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FROM THE HINTERLANDS: MODERNISM AND REGIONALISM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1918-1941

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by

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ABSTRACT:

From the Hinterlands: Modernism and Regionalism in American Literature, 1918-1941 argues for renewed attention to American modernist writing that negotiates spatial attachment through the sub-national scale of the region. While literary critics thus far have characterized American regionalist writing as an attempt to either unify or fracture national community, I show that a number of American modernist writers employed a regionalist approach to critique, reimagine, and reinvigorate modern American culture and as a strategy to envision community outside the artificial structures of the sovereign nation-state and the modern metropolis. Considering "modernist regionalism" less as a generic category or a set of ideals and attitudes than as a *discourse*, a discrete strategy for negotiating, resisting, or reinforcing meanings about particular sub-national places and their inhabitants, I argue that a diverse and diffuse group of modernist writers used regionalism as a framework for rethinking the modern era's relationship with the past and for restoring a sense of place and community to the peripatetic and deracinated conditions of twentieth-century life.

Despite the New Modernist Studies' "transnational turn," which has productively opened up modernist literature and culture to diverse locations, movements, and networks beyond the Euro-American metropolitan axis, scholars have been slow to address the modernism of early twentieth-century American regionalism. Because modernism is so intimately connected with the urban space, modernist critics have customarily minoritized regional writing either by characterizing it as a residual form of nostalgic nineteenth-century "local color" or by relegating regionalists to discrete geographically-bounded categories. My intervention involves rethinking regionalism as neither a unifying literary tourism nor a heroic resistance to American imperialism; rather, for some American modernist writers, "the region" constituted an alternative to the communal scales of the nation-state and of the metropolis, a substitute for nationalism's "imagined community" and urbanism's "blasé outlook."

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Introduction:

Modernist Regionalism

> [Exploring the variations in modernism] means, above all, seeing the imperial and capitalist metropolis as a specific historical form, at different stages: Paris, London, Berlin, New York. It involves looking, from time to time, from outside the metropolis: from the deprived hinterlands, where different forces are moving, and from the poor world which has always been peripheral to the metropolitan systems. This need involve no reduction of the importance of the major artistic and literary works which were shaped within metropolitan perceptions. But one level has certainly to be challenged: the metropolitan interpretation of its own processes as universals.
>
> – Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*[1]

> The rise of regionalism in American art may be a means of escape, for it is a protest against the giddy and ridiculous whirl of our industrial life—an assertion that life does not have to be a mad, scrambling, roaring confusion. The young artist about to board the train for New York might think for a few moments about what his own province has to offer him.
>
> – Carey McWilliams, "Young Man, Stay West"[2]

Early in Glenway Wescott's 1927 novel *The Grandmothers*, American expatriate artist Alwyn Tower sits at a café in the Swiss Alps contemplating, of all things, rural Wisconsin. Alwyn imagines "that he sat, not in Gastein, but on one of [Wisconsin's] hills, dreaming of its history. For a moment all Europe seemed less significant than the vicissitudes of pioneers."[3] Even on the

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[1] Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism* (New York: Verso, 1989), 47.

[2] Carey McWilliams, "Young Man, Stay West," *Southwest Review* 15, no. 3 (Spring, 1929), 309.

[3] Glenway Wescott, *The Grandmothers: A Family Portrait* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927), 18.

French Riviera, "dining with friends at La Turbie" in Monte Carlo, Alwyn is drawn back to the past of "Wisconsin, his grandmother's wilderness," in comparison with which "Europe seemed only the scene of a classic play continually repeated."[4] As Alwyn loses himself in regional reflections, the biographies of his ancestors take over the rest of the novel, each chapter devoted to the life of a different family member, "Ghosts of the little local history."[5] Considering the significance of this spectral local history, Alwyn perceives that in the his own era a certain "holiness was going out of the land."[6] In building its "great towns" American had taken "a step in the wrong direction."[7] Between the "moribund prosperity" and "abortive progress" of modernity, Alwyn thinks, "the future, for its purposes, whatever they were, would find little to choose. Would it not have to fall back upon the past, upon the poor God of poverty and His remnant of pioneers?"[8] In the humble "remnant of pioneers," the regional inhabitants of places like rural Wisconsin, Alwyn suggests, America might find hope for the future, even in spite of its "abortive" rush into modernity. "There were modern inventions for warming the heart," he reasons, "and certain fires with too bitter smoke had been allowed to go out—except upon old-fashioned, unattractive hearths."[9] The "old-fashioned, unattractive hearths" of America's regional spaces, the hearths of his Wisconsin progenitors, Alwyn avows, still hold the "fire" needed to address the cultural shortcomings of the modern present and future. "The children of these hearths, reared in, embittered and half-intoxicated by the smoke," Alwyn asserts, "would have to do the work."[10] Indeed, he declares, "The future of America, if it was to be worth troubling about, depended on them."[11]

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[4] Ibid., 19.

[5] Ibid., 387.

[6] Ibid., 374.

[7] Ibid., 373.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 374.

Alwyn Tower bears a close resemblance to Wescott himself.[12] Born and raised in the farm country near Kewashkum, Wisconsin, Wescott had made his way eastward to Chicago and New York before, in 1925, moving to France, where he would live for the next eight years. Having just published his first novel, *The Apple of the Eye*, a series of interconnected stories set in rural Wisconsin, Wescott quickly became a well-known American expatriate in Paris, eventually making cameo appearances in such canonical modernist texts as Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*.[13] Nonetheless, he remained invested in the imaginative resources of the regional space. With the publication of *The Grandmothers*, a popular and critical success, Wescott took a trip back to his home state, during which he composed the essay that would open and provide the title for his 1928 short story collection *Goodbye, Wisconsin*. Back in Wisconsin, he wrote, "the country, in the old sense of the word, has ceased to exist. Wisconsin farmers are no longer rustics; they have become provincials."[14] He saw modernity encroaching on the region: "Now, by telephones, the radio, and automobiles, the farms have been turned into a sort of spacious, uncrystallized suburb around towns like Claron."[15] But as compared to "such questionable utopias as New York and Montparnasse," the region seemed home to a certain residual *élan vital*: "Men and women have human stature in it and feel a greater number of satisfactions and disappointments; there is less cruelty, less involuntary cruelty at least."[16] In contrast, though "the future of American civilization is a genuine riddle," Wescott wrote, the modern metropolis would provide no answers: "Never live in Paris: everyone there has done some harm to everyone else," he advised, "never live in New York either."[17]

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 375.

[12] See Jerry Rosco, *Glenway Wescott Personally* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

[13] Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner, 2006), 17. Gertrude Stein, "The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas," in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 206. While Wescott appears under his own name in Stein's novel, Hemingway gives him the pseudonym Robert Prentiss in *The Sun Also Rises*.

[14] Glenway Wescott, *Goodbye, Wisconsin* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928), 15.

What Wescott expressed explicitly in *Goodbye, Wisconsin* and *The Grandmothers*, the sense that regionalism might offer a way to confront the conditions of modern America, was a notion held by many of the country's artists and intellectuals in the early twentieth century. In his history of the regionalist movement between the world wars, *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945*, Robert L. Dorman has shown the extent to which, during the early twentieth century, "artists and intellectuals across the United States awakened to the cultural possibilities that they believed to be inherent in the regional diversity of America."[18] For figures like Lewis Mumford, Howard Odum, Mary Austin, Henry Nash Smith, and Walter Prescott Webb, Dorman argues, "the region" served as the means toward "a richer, freer, and more humane way of life" and a defense against "the congested, proletarianized, centralized, and standardizing future toward which the country seemed irreversibly to be declining."[19] As a broad ideological movement, he writes, regionalism offered a "utopian means for reconstructing the nationalizing, homogenizing urban-industrial complex, redirecting it toward an accommodation with local folkways and local environments."[20] From Mumford's Regional Planning Association of America to Odum's regionalist school of sociology, a wide variety of American creators converged on the notion of regionalism between the wars, hoping to fashion "a democratic civic religion, a utopian ideology, and a radical politics."[21]

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[15] Ibid., 16.

[16] Ibid., 42.

[17] Ibid., 4.

[18] Robert L. Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist History Movement in America, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), xi.

[19] Ibid., xii.

But Wescott's novel also suggests the sense in which regionalism became part of a distinctly modernist aesthetic project, a literary strategy for responding to the dehumanizing processes of modernization. Contemporary critics noted not only "the modernistic manner" of *The Grandmothers*, but its regionalism, too.[22] With its plotless "series of disjointed stories, sketches, and characterizations" and its "simple declarative sentence without a suggestion of naiveté," reviewers found the book modernist, experimental, "a severe strain" on traditional novel form.[23] Yet they also compared it to such recognizable regionalist texts as Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. "*The Grandmothers*," asserted Burton Rascoe, "is a novel not only with its roots in the American soil, but it is a novel of those roots and of that soil. It is a novel that gives a new significance to

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[20] Ibid., xii.

[21] Ibid., xiii.

[22] Joseph Warren Beach, *The Twentieth Century Novel: Studies in Technique* (New York: Century, 1932), 479.

[23] Allan Nevins, "A Family Portrait Gallery," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 24 September 1927, 131. Burton Rascoe, "New Works of Fiction," *Bookman*, September 1927, 87. Nevin writes, "Were the term novel less elastic than it is, this prize-winning narrative, the second fruit of a talent whose first work won pleased and expectant attention, would place upon it a severe strain" (131).

American life."[24] In mixing modernist and regionalist aesthetics, Wescott was by no means unique, however; numerous American modernist writers of the 1920s and 1930s drew strongly on the creative abundance provided by country's regional spaces, from familiar figures like William Faulkner, Sterling A. Brown, Sherwood Anderson, and Willa Cather, to more neglected writers like Jack Conroy and H. H. Lewis.

Yet despite the New Modernist Studies' "transnational turn," which has productively opened up modernist literature and culture to diverse locations, movements, and networks beyond the Euro-American metropolitan axis, scholars have been slow to address the modernism of early twentieth-century American regionalism.[25] After all, modernism was, as Malcolm Bradbury phrased it, "an art of cities."[26] "When we think of Modernism," he wrote, "we cannot avoid thinking of these urban climates."[27] Not only did modernism's major movements emerge in metropolitan centers, according to this traditional account, but its affective character also centered on two particular responses to the modern urban environment, shock and blasé. Moreover, any attempt to focus on the regional would fail to account for what Andreas Huyssen termed "modernism at large."[28] In this sense, John N. Duvall admits, "Any attempt to link regionalism to American modernism may seem, at first blush, a perverse enterprise."[29] Consequently, modernist critics have customarily minoritized regional writing either by characterizing it as a residual form of nostalgic nineteenth-century "local color" or by relegating regionalists to discrete geographically-bounded categories such as Southern literature or Midwestern literature, categories in which readings come pre-packaged and possibilities for interpretation are limited to reflections on the cultural particularities of the region in question.[30] Even as critics have brought renewed attention to modernism's spatial dimensions, Jon Hegglund notes, they "have at times idealised the '*trans-*' without fully considering the '*national*.'"[31] Modernist fiction does not simply transcend national attachment in the twentieth century, says Hegglund; rather, it "continually mediates the scale of the national."[32] Instead of putting forward yet another spatial scale that outflanks the nation-state, then, *From the Hinterlands: Modernism and Regionalism in American Literature, 1918-1941* argues for renewed attention to American modernist writing that negotiates spatial attachment through the *sub-national* scale of the region.

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[24] Rascoe, 87.

[25] On the New Modernist Studies and its "transnational turn" see: Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123, no. 3, (May 2008): 737–748.

[26] Malcolm Bradbury, "The Cities of Modernism," in *Modernism: A Guide to Europeans Literature, 1890-1930*, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (New York: Penguin, 1976), 96-104.

[27] Bradbury, 96.

[28] Andreas Huyssen, "Modernism at Large," in *Modernism: A Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, Volume 1*, eds. Astradur Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Press, 2007), 53-66.

Rather than taking as self-evident the newly emergent vision of the modern world as made up entirely of formally equivalent territorial nation-states, a variety of American modernists sought, through a regionalist approach, to counter the nation as the normative condition of political sovereignty and to counter national (and metropolitan) life as the normative scale of community life. While literary critics thus far have characterized American regionalist writing as an attempt to either unify or fracture national community, *From the Hinterlands* argues that a number of American modernist writers employed a regionalist approach to critique, reimagine, and reinvigorate modern American culture and as a strategy to envision community outside the artificial structures of the sovereign nation-state and the modern metropolis. In relation to what Lawrence Rainey calls "the institutions of modernism," the array of marketing and publicity structures that converged in the early twentieth century around a shareable modernist idiom, this "modernist regionalism" can be considered less as a generic category or a set of ideals and attitudes than as a *discourse*, a discrete strategy for negotiating, resisting, or reinforcing meanings about particular sub-national places and their inhabitants.[33] After all, the word "region" (from the Latin *regere*, to rule) signifies not a specific geographical scale or boundary but a political relationship of subordination, "an area ruled by a more powerful entity, earlier a king, in modern times the state or nation, and increasingly at present global economic interests."[34] Writing from the country's margins, from America's "deprived hinterlands," a diverse and diffuse group of modernist writers used regionalism as a framework for rethinking the modern era's relationship with the past and for restoring a sense of place and community to the peripatetic and deracinated conditions of twentieth-century life.

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[29] John N. Duvall, "Regionalism in American Modernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*, ed. Walter Kalaidijan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 242.

[30] Studies accounting for only one particular region in relation to modernism include, for instance, Leigh Anne Duck's *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006) and Daniel Worden's *Masculine Style: The American West and Literary Modernism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[31] Jon Hegglund, *World Views: Metageographies of Modernist Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 5. Emphasis in original.

[32] Ibid., 6.

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[33] Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999). In imagining regionalism as a discourse, I am indebted to the groundbreaking work of Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse in *Writing out of Place: Regionalism, Women, and American Literary Culture* (Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 2003), but my use of "regionalism" also bears some crucial differences. For one, Fetterley and Pryse take "regionalism" to signify a particular kind of writing unique to the marginalized communities of the late nineteenth century, women in particular.

[34] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. "region." Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 5.

In American literary studies "regionalism" has often been taken as synonymous with the popular "local color" genre of the late nineteenth century, exemplified by such authors as Bret Harte, Charles Chesnutt, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Mary Wilkins Freeman. While early critics like Warner Berthoff and Jay Martin understood this "local color" writing as a decidedly "minor" part of American literary history, a "feminine" genre defined by its fetishization of an idyllic Golden Age of American community, a number of prominent Americanist scholars in the 1990s revitalized this supposedly lesser literary category by assigning it a major cultural significance.[35] On one hand, Amy Kaplan, Richard H. Brodhead, and Stephanie Foote argued that regional writing helped unify the fractured nation in the wake of the Civil War by providing its primarily Eastern, urban, middle-class audience with fantasies of national community.[36] Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse, on the other hand, asserted that regionalism actually offered a uniquely feminist method for critiquing and resisting normative structures of late nineteenth-century American imperialism.[37] In other words, the question that has typically divided critical accounts in recent years has been whether American regionalism participated in the marginalization of regional space or resisted that marginalization. As Tom Lutz summarizes, "the central debate over the last couple of decades has been the one…concerning regionalism's hegemonic or anti-hegemonic force."[38]

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[35] See Warner Berthoff, *The Ferment of American Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919* (New York: Free Press, 1965), and Jay Martin, *Harvests of Change: American Literature, 1865-1914* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

[36] Amy Kaplan, "Nation, Region, Empire," in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 240-66; Richard H. Brodhead*, Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Brodhead, "Regionalism and the Upper Class," in *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations*, eds. Wai Chi Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 150-74; and Stephanie Foote, *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).

But this critical division, while it may well reveal something important about the late nineteenth century's "local color" movement, ultimately fails to capture the motivation or force of the modernist regionalism practiced by Wescott and his cohort. In modernist novels like *The Grandmothers*, regionalism embodies neither a unifying literary tourism nor a heroic resistance to American imperialism; rather, "the region" constitutes an alternative to the communal scales of the nation-state and of the metropolis, a substitute for nationalism's "imagined community" and urbanism's "blasé outlook."[39] In his classic *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, Robert H. Wiebe revealed the "dislocation and bewilderment" that arose as the forces of modernity, "nationalization, industrialization, mechanization, [and] urbanization," pushed their way into the network of "island communities" making up America's regional spaces around the turn of the century.[40] "As the network of relations affecting men's lives each year became more tangled and more distended," Wiebe argued, these regional inhabitants "in a basic sense no longer knew who or what they were. The setting had altered beyond their power to understand it, and within an alien context they had lost themselves."[41] As expressed in texts like *The Grandmothers*, modernist regionalism can be understood as a sort of reaction and rejoinder to this "dislocation and bewilderment," a response to the loss of what Raymond Williams, in *The Country and the City*, described as "knowable communities."[42] With "the growth of towns and especially of cities and a metropolis," argued Williams, "any assumption of a knowable community," in which a smaller scale allows for more immediate social relations, "became harder and harder to sustain."[43] In response, rather than investing in a "characteristically native land of their imagination," as Wescott's Alwyn Tower phrases it, many modernists sought alternatives to what they saw as the synthetic social structures of the modern nation-state and metropolis, finding residual “knowable communities” (or at least their remnants) in the country’s regional spaces.[44]

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[37] Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing out of Place*. Also see their companion collection, *American Women Regionalists, 1850-1910: A Norton Anthology*, eds. Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse (New York: Norton, 1992).

[38] Tom Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004), 26.

[39] On nationalism and "imagined community," see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983). On urbanism and the "blasé outlook," see Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), 409-24.

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[40] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 12. In envisioning regional spaces as "island communities," Wiebe in some ways predicted the current vogue in American studies for the archipelagic imagination—but from *within* rather than *without* the continent. On this archipelagic imagination see *Archipelagic American Studies*, eds. Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2017).

[41] Ibid., 42.

[42] Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Verso, 1973), 165. Williams also describes certain novels themselves as "knowable communities" insofar as they make manifest these immediate social relations.

[43] Ibid.

In this sense, in its “search for order” at the sub-national scale, much of the regionalist writing of the early twentieth century embodies precisely the “integrative mode” that Daniel Joseph Singal argues is central to American modernism.[45] Taking seriously Susan Stanford Friedman’s advice to embrace and work within the “definitional dissonance” at the heart of the term *modernism*, *From the Hinterlands* nonetheless follows Singal and others in regarding American modernism not as a static canon, a specific range of attitudes, nor a set of formal devices but instead as a “full-fledged historical culture” characterized by its continuous “attempt to restore a sense of order to human experience under the often chaotic conditions of twentieth-century existence.”[46] Toward this “integrative” end, American modernists like Wescott found in regionalism what Van Wyck Brooks in 1918 described as “a useable past,” a way to bring the past to bear as an active agent in the ongoing modern present.[47] Thanks to those interpreters of the American past who “have put a gloss upon it which renders it sterile for the living mind,” Brooks wrote, “the present is a void, and the American writer floats in that void because the past that survives in the common mind of the present is a past without living value.”[48] If American writers are “to get a vital order out of the anarchy of the present,” therefore, they must realize that "the past experience of our people is not so much without elements that might be made to contribute to some common understanding in the present."[49] In *The Grandmothers*, disavowing the nostalgia of "the feverish, reactionary ones [who] went back, in imagination, to what had produced them," Alwyn Tower asserts that while "the weak stayed [in the past]; the strong returned—returned once more to the place from which they had gone back, from which they would have to go forward."[50] Rather than elegizing a bygone era, regionalism offered Wescott and likeminded modernists a way, in Alwyn Tower's words, "to build one's continual bridge from the past, across a sort of abyss in the dark, to the future."[51] In the residual folkways, traditions, customs, and rituals still binding together communities in the country's regional spaces many American modernists discovered strategies for mobilizing the regional past to critique modernity and imagine a better future.

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[44] Wescott, *The Grandmothers*, 375.

[45] Daniel Joseph Singal, “Towards a Definition of American Modernism,” *American Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): 12.

[46] Singal, 8. See: Susan Stanford Friedman, “Definitional Excursions,” *Modernism/Modernity* 8, no. 3 (2001): 493-513.

[47] Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Useable Past,” *The Dial* (11 April 1918): 337.

[48] Ibid., 337, 339

While regionalism has been largely neglected by modernist studies, *From the Hinterlands* builds on several recent attempts to draw connections between modernism and regionalism, including a special issue of *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* from 2009 on "regional modernism." Scott Herring, this issue's editor, astutely notes modernist critics' inclination toward "metronormativity," in which regionalism "becomes a discarded literary mode, the case study of an isolate, or, scraping the bottom of the ideological barrel, the henchman of the nation-state."[52] Such a crude notion of regionalism, he asserts, "inevitably paints a highly restricted field that neglects the importance of locality to modernism's world-imaginary."[53] Yet even as it perceptively calls for renewed attention to the regional within modernist studies, the *MFS* special issue nonetheless exemplifies a revealing and pervasive problem in attempts bring modernism and regionalism into conversation—that is, in order to legitimize regional expression as properly "modernist," critics have often felt compelled to *delocalize* it. Introducing terms like "transnational regionalism," "transpacific modernism," and "regional cosmopolitanism," modernist scholars seem to suggest that regionalist writers must somehow transcend their "mere" local particulars and affirm instead some vaguely transnational or cosmopolitan relevance in order to be afforded critical respect.[54] As Pryse observes approvingly in the special issue's afterword, the contributors "all nudge regional modernism into the global and the transnational."[55] Recent studies by Tom Lutz and Philip Joseph follow the same logic. In *Cosmopolitan Vistas: American Regionalism and Literary Value*, Lutz offers his own term, "provincial cosmopolitanism," to describe regional writing's "attention to both local and more global concerns," arguing that such writing "enacts, in its cosmopolitanism, an advertisement for its own value."[56] In *American Literary Regionalism in a Global Age,* Joseph, likewise, argues, "regionalism speaks most pertinently to us when it recognizes a dynamic, mutually informing relationship between members of a locality on one hand and the institutions and cultures of a globalized world on the other."[57] Even in the British and Irish context, in their 2013 collection *Regional Modernisms*, editors Neal Alexander and James Moran claim that from "instances of regional modernism an internationalist or cosmopolitan sensibility arises, paradoxically, from situations or contexts that are distinctively local or provincial."[58]

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[49] Ibid., 340, 337.

[50] Wescott, *The Grandmothers*, 364.

[51] Ibid., 365.

[52] Scott Herring, "Regional Modernism: A Reintroduction," *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 55, no. 1 (Spring, 2009): 2-3.

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[53] Ibid., 3.

[54] Each of these terms is taken the same *MFS* issue: Marjorie Pryse, "Afterword: Regional Modernism and Transnational Regionalism," 189-92; Denice Cruz, "Jose Garcia Villa's Collection of 'Others': Irreconcilabilities of a Queer Transpacific Modernism," 11-41; and Jessica Berman, "Toward a Regional Cosmopolitanism: The Case of Mulk Raj Anand," 142-62.

[55] Pryse, "Afterword," 191.

[56] Lutz, *Cosmopolitan Vistas,* 30, 14.

But modernist studies' inclination to emphasize the global, transnational, and cosmopolitan in regional writing at the expense of the local is by no means new. In his 1965 study of Glenway Wescott, William H. Rueckert wrote, "Just as one must perceive the ways in which Fitzgerald and Faulkner transcend their regional and American material, so one must see those things in Wescott if one is to get him out of the regional bin into which he was thrown many years ago."[59] In his well-known 1976 essay on the "geography of modernism," Bradbury wrote that a modernist writer "may hold on to locality, as Joyce did on to Dublin, Hemingway the Michigan woods; but he perceives from the distance of an expatriate perspective of aesthetic internationalism."[60] Indeed, Larry McClain has traced this trend back to the New Critics themselves, who, he writes, celebrated only regional fiction that "conformed to the cresting modernist aesthetics of universality."[61] In making their case for the canonization of Southern Renaissance writers, McClain argues, "New Critics embraced 'regional' literature only by simultaneously emptying the label of any real meaning."[62] As a result, "critics still look for regional writing to use the socially and culturally specific merely as a localized means to a universal end," to produce work, in other words, that speaks not to, but *through* the region.[63] Modernist scholars, thus, have tended to treat only those regionalist writers who can be shown to deal with "universal truths" as deserving of a spot in the canon and have relegated those who address the "merely" local to marginalized, minor status: "'regional' at best; 'local color' at worst."[64]

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[57] Philip Joseph, *American Literary Regionalism in a Global Age* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 7.

[58] Neal Alexander and James Moran, "Introduction: Regional Modernisms," in *Regional Modernisms*, eds. Neal Alexander and James Moran (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 2.

[59] William H. Rueckert, *Glenway Wescott* (Twayne Publishers, 1965), 59.

[60] Bradbury, "The Cities of Modernism," 101.

[61] Larry McClain, "The Rhetorical of Regional Representation: American Fiction and the Politics of Cultural Dissent," *Genre* 27 (Fall, 1994), 229.

From the Hinterlands responds to this troubling delocalizing tendency in modernist studies by tracing it back to its source in modernist literary production itself. Building on Kevin J. H. Dettmar and Stephen Watt's *Marketing Modernisms*, Lawrence Rainey's *Institutions of Modernism*, Aaron Jaffe's *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity*, and other contributions to the "materialist turn" in modernist studies, my first chapter argues that for American modernist authors between the world wars, regionalist writing offered a useful straw man against which to promote their own authorial brands and shape an audience receptive to their modernist cultural production.[65] For modernists and their critics, names and reputations provided the means to collect, exchange, and allocate cultural capital, such that "the key ingredient in elite modernist reputation," Aaron Jaffe argues, "is not only the demonstration of high literary labor through imprimaturs and extant masterpieces, but also the capacity to frame work against contrastingly lesser labors of contemporaries."[66] As harsh parodies of their erstwhile mentor, Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner's *Mosquitoes* and Ernest Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring* constitute efforts to define and promote their authors as cosmopolitan, sophisticated, masculine, and part of the elite minority culture of modernism, through contrast with the supposedly provincial, sentimental, feminine subgenre of regionalism for which Anderson served as a convenient synecdoche. In the very promotional logic of modernism, then, lies the root of the critical propensity to stress the "universal" in regional writing over and above its commitment to the local. But in defining modernism as the negation of regionalism, Hemingway and Faulkner also suggest a fundamental connection between the two discourses. Attending closely to this connection, each of the next three chapters of *From the Hinterlands* explores a point of intersection between modernism and regionalism. In the second chapter, Jack Conroy and the *Anvil* group proclaim regionalism as a model for radical political change in the modern age; in the following chapter, Willa Cather devises a more restrained approach, using "reflective nostalgia" for the region to subtly suggest the shortcomings of modernity; and in the final chapter, imagining what such regional configurations might look like, Sterling Brown creates a spatial poetics of regional community.

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[62] Ibid., 230.

[63] Ibid., 229.

[64] Ibid., 230.

[65] See *Marketing Modernisms: Self-promotion, Canonization, Rereading*, eds. Kevin Dettmar and Stephen Watt (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*; and Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Considering those who imagined regionalism as a call for radical political upheaval, my second chapter plumbs the archives to examine an eclectic and neglected group of regionalist worker-writers associated with Jack Conroy's little magazine, *The Anvil*. The *Anvil* group, I argue, developed a politically committed modernist regionalism that responded to the conditions of modernity for the regional working-class by drawing on and reshaping resilient regional folkways and traditions in order to raise social consciousness, provoke radical political change, and envision a more just modern world. Conroy, an aspiring writer and poor miner's son from Moberly, Missouri, grew frustrated in the early 1930s that the prominent leftist publications in New York like the *New Masses* seemed to be more concerned with arguments about the correct communist doctrine or the details of Marxist theory than the day-to-day issues of the actual working class, especially those overlooked non-urban workers dispersed across the country's regional spaces. Building a network of likeminded worker-writers across regional America, Conroy decided to create his own little magazine, a publication that would create a space for radical regionalist expression and challenge the hegemony of the metropolitan left. Printed out of a barn in Minnesota, *The Anvil* published regionalist writers like Joseph Kalar, a papermill worker from northern Minnesota; H. H. Lewis, a farmer from southeast Missouri; and John C. Rogers, a tree surgeon from rural Virginia. Conroy sought to "present vital, vigorous material drawn from the farms, mines, mills, factories, and offices of America" rather than "theoretical problems."[67] More than just giving a voice to the country's leftist regional writers, however, Conroy and the *Anvil* group also discovered in the communal structures of binding together the inhabitants of the country's regional spaces a potential model for radical political solidarity and for imagining modern community. In regional ties of kinship and tradition, they recognized the potential to join together workers in radical revolt, imagining that the workers revolution might begin not among the grey masses of city factories but in the "knowable communities" of the regional hinterlands.

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[66] Jaffe, *Modernism*, 4.

But not all writers were so explicit in championing the region as a bulwark against the corrosive forces of modernity. Following the subtle modernist regionalism of Willa Cather in three parts, my third chapter first examines Cather's *Obscure Destinies* and shows how its intergenerational allegories, particularly in "Old Mrs. Harris," express a sense of transition from an older "local color" regionalism associated with Sarah Orne Jewett to the newer modernist regionalism of Cather herself. Next, the chapter explores Cather's regionalist method and how it was misinterpreted in the 1930s by critics like Lionel Trilling. Reading Cather as a nostalgic escapist unable to cope with modern life, Trilling took her "démeublé" method as an injunction to throw out all "social fact."[68] Far from seeking to avoid the political, Cather merely advised novelists to operate by evocation and suggestion, thereby avoiding what she saw as the journalistic "cataloguing" and "enumeration" practices of the heavy-handed political novels of the decade. Likewise, rather than escapism, Cather used nostalgia for the regional past as a way to subtly and evocatively critique the conditions of the modern present and imagine a better way forward. In this sense, her nostalgic mode resembled what Svetlana Boym has termed "reflective nostalgia," which "consists in the exploration of other potentialities and unfulfilled promises of modern happiness."[69] In the third portion of the chapter I read *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, a novel in which the imagined past of the regional Southwest suggests the shortcomings and potentials of modernity. In her story of two nineteenth-century Catholic priests sent to minister to the newly-annexed New Mexico territory, Cather *e*vokes modernity without *in*voking it, imagining the past as charged with potential, a series of nonteleological possibilities that call into question the modern present and help imagine a better future.

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[67] Jack Conroy, "The Anvil and Its Aims," *The Anvil* 1 (May 1933): 4

Though Conroy and Cather expressed the region as a latent framework for reorganizing and reintegrating American community, their accounts concern themselves little with what such a reorganization might look like in practice. In the poetry of Sterling Brown, my fourth chapter argues, we find an articulation of just how regionalism might restructure American communal life—particularly for African Americans. Exploring the collaboration between Brown and folklorist Benjamin Botkin on the 1930 volume of *Folk-Say: A Regional Miscellany*, this chapter argues that, while critics of African American literature have offered rich accounts of the regional in Brown's *Southern Road*, attending closely to the influence of Botkin and his complex understanding of the region reveals a more capacious and dynamic modernist regionalism at work in Brown's poetry. Challenging traditional conceptions of "the folk," Botkin envisioned folklore as an oral literature not bound to the past nor threatened by modernity but being created anew each day "as culture in decay is balanced by folklore in the making."[70] The spatial scale of the folk group, Botkin asserted, was "the region," which he imagined as the basic unit in a pluralistic network of diverse and distinct folk cultures. With Botkin helping to edit and revise, Brown prepared three poems for inclusion in the 1930 *Folk-Say* annual, including "Southern Road," "Ma Rainey," and "Dark of the Moon," poems depicting the region as the proper scale of black communal life and thus as a source of strength against the artificial communal structures of the modern metropolis and the nation-state. Offering oblique criticisms of what he called "the Harlem school" and its simplistic notion of regional affiliation as a burden to be cast off on the path to modernism, Brown drew on Botkin's nuanced notion of regionalism in his *Folk-Say* poems to develop a spatial poetics of the African American South stressing intraregional diversity, interregional connections, and regional communal cohesiveness.

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[68] Lionel Trilling, "Willa Cather," in *Willa Cather: Critical Assessments Vol. 1*, ed. Guy Reynolds (Helm Information, 2003), 287.

[69] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 342.

"Whenever he had come back from Chicago to the country he had looked about him with a half-willing, almost bitter enthusiasm," Alwyn Tower explains near the end of *The*

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[70] B. A. Botkin, "The Folkness of the Folk," *The English Journal* 26 (1937): 469.

Grandmothers.[71] Considering the two spaces, city and country, Alwyn thinks, “There was this difference between Chicago and Wisconsin: in the country the avidity had never been assuaged.”[72] For a number of American modernist writers, much like the fictional Alwyn Tower, surveying the dislocated cultural milieu between the world wars, the modern metropolis and nation-state seemed to offer little hope for renewed communal belonging. But in the residual “knowable communities” of the country’s regional spaces, with their “useable past” and their resilient “avidity” in the face of modernity, these writers found possibilities for imagining the decentralization and reorganization of American life. As Alwyn poetically phrases it, “Across the Mississippi Valley, the barbed-wire fences lay like the staves of music paper on which as yet there were scarcely any notes.”[73] Rather than suggesting nostalgia for a bygone Golden Age or a way to reinforce or resist the pressure of the nation-state, these modernist writers recognized in literary regionalism a set of staves “on which as yet there were scarcely any notes,” a field of potential in the regional community and its past as a way to confront the disintegration of modern American communal life.

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[71] Wescott, *Goodbye, Wisconsin*, 372.

[72] Ibid., 373.

[73] Ibid.

Chapter One:

"In the manner of Mr. Anderson": Faulkner, Hemingway, and American Modernism's Disavowal of Regionalism

> The two most notable young writers who have come on in America since the war, it seems to me, are William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway. I knew both men rather intimately just after the war and before either had published.... With both men I had a quarrel.
>
> – Sherwood Anderson, "They Come Bearing Gifts"[1]

One of the foremost figures associated with the emergent early twentieth-century regionalist movement in the United States, Sherwood Anderson was abruptly publicly repudiated in the mid-1920s by a younger generation of modernist authors. F. Scott Fitzgerald, who had lauded Anderson's *Many Marriages* as an "amazingly beautiful vista," published an essay in 1926 that treated Anderson as a synecdoche for regionalism writ large and blamed him in particular for its supposed shortcomings.[1] Fitzgerald indicted Anderson for inspiring "the insincere compulsion to write 'significantly' about America" that had sent masses of writers of the new generation scrambling in a "literary gold rush" to present some distinctly American period, place, or way of life "that hadn't been 'used.'"[2] According to Fitzgerald, Anderson and his regionalist approach had sent writers into the country's marginal spaces to dig up the mere "raw and undigested" local particulars of American life: "One author goes to a midland farm for three months to obtain the material for an epic of the American husbandmen! Another sets off on a like errand to the Blue Ridge Mountains, a third departs with a Corona for the West Indies."[3] But regardless of the place, wrote Fitzgerald, "one is justified in the belief that what they get hold of will weigh no more than…journalistic loot."[4] Without the necessary weight of profound "ideas," Fitzgerald argued, this kind of regional material constituted underdeveloped accumulated details "doctored up to give [them] a literary flavor," that is, merely a shortcut literary method rather than "high" art.[5] Fitzgerald thus drew a clear line between, on one hand, what he saw as the unliterary, commercial, "journalistic loot" of American regionalism, represented by Anderson, and on the other hand, the highbrow literary production of the elite expatriate modernist group.

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[1] Sherwood Anderson, "They Come Bearing Gifts," *The American Mercury* 21, no. 82 (October 1930): 129.

[1] F. Scott Fitzgerald, "Sherwood Anderson on the Marriage Question," *New York Herald* (4 March 1922): 5. F. Scott Fitzgerald, "How to Waste Material—A Note on My Generation," in *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Short Autobiography*, ed. James L. W. West III (New York: Scribner, 2011), 85-91.

[2] Fitzgerald, "How to Waste Material," 86.

Fitzgerald was not alone in his modernist disavowal of Anderson and, by extension, regionalism. In fact, two of Anderson's former mentees turned in the mid-1920s to extended mockery of the older author and his work. William Faulkner, for one, had known Anderson in the vibrant New Orleans literary scene and had sought his help and mentorship in starting a career as a writer; yet Faulkner subsequently satirized Anderson at length in *Mosquitoes* through the parodic character of Dawson Fairchild, a fumbling and naïve Midwestern regionalist author.[6]

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Faulkner also wrote another parody of Anderson as a short foreword to a book of caricatures (co-authored with artist William Spratling) called *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles: A Gallery of Contemporary New Orleans*, which was published just after *Mosquitoes* was accepted for publication.

Likewise, though Anderson had been instrumental in introducing Ernest Hemingway to Paris's avant-garde circles and in getting *In Our Time* published, Hemingway brutally parodied Anderson's most recent novel, *Dark Laughter*, in his first long work, *The Torrents of Spring*. Why did Faulkner and Hemingway suddenly turn against Anderson, their erstwhile mentor and promoter? The critical consensus on these often overlooked early texts thus far has held that they function merely as "declaration[s] of independence" from Anderson,[7] as "gesture[s] of

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For more on this project, see Joseph Blotner*, Faulkner: A Biography* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1974), 195-6.

[7] Lawrence S. Morris, "Frolicking on Olympus," *The New Republic* (15 September 1926): 101. Early reviewers like Morris noted that *Torrents* seemed an attempt by Hemingway to distance himself from comparisons to Anderson, and subsequent criticism has maintained this line. James R. Mellow calls it Hemingway's arrangement "to take leave of Sherwood Anderson" (*Hemingway: A Life Without Consequences* [New York: Da Capo Press, 1992], 343), and Jeffrey Meyers calls it a way "to dissociate himself from Anderson's influence" (*Hemingway: A Biography* [New York: Da Capo Press, 1985], 167). While critics have also popularized the idea that Hemingway wrote *Torrents* in order to escape his contract with Liveright, Michael S. Reynolds explains that this was in fact a secondary aim: "He did not want to be in the same [publishing] house with Anderson, his literary godfather. Tired of hearing himself compared with Sherwood, he wanted a place of his own" (*Hemingway: The Paris Years* [New York: Norton, 1989], 315). As Hemingway himself told Fitzgerald, he had "known all along that [Liveright] could not and would not be able to publish it as it makes a bum out of their present ace and best seller Anderson;" yet he also noted, crucially, that "I did not, however, have that in mind in any way when I wrote it" (*The Letters of Ernest Hemingway, Volume 2, 1923–1925*, ed. Sandra Spanier et al. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], 459).

irreverence toward a literary father figure."[8] Yet "anxiety of influence," to use Harold Bloom's famous phrase, seems hardly sufficient to account fully for what was at stake for Faulkner and Hemingway in their parodic dismissals of Anderson.[9] Rather, these "gestures of irreverence" appear to be embedded in the complex relationship between modernism and American regionalism, attempts to stake out a clear line between the self-styled highbrow literature of the "new" and the allegedly tired and sentimental "journalistic loot" of an imagined past.

Susan Stanford Friedman has reminded us that "[w]hat is modern or modernist gains its meaning through negation," arguing that "the relational meaning for modern (and its siblings) exists within a comparative binary."[10] For modernists and their critics, names and reputations were not merely the means to hoard cultural capital but also the means to exchange it, "standards for defining value relationally."[11] In this sense, "the key ingredient in elite modernist reputation," Aaron Jaffe argues, "is not only the demonstration of high literary labor through imprimaturs and extant masterpieces, but also the capacity to frame work against contrastingly lesser labors of contemporaries."[12] *Mosquitoes* and *Torrents* represent just such framing gestures. Using parody to invoke and publicly mock Anderson, Faulkner and Hemingway positioned themselves not only against their former mentor but also against the burgeoning regionalist movement with which his reputation was closely tied.[13] Though in many respects a modernist movement in itself, regionalism in the early decades of the twentieth century was still largely marginalized as a residual continuation of popular nineteenth-century "local color" writing, considered a subset of realism or merely a "minor" genre of "women's writing."[14] By developing in these texts their own distinctly masculine modernist authorial identities as sharp contrasts against depictions of Anderson and his work as feminine (and therefore *un*-modernist), Faulkner and Hemingway attempted to frame themselves as members of the elite, minority culture of modernism.[15] But if we think of modernism as to some extent an institutional configuration, an array of marketing and publicity structures, then this opposition to regionalism appears to constitute a central part of modernist institutional logic, an important tool for "defining value relationally."[16] If "the history of modernism's 'structural logic and development' is embedded in…the kinds of discourse it habitually marks as subordinate," then we might also understand these disavowals as subtle indications of regionalism's actual centrality to the promotional development of modernism.[17] In other words, in becoming opposed, modernism and regionalism also became entangled. By defining modernism through the negation of regionalism, *Mosquitoes* and *Torrents* summon regionalism to the heart of the modernist ontology and ultimately reveal the untenability of the opposition between these two discourses. Indeed, this instability is also manifested on a formal level, via the inherently self-contradictory nature of parody, which Linda Hutcheon has shown is "doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies."[18] Faulkner and Hemingway thus express a version of what Lawrence Rainey calls "modernism's ambiguous achievement": by defining and promoting modernism through a specious opposition to regionalist writing, their parodic novels both conceal *and* articulate the ways modernism might actually "overlap and intersect" with regionalism in a variety of contradictory ways.[19]

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[8] André Bleikasten, *The Most Splendid Failure: Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 26. As with *Torrents*, critics unanimously describe *Mosquitoes* as motivated by a desire to break with Anderson. Michael Millgate calls the novel an attempt to "shake off Anderson's influence," and argues that Faulkner's "realization that he had nothing further to learn from Anderson may have been one of the factors prompting him to the repudiation which *Mosquitoes* undoubtedly represents" (*The Achievement of William Faulkner* [New York: Random House, 1963], 73). Max Putzel argues that "the novel Mosquitoes reflects Faulkner's determination to reject in its totality...Anderson's precendent" (*The Genius of Place: William Faulkner's Triumphant Beginnings* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985], 74). Daniel Joseph Singal asserts that *Mosquitoes* "attempted to differentiate [Faulkner] from Anderson" (*William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997], 84-85).

[9] Harold Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[10] Friedman, "Definitional Excursions," 503.

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[11] Jaffe, *Modernism*, 10.

[12] Ibid, 4. For the relationship between Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, see Joseph Fruscione's *Faulkner and Hemingway: Biography of a Literary Rivalry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012).

[13] On the early-twentieth-century regionalist movement, see Dorman, *Revolt of the Provinces.* Dorman uses the word "movement" self-consciously, however, noting that "the movement itself had no center, no directing or dominating group" (34). Thus, while Anderson cannot be considered "central" to such a dispersed movement, I will suggest that Faulkner and Hemingway treated him as such. Especially following the critical success of *Winesburg, Ohio*, Anderson's reputation was in the mid-1920s strongly tied to the emergent regionalist movement.

[14] For the most important study of nineteenth-century regionalist writing, particularly with regard for gender, see Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place.*

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[15] The gender dynamics of modernism are complex, but modernist studies have long recognized the movement's anxious aesthetic repudiation of the feminine. Male modernists often defined the movement against femininity, associating women with tradition, nostalgia, nature, or mass culture. In *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) for instance, Huyssen famously argued that modernism's opposition to mass culture was also an opposition to women, who, by virtue of being associated with mass culture, he called "modernism's other" (44-62). Similarly, in *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987-1994), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, identified modernists' anxious rejection of the assertive autonomy of the New Woman. For an overview, see Natalya Lusty's "Introduction: Modernism and Its Masculinities" in *Modernism and Masculinity,* ed. Natalia Lusty and Julian Murphet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-16.

[16] Jaffe, *Modernism*, 10. In the wake of Huyssen's influential *After the Great Divide*, scholars of modernism have reconceptualized the relation between modernist literature, high and low art, and the commercial market. Particularly with the rise of "new modernist studies" and its ethos of vertical "expansion," critics have shown that far from being opposed or indifferent to popular culture, modernist authors actually appropriated certain of its promotional discourses in order to set themselves and their work apart as part of an elite, minority culture of modernist art. Approaching modernism "less [as] a periodizing term or a bundle of formal concerns than [as] a historically circumscribed mode of presenting value and prescribing frameworks of expectations," these critics have argued that modernists used strategies of publicity, promotion, and celebrity to accumulate literary-cultural value and authority.

"You don't plant corn in geography": Faulkner's *Mosquitoes*

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[17] Ibid., 6.

[18] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (Routledge, 1989), 101. Also see Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms* (Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1985). Rather than "simply academic play or some infinite regress into textuality" (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 95), parody for Hutcheon is a "critical act of reassessment and acclimatization" (*A Theory of Parody*, 2)—that is, a strategy for dealing with the weight of the past that expresses "less a rejection of the methods those writers parodied than a situation in which they are still negotiable" (26).

[19] Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*, 3.

Already a great admirer of Anderson's, Faulkner early in 1925 used his acquaintance with Elizabeth Prall, recently become Mrs. Anderson, as an excuse for meeting the author himself in New Orleans.[20] The two spent enough time together in the French Quarter that biographer Joseph Blotner says Anderson was Faulkner's "strongest influence" at the time.[21] Faulkner praised Anderson in an April 1926 survey of his work for the *Dallas Morning News* and suggested that readers should identify him, above all, as a regionalist. Describing Anderson in terms of corn, he wrote that author should be considered not in an international but in a regional context: "Men grow from the soil, like corn and trees: I prefer to think of Mr. Anderson as a lusty corn field in his native Ohio."[22] Though he noted points of stunted growth in *Marching Men* and *Many Marriages*, Faulkner was generally effusive, calling Anderson a "genius," pronouncing "I'm a Fool" "the best short story in America," and gushing with praise for *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Horses and Men*.[23] Despite "our passion in America for giving our own productions some remote geographical significance," Faulkner reiterated, Anderson should continue to be taken as a representative of American regionalism: "To blame this man on the Russians! Or anybody else.... He is American, and more than that, a middle westerner, of the soil: he is as typical of Ohio in his own way as Harding was in his. A field of corn with a story to tell and a tongue to tell it with."[24]

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[20] Blotner, *Faulkner*, 121-22.

[21] Ibid., 134.

[22] William Faulkner, "Sherwood Anderson" in *Faulkner: New Orleans Sketches*, ed. Carvel Collins (New York: Random House, 1958), 132-3.

[23] Ibid., 133, 136.

[24] Ibid., 138.

Despite this commendation of Anderson and his regionalist approach in particular, Faulkner made his way to Paris that summer and embraced a different sort of artistic life, that of the modernist Left Bank. He wrote to his mother excitedly about the thrilling scene in Paris: "Went to a very modernist exhibition the other day, futurist and vorticist."[25] He described taking in Matisse, Picasso, Rodin, "as well as numberless young and struggling moderns," and said later of this time, "I knew of Joyce, and I would go to some effort to go to the café that he inhabited to look at him."[26] Here, in this distinctly modernist context, Faulkner began work on a piece he called "Mosquito."[27] Though he had recently praised Anderson and his regionalist mode, Faulkner turned abruptly to parody and mockery of his former mentor in what critics would later call "a frontal assault on Anderson."[28] In this novel, which eventually became *Mosquitoes*, Faulkner created a parodic double of Anderson named Dawson Fairchild, a character reproducing in exaggerated form the older author's appearance, mannerisms, philosophies, and even some of his actual conversation.[29] As critics have noted, "the identification of Dawson Fairchild as Sherwood Anderson is clear beyond doubt," and contemporary readers would have recognized an "unmistakable, full-length portrait of Sherwood Anderson."[30] Through the parodic figure of Dawson Fairchild, Faulkner attempted not only to distance himself from the past of Anderson's influence but also, by positioning Anderson as a synecdoche for regionalism writ large, to signal his own place within the elite, masculine culture of modernism by contrast with the passé and feminine regionalism. Yet even as it constructs an opposition between modernism and regionalism for the purpose of modernist self-promotion, Faulkner's novel itself seems to undermine this binary. Embodying what Hutcheon calls the "doubly coded" politics of parody, *Mosquitoes*' apparent rejection of regionalism might ultimately be understood less as a repudiation and more as a renegotiation.

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[25] William Faulkner, *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Random House, 1977), 11.

[26] Ibid. Also see Blotner, *Faulkner*, 160.

[27] Blotner, *Faulkner*, 161-2.

[28] Singal, *William Faulkner*, 85.

[29] As Martin Kreiswirth has shown, several specific phrases of Anderson's appear nearly verbatim in *Mosquitoes* (*William Faulkner: The Making of a Novelist* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983], 92-4).

Part satirical *roman à clef* and part "novel of ideas" in the vein of Huxley's *Crome Yellow*, *Mosquitoes* is structured by a simple situation: a group of intellectuals, artists, and socialites take a yacht cruise on Lake Pontchartrain.[31] Stranded on a sandbar for much of the novel, these characters have an abundance of time for long conversations and debates that buzz like the lake's mosquitoes. The narrator frequently expresses the novel's key theme, the inanity of pointless conversation: "talk, talk, talk: the utter and heartbreaking stupidity of words. It seemed endless, as though it might go on forever. Ideas, thoughts, became mere sounds to be bandied about until they were dead."[32] Dawson Fairchild, described as "an example of profuse verbalization," is one of the most talkative members of this group.[33] A fumbling, self-important, middle-aged writer from Indiana likened to "a benevolent walrus," Fairchild embodies a naively sentimental attitude toward literature.[34] His very name, which contains both "son" and "child," hints at immaturity; as he puts it himself, he has "a childlike faith in the efficacy of words, you see, a kind of belief that circumstance somehow will invest the veriest platitude with magic."[35] Fairchild also embodies the contemporary regionalist movement. A thoroughgoing Midwesterner, Fairchild articulates his approach to fiction most fully in the observation that "you can't grow corn without something to plant it in."[36] Literature must be rooted in the regional particularities of a specific place, argues Fairchild, recalling Faulkner's earlier description of Anderson as "a lusty corn field in his native Ohio."[37] Characterizing Fairchild as a chatty, naïve, and sentimental regionalist, Faulkner associates the character tacitly with an "imaginary male femininity," excluding him from the masculine "high" artistic realm of modernism.[38]

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[30] Millgate, *Achievement*, 68. See also Putzel, *Genius*, 78. Critics agree that Dawson Fairchild is essentially a direct stand-in for Anderson.

[31] Blotner, *Faulkner*, 182. Blotner notes that "one of the novels…which Faulkner apparently read [before writing *Mosquitoes*] was Aldous Huxley's *Chrome Yellow*" (182).

[32] William Faulkner, *Mosquitoes* (Liveright, 2011), 194.

[33] Millgate, *Achievement*, 72.

To sharpen this feminized characterization of Fairchild, Faulkner contrasts the masculine Mark Gordon, his "archetypal artist."[39] While Fairchild is passive, emotional, and exceedingly talkative, Gordon is active, muscular, and virile. Indeed, the most striking feature about Gordon is "his unmistakable masculinity," Daniel Joseph Singal notes, especially "in comparison with the flabby Fairchild."[40] Another in "that line of Faulkner protagonists…who represent idealized self-projections," Gordon also signifies "the creative writer [Faulkner] would like to become"—

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[34] Faulkner, *Mosquitoes*, 31.

[35] Ibid., 262.

[36] Ibid., 191.

[37] Faulkner, "Sherwood Anderson," 132.

[38] Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 45.

[39] Blotner, *Faulkner*, 183.

[40] Singal, *William Faulkner*, 89.

or, perhaps more accurately, the modernist artist he would like the authorial tag "William Faulkner" to signify.[41] Emblematic of the "prototype modernist artist," Gordon has been described as a Faulkner's Stephen Dedalus, a figure whose values and attitudes reflect "thorough immersion in the Modernist sensibility."[42] Committed to his artistic "work," Gordon only attends the yacht cruise because of his irresistible desire for the host's young niece, Pat.[43] Gordon needs desperately to possess and dominate abstract femininity, a desire expressed not only in his attraction to Pat, who he finds "sexless" and "pure" in her sexual immaturity, but also in his artistic masterpiece, a marble statue of a woman's torso (made of marble "because they gave yet to discover some way to make it unpure"), an idealization of the female form that Pat notices is "like me."[44] But his need to possess "pure" abstract femininity is rivaled by his harsh denigration of actual women, clear in his description of his sculpture as "my feminine ideal: a virgin with no legs to leave me, no arms to hold me, no head to talk to me."[45] Thus in his artistic apotheosis of abstract feminine “purity,” Gordon conjures up actual lived femininity as a subordinate “other” against which the “male mystique” in modernist cultural production can be defined.[46]

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[41] Ibid. Bleikasten, *Most Splendid Failure*, 32.

[42] Singal, *William Faulkner*, 88-9. Bleikasten has suggested a comparison between Gordon and Stephen Dedalus (28), as has Cleanth Brooks ("Faulkner's Mosquitoes," *The Georgia Review* 31, no. 1 [Spring 1977]: 217).

[43] Gordon repeatedly refers to his artistic endeavors as "work" (24, 45, 46). This detail is relevant to the discussion of modernist "difficulty" below.

[44] Faulkner, *Mosquitoes*, 18, 348, 21. Though Pat is eighteen years old, her unusual sexual immaturity is a focal point of the novel, and Gordon thinks of her as having a "boy's body…sexless, yet somehow vaguely troubling. Perhaps like a calf or a colt" (21).

[45] Ibid., 23.

But this opposition between Gordon’s masculine modernist high art and his misogynistic notion of the low reality of actual women is mapped onto the novel’s continuous contrast of Gordon and Fairchild, structuring regionalism’s relation to modernism as the feminine “other,” “the distortion or betrayal of that [modernist] ideal.”[47] By juxtaposing the regionalist Fairchild and the modernist Gordon, in other words, Faulkner builds into *Mosquitoes* a latent opposition between a feminized regionalism and a masculine modernism. This becomes particularly clear in the novel’s lengthy attacks on Fairchild’s regionalist mode itself as sentimental, provincial, and unchallenging—that is, as feminine and therefore *un*-modernist—moments in which Faulkner clearly allies himself strongly with the values and attitudes of modernism as elite, masculine, high art. Through the novel’s two sharpest literary-critic characters, Julius Kauffman and his sister Eva Wiseman, Faulkner takes Fairchild’s regionalism to task, and in these characters’ “estimate of what is right and wrong with the literary work of Dawson Fairchild,” Cleanth Brooks argues, the reader is meant to glimpse “Faulkner's own 1926 estimate of the worth of Sherwood Anderson.”[48]

As with Fairchild, Eva Wiseman’s name is instructive—suggesting that she is an “eve,” a prototypical woman, yet also “wise” like a “man,” and thus qualified to pass literary judgment. Indeed, she is identified almost exclusively by her surname, as Mrs. Wiseman, as if to emphasize the sense in which she is represents a “wise man” and to understate her status a woman. The source of Fairchild’s “bewilderment,” she says, is his “belief that the function of creating art depends upon geography."[49] Despite Fairchild's claim that "you can't grow corn without something to plant it in," Mrs. Wiseman counters this commitment to localism with a modernist appeal to cosmopolitanism: "But you don't plant corn in geography: you plant it in soil. It not only does not matter where that soil is, you can even move the soil from one place to another—around the world if you like—and it will still grow corn."[50] Connecting regionalist writing with an inherent sentimentality, Mrs. Wiseman claims that Fairchild only "clings to his conviction" of local particularity because it is a comforting illusion, "like a belief in immortality."[51] For proper modernist writing, Mrs. Wiseman argues, local details matter only to the extent that they can be delocalized, universalized, so that "[no] matter where that soil is…it will still grow corn."[52] In this critique of his mentor's regional approach, Faulkner thus insists that the "local materials" of regionalism are useful "*only* when they [are] set in reference to a larger context and given universal symbolic meaning."[53] While regionalism represents merely feminine sentimentalism, Mrs. Wiseman seems to suggest, a modernist writer does not "cling" to a certain region's particularities but expresses instead a sort of practical, masculine cosmopolitanism.

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[46] Ibid,, 348. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 60.

[47] Ibid., 32.

[48] Brooks, “Faulkner’s Mosquitoes,” 225.

In another scene, Julius (identified, in contrast, almost exclusively by his first name) and Mrs. Wiseman diagnose Fairchild's "fumbling" writing as a product of his narrow-minded provincialism. Characterizing this provincialism as a sort of literary domesticity, they draw on the gendered rhetoric of "separate spheres" to mark Fairchild's work as "minor."[54] Mrs. Wiseman suggests "that having been born an American of a provincial midwestern lower middle class family, [Fairchild] has inherited all the lower middle class's awe of Education with a capital E."[55] Not only is Fairchild anxious about the hovering ghosts of the "major" American literary tradition, Julius adds, but he also "lacks…a standard of literature that is international."[56] Furthermore, he argues, the "details" of regional writing are not really even local in the first place: "Life everywhere is the same, you know. Manners of living it may be different…but man's old compulsions…they do not change. Details don't matter, details only entertain us."[57] With his limited, provincial attitude, Fairchild lacks the ability to delocalize his work such that that it can be considered "major" or "high" art, Julius argues, to give it the universal significance of Literature with a capital L that will allow it to "become universal and timeless despite him."[58] Reaffirming Mrs. Wiseman's claim that it "does not matter where that soil is," Julius concludes that the truly literary is universal, and that the local particularities contained in regional writing are insignificant "details" and "trivialities."[59]

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[49] Faulkner, *Mosquitoes*, 191.

[50] Ibid., 191. On modernism and cosmopolitanism, see Janet Lyon "Cosmopolitanism and Modernism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, eds. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 387-412.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Singal, *William Faulkner*, 85. All quotations as originally printed.

Julius also pushes the critique of regionalism as feminine and "minor" a step further. Fairchild's "clinging spiritually to one little spot of the earth's surface" is not just sentimentalism and provincialism but also a method that shirks the manly labor of literary production. In

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[54] On regionalism's complex relation to the ideology of "separate spheres," see Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 13-7.

[55] Faulkner, *Mosquitoes*, 253.

[56] Ibid., 254.

[57] Ibid., 255.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., 191.

Fairchild's regionalist approach, he argues, "so much of his labor is performed for him. Details of dress and habit and speech which entail no hardship in the assimilation and which, piled one on another, become quite as imposing as any single startling stroke of originality, as trivialities in quantities will."[60] As a replacement for real "originality," Julius claims, regionalism constitutes a mere accumulation of local details or "trivialities in quantities," a method that, crucially, "entail[s] no hardship." For literary modernists and their critics, Leonard Diepeveen has argued, "difficulty" became not only "the most noted characteristic of what became the canonical texts of high modernism," but also "the necessary condition for canonization."[61] Indeed, more than just an incidental feature of the modernist text, this overtly masculine sense of literature as "difficult," as produced and consumed with manly labor, was "seen as being central to art's direction."[62] Furthermore, because "modern difficulty made big claims for itself," the notion of "difficulty" also played a central role in the movement's complex promotional logic, serving as a sort of signature, or "imprimatur," through which authors could publicly signal their place within the elite culture of modernism.[63] Thus, in characterizing regionalism as the lazy compiling of local "details," Julius suggests that regionalist writing is a shortcut literary mode that "entail[s] no hardship," bypassing the manly labor necessary for modernist cultural production. Depicted as merely "trivialities in quantities," then, *Mosquitoes* depicts regionalism as a feminine method that sidesteps the masculine "difficulty" essential to the ontology of modernism.

Yet even as Faulkner uses the contrast between highbrow modernism and hidebound regionalism to suggest his own place within the contemporary culture of modernism, the novel also in many ways undermines this very opposition. Reintegrating the standard orthodox reading of *Mosquitoes* as an apprentice "novel of ideas" reveals the text's parody of Fairchild as less of an outright rejection of regionalism and more as an attempt to refine, redirect, and adapt it as a potential strategy for articulating modernist goals, attitudes, and values. As Ted Atkinson summarizes, the "general consensus" among critics has been that, by holding up a variety of aesthetic positions for ridicule, *Mosquitoes* serves as the fictional space for "a budding novelist to work through thoughts on various topics of interest, particularly the nature of art and the role of the artist in modern society."[64] Indeed, many of the novel's characters function as little more than "rhetorical devices through which the novel attempts to articulate a coherent aesthetic vision," and even Faulkner himself famously makes a cameo appearance as a "crazy" stranger.[65] *Mosquitoes* was written, as Lothar Hönnighausen has shown, at a time in which Faulkner was experimenting widely with authorial roles and masks, including an analogous send-up of the Left Bank artist community in an aborted novel called *Elmer*.[66] From this angle, then, *Mosquitoes*' parody of regionalism not only constitutes an attempt to signal Faulkner's authorial place within elite modernist culture, but also part of what John Earle Bassett characterizes as "Faulkner's conscious attempt to develop a satisfactory aesthetic position."[67] Reading Faulkner's parody as both a repudiation and renegotiation of regionalism helps explain why, despite harshly mocking Anderson and regionalism in *Mosquitoes*, in his next novel, *Sartoris*, Faulkner would follow Anderson's advice and take up a regionalist approach, creating for the first time the fictional Mississippi county, Yoknapatawpha, where all but three of his subsequent novels would take place.[68] Dedicating the book to Anderson, Faulkner would later write that "Beginning with *Sartoris* I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about."[69] As Blotner puts it, Faulkner discovered that "Sherwood Anderson had been right."[70] Indeed, twenty-seven years and thirteen novels later, Faulkner would publish "A Note on Sherwood Anderson," calling the latter "a giant in an earth populated to a great—too great—extent by

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xi, 214.

[62] Ibid., xi.

[63] Ibid., xi. On modernism's promotional "imprimaturs," see Jaffe, *Modernism*.

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[64] Ted Atkinson, "Aesthetic Ideology in Faulkner's Mosquitoes: A Cultural History," *Faulkner Journal* 17, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 16.

[65] Ibid. Faulkner appears as "a sunburned and kind of shabbily dressed" man, who once "said some funny things" to Jenny. "Faulkner?" replies Pat, "Never heard of him" (149-50).

[66] See Lothar Hönnighausen, *Faulkner: Masks and Metaphors* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997). A prospective novel begun in the summer of 1925 and later abandoned, *Elmer* was the tale of a blundering young expatriate in Paris who seeks to become a famous artist. As opposed to the modernist promotional work accomplished by his parody of Anderson in *Mosquitoes,* Millgate argues that Elmer was dropped because the material with which Faulkner was "attempting to work seems to have been too close to him in time, and too nearly autobiographical" (*Achievement*, 22). Faulkner later extracted a short story, "A Portrait of Elmer," from the novel's fragments and sought unsuccessfully to publish it. Blotner

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reprints "A Portrait of Elmer" in *Uncollected Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: Vintage, 1997), 610-41.

[67] John Earle Bassett, "Faulkner's 'Mosquitoes': Toward a Self-Image of the Artist," *The Southern Literary Journal* 12, no. 2 (Spring, 1980): 50.

[68] *Pylon*, *The Wild Palms*, and *A Fable* are set elsewhere.

[69] William Faulkner, "Interview with Jean Stein Vanden Heuvel," *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962*. eds. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), 255. Faulkner dedicated *Sartoris*, "To Sherwood Anderson through whose kindness I was first published, with a belief that this book will give him no reason to regret that fact."

[70] Blotner, *Faulkner*, 192.

pygmies."[71] Anderson had actually taught him something akin to Dawson Fairchild's regionalist principle that "you can't grow corn without something to plant it in." As opposed to the arguments of Julius and Mrs. Wiseman that it "does not matter where the soil is," that "[l]ife everywhere is the same," and that "[d]etails don't matter, details only entertain us," Faulkner would recall Anderson's words: "You're a country boy; all you know is that little patch up there in Mississippi where you started from. But that's all right too. It's America too…as little and unknown as it is.'"[72] In *Sartoris*, as Faulkner himself seems to have acknowledged, the opposition developed in *Mosquitoes* between regionalism and modernism had been renegotiated and overcome; only after engaging regionalism via parody, in what Hutcheon calls "a critical act of reassessment," could Faulkner create his own modernist regionalism.[73]

"The smarty tinge": Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring*

Three years before Faulkner met Anderson in the French Quarter of New Orleans, the twenty-one-year-old journalist and aspiring writer Ernest Hemingway encountered Anderson amid the afterglow of the Chicago Renaissance in early 1921.[74] Introduced to the older author by mutual friends, Hemingway briefly became a dedicated protégé to Anderson, whose career was reaching its pinnacle.[75] During their time together, Anderson not only introduced Hemingway to the American literary scene, but also gave feedback on some of Hemingway's early work, provided him with a clearer idea about how to lead a professional literary life, and showed him what it meant to be a writer.[76] He also convinced Hemingway to move to Paris and embrace its famous modernist expatriate literary scene, paving the way by providing letters of introduction to such prominent figures as Sylvia Beach, Lewis Galantière, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein.[77] In return, Hemingway, like Faulkner, lauded the work of his mentor. In his March 1925 review of Anderson's *A Story-Teller's Story*, for instance, Hemingway rejected comparisons to *The Education of Henry Adams*, writing that *A Story-Teller's Story* "is such a good book that it doesn't need to be coupled in the reviewing with Henry Adams or anybody else."[78] The book contained, Hemingway wrote, "as good writing [sic] as Sherwood Anderson has done and that means considerably better than any other American writer has done."[79]

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[71] William Faulkner, "A Note on Sherwood Anderson," in *Essays, Speeches, & Public Letters*, ed. James B. Meriwether (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 10.

[72] Ibid., 8.

[73] Hutcheon., A *Theory of Parody*, 2

[74] Reynolds, Michael S. *The Young Hemingway* (New York: Norton, 1986), 181-2.

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[75] According to Reynolds, the two met through Y. Kenley Smith, the older brother of Hemingway's longtime friend, Bill Smith. The elder Smith brother worked for the Critchfield advertising firm where Anderson wrote copy (*Young Hemingway*, 181-2). Anderson's masterwork, *Winesburg, Ohio*, had been published in 1919, and he would win the first annual *Dial* Award in December of 1921.

[76] On Anderson's professional guidance of Hemingway, see Reynolds, *Young Hemingway*, 183-5.

[77] On these letters of introduction from Anderson, see Walter B. Rideout, *Sherwood Anderson: A Writer in America, Vol. 1* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 444, and Reynolds, *Young Hemingway*, 253.

[78] Ernest Hemingway, "A Lost Book Review: A Story-Teller's Story," ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli, *Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual* (1969): 72.

[79] Ibid., 73.

Despite this high praise and the fact of Anderson's helpful mentorship, the heavy shadow of his "literary father" had already begun to weigh on the ambitious young Hemingway.[80] Nearly all of Hemingway's early literary accomplishments were tainted for him by the suggestion of Anderson's influence. A compulsive reader of reviews, Hemingway quickly noticed the infuriating abundance of comparisons to Anderson in the reviews of his first two books: the *New Republic* found "something of Sherwood Anderson" in Hemingway's work; the *Saturday Review of Literature* commented on the "obvious traces of Sherwood Anderson in Mr. Hemingway;" and the *New York Herald Tribune* considered Hemingway "very strongly under the influence of Sherwood Anderson."[81] In a review in the *Dial*, Edmund Wilson even suggested that "Mr. Anderson and Mr. Hemingway may now be said to form a school by themselves."[82] Calling attention to similarities between the authors in style and subject matter, these early reviewers never explicitly mentioned "regionalism" as a common denominator, but, as Hemingway knew, association with Anderson necessarily carried that implication. In a letter to Ezra Pound, Hemingway asked in frustration, "Burton Rascoe said *In Our Time* showed the influences of who the hell do you think? …Sherwood Anderson!"[83] Tired of being considered merely a derivative apprentice to Anderson, Hemingway searched for a way to break from his mentor’s influence and ties to regionalism, a way to ally himself instead with his newfound expatriate literary group in Paris.

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[80] Reynolds, *Young Hemingway*, 212.

[81] As quoted in Reynolds, *Hemingway: The Paris Years* (New York: Norton, 1989), 328-29. Hemingway subscribed to a New York "clipping service" for much of his life, and Reynolds notes that he "read all the reviews his clipping service sent him" (*Hemingway: The Final Years* [New York: Norton, 1999], 259).

[82] Edmund Wilson, "Mr Hemingway's Dry Points," *The Dial* 77 (October 1924): 340-41.

[83] Ernest Hemingway, *The Letters Volume 2*, 135. Burton Rascoe had compared Hemingway to Anderson in his 15 June 1924 column, "A Bookman's Day Book," in the *New York Herald Tribune* (as quoted in *Letters Volume 2*, 136, fn. 6).

Hemingway found his target in Anderson’s first and only popular success, *Dark Laughter*.[84] A decidedly regionalist novel, *Dark Laughter*, as Irving Howe put it, was an expression of “[Anderson’s] disillusionment with urban Bohemia and his wish to return to the apparently simpler life of the town.”[85] Rife with long interior monologues and associative flashbacks, the circuitous plot of *Dark Laughter* follows a former Chicago newspaper man, Bruce Dudley, who has suddenly set out on a “voyage of discovery,” a trip “back to the country,” abandoning the city, his job, and his wife to take up a job as factory worker in a small Indiana town on the Ohio River.[86] Working alongside Sponge Martin, a poor white craftsman now reduced to factory-work, Bruce mourns the prelapsarian “lost youth” of America. But Anderson suggests that a more “primitive” masculinity has actually survived modernity’s devastation in the country’s regional spaces and particularly in the black servants and deckhands whose folk songs and “dark laughter” pepper the narrative. By the novel’s end, the virile Bruce has an affair and runs away with Aline, the wife of the factory-owner, Fred Grey, whom the First World War left irreversibly emasculated. Connecting lost primitive values with the regional space, *Dark Laughter* depicts a modern (white) masculinity driven to crisis by urban life contrasted against the choral backdrop of a caricatured African American culture. As Anderson himself described it, the novel was supposed to depict “the neuroticism, the hurry and self-conscious of modern life, and back of it the easy, strange laughter of the blacks."[87] *Dark Laughter* was widely praised, with positive reviews appearing in such influential periodicals as the *Saturday Review of Literature*, the *New Republic*, and *The American Mercury*, but Hemingway was unimpressed.[88] He wrote bitterly to Pound in mid-November, 1925, that "Sherwood Anderson has written about 350 pages of perfect diahorreah [sic] or however it is spelled and become a best seller. Critics unite in saying nothing finer has been written since the Treaty of Versailles."[89] Though he expressed disdain for the novel's popular success and its praise among middlebrow critics, Hemingway may have been a little jealous, particularly regarding the marketing attention paid to Anderson by their mutual publisher. He wrote of Boni & Liveright's "splurge" on *Dark Laughter*: "they are certainly putting Sherwood over big and will evidently make the boy a lot of money."[90] Perhaps it was this mixture of jealousy and contempt for *Dark Laughter*'s success, coupled with the continuing urge to break from his mentor's influence, which finally drove Hemingway to a tipping point. By the next month he would write *The Torrents of Spring: A Romantic Novel in Honor of the Passing of a Great Race*, a book intended, as he told Pound, "to destroy Sherwood and various others."[91] Anderson, he bragged, would never be able to write again.[92]

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[84] *Dark Laughter* was published on 15 September 1925 and by December was in its second printing, having sold twenty-two thousand copies (Rideout, *Sherwood Anderson*, 595-7).

[85] Irving Howe*, Sherwood Anderson: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1951), 205.

[86] Sherwood Anderson, *Dark Laughter* (Liveright, 1960), 61.

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[87] Ibid., 142.

[88] On the details of *Dark Laughter*'s critical reception, which was generally positive, see Rideout, *Sherwood Anderson*, 595-6. Among the numerous positive reviews were H. L. Mencken's review in *The American Mercury*, Henry Seidel Canby's in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, and Robert Morss Lovett's in the *New Republic*. Negative reviews included V.F. Calverton's in the Baltimore *Evening Sun* and Fanny Butcher's in the Chicago *Tribune*.

[89] Hemingway, *Letters Volume 2*, 415.

[90] Ibid., 408. A footnote to this letter adds that "*Dark Laughter* was released with considerably more publicity than EH's *IOT* [*In Our Time*] and was Liveright's best seller for the year" (409).

During a ten-day span in late November of 1925, Hemingway composed his satirical send-up of *Dark Laughter*, which had been published only a few weeks earlier.[93] Unlike Faulkner's somewhat mediated parody of Anderson through a stand-in regionalist figure, *Torrents* was a direct mocking recreation of Anderson's regionalist mode in *Dark Laughter*. In an excised preface to *Torrents*, Hemingway sarcastically explained: "[because] many critics commenting on a book of stories written by myself and published last fall remarked on how much whatever excellencies they detected in these stories resembled the excellencies of Mr. Sherwood Anderson…I resolved to write henceforth exclusively in the manner of Mr. Anderson."[94] The result was an absurd narrative following two characters, Yogi Johnson and Scripps O'Neill, rough counterparts to *Dark Laughter*'s Bruce Dudley and Sponge Martin, as they each had a series of mystical experiences and personal epiphanies, experiencing "the vague, inarticulate longings and pointless questions Anderson's men always had."[95] Indeed, Yogi's sentimental and absurdly-detailed musings on the American landscape show Hemingway mockingly mimicking Anderson's regionalist style:

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[91] Ibid., 422. In his letter to Pound, Hemingway explains more specifically that the book "shows up all the fakes of Anderson, Gertrude [Stein], [Sinclair] Lewis, [Willa] Cather, Hergo [Joseph Hergesheimer] and all the rest of the pretensious [sic] faking bastards" (422).

[92] Ibid.

[93] Hemingway began *Torrents* on 23 November 1925 and finished on 2 December 1925 (Reynolds, *The Paris Years*, 333-8). *Dark Laughter* had been published on 15 September 1925 (Rideout, *Sherwood Anderson*, 595).

[94] Ernest Hemingway, "The 'Author's Preface' for *The Torrents of Spring,*" *Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual* (1977): 112. Part of this comment is quoted in my article's title.

[95] Reynolds, *The Paris Years*, 334

> On his right was a field that stretched to Little Traverse Bay. The blue of the bay opening out into the big Lake Michigan. Across the bay the pine hills behind Harbor Springs. Beyond, where you could not see it, Cross Village, where the Indians lived. Even further, the Straits of Mackinac….'Way 'way beyond, and, in the other direction, at the foot of the lake was Chicago….Near there Gary, Indiana, where there were the great steel mills. Near there Hammond, Indiana. Near there Michigan City, Indiana. Further beyond would be Indianapolis, Indiana….Further down there would be Cincinatti, Ohio. Beyond that, Vicksburg Mississippi. Beyond that, Waco Texas. Ah! There was a grand sweep to this America of ours.[96]

With romantic notions like these about the "grand sweep" of the American landscape, Hemingway derided what he saw as the pastoral tendency of Anderson's regionalist style and its focus on "people on the land."[97] Scripps, similarly, expresses bewilderment at Henry James's emigration to England: "For what had he left America? Weren't his roots here?"[98] Creating Andersonian characters preoccupied with outdated pastoral notions of regionalist "roots" rather than chic modernist cosmopolitanism, Hemingway called out what he saw as regionalism's tired and shallow sentimentalism.

Beyond its mocking recreation of a regionalist style, Hemingway's parodic critique of *Dark Laughter* was centered on Anderson's depiction of modern masculinity as redeemed only by the regional space or by connection to a more "primitive" racial otherness. Like *Dark Laughter*'s Bruce Dudley, Scripps O'Neill sets out on a "voyage of discovery," leaving his wife and daughter for the small waterside town of Petoskey, Michigan.[99] Also like Bruce, Scripps here finds a new woman as quickly as he had discarded the previous one, the regional space mysteriously liberating his formerly repressed masculine desire. He abruptly marries an elderly British waitress at the local beanery, but by the close of the story he abandons her, too, for a younger (and more well-read) beanery waitress. Despite a notable absence of authentic blackness in his own work, Hemingway also derides the way Anderson's regionalist mode appropriates the New Negro "vogue" via the character of Yogi, who briefly allows himself to be mistaken as a Native American in order to join a pool club: "He felt touched. Here among the simple aborigines, the only real Americans, he had found that true communion."[100] Given a "keepsake" of wampum, Yogi projects his own sentimental notions onto this symbol of racial otherness, thinking, "What a part that string of wampum had played in this America of ours," until a rather pragmatic Native American tells him, "They have no intrinsic value really….Their value is really a sentimental one."[101] Yogi later wanders to the beanery, where he again seeks to capture "primitive" racial otherness by declaring his love for the naked Indian woman he finds there.

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[96] Ernest Hemingway, *The Torrents of Spring: A Romantic Novel in Honor of the Passing of a Great Race* (New York: Scribner, 1998), 53.

[97] Ibid., 43.

[98] Ibid., 38.

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[99] Anderson, *Dark Laughter*, 61.

[100] Hemingway, *Torrents*, 57. The most important and influential text on racial representation in Hemingway's fiction is Toni Morrison's chapter, "Disturbing nurses and the kindness of sharks" (*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* [New York: Vintage, 1992], 61-91). Morrison argues that Hemingway's fiction reinforces racist stereotypes. For a more recent "revisionist" account on this topic, see Amy L. Strong's *Race and Identity in Hemingway's Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[101] Ibid., 63.

When she leaves, he follows, roused by "some vague primordial feeling," stripping off his clothes as he goes, seeking a primal state of masculinity supposedly lost in the modern age.[102]

With his farcical tale, Hemingway mockingly reproduced many of Anderson's motifs and thematic patterns, particularly his mournfulness about the loss of authentic white masculinity and the romantic notion that this authenticity can be found outside the cities and among marginalized racial groups. Through the character of Yogi, who "was not haunted by the men he had killed," Hemingway also seems to suggest "that fellow Anderson" is the one who has lost his masculinity.[103] In this feminization of Anderson, *Torrents*, like *Mosquitoes*, reveals an underlying tension between two competing literary scenes, the expatriate modernism of Paris and the American regionalism for which Anderson stood as a convenient synecdoche. While critics have noted *Torrents*' mockery of common Andersonian regionalist quirks, they have thus far overlooked aspects of the text that reveal this key tension between modernism and regionalism. In *Torrents*, Hemingway provides a series of lengthy notes to the reader that allow him to step away from the parodic narrative and paint a picture of himself in contrast as a participant in the masculine modernism of the Left Bank. He also stages the opposition between this expat modernism and feminized regionalist writing as a conflict between Scripps's wives, sharply contrasting the high culture of modernism with the supposedly "minor" mode of American regionalism.

Throughout *Torrents*, Hemingway often departs from the narrative of Yogi and Scripps in a series of lengthy "notes to the reader" that explain bits of the narrative ("In case the reader is becoming confused, we are now up to where the story opened"), comment on the writing process

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[102] Ibid., 79.

[103] Ibid., 53-6.

("It is very hard to write this way, beginning things backward"), and even digress on Hemingway's authorial context ("It was at this point in the story, reader, that Mr. F. Scott Fitzgerald came to our home one afternoon").[104] In several of these notes, as in the latter, Hemingway refers conspicuously (and somewhat flippantly) to his modernist friends and their bohemian lives in Paris. At one point he even encourages the reader to visit him in Paris, remarking, "I am always at the Café du Dôme any afternoon, talking about Art with Harold Stearns and Sinclair Lewis."[105] With insider references like these interrupting his parody of Anderson, Hemingway emphasizes his intimate connection to the bohemian expat community in Paris, a connection particularly important for signaling one's involvement in the culture of modernism.[106] Painting a picture of a modernist "boy's club," Hemingway mentions, among others, "Mr. H. G. Wells, who has been visiting our home," John Dos Passos, with whom he goes out to lunch, and Ford Madox Ford, who tells the best literary anecdotes.[107] While these references are clearly tongue-in-cheek, nonetheless, by mentioning prominent Left Bank literary figures and the Montparnasse cafés they frequented, Hemingway's notes to the reader continue to build a sense of his embeddedness in the modernist literary community, promoting his own insider status and intimate relations with the modernist scene in Paris.

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[104] Ibid., 46, 47, 76.

[105] Ibid., 47. Hemingway references here a recent attack by Lewis on the American expats in Paris. In an October 1925 article in *The American Mercury*, Sinclair Lewis had ridiculed the Americans artists of the Left Bank, and Harold Stearns had responded in kind. For a more extended treatment of this fight, see Mark Orwoll, "A Battle in Bohemia: The Sinclair Lewis-Harold Stearns Feud," *Lost Generation Journal* 9 (1989): 2-5.

[106] Janet Lyon has argued, for instance, that "the workshops, art centers, salons, moveable feasts, hostess parties, [etc.] where modernists gathered were inseparable from the transmission and production of modernist aesthetics" ("Gadže Modernism," in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, eds. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel [Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2005], 198). For a broader discussion of modernist sociology's reaction to the alienating forces of modernity, see also Lyon's "Sociability and the Metropole: Modernism's Bohemian Salons," in *ELH* 76, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 687-711.

In several of these "notes to the reader," Hemingway also signals his modernist status by asserting the ease of writing like Anderson. At the close of chapter twelve, he writes: "Author's Note to the Reader: In case it may have any historical value, I am glad to say that I wrote the foregoing chapter in two hours directly on the typewriter."[108] As compared to his own more "difficult" avant-garde literary production, later detailed in *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway implies that Anderson's simplistic writing can be reproduced in mere hours.[109] Furthermore, he adds, the subsequent chapter was also written that afternoon, "after deciding not to go to the Café du Dome and talk about art."[110] For Hemingway, the promotion of his work's "difficulty" was clearly linked to "the virile posture of high modernism," the belief that the production and consumption of modernist art was manly labor.[111] Hemingway continually asserted his work's machismo not only through its style and content but also by suggesting the physically laborious process of its production.[112] As opposed to a “minor” form of writing like regionalism, which could be reproduced without real “difficulty” and was therefore comparatively feminine, Hemingway suggests that the production of modernist art is hard work. Recalling the critique in *Mosquitoes* of regionalism as a shortcut method “which entail[s] no hardship,” Hemingway argues that recreating Anderson’s writing, and by metonymic extension, regionalist writing in general, is easy and consequently *un*-modernist.

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[107] Hemingway, *Torrents*, 68, 47.

[108] Ibid., 68.

[109] In *A Moveable Feast* (New York: Scribner, 1964), Hemingway recalls working at his writing for long hours in a cold apartment and going without food. See also contemporary letters to his critics, in which Hemingway claimed to have "worked like hell" on his writing (*Letters Volume 2*, 37, 166), and described "working so that you're too tired at night to think let alone write" (*Letters Volume. 2*, 75).

[110] Hemingway, *Torrents*, 68.

[111] Diepeveen, *Difficulties*, 164.

As a measure of just how well *Torrents* delivered its modernist self-promotional message of manly literary “difficulty” and intimate social connectedness, a review of the book in *Time* opened with this sentence:

> It seems that young Mr. Hemingway, who works like a nailer over his own writing, with extraordinarily promising results, was going about his business in Paris, lunching frequently with Scott Fitzgerald, Ford Madox Ford, John Dos Passos and even H. G. Wells, when a copy of *Black Laughter* [sic] by Sherwood Anderson reached him and caused him a bit of pain.”[113]

Evidently, just as much as a parody Anderson, *Torrents* also conveyed to readers an image of Hemingway himself working hard, “like a nailer,” over his writing while also “lunching frequently” with his connections in the modernist expat crowd. Yet even as the self-promotional posturing performed by these extra-narrative notes helped Hemingway position himself as a part of the expatriate modernist scene, the fictional narrative of *Torrents* also subtly juxtaposes this modernism with the American regionalism for which Anderson stands as a synecdoche. Fittingly for a text so concerned with expressing its author's modernist masculinity, this conflict is mapped onto the struggle between Scripps's new wives. Upon arrival at the Petoskey Beanery, Scripps abruptly marries the elderly British waitress, Diana, who is defined by her romantic regional background in the English Lake District. Finding his new wife's regional connection to "Wordsworth's country" compelling, he tells her, "I write stories. I had a story in the *Post* and two in *The Dial*."[114] But his infatuation with the regionalist character is short-lived, and he quickly becomes enamored by a younger waitress, Mandy, because of her apparent ties to the contemporary modernist literature. Much like Hemingway's own asides to the reader, Mandy tells personal literary anecdotes that reveal her connections to the modernist literary scene, including one about "a great friend of mine, [Ford Madox] Ford, you've heard me speak of him before" and one "about when Knut Hamsun was a streetcar conductor in Chicago."[115] The juxtaposition of these two waitresses throughout *Torrents* reveals a contrast between "Diana as an Anderson-like character who reads literary magazines voraciously as an attempt to 'hang onto' Scripps, [and] Mandy as an Ezra Pound or Gertrude Stein-like character who has the inside gossip on literary figures."[116] In Diana, Scripps had been attracted to a sort of sentimental regionalism, the "picturesque quality" of "her strange background," but now, with Mandy, he finds himself attracted to the elite modernist literary scene revealed in "interminable literary reminiscences" and "endless anecdotes."[117] If the foundational opposition of *Torrents* involves the contrast between the "minor," feminine regionalist mode parodied in the narrative and the elite, masculine modernist scene sketched in the author's asides to the reader, then this foremost opposition is clearly mapped onto Scripps's choice between Diana and Mandy respectively. Scripps's choice between Diana and Mandy thus ultimately represents a choice between the regionalism represented by Anderson and the modernism of Hemingway's new Parisian expat group.[118]

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[112] Questions of masculinity and gender have come to dominate scholarship on Hemingway in recent decades. An essential text in this respect is Thomas Strychacz, *Hemingway's Theaters of Masculinity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

[113] “Disrespectful,” *Time* (28 June 1926), 31.

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[114] Hemingway, *Torrents*, 19, 18.

[115] Ibid., 85, 86.

[116] David M. Earle, *Re-Covering Modernism: Pulps, Paperbacks, and the Prejudice of Form* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 31.

[117] Hemingway, *Torrents*, 37, 42.

Hemingway also puts the contrast between modernism and regionalism into a specific institutional context of literary criticism, feminizing regionalism through its association with the mass market. In an effort to "make him stay," Diana tries to mimic Mandy's literary pretensions by reading a host of middlebrow literary periodicals, such as *Century*, *Bookman*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, and the *New York Times* "Literary Section," even "learn[ing] editorials by John Farrar by heart."[119] But these periodicals cannot provide the kind of insight on the avant-garde literary scene illustrated in Mandy's personal anecdotes, as becomes clear when Diana attempts to get Scripps's attention by mentioning a prominent regionalist writer: "I've been reading a story by Ruth Suckow…. It was about a little girl in Iowa."[120] With Diana's gambit to reclaim Scripps through a reference to a female regionalist writer, Ruth Suckow, Hemingway slights regionalism as a genre concerned with nothing more significant than "a little girl in Iowa." Noting that the story "was about people on the land," Diana tries to remind Scripps of his regionally-based interest in her: “It reminded me a little of my own Lake Country.”[121] But Scripps is unmoved. Diana finally asks, “Scripps, dear, wouldn’t you like to come home?... There’s a wonderful editorial in [*American Mercury*] by Mencken.”[122] Here Diana presents a final appeal to her middlebrow literary institutional authorities by invoking H. L. Mencken, the critic to whom *Torrents* was sarcastically dedicated “IN ADMIRATION.”[123] Not only a sharp critic of the American expat group in Paris but also a major promoter of regionalist authors like Suckow, Mencken was a middlebrow tastemaker of the kind disdained by modernism, such that in his next novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway’s Jake Barnes laments that “So many young men get their likes and dislikes from Mencken”[124] Scripps thus signals a final break with Diana and with regionalism by replying harshly, “I don’t give a damn about Mencken any more.”[125] The novel’s dust jacket (*Figure 1*) itself highlights this final choice in the opposition between Mandy’s masculine modernism and Diana’s feminine regionalism. Looking like a young flapper with her bob and high-heels, Mandy, whose name appropriately contains the word “man,” stands to the left of Scripps, gesturing in the telling of an engrossing anecdote. The more matronly, elderly Diana, clutching her copy of *American Mercury* and holding Scripps' pet bird, stands to the right, totally forgotten.[126] Scripps, in the center, leans intently toward Mandy, hand on his chin, listening closely. The reader, Hemingway and his dust jacket both suggest, should do like Scripps and refuse to "give a damn" about regionalism anymore.

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[118] Critics have also noted that Scripps's relationship with Diana and Mandy roughly reflects Hemingway's relationship with his first two wives during the composition of *Torrents*. See Kenneth S. Lynn, *Hemingway* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 305; Dennis B. Ledden, "Self-Parody and Satirized Lovers in *The Torrents of Spring*," *Hemingway Review* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2015), 91-104; and Reynolds, *The Paris Years*, 335-7.

[119] Hemingway, *Torrents*, 43. Farrar was editor of *The Bookman* from 1921 to 1927.

[120] Ibid., 45.

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[121] Ibid., 45.

[122] Ibid., 83.

[123] The novel was dedicated: “To H. L. MENCKEN AND S. STANWOOD MENCKEN IN ADMIRATION.” S. Stanwood Menken, whose name Hemingway misspelled in his dedication, was a vice crusader and president of the National Security League, a right-wing political group.

[124] Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises,* 49. According to Earle, “Mencken saw…discovered and championed [Suckow] in *The Smart Set*” (32). Other prominent women writers promoted by critics like Mencken and associated with regionalism around this time included Willa Cather, Mary Austin, Ellen Glasgow, Zona Gale, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Edna Ferber, and Bess Streeter Aldrich.

[125] Hemingway, *Torrents*, 83.

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[126] Diana also holds a birdcage in this image. Early in chapter three, Scripps finds and somewhat mystically resuscitates a dead bird, who becomes his companion for much of the narrative. The fact that Scripps now ignores Diana as well as his pet bird on the dust jacket shows his engrossment with Mandy.

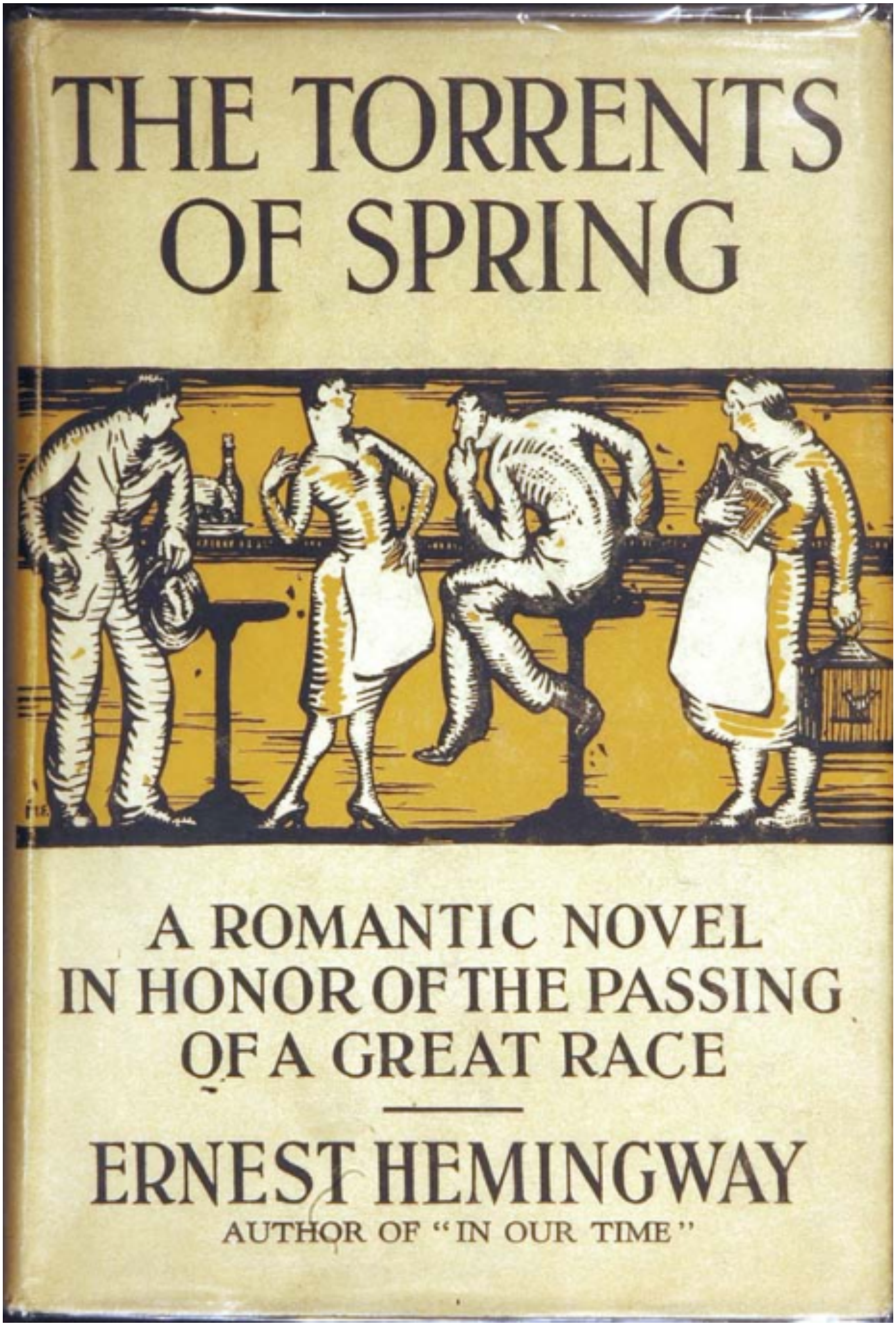
THE TORRENTS OF SPRING
A ROMANTIC NOVEL IN HONOR OF THE PASSING OF A GREAT RACE
ERNEST HEMINGWAY
AUTHOR OF "IN OUR TIME"

Figure 1: The first-edition dust jacket for Hemingway's The Torrents of Spring.

In May of 1926, the month of *Torrents*' publication, Hemingway wrote to Anderson with an explanation. The letter, which Anderson called "the most completely patronizing letter I had ever received," clarified that *Torrents* "is a joke and it isn't meant to be mean."[127] As serious writers, Hemingway said, he and Anderson had a duty not to "pull our punches" in critiquing each other's work.[128] "Please let me hear from you," he wrote in closing, "whether you're sore or not."[129] But Anderson was unwilling to reassure the irresolute Hemingway. In fact, his annoyed reply reveals a vague awareness of the modernist self-promotional posturing embodied by *Torrents*: "You sound like Uncle Ezra [Pound]…Damn it man you are so final—so patronizing. You always speak to me like a master to a pupil. It must be Paris—the literary life."[130] Anderson even thought the public might recognize the text's self-promotional qualities, for "[in] spite of all you say [*Torrents* has] got the smarty tinge."[131] *Torrents* is marked, Anderson asserts, by the "tinge" of Hemingway's promotion of himself as a member of the "smart set," the elite culture of expat modernism in Paris. More than just a mockery of his own work, Anderson saw *Torrents* for what it really was: an attempt by Hemingway to align himself publicly with the modernism of "Uncle Ezra."

Hemingway's modernist self-promotional ploy seems to have paid off, however. The "personality contest (Anderson vs. Hemingway)" of *Torrents*, Leonard Leff notes, "was catnip to the American book press of the 1920s," catnip bolstered by publicity blurbs like Ford Madox Ford's, which posited Hemingway as "the most promising American author in Paris."[132] As Anderson's career declined in the wake of *Torrents*, Hemingway's began its meteoric rise. With the publication of *The Sun Also Rises* that fall, Hemingway was widely identified as "undeniably one of the moderns."[133] Yet despite its self-promotional success, *Torrents*, like *Mosquitoes*, is somewhat ambiguous in its repudiation of regionalism. After all, if *Torrents* is meant to mock *Dark Laughter*'s sentimental lament for the loss of modern masculinity in the wake of the First World War, Hemingway's next novel reveals a certain hypocrisy: what theme is more central to Hemingway's next novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, a novel in which the veteran protagonist has literally lost his manhood? Furthermore, unlike Faulkner's indirect parody of Anderson through Fairchild, Hemingway's absurd short novel is utterly reliant on its target for significance and coherence, even more than most conventional parodies. *Torrents*' jumbled and clumsy narrative makes little sense as anything other than the setup for situations in which to make jokes about *Dark Laughter*. This is perhaps what the *New York Times* meant in calling the book "a somewhat specialized satire," and why the *Evening Post* felt the need to temper its assessment of the book as "delicious fun" with the caveat, "(always provided [readers] know Mr. Anderson's work)."[134] Likewise, Boni and Liveright's publicity director, Isador Schneider, had declined the book at least partly because “It seems to me to be too faithful to your subject.”[135] Even John Dos Passos, who had been opposed to the book from the start, later recalled telling Hemingway that “it wasn’t good enough to stand on its own feet as a parody.”[136] In assuring Liveright that the book “does not depend on Anderson for its appeal,” then, Hemingway may have overstated the case.[137] Indeed, probably the main reason *Torrents* has been so much forgotten, even within such a canonical *oeuvre* as Hemingway’s, is that *Dark Laughter* and Anderson’s writing in general (with the exception of *Winesburg, Ohio*) have fallen into relative obscurity.[138] Unable to stand independently, *Torrents* reads almost as a satirical companion to Anderson, a collection of jokes that would be more fitting as an appendix to *Dark Laughter* than between its own covers.

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[127] Sherwood Anderson, *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs: A Critical Edition*, ed. Ray Lewis White (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 463. Hemingway, *Letters Volume 2*, 82.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ibid., 83.

[130] As quoted in Reynolds, *Hemingway: The Homecoming* (New York: Norton, 1992), 42.

[131] Ibid., 43.

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[132] Leonard Leff, *Hemingway and his Conspirators: Hollywood, Scribner's, and the Making of American Celebrity Culture* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 40, 43.

[133] As quoted in Audre Hanneman, *Ernest Hemingway: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1967), 351.

[134] *New York Times Book Review* (13 June 1926): 8. *New York Evening Post Literary Review* (12 June 1926): 9.

As a repudiation of Anderson’s regionalism, then, *Torrents* is subtly ambivalent. To cohere as a satirical imitation of Anderson and regional writing, Hemingway’s parody can never fully “destroy Sherwood,” as he had hoped, but rather must always in the end maintain the conditions under which his regional approach is still viable. In this sense, Daniel Pollack-Pelzner characterizes *Torrents* as ultimately and inextricably concerned with the persistence of regionalism: “the etymological para- in ‘parody’ is the same prefix as the para- in ‘parasite’; you have to keep your host alive in order to mooch off his bounty.”[139] *Torrents*, by recreating Anderson’s writing itself, might ultimately suggest that regionalism is still a valid mode of literary expression, even in the modernist moment.

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[135] Isador Schneider, as quoted in *Hemingway and Faulkner in Their Time*, eds. Earl Rovit and Arthur Waldhorn (New York: Continuum, 2006), 54. Schneider’s unpublished letter is located in the JFK Library.

[136] John Dos Passos, *The Best Times: An Informal Memoir* (New York: New American Library, 1966), 158.

[137] Hemingway, *Letters Volume 2*, 435.

[138] Daniel Pollack-Pelzner notes, “This dependence upon the object [of parody] may explain why *The Torrents of Spring*, Hemingway's 1926 parody of Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter* (among other worthy objects), for example, was out of print for so long and is now so seldom read: few bookstore browsers know Anderson well enough to get the joke” (“Swiping Stein: The Ambivalence of Hemingway Parodies,” *The Hemingway Review* 30, no. 1 [Fall 2010], 70).

“Sherwood Anderson must take part of the blame for this enthusiastic march up a blind alley in the dark,” declared F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1926, faulting Anderson for the influx of regionalist writers “wasting” American “material” on literary endeavors like “an epic of the American husbandmen.”[140] But in his indictment Fitzgerald was only echoing briefly a position expressed at length in *Torrents* and in the soon-to-be-published *Mosquitoes*. The resurgence of American regionalist writing in the early twentieth century was met with outright hostility in the 1920s by authors like Faulkner and Hemingway, who sought to leverage opposition to regionalism as a way to define and promote themselves as modernists. Treating Anderson as a synecdoche for regionalism writ large and mocking his work for its literary qualities perceived as feminine, like sentimentalism, provincialism, and a lack of adequate “difficulty,” Faulkner and Hemingway affiliated themselves with modernism, rendering their own work as decidedly masculine, elite, “high art.” In so doing, they sought to strengthen their own reputations as modernists and to suggest the value of modernist cultural production itself through contrast with the supposedly “lesser” work of regionalism. Positioning Anderson as the metonymic representative of regionalism, they created a foil against which not only to promote their own brands as modernists but also to shape an audience receptive to modernist cultural production and at least indifferent, if not opposed, to that of regionalism.

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[139] Ibid.

[140] Fitzgerald, “How to Waste Material—A Note on My Generation,” 86.

Yet *Mosquitoes* and *Torrents* also reveal a foundational assumption critically normalized within modernist studies today. That is, they highlight the extent to which we, as critics of modernist literature, are guilty of reproducing a version of this very same phenomenon, such that the very combination of modernism and American regionalism remains to us a "contradiction in terms," "a perverse enterprise," or a conversation "that brooks little or no dialogue."[141] This is not to overlook the few important efforts that have been made to mediate these two terms, but rather to assert that scholarly work in modernist studies bringing modernism and regionalism into closer conversation remains urgent.[142] After all, such work has been productive in studies of architecture and in some isolated literary subfields.[143] Such a renewed attention to the modernist impulses of early twentieth-century American regionalist literature might uncover yet another forgotten modernism, opening up a constellation of figures ripe for the kind of “expansion” at which the new modernist studies have been so effective. Such an expansion could in fact reveal the sense in which American regionalism might be considered “one of a loosely defined range of modernist cultural movements,” as proposed by Dorman. In the end, perhaps the most crucial insight gleaned from a reading of the opposition between modernism and regionalism constructed by Faulkner in *Mosquitoes* and by Hemingway in *Torrents* is not the awareness of the falsity of this opposition or even of its continued persistence in modernist studies today, though these are surely vital ideas, but rather the impulse to pull this opposition apart. The most important upshot of a close reading of *Mosquitoes* and *Torrents* may actually be the urge to unravel this entangled relation, to reconsider the modernism of regionalism and vice versa.

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[141] See Catherine Morley, *Modern American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 104; Duvall, "Regionalism in American Modernism," 242. Harilaos Stecopoulos, "Regionalism in the American Modernist Novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to the American Modernist Novel,* ed. Joshua Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 21.

[142] See, for instance, Dorman, Duvall, Lutz, and *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* special issue on "Regional Modernism" (Spring 2009), ed. Scott Herring.

[143] Studies in architecture have fruitfully aligned regionalism and modernism. Herring notes that the term "regional modernism" "first originated in architecture studies, where it came— and where it continues— to characterize building design that opposed the standardizations of an International Style promoted by the likes of architects such as Le Corbusier" (2). On "regional modernism" in architecture, see, for instance, Vincent B. Canizaro, "Introduction," in *Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition*. Ed. Vincent B. Canizaro (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural, 2007), 16-33.

Chapter Two:

The Radicalism of Tradition: Modernism, Regionalism, and Radical Politics in Jack Conroy and the *Anvil* Group

> The poets of the old school either fell to glorifying the simple emotions of "real folks," the delights of "fishin'," or apostrophizing landscapes and daffodil.… Within the last few years, the poet who strives to wed the technique of the past to the spirit of the present has been raising his voice above the clamor of the cult of unintelligibility.… Here is the new spirit of protest—protest not against "the fetters of form," but against the industrial and economic slavery which is brutalizing the world.
>
> – Jack Conroy[1]

In his review of William Cunningham's *The Green Corn Rebellion,* leftist worker-writer Jack Conroy noted "sporadic manifestations" within "the past few years" of a new form of "what is called 'regional' literature."[2] *The Green Corn Rebellion*, the tale of a socialist uprising among Oklahoma tenant farmers, represented for Conroy "a proletarian novel in the best sense of the word, and of a variety too long neglected."[3] Not only was Cunningham's novel a "proletarian novel," Conroy asserted, but also "an excellent specimen" of literary regionalism, a novel presenting the neglected perspective of the "overalled, bare-footed, dust- and sandstormcovered" folk of America's hinterlands.[4] In fact, according to Conroy, regional writing had lately "contained a good many splendid examples of what has since become known as proletarian fiction."[5] Though "regional literature" had traditionally been considered nostalgic and sentimental "as a Native Son's hymns to the California climate," wrote Conroy, an emergent strain of regional writing had recently become a vehicle of working-class narrative in the pages of publications like *Folk-Say* (1929-1932), *The Left* (1931-32) and *Hinterland* (1934-1936), and in the work of such writers as Erskine Caldwell, Meridel Le Sueur, H. H. Lewis, Josephine Herbst, and William Cunningham.[6]

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[1] Jack Conroy, "Introduction" in *Red Renaissance* (Holt, MN: B. C. Hagglund, 1930): 2.

[2] Jack Conroy, "Review of The Green Corn Rebellion," *Windsor Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Fall 1935): 76.

[3] Ibid. Cunningham's novel was a fictionalization of an actual uprising in Oklahoma of the same name. On the real Green Corn Rebellion, see Nigel Anthony Sellars, "With Folded Arms? Or with Squirrel Guns?: The IWW and the Green Corn Rebellion," in *Oil, Wheat & Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905-1930* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1998), 77-92.

Then as now, regionalism was commonly considered reactionary and conservative rather than radical and progressive. But for Conroy the juxtaposition of regionalism and leftist politics was neither unnatural nor unfamiliar. A miner's son from Moberly, Missouri, Conroy often combined radical political messages with regional settings, folklore, and local vernacular in his own writing. In his editorial work on his own modernist 'little magazine', *The Anvil* (1933-1935), Conroy drew upon a network of little-known American leftist writers—living and working, for the most part, outside the country's urban centers—to create a venue of publication for just such politically radical regionalist writing. *The Anvil* not only gave a voice to the marginalized leftist worker-writers of America's regional spaces, writers dissatisfied with the hegemonic role of New York in the country's political left and its literary representation, but also, under Conroy's astute editorship, published fiction that emphasized vernacular expression, local community, and regional tradition as foundational to radical political renewal. Disdaining the theory-heavy programs of more orthodox leftist publications, such as the *New Masses*, and drawing instead on the folk-based legacy of Midwestern movements like the Populist Party, the Farmer's Alliance, and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Conroy and his radical regionalists suggested that powerful leftist movements might arise not just from the urban Northeast but also from the regional hinterlands, from communities with fundamental unity in their mutually shared past, traditions, and beliefs. Conroy and the *Anvil* group put their faith not in the grey masses of the urban proletariat but in "the radicalism of tradition," the overlooked political power contained in the nation's regional spaces, to bring about a progressive cultural revolution.

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

Despite their contempt for bourgeois high modernism, which Conroy described as a posturing "cult of unintelligibility" that neglected the "common reader," the *Anvil* writers nonetheless created, distributed, and advocated a politically charged modernist writing grounded in literary regionalism.[7] Replacing a vision of the "revolution of the word" with a project for the revolution of the world, the *Anvil* group utilized the modernist 'little magazine' format to call for a new politically committed literature opposed to the high modernist proclamation, "the plain reader be damned," a new leftist literature that would speak directly to the concerns of actual working people—particularly those overlooked in the small towns and rural spaces—in a language they understood.[8] In spite of the persistent distinction between politically engaged writing and aesthetic modernism and the consequent critical segregation of so-called 'thirties literature' from modernism at large, Conroy and the *Anvil* writers remind us not only that these divisions are untenable but also that political commitment was actually a central modernist narrative concern. Jessica Berman has even argued that Conroy's writing and editorial work on *The Anvil* "exemplifies an important modernist strain of radical writing."[9] Berman's insightful account focuses chiefly on the formal qualities of Conroy's writing, however, and has relatively little to say about the distinctly regionalist underpinnings of Conroy's writing and editorial work on *The Anvil*. Michael Denning, too, notes that despite their disdain for what we would call 'canonical' high modernism, the *Anvil* group nonetheless attempted "to fuse the energies of modernism, the 'new', with a recognition of the social and political crisis…[forming] a third wave of the modernist movement"; yet even as he ties this modernist impulse to the rise of a "proletarian regionalism" in *The Anvil* and the regional 'little magazines' that followed in its wake, Denning remains fairly indefinite about what Conroy and his *Anvil* cohort might have found 'radical' or 'new' about regionalism itself as a literary mode, beyond its inherent opposition to the metropolitan left.[10] In fact, only Douglas Wixson, Conroy's biographer and literary executor, suggests the vast political possibilities that these radical writers found in the regionalist notion of a shared communal past, and even Wixson misses the fundamental modernism of this attempt to repurpose local tradition toward political—and literary—renewal.[11] In the traditional communal structures, local language, and folk customs binding together the inhabitants of the country's regional spaces, Conroy and the *Anvil* group recognized an untapped and potentially radical political power as well as a foundation for imagining modern community. Though long repressed by a codified midcentury modernism that effaced political allegiances, the writing of Conroy and the *Anvil* writers responded to the conditions of modernity for regional working-class people by drawing on and transforming resilient local folkways, vernacular, and communal traditions in order to raise social consciousness, incite radical political change, and imagine a more just world.

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[7] Conroy, "Introduction," 2. This description of modernism as a "cult of unintelligibility" had originally been coined by Max Eastman in an April 1929 essay for *Harper's Magazine* titled "The Cult of Unintelligibility." Throughout the essay, I refer to a group of radical regionalist writers associated with *The Anvil* as "the *Anvil* group" or "the *Anvil* writers." Though these writers may not have referred to themselves explicitly as such, I use this designation for convenience, drawing inspiration from Meridel Le Sueur's assertion that "In the Middle West an important nucleus for the worker-writer is grouped around the *Anvil*" ("Proletarian Literature in the Middle West," in *American Writers' Congress*, ed. Henry Hart [New York: International Publishers, 1935]: 137).

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[8] In his modernist manifesto, "Revolution of the Word," published in *transition* 16/17 in June of 1929, Eugene Jolas famously declared: "The writer expresses. He does not communicate. The plain reader be damned" ("Proclamation," *transition; A Paris Anthology* [Phillips & Company Books, 1990]: 19).

[9] Jessica Berman, *Modernist Commitments: Ethics, Politics, and Transnational Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 263.

[10] Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 122.

While the notion of a politically engaged modernism is not in itself new, what has been overlooked is the crucial fact that much of the socially committed modernist writing in the United States had its roots in regionalism.[12] Addressing this neglected connection in "Region and Class in the Novel," Raymond Williams argues that regional writing has "been valued in the labour and socialist movements" not only because of the fact of their mutual subordination—"a whole class, like whole regions, can be seen as neglected"—but also because the two are marginalized in analogous ways: "by assigning certain novels to a deliberately limited area; indicating their limited status by this kind of 'narrowness,' or by their limiting priority of 'social' over ‘general human’ experience.”[13] Indeed, writes Williams, “class can indeed be seen as a region: a social area inhabited by people of a certain kind, living in certain ways.”[14] But even in the 1930s, intellectuals like B. A. Botkin and Constance Rourke had already reached similar conclusions. In her 1933 polemic against prominent Marxist critics V. F. Calverton and Granville Hicks, Rourke asserted not only that much of the writing of the so-called proletarian movement was in fact regional writing but that this regionalism was central to American leftist culture. In their respective books, *The Liberation of American Literature* and *The Great Tradition*, Calverton and Hicks had both argued that modern industrial homogenization had made American regionalist writing dated and irrelevant: “the new emphases upon regionalism and sectionalism belong to the past and not to the future,” wrote Calverton.[15] “Main street,” he argued “has become very much the same in almost every part of the nation.”[16] In response, Rourke called attention to “a deeply rooted, widespread folk expression—regional in character, some of it quite explicitly proletarian in sentiment,” arguing that “when Mr. Calverton discounts the spirit of a region, its customs, folklore, and native speech, he is thus throwing away a means of understanding (for the purposes of revolution) our apparently standardized but deeply divided and enigmatic native life."[17] Indeed, despite the dismissal of regionalism by leftist critics like Calverton and Hicks, Rourke asserted that "a knowledge of these regional differences would seem essential for the enterprise of initiating the class struggle on any broad scale."[18] Similarly, in his speech to the 1937 American Writers' Congress, Botkin noted the rise of what he called "proletarian regionalism," a politically progressive regionalist writing attempting to "make the masses articulate by letting them tell their own story, in their own words."[19] Far from the conservative and reactionary regionalism of the southern Agrarians, which took "a certain social background for granted and a certain social order as final," this proletarian regionalism was dynamic and progressive, Botkin said, "creat[ing] new forms, styles, and modes of literature by drawing upon place, work, and folk for motifs, images, symbols, slogans, and idioms."[20] For Botkin and Rourke, surveying the literature of the 1920s and 1930s, much of this new regionalist writing represented not the conservative politics of nostalgia and social stasis but a dynamic and progressive political renewal rooted in the collective sources of, in Rourke's words, "place and kinship and common emotion that accumulate through generations."[21]

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[11] Douglas Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898-1990* (Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

[12] Martin A. Kayman's *The Modernism of Ezra Pound* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), Paul Peppis's *Literature, Politics, and the English Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), and Rachel Potter's *Modernism and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), for instance, have worked to abolish the myth of the apolitical modernist aesthete.

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[13] Raymond Williams, “Region and Class in the Novel,” in *Writing in Society* (New York: Verso, 1983), 233. It is important to note that Williams’ argument is made in the British literary context, though the general stroke of his argument in this case applies equally well to American literature.

[14] Ibid., 234.

[15] V. F. Calverton, *The Liberation of American Literature* (Scribner’s, 1932), 362, and Granville Hicks, *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature since the Civil War* (Macmillan, 1933). Hicks argued that despite the early development of “provincial cultures” that “might have greatly enriched our literature,” industrialization had eventually eliminated regionalism: “as a section reached the level of physical well-being and social solidarity that would permit cultural development, forces came into play to destroy both its uniqueness and its homogeneity” (33).

[16] Calverton, *Liberation*, 364.

Yet this emergent strain of radical regional writing remained largely overlooked, and writers outside the country's urban centers felt utterly ostracized from mainstream cultural apparatuses of the left. Sanora Babb, an Oklahoma writer and member of what would become the *Anvil* group, recalled that "'regional' was the stinging word used by certain influential New York groups to try to keep writers outside NY [*sic*] in their places. It was a patronizing put-down."[22] An *Anvil* contributor from Iowa, Paul Corey wrote that for leftist writers "the label farm fiction could stop any story dead in a magazine slushpile."[23] Frustrated by this exclusion of regionalist writers, Conroy speculated in 1931 that "the *New Masses* is becoming a Mutual Admiration Society piloted by a rapidly narrowing clique of metropolitan writers."[24] In a barbed letter to the editors, he reminded leftist critics that "all proletarians cannot be garment workers or live east of Philadelphia."[25] Indeed, wrote Conroy in an unpublished review, "what our revolutionary critics hail as the real stuff from soviet writers becomes 'not real art' when it springs from American soil and is couched in a native idiom."[26] A southeastern Missouri farmer-poet and prominent *Anvil* writer, H. H. Lewis dubbed the *New Masses* clique the "Kaffee Klatsch Klan,"[27] and expressed his disdain in the form of satirical verse: "East of the Hudson, off in dual fashion, / Way over yonder with a culty passion, / Some 'proletarian' critics draw the shades /

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[17] Constance Rourke, "The Significance of Sections," *The New Republic* (20 Sept 1933): 149.

[18] Rourke, "The Significance of Sections," 148.

[19] Botkin, "Regionalism and Culture," in *The Writer in a Changing World*, ed. Henry Hart (Equinox Cooperative Press, 1937), 157.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Rourke, "The Significance of Sections," 149.

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[22] As quoted in Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 377. Wixson cites personal correspondence with Babb. Babb's short story, "Dry Summer," appeared in the eighth number of T*he Anvil* (September-October 1934).

[23] Paul Corey, "Lurching toward Liberalism: Political and Literary Reminiscences," in *Books at Iowa* 49 (Nov 1988), 60. Corey's short story, "A Good Recommendation," appeared in the third number of *The Anvil* (November-December 1933).

[24] Conroy letter to Kenneth Porter, 6 February 1931. Conroy Papers. Newberry Library.

[25] As quoted in Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 198.

[26] Jack Conroy, "Plowboy Poet's Third Booklet" (unpublished). Newberry Library. Jack Conroy Papers.

[27] H.H. Lewis letter to William Carlos Williams, undated. Yale University Library. William Carlos Williams Papers.

And count who's who—behind the Palisades."[28] Another member of the *Anvil* group, Joseph Kalar, a rural Minnesota papermill-worker turned poet, complained in a letter to Conroy about the widespread "deference to the dead hand of the New York Clique,"[29] threatening "to issue a vicious broadside to [the *New Masses*], if they omit Conroy, Lewis and Kalar and go heavy on the NY stuff."[30]

Not only did these scattered and isolated regionalist writers feel excluded from publication in the left's literary organs, they also felt that these magazines were publishing the wrong kind of material altogether. The mainstream leftist magazines increasingly preferred to publish what regionalist worker-writers like Conroy and his cohort, most of whom were forced by financial necessity to maintain full-time manual labor jobs, saw as jargon-filled debates about the subtle details of Communist Party doctrine or Marxist theory, rather than writing by and for workers. Kalar lamented in a letter to a fellow *Anvil* writer, "the *New Masses* is in the hands of the theoreticians."[31] In a bitter letter to the editors, he complained that "the *New Masses* is publishing far too many manifestoes on the desirability and significance of proletarian art" rather than "actually *creating* proletarian art."[32] As workers themselves, writers like Conroy and Kalar felt that the cultural authorities of the literary left ought to meet workers on their own terms and publish writing that would resonate with their own daily experiences. "What I would like to see," wrote Kalar, "is a *New Masses* that would be read by lumberjacks, hoboes, miners, clerks, sectionhands, machinists, harvesthands, waiters," a magazine read by workers themselves rather than the bourgeois "paid scribblers" who may know "correct ideology" but have never experienced the daily struggles of working-class life.[33] Like most of his fellow regionalist worker-writers, Conroy felt sharply a lack of Marxist learning and believed the mainstream radical magazines were squandering the potential for an actual working-class audience by emphasizing communist dogma. After a rejection from *New Masses* in 1929, he remarked that "one must almost have a communistic slant before he can get in."[34] Resentful of what he called the worker-writer's "necessity of leading a dual life," Conroy complained that for the worker-writer the task of studying theory and honing one's writing must compete with "the struggle to live, the impediments of fatigue from the daily job and the difficulties imposed by lack of education and facilities for publication."[35] Often working long days for little pay, Conroy felt that the lived reality of the working class virtually precluded the deep theoretical reading necessary for publication in the mainstream leftist magazines. As he recalled later, "Just to see Marx's *Das Kapital* on the shelf gave me a headache."[36] Seeking a publication that would speak the language of his fellow workers, particularly those like him, isolated and overlooked outside the metropolis, Conroy determined to create a venue for workers' writing, a magazine that would emphasize not theoretical doctrine but lived working-class experience, not Communist jargon but local vernacular.

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[28] H. H. Lewis, "The Noselings," in *Salvation* (Holt, MN: B. C. Hagglund, 1934), 31. It should be noted that Lewis's poem is also virulently anti-Semitic. While largely progressive in their writing, the *Anvil* writers were by no means free from the bigotry and prejudice of their time.

[29] Joseph Kalar letter to Conroy, 10 November 1931. Conroy Papers. Newberry Library.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Joseph Kalar letter to Warren Huddlestone, 19 December 1932. Reprinted in *Poet of Protest*, ed. Richard G. Kalar (Blaine, MN: RBK Publications, 1985), 162.

[32] Joseph Kalar, "Letter to the Editors," *New Masses* (September 1929): 22.

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Jack Conroy letter to Emerson Price, c. fall 1929. Conroy Papers. Newberry Library.

[35] Jack Conroy, "A Note on the Proletarian Novel," *Call of Youth* (Apr 1934): 5.

[36] As quoted in Daniel Aaron, "Introduction," *The Disinherited* (Hill & Wang, 1963): xii. Also quoted in Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 531 fn 78.

“We belong there”: The Genesis of *The Anvil*

As the Stock Market Crash ushered in the 1930s, Conroy and radical regionalists like Lewis and Kalar realized the need of a leftist assemblage of their own. In 1929, Conroy co-founded the Rebel Poets organization, an accomodationist group intended to unite leftist writers in local chapters across the country and across a wide spectrum of progressive political positions. As Douglas Wixson describes it, the Rebel Poets enterprise at its inception constituted “an effort to establish a corresponding network of separate, autonomous epicenters, usually individual poets isolated in small towns.”[37] Adopting the duties of editing the group’s newsletter, *Rebel Poet*, and its annual publication, *Unrest: The Rebel Poets Anthology*, Conroy sought not only to provide an alternative and independent radical magazine but also to stress a certain underrepresented regionalist quality.[38] An advertisement in *The Left* in 1931 shows this working-class and regionalist emphasis with its emphatic declaration that “[*Rebel Poet*] is printed in a barn; its publisher shares his quarters with a melancholy proletarian cow.”[39] As the *Rebel Poet* newsletter quickly gained traction under Conroy's keen editorship, however, it also came under close scrutiny from the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), which controlled much of the magazine's distribution. The CPUSA accused Conroy of "tolerating unorthodox positions,"[40] pressuring him to adhere strictly to "consistent" and "correct" Party doctrine.[41] With pressure mounting, control shifted increasingly to the Rebel Poets chapter in New York, led by the young Philip Rahv. Replacing "book reviews with theoretical and dialectical notes," the New York Rebel Poets sought to reshape the magazine in line with the *New Masses*, as Rahv explained to Conroy in 1932: "We are by degrees doing away with the lowbrow tone…of the poetry that used to appear in *Rebel Poet*."[42] Amid swirling rumors of an impending New York coup, Conroy exercised an abrupt editorial fiat from his home in Moberly, Missouri, dissolving the *Rebel Poet* after its October 1932 issue. As Kalar summarized in a letter, "*Rebel Poet* was taken over by the strictly communist group in New York who knew just what proletarian art is and as a result the whole thing is 'done fer'."[43] Wixson writes that "over its brief life of twenty-two months, *Rebel Poet* had moved from a little magazine of scattershot social protest, printing poems of frustration and anger against injustice and inhumanity, to one centered in New York, glorifying Soviet achievements."[44] In its final issues, he asserts, the magazine had essentially "become the organ

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[37] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 290.

[38] Seventeen numbers of the *Rebel Poet* newsletter, all edited by Conroy, were published from its inception in January 1931 to its end in October of 1932. There were three volumes of *Unrest: The Rebel Poets Anthology* published in 1929, 1930, and 1931, respectively.

[39] *The Left: A Quarterly Review of Radical & Experimental Art* 1, no. 2 (Summer and Autumn 1931): 99. As quoted in Michael Rozendal, “Rebel Poets and Critics: *The Rebel Poet* (1931-2); *The Anvil* (1933-5); *Dynamo* (1934-5); and *Partisan Review* (1934-2003)," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of*

Modernist Magazines: Volume 2, North America 1894-1960, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 905.

[40] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 288.

[41] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 274.

[42] Philip Rahv letter to Conroy, 4 August 1932. Also quoted in Michael Fabre, "Jack Conroy as Editor," trans. David Ray, *New Letters* 39, no. 1 (1972), 121.

[43] Joseph Kalar letter to Warren Huddlestone (19 Dec 1932), reprinted in *Poet of Protest*, 162.

[44] Wixson, 283.

of the New York chapter."[45] But Conroy had learned his lesson from his work on *Rebel Poet*. He remained determined to create a space for radical regionalist expression, an independent publication dedicated to disseminating the folkways and vernacular expression of the non-urban workers, a publication speaking the language of the working-class, promoting leftist causes, and challenging the hegemony of the metropolitan left.

In December of 1932, Kalar wrote of the "shakeup" to Warren Huddlestone, a fellow leftist writer from Indiana: "Conroy has broken definitely with [the New York] group and is launching, the first of the year of thereabouts, a quarterly [...] called THE ANVIL. We belong there."[46] In the early months of 1933, Conroy gathered his radical regionalist contacts among the old Rebel Poets group and began collecting manuscripts for a 'little magazine' to be called *The Anvil*.[47] In this editorial endeavor, he drew inspiration from several influential sources. The grassroots radicalism that had historically formed in the country's regional spaces, such as the IWW and the Populist Party, provided Conroy with alternative organizational models to the urban-centered, "top-down structures of institutionalized radicalism" of the CPUSA and mainstream leftist literary culture.[48] Conroy would conduct editorial duties out of his house in Moberly, Missouri; associate editors would assist from their respective homes throughout the hinterlands; the printing would be done from Holt, Minnesota and later Leesville, Louisiana; and contributors across the country would send in their submissions by mail. With *The Anvil's* production dispersed across the hinterlands and outside of the hegemonic literary system, Conroy ensured that the magazine's organization would be thoroughly horizontal, decentered, and nonhierarchical. In seeking out submissions from little-known writers across the countryside, Conroy was also following the example of John T. Frederick's long-running regionalist magazine, *The Midland* (1915-1933), which was folding just as *The Anvil* was set to begin.[49] Having been strongly influenced by *Midland*, Conroy wrote to Frederick in 1933, offering what little money he had to help the magazine stay afloat. When the magazine ceased publication that year, writes Wixson, "Jack felt that he must now also carry on Frederick's work in discovering new writers in the hinterland."[50] Thus, inspired by the collapse of *The Midland*, Conroy resolved to provide a venue for expression to the radical regionalist writers marginalized by their relative geographical isolation as well as by the mainstream, urban centric leftist literary culture.

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[45] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 289.

[46] Joseph Kalar letter to Huddlestone, 19 December 1932. Reprinted in *Poet of Protest,* 162.

[47] In an interview in *The Chicago News*, Conroy later said he had chosen the title "while working at an anvil as a blacksmith helper in a railroad shop" because he wanted to "publish stories about American men and women who have been beaten downward or shaped upward on the powerful anvil of life in the U.S. today" (Fabre, "Jack Conroy as Editor," 124).

[48] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 260.

Yet Conroy wanted not only to give voice to overlooked regionalists but also to bring light to what he, like Botkin and Rourke, saw as the radical revolutionary potential of regionalism. He later recalled that "out in the Midwest of penny auctions and burning corn (because the price was so low) we were far from the ideological tempests raging in New York coffee pots, [but] it was a revolutionary situation, sure enough."[51] This "revolutionary situation" brewing in America's regional spaces, unseen and underrepresented, deserved attention, and Conroy determined to shine a spotlight on it with *The Anvil*. In this aim he was backed by prominent leftist writer, editor, and activist Mike Gold. In his *Daily Worker* column, Gold had already called for a radical regionalism: “We are seeing the rise of a factory-worker literature in this country, but there has been as yet too little that expresses the life of the revolutionary farmers.”[52] As Conroy formulated the direction of *The Anvil*, Gold sent a letter that confirmed this regionalist trajectory, advising Conroy to “make [*Anvil*] middle west, full of gumbo mud local color and hhlewis [sic],” and to emphasize “local stuff with the bark on.”[53] More regionalism, Gold asserted, was precisely what was needed on the left: “why imitate [the *New Masses*], why not make it a regional paper, for the peasant poets and midwest literary proletarians—I am a great believer now in this kind of regionalism, we need more of it in the movement—proletarian in content, regional in form.”[54] A “regional paper” was precisely what Conroy intended for *The Anvil*. With his own writing as well as his editorial work, Conroy would reveal the radical political power latent in the hinterlands, the “revolutionary situation” in America’s regional spaces.

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[49] Wixson asserts that "Frederick's *Midland*…influenced Conroy's editorial perspective" (*Worker-Writer*, 316-7).

[50] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 310.

[51] Jack Conroy, "The Literary Underworld of the Thirties," in *The Jack Conroy Reader* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1979), 153.

In early May of 1933, contracting the help of Minnesota farmhand and amateur printer Ben Hagglund, who had printed the *Rebel Poet* out of his barn on an antiquated hand-set press, Conroy published the first issue of *The Anvil* with the simple subtitle, “Stories for Workers” and the slogan, “We prefer crude vigor to polished banality” (*Figure 1*). In his opening statement, “The Anvil and Its Aims,” Conroy promised to follow through on his vision for an eclectic and independent magazine of workers’ expression, announcing that “my associate editors and I are going to present vital, vigorous material drawn from the farms, mines, mills, factories, and offices of America. We'll not devote much time to theoretical problems."[55] Though containing contributions from more established names like Langston Hughes ("Park Bench" and "Ballad of Lenin") and Maxim Gorky ("Stormy Petrel"), the first number established *The Anvil*'s pattern of publishing work by relatively unknown regionalists who wrote about the "revolutionary situation" outside the country's urban spaces. For instance, Virginia tree surgeon, writer, and artist John C. Rogers contributed "When the Sap Rises," a story set amid the growing unrest of the impoverished folk in the Blue Ridge mountains.[56] Simlarly, Kalar's impressionistic "Night Piece," narrated in a stream-of-consciousness style, describes workers in a Minnesota town as "proletarians swimming like drowning rats in the swamp…in the ideology that bloomed like a fat stupid face from all the centers of 'culture.'"[57]

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[52] Mike Gold, “Barnyard Poet,” in *Change the World* (New York: International Publishers, 1936), 143. Gold’s comment was made with reference specifically to *Anvil* poet H. H. Lewis.

[53] Mike Gold letter to Conroy, undated. Newberry Library. Jack Conroy Papers.

[54] Ibid.

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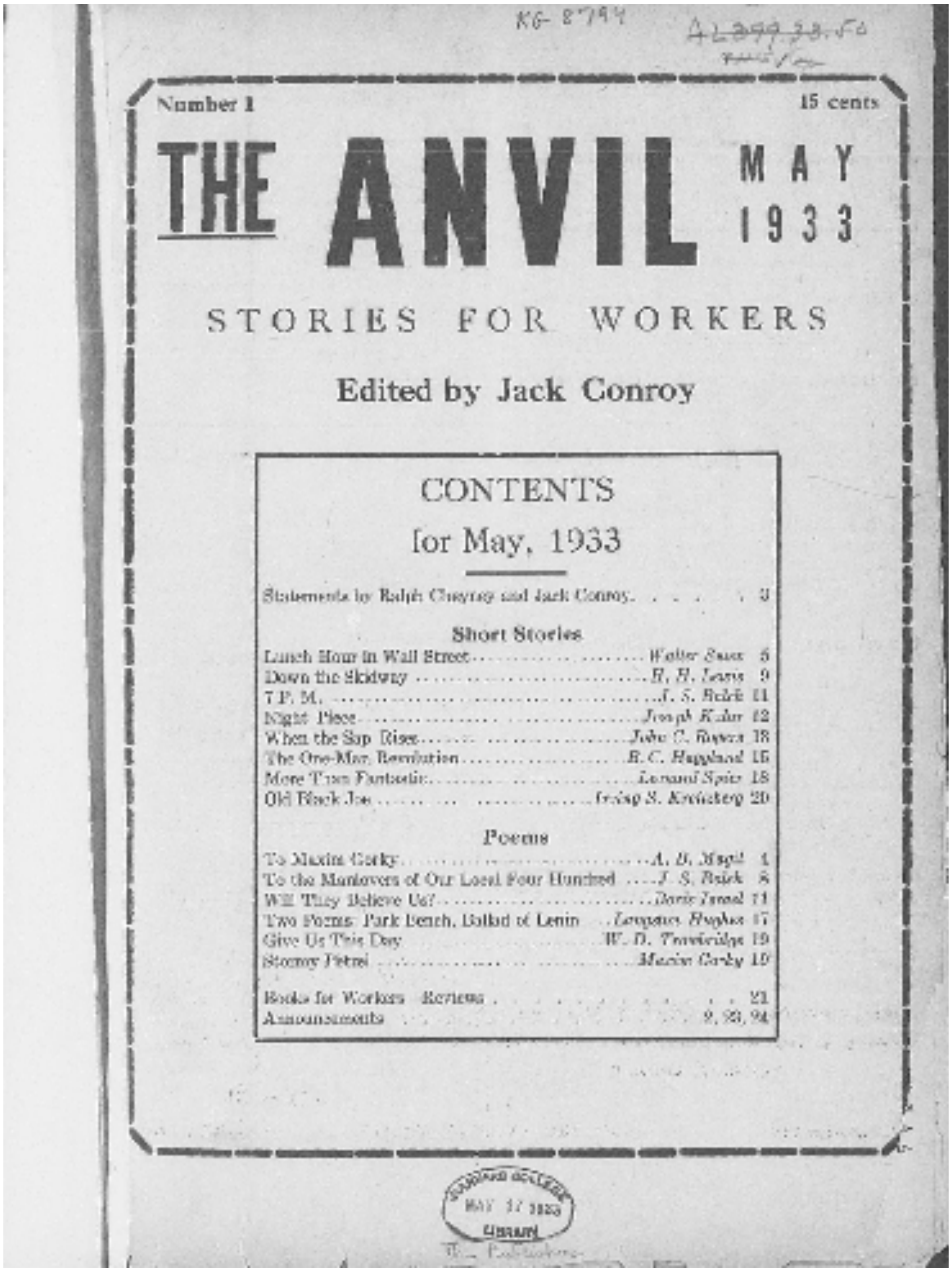
[55] Jack Conroy, "The Anvil and Its Aims," 4.

[56] John C. Rogers also published another story of the Blue Ridge mountains folk, "Call It Love," in *The Anvil*'s third issue (November-December 1933).

[57] Joseph Kalar, "Night Piece," *The Anvil* 1 (May 1933): 12.



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THE ANVIL MAY 1933

STORIES FOR WORKERS

Edited by Jack Conroy

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Figure 1: Cover of *The Anvil* issue number one. Alongside Langston Hughes and Maxim Gorky, *The Anvil*’s first number (May 1933) featured a number of unknown worker-writers, several of whom would come to form the core of the *Anvil* group, such as H. H. Lewis, John C. Rogers, and B. C. Hagglund.

Despite (or, perhaps, because of) its abundance of unfamiliar authors, *The Anvil* drew attention from the very beginning. The first 1,000 copies of the magazine printed were sold before the end of May, and the subscription list grew to over 250, drawing readers from cities like New York and Los Angeles as well as those from tiny towns like Copperhill, Tennessee and Humboldt, Iowa.[58] The cultural authorities took immediate notice of *The Anvil*, too, connecting its project with that of the modernist 'little magazines' of the 1920s. Heywood Broun's column in the *New York World-Telegram*, for instance, faulted the magazine for the difficulty of its prose, remarking, "I have pretty nearly decided not to make my new book a proletarian novel. In this decision I have been very largely influenced by reading a magazine called *The Anvil*."[59] A review of *The Anvil* published in *The New Republic*, however, reveals explicitly the extent to which Conroy had effectively adapted the model of modernist avant-garde publication to his radical regionalist ends. Indeed, Michael Rozendal has argued that this review conveys the shock of a "regional shift" in the production of modernist 'little magazines'.[60] The reviewer notes that the first issues of several new and politically radical literary publications "are almost entirely given over to the work of young and unknown writers. As such they suggest a comparison with the little magazines, *Broom*, *The Little Review*, and dozens of others, which flourished and died in the period immediately after the War."[61] Like these new leftist magazines, the high modernist 'little magazines' were forced to "build up their own publications," the reviewer writes, as "editors of established magazines had no sympathy for their […] experiments or […] social convictions."[62] Yet between these two incarnations of 'little magazine' form, the reviewer pinpoints one quite "significant" difference: "The advance guard magazines of the twenties, railing against American civilization primarily from an aesthetic point of view, were edited in Rome, Paris, Vienna and half the capitals of Europe. These new arrivals, preaching the international revolution, hail from such plain American addresses as […] Moberly, Missouri."[63] Using the model of the modernist 'little magazine' as a vehicle for radical regionalist project, as the review suggests, Conroy had united modernism's anti-establishment and avant-garde attitudes not with a sense of individual urban alienation but with radical politics and a regionalist emphasis on vernacular expression and local community, combining the desire to be radical, subversive, to 'make it new,' with an impulse to seek political renewal in collective sources of orality, folklore, and communal tradition.

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[58] Subscription lists of *The Anvil*. Newberry Library. Also see Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 308-9.

[59] Heywood Broun, "It Seems to Me," *New York World-Telegram* (15 May 1933): 17. Broun's criticism is somewhat unfair, as he judged *The Anvil* by only one story, Kalar's "Night Piece."

[60] Rozendal, "Rebel Poets," 908. Rozendal notes that "beyond the political and aesthetic attempts to differentiate *The Anvil* from earlier 'little magazines', the regional grounding for the journal, as with many of the short-lived proletarian magazines, marked an important break from the high modernist journals" (908).

The Anvil's regionalist slant has been identified as a lynchpin in Conroy's pioneering adaption of the modernist 'little magazine' form toward leftist political aims. Denning goes as far as labeling the *The Anvil* and the regional 'little magazines' of the left that followed in its wake, such as *Dubuque Dial* (1934-35), *Hinterland* (1934-36), and *Midwest* (1936-37), "the descendants of the little magazines of high modernism."[64] Rozendal has argued that in the regionalist impulses of his editorial approach, the "celebration of an anti-establishment position and dismissal of the expectations of purity in poetry," Conroy "tapped into the stance held by modernists of the previous decades."[65] Berman notes that *The Anvil*'s regionalist orientation engendered a modernist "ethics of dissensus" in its "multivocal" formal quality and a modernist organizational structure in its "decentered, nonhierarchical" network of contributors.[66] But for the *Anvil* writers, regionalism offered far more than just a formal, organizational, or even anti-establishment position; regionalism offered a new way to think about the potential for workers' unity. Though the *Community Manifesto* had assured workers that their shared bondage would somehow join them together in revolution, regionalist worker-writers remained skeptical. From their perspective outside America's modern industrialized cities, the *Anvil* group recognized instead the radical power of forces like tradition, dialect, and local community. Recognizing the potential for these underlying forces to join workers together into a vigorous and sustained insurgency, the *Anvil* group imagined that the worker's revolution might begin not among the masses in the city factories but in small communities of the regional hinterlands. Frustrated with the urban left's sectarian infighting, ignorance of the realities of working class life, and lack of interest in workers outside the cities, Conroy and his *Anvil* cohort found inspiration in the overlooked "revolutionary situation" that surrounded them in the nation's regional spaces—that is, in the radical potential of regionalism.

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[61] "The Week," *The New Republic* (11 Oct 1933): 226.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Denning, *Cultural Front*, 211.

"The Radicalism of Tradition": Progressive Political Power in the Hinterlands

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[65] Rozendal, "Rebel Poets," 906.

[66] Berman, *Modernist Commitments*, 247

The modernism of *The Anvil*'s radical regionalist project was not limited to its form of circulation or organization; rather, the contents of the magazine reveal an innovative notion of the possibilities for effecting radical political change. Hagglund's didactic story, "The One-Man Revolution," which appeared in *The Anvil*'s first number, illustrates this idea in the tale of a stubborn Minnesota farmer, Eric Gulbrandson, who tries to forcibly resist the sale of his farm after he defaults on his mortgage. Though the narrator, a leftist organizer, urges him to seek the help of his fellow farmers, Gulbrandson instead tries to stage a "one-man revolution" by barricading himself inside his house. The local sheriff takes back the farm with a team of deputies, and as Gulbrandson is hauled away, the narrator asks him about his politics. Still somewhat skeptical of communism, Gulbrandson tentatively remarks, "Maybe you're right about Russia."[67] The narrator asks, "What would have happened if you had invited forty, fifty of your neighbors out there today?"[68] At this, the farmer takes a handful of leftist pamphlets, saying, "By god…You're right!"[69] Despite his lingering uncertainty about orthodox communism, Gulbrandson realizes the power of organizing workers based on local communal affiliation, the power of "forty, fifty of your neighbors" to create an insurgent leftist rebellion. In a letter to Conroy, Hagglund further explained "the atmosphere of my story, 'One-Man Revo'" and its grounding in the real political situation near his home in Holt, Minnesota: "[the farmers] join together to protect each other from getting foreclosed on—oh, yes that has happened. But it is not what you would expect, Jack."[70] Though "skepticism of capitalism has deluged our country," he writes, nonetheless, for these famers, as for the fictional Eric Gulbrandson, "socialism and communism are included in this skepticism."[71] When banded together, the farmers are "heavenly in their fury," but "until they are disillusioned, they will continue to deride Communists, and chase them out of town."[72] "The One-Man Revolution" reveals that despite their skepticism for leftist dogma and unconsciousness of mutual class struggle, Hagglund explains, the rural folk can be united by their "innermost beliefs," the sense of local tradition and community that links them together against the injustices of capitalism.[73] With these "old pictures in their mind," he asserts, "[the farmer] may destroy capitalism yet."[74]

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[67] B. C. Hagglund, "The One-Man Revolution," *The Anvil* 1 (May 1933): 17.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Hagglund to Conroy, 2 May 1933. Conroy Papers. Newberry Library.

Conroy's first and best-known novel, *The Disinherited*, stages in its closing pages a scene much like the one Hagglund describes, a scene in which farmers create a powerfully rebellious labor force and "join together to protect each other from getting foreclosed on." Lauded for its authenticity and "truthfulness," *The Disinherited* launched Conroy and the notion of the worker-writer into the public eye: "I have no idea," wrote Dorothy Canfield, "what kind of a compromise between manual work and authorship has produced Jack Conroy. But his account of the hard, but by no means gloomy, life of the vigorous son of a coal miner has the very ring of truth."[75] Proof that "proletarian literature"—whatever that might turn out to be—could be produced by real workers, Conroy's novel was largely embraced by the urban literary left: "You know this life, Jack, as well as Hemingway knows the atmosphere of fifty Paris bistros," wrote

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Dorothy Canfield, "Review of *The Disinherited*, by Jack Conroy," in *Book-of-the-Month Club News* (1934), 59.

Gold in a letter published in *New Masses*.[76] Yet Gold and the rest of the New York-based network of leftist tastemakers largely ignored the role of regionalism in the novel, as have subsequent scholars following the novel's revival by Daniel Aaron in the early 1960s.[77] In fact, Wixson is perhaps the first to assert the centrality of local "collective memory and orality, the folk view of experience" in *The Disinherited*.[78] The radical regionalist message of the novel is particularly apparent, however, in the crucial closing scenes of the novel, which depict a revolutionary political force being born out of local communal ties. The novel's protagonist, Larry Donovan, comes into his own as a labor organizer not by leading an urban mob against capitalist bosses or leading a strike on a city factory, as might be expected, but rather by organizing a group of farmers from his little hometown in Missouri to save a nearby farm from foreclosure auction. After watching a group of poor local farmers helping a man fill his car with gas, Donovan is struck by an idea: "'Say fellows,' I called to the men still standing about….'There's a man going to have everything he owns sold this afternoon. It's near noon now. In other places where there are enough men with enough guts, such sales don't come off.'"[79] With this, Donovan leads a group of farmers, armed with guns and clubs, to the auction, where they threaten violence for anyone who bids. When the local sheriff questions their loyalties, they readily admit their impulse to be skeptical of communism: "We helped you tar and feather that organizer, yes, but we know better now."[80] Indeed, after successfully saving the farm from foreclosure, the farmers hold an impromptu labor rally:

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[76] Mike Gold, "A Letter to the Author of a First Book," *New Masses* (9 Jan 1934): 25. Tastemakers on the left were by no means entirely approving of Conroy's novel. Gold also scolded Conroy for various perceived missteps—the protagonist's bourgeois enjoyment of romantic poetry, for instance. James T. Farrell also wrote a very hostile review of the book in *Nation*.

[77] Aaron discussed *The Disinherited* in his landmark book, *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), and wrote the introduction to a new edition of the novel published by Hill & Wang in 1963.

[78] Wixson, *Worker-Writer,* 340.

[79] Conroy, *The Disinherited*, 302.

> Speakers mounted the table one by one. They were farmers, habitually stern and taciturn. Silently, they had plodded behind the plow, watching the fat furrows curl away. They had burned brush in the fence corners, merely nodding at their acquaintances as they rode by. They were not speakers, but some vital force flowed from them as they talked. I was standing near the table when Hans nudged me. "Now it's your turn," he said. I did not demur. I had been thinking of things I'd like to say to these men.[81]

In this final scene, as the narrator takes the stage and takes on his new role as a labor organizer, Conroy suggests a message much like that of Hagglund's story, emphasizing the radical power latent in the regional space, the radical power of a community linked together because their traditions and values are threatened by the encroachment of modernity.

Adopting the language of folklore, Conroy would express a similar message in a series of stories published in the *Daily Worker*'s Sunday supplement over several months in 1938 and 1939. Conroy's obscure "Uncle Ollie" stories adapted the form of the humorous oral folktale toward radical leftist causes, depicting the rustic antics of the narrator's eccentric Uncle Ollie and his humorously naïve yet effective resistance to capitalist injustice.[82] In the first tale, "Home to Uncle Ollie's," the narrator leaves his tough factory job in the city and heads for the bucolic charm of his uncle Oliver "Ollie" Wilcox's farm near Sharon Springs, Missouri. But the farm is hardly the pastoral paradise the narrator had imagined; Ollie has been forced deeply into debt in recent years and has consequently conceived of a harebrained scheme to raise money by selling muskmelons in the city. In "Uncle Ollie on Trial," Ollie and his nephew are unsuccessful in peddling their melons, defeated by big business: "truck growers far off in the Imperial Valley of California had long since taken the edge off city folks' appetite for muskmelons."[83] In "Uncle Ollie Finds a New Market," Ollie donates his many unsold melons to the strikers at the local cannery, expressing solidarity with the many ex-farmers forced to find work there. The workers use the overripe melons to pelt incoming strikebreakers in "Uncle Ollie's Rabbit Hunt," so the wily Uncle Ollie organizes a local fundraiser to provide extra food and donations for the strikers, to "show 'em the farmer ain't got nothin' agin 'em and will even help 'em."[84] Weaving radical political messages into his "Uncle Ollie" folktales, Conroy drew upon the populist tradition of the IWW poets, who used direct, vivid, vernacular language in their folk stories and songs to disseminate progressive ideas among the rural Midwestern populace. Far from the stereotypical conservative stick-in-the-mud farmer, Conroy's Uncle Ollie represents not only a folk-archetypal "Uncle" figure, but also a radical political leader; writes Wixson, "no better example of this two-fold purpose exists than Conroy's folk narratives."[85] Much like the conclusion of his first novel, Conroy reveals in this Uncle Ollie stories the radical capability of rural folk culture, the potentially potent unity inherent in traditional communities.

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[80] Ibid., 305.

[81] Ibid., 307.

[82] Wixson discovered and printed the "Uncle Ollie" stories in a collection of Conroy's work, *The Weed King & Other Stories* (Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1985). Wixson notes in his introduction to the volume that the "Uncle Ollie" stories were "long overlooked even by Conroy" (xviii).

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[83] Jack Conroy, *The Weed King*, 9.

[84] Jack Conroy, *The Weed King*, 31.

[85] Douglas Wixson, "Jack Conroy," in *Encyclopedia of American Humorists*, ed. Steven H. Gale (New York: Routledge, 2016), 100.

In the fall of 1933, Conroy led off *The Anvil*'s third number with yet another story conveying this radical regionalist message, this one from of the country's most promising and controversial young writers, Erskine Caldwell.[86] Caldwell, who called Conroy "a genius of an editor," had sent his story, "Daughter," directly to *The Anvil* for publication, writing, "I'd rather have you publish a story in *The Anvil* than to get it in anywhere else."[87] Set in the rural South, "Daughter" tells the story of Jim Carlisle, an impoverished African-American sharecropper who is taken away to jail one morning. As the townspeople gather outside the jail, news spreads of "the trouble" at Jim's place the previous night. Driven mad by his eight-year-old daughter's continuous complaints of hunger, Jim had shot and killed her. "Daughter said she was hungry," he explains to the onlookers, "She'd been saying that for all the past month. Daughter'd wake up in the middle of the night and say it. I just couldn't stand it no longer.'"[88] The crowd grows steadily, until "the jail yard, the street, and the vacant lot on the other side was filled with men and boys. All of them were pushing forward to hear Jim."[89] Building the generic expectations of a typical Southern lynching story, Caldwell hints at impending vigilante justice for Jim at the hands of a violent lynch mob; yet he also subtly undercuts and questions this expectation with murmurs from sympathetic voices in the crowd: "'The State has got a grudge against you Jim,' somebody said; 'but somehow it don't seem right.'"[90] Soon the townsfolk discover that Colonel

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[86] When he submitted "Daughter" to the Anvil, Caldwell had recently published his two career-defining novels, *Tobacco Road* (1932) and *God's Little Acre* (1933).

[87] As quoted in Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 314. Erskine Caldwell letter to Jack Conroy, 18 Novemeber 1933. Conroy Papers. Newberry Library.

[88] Erskine Caldwell, "Daughter," *The Anvil* 3 (November-December 1933): 4.

[89] Ibid., 5.

[90] Ibid., 4.

Henry Maxwell, the wealthy landowner whose land Jim farms, had unjustly forced Jim to pay for the death of an old mule, leading to his family's slow starvation. As the crowd becomes more animated, someone "climbed up on an automobile and began swearing at the top of his lungs."[91] But Caldwell leaves the mob's intention ambiguous until the very last, when finally a man leads the crowd toward the jail with a crowbar: "'Pry that jail door open and let Jim out,' somebody said. 'It ain't right for him to be in there.'"[92] Instead of being lynched, Jim goes free.

With his story of an small Southern town's rebellion against the government's law and a capitalist's greed, Caldwell ironically reverses the typical lynching story. The mob that forms outside the small southern town's jailhouse unites not to murder Jim but to avenge him, to release him from prison and march instead against Colonel Henry Maxwell, the avaricious landowner who apparently drove Jim to his crime. Caldwell depicts a small community united in revolt not by their shared consciousness of class solidarity but by the more forceful bonds of vernacular, kinship, and tradition. Indeed, in her reading of "ethical community" in the story, Berman, too, stresses the importance of these communal connections. Rather than aspiring to universal principles, she argues, Caldwell's story "suggests that in reaching a common cause as they release Jim, the townspeople have developed an ethical understanding directly out of their shared experience that needs no abstract, principled explanation."[93] In this sense, "the use of the vernacular and the emphasis on Jim's location […] are not merely elements of local color," but instead reveal "an ethical community with its own categories of understanding."[94] In other words, in Caldwell's "Daughter," as in the stories of Hagglund and Conroy, the regional folk join together in rebellion not because they have had the devious workings of capitalism explained to them or because they are newly class conscious, but because they are, in a sense, already united against the injustices of capitalism by an underlying sense of community made possible in part by their regional situation. Far from mere "local color," the emphasis on vernacular, kinship, and tradition in Caldwell's story underscores the radical power of regionalism.

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[91] Ibid., 5.

[92] Ibid., 6

[93] Berman, *Modernist Commitments*, 252.

[94] Ibid.

Though Hagglund, Conroy, and Caldwell never articulated in theoretical language the radical regionalist message expressed in their fiction, more recent sociological research has corroborated the basic message of these stories from Conroy and the *Anvil* group. In his influential study, "The Radicalism of Tradition," Craig Jackson Calhoun has explained the unexpected power of tradition and community in labor movements. Calhoun argues that Marx overestimated the extent to which proletarian unity would arise from the new social conditions of industrial capitalism. Marx assumed, writes Calhoun, that despite their heterogeneity and lack of preexisting social organization, "the very large class of workers will unite to seek a very uncertain collective good in a highly risky mobilization, without much control over each other."[95] Examining common factors between historically successful radical movements, Calhoun finds instead that preexisting communal relations and traditions are essential to their social strength:

> When societies are rapidly changing, commitment to tradition can be a radical threat to the distribution of social power. And communities in which interpersonal relations are densely knit, many-faceted, and organized in harmony with traditional values can be potent informal organizations on which to base sustained insurgency.[96]

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[95] Craig Jackson Calhoun, "The Radicalism of Tradition: Community Strength or Venerable Disguise and Borrowed Language?" *American Journal of Sociology* 88, no. 5 (March 1983), 890-1.

[96] Ibid., 894.

Ironically, the apparently "conservative" attachments of regional communities can serve as "crucial bases for quite rational participation in the most radical of mobilizations," Calhoun argues.[97] Instead of "acting defensively" with regard to modern capitalism, he writes, the rural poor (as opposed to urban workers) have often sought "a new realization of traditional values" and thus have tended to be more "open to new political ideas which fitted with their existing culture and communities."[98] Reaching a similar conclusion, Eric Hobsbawm has coined the term "primitive rebels" to describe the "peasant revolutionary movements" which form on the cusp of dramatic socio-economic transformations and develop "ostensibly 'conservative'" political allegiances toward radically progressive goals.[99] In this sense, serving as a sort of "primitive rebels," Conroy and the radical regionalist writers of the *Anvil* group reproduced in their writing precisely Calhoun's notion of "the radicalism of tradition," depicting the revolutionary power inherent in local communities bonded together by existing ties like kinship, vernacular, and tradition.

"Plowboy Poet": The Gospel of a Soviet America

Not all of the regionalist writing in *The Anvil* was quite so frankly optimistic about the potential radical power of the hinterlands, however. The writing of H. H. Lewis, the enigmatic figure

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[97] Ibid., 888.

[98] Ibid., 899.

[99] Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Century* (Norton, 1959), 2. Hobsbawm also includes in "primitive rebels" groups like "city mobs" and religious sects, and focuses in particular on the figure of the "social bandit," a "Robin Hood type" of rebel outlaw with shifting socio-political motives (1).

Conroy nicknamed “Plowboy Poet of the Gumbo,” represents a complex case, an intensely sardonic, scornful, and irreverent expression of the radical regionalist outlook.[100] Though forgotten and out of print today, Lewis was published across a variety of radical magazines and in such mainstream publications as H. L. Mencken’s *American Mercury* and Harriet Monroe’s *Poetry*.[101] He was championed in the 1930s by V. F. Calverton, who hailed him as a rising star, and William Carlos Williams, who wrote several appreciative essays on Lewis, describing him as “tremendously important in the United States as an instigator to thought about what poetry can and cannot do to us today.”[102] Writing from his farm outside Cape Girardeau, Missouri, where he lived in a converted corncrib, Lewis was committed to a scathingly bitter view of the injustices of American life as experienced isolated in country's rural spaces. As Gold put it, "H. H. Lewis is a Missouri farmhand, who spends half his time shoveling manure and the better half writing bitter poems against the American kulaks and bankers who exploit him."[103] One of the most frequent *Anvil* contributors, he often combined a deeply idealistic reverence for communist Russia with an equally deep cynicism concerning the United States, particularly the urban northeast, as seen in the playful titular poem from his collection, *Thinking of Russia* (1932): "I'm always thinking of Russia, / I can't get her out of my head, / I don't give a damn for Uncle Sham, / I'm a left-wing radical Red."[104] The third line's sharp yet self-indulgent pun encapsulates the almost childishly mocking contempt for the U.S. common to Lewis's verse. Many of his irreverent poems published in *The Anvil* reveal this scornfulness, such as "Dogmatrix," a rant against American school systems, or "That Smile," an attack on Herbert Hoover and American consumerism that appeared in the sixth issue.[105] In other *Anvil*-published poems, such as "One Bright Star," Lewis offered intensely reverential lines on the communist ideal, which he characterized as the "one bright star" of the U.S.S.R.[106] Though he never visited Russia, Lewis's devotion to the Soviet experiment was almost religious. The failure of American democracy to meet his expectations had left Lewis angry and cynical, and even isolated in the country's hinterlands. “Communism extended to Lewis a belief, a promise of heaven in the here and now,” writes Wixson, “or at least a better hand than most poor gumbo farmers in southeastern Missouri had been dealt.”[107] When not criticizing the American government, Lewis would preach the gospel of Soviet communism to anyone who would listen.

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[100] Jack Conroy, “H.H. Lewis: Plowboy Poet of the Gumbo,” *The Jack Conroy Reader*, 237-42. Gumbo is a term for the moist, muddy soil of southeastern Missouri. Lewis picked up a number of these nicknames; Alfred Kreymborg, for instance, called him the “Farmhand Poet” (*New Masses* [28 Apr 1942]: 22) and Mike Gold called him the “Barnyard Poet” (*Change the World!* 143). Many of his friends called him “Humpy,” and he signed letters to Conroy as “Gumbo Jake.”

[101] Lewis published the short story “Schooldays in the Gumbo” in the *American Mercury* (January 1931) and five poems in the June 1938 issue of *Poetry Magazine*. He would win the Harriet Monroe Prize for Poetry in 1938.

[102] Calverton, *Liberation*, 467. William Carlos Williams, “An American Poet,” *New Masses* (23 Nov 1937): 18. The other two essays Williams wrote on Lewis are “A Twentieth-Century American” and “An Outcry from the Dirt”—the former was published in *Poetry* in 1936 and the latter was unpublished. All three essays are reprinted in *Something to Say: William Carlos Williams on Younger Poets,* ed. James E. B. Breslin (New York: New Directions, 1985), 68-82. For more on the relationship between Lewis and Williams, see Wixson “In Search of the Low-Down Americano: H. H. Lewis, William Carlos Williams, and the Politics of Literary Reception, 1930–1950,” *William Carlos Williams Review* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 75-100.

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[103] Mike Gold, *Change the World!*, 143.

[104] H. H. Lewis, "Thinking of Russia," *Thinking of Russia* (Holt, MN: B. C. Hagglund, 1932), 1. Each of Lewis's four poetry collections was printed by *Anvil* printer Ben Hagglund and featured the dedication: "Written by a Missouri Farmhand and Dedicated to Soviet Russia."

[105] H. H. Lewis, "Dogmatrix," *The Anvil* 4 (January-February 1934): 1; reprinted in *Salvation* (Holt, MN: B. C. Hagglund, 1934), 9-10. H. H. Lewis, "That Smile," *The Anvil* 6 (May-June 1934), 20; reprinted in *Road to Utterly* (Holt, MN: B. C. Hagglund, 1935), 3-4.

[106] H. H. Lewis, "One Bright Star," *The Anvil* 6 (May-June 1934), 22; reprinted in *Road to Utterly*, 17.

Yet Lewis’s cynical anti-Americanism and idealistic faith in Soviet Russia were an inextricable part of his radical regionalism, his gloomy account of the American regional space as a hopeless environment that would inevitably drive the rural poor toward a revolutionary uprising. Despite his hatred for the U.S. writ large, Lewis felt a strong attachment to southeastern Missouri, felt involuntarily shaped by its land, people, and local economic conditions. “Here I am,” he wrote, “Hunkered over the cow-donick, / Earning my one dollar per / And realizing, / With the goo upon overalls, / How environment works up a feller's pant-legs to govern his thought.”[108] Consistently highlighting the bleak conditions of the regional space that had shaped his life, Lewis wrote in “Farmhand’s Refrain,” “Not ours, not ours the farms we till, / We’re working for somebody else—[…] / Milking somebody else’s ownsome cow, / Calling somebody else’s swine, / Doing somebody else’s chores, and how, / Just a-being for somebody else!”[109] Echoing this sentiment in “Up to my Chin,” Lewis describes the shit-filled existence of a rural work: “Out in the morning / At the tick of four / Back to the tsk-tsk / On the cowbarn floor,-- / Squirming in tsk-tsk / Up to my chin, / I know plumb certain / What class I'm in.”[110] Even in the covers he commissioned for *Thinking of Russia* (*Figure 2*) and *Road to Utterly* (*Figure 3*), Lewis expressed the hopeless plight of the American rural worker. Scrupulous in his plans for these cover images, Lewis contracted fellow *Anvil* writer and artist John C. Rogers to create them according to this vision.[111] In the cover for *Thinking of Russia*, a shabbily-dressed farmer and his mules laboriously plow the earth, while a bright sun, representing the example of Soviet Russia, rises on the horizon. For Lewis, as this cover suggests, the light of communist salvation illuminated but did not emanate from the American regional space, which held only tedious toil for the rural working class. Taking the plow-driving perspective of the farmer from this cover image in the poem, "Poof, No Chance to be President," Lewis asks, "Oh how can I struggle / And win through strife, / Looking up a mule's pratt / All of my life?"[112] Just as cynical in tone, the woodcut for *Road to Utterly* shows an overalled figure walking through a desolate, almost post-apocalyptic rural landscape. Far from the optimism and hopefulness about the radical potential of traditional communities expressed in the writing of Hagglund, Conroy, and Caldwell, Lewis's covers and the poems behind them depict the regional space as a hopeless place, a place of meaningless toil for capitalist masters.

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[107] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 253.

[108] H. H. Lewis, *Thinking of Russia*, 12.

[109] H. H. Lewis, “Farmhand’s Refrain,” *Poetry* 52, no. 3 (June 1938), 116.

[110] Lewis, *Road to Utterly*, 5.

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[111] Lewis's meticulous attitude toward these cover designs can be inferred in part from Rogers' complaints to Conroy: "I've just finished a cover that Lewis will cuss me out for because it does'nt [*sic*] have all the stuff in it he wanted" (Rogers letter to Conroy, c. 1934, Conroy Papers, Newberry Library).

[112] Lewis, *Road to Utterly*, 21.

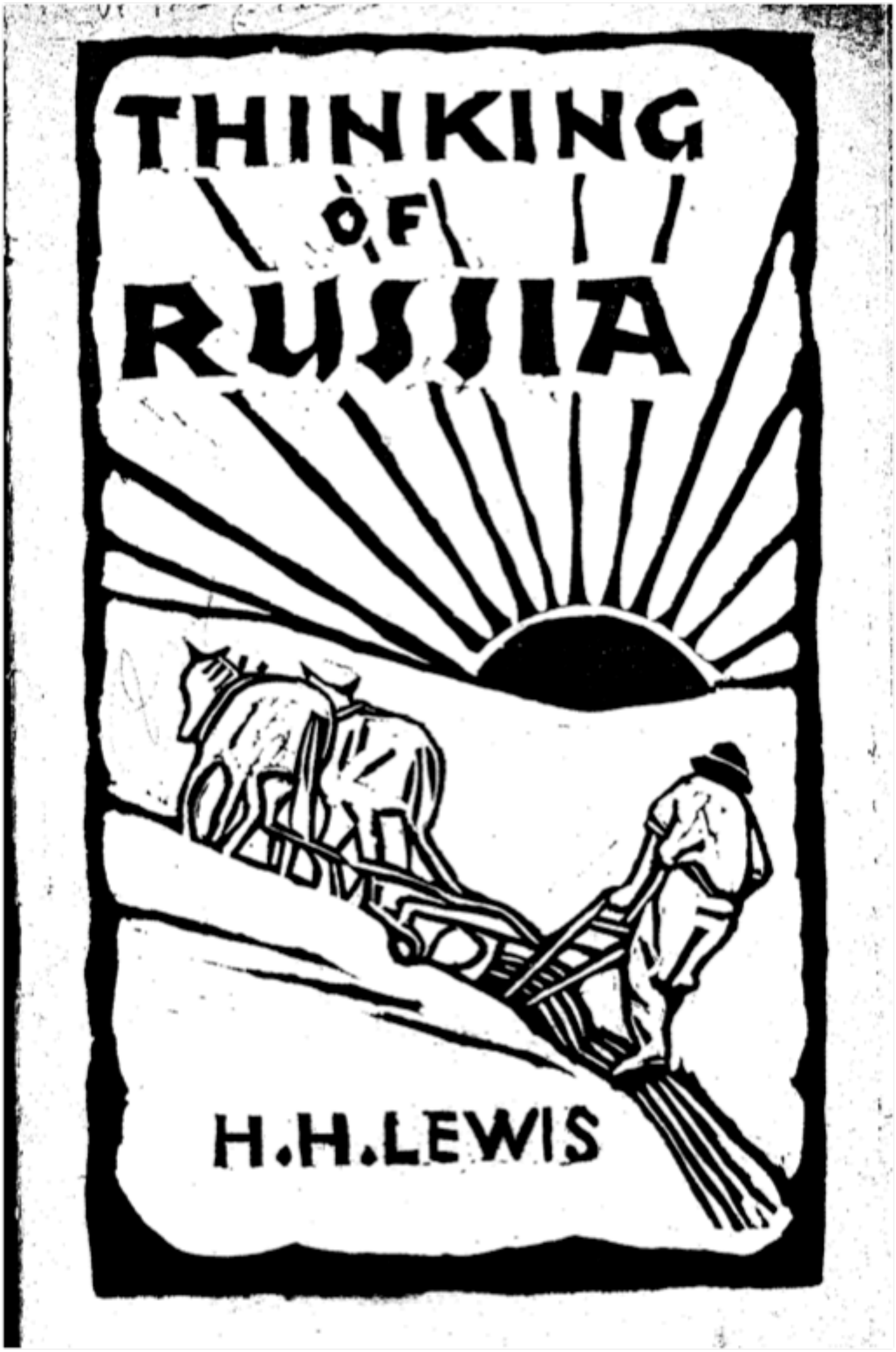
THINKING
OF
RUSSIA
H.H.LEWIS

Figure 2: Cover page for Lewis's Thinking of Russia. Black on a grey background. Lewis Archive. Southeast Missouri State University.

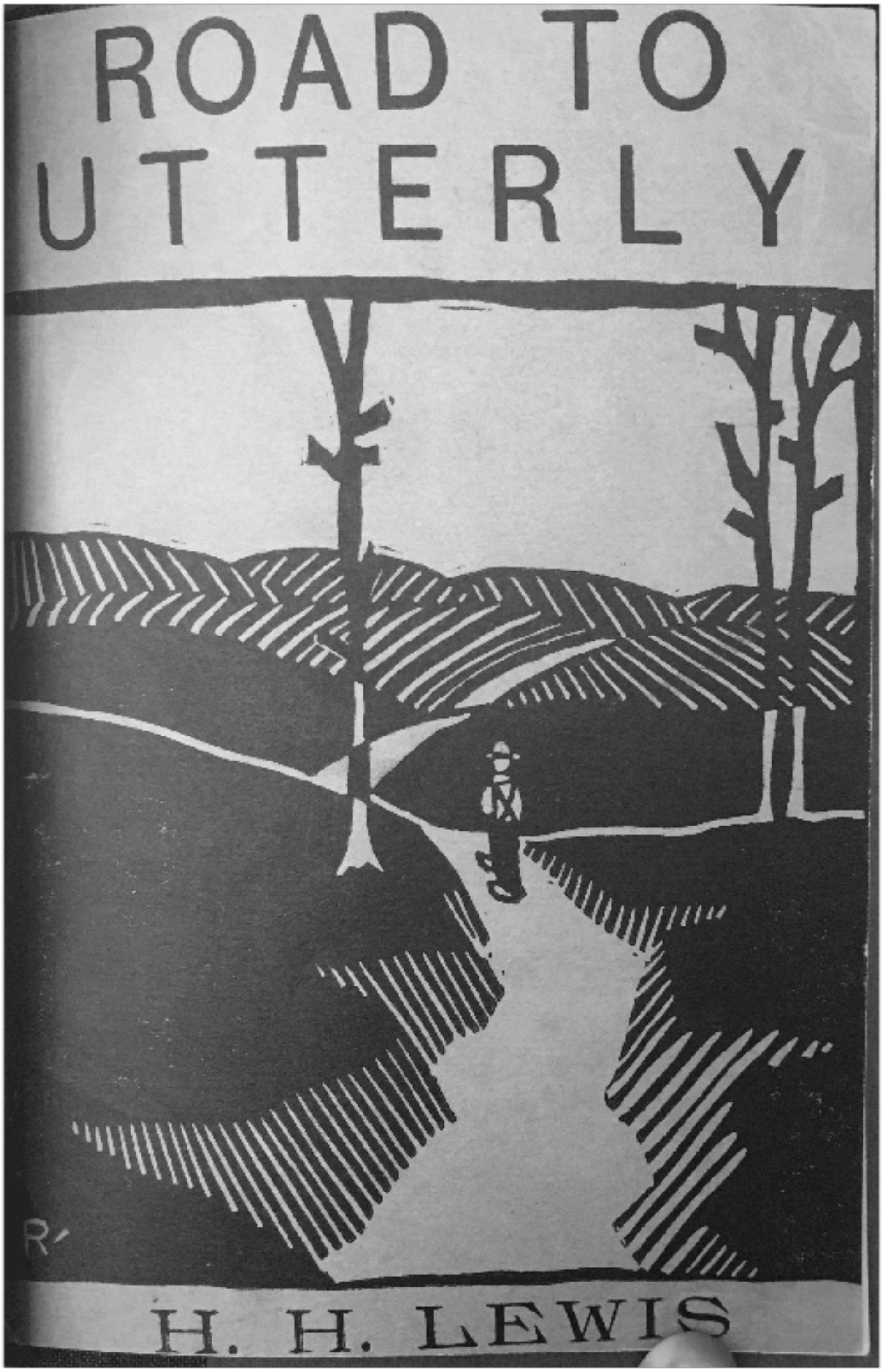
ROAD TO UTTERLY
R
H. H. LEWIS

Figure 3: Cover page for Lewis's Road to Utterly (1935). Lewis Archive. Southeast Missouri State University.

Lewis's worship of Russia, too, was tied to this distinct radical regionalist viewpoint. For him, a new Soviet America was the logical conclusion of the inevitable regional uprising. In his *New Masses* essay on Lewis, William Carlos Williams noted that "when [Lewis] speaks of Russia, it is precisely then that he is most American, most solidly in the tradition."[113] Indeed, wrote Williams, "there is a lock, stock, and barrel identity between Lewis today, fighting to free himself from a class enslavement which torments his body with lice and cow dung, and the persecuted colonist of early American tradition."[114] Alfred Kreymborg likewise noted that despite his reverence of Russia, Lewis "is fully as American as our original forebears."[115] As Williams and Kreymborg suggest with reference to the nation's founders, Lewis's veneration of Russia constituted the imagining of a new America, a Soviet America born from a regional revolt and shaped in the model of communist Russia. In his poetry, rather than calling for escape to Russia, Lewis consistently called Russia by phrases like "America's loud EXAMPLE SONG" or "Mighty example-force," and referred to himself as "a penniless 'failure' of a farmhand jerked to the seventh heaven of hope by Russia… / Triumphant EXAMPLE!"[116] As Williams put it an unpublished essay on Lewis, "He isn't even concerned with the niceties of HOW it should be brought to an end. He simply yells, END it! It's being done in Russia. Then I'm for the same thing here."[117] In spite of its cynicism, Lewis's writing, Williams argued, is "of triumph, realization. A poet's vision of a real future."[118] Unlike much of the radical regionalist content Conroy published in *The Anvil*, Lewis's writing suggested not the power of the regional space but its inevitable collapse and rebirth, the long-awaited incarnation of a Soviet America beginning in the nation's countryside.

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[113] Williams, "An American Poet," 17.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Kreymborg, "Farmhand Poet," 22.

[116] H. H. Lewis, "Example-Song," *Road to Utterly*, 25. H. H. Lewis, "Salvation," *Salvation*, 21. H. H. Lewis, "Intoxication," *Thinking of Russia*, 21.

[117] William Carlos Williams, "An Outcry from the Dirt," in *Something to Say: William Carlos Williams on Younger Poets,* 72.

Even the formal qualities of Lewis's verse bear out this radical regionalist message. Using a vivid, direct vernacular to express a sharp leftist political message, Lewis reinvested traditional forms with modernist content and created radical regionalist verse that read like an old socialist folksong. Indeed, he was often compared by critics to legendary IWW poet Joe Hill.[119] Williams described Lewis's writing as the "closest to word of mouth," and Jack Balch lauded his "original use of contemporary folk-slang."[120] Cary Nelson blames Lewis's subsequent critical marginalization on precisely this vernacular quality and rhetorical directness in his form, its lack of the "surface indecision and ambivalence that many critics since the 1950s have deemed a transcendent, unquestionable literary and cultural value."[121] Yet Nelson asserts that Lewis's radical regionalist style nonetheless retains its modernist force "because traditional forms place him in more direct confrontation with dominant culture."[122] Impressed with Lewis's ability to reinvest traditional forms with radical significance, Williams saw the value of expressing radical political notions via the local language of one's region. Speculating on the modernism of Lewis's radical regionalist style, Williams described poetry that "has roots" and "stands solidly on the specific history of the place" but "doesn't reverence for itself the illustrious examples of the past."[123] While "for years poets have been fighting to get out from under the implications of the older verse forms and practices," Williams wrote, "Lewis goes across poetry as if he were following one of his mules across a clayey pasture he was turning."[124] Clearly, Conroy, who had combined a folklore-inspired style and radical politics himself in the Uncle Ollie stories, saw the connections between his own radical regionalism, which emphasized the progressive political power of the regional space, and Lewis's, which depicted a rural landscape on the brink of collapse and communist rebirth. Conroy not only published Lewis repeatedly in *The Anvil* but also, importantly, defended him against undeserved criticism. In response to William Rose Benet's comments in the *Saturday Review of Literature* that Lewis's verse was "really very bad," Conroy fired back with venom: "Lewis is 'very bad' for Ivory Tower aesthetes who browse undisturbed in the sedentary confines of the library, while outside millions of desperate men are starving."[125]

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[118] Williams, "An American Poet," 18.

[119] Jack Balch wrote that "Whispers reach us from time to time, breathing his name with Joe Hill's" ("Singer of the Gumbo," *New Masses* [9 Jul 1935]: 24). Gold wrote, "Thirty years from now he will probably be in all the red anthologies alongside of Joe Hill" (*Change the World!*, 144). Malcolm Cowley wrote that "Lewis might well be the red-starred laureate, the Joe Hill of the Communists" *(as quoted in Wixson,* "In Search of the Low-Down Americano," *76*).

[120] Williams, "An American Poet," 17. Balch, "Singer of the Gumbo," 24.

[121] Cary Nelson, *Repression and Recovery, Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory, 1910–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992): 44.

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[122] Ibid., 48.

[123] Williams, "An Outcry from the Dirt," 71.

[124] Ibid., 71.

[125] William Rose Benet, "Round About Parnassus," *Saturday Review of Literature* (4 June 1932): 775. Conroy, *Rebel Poet*, (August 1932): 2.

How "New York City Slickers hornswoggled country boy Conroy out of his magazine": The End of *The Anvil*

The Anvil's undoing followed much the same path as *Rebel Poet*'s. As the magazine gained increasing prominence on the left, with subscriptions eventually reaching almost one thousand and circulation almost five thousand, it attracted the scrutiny of the CPUSA in New York and the pressure of its incessant factionalism.[126] Divisions had emerged between *Anvil* radicals across the hinterlands and orthodox Party members in the metropolitan East.[127] "The Party seemed ambivalent about the regional basis of art," writes Wixson, and *Anvil* writers felt called to defend against allegations that they were "hopelessly parochial."[128] Lewis satirized this condescension from the East in verse: "Can any good come out of *Anvil*-yard? Can any rube be Rapply citified[?]"[129] Meridel Le Sueur, who later expressed her indebtedness to Conroy and *The Anvil* for publishing early portions of what became *The Girl* (1939; 1978), recalled that at the 1934 Chicago Convention of John Reed Clubs, Philip Rahv and William Phelps, founders of *Partisan Review*, "made this awful speech about Jack's writing and my writing and in the middle of this, that the farmer was already a capitalist, that […] there's not use in writing about the farmer, that he didn't love the land—that was just romanticism."[130] As pressure on *The Anvil* began to mount, Conroy was distracted by his work-in-progress second novel, *A World to Win*, and failed to notice the political power play taking place beneath his feet. Walter Snow, who had acted as a liaison between the *Anvil* and the Party, soon gained editorial control at the latter's request, moving the magazine's center of gravity to New York: "In New York, Snow said, the *Anvil* could be put back on firmer footing, with the party's help," writes Wixson.[131] Snow negotiated with the Party to make *The Anvil* what he called "the official fiction magazine of the Communist literary movement."[132] As for the magazine's reputation for horizontal organization and publishing obscure regionalists, Snow told Conroy "that period in the career of *Anvil* is past."[133]

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[126] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 318. Wixson also writes that these numbers "did not accurately reflect the number of readers" because the magazine was often passed around and read in libraries (318).

[127] "Anvil's considerable success, ironically, raised concern within the Party's cultural circles" (Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 319). Conroy's commitment to editorial independence caused many in the Party to consider him unreliable and inconsistent.

[128] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 377.

[129] Lewis, "The Noselings," *Salvation*, 31.

Conflict between radical regionalists and orthodox Party members came to a head at the 1935 American Writers Congress in New York City, inflamed by Conroy's plea for addressing workers on their own terms. "To me, a strike bulletin or an impassioned leaflet is of more moment," said Conroy in his speech, "than three hundred prettily and faultlessly written pages about the private woes of a gigolo or the biological ferment of a society dame as useful to society as the buck brush that infests Missouri cow pastures."[134] Despite the sincerity of his statement and its articulation of a workers' perspective, eastern critics found its implications insulting, evidence of a commitment to sloppy writing. Rival writer James T. Farrell, reacting to the homespun language of Conroy's speech, gave him the derisive nickname "Jack Cornrow" and later parodied his speech in *Yet Other Waters* (1952), portraying Conroy as "poor yokel, Pat Devlin."[135] "Conroy's misinterpreted strike-bulletin comment stiffened the hostility of the literary standard bearers," writes Wixson, "who felt called upon to defend against rude interlopers."[136] Indeed, the editors of the newly-founded *Partisan Review*, William Phillips and Philip Rahv, had taken it upon themselves to eliminate these "rude interlopers." In a joint editorial in the third number of *Partisan Review*, the editors attacked leftist "vulgarism," identifying *Anvil* writer H. H. Lewis in particular.[137] Next, unbeknown to Conroy, they arranged with Snow to merge *Anvil* into their own magazine. In August of 1935, before Conroy had a chance to reply in protest from Moberly, Snow notified him of the impending merger of *The Anvil* and *Partisan Review*. Though a handful of concessions were made to *The Anvil*, the move was essentially a hostile takeover. As the *Anvil* business manager wrote, "It looks like a raiding party of a group of backslappers who want to feed on the carcass of *Anvil*."[138] Apparently defeated again by calculating backroom politics of the Party and its New York cliques, Conroy told Snow, "I have no illusions about the character of the merged magazine. It will be *Partisan Review*, not *Anvil*."[139] True to his prediction, *Anvil* was soon dropped from the title altogether, and by the time of *Partisan Review*'s relaunch in 1937, not a trace of Conroy's magazine remained. The "New York City slickers," as Conroy put it later, with a note of self-satire, had "hornswoggled country boy Conroy out of his magazine."[140]

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[130] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 380. Wixson cites a personal interview with Le Seuer.

[131] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 384. Snow is listed as the New York "business office manager" in the March 1935 issue of *The Anvil*. He had taken over most of the editorial role by this point.

[132] Walter Snow letter to Jack Conroy, 18 December 1934. Conroy Papers. Newberry Library.

[133] Ibid.

[134] Jack Conroy, "The Worker as Writer," in *The Jack Conroy Reader*, 218.

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[135] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 390. James T. Farrell, *Yet Other Waters* (New York: Vanguard, 1952), 398. Farrell has Devlin say, for instance, "I thrill with joy when I read a simple strike leaflet" (113).

[136] Wixson, *Worker-Writer*, 391.

[137] William Phillips and Philip Rahv. "Problems and Perspectives in Revolutionary Literature," *Partisan Review* 3 (June-July 1934): 5.

[138] W. W. Wharton letter to Jack Conroy, October 1935. Conroy Papers. Newberry Library.

[139] Conroy letter to Walter Snow, 22 October 1935. Conroy Papers. Newberry Library.

Yet even in its short life, Conroy's magazine had an enormous impact. In adapting the modernist 'little magazine' form to its radical regionalist ends, *The Anvil* ushered in the "classic" period of proletarian magazines and cleared a critical space for leftist politics with regional concerns.[141] "Taking *Anvil* as a model," writes Denning, the regionalist 'little magazines' that followed "created a 'proletarian regionalism'" in which "the 'regionalist' banner was adopted in the face of the metropolitan cultural left, and the 'proletarian' banner was adopted in opposition to the forms of reactionary and racist regionalism epitomized by the southern Agrarians."[142] Conroy and his disseminated network of writers also employed a distinctly modernist literary mode, a radical regionalism treating resilient regional folkways as essential to imagining political renewal in an increasingly disillusioned modern world.[143] Though their political engagement and regionalist approach has left them neglected by scholars of modernism, Conroy's *Anvil* group developed in their writing a leftist politics responsive to the problematics of modernity and insistent on the power of local vernacular, community, and tradition unite workers toward revolution.

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[140] Jack Conroy, "Days of 'The Anvil'" *The Jack Conroy Reader*, 147.

[141] Denning, *Cultural Front*, 211. Denning writes: "There were basically two kinds of little magazines: the radical modernist magazines that appeared in the wake of the crash; and the 'classic' proletarian magazines that followed the appearance of *Anvil* and *Broom* in 1933" (211).

[142] Denning, *Cultural Front*, 219, 133.

[143] Denning claims that this leftist regionalism "often overlapped with the proletarian culture avant-garde" (*Cultural Front*, 133).

Chapter Three:

Regionalism *Démeublé*: Willa Cather and the Rise of Modernist Regionalism

> Men travel faster now, but I do not know if they go to better things.
>
> – Willa Cather[1]

In the winter of 1908, at the Boston home of Annie Fields, Willa Cather, thirty-five-year-old editor of *McClure's* magazine and aspiring novelist, met veteran regionalist writer Sarah Orne Jewett.[2] The two women sparked an instant connection and kept up an active correspondence until Jewett's death sixteen months later. Jewett advised Cather, who was at a crossroads in her literary career, to take "time and quiet to perfect your work" by quitting her editorial job to become a full-time writer and "to be surer of your backgrounds" by relying more on the regional setting of Nebraska.[3] This advice, Deborah Carlin writes, "cemented for all of Cather's biographers and the majority of her critics the centrality of this relationship as the crucial turning point in Cather's career."[4] Indeed, Cather scholarship has customarily assumed the enormous influence of Jewett as a literary model and mentor, and evidence certainly appears to support this reading. Cather herself stresses in particular Jewett's regionalist influence, to which critics often attribute her shift from the Jamesian realism of her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), to the Midwestern regionalism of her more successful subsequent "prairie trilogy," *O Pioneers!* (1913), *The Song of the Lark* (1915), and *My Ántonia* (1918). Highlighting this regionalist connection in a 1921 interview, Cather told the *Bookman*, "[Jewett] said to me that if my life had lain in a part of the world that was without a literature, and I couldn't tell about it truthfully in the form I most admired, I'd have to make a kind of writing that would tell it, no matter what I lost in the process."[5] Cather even edited *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* for Houghton Mifflin in 1925. Her preface to the two-volume collection lauds Jewett's stories as "almost flawless examples of literary art" and locates her as a central figure in the canon of American literature: "If I were asked to name three American books which have the possibility of a long, long life, I would say at once, 'The Scarlet Letter,' 'Huckleberry Finn,' and [Jewett's] 'The Country of the Pointed Firs.'"[6]

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[1] Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (Vintage, 1990), 289.

[2] On this meeting, see James Woodress, *Willa Cather: A Literary Life* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 197.

[3] Willa Cather, *Selected Letters of Willa Cather*, eds. Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout (New York: Penguin, 2014), 117.

[4] Deborah Carlin, "Cather's Jewett: Relationship, Influence, and Representation" in *Cather Studies* 10 (2015): 172.

But by 1936 Cather had completely reframed her relationship to Jewett. In *Not Under Forty*, Cather pulled back markedly from the older author's influence and consigned her regionalist mode to a fading nineteenth-century tradition of 'local color' writing. In "Miss Jewett," a revised and expanded version of her preface to *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett*, Cather subtly turned commendation into critique. Jewett, she said, "had never been one of those who 'live to write'" but one for whom writing was "one of many preoccupations," merely "a ladylike accomplishment."[7] In a backhanded compliment suggesting the 'limits' of Jewett's regional settings, Cather noted the "fine a literary sense" that allowed the older author to revere

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[5] Willa Cather, *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches, and Lectures*, ed. L. Brent Bohlke, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 22

[6] Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett*, ed. Willa Cather (Peter Smith, 1962), xviii.

[7] Willa Cather, *Not Under Forty* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 85-6.

"contemporary writers of much greater range than her own."[8] Whereas she had called *Country of the Pointed Firs* a "masterpiece" in her preface, Cather now reduced the collection to mere 'provincialism' by suggesting "[Jewett's] stories were but reflections" of "personal pleasure" derived from "the Maine country and seacoast."[9] Excising the bold pronouncement that placed Jewett's fiction firmly in the canon of American literature alongside Hawthorne and Twain, Cather concluded: "Among those glittering novelties which have now become old-fashioned Miss Jewett's little volumes made a small showing. A taste for them must always remain a special taste."[10]

Why would Cather revise her attitude toward Jewett in this way? Why diminish the author she had previously considered a mentor and a model? While Sharon O'Brien has argued that Cather was simply reporting Jewett's altered standing among "a new class of unsympathetic readers," Carlin notes that this explanation "doesn't even attempt to address Cather's quite specific references to—and veiled critiques of—Jewett's work."[11] Carlin suggests instead that Cather intended to signal to reviewers critical of her own work that she, in contrast with Jewett, was "not burdened by nostalgia for an irretrievable past."[12] In other words, though she had at first encouraged comparisons between herself and Jewett in terms of regionalism, Cather sought in the 1930s to separate from the burden of nostalgia she now found embodied in Jewett's regional writing. Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse have argued as much in their influential reading of Cather's "Old Mrs. Harris" (1932), the story of a Southern family relocated to a small town in the Midwest. Closing their anthology *American Women Regionalists* with "Old Mrs. Harris," Fetterley and Pryse argue that the story announces "the 'end' of regionalism as a viable mode."[13] In its intergenerational conflict, they write, "Old Mrs. Harris" "articulates Cather's need to separate from the writing tradition created by an earlier generation of women," such as Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, and Kate Chopin.[14] Like her revised "Miss Jewett" essay, Cather's "Old Mrs. Harris," in their words, "underscores the limitations of regionalism for a modernizing culture committed to separating from its past." [15] In "Old Mrs. Harris," they argue, regionalism becomes simply a "comforting memory."[16]

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[8] Ibid., 89-90.

[9] Ibid., 87.

[10] Ibid., 92.

[11] Sharon O'Brien, "Becoming Non-canonical: The Case Against Willa Cather," *American Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (March 1988): 120.

[12] Carlin, "Cather's Jewett," 185.

But what others interpret in "Miss Jewett" and "Old Mrs. Harris" as a close I take as an opening. In distancing herself from Jewett in the 1930s, Cather does not signal the end of regionalism as such but rather the beginning of a new approach to regionalism, a modernist regionalism that abandons the reactionary nostalgia of 'local color' for more progressive nostalgia that looks longingly into the past not as a rejection of or retreat from the modern present but in order to reconsider, critique, and reimagine modernity. Cather's work does indeed "underscore the limitations of regionalism," as Fetterley and Pryse put it, but only the regionalism of a previous generation, a regionalism predicated on what Svetlana Boym calls "restorative nostalgia," which seeks to "return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment."[17] Cather's late fiction, by contrast, reveals the development of a modernist regionalism grounded in a "reflective nostalgia," which offers a critical vantage point on modernity and, in Boym's words, "opens up a multitude of potentialities, nonteleological possibilities."[18] Rather than reading "Old Mrs. Harris" as the closing number of the American regionalist tradition, then, I begin this chapter by repositioning the story—as well as the other two stories collected in *Obscure Destinies*—not at the end of regionalism but at a moment of transition from one form of regionalism to the next, a transition between the 'local color' of the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century's modernist movement. Reversing Fetterley and Pryse's reading, I will argue that the intergenerational conflicts of *Obscure Destinies* actually allegorize the recent rise of a new modernist form of regionalism.

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[13] *American Women Regionalists, 1850-1910*, 595.

[14] Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place,* 56. Critics have at times insisted on sharp distinctions between "local color" and "regionalism." Fetterley and Pryse, for instance, characterize the former as "a destructive form of cultural entertainment that reifies not only the subordinate status of regions but the hierarchical structures of gender, race, class, and nation" and the latter as a discursive strategy that "uncovers the ideology of local color and reintroduces an awareness of ideology into discussions of regionalist politics" (6). I do not make such an acute distinction between "regionalism" and "local color," which I merely take as a periodizing term denoting a particular kind of regionalist mode practiced in the late 19th century.

[15] Ibid., 58.

[16] Ibid., 57

What did this new regionalist mode look like for Cather? Her late masterpiece, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), provides an answer. This regionalist novel constitutes a search for 'authenticity' in an imagined legendary past, but rather than, as she put it, "hold[ing] the note," by forcing an explicit commentary into her narratives, Cather instead sought "to touch and pass on," that is, to allow the contradictions, conflicts, and complexities of modernity to arise from its contrast with the past.[19] Despite the fact that critics in the 1930s would misread this nostalgic mode as regressive and conservative, tagging Cather with the "escapist" reputation that would follow her work for the next several decades, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* actually reveals an *engagée* novelist committed to critical reflection on modernity by way of nostalgia for the regional past. Moving from the heartland prairies of her youth to nineteenth-century New Mexico, Cather depicts a regional past that can subtly call into question the norms, values, and beliefs of the modern present. This novel constitutes Cather's clearest articulation of a modernist regionalism, a narrative mode taking the regional space as the site of a "reflective nostalgia" with the power to critique modernity and imagine a better future.

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[17] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 49.

[18] Ibid., 50.

The question of whether Cather can truly be considered a "modernist" remains unsettled. "To some," write Melissa J. Homestead and Guy Reynolds, "linking Willa Cather to 'the modern' or more narrowly to literary modernism still seems an eccentric proposition."[20] As Richard H. Millington points out, "one will look in vain for Cather's name in the index of most accounts, whether new or old, of the nature and history of Anglo-American modernism."[21] In some ways, this neglect appears justified. Born into a late-Victorian world, Cather was significantly older than canonical American modernist novelists like F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, and in many of her public statements and fictional motifs, she appeared to spurn modernity.[22] Moreover, her work was fundamentally shaped by her reception, marketing, and self-fashioning as a regionalist writer, granting her a reputation that seemed to exclude her from urban-centric modernism.[23] In fact, this may have been the decisive factor in her exclusion from the canon; as Middleton argues, "the designation of regional writer…served to relegate Cather to a relatively minor role in the development of American literature."[24]

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[19] Willa Cather, *Willa Cather on Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 9.

[20] Melissa J. Homestead and Guy Reynolds, "Introduction," *Cather Studies* 9 (2011): xi.

[21] Richard H. Millington, "Willa Cather's American Modernism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Willa Cather*, ed. Marilee Lindemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 51.

[22] Homestead and Reynolds, "Introduction," xi.

In the last few decades, however, as her stock in the academy and the canon has continued to rise, many critics have made convincing cases for Cather's modernism. On one hand, scholars have pointed to her work's modernist formal qualities. Phyllis Rose and Jo Ann Middleton, for instance, have argued for Cather's affinities with the aesthetic ideals of particular modern artists, such as D. H. Lawrence or Virginia Woolf.[25] On the other hand, recent historicist readings have argued for Cather's modernism via emphasis on the historical resonances of particular themes or episodes, highlighting the way she attempts "to synchronize and bridge very different cultural eras."[26] Kelsey Squire, for one, argues for Cather's modernism on the grounds that her work is "complicated by twentieth-century economics, consumerism, and cosmopolitanism."[27] Yet even as Cather has today been largely incorporated into the modernist canon, neither formalist nor historicist approaches have adequately addressed the crux of her original exclusion, namely, her regionalism. The formalist approach goes no further than identifying regionalism as the source of Cather's "deceptive simplicity of style," while the historicists too often rely on the vague assertion that merely because Cather's content is "regional" and her context is "modern" the former must be somehow "complicated" by the latter.[28] While recent historicist readings usefully remind us that Cather's work seeks to "recall and capture the past in order to understand the present and, perhaps, create a bridge to the future," they often neglect the crucial role of the spatial.[29] Incorporating formalist and historicist concerns, my reading of Cather also accounts for the critical regionalism at the heart of her aesthetic project. In *Obscure Destinies* Cather crafts an allegory of generational struggle, marking the transition between older and newer regionalisms, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* reveals her own conception of a modernist regionalism in practice, a *démeublé* regionalist method relying on a reflective nostalgia to suggest and engage with the failings and potentials of modernity.

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[23] On the genesis and effects of Cather's reputation as a regionalist see Guy Reynolds, "Willa Cather's Case: Region and Reputation," in *Regionalism and the Humanities*, eds. Timothy R. Mahoney and Wendy J. Katz (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 79-94.

[24] Jo Ann Middleton, *Willa Cather's Modernism: A Study of Style and Technique* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), 20.

[25] For examples of this formalist approach see Middleton, *Willa Cather's Modernism*, and Phyllis Rose, "The Case of Willa Cather," in *Writing of Women: Essays in a Renaissance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan Uniersity Press, 1985), 136–52.

[26] Homestead and Reynolds, "Introduction," xx. Examples of this historicist approach include Guy Reynolds' *Willa Cather in Context: Progress, Race, Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) and Joseph R. Urgo's *Willa Cather and the Myth of American Migration* (Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

Manifest Legacies, Obscure Destinies

"Old Mrs. Harris," the longest story in *Obscure Destinies* (longer in fact than one of Cather's previous novels, *My Mortal Enemy*), was serialized in *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1932 as "Three

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[27] Kelsey Squire, "Jazz Age Places," *Cather Studies* 9 (2011): 46-66.

[28] Middleton, *Willa Cather's Modernism*, 20.

[29] Homestead and Reynolds, "Introduction," xx.

Women," a title indicative of the generational dynamics that form the heart of the narrative. The story is concerned with three generations of women in the Templeton family, which had, like Cather's own family, migrated from the rural South to the Midwest. Indeed, the Templetons parallel the Cathers: old Mrs. Harris is based on Cather's maternal grandmother, Rachel Boak; her middle-aged daughter, Victoria Templeton, is modeled after Cather's mother, Jennie Cather; and Victoria's ambitious fifteen-year-old daughter, Vickie Templeton, is a stand-in for Cather herself. Hardly more than a household servant, old Mrs. Harris lives a weary and tedious life of work and sleeps each night on a wooden lounge in a little back room. She lies on the slats "thinking about the comfortable rambling old house in Tennessee."[30] Though her family largely neglects her, Mrs. Harris gets through the dreary days on the strength of her longing for the past, "the old neighbors, the yard and garden she had worked in all her life, the apple trees she had planted, the lilac arbor, tall enough to walk in, which she had clipped and shaped so many years."[31] Yet she is repulsed by the idea of being pitied, thinking, "at home, back in Tennessee, her place in the family was not exceptional, but completely normal."[32] Her daughter, Victoria, who "had been a belle in their town in Tennessee," craves popularity and social standing, "but here she was not very popular, no matter how many pretty dresses she wore, and she couldn't bear it."[33] Victoria feels abused by her circumstances, "shut up in a little clustered house with children and fresh babies and an old woman and a stupid bound girl and a husband who wasn't very successful."[34] Like her mother, Victoria is stuck in a fading way of life, trying to force outdated Southern social codes onto a bourgeois Midwestern modernity: “she wanted to run away back to Tennessee, and lead a free, gay life, as she had when she was first married.”[35]

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[30] Willa Cather, *Collected Stories* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 271.

[31] Ibid., 271.

[32] Ibid., 286.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 308.

The mutual anguish of Mrs. Harris and her daughter stems from the realization of being out of place in modernity, or, as the narrator puts it, “no longer living in a feudal society, where there were plenty of landless people, glad to render service to the more fortunate, but in a snappy little Western democracy, where every man was as good as his neighbour and out to prove it.”[36] Victoria’s longing is regressive, characterized by a desire to bring back the “old ways” of her memory by “run[ning] away back to Tennessee,” and Mrs. Harris’s longing constitutes a full retreat into those memories of the old home. Victoria wishes to return to the old days, while Mrs. Harris has already done so in her mind—even in her final moments, she is “remembering the old place at home.”[37] Reading “Old Mrs. Harris” allegorically, then, as do Fetterley and Pryse, Mrs. Harris and Victoria can be taken as representative of a fading regionalist mode, a ‘local color’ tradition “understood to be no longer viable.”[38] For Fetterley and Pryse, the story represents Cather’s “modernist vision,” her expression of the limitations of the regionalism in a modern era more concerned with the future than the past.[39] But in their focus on Mrs. Harris and Victoria, Fetterley and Pryse ground their allegorical interpretation in a fundamental misreading of the story’s central character, Vickie Templeton. Because “Vicki’s [*sic*] future lies elsewhere than in the regionalism of Old Mrs. Harris," and because "her development requires different values from those represented by this regionalism," they argue, "Old Mrs. Harris" proposes that "regionalism can no longer serve the purposes of an ambitious girl from the 'provinces' who seeks to be a major American (not woman) writer."[40] Yet a closer look at Vickie's character, a fictionalized version of Cather herself, actually reveals a deep commitment to regionalism, albeit a regionalism with "different values" than those represented by her mother and grandmother. A sharper understanding of Vickie Templeton in fact reveals that the crucial announcement of "Old Mrs. Harris" is not the end of regionalism but its modernist mutation.

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 288.

[37] Ibid., 313.

[38] Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 55.

[39] Walter Benn Michaels offers a somewhat analogous reading by suggesting that Cather evokes and mourns an “idealized ancestry” in “Old Mrs. Harris” (*Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995], 153).

In contrast with the older Templeton women and their yearning to bring back the past, Vickie Templeton is a child of her age, energetic, enterprising, and egoistic. She spends her time devouring literature from the large library of the Rosens, whose house "was the nearest thing to an art gallery and museum that the Templetons had ever seen."[41] When she applies for a scholarship to attend the University of Michigan, her mother and grandmother fail to understand why she would break with their old-fashioned conventions: "I don't see where she got this notion," Victoria laments, and Mrs. Harris notes, "None of our people, or Mr. Templeton's either, ever went to college."[42] Meanwhile, Vickie herself places all her hopes on this ticket out of the provincial life, thinking, "There was no alternative. If she didn't get [the scholarship], then everything was over."[43] She eventually wins the scholarship, and at the end of the story she is preparing to leave for Ann Arbor.

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[40] Fetterley and Pryse, *Writing Out of Place*, 58.

[41] Cather, *Collected Stories*, 274.

[42] Ibid., 295.

[43] Ibid., 297.

While Vickie's flight from her hometown might seem to suggest a disavowal of regionalism, a crucial facet of the story indicates her fundamental connection to regional space. Vickie's thirst for knowledge, we learn, was inspired not by the desire for material gain or for romantic adventure—when asked what she wants to do with her knowledge, Vickie tells Mr. Rosen, "I don't know. Nothing I guess. […] I just want it"[44]—but rather by a curiosity about regional history. The previous summer, a young professor and his students had come to town to dig for fossils in the nearby sandhills, and Vickie had been captivated by their research. Mrs. Harris points to this visit as the source of Vickie's new interest in studying: "I expect it is all on account of the young gentleman who was here last summer."[45] During the three months of the researchers' stay, "Vickie had spent a great many mornings in their camp" and become "their mascot."[46] When the professor and his students had found a bed of mammoth fossils, "they were greatly excited by their finds, and so was Vickie."[47] Thus, Vickie's drive and desire is actually rooted in regionalism, in the early history of her own local space. Notably, she shares this biographical fact with another of Cather's characters, Thea Kronborg, the protagonist in Cather's *The Song of the Lark*. Thea's imagination, like Vickie's, is fired by her childhood discovery of ancient remains in the sand hills near her Midwestern hometown. Thea's early life and later her career as a famous singer are fundamentally molded by these origins, particularly by her encounter with the deep regional past, which continues to help shape her artistic vision. Though Cather leaves the reader to imagine what happens to Vickie after leaving home for Ann Arbor, her strong likenesses to Thea Kronborg suggest that her regional connection will remain just as strong as Thea's does. Indeed, the story closes by highlighting this regionalist future, as the narrator observes, "Vickie still had to go on, to follow the long road that leads through things unguessed at and unforeseeable."[48] Reading Vickie as the end of regionalism, then, is to overlook her clear and defining link to her own regional origins. Taking Vickie as a representative of a new modern regionalist mode, Cather's "Old Mrs. Harris" can be understood as an allegory not for the end of regionalism altogether but for the transition from the 'local color' of Jewett to the modern regionalism of Cather herself.

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[44] Ibid., 299.

[45] Ibid., 295

[46] Ibid., 296.

[47] Ibid.

The other two stories in *Obscure Destinies* underscore this interpretation as well. Both "Neighbor Rosicky" and "Two Friends" are framed not by the titular figures whose deaths they elegize but by representatives of the younger generation who carry on into the future, all while remaining intimately connected to the regional space. "Neighbor Rosicky," for instance, tells of the final days of Anton Rosicky, an immigrant from Bohemia who finds a "complete and beautiful" life as a Nebraska farmer; yet the story is framed by the young Doctor Burleigh, a local boy who returned home to be a country doctor after medical school. In the story's closing scene, after Rosicky's death, Burleigh compares "city cemeteries," which seem like "arranged and lonely and unlike anything in the living world," with Rosicky's final rest in the country cemetery: "nothing could be more undeathlike than this place."[49] The story's central event reaffirms this theme: as Rosicky dies he imparts to his restless young daughter-in-law, who wants to move to the city, a sort of regional "awakening" that convinces her to stay in the country.[50] The final story, "Two Friends," tells about the demise of a friendship between two business men in a little Kansas town, Dillon and Trueman, who meet on the street corner each evening to banter good-naturedly about their opposing political views. But the story is narrated from the first-person perspective of a thirteen-year-old girl, who finds excuses to stand nearby on the street and listen to their talk. As the story closes, the narrator admits that she often thinks back sadly on this broken friendship, but even so, it showed her that "wonderful things do happen even in the dullest places."[51]

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[48] Ibid., 313.

[49] Ibid., 261.

[50] Ibid., 259.

As with "Old Mrs. Harris," "Neighbor Rosicky" and "Two Friends" both reflect on a passing generation while affirming the regional connections of the next. The collection's title thus not only refers to the "obscure destinies," the unremarkable deaths, of humble regional characters—as in the "homely joys, and destiny obscure" of Gray's famous "Elegy"—but also to the "obscure destinies," the indeterminate futures, of the next generation of regionalists. Through the intergenerational dynamics in "Neighbor Rosicky," "Two Friends," and especially "Old Mrs. Harris," Cather allegorizes a transition between two conflicting conceptions of regional writing, an older and a newer. Each story pivots on an ambitious younger character, an emissary of the new generation, such that the final emphasis falls not on the passing form of 'local color' but on an emergent modernist conception of regional writing. Cather must have realized in the 1930s the growing distance between her own regional project and that of her 'local color' forebears. Her father had died in 1928, followed by her mother in 1931, and thus she may have been thinking generationally—as biographer James Woodress notes, "With both parents gone Cather now was a member of the generation next to death."[52] She was keenly aware of literary history and her place within it, the role her own work and reputation played among the various forces shaping American literature at this time. As Marilee Lindemann has shown, Cather was fully

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[51] Ibid., 323.

[52] Woodress, *Willa Cather*, 435.

"engaged with, in, and against the American literary history that was being invented all around her."[53] Indeed, writes Lindemann, "aside from her obvious professional interest in the formation of that history, Cather had personal connections to several of its important makers," including Carl Van Doren, Louise Pound, Mary Austin, and D. H. Lawrence.[54] In this sense, *Obscure Destinies* can be understood as the metaphoric device through which Cather represented the regionalist shift taking place around her and in which she herself was participating. After all, she had already made a significant contribution to this shift in a previous experimental novel, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. In this novel Cather had continued to reinvest in the imaginative resources of the region, turning to a nostalgic method that would allow a critique of modernity to arise from a sustained engagement with the 'legendary' past.

Regionalism Démeublé, Modernism Nostalgic

Though she had enjoyed critical and popular acclaim and a firm position as a 'major' writer throughout the 1920s, many prominent reviewers in the 1930s suddenly soured on Cather, now condemning her regionalist mode as "escapist" and "nostalgic." "As Cather seemed to retreat further and further into the past in search of an orderly and harmonious world," writes Sharon O'Brien, "travelling first to the nineteenth-century Southwest and then to seventeenth-century Quebec, the pages of left-wing journals like the *New Republic* and *The Nation* as well as those of the *New York Times Book Review* began to fill with criticism of Cather as a romantic, nostalgic writer who could not cope with the present."[55] Most notably, Granville Hicks's "The Case Against Willa Cather," published in *The English Journal* in 1933, presented the latter as a writer who had "surrendered to the longing for the safe and romantic past."[56] Cather, he wrote, "has never once tried to see contemporary life as it is;" instead, "she sees only that it lacks what the past, at least in her idealisation [*sic*] of it, had. Thus she has been barred from the task that has occupied most of the world's great artists, the expression of what is central and fundamental in her own age."[57] While her earlier novels had at least some "basis in reality," thanks to their foundation in her Midwestern past, says Hicks, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* reveal Cather's final abandonment of the present.[58] Likewise, Clifton Fadiman, writing in *The Nation* in 1932, found fault with her lack of presentism: "Although this preoccupation with the past bore fruit in two beautiful and significant novels [*The Song of the Lark* and *My Antonia*], it has also been responsible for Miss Cather's continuous diminution of vitality since *A Lost Lady*."[59] Having "fully exploited her early Western recollections," Fadiman said, Cather had now retreated entirely into the past. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* "there is something precious, over-calculated," he wrote, such that they seems "hardly novels at all, as we understand the word, but reworked legends."[60] In her most recent novels, contemporary critics like Hicks and Fadiman argued, Cather had lost all grasp on reality and retreated into "the safe and romantic past" of her "reworked legends."

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[53] Marilee Lindemann, *Willa Cather: Queering America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 91.

[54] Ibid.

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[55] O'Brien, "Becoming Non-canonical," 115.

[56] Granville Hicks, "The Case Against Willa Cather," *The English Journal* 22, no. 9 (November 1933): 710.

[57] Ibid., 708

[58] Ibid., 705.

[59] Clifton Fadiman, "Willa Cather: The Past Recaptured," *The Nation* (7 December 1932): 563.

[60] Ibid.

On one hand, of course, Cather had turned toward the 'legendary' past of the Southwest at just the wrong moment. As O'Brien writes, "Cather and her literary reputation were caught in the midst of a generational and ideological shift in American literary culture as a new cohort of critics began to apply different standards to determine literary merit."[61] The criteria by which works of literature were judged had shifted in the wake of the Great Depression, and critics now demanded clear social relevance. On the other hand, however, these critics' interpretation of Cather's work also relied on a foundational misreading not only of her most recent novels but also of her larger aesthetic project and goals. What they interpreted as an unwillingness to confront modernity or a desire to 'escape' into the regional past was actually part of Cather's subtle pursuit of "the inexplicable presence of the thing not named," her attempt to subtly make manifest and reflect on the modern present without overt identification or explanation.[62] Lionel Trilling's "Willa Cather," printed in *The New Republic* in 1937, perfectly exemplifies this misinterpretation. Perhaps having recently come across *Not Under Forty*, a collection of Cather's essays published the previous year, Trilling thought he had discovered just what constituted "the subtle failure of her admirable talent."[63] He identified "The Novel Démeublé," an essay originally published in 1922 and reprinted in *Not Under Forty*, as "the rationale of a method which Miss Cather had partly anticipated in her early novels and which she fully developed a decade later."[64] In this essay, Trilling argued, Cather had "pleaded for a movement to throw the 'furniture' out of the novel—to get rid, that is, of all the social fact[s]." For Trilling, the supposed "spirituality" of her latest novels "consists chiefly of an irritated exclusion of those elements of modern life with which she will not cope."[65]

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[61] O'Brien, "Becoming Non-canonical," 116.

[62] Cather, *Not Under Forty*, 50.

[63] Lionel Trilling, "Willa Cather," in *Willa Cather: Critical Assessments, Volume 1*, ed. Guy Reynolds (Robertsbridge, Sussex: Helm Information, 2003), 283.

Far from a proposal to exclude reality, "The Novel Démeublé" actually constitutes Cather's rebuttal of, as she put it, "the popular superstition that 'realism' asserts itself in the cataloguing of a great number of material objects, in explaining mechanical processes, the methods of operating manufactories and trades, and in minutely describing physical sensations."[66] Instead of assembling great lists of details in pursuit of "realism," Cather advises, authors ought to "present their scene by suggestion rather than enumeration."[67] In an oft-quoted passage, she explains:

> Whatever is felt upon the page without being specifically named there—that, one might say, is created. It is the inexplicable presence of the thing not named, of the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it, the verbal mood, the emotional aura of the fact or the thing or the deed, that gives high quality to the novel or the drama, as well as to poetry itself.[68]

In other words, if the novel is to be a form of "imaginative art," says Cather, it cannot be merely "a vivid and brilliant form of journalism" but must rather be evocative and expressive.[69] Yet in her advocacy of "suggestion" over "enumeration," "overtones" over "cataloging," Trilling found Cather to be taking the position that novelists should "get rid of […] all the social fact[s]."[70] Is the story of a banker who is unfaithful to his wife, she asks in the essay, "at all reinforced by a masterly exposition of banking, our whole system of credits, the methods of the Stock Exchange?"[71] Trilling reads this as a rejection of economic realities. Is Balzac's work remembered "in exactly so far as he succeeded in pouring out on his pages that mass of brick and mortar and furniture and proceedings in bankruptcy," she asks, or by his evocations of "greed and avarice and ambition and vanity and lost innocence of the heart[?]"[72] Trilling interprets this as a rejection of the "social fact[s] that Balzac and other realists had felt to be so necessary for the understandings of modern character."[73] Rather than a method in which unmentioned things are nonetheless made present, Trilling misunderstands Cather's essay as a recommendation "that the social and political facts be disregarded."[74]

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid., 287.

[66] Cather, *Not Under Forty*, 45.

[67] Ibid., 48.

[68] Ibid., 50.

[69] Ibid., 48.

Trilling's misreading is instructive, however. In fact, he almost cuts to the heart of Cather's modernist regionalism. "We use the word 'escape' too lightly," he writes, but "we must realise [*sic*] that the return to a past way of thought or life may be the relevant criticism of the present."[75] Not all depictions of a previous era are "escapist," then, says Trilling; some can mount a "relevant" challenge to the conditions of the present. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* actually constitutes Cather's attempt to do just that, to subtly evoke and confront the conditions of the present through her depiction of a particular region's imagined legendary past, but perhaps because she never declares this purpose outright, Trilling assumes that Cather's turn to the past is defeatist, merely "the weary response to weariness."[76] In abandoning the "social facts," he writes, she loses "the objectivity that can draw strength from seeking the causes of things."[77] But Cather's *démeublé* method does *not* in fact mean abandoning material realities, only abandoning the "cataloguing" and "enumeration" practices of the novelist as "interior decorator."[78] Far from omitting material realities, Cather sought instead to omit explicit sermonizing about those realities. She sought to make modernity manifest and to provide a critical vantage point on it, yet avoid the tactless, heavy-handed lecturing that so often accompanied so-called 'political' novels. Indeed, she had grown frustrated at the proliferation of writers seeking not 'art' in their fiction but an excuse for political pontification. Lee characterizes Cather's position in the 1930s as a struggle to "detach fiction from polemics."[79] "At this particular time few writers care much about their medium except as a means for expressing ideas," Cather wrote in an essay on Katherine Mansfield.[80] By contrast, Mansfield's gift, she wrote, was her ability "to approach the major forces of life through comparatively trivial incidents," to create an "overtone" suggesting that which "lie[s] hidden under our everyday behavior."[81] Far from "an irritated exclusion of those elements of modern life with which she will not cope," as Trilling put it, Cather aimed to refine and perfect the method she detected in Mansfield, to "approach the major forces of life," yet to make those conditions "felt upon the page without being specifically named there."[82]

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[70] Trilling, "Willa Cather," 283.

[71] Cather, *Not Under Forty*, 45-6.

[72] Ibid., 47.

[73] Trilling, "Willa Cather," 283.

[74] Ibid., 287.

[75] Ibid.

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Cather, *Not Under Forty*, 47.

[79] Hermione Lee, *Willa Cather: Double Lives* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 328.

[80] Cather, *Not Under Forty*, 134.

[81] Ibid., 135.

To be sure, critics like Hicks, Fadiman, and Trilling had good reason to be skeptical of the political implications of regionalist writing. After all, as Richard H. Brodhead and Amy Kaplan have shown, the nostalgic longing central to the 'local color' fiction of the late nineteenth century often served as a subtle ideological tool, a way for readers unsatisfied with the industrial present to project images of their desire for a simpler time onto the past as represented in regionalist fiction.[83] Rather than engaging with unsatisfactory social conditions, readers escaped these conditions in the nostalgic mode of regionalism, which described for them an imagined space and time removed from the concerns of industrial urban life and characterized instead by unchanging values and authentic traditions. But Cather had recognized the failings of 'local color' writing's reactionary nostalgia, as indicated in part by *Obscure Destinies*' allegories of the move away from this outdated regionalist tradition. In fact, Cather had by 1927 reimagined the modernist possibilities of regionalist writing. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* Cather had developed a "modernist regionalism" grounded in a kind of nostalgic longing that would elicit not disengagement with modernity in favor of an prelapsarian place and time but rather a critical awareness of modernity's potentials and pitfalls. Far from the regressive, reactionary nostalgia identified by her critics in the 1930s, the nostalgia evoked by Cather in this novel was a more decidedly "modern nostalgia."

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[82] Ibid., 50.

[83] See Amy Kaplan, "Nation, Region, Empire," and Richard H. Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters*.

Modernist scholars have recently recovered nostalgia, traditionally considered antithetical to modernism, as a key feature of much modernist aesthetic production.[84] Stephen Spender, an early theorist of this notion, asserted that in some ways "nostalgia has been one of the most productive and even progressive forces in modern literature."[85] In contrast with Victorian expressions of "Golden-age nostalgia," Spender argued, the "elaborate irony" of the modern era "put nostalgia itself into perspective, by making it appear not just as hatred of the present and yearning for the past, but as a modern state of mind, a symptom of the decline that was also modern."[86] Likewise, Tammy Clewell, in her introduction to *Modernism and Nostalgia*, notes that many modernist writers discovered in nostalgia "the potential for a productive dialogue where the past is brought into conversation with the present."[87] Such a dialogue, she writes, "might nurture regressive fantasies of returning to the preindustrial or prelapsarian, but it also might lead to creative visions for self-fashioning, culture, and artistic practice."[88] A decidedly modernist use of nostalgia, then, need not be understood as a mere fixation on an idealized past. Rather, modernist nostalgia might be serve as a safeguard against unexamined conformity to the conditions of the present, a critical perspective on the existing order, and creative source for imagining the future.

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[84] See, for instance, Robert Hemmings' *Modern Nostalgia: Siegfried Sassoon, Trauma, and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Greg Forter's *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), and *Modernism and Nostalgia: Bodies, Locations, Aesthetics*, ed. Tammy Clewell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[85] Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 212.

[86] Ibid., 213

[87] Tammy Clewell, "Introduction: Past 'Perfect' and Present 'Tense': The Abuses and Uses of Modernist Nostalgia," in *Modernism and Nostalgia*, 1.

[88] Ibid.

More specifically, the modernist nostalgia Cather develops through her regionalist mode in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* can be understood as roughly parallel to what Svetlana Boym has labeled "reflective nostalgia." In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym argues that nostalgia can be divided into two types, "the restorative and the reflective."[89] As opposed to "restorative nostalgia," she writes, which "stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home," reflective nostalgia "consists in the exploration of other potentialities and unfulfilled promises of modern happiness."[90] Whereas restorative nostalgia "protects the absolute truth," according to Boym, reflective nostalgia "calls it into doubt."[91] Rather than seeking to restore the past as established in a particular place, then, reflective nostalgia can provide a critical vantage point on the present, such that "the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, nonteleological possibilities of historic development."[92] Thus, if restorative nostalgia depends on a chronological notion of corrupting progress, reflective nostalgia, by contrast, "opens up" the past not as a sequential as but as synchronous and alive within the present. Indeed, drawing on Henri Bergson's notion that the past, as he put it, "will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality," Boym argues that reflective nostalgia "tends to be *prospective* rather than *retrospective*, a kind of future perfect with a twist."[93] In this sense, she writes, reflective nostalgia "is not a nostalgia for the ideal past, but only for its many potentialities that have not been realized."[94] In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* Cather uses reflective nostalgia for the imagined past of a particular regional space to evoke—without moralizing upon—the shortcomings of modernity and to suggest a better way forward.

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[89] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xviii.

[90] Ibid., 342.

[91] Ibid., xiii.

[92] Ibid., 50.

[93] Ibid., 168.

Death Comes for the Archbishop

"It seems inevitable in retrospect," writes Woodress, "that some day [Cather] would write a novel about the Southwest."[95] The region had fascinated her since childhood and had especially provoked her imagination after a formative first visit in 1912. Since then, she had continued to revisit the Southwest both in person and in her fiction, situating sections of *The Song of the Lark* and *The Professor's House* there.[96] Not until *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, however, which she finished in the fall of 1926, had she attempted a novel in which the Southwest served as the central setting. After all, much of her previous fiction had drawn on her extensive memories of the people and places of the Midwest, and she had relatively little experience in the Southwest. But in the summer of 1925 Cather found her Southwestern subject in an obscure book, William Howlett's *The Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf* (1908). Having long admired the bronze statue in Santa Fe of Archbishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy, the first Bishop of New Mexico, Cather explained that Lamy "had become a sort of invisible personal friend," and Machebeuf, the subject of Howlett's biography, had been Lamy's longtime friend and vicar general in New Mexico. Howlett's book thus provided the background she needed to create their tale: "At last I found out what I wanted to know about how the country and the people of New Mexico seemed to those first missionary priests from France."[97] Opening in the aftermath of the Mexican-American War, *Archbishop* tells the story of these two priests, Father Jean Marie Latour (Lamy) and Father Joseph Vaillant (Machebeuf), sent by the Roman Catholic leadership to minister to the Indians, Mexicans, and encroaching Americans occupying the newly-annexed New Mexico territory. Through nine books, the essentially plotless novel episodically narrates the gradual organization of the new territory's vast diocese. Though it is based on historical records and features historical persons, however, Cather's novel is by no means a conventional "historical novel." Woodress calls it "the most innovative of all Cather's experiments with the novel form."[98] Far from historical romance, Reynolds has argued that *Archbishop* "eschews the dramatic foreground of history" in favor of "the hinterland of history…the quotidian background, the everyday ministrations of Fathers Latour and Vaillant as they reform and strengthen their Church."[99] Even contemporary reviewers noted this reversal of the "historical novel" form. In 1927 Henry Longan Stuart defined Cather's novel "not so much as an historical novel, as a superimposition of the novel upon history."[100]

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Woodress, *Willa Cather*, 391.

[96] On the influential first visit Cather made to the Southwest in 1912, see Woodress, *Willa Cather*, 3-11.

In this sense, then, *Archbishop* not only constituted a marked change in setting and subject matter for Cather but also a distinct shift in narrative method. As she explained the genesis and method of the novel in a letter to *Commonweal* in late 1927, "I had all my life wanted to do something in the style of legend, which is absolutely the reverse of dramatic treatment."[101] In hagiography, particularly the medieval *Golden Legend* and the nineteenth-century frescoes of Puvis de Chavannes, Cather found the model for this reversal, an episodic flatness with regard to the past that eschewed the grandly melodramatic and instead infused the everyday with deep significance. In these works, she wrote, "the martyrdoms of the saints are no more dwelt upon than are the trivial incidents of their lives."[102] Disdainful of the contemporary emphasis on "situation," the "tendency to force things up" with sensationalism and suspense, Cather sought, as she put it, "something without accent, with none of the artificial elements of composition."[103] Through this method, downplaying the dramatic foreground and focusing on the "hinterland of history," she could *e*voke modernity without *in*voking it. Indeed, much like her pursuit of "the inexplicable presence of the thing unnamed," Cather explains in her commentary on *Archbishop* that "the essence of such writing is not to hold the note, not to use an incident for all there is in it—but to touch and pass on."[104] Rather than "hold[ing] the note," using a story to make a point or as an excuse to pontificate, she seeks "to touch and pass on," allowing the complexities and contradictions of modernity to emerge spontaneously. In an analogy with New Mexico churches, she illustrates this method, her notion of simply allowing stories to signify "without accent":

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[97] Cather, *Willa Cather on Writing*, 8.

[98] Woodress, *Willa Cather*, 398.

[99] Reynolds, *Willa Cather in Context*, 150-1. In "Willa Cather's Rewriting of the Historical Novel in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*," Enrique Lima has made a similar argument about the novel's reversal of the traditional "historical novel" genre, arguing that "Cather portrays elements of Jean Marie's quotidian life as embodying the long past that define a culture" (*Novel* 46, no. 2 [2013]: 181).

[100] As quoted in Reynolds, *Willa Cather: Critical Assessments Volume 2*, 32.

> I used to wish there were some written account of the old times when those churches were built, but I soon felt that no record of them could be as real as they are themselves. They are their own story, and it is foolish convention that we must have everything

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[101] Cather, *On Writing*, 9.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

> interpreted for us in written language. There are other ways of telling what one feels, and the people who built and decorated those many, many little churches found their way and left their message.[105]

Rather than relying on artificial “situation” or external explanations, these churches to Cather “seemed a direct expression of some very real and lively human feeling.”[106] Likewise, she thought, her novel need not give an “account of the old time,” explaining the past in terms of the present, but only, like the little churches of New Mexico, be its “own story.”

As Edith Lewis, Cather’s domestic partner for almost forty years, wrote, “[Cather] could make the modern age almost disappear, fade away and become ghostlike, so completely was she able to invoke her vision of the past and recreate its reality.”[107] Indeed, in *Archbishop* the modern age almost disappears—almost. Modernity becomes “ghostlike,” haunting the narrative like an unarticulated specter. Although the novel is “all in the direction of suggestiveness and evocation, away from propaganda and orthodoxy,” writes Lee, yet there is the presence of “something ferocious and unreconciled…placed at arm’s length.”[108] Even as it pines for the imagined regional past of Fathers Latour and Vaillant, *Archbishop* develops a reflective nostalgia that opens up critical perspectives on the modern present. Far from advocating the restoration of nineteenth-century New Mexico, Cather’s nostalgic longing evokes the promises and pitfalls of the regional past—the promise of cultural pluralism represented by Catholicism, for instance, and the pitfall of imperialist expansion represented by Americanization. Even in its narrative method, which eschews linear time for synchronicity, the novel undermines the notion of inevitable 'Progress' so central to modernity and instead imagines the past as a series of nonteleological possibilities. In his final moments, Father Latour himself even enacts this reflective nostalgia, treating his memories not as ideals but as objects "for reflection, for recalling the past and planning the future."[109]

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[105] Ibid., 5-6.

[106] Ibid., 5.

[107] Edith Lewis, *Willa Cather Living* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 120.

[108] Lee, *Willa Cather*, 267, 260.

Yet *Archbishop* also reveals the limits of Cather's reflective nostalgia. In her attempts to avoid the explicitly political, to "touch and pass on," Cather leaves largely unexamined the question Native American and Mexican exploitation, past and present. Despite her close ties to a Southwestern community of modernist artists and intellectuals strongly committed to Native American rights, as Janis P. Stout has shown, "Cather's interest, by contrast, was entirely aesthetic and historical, centering primarily on landscape."[110] Indeed, Molly H. Mullin argues that "Cather's interest in Indians never developed much beyond their usefulness as material for her fiction; at least she never took much interest in living Indians and the political struggles to which her friend [Elizabeth] Sergeant became so committed."[111] In attempting to allow her stories to signify "without accent," in other words, Cather's narrative method may in fact ultimately *de*-accent some of the profound political injustices experienced by the marginalized communities represented in her narrative. Even as it exposes the problematics of modernity, then, *Archbishop* nonetheless largely occludes the "pressures" of the Mexican and Indigenous past.

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[109] Cather, *Archbishop*, 229.

[110] Janis P. Stout, "Modernist by Association: Willa Cather's New York / New Mexico Circle," *American Literary Realism* 47, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 117-135.

[111] Molly H. Mullin, *Culture in the Marketplace: Gender, Art, and Value in the American Southwest* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 44.

Archbishop suggests the Catholicism as a contrast against the homogenizing force of encroaching modernity and American empire. For Cather, Reynolds has argued, Catholicism "was not the monolithic autocracy caricatured by American nativists; it was instead a repository of European culture, endlessly adapting itself to alien environments."[112] Much like the Midwestern immigrant cultures of her early novels, then, the Catholicism of Cather's Southwest represents, in Reynolds's words, "an enriching cultural pluralism."[113] This Catholic diversity finds its clearest illustration in the moment the Father Latour first hears the Angelus ringing in Santa Fe. As he explains to Father Vaillant,

> I am trying to account for the fact that when I heard it this morning it struck me at once as something oriental. A learned Scotch Jesuit in Montreal told me that our first bells, and the introduction of the bell in the service all over Europe, originally came from the East. He said the Templars brought the Angelus back from the Crusades, and it is really an adaptation of a Moslem custom.[114]

The Angelus bell suggests a cosmopolitan mixture, a European tradition with roots in the East. Speculating further on the bell's origin, Latour notes that "the Spaniards handed on their skill to the Mexicans, and the Mexicans have taught the Navajos to work silver; but it all came from the Moors."[115] Likewise, the novel's prologue, depicting a meeting of several Catholic leaders, stresses this diversity. In this prologue, an Italian Cardinal from Venice, a French Cardinal from Normandy, a Spanish Cardinal with English ancestry, an Irish Bishop with French ancestry all meet appoint Latour Bishop of the New Mexico territory: "The Italian and French Cardinals spoke of it as *Le Mexique*, and the Spanish host referred to it as 'New Spain.'"[116] Even Catholic doctrine seems to allow for diversity and hybridization, as in the early "Hidden Water" scene. When Father Latour loses his way on a journey to Durango, he happens upon a Mexican settlement named Agua Secreto in which the inhabitants have combined elements of local indigenous beliefs with the Catholicism brought to them generations ago by the Spanish. In this village full of "old men trying to remember their catechism to teach to their grandchildren," the Bishop is surprised to find on a mantelpiece "a little equestrian figure, a saint wearing the costume of a Mexican *ranchero*."[117] A local boy identifies this wooden figure as Santiago, "the saint of horses," asking "Isn't he that in your country?"[118] "No," replies the Bishop, "I know nothing about that."[119] The boy explains, "He blesses the mares and makes them fruitful. Even the Indians believe that."[120] Catholicism in *Archbishop* thus stands for enriching diversity and cultural pluralism, while the figure of the American, by contrast, evokes a mood of encroaching modernity and imperialism.

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[112] Reynolds, *Willa Cather in Context*, 157.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Cather, *Archbishop*, 43.

[115] Ibid., 45.

The novel's Americans "are almost always unpleasant," as Lee puts it, "all other cultures are carefully celebrated."[121] One of the first Americans encountered in the narrative, Buck Scales, serves to establish the theme. On the road to Mora, the Fathers seek shelter a humble house: "a man came out, bareheaded, and they saw to their surprise that he was not a Mexican, but an American of a very unprepossessing type."[122] The man, Buck Scales, speaks "in some drawling dialect they could scarcely understand" and seems "evil-looking," "not more than half human," and "malignant."[123] Luckily, the man's Mexican wife, Magdalena, warns them of danger, and they are able to escape. Magdalena had known her husband "for a dog and a degenerate—but to Mexican girls, marriage with an American meant coming up in the world."[124] Not only are the novel's Americans figured as rude interlopers, then, but also as representative of the powerful developmental force of modernity, a way for marginalized groups to 'Americanize' themselves in order to "come up in the world." Likewise, the inhabitants of Agua Secreto feel this pressure: "They had no papers for their land and were afraid the Americans might take it away from them."[125] When Latour explains that Americans are not "infidels," one young man asserts, "They destroyed our churches when they were fighting us, and stabled their horses in them. And now they will take our religion away from us. We want our own ways and our own religion."[126]

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[116] Ibid., 4.

[117] Ibid., 32.

[118] Ibid., 28.

[119] Ibid., 29.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Lee, *Willa Cather*, 279.

Even Kit Carson, the famous frontiersman, who at first seems to exemplify the less "unpleasant" features of the American type, is ultimately tied to encroaching modernity and American imperialism. "The great country of desert and mountain ranges between Santa Fe and the Pacific coast was not yet mapped or charted," the narrator explains, "the most reliable map of it was in Kit Carson's brain."[127] While the local indigenous people imbue the landscape with symbolic and ritualistic meaning, taking it as essential to their identities, Carson reduces the landscape to mere political representation, the conceptual space of a map. But Carson's "world-renowned explorations" take an even more nefarious turn by the end of the novel. Latour remembers from his deathbed "his own misguided friend, Kit Carson, who finally subdued the last unconquered remnant of [the Navajo tribe]; who followed them into the Canyon de Chelly, wither they had fled from their grazing plains and pine forests to make their last stand."[128] Serving as an agent of the U.S. Government, Carson had led American troops into the Canyon to destroy and take possession of the Navajo's ancestral lands: "Carson followed them down into the hidden world between those towering walls of red sandstone, spoiled their stores, destroyed their deep-sheltered corn-fields, cut down the terraced peach orchards so dear to them. When they saw all that was sacred to them laid waste, the Navajos lost heart."[129] With "subtle pressures" in moments like these emerging throughout the narrative between Catholic diversity and American imperialism, Cather conjures a sense of encroaching modernity and its devastating effects even without explicit commentary on the latter.

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[122] Cather, *Archbishop*, 66.

[123] Ibid., 66-7.

[124] Ibid., 71-2.

[125] Ibid., 26.

[126] Ibid., 27.

[127] Ibid., 76.

Yet the reflective nostalgia of *Archbishop* also evokes and critiques the forces of modernity in its narrative method, which destabilizes modern notions of progress and linear time. The narrative moves fitfully and episodically through the regional past, with events connected thematically rather than chronologically. Crucial events like the conquering of the Navajo are passed over without being emphasized or rendered dramatically. Likewise, narrative suspense is spurned. When Father Vaillant leaves for Denver, for instance, anticipation is preempted with Father Latour's thoughts: "he seemed to know, as if it had been revealed to him, that this was a final break; that their lives would part here, and that they would never work together again."[130] As Lee puts it, "'Memorable occasions,' such as the building of the new cathedral, are anticipated or recalled, but not enacted. Dates are withheld, and sometimes work backwards."[131] The novel's final section, for instance, opens with the discovery of a letter from Latour dated 1888, then recalls the arrival of his assistant in 1885, shows his move into Santa Fe in 1888, then moves backward to the building of the cathedral in 1880, and finally to his journey to Navajo country in 1875. Like her hagiographic models, then, Cather presents not a continuous narrative but a series of related panels, a set of loosely related images from key moments in the lives of Fathers Latour and Vaillant. Her reflective nostalgia deliberately subverts the notion of sequential time so central to modernity in favor of a sort of synchronicity, a concurrence of timeless moments rather than a chronological development.

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[128] Ibid, 291.

[129] Ibid.

In rejecting sequentiality, Cather forgoes what Boym calls "restorative nostalgia," which relies on a notion of chronological progress in its desire to restore some idealized antediluvian moment. Rather than reactionary longing for paradise, the reflective nostalgia that permeates *Archbishop* imagines the past as nonteleological, full of hidden potentialities, and permeating the present. In Father Latour's attitude toward miracles Cather suggests precisely this reflective attitude toward the past, an understanding of the past as a force that "acts," in Bergson's words, from within the present. Hearing of the miraculous shrine of Our Lady of Guadaloupe, Father Vaillant is stirred, saying to Latour, "Doctrine is well enough for the wise, Jean; but the miracle is something we can hold in our hands and love."[132] As opposed to the discursive immateriality of "doctrine," Vaillant seems to say, miracles are embodiments of god, idols to be held and worshipped. On the contrary, replies Latour, the miraculous is not static but surrounds us at all times. The miraculous, he says, requires only the right kind of awareness to discern: "The Miracles of the Church seem to me to rest not so much upon faces or voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears can hear what is there about us always."[133] Rather than a shrine to be worshipped or a situation to be brought "near to us from afar off," Cather suggests here, the past exists within and acts upon the present—all one needs is fine "perceptions" to see and hear "what is there about us always."

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[130] Ibid., 250.

[131] Lee, *Willa Cather*, 271.

[132] Cather, *Archbishop*, 50.

In the novel's final section, as his health begins to fail, Latour's consciousness seems almost to coalesce into the reflective nostalgic mode of *Archbishop* itself. As he drifts deeper and deeper into his own past, Latour imagines not a chronological development but a set of collected moments, which he calls "the great picture of his life."[134] Searching through his own past for hints of its failings and potentials, Latour begins to see his own life as *Archbishop* does, without "perspective," as synchronous:

> He observed also that there was no longer any perspective in his memories. He remembered his winters with his cousins on the Mediterranean when he was a little boy, his student days in the Holy City, as clearly as he remembered the arrival of M. Molny and the building of his Cathedral. He was soon to have done with calendared time, and it had already ceased to count for him. He sat in the middle of his own consciousness; none of his former states of mind were lost or outgrown. They were all within reach of his hand, and all comprehensible.[135]

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[133] Ibid., 50.

[134] Ibid., 263.

[135] Ibid., 288.

Outside of "calendared time" Latour sees all the moments of his life at once, "all within reach of his hand," which allows him what he calls "a period of reflection." "Now," says the narrator, "when he was an old man and ill, scenes from those bygone times, dark and bright, flashed back to the Bishop."[136] In these final deathbed thoughts, Latour himself suggests the defects and potentials of modernity by juxtaposing discordant moments in the regional past of his memories.

When Latour compares the Santa Fe of 1851 to that of the present day, he finds the latter in need of a proper sense of "setting," of harmony between people and their place. As he recalls, "The old town was better to look at in those days. […] In the old days it had an individuality, a style of its own; a tawny adobe town with a few green trees, set in a half-circle of carnelian-coloured hills; that and no more."[137] The modern era had warped Santa Fe, he thinks, made it "incongruous" with its surroundings: "the year 1880 had begun a period of incongruous American building. Now, half the plaza square was still adobe, and half was flimsy wooden buildings with double porches, scroll-work and jack-straw posts and banisters painted white."[138] Rather than retreating into the past, however, Latour's nostalgia draws into question the shortcomings of modernity symbolized by these "flimsy wooden buildings" and imagines instead a structure that would encompass the best of both worlds, past and present, Old World and New, and reflect its regional setting—namely, his cathedral. The capstone of his career, his cathedral, with its Midi Romanesque style and its gold rock, "seemed to start directly out of those rose-coloured hills—with purpose so strong that it was like action."[139] Like *Archbishop* itself, Latour rejects notions of teleological development for a reflective nostalgia that calls the supposedly self-evident values of the modern present into doubt and imagines the potentials of the past inherent in the present, culminating in the construction of his grand cathedral. Indeed, in one telling moment from this final section, Latour hears precisely this blending of the past and the present:

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[136] Ibid., 295.

[137] Ibid., 268.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid., 269.

> As the darkness faded into the grey of a winter morning, he listened for the church bells, — and for another sound, that always amused him here; the whistle of a locomotive. Yes, he had come with the buffalo, and he had lived to see railway trains running into Santa Fe. He had accomplished an historic period.[140]

Modernity has left the world with blemishes, to be sure, but the future looks bright to Latour: "It was the Past he was leaving. The Future would take care of itself."[141]

"The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts," Cather famously wrote in her "prefatory note" to *Not Under Forty*, "and the person and prejudices recalled in these sketches slid back into yesterday's seven thousand years."[142] Laying the groundwork for decades of "escapist" accusations, the critics of the 1930s found in statements like these and in Cather's late fiction not only resentment for the avant-garde but also a certain "smugness." Comparing Cather to T. S. Eliot, who in 1927 had converted to Anglicanism, Louis Kronenberger found in this prefatory note "an odd feeling of guilt, of a deep feeling of regret for the past and a self-righteous loyalty in going to the past's defense."[143] Even as Cather has been recuperated since the 1990s, scholars still have generally understood this preface as expressing Cather's "grumpily disaffected" attitude with regard for her own era.[144] Such a reading is appealingly simple. But a renewed understanding of *Obscure Destinies* and *Archbishop* that incorporates formalist and historicist concerns while also attending closely to the regionalism at the core of Cather's aesthetic project helps us reframe this ostensibly exclusionary statement and her understanding of the between the modern present and the imagined past. Rereading the literary-historical allegory of *Obscure Destinies* and the reflective nostalgia of *Archbishop* actually reveals Cather as firmly engaged with the conditions of the cosmopolitan present by way of the local past. The tale of Fathers Latour and Vaillant does not call us to recreate the world of nineteenth-century New Mexico but rather to reconsider the modern present and the bits of the regional past that might still be embedded within it—as Woodress puts it, "their lives renew faith in human possibilities."[145] Indeed, *Archbishop* exemplifies the ways modernism and regionalism, though they have been customarily been taken as antagonistic, ultimately coalesce around a set of shared methods and concerns. Indeed, Cather suggests as much in her prefatory note to *Not Under Forty*. "Thomas Mann," she writes, "to be sure, belongs immensely to the forward-goers, and they are concerned only with his forwardness. But he also goes back a long way, and his backwardness is more gratifying to the backward."[146] To one of "the backward," like Cather, modernism's regional "backwardness" was just as crucial as its global "forwardness," the potential of the past just as important as the need to "make it new."

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[140] Ibid., 271.

[141] Ibid., 287.

[142] Cather, *Not Under Forty*, v.

[143] As quoted in Woodress, *Willa Cather*, 473.

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[144] Lee, *Willa Cather*, 328.

[145] Woodress, *Willa Cather*, 405.

[146] Cather, *Not Under Forty*, v.

Chapter Four:

New Negro, New Regionalism: Sterling A. Brown, B. A. Botkin, and the Regional Routes of the New Negro Renaissance

> "I have no relationship to any Harlem Renaissance. When they (the luminaries of that era) were down there flirting with Carl Van Vechten, I was down south talking to Big Boy."
>
> - Sterling A. Brown[1]

In May of 1929 folklorist Benjamin Botkin contacted Charles S. Johnson seeking African American contributors to the second volume of his annual collection *Folk-Say: A Regional Miscellany*. Johnson, founder of *Opportunity, A Journal of Negro Life* and head of the Department of Social Research at Fisk University, replied, "I have in mind particularly Mr. Sterling A. Brown, Professor of English here, who is well versed in Negro folk lore."[2] The son of a prominent Washington, D. C. minister and theology professor, Brown was an unlikely expert on "Negro folk lore." He had graduated at the top of his class from Washington's renowned Dunbar High School in 1918, completed his undergraduate degree in English at Williams College in 1922, then earned a master's degree from Harvard in 1923. But in a series of teaching positions at Virginia Seminary and College in Lynchburg, Virginia (1923-1926), Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri (1926–1928), and Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee (1928–1929), Brown had found his true passion: African American folk culture. After immersing himself for years in what one colleague called "The Academy of Black Folk," Brown was "well versed" in the folkways of black southerners by 1929;[3] indeed, he had already begun formulating his own folk-based literary vision in book reviews for *Opportunity* and in poems like "Odyssey of Big Boy."[4] Brown jumped at the chance to contribute to Botkin's new annual, promising to send along "some things for your scrutiny."[5]

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[1] Genevieve Ekaete, "Sterling Brown: A Living Legend," *New Directions* 1, no. 2 (1974): 6

[2] Charles S. Johnson letter to Benjamin A. Botkin, 17 May 1929. Benjamin A. Botkin Collection of Applied American Folklore, Archives and Special Collections (hereafter Botkin Collection). University of Nebraska-Lincoln. *Opportunity, A Journal of Negro Life* will hereafter be cited as *Opportunity*.

In his pioneering archival work, Steven B. Shively has shown the depth of this mutually influential relationship between Botkin and Brown, who in their work together "formed a lifelong friendship."[6] Brown would publish more poetry in Botkin's *Folk-Say* annual than in any other publication (eighteen poems across three collections), and the two would also later collaborate on the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), particularly on the collection of slave narratives published as *Lay My Burden Down*.[7] Exploring their shared commitment to a folk aesthetic, Shively shows Botkin's role in editing Brown's "Ma Rainey" and suggests that this poem "represents a landmark expression of African American folk modernism."[8] While Shively is attentive to the importance of "regional folk grounding" in Brown, particularly in his "attack[ing] the Harlem-worship he so disliked,"[9] taking a closer look at Botkin's distinct notion of the region and how it surfaces in Brown's poetry reveals a more capacious and dynamic regionalism than noted by Shively and, indeed, a new direction for examining these two writers' intimate relationship. Tracing the modernist regionalism visible in Brown's poetry back to Botkin means building on Shively's pioneering work by attending not only to the way Brown suggests the folk past as a way to confront the modern present, but also how he offers the region as an alternative communal scale to confront that of the modern metropolis and nation-state. Paying close attention to Botkin's influence on Brown's vision of the South ultimately reveals his poetry's regionalist contentions about the proper spatial scale of black community and communal solidarity in the early twentieth century.

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[3] Arthur Huff Fauset, "Biographical Sketch of Sterling A. Brown," in *Sterling A. Brown: A UMUM Tribute,* ed. Black History Museum Committee (Philadelphia: Black History Museum UMUM Publishers, 1976), 5.

[4] Brown's "Odyssey of Big Boy" had been published in *Caroling Dusk: An Anthology of Verse by Negro Poets*, ed. Countee Cullen (Harper and Brothers, 1927), 130.

[5] Sterling A. Brown letter to B. A. Botkin, 19 January 1930. Botkin Collection.

[6] Steven B. Shively, "No 'urbanized fake folk thing': Benjamin Botkin, Sterling Brown, and 'Ma Rainey,'" in *America's Folklorist: B. A. Botkin and American Culture*, eds. Lawrence Rodgers and Jerrold Hirsch (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 150.

[7] *Lay My Burden Down,* ed. B. A. Botkin (New York: Delta, 1945). On the Botkin-Brown relationship in the context of the FWP, see John Edgar Tidwell's essay in *America's Folklorist*, 168-183.

In his writings as well as more directly in his editorial work, Botkin's particular and nuanced notion of regionalism influenced Brown's nascent poetic project in the 1930s in pivotal ways. With regard to the three poems he published in *Folk-Say* 1930, Brown wrote that he felt indebted to Botkin, "for some of the best hits in these [poems]—I hate to call them mine."[10] He told Botkin, "you struck the bulls-eye so often—have detected the places that I knew needed bolstering up, so well that you seem to have been on hand when I wrote them."[11] Indeed, such was his support for Botkin's regionalist views that in the anthology he co-edited in 1941, *The Negro Caravan*, Brown wrote of himself, "Brown's work belongs to the new regionalism in

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[8] Shively, "No 'urbanized fake folk thing,'" 166.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Brown letter to Botkin, c. late February 1930. Botkin Collection.

[11] Brown letter to Botkin, 17 February 1930. Botkin Collection.

American literature."[12] Elsewhere in the volume, he also notes, "B. A. Botkin's critical articles sponsoring the new regionalism as opposed to the old local color, and his creative editing of *Folk-Say* from 1929 to 1932 were spurs to understanding studies and recreations of Negro folk stuff."[13]

In his revisionist conception of folklore, Botkin maintained that, rather than merely a collection of relics from a previous era, folklore actually constituted a set of "creative and practical responses to contemporary conditions," such that "the study of folklore becomes a study in acculturation—the process by which the folk group adapts itself to its environment and to change, assimilating new experience and generating fresh forms."[14] And the proper spatial scale of these "folk groups," asserted Botkin, was "the region." Integral to his theory of folklore, then, was the notion of a "dynamic and transitional" regional configuration, a regionalism "not simply of the past but of the present and of the future, not simply of separate but of interrelated regions."[15] Drawing on the work of Lewis Mumford, Botkin stressed the pluralistic nature of regionalism as a strategy for the "integration and reciprocity of a 'diversity of cultures,'" as opposed to the "imagined community" of the nation-state or the "aimless nomadism" of the modern metropolis.[16] Brown's masterwork, *Southern Road* (which included ten poems first published in *Folk-Say*), reveals the extent to which he integrated and built upon Botkin's thinking to develop his own modernist regionalism, an approach expressing the richness and diversity of the black folk culture of the South, offering a way to "oppose or resist the rootlessness of modern life," as Botkin put it, and stressing the strength inherent in regional communal structures.[17]

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[12] *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes,* eds. Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. Davis, and Ulysses Lee (New York: Citadel, 1941), 282.

[13] Ibid., 433.

[14] B. A. Botkin, "The Folkness of the Folk," 465. On Botkin as a "radical revisionist, see Jerrold Hirsch, "Folklore in the Making: B. A. Botkin" (*The Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 395 [January-March, 1987]: 3-38).

[15] B. A. Botkin, "Regionalism and Culture," 154.

[16] B. A. Botkin, "We Talk about Regionalism—North, East, South, and West," *Frontier* 13 (1933): 293.

In the wake of the "spatial turn" in the humanities, modernist scholars have reassessed the fundamental importance of space, place, and the local to the modernist ethos.[18] Indeed, a number of critics have offered rich understandings of the regional in Brown's poetry, noting a complex spatial dynamic at work in his depictions of the South. Mark A. Sanders, for one, has noted how Brown's poems "register various dimensions of the folk southern milieu and invoke voices, myths, and rituals as salient responses to oppression."[19] In his metaphor of the southern road, Sanders argues, Brown found "the physical and conceptual space from which to critique hegemonic modernism and in turn to reconstruct African American artistic modernity."[20] Likewise, Daphne Lamothe claims that for Brown "the South is best understood as a network of geographic and imaginative landscapes that mark the region as a place of complex cultural productions and negotiations."[21] As Sanders and Lamothe have shown, Brown did not believe that local specifics needed to be transcended or universalized[22]—for him, the region was crucial, not a coincidental detail but a spatial concept closely intertwined with folk culture. Attending closely to the influence of Botkin's theory of regionalism helps extend and bring depth to these astute descriptions of Brown's spatial poetics by locating a crucial wellspring for and revealing unnoticed facets of his nuanced modernist regionalism.

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[17] Ibid., 296.

[18] See, for instance: Mao and Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," in which the authors mark a "Transnational Turn" in modernist studies; Andrew Thacker's *Moving Through Modernity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); *Geographies of Modernism: Literatures, Cultures, Spaces* (eds. Andrew Thacker and Peter Brooker [New York: Routledge, 2005]); and *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 55.1 (Spring 2009), a special issue on the topic of "regional modernism."

[19] Mark A. Sanders, *Afro-Modernist Aesthetics and the Poetry of Sterling Brown* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 38.

[20] Ibid., 35.

A closer engagement with Brown's regionalism can also help enrich established critical understandings of the relationship between modernism and African American literature. In the influential *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*, Walter Benn Michaels argues that underlying American modernism's cultural pluralism was a sinister "identity essentialism," the (racist) assumption that ethnic and racial parts are identifiable and themselves homogeneous.[23] A counterexample subverting Michaels' too-literal understanding of modernism's politics, Brown's regionalism actually asserts cultural pluralism and stresses intraregional diversity rather than homogeneity.[24] With its emphasis on "the road," mobility, regional networks, and homecomings/departures, *Southern Road* presents a spatial understanding of black identity "as a process of movement and mediation," in Paul Gilroy's words, as a matter of *routes* rather than *roots*.[25] Far from constructing essentialized identities, Brown's poetry constitutes an act of communal remembering that points to and instantiates the regional foundation of African American political and social solidarities in the modern present.

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[21] Daphne Lamothe, *Inventing the New Negro: Narrative, Culture, and Ethnography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 91-2.

[22] However, some critics, including Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Vera M. Kutzinski, have actually downplayed the role of the South in Brown's poetry. "Above all else, Brown is a regionalist," asserts Gates, but Brown's "region," he continues, "is not so much 'the South,' or Spoon River, Tilbury, or Yoknapatawpha as it is 'the private Negro mind'" ("Review of The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown," in *After Winter: The Art and Life of Sterling A. Brown*, eds. John Edgar Tidwell and Steven C. Tracy [Oxford UP, 2009], 61-2). Likewise, Kutzinski goes so far as to claim that Brown's *Southern Road* does not depend on "the actual existence of a place or a region called…'the South'" and that Brown is interested only in "an imaginary reality that shapes and, in its turn, is shaped by the poem itself" ("The Distant Closeness of Dancing Doubles: Sterling Brown and William Carlos Williams," reprinted in *African American Review* 50, no. 4 [Winter 2017]: 677-8).

In this sense, a closer look at Brown's regionalism also helps extend of the central arguments of foundational works like Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* and Michael North's *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature*. For Gates as well as North, writers like Zora Neale Hurston and Sterling A. Brown were successful to the extent that they were able to undermine or *signify* "upon James Weldon Johnson's arguments against dialect" and in so doing reclaim black dialect from its misuse and racist abuse by dislodging it from the white gaze.[26] Focusing particularly on the regionalism central to Brown's redemption of black folk culture reminds us that black writers like Hurston and Brown challenged not just the opposition between the black vernacular and standard English, but oppositions such as rural and urban, regional and national, local and universal. Paying attention to some of these further oppositions, we add to the arguments of Gates and North a much-needed spatial element, an awareness of the actual locations that ultimately produce such linguistic diversity.

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[23] Michaels, *Our America,* 140.

[24] For an extended critique of Michaels' argument, see Carla Kaplan, "On Modernism and Race," *Modernism/modernity* 4, no. 1 (January 1997): 157-67.

[25] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Verso, 1995), 19. In *Conjuring the Folk: Forms of Modernity in African America*, David G. Nicholls makes a similar point to connect Brown and Gilroy ([Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000], 10).

[26] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 194. James Weldon Johnson, "Preface to the First Edition," *The*

"Folklore in the Making": The New Regionalism of B. A. Botkin

Like Sterling Brown, Benjamin Botkin was an unlikely folklore enthusiast. Born in 1901 to poor Lithuanian Jewish immigrants in Boston, Botkin went on to earn degrees in English from Harvard (B.A., 1920) and Columbia (M.A., 1921) before taking a teaching position at the University of Oklahoma in 1921.[27] Here, "encountering a different and more vital variety of word and deed," he later wrote, "I soon found my Harvard accent and 'indifference' breaking down."[28] Botkin found in Oklahoma a lifelong passion for folklore, recalling that "the

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Book of American Negro Poetry, 2nd edition, ed. James Weldon Johnson (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931), vii-xlvii. Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[27] On Botkin's early life, see the Lawrence Rogers and Jerrold Hirsch's introduction to *America's Folklorist: B. A. Botkin and American Culture* (1-20). In 1931, he would complete a Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska in English and anthropology (there was no formal degree in folklore studies at the time) under the pioneering folklorist Louise Pound.

[28] B. A. Botkin, "Folk-Say and Space: Their Genesis and Exodus," *Southwest Review* 20, no. 4 (July, 1935): 322.

possibilities of Oklahoma as literary material struck me with the force of the Oklahoma wind."[29] Challenging what was then called "the science of folklore," Botkin rejected traditional hierarchies in folklore studies that privileged the past over the present, survivals over revivals, older genres over emergent forms, and homogeneous groups over heterogeneous ones.[30] "Botkin did not look at folk traditions for evidence of what a culture was like in some pristine age before it was affected by outside forces," asserts Jerrold Hirsch. "He thought studying folklore offered a way of understanding how cultures respond to urbanization and industrialization."[31] For too long scholars had, according to Botkin, "emphasize[d] the anachronistic and static…aspects of folklore to the neglect of its living and dynamic phases."[32] The modern world did not threaten folklore, he argued: "For every form of folk fantasy that dies, a new one is being created, as culture in decay is balanced by folklore in the making."[33]

Asserting a spatial foundation for "the folk," Botkin claimed that "folk society is basic to the region."[34] He stressed that "geographical isolation tends to give the folk group a regional basis… just as geographical adaptation leads to local variations in the lore."[35] Despite the constant risk of drifting toward romantic nostalgia, "the dilemma of all regionalists who conceive of regionalism as taking things for granted and accepting as final a certain social order," Botkin argued that "regionalism is capable of solid contemporary and forward-looking social significance."[36] Indeed, taking the region as the proper scale of "authentic" community, Botkin thought, would not only "oppose or resist the rootlessness of modern life," but also provide the template for "a fundamental reorganization of American life," a "decentralization and desystemization" that would proceed, he wrote, "from below upwards rather than as at present, from above downwards."[37] For Botkin, regionalism, "viewed as an *integration* within differentiation and decentralization," meant opposing the hegemony of the modern metropolis and deconstructing the modern nation-state in favor of a pluralistic network of independent regional cultures, a truly "interregional life and literature."[38] Allowing diverse folk cultures a spatial "intercourse and reciprocity" as "equals," Botkin argued, drawing on Lewis Mumford, regionalism might allow for "the existence of real groups and social configurations and geographic relationships that are ignored by the abstract culture of the metropolis and which oppose the aimless nomadism of the modern commercial enterprise."[39]

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Hirsch and Rogers, *America's Folklorist*, 3.

[31] Hirsch, "Folklore in the Making: B. A. Botkin," 3.

[32] Botkin, "The Folkness of the Folk," 466.

[33] Ibid., 469.

[34] Ibid., 467.

[35] Ibid.

By 1928, having become president of the Oklahoma Folklore Society, Botkin had formulated a plan to disseminate and promote his innovative ideas on folklore and regionalism by forming his own publication. In 1929 the newly-founded University of Oklahoma Press published *Folk-Say: A Regional Miscellany*, titled after a term Botkin had coined the previous year.[40] An otherwise unremarkable 151-page collection of primarily Midwestern folktales and

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[36] B. A. Botkin, "Regionalism: Cult or Culture?" *The English Journal* 25, no. 3 (Mar., 1936): 183.

[37] Botkin, "We Talk about Regionalism–North, East, South, and West," 293.

[38] B. A. Botkin, "Regionalism and Culture," 154.

[39] Ibid., 294.

[40] In his essay "'Folk-Say' and Folklore" (*American Speech* 6, no. 6 [Aug., 1931]: 404-6), Botkin clarified "folk-say" as a term that "centers attention on *folklore as literature* rather than as science," emphasizes "*the oral, linguistic, and story-telling…aspects of folklore and its living as well as its anachronistic*

"folk motifs," the first volume of *Folk-Say* opened with Botkin's own bold manifesto, "The Folk in Literature: An Introduction to the New Regionalism." In this essay Botkin argues against divisions between folk, popular, and high culture, and suggests the power of folklore to serve as an effective rejoinder to the destructive forces of modern life. "In the beginning lore and literature were one," he writes, but the relationship between the two became obscured "with the invention of writing and printing, the stratification of society, and the growth of modern individualism, sophistication, and 'private property'"[41] What we call "folklore" today, Botkin argues, is comprised of those cultural products that go unwritten, whereas "high" or popular cultural products are simply those that have been recorded. Yet "the separation of the two has never been complete," he continues: "in every age literature moves on two levels—that of the folk and that of culture; and…whenever the latter is in need of being strengthened and revitalized, it returns to the lower level of the folk."[42] The writer's task was not to merely to collect this folk material, however, but to use folk material to create art. Thus, with literature in need of revitalization, Botkin declares: "the future of American literature [is] in the hands of those writers who, without confusing the native with the national and localism with local color, would find their materials and methods in their own *regional* culture—a culture, that is, with its roots in oral tradition."[43] As opposed to the "local color" school of the late nineteenth century, which was "narrowly sectional rather than broadly human, superficially picturesque rather than deeply interpretive, provincial without being indigenous," writes Botkin, this "new regionalism"

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phases," and "provides a term that will include *literature about the folk as well as literature of the folk*" (405-6).

[41] B. A. Botkin, "The Folk in Literature: An Introduction to the New Regionalism," *Folk-Say* 1 (1929), 9.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 12. Emphasis added.

is inspired by "the genuine need of taking root, of finding solidarity and unity in identifying oneself with the community, a need growing out of world unrest and conflict during and since the War."[44]

While his manifesto was well received—the *Southwest Review* called it "the foundation stone of a new theory of regionalism" and Carey McWilliams published a chapbook in direct response, *The New Regionalism in American Literature*[45]—Botkin considered this first volume of *Folk-Say* an overall failure, recalling that "although I tried to emphasize the contemporary aspects of folklore by including 'lore in the making'…the emphasis seemed to fall on the primitive and frontier phase."[46] Realizing that he would need to "increase its size, scope, and variety," Botkin dedicated himself gathering the right material for the next year's collection, more diverse and more "contemporary" material. When he contacted Sterling Brown for this purpose, Shively notes, the two "were undoubtedly aware of each other's work," as both had recently been regular contributors to *Opportunity*.[47] Indeed, Botkin may have recalled one of Brown's poems from *Opportunity* or from Countée Cullen's collection *Caroling Dusk*, which he had reviewed in 1928.[48] Of the five poems published in *Caroling Dusk*, Brown's "Odyssey of Big Boy," which later appeared in *Southern Road*, may well have struck Botkin as just the thing needed for his second volume. With its allusions to well-known folk-heroes, "Odyssey of Big Boy" connects the Homeric associations of its title with southern folklore figures like "Stagolee" and then frames them via the contemporary folk persona of its titular speaker, Calvin "Big Boy" Davis, an itinerant performer Brown met in 1930 while teaching at Virginia Theological Seminary and College in Lynchburg, Virginia.[49] As the poem opens, "Big Boy" imagines his future death via the southern past, wishing to be remembered as a folk-hero himself:

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[44] Ibid., 14.

[45] Henry Smith, "Review of Folk-Say," Botkin Collection. Carey McWilliams, *The New Regionalism in American Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1930).

[46] Botkin, "Folk-Say and Space: Their Genesis and Exodus," 325.

[47] Shively, "No 'urbanized fake folk thing,'" 153. Botkin had published "Spectacle" (a poem) in the January 1927 issue of *Opportunity* and "Self-Portraiture and Social Criticism in Negro Folk-Song (a review article of *Negro Workaday Songs* by Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson) in the February issue of that same year. Brown had published several poems, numerous reviews, and an essay on Roland Hayes in *Opportunity* throughout the late 1920s.

> Lemme be wid Casey Jones,
> Lemme be wid Stagolee,
> Lemme be wid such like men
> When Death takes hol' on me,
> When Death takes hol' on me…."[50]

Next, Davis validates his diverse southern experiences as deserving of folkloric immortality:

> Done skinned as a boy in Kentucky hills,
> Druv steel dere as a man,
> Done stripped tobacco in Virginia fiel's
> Alongst de River Dan,

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[48] B. A. Botkin, Review of *Caroling Dusk*, *Daily Oklahoman* (13 May 1928). Brown had published five poems in *Caroling Dusk*, including a poem that would become one of his best-known, "Odyssey of Big Boy."

[49] On Brown's meeting Calvin "Big Boy" Davis in 1930, see Sanders, *Afro-Modernist Aesthetics,* 35.

[50] Sterling A. Brown, *Southern Road* (Harcourt, Brace, 1932), 5.

Alongst de River Dan.[51]

Lamothe reads this poem in particular as testifying "to the scope of Negro contributions to the building of the nation," arguing that Brown articulates here "the Negro claim to national belonging."[52] But Big Boy's extended tour of the South stresses the regional rather than the national scale, expressing the internal diversity of the regional space by noting experiences in places from "Kentucky hills" and "Virginia fiel's" to West Virginia, "Marylan'," Georgia, South Carolina, "Arkansaw," Tennessee, and so on. Big Boy's "Odyssey," then, can be seen not just as a way to bring the regional past to bear on the modern present, as Sanders stresses in his extended reading of the poem,[53] but also as an assertion of *intra*regional variety. Even in its very form, combining the structure of a ballad with the spirit of the blues, Brown's poem suggests a sort of internal diversity.[54] Moreover, "Southern Road" also gestures to a sort of *inter*regional dynamics. Midway through his southern wanderings, Big Boy journeys North for one stanza before returning to the South:

Done slung hash yonder in de North
On de ole Fall River Line,
Done busted suds in li'l New York,
Which ain't no work o' mine–

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Lamothe, *Inventing*, 102.

[53] Sanders, *Afro-Modernist Aesthetics,* 48.

[54] This combination of ballad and blues is well-noted in criticism of Brown. On the blues-ballad form, see Stephen Henderson, "The Heavy Blues of Sterling Brown: A Study of Craft and Tradition," *Black American Literature Forum* 14 (Spring 1980): 32-44.

Lawd, ain't no work o' mine.[55]

Depicting what Botkin called "interregional life," Brown suggests the South's relative place in a pluralistic system of distinct but interconnected regional spaces. In particular, Big Boy's reference to working on "de old Fall River Line," a steamboat and railroad connection between New York City and Boston, reinforces this sense of interregional transit and border crossing. Clearly in line with his own thinking on folklore and regionalism, doubtless Botkin would have considered poetry of this sort prime material for the 1930 volume of *Folk-Say*.

Likewise, Brown was also probably aware of Botkin's work.[56] In 1927 Botkin had published an insightful review essay in *Opportunity,* the title for which would have certainly caught Brown's eye, "Self-Portraiture and Social Criticism in Negro Folk-Song." In this essay, a review of *Negro Workaday Songs* by Howard W. Odum and Guy B. Johnson, Botkin had highlighted the ability of African American folk expression to resist and critique hegemony, or, as he put it, to provide a "conviction of social injustice and an indictment of the existing order."[57] This argument would have struck a chord with Brown, who had been suggesting much the same thing in his reviews for *Opportunity*. Brown had praised Julia Peterkin, for instance, for "at last recognizing in the Negro what Synge has seen in Aran Islanders, Gorki in Russian peasants, and Masefield and Gibson in the lowly folk of England."[58] Brown was evidently aware of *Folk-Say* even before Botkin began soliciting contributions for the next volume, as he admits in his reply that he had "heard of your Annual."[59] In fact, Brown writes, "I had intended on subscribing and submitting something for your approval or disapproval."[60] Promising to send along "some things for your scrutiny," Brown explains that, like Botkin himself, "I am an enthusiast in this matter of folklore… [and] my approach is literary rather than scientific."[61] Not merely interested in the idea of a folklore collection, however, Brown notes in another letter having been affected in particular by the theory of regionalism expressed Botkin's manifesto: "I liked very much your article The Folk in Literature. About this I shall have to write later, more at length."[62] Explicit evidence of Brown's fascination with Botkin's theory of regionalism, this heretofore unpublished comment itself validates a rereading of Brown's poetry with Botkin in mind. Disappointed at the dearth of regionalism in African American writing, Brown lamented to Botkin, "I am sorrier than you imagine to state that the Southern scene is being neglected by our writers. I do not know any poets who are dealing with it."[63]

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[55] Brown, *Southern Road*, 5.

[56] Shively, "No 'urbanized fake folk thing,'" 153. Shively points to "Self-Portraiture and Negro Folk Song" as a piece Brown would likely have seen. He also notes a poem of Botkin's published in *Opportunity*, "Spectacle," which, he writes, "likely drew an appreciative glance from Brown" (153).

[57] B. A. Botkin, "Self-Portraiture and Social Criticism in Negro Folk-Song," *Opportunity* 5 (February): 41.

[58] Sterling A. Brown, "The New Secession—A Review," *Opportunity* (May 1927): 147.

In Botkin, Brown had found a likeminded collaborator as well as a helpful editorial eye. Three of the finest poems Brown ever published, "Southern Road," "Ma Rainey," and "Dark of the Moon," first appeared in the 1930 volume of *Folk-Say* and later featured prominently in *Southern Road*. On receiving these poems from Brown, Botkin replied with gusto, "Your poems are just what I want. They couldn't have been any better if they had been written to order."[64] In these three poems, drawing strongly on Botkin's "new regionalism," Brown constructs a vision of the South as not only internally diverse but also part of a pluralistic network of regional spaces. A closer look at these three poems in particular reveals their depiction of the region as the proper scale of community, a spatial foundation for solidarity against the artificial communal structures of the metropolis and nation-state and for what Botkin called "a fundamental reorganization of American life."

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[59] Brown letter to Botkin, 19 January 1930. Botkin Collection.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Brown letter to Botkin, 17 February 1930. Botkin Collection.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Botkin letter to Brown, 5 February 1930. As quoted in Shively, "No 'urbanized fake folk thing,'" 155.

"Git Way Inside Us / Keep Us Strong": The Southern Road of Sterling A. Brown

In "Self-Portraiture and Social Criticism in Negro Folk-Song," Botkin had written that "the best index to the psychology of a race, paradoxical as it may seem, is what a man thinks about when he is at work."[65] Reviewing the themes of various "Negro workaday songs," Botkin had found that in addition to their fundamental "social criticism," these are songs of mobility, "of going home, full of rivers and roads, trains and shoes, arks and chariots 'comin' for to carry me home.'"[66] Taking up the form and spirit of these traditional "workaday songs" in the poem that would provide the title for his collection, Brown's "Southern Road" ironically combines a figure of stasis, the incarcerated speaker, with a figure of inter- and intraregional movement, the southern road. Even as it narrates the tragic tale of the speaker's life and current incarceration, "Southern Road" emphasizes the solidarity found in regional community and asserts the possibilities of the road as an access point in a larger regional network that spans the South and connects it to other distinct regions—developing a regionalism, in Botkin's words, "not simply of separate but of interrelated regions."[67] Noting the centrality of the road, which he calls Brown's "master metaphor," Sanders has argued that "this central metaphor encompasses the widest range of signifying possibilities, alluding to both the physical realities of black southern life and to the metaphysical implications of Afro-modernity."[68] Attending to Brown's nuanced modernist regionalism reveals that the titular southern road can be understood not only as a symbol of mobility and historicity but as Brown's way to suggest a tension between the *intra*regional (a *southern* road), and the *inter*regional (a southern *road*). Furthermore, the affirmation of southern community and regional circulation in "Southern Road" can be seen as a response to the unidirectional northward migration depicted in Langston Hughes' "Bound No'th Blues."

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[65] Botkin, "Self-Portraiture and Social Criticism in Negro Folk-Song," 38.

[66] Ibid., 42.

The poem opens with the image of a chain gang working in time to a song on the side of a southern road:

> Swing dat hammer–hunh–
> Steady, bo';
> Swing dat hammer–hunh–
> Steady, bo';
> Ain't no rush, bebby,
> Long ways to go.[69]

Though the rest of the poem will narrate one man's sad story, the concerted exertion signaled by the repeated "hunh" serves as a constant reminder of the communal nature of this work and suggests an underlying strength of resistance. As James A. Smethurst puts it, this “hunh” shows “the narrator is a member of a community engaged in a common effort, albeit against its will.”[70] And as the poem’s title suggests, this is an explicitly regional community. Indeed, by deliberately excluding from the poem any mention of the road’s location other than the “Southern Road” of the title, Brown emphasizes the fundamental southernness of this community united in shared labor. Reinforcing this sense of regional solidarity and resistance is the fifth stanza, which notes the forces keeping the speaker in place:

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[67] Botkin, "We Talk about Regionalism–North, East, South, and West," 293

[68] Mark A. Sanders, "Sterling A. Brown's Master Metaphor: Southern Road and the Sign of Black Modernity," *Callaloo* 21, no. 4 (Autumn, 1998): 918.

[69] Brown, *Southern Road*, 46.

> Doubleshacked–hunh–
> Guard behin’;
> Doubleshackled–hunh–
> Guard behin’;
> Ball an’ chain, bebby,
> On my min’.[71]

“No poem more pathetically depicts the despair of the entire race than ‘Southern Road,’” argues Jean Wagner, citing the “stoic acceptance” visible in this stanza.[72] Far from “stoic acceptance,” however, “Southern Road” actually serves as an assertion of resistance. But while Smethurst suggests “the survival of community” itself in this poem constitutes “a form of resistance,”[73] the speaker’s most explicit refusal of stasis actually comes in his mental wanderings along the southern road. In his constant attentiveness to his own involuntary immobility ("Ball an' chain, bebby, / On my min'"), the speaker suggests persistent contemplation of resistance and escape. In fact, the enforced stasis noted in this first stanza serves as an effective prelude to what Sanders calls the speaker's "psychic flight."[74] In the middle section of the poem, neither the shackles nor the "Guard behin'" prevent the speaker's mind from wandering the road along which his family been dispersed.

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[70] James A. Smethurst, *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry, 1930-1946* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 65.

[71] Brown, *Southern Road*, 47.

[72] Jean Wagner, *Black Poets of the United States: From Paul Laurence Dunbar to Langston Hughes*, trans. Kenneth Douglas (Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 517-8.

[73] Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*, 65.

Despite his place on a chain gang, the speaker's narrative creates a mental mobility along the road toward various nodes in a network of southern (and northern) roads. In the third and fourth stanzas the speaker explains the tragic and scattered state of his family:

Gal's on Fifth Street–hunh–
Son done gone;
Gal's on Fifth Street–hunh–
Son done gone;
Wife's in de ward, bebby,
Babe's not bo'n.

My ole man died–hunh–
Cussin' me;
My ole man died–hunh–
Cussin' me;
Old lady rocks, bebby,

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[74] Sanders, *Afro-Modernist Aesthetics*, 57.

Huh misery.[75]

Despite the shackles and guards, the speaker moves imaginatively along the southern road to describe his wayward son, his prostitute daughter, his pregnant wife, his deceased father, and his miserable old mother. In mentioning the northward movement of the children, Brown emphasizes what Vera Kutzinski argues is the real "referential ambiguity" of the southern road metaphor, "the fact that [the road] leads both *away* from the South (to a symbolic North), and thus becomes an emblem of adversity, as well as *back toward* the South, in which case it is transformed into an 'image of kin.'"[76] Though they may have fled to the North, to northern roads like "Fifth Street," Brown suggests, the southern road still ties them to the regional space of their origin.

In addition to this interregional dynamic, the mental wanderings of the speaker also assert an *intra*regional movement. Not only does the road lead North and back, but it also circulates throughout the South, toward the speaker's deceased father, his poor old mother, and his pregnant wife. In the poem's final lines in particular Brown drives home this notion of southern circulation by citing the same blues song mentioned in Botkin's article on "Negro workaday songs." With their emphasis on homegoing, writes Botkin, "Negro folk-songs" express "the homesickness of an alien, homeless folk, 'po' boy long way from home.'"[77] Closing "Southern Road," with reference to the same song, "Po' los' boy, bebby / Evahmo'…." Brown, too, riffs on a classic blues tune, "Poor Boy Long Ways from Home," which Jeff Todd Titon classifies as

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[75] Brown, *Southern Road*, 46.

[76] Kutzinski, "Distant Closeness," 78.

[77] Botkin, "Self-Portraiture and Social Criticism in Negro Folk-Song," 42.

"downhome blues," a style that evokes a particularly southern "sense of place."[78] At once suggesting homegoing and homelessness, southern itinerancy and southern rootedness, Brown's reference to "Poor Boy Long Ways from Home" thus expresses a sense of *intra*regional circulation.

In titling his collection *Southern Road*, as Smethurst has argued, Brown offers "a declaration of independence from the Harlem Renaissance" and responds obliquely to Langston Hughes' "Bound No'th Blues," published in his 1927 collection, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*.[79] The alienation from the South presented in Hughes' poem, he argues, stands in contrast to the poems of *Southern Road*, which "emphasize the protagonists' generally positive connections to other members of the southern African-American community."[80] Beyond their contrasting attitudes toward the South in particular, however, Hughes' "Bound No'th Blues" and Brown's "Southern Road" also offer tellingly divergent accounts of regionalism itself. While in Hughes' poem regional connection is merely something weighing on the speaker, a burden without which one can properly adapt and adjust to modern life, "Southern Road," in contrast, suggests the region as a spatial means for continued communal strength against the corrosive forces of modernity. While he, too, draws on dialect and folk forms, Hughes, in contrast with Brown, depicts the road simply as a means of rejection and separation from the outmoded regional past:

> Road, road, road, O!
> Road, road…road…road road!
> Road, road, road, O!

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[78] Jeff Todd Titon, Early Downhome Blues: A Musical and Cultural Analysis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), xv. On the "Poor Boy" blues, see Titon, 20, 105.

[79] Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*, 63.

[80] Ibid., 64.

On the no'thern road.
These Mississippi towns ain't
Fit fer a hoppin' toad.[81]

As opposed to the communal cohesion, interregional connections, and itinerant intraregional circulation associated with Brown's nuanced regionalism, Hughes' "Bound No'th Blues," with its lonely speaker, emphasizes the region as simply a backwards, obsolete space to be repudiated. In Hughes' poem, the "no'thern road" is unidirectional, teleological, solitary—a way to break from the regional community and leave "These Mississippi towns" behind.[82] Presenting the region as just a place to be discarded on the path toward modernity, Hughes' "Bound No'th Blues" serves as an allegory for the northward literary movement of the Harlem Renaissance. As a reply to Hughes' "no'thern road," then, Brown's "Southern Road" offers the region as a complex spatial register through which to maintain durable communal connections in the face of increasing isolation and deracination—a means of, as Botkin put it, "finding solidarity and unity in identifying oneself with the community."[83]

In February of 1930 Brown wrote to Botkin, "I am attempting to do a literary treatment of the blues, stressing their folk values, i.e. superstitions, customs, concrete imagery connected with details from the life of the people, folk humor, etc., treating their imagery, their poetic value, their irony, etc."[84] In this essay, "The Blues as Folk Poetry," which appeared in the second volume of *Folk-Say* along with his poems, Brown argued that "at their most genuine [the blues] are accurate imaginative transcripts of folk experience, with flashes of excellent poetry."[85] Despite their roots in "folk poetry," however, the blues were quickly "becoming cabaret appetizers."[86] Thanks to undiscerning urban audiences, Brown wrote, "Artless cottonfield calls and levee moans are quite as likely to be found as urbanized fake folk things."[87] In opposition to the stylized, commodified "local color" found in these displaced northern "urbanized fake folk things," Brown sought to return the blues to their proper setting, the South, and to show them at their most "genuine" by publishing in *Folk-Say* the poem "Ma Rainey." Highlighting the integral connection of the blues to the regional community, "Ma Rainey," he told Botkin, "would be a good companion piece for my article, as it illustrates some of my ideas better than prose can."[88] With editorial help from Botkin, Brown crafted "Ma Rainey" into a masterful depiction of the blues as a regional ritual, a communal strategy for building unity and strength by articulating and transcending hardship, chaos, and uncertainty. By gradually narrowing perspective, Brown allows the blues performance to merge with the poem itself and Ma Rainey to merge with her audience, the regional community that provides shelter from "de hard luck" and communion on "de lonesome road."[89]

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[81] Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (New York: Knopf, 2004), 76.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Botkin, "The Folk in Literature: An Introduction to the New Regionalism," 14.

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[84] Brown letter to Botkin, 17 February 1930. Botkin Collection.

[85] Sterling A. Brown, "The Blues as Folk Poetry," *Folk-Say* 2 (1930): 339. Brown also contributed to this volume a review essay that he had co-authored with Alaine Locke, "Folk Values in a New Medium."

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., 324.

[88] Brown letter to Botkin, 9 March 1930. Botkin Collection.

[89] Brown, *Southern Road*, 63.

Crafted in the form of a hybrid blues-ballad, “Ma Rainey” recounts from several points of view a moving performance by legendary “Mother of the Blues,” Gertrude “Ma” Rainey.[90] The first stanza opens by identifying the many places across the South from which the community assembles to hear Ma Rainey sing the blues:

When Ma Rainey
Comes to town,
Folks from anyplace
Miles aroun’,
From Cape Girardeau,
Poplar Bluff,
Flocks in to hear
Ma do her stuff;
Comes flivverin’ in,
Or ridin’ mules,
Or packed in trains,
Picknickin’ fools....
That’s what it's like,
Fo’ miles on down,
To New Orleans delta
An’ Mobile town,
When Ma hits

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[90] On the life and work of Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, see Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage, 1998).

Anywheres aroun'.[91]

From a wide range of diverse intraregional locations, along a network of southern roads, folks come together "to hear / Ma do her stuff." Yet even as they assemble to form a regional community, the audience is by no means homogeneous, as Brown stresses in the following stanza by narrowing his focus to the audience members themselves as they prepare to hear Ma Rainey sing: some "stumble in de hall, jes' a laughin' an' a-cacklin', / Cheerin' lak roarin' water, lak wind in river swamps," while others "sits dere waitin' wid deir aches an' miseries."[92] With references to laughter like "roarin' water" and "river swamps," Brown uses vivid dialect and imagery that reinforces the regional settings from which these listeners come, creating a strong sense of contrast with (white) urban audiences and their "cabaret appetizers." "The specific details of picnic trains and mule riding farmers," writes Shively, "contrasts with the streetlights, jazzy crowds, and smoky cabaret clubs evoked by the Harlem writers of the time."[93]

In its published form, the third stanza of "Ma Rainey" forms the crux of the piece, the point at which perspective narrows from *describing* to *embodying* the audience itself. In the first draft of the poem, however, as Shively has shown, Brown had planned to shift perspective in the opposite direction, dropping dialect and making the speaker an observer.[94] In the original draft Botkin received from Brown, the third stanza read:

Ma Rainey

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[91] Brown, *Southern Road*, 62.

[92] Brown, *Southern Road*, 63

[93] Shively, "No 'urbanized fake folk thing,'" 159.

[94] In his analysis of this first draft, Shively notes that Brown "speaks of Ma Rainey from the perspective of an outsider, an observer; the revised stanza speaks from the perspective of an insider who directly addresses the singer" ("No 'urbanized fake folk thing,'" 165-6).

Sing it for your people
You who are of them,
Who know so well the darkness
Of their lowland days:
Gather from the Yazoo, the Red River Delta,
From the cottonfields of Mississippi,
And Louisiana canebreaks,
And then give them back
Their songs,
Give back what you have learned
Of their joys and sorrow;
Give back their unflagging humor and irony,
That keeps their back up in their pressing days.
O strongvoiced woman,
Brown and solid planted
So much still one of them,
O staunch daughter of the lowlands,
So much a daughter that they herd to hear you sing,
Give to them words;
Teach them to bear.[95]

This early draft tellingly stresses the ability of Ma Rainey's blues ritual to gather diverse black southerners into a strong regional community and "teach them to bear" hardship, but its tone is expository and its language is standard English. Indeed, Botkin complained that this section was "dithyrambic," full of exaggerated nonsense.[96] With his conviction that "folk society is basic to the region," Botkin would have disliked the way Brown's third section abstracted the speaker from the poem's regional grounding.[97] He recommended therefore that Brown place the speaker within the audience and refashion this section in southern dialect. "I am working over stanza three in Ma Rainey," replied Brown. "I have felt the 'dithyrambic' quality a bit out of keeping with the rest. I want very much to make a good poem out of it."[98]

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[95] Brown poem drafts sent to Botkin. Botkin Collection.

Finding Botkin's advice sound, Brown revised the third stanza, noting in his letter, "The change in Ma Rainey third stanza is a change to folk speech."[99] In this revised version, Brown merges speaker and audience, giving direct expression to the ways Ma Rainey affects her regional listeners:

O Ma Rainey
Sing yo' song;
Now you's back
Whah you belong,
Git way inside us,
Keep us strong….

O Ma Rainey

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[96] "Full of exaggerated nonsense" may not be a totally accurate definition of a complex Greek term like "dithyrambic," but this appears to be what Botkin meant by it.

[97] Botkin, "The Folkness of the Folk," 467.

[98] Brown letter to Botkin, 9 March 1930. Botkin Collection.

[99] Ibid.

Li'l an' low,
Sing us 'bout de hard luck
Roun' our do';
Sing us 'bout de lonesome road
We mus' go….[100]

Though Shively rightly recognizes in this perspectival shift a celebration of the "voices of the folk" and a contribution to the poem's "regional folk grounding,"[101] this revision also asserts anew the communal power of the blues ritual and the spatial specificity that makes it possible: "Now you's back / Whah you belong, / Git way inside us, / Keep us strong…." Only when Ma Rainey has followed that southern road back where she belongs can she get "inside" the regional community, merging into them and keeping them strong. As a contrast with blasé urban audiences looking for amusement in their "cabaret appetizers," then, this revised third stanza suggests that the blues offer regional audiences a sense of communal belonging and solidarity. Brown's poem demonstrates Ma Rainey's power to articulate and thereby exert a semblance of control over "de hard luck" and "de lonesome road." With the regional ritual of the blues to address their troubles, Brown suggests, the southern road is not so "lonesome" after all.

In its final stanza, the poem completes its gradual narrowing of perspective by incorporating Ma Rainey's performance into the poem itself via an audience member's anecdote:

I talked to a fellow, an' the fellow say,

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[100] Brown, *Southern Road*, 63.

[101] Shively, "No 'urbanized fake folk thing,'" 166. Likewise, Tony Bolden writes that in this third stanza "we find that the persona is a member of Rainey's audience: he or she reflects its worldview. Here the poem describes the role of the blues singer in the community" (*Afro-Blue: Improvisations in African American Poetry and Culture* [Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 2004], 87).

“She jes’ catch hold of us, somekindaway.
She sang Backwater Blues one day:

It rained fo’ days an’ de skies was dark as night,
Trouble taken place in de lowlands at night.

Thundered an’ lightened an’ the storm begin to roll
Thousan’s of people ain’t got no place to go.

Den I went an stood upon some high lonesome hill,
An’ looked down on the place where I used to live.

An’ den de folks, dey natchally bowed dey heads an’ cried,
Bowed dey heavy heads, shet dey moufs up tight an’ cried,
An’ Ma lef’ de stage, an’ followed some de folks outside.”[102]

Just as her performance merges into the poem itself, the anecdote closes with Ma Rainey becoming one of and one with her audience, as she “lef’ de stage an’ followed some de folks outside.” Though Rainey sings of an individual trauma and dislocation, Lamothe writes, “her audience hears and receives it as a communal story, so it is fitting that at the end of the performance, the individual folds into and merges with the collective body.”[103] Ma Rainey merges with her audience, gathered from across the South, to form a regional community that can help deal with hardship and provide a bulwark against modern dislocation. In Ma Rainey’s performance, then, Brown gives vivid articulation to Botkin's notion that regionalism can "serve as an organizer as well as an interpreter of social thought, assisting integration and re-orientation."[104] The poem begins by organizing a regional audience to hear the blues ritual, registering their anticipation and diversity, then showing Ma Rainey's power to "integrate" and "reorient" them together by articulating their pain, and finally closes with her performance and the audience's cathartic response. Through the blues ritual, Brown asserts, Rainey's regional community can find the strength to cope with the trauma and displacement of the modern age.

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[102] Brown, *Southern Road*, 63-4.

[103] Lamothe, *Inventing*, 106.

But as with "Southern Road," in "Ma Rainey," too, Brown uses a subtle allusion to contrast his notion of the regional community as a source strength and resilience with what he saw as Harlem's abandonment or misuse of the regional space. "Backwater Blues," the song Ma Rainey sings in the poem, was actually composed by Rainey's rival and former protégé, Bessie Smith, suggesting a comparison between the two legendary blues singers. In his preference for Rainey, as Shively has shown, Brown was "sticking it to [Carl] Van Vechten" and staging a preference for the regional South over urban Harlem. But by having Ma Rainey perform Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues," Brown also shows Rainey redeeming what might otherwise have become an "urbanized fake folk thing" and giving it the power to "integrate" and "reorient" the regional community rather than merely entertain white voyeurs. "When Harlem emerged as the cultural capital of black America," writes Angela Y. Davis, "Bessie Smith became the quintessential Harlem blues woman."[105] While Smith "became a darling of café society and a goddess of the Harlem Renaissance," says Davis, Rainey became "the South's premier black entertainer" and "always maintained her residence in the South."[106] By putting Smith's song in

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[104] Botkin, "Regionalism and Culture," 157.

[105] Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 152.

[106] Ibid., 77, 72, 83.

Rainey's mouth, then, Brown also connects "Ma Rainey" to another poem in *Southern Road*, "Bessie," a poem in which he makes explicit the results of taking the blues from their proper place and turning them into "cabaret appetizers":

> Who will know Bessie now of those who loved her;
> Who of her gawky pals could recognize
> Bess in this woman gaunt of flesh and painted,
> Despair deep bitten in her soft brown eyes?[107]

In contrast with her current urban misery and degradation, Brown recalls Smith's idyllic regional childhood:

> Bessie with her plaited hair, Bessie in her gingham,
> Bessie with her bird voice, and laughter like the sun,
> Bess who left behind the stupid, stifling shanties,
> And took her to the cities to get her share of fun….[108]

In linking these two poems, much as he links "Southern Road" and "Bound No'th Blues," Brown suggests the devastating results of severing the connection to the regional space and its capacity for communal integration. Being "Whah you belong, in this sense, even in the face of the traumas of modernity, is what gives the blues the power to "Git way inside us / Keep us strong."

Like "Bessie," "Dark of the Moon," tells the tragic results of separating from the regional community. Framed by the folk belief that activities undertaken on a moonless night are doomed to failure, Brown's "Dark of the Moon" tells the story of a young black southerner who becomes an individualistic "flashy rascal," abandons the regional community, and loses his family's farm as a result. Presented via the collective voice of "ole head," regional communal wisdom, the poem expresses the danger of leaving the well-worn paths of the southern road. Moreover, with his emphasis on intergenerational dynamics, Brown uses the poem as a subtle allusion to the young generation of writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance, a warning about rejecting "ole head" to become a "sweet man uh town."

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[107] Brown, *Southern Road*, 41.

[108] Ibid.

"Dark of the Moon" opens by articulating its titular superstition:

Plant a fence post
On de dark uh de moon,
Locust, oak, hickory,
Any uh dose
Yuh plant it fo' nothin',
Yuh plant it fo' rottin',
Is a ole head's sayin',
An' a ole head knows.[109]

Anything one does on a moonless night, such as planting a fence post, is done "fo' nothin'" and bound to fail. Because this saying derives from the "ole head," the accumulated collective knowledge of the regional community, it is to be trusted, for "a ole head knows." As Sanders puts it, "An 'ole head' knows the past, knows the tradition and its sustaining continuum, and thus it can see the future in a much clearer sense."[110] Not only does it know the past, however, but the

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[109] Ibid., 19.

[110] Sanders, *Afro-Modernist Aesthetics*, 52.

“ole head” also, importantly, gives voice to the regional community, providing the perspective of the poem. The “ole head” frames the sad tale of Daniel, a local boy who “was likely” and “was handsome,” a “Promisin’ lad,” the pride and joy of his “Bent-over mammy” and his “Upstandin’ dad.”[111] When his mother dies, his father looks to Daniel, “To drive off his mopin’ / To keep him his farm.”[112] Daniel has other ideas:

> But Dan was a smart 'un,
> Big, flashy rascal,
> Dan got to be
> De sweet man uh town;
> Sweet man fo’ hussies,
> Badman fo’ poolrooms,
> Was drunk when dey dropped
> His dad in de groun’.[113]

With “His travelin’ feet / Allus itchin’ to go,” Daniel “never found out / What his dad wanted so.”[114] And after that,

> Ole folks who passed by
> De farm up fo’ auction,
> Knew why his hard dad
> Wore out so soon;

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[111] Brown, *Southern Road*, 19. Note that the poem as published in *Folk-Say* used the name Joseph instead of Daniel. It is unclear why Brown made this name change in the *Southern Road* version.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid, 20.

[114] Ibid.

Shook dey heads solemn,
Thinking uh Daniel
"Must uh been been bo'n
On de dark uh de moon."[115]

Wagner reads the poem as showing "the Negro as the victim not of the white man alone, but of all that surrounds him," with Dan the victim of fate and his father "the victim of his [own] chagrin."[116] Far from stressing black victimhood, however, Brown frames Daniel's story with the local wisdom of "ole head" not to suggest cruel fate but rather to assert the results of abandoning of the regional community and its supportive power. Becoming a "sweet man uh town" means taking Hughes' "no'thern road," rejecting communal knowledge, and leaving "These Mississippi towns" behind. Brown reinforces this message by allowing the "Ole folks who passed by" to pass the final judgment on Daniel, giving the regional community itself a voice; Daniel, in contrast, is left voiceless and displaced.

As in "Ma Rainey," the trauma of "Dark of the Moon" is ultimately displacement: Daniel's great failure is not only becoming a "sweet man uh town" but losing his family's treasured farm, a literal portion of the regional space. Just as Ma Rainey's blues give the regional community strength to overcome traumatic dislocation, so does "old head" give the community guidance to avoid such trouble altogether. Even the illustration of the "old head's sayin'," the planting of a fence post, offers an illustration of emplacement. For Botkin and Brown, the notion of planting fence posts, with its suggestion not only of grounding in a particular place but also an interconnection with other fenceposts across the landscape, must have provided a useful metaphor for regionalism. In a preface to the following year's *Folk-Say* Botkin would offer a poem of his own with a similar image:

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[115] Ibid.

[116] Wager, *Black Poets*, 483, 488.

Old man, I am planting a fence,
A crazy worm fence,
With songs for rails,
With men and regions for songs–
Myself the ground rail–
In the light of the moon.[117]

Taken as a response to Brown's "Dark of the Moon," Botkin's poem reinforces an understanding of Daniel as a rotten fencepost, a youngster who loses his grounding in the region. In contrast with the tragic story of "Dark of the Moon," Botkin's poem suggests that "Anything you want to stay on top of the ground, / Plant in the light of the moon."[118] Perhaps recognizing the connection between their two poems, Brown would tell Botkin, "I think your poem at the beginning is just the correct 'spiritual' key; it tells me a whole lot—and it's a good poem in its own right. You know how I would like it—with its use of the dark of the moon superstition—I like it immensely."[119]

Shaping Daniel's tragic story around an intergenerational conflict between father and son, Brown also condemns the "travelin' feet" of a restless young generation that has lost sight of the southern road, the connection to the regional community and its wisdom. As the allegorical representative of what Brown called "the Harlem school," Daniel's shortcomings mirror what Brown understood as the shortcomings of that group. Black authors of the 1920s, according to

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[117] B. A. Botkin, "Old Man, what are you planting?" in *Folk-Say* (1931): 5.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Brown letter to Botkin, 20 January 1932. Botkin Collection.

Brown, "set up their own Bohemia, sharing the nationwide rebellion from family, church, small town, and business civilization," but while "the cabin was exchanged for the cabaret," the old stereotypes went unchallenged and "revolt from racial restrictions was sporadic."[120] In contrast with the Harlem group, with its "false Africanism and Bohemianism," Brown asserted, "The New Negro movement had temporal roots in the past and spatial roots elsewhere in America."[121]

Examining the crucial relationship between Botkin and Brown provides more than just an interesting addition to their respective biographies. Noting the influence of Botkin's regionalist thinking helps bring to light some new facets of the nuanced regionalism at the heart of what Sanders calls Brown's "afro-modernist aesthetics." While critics like Sanders have noted a complicated understanding of the South in Brown, tracing the latter's regionalist thinking back to Botkin helps extend and enrich these accounts. With its emphasis on the proper scale of communal belonging, Botkin's "new regionalism" suggested to Brown a way to conceptualize how American life itself might be decentralized to create an "interregional life and literature."[122] Just as critics like Gates and North have suggested linguistic rebellion as fruitful grounds on which to explore the connections between white and black modernisms, attending to Brown's regionalism reveals another productive terrain for this purpose. Brown's complex understanding of regionalism exposes blind spots in our critical understandings of both the New Negro movement and American modernism writ large, particularly with regard for binaries like country and city, region and nation, local and universal. Not only did folklore offer Brown a way to see black identity as thoroughly historicized, but Botkin's notion of regionalism also helped him oppose the hegemony of Harlem, the deracination of modern life, and the synthetic communal structures of the metropolis and nation-state.

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[120] Sterling A. Brown, "The New Negro in American Literature (1925-1955)," *A Son's Return: Selected Essays of Sterling A. Brown*, ed. Mark A. Sanders (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 187.

[121] Ibid., 185.

[122] Botkin, "We Talk about Regionalism–North, East, South, and West," 294.

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SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Articles:

- "How to Waste (Regional) Material: F. Scott Fitzgerald and Regionalism Disavowed"
  Midwestern Miscellany 45, no. 2 (2017): 12-25.

- "'Dear Mr. Hemingway': Modernism, the Market, and the Fan Mail Reception of *A Farewell to Arms*"
  The Hemingway Review 37, no. 1 (2017): 85-107.

"'Scott Fitzgerald as I knew him': F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Secondary Memoir"
The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review 13 (2015): 236-59.

Reviews:

- Review of *Teaching Hemingway and War*, ed. Alex Vernon (2015)
  The Hemingway Review 36, no. 1 (2017): 114-6.

- Review of *The Geopoetics of Modernism* (2015)
  Literary Geographies 1, no. 2 (2015): 227-30.

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

❖ Hemingway Society Founders' Fellowship	Spring 2018
❖ Center for American Literary Studies Dissertation Fellowship	Fall 2017
❖ Center for American Literary Studies Summer Graduate Fellowship	Summer 2017
❖ Dolinger Graduate Fellowship in the World War II Era	2016/2017
❖ Modernist Studies Association Travel Grant	Fall 2016
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