards hearth-focused moralistic fiction, domestic miscellany, and agricultural news. Urban weeklies tended more towards local gossip, political snark, and society news. Regional literary weeklies shared with these publications a tendency to print pieces that were brief in length (usually less than two pages) and wide-ranging in subject, combining original content with reprinted matter. Yet Mott’s formalist classificatory approach sometimes omits discursive and circulatory affinities. While related to farm papers or urban weeklies, the periodicals I’m calling regional literary weeklies exceeded them in literary aspirations, number of subscribers, and geographic scope. In matters of content regional literary weeklies bridged these two peer forms and the rural/urban divide they represented,

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54. “The Editor’s Table,” 107.
55. “The Editor’s Table,” 107.
passing from satiric wit to homely romance. The closest national analogues were *Harper’s Weekly* and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, but these publications lacked the insider tone that made their regional counterparts exciting.

For they were in fact exciting: fast-paced, lightly-irreverent, and opinionated. Editors of regional literary weeklies prioritized volume and multivocality while preserving an authoritative editorial voice. The *Current’s* (Chicago, IL) editor proved statistically that it had “published more matter than *Harper’s Monthly* and *The Atlantic* combined and nearly as much as *The Century* and *The Atlantic* combined [...] each month *The Current* has had twice as many contributors as any one of the magazines mentioned.” The *Sunny South* regularly advertised that no publication printed more Southern writing. The combination of volume and brevity spread across multiple columns facilitated brisk reading and guilt-free skipping. With so much space available, a reader of either of these publications could reasonably imagine themselves one day printed in it. Regional literary weeklies balanced original literary contributions with extensive reviews departments, which often occupied a quarter of an issue. Weeklies could share the gossip or joke as quickly as any newspaper; they were as qualified to pass judgment as any other magazine, wherever it was printed. While their criticism gave a sense of in-group identity and up-to-date cool, then, the multivocality of regional literary weeklies encouraged readers to consider themselves part of the club.

If weeklies were less prone to sweeping pronouncements on regional culture than their monthly compatriots, it was because their geographic affiliation was more self-evident. In keeping with their more rapid interval of publication, the content they printed was much more topical and more likely to reference both local events and fellow publications within their region. Regional literary weeklies were especially attuned to the alignment of regional politics, economics, social issues, and cultural production; they insisted that a region’s literature could only thrive if prerequisite material conditions were met. The *Argonaut* (San Francisco, CA) repeatedly linked the cause of Western letters with that of Western politics or economics, as excerpts below on New York demonstrate. The *Harlequin* (New Orleans, LA) blamed the South’s comparatively smaller reading public of on “the days of

slavery, when only the sons and daughters of the rich were given educations,” and it argued that the continued “spread of education” and libraries was necessary for “the increase in the possibilities of publication.” Like many of its peers, the Harlequin understood that a community’s cultural achievement developed in tandem with the progressive improvement of cultural institutions. “When the primary market is established,” it promised, “there will be a literature peculiarly its own in this section as distinctive as is the charm of Southern speech.” This assessment puts reception first and production second, reversing the causal chain that antebellum commentators and even contemporary literary scholars often expect when looking for distinctive literary traditions.

Literary boosters combined elements from literary monthlies and literary weeklies with a promotional ethos. Central to the appeal of these magazines was their accessible prose and lavish illustration, augmented by larger page dimensions than typical of general interest magazines. They were neither mere tourist magazines nor booster pamphlets, however. Rather than recommending specific forms of tourism or investment in specific locales, literary boosters were more interested in developing general ideas about broader, regional spaces. The defining gambit of these publications was the belief that cultivating a sense of regional cultural cohesion would appeal to readers outside the region precisely by appealing to readers within the region. In other words, they reversed the strategy that failed the Kansas Magazine, which had sought home readers a decade earlier by obtaining the endorsement of Northeastern literary centers. In these magazines, unlike boosterism generally, promoting a region externally was dependent on and subordinate to promoting it internally.

The Northwest Illustrated (St. Paul, MN), one of the most successful of these publications, exhibits their distinctive combination of features. Most issues of the Northwest Illustrated open with a lengthy article extolling a single Northwestern city and its surroundings. Touching on notable conditions, characteristics, people, and scenery with glowing tone, these articles clearly appeal to both civic pride and potential immigrants, investors, or tourists. As a genre, these progress-oriented small-city exposés possessed literary value

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of their own that drew from the intersection of business journalism and local color. Indeed, they began to appear at the same time in Mid-Atlantic literary monthlies; the *Northwest Illustrated*’s editor, Eugene Smalley, had previously written several for the *Century*. Other regular features of literary boosters were more analogous to literary weeklies or even newspapers. One staple was reports on grain and livestock prices. In the *Northwest Illustrated*, a regular “Home Interests” section reprints newspaper clippings either from newspapers within the region or about the region from newspapers outside it. Another prints “Western Humor.” Finally, some of the regular features of literary boosters are common to all three classes of regional literary magazine: books received, editorial columns, and a grab-bag back page. This flexible formula distinguishes other literary boosters such as the *St. Louis Magazine* (St. Louis, MO) and *Out West* (Los Angeles, CA) as well, sometimes with serial fiction, fashion plates, or society gossip mixed in.

Because of their promotional ethos and affinity for advertisement, literary boosters render particularly clearly the role regional magazines played in developing ideas about regions and their defining characteristics. The *Northwest Illustrated* was engaged in a process of shifting regional self-definition, advocating geographic coherence and similitude for a new northwest that combined the Old Northwest or today’s Upper Midwest with the Pacific Northwest. The magazine envisions a kind of migratory transit westward, projecting vector-like from Chicago, as well as forms of return transits. These transits were mirrored in advertisements, which located industrial equipment in Chicago or (to a lesser extent) Milwaukee, land claims in Montana, Oregon, or Washington, and gradations of mid-sized products and everyday goods in between. As writings like those of black South Dakota homesteader Oscar Micheaux make clear, people increasingly circulated along the same regional routes as the products they bought.\footnote{Oscar Micheaux, *The Conquest: The Story of a Negro Pioneer* (Lincoln, NE: Woodruff Press, 1913).} Indeed, many of the advertisements for travel within these magazines were for intra-regional trips on regional rail lines rather than trips from the outside in. As the local color and travel writing of the leading literary monthlies grew increasingly international, literary boosters were venues in which readers could enjoy high quality scenic illustrations not of some faraway land but of their own region. Literary boosters encouraged a sense of shared characteristics and belonging among residents by
depicting their region as a place possessing the qualities of a destination, a place worth belonging to.

Regional literary monthlies, weeklies, and boosters thus performed complementary functions. While each format had its own emphases, the attributes of each appeared in the others to some degree as well. Monthlies could include topical news or gossip, weeklies could sketch indulgent panoramas, and boosters could theorize aesthetic ideals. The priorities of each class differed enough to reach divergent audiences while coordinating shared regional visions across those audiences (enough so, furthermore, that multi-subscribers would not tire from redundancy). The same is true, to a lesser degree, of the other formats of regional magazines: on one side the more prestigious critical reviews, which were invested in literature but didn’t typically print it, and on the other side the less prestigious story papers, fashion magazines, and newspapers, which had more casual or passing interest in literature. Nonetheless, general interest monthlies, weeklies, and boosters, were the core movers when it came to advocating literatures of and for their regions. The styles of writing they published and the modes of reading they recommended caught on in all other periodical formats. In these two respects, despite differing in particulars from region to region, regional literary magazines constituted a unified front.

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The literary program regional literary magazines represented is perhaps clearest when contrasted with their relationship to the Mid-Atlantic. Regional literary magazines criticized the major publishing centers and New York City in particular. Complaints of a Mid-Atlantic near-monopoly on literary publishing and literary standards can be found across the board. As the *St. Louis Magazine* wrote, “It is a notorious fact that Western writers cannot gain favor with the editors of Eastern magazines; that not one article in fifty published in Eastern magazines is from a Western contributor.” The *Sunny South* agreed that “the East, from the fact that it is the home of the magazines, appears to think that the matter of writing amounts to nothing until the stamp of approval is fixed by Boston or

New York." It is essential to note that “the East” in these formulations does not include “New England,” which critics referred to by that name, any more than it included South Carolina. As detailed in the first section of this chapter, “the East” and “the middle states” – what I’m calling “the Mid-Atlantic” for clarity – referred to the interlinking of the major urban centers of the Northeast and their immediate hinterlands. Contesting this authority was a defining commitment of regional literary magazines. Outside of prospectuses and the occasional editorial, however, regional literary magazines were not fixated on the Mid-Atlantic or their grievances with it. The *St. Louis Magazine* summed up the prevailing ambivalence: to the degree that “Western literature is not good enough to appear in the pages of Eastern magazines, Western money is not of sufficient value to buy them [...] let literary ostracism be mutual.”

On the whole, in fact, these publications took a mercenary approach to the geographic centralization of power, cultural or otherwise. Writing her regular column in the *Argonaut*, the popular novelist Gertrude Atherton gave a typically Western version of the relationship between Mid-Atlantic institutions and regional talent:

> I firmly believe that California to-day has more native genius, more originality and vital strength than any other country in the world. The very mountains, the very atmosphere, every landscape—all are unique, and not to be duplicated elsewhere in the world. And this individuality her people absorb with the air they breathe. [...] The very lack of homogeneity which still presides over California like a restless spirit is partly responsible for the aggressive individuality of the race. [...] A man of genius may bless his natal star for having shone over his cradle in California, but if he wants to become an artist he must come East and imbibe its conventions. If he have real originality and audacity, Eastern polish will do no more than rub off the sharp points and polish the bristles. [...] Bret Harte went there with an Eastern-trained mind. So did Joaquin Miller; he inhaled the madness of California, but he put the method of Boston law-givers in it.

Nearly every regional magazine repeated versions of Atherton’s argument, albeit with different sets of proposed regional characteristics: the *Current* claimed that no-frills straight-talk

62. The *Sunny South* is itself excerpting from the Chicago *Tribune* approvingly with commentary, illustrating at once the connection between literary weeklies and newspapers as well as the sense of camaraderie between regional publications (the Chicago *Tribune* already enjoyed circulation into the surrounding states).


was the hallmark of the Midwest while the *Alkahest* claimed that elegance and chivalry distinguished the South. In any case, the Mid-Atlantic set the law (Harte went to Boston, Miller to New York) and for that very reason lacked the freshness or distinctiveness found in other regions. Atherton argued that authors should exploit this arrangement for gain rather than exhausting themselves bucking the current only to go unread. The Mid-Atlantic was simply where the greatest concentration of publishers were; by paying court an author could game the system to reach their own “country” while still speaking for it. Neither the principled oppositionalism or the apathetic individual capitulation scholars often attribute to regional-ism, this stance represents a calculatedly practical navigation of the literary field.

Most regional literary magazines were satisfied with this arrangement because they ascribed to a stadial theory of literary progress that recognized the disjuncture of production and reception under industrialism. An article on “The Progress of Literature” in the *Harlequin* opined that “London to-day from a literary point of view is highly civilized, New York is civilized and New Orleans is in a state of barbarism. And yet there are in our city [...] gleams of the rising sun.” After all, literature “has not always existed in other cities. Not to go back so far as the Romans who looked beyond their own writers, to whom scholars now devote their lives, to the writers of the Greeks, how long ago has it been since in London Oliver Goldsmith lived in a garret.” The Mid-Atlantic’s ascendency was a historical coincidence of material factors, not of artistic genius or even correct judgment. There was no reason to doubt that the infrastructure of literary production would come to every region’s leading cities if due steps were taken – for critics, like businessmen and politicians, had no illusion that either infrastructure or regions themselves could exist without urbanization.

The growth of regional literary magazines was one such step. But as editors made clear in their own mercenary attitude towards Mid-Atlantic publishers and critics, a center of...
production did not make a literary tradition in itself. At most, as the *Harlequin* suggests, it was a retroactive material development, a belated outgrowth of the real source of culture: the cultivation of readerly interest. So the *Overland* cheered “processes which will make California in future generations the educational center of the world, and the home of the highest civilization;” the *Alkahest* sponsored a regional lyceum circuit focused on improving the populace’s writing; and many others advocated literary clubs in their region.\(^69\)

The Mid-Atlantic’s real power over other regions, by this understanding, stemmed from the volume of its print output, and regional literary magazines responded in kind. From this perspective, the most important function these magazines performed was continually reminding their region of its own eminent artists in fiction as well as music and painting. From volume to volume and even issue to issue, one finds consistent stables of artists invoked repeatedly. Such lists serve to recommend, elevate, and promote memory. This attitude marks a historical shift. Antebellum literary magazines were often characterized by orientation to the future, an impatient waiting for the coming of a truly regional (or national) culture shored up by the “fake it ‘til you make it” premise of puffery.\(^70\) Their postbellum successors by contrast suffered very little anxiety in these quarters. By the end of the nineteenth century regional literary magazines were confident that they had writers and readers, and through regular acts of listing they inspired this confidence in their readers as well. Our present unfamiliarity with many of the names in these publications belies their postbellum ubiquity and instead reflects a much later triumph of incorporation in mid-twentieth century canon formation efforts, only partly ameliorated by the expansions of the 1980s. As shown in Chapter 1, many regional authors unknown today, like Ina Coolbrith, enjoyed significant popularity within their own region. As shown in Chapter 2, many regional authors still overlooked, like Mary Murfree, enjoyed near-universal critical esteem as belonging to the avant garde. Editors saw their task as one of communication and cultivation, of marshalling these reputations to reinforce their region’s spatial domain, reiterate the links between writers, and render unconscious reading practices explicit. They were teaching their subscribers to read for region across the terrain of periodical publishing.


from newspapers to national magazines, a complement to the mercenary publishing strategy they espoused.

As a consequence of their self-assurance and practical approach to centralization, regional literary magazines insisted that the Mid-Atlantic was simply another region and opposed the idea that it represented the nation as a composite whole. *Out West* teased that “many worthy gentlemen who scratch what horizon they have with all their elbows, every time they turn around,” have decreed that “literature’ must be not provincial but cosmopolitan; and, as every self-respected dictionary knows, ‘cosmopolitan’ means New York or London, ‘provincial’ means everywhere else.” For *Out West*, the leading magazines' call for a cosmopolitan literature turned out to be a narrow and geographically distinctive preoccupation. The *Argonaut’s* editor, Frank M. Pixley, pressed the point: “we speak of New York as a vile community, and such it is beyond any other in America. Politically, its rottenness is a national scandal; its masses of cosmopolitan ignorance, dirt, and crime, whence Tammany derives its power, are paralleled nowhere else.” Pixley’s use of “cosmopolitan ignorance” taps into virulent anti-immigrant racism, but in this instance it is tellingly deployed in service of a metaphor for “the vileness at the upper end of the social scale:” Pixley critiques the idea of the Mid-Atlantic as the cosmopolitan region that Howells treated with ambivalent acceptance in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. Just because the Mid-Atlantic contains people or publishes writers or headquarters businesses from every part of the country doesn’t mean that it represents every part of the country. Instead, Pixley turns the opposition on itself, claiming “New York is as self-absorbed as a hamlet, which is why it is so painfully provincial.” The Mid-Atlantic claim to represent all regions ends up representing none – and in doing so ironically fails to represent America, the nation of regions, far more than any individual self-honest region. Readers were encouraged to read books and periodicals from the major publishing centers against the grain of the presumptions embedded therein.

71. “In the Lion’s Den,” *The Land of Sunshine* 4, no. 2 (January 1896): 87–89. “The Land of Sunshine” was *Out West’s* original title.
73. *Pixley* 1.
Though Howells himself was conflicted about the status of the Mid-Atlantic, regional literary magazines came to consider him representative of it. The *St. Louis Magazine* voiced the standard association of Howells with the Mid-Atlantic, warning fellow editors and readers – or perhaps daring them – that to doubt “the utter perfection of the art of Messrs. Howells and James as novelists” would be seen as tantamount to “tramping on the immaculate toes of the Great Eastern Literary Cabal and Mutual Admiration Society and its many radiating branches.”\(^{75}\) In marking this regional affiliation, regional literary magazines treat Howells as any other leading regional author. One critic in the *Midland* wrote that “Mr. Cable’s name conjures up pictures of the Creole; Mr. Howells tells us of Boston and New York; Amelie Rives quickens one’s blood with the warmth of Virginia; Miss Murfree makes the reader feel as though he had been spending a holiday in the mountains of Tennessee; Hamlin Garland could plow a prairie or write a poem.”\(^{76}\) The frequency with which these publications classified Howells with regional writers is almost mischievous; though clearly not an insult from their own perspective, editors no doubt anticipated it would draw the ire of advocates of national literature and international realism alike. The *Harlequin* drew up a similar list, and a critic in the *Current* drew an axis between “the Boston cliques, the Howells-James school, [and] the New York clubs.”\(^{77}\) The conclusion is a startling contrast with the position Howells (and James) has come to occupy in our literary histories. Howells’ realism, like the Mid-Atlantic’s cosmopolitanism, was regional rather than nationally representative.

For many regional magazines, then, staking a position on Howells became an important part of articulating the relationship between their aesthetic program and centralized cultural authority. Southern magazines tended to oppose Howells’ work and aesthetic program more uniformly, preferring romance to realism as a more universally appealing mode of writing. The *Sunny South’s* resident critic lamented “Oh, why can’t William Dean Howells give us a rest! He seems to feel that he has reading humanity in his power and can inflict on them as many dry, insipid, uninteresting novels as he chooses to write,” while another

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berated him as “that hyper-analytical, self-conceited, self-constituted Prophet-Priest-and-King of Realism.” The *Harlequin* periodically parodied “the realist” in its weekly page of literary criticism; it preferred fiction like Thomas Nelson Page’s plantation romance *Red Rock* (1898), which captured “the Southern spirit; the noblesse oblige, the grace, the chivalry, the elegance of the Virginia gentleman.” By contrast, Midwestern magazines tended to support Howells’ realist program in general but with the qualification that it ought to depict more common people instead. As such, they often lionized their own authors as its standard-bearers. The *Current* elevated E. W. Howe and his *Story of a Country Town* (1883) as realism’s champion, while the *Midland* a decade later put Hamlin Garland at the fore and deployed his term “veritism” for the movement. The admiration was mutual: Garland’s veritist manifesto, *Crumbling Idols* (1894), singled out the *Midland* for praise.

New York and Boston critics naturally made some broadly similar evaluatinoes of realism, but the substance of their arguments and preferences varied. Outside the Mid-Atlantic, the predominant critical response to realist aesthetics depended on where the critic was writing.

While Marion Crawford and Richard Harding Davis pushed for romance in Mid-Atlantic magazines against the realism of Howells and James, regional literary magazines advocated a position between the two. Good writing, according to critics in these publications, is real insofar as it is locally-grounded, not insofar as it depicts, in Howells’ famous formulation, “men and women as they really are.” Conversely, good writing is romance insofar as it endears or charms, not insofar as it depicts economic or inherited privilege. A *Southern Bivouac* review helps specify this balance: “in that Miss Murfree treats of an unromantic class, she is a realist, undoubtedly, as much so as Mr. Howells. But her methods are idealistic, almost idyllic. She revels in the description of mountain scenery, and there she is anything but realistic. Over all there is a glamour that touches her characters and makes them but children of the mist. It is not realism that seizes on the reader’s fancy.”

Good writing – for good writing to these magazines was good regional writing – needed to be grounded in geographic particularity while in some way transfiguring it. Without the

81. “The Editor’s Table,” *Southern Bivouac* 2, no. 9 (February 1887): 582.
former, fiction lacked relevance; without the latter, it lacked appeal. Regional literary magazines persisted in this position even as the tastes in national magazines turned from Howells and James’ realism to Crawford and Davis’ romance over the 1890s. This formulation again differs from how we usually think of regional-ism. Aside from prioritizing flagship authors (Murfree, Garland, etc.), regional literary magazines actively curated inclusive categories of regional writing.

Indeed, these critics vehemently fought the idea of a specific mode or single regional-ism, and they encouraged methods of reading regionally that were based instead on synthesizing a variety of literary texts. The *Midland* cautioned against types: “genre pictures worthy the name are unvaryingly true to life, and the artist who with pen or brush draws lines that are not true, or lines that are true of exceptional instances, characters or conditions, and puts them before the world as types, or generalizations,— or the editor who knowingly circulates such libels,— can do great harm to others, to whole communities and sections, but he can do himself far greater harm.”

This was an important point of contention. Regional literary magazines wanted to assert that the literature of their region possessed distinctive stylistic or thematic qualities, but they firmly resisted the hardening of those features into types or confinement to set genres. As a multi-book review in the *Alkahest* attests, they took great pains to emphasize the variety of regional writing:

“A striking characteristic of our literature is its fine variety, the elemental dissimilarity of type and theme. These four books, contemporaries of one cline, bear perhaps no suggestions of relationship, save for the rich prevailing glow of local color. Singular that four books in one year, from four states so nearly related as Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky and Virginia, could each be a type in itself. The [Mary] Johnston-[Ellen] Glasgow-[Harris] Dickson-[James Lane] Allen literary quartette!—full, clear soprano; deep, rich contralto; firm, thundering basso, and purest tenor.”

In the image of a harmonious chorus of types rather than a single reductive type, the *Alkahest* exemplifies its peers’ call for regional writing in every genre. A region ought to excel in every genre – not to make each region accessible to each other region, as in the genre ecosystem of the leading literary monthlies, but to provide breadth and variety of

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representation for the home audience. If reading regionally in the 1870s was primarily critical, a practice of testing the validity of types, reading regionally in the 1890s was primarily synthetic, a practice of locating common denominators. Part of the active task of reading regionally that these critics advocated was to seek out these resonances across authors and locations within the same region. To read regionally was to retrace the map, through this practice of synthesis, with every new book.

To this end, regional literary magazines often cross-examined the authors they most championed. In the Midland’s serialization of Frank W. Calkins’ The Young Homesteaders, characters debate the truthfulness of Garland’s depiction of the region one winter evening. One begins by disclaiming the pessimism of Main-Traveled Roads (1891): “I don’t like the way Garland writes about us Western people [...] of the farmer class. They’re not such a hopeless, woe-begotten lot.”\(^{84}\) Another, though, justifies any excess Garland might have on the basis of the “great sincerity of feeling and purpose in his writing” for the people of the place. It is acknowledged that while the present company has endured some of the hardship Garland chronicled, they still “managed a good deal of cheer and comfort even inside our squalid little sod shanty.”\(^{85}\) The conversation concludes with what is essentially another plea for breadth of style in the judgment that “life and nature are many-sided affairs on these prairies, as elsewhere.”\(^{86}\) In other magazines similar dialogues played out between critics over the span of issues, on Cable’s account of Gulf Coast race relations, whether Murfree includes sufficient nobility in her Appalachian Southerners, or the veracity of the Western laxity in Atherton’s depictions – especially when the author in question was published in national magazines and thereby in need of repatriation. Whatever agreements or disagreements these publications had with Howells’ aesthetics, his fiction was that of an outsider by comparison. This manner of critical discourse modeled a reading practice of engagement on the basis of geography. Readers were to evaluate the manner and content of fiction based on their own intimate experience; in other words, to practice cultural geography as a form of literary criticism.

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84. F. W. Calkins, “The Midland Book Table,” Midland Monthly 8, no. 6 (December 1897): 273.
85. Calkins 274.
86. Calkins 275.
All this puts the famed *Atlantic* in a slightly different light. In several of the ways it circulated and the communities it fostered, the *Atlantic* had more in common with regional literary magazines than it did with the *Century, Harper’s, Lippincott’s, or Scribner’s*. It is true that the *Atlantic* was more commonly held by libraries than the average regional literary magazine, but it was less commonly held than the major literary monthlies. In the Muncie Public Library it was borrowed only half as often as the *Century, Harper’s, and Lippincott’s*.[87] And despite the boon of its extra availability and attachment to one of the most successful publishing houses in the country, the *Atlantic*’s subscription numbers remained firmly within the range occupied by regional literary magazines (Table 3.1). Finally, the *Atlantic* remained much more attached to writing by or about New Englanders for much longer than the major literary monthlies, as most evident in regular features like the "Contributor’s Club" that more clearly paralleled features found in the *Argonaut* or *Midland*. In these respects, it is useful to decenter the *Atlantic* from what Nancy Glazener calls "the *Atlantic* group" and classify it too as a regional literary magazine. This isn’t to dispute Glazener’s characterization of the magazine itself so much as to question where the *Atlantic* fit within a broader print marketplace in which most magazines were associated with subnational geographies. The *Atlantic*’s exceptional patrimony and influence didn’t necessarily come across to readers, and when they did readers didn’t necessarily interpret these qualities as national. Recovering the regional literary magazine as an established magazine class better explains how the *Atlantic* functioned and what it meant to its readers.

For all its distinguished writers, the *Atlantic*’s style and structure developed in conjunction with those of its regional peers. After all, it was the *Overland*’s and Bret Harte’s intertwined success in the late 1860s that led the *Atlantic* to expand its geographic scope and, disastrously, lure Harte himself to New England on the famous $10,000 contract – though he first considered a rival offer from Chicago’s *Lakeside* (Chapter 1). Only after this Western influx did the literary monthly become a coherent class with the defining genre

[87] Bound volumes of *Harper’s* had 215 checkouts, the *Century* 171, *Lippincott’s* 146, *Scribner’s* 86, and the *Atlantic* 73; since transaction records run from 1891-1902 and *Scribner’s* had only been founded in 1887, it did not have nearly as many volumes to borrow. See Felsenstein and Connolly, *Print Culture in an American Small City*, 120.
ecosystem that would make it a national success with readers. *Lippincott’s* was founded in
the same year as the *Overland*, the *Century* was founded in 1870, and *Harper’s* ceased pub-
lishing mostly British writers around the same time. The *Lakeside* and *Southern Magazine*,
found in 1869 and 1871 respectively, were not retroactive copies of their Mid-Atlantic
counterparts: they were co-influencing contemporaries at this cutting edge. Foregrounding
the regional nature of the *Atlantic* illuminates the mutual influence of publications in differ-
ent parts of the country. It also highlights the cultural esteem available to regional literary
 endeavors – the esteem regional literary magazines sought to replicate – and the reasons
why regional literary magazines were so appealing even when lacking the stamp of prestige.
If no other regional literary magazine achieved the *Atlantic*’s lasting aesthetic influence,
many certainly matched its success in several metrics of more immediate importance: they
helped sustain the careers of writers, develop cultural institutions, and shape the reading
practices of their regions.

4. Howells in Middletown: the Regionality of Realism

In February 1889, as Howells was preparing the first chapters of *A Hazard of New Fortunes*,
recently discovered natural gas wells around Muncie, Indiana made first page national news
for attracting Eastern investors. Though the wells had been discovered in the area some
three years prior, it was the annexation of the resource by national capital that put the story
on the front of the *New York Times* for February 12, 1889. The first installment of *Hazard*
appeared a month later in the March 23, 1889 *Harper’s Weekly*. Howells undoubtedly had
the newspaper reports of Muncie in mind when, in Chapter XI printed in the April 27, 1889
issue, he first introduced *Every Other Week*’s “angel” as Dryfoos, a man whose fortune
originated in the discovery of natural gas on his farm in the barely-fictionalized town of
“Moffitt,” Indiana. Dryfoos went East with his fortunes in *Hazard*, representing the Mid-
west in Howells’ novel of the nationally representative region in the era of centralization.
But others, like the Ball brothers who would soon construct Muncie’s famous glassware
factories, went in the opposite direction. The local boom turned a modest agricultural hub
into a small city with a population of nearly 21,000 by 1900. The cultural institutions that flourished as a result included a public library, whose recently-rediscovered checkout records from 1891-1902 constitute the most substantial evidence of postbellum library circulation (Figure 3.4). This stroke of serendipity allows us to follow Dryfoos as he circulated back to Moffitt/Muncie. In accord with the literary program espoused by regional literary magazines of the period, the view of Howells from “Moffitt” situates his realism as Mid-Atlantic in spite of its national aspirations. Muncie library-goers instead disproportionately preferred Midwestern novels by authors like Booth Tarkington who wrote at a crossroads between realism and romance.

![Figure 3.4: Total checkouts from the Muncie, Indiana Public Library from November 5, 1891 to May 28, 1892 and November 5, 1894 to December 3, 1902 (all extant records). Source: What Middletown Read.](image)

The major publishing houses of the Mid-Atlantic weren’t certain how the rise of libraries impacted publication numbers (or, more to the point, sales). Some worried that libraries drove down the number of potential buyers. But Walter Hines Page of Doubleday, Page submitted that “it is a working theory that every subscriber to a circulating library
who reads a novel and talks about it at the woman’s club may induce somebody to buy a copy who otherwise would never have heard of it. At any rate, the total number of novels, or of books of other sorts, now sold is not less.”

Public libraries grew increasingly common from 1890 to 1920, fueled by the famous Carnegie matching donations that helped move over 1,500 libraries from cramped rooms in city halls or second floors of downtown commercial blocks to their own dedicated buildings. Patrons relied on libraries for books, especially when novels were outside the range of regular expenses for most Americans: even the $1.20 average retail price of the standard $1.50 list price amounted to $37 in 2020 dollars. Because books primarily functioned as part of the gift market – Publishers’ Weekly estimated in 1910 that 65% of publishing output appeared in the six weeks preceding Christmas and Easter – sales were particularly susceptible to hard times. Indeed, the Panic of 1893 is undoubtedly one cause for the doubling of the number of Muncie Public Library transactions between May 1892 to November 1894 (unfortunately coinciding with the one gap in the Muncie records). Connolly and Felsenstein point out that “the 22,000 loans the library made in 1899 easily dwarfed any such figures for the smaller private libraries and in all likelihood far exceeded the number of books sold” by the local book store and drug store (another important source of books, especially popular ones in towns without department stores). Furthermore, growing library collections by the 1890s allowed patrons to do what the typically-limited stock at nineteenth-century bookstores didn’t allow: actually peruse the books they saw referenced in newspapers and magazines (and, increasingly, catalogs).

Libraries served as a vital community hub that linked together other forms of print engagement in these decades. They shared board members with literary societies who exerted influence over collections by recommendation or donation (from the latter to the

88. Page, A Publisher’s Confession 151.
89. The sale price of a single trade book (excluding cheap and “pirate” publishers) could be notoriously volatile at times in the decades after the Civil War because under conditions of economic duress publishers undercut booksellers’ prices and department stores undercut both by selling books at no profit as a lure to induce costumers to purchase other items with higher margins. Nonetheless, general averages increasingly prevailed towards the end of the century: see Sheehan, This Was Publishing: A Chronicle of the Book Trade in the Gilded Age 217, 229.
91. There are no doubt other causes here (and Muncie did enjoy continued prosperity relatively speaking as a result of its natural gas), but many are mutually-reinforcing: growth in collections, growth in membership, etc.
92. Felsenstein and Connolly, What Middletown Read: Print Culture in an American Small City 86.
Scales of Circulation

former). Libraries, especially the spacious Carnegie-funded ones, often served as bases of operation for these groups, whose members were often power-users of the collection.\footnote{See Wiegand, \textit{Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876-956}, 112.} The library reading room in particular occupied a central place in public life. Patrons, including many who rarely checked out books, flocked to reading rooms to consult reference books, peruse shelves, and, especially, to read the latest periodicals – all knowing they would run into friends, coworkers, fellow church members, and so on. This mix of the serial and the social, print and community, made libraries vibrant and fashionable in addition to entertaining or informational. The Sage Public Library of Osage, Iowa, for example, had 1,142 people out of a population of 2,734 visit its reading room in 1899 compared to 2,769 checkouts.\footnote{Wiegand, 56.} As such, librarians were continually compelled to extend hours and carry more magazines – including regional literary magazines.\footnote{Wiegand, \textit{Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876-956}, 103; Pawley, \textit{Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late-Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa}, 122; Felsenstein and Connolly, \textit{What Middletown Read: Print Culture in an American Small City}, 57.} The Muncie Public Library catalog records several volumes of two Midwestern literary magazines, the St. Louis Western and the Chicago \textit{Dial}; if it subscribed to others, as it may well have, it either did so sporadically or without saving copies. In her study of turn of the century library and print culture in Osage, Iowa, Christine Pawley found that selection committees also relied on reviews when acquiring new books; in Osage they may well have consulted the library’s copy of the \textit{Midland}.\footnote{Pawley, \textit{Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late-Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa}, 91.}

These diverse uses of print made public libraries a site of contact and contest between national trends and local preferences, hegemonic norms and individual practice, as well as rival class interests internal to the community itself. White middle-class Protestants disproportionately used and governed turn of the century libraries, which came to reflect that demographic’s ideals concerning the appropriate uses and goals of reading. Yet as Pawley argues, their domination was far from complete, for the income levels that counted as middle class and the denominations that counted as Protestant varied with geography and
population density: “middle class” was a more capacious grouping in a Midwestern town. As Wayne Wiegand insists in his approach to foregrounding “the library in the life of the user,” libraries neither (successfully) imposed cultural mores from above nor offered an ideologically free space for individual self-fashioning. Disagreements over reading room hours, borrowing policies, and acquisitions formed an ongoing if uneven compromise between community leaders, librarians, the middle class majority of patrons, and the working class and immigrant minority of patrons over the purpose of the library and by extension of reading itself. Each transaction, at once personal and social, participated in this intertwined process of individual and community formation. Comparing the holdings of multiple libraries to the recommendations of national professional organizations like the American Library Association, Wiegand concludes: “that the record is so mixed demonstrates the extent to which the mediated process of public library book selection was unique to each community.” Libraries carried most (though not all) national bestsellers, but varying numbers of copies and of transactions from one library to the next attest that communities had their own favorites and participated in national trends to different degrees.

Howells makes for an instructive case study because he enjoyed both the professional recommendation that came with critical acclaim and the broader popularity that came with regular serialization in leading magazines. Harper Brothers printed some 20,000 copies of A Hazard of New Fortunes, exceeding totals for Howells’ novels of the 1880s. The Muncie Public Library acquired its copy belatedly along with several other Howells novels two years later, in fall 1892, before which time it had only held a copy of his travelogue Venetian Life (1866). A gap in the surviving records from May of that year until November 1894 leaves us only with transactions after the latter date. Because the Muncie Public Library had the original two volume edition of the novel, we can see that Hazard’s uptake was mixed: of 30 patrons who borrowed the first volume only 20 borrowed the second, an attrition rate of 33%. This wasn’t necessarily because it was a “challenge,” however, given that the

97. Pawley, Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late-Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa, 77, 20.
98. Wiegand, Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876-1956, 141.
gender and class demographics of borrowers remain consistent between the two volumes. What this dropoff and belated acquisition do suggest is that *Hazard*, despite being one of Howells’ more commercially successful novels, didn’t have notable traction in Muncie even though it performed reasonably well. Over half of *Hazard* transactions came after the library had already begun circulating other Howells novels that proved more popular with patrons. Howells’ most-read realist novel in the Muncie Public Library was actually the now-overlooked *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* (1897), with 79 unique borrowers and 88 total checkouts (Figure 3.5). These figures align with the novel’s reasonable success in cities nationwide; it cracked the Bookman’s lists of the top-six selling books in Boston, MA, Chicago, IL, Los Angeles, CA, and Cincinnati, OH in its first months.

![Figure 3.5: Muncie Public Library checkouts of William Dean Howells’ *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* (1897). Orange line marks checkouts per month, black vertical line marks the accession of a new copy of the novel. Source: What Middletown Read.](image)

*The Landlord at Lion’s Head* shows another side of the urbanization and incorporation depicted in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*; like many other pairs of novels in Howells’ corpus,

100. This number was exceeded by one Howells novella, *The Day of Their Wedding* (1896), with 100 unique borrowers.
101. “Sales of Books During the Month,” *Bookman* 5, no. 4 (June 1897): 357–360; “Sales of Books During the Month,” *Bookman* 5, no. 5 (July 1897): 443-446.
they form a diptych in theme and subject. The 1897 novel follows the transition of family farmland into a resort hotel and the family’s scion, Jeff, into an unscrupulous entrepreneur. *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* was perhaps Howells’ last great realist novel. Like *Hazard* and many of his preceding novels it both courts and frustrates readerly expectations based in popular conventions. The interplay between Jeff’s practical preoccupations and his painter friend Westover’s romantic ideals animates the novel, with each perspective illuminating the other’s flaws. *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* also teases readers with love plots that it ultimately violently severs. Jeff cheats on his rural childhood beau in a nonconsensual physical encounter with an urban socialite, losing both women, only to make a last-minute marriage of convenience with a third. Initial geo-economic class tensions and the wreckage of his home community notwithstanding, Jeff gets everything he wants. As old socio-economic structures contort into flashier yet crueler forms, characters and narrator alike wonder: are people the product of their own actions or their circumstances? Does sowing evil actually bring evil fruit? *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* is, in short, an exemplary realist novel whether measured by the standards of contemporaneous critics or those of modern scholars.

Howells’ realism of the 1890s finds its foil in Booth Tarkington’s first novel, 1899’s *The Gentleman from Indiana*. Where Dryfoos left Moffit/Muncie in order to follow his fortune, John Harkless returns to “Plattville”/Muncie (where oil has been discovered instead of natural gas) from an Eastern college in order to find himself. *The Gentleman from Indiana* opens with a stark assertion of regional difference, opposing Midwestern geography to the expectations of Mid-Atlantic viewers: “there is a fertile stretch of flat lands in Indiana where agrarian Eastern travellers, glancing from car-windows, shudder and return their eyes to interior upholstery, preferring even the swaying caparisons of a Pullman to the monotony without.” Harkless edits a newspaper rather than a magazine, earning widespread admiration for his campaigns to uproot corruption and scatter whitecaps. At the same time, the novel echoes themes and plots from Edward Eggleston’s foundational Midwestern novel *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871). Eggleston’s influence may well be the reason why *The

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102. For example, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) is the story of a farm-to-city emigre with a fortune who is too old to learn new manners while *The Minister’s Charge* (1886) is the story of a farm-to-city emigre young enough to learn new manners who lacks a fortune. *Annie Kilburn* (1889) and *The Quality of Mercy* (1892) form another such diptych around the issue of the scale of charity.

Gentleman from Indiana already exhibits the at once teasing and endearing tone characteristic of Tarkington’s better-known later fiction such as The Magnificent Ambersons (1918). Despite his local accomplishments, however, Harkless still feels unfulfilled. Rather than sharing the narrator’s sense of endearment for the region, Harkless feels the loneliness of the Mid-Atlantic travelers invoked in the novel’s opening sentence, and the Plattville community fears that he will leave them for better opportunities in a Mid-Atlantic city. It is only when Harkless falls in love with Helen – another prodigal Hoosier, who proves herself just as adept a newspaper editor – that he begins to feel the regional pride and love of home interspersed throughout the novel in neighbors’ dialogue and narrative asides.

Harkless’ realization of this pride, The Gentleman from Indiana’s spiritual climax, comes as he returns to Plattville after a long interval of hospitalization. Pages of building rhapsodies of the countryside culminate as follows:

“All at once the anger ran out of John Harkless [...] and in place of it a strong sense of home-coming began to take possession of him. He was going home. ‘Back to Plattville, where I belong,’ he had said; and he said it again without bitterness, for it was the truth. ‘Every man cometh to his own place in the end.’ [...] He looked out over the beautiful ‘monotonous’ landscape, and he answered heartily, ‘No!’ There was ignorance in man, but no unkindness.”

In its train car setting and pointed use of scare quotes for “monotonous,” this passage directly counters the novel’s opening. The perspective of the Mid-Atlantic sojourners and, implicitly, readers is refuted; more importantly, Indiana, the “flat lands,” and by extension the Midwest are redeemed in Harkless’ conversion. If its title weren’t enough to signal these investments, editions of the novel in its first years of publication also had an ear of corn device on the spine. The Gentleman from Indiana is precisely the kind of novel called for by regional literary magazines and Midwestern ones in particular. Broadly realist in its grounding in a geographically-defined culture, Tarkington’s novel casts a broadly romantic glow over his protagonists’ beliefs and emotions that is evident in the excerpt above. From the perspective of the Current or the Midland, in other words, the novel is realist insofar as it is engrossed in town life and newspaper work while being romantic insofar as it elevates

ostensibly everyman ideals. The novel’s moral reaffirms that even young aspirational people can have a fulfilling life because of, not just in spite of, living a Midwestern town.

*The Gentleman from Indiana* did not crack the recently-established Publishers Weekly annual top ten bestseller list for either 1899 or 1900, but it did move a respectable 65,000 copies for Doubleday, Page in its first twelve months at a time when historical romances and war books led in sales.\(^{105}\) In the Muncie Public Library, however, it became a runaway favorite with 260 unique borrowers and 274 total checkouts (Figure 3.6). In the four years from December 1898 (almost a year before *The Gentleman from Indiana* was published) to the last extant records in December 1902, only the national phenomenon *David Harum* (1898) had more checkouts. Though *David Harum* sold over 400,000 copies nationwide, in Muncie it only surpassed Tarkington’s novel by 8 unique borrowers. The library acquired its copy of *The Gentleman from Indiana* within the first weeks of publication, before the novel had picked up momentum in sales, and it acquired three more over the next two years to accommodate demand. This too was unusual: only pop science/reference works and the most stratospheric of national bestsellers in fiction, such as *David Harum*, had four copies in the Muncie Public Library. *The Gentleman from Indiana* was significantly and enduringly more popular in Indiana than in the nation as a whole. In fulfilling Midwestern literary magazines’ proscriptions for regional writing, Tarkington’s novel became more popular with Muncie’s readers than other novels simply set in the Midwest or even Indiana specifically.

Patron demographic data suggests that gender and class differences played less of a role in readers’ selection of Tarkington’s novel than Howells’. *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* had 60 female borrowers compared to only 20 male, and while far less class data is available, the novel had 11 identifiably white collar borrowers to only 3 blue collar. These proportions, roughly 3:1 in both cases in favor of female and white collar borrowers, are less marked for Tarkington’s novel than Howells’ despite the fact that the former’s more romantic outlook might lead one to assume the opposite. *The Gentleman from Indiana* had 171 female borrowers compared to 85 male and 47 identifiably white collar borrowers to 27 blue collar, roughly 2:1 proportions in both cases. These proportions more closely match

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Figure 3.6: Muncie Public Library checkouts of Booth Tarkington’s *The Gentleman from Indiana* (1899). Orange line marks checkouts per month, black vertical lines mark the accession of a new copy of the novel. Source: What Middletown Read.

library checkout statistics as a whole (58% of transactions were women, 64% of transactions were white collar). Taken alongside the novel’s regional investment and its disproportionate popularity in Muncie, the absence of other confounding demographic variables suggests that borrowers read *The Gentleman from Indiana* out of regional interest across gender and class differences.

Shared borrowing habits reinforce the conclusion that readers of *The Gentleman from Indiana* read for region, especially when compared with the borrowing habits of readers of *The Landlord at Lion’s Head*. The principle here is akin to that of the familiar “Customers who bought this item also bought” recommendation on online bookseller websites like Amazon.com. Rather than prioritize the percent of borrower overlap between each of these two novels and all others in Muncie’s collection, however, I have organized borrowing data by the difference between borrower overlap percentages for each novel (Table 3.2). Doing so highlights where borrower behavior most diverged and compensates for universally popular books. In a computational model these are the authors who would be the most predictive of whether a borrower read Tarkington’s novel versus Howells’. There are indeed several widely popular authors who *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* borrowers and *The Gentleman
from Indiana borrowers checked out in roughly equally large percentages (who are, as such, not included in Table 3.2). Marion Crawford, for example, whose characters were more like Howells’ but whose style was more like Tarkington’s, was popular with readers of both authors. The generally low percentages of borrower overlap between authors (and thus also the difference in percentages between the two novels) is partly a consequence of the fact that I have focused on a single well-circulated novel by each author in order to compensate for the fact that data exists only for the start of Tarkington’s career; readers often instead selected titles by author while treating individual titles themselves indiscriminately. That said, low overlap between novels also reflects just how varied and idiosyncratic individual reading patterns could be.

106. Pawley, Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late-Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa, 95–96; This phenomenon is well attested in other contexts as well; see, for example, Jonathan Rose, The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Most Borrowed Title</th>
<th>Checkouts</th>
<th>Borrowed Gentleman from Indiana</th>
<th>Borrowed Landlord at Lion's Head</th>
<th>Difference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tarkington, Booth</td>
<td>the gentleman from indiana</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnston, Mary</td>
<td>to have and to hold</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>18.87%</td>
<td>5.88%</td>
<td>-12.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacheller, Irving</td>
<td>eben holden: a tale of the north country</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>17.74%</td>
<td>7.06%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thompson, Maurice</td>
<td>alice of old vincennes</td>
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<td>Major, Charles</td>
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<td>Cholmondeley, Mary</td>
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<td>Lloyd, John Uri</td>
<td>stringtown on the pike: a tale of northernmost kentucky</td>
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<td>david harum: a story of american life</td>
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<td>Hawkins, Anthony Hope</td>
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<td>Connor, Ralph</td>
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<td>8.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alden, Isabella Macdonald</td>
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<td>20%</td>
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<td>Diaz, Abby Morton</td>
<td>the entertaining story of king bronde</td>
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<td>11.76%</td>
<td>9.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freeman, Mary Eleanor Wilkins</td>
<td>Jerome, a poor man</td>
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<td>17.74%</td>
<td>27.06%</td>
<td>9.32</td>
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<td>Wiggin, Kate Douglas Smith</td>
<td>polly oliver’s problem: a story for girls</td>
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<td>20%</td>
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<td>my lady nobody: a novel</td>
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<td>6.04%</td>
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<td>the lilac sunbonnet: a love story</td>
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<td>the second wife: a romance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wood, Henry, Mrs.</td>
<td>the master of greylands: a novel</td>
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<td>9.81%</td>
<td>21.18%</td>
<td>11.37</td>
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<td>Howells, William Dean</td>
<td>the landlord at lion’s head: a novel</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>10.19%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>89.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: The novels most likely to be checked out by Muncie Public Library borrowers of either *The Gentleman from Indiana* or *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* and not the other, with the percentage of shared borrowers for each. In other words, these are the checkouts that most distinguish borrowers of *The Gentleman from Indiana* from those of *The Landlord at Lion’s Head*. Source: What Middletown Read.
Two related patterns nonetheless emerge that distinguish the readers and modes of circulation of *The Gentleman from Indiana* from those of *The Landlord at Lion’s Head*; one pattern is based on market position and the other is based on region. Borrowers of *The Gentleman from Indiana* tended also to borrow national bestsellers (Mary Johnston, Irving Bacheller, Edward Noyes Westcott) and authors from the Midwest. The latter category included Maurice Thompson (who had written for the Chicago *Current*), Charles Major (who lived in Indiana his whole life despite writing primarily historical romance set elsewhere), Ohio River valley regionalist John Uri Lloyd, Ralph Connor (who wrote of the Canadian prairies), and Winston Churchill (who despite leaving Missouri early in his career set his equally popular unionist Civil War novel, *The Crisis* [1901], in that state). Some borrowers predominantly read one of these two groups of authors, and from their perspective Tarkington’s novel likely would have registered as either another popular contemporary novel or another novel about their region. For other borrowers, Tarkington’s novel was a welcome confluence of ongoing interests in both Midwestern fiction and the most popular fiction of the day. For still others, it was a conduit from popular to Midwestern fiction. These pathways are somewhat obscured by *The Gentleman from Indiana*’s exceptional popularity. For example, while only 8.7% of that novel’s borrowers also checked out a book by Ralph Connor, almost half of Connor’s borrowers also checked out *The Gentleman from Indiana*. Whatever the trajectories of individual readers, this overall pattern of overlap evinces that borrowers read across genres for common regional ground.

By contrast, borrows of *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* tended towards international authors of social problem novels and authors from New England or the Mid-Atlantic. Some authors in the former category shared interests with Howells and Henry James without necessarily being realist standard bearers themselves: Eugenie John (pen name E. Marlitt) and Jozua Marins Willem Schwartz (pen name Maarten Maartens) wrote about contemporary issues but with romantic plotting, while English authors Mrs. Henry (Ellen) Wood, R. D. Blackmore, and Mary Gleed Tuttiét wrote in a vein closer to melodrama. The Boston- and New York-based authors that readers of *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* also comparatively preferred, such as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Isabella Macdonald Alden, and Abby Morton Diaz, diverge even more from Howells’ literary style. It would seem tenuous to call either of
these two groups realism, though the small number of definitively realist authors makes it a difficult category to use as a basis for comparison. Regardless, for Muncie’s readers Howells fell within a group of authors most distinguished by affiliation with Eastern metropoles or the fashionable sensationalism of modern issues. Indeed, borrowers of *The Landlord at Lion’s Head* were also 50% more likely to borrow Mid-Atlantic magazines than borrowers of *The Gentleman from Indiana*, magazines which were themselves the main conduit by which many of the international authors named above entered the American literary marketplace. Readers intuited the link between this kind of literary cosmopolitanism that is perhaps better dubbed chic and the ostensibly cosmopolitan region, the same link represented and facilitated by the leading literary monthlies, thematized in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, and critiqued by regional literary magazines.

Seen from Muncie, Howellsian realism was a regional form; or, perhaps more precisely, borrower behavior manifests an understanding of Howells as a regional writer. This assessment has affinities with the scholarly shift from formalist to social accounts of post-bellum realism. As Glazener argues, readers had to be instructed how to read for realism via reviews, editorials, and realist novels themselves – that the phenomenon of realism is better understood as a practice of reading than a quality of texts. Amy Blair has similarly shown how popular recommenders like Hamilton Wright Mabie made realism accessible by showing an upwardly mobile middle class how to read it romantically or otherwise against its own grain. In the case of Muncie Public Library borrowing patterns and the author associations that emerge from them, however, prioritizing realism offers little explanatory power even if it had justification. To read Howells as a regional writer is to instead locate his thematic and stylistic concerns, as I did in the first section of this chapter, in the cultural

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108. This remains the case whether transaction data is sliced by all Howells novels held, by uncomparable percentage overlaps, or by other methods of comparison.


110. Focusing on *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Blair argues that “whether Lapham was immoral or simply unwise, the lesson for the striving Mabie reader is the same: things need not have gone this way. Lapham’s financial fall precipitates his moral rise only because he was not ethical in the first place, but ethics and wealth are not mutually exclusive” – and Howells might help you be both Blair, *Reading Up Middle-Class Readers and the Culture of Success in the Early Twentieth-Century United States*.
and socio-economic commitments of the place they depict. Realist fiction was subject to dynamic reassessment and re-classification as it crossed cultural geographic space.

Records of reading at the Muncie Public Library – in many ways representative of reading culture in the upswell of Midwestern small cities at the turn of the century – attest to regional literary practices that undercut the centralized authority and cosmopolitan pretensions of the Mid-Atlantic. Borrower behavior aligned with the practices advocated by regional literary magazines. Literary engagement was an exercise in cultural geography and an act of cross-generic regional canon building that contested other categories of Mid-Atlantic publishers or critics even when indebted to such publishers or critics for access. If anything, borrower overlap underreports the influence of region on interpretation: we can only hypothesize based on community tendency, for example, how library patrons who read both Howells and Tarkington would have compared or contrasted the two authors. Not all readers, of course, approached literary production regionally. For every active library patron who borrowed *The Gentleman from Indiana* there were several who did not. When it came to the broad field of possible literary engagement, however, reading regionally stands out as an interpretively flexible, widely available, and well-ingrained approach to fiction in America during the era of centralization.
CHAPTER 4

RACE, REGION, AND THE BLACK MIDWEST IN THE DUNBAR DECADES

In September 1899 the *Kansas Agitator*, a newspaper closely aligned with the Midwestern Populist movement, reprinted Paul Laurence Dunbar’s “Sympathy.” With its famous line “I know why the caged bird sings,” the poem has long epitomized Dunbar’s position in the African American literary tradition. What is it doing in rural Kansas? One wouldn’t have expected the *Kansas Agitator* to sympathize with Dunbar, whose plantation poetry and fiction were appearing regularly in the period’s most widely read and critically esteemed literary magazines by 1899. There, Dunbar’s name was synonymous with Black gentility and achievement to a degree exceeded only by W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. But “Sympathy” is not plantation poetry, the genre of ostensible nostalgia for life under slavery to which scholars have typically attributed Dunbar’s national popularity, and the *Kansas Agitator* reprinted it in a column devoted to labor news. The predominantly white Kansas farmers who encountered “Sympathy” alongside calls for cooperative production and accounts of rural poverty would have likely read Dunbar as a regional writer sympathizing with the hopes and hardships of Midwestern life at a time of pronounced social tension between regions.

The capacity of “Sympathy” to circulate as both a Black poem and a Midwestern poem reflects broader patterns in Dunbar’s reception that require we rethink the interplay between popular conceptions of race and region at the turn of the century. From his breakthrough volume *Lyrics of Lowly Life* in 1896 through his tragically early 1906 death and into the 1910s, the Ohio-born Dunbar was one of the most famous writers in the US—as a Black poet and as a Midwestern poet. In these decades, the idea of regions as units of cultural geography – as alignments of aesthetic, social, economic, and political practices in a

particular though ambiguously bounded geographic space – was one of the most important frameworks by which Americans understood cultural production and belonging. More than just the basis of the institutionalized literary aesthetic that scholars have since termed regionalism, this framework fueled profuse differences in what people in different parts of the country read and how they read. At the same time, Jim Crow-era codifications of Blackness and growing non-Western European immigration had already made race one of the most pervasive concepts for interpreting, policing, and organizing cultural difference. We often think of race in the period as defined by the Jim Crow “one-drop rule” binary, whereby nonwhiteness functions as excluding other forms of representation and identification – as indeed publishers and politicians alike often deployed it. Writing in what was considered the Midwestern style at the height of its popularity, however, allowed Dunbar to engage regionally distinctive circulation networks and reading practices despite racial prejudice, even as he concurrently sustained another reputation for writing in forms, dialects, and types marked as Black.

Race and region were already intertwined in the cultural imagination. To be Black in the US, Dunbar complained in 1899, was to be a “quasi-Southerner.” So he wrote in “The Hapless Southern Negro,” one of several articles in which he diagnosed the nation’s much-discussed “race problem” as at heart a regional one. Dunbar was born after emancipation and lived most of his life in Dayton, Ohio; his experience of race and racism was shaped by the relative lack of racial discord resulting from a combination of local economic prosperity and a well-established Black community. Dunbar recognized, however, that the dominant accounts of Black life and culture – whether Du Bois’s anthropology, Washington’s politics, the Fisk Singers’ spirituals, or the minstrel stages’ jokes, Joel Chandler Harris’ folklore, and Thomas Nelson Page’s fiction – all located authentic Black experience in the South. Dunbar chafed against this elision, one which primarily defined his race through the exaggeration and essentialization of regional practices with which he had little in common. Newspapers reprinted his objections to “those who would hold the negro down to a certain kind of

poetry—dialect and concerning only scenes on plantations in the south.” In these pieces Dunbar targets the nefarious regionalization of race that confined Blacks to the South representationally much as other forms of policing confined them there physically. “The Hapless Southern Negro” concludes that the only solution to this intertwined representational and political “question of the South” is “the widening of the Negro’s field, [the] spreading out of their district”: Blacks must exchange the South not for the cities of the Northeast but for the “great and generous” Midwest and West. The Great Migration, during which millions would do just that, was still two decades off. Yet, as Dunbar was at pains to point out, there was already a growing Black population in the Midwest and, with it, a growing Black Midwestern reading public and periodical press.

The South nonetheless continues to be the focal point of most scholarship on postbellum Black literature even when tracing material and imaginative transits into and out of it. Scholars of postbellum literary regionalism have similarly shown that the genre’s institutionalization offered opportunity for Black authors to publish as Southern while assuaging white anxiety by transmuting racial difference into less-threatening geographic difference. But such was not necessarily the case. A growing body of new work on the circulation of Black print by scholars including Eric Gardner and Elizabeth McHenry has directed our attention to sites of reading and writing outside the South, sites otherwise obscured by

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5. With few exceptions, black newspapers in the Midwest were unable to secure enough readers to sustain stable print runs until the 1890s, when scores began to flourish across the region. See Henry Lewis Suggs, ed., The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865-1885 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

6. See Kaplan, “Region, Nation, Empire” 251; Brodhead, Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America 177; Foote, Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature; Greason, Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature.
our misplaced focus on that region. Dunbar didn’t just write in or about non-Southern locations: he was able to become widely understood as representing the Midwest, Black and white, by interfacing the expanding geography of Black experience with the period’s framework of regional representation. Conversely, a recent formal turn in African American literary scholarship, bolstered by seminal work on Dunbar by Gene Jarrett and Margaret Ronda, has shifted attention from longstanding questions of authenticity to the political implications of literary form. Still, scholars have largely dismissed Dunbar’s use of Midwestern conventions because we haven’t pursued the alternative publishing venues and extensive newspaper reception that registered this writing’s meaningfulness for interpreting and defining the region. Increasingly, this function mattered not only to white Midwesterners but Black ones too, among whom Dunbar sparked a wave of regionally inflected writing and the sensation of Dunbar Literary Clubs. In this light Dunbar is not exception but exemplar, not a dead-end before the Harlem Renaissance but a watershed point in alternative trajectories of both Black and regional literature.


9. Gene Jarrett discusses some of Dunbar’s Midwestern prose as “anomalous African American literature”: literature that challenges the notion of a unified linguistic standard of black “race realism.” For Jarrett, Dunbar challenged “the hegemonic tendency of Anglo-American literature to overlook the racial politics of local color” but didn’t participate in a Midwestern literary mode. Jarrett, *Deans and Truants: Race and Realism in African American Literature* 306; Nadia Nurhussein asserts that Dunbar was “both a black writer and a local color writer” but goes on to argue that, as such, “Dunbar belongs to categories that are treated as practically mutually exclusive, treated so in part because of Dunbar’s original reception by both black and white readers.” Nadia Nurhussein, *Rhetorics of Literacy: The Cultivation of American Dialect Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), 93; Gavin Jones mentions Dunbar’s Midwestern dialect poetry to show that “Dunbar acts to disrupt the notion of a unified linguistic standard of white English,” but for Jones Dunbar neither participated in a Midwestern literary mode nor was he read as such. Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 196.
By refocusing on his work’s participation in regional literary style and reception, I argue that Dunbar deployed his Midwestern identity, successfully, as an alternative site for Black expression and cultural identification. In doing so, I use his career to illuminate a more dynamic relationship between popular conceptions of race and of region at the fin de siècle, one that facilitated widespread practices of writing and reading that combine and blur their respective modes of representation. Dunbar expertly activates these latent cultural resources in his poetry and prose. Moreover, interacting with Dunbar’s work entangled readers in the very question of the relation between race and region. In the first two sections of this essay, I show that Dunbar’s use of Midwestern conventions, along with a good dose of publishing savvy, enabled his Midwestern poetry and prose to circulate widely without necessarily being racially marked. Under such circumstances, I contend, it was possible for regional identity to take precedence over racial alterity as a framework for classifying and interpreting cultural difference. This move from aesthetic innovation to material circulation foregrounds the power of literary form to do cultural work in the world. In the third and fourth sections I show that a second group of Dunbar’s writings combined commonplace regional conventions with racial ones, synchronizing commonalities between them and his double reputation to highlight affinities between Black life and a Midwestern one. Interacting with these works compelled readers to use region to blur racial lines. For white readers in the Midwest, this meant considering that regional identity could be multiracial; for the region’s Black writers and reading communities like the literary clubs that bore his name, it made Dunbar a model of the cultural possibilities of the Black Midwest.

1.

In the 1890s a new literary Midwest was emerging in the generation of writers that included Dunbar, Henry Blake Fuller, Hamlin Garland, Booth Tarkington, and Octave Thanet. As Dunbar’s critiques of Southern Black dialect poetry circulated in newspapers across the country, he positioned his Midwestern poetry as part of this group. Dunbar’s early tribute to “James Whitcomb Riley” for example, one of his many poems in Midwestern dialect,
is subtitled “From a Westerner’s Point of View” to emphasize regional affirmation. “The Spellin’-Bee” – a long poem in which a young man purposely loses a spelling bee to a young woman he loves – refashions a famous episode from *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871), the bestseller by Edward Eggleston that spawned a series of popular “Hoosier novels” and spelling bee poems (including one by Riley). Readers might have recognized these acts of poetic citation to some of the country’s most popular authors. From New York’s *Harper’s Monthly* to San Francisco’s *Overland* to Chicago’s *Dial*, commentators remarked on the groundswell of interest in Midwestern literature. The phrase “Middle West” itself entered common use at this time, gradually superseding other monikers for roughly the same geographic space including “the Old Northwest,” “the Upper Mississippi,” and an antiquated sense of “the West.” This rearticulation shifted the geographic distribution of the nation’s literary attention, and in so doing offered new aesthetic and publishing opportunities. The leading monthly magazines included writing about the Midwest as regular content, Midwestern magazines advocated expression of a distinctive heritage for the region, and newspapers reprinted Midwestern literature or literary news apropos to social commentary. Dunbar was no mere beneficiary of this process; his contributions played a significant role in the burgeoning Midwestern literary movement.

While Dunbar was circulated and read as a Black writer, we shouldn’t conclude that his writing wasn’t also circulated as a regional literature: one did not preclude the other. Maintaining a regional reputation, however, required careful and constant maneuvering within a fin-de-siècle literary field in which critical gatekeepers and publishers were more comfortable with Black authors writing within familiar Southern stereotypes. By 1900 Dunbar was increasingly compelled to publish Southern Black dialect poems to be reprinted in illustrated gift volumes, though these went through fewer editions than his larger collections.

12. Timothy Flint used “Middle West” in the 1820s to refer to the latitudinal middle states of what was then the West, i.e., the Ohio River Valley. As the nation continued displacing Native peoples and expanded westward, the phrase shifted to describe the longitudinal middle states.
of new work in a variety of styles, such as *Lyrics of Lowly Life*.\(^{13}\) Far from acquiescing, Dunbar countered the racist pressures of editors and publishers by expanding his prose output and the number of print venues in which it appeared. In addition to his now better-known *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), he published the Midwestern novels *The Uncalled* (1898) and *The Fanatics* (1901) as well as an extended series of short stories called “Ohio Pastorals” in *Lippincott’s Magazine* starting in 1901. Tracing the movements of Dunbar’s Midwestern prose in the literary marketplace helps elucidate the literary techniques by which he bolstered his regional reputation across genres as well as the publishing strategies by which he kept a step ahead of critics who might try to keep him a “quasi-Southerner.”\(^{14}\)

The “Ohio Pastorals” exhibit all the hallmarks of Midwestern style as understood at the fin de siècle. Akin to the local color writing by contemporaries Garland and Thanet, Dunbar’s stories are set in a fictionalized small city named Dorburry that is generalizable enough to stand for the region.\(^{15}\) Narrative tone hovers between light-hearted humor and endearing sympathy; characters, who all speak in Midwestern dialect, are well-meaning but inclined to near-sighted judgment. The affinity between character and narrative voices, in the idioms they use and the morals they draw, underscores the egalitarianism central to the Ohio Pastorals. Many of the stories concern familial love or religious faith and how these virtues can slip into jealousy or repression. In “The White Counterpane” a mother learns that she will not lose her son by letting him marry, and in “The Minority Committee” elder parishioners agree to adopt some new ways. Almost all of the Ohio Pastorals are fables of compromise or practicality, trading on the proverbial middleness of the “Middle West.” Of course, parallels exist in local color short stories set in other regions, but these themes

\(^{13}\) *Lyrics of Lowly Life* went through at least seven editions by 1913 (1896, 1897, 1898, 1901, 1907, 1908, 1909), more than any of Dunbar’s illustrated gift books. Ray Sapirstein found that *Poems of Cabin and Field*, the first and most successful of these volumes, went through five editions in this time (1899, 1902, 1904, 1908, 1913), the same number as the larger, multigenre collection of new verse Dunbar published that year, *Lyrics of the Hearthside* (two editions in 1899 and one each in 1903, 1904, 1913) (336). Subsequently, however, Dunbar’s collections of new verse outpaced his illustrated ones: *Lyrics of Love and Laughter* went through four editions (1903, 1906, 1908, 1913) while his gift books for that year (*When Malindy Sings*) and each of the following years only went through one each. This is not to dismiss the influence of this facet of Dunbar’s corpus, which Sapirstein and others have shown to be aesthetically significant in its own right. Rather, it is to point out that Dunbar’s reputation was less tethered to Southern styles than often assumed and to resist the idea that Dunbar’s career followed a strict trajectory. Ray Sapirstein, “Picturing Dunbar’s lyrics,” *African American Review* 41, no. 2 (2007): 327–339.


\(^{15}\) Hamlin Garland, *Prairie Folks* (Chicago: Stone & Kimball, 1892); Octave Thanet, *Stories of a Western Town* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893).
and tropes worked in tandem with more explicit markers – dialect, landscape, or lifestyle – through which they became identified as Midwestern.

The result was a distinctive balance of hope amid hardship and egalitarianism through hard work that contemporaneous critics in every strata of the periodical press associated with the Midwest. As William Dean Howells wrote in the *North American Review*, “poetry in the Middle West ... is deeply rooted in the life of the region ... in a certain tenderness of light and coloring” in contrast with “the New England school, where conscience dwells almost rebukingly with beauty.” The influential Midwestern editor and critic Johnson Brigham, writing of “Characteristics and Possibilities of Middle Western Literature” in the *Review of Reviews*, made equivalent claims of the region’s prose. The “heterogeneous elements of the population of the middle West” – in which Brigham includes Irish, Germans, Scandinavians, and “negroes” – promoted an egalitarian sympathy in fiction that inspired “new courage for life’s humdrum duties as well as for its crises” and highlighted the “compensations for [life’s] inevitable woes.”

An article in the *Washington Times*, “Poets of the Middle West,” similarly asserted that the region’s writers emphasized “the heroism of the common man, who is patient, brave, [and] unselfish”: Midwestern literature had a “democratic quality” and “downright and practical” philosophy stemming from a pioneer ethos that set it apart from the aristocratic virtues and sense of social hierarchy in Southern literature. As both Brigham and Howells also argued, Midwestern writing offered particular representational opportunities that distinguished it from other regional literatures (which were themselves subject to ongoing definition). For its examples “Poets of the Middle West” quotes none other than Dunbar, presenting him along with Eugene Fields and Riley as the region’s defining poets.

16. Though critical essays define Midwestern literature more explicitly, the classification was invoked more frequently in passing in advertisements, notices, and reviews like those quoted in the next section. Newspapers and regional periodicals often excerpted articles from the leading reviews; Brigham’s, for example, appeared as Johnson Brigham, “Middle Western Literature. Opportunities for Delineating Every-Day Life,” *St. Louis Republic*, March 5, 1899, 2.  
Dunbar links these regional conventions to place-based accounts of personal development and literary meaning-making in “The Vindication of Jared Hargot,” one of the later Ohio Pastorals. This story follows Doburry’s excitement over the publication of town poet Jared Hargot’s first collection. Like Dunbar, many of Hargot’s poems are about Midwestern manners and mores; like Dunbar, Hargot’s work had hitherto appeared in newspapers and at events in the surrounding area. The intimate bonds of community map onto those of publication to such a degree that Hargot’s poems are treated as collaboratively authored. The narrative voice itself joins in on the camaraderie, professing that “one cannot help ... absorbing some of the author’s creative enthusiasm and delegating to one’s self a partnership in the work. The amaneunsis who copies the page for the press speaks with pride of ‘our book,’ while it is ‘our book’ to the boy who carries it to the post office.”

 Unlike the outside-observer narrator common in local color fiction by contemporaries like Sarah Orne Jewett, Dunbar’s narrator is part of the community and invites readers to join this “our.” Dunbar’s use of communal characters and intimate narrative voice marks an advancement from Eggleston and Riley that prefigured important Midwestern fiction of the next decade like Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and Edgar Lee Masters’ *Spoon River Anthology* (1915). The Ohio Pastorals reenact this logic to coordinate Dunbar’s regional affiliation, first across individual stories and then across literary formats. The stories constellate recurring characters and concerns to reinforce the importance of their shared setting. Interlinking ties also helped readers connect new stories with preceding ones and associate the series’ style with Dunbar himself. Hargot’s status as Dunbar’s delegate becomes even more apparent when we learn that the former’s poems capture in the same tone some of the same events as previous Ohio Pastorals. Protagonist echoes author again: many of the stories in the series, itself named for a poetic genre, riff on characters or scenarios Dunbar had already explored in poetry. The figure of Hargot signifies the stylistic and thematic continuities of Dunbar’s Midwestern writing, inviting us to read for region across literary genres and formats.

Dunbar used this focus on region and Midwestern style in particular to make the characters in “The Vindication of Jared Hargot” racially unmarked. In this respect the story is consistent with the characters and speakers of his Midwestern prose and poetry in general. These works belong to what Jarrett has called “anomalous African American literature,” Black writing that opposes “minstrel realism” by avoiding “racial realism” entirely. Writing in a regional style could resist Black stereotypes even more effectively by emphasizing an alternative identity marker and appealing to another interpretive framework. Here Dunbar channeled the conventional wisdom of the period, which understood regional styles, through the lens of the ballad and the local color sketch, as expressions of identity encompassing if not anterior to other aesthetic categories. Unlike the writing set in the South however, where speech or social position immediately indicated race, Dunbar’s Midwest characters could be regionalized without necessarily being racialized. In poetry this required using dialect or, especially in nonlyric genres, stacking other Midwestern conventions; in prose it further necessitated an ambiguity of physiological description. In “The Vindication of Jared Hargot” as elsewhere, Dunbar leverages the equivocality of Midwestern dialect with regard to the region’s (albeit primarily European) racial heterogeneity as well as the Midwest’s image as agrarian and egalitarian. Dunbar adeptly negotiated conventions between genres, maintaining continuity while deploying the particular associations of different forms. Midwestern writing allowed Dunbar to explore affects and themes without them being immediately read as representative of an essentialized Black experience – the very thing he protested in overdetermined Southern styles. These could include good humor, in narrative poems like “The Spellin’-Bee,” without implying that Blacks were satisfied with their socioeconomic state, or nostalgia, as in ballads like “The Old Apple Tree,” without

22. Garland, drawing on Hippolyte Taine’s theory of literature as a product of its author’s milieu, gave in the most forceful contemporary articulation of the idea that geographic identity preceded literary form. Hamlin Garland, *Crumbling Idols* (Chicago: Stone & Kimball, 1894); More recently, scholars have shown how broader practices of writing and reading that traded on this discourse (without necessarily subscribing to it) in fact grew out of assumptions surrounding particular ascendant genres. Michael Cohen argues that “the centralization of the ballad in the generic hierarchy of the nineteenth century” led to the broader proliferation of “ballad reading,” a mode of use by which “poems could be identified with the popular spirit, with regional and national histories.” Cohen, *The Social Lives of Poems in Nineteenth-Century America*, 187; Brad Evans argues that the local color craze resulted from that genre’s ability to focalize what made ethnography, folklore, and the aesthetic arts movements popular: a “primal connection to a locale from which they might be displaced” as an aesthetic commodity. Evans, *Before Cultures: The Ethnographic Imagination in American Literature, 1865-1920*, 151.
implying that Blacks wished for a return to Southern antebellum social and economic relations. If Dunbar’s Southern Georgics, as Ronda argues, protest the disjunction of “effort [and] achievement” under Jim Crow, his Midwestern poems like “Home Longings” were free to portray labor as fulfilling without impugning that protest.\textsuperscript{23} Midwestern style offered a representational space in which region could operate as the primary form of cultural significance independently of race.

In “The Vindication of Jared Hargot,” through the self-reflexivity afforded by local color as a genre, Dunbar makes this case most directly. The story’s conflict arises when a young newspaper editor mocks the conventionality of Hargot’s verse. The despairing poet is given counsel that, as we will see, sounds remarkably like Midwestern biographical pieces on Dunbar himself: no one has “‘any right to judge whether yore poetry is poetry or not, ‘cept’ yore friends,’” whose work, land, and cares the poet has versified.\textsuperscript{24} The point of art is to do good, not merely be good: that any theory of literary value must also be a theory of utility. The story endorses this sentiment by concluding with a town poetry reading to honor Hargot. This resolution lies in the vindication not of Hargot’s poetry – the narrative all but confirms the editor’s opinion that it simply isn’t very good – but of its mode of circulation. Dunbar is making the case for reading regionally: that is, reading in accord with the local practices whose spatial aggregation constitutes a region in the first place. In this respect he anticipates what scholars have called the “relational” sense of cultural geography.\textsuperscript{25} Regions are not static districts with fixed conditions but rather the unfolding space of the collective circulatory practices that generate particular conventions or priorities. In giving an account of literary production and cultural belonging grounded in geographic proximity that rejects universalizing extrapolations whether based on race, class, or taste, “The Vindication of Jared Hargot” draws on this dynamic quality and the Midwestern thematics underlying the Ohio Pastorals’ running investment in communities’ ability to grow in likeness through compromise.

\textsuperscript{23} Ronda, ““Work and Wait Unwearying”: Dunbar’s Georgics,” 868.
\textsuperscript{24} Dunbar, \textit{The Complete Stories of Paul Laurence Dunbar}, 491.
\textsuperscript{25} The relational approach informs much of the most compelling work on region in literary and cultural studies in the last fifteen years. See Greer, \textit{Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature}; Howard, \textit{The Center of the World: Regional Writing and the Puzzles of Place-Time}; Madera, \textit{Black Atlas: Geography and Flow in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature}; Powell, \textit{Critical Regionalism: Connecting Politics and Culture in the American Landscape}. 
Dunbar’s vindication, like Hargot’s, lay in disseminating his work to readerships sensitive to the significance of place. All eight Ohio Pastorals were published in *Lippincott’s*, which at the time enjoyed a renaissance as one of the more widely read elite literary monthly magazines. Regularity of print appearance strengthened the associations thematized in the Ohio Pastorals among Dunbar, local color, and the Midwest. *Lippincott’s* long-running commitment to Dunbar’s Midwestern fiction – it had earlier published his novel *The Uncalled* – indicates that the stories succeeded in their own right and not merely a ploy to land Dunbar’s fame. After the initial series of five monthly entries, the magazine published three more before Dunbar’s untimely death intervened. As Jarrett and Thomas Lewis Morgan observe, the magazine “represented one of the few and last places where he could write on his own terms.”

But it is important also to observe that in *Lippincott’s* pages, this publishing arrangement took the form of a specific authorial persona based in Midwestern regional affiliation. Whereas the Dunbar of the *Century* was a Southern Black dialect poet and the Dunbar of the *Saturday Evening Post* was a plantation fiction writer, the Dunbar of *Lippincott’s* was a Midwestern local colorist.

From this position in the literary field Dunbar’s regional affiliation was readily publicized by editors and critics across the hierarchy of periodical print formats. In the postbellum decades, newspapers relied on the entertainment value of poetry, serialized or excerpted prose, and literary news to cultivate domestic readership as their source of revenue shifted from political subsidies and subscriptions to advertisement. Magazines and newspapers enjoyed a symbiotic relationship of reprinting in which the latter obtained quality content in exchange for giving the former free publicity. Thus, newspapers were the primary source of literature and literary information for most Americans. While most elite Northeastern magazines other than *Lippincott’s* were unwilling to print Dunbar’s writing if it was not Southern Black dialect, editors of newspapers (and mid-tier periodical formats like farm papers or urban weeklies) had other sources of literature: they drew on published volumes.

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27. See Baldasty, [*The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*].
fellow periodicals, and syndication services, in addition to original contributions. Amid growing dependence on regional economies and pressure from the accelerating distribution of metropolitan periodicals, editors made judicious selections based on the preferences of their geographic constituency, as they saw them; they did so even when relying on syndicates, which were themselves regional in scope and advertised as such. In the Midwest over the 1880s this growing place-based understanding of newspapers’ market niche led to the development of what become known as “Western Journalism,” an approach characterized by more news from the surrounding communities and more local contributors. Newspapers weren’t just supposed to inform a particular geographic area: in doing so, they were also supposed to represent it.

Dunbar’s Midwestern writing was well suited to traversing this print ecosystem. In yet another mark of their success with readers, the Ohio Pastorals received top billing in the standard notices that most newspapers across the country gave of the contents of major literary magazines each month. The purpose of such notices was to promote magazines to potential library patrons, single-issue news depot purchasers, and individuals who exchanged copies with friends or neighbors. In this way, they directed readers outside Lippincott’s regular subscribers toward the Ohio Pastorals. Dunbar took advantage of the fact that promotion at this scale was typically only available to prose. The ubiquity of these monthly notices publicized Dunbar’s association with the Midwest – and vice versa – even for those who didn’t actually read him. Indeed, newspaper commentary on the Ohio Pastorals often testified to a general awareness of Dunbar’s Midwestern writings. The Chicago Post, for example, wrote that “Paul Laurence Dunbar has two veins in story-telling.

28. By Dunbar’s time, syndicates had shifted priorities from the early readyprint or “patent insides” system to much more flexible plate service (which could be sawed as desired) and galley proof offerings in order to meet editors’ demands for more control. See Johanningsmeier, Fiction and the American Literary Marketplace: The Role of Newspaper Syndicates in America, 1860-1900; Elmo Scott Watson, A History of Newspaper Syndicates in the United States 1865-1935 (Chicago: [No Publisher], 1936); On newspapers growing embeddedness in local commodity and labor markets, see Baldasty, The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century 146.


30. We can assume readers regularly consulted magazine notices both because of the amount of space newspapers devoted to them and because library and news depot records show that patrons consumed magazines voraciously yet not necessarily consecutively. See Felsenstein and Connolly, What Middletown Read: Print Culture in an American Small City.
The one deals with the negro, and is mostly pathetic or tragic. The other depicts humorously the Ohio farmer and his domestic belongings. This is the vein of the ‘Ohio Pastorals,’ now appearing in Lippincott’s.\footnote{31} The presence of similar commentary in newspapers across the Midwest evinces the success of Dunbar’s publication strategy in Lippincott’s, which bolstered his Midwestern reputation even while enabling him to continue publishing plantation tradition stories and verse in other venues.\footnote{32} Like “Poets of the Middle West,” these notices treat Dunbar’s Midwestern output and persona as common knowledge, uncontroversial and foundational for understanding the author.

Even though the constant press coverage that made Dunbar a household name almost always identified him as Black, Midwestern critics frequently professed that his race was not antithetical to his region. When a \textit{Boston Transcript} article mischaracterized Dunbar’s relation to the South, a correspondent in the \textit{Indianapolis Journal} rebutted with a typical retelling of Dunbar’s biography. Dunbar is Midwestern not simply because he was raised there but because that is where people read and cared about him most: “It will be sad news to many people in the central states of the West to learn that Paul Laurence Dunbar is seriously ill in New York, for he has attracted friends among the thinking people of many cities, towns and country localities.”\footnote{33} Northeastern readers may misidentify Dunbar, but Midwesterners are more discerning of their own. The \textit{Indianapolis Journal} frames Dunbar’s race differently on the basis of this attachment. Whereas the \textit{Boston Transcript} article dwelled on Dunbar’s “very dark color,” the \textit{Journal} correspondent counters that Dunbar is a “star ... risen in the firmament of the American negro” who Midwesterners nonetheless embraced “without much thought or care as to his race or color.”\footnote{34} Without ignoring the risk of erasure inevitable in professions of “color-blindness,” the letter emphasizes regional inclusion over racial othering. Dunbar was Black but he was also Midwestern, and to Midwesterners, that mattered. That corresponds like the \textit{Indianapolis Journal}’s, articles

\footnote{31}{“Literary News,” \textit{Chicago Post}, July 23, 1901, reel 5, n.p.}
\footnote{32}{For example, see “[Untitled],” \textit{St. Louis Republican Leader}, August 1, 1901, reel 5, n.p.; “[Untitled],” \textit{Rockville Tribune} (IN), October 30, 1901, reel 4, n.p.; “Literary News,” \textit{Alma Record} (MI), August 9, 1899, 8.}
\footnote{33}{Ben S. Parker, “Paul Laurence Dunbar: Some Facts Relating to the Beginning of His Literary Career,” \textit{Indianapolis Journal}, August 6, 1899, 9.}
\footnote{34}{“Paul Laurence Dunbar: The Negro Author’s Success in Concert Hall Songs—Ill in New York,” \textit{Indianapolis Journal}, July 23, 1899, 15.}
like “Poets of the Middle West,” and notices like the Chicago Post’s could discuss one of the most famous Black men of the day without making race the sole defining feature of his work reveals how Dunbar’s reputation as a Midwestern writer became widespread without being overridden by his reputation as a Black writer.

In accord with these more capacious assessments of his work, Midwestern newspapers reprinted Dunbar in a manner that more closely reflected the diversity of style and theme in his major collections than the fad of plantation poetry that scholars, following the interpretive trends set by Howells in Harper’s Weekly and Richard Watson Gilder in the Century, have assumed was the exclusive basis of Dunbar’s popularity. Some Dunbar poems reprinted in the region’s newspapers, like “October” and “Merry Autumn,” mark the rhythms of the seasons. Other favorites, such as “The Farm Child’s Lullaby,” sentimentalize homestead life; Lippincott’s first published this poem and William Jennings Bryan’s own widely distributed newspaper, the Commoner of Lincoln, Nebraska, reprinted it. Newspapers also reprinted brief prose morals or jokes just as they did poetry, and the Ohio Pastorals abound in short self-contained passages ripe for excerption. A selection from “The Mortification of the Flesh” usually entitled “How Nathan Proposed” and a paragraph from “The White Counterpane” usually entitled “What Ages a Woman,” both containing Midwest dialect, circulated as much as any of Dunbar’s dialect poems. Ample precedent pointed to the Midwestern appetite for these forms of Midwestern writing, as Dunbar knew well from his own painstaking efforts to track his reception. Dunbar’s gambit in publishing such work was to test whether a famously Black Midwesterner could circulate as part of newspapers’ representative function too; editors’ selections showed that he could. On the


36. This is true of major digitized newspaper collections like Chronicling America and Dunbar’s press clippings scrapbooks. Reels 4 and 5, Paul Laurence Dunbar Collection, Ohio Historical Society, Dayton, OH.

37. Dunbar’s contemporaries Madison Cawein and Ironquill (Eugene Ware), for example, were prominent Midwestern writers with regional followings who nonetheless failed to sustain consistent national publishers; see William Dean Howells, “Editor’s Study,” Harper’s New Monthly Magazine 84, no. 2 (January 1892): 317-318. On Dunbar’s efforts to track his own reputation, see footnote 3.
pages of Midwestern newspapers an alternative canon of Dunbar’s writings emerges from among his hitherto overlooked poetry and prose.

The sheer volume of print material associating Dunbar with the Midwest – commentary classifying Dunbar or his work as Midwestern, Midwestern writing by other authors that made the style readily identifiable, Dunbar’s own Midwestern poetry and prose – encouraged readers to do so as well. Under these circumstances, we can recognize the Midwestern valences even in a seemingly nondescript poem like “Life,” one of Dunbar’s most popular and one that, records suggest, was disproportionately so in the Midwest.

A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in,
A minute to smile and an hour to weep in,
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,
And never a laugh but the moans come double;
And that is life!

A crust and a corner that love makes precious,
With a smile to warm and the tears to refresh us;
And joy seems sweeter when cares come after,
And a moan is the finest of foils for laughter;
And that is life!

With a cleanly encapsulated moral and no identifiable speaker, setting, or occasion, “Life” was well tailored for general newspapers. Yet it contains many of the attributes that Brigham, Howells, and others insisted were Midwestern. “Life” frankly asserts emotional and physical hardships of living hand-to-mouth. Rather than dispelling these “inevitable woes,” the second stanza revises them in light of the “compensations” of the quotidian, its small joys and silver linings. This is a celebration of “the heroism of the common man,” treated with sympathetic “tenderness” but without patronizing or moralizing. The poem accentuates the “downright and practical” nature of its moral with a “direct, straightforward” standard English that eschews the archaic spellings (“thou,” “wast”) and syntactic affectations then common in newspaper poetry – though “peck” also signals an agrarian

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38. Using several digitized newspaper collections and Dunbar’s press clippings scrapbooks (PLD Collection, reels 4 and 5), I have located 160 reprints of “Life” between 1896 and 1910, of which half were from the Midwest.


inflection. "Life" expresses a universal sentiment, then, in the sense Garland advanced in his manifesto Crumbling Idols (1894), that artists convey higher "truth" by voicing the distinctive "talent of their region." The poem’s sentiment and formal qualities were considered uniquely expressive of a particular region at the turn of the century. Much as scholars have shown how Dunbar’s nondialect poems allow themselves to be read as Black, Midwestern editorial practices framed nondialect poems like “Life” alongside local matter in ways that opened them up to regional readings. Within this context, the popularity of Dunbar’s Midwestern writings was inseparable from what marked them as Midwestern.

The degree to which Dunbar and his work could be read as Midwestern provides fundamental insight into the relationship between postbellum conceptions of race and region. That Dunbar, famous as a Black writer during a particularly brutal era of segregation in US history, could be also – even equally – famous as a Midwestern writer attests to the power of region as an organizing concept for cultural production and identity. His absence from scholarship on regionalism indicates that our application of that classification still has much to gain from thematic and material-historical expansion. Regional association – as well as the aesthetic capacities and readership access that came with it – was of course difficult to attain for many authors of color. That Dunbar’s work did manage to achieve a regional reputation depended on a fortunate combination of his own literary skill and publication savvy as well as local contingencies. Nonetheless, the wide-reaching success of Dunbar’s efforts shows that, though race was a powerful vehicle for imagining and policing cultural practice, it did not necessarily foreclose the significance of region in the postbellum US. Under the right print conditions, regional belonging could take precedence over racial alterity. Dunbar did not simply present as Midwestern; his work and its consumption contributed to the social process of regional definition.

41. Washington Times, “Poets of the Middle West” 18; Brigham, “Characteristics and Possibilities of Middle Western Literature” 333.
42. Garland, Crumbling Idols 161.
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The rising literary Midwest of Dunbar’s generation also coincided with the emergence of a Black Midwestern reading public. Dunbar had already thought much about reaching and representing this demographic, his own. In 1890 he launched a short-lived newspaper, the *Tattler*, which aspired to give voice to Dayton’s Black community for a multiracial readership. Then, merely 18 years old, Dunbar could not sustain the enterprise, but he continued grappling with this representational question in prescriptive articles like “The Hapless Southern Negro” as well as in poetry and fiction. Dunbar’s proficiency in the specifically-Southern modes of depicting Black life that was then dominant, as in the multigeneric plantation tradition, proved useful. His writing combined and blurred the conventions of Midwestern and Black writing by drawing on latent commonalities between them as well as his reputations for each. In this way Dunbar represented the Black Midwest not by mimetic or otherwise ethnographic realist representation but rather by experimenting formally with various combinations of conventions.

“After A Visit,” a poem in *Lyrics of Lowly Life* that fluctuates between Midwestern dialect and Southern Black dialect, exemplifies Dunbar’s approach. The speaker begins by saying that he has just returned from having “be’n down in ole Kentucky / Fur a week er two,” indicating that he is from one of the Midwestern states, like Ohio, to the immediate north. At the level of subject, the poem is mostly a lighthearted reflection on good hospitality; at the lexical level, however, this focus on the locatedness of manners becomes an exploration of the locatedness of language. Spellings typical of schematizations of Black vernacular, like “wuz,” “ez,” and “nuthin,” appear interspersed throughout the poem alongside spellings typical of schematizations of Midwestern vernacular, like “allus,” “be’n,” and “yore.” Most of these words had a standard spelling in the other dialect: the poem’s fluctuation between dialects signals Dunbar’s refusal to fit the expectations of either one exclusively. “After a Visit” also lacks some of the most commonplace and telltale

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44. Dunbar, 42. Besides Dunbar, this analysis of dialect in “After A Visit” draws on plantation fiction by Chesnutt, Harris, and Page, as well as Midwestern writing by Eggleston, Garland, and Riley. I prioritize spellings consistent across multiple works of multiple authors.
dialect spellings, most notably by using “they” instead of the ubiquitous “dey” of Black dialect, while including several spellings that consistently appeared in both dialects, like “fur,” “roun’,” “yer,” “git,” and “lows.”\(^45\) Finally, the poem includes a number of spellings that lack clear precedence in either dialect, such as “argerin’,” “pleg-gone,” and “cain’t.”\(^46\) “After a Visit” is not merely a mixture of dialects but a distinct hybrid not expressed before Dunbar: Black Midwestern dialect, a representation of the confluence of racial and regional vernaculars.

When Joseph S. Cotter, a Black poet from Louisville, published a genial “Answer to Dunbar’s ‘After a Visit’” two years later in his collection *Links of Friendship* (1898), he responded in the same hybrid dialect.\(^47\) Dunbar’s poems, according to Gavin Jones, highlight the artificiality of dialect by deploying “ambiguous, composite languages that are neither really black nor white.”\(^48\) As Cotter’s attuned “Answer” demonstrates, however, the opposite could also be true: rather than denaturalize the relation between dialect and community, composite language could make linguistic communities tangible. This is the specifying function of dialect, which can be recomposed or recombined to call “new” regional or ethnic groups into recognition. Plantation tradition writers professed that discrepancies in dialect reflected variations in Black vernacular speech within the South; Dunbar extended this logic by expanding it to another region.\(^49\) Drawing on the recognizability of formal conventions, the dialect of “After a Visit” and Cotter’s “Answer” is a specific hybrid that represents the idea of Black Midwestern speech independent of quibbles over ethnographic accuracy. In doing so it portrays the Midwest as a site of cultural identity that cuts across racial polarities and thereby necessarily blurs (or slurs) them with tokens of their overlap and compatibility. Equally importantly, it attests to and speaks for the growing demographic of Black Midwesterners, prefiguring the new accents in which they would perform poems like these. Cotter’s *Links of Friendship*, true to its title, joins Dunbar in linking up this network via poems to educators, editors, and writers in the surrounding towns and states. Indeed,

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46. Dunbar, 42.
49. See the introductory “Note” in Thomas Nelson Page, *In Ole Virginia; or, Marse Chan and Other Stories* (1887).
immediately following “Answer to Dunbar’s ‘After a Visit’” Cotter includes a panegyric to Riley in the same style as Dunbar’s.

Dunbar continually experimented with new ways of integrating Black and Midwestern conventions. Indeed, his corpus proves the rich intersection of these representational lexicons. Dunbar applied this approach to tropes in the nondialect poem “Dinah Kneading Dough,” which opens by playfully prefiguring its multivalent subject with a list of descriptive stereotypes she exceeds:

I have seen full many a sight
Born of day or drawn by night:
Sunlight on a silver stream,
Golden lilies all a-dream,
Lofty mountains, bold and proud,
Veiled beneath the lacelike cloud.\[50\]

“Dinah Kneading Dough” relishes in the complementarity of hues. As the poem proceeds, this doubleness shifts to Dinah herself. Although the name “Dinah” was associated with stereotypes of Black women at the time, it was also a common name in the West. At the least, the point of the piece – which we learn in the final stanza is a love poem for a hardworking farm girl – depends on revising the typical Black “Dinah” stereotype, someone often middle-aged and bumbling. While the poem describes Dinah’s arms as “brown,” this too is a point of potential double association. Brown skin was used as a broad descriptor for nonwhites, but Midwestern writings by Garland, Riley, and James Hall before them also described hands, foreheads, and legs as brown to denote hard-working farmers.\[51\] Selective use of these overlapping tropes points to their conjunction. Rather than a question of Dinah’s being either Black and implicitly Southern or Midwestern and implicitly white, the poem implies that she is a Black Midwesterner.

Much as with the combination of dialects in “After a Visit,” the combination of Midwestern and Black tropes in “Dinah Kneading Dough” draws attention to their compatibility and thus to the compatibility of their referents. These poems play on the dialectic between literary representation and cultural practice – between the referentiality of conventions and

51. See, for example, Garland’s “Sam Burn’s Wife” and Riley’s “That Other Maud Muller.”
the conventionality of everyday life – without either conflating the two or dismissing the generativity of their relation[^22]. Here Dunbar again channels a relational understanding of cultural geography. Both poems figure how imagery and vernaculars transform as they travel, and both poems demonstrate that this process takes place through pre-existing affinities. The resulting commonalities between race and region are quotidian, which is precisely what enables them to evoke so adeptly the associations of both representational paradigms. The promise of young lovers in “Dinah Kneading Dough” maps onto that of the new region and corresponds to the new life that the poem breathes into tropes that might otherwise appear trivial or even restrictive.

Here too Dunbar had compatriots. James D. Corrothers, another Black Midwesterner who published in national magazines in the 1900s and 1910s, took up these experiments with hybridity in literary style. In Corrothers’ sequence of episodic sketches, *The Black Cat Club* (1902), Black Chicagoans collect snippets of heavily stereotyped Southern Black folklore in an attitude that parodies the detached yet self-implicating posture of postbellum ethnography[^23]. In doing so the club members, paradoxically, embrace their ties to the South as a cultural heritage to be cultivated while estranging those ties with exaggerated, tongue-in-cheek performances. Between exchanging these anecdotes, however, the members make excursions into the Indiana countryside, become guests of honor at a German bar, and share knowing jokes about Chicago politics. This at times dizzying mix of racial and regional tropes highlights continuities and throw incongruities into sharp relief; *The Black Cat Club* evokes a Black Midwest in all its turbulent emergence. Infusing his own touch of Chicago’s avant-garde iconography and unruly parody, Corrothers pushes the limits of Dunbar’s strategy while maintaining its end. Both authors rewire the postbellum lexicon of tropes to reimagine cultural relations figuratively. Neither polite acquiescence nor subversive resistance, these pieces model positions – provisional, imaginative, even pleasurable – that combine racial and regional cultures.

[^22]: In this respect Dunbar also participated in what Elizabeth Renker has usefully re-identified as “realist poetics” in Elizabeth Renker, *Realist Poetics in American Culture, 1866-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
Besides Corrothers and Cotter, dozens of new Black Midwestern authors built upon Dunbar’s work in the two decades following his rise to fame. Priscilla Jane Thompson deployed similar circuits of South-to-Midwest migration and Midwest-to-South memory in her poetry collection *Gleanings of Quiet Hours* (1907). Oscar Micheaux’s autobiographical novel *The Conquest* (1913), like Dunbar’s major volumes of poetry, interleaves witty episodes of farm life in characteristic Midwestern style with stinging passages of Washingtonian racial critique. Micheaux dramatized what Dunbar asserted in “The Hapless Southern Negro”: that Midwestern independence was uniquely equipped to ameliorate a history of forced Southern dependence. Similar intermixings of racial and regional dialects, tropes, or allusions can be found in volumes published from Michigan to Nebraska by authors like James Edwin Campbell, Charles Henry Shoeman, and Aaron Belford Thompson, not to mention the yet-untold many more who wrote in the swelling ranks of Black Midwestern newspapers. Though Charles Chesnutt did not emphasize regional conventions in his non-Southern fiction, even his turn to Midwestern settings followed Dunbar’s breakthrough. Most of these authors had personal and artistic histories like Dunbar’s in that they were raised under Reconstruction often in Black communities that were becoming a part of everyday life throughout Midwestern towns and cities. Like Dunbar, they wrote in various forms primarily for newspapers (both Black and white). Many lived or recited their work in places with Dunbar Literary Clubs. Dunbar’s success helped to open new ways of writing and new venues for publishing for this growing body of Black authors, providing a touchstone for affiliation and representation. Individually, these authors with their intraregional circulation have seemed isolated and inconsequential; together and in

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54. Priscilla Jane Thompson, *Gleanings of Quiet Hours* (Rossmoyne, OH: [Self-Published, 1907).  
56. Campbell projects a line from the plantation South to elsewhere that include Ohio fields and the Bohemia of Chicago, which he knew as a staff writer at the Chicago Times in James Edwin Campbell, *Echoes—from the Cabin and Elsewhere* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, 1985); intersperses Southern Black dialect with an acrostic to the University of Michigan, where he was a student, and poems like “Despairing” in the style of Dunbar’s “Life” in Charles Henry Shoeman, *A Dream and Other Poems* (Ann Arbor, MI: George Wahr, 1899); Thompson published with an introductory note from Riley, includes poems in Black Midwestern dialect such as “After the Honeymoon” and “Out Among Um” in Aaron Belford Thompson, *Harvest of Thoughts* (Indianapolis, IN: [Self-Published, 1907).  
57. Though Chesnutt used Midwestern setting in published short fiction as a space productively outside the confines of Southern styles and stereotypes, he tended to retain the North/South dichotomy in doing so.
light of Dunbar’s more recognizable success, the broader constellation of their aesthetics and significance comes into focus.

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Dunbar’s and his peers’ formal experiments at the intersection of race and region bore social fruit almost from the start. To identify the blends of dialects and tropes in their work requires a threshold of cultural literacy in late nineteenth-century conventions, yet the immense popularity of Midwestern literature and the plantation tradition made this knowledge readily available. Dunbar’s simultaneous reputations in each of these “two veins” (in the words of the Chicago Post) primed readers to approach his work with both sets of expectations and to locate instances in which they connected. By drawing the seemingly stable categories of Black and Midwestern into new configurations, Dunbar entangled readers in questions of the relation between race and region. In doing so, his work disrupted the presumed whiteness of the Midwest and animated a groundswell of Black Midwestern reading communities, named Dunbar Literary Clubs, that aimed to carry on the spirit of this work through the 1910s. Underlying these strains of reception was the growing recognition of what inspired Dunbar’s work itself, the conviction that Black communities were no longer merely in the Midwest but were part of its literary and cultural texture.

The reception of Dunbar’s widely read first novel, The Uncalled, revolved around the very difficulty of siloing racial markers when aligned with a predominantly regional representative framework. The Uncalled is the story of a young man pressured into the ministry in another fictional Dayton. The novel patently uses Midwestern themes and conventions and explicitly avoids assigning race to its characters. Critics were divided on what to make of this fact, some declaring it a Black novel and others a white novel. While some readers would have assumed that the novel’s characters were white by default, other critics acknowledged both possibilities. In the Book Buyer, then one of the most influential

58. For an observation of this disagreement, see “[Untitled],” Chicago Times-Herald, December 26, 1898, reel 4, n.p.; . The Uncalled received mixed yet generally sympathetic reviews that, if anything, skewed more positive in the Midwest; for a survey, see E. W. Metcalf Jr., Paul Laurence Dunbar: A Bibliography (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975).
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trade journals, Arthur Reed Kimball easily classified The Uncalled as an Ohio novel, but he failed to pinpoint race by dialect or facial expression and concluded that “the doubt thus raised at the outset of the story, as to whether the people one is to meet in it are white or more or less black, baffles one to the end.”[59] A Chicago Tribune review, “Novel by Dunbar,” claimed the novel was “an interesting study of certain aspects of life among the lowly” but confessed an inability to determine “whether it is the story of whites or blacks.”[60] In this respect, the review anticipates Jarrett’s argument that “the racialism of the novel lies ... in its historical depictions of class hierarchy and regional culture,” analysis which “draws on African American histories of racial unrest and inequity.”[61] Both of the historical critics locate a racial reading in the novel’s portrayal of the “lowly,” but “Novel by Dunbar” deems a regional reading equally available on the same basis. The two reviews recognized that the characters’ region is what makes ruling out either race impossible: its narrative conventions in representing the Midwest uniquely bridge those distinguishing Blackness from whiteness. These speculations depict The Uncalled as a novel about the potential indeterminacy of textual representations of race amid representations of region, a text that cannot be encountered without raising questions of their connection or overlap. Midwesterness and Blackness seem to blur together, first on the pages of The Uncalled and then in the reviewers’ own interpretations.

These reviews belonged to a broader phenomenon. Public discourse about Dunbar similarly grappled to articulate the conjunction of race and region so clearly vital to the establishment of his career. Whereas Southern commentators in the influential Sunny South and elsewhere averred contradiction, commentators in Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio in particular saw concurrence.[62] Dunbar was remarkably popular in these states, where newspapers

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[62] Southern critics could be quick to accuse Dunbar of inaccuracies based on his Midwestern affiliation. A critic in the Sunny South, which hit 50,000 subscribers during Dunbar’s career and proclaimed itself the region’s leading literary periodical, pointedly remarked that Dunbar’s black characters were “entirely different from anything with which we are familiar in this section.” “Literature,” Sunny South 39, no. 9 (May 4, 1901): 8; As another Southern critic elaborated: “Whoever heard of a colored mammy using such an expression as ‘hadn’t oughter?’ That is a colloquialism that does not belong to the Southern part of the Union and that is never heard south of the Ohio river (sic) except as an importation ... Dunbar should not allow association with white folks in another section of the country to make him forget the dialect he is trying to imitate.” We should read these articles as registering, if through a glass darkly, Dunbar’s integration of conventions. “As to Negro Dialect,” San Antonio Express (TX), January 10, 1900, reel 4, n.p.
regularly followed his movements, opinions, and publications. Race and region jostle for prominence and intermingle in these articles: Dunbar was a “full-blooded negro” and a denizen of Ohio, loved by Black readers and “home people,” raised as he was on his emancipated mother’s stories of slavery and in the otherwise white Dayton High School. Midwest newspapers that refer to Dunbar as a “colored poet” in one paragraph just as easily refer to him as a “Buckeye Boy” in the next. An article titled “Dayton’s Dunbar,” prioritizing geographic affiliation as its frame, is just as readily subtitled “The Negro Poet Tells About His Early Efforts.” Just as often, this order is flipped or distilled into compound phrases like “Ohio’s Colored Poet.”

While Dunbar’s reception was the most extensive, Corrothers’ regular presence in Midwestern newspapers or Cotter’s stature as an artistic and educational leader in the area reflect similar sentiments. The interchangeability of the order of race and region in news articles reveals the degree to which Dunbar provoked uncertainty over which was more important for defining his career and by extension for interpreting cultural production.

Attempting to synthesize the regional and racial facets of Dunbar’s career pressed white readers to consider that regional belonging was not contingent on race. A 1900 article in the *Dayton News* suggests how these reflections unfolded beyond strictly literary considerations:

> [T]he colored race has been making rapid strides in an educational way for the past ten years. Paul Laurence Dunbar’s rise in life and in fame seemed to act as a stimulant and since he has climbed the ladder others of his race have gone through the High school and college until now the colored people have right here in this midst doctors, lawyers and preachers. While there are scores of them qualified in every respect to discharge the duties of a deputyship, still none have ever been appointed by the party whose candidates they have elected to the offices at the polls year after year.

This article is striking not because it rightly blames whites for unwarranted racial exclusion from local governance but because Dunbar catalyzes this recognition. Dunbar is presented as a trailblazer whose success offered new inspiration and opportunity for Blacks in a biracial

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local community. In recognizing his role in this process, the article implies that Dunbar functions as a “stimulant” to local whites as well, drawing their attention – and that of the Dayton News – to Black fellow Ohioans. The article’s perspective remains, of course, limited: it calls for Black deputies, not Black office holders, and it relies on a Du Boisian ideology that exceptional “race men” fuel uplift. Even for Dunbar the postbellum conception of region could not fully integrate race. Yet the confluence of race and region that Dunbar embodied and that he explored in his writing nonetheless encouraged white Midwestern readers in meaningful ways to reconsider region’s capacity, as a cultural framework, for racial inclusion.

Dunbar’s career appears to have exerted an even more profound influence on Black Midwesterners’ understanding of what it meant to belong to both a race and a region at the turn of the century. As the Dayton News attests, Dunbar was a model for Black participation within local communities in the Midwest. Commentators frequently remarked upon his exceptional success with Black audiences and readers there, during Dunbar’s frequent speaking tours when he performed a mix of nondialect, Midwestern dialect, and Southern Black dialect poems.  

65. Two poems in Midwestern dialect, “The Corn-Stalk Fiddle” and “The Old Apple Tree,” were among Dunbar’s most performed. See pamphlets in PLD Collection, reels 4 and 5.


times of their own composition. The *Broad Ax*, a Black newspaper of Chicago, described an especially well-established Cincinnati club in an article titled “Dunbar Literary Club an Ideal Enterprise”: “The clubhouse on Central avenue contains spacious rooms elegantly fitted up. It has a well stocked library of choice books, magazines and papers for the benefit of its members. ... ‘Are you a Dunbar?’ has become the usual and popular greeting among the more aggressive element of young folks.”

Even when not so grandly outfitted, these clubs were hubs of cultural formation, and they constituted the most active readers and disseminators of Dunbar’s work.

Dunbar Literary Clubs in the Midwest promoted a bold vision for the cultural geography of race. McHenry has argued that “middle-class Black Americans saw their literary work as a means of instilling pride in their own community” and of constituting community.

This was especially vital for Midwestern Dunbar Literary Clubs, where Black communities were smaller and newer than in the South and Northeast. Whereas clubs elsewhere were largely attached to Black colleges (like the Hampton Institute) or located in urban centers, clubs in the Midwest and West often cropped up in towns and small cities: one Black newspaper, the Des Moines *Iowa State Bystander*, printed notices for clubs in Monmouth, IL and Clinton, Davenport, Ft. Madison, and Sioux City, Iowa in addition to Des Moines.

Much like Black newspapers in the Midwest, which cultivated regional subscription bases in order to reach a dispersed Black population, Dunbar Literary Clubs linked together a loose regional network of geographic proximity, citation, and shared ethos. Chicago’s *Broad Ax* points to Cincinnati’s club as its ideal, not New York City’s. According to McHenry, Black literary societies were motivated by the belief that “African Americans could themselves make public specific information about the diversity of black life in the United States” and combat stereotypes through literature.

Dunbar Literary Clubs applied this belief to geographic diversity. Under the aegis of Dunbar, they imagined a more racially integrated

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68. “Dunbar Literary Club an Ideal Enterprise,” *The Broad Ax* (Chicago), May 21, 1910, 2.
Midwest. As the *Iowa State Bystander* boasted, the Des Moines club “promises to be of the leading literary societies of the state.” Club activities often included a major public event, and white papers sometimes reported on their meetings. Dunbar Literary Clubs developed a sense of community belonging that was both Black and Midwestern, taking inspiration from the ways that their namesake’s writing and career modeled the same.

Dunbar Literary Clubs used literature to mediate between racial and regional self-expression, social affiliation, and cultural understanding. Like Dunbar’s work itself, they became a vehicle by which Black interests took on the inflection of Midwestern demographic circumstances and by which the fact of Black populations challenged white Midwesterners’ regional imagination. In this respect they can be understood as a manifestation of the literary environment that facilitated Dunbar’s career and of the forces that helped shape his enduring legacy in the decades after his death. Dunbar’s writing was only the most prominent embodiment of the alternative alignments between conceptions of race and region made possible by the growing Black population in the Midwest during the period. Taking this approach yields a more holistic view of his career—one that is so often truncated to a handful of unique texts—and of the role of cultural geography in print circulation that made such a corpus available to future generations. It also illuminates trajectories of African American literary history that point as much to the Chicago Black Renaissance as to its predecessor in Harlem. By then the Great Migration Dunbar had envisioned was well underway, driven by some of the same Black Midwestern newspapers that had championed him. The identification of a poet like Gwendolyn Brooks with Chicago, to give but one example, extends the regional and racial reconfigurations that had started to take shape during Dunbar’s lifetime. It is hardly surprising that Brooks’ mother had encouraged her to become “the female Paul Laurence Dunbar”: her identification as not only a Black poet but a Midwestern Black poet followed a course anticipated by Dunbar’s reception at the turn of the century.

73. “A Brief History of Some of our Leading Race Men of Iowa,” *Iowa State Bystander* (Des Moines), December 24, 1897, 8.
74. For example, see “Niles, Mich.,” *South Bend News-Times* (IN), February 2, 1917, 16; “Among the Colored People,” *Emporia Daily Gazette* (KS), November 4, 1898, 4.
CHAPTER 5
THE RISE OF THE REPATRIATION MECHANISM

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, Americans bought more print and publishers distributed it more quickly than ever before. These quantitative changes, though continuations of postbellum trends, reconfigured the literary marketplace qualitatively. The mid-1890s saw the birth of a new class of monthly magazine led by *McClure’s*, *Munsey’s*, *Cosmopolitan*, and the *Ladies Home Journal* whose ten-cent per-issue price revolutionized the field by taking advantage of cost-lowering improvements in chromolithography and the ever-increasing acceptable number of advertisement pages per issue.[1] Literary monthlies, owned by publishing houses, had often sold at or below cost of production by profiting when it came time to publish their contributors in book format; the new ten-cent monthlies sold below cost of production by profiting on the extra ad revenue that their swelling circulation figures generated. At the same time, urban newspapers made significant improvements in the speed with which they delivered copies across not only their metro areas but their entire states; at the start of the new century, the largest employed a combination of multiple express trains and wagons departing from stations to deliver papers by midday.[2]

Large urban newspapers also began publishing “Sunday magazines” that competed with weekly periodicals like *Harper’s Weekly* and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, and in the first decade of the twentieth century they began jobbing out the production of these para-magazines to companies like the Sunday Magazine Association.

1. The price war that took place during the Panic of 1893. *McClure’s* struck first with 15 cents; the *Cosmopolitan* responded with 12.5 cents; finally *Munsey’s* set the 10 cent price that most others adopted. Though gains in circulation came immediately, it took several more years for these publications to solidify the dominance of the periodical market that they would enjoy in the 1900s and 1910s. By 1920 many were in difficult straits or had reoriented their appeal. The number of advertisements in both the literary monthlies and the ten-cent monthlies doubled between the early 1890s and the early 1900s.

Along with periodicals and newspapers, books were moving faster and farther too. At the turn of the century trade publishers still complained incessantly over what they called the problem of distribution: that methods of selling books to Americans had not yet caught up to technological advancements in methods of production and transportation. This wasn’t entirely true. News depots and mail order supplied books to a large portion of the country, though much of this business fell outside the bounds of trade publishing. What was true was that the number and spread of bookstores in the country had lagged seriously behind that of the national population for the second half of the nineteenth century. Over the first quarter of the twentieth century, however, this gap finally began to shrink. Aided by a series of price wars and publishers’ gradual embrace of the new product-driven approach to advertisement, trade publishing became significantly and tangibly more accessible locally across the country.

Rather than heralding the eclipse of region as an intertwined phenomenon of circulation and interpretive framework, however, these forces occasioned another shift in the way that writers and readers understood and experienced region. We can see this shift, above all, in the ways that literary forms navigated the aesthetic and market pressures of these new formats. The literary monthly magazines reacted by appealing to a more culturally stratified audience than they had previously. This tactical withdrawal maintained some of their influence as cultural gatekeepers, but it sacrificed much of the cross-sectional appeal that had made them so dynamic in the 1870s and 1880s. In the process of becoming more urbane, literary monthlies became less interested in regional geography as well (regional literary magazines took advantage of this newly-opened space). This editorial repositioning may be responsible for the tendency for scholarship on regional-ism to gravitate toward the early 1890s – with Sarah Orne Jewett’s *Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) as a kind of high-water mark – but new genres of regional writing and channels of regional circulation continued to develop. Newspaper editors responded to the incursions of other print formats by fostering a new form of literary reportage that I call local color journalism. Modernist authors wrote experimental texts of departure and return that thematized their fluid movement in the literary marketplace. Bestseller lists helped readers navigate the changing pace.
and volume of trade publishing by identifying variations in national popularity between regional centers.

The main contention of this chapter is that American writers and readers in the early twentieth century came to understand region and regional affiliation primarily through the frame of ex/repatriation – by place of origin rather than by place of residence. Americans had always been a highly mobile population, of course, and internal migration was a fixture of the nineteenth century. What was new here was the idea that departure and return, either imaginatively or materially, was itself a form of regional identification and even of region formation. By the 1920s, this idea was prevalent in literary writing. How did it come to be? On the face of it, associating people, characters, or texts with the region they left would seem to indicate a decline in regions’ physical hold and conceptual utility. Yet this shift in the popular understanding of region is another instance of the phenomenon tracked across this dissertation: national circulation producing rather than erasing cultural difference over space through patterns of aggregation. Repatriation does mark a different spatial trajectory and an added layer of reflexivity in this process. Whereas previous chapters mapped the accretion of disproportionate patterns in national circulation within particular regional spaces, repatriation describes circulation away from and then back to a particular regional space. Whereas previous chapters showed how writers articulated regional distinctiveness in contrast to other regions’ preferences and practices of reading, repatriation entails inhabiting the preferences and practices of another place. These differences constitute a new phase in the history of region in America, yet repatriation continued to do what national circulation had done since the 1850s: to influence what Americans read, how they read, and how they wrote. As such, it serves as a fitting conclusion to this dissertation.

This chapter traces the rise of repatriation as mechanism of both literary writing and the literary marketplace across three key sites. The first section focuses on the techniques of local color journalism in the 1890s newspaper writings of Theodore Dreiser and Edith Maude Eaton, better known by the pen name Sui Sin Far. As a subset of the broad movement somewhat narrowly termed “yellow journalism,” local color journalism located regional uniqueness in what an outsider would identify as distinctive but an insider would be able to explain. The second section looks to the transformation of book retail and
the advent of the bestseller list in the intervening decades. Based on regional clustering in city bestseller trends, I argue that in these years trade books underwent their own form of repatriation insofar as their popularity depended on a publicized cycle in which regionally-distinctive purchasing fed into national bestseller status that nonetheless reinforced regionally-distinctive purchasing. The third section considers how several landmark texts in American modernism, including Jean Toomer’s *Cane* (1923), Robert Frost’s *New Hampshire* (1923), and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), worked through the consequences of defining regions through displacement. The dislocated protagonists and speakers in these texts are animated by the attempt to locate identity geographically via the cyclical movement between distant other and distant origin.

1. **Local Color Journalism**

Not unlike traditional literary movements, journalism changes in waves that, if subtler, involve shifts in subject, style, and even how genres are understood. Local color journalism had a number of precedents in newsprint genres that emerged in the 1850s and 1860s (Chapter 1). Local correspondence and variants like the local gossip column George Washington Cable wrote for the New Orleans *Picayune* had already made the somewhat informal reportage of unique if minor facts of everyday social life in the surrounding area a newsprint fixture. Parodic musings from the feigned voice of a yokel, a genre repurposed by Mark Twain and other humorists drawing on the antebellum tradition of Old Southwest Humor, had key similarities as well. Where the former is immersed in the immediacy of local events, however, local color journalism reflects on the place of its subjects within a broader cultural geography; where the later reinforces its parody of folk knowledge as outdated through a tenuous relation to facticity, local color journalism presents geographically-embedded knowledge as cutting-edge, a source of value and discernment.

In integrating these influences local color journalism also managed to negotiate a balance between the two central values in the world of 1890s journalism, “facts” and “color.” Michael Schudson usefully describes these as the “ideal of information” and the “ideal of
the story”: the first typified by William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Times* and characterized not so much by objectivity as by organized presentation of detail, the second typified by Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* and characterized by sensation. Of course, these two ideals were never fully distinct from one another. In one of those open-faced not-quite-contradictions so common in the newspaper industry, it was the *New York World*’s newsroom that was plastered with the slogan “The Facts—The Color—The Facts!” Local color journalism was part of the broader movement that embodied these ideals at the end of century, known variably as “new journalism” or, among its deprecators, “yellow journalism.” As Frank Luther Mott points out, there were many kinds and degrees of yellow, and as such it is less helpful to try to identify something as yellow or not than it is to identify the varying uses to which journalists applied it. For Mott, the “distinguishing techniques of yellow journalism were: (1) scare-heads [...] (2) the lavish use of pictures [...] (3) impostures and frauds [...] (4) the Sunday supplement [...] and (5) more or less ostentatious sympathy with the ‘underdog.’” What distinguished local color journalism as a subset of this movement were the same qualities that distinguished it from its precursor forms: its self-reflexive interest in cultural geography and its engagement with readers in the activity of discernment. On these bases, local color journalism bridged the journalistic sense of “color” with the older literary sense of “local color.”

Theodore Dreiser was a representative practitioner of local color journalism, and his St. Louis, Missouri newspaper career demonstrates how the genre could be adapted to a newspaper’s particular market niche and preferred journalistic ideal. In November 1892 the Indiana-raised Dreiser began at the (Republican) *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, then the leading morning paper in St. Louis. Like many leading papers in urban centers it boasted a regional circulation, one that covered the central Mississippi Valley and into the Great Plains. The *Globe-Democrat* had an edge in national and international news, much of which it obtained through subscriptions to wire services, that left its reporters free to do local

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The basic dynamics of local color journalism are already evident in one of Dreiser’s earliest pieces for the paper, “Greatest in the World.” Dreiser begins by acknowledging that it is “common knowledge” that the St. Louis Union Depot marks a key juncture of six major rail lines and that “common knowledge goes further and covers” the design and details of the project; after all, “many have watched the progress of the work and visited frequently.”

“Readers of the Globe-Democrat, however, have not viewed the structure in progress” from an interior, guided perspective (21). From the very start, Dreiser has established the rapport with readers that will continue through the piece. He acknowledges his readers as well-informed of the particulars of their locality and the significance of these particulars to a wider public, and he promises to provide them with insider information that will further enhance this understanding.

These three components – recognizing readers’ local literacy, noting links between locale and region, and delivering new insight – characterize Dreiser’s most compelling newspaper work. In “Greatest in the World,” the payoff of careful discernment of local details is straightforwardly utilitarian: “various individuals in inner depot circles profited by their foreknowledge [of the project] substantially” (25). More often, though, the value of such knowledge for readers lies in better understanding the space they inhabit, and accordingly it has value only for those who already possess sufficient knowledge about that space to begin with. Dreiser doesn’t simply sensationalize the news, for example, of a kidnapped orphan by adding dramatic hooks and delays as typical of yellow journalism: he takes the further step of using the story to impart information about the city orphanage system. It is noteworthy that Dreiser did not write for the primary organ of yellow journalism in St. Louis, the Post-Dispatch, which was Pulitzer’s first and only newspaper before the New York World and the region’s leading evening daily. These shades of difference had implications for a paper’s market niche and audience.


Furthermore, while Dreiser professes in “Greatest in the World” that “when completed the depot will stand as a monument to the enterprise and constructive genius of St. Louisans,” he is sure to make clear that useful local knowledge is never merely local (25). In this case, it projects outward through relations with the region that comprises the “central portion of the Union and of the Mississippi Valley” (21). Ties between city and region, if not always so literal as a new railway terminal, are never far from view. Significance is measured in space – that is, within the bounds of St. Louis’ mutual influence: Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan. While part of the Globe-Democrat’s readerly appeal lay in its national and international coverage, this perimeter acts as an unnamed perimeter of interest in Dreiser’s contributions.8 Even short pieces detailing conversations overheard among guests in hotel corridors, almost certainly embellished, pursue circuits into and out of St. Louis as they ply the space between community-specific knowledge and special insight. Dreiser’s Globe-Democrat journalism makes the local into news by emphasizing the existence of unfamiliar details just beyond the familiar that extend past the immediate horizon.

After a dispirited departure from the Globe-Democrat, Dreiser joined its competitor, the (Democratic) St. Louis Republic, in May 1893. With less national and international coverage, the Republic “gave more prominence to city news, always printing important local stories in detail on the front page.”9 Dreiser adapted in kind to his new paper’s circumstances. Excursions to the World’s Fair in Chicago are depicted through extensive plotting, with character development, conflict, and resolution; accounts of hangings receive full paragraphs of scenic natural description; dialect abounds irrespective of class or race. By infusing these literary devices after the fashion of the local color that was beginning to appear less in the literary monthlies, Dreiser produced news stories in the literal sense of the phrase. Dreiser’s best work in this vein was a series of articles concerning a baseball game between two of St. Louis’ leading social fraternities. Most of the installments, including the first, “The Trouble Still On,” are in fact advance notices that build anticipation for the upcoming game by relating the story of its reporter ducking from one captain’s place

of business to the next in search of advance information about the teams’ preparations. The teams’ competitiveness, like their preparations, are humorously disproportionate to the occasion, fueled by rampant local pride.

There was one catch: as Dreiser recollected in his autobiography, almost all the details were invented. For this very reason, the article and its successive installments were an instant hit with the Republic’s readers. Dreiser quickly became a local celebrity (with the social fraternities as much as with anyone) because his fictionalized depiction struck with novelty upon quirks and contingencies that his readers considered distinctively their own. Dreiser’s Republic articles, building on his technique in the Globe-Democrat, make the local into news by depicting the familiar unfamiliarly—even if this involved some falsity. To this end, the figure of the “Reporter” is almost always present in his journalism, explicitly and repeatedly marking the role of mediation in the news story. Dreiser depicts what are meant to be characteristic scenes of life in the area from the view of someone who is well-acquainted with them yet at the same time views them with fresh eyes.

Edith Maude Eaton, the writer who would one day be known as Sui Sin Far, excelled at balancing this double perspective. In December 1896 Eaton began a half-year stint as a reporter, columnist, and sub-editor for the Kingston, Jamaica Gall’s Daily News Letter. Eaton’s work for this newspaper testifies, as directly as any of her other writing, to David Shih’s warning against “her interpellation as a discrete racial and national subject – a Chinese American – to the neglect of alternate subject positions” that she developed across her career. Under the name “Fire Fly” or “Canadian Fire Fly,” Eaton wrote local color journalism for the News Letter that regularly identifies her authorial persona with her home nation of Canada while recording her observations among a multiracial Jamaican populace. As with Dreiser’s local color journalism, the Fire Fly columns cover a mix of local events, gossip, crime, and familiar scenes. Where these columns differ from Dreiser and from Eaton’s earlier local color journalism at the Montreal Daily Star is in the Fire Fly’s position as someone representing an outside location. Indeed, this distance is a premise of

the column, yet intimately local modes of observation and address prove just as central to its function.

“The Kingston Races” both illustrates Fire Fly’s use of embedded distance. It begins by following collective hearsay. “The great event of the year, I am told in Kingston is the races, [sic] so I am very glad that I have had the opportunity of witnessing them.” Fire Fly confesses that she was not much interested in the race herself for lack of knowledge about the horses or their owners. The article instead focuses on the experience of the event:

You know in a crowd we can be very much alone – much more than we are sometimes in our own little room when the only bodily presence is our own small self, and so as I sat in that crowd, it seemed to me as if I were separated from it by many miles, and so being separated I began to study the people and criticize them in a way I would scarcely have dared to do had I felt them near.

(101)

The “distance” Fire Fly experiences is at once an allusion to the literal distance from her oft-mentioned Canadian home and a reflection on the consequenting cultural distance she experiences. It is this twinned sense of distance that allows her to see her surroundings with a discerning eye—to “criticize” in the neutral rather than negative sense. “Jamaica has an individuality of its own,” and Fire Fly proceeds to identify a few fashions and behaviors that stand out to her (102). The article refrains, however, from any application or reification of types. Most of the observations in the column, such as the comparative unrowdiness of the Kingston races, in fact would be of little use for classificatory purposes. Fire Fly’s local color journalism courts regional pride by depicting what an unattuned outsider would look past or note only as trivial but true insiders would appreciate.

This is one of several key elements that separate even the local color journalism of a professed non-native from the participant-observer outsider common to ethnographic local color writing. Fire Fly does not attempt to explain observations or articulate theories for the uninitiated. Rather, she trusts that the right readers will know what to make of the perspective she lends, and she addresses them directly, not infrequently with “you.” “The Kingston Races” ends on a note that underscores this point. Shifting subjects, she writes

12. Quoted in Edith Maude Eaton, Becoming Sui Sin Far: Early Fiction, Journalism, and Travel Writing by Edith Maude Eaton, ed. Mary Chapman (Chicago: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), 101. All subsequent citations of texts from this collection will be parenthetical.
that “I don’t know whether I’ve a right to speak, but I’ve a deep, dark suspicion that some young men and women flirt at the races. Isn’t that just too awful?” (102). Though the activity in itself is hardly unique, the winking sarcasm and deference with which Fire Fly delivers it communicate that both she and her intended readers are sufficiently informed as to need no further explanation. This rapport runs through the Fire Fly columns. Though her musing tone in the passages above may seem far from the sensationalism associated with yellow journalism, past the immediate differences in pacing Fire Fly’s columns otherwise works much like Dreiser’s local color journalism.

Fire Fly hails from elsewhere, but she is not an outsider. The distinction matters, and Fire Fly is careful to signal it wherever possible. Eaton’s differentiation of the “Fire Fly” from the “Sui Sin Far” or even the “Eaton” byline is a salient case in point. Eaton lived in and wrote of the Pacific Northwest, Montreal, and, very briefly, Jamaica; Sui Sin Far was of the Pacific Northwest; Wing Sing, another authorial persona, was from China and San Francisco but wrote of other parts of North America; Fire Fly was exclusively a Canadian of Jamaica, free from the specificity of Eaton’s biographical circumstances. A subsequent article, “Our Visitors,” provides another example. Published in spring, “Our Visitors” reports on the vacationers lately disembarked in two leading Kingston hotels. Fire Fly lightly teases the tourists’ antics and the practice of tourism in general as a resident, as already suggested by the pronoun in her title. Her focus then shifts to the subject of vacation seasons, vacations, and seasons in Jamaica as compared with Canada. When seen from Canada, Jamaica has the benefit of lush “perpetual summer” that her readers may be too “worn out” from to fully admire; the presence of tourists should serve as a reminder (134). Fire Fly nonetheless prefers the four seasons of Canada all the more for missing them in Jamaica. The piece ends with a gesture of cooperation between the two places based on the complementary perspectives each allows of the other. “You have a country for our tourists in the winter months, but in summer,” Fire Fly writes, it “will be the time to see Canada” – “if only to bring some brightness to [the traveler’s] eye” and “some color to her cheek” (134). These phrases, which echo Fire Fly’s earlier account of the physical thrill of Canadian winter, also invoke the change in outlook – a brighter eye, new color – provided by returning to one’s point of origin via the unfamiliar.
The conclusion of “Our Visitors” is playful in that Fire Fly is under no illusion that her newspaper readers will summer in Canada, at least in any substantial numbers. Like much of Dreiser’s and Fire Fly’s (and Eaton’s) newspaper writing, this moment is small and full of what has since become conventionality. But it encourages readers to reflect on their quotidian placedness, not just their immediate locale but the broader area that non-natives would consider equivalent to it, in a new way. This is the most important function of local color journalism, as practiced by Dreiser and Fire Fly. It guides readers toward understanding their own locality by imagining it via an informed yet distanced perspective – as an insider with outside vantage – from which it appears as part of a unique region. This everyday act of imaginative dislocation accustomed readers to the practice of defining their region by looking back at it, and in doing so it helped pave the way for readers to identify the region that was theirs as the one that they came from.

Dreiser and Eaton both utilized these approaches in their later careers in fiction. In *Sister Carrie* (1900), Dreiser draws on his experience writing local color journalism to render Chicago as both new and, to the knowing reader, familiar; this duality generates the interplay of surprise and expectation that constitutes the work of “fate” in the novel’s naturalism. Sui Sin Far’s short fiction adapts the techniques of her local color journalism to assert regional commonality that highlights racial difference only to subsume it. More specifically, in *Miss Spring Fragrance* (1912) geographic proximity highlights differences between Anglo- and Chinese-Americans while making this difference itself represent the Pacific Northwest. Rather than focus on these texts, however, I wish to turn to the revolution in book retail that was just beginning.

### 2. Expanding Book Retail and Regional Bestsellers

For most of the nineteenth century the book was a gift commodity in a majority of the trade publishing market. The gift function did not just prevail among formats specifically oriented towards presentation and present-making such as the gift book, with its lavish illustrations, or even upscale reprints of texts previously published in magazines or cheap
book formats, refitted with ornately embossed bindings and spacious margins. When the
dominant modes of distribution were aquatic, the economic rhythms of the book trade
slowed when the rivers and canals on which it relied froze. This tended to augment the
importance of late fall and early spring transportation, which in turn aligned with sale in the
lead-up to Christmas and mid-spring. This pattern persisted after the railway became the
dominant mode of distribution in the 1850s. As late as 1910, Publishers’ Weekly estimated
that 65% of all trade publishing sales occurred in the six weeks preceding Christmas and
Easter – just 23% of the year. In 1930, however, the same two windows in the calendar
accounted for at most 37.5% of sales. The role of the book in the literary marketplace was
rapidly changing. This shift was closely related to a watershed swell in the geography of
retail. Together, these changes transformed the role of the book in the literary marketplace
and the nature of its circulation.

Between 1915 and 1925 the number of booksellers in America increased by 54%, from
3,555 to 5,505, while the national population increased by 16%, according to data from the
Publishers’ Weekly annual book trade directories. The resulting increase in the number
of booksellers per capita at the national level was chiefly driven by disproportionately large

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13. See Ronald J. Zboray, A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 56. Among other evidence, Zboray cites Mathew Carey’s ledgers for 1817, which show the publisher’s sales in March, April, and September at almost double the year’s winter low-point.


15. O. H. Cheney, Supplementary Report of the Economic Survey of the Book Industry for Bookbinding Executives (New York: Employing Bookbinders of America, 1932), 11; Quoted in Sheehan, This Was Publishing: A Chronicle of the Book Trade in the Gilded Age, 173. Sheehan uses this data to make the opposite argument: that trade publishing continued to be part of the gift market. Surely the influence of the gift function lingered: 37.5% of sales in 23% of the year is still disproportionately high even taking into account specifically gift-oriented formats like the gift book. The sheer degree of change, however, makes the change more significant than the consistency.

16. Publishers’ Weekly’s directories of the book trade in America list 3,555 booksellers in 1915 and 5,505 booksellers in 1925 in towns with populations of 3,000 or greater, for an increase of 54.9%; see American Book Trade Manual 1915: Including Lists of Publishers, Booksellers and Private Book Collectors; American Book Trade Manual 1925: Including Lists of Publishers, Booksellers and Private Book Collectors. I have excluded entries for towns with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants in an attempt at regularization due to the inconsistent record of booksellers in towns smaller than this size in the 1915 directory. The US Census reported national populations of 92,228,496 in 1910, 106,021,537 in 1920, and 123,202,624 in 1930 for a growth of 15% and 16.2%, respectively. Publishers’ Weekly was not the only entity to compile directories of booksellers, though its precursors were largely inconsistent. H. W. Wilson Company produced a 1910 directory that lists roughly 4,000 booksellers. This is notably higher than the 1915 Publishers’ Weekly directory because it was compiled according to a looser classification of what constituted a bookseller; that said, the 1925 Publishers’ Weekly figure is still 38% higher than the 1910 Wilson figure. I have not been able to locate any subsequent installments of Wilson’s directory, if they exist. Directory of booksellers, newsdealers and stationers in the United States and Canada (Minneapolis: H. W. Wilson Co., 1910).
growth in urban markets (Figure 5.1). This was especially the case in regional literary centers, including cities with longstanding literary communities like Boston, San Francisco, and Cincinnati as well as upstarts like Kansas City, Minneapolis, and Seattle. These were the places that also led in the publication of regional literary magazines (Chapter 3), whereas cities with fewer regional periodicals tended to lag in the number of booksellers as well. This loose correlation vindicates the optimistic assertions found in the regional literary magazines themselves: growth in regional print was clearly related to growth in print infrastructure.


Underneath this trend was another still more important one: an explosion in the number of bookstores in cities with populations between 3,000 and 10,000 (Figure 5.2). The number of booksellers in this category more than doubled from 506 in 1915 to 1,052 in 1925 (a phenomenon not immediately evident in Figure 5.1 because many of these booksellers were one of fewer than five in their city). This fact is all the more striking in light of
population growth across the board: while the mean or average city population for all booksellers is still higher in 1925 than in 1915 when cities with populations over 200,000 are excluded, the median or middle value of city populations for all booksellers is actually lower in 1925 than in 1915. The 506 booksellers serving populations between 3,000 and 10,000 in 1915 represented 31% of the 1,637 cities in this category in the 1910 census; the corresponding 1,052 booksellers in 1925 represented 56% of the 1,874 cities in the same population bracket. Book retail was growing rapidly beyond the metropole both numerically and in diffusion. Trade publishing was becoming more physically present at the local level.

Figure 5.2: Increase in booksellers in small cities, 1915 vs 1925. Population bin-width = 1,000. Population outlier cutoff = 200,000. 1915 Booksellers: Q1 = 10,993, Median = 19,659, Mean = 34,650, Q3 = 43,684. 1925 Booksellers: Q1 = 9,307, Median = 18,600, Mean = 37,374, Q3 = 48,374. Source: Publishers’ Weekly and https://azleslie.com/data/booksellers1915/.

17. Transcribed population data from Benjamin Schmidt, Creating Data: The Invention of Information in the Nineteenth Century American State (2021), Schmidt’s dataset relies on those of Wikipedia editor Jacob Alperin-Sheriff and Stanford’s CESTA: U.S. Census Bureau and Erik Steiner, Spatial History Project, Center for Spatial and Textual Analysis, Stanford University. http://creatingdata.us
One reason for this sudden growth was the expansion of the variety of retailers who sold books in significant quantities, as attested to by the conflicts between retailers over pricing that mounted in the 1890s and eventually led to the establishment of the regulatory American Publishers Association in 1901. In compiling their data on booksellers, Publishers’ Weekly was careful to delineate this point by only including retailers that at minimum “have book departments”: that is, including a number of news depots, drug stores, and department stores but excluding the greater multitude in each of those classes that only carried books piecemeal and thus “can scarcely be classed as bookstores.”

Competition and conflict, of course, erupted between these classes of retailer. Department stores were the primary instigator, selling books at a loss in order to induce customers to purchase other items with higher profit margins. The overall effect was to lower book prices overall: the standard discount on the typically-priced $1.50 novel ranged from the all-but-automatic 20% to 50%.

Though dedicated bookstores and publishers decried this pressure from department stores, lower book prices helped make trade publishing more accessible and enabled readers to purchase more books.

Dedicated bookstores were not without their own advantages. Another reason for the growth in booksellers was that retailers’ advice in book selection was all the more valuable as book production soared. In a survey of purchasers of Chauncey Hotchkiss’ minor 1903 bestseller For a Maiden Brave, 26% of 478 respondents cited bookseller recommendation as the motivation to purchase; 16% purchased the novel because they were familiar with the author’s previous work, 14% because a friend recommended it, 12% because they saw it advertised, 10% because they saw it reviewed, and 17% because they were attracted by its binding, illustrations, or title.

While periodical print formats, social ties, and material qualities all exerted influence, a bookseller’s (and, perhaps to a lesser extent, a book department clerk’s) advice was a valued aid in book selection. This proved a significant factor in the local idiosyncrasies and regional patterns in book purchase.

The adoption of mass advertising in the publishing industry, though in fits and starts, was a key factor in this shift as well. Publisher complaints about the unpredictability of advertising in the postbellum decades are a dime a dozen, but uncertainty did not stop publishers from experimenting with a broad range of formats and strategies. The case of Doubleday, Page is instructive. Seeking to carve out market space after its 1898 founding, the publisher took to launching advertising campaigns immediately after the Christmas sale season for books that it predicted would be successful, such as its sequel bestsellers Frank Norris’ *The Pit* (1903) and Thomas Dixon, Jr.’s *The Clansman* (1905). In a double advertisement for the former and Dixon’s bestselling sophomore novel, *The One Woman* (1903), Doubleday, Page emphasized this very point:

> When to publish? For many years it has been the custom to crowd the publication of as many books as possible into September, October, and November [the necessary advance preparation for the Christmas market], so that perhaps 3,000 or 4,000 new books are issued in these months, and practically none in January, and none in the summer. On January 15th we published *The Pit*, by Frank Norris, and people said that the trade would not buy just before stock taking, but it did. The ‘closed season’ did not hurt this novel, rather the reverse, and now we have decided to publish an equally important book [...] on the first of August.

Appearing in *Publishers’ Weekly*, the ad addresses booksellers in particular: “booksellers will then have leisure to find out about the book, the papers and magazines to review it and advertise it, and the public to hear about it, when it has the field to itself.” This argument, borne out in the success of the novels in question, demonstrates how the saturation of the fiction market in the early twentieth century incentivized publication timelines that gradually evened out the seasonal disparities. Mass advertisement itself encouraged a degree of stabilization: year-round periodicals relying on advertising revenue operate more smoothly with consistent advertising revenue (and, just as practically, consistent copy to fill the space allotted for advertisements). Widespread general advertisement also depended on and in turn promoted retail availability.

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All of these trends in conjunction – books as an advertised commodity that could be examined and purchased locally at more frequent intervals – gave rise to a new phenomenon at the turn of the century: the bestseller. Many novels, of course, had been nationally and astoundingly popular in their own right in the decades since *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Yet the bestseller phenomenon was something more: it wasn’t just periodic fads about a book but an ongoing fad about the fads about books. In America, this shift began when the *Bookman* started collating monthly top-six bestseller lists by city in 1895. The *Bookman* initially printed lists for twenty cities a month, but as interest surged over the next decade it printed lists for forty cities that included separate sections for fiction, non-fiction, and juveniles. Other trade journals like *Publishers’ Weekly*, which would eventually take over the practice, were soon aggregating and commenting on these lists. While the influence and the (relative) consistency of the *Bookman*’s nationally-encompassing list epitomized the phenomenon, newspapers across the country tried their hand at more local lists of the books most purchased (or most requested at libraries).

In newspapers and periodicals critics attempted to describe the bestseller phenomenon and opine on what the bestseller lists revealed (or didn’t) about American taste, and speculate on whether there was such a thing as a bestseller formula. George Seibel, writing in the *Critic*, embodied the mix of fascination, awe, and dismissiveness typical of these articles:

> To write a successful novel in our time is almost like a ninety-day sentence to the Hall of Fame [...] huge pyramids of [the author’s] immortal masterpiece fill the bookseller’s windows; he is reverently discussed in women’s clubs, and young ladies, ravening for culture, besiege the libraries for one of the fifty copies kept in constant circulation. Then somebody else writes something else, and the popular author is eclipsed by the new-born boom.

The sense of mystery and the compulsion to speculation was typical of the tune as well. In the article “Books that have Passed the Hundred Thousand Mark,” for example, Harriet Monroe asked “What is it that sells a book? The effort to answer this question is like the construction of a ‘system’ for winning at faro, and its influence upon certain authors and...

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23. The American *Bookman* modeled this practice on the unaffiliated British periodical of the same name, which had begun collating monthly bestseller lists by city in 1891.

publishers is quite as demoralizing.”\(^{25}\) Monroe, unflustered by the honestly mediocre novel, is less frustrated by the hack novel than the seeming impossibility of determining why the one might rank higher or lower than the other. The flood of commentary like Monroe’s and Seibel’s was an important facet of the bestseller phenomenon. For one, it publicized. Just as pivotally, constant commentary made the bestseller phenomenon fundamentally self-reflexive. As Resa Dudovitz argues, “above all, the bestseller is a book which appears on a list most commonly known as the bestseller list.”\(^{26}\) The surest outcome of the bestseller list was talk about the bestseller list. It marketed interest over individual products.

Publishers, naturally, embraced the hype. It became customary for them to advertise novels of even moderate sales by the number of copies printed. The *Bookman* rankings and others like them operated in the same anticipatory way. The books occupying the lower positions on a single monthly list, while no doubt selling unusually well for the particular city, could hardly be dubbed best-selling on any historical scale – that is, until they could. In a strange turn of history before the fact, novels became best-selling because they were “bestsellers.” As Laura J. Miller argues, the bestseller list was (and remains) a marketing tool actively involved in “the social production” of bestsellers.\(^{27}\) While many of the observations made by the likes of Monroe and Seibel in the early twentieth century sound familiar in the twenty-first, two aspects of the bestseller phenomenon as it first appeared warrant dwelling on. First, it represented a continuous process, an unbroken sequence of novels in which there were always bestsellers. Bestsellers are not unique events or isolatable, and in this respect it would be misleading to speak of them in the singular. Second, the bestseller phenomenon represented a frame for measuring all novels rather than singling out exceptions, a sliding quantitative scale rather than a qualitative category. Every new novel was a potential bestseller, but the vast majority of old bestsellers subsided into mere novels at their strokes of midnight. Even though they did not fully comprehend the consequences, Monroe and Seibel recognized these two new aspects of the book market in action. They professed, furthermore, that everyone else did too.


\(^{27}\) Miller, “The Best-Seller List as Marketing Tool and Historical Fiction” 300.
For all the emphasis on their uniformity and ubiquity, however, the *Bookman*'s bestseller lists were not in fact very uniform or ubiquitous. Scholars who have analyzed bestseller lists have tended to treat them as representing a singular popular taste, but this leaves out the majority of what the lists contain.\textsuperscript{28} True, in most months a handful of novels stood out as appearing on a majority cities’ lists. Consensus, however, was much less common, and rank varied widely. 34% of all entries on the *Bookman*'s lists represented titles with fewer than 30 total appearances, a figure lower than even the average number of cities for which lists were published each month. On average, books included as bestsellers appeared on the lists of only 5 cities (the median number was only 1 city). This variability is even more salient in light of the bestseller lists’ role in the social reproduction of the bestseller phenomenon. For the critics and readers who reported on it or consulted it, a major appeal of the *Bookman*'s monthly list was precisely that it recorded geographic specificity.

Cluster analysis helps illuminate regional patterns in the bestseller phenomenon. I use two different methods of cluster analysis applied to two different methods of aggregating bestseller data from 1895 through 1909. Both employ the *Bookman*'s system for assigning points based on rank, with 10 points for the top bestseller, 8 for the second, 7 for the third, 6 for the fourth, 5 for the fifth, 4 for the sixth, and 0 for nonappearance.\textsuperscript{29} Additionally, both applications exclude all cities with fewer than 70 months of data in the 15 year timespan: cities with data at this threshold tend to cluster together automatically, even when it has relatively low overlap, due to their comparatively inconsistent coverage.\textsuperscript{30} The *Bookman* lists also include some cities with multiple lists for the same month (typically for very large cities like Boston and Chicago). I did not attempt to sort lists into separate categories in these instances because there was no reliable way to do so except in the case of New York City, which the *Bookman* represented with two lists explicitly labeled Uptown and Downtown. In all other cases of multiple lists per month, all available data for each city

\textsuperscript{28} This is true not only of Alice Payne Hackett’s more straightforwardly synthetic lists in, for example, Alice Payne Hackett, *70 Years of Best Sellers, 1895-1965* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1967); but also Frank Luther Mott’s more expansive account in Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1947).

\textsuperscript{29} Trials with other assignments, such as a strict 6-1 inversion, produced equivalent results.

\textsuperscript{30} Observations with comparatively less data do still exert some influence on clustering: the cities with the fewest months of data included here are Montreal, Norfolk, Omaha, and Dallas. Otherwise, volume of data, either high or low, does not have a determining impact on clustering (the cities with the most months of data are Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and New York City Uptown).
was aggregated into the same total, with each separate list counting as an additional month’s worth of data when regularizing. This idiosyncrasy raises a question about the city bestseller data itself: does it represent a single leading, general bookstore in each city or an aggregation of several? The *Bookman* unfortunately never clarified this point, and there is evidence to suggest each possibility. Accordingly, cluster analysis has the additional utility of shedding light on the scope of the data’s idiosyncrasy. If cities tend to have more in common with those nearby or in the same region, then we can be reassured that the data represents underlying trends that are broader than any single city or bookstore despite questions over the manner in which that data was collected.

Agglomerative hierarchical clustering is particularly useful for indicating affinities between the bestseller lists of neighboring cities. This algorithm treats a set of observations as individual clusters and identifies the two with the smallest distance between a given set of values. It then groups these two clusters together and repeats the process until one single cluster of all observations remains. This first application aggregates each city’s bestsellers together regardless of when each bestseller appeared on that city’s list (Figure 5.3). Each city has a value for every book that appeared on any city bestseller list (3,302 in total). These values represent the sum of each novel’s bestseller ranking points divided by the number of months of data for each city. The results show that, taking this fifteen-year span as a whole, cities’ bestseller lists tended to have the most in common with those of other cities in the same vicinity or region. The bestseller lists for New York City Uptown and Downtown have strong overlap, as do the lists for San Francisco and Los Angeles. The most reliable Southern cities in the data, New Orleans, Atlanta, and Memphis, cluster together, as do most of the New England cities in the data: Boston, New Haven, Providence, and Worcester. As their isolation and the relative height metric indicates, the bestseller lists for the Canadian cities of Toronto and Montreal have less in common with the lists of other cities than any other city pair, despite the fact that they have less in common with each other than most other pairings.

31. An interesting additional investigation along these lines would be to use predictive modeling to test whether a randomly-sampled chronological sequence of one-month lists from a city like Boston with multiple lists per month could be reliably distinguished from other cities’ lists.

32. More specifically, this application uses Ward’s method for minimum variance.
Figure 5.3: Regional clustering in cumulative city bestseller lists, 1895-1909. Hierarchical agglomerative cluster dendrogram using Ward’s Method for minimum variance. Source: The Bookman.

The strength of hierarchical clustering is that it provides a relatively direct account of the proximity of each cluster; its limitation lies in the fact that later iterations of the algorithm can unduly separate observations that were relatively but not optimally similar at the start of analysis by combining each with other clusters that are less similar (adding one new observation to a dataset can sometimes produce more than trivially different hierarchical cluster analyses for this reason). Aggregating bestseller data without regard to date has the benefit of smoothing over gaps in data or potentially trivial temporal differences (ex., when a novel is the second-highest seller in June and third-highest in July for one city vs third-highest in June and second-highest in July for another city). Yet chronology is often significant – especially when it comes to fads, where temporal difference also encodes spatial and economic difference. Many bestsellers caught on in different places at different times, often by a factor of multiple months, and not simply in a unidirectional center-to-periphery trajectory.

K-means clustering provides a complementary second perspective on the regional affinities between cities’ bestseller lists by representing the relations among observations
on a two-dimensional plane. Here I employed an alternative approach to aggregating the *Bookman* data in order to reintroduce its temporal variation. For each city, every month of data is paired with every corresponding month of data for every other city. The number of shared points awarded to the same novel is calculated per month (i.e., if in July 1907 *Sister Carrie* ranked second [8 points] in Uptown New York City and third [7 points] in Cincinnati, the number of shared points is 7). The sum of shared points for all novels is then divided by the number of months for which both cities have data. This is repeated for each city to produce a matrix of monthly bestseller overlap. K-means clustering takes a pre-assigned k number of clusters and assigns each city to a cluster by identifying cluster centers that produce the lowest the mean distance between each center and the data for the cities assigned to it. This is plotted in two dimensions using principal components or linear reductions of the original variables or dimensions (the k-means algorithm itself utilizes all provided variables-dimensions, which is why clusters can appear to overlap when plotted in two dimensions).

Aggregating bestseller lists by monthly overlap again demonstrates that the primary affinities between cities’ bestsellers were regional, both when using k-means clustering (Figure 5.4) and hierarchical clustering (Figure 5.3). New England cities shared more shared bestsellers month-to-month with each another than they did with cities elsewhere. The same was true of Southern cities and Canadian cities. A few cities no longer have the strong ties that they did in atemporal aggregation, but these discrepancies are instructive rather than contradictory. Uptown New York City, for example, clusters with New England instead of Downtown New York City; this separation reflects the wealthier Uptown’s affinity with New England tastes and its tendency to take to new books a month ahead of Downtown. Other more heterogeneous clusters bridge two groups, as where cluster 3 splits roughly into Midwestern and East Coast cities. Even cluster 5, while not strictly regional, has a coherent geographic logic as additional publisher location information below makes clear. On the whole, then, month-to-month aggregation of city bestseller lists reaffirms the

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33. The selection of k in k-means clustering is debatable because there exist several possible metrics and justifications. I chose k=6 for the visualization above – k selection does not change the position of points on a principal component plot – in order to highlight subdivision. Optimized from 300 iterations of 20 random sets.
regional clustering found in atemporal overall aggregation. Together, these results suggest that regional difference was the primary source of variation between cities in the books that became bestsellers.

Figure 5.4: Regional clustering in month-to-month city bestseller lists, 1895-1909. K-means cluster plot. Source: *The Bookman.*

Books that took a particular interest in a particular region were an important contributor in the regional divergence in bestseller trends. Thomas Nelson Page’s and Joel Chandler Harris’ books sold better in Atlanta, comparatively, than in any other city. Mary Wilkins Freeman was a regular bestseller in Boston, Providence, Portland (Maine), and Worcester but rarely appeared on lists elsewhere. Jack London’s *The Sea Wolf* (1904) met relatively more success in the Pacific West, and John Fox, Jr.’s *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908) was on bestseller lists almost twice as often in the states of the Ohio River Basin. Readers often selected books based on existing familiarity with the author, so a strong authorial association with a region could achieve the same effect. Booth Tarkington’s novels often sold better in Midwestern cities even when they weren’t about the Midwest.

34. See above and Section 4 of Chapter 3.
though many others after his freshman effort, such as *The Conquest of Canaan* (1905), were. Examples proliferate. Beyond more recognizably canonical or canon-adjacent authors, city bestseller lists also periodically included nonfiction books concerning their regional history, biography, or ecology. While many of these cases did not count for massive or long-running differences individually, in the aggregate they differentiated the popular preferences of one part of the country from the next. Readers of books in the early twentieth century, like the readers of newspapers in their parents’ and grandparents’ generations, continued to find particular interest in literary accounts of their own region.

Regional commercial and infrastructural networks continued to drive regional divergence in bestseller trends as well. Charles Major’s *When Knighthood Was in Flower* (1898) was a bestseller in Indianapolis for months before catching on first in neighboring Ohio and Kentucky, then in Missouri, Tennessee, and New York, and finally spreading outward to sell...
an astounding 400,000 copies nationwide. The novel, a medieval romance, had little to do with the Midwest. Its publisher, however, was the Indianapolis-based Bowen-Merrill Company later and better known as Bobbs-Merrill. Major’s novel helped catapult Bobbs-Merrill into becoming one of the most prodigious producers of bestsellers in the 1900s and 1910s, yet even then the success of their publications varied according to a location’s distance from Indianapolis.\footnote{35. On Bobbs-Merrill see Jack O’Bar, \textit{The Origins and History of the Bobbs-Merrill Company} (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1985), \url{https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/3947/glsisoccasionalpv0000000172.pdf?sequence=1}.} As the only publisher of notable size in Indianapolis, which despite its advantageous position in the national rail system was hardly a leading industrial center, Bobbs-Merrill was an exceptional case. Yet the books chosen for publication by Chicago and Boston firms were also subject to regional disparities in distribution and taste (Figure 5.6). The northwest-ward influence of Chicago publishers (chiefly McClurg, Revell, and Stone & Kimball) maps directly onto the city’s industrial influence, as observed in regional magazines like the Northwest Illustrated. If the influence of Boston’s publishers – greater in number and in volume of output – is not as cleanly delimited geographically, its dropoff is telling. Boston-published books make up the lowest percentage of bestsellers in cities most firmly within the sphere of influence of other publishing centers, such as New York, Chicago, Indianapolis, and even San Francisco. New York publishers claimed between 50-75\% of every city’s bestsellers, but within this fluctuating range and beyond lay meaningful variegation.

Literary content and distribution channels alone, however, do not explain all the regional variation between city bestseller lists – i.e., the variation that wasn’t simply due to idiosyncrasies in the data for individual cities. Books with no self-evident or substantial tie to one region over another also co-appear on the bestseller lists of cities in the same region. Karl Marx’s classic description of the commodity fetish as “material relations between persons and social relations between things” is a tempting description for this interaction, in which purchasers seem to mechanically carry out autonomous relations between books.\footnote{36. Karl Marx, \textit{Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy}, trans. Ben Fowkes, New York, 1992, 166.} The cause of this more extensive regional variation lies in the essentially recursive nature of the bestseller phenomenon itself. Bestseller lists generated commentary and publicity

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\item 35. On Bobbs-Merrill see Jack O’Bar, \textit{The Origins and History of the Bobbs-Merrill Company} (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1985), \url{https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/3947/glsisoccasionalpv0000000172.pdf?sequence=1}.
\end{thebibliography}
that organized literary output as a continuous string of bestsellers that were promoted on that basis, though always, at least in a novel’s initial appearance on a list, in anticipation:
bestsellers were best-sellers before the fact. Because bestseller lists varied regionally, their publicization reproduced regional variation, which was reflected in subsequent lists.

This cycle operated independently of any given titles, and it amplified even accidents of preference into cumulative regional taste. Consider: a bookseller in one city orders novels from a (more often than not) New York publisher. Readers take to some novels rather than others. The bookseller reports on their popularity to peer booksellers or newspapers as well as to the books’ publishers and the *Bookman*, also of New York. Next, the *Bookman* collates figures and repatriates them back, in a format that highlights regional variations, to booksellers and critics. Each of these parties further disseminates list contents, as bestsellers, to readers in the form of recommendations, commentary, or reviews, which shaped booksellers’ next orders, and so on. A book’s regional sales garnered national notoriety which in turn reinforced its status with retailers, writers, and readers in the region. In other words, in the era of the bestseller – which is to say, the new era of the book – the novel circulated something like the interplay of perspectives in local color journalism. Novels acquired regional ties through a series of dislocations and returns embodied by the form of the city bestseller list. Indeed, their connection to a region might consist of little else. These regional flows in trade publishing, driven by inertia and reflexivity, continued to prove adaptive to changes in the infrastructure of distribution.

3. Returning Once More: Modernist Narratives of Repatriation

Carl Van Doren began his lastingly influential 1922 study of modern writing with an attack on the “now moribound cult of local color.”

By “local color” he meant a body of writing that comes close to what contemporary scholars call regional-ism. Tellingly, the misreadings in Van Doren’s critique of local color correspond to the limitations of the contemporary critical category of regional-ism: the style is unable, he says, to sustain longer forms like the novel, it “thought first of color and then of form,” it “fit obliging fiction to resisting fact.” Van Doren did not of course mean that writing should ignore local or

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38. Van Doren 1–3.
regional life and culture, but he believed that it should recognize their limited scope and restriction of individualism. He championed above all the tendency in fiction by Sherwood Anderson, Dorothy Canfield, Zona Gale, and Sinclair Lewis that he dubbed the “revolt from the village.” While canon expansion efforts on both sides of 1900 have superseded the central chronological component of Van Doren’s account, scholars have reinscribed his characterization of these two opposed tendencies – revolting versus remaining – in both the postbellum period and the progressive era. When we consider modernists as regional, we often do so on the basis of their attachment to a specific locale; when we consider modernists as non-regional, we often do so on the basis of their sense of dislocation. This division disappears, however, we take region as a geographic pattern or aggregation that emerges through national (or international) circulation rather than as a culture opposed or subsumed into it. For writers like Willa Cather, Jean Toomer, Robert Frost, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, the cycle of expatriation and repatriation, of projecting a distanced perspective and reflecting on a point of origin, constituted region itself.

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* opens with a recollection of advice passed intimately from father to son: “‘Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone,’ he told me, ‘just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had.’” The narrator, Nick Caraway, continues that “in consequence, I’m inclined to reserve all judgments,” for “reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope” (1). Over the subsequent pages Fitzgerald situates this advice as Midwestern. Nick is the third generation scion of a Midwestern family that runs a wholesale hardware business. He has already withstood a series of longitudinal movements, the first being to Yale for college. Where Nick’s father took up the Minnesota mantle of his youth again smoothly after a degree at Yale, Nick was jettisoned farther still by the Great War. By the time Nick did go back, “instead of being the warm center of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe—so I decided to go East and learn the bond business” (3). Here, as throughout

39. The critical tendency is to emphasize an artist’s geographically-embedded aesthetic practice as it bears on their participation in or resistance to a transnational modernist movement. See, for example, the special issue beginning with Scott Herring, “Regional Modernism: A Reintroduction,” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 55, no. 1 (2009): 1–10; and Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, “The New Modernist Studies,” *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (2008): 737–748.

40. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 1. All subsequent citations of this text will be parenthetical.
the novel, Fitzgerald’s use of “East” refers to the Mid-Atlantic in accord with the usage that had become common in the late nineteenth century. Fitzgerald depicts many of Nick’s early decisions that set the stage for the novel’s plot as stemming from this regional background. Nick moves to the unfashionable but spacious West Egg instead of taking rooms in Manhattan, “the practical thing,” because “I had just left a country of wide lawns and friendly trees” (3). Here he meets his neighbor Jay Gatsby, though only after considerable buildup because Nick’s Midwestern sense of restraint – or distaste for the gaudy or riotous – prevents him from attending one of Jay’s frequent parties without an invitation.

It turns out, almost too serendipitously, that all five of the novel’s central characters hail from the Midwest: the belligerent Tom Buchanan from Chicago, the vacuous Daisy, Tom’s wife and Nick’s distant relative, from Louisville, her aloof childhood friend Jordan Baker from the same, and the elusive Jay himself from North Dakota. The trysts and entanglements that follow seem to pull Nick along. Nick is reluctant, “simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life” in New York; he rides in the passenger seat of his own narrative much as he does in his friends’ cars (36). Nick becomes both an unwilling witness to Tom’s messy affair with a married woman, Myrtle, and an ambivalent matchmaker in Jay’s pursuit of Daisy. The latter couple had fallen in love years before only to be separated by the Great War, and Gatsby attained his subsequent wealth with the aim of winning her back. In the novel’s climax, a tense scene between the five central characters in a stuffy Manhattan hotel, Jay insists on an unadulterated love: Daisy must profess that she never loved Tom. Tom reveals in reply that Jay made his fortune on bootlegging and has lied about his past, the impropriety of which alarms Daisy back into submission to her husband. The party leaves Manhattan in two cars. Daisy, with Jay, hits and kills Myrtle. Tom later tells Myrtle’s husband that the car belonged to Jay; as a result the widower, thinking that Jay rather than Tom must have been having the affair with Myrtle, kills Jay and then himself. “After Gatsby’s death the East was haunted for me […] so when the blue smoke of brittle leaves was in the air and the wind blew the wet laundry stiff on the line I decided to come back home” (178). These moves make alienation tangible by mapping it onto geography. Region’s capacity to stand in for multiple facets of
cultural difference allows Fitzgerald to translate internal discord into spatial displacement and the absence of principle into the lack of grounding.

Yet reading for the alienation of the “Lost Generation” here can be misleading. It is not just the case that characters feel inner conflict over opposed personal identities forged by two different regions. Nor is it just the case that the passage of time in an adoptive place distorts memory into nostalgia or bitterness for an originary point. Both regions are defined through – which is to say from – the other. Nowhere is this clearer than in the fact that the Mid-Atlantic in itself did not make the performed personality that was Jay Gatsby. Jay was born as James Gatz to poor, uncouth farmers in the Midwest, but his “imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself” (99). Nick reflects when first explaining James’ true personal history that “I suppose he’d had the name ready for a long time” (99). James invented Jay as a seventeen-year-old boy dreaming of wealth and position on the shores of the Great Lakes, and “so he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent” (99). It is appropriate, then, that the only detail of James’ life that Jay kept was his region of origin. Jay is James’ Midwestern projection of the Mid-Atlantic as a distant other from which to make sense of his disappointment living in the Midwest, “and to this conception he was faithful to the end” (99).

Nick divulges these details suddenly, at the start of a new chapter almost exactly halfway through the novel, well before the point at which he learned them in the story he relates. As Nick explains, Jay “told me all this very much later, but I’ve put it down here with the idea of exploding those first wild rumors about his antecedents, which weren’t even faintly true” (102). It is one of numerous occasions in the novel in which Nick expresses his protectiveness over Jay’s memory. What stands out about this instance in particular is the fact that Nick reinserts Jay’s history as an explanatory tool in anticipation of the climactic hotel room scene in the subsequent chapter–since over a quarter of the novel is denouement. In that tense argument, Jay “wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say: ‘I never loved you.’ After she had obliterated four years with that sentence they [...] were to go back to Louisville and be married” (111). Though Jay had long dreamed of
attaining Daisy’s love, his hopes could only be fulfilled if he could return with her to where they met. Self-identification via the distant other of the Mid-Atlantic, once achieved, turns to self-identification via the now-distant origin of the Midwest. Jay’s decisive mistake is that he confuses going back in time for going back in space; Daisy might have done the latter, but she could not do the former.

*The Great Gatsby* ends with a series of vignettes as Nick prepares to leave for the Midwest. He reflects that “I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life” (177). *The Great Gatsby* is a Midwestern novel in the same sense that its characters are Midwesterners: because both novel and characters originate there and this fact shapes the ways that they progress. Fitzgerald’s use of “perhaps,” however, marks where melancholy impairs his narrator’s judgment. The central quintet was far from unadaptable to the Mid-Atlantic, and, what’s more, adaptability was never really the problem. Nick laments that the Buchanans “were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made” (180-1). Yet Nick fails to fully realize that he has unwittingly changed and, as a result, done the same. In the immediately preceding vignette, Nick seeks out Jordan in order to “leave things in order” or, less generously, clear his conscience after their almost-romance has petered out (178). Jordan replies that “nevertheless you did throw me over” and turns Nick’s own moralizing back on him: “you said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn’t I?” (179).

If Nick has failed to appreciate how much the Mid-Atlantic has shaped him, the region has nonetheless motivated his ideal of the Midwest and facilitated his previously-untenable return. In one of the final vignettes, Nick recollects that “one of my most vivid memories is of coming back West from prep school and later from college at Christmas time” (176). “That’s my Middle West,” he continues, “not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth” (177). The act of repatriation itself constitutes region. The shifts in verb tense in these final pages reinforce the significance of
the point. Jay and the others “were” from the Midwest; the persistence in the present of past origins, ‘being from,’ by contrast requires “coming back,” as Nick phrases it, rather than ‘going back’ or ‘went back.’ In this light the novel’s final line – “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past” – is neither frivolous escapism nor fruitless despondency but suggests that Nick may circumvent Jay’s mistake (182). “Beat” is both a past and present tense verb, and as a past participle “borne” denotes continuation. Fitzgerald’s concluding image expresses the state of repatriation: the boat remains fixed in place through the tension of countervailing movements. There is no reason to hold that Nick will stay in the Midwest any longer than he did the last time. What makes him Midwestern is the fact that, in the circuits of narrative memory and physical transit, he keeps coming back.

Repatriation in *The Great Gatsby*, then, is more than a setting, set of tropes, or source of materials. It is a mechanism for advancing plot and organizing meaning. American authors in the 1910s and 1920s used repatriation in this sense almost as prevalently as they did Van Doren’s “revolt from the village” (several texts, like Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street* (1920) manage to balance both). Willa Cather’s *My Antonia* (1918) set a paradigmatic example. The novel opens as its protagonist, Jim Burden, takes a train from his present residence in New York through the Great Plains where he grew up. This prompts recollection of his youth especially as it intersects with Jim’s childhood intimate Antonia, whom he idealistically and somewhat possessively sees as embodying “the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood.” Jim has conceived of his own life through his youth in the Great Plains, in both romantic and eminently practical senses: “his faith” in the region “and his knowledge of it have played an important part” in the development of the railway that employs him as a lawyer. Yet Antonia, who somewhat to Jim’s surprise is not just a passive receptacle, has done the equivalent. Her lot is hard but she has gone on living, and stories of Jim’s distant life and their shared childhood have served as a foil for her own experience of farm life on the Great Plains.


42. Cather 4.
Jean Toomer organized *Cane* (1923) similarly in the form of departure and return. The collection consists of poems, short stories, and sketches intermixed in two parts followed by a third part that contains a single prose drama, “Kabnis.” The first of these three parts is set in the rural South, lush, potent, and uninhibited; the second moves to several Northern cities, chiefly New York and Washington, D.C., which are cold, stark, and lack the communal bonds of Black life in the South; the third follows Kabnis, accustomed to life in Washington D.C., in his shocking rediscovery of the South of his forebears. Yet the symbols, episodes, and aesthetic forms of the South, like the antiphonal call-and-response Toomer drew from spirituals, had reappeared already throughout Northern poems and sketches of the second section. Kabnis’ incomplete reconversion to the South at the end of *Cane* is another partial return in this sequence. It points readers to revisit the text’s origin in the South too—much like the sunrise with which the text ends or the illustrations of circle segments that separate the text’s three sections. The reader who does go back to the start, as Toomer intended they should, encounters the Southern symbols, episodes, and aesthetic forms of the first section anew in light of their presence in the North in the second section. The South becomes the circular process of referencing beyond the region and back to it.

Even Robert Frost, whose work can often seem rooted in place, utilized repatriation in *New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes* (1923), his first Pulitzer-winning collection. The collection’s title poem and organizing force, “New Hampshire,” repeats a cycle of displacement and return. First, interlocutors in other regions and representative states— the South, Arkansas, California, the Midwest, New York— marvel at New England; then, the poem’s New England speaker responds to either disagree or vindicate his region. This process of counterdefinition gets “New Hampshire” into seeming double-binds. An anecdote about a man who burned down his farm for insurance money in order to buy a telescope

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43. Toomer’s well-known letter to Waldo Frank argues for cyclical reading specifically with regard to region:

> From three angles, *Cane’s* design is a circle. Aesthetically, from simple forms to complex ones, and back to simple forms. Regionally, from the South up to the North, and back into the South again. Or, from the North down into the South, and then a return North. From the point of view of the spiritual entity behind the work, the curve really starts with Bona and Paul (awakening), plunges into Kabnis, emerges in Karintha, etc., swings upward into Theater and Box Seat, and ends (pauses) in Harvest Song.

makes an effective poetic image for New England’s detachment from commercialism, for example, yet it undercuts the poem’s assertion of the region’s investment in the rhythms of rural labor. Rather than treating such moments as contradictions, “New Hampshire” defines place through the ricochet movement back and forth between regions. Frost channels this movement into the rest of the volume by using footnotes that link “New Hampshire” to the subsequent set piece monologues, the form for which he is better known. “New Hampshire” thereby animates New Hampshire, situating its component poems as different moments in the series of departures and relocalizations that constitute New England and New Englanders.

Through this mechanism of repatriation, Cather, Fitzgerald, Frost, and Toomer articulated the changing modes of circulation in the literary marketplace that, having already reoriented the local newspaper and book retail, transformed Americans’ experience of cultural geography. Nick’s alternating projections of a distant regional destination and a distant regional origin in The Great Gatsby extend those of local color journalism, and his repatriation parallels that of the bestseller. Region plays an outsized role in these novels and collections not only because it makes repatriation apprehensible by naming the points of relocation but also because it represents the outcome of this movement. Regions, as I have argued, take shape through the dialectic between cultural products and their uneven reception across space. The American modernists worked on the tensions that emerged as people increasingly understood their own circulation across space in the ways that they had previously understood that of print.

44. Anthologies have suppressed these footnotes as well as the original volume’s tripartite division into “New Hampshire,” “Notes,” and “Grace Notes.” See for example, the only comprehensive anthology of Frost, Robert Frost, The Poetry of Robert Frost: The Collected Poems, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: St. Martin’s, 1969).
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