Collaborative momentum: the author and the middle man in U.S. literature and culture

Matthew Josef Lavin
University of Iowa

Copyright 2012 Matthew J. Lavin

This dissertation is available at Iowa Research Online: https://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/1352

Recommended Citation
https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.b7allvhp.

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.uiowa.edu/etd
Part of the English Language and Literature Commons
COLLABORATIVE MOMENTUM:
THE AUTHOR AND THE MIDDLE MAN IN
U.S. LITERATURE AND CULTURE, 1890-1940

by

Matthew Josef Lavin

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in English in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

July 2012

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Loren D. Glass
ABSTRACT

In the frame introduction to Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia* (1918), an unnamed author encounters her childhood friend Jim Burden on a cross-country train. Jim asks the author why she has never written anything about their mutual friend Ántonia. To answer Jim’s criticism, she proposes they both write stories about Ántonia, but only Jim honors the agreement. The rest of the novel is put forth as Jim’s manuscript “substantially” as he brought it to the author (xii). This scenario is but one of several ways *My Ántonia* evokes Cather’s experience ghostwriting S.S. McClure’s *My Autobiography* (1914) for, just as the authorial voice in *My Ántonia* dissolves into Jim’s, Cather had to adopt McClure’s perspective to write her former employer’s life story. Going further, Cather worked closely with her book editor Ferris Greenslet and the production editor R.L. Scaife to be sure Houghton Mifflin would paginate the introduction with roman numerals and thereby produce the effect of a true authorial preface. The introduction recalls the preface of McClure’s autobiography, which acknowledged Cather for “cooperation” that contributed to “the very existence” of his book.

Interpreting *My Ántonia* and *My Autobiography* as projects connected by authorial process, textual allusion, and even typesetting suggests the complicated and elusive nature of collaborative labor in the literary marketplace, as well as the extent to which modern literary texts responded to those complexities. Working on a task or project with a partner or in a group can frustrate, energize or empower those involved, but whatever feelings it inspires, interactive labor often has a life of its own. This is the idea of collaborative momentum. My dissertation examines relationships among authors, agents, editors, publishers, and unofficial “middle men” to argue that supportive and adversarial cycles of interactive labor in the modern American literary marketplace created the basic parameters of modern authorship. I show that as professional specialization becomes more rigid and institutionalized, the literary field paradoxically created new spaces for
nebulous but crucial cooperative labor. In particular, the effect I call collaborative momentum facilitated the exchange of economic and symbolic capital. I show that narratives of the modern period are inextricably invested in corporate and institutional labor systems that surround them and can be interpreted as rhetorical attempts to reform and improve those systems.

By analyzing the author’s cultural identity in relation to rising institutional collaborators of the modern era, I contribute to the steadily growing field of authorship studies while adding to ongoing scholarly conversations about individual authors and texts. My chapters analyze the systemic production of literary identity, reciprocal relationships between editors and authors, the modern apparatus of literary debut, and the role bibliophilia and book collecting played in the production of The New Negro. I therefore highlight four paradigmatic examples of interactive labor while simultaneously emphasizing that collaborative momentum was crucial not only to those with privilege but also to individuals and groups struggling against inequality. My work helps scholars see a power structure that granted disproportionate credibility to white men as literary creators and publishing industry insiders, yet it also shows a modern American literary culture shaped as much by the experience of marginalized individuals and groups negotiating a discriminatory publishing industry as it was by aesthetic contests between popular fiction and high modernism.

Abstract Approved: ______________________________________

Thesis Supervisor

________________________________

Title and Department

________________________________

Date
COLLABORATIVE MOMENTUM:
THE AUTHOR AND THE MIDDLE MAN IN
U.S. LITERATURE AND CULTURE, 1890-1940

by

Matthew Josef Lavin

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

July 2012

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Loren D. Glass
Copyright by
MATTHEW JOSEF LAVIN
2012
All Rights Reserved
This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Matthew Josef Lavin

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree in English at the July 2012 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Loren D. Glass, Thesis Supervisor

Kathleen Diffley

Harilaos Stecopoulos

Laura Rigal

Kembrew McLeod
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A project on collaborative labor, like any other, owes much to its collaborators. I would like to extend my gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee—Kathleen Diffley, Harilaos Stecopoulos, Laura Rigal, Kembrew McLeod—for their support and assistance with this project. To my dissertation director Loren D. Glass I want to convey a particular message of thanks, for he was at all times an attentive and sympathetic mentor who always pushed me to do my best. I want to thank Professor Garrett Stewart for his encouragement and advice at various stages of the process. Assistant Professor Miriam Thaggert kindly took time to provide feedback on my work, and I thank her. To David Depew and Leslie Margolin, co-leaders of the POROI seminar “Writing for Learned Journals,” I am grateful for all you did to help me advance this project. I am also grateful to my classmates in all the dissertation workshops in which I took part. To my friends and cohort in Iowa City, thanks you for everything you did to help me finish this dissertation.

This project would not have been possible without the participation of Columbia University’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the New York Public Library, the Newberry Library, the University of Virginia’s Alderman Library, Indian University’s Lilly Library, and Howard University’s Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, as well as financial assistance from the Lilly Library’s Everett C. Helm, the University of Iowa’s Frederick P. W. McDowell Scholarship, and grants from the University of Iowa Graduate College. I want to thank my home department for other financial assistance that helped me finish this project: the Frederick F. Seely Fellowship, a post-comprehensive exam course release, and funding associated with Garrett Stewart’s “Story in Theory” dissertation seminar.

Stepping outside the boundaries of my home university, I want to thank my
friends and colleagues who supported this project in more ways than I can name. Several of my fellow Cather scholars—Florence Amamoto, Tim Bintrim, Evelyn Funda, Richard Harris, Mark Madigan, Melissa Homestead, Andy Jewell, Anne L. Kaufman, David Porter, Guy Reynolds, Steve Shively, and Bob Thacker—participated in energizing and informative conversations, as well as direct feedback and support.

To my friends and loved ones around the country, thank you for providing couches and futons to sleep on near archives I had hoped to visit. John Ward and Danielle Palombini, Ed and Emily Forbes, and Sarah Stoeckl and Mark Gully: Your couches, in particular, I recall with fondness.

Lastly, to Jen Zoble, I want to name you for the benefit of anyone reading these acknowledgements, but I won’t try to cover in this brief space what you have meant to me or to my dissertation. We both know, and that’s what matters to me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I: CHARACTER, PERSONALITY, AND THE EDITOR FIGURE:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS AND THE INSTITUTION OF IMAGE-BUILDING</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading the Editor as a Member of the Professional-Managerial Class,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as a Personality, and as a Celebrity</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Merciless Blue Pencil and the Trembling Contributor: Figuring the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor in the U.S. Marketplace</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howells as an Unreal Editor</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howells, <em>Harper’s Weekly</em>, and the Question of Editorial Intervention</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality, Character, and the Editor Figure in <em>A Hazard of New Fortunes</em></td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II: RECIPROCITY AND THE “REAL” AUTHOR: WILLA CATHER</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS S.S. MCCLURE’S GHOSTWRITER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocity and Authorship Studies</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClure’s Debt Spiral and <em>My Autobiography</em></td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indebtedness and Cather’s Cooperation</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghostwriting and Collaborative Authorship</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClure’s Autobiography by Installments</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indebtedness and Reciprocity in <em>My Ántonia</em> and <em>The Professor’s House</em></td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Owing “Something” to Miss Cather</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III: DISCOVERY OF THE MONTH: D’ARCY MCNICKLE AND THE APPARATUS</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OF LITERARY DEBUT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McNickle and (Native) American Authorship</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking into Literature: Anonymity, Credibility, and Market Practices</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Commanding Prices to Discovering Talent: The Literary Agent as an</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging American Profession</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Don’t Let’s Have Publicity Men”: McNickle, Rae, and the Gendered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Agent</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discovering McNickle and Fashioning McNickle as a Discovery</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Musician by Birth and a Printer by Accident”: Cultural Exchange in The Surrounded .................................................................................................. 191
Conclusion: Seeking Permission ................................................................. 212

CHAPTER IV: IRREPRESSIBLE ANTHOLOGIES, COLLECTIBLE COLLECTIONS: BIBLIOPHILIA AND BOOK COLLECTING IN THE NEW NEGRO ................................................................. 215

Introduction ........................................................................................................ 215
The Harlem Renaissance and the History of the Book .................................. 223
The New Negro as a Bibliophilic Edition ...................................................... 226
Making Matter and Material ............................................................................ 252
Digging up the Past: Book Collecting, Black Bibliophiles, and The New Negro ............................................................................................................. 257
Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 269

APPENDIX: WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS, EDITOR FIGURE ACTIVITIES, 1890-1900 ........................................................................................... 270

REFERENCES: ..................................................................................................... 272
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Free Indirect Discourse in *The Surrounded* ........................................... 192
Table 2: Examples of Revisions from Scene Action to Interiority ......................... 197
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Thomas Nast, “Too Heavy a Load for the Trade Unions,” Harper’s Weekly, May 15, 1886, 305. Front Page Illustration ........................................... 47


Figure 2.1: “My Autobiography” Installment 1, McClure’s Magazine, 41.6 (October 1913): 33 ................................................................................ 112

Figure 2.2: An example of a page pairing an illustration (top left) of McClure reading as a young boy with a photograph (bottom right) of Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. “My Autobiography” Installment 3, McClure’s Magazine, 41.8 (December 1913): 98-99 ....................... 116

Figure 2.3: A young McClure reads a book by the light of a small window. Installment 2, McClure’s Magazine, 41.7 (November 1913): 78 .......... 118

Figure 2.4: McClure and his brother John walk by the light of the moon between two towns in rural Indiana. My Autobiography Installment 4, McClure’s Magazine 41.9 (January 1914): 107-108 ...................... 120

Figure 4.1: The title page of the 1925 first edition of The New Negro (left) is markedly different from the title page of the Touchstone edition (1997), which remains the most widely circulated presentation of the anthology (right) ................................................................................. 217

Figure 4.2: Reiss’s signature on the frontispiece of The New Negro, to the left of the title page .......................................................... 219

Figure 4.3: Reiss’s design work for the cover of Opportunity (February 1925) .... 229

Figure 4.4: Opportunity. Editorial page (August 1925) ........................................ 232

Figure 4.5: Opportunity. Table of contents page (May 1925) ............................. 233

Figure 4.6: The 1925 version of Opportunity’s book review department, titled “Book Shelf” and later “Our Book Shelf.” .............................. 234

Figure 4.7: “Book Shelf,” Opportunity (November 1925): 342 ..................... 235

Figure 4.8: “Our Book Shelf” Opportunity (September 1923): 276 ............ 235
Figure 4.9: The cover of the March 1925 special issue of *Survey Graphic*. Reiss’s signature S is visible in the photo credit (center right) and appears in the magazine title. A typographical motif features single and double triangles in several letterforms .......................................................... 237

Figure 4.10: Reiss’s design of the dust jacket and the book cover for the first edition of *The New Negro* ................................................................. 238

Figure 4.11: Albert and Charles Boni cover design, 1926-1932 ...................... 236

Figure 4.12: Dust jacket for *The New Negro*, new and revised edition, 1927 .......... 239

Figure 4.13: “Ornamental frames” from Reiss’s *You Can Design* (1930) ............ 243

Figure 4.14: A book decoration used as a header in *The New Negro* ................. 244

Figure 4.15: A book decoration used as a header in *The New Negro* ................. 245

Figure 4.16: A book decoration used as a footer in *The New Negro* ................. 245

Figure 4.17: Locke’s “To Certain of Our Phillistines” closes with one of Reiss’s decorative designs wrapped around an image of a book shelf, the header associated with *Opportunity’s* “Book Shelf” feature .................... 250

Figure 4.18: *The New Negro*, dedication page ....................................................... 253
INTRODUCTION

Susanna Ashton’s *Collaborators in Literary America, 1870-1920* opens with the claim that the second half of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of a collaborative age in American literature. Some of the most iconic examples of literary collaboration come from this period, including Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner’s *The Gilded Age* (1873), Jack London and Anna Strunsky’s *The Kempton-Wace Letters* (1903), and the twelve-author *The Whole Family* (1906), featuring an ensemble that included William Dean Howells and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. In each of these instances, collaboration can be defined as two or more authors working in tandem to produce a singular text.\(^1\) Further, in all three cases, much of the work was completed in respective isolation and assembled to form a whole. Each author of *The Whole Family* wrote one chapter; London wrote the Herbert Wace sections of *The Kempton-Wace Letters* and Strunsky wrote the letters attributed to Dane Kempton. Even in an example where it’s not clear who has written what, models tend to have authors working separately, or with one subordinate to the other, on a common literary text or set of texts.\(^2\)

Collaboration defined in this manner, while certainly an important aspect of the collaborative age, cannot account for the complexity and tenuousness associated with cooperative labor at the cusp of an industrial economy with national and international


\(^2\) For example, twentieth-century Australian literary collaborators Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw published under the name M. Barnard Eldershaw. For more information on this partnership, see London, *Writing Double*, 95.
reach. Take, for example, a story about a poet and editor named William Stanley Braithwaite. In October of 1899, then unknown, he sent a letter to William Dean Howells asking for assistance securing publication for his first book of poems. “Most Reverend Sir,” he began. “I am an American Negro in my twentieth year who has just come to New York with a MS with the hope of disposing it to a publisher. To you as the ‘Dean of American Literature’ I make an application for assistance.”³ As Braithwaite’s reference to the nickname “Dean of American Letters” suggests, Howells was at this time regarded as one of the nation’s most prominent writers. He had championed Paul Laurence Dunbar’s second poetry collection *Majors and Minors* (1896) by reviewing it in *Harper’s Weekly* and had written the preface for Dunbar’s *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, published later the same year. Braithwaite hoped Howells would “evince the same interest” in his own work. Braithwaite received “a prompt and cordial reply” inviting him to Howells’s home. Howells refused to give assistance to the young poet, or even to read Braithwaite’s manuscript. Howells did agree, however, to give him a card of introduction to Dunbar’s publishers.⁴

As a young man, Braithwaite realized the challenges he faced as an African American of little means in pursuit of a literary career. Born in 1878 in Boston, Braithwaite was forced to leave school at age 12 to support his family. Like Howells, he was apprenticed to a typesetter as a teenager (the Boston publisher Ginn & Co.). “The passion which I now was driven by for a poetic and literary career,” he writes in his memoir, “made me sensible of the cultural training necessary for an artist before he could hope to realize his ambitions.” In 1904, he published a book of poems *Lyrics of Life and

---


⁴ Ibid. In his autobiography *The House under Arcturus*, originally serialized in *Phylon*, 1941-1942, Braithwaite acknowledges that Howells was essentially “harassed and importuned” by countless “obscure literary aspirants of the day.” Butcher, *The William Stanley Braithwaite Reader*, 175.
Love, but it was his “career as editor and anthologist” that set him on the course to prominence.\textsuperscript{5} In 1906, he published \textit{The Book of Elizabethan Verse} and began as a columnist for the \textit{Boston Evening Transcript}, eventually rising to the position of literary editor. Between 1913 and 1929, he published a yearly anthology of poetry titled \textit{The Anthology of Magazine Verse}. Perhaps most infamously, Harriet Monroe once castigated him as “The Boston Dictator” and “Sir Oracle.” Other editorial work included \textit{The Anthology of Georgian Verse} (1908) and \textit{Bewitched Parsonage} (1948), a study of the Brontes. In a 1907 letter to Ray Stannard Baker, he indicated his plans to publish \textit{William Dean Howells: A Critical Study}, but he never completed the project.\textsuperscript{6} Braithwaite expressed his poetic identity not merely through his own poetry, but through his editorship, his advocacy, and his criticism.

In February 1912, Braithwaite reached out to George Washington Cable with the following invitation: “Mr. William Dean Howells is seventy-five years old on March 1. The \textit{Boston Evening Transcript} on February 24 is publishing the tributes and appreciation of Mr. Howells’s contemporaries in honor of his birthday. These tributes are requested to be from three to five hundred words.”\textsuperscript{7} Pieces by Braithwaite, Cable, W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and Robert Herrick appeared in the April issue. Braithwaite wanted the work to serve as “a collective expression of the esteem we have for Mr. Howells as man and author.”\textsuperscript{8} He might have easily replaced the word \textit{author} with the word \textit{editor} or \textit{critic}. It was Howells’s reputation as a taste-maker that had most significantly influenced Braithwaite’s career. More important than a direct affinity for

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{5} Philip Butcher, \textit{The William Stanley Braithwaite Reader}, 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{6} William Stanley Braithwaite to Ray Stannard Baker, 3 October 1907, \textit{The William Stanley Braithwaite Reader}, 245.
  \item \textsuperscript{7} William Stanley Braithwaite to George Washington Cable, 17 February 1912, \textit{The William Stanley Braithwaite Reader}, 252.
  \item \textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Howells as a literary author was the fact that Braithwaite adopted Howells’s notion of critical engagement and self-fashioning through the institution of editorship.

Howells’s influence on Braithwaite was immense. However, their collaboration, in the strictest sense of the word, was nonexistent. Studies of literary collaboration that have worked with a fixed notion of authorship certainly have merit, but they necessarily leave an entire aspect of collaborative labor unaddressed. My dissertation title, in response, is meant to highlight the nebulous but nevertheless critical impacts of collaborative labor in unexpected places. Working directly with a partner or engaging in a collaborative system can frustrate, energize, or empower those involved, but whatever feelings it inspires, interactive labor often has a life of its own. This is the central idea of *Collaborative Momentum*. Just as Mary Susan Fishbaugh’s *Models of Collaboration* (1999) identifies consulting, coaching, and teaming as the three major categories of cooperative work, my goal is to provide an analysis of cooperative labor that goes beyond traditional partnerships. Further, I want to gesture at how collaborative enterprise reshaped the institution of authorship in industrial America.\(^9\) Investigating this topic involves taking up several instances of direct collaborative writing—for example, Willa Cather and S.S. McClure both performed authorial labor in producing McClure’s autobiography—but it also requires a thorough analysis of the cooperative labor that enabled literary production and shaped its reception.

Of course, the type of collaborative labor I am talking about is by its very nature elusive and therefore difficult to analyze. Scholars have counteracted this imprecision by focusing on one or more specific authors or publishing companies, or by studying an identifiable professional identity such as the literary agent or the reporter. Since my goal is to explore collaborative mechanics amid and between such figures, I have chosen

instead to focus on a range of professions associated in their time with the terms *middle man* or *go-between*. The idea of a middle man as a person standing in an intermediate relation to two parties dates back to the seventeenth century, but the now-predominant definition of an entity or person that handles a commodity between producer and consumer, with all its negative connotations, is attributed to Edmund Burke’s *Thoughts on Scarcity* (1795).\(^\text{10}\) In *Capital* (1867), Marx described “the interposition of parasites” between the capitalist and the wage-laborer. “The gain of these middle-men” he said, “comes entirely from the difference between the labour price which the capitalist pays, and the part of that price which they actually allow to reach the labourer.”\(^\text{11}\) Social emphasis on the economic identifiers of the term led to its widespread use in criticizing the literary agent at the turn of the century. *The Critic* wrote that “a middle-man” was the object of publishers’ deepest fears: “that terrible bogey, the agent, who drinks champagne out of their skulls.”\(^\text{12}\) Items in various American periodicals and books from 1887 to 1904, however, applied the term (often derisively) to the editor, the publisher, the bookseller, the agent, the advertiser, and even the popular writer.\(^\text{13}\) Therefore, I mean to call attention to this widespread but nebulous term and then interrogate its use for an obscured cast of characters who made literature happen but have not been granted the individual status that authors or other elevated creators have possessed. My major focus is the new and changing institutional roles of the late nineteenth century, but I also


acknowledge that unofficial middle men such as relatives, spouses, and friends were often integral to the collaborative networks I mean to interpret.

The central challenge of this dissertation, then, is demonstrating how an authorship study of the United States can satisfactorily account for the expansion in number and influence of literary middle men between 1890 and 1940. Division of labor, professionalization, and the success of large publishing houses led John Tebbel to dub the 25-year period between 1915 and 1940 “The Golden Age” of American publishing.\textsuperscript{14} The groundwork for this era was set in the 1890s, with the passage of the Chace Act in 1891, which spurred a new transatlantic publishing marketplace by establishing international copyright. As a direct result, Paul Revere Reynolds founded the first official or professional American literary agency in 1892. Between 1891 and 1893, the so-called “mass market magazine revolution” led to the preponderance of cheap, large-market magazines, increasingly dependent on ad revenue for their profits. The existence of these new markets contributed to the expansion of lucrative publishing opportunities for writers and an increased role for advertising and publicity. New divisions between highbrow, lowbrow, and middlebrow culture coincided with these cultural reconfigurations.\textsuperscript{15} Celebrity became an integral part of the way authorship was understood and valued. In short, the consumer marketplace that had already begun to emerge in the nineteenth century now operated with unprecedented force.

Although \textit{Collaborative Momentum} builds upon a large body of scholarship about the changing conditions of the publishing industry, it is foremost an extension of the sub-specialty of the history of the book commonly referred to as authorship studies. In the 2005 “State of the Discipline” essay review for \textit{Book History}, Christine Haynes identified

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}
five major trends in scholarly work on authorship:

1. The Origins of the Material and Moral Rights of Authors
2. Dramatic Authorship
3. Women, Gender, and Authorship
4. The Cultural Construction of Authors as a Class or Occupation
5. Practices of Authorship

Haynes’s glimpse at the field deserves extended attention. First, her categorical divisions are particularly useful because they offer a glimpse of the major concerns of the authorship studies subspecialty. They also reveal something important about scholarly boundaries. Her categories, of course, see some overlap, as studies of authorship drawing insight from feminist and gender theory might just as easily be discussing theater or authorial practices.

Further, as Haynes points out, work on “the cultural construction of authors as a class or occupation” and “practices of authorship” have both begun to make room for publishing industry collaborators as a major influence on modern authorial identity and practice. With regard to the cultural construction of authorship in America, she highlights Grantland S. Rice’s *The Transformation of Authorship in America*, and Michael Newbury’s *Figuring Authorship in Antebellum America*. “Assuming that it continues,” Haynes states, “this new emphasis on representations of authorship promises to make us more aware of and knowledgeable about the cultural origins of our modern conception of the author as an autonomous, original, disinterested, and heroic creator.”

As for authorial practice, literary studies work has continued to highlight the individual author but has “begun to pay increasing attention to the material conditions and social

---

relationships in which the practices of authors have been embedded.”  

Studies of famous literary partnerships have begun to show “the habits of coauthors, ghostwriters, and amanuenses,” while recent monographs on publishers and publishing firms have suggested that “the practices and rewards of authorship were shaped by publishers.”  

Book studies scholarship on the cultural construction of authors and authorial practices has taken different paths to gesture at the same tentative conclusion: that collaborative labor produces a culturally constructed authorial identity tied to notions of solitary genius.

Haynes assigns separate categories for the cultural construction of authorship and the historical study of authorial practices. To an extent, the space between these two subject areas is a lesser subject of discussion and debate. My work represents an attempt to address the complicated and elusive nature of cooperative labor in the American literary marketplace to show how collaborative practices—supportive and adversarial—shaped the cultural construction of authorship. Only by crossing the line between practice and representation can questions about these interactive relationships be fully addressed. My work, therefore, is partly a rediscovery of the personal and institutional relationships that defined the turn-of-the-century literary publishing scene in the United States, and partly a reevaluation of the subfield of authorship studies most relevant to the study of authorial practice and representation. Work in this vein generally has begun to see authorship itself as an identity defined as much by its secondary labor as it was by its


18 Haynes, “Reassessing ‘Genius’ in Studies of Authorship” 308, 309. David Finkelstein’s The House of Blackwood: Author-Publisher Relations in the Victorian Era (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002) is an often-cited example of a publishing house history with implications for scholars of collaborative labor. Haynes notes that this particular subcategory of work on authorial practice has favored the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, probably due in large part to the availability of archival records.
authors. I mean to advance that work with a direct study of the author and the middle man.

Existing studies of American authorship and American social thought have provided a working conceptual framework for my dissertation. Like Loren D. Glass, Leon Jackson, James F. English, and George Hutchinson, I have also found that the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers the most effective method, thus far, for explaining the economic and social conditions that informed modern authorship. In *The Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu traces the emergence of “art for art’s sake” in nineteenth-century France, where an interdependent opposition arose between the commercial market (the field of large-scale production) and the avant-garde (the field of restricted production). By rejecting financial profit, writers in the restricted field gained credibility, prestige, and authority (symbolic capital), even though they made little or no money (economic capital). That is, according to the ordinary rules of economics the field of restricted production is governed by a “generalized game of ‘loser wins’.” Even though the two fields seem antagonistic to one another, the field of large-scale production may “renew itself” periodically by drawing upon the restricted field.

Also like Glass, Jackson, English, and Hutchinson, I am aware that Bourdieu’s work has been a source of contention in American academic circles. In an essay titled

---


“Bourdieu’s Refusal,” John Guillory suggests that Bourdieu’s major flaw is “his apparent reduction of social action to self-interest, in the form of the accumulation of ‘capital,’ and, further, his implicit foreclosure of any action that transcends individual interest or has progressive social change as its end.”

English’s essay “Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards, and the Rules of Art,” similarly grants that Bourdieu “ultimately offers us an individual subject no less reduced in its agency to acquisitiveness and competition, and not much better articulated along axes of race, gender, or sexuality, than the Economic Man of neoclassical economics.”

In discussing nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature, these shortcomings are perhaps even more damning than they are in the French context. It can be argued that one of the major questions of American literature has been its relative capacity to represent the nation in all its diversity. More urgently, can literature assist the marginalized in contesting the established centers of power? Contemporary scholars’ overall strategy has been to recognize Bourdieu’s limitations while appropriating his most useful insights.

Of all the recent scholarship drawing on Bourdieu’s methods, English’s study of cultural prizes provides the best revision of those theories for a twentieth-century American context. Especially significant is English’s emphasis on intraconversion between economic and symbolic capital. Where Bourdieu’s model seems to suggest that the field of large-scale production and the restricted field are “two discreet zones, respectively dominated by artistic and economic capital,” English urges his readers to recognize that the different forms of capital are caught up in a process of “exchange or

---


23 James F. English, “Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards, and the Rules of Art,” New Literary History 33, no. 1 (2002): 111. This essay is in many ways a precursor to English’s more developed The Economy of Prestige (2008), but the essay version’s discussion of Bourdieu’s reputation is not included in the book.

24 English also provides a crucial intervention by offering an example of how a contemporary American scholar can benefit from Bourdieu while simultaneously exposing his shortcomings.
translation from form to form, at every point of the field simultaneously and at variable rates whose negotiation is always part of this process, being carried out by every player in every position.” The ideal of artistic autonomy is not attained by positioning oneself at the “ever-narrower margin” of a system dominated by monetary concerns, but is instead pursued by “seizing and managing” the various cultural instruments and systems that facilitate the negotiation of capital conversions. For English, the most critical of these instruments is the cultural prize. Yet his reformulation of Bourdieu explains with uncanny precision the critical role that secondary literary laborers must play in allowing a culture of letters to exist within a culture industry and to appear impervious to its adverse implications.

A final shortcoming of Bourdieu’s that requires addressing is the absence of a specific set of principles by which to evaluate relationships among publishing industry actions or practices as well as textual representation and bibliographic codes. Bourdieu does engage in critical readings of literary texts (namely Gustave Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*) but does not offer a satisfactory way for scholars to appreciate texts as physical objects operating in the field of cultural production. What he does offer is the concept of “position-takings” to account for the ways authors and secondary literary laborers construct literary meanings by defining themselves and each other “relative to other positions.” Artistic works, written pronouncements about art, and market choices all constitute position-takings in the field of cultural production. Addressing my


26 Ibid.

27 Here I invoke the title of Richard H. Broadhead’s study of late nineteenth-century American literature and Theodor W. Adorno’s most well-known essay on mass culture as the ultimate form of subjugation. My goal is to summon their respective associations to show the extremity of the contradictions held in ostensible harmony by the field of cultural production and not to reduce either critic’s work to banality.

dissertation’s central question, however, requires a more aggressively articulated way of engaging with the different of material forms of these position-takings.

To resolve this tension, I turn at several points in this dissertation to the critical framework of Jerome J. McGann and those who have followed in his path.\(^\text{29}\) McGann’s *The Textual Condition* describes a “textual field” where “the meaning of texts’ will appear as a set of concrete and always changing conditions.”\(^\text{30}\) He argues that textual meaning is transmitted through “bibliographical and linguistic codes” but that author-centered theory “largely ignores the transmissive or communicative aspects of linguistic events.”\(^\text{31}\) Close readings that interpret a literary text foremost as a set of signifiers downplay the extent to which a text’s linguistic codes are available for an audience only to the extent that they are presented materially by a specific volume or edition. As a result, Bourdieu’s model of position-taking would have to recognize that a particular edition of *Sentimental Education* takes positions in relation to its author, its publishers, and as a physical agent in itself. A subsequent edition of the title would also take a position in relation to the first edition. To quote a recent essay by Leslee Thorne-Murphy, an appreciation of bibliographic codes can point scholars to “the contributions made by unacknowledged, unrecorded editors and publishers who altered and rewrote a text


\(^{31}\) McGann, *The Textual Condition*, 56, 57.
beyond the author’s control.” Such collaborations can be more difficult to trace but were also the most common.33

As will no doubt become clear, a range of additional critical studies have been important in detailing, to various degrees, how the amplification of the professional (or technical) sphere in the late nineteenth century and the rise of an unprecedented commercial marketplace fundamentally reordered social conditions in the United States.34 Karl Polanyi’s The Great Transformation (1944), Warren Susman’s Culture as History (1984), and Christopher P. Wilson’s The Labor of Words (1985) all emphasize, in their own way, a rising institutional consciousness mediated through mass culture at the turn of the twentieth century.35 Simultaneously, each provides a different central explanation for the changing relationship between the individual and his or her society during this time period. Since a large part of my aim with this dissertation is to push the limits of how literature scholars generally define collaboration, chapters to follow will deploy these historical and critical models when they are most applicable.

In Collaborative Momentum, I argue for a reconsideration of the role of the literary intermediary in the construction of modern American authorship. As professional specialization became more institutionally defined and rigidly structured, the literary field


33 For Thorne-Murphy, this is especially the case with nineteenth-century transatlantic publishing. She “rarely leaves manuscript remnants (correspondence, business records, and so forth) to reveal exactly who edited and altered a text and why.” Thorne-Murphy, “Re-Authorship,” 83.


paradoxically created new spaces for nebulous but crucial cooperative labor. The effect I have labeled *collaborative momentum* was the driving force that facilitated the exchange of economic and symbolic capital. My four chapters offer case studies to support my argument about the relationship between cooperative labor and authorial identity. With each case study, I hope to call attention to significant instances of literary collaboration and offer evidence of the cultural forces and social norms that mediated such literary exchanges. Of particular importance were the collaborative structures that mediated and often contested notions of group formation, shared history, and common purpose. Because my dissertation argues for a relationship between collaborative practice and the construction of authorial identity, each chapter reads a literary text as the culminating response to a specific form of collaborative momentum.

My first chapter, “Character, Personality, and the Editor Figure: William Dean Howells and the Institution of Image-Building,” establishes that the same cultural logic that allowed Samuel Clemens to develop a public persona as a fictional character also empowered William Dean Howells to create his literary identity as the nation’s foremost editor figure. Christopher P. Wilson observes that “a new breed of editor-publisher” arose in the 1890s to set themselves off against “supposedly ‘anaemic’ competitors inside the office and out” and “called upon a new ‘unity’ of purpose energized by an editorial dynamo.”36 Outside Wilson’s emphasis yet significant is the fact that many of these new editors had more traditional, conservative subordinates managing their editorial departments. The Progressive Era was the age of the celebrity editor as much as the editorial revolutionary. My case study of Howells in the 1890s exemplifies the degree to which collaborative momentum mediated the “contradictions of modern American

36 Wilson, *The Labor of Words*, 40, 48. His examples of such editors include Bok, Collier, Curtis, Lorimer, Page, McClure, Munsey, and Walker.
authorial celebrity” as described by Glass’s *Authors, Inc.* I argue that Howells’s magazine work published in the name of “the editor” as a figure, as well as his idea of the “unreal editor,” are the most appreciable examples of Howells defining his own authorial persona in relation to the editor and, by extension, defining his peers and contemporaries in response to his figural editorship. This persona work extends to *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), a novel in which the main characters—co-founders of a fictional literary magazine—have contrasting editorial philosophies. Fulkerson is ostentatious but lacks substance; Basil March is so unsure of himself that he hardly has an identity. By positioning the two characters against the backdrop of a citywide labor uprising, Howells criticizes the superficiality of the emergent culture of personality and its ties to authorial celebrity. He posits an editor-author hybrid as the proper figure to confront what he sees as a culture on the verge of chaos.

In chapter two, “Reciprocity and the ‘Real’ Author: Willa Cather as S.S. McClure’s Ghostwriter,” I trace a cycle of debt from McClure’s rise as magazine editor to a moment of financial crisis in 1912 that led his corporate board to oust him from his own magazine. To pay off his debts, he asked Willa Cather to ghostwrite his autobiography. Yet financial matters cannot explain the full force of Cather and McClure’s collaboration. Cather accepted the role out of personal loyalty and took no money for her work. Drawing on Polanyi’s theory of a great transformation that left symbolic exchange subordinate to the market, I read Cather’s ghostwriting as an example of how mutual debt and repayment are generative precisely because cycles of reciprocity depend on the conversion of economic and symbolic capital. By close reading *My Autobiography* (1914) and two of Cather’s novel’s: *My Ántonia* (1918) and *The Professor’s House* (1925), I argue that McClure and Cather’s collaboration affected their

37 Glass, *Authors Inc.*, 7.
authorial personae. Each text engages with cycles of debt and indebtedness and, to varying degrees, imagines collaborative exchanges unclouded by monetary gain. In Cather’s most advanced version of this motif, the characters express a desire to convert mutual indebtedness into narrative itself.

Any analysis of collaborative momentum in the twentieth century must reckon with the rise of the literary agent as an institutional figure. My third chapter, “Discovery of the Month: D’Arcy McNickle and the Apparatus of Literary Debut” takes up the changing institutions of literary career-launching, namely the emergent triangulation among publishers, literary agents, and literary aspirants (especially writers of fiction). My approach brings together two scholarly conversations, one preoccupied with McNickle’s refinement of his perception of Native cultures, and the other concerned with the cultural systems that codified twentieth-century authorial identity and credibility (such as English’s study of the cultural prize). The exceptional aspects of McNickle’s story—the nine-year duration of his effort to publish his first book, his hybrid and marginal identity, and the number of avenues he tried in order to become established—make for a fruitful case study. To better understand McNickle’s relationship with literary agent Ruth Rae, I frame my analysis with the story of the literary agent’s rise as an integral figure in literary debut. Turning to McNickle’s fiction in the second part of this chapter, I analyze his first novel *The Surrounded* as a reaction to cultural institutions of literary discovery that kept the novel from being published for nine years. The version finally published in 1936, heavily revised after more than fifty rejections, narrates the tragedy of failed mediation embedded in allusions to the Salish oral tradition. The novel therefore gestures at an alternative model of interaction premised on an experience of mutual discovery and forecasts tragedies to come if such a model is not pursued.

Chapter four, “Irrepressible Anthologies, Collectible Collections: Bibliophilia and Book Collecting in *The New Negro,*” (1925) continues my analysis of the literary middle man’s changing identity by tracing the intersection of anthology, book collecting, and
bibliophilia as they pertain to *The New Negro*’s book design, artistic form, and multi-generic content. While recent studies have linked the anthology to Boasian ethnography and modernist collage, I provide a more immediate reading of the philosophies of collecting inherent to modern and African American print cultures. I read *The New Negro* as a book production process structured by efforts to produce an object worthy of being collected. I also analyze how the anthology’s book design interacts with the positions on materiality and collecting at play in its prose and poetry. This case study of the creator-intermediary as book collector and designer historicizes book collecting and appreciates African American bibliophiles as an alternative to the dominant white American and European book collecting traditions.

In all four chapters, I argue that collaborative momentum shaped and often complicated authorial identity. As nebulous as the term *middle man* might be, the common element among the editor, the publisher, the agent, and the book designer is that each figure played an important part, along with the others, in mediating the exchange of economic and symbolic capital. This process involved helping to construct individual and shared identities, to establish common purpose, and to contest the present moment by refashioning the past. Each figure, at one time or another, was also conspicuously obscured in service of the author. My dissertation suggests, ultimately, that the study of authorship should be concerned with the middle man as a direct collaborator and as an interactive and sometimes oppositional force shaping the institution of authorship. It is therefore fitting, I think, that I turn now to my analysis of Howells’s personal and professional image-building work in the 1890s as my first case study, as this chapter is a collaboration study focusing on one individual’s public image to illustrate how extensively I mean to question customary notions of collaboration.
CHAPTER I

CHARACTER, PERSONALITY, AND THE EDITOR FIGURE:

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS AND THE INSTITUTION OF IMAGE-BUILDING

Howells, it can be truly said, is greater than his literary volumes make him out to be. If this be considered little enough, then let us say he is even greater than his reputation. Since it is contended that his literary reputation far outweighs his achievements, let this tribute be taken in full, for he is all that it implies—one of the noblemen of literature.

Theodore Dreiser, “The Real Howells”

Introduction

The opening lines Dreiser’s often-discussed interview “The Real Howells” set the stage for a full-throated defense of the Dean of American Letters. He distinguishes Howells the man from Howells’s literary output and other achievements. Howells’s most important role, Dreiser writes, has been as “an influence for good in American letters.” His patronage was more important than his written work. According to John W. Crowley, Dreiser constructs Howells’s “private generosity” as a kind of “public-minded philanthropy.” In addition to emphasizing Howells’s impact over his literary oeuvre, Dreiser distinguishes between Howells’s reputation, earned over time, and fame, a commodity others pursued for shallow self-gratification. He states, “By the side of the egotists in his field, the chasers after fame and the hagglers over money, this man is a towering figure.” In this sense, Dreiser’s interview of one literary figure was also a treatise of sorts on the changing nature of literary renown. Howells becomes the “towering figure” associated with an underappreciated type of symbolic capital: his

---

1 Theodore Dreiser, “The Real Howells,” Ainslee’s (March 1900): 135-142.
2 Ibid., 142.
3 John W. Crowley, The Dean of American Letters: The Late Career of William Dean Howells (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 73.
4 Dreiser, “The Real Howells,” 142.
advocacy on others’ behalf.

What Dreiser does not state is that Howells’s impact on American letters was directly attributable to his identity as an editor. What’s more, Howells’s “identity as an editor” was very much a public construction. While he was unquestionably an editor figure, from 1886 to 1920, Howells did not hold a traditional editorship at any point after he stepped down from *The Atlantic Monthly* 1881. From 1886 to 1892, he wrote a column for *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* called “The Editor’s Study,” but Henry Mills Alden was at the magazine’s helm. Howells was, to use his own phrasing, the “unreal editor,” an “airy, elusive abstraction” with the ability to “sit at fine ease” and converse openly with the reader.\(^5\) In this case, he was a columnist who used the idea of the editor as his thematic focus. He was named an associate editor of *Cosmopolitan* in 1889, but, as D.M. Rein explains, his “editorial connections lasted only two months and he was never really editor.”\(^6\) He wrote “The Editor’s Easy Chair,” column for *Harper’s* from 1900 up to his death in 1920, but he had the same general labor parameters as he did with “The Editor’s Study.”\(^7\) In linking Dreiser’s defense of Howells’s reputation to his identity as an editor, then, I mean to tie it to a nebulous set of private and public position-


\(^7\) By the turn of the century, Howells had become known as the “Dean of American Letters.” This title was ascribed to many literary figures, including Oliver Wendell Holmes and William Cullen Bryant. See “Oliver Wendell Holmes” *The Fortnightly* 40 (July 1, 1886): 237; and William R. Thayer, “Bryant’s Centennial” *Review of Reviews* 10.4 (October 1894): 403. An article in *The Bookman* in 1900 described Charles Dudley Warner by the same title and added a note of explanation: “Mr. Richard Henry Stoddard is sometimes called the Dean of American Letters, and Mr. Howells is another Dean, and so is Mr. Stedman. Harry Thurston Peck, “A Note on Charles Dudley Warner,” *The Bookman* 12, no. 4 (December 1900): 369. The *Cyclopedia of American Biography* (1900) states, “Today there is very little opposition to the general opinion that Mr. Howells is, and has been for many years, the foremost writer of American fiction, the dean of American letters.” James E. Homans, *The Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 1900, 174. Crowley credits the term to Dreiser’s “The Real Howells.” Crowley, *The Dean of American Letters*, 72. After 1905, references to the honorific almost exclusively refer to Howells.
takings as a critic, arbiter, and advocate—or, as an editor figure.\footnote{By 1890, critics had begun to use the adjective Howellsian to describe other writers. This distinction was reserved for writers with “special cultural authority.” Crowley, The Dean of American Letters, 4. The Literary News (June 1890), a monthly book-trade magazine founded as The Literary Bulletin in 1868 and eventually crowded out by Publishers’ Weekly, used the term to describe Thomas Russell Sullivan’s penchant for “social analysis” in Day and Night Stories, published that year. “Review of Day and Night Stories,” The Literary News, June 1890, 176. The unsigned review was reprinted from the Brooklyn Times.}

In this chapter, I want to frame my analysis of the middle man’s influence on authorial identity by linking Howells’s career to the idea of the editor figure—a public identity constructed as “editor” yet detached from activities that went beyond the labor traditionally assigned to a newspaper, magazine, or book editor. Editors “in name only” had existed in previous time periods, but, as I will detail, editors were increasingly becoming national, public figures, and the scope of their duties was changing rapidly at the turn of the century. My work in this chapter will focus on William Dean Howells’s public persona as editor, critic, and advocate between 1886 and 1900, the years that saw the start of Howells’s “Editor’s Study” column, his move to New York City, and the publication of his most overt novel on the New York publishing industry, A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890).\footnote{A Hazard of New Fortunes was first serialized in Harper’s Weekly in 1889, but 1890 is the date of the first book publication.} Image-building is a practice often associated with dynamic individuals like authors, musicians, and movie stars, but I want to analyze Howells as an example of authorial persona constructed in relation to existing ideas about editors and editorial labor. Howells’s nonfiction work in this date range invokes the generalizing grammar of “the editor” to influence young writers and advocate for public commitment to social reform. My work then extends the analysis to A Hazard of New Fortunes, a novel that brings the professional personalities of a magazine office into contact with the threat of working class uprising in an increasingly stratified society. Howells’s position-takings during this period construct and sustain public notions of editor and author. By extension, I hope to show that collaborative labor during this period helped refigure...
publicly constructed editor-author relationships at the close of the nineteenth century.

**Reading the Editor as a Member of the Professional-Managerial Class, as a Personality, and as a Celebrity**

One of my goals with this chapter is to bring scholarship on Howells and his literary career into contact with a conversation about literary fame and identity in a modernizing publishing industry. Howells’s critics have discussed the extent of Howells’s literary reputation, his influence on others (sometimes seen as problematic), and the social and ideological limits of his fiction. Regarding legacy and influence, John W. Crowley’s trilogy is the most ambitious effort to date to account for Howells as a national literary figure.\(^\text{10}\) His third book in the series, *The Dean of American Letters: The Late Career of William Dean Howells* (1999), is particularly relevant to my chapter as it covers Howells’s career from 1890 to his death in 1920. Crowley emphasizes “perception of shifting actualities in the business of authorship and his responses to those changes” over “the literary marketplace within which Howells operated.”\(^\text{11}\) His work differs from a biography in the sense that it focuses on the “manufacture of [Howells’s] symbolic cultural role” from 1890 to 1920, especially charting his “creative decline” and his “ascension to glory as an exemplar of the American Victorian ethos.”\(^\text{12}\) Augusta Rohrbach’s “‘You’re a Natural-Born Literary Man’: Becoming William Dean Howells, Culture Maker and Cultural Marker” also engages with Howells’s literary legacy.

---


\(^{11}\) Crowley, *The Dean of American Letters*, 4.

\(^{12}\) Ibid. Crowley argues further that, by 1899, Howells was becoming “a literary plutocrat.” His “earning power was out of phase, by a decade or so, with his imaginative reserves” and he began to mine his past, unpublished work for publishable material. Crowley, *The Dean of American Letters*, 47.
Rohrbach interprets Howells’s “loss of status among writers and critics” as evidence of “a crucial moment” of transition in “the cultural construction of American literature,” for “the image Howells cultivated,” like his fiction, “sought to negotiate nineteenth-century gentility for the more modern sensibility.”\(^\text{13}\) Other studies of Howells’s influence have tended to focus on specific pairings: e.g., Howells and Abraham Cahan; Howells and Paul Laurence Dunbar; Howells and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.\(^\text{14}\)

Readings of Howells’s fiction are numerous, and many focus on A Hazard of New Fortunes. The major preoccupation of these essays and book chapters has been ideological ambitions and limitations of Howells’s literary work. Amy Kaplan’s chapter on Howells in The Social Construction of American Realism (1992) remains the dominant interpretation of A Hazard of New Fortunes. Kaplan argues that the city, circa 1890, had become “a shorthand for everything threatening in American society” and a “touchstone of ‘the real’ itself.”\(^\text{15}\) In fiction and nonfiction, meanwhile, the city was often depicted unreal, alien, or in a not-yet-realized state. A Hazard of New Fortunes approaches the edge of “the unreal city”—a conceptual space where lines separating social classes might disappear—but encounters an “abyss of conflict and fragmentation

\(^{13}\) Augusta Rohrbach, “‘You’re a Natural-Born Literary Man’: Becoming William Dean Howells, Culture Maker and Cultural Marker,” The New England Quarterly 73, no. 4 (December 1, 2000): 626.


\(^{15}\) Amy Kaplan, The Social Construction of American Realism (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 44.
that it can neither enter nor bridge.” \[16\] The novel therefore “fulfills and exhausts the project of realism to embrace social diversity within the outlines of a broader community. \[17\] Kaplan’s reading of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* has inspired numerous reassessments of the novel’s ideological implications. \[18\]

In the field of book studies, analyses of Howells and his work have gestured at the connections I want to make. Patricia Okker has a chapter on the serialization of *A Modern Instance* that addresses Howells’s “lack of confidence in a community of readers.” \[19\] Christopher P. Wilson’s “Markets and Frictions: Howells’s Infernal Juggle” reads *A Traveler from Altruria* as a novel ruminating upon “the future of literary property.” \[20\] Gib Prettyman’s “The Serial Illustrations of *A Hazard of New Fortunes*” provides a thorough overview of the novel’s serialization and publication in book form. \[21\] Rohrbach’s is the best example of an essay that links *A Hazard of New Fortunes* to Howells’s public image as I do in this chapter. I want to go further than Rohrbach, however, in linking Howells’s numerous position-takings of the 1890s—many seeming more authorial than editorial—to an author-editor middle space. I also want to step outside the boundaries of Rohrbach’s work by linking my claims to the larger question of the editor figure as an authorial

\[16\] Ibid., 63.

\[17\] Ibid.


counterpart in the field of large-scale production.

Understanding Howells’s experience as an editor figure in the 1890s requires an appreciation of the changing systems of identity associated with this time period. Foremost in its relevance to Howells’s experience as author and editor figure in the 1890s was the emergence of the professional-managerial class. Barbara and John Ehrenreich define the professional-managerial class (or PMC) as a distinct class of “salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor” that includes the “reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations.”

Including doctors, lawyers, engineers, academics, and social service workers, the PMC arose with “dramatic suddenness” between 1890 and 1920 due largely to the growing consumer culture and grew to adopt a common lifestyle centered on consumption and the notion of expertise. The Ehrenreichs argue that the PMC’s relationship with the working class was “objectively antagonistic” in the sense that the status and position of the PMC was granted by the ruling class in exchange for complicity in managing the working population. Richard Ohmann, drawing on the Ehrenreichs’ general framework, illustrates the extent to which mass-market magazines and their associated professionals created mass media that expressed “the desires and aspirations of the rising professional-managerial class.” Magazine employees like publishers, editors, business managers, and full-time contributors were, of course, a unique subset of the


23 Ibid., 18, 21.


PMC directly involved in making culture. Many of these specialists were literary figures and magazine employees like Howells.

Going further, the culture of personality offered members of the PMC a particular way of framing their roles as culture validators and status merchants. As Burton J. Bledstein argues, “The culture of professionalism incarnated the radical idea of the independent democrat, a liberated person seeking to free the power of nature within every worldly sphere, a self-governing individual exercising his trained judgment in an open society.” To succeed, members of the PMC had to adopt this attitude and use the skills set of the new self-help revolution to become masters of their professions and their private lives. According to the Ehrenreichs, the absence of a direct heredity system led the PMC to internalize deep anxiety about class reproduction: “The inner life of the PMC must become continuously shaped, updated, and revised by—of course—ever mounting numbers of experts: experts in childraising, family living, sexual fulfillment, self-realization, etc. The very insecurity of the class, then, provides new ground for class expansion.” PMC worries and values were central to the new cultural orientation, and mass media extended these values to the working-class in the form a promise that the right kind of consumer strategy or self-help program would ensure upward mobility. In the 1890s, Howells found himself at the epicenter of this new cultural program and was uncertain of what it heralded. Howells used his editorial persona to criticize the new personality culture’s emphasis on performed selfhood. Yet that persona was a product of the very system that provoked his disapproval.

26 Ohmann’s Gramscian definition of mass culture is a series of “voluntary experiences, produced by a relatively small number of specialists, for millions across the nation to share, in similar or identical form.” Ibid., 44.


Warren Susman’s work on a “new consciousness of self” with the rise of modernity is also relevant to my analysis of Howells as a public figure or “personality.”

Public discourse in nineteenth-century England and America was preoccupied with understanding and cultivating character, while the twentieth century became obsessed instead with questions of personality. The distinction between the two is best summarized as a change in the individual’s relationship with his or her own identity. Where character emphasized “a group of traits believed to have social significance and moral quality,” personality stressed “individual idiosyncrasies, personal needs and interests” and “the quality of being Somebody.” After 1900, for example, British and American publishing marketplaces saw a massive surge in self-help manuals, and, after 1910, American motion picture studios customarily credited actors by name, thus birthing the institution of the movie star. While the paradox of a character-driven society was that the highest form of selfhood was found in exercising self-control, personality presented a paradox of its own: becoming successful required being “true to yourself,” but involved adopting specific practices and performing them for others in order to be well-liked and distinguishable from the crowd. Susman specifically associates new valuations of personality with the rise of mass consumer society, but the new way of thinking about selfhood had both a commodity function and an impact on individuals’ symbolic capital. A well-crafted personality could help someone make money, convey trustworthiness, or exude artistic validity.

In the American literary scene, the institution most closely associated with this shift was celebrity authorship, a new intersection of literary identity and


30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 280.
commodification, according to Loren D. Glass, occasioned by the “formation of a corporate culture industry as an economic environment related to, yet distinct from, the genteel culture of publishing.” Factors after 1890 including the commercialization of the magazine marketplace, new copyright legislation, and the proliferation of literary agents contributed to this new atmosphere. Authorial renown was not restricted to the modern era, but, as Glass explains, “Public exposure and interrogation of authorial private lives was nowhere near as extensive and autonomous as it became with the late-nineteenth-century development of the gossip column and human-interest journalism.”

Authorial celebrity was thus “a resolutely historical phenomenon” emergent in the second half of the nineteenth century and largely defunct with the rise of postmodern period. Celebrity extends the logic of a personality-obsessed culture to interact with public figures as consumer objects. In the same way that self-help manuals promise that a person can learn to display his “true identity” as if it were a performance, celebrity culture promises consumers that human interest stories and gossip columns will somehow grant access to intimate portraits of noteworthy individuals. Ironically, the very institution that promises direct access to a public figure’s private life reinforces the gap between the public and private self by making the private self a commodity and therefore something well worth distorting for the purposes of public presentation.

The related concepts of personality, celebrity, and the PMC can begin to explain Howells’s status as author and editor figure in the late nineteenth century. Howells had a consistent presence in the national literary conversation, acted as an advocate for other writers, and was a celebrity in his own right. These aspects of Howells’s identity


33 Ibid., 19.

34 Ibid., 23.
informed each other, for Howells’s fame ensured that other critics would read and respond to his writings and, likewise, his writings about various subjects became the central points of access to his public persona. Each time Howells defended one author or criticized another, he modified his public image by further constructing associations between those figures and himself. Each time Howells wrote from the vantage point of his persona as unreal editor, he contributed to an ongoing, dynamic conversation about the editor profession. Evolving ideas about editors, in turn, doubtlessly affected Howells’s public image. Defining Howells in relation to the editor profession, therefore, is a prerequisite to any argument about Howells’s individual persona as an editor figure.

**The Merciless Blue Pencil**

**and the Trembling Contributor:**

**Figuring the Editor in the U.S. Marketplace**

Approaching the end of the nineteenth century, the editor had emerged as a professional personality unto himself. The most common way of describing the evolution of American literary culture at the end of the nineteenth century is in terms of a transition from the genteel literary tradition to a professional marketplace. The antebellum editor, according to James L. W. West III, had a distinct role “as cultural arbiter and protector of public standards.”35 Editors like James Russell Lowell of *The Atlantic Monthly*, 1857-1861, were “appreciative and sympathetic” if “sometimes dilatory and exasperating.”36 Matthew Schneirov argues that “the genteel editor could still see his readers as personal


friends, roughly sharing the same tastes and level of education.” Approaching the end of the century, the antebellum ideal of a personal connection among author, editor, and reader continued, but its empirical practicality was undeniably challenged by a much larger, national marketplace.

Wilson’s scholarship on editors of the Progressive Era emphasizes that the “passive, restrained role of the aristocratic professional” gave way to a professional and vocational revolution. The turn of the century saw Pulitzer and Hearst revolutionize newspaper operations by emphasizing high-risk expenditures and investigative journalism. Theirs was the “age of the reporter” and simultaneously a period when the self-styled “liberators” of journalism with “huge egos” built empires around the idea of an intrepid outsider bringing new values and practices to the publishing industry. In the world of magazines, similarly, “the editor lent his energy, enthusiasm, and personality to a broad restructuring of magazine production.” The new editors of the Progressive Era were distinct public figures or, perhaps more appropriately, big personalities. Howells, as former editor of the Atlantic Monthly, was associated with the prestige of the Boston periodical. By 1886, however, he was well on his way to becoming a New York voice, if not yet a voice speaking from a New York address. Because of this transition, he had


38 Schneirov provides an extensive discussion of Harper’s Weekly editor George William Curtis as a member of the old brand of editors who sought to preserve the genteel literary tradition. Curtis also wrote “The Editor’s Easy Chair” for Harper’s Monthly. According to Schneirov, “The tone of his monthly feature was one of a highly literate and genial conversation with a friend.” Yet this effort was also distinct from later attempts to “personalize the editor.” Schneirov, The Dream of a New Social Order, 43.


40 Ibid., 18.

41 Ibid., 49.

42 Although the precise moment when William Dean Howells quit Boston and became a New Yorker is a matter of some complexity, Alfred Kazin’s often-repeated remark that, with the move, Howells brought the
unique status as a mediator between the traditional, aristocratic editors and the Progressive Era vanguard.

Of course, many of the most well known editors of the period were not, in the traditional sense, actual editors. Joseph Pulitzer began as an editor but turned editorial duties over to his subordinates as his empire grew. Hearst began his career in newspapers by taking over the management of the *San Francisco Examiner*, which his father purchased in 1887. S.S. McClure oversaw content acquisition and development but relied on his former schoolmate John S. Phillips to do the day-to-day work of editing *McClure’s*. The changing idea of the editor was an explicit symptom of the new era of magazine commercialism, yet the emerging commercial atmosphere also rendered the editor the object of widespread misconception. A distinct effect of the division of labor, the title indicated a wide range of potential responsibilities. Newspapers, magazines, and publishing houses all employed individuals called editors, but the day-to-day labor being performed by these employees depended on the company and the actual position in question.

The most widespread distinction between editor and publisher is that the editor works with magazine or newspaper content and a publisher oversees financial matters or interdepartmental operations. While “the editor” often refers to an editor in authority, the title of editor can also describe several editorial subordinates. Robert Luce, who, in 1887, founded *The Writer* with his former *Boston Globe* colleague William H. Hills, to “interest and help all literary workers,” sought to instruct novices on this point: “The


public generally seems unable to comprehend the vast difference between ‘the editor’ and ‘an editor’ … An editor has authority only over his own department, and even then he is under constant supervision." By using the definite and indefinite articles the and an to makes this distinction, Luce emphasizes the definite quality behind the category of editorship that possesses true power. Editorial duties could include copyediting, screening submissions, writing editorials, purchasing content, or supervising a periodical department or section of specialized content. From without, the tendency is to conflate low-level, top-level, and nominal editors, to associate all editors with one category of invisible labor—“editing”—and an abstract idea of authority or power.

In the emerging field of cultural production, a duality arose between certain editors who were becoming known for their individual, public personalities (many of them not proper editors) and a still-pervasive stereotype of a nameless, faceless editor figure with characteristic attitudes and behaviors. This editor was powerful and hard to please. He threatened to stifle all that was too bold, too radical, and too different. Luce, for The Writer once again, argues that editorial copy is a thing of “beauty and symmetry and grace,” until “the editor gets hold of [it] and with the merciless blue pencil disfigures his comely garments” and “the copy-cutter mutilates him without remorse and brands his face with ‘X P 19’ or some such mystic symbol.” Luce urges writers to produce copy that requires less editing, but his central device plays upon popular conceptions of the editor as destroyer of art. His use of the word mystic—symbols so foreign they border on sorcery—ridicules the opaque nature of the editor’s professional activity. By 1886, a blue-tipped pencil was the conventionally used implement of the copyeditor, but Luce’s blue pencil is practically a weapon. Luce’s allusion to the blue pencil is an example of how artistically inclined newcomers and working writers defined their labor in contrast to

46 “Hints for Making Copy,” The Writer, June 1887, 44.
the editor’s, especially as the literary marketplace professionalized.47

The editor’s identity as a cryptic laborer was equally informed by the idea that countless masses of would-be writers were engaged in an ongoing struggle to stand out in the eyes of the editor, who was by default, predisposed to find fault with any given submission. Adele E. Thompson, in an 1896 issue of The Editor, a monthly journal of “information for literary workers,” argues that periodicals’ “increasing use of fiction … set flying numberless pens in its production” and produced a “stream of stories that pours into the average editorial office.”48 The metaphor of the stream emphasizes how the sheer volume of submissions threatened to negate a contributor’s individual identity. The successful contributor, like the successful businessman or entertainer, had to acknowledge that “we all live constantly in a crowd” and find a way to “distinguish ourselves from others in that crowd.”49 Simultaneously, that contributor had to be sure not to try too earnestly to capture an editor’s attention for, in doing so, he or she risked angering a notoriously temperamental figure. According to an advice column by C.M. Hammond:

You gain nothing and lose much by calling on the editor personally with your articles. If he be an editor who amounts to anything, he is always busy in office hours. He has no time to talk with you or to listen to your explanations. He wishes you haven’t called, and he is prejudiced against you and whatever you may have written.50

Hammond’s use of the second-person direct address and the masculine singular pronoun he implicates the specific reader of his column as an amateur and an annoyance, but his message any further depicts the editor as a category apart from his contributors.

47 Luce was himself an editor, of course, but the context of his magazine, along with his word choice, positions him as a writer’s editor.

48 Adele E. Thompson, “What the Editor Wants in Fiction,” The Editor 4, no. 4 (October 1896): 123.

49 Susman, Culture as History, 277.

50 C.M. Hammond, “How to Get into Print,” The Editor 1, no. 4 (April 1887): 8.
Hammond, Luce, and Thompson share in common a rhetorical strategy that represents the editor from the aspiring contributor’s perspective. In magazines like The Writer and The Editor, where the imagined audience was in fact the aspiring or working writer, this strategy served a pragmatic purpose. However, such rhetorical techniques also contributed to the distancing of the overall editor identity from specific editors’ personalities. Even Thompson’s column, which names several well-known editors and uses personalized quotations to summarize what kind of fiction they are hoping to read, uses “representative editors” to understand “what the present editorial want in fiction is.”

Increasingly, authors in the popular marketplace were puzzling over the best way to anticipate and respond to editors’ predilections while simultaneously concluding that the figure, in general, was almost supernaturally difficult to please, so much so that his dissatisfaction subsumed his identity. Editors, as such, appeared to offer an unparalleled ability to endow authors with symbolic capital.

**Howells as an Unreal Editor**

Joseph Henry Harper’s 1912 retrospective The House of Harper: A Century of Publishing in Franklin Square includes a long account, written by Howells, of the author’s association with the New York publishers. He explains that he agreed to write “The Editor’s Study”—“a department in the magazine every month, covering the whole ground of reviewing and book-noticing”—only after first objecting to the idea. He

51 Thompson, “What the Editor Wants in Fiction,” 126.

52 The quintessential expression of the paranoid sentiment that editors are not real people at all appears in Jack London’s Martin Eden (1908). The eponymous character “poured his soul into stories, articles, and poems, and entrusted them to the machine. … There was no human editor at the other end, but a mere cunning arrangement of cogs that changed the manuscript from one envelope to another and stuck on the stamps.” Jack London, Martin Eden (Penguin, 2008), 160.

elaborates:

Mr. Alden had proposed this to me by letter, and I had distinctly objected to it as forming a break in my fictioning; I should have to unset myself from that, and reset myself for it, and the effect would be very detrimental to me as a novelist. I still think I was right, that turning aside to critical essaying at that period of my career, when all my mind tended to fictioning, had the effect I feared.54

Here is Howells, circa 1912, declaring his allegiance to his identity as a fiction writer and distancing himself from his decision to try and function as a novelist and a critic at the same time, for “a novelist should be nothing but a novelist.”55 Yet Howells’s career in the 1890s, in particular, was marked by a vast range of activities a scholar of today might easily group in the precise middle space between editor and author that Howells later eschewed.

A full examination of Howells’s activities as an editor figure in the 1890s alone could easily fill an entire dissertation. I want to gesture at the sheer breadth of material available to me as I make this argument but, in particular, I want to focus on one aspect of Howells’s identity as an editor figure—his accessibility to imagined authors and readers. This aspect of Howells’s identity is most prevalent in Howells’s inaugural “Editor’s Study” column, his essay “The Man of Letters as a Man of Business,” and his essay “An Editor’s Relations with Young Authors.” It falls outside the boundaries of a chapter like this one to engage fully with a body of work as extensive as Howells’s, but I will end this section with an overview that gestures at how much of Howells’s material in the 1890s engages with the idea of the editor.

Howells’s first “Editor’s Study” column offers a public image in direct contrast to the widespread editorial stereotypes I have already detailed. First, Howells draws a clear distinction between himself as author of “Editor’s Study” and Henry Mills Alden, the true editor of Harper’s Monthly. There is a room, he explains, in “almost every dwelling of

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
any pretensions to taste” where “the master of the house lounges his leisure, scanty or abundant, and nobody apparently studies.” Just as Howells is not a real editor, the physical study he describes is different from the study as it is commonly conceived:

The study of an editor of such a magazine as ours in necessarily somewhat different, though its appointments are equally expressive, we hope, of cultivated pursuits. It is, in any case, not at all the kind of place which the reader, his mind full of the Grub Street traditions of literature, would fancy—a narrow den at the top of the house, where the occupant, piled about with books and proofs and manuscripts, darkles in a cloud blown from his own cigar. The real editor, before whom contributors tremble, may be something like this in his habitat and environment; but the unreal editor, the airy, elusive abstraction who edits the study, is quite another character, and is fittingly circumstanced.

The image of Howells’s study hinges upon the distinction between “the real editor” of *Harper’s*, “before whom contributors tremble,” and the “unreal editor,” Howells, author of “Editor’s Study.” The real editor, with the power to reject submissions, inspires fear; by contrast, an “airy, elusive abstraction” can “sit at fine ease” and converse openly with the reader. The images of books, proofs and magazines “piled about” in the real editor’s study points to the stereotype of an overworked literary authority, and the darkling cloud of the editor’s cigar smoke suggests a secretive and perennially dissatisfied, brooding thinker. As Howells describes it, his position as an unreal editor allowed him the privilege of stepping away from the piles of books and the smoke-filled room to forge a new relationship with his public. Howells seems to delight in the paradox of an abstraction more approachable (no stairs) and more visible (no smoke) than the real editor. In order to establish this more open identity for himself, however, he frames that identity against a well-established stereotype and, in so doing, proliferates the idea of the real editor as an opaque figure to be feared and the unreal editor, ironically, as a

56 Howells, “Editor’s Study,” 321.
57 Ibid.
straightforward broker.58

Howells sought to exert influence over the writing, publication, and reception of new writers’ work with essays like “The Man of Letters as a Man of Business”—first published in Scribner’s in 1893—and “An Editor’s Relations with Young Authors”—which first appeared in the September 5, 1895 issue of Youth’s Companion’s. Wilson describes “The Man of Letters as a Man of Business” as “essentially … a survey of literary livelihood as it stood at the time—an overview of royalty rates, tendencies in the book and magazine trades, and so forth—combined with a retrospective look by Howells at his profession’s progress during his lifetime.”59 However, the essay has two secondary aims woven into its more general overview: a claim to be speaking to and for a new generation of young writers, and an overt defense of the editor. The phrase young author appears ten times in the text, and the phrase young writer appears four more. The word editor appears thirty-nine times. Of course, these twin concerns are in fact two parts of one predominant focus, for it is the relationship between young writers and editors that makes up Howells’s major object of concern. Howells’s addressee is the writer, and his purpose is to show that writer the benefits of developing business acumen in addition to aesthetic mastery. Expertise in copyright, magazine, newspaper, and book marketplaces, audience demand, and editor’s expectations would, according to Howells, begin to emancipate writers, especially those attempting to make their living from the uneven proceeds of magazine publication.

Implicit in Howells’s argument is an attempt to convince the next generation of young writers to inject editorial sensibilities into their sense of authorial professionalism.


59 Wilson, The Labor of Words, 10.
Understanding the editor’s position and respecting his professionalism would help young writers publish their work. “Few editors,” he states, “are such fools and knaves as to let their personal feeling disable their judgment; and the young writer who gets his manuscript back may be sure that it is not because the editor dislikes him, for some reason or no reason.”

Appreciating an impersonal relationship between editor and contributor should soothe the young writer’s emotional response to rejection and give him a basis from which to begin submitting strategically, for a professional atmosphere, after all, can be mastered through persistence and hard work. “Above all,” Howells adds, “[the contributor] can trust me that his contribution has not been passed unread, or has failed of the examination it merits. Editors are not men of infallible judgment, but they do use their judgment, and it is usually good.”

Howells’s message is one of trust; editors are professionals, fallible but well trained and therefore responsible. The direct object pronoun me, however, adds a second dimension to the sentence. Do not merely trust the editor, he says. Trust an expert on editors: the person reading your work conforms to an established set of traits. His argument on behalf of editors, then, depends on the warrant that he has the competence to judge them.

Howells continued to cultivate his image as an approachable and conversational editor. In “An Editor’s Relations with Young Authors,” Howells remarks, “I do not believe that in my editorial service to the Atlantic Monthly, which lasted fifteen years in all, I forgot the name or the characteristic quality, or even the handwriting, of a contributor who had pleased me, and I forgot thousands who did not.” Howells points to an imagined affinity or collegiality among editor, contributor, and reader. This message

---


61 Ibid.

62 William Dean Howells, “An Editor’s Relations with Young Authors,” *Youth’s Companion*, September 5, 1895, 418.
was particularly strategic in light of Howells’s initial target audience. *Youth’s Companion* content was aimed at children, but its marketing suggested that it was something the entire family could read together. As with “The Man of Letters as a Man of Business,” Howells addresses the young writer directly. He argues against the prominent myth of an adversarial relationship between editor and contributor and recommends young writers adopt a collegial attitude toward their magazine counterparts. “The new contributor who does charm,” he states, “can have little notion how much he charms his first reader, who is the editor. That functionary may hide his pleasure in a short, stiff note of acceptance, or he may mask his joy in a check of slender figure; but the contributor may be sure that he has missed no merit in his work.” Howells grants, “The editor will have his moods when he will not see so clearly or judge so justly as at other times.” Nevertheless, Howells’s essay reassures as much it coaches. The editor’s work, though veiled, deserves respect. He anticipates the young contributor’s frustrations and responds: “Of course the contributor naturally feels that the public is the test of his excellence, but he must not forget that the editor is the beginning of the public.” Howells emphasizes that the editor is not merely an aesthetic judge but is also a conduit between “the people,” broadly imagined, and the author.

Although my analysis thus far has been preoccupied with Howells as an individual, I would like to pause to reiterate that this argument is essentially about the collaborative elements at play as Howells navigated his identity as an editor figure. Howells was staking out positions that described his public image, his identity as an editor figure, and the national institution of editorship as a whole. In so doing, he was engaging directly and indirectly with countless other authors, editors, and other middle

---

63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
men engaging with the same institutional identities. This version of collaboration is highly abstract, perhaps so much so that it will meet with some resistance. However, Howells was also collaborating much more directly with the individuals and institutions that helped him stake out these positions. To name only a few, Howells’s move to the House of Harper in 1885 owed to the efforts of his friend Henry Mills Alden and his friend and former publisher James R. Osgood. J.W. Harper extended Howells the contract that allowed him to develop work in *Harper’s* and *Harper’s Weekly* and then adapt to book form. Howells had to cooperate with the staff of *Scribner’s* and *Youth’s Companion* to publish two of his most important essays on the editor, and he often relied on Alden and Curtis, as editors of *Harper’s* and *Harper’s Weekly*, respectively, to carry his work to a readership.

Shifting toward the bibliographic sensibility offered by a critic like Jerome McGann, I want to extend my point to the particularly revealing way in which Howells adapted magazine material to book form. When his work is viewed cumulatively, a new set of bibliographic codes render uniform and de-temporalized that which was once articulated as tentative if not ephemeral. For example, both “The Man of Letters as a Man of Business” and “An Editor’s Relations with Young Authors” were reprinted in *Literature and Life* (1902). The latter bears the revised title, “The Editor’s Relations with the Young Contributor.” A change as minor as the addition of definite articles in the title reframes the entire essay as not merely a reflection on editors and authors, but as a treatise on the editor and the young contributor. It establishes the essay as a counterpart to “The Man of Letters as a Man of Business,” which bears the same grammar in its title.67

66 Osgood’s publishing company failed in 1885 and Osgood, like Howells, went to work for *Harper’s*. He died in 1892.

67 And, by extension, “The Editor’s Study.”
The change of the word *author* to *contributor* emphasizes a democratic vision of literary aspiration. To be a contributor, one need only contribute. To call oneself an author, one must first accrue a certain public status. Howells’s bibliographic consolidation, in other words, ties directly to his public image as an approachable editor figure, a fact Howells himself noted in “The Man of Letters as a Man of Business.” Howells, like Dreiser, saw his own efforts to establish a reputation as fundamentally distinct with younger authors’ obsession with becoming famous. The critical difference was the level of merit that informed his renown:

The young author who wins recognition in a first-class magazine has achieved a double success, first, with the editor, and then with the best reading public. Many factitious and fallacious literary reputations have been made through books, but very few have been made through the magazines, which are not only the best means of living, but of outliving, with the author; they are both bread and fame to him. If I insist a little upon the high office which this modern form of publication fulfills in the literary world, it is because I am impatient of the antiquated and ignorant prejudice which classes the magazines as ephemeral. They are ephemeral in form, but in substance they are not ephemeral, and what is best in them awaits its resurrection in the book, which, as the first form, is so often a lasting death.68

Approximating a distinction associated with a character-driven culture rather than a culture obsessed with personalities, Howells distinguishes not between anonymity and renown but between well-deserved and ill-deserved recognition. Howells argues that the periodical marketplace offered readers the assurance that the writer’s work had been vetted. Book publication gave writers the chance to earn reputations out of step with their merit. Such reputations, whether “factitious” or “fallacious” or both, nevertheless qualify as literary reputations. He grants that a cynical author can exploit the publishing industry to appear more credible than he is, but he articulates faith in the periodical marketplace’s ability to vet newcomers appropriately. His later works, republished from previously vetted magazine contributions, exploit the advantages of both forms. In periodicals, he

could stake out artistic territory and hone his image over time. In his subsequent books, he could present a cumulative if not altogether consistent self.  

Howells added to his public identity as an author-editor in the 1890s with a range of activities too numerous to analyze here. I offer an overview of these various activities for the purposes of gesturing at the breadth of position-taking built upon foundational material in Howells’s first “Editor’s Study” column and essays such as The Man of Letters as a Man of Business” and “An Editor’s Relations with Young Authors.” Other commentary on authorship by Howells appeared regularly, much of it reprinted. For example, Advice to Young Authors To Write or Not to Write (1891), Kiplingiana (1899), and Modern Eloquence (1900) feature work by Howells taken directly from Howells’s writings for periodicals.  

Concurrently, Howells was a regular contributor to several different columns: “The Editor’s Study” for Harper’s Magazine (1886-1892), Editor in name only for Cosmopolitan (1891), “Life and Letters” essay review column for Harper's Weekly (1895-1898), “American Literature” essay review column for Literature (1898-1899), and “The Editor’s Easy Chair” (1900-1920). Collections of reprinted essays appeared periodically: Criticism and Fiction (1891), My Literary Passions (1895), Impressions and Experiences (1896), and Literary Friends and Acquaintance (1900).

Howells also wrote numerous book prefaces and introductory notes during this

---

69 Impressions and Experiences was an essay volume that included “An East Side Ramble” and “New York Streets,” two works where Howells depicts on the page his conflicted sense of a society with deep economic inequalities and the possibility of a troubling future.

70 Alice R. Mylene, Advice to Authors: To Write or Not to Write (Boston: Cooperative Literary Press, 1891); Milburg Francisco Mansfield, Kiplingiana: Biographical and Bibliographical Notes Anent Rudyard Kipling (New York: M.F. Mansfield & A. Wessels, 1899); Thomas Brackett Reed et al., Modern Eloquence: After-dinner Speeches (Chicago: George L. Shuman & Co., 1900). Howells’s contribution for Advice to Authors was a reprint, and perhaps without permission. Modern Eloquence reprinted Howells’s speech “The Atlantic and Its Contributors,” delivered at the 70th birthday celebration of John Greenleaf Whittier in 1877, and Howells’s piece on Kipling, “Most Famous Man in the World,” appeared first in North American Review (May 1899) and was reprinted in A Kipling Note Book (1899) before appearing for the third time in Kiplingiana.
period. According to George Arms, “some, though intended as prefaces from the start, were first published in magazines; some were offered by Howells out of powerful convictions regarding the author or work; some were commissioned because of Howells’s known enthusiasm.”

Out of “thirty-three prefaces to books by contemporary authors” in his career, thirteen appeared between 1887 and 1900. His major preface period coincides with his pivot from novelist and emeritus editor to his role between 1886 and 1900 as imagined editor and literary authority figure. According to Gérard Genette, the preface is a “threshold of interpretation,” an “undefined zone” of utterance that mediates the text’s meaning. A reader is free to bypass the title page, the publication information, and the preface and proceed directly to “the real text”; yet, a preface written by one writer for another’s writer’s work had special status in its implicit recommendation.

As this broad overview suggests, Howells certainly understood the basic collaborative structure of the culture of letters and manipulated it to his advantage. According to Rohrbach, “Using the professional demands of both author and editor for the Atlantic Monthly and Harper’s to keep himself in tune with the marketplace, Howells had access to the very engine that was constructing his image.”

To the extent that Howells navigated this system of public personalities expertly, he would seem in

---


72 Ibid., 1. Apart from a single preface in 1882 for Living Truths from the Writings of Charles Kingsley, Howells did not engage in preface-writing until 1887.

73 Genette argues further that the allographic preface-writer “has the advantage over the authorial preface-writer” and plays the “role of ideological ‘godfather’.” Such prefaces also create or reinforce a layer of association between two writers. Gérard Genette, Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

74 Ibid.

75 Rohrbach, “You’re a Natural-Born Literary Man,” 652.
alignment with his historical moment. Yet his public image was so heavily informed by questions of character—the basis by which he claim symbolic capital as an editor figure—that he operates in that system as a defender of outdated values. As a result, Howells’s identity as an editor was constructed by two opposing principles: the status of public individuality generally reserved for artistic creators such as authors and opera singers, and the collaborative labor that allowed economic and symbolic capital to be exchanged for one another. Bringing together this evidence to reassert Howells’s individual genius, while certainly tempting, would miss what I see as one of the most important aspects of the networks of collaborative labor (direct and indirect) that produced Howells’s public image. Rather, I want to emphasize that the singularity of Howells’s persona was a result of the collaborations that allowed symbolic capital to converge around it. Howells’s individual choices within those systems are significant, but his story can say as much or more about the nature of the field of cultural production.  

Howells, Harper’s Weekly, and the Question of Editorial Intervention

It is impossible to discuss Howells as an editor figure properly without accounting for his emerging views of editorial intervention, particularly as they relate to issues of political and social controversy. Although Howells was doubtlessly a professional before 1885, his contract with Harper’s reestablished his role as a regular employee of the publishing company and a wage-earner with expectations for regular work. Howells’s professional identity informed his class status, and that status had an impact on the way he viewed and reacted to questions of literary aesthetics and social justice. Increasingly

76 Bourdieu engages with these questions by considering how much “conscious strategy” and “cynical calculation” an individual might possess at any given moment. He concludes that “lucidity is always partial” and “varies from one agent and one moment to another.” See Pierre Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 72.
after 1886, however, Howells became associated with his emergent sympathies toward socialism. Biographers and other scholars have demonstrated this change in Howells’s demeanor and linked it convincingly to Howells’s experience with the Haymarket Affair, but I would like to revisit those experiences for the purpose of linking the known narrative to questions of an editor’s responsibilities and limitations. This review has a direct impact on how, in the final section of this chapter, I interpret *A Hazard of New Fortunes* as a novel that attempts to resolve the dilemma of editorial intervention by synthesizing the opposing values associated with character and personality.

The Haymarket incident began as a labor strike against the McCormick Harvesting Machinery Company on May 2, 1886. Police fired guns into the crowd and killed four demonstrators. Chicago anarchists and union members converged at Haymarket Square the following evening. City police were ordering the crowd to disband a pipe bomb exploded, killing one officer instantly and fatally wounding seven other others. As many as eight workers died at the hands of retaliatory fire, and more than forty people were wounded in the ensuing chaos. Eight rioters were arrested and put on trial. Oscar Neebe received a 15-year sentence before being pardoned by Illinois Governor John Peter Altgeld in 1893. Michael Schwab and Samuel Fielden were sentenced to death in August 1886 but asked for clemency, and Governor Richard James Oglesby commuted their sentences to life in prison the day before they were to be executed. They were later pardoned with Neebe. Louis Lingg committed suicide in prison the night before the executions. Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel, and Adolph Fischer were hanged on November 11, 1887. Scholars including Paul Avrich and Jeffory Clymer

---

77 Arguably one of the most significant events in American labor history, the Haymarket Affair and its consequences represented the critical factor coloring Howells’s sense of national despair in his 1888 letter to Henry James. His oldest daughter Winnie’s death from heart failure after a persistent and “mysterious illness” (March 3, 1889) further exacerbated his outlook. For more information on Winnie Howells, see Cynthia J. Davis, *Bodily and Narrative Forms: The Influence of Medicine on American Literature, 1845-1915* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000).
generalize that media reaction to Haymarket emphasized the violence as a direct threat to
public safety perpetrated by foreign radicals.\textsuperscript{78} Clymer adds that national media coverage
turned the riot and resulting trial into “a huge public event.”\textsuperscript{79} Advances in
communications and print technologies enabled the press to create an unprecedented
spectacle.

Howells followed the trial from his home in Boston and grew increasingly
concerned about the possibility a just outcome. According to Clymer, Howells was “the
only major American literary figure to publicly condemn the sham legal proceedings
 accorded the Haymarket anarchists.”\textsuperscript{80} In November 1887, he appealed directly to the
governor of Illinois to commute the death sentence of the rioters whose actions had
supposedly contributed to the death of a police officer. An essay by Clara and Rudolph
Kirk shows the extent to which Howells “jeopardized his own professional standing by
reaching out to \textit{Harper’s Weekly} editor George William Curtis on the Anarchists’
behalf.\textsuperscript{81} He went so far as to submit a letter on behalf of the convicted to \textit{Harper’s
Weekly} for publication but, when he saw Curtis’s response that Howells ought not
interfere, Howells withdrew the letter from consideration.\textsuperscript{82} Writing to Curtis, Howells
argued that “the case was worked up beforehand by the press and police.”\textsuperscript{83} After the
executions of November 11, he wrote a letter to the editor of the New York \textit{Tribune}

\textsuperscript{79} Jeffory A. Clymer, \textit{America’s Culture of Terrorism: Violence, Capitalism, and the Written Word} (Chapel
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{81} Clara Kirk and Rudolf Kirk, “William Dean Howells, George William Curtis, and the ‘Haymarket
Affair’,” \textit{American Literature} 40, no. 4 (January 1, 1969): 497.
\textsuperscript{82} Curtis also authored the “Editor’s Easy Chair” column in \textit{Harper's New Monthly Magazine}, which
Howells later took over.
\textsuperscript{83} William Dean Howells to George William Curtis, 18 August 1887, “William Dean Howells, George
William Curtis, and the ‘Haymarket Affair’,” \textit{American Literature} 40, no. 4 (January 1, 1969): 490. The
entire letter is included in this essay.
criticizing the trial but never sent it.\textsuperscript{84} This incident symbolized, for Howells, the possibility of a violent social revolution and an equally violent effort to quell the upheaval that lurked behind the nation’s sense of optimism and progress. It also led him to question the ostensibly apolitical posture Curtis had struck; Curtis’s unwillingness to interfere betrayed tacit approval of the entire chains of events.

The weekly’s Haymarket coverage began immediately in May 1886 and continued for more than a year as the magazine followed the resulting trials, sentencing, and executions. As Kirk and Kirk argue, this coverage decidedly condemned the Anarchists. “Anarchist Riots in the West,” an unsigned news article in \textit{Harper’s Weekly}, depicts the incident much like the nation’s newspapers—mob violence perpetrated by lazy, incompetent workers, “brutal ruffians” with no legitimate reason to complain or go on strike.\textsuperscript{85} A front-page illustration, by Thomas Nast, shows a working man hunched over in an attempt to carry an overweight “agitator” on his back (Figure 1.1). The headline reads “Too Heavy a Load for the Trade-Unions. The Competent Workman Must Support the Incompetent.”\textsuperscript{86} The agitator carries a whip and sits with his back arched and his left hand on his hip. His posture conveys arrogance and his protruding stomach marks him as a hypocrite. An editorial on the following page comments that labor strikes and boycotts threaten “such disturbance of public order” that the authorities should prepare to “keep the peace by all necessary means.”\textsuperscript{87} The coverage mixes derision with a strong sense of alarm.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 497.


Another Nast cartoon printed in the wake of the Haymarket incident lampoons the figure of the immigrant socialist (Figure 1.2). He is wild-eyed, bearded, toothless, and scraggly. The caption reads “The Evolution of the Americanized Foreigner” and includes a quotation from Pat Boodle, a fictive alderman: “Go on, Hans Socialist,” he says, “you’ll be an Alderman someday; I used to be a rioter myself.”88 The alderman is marked by a

---

checkered suit, a thick mustache, and a massive stomach, while the rioter is gaunt with a wild beard and long hair. The comic highlights the hypocrisy of socialism and embodies the belief that immigrants will “come up” in society and forget their politics. It reassures law-abiding Americans of a tradition of radicalism that ends with assimilation and a return to social order. Ironically, however, the anarchist seems older than the alderman, which may satirize the absurdity of Boodle’s faith in imminent assimilation. Regardless, the dust-clouded signs of mob violence—including a raised club over the alderman’s shoulder—suggest that the alderman’s flaw is not his insensitivity to the rioters but his failure to see them as a serious threat.

Howells’s attitude toward his own role as an editor figure and the news magazine’s public responsibilities reflects a broader dilemma about Howells’s class identity. He told Curtis in 1887 that he suspected the Haymarket defendants had been tried for “socialism and not for murder” but added that, if they were guilty, “civilization cannot afford to give martyrs to a bad cause.”

Radicalism unrestrained would simply create more situations like Haymarket, and conservative reactions to that radicalism would ensure conflict, violence, and social deterioration. Howells harbored the hope that turning toward democratic socialism could resolve the nation’s deepest inequities. Simultaneously, he cursed his own luxurious standard of living. In his often-quoted 1888 letter to Henry James, he remarked: “After fifty years of optimistic content with ‘civilization’ and its ability to come out all right in the end, I now abhor it, and I feel that it is coming out all wrong in the end, unless it bases itself anew on real equality. Meantime, I wear a fur-lined overcoat, and live in all the luxury my money can buy.”

Anticipating, perhaps, Thorstein Veblen’s central critique of the leisure class—a tendency toward conspicuous consumption—Howells impugned himself for his standard of living and his hypocrisy but did not ultimately reject the advantages of his status nor take any actions radical enough to threaten his own standard of living. Such questions implicated Howells’s identity as both an author and an editor figure.

Although I do not want to attempt an expanded bibliographical analysis of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* in this chapter, I do want to use my analysis so far to point to the idea that *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, bibliographically and linguistically, reads as a

---


rebuttal to the weekly’s norms for depicting socialist upheaval. Kirk and Kirk’s essay on Howells and Haymarket does not address the question of how *Harper’s Weekly* coverage might have informed the serialization of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* in the same news magazine less than two years after the executions of November 1887. Gib Prettyman notes that Henry Mills Alden originally requested “a series of sketches of New York life” to be featured prominently with many illustrations. Howells eventually abandoned this version of the project in favor of his New York novel. Although it is difficult to say exactly why Howells’s project changed so drastically, I would like to associate the serialization of the novel with Howells’s “editor figure” prose work and other image-making efforts of the 1890s, which accrued added meaning because of the context in which they were distributed. In particular, the question of editorial intervention, raised by Howells’s experiences with Curtis and the Haymarket Affair, are revisited in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. And Howells’s treatment of this question fits more generally into the issues of character and personality he was questioning with each position-taking that helped construct his public image.

The serialization of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* in *Harper’s Weekly* meant that Howells could reach a wider audience and that his work would appear in a news magazine peppered with reportage, commentary, and images reacting to current events. In contrast, the goal of the monthly was, according to its inaugural editorial, to “place every thing of the Periodical Literature of the day, which has permanent value and

---

91 Kirk and Kirk summarize the November 18, 1887 issue of *Harper’s Weekly*, which included a “fully illustrated” factual account of the Haymarket executions and a detailed retrospective of the entire Haymarket Affair. An editorial comment appeared the following week. See Kirk and Kirk, “William Dean Howells, George William Curtis, and the ‘Haymarket Affair’,” 497.


93 Ibid., 181.

94 Nast had left the weekly by 1889, but the news magazine’s coverage of labor issues continued, as did its reliance on pictorial content.
commanding interest.”

Poetry, short stories, serial novels, literary criticism, and general interest nonfiction appeared regularly. Because it was set for press at least a month in advance, *Harper’s* steered away from news coverage and did not cover the Haymarket riot or the resulting trial. Social and political content tended to flank toward deep analysis of ongoing subjects, so that timeliness of the discussion was less likely to be a factor. For example, in July of 1886—the first issue of the monthly that could have conceivably reacted to Haymarket—the magazine included Richard T. Ely’s “The Nature of the Railway Problem” and Richard Wheatley’s “The New York Produce Exchange.” Both features, rather than depending on specific news events, offer reflective analyses of long-term issues. *Harper’s Weekly* was an offshoot of the already successful *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, founded by Harper & Brothers in 1857 as an affordable news magazine. Three years after its inception, *Harper’s Weekly* boasted 200,000 subscribers, for it had attracted new readers with its political cartoons, detailed illustrations, and mainstream coverage of current events. It straddled the line between monthly magazine and daily newspaper. It was “a cheap family journal of news and entertainment” according to Frank Luther Mott, and “the best of its class.”

Bibliographic codes reinforce connections between the weekly that had published a series of drawings of the Haymarket anarchists sitting in their cells and being led to the gallows, and the serial novel’s labor strike plot. The novel’s linguistic or narrative codes, likewise, situate *A Hazard of New Fortunes* as the conceptual apex of Howells’s campaign to redefine editorial obligation and, in turn, authorial identity. These codes, together, offered the possibility of directing Howells’s reputation in service of his political views.

---


Personality, Character, and the Editor Figure

in A Hazard of New Fortunes

A Hazard of New Fortunes tells the story of a range of personalities who come together in New York City to establish a new, innovative magazine called Every Other Week. The magazine is successful, in part because of its distinct mix of professionals, including an entrepreneurial syndicate man, a former insurance worker turned editor, a financial backer who made his fortune in natural gas, a figurehead publisher who wants to be a minister, a socialist translator, a Casanova art editor, and a young female illustrator. The magazine is thrown into turmoil when Dryfoos, the financial backer, attempts to interfere with editorial decision-making by ordering the dismissal of Lindau, a socialist, over a dinner table disagreement. Basil March, the magazine’s editor and the novel’s protagonist, resigns in protest, but the novel turns away from conflict at the magazine when a citywide horse car strike erupts. Lindau is killed in the riots, as is Dryfoos’s son Conrad. Devastated by the loss, Dryfoos agrees to cede control of the magazine to March and Fulkerson, the syndicate man. The novel also features several side plots, including Fulkerson’s courtship of the Confederate veteran Colonel Woodburn’s daughter, and a romance between two magazine artists, Angus Beaton and Alma Leighton.

Earlier in this chapter, I alluded to the fact that critical readings of A Hazard of New Fortunes have tended to focus on the social politics, for it is a book preoccupied with class conflict: first, in the magazine office; then, in the city at large. The ostensible project of the novel is to reconcile a pervasively individualistic ethical matrix with a socialist understanding of the inequalities and injustices that were pervasive in Howells’s New York, to acknowledge the need for change while warding off the threat of anarchy and the possibility of a working class uprising. Amy Kaplan’s The Social Construction of American Realism remains the dominant reading in this vein. Her reading is largely preoccupied with one of the novel’s most notable features: that the magazine office,
supposedly central to the plot, fades to the background for large swaths of the text while the protagonist moves through the urban streets of New York City. As a result, her reading focuses on how the novel reestablishes, rather than demolishes, boundaries between the middle and working classes. One of my goals in reading *A Hazard of New Fortunes* through the lens of Howells as an editor figure is to establish stronger ties between Howells’s social politics and the process by which he figures editor and author.

In my reading, I want to depart from most interpretations of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* by focusing first on the fictional magazine *Every Other Week* and its offices. The novel revolves around an ensemble of literary intermediaries. Fulkerson and March, the magazine’s two founders, possess editorial control of *Every Other Week* and can be understood as two different types of editor—real and unreal. Dryfoos, the financial backer, inserts his son as figurehead publisher and later tries to assert his own authority over the editorial department. The novel’s social translator Lindau, meanwhile, is framed in direct opposition to any editorial role. I argue that the contrast between Fulkerson and March allows Howells to rehash conflicts related to the turn-of-the-century shift from character to personality, especially as they pertained to editorial identity. I want to read these two aspects of an editor’s (or editor figure’s) public function as a kind of collaborative momentum in itself, one that implicitly exchanges symbolic and economic capital. After establishing this interpretive baseline, I will re-approach the city scenes with the idea of charting Howells’s conflation of “editor” and “middle class.” I argue that the climax of the novel and its subsequent resolution shirks a fantasy of artistic escape by establishing the editor as the central figure of sustained counter-revolutionary compromise.

To understand *A Hazard of New Fortunes* as a component of Howells’s broader conceptual project leading up to the turn of the century, I will first establish its interest in defining editorial identity in contrast to an authorial identity not portrayed in the novel itself. In the second half of the nineteenth century, American fiction dwelled extensively
on what it meant to be an author, with specific interest in the relative independence of the creative mind. Dreiser, James, London, Norris, Wharton, and countless others wrote overt authorship fiction, narrating and responding to key developments in the literary culture of the period. In many cases, the story of the struggling author is of course merely an adaptation of the well-established *künstlerroman*, or portrait of a young artist, but the American version of this subgenre situated the rising artist against the backdrop of a hostile literary apparatus or unsympathetic reading public. Other versions of the genre focus on the small town or city newspaper writer facing similar conflicts. Booth Tarkington’s *The Gentleman from Indiana* (1899) tells the story of a country newspaper man, while Edith Wharton’s *The Touchstone* (1900) depicts a deceased writer’s private letters literally being “sold off” to make the protagonist’s fortune. Mark Twain’s “autobiographical” travel narratives develop a fictional author-hero persona, and authorship was a recurring subject in the work of Henry James. Moving into the twentieth century, this genre of fictionalized authorial narratives expanded even further. In one sense, the fiction industry was simply becoming more self-referential and marked by what Bourdieu calls a series of “winks and nudges” to associate authors with known aesthetic positions and coteries. Many had the more specific effect of elevating the author as an independent and artistic figure.

The novel’s pivot from author-protagonist to editor-protagonist allowed Howells to project a sense of uncertainty about literary enterprise and production against the backdrop of an unrestrained market economy. The title itself, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, expresses a fundamentally double-edged view of novelty and institutional authority. The


99 Jack London’s *Martin Eden* (1909) is perhaps the iconic example of a fictionalized author struggling against an unsympathetic publishing industry. See Glass, *Authors Inc.*, 83-114.
use of the word *new* requires little analysis, but the classical reference is less obvious. The complete phrase alludes to Chatillon, the French diplomat in Shakespeare’s *King John*, describing English soldiers who have “sold their fortunes at their native homes,” made their way to France “bearing their birthrights proudly on their backs … to make hazard of new fortunes here.” According to Phillip Lopate, this reference “announces the theme of outsiders taking chances.” Lopate’s reading is particularly compatible with the Renaissance denotation of hazard as “a game of chance” rather than the later concept of the term indicating genuine danger. By the time Howells’s novel appeared, the latter connotation had prevailed, as had the linguistic turn associating the word *fortune* more with monetary worth than with fate or destiny. Thus, I would add to Lopate’s interpretation the likely possibility that the novel’s title announces the theme of new money’s implicit perils and the reconciliation of conflicting systems of value. The title announces a focus on novelty while simultaneously paying veiled tribute to the classical.

The novel’s interest in past and future (or antiquity and novelty) is directly related to the questions of character and personality pervasive in the narrative. The opening chapter depicts Basil March quitting Boston for New York City to take part in the formation of a new literary magazine. March’s friend, an entrepreneur named Fulkerson, convinces March to leave the insurance business and take part in his latest business scheme. When March ponders whether the magazine could launch from Boston, Fulkerson replies: “Wouldn’t do. You might as well say St. Louis or Cincinnati. There’s only one city that belongs to the whole country, and that’s New York.” Fulkerson’s faith in New York reflects his commercial zeal and economic progressivism. March is

---


102 Ibid., 10.
simultaneously established as a conduit to the old guard of Boston.\textsuperscript{103} Put another way, Fulkerson is \textit{personality} and March represents the idea of \textit{character}.

Howells describes Fulkerson as “a pure advertising essence.”\textsuperscript{104} He calls the magazine “the greatest idea that has been struck … since the creation of man.”\textsuperscript{105} Fulkerson’s ideology is progressive in that his vision of the magazine is simultaneously a vision of a national future. He displays a keen awareness of the importance of publicity in literary enterprise, stating, “I want all the publicity we can get—beg, borrow, or steal—for this thing.”\textsuperscript{106} He expects \textit{Every Other Week} to “attract attention” and generate conversation. Enthusiastic about a contribution by his friend Colonel Woodburn on the merits of slavery, Fulkerson says, “Our people like a bold strike,” and predicts the submission will “shake them up.”\textsuperscript{107} His currency of choice is not dollars per se but rather his status in the eyes of the public. He speculates that the New York reviewers will not “make or break” the magazine; rather, a “great mass of readers” across the continent will decide its fate.\textsuperscript{108} He expects “the novelty of the thing to pique public curiosity.”\textsuperscript{109} Irene C. Goldman-Price argues that Fulkerson, as “entrepreneur and booster,” is “the modern man, the one who can negotiate all social classes in a way that neither March, on the one hand, nor Dryfoos, on the other, could have managed.”\textsuperscript{110} Despite a class identity that

\textsuperscript{103} Fulkerson and March are both Midwesterners who have migrated east, a detail Fulkerson enlists to account for his faith in March.

\textsuperscript{104} Howells, \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes}, 293.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 255–256.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 261.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 86.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 18.

belie his self-image, Fulkerson sees himself as a man of the masses.

Only Fulkerson’s status as a celebrity or editor figure can hold this contradiction in a suspended state. The culture of personality, as described by Susman (and linked to celebrity in Glass’s work) allowed the performance of self to operate as a commodity unto itself, one capable of producing economic and symbolic capital. Fulkerson considers creative thinking, high-quality journalism, and profit-seeking completely compatible. Fulkerson is a “syndicate man,” a literary businessman who has made his living selling syndicated fiction to newspapers across the country. He plans to apply the syndicates’ “principle of cooperation” to a new magazine. The planning phase of *Every Other Week* is accompanied by “heaps of the manuscripts which began to pour in” from “old syndicate writers” and “adventurous volunteers all over the country.” In Fulkerson’s own words, he has a “beautiful vision of a lot of literary fellows breaking loose from the bondage of publishers and playing it alone.” Progressive rhetoric reinforces the idea of *Every Other Week* as fresh and innovative, despite the fact that many of its features are in fact borrowed from periodicals that Howells had either read, been published in, or worked for. Fulkerson’s consumerism is a function of his excessive personality and apparent lack of character. His shortcomings comment upon the limits of a personality-obsessed culture, which was beginning to conflate creativity and ingenuity with ostentatious individuality and a desire to make money. He is the novel’s most identifiable editorial figurehead in that he shares the editorial helm of the magazine with March while remaining free from most editorial obligations. His identity is so dependent on public recognition, in fact, that he has no first name. Reportedly named after a childhood friend of Howells’s from southwestern Ohio, he is merely referred to as Fulkerson throughout.

---


112 Ibid., 86–87.

113 Ibid., 9.
the book. And this remains true in spite of the fact that the novel features several conversations with his fiancée.\textsuperscript{114}

March’s hesitancy, meanwhile, stands in direct contrast to Fulkerson’s personality. When Fulkerson tries to recruit March to \textit{Every Other Week}, March replies: “I haven’t had any magazine experience, you know that; and I haven’t seriously attempted to do anything in literature since I was married. I gave up smoking and the Muse together.”\textsuperscript{115} Isabel March describes his shift from the insurance industry to the periodical as “an escape,” reinforcing the idea that March is focused on his departure from the insurance industry and thus is an even unlikelier candidate to take the helm of Fulkerson’s utopian enterprise.\textsuperscript{116} Basil has the character of a “philosophical observer”; he promotes compromise, civility, and aesthetic excellence.\textsuperscript{117} As the representative of an old model of character, March “was proud of reading critically, and he kept in the current of literary interests and controversies. It all seemed to him, and to his wife at second-hand, very meritorious.”\textsuperscript{118} Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson note “March’s hesitations, stumbles, and headlong plunges,” as he remains “mostly an observer with no solution, except for an eccentric flash of courage shown in his refusal to fire his old friend.”\textsuperscript{119} March has internalized a democratic value system, but he is timid, reserved, and thoughtful to the point of paralysis, in direct contrast to Fulkerson’s unabashed bravado.

In another contrast to Fulkerson, March is the true day-to-day editor of \textit{Every

\textsuperscript{114} Goldman-Price, “The Booster as Mentor in \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes},” 48. Goldman-Price uses the full name \textit{Jonas Fulkerson} to describe the syndicate man, but no first name is given in the novel. Her use of the name seems to allude to the boyhood friend of Howells who was Fulkerson’s namesake.

\textsuperscript{115} Howells, \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes}, 6.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 374.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 21.

Other Week, responsible for selecting, arranging, and developing pieces commissioned by Fulkerson. Internalizing March’s ethic of self-erasure, the narrator states, “he had not voluntarily put it all together for that number; it had largely put itself together, as every number of every magazine does.”120 This passage explains March’s view of his role as editor: he sees himself as serving an intermediary role, not an innovative one. Goodman and Dawson’s deprecatory view of March reflects their expectation of a heroic protagonist, but Howells defies this expectation and produces instead a hesitant, introspective central character whose sense of doubt implicates any similar member of the middle class. More than anything, March is tentative, a self constantly being constructed by outside factors and always engaged in the act of becoming.

March’s editorial and personal self-effacement, especially in the early stage of the novel, echoes a point Bourdieu makes about the systems that allow literary culture to uplift authorial genius. There are few areas other than literature “in which the glorification of ‘great individuals,’ unique creators irreducible to any condition or conditioning, is more common or uncontroversial.”121 The secondary literary laborer has “the power to consecrate,” an influential role in “a circle of belief” in which “the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated.”122 Authors also participate in the process, but non-authorial laborers create “the authority with which authors authorize.”123 Because the rise of a commercial publishing market created new terms of literary valuation, one of which was an increased dependence on marketing an authorial persona, literary middle men were also enlisted to participate in their own erasure from the public eye. March invests belief in the illusion central to his professional

121 Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature, 29.
122 Ibid., 77.
123 Ibid., 76.
identity; or, quite possibly, he engages in a profession perfectly suited to his middle class sensibilities.

The most suggestive point of contrast between Fulkerson and March at first appears to unite them. As they plan Every Other Week’s first issue, Fulkerson describes the general philosophy of the magazine to Basil: “The editorial management was going to be kept in the background, as far as the public was concerned; the public was to suppose that the thing ran itself.” Basil’s later remark that the magazine “had largely put itself together” mirrors this comment but, where Basil internalizes the ethic of the self-effacing intermediary, Fulkerson knows that he is presenting an illusion to the public, indicated by the qualifiers “as far as the public was concerned” and “the public was to suppose.” The doubling of two phrases to that effect creates a sentence where “the public” appears twice in the span of six words, creating a rhythmic mantra (the public … the public) that emphasizes the ironic distance between how Fulkerson presents himself and what he believes himself to be. The verb tense of “was to suppose” augments the suggestiveness of his comment; his double meaning is doubled by a verb structure that combines the past tense of “to be” with the infinitive of “suppose” and creates the “was-to” future tense, meaning that in the future, the public will be meant to assume and go on assuming that the magazine ran itself. This verb structure emphasizes the action (the public was to suppose) and eschews the identity of the individuals responsible for creating the illusion. The term “the thing” augments the overall effect of a silent collusion between the magazine employees and the public at large that places all the creative agency of a magazine like Every Other Week in the hands of the authors who write the content and the readers who evaluate it.

---


March naturalizes the compendium as an almost inevitable confluence of material; Fulkerson articulates a strategy to strengthen the magazine’s image in the public eye as a passive and almost invisible zone of contact between author and reader. Both attitudes allow the magazine to function as a site of ideological disavowal. A magazine like Harper’s Weekly (or indeed Every Other Week as fictional kin) implicitly claims, as a “Journal of Civilization,” to represent the full range of public discourse. The notion of total representation, of course, is absurd, but publications like Harper’s Weekly did make attempts to universalize their depictions through a variety of rhetorical strategies.  

According to the weekly’s inaugural manifesto:

Harper’s Weekly will contain a full and impartial Summary of the Political, Social, Religious, Commercial, and Literary News of the day. It will chronicle the leading movements of the age, record the inventions of genius, the discoveries of science, and the creations of art. It will, in a word, aim to present an accurate and complete picture of the age in which we live.

The global rhetoric of this inaugural aims at comprehensive depiction and evaluative exultation. Periodicals of the period routinely purported themselves to be “the organ” of a group or enclave, and often went so far as to attempt to represent the entire society. Condemned villains such as the Haymarket rioters had therefore implicitly disqualified themselves from inclusion in that society.

Similarly, Every Other Week’s hands-off model masks its ideological function mediating power relations. To the point of hyperbole, Fulkerson is guided purely by

---

126 The idea of a magazine that runs itself is reminiscent of the notion of print culture as a repository for the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas describes the public sphere as a disembodied, democratic, all-inclusive, and all-encompassing zone of conversation, debate, and exchange. This idea of the public sphere is a cultural construction (an “imagined community”) that writers, editors, and publishers actively helped create. Nancy Fraser notes a “remarkable irony” associated with the public sphere: “A discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality and the suspension of status hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction.” Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Habermas and the Public Sphere, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 115.

sensationalistic instincts and seems never to question the moral or ethical dimension of his business decisions. The central ethical crisis of the novel later requires Fulkerson to becomes situated in a moral conflict and establish his sense of character. Enthusiastic about a contribution by his friend Colonel Woodburn on the merits of slavery, Fulkerson says, “Our people like a bold strike,” and predicts the submission will “shake them up.”

Fulkerson believes the magazine has a duty to represent and to raise controversy but not to mediate it. Of course, despite any insistence to the contrary, mediation is exactly what is taking place. The cautious expert, the calculating critic, the editor, the mentor, and the arbiter of taste—the figure hunkered down in the engine room of the literary locomotive—has the power to create order from such a chaotic mix of voices and variables. Fulkerson does not make value judgments because such judgments are not a part of his idiosyncratic personality. March has character, but his values are useless when held at bay by his internal sense of hesitancy.

The novel’s other magazine intermediaries—namely the financial backer Dryfoos, his son Conrad, and the socialist translator Lindau—further raise a challenge to the fantasy of ideological disavowal. At the height of the magazine’s success, the expected profits are only $25,000 a year, an amount Dryfoos scoffs at, having made all his money (approximately $500,000) as a result of the natural gas boom in Moffitt, Indiana. “I made that much in half a day in Moffitt once,” he says. “I see it half a minute in Wall Street, sometimes.”

The magazine as a business enterprise brings into uneasy alignment the competing ideologies of consumerism, the entrepreneurial spirit, literary and artistic taste, and radical political principles, but behind this sense of balance is a lingering expectation of conflict. In fact, the narrator goes so far as to call commercialism “the poison at the


129 Ibid., 199.
heart of our national life.”

If March represents the reserved editor, and Fulkerson represents unfettered zeal, Dryfoos signifies the deterministic element of corporate profit for its own sake. Commenting on the difference between the natural gas business and the magazine business, he states: “It’s all a game; it don’t make any difference what you bet on. Business is business.”

Fulkerson explains to March that Dryfoos has come to New York “to spend his money, and get his daughters into the old Knickerbocker society.” At first, Dryfoos supplies the money for the endeavor but does not involve himself in the magazine’s management; he proceeds “without any sign of anxiety” or “any sign of interest.”

Dryfoos is not meant to take part in daily operations but, as March later laments, “The man that holds the purse holds the reins. He may let us guide the horse, but when he likes he can drive.”

Dryfoos’s interest in profits alone distinguishes his version of market capitalism from Fulkerson’s.

Dryfoos’s son Conrad, meanwhile, offers an exaggerated version of March’s public hesitancy and private morality. Throughout the story, Dryfoos feminizes and diminishes his son for his views and actions. According to William M. Morgan, characters like March and Conrad in Howells’s fiction are “less figures of reform and rationalization than public men who have been damaged by their complicity in the social realm.”

Conrad wants to be a preacher, having had no prior career. According to his

---

130 Ibid., 304.
131 Ibid., 200.
132 Ibid., 76.
133 Ibid., 192.
134 Ibid., 202.
father, Conrad “knows about as much as a girl.” Conrad’s Christianity is a source of empathy for the poor and distrust of the rich. As he says to March: “Didn’t the Saviour himself say, ‘How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God?’” Descriptions of Conrad’s timidity (as with March) obfuscate how active he actually is within the context of his professional domain. His role in the *Every Other Week* counting room enables the periodical to process currency into ideas, and vice versa. Conrad also acts as a pacifier and negotiator between his father and the rest of the office. He explains his father’s motives to his colleagues. Later, when he attempts to pacify a disagreement over the citywide strike, he says he is “not authorized to speak” for the strikers and prefers not to discuss the matter further.

Lindau also plays a pivotal role in framing character, personality, and magazine professionalism. Lindau is a German immigrant, a socialist, and a veteran. He has lost an arm fighting for the North in the Civil War. As a translator at *Every Other Week*, Lindau is paid to reproduce the thoughts of others in a form that permits understanding. He has no role in selecting authors, works, or content. His role at *Every Other Week* is described as “almost purely mechanical.” In the literal sense, this remark indicates that Lindau’s job is insignificant, but the word *mechanical* connotes a lack of individual agency, one that seems to describe the entire magazine staff as the rising action takes place. This description of his duties reflects a nineteenth-century ethic of translation, in which the

---

136 Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, 235. The text’s latent anxiety about manliness permeates its portrayal of a humanitarian social contract. William M. Morgan traces “uneasy masculinity” in several works of American realism and argues that, because of the gender insecurities implicit in Howells’s writing, the novelist is “skeptical of idealism in any stripe.” Morgan, *Questionable Charity*, 24. Morgan states, “Manhood is the social category through which Howells writes toward his understanding of the problems of complicity and moral temporizing in the Gilded Age, but these problems are at the core of his artistic preoccupations and social anxieties.” Ibid., 24–25.


138 Ibid.

139 Ibid., 322.
translator is viewed not as a creative figure but as a rote facilitator of language transfer.\textsuperscript{140} He has little or no potential to threaten the establishment (magazine or otherwise) in his professional capacity.

Lindau’s socialism, however, leaves him unwilling to remain “caught in the middle” as other characters seem to be. He lives among the poor because he is worried he will forget their struggles. He refuses to put his money in a bank and “would receive his pay only from March’s hand, because he wished to be understood as working for him, and honestly earning money honestly earned.”\textsuperscript{141} He also renounces his veteran’s pension in protest. Lindau thus conjures what Martha Banta calls the “specters of European anarchy and socialism” which, by the 1890s, were “already haunting middle-class constituencies.”\textsuperscript{142} He stands in direct contrast to Fulkerson, March, and Dryfoos as a trio, which underscores the similarities among them.

Even the fictional magazine at the center of the story occupies a kind of conceptual and cultural middle space. \textit{Every Other Week} operates according to a corporate model, with a variety of figures performing discrete tasks. According to Wilson, “an enormous revolution in the managerial and professional dimensions of an expanding and nationalizing economy” took place during the run up to the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{143} He elaborates:

These were the years in which traditional individual or family partnerships in business commonly gave way to bureaucratic or ‘pyramid’ structures, largely directed by middle managers and salaried professionals. The ‘visible hand’ of managerial know-how, which stressed market anticipation and stability, replaced the traditional orientations of laissez-faire entrepreneurialism and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{140} For an expanded discussion of this point, see Lawrence Venuti, \textit{The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation} (New York: Routledge, 1995).

\textsuperscript{141} Howells, \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes}, 317.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 248.

\textsuperscript{143} Wilson, \textit{The Labor of Words}, 19.
\end{footnotesize}
The organizational structure of the magazine echoes an historical trend. The magazine’s corporate structure reaffirms a hands-off attitude toward action and responsibility, a nearly mechanistic structure that diminishes the sense that the characters are free agents making decisions for themselves.

As a material object, *Every Other Week* straddles the line between classicism and novelty. It is a fortnightly periodical with “a duodecimo page, clear black print, and paper that’ll make your mouth water.”\(^{145}\) Most magazines of the period were monthlies or weeklies, so the choice to portray a twice-a-month magazine suggests a certain cultural middle space in itself. The duodecimo size differs from several industry models. *Harper’s Weekly* was Folio at 12" x 19", while other weekly story magazines were primarily Octavo at 6" x 9", and traditional literary magazines like *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, *Scribner’s Monthly*, and the *Atlantic Monthly* were Quarto size at 9½" x 12”. Fulkerson’s suggestion of duodecimo, at about 5" x 7", would have made for an extremely small magazine.\(^{146}\) In fact, *Every Other Week* is closer to a book than a magazine in texture and size. According to Fulkerson: “It’s a book, to all practical intents and purposes. And what we propose to do with the American public is to give it twenty-four books like this a year—a complete library—for the absurd sum of six dollars.”\(^{147}\) *A Hazard of New Fortunes* is a book about a magazine, but the novel’s fictitious magazine, *Every Other Week*, is a periodical designed to impersonate a book. Alternatively, *Every Other Week* occupies a middle space between *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* and *Harper’s Weekly*.

\(^{144}\) Ibid.


\(^{146}\) See Mott, 57-75.

\(^{147}\) Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, 123.
Although the early stages of A Hazard of New Fortunes make the world of the editor the primary object of focus, the novel’s conflict, climax, and resolution pivot toward a collision between professional disavowal and social chaos. I have already demonstrated that the editor figure replaces the author as an everyman protagonist. In contrast to Jack London’s Martin Eden or Kate Chopin’s Edna Pontellier, Howells’s Basil March does not represent a fantasy of artistic transcendence or escape; rather, he signifies engaged participation in perpetual self-fashioning as a way to deflect upheaval. The magazine plot first collides with the novel’s social concerns when Howells dedicates two full chapters to the Marches as they roam about New York City and accrue a cognitive geography and local rulebook while they look for an apartment. Amy Kaplan argues that the novel’s extended city passages represent colonization of foreign space. I agree with her central claim but want to emphasize that an editor figure’s characteristic way of seeing and navigating is as much the rule in these scenes as it is anywhere else in the book. The result is a flawed attempt to conflate the editor’s sensibility and middle-class identity generally.

Like an editor assembling an issue of a magazine, March gathers information from a variety of sources, combs through them with a keen eye, eliminates sources of bad information, and pursues leads that show promise. The Marches first seek out Fulkerson, who has already spoken to real estate agents. They visit a variety of locations and, having no success, determine that there is “something in the human habitation that corrupts the natures of those who deal in it, to buy or sell it, to hire or let it.”148 Frustrated, they turn their attention to newspaper advertisements, an alternative intermediary, but have similar difficulties: “There was a sameness in the jargon which tended to confusion.”149 The Marches once again revert to agents, and then fall back on Fulkerson’s advice.

148 Ibid., 44.
149 Ibid., 45.
Throughout, they negotiate interactions with doormen, janitors, superintendents, prospective landlords, and cabbies.

In sections where Basil and his wife hunt for an apartment, they can only navigate the culture through a host of social intermediaries. A muddle of interdependency undermines the stereotypical American notion of self-determination that has been repeatedly associated with the experience of procuring, building, and inhabiting a domicile. Howells’s apartment-hunting chapters disassemble the ideological import of the dwelling-place experience to suggest that the only way to negotiate the streets of New York is through careful manipulation of a complex array of social and economic interrelations. The mere fact that the Marches are searching for an urban apartment to rent rather than purchase further accentuates a new version of middle-class identity. The web of interconnections they must navigate in order to establish a residence might suggest a loss of agency, but only if a subject/object relationship with the Marches at the center is artificially emphasized. Instead, the scenes should be interpreted as a series of instances in which various types of active agents must interact with one another. They are dependent on each other, but creative agency is still possible, and still required.

Basil negotiates the pages of the city, bearing witness to that which unsettles his notion of social order. When he watches a well-dressed Frenchman picking through the trash for food, he looks on with fascination and a sense of duty to offer assistance. Shamed by his interaction with the man, he states: “Of course, there are twenty places where he could have gone for help if he had known where to find them.” The Marches

---

150 Although “property” is not listed in the Declaration of Independence, the Declaration of Colonial Rights of 1774 stated that life, liberty, and property were “inalienable rights of man.” Thoreau’s cabin in *Walden*, Sutpen’s estate in *Absalom, Absalom*, and Lena’s prospective house in Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* make explicit the ideal of real estate not merely as a symbol of wealth, power, and privacy, but as a particular invocation of selfhood. Locke’s writings in particular conflate selfhood and property. For more information, see C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

have begun to master the manipulations of middle management; they have succeeded to
this point in negotiating the parameters of the New York streets and have concluded that
the networks of intermediaries available to them are reasonable and effective. But “the
possibility of his needing the help so badly as that” unsettles Isabel’s worldview and
implicates readers with comparable views.\textsuperscript{152}

Once again conflating an editorial point of view with middle-class consciousness,
Howells depicts racial difference and inequality through the Marches’ perspective. Basil
and Isabel notice and react to the black laborers they encounter during their hunt for an
apartment, but their reactions are steeped in naïve romanticism. It is no doubt a mistake
to associate the Marches’ attitudes toward race relations with Howells’, as it would be a
mistake to do so with their class politics. At the very least, however, it should be
acknowledged that Howells does not attend to issues of race in a comprehensive way.
According to Elsa Nettels, “Howells’s portrayal of blacks documents actual conditions
and also reflects attitudes and assumptions he shared with his contemporaries. … He
accepted the widely held belief that race determines temperament.”\textsuperscript{153} Brook Thomas
claims that Fulkerson’s marriage to Colonel Woodburn’s daughter creates a figurative
“marriage of Northern and Southern interests,” which suggests that “the renegotiation of
the federal contract needs to include all of its citizens in the new federal family.”\textsuperscript{154} This
marriage certainly suggests a reunion of the North and South, one of the novel’s many
concluding gestures in the final chapters. It does not necessarily endorse racial unity.
Issues of race are present in the novel but are largely subordinated to labor and class
concerns. Most importantly, Howells does not craft a race-inflected spokesman for

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{153} Elsa Nettels, \textit{Language, Race, and Social Class in Howells’s America} (Lexington: University Press of
Kentucky, 1988), 87.

\textsuperscript{154} Thomas, \textit{American Literary Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract}, 169, 171.
African American claims as he does for socialism through Lindau.\textsuperscript{155}

Poverty, the physical symptom of underlying social injustice, resurfaces constantly, reappearing each moment when the Marches have seemingly shed their guilt and denied any obligation to react to the socioeconomic conditions around them.\textsuperscript{156} Isabel ponders the extreme poverty of the city but concludes, “It’s very easy to have humane sentiments … when we see how these creatures live … But if we shared all we have with them and then settled down among them, what good would it do?”\textsuperscript{157} While the third-person narration in this section follows Basil’s point of view, these recurrent images of the poor create a constant sense of self-scrutiny. Additionally, Howells undercuts March’s hesitancy by contrasting him with Lindau, who has clearly taken the symbolic actions (refused his pension, settled down among the poor) that the Marches see as futile.

Just as the apartment-hunting scenes suggest an inevitable intertwining of go-between roles, the inevitable breakdown of the magazine office’s compartmentalization of private and public morality leads to the novel’s central crisis. A dinner party meant to celebrate the success of the magazine brings into social contact a series of ideologically incompatible individuals. Fulkerson tells the story of how Dryfoos broke a labor union by having its organizers escorted off his property at gunpoint. “What kind of man is this?” the socialist Lindau asks upon hearing the story. “Who is he? He has the heart of a tyrant.”\textsuperscript{158} Dryfoos is convinced that socialists “want to ruin the country” and demands

\textsuperscript{155} Gender inequality, as a social question, does not have a significant place in the narrative. In contrast, the novel seems to recognize racial inequality but not to focus on it.

\textsuperscript{156} The narrator states of Isabel, “It shocked her to hear that rich and poor were not equal before law in a country where justice must be paid for at every step in fees and costs.” Howells, \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes}, 265.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 56.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 310.
that Lindau be fired from the magazine. \(^\text{159}\) Basil feels Dryfoos has overstepped his role as owner, and Dryfoos’s actions violate March’s sense of loyalty. Lindau, despising Dryfoos as much as Dryfoos despises him, ultimately refuses to continue working for the magazine and returns his previous earnings. “It is not hawnest money,” he states. “I feel as if dere vas ploodt on it.” \(^\text{160}\) Lindau’s unwillingness to engage in commerce with a person of opposing values directly contrasts the Marches’ distanced pity when they seek an apartment in New York City. While they seek shelter from the realities of a hostile system, Lindau imposes restrictions on himself to avoid any possibility of hypocrisy. Lindau is a revolutionary. He sees no appeal in gradual progress or in managing change, for he does not perceive radical change in negative terms.

Critics have rightly focused on Lindau as an icon of Howells’s radicalism or lack thereof. As a Civil War veteran, an amputee, an immigrant, and a socialist, Lindau represents a “hybrid presence” in Kaplan’s words. \(^\text{161}\) He is Howells’s mouthpiece for socialist ideals and enunciates positions that are controversial within the context of the novel (friends and colleagues are routinely offended by his claims) as well as the context of Harper’s Weekly. A fictional character in a novel published in a weekly news magazine could indeed say things that a columnist or a contributing writer could not. His ability to serve as Howells’s mouthpiece, however, is steadily undercut by his thick accent. Kaplan argues that Lindau’s way of speaking “quells the threat of fragmentation,” which bolsters the reality effect but simultaneously mutes “the force of his speech.” \(^\text{162}\) Elsa Nettels adds, “Of all the characters, Lindau is the most seriously compromised by his speech in that in its effect it jars the most with the sentiments and ideals it

\(^{159}\) Ibid., 313.  
\(^{160}\) Ibid., 327.  
\(^{162}\) Ibid.
conveys.”  His accent recalls the stereotype (or Nast’s caricature) of the immigrant socialist, lampooned regularly in the popular American media (see Figure 1.2).

Imagining how controversial it might have been had Lindau used the magazine as a mouthpiece for his political views, March contrasts the German’s ideas with the recently published pro-slavery writings of Fulkerson’s friend Colonel Woodburn: “We could print a dozen articles praising the slavery it’s impossible to have back,” March says. “But if we printed one paper against the slavery which Lindau claims still exists, some people would call us bad names, and the counting room would begin to feel it.”

While March finds the idea of printing Lindau’s views utterly impossible, Howells (through a fictional mode) does exactly that. Lindau’s perspectives, unfit for print in *Every Other Week*, are in effect embedded on the page of *Harper’s Weekly*, a contrast that creates distance between the fictional magazine and its “real-life” counterpart. Judging by the weekly’s reaction to the Haymarket trial, Lindau’s views (in the form of an opinion piece) would have been equally unfit for *Harper’s Weekly*. Howells exploits the fictional mode to give Lindau, as a character, access to this space.

Lindau’s death also softens his critique of the social order. The climax of the novel sees the localized conflict between Lindau and Dryfoos give way to a citywide horse-car strike. Lindau participates in the strike and is beaten heavily by police officers attempting to control the mob. He dies in the hospital a few days after the strike ends. Lindau’s very presence in unexpected places enables his ability to challenge the economic and social hierarchies surrounding him. Critics have indeed read his death as a kind of erasure, pointing out that his physical body, along with his voice, produces his

---


164 Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, 321. The novel’s discussion of slavery throughout the Woodburn episode to a degree counterbalances the sense that Howells ignores race as a subject, but the pro-slavery magazine submission is better understood as a hyperbolized example of something that is politically safe enough to find its way into *Every Other Week*. As a result, the episode adds weight to the novel’s analysis of class conflict rather than primarily attending to race as a subject of public debate.
effect as the social conscience of the novel. Lindau, in a variety of ways, occupies a mitigated presence in the text. Death silences him, and the narrative gives him no opportunity for a rallying cry or a deathbed monologue. Yet these mitigating factors do not erase him; the challenges he raises cannot be so easily dismissed.

On one level, Lindau’s fate represents a kind of cautionary tale, a parable of the dangers of unrestrained radicalism. March notwithstanding, the novel’s major characters deride Lindau’s radicalism. When Fulkerson notices a widely known socialist eating dinner at his favorite restaurant, he opines: “I’d like to see those fellows shut up in jail and left to jaw each other to death.”165 His is a perspective reminiscent of the *Harper’s Weekly* coverage of Haymarket, but the significant interpretive factor is not Fulkerson’s bigotry but the degree to which, in the face of disdain, the “vanishing socialist” will not vanish.166 Like his own amputated arm, Lindau is a symbol of the appendage that can be removed, even while its absence remains a kind of presence. It marks his body and his persona. In establishing Lindau’s decency, Basil invokes the war wound, saying, “that stump of his is character enough for me.”167 When the group of police officers surrounds Lindau and begins to beat him, Conrad sees “the empty sleeve dangle in the air, over the stump of his wrist.”168 Likewise, the weight of Lindau’s accusatory function cannot be extricated from the ensemble structure of the novel. Like the novel’s many other secondary literary laborers, Conrad finds himself facing a compromised range of choices with a persistent imperative to take action. The choice that ultimately results in his death is the clearest example of this generalization.

With the strike erupting outside, Dryfoos pays a visit to *Every Other Week* and

165 Ibid., 72.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., 134.
168 Ibid., 383.
finds his son Conrad alone in the office. They quarrel about the strike, and Dryfoos hits his son, which causes Conrad to flee into the streets in a confused panic. He comes upon a group of policemen attacking Lindau and begins to intercede on Lindau’s behalf, but he is shot before he is able to enunciate his message. “Don’t strike him! He’s an old soldier! You see he has no hand!” The narrator explains that Conrad would have said this if he had not been shot and killed. A stray bullet strikes him in the heart and kills him instantly. Once again, as with Lindau’s unprintable ideas, Howells gives his readers access to an utterance that is, within the plot, censored or silenced. Conrad is thus the middle man who would have rejected his role but is put down preemptively instead. His status is underscored by the description of his face as a “mere image of irresponsible and involuntary authority” and by the fact that the policeman who shoots him is labeled “as much a mere instrument as his club was.” The characters’ self-soothing explanations after the strike suggest a persistent sense of anxiety with the social structure, despite all efforts to restore order. As with the “merely mechanical” Lindau,” figurative language once again diminishes the individual’s capacity to act. The strike itself symbolizes “the threat” of chaos, personalized through the violence done to Conrad, the implication being that untempered radicalism begets senseless bloodshed and unjustifiable collateral damage. The tone of suspicion toward outright revolt is reminiscent of Howells’s previous condemnation of the Haymarket riots and his desire to see the Haymarket anarchists receive a fair trial.

The novel makes an ultimately doomed attempt, through the rioting workers, to draw parallels between the professional managerial class and the working class laborers of New York City. The limits of this effort can be illustrated by noting that not a single worker in the dialogue earns a name or a line of dialogue. Howells’s effort here is

169 Ibid.
170 Ibid., 391.
perhaps comparable to his insistence, in “The Man of Letters as a Man of Business,” that the author “in the last analysis,” is “merely a working-man … under the rule that governs the working-man’s life.” Howells insists that the author belongs to the working class, but Howells’s conception of authorship is ultimately middle class and genteel. In A Hazard of New Fortunes, comparably, the magazine workers are characters, while the strike is merely an event. Like Lindau, the horse-car strikers are economic intermediaries who have stepped out of their assigned role in order to insist upon their human rights, a perspective Howells emphasizes through various characters’ assessments of their working conditions. Rather than defining intermediaries primarily as buyers and resellers, Howells draws strong associations between the main magazine employees and their working-class counterparts. The strikers’ ability to cause such panic in the streets of New York City calls attention to the complexity of social and economic networks, as well as their inherent vulnerability to the many middle figures who refuse to perform their role. Through this lens, the strike recalls the novel’s preceding in-betweeners—doormen, porters, real estate agents, housekeepers—who inhabit the narrative as those who serve but who suddenly represent potential disturbances in the social fabric. Howells’s effort to conflate middle- and working-class identities, however, fails to account for March and Fulkerson’s “moment of truth” as a distinctly middle-class way of processing morality.

Howells symbolically exterminates Conrad’s sentimentality and Lindau’s radicalism, which leaves the remaining ensemble of characters to reflect on what has occurred. If Lindau is the middle man who rejects his role, and Conrad is the “humanitarian dreamer” whose naiveté destroys him, March is the character who must come to terms with all that has taken place, and with his place in this world. Further supporting the idea that Lindau’s death cannot be read in a vacuum, the narrative


172 Howells, A Hazard of New Fortunes, 324.
emphasizes March’s reaction to the deaths of his friend and his employer’s son. Dryfoos learns that his son died coming to Lindau’s aid and expresses a desire to atone for his wrongdoings. He holds Lindau’s funeral at his house and sells *Every Other Week* to March and Fulkerson for a greatly reduced price. March questions Dryfoos’s conversion experience: “I suppose I should have to say that we didn’t change at all. There’s the making of several characters in each of us; we *are* each several characters, and sometimes this character has the lead in us, and sometimes that.” March once again denies his own agency, falling back on a metaphor of impermanent selfhood. By suggesting we are each “several characters,” he emphasizes not the multiplicity of identity but its performative dimension.

The logic of March’s metaphor suggests diminished agency by way of fragmented internal impulses, but Isabel questions his “fatalism” and explains it to herself: “She knew he was enamored with the literary finish of his cynicism, and that at heart he was as humbly and truly grateful as she was for the good fortune opening up to them.” As a result, Howells emphasizes the “never finished” aspect of self-refashioning. Multiplicity of self has a temporal dimension. March is unsettled but settling, a tenuous member of the professional-managerial class. The web of undermining oppositions surrounding Basil’s fatalism at the conclusion of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* displays a feature of realism that Barthes labels a “classic remedy” to “boredom, conformism, and disgust … to make them ironical … i.e., to superimpose on the vomited code a second code which expresses it as a distance.” This use of irony, in a text like Balzac’s “Sarrasine” or Howells’s *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, quarantines the author’s ideological stance. Suspension is therefore a kind of closure: “Like the Marquise, the classic text is pensive.

---

173 Ibid., 440.
174 Ibid.
… the pensive (in faces, in texts) is the signifier of the inexpressible, not of the unexpressed.”\textsuperscript{176} Pensive imbalance suggests an “infinite openness” and embodies “an interiority whose supposed depth compensates for the parsimony of its plural.”\textsuperscript{177} In the case of “Sarrasine,” closure is thus a final strategy of ideological disavowal, another snare that buttresses the text’s ideological matrix. In \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes}, similarly, Basil March articulates and embodies a state of physical and mental paralysis, making suspension the dominant mode of the closing chapters.

Examining the novel’s denouement, Daniel H. Borus argues that the “attempt to mediate as little as possible … conceals a desire to manage the reader, to render him or her incapable of either contemplation or creativity.”\textsuperscript{178} With Fulkerson and March co-owning and running the periodical, an alliance is struck between Fulkerson as an editorial personality March as a reluctant but character-driven editor. “March and Fulkerson retrenched at several points where it seemed indispensable to spend, as long as they were not spending their own [money].”\textsuperscript{179} They “reduced the number of illustrations” and “systematized the payment of contributors strictly according to the sales of each number.”\textsuperscript{180} This brief description of the changes at \textit{Every Other Week} includes little to placate the conflicts raised by Lindau’s death. The periodical is still a business, and it must operate according to capitalist principles. “Business is business,” March states, echoing Dryfoos’s earlier line. “But I don’t say it isn’t disgusting.”\textsuperscript{181} Howells’s sense of closure stands in contrast to the iconic ending of Upton Sinclair’s \textit{The Jungle} (1906), a

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 216.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 216–217.
\textsuperscript{178} Borus, \textit{Writing Realism}, 133.
\textsuperscript{179} Howells, \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes}, 447.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 441.
book about a Lithuanian immigrant who works in Chicago’s beef industry. It concludes with the main character Jurgis attending a socialist rally, where a “young, hungry-looking, full of fire” orator addresses a crowd of workers. This orator concludes: “We shall bear down the opposition, we shall sweep it before us—and Chicago will be ours! Chicago will be ours! CHICAGO WILL BE OURS!”\footnote{182} Sinclair’s final lines collapse into a working-class, revolutionary perspective in both form and content. Howells’s conclusion, in contrast, manages conflicts by removing (at least temporarily) the threat of revolution.

In keeping with the norms of the novel form (especially with high realism), the denouement of \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes} restores aesthetic unity at the expense of the story’s potential for social radicalism, but it also renders this closure ironic by processing it through March’s hyperbolic tentative point of view. D.A. Miller argues that “what discontents the traditional novel is its own condition of possibility.”\footnote{183} Novelists, in response, express a need “to situate their texts within a controlling perspective of narrative closure, which would restore the world (and with it, the word) to a state of transparency.”\footnote{184} \textit{A Hazard of Fortunes} restores order in the Aristotelian sense, revivifying the novel’s dominant linguistic and thematic structures. The titular reference to Shakespeare’s \textit{King John} makes this interpretation all the more tempting. The play has iconic status as a drama that transgresses the line of regicide and concludes with a rearticulation of English patriotism.\footnote{185} Much like \textit{King John}, however, \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes}...
*Fortunes* restores order aesthetically, in a way that fails to resolve and, in fact, calls attention to the conflicts raised by the rising action and climax of the novel. In effect, the question is whether the strike is a large enough transgression and the ending a superficial enough reversal to support the argument that Basil’s fatalistic literary finish (according to his wife) does not resolve the social and ethical contradictions raised by the strike and the subsequent death of Conrad and Lindau. Howells’s retreat to a position of aesthetic closure represents a position-taking in Bourdieu’s sense of the term. While *The Jungle* declares its credibility in its potential to disrupt the field of power, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* uplifts artistic unity as the basis of the novel’s legitimacy, and then undercuts it with irony. The image of “literary finish” indicates foremost a kind of aesthetic veneer that obfuscates political radicalism, but it also functions as a critique of aesthetically motivated closure.

In a novel about middle men and middle management, perhaps the ending of the tale is less significant than its middle. Peter Rabinowitz has argued that beginnings and endings occupy “privileged positions” in narratives, which means “certain details will remain more firmly in memory” and “our sense of the text’s meaning will be influenced by our assumption that the author expected us to end up with an interpretation that could account more fully for these details than for details elsewhere.”186 In the case of *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, the narrative articulates its critical parameters during the novel’s rising action. When Dryfoos first instructs March to fire his friend Lindau, March reacts by defiantly resigning his post as editor of *Every Other Week*. His refusal is an idealized act of self-assertion: an individual in the face of a rapidly escalating conflict has

---

186 Peter Rabinowitz, “Reading Beginnings and Endings,” in *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 300.
the opportunity to slow down the experience and take decisive action, even without the power to effect change. This critical moment for March represents a kind of precursor climax, an instance when March must decide whether his internal sense of obligation outweighs the employer and employee power structure. This decision mirrors the wider question that the strikers must ask as they decide whether to engage in illegal acts to defend their rights as workers.

Although Howells does much to critique Fulkerson and March, he makes the contrast between them the basis of their redeeming qualities. March is educated, intelligent and morally sophisticated, if he chooses to make use of his conscience. March’s identity as a member of the professional-managerial class, as well as his status as a literary middle man, informs the novel’s final state of ideological suspension. As an editor, he is in fact the ultimate intermediary, for the crux of his power and powerlessness is the ability to include and exclude, to qualify, to frame, and to assemble reality like a collage. Whereas the figure of the author inherently calls to mind the trope of the hero overcoming or overcome, the editor’s role is always embedded in an economy of exchange, a discourse of collaboration. This in-between position is also the editor’s fundamental crisis, as Basil makes clear. March’s wife Isabel acts as a narrative balance to Basil’s cynicism. Fulkerson, meanwhile, may lack a moral compass but possesses one quality I would associate with the system of character rather than personality: his friendship with March. When March resigns from *Every Other* Week over the issue of Lindau’s dismissal, Fulkerson, despite agreeing with Dryfoos’s decision to fire Lindau, chooses loyalty to March over his own (lack of) conscience. March finds his character in the editor’s professional code, as Dryfoos overstepped his authority; Fulkerson finds character through loyalty to his friend. This is the apex of Howells’s critique of personality, as well as his rebuke of the American publishing industry’s increasingly corporate nature, driven by a profit system that devalues personal accountability and constructs individual identity as a consumer product.
Shortly after leaving the offices of *Every Other Week*, March tells his wife that he has quit his job for reasons of conscience. Later the same day, Fulkerson arrives at the Marches’ house, tries to reason with March, and eventually offers to leave the magazine in solidarity. March refuses to “become an agent to punish [Lindau] for his opinions.” He resigns himself to the fact that he is a middle man, but he seeks to negotiate the precise terms of that role. After March quits but before Fulkerson comes to March’s house, Mr. and Mrs. March sit down and imagine what the future will bring:

They had not saved anything from the first year’s salary; they had only prepared to save; and they had nothing solid but their two thousand to count upon. But they built a future in which they easily lived on that and on what March earned with his pen. He became a free lance, and fought in whatever cause he thought just; he had no ties, no chains. They went back to Boston with the heroic will to do what was most distasteful; they would have returned to their own house if they had not rented it again; but, any rate, Mrs. March helped out by taking boarders, or perhaps only letting rooms to lodgers. They had some hard struggles, but they succeeded.

Although narrated in the past tense, (as if these events occur), the entire paragraph is a flight of fancy, a narrative mislead. When Fulkerson walks in and gets March to take back his job, we know we have been duped. The expression “built a future,” is our initial clue that this summary is a false narrative, which the reader might first misinterpret as a literal series of events. The word *perhaps* also suggests that the passage is a fantasy of what might occur, not a summary of what has occurred. Both phrases indicate free indirect discourse, a narrative that is channeling the March’s ideas and feelings about the future.

The choice of the verb *built* suggests that Mr. and Mrs. March do not merely plan their future; they construct it imaginatively. The phrase “They built a future” implies that, in fact, Mr. and Mrs. March both participate in constructing the fantasy. Their act is

---


188 Ibid.
authorial in nature; they narrate their future as if it has already occurred, and they do so collaboratively. Their shared sense of anxiety and openness mirrors their experience in the exposition as they leave Boston for New York. So the scene mirrors the rising action of the novel, as well as the approaching climactic moment, a double mirror that highlights the moment in question’s relation to past and future. The passage is reminiscent of Fulkerson’s use of the “was-to” future tense, and it supports my claim that the complexities associated with mediating symbolic capital often have a temporal element. In this moment, March’s “heroic will” is made manifest; he has “no ties” and “no chains.” The effect of the expert returns, as the past-tense voice evaluates and rewrites the terms of the literary culture.

The term “free lance,” divided into two words rather than compounded or hyphenated according to nineteenth century norms, speaks to the autonomous nature of the job description, as well as its roots in a discourse of the heroic. The etymology of the term exposes these ties to heroism, for the term “free lance” (often spelled “freelance” or “free-lance”) was coined by Sir Walter Scott in Ivanhoe to describe a knight who quite literally had a free lance. By the late nineteenth century, the term was used more generally to mean, “Relating to, of the nature of, or designating work which is not done as part of one’s permanent or long-term engagement by a single employer, but which constitutes an assignment for a particular employer, or may be offered to prospective employers or clients.” A Hazard of New Fortunes gestures at the significance of heroic

189 Howells expresses this idea in thematic terms early in the text when he interprets a painting of a train in motion: “Do you see how the foreground next the train rushes from us and the background keeps ahead of us, while the middle distance seems stationary? I don’t think I ever noticed that effect before. There ought to be something literary in it: retreating past and advancing future and deceitfully permanent present.” Ibid., 34.


191 The reasoning for this shift in meaning is not discussed in the OED.
independence, but the novel simultaneously frames this impulse as a dream that has no place in a realist novel.\textsuperscript{192} The double meaning of the words \textit{ties} and \textit{chains} further underscore the gap between dream and “reality.” Both can be associated figuratively with captivity, but both can alternatively connote linkage or interpersonal connection, as in family ties or a chain letter. Exaggerated authorial escapism is not an option for Basil, for even his image of freedom is attached to the consumer marketplace. His ability to make a living as a freelance writer grants him imagined independence and, in his fantasy, he is still married with children, still responsible to provide for his family, still inextricable from the economic and social constraints that so aggressively affect his consciousness.

The daydream episode highlights the central idea that Howells’s middle men are not merely members of the bourgeoisie but are also implicated as collaborators constructing authorship’s cultural meaning. March accepts his supposedly required compromises, but the novel records the signs of social change all around him. Howells’s conceptual project, however, goes further. By replacing the author figure with the editor figure, he enters a more general conversation about agency and social responsibility. \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes} repositions the central subject from the escaping author to the compromising literary middle man and, in the process, redefines the terms of both. Howells’s model of progress sees unmediated change as something to be feared, something to be managed, and something that warrants supervision. As with “The Editor’s Study,” Howells depicts an editor whose expertise and authority become a mandate to engage with the threat of social upheaval, manage conflict, and take part in

\textsuperscript{192} Georg Lukács argues that the identity achieved by an author writing a novel is comparable to godliness in a world typified by existential crisis. He suggests that the fundamental irony of all novels rests in the “freedom of the writer in his relationship to God, the transcendental condition of the objectivity of form-giving.” In the nineteenth-century context, where the advancement of the sciences of psychology, biology, and sociology renders traditional theism problematic, the novel becomes the site where “God is to be found in a world without God.” The writer is thus part God, and part demon challenging God’s authority. A novel’s hero often serves as the mouthpiece of this defiance. Georg Lukács, \textit{The Theory of the Novel} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 92.
the perpetual work of self-revision. This model encapsulates the Ehrenreichs’ definition of the professional-managerial class and extends that model to the unique public identity of Howells’s editor figure.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to establish William Dean Howells as an author and an editor figure engaging with collaborative systems to shape his public image. Because of Howells’s high public profile, his efforts to establish a public identity between author and editor also had an impact on widespread ideas about authors and editors more generally. The critical concepts of character and personality represent a useful way to flesh out the idea of the editor figure and historicize Howells’s efforts to accrue and exchange economic and symbolic capital. They help explain some of Howells’s motives in writing regular columns for three magazines, prefaces for thirteen books, and several essays on the publishing industry during the 1890s. The concepts also situate *A Hazard of New Fortunes* as a set of position-takings invested in complicating editorial and authorial identity. Throughout this chapter, I have also gestured at some of the collaborative practices that allowed Howells to stake out his particular position in the field of cultural production, including his friendships and professional relationships with Henry Mills Alden, George William Curtis, J.W. Harper, and James R. Osgood.

For the most part, however, I have allowed the focus of this chapter to remain with Howells as a distinct individual with a distinct public image and have shown, by implication, how dependent on interactive and collaborative systems his position-takings must have been. I see this as the first step to establishing the idea of collaborative momentum as related to but distinct from direct collaborations such as co-authorship. In my next chapter, I want to put more pressure on my dissertation’s central idea by taking up an iconic if not widely known instance of literary co-writing: Willa Cather’s agreement with editor and publisher S.S. McClure in 1912 to serve as ghostwriter for his
serial autobiography. My goal in analyzing this act of cooperative authorship will include an analysis of the details of their partnership, but I also want to situate that labor within the collaborative systems of debt and repayment as they functioned in the early decades of the twentieth century.
CHAPTER II

RECIPROCITY AND THE “REAL” AUTHOR:

WILLA CATHER AS S.S. MCCLURE’S GHOSTWRITER

I am indebted to the cooperation of Miss Cather for the very existence of this book.

S.S. McClure, *My Autobiography*

Introduction

The acknowledgements section of S.S. McClure’s *My Autobiography* (1914) lists Willa Cather as one of ten individuals whose influence on the publisher, editor, and entrepreneur called for a formal display of public recognition. The full list includes his mother, his wife, his college mentor, three former employers, and four former employees and colleagues. In the sense that McClure recognizes “the people and institutions that, in various ways, helped the author, write, prepare or produce his book,” this paratext performs the function of any acknowledgements page. What is not typical of Cather’s place among nine other individuals is the particular labor she performed.

Willa Cather, a former *McClure’s* editor who had established a national reputation as a novelist by 1913, was the ghostwriter of McClure’s *My Autobiography*. His acknowledgements section is one of several bibliographic indicators that the first-person voice of the “real” S.S. McClure is identical to the first-person narrator of the autobiography’s narration. The very act of recognizing Cather for her assistance helped codify the idea of McClure as solitary author and reduced her role to that of a helper or supporter. Meanwhile, McClure’s inscription of Cather’s personal copy of *My

---

1 *Paratexts*, 211. In the context of an autobiography, such prefatory matter might attempt to show gratitude toward those who had significant impact on the autobiographer or the autobiography. Assistance could take the form of “moral, emotional, or financial support” or more direct collaboration. *Ibid.*, 212.
Autobiography states: “With affectionate regard for the real author.” What McClure could indicate privately to Cather he could not publish in his acknowledgements. Instead, by gesturing at the unprintable, the acknowledgment expresses twin impulses to highlight and to obscure the full extent of the ghostwriter’s labor.

Further, McClure does not merely thank Cather. He expresses indebtedness. The difference between the two is subtle—so much so that one is often confused for the other—but significant. Gratitude can be defined as a feeling of appreciation or recognition; indebtedness constitutes “a state of obligation to repay another.” Leon Jackson’s recent study of antebellum authorship adds clarity to the importance of McClure’s sense of obligation. He argues that the American writer’s late nineteenth-century transition from “amateur” to “professional” was more importantly a transition from one type of economy to another. In embedded economy, exchanges served to “convey goods and money from one party to another” and “create and sustain powerful social bonds.” The rise of a national market economy produced a disembedded literary marketplace that was “less personal and less trusting, less flexible and less sustained.”

He enlists Karl Polanyi’s analysis of a “great transformation” by which embedded economies, instead of disappearing, became subordinated within a market-dominant system. “Instead of the economy being embedded in social relations,” Polanyi states,

---


5 Ibid., 3.
“social relations are embedded in the economic system.” Jackson does not dwell upon the precise nature of authorial relations in culture where practices of personal trust and loyalty, such as those between Cather and McClure, remained vital but operating subordinate to a dominant market economy.

Scholars focusing on Cather and McClure specifically have laid the groundwork for such an analysis. Sharon O’Brien’s biography of Cather is perhaps the dominant reading. She emphasizes that her coming-of-age required outgrowing her role as “the deferential daughter to two fathers”: Henry James (her aesthetic father) and McClure (her professional father). To move from McClure’s editor to a novelist of national significance, Cather had to outgrow this relationship. McClure initiated a “complex emotional and psychological drama” that “prolonged her apprenticeship.” Robert Thacker’s work on Cather and McClure offers a competing narrative. He argues that Cather’s “gift of sympathy” was the major force behind her role as ghostwriter—“That is, she wrote it as a favor and out of gratitude for all he had done for her since their first meeting in 1903.” He argues that the experience of subordinating her writing style in favor of McClure’s first-person voice was critical in the formation of her “autobiographical realism,” which is a major presence in Cather’s fiction.

---


7 McClure biographer Peter Lyon does much to establish the details of McClure’s debt spiral. His mentions of Cather are occasional and abbreviated. They comprise perhaps fifteen pages of the 433-page book.


9 Ibid., 289.


11 Ibid., 124.
have also written articles connecting Cather’s ghostwriting to aspects of her literary persona or oeuvre.¹²

My analysis of McClure and Cather is premised on the notion that a better understanding of the generative force of reciprocity can offer a unique way of thinking about their literary collaboration. In this sense, I share an overall compatibility with Thacker’s argument, but I want to expand this chapter beyond the formation of Cather’s literary aesthetic into the arena of book studies by focusing on their positions relative to authorship in a market-driven, professional context. As such, I want to subject the idea of owing to more analytical pressure than any of Cather’s critics have previously done. Reciprocity in this case straddles distinctions between economic and symbolic capital. My focus therefore includes McClure’s boom and bust financial record, his tendency to borrow in order to expand, and his multiple brushes with bankruptcy, in conjunction with his actions as a favor-trader, reputation-builder, and broker between systems of capital. Likewise it includes Cather’s connection to McClure from a financial perspective and her personal ties to the publisher and his legacy. I conclude by focusing on how *O Pioneers!* (1913), *My Ántonia* (1918), and *The Professor’s House* (1925) revisit the idea of indebtedness in increasingly nuanced ways.

By extending Jackson’s work to this case study, I am also trying to be responsive to Christine Haynes’s critique of “the historicist turn in literary studies” in *Book History*’s 2005 “State of the Discipline.”¹³ The trend, she argues, has “done little to advance our understanding of the history of authorship but has, in fact, often served to perpetuate the Romantic notion of genius it purports to critique.”¹⁴ She recommends that book historians

---

¹² I will return to these additional scholars when I begin my section on Cather’s fiction, as their readings are most relevant to that subject.


¹⁴ Ibid.
pay “more sustained attention to the historical record” and trace the norms and practices that characterized authorial labor and identity. My chapter, in response, traces the debts and repaysments that led McClure to undertake an autobiography, in tandem with the systems of favor trading and reciprocity that brought Cather to the project as ghostwriter. I will offer a detailed analysis of the collaborative labor that ushered the autobiography from conception to magazine serialization to book publication, a process in which the boundary between authorial and secondary literary labor is somewhere between murky and meaningless. Precisely because indebtedness between Cather and McClure progressed from direct collaboration to symbolic repayment, this case study offers a way to re-approach questions about collaborative authorial labor and its role in constructing a notion of author as solitary genius.

In this chapter, I argue that McClure’s economic borrowing and repayment pervades the story of his rise and fall as a public figure but does not explain major aspects of his collaboration with Willa Cather. Namely, a purely economic analysis cannot account for the fact that Cather refused payment for her role as a ghostwriter, nor can it explain Cather’s use of the ghostwriting exchange as a recurring motif in her later fiction. An analysis of indebtedness framed against my previous discussion of symbolic capital, however, can address these questions, especially if such an examination appreciates ghostwriting itself transforming but not yet fully transformed into a market-dominant set of norms. In the field of large-scale production, embedded exchanges such as the agreement between Cather and McClure occurred against the backdrop of a nationalized market but in a sheltered subculture where credibility and loyalty predominated. I argue that collaborative systems of economic and symbolic reciprocity led Cather to weave ideals associated with embedded exchange into McClure’s autobiography and her later

15 Ibid.
fictions. Their cooperative labor, therefore, converted a distinct notion of the past into a form of cultural and narrative currency.

**Reciprocity and Authorship Studies**

Having laid out a basic distinction between gratitude and indebtedness, let me establish a closely related distinction between debt and indebtedness. While the terms can be used interchangeably in everyday circumstances, their respective definitions emphasize two discrete qualities. Debt primarily describes the owing of specific assets such as money or property and implies an objective basis for repayment, often adjusted for interest and codified with a calendar of repayment. For instance, in 1908, McClure owed John S. Phillips—his best friend since college who had cofounded *McClure’s Magazine*—$75,000 associated with Phillips’s departure from McClure’s publishing enterprises. Indebtedness, the feeling of owing associated with systems of giving and receiving, tends to occur only when some aspect of the exchange crosses the boundaries of economic exchange into symbolic capital. Good will, trust, assistance, and sharing instill in their recipients a desire to reciprocate, which is fundamentally distinct from an economically codified system of borrowing and repaying. Personal loans, mortgages, bonds, and futures were designed to restrict emotional involvement in favor of the profit motive and backed by contractual assurance, not trust. Eventually, McClure paid off his debt to Phillips, but his feelings of indebtedness to his lifelong friend did not diminish.

For the purposes of this essay, I will maintain a steady distinction between these two terms.

Concepts such as gratitude, debt, and indebtedness are all associated with a body of sociological and anthropological work on the nature of gift exchange. While Marcel

---

Mauss’s early work on the social pressures that enforce reciprocity is integral to all gift theory, Lewis Hyde’s more recent work is much more relevant to the Cather and McClure’s friendship.\cite{17} Hyde devalues gifts given because of obligation: “We cannot really become bound to those who give us false gifts,” he states. “And true gifts constrain us only if we do not pass them along—only, I mean, if we fail to respond with an act or an expression of gratitude.”\cite{18} For Hyde, gifts that matter transcend the confines of transactional thinking and empower the giver and recipient to share a spiritual experience.

The labor of gratitude is the middle term in the passage of a gift. It is wholly different from the ‘obligation’ we feel when we accept something we don’t really want. (An obligation may be discharged by an act of will.) A gift that has the power to change us awakens a part of the soul. But we cannot receive the gift until we can meet it as an equal. We therefore submit ourselves to the labor of becoming like the gift.\cite{19}

Hyde establishes the conceptual framework in which gift giving, even in a late capitalist society, engenders powerful sustained relationships between participants. Indebtedness within this context speaks to a deep connection between people who have shared the experience of the gift that lies well beyond a socially mandated expectation of reciprocity.\cite{20}

\begin{itemize}
\item \cite{17} Marcel Mauss, author of \textit{The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies} (1924) and gift theory’s first major practitioner, provides foundational analysis of the seemingly voluntary nature of gift giving, which masks a powerful social obligation to reciprocate \textit{The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies} (New York: Routledge, 1990), 3. Of particular interest: “What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?” Ibid., 4. Mauss argues that self-interest motivates reciprocation in pre-modern cultures; ignoring obligations associated with reciprocation will result in a loss of authority, prestige, and the spiritual “talisman” that creates wealth and authority Ibid., 11. By analyzing the basic pressures that ensure equitable gift exchange, Mauss hopes to provide an archeology of “the nature of human transaction” and to reveal that “this morality and organization” still exists “below the surface” of societies ostensibly organized around capitalist and contractual exchange Ibid., 4, 5.
\item \cite{18} Lewis Hyde, \textit{The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World} (New York: Random House, 2007), 91.
\item \cite{19} Ibid., 65.
\item \cite{20} Pierre Bourdieu’s work on symbolic capital is also relevant to my analysis. Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as prestige or credibility, but his understanding of this broad concept includes social capital,
\end{itemize}
McClure’s Debt Spiral and My Autobiography

Following McClure’s lead, reviewers of My Autobiography consistently described a self-sufficient Irish immigrant’s meteoric rise from anonymity to prominence. An advertisement for the book called it “one of the most romantic and typically American stories ever told.” In 1882, McClure graduated from Knox College (Illinois) penniless and unknown. By June of 1885, he had established one of the nation’s first newspaper syndicates that distributed short stories and novels in serial form to newspapers. As Charles Johanningsmeier has shown, these syndicates reached more American readers than did books and magazines. In 1893, amid a national financial panic, McClure used profits from the syndicate to found McClure’s magazine, a monthly that would have an average net monthly circulation of 361,912 at decade’s end in 1900. Additionally, McClure was widely credited with pioneering the Muckraking Era of American journalism. His staff included Ray Stannard Baker, Lincoln Steffens, and Ida Tarbell. In 1906, the editorial staff staged a now-infamous mutiny over McClure’s irresponsible business practices, his wild managerial style, and a scandalous extramarital affair. Phillips, Baker, Steffens, and Tarbell left to found The American Magazine. McClure was left to rebuild his operation nearly from scratch. The magazine, however, enjoyed another decade of increasing circulation and critical success. As late as 1913, for example, Professor Albert Frederick Wilson was writing for the New York Times, “McClure’s has

credibility among peers or within social networks, and cultural capital, credibility as conveyed institutionally by measures like degrees, certifications, and awards. Economic capital, in contrast, describes money, or objects with hard monetary value. Symbolic capital acts as a “‘credit’ which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees ‘economic’ profits,” especially in a cultural institution like literary production, where credibility is in fact the primary currency by which value is attributed (Field 75).


23 Lyon, Success Story, 251.
come back.” The magazine was “gathering tremendous momentum” and was “significant” as a “study in modern magazine editing.” McClure’s autobiography seemed aptly timed to celebrate McClure’s achievements.

As McClure’s biographer Peter Lyon and others have noted, however, McClure was at the cusp of a personal and financial crisis when he began making plans to serialize an autobiography. After the staff break-up of 1906, McClure struggled with mounting financial burdens. To raise enough money to buy John S. Phillips and Ida Tarbell out of McClure’s he had to borrow almost $200,000. McClure was, if anything, overly accommodating with his former partners. He wrote one financial backer (also a Knox classmate) Robert Mather that losing his editorial board was “the greatest tragedy in my life thus far.” Further, McClure was confident that the magazine could “increase its profits immediately between $100,000 and $200,000 a year.”

He soon found that his estimates were sorely inflated; worse, he was not free to act on his instincts as he had in the past. Three trustees were assigned to watch over his financial decisions until the sum was entirely repaid. In addition, the company was saddled with a massive financial burden in the form of a printing plant in Long Island City that Phillips and Oscar Brady (former business manager) had purchased. Hoping to

---


26 $187,000 according to Lyon’s account. Lyon, *Success Story*, 291.


28 Ibid., 4.

29 The trustees were Robert Mather, Frank Doubleday, and Josiah Quincy Bennett. For more information, see Lyon, *Success Story*, 312.
free the business from its trustees, at least, McClure wooed Harold Roberts, head of the foreign department of the American Tobacco Company, into the business. Roberts agreed to purchase Tarbell and Phillips’s company shares and all other available shares of stock and was given the title of general manager and treasurer. But Roberts schemed to bankrupt the company. He “spent money lavishly on purpose and had so arranged our payments as to make it impossible for us to go on.” Roberts’s plan was discovered and McClure “escaped a very great danger.” But his efforts to free himself from his financial constraints had in fact made the company’s situation worse than it had been after the initial split with Phillips and Tarbell.

McClure’s debt spiral continued. In March 1908 McClure took on more debt in order to buy Roberts’s shares. He made a deal with John G. Luke of West Virginia Pulp and Paper to borrow at a sixteen percent interest rate. The deal placed all McClure stock into trust with West Virginia Pulp and Paper and required the McClure Publishing Company to buy its paper from its new benefactor. By April 1908, according to Lyon, McClure had “never been deeper in debt.” Cameron Mackenzie, who had come to McClure’s from The Sun after the 1906 staff break-up, stepped into the role of general manager and treasurer. Mackenzie had also married McClure’s daughter by this time. In November of the same year, McClure finally unloaded the Long Island City printing plant for $70,000 and sold his book publishing to Frank Doubleday. By 1911, circulation

---

30 Roberts apparently talked McClure into a horrible arrangement. If, after twelve months, Roberts wanted to part ways, McClure would be obligated to buy back the stock.

31 S.S. McClure to Harriet McClure, 4 April 1908, McClure Papers.

32 Ibid.

33 Lyon, Success Story, 313–319. The sixteen percent rate was derived from the following formula: six percent interest, plus a ten percent bonus because of the emergency nature of the loan.

34 Ibid., 320.

35 Cameron Mackenzie to Harriet McClure, 6 April 1908, McClure Papers.
and advertising figures had increased, but the company owed more than $50,000 per year in interest alone.\textsuperscript{36} Another financial reorganization, designed to alleviate the company of its unsustainable monthly costs, created McClure Publications, Inc. and left McClure essentially powerless within the company.\textsuperscript{37} Frederick Collins, secretary of the Crowell Collier Publishing Company, became chairman of the newly formed McClure Publications, Inc. Cameron Mackenzie was named secretary.\textsuperscript{38}

In May 1912, McClure was forced into a final agreement that ousted him from the magazine entirely. In April, he wrote Knox College President Thomas McClelland that he would sadly miss commencement: “I just avoided bankruptcy a few months ago with great difficulty.”\textsuperscript{39} He planned to rejoin Mrs. McClure in Europe and bring her to the German spa town of Nauheim. McClure’s lawyer Roberts Walker, possessing power of attorney in McClure’s absence, signed a contract guaranteeing McClure $10,000 a year, along with a nominal editor title. The deal barred McClure from using “his name in connection with any periodical publication” except a newspaper “for a period of twenty years”; he could not edit a competing magazine “nor contribute articles in any publication under his own name.” Further, “his right to the use of the name ‘McClure’ in connection with publications” belonged exclusively to McClure Publications “for use in connection with any publication that it may at any time own or publish.”\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{36} Meaning McClure’s debt had increased to more than $312,000.

\textsuperscript{37} In the initial deal, McClure was promised $500,000 of second preferred stock. This amount was eventually reduced to $250,000, a meaningless gesture apart from the insult it conveyed, for stock was structured to pay dividends if profits from the magazine increased, which never occurred. McClure was named as a vice president of the new company, but Collins and Mackenzie soon used his indebtedness to leverage McClure out entirely. For more information, see Lyon, \textit{Success Story}, 335–336.

\textsuperscript{38} Articles of Agreement, 14 May 1912, McClure Papers. This May 1912 contract refers to the original reorganization (27 September 1911) that stripped McClure of his authority and gave control to Collins. It also lists McClure’s indebtedness at $750,000 as of 1 January 1912. Collins had also served as editor of the \textit{Woman’s Home Companion}, a Crowell publication.

\textsuperscript{39} McClure to McClelland, 3 April 1912, McClure Papers.

\textsuperscript{40} Articles of Agreement, 14 May 1912, McClure Papers.
The agreement left McClure financially destitute and saddled with numerous financial dependents. His expenses far outweighed his income, and much of the debt he had accrued trying to rehabilitate his magazine fell on his shoulders personally. He was barred from using his name in connection with another magazine. According to Lyon, the new editors of *McClure’s* (including Cameron Mackenzie) proposed that McClure hire someone to write the autobiography for serial publication. They would assign a price to the memoirs and pay that sum to the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company to reduce the debt that had become McClure’s in the latest financial reorganization. Any proceeds associated with a book version of the autobiography would go entirely to McClure.

The autobiography was therefore a project born out of financial and personal obligations. But it was also connected to a cycle of symbolic owing and repayment that helps explain Cather’s cooperation.

**Indebtedness and Cather’s Cooperation**

The chain of events that led McClure to enlist Cather as a ghostwriter cannot be fully understood without an appreciation of loyalty, trust, and credibility as a form of currency distinct from but connected to economic capital.

Otherwise it might register as merely ironic that many of Willa Cather’s career opportunities corresponded with McClure’s financial woes. After graduating from the

41 Lyon, *Success Story*, 341.

42 McClure wrote to McClelland, “It will be some time before I shall be able to send any more money to Knox College. The money due for interest up to the present time I shall have to pay in notes.” McClure to McClelland, 4 April 1913, McClure Papers.

43 Lyon, *Success Story*, 342.

44 Although my chapter has already quoted from several letters and documents from the McClure collection at Indiana University’s Lilly Library, the following analysis of Cather’s disposition toward McClure quotes from Cather letters never before excerpted in print. This archival material has been blocked from publication until very recently. According the Willa Cather Literary Trust: “Since Willa Cather’s death in 1947, the executors of her estate have been bound by restrictions established in her will, including a ban on
University of Nebraska in 1895, Cather worked as a journalist in Pittsburgh. In 1901, she took a job as a high school teacher. Two years later, in 1903, she traveled to New York and met with McClure for “two hours of a fine spring morning.” He invited her to stay at his home while he talked of placing her short stories in *McClure’s* and *Harper’s* and publishing a short story collection on her behalf. Cather wrote to Will Owen Jones, who had helped arrange the meeting, “At ten o’clock last Friday I was not much afraid of street car accidents and things, but when I left the office at one I had become worth saving.” McClure, she said, had a “genius … for proselytizing” and an ability to make Cather feel important: “He takes hold of you in such a personal way that business ceases to be a feature of your relationship with him.” Three years later, in 1906, she was still working as a high school teacher in Pittsburgh and was an occasional contributor to the magazine. Then came the editorial break-up. Baker, Phillips, and Tarbell vacated the office in April 1906. Cather was behind a desk in *McClure’s* New York offices by May.

McClure first offered her a job as a staff writer, but she ascended quickly to the position of managing editor. In June 1906, she wrote to Pittsburgh to say she would not return in the fall. By 1907, she was confident enough to evaluate her colleague Mackenzie as “the best thing which could have happened to our office” and add “and I know whereof I speak.” Sharon O’Brien emphasizes the degree to which Cather “felt the publication of her letters and the adaptation of her works into other mediums. However, under the terms of the same will, these prohibitions expired upon the death of her nephew Charles Edwin Cather, who died March 14, 2011.” It is my belief that direct quotation of these letters only augments the case of mutual indebtedness as I describe it.

45 Cather to Will Owen Jones, 7 May 1903, Papers of Willa Cather 1899-1949. Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

46 Ibid., Cather Papers.

47 Ibid., Cather Papers.

48 Cather to McClure, 17 January 1907, McClure Papers.
rejuvenated by McClure’s sorcery” and that “this renewal endured” for several years.49 But even she maintains that Cather’s emergence as self-reliant novelist was a direct result of the process by which she separated from the man and his magazine, beginning with a leave of absence in Fall 1911. Writing the autobiography, she argues, was a chance for Cather to reverse their roles: “the great crusading journalist, the dictator who commandeered so many writers, was acknowledging that she was the better writer, relying on Cather to tell the one story he should have been able to write himself.”50 Cather’s role as editor in other words—whether primarily a boon, an obstacle to her literary career or, more likely, a complicated mixture of the two—was in part created by McClure’s unpredictable business practices.

Whatever the precise nature of their relationship—professional, fatherly, or a deep friendship—they had a powerful connection. When McClure needed someone to he could trust to perform a difficult task, he usually looked to Cather. Early in her tenure, for example, he sent her to Boston to revise and fact-check the series that eventually became The Life of Mary Baker Eddy and the History of the Christian Science Church (1909). From Boston, she wrote to McClure: “I was feeling far from well when I left New York, and I brought your good letter along with me to give me courage. I have read it over many times since I have been here and take great comfort in it. It does help me so much to feel that you trust me and feel such an interest in the work I am trying to do.”51 In 1909, he sent her to England to buy fiction for the magazine. He wrote, “I am awfully proud of your splendid work in Europe. Things are looking mighty fine here for an extraordinary lot of stuff.”52 Such issues are significant because, in the context of

49 O’Brien, Willa Cather, 289.
50 Ibid., 296.
51 Cather to McClure 17 January 1907, McClure Papers.
52 McClure to Cather, 19 June 1909, McClure Papers.
embedded exchange, efforts to repay create additional layers of indebtedness. From the outset Cather said McClure had “so encouraged and strengthened me that I feel as though I want to do well almost as much for him as for myself.”

James Woodress’s definitive biography of Cather twice describes her departure from McClure’s as an “escape.” Framing Cather’s departure from McClure’s in this way, however, ignores the fact that she remained very much entwined with McClure and the magazine from 1911 to 1913. Withdrawing to Cherry Valley, New York, in the initial autumn of her departure in 1911, she corresponded regularly with McClure. McClure visited Cherry Valley in early November, and Cather sent drafts of her first novel Alexander’s Bridge to McClure and the magazine. She serialized the novel as Alexander’s Masquerade in McClure’s from February to April, 1912. She also wrote several articles for the magazine during this period. Her essay “Three American Singers” was the cover piece for the December 1913 issue of McClure’s, which also included the third installment of My Autobiography. Only after McClure’s dealings with the magazine ceased did Cather truly extricate herself.

Cather’s gesture—offering to ghostwrite the autobiography without charging a fee for her services—was meant to minister to McClure’s economic and emotional wounds. Although it is true that Cather told McClure in an April letter she would be glad to assist him with the autobiography, the project took on added urgency when McClure was ousted. McClure’s dismissal took place when Cather was traveling on vacation

53 Cather to Will Owen Jones, 7 May 1903, Cather Papers.

54 Willa Cather: A Literary Life (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 213, 229.

55 Letters refer to the manuscript simply as “Alexander.” It was published as a book under the title Alexander’s Bridge. Tom Quirk, in University of Nebraska’s scholarly edition of the novel, notes: “Cather never referred to her novel as Alexander’s Masquerade; apparently this title was the invention of the editorial staff at McClure’s.”

56 Cather to McClure, 22 April [1912], McClure Papers.
throughout the Southwest (and gathering material for what was to become *The Song of the Lark*.) As a result, her knowledge of the situation was somewhat confused but, by June of 1912, her letters convey an understanding that McClure had been forcibly removed and was in dire financial straits. “It makes me not only mad but very mad, fighting Irish mad, to have you tormented and devilled about money like this,” she wrote. “You never tormented anyone else like this.” 57 The letter suggests Cather’s belief that the credit McClure extended to others should be reciprocated. Three days later, in a longer and more informed letter, Cather volunteered to work on the autobiography without monetary compensation. She would save him, at least, “the cost of a good stenographer” and would have a “purely personal interest” in the project. 58 She adds: “I think I could do it better and would feel more zest in the doing of it, if there were no question of payment at all. You have done more favors for me than a few, and I should like to have the opportunity to do a small one for you.” 59 Cather uses the rhetoric of reciprocity and the idea of a small favor in a context of many large favors to minimize not her role in the production of the autobiography but the amount McClure would owe her after her work was finished. 60

Despite Cather’s efforts to minimize her role in the autobiography, the collaboration points to a deep sense of indebtedness between the two figures. The characteristics of such indebtedness include a mutual sense obligation and the fact that

57 Cather to McClure, 9 June 1912, McClure Papers.

58 Cather to McClure, 12 June 1912, McClure Papers.

59 Ibid.

60 Later in the same letter, she says she “was never more willing about a piece of work” but warns McClure that she might not be able to “catch step” and “write the articles in the way you wish them written.” As an example of a project’s tendency to “sing one tune” to one person and another tune to someone else, she mentions her work on the Eddy articles. Such a reference suggests a kind of conceptual shorthand between the two figures but also conveys a stray note of indebtedness Cather feels toward McClure after failing, in her eyes, to produce the Eddy narrative to McClure’s expectations. Ibid.
efforts to repay, rather than erasing past debts, engender deeper emotional ties. Cather felt that she owed something deep and indescribable because of the confidence he had shown in her so many years before. She accepted no salary for her role as ghostwriter because, to her, the act transcended financial quantification. McClure owed Cather something equally indescribable for her years of service as a trusted employee. After she had ghostwritten his autobiography, though, McClure had yet another reason to feel indebted to Cather.\textsuperscript{61} What he owed was difficult to repay because the essence of what he owed could not be measured in numerical terms. If Cather had assigned monetary value to her labor, the same would not be true.

**Ghostwriting and Collaborative Authorship**

The history of ghostwriting in the United States unfolded approximately parallel to the disembedding of American authorship as Jackson describes it. Two factors, however, make its early roots and development as a professional practice particularly difficult to trace. First, the very nature of ghostwriting is secretive. While it is true that speech writers and autobiographical collaborators (especially in the contemporary context) often take credit for their work, the full extent of ghost labor runs from understated to utterly shrouded. According to Phillip Lejeune, in the case of ghostwritten autobiographies, the presumed author’s signature forms the basis of what Lejeune has termed “the autobiographical pact.” The presence of a ghostwriter threatens this unspoken guarantee of authenticity. Further, ghostwriters “cast suspicion, no doubt legitimately so, on the rest of the literature,” for a ghostwriter’s convincing imitation of another person’s subjectivity “reveals the secrets of fabrication and functioning” of

\textsuperscript{61} Indebtedness rather than debt led Cather to become McClure’s ghostwriter but, in fact, it would be simplistic to emphasize what Cather owed McClure without contextualizing such a debt amid the many layers of mutual indebtedness between them. First, as O’Brien points out, McClure benefitted greatly from Cather: “In contrast to writers who kept evading and deserting him, Cather was admiring, steadfast, and loyal.” O’Brien, *Willa Cather*, 289.
autobiography itself.\(^6^2\) Second, and certainly related, is that the word *ghostwriter* is a recent addition to the English language. According the *Oxford English Dictionary*, by 1884, the word *ghost* was being used to describe “one who secretly does artistic or literary work for another person, the latter taking the credit.”\(^6^3\) While a 1920 article for *The Editor* titled “The Ghost Writer and His Story” paired the two words *ghost* and writer, the first published use of the compound term, as a hyphenate, was in 1927.\(^6^4\) This etymological transition period is significant in that it gestures to a moment when ghostwriting was becoming an institutional practice.

The labor associated with ghostwriting is ancient. According to Jennie Erdal, “it might almost qualify as the oldest profession on earth if prostitution had not laid prior claim.”\(^6^5\) In the ancient world, many individuals with messages to convey were not literate. The Roman *scrittori* or public scrivener was paid “to prepare manuscripts for the poorer classes” and translate or copy manuscripts for “foreigners, the nobles and often the priests.”\(^6^6\) Writing first-person letters to loved ones *on behalf of others*, sometimes for pay, was widespread through the nineteenth century. Ghostwriting transformed a widespread cultural practice to a market-driven profession. By the time the word *ghostwriter* came into public usage, the hack writer or penny-a-liner’s practice of generating material to be published under another public figure or writer’s name was well established. “The Ghost Writer and His Story” (1920) signals this fact, as the article’s author refers to ghostwriting as “one of the most profitable fields for the free lancer and

---


\(^{64}\) Magazines were eliminating the hyphen by the following year. See *Vanity Fair* 29.4 (1928): 59.


\(^{66}\) Christopher Greenleaf, “The Roman Scrivener,” *Sartain’s Union Magazine of Literature and Art* 4, no. 6 (June 1849): 395.
the hack writer.”67 Rollin Lynde Hartt in a 1933 article for The Bookman likewise tells of her induction into the profession “back in the dwindling nineties” when a clergyman engaged her to “English” his log book.68 Hal D. Steward, in a 1970 volume titled The Successful Writer’s Guide, noted that ghost writing had now “become a respectable occupation.”69 The emergence of the words ghostwriting and ghostwriter, then, points to the increasing institutionalization of ghost labor, rather than the inception of the practice the words describe.

Circa June of 1912, when Cather agreed to work on McClure’s autobiography, ghostwriting had yet to see the public recognition of a compound noun and verb. However, the category of employment was becoming fixed and developing a standardized set of norms and practices. Cather’s work for McClure corresponds with several of these conventions. Foremost, ghostwriters differentiated between turning notes or spoken material into a narrative, versus preparing material to be signed by an ostensible author. Hartt, critical of the distinction, writes, “When you do the talking and I do the writing, what harm? But when I bring you something all my own and you sign it, oh, scandalous!”70 The two best descriptive sources for Cather’s role in the autobiography are Edith Lewis’s memoir on Cather and a 1944 letter from Cather’s longtime secretary, Sarah J. Bloom, to the literary critic Edward Wagenknecht, who wrote of Cather and McClure in Cavalcade of the American Novel (1952).71 Lewis and Bloom share the memory of McClure coming to Cather’s New York apartment on

68 Rollin Lynde Hartt, “Ghost Writing,” The Bookman 76, no. 3 (March 1933): 222.
70 Hartt, “Ghost Writing,” 224.
71 For more on these sources, see Thacker 128-130. He quotes both at length.
multiple occasions. They share the sense that McClure spoke at length while Cather listened, taking no notes. Cather would write down what she remembered only after he left.

Cather, like most ghostwriters, was committed to the pretense of a ghostwritten project, a kind of visible invisibility that went further than keeping her role in the autobiography away from the reading public. She articulated a strong commitment to capturing an accurate sense of McClure’s voice in her depiction. Lejeune explains that ghostwriting an autobiography typically involves dividing authorial labor into two jobs: writing and remembering. The model is “reduced to the state of source,” which allows “memory to take over.” The interview-writer, in turn, controls plotting, ordering of events, what to summarize, and what to omit. Rather than imposing a voice, however, the ghostwriter opens him or herself to “a double exercise of pastiche” between “the image of life floating in the memory and spoken word of the model, and the narrative forms that are currently on the market.” Consistent with Lejeune’s baseline, Cather told Jones that writing “through a man’s memory” and “in the first person” was severe training. “I tried so very hard to give his exact impressions in his most characteristic language and with his nicest feeling.” A letter from Cather to McClure’s wife from late 1913 or early 1914 suggests that Cather valued Mrs. McClure’s approval of her work. Cather wrote, “Your feeling about the autobiography has given me more satisfaction than anything connected

---

72 Cather was open about her role when questioned directly by personal or professional insiders. In May of 1914, the very month that the autobiography finished its serial run in McClure’s, She wrote to her former employer Will Owen Jones that she had enjoyed working on the autobiography. (A final installment of fan mail related to the autobiography appeared in the June 1914 issue, but May concluded Cather’s ghostwritten text.)

73 Lejeune, On Autobiography, 188.

74 Ibid., 189.

75 Ibid.

76 Cather to Will Owen Jones, 20 May 1919, Cather Papers.
with the writing of it or the reception of it, though the reception has been such a warm one.”77 Years later, she also remembered fondly that Phillips, McClure’s former classmate and business partner, also felt she had done justice to McClure’s voice.78

Cather’s reasons for valuing her anonymity and success at embodying McClure, of course, went beyond a sense of vocational pride. As she indicated to McClure in her initial acceptance of the ghostwriting role, Cather felt a need to do justice to the task before her. Compared with Hartt or now-known ghostwriters of this period, Cather was atypical because she was a former editor of McClure’s and because she agreed to write the autobiography not as a disinterested professional but precisely because of her close personal ties to McClure. In a disembedded exchange, the ghostwriter performs a service for a fee and can divest him or herself of weightier obligations. A careful timeline of the collaboration only underlines this point. While scholars cannot determine the precise moment Cather and McClure began their work, it is known that the visit took place after Cather returned to New York in late 1912. That the first installment of the autobiography was typeset in August 1913 establishes a hard end date, but we can push this date back to mid-July, for McClure wrote to lecture agent Lee Keedick and his brother Robert that he was sailing for a two-month stay in Europe on Saturday, July 13.79 Further, McClure traveled several times in the winter and Spring, and Cather took time in April 1913 to read page proofs of her second novel O Pioneers!, released in June. In a July 7 letter, McClure told Robert that he was “terribly tied up yesterday in the forenoon on the

77 Cather to Harriet McClure, 12 December 1913, McClure Papers.

78 “I succeeded so well that Mrs. McClure and Mr. Phillips, his partner and schoolmate, wrote me that it seemed to them a perfectly convincing presentation of him as a boy and young man, and that the sentences themselves had the abruptness and suddenness characteristic of him.” Cather to Will Owen Jones, 20 May 1919, Cather Papers.

79 McClure to Robert McClure, 7 July 1913. McClure to Keedick, 8 July 1913, McClure Papers.
autobiography” and had “to get down to Miss Cather’s today by 9 o’clock.”\textsuperscript{80} As McClure’s deadline approached, in other words, Cather cleared her schedule for him.

Further, McClure’s son-in-law, now editor of \textit{McClure’s} (and vice president of McClure Publications, Inc.) wrote to McClure in May to report, “I have told Miss Cather that the Lakewood trip is allright, and I am lunching with her to-day to go over the scheme of illustration.”\textsuperscript{81} Two days later, he wrote again: “Miss Cather has no doubt seen you by now, and told you that the matter of illustration is now under way.”\textsuperscript{82} The letters are addressed care of Dr. Fechtig, in Lakewood, N.J. McClure had withdrawn to his sanitarium there, and Cather joined him, presumably to continue working on the autobiography.\textsuperscript{83} Cather’s role with the illustrations adds weight to the sense that her duties went beyond those of a traditional ghostwriter. Her past work for \textit{McClure’s} and her status as a trusted collaborator both potentially inform this expanded set of duties, as does the fact that McClure was not in the city.

McClure’s mention of Cather in his acknowledgements also places Cather outside the category of a conventional ghostwriter. Ghosted works tend to erase the collaborator completely or include a secondary authorial credit on the title page. Booker T. Washington’s \textit{The Man Farthest Down} (1912), for example, bears this authorial credit: “By Booker T. Washington, with the collaboration of Robert E. Park.” Maurice Evans McLoughlin’s \textit{Tennis as I Play It} (1915), which is widely purported to be a ghosted work, includes no reference to Sinclair Lewis, the purported ghostwriter. The short story

\textsuperscript{80} McClure to Robert McClure, 7 July 1913, McClure Papers.

\textsuperscript{81} Mackenzie to McClure, 22 May 1913, McClure Papers.

\textsuperscript{82} Mackenzie to McClure, 24 May 1913. , McClure Papers.

\textsuperscript{83} Dr. St. George Fechtig was a well-known Osteopath and Ophthalmologist who ran sanitariums in New Jersey and Florida. According to one advertisement, his central idea was “the milk and rest treatment.” Advertisement for Dr. St. George Fechtig, \textit{The Fra: Exponent of American Philosophy}, April 1911 (Advertising Number), xxxvii.
“Under the Pyramids” published in *Weird Tales* (1924) as a story “By Houdini,” does not make mention of H.P. Lovecraft, the actual writer. *Houdini's Escapes and Magic*, in contrast, is said to be “Prepared from Houdini’s Private Notebooks and Memoranda with the Assistance of Beatrice Houdini, Widow of Houdini, and Bernard M. L. Ernst, President of the Parent Assembly of the Society of American Magicians.” Ghostwriter Walter B. Gibson is listed as the book’s author. McClure’s particular combination of acknowledging Cather openly without giving her collaborative credit is uncharacteristic of her particular role. McClure’s preface seems to point instead to a professional need to hide Cather’s role and a personal desire to thank her publicly.

**McClure’s Autobiography by Installments**

Even compared to the relatively small amount of scholarship on Cather and McClure, there are surprisingly few close readings of *My Autobiography*. Deborah Lindsey Williams and Emmy Stark Zitter provide the most thorough interpretations.84 Williams offers a queer reading based upon a fundamental disparity between the text and its mode of creation: “As the text attempts to write McClure into the tradition of U.S. (male) autobiography, its mode of creation—man’s life written by a woman who is also a lesbian—deconstructs and destabilizes that tradition.”85 She adds, “Cather’s creation of a public persona for herself that closeted her lesbian identity” distinctly parallels “Cather’s position as a ghostwriter”; her “apparent invisibility” grants “power over access to secret knowledge and the power to escape definition and categorization.”86 Zitter reads Cather’s

---

84 Thacker pairs a biographical reading with analysis of Cather’s fiction. O’Brien refers to the autobiography’s text sparsely, and only in service of her argument about McClure and Cather’s relationship.


86 Ibid., 29.
ghostwriting as a component of a larger authorial project of producing a “multi-biography,” or “a written life implicit in an author’s works and capable of being deconstructed by critics.”87 She argues that Cather explores aspects of her own life through McClure’s narrative and “later draws on these motifs in her own biographically rooted fictional characters.” Her central point in reading My Autobiography has marked similarities with O’Brien’s argument: “Cather can be seen as wresting the authority and mastery over the text from her own former boss, who becomes as insubstantial as one of Cather’s fictional characters in the hands of the animating spirit behind his life story.”88

My close reading of the autobiography departs from Zitter’s by resisting an interpretation informed primarily by a power struggle. I endorse Williams’s point about an important parallel between Cather’s lesbian identity and the idea of a ghostwriter, but my argument turns to book studies to question the power dynamics associated with that manufacturing or repackaging a public persona while simultaneously erasing the very labor that produced it. Charting the narrator of My Autobiography, I refer often to “Cather’s ghost” as a way of representing this erased collaboration, but I want to avoid the temptation to divide the text into discrete categories associated with McClure and Cather respectively. By close reading the serial autobiography’s bibliographic and linguistic codes, I will show the degree to which the autobiography narrates McClure’s ostensible success as a product of embedded exchange, or, more pointedly, as a result of collaborative momentum. The autobiography has traces of an individualistic narrative and a collectivist counter-narrative, but the end result blurs these two elements, ostensibly to account for McClure’s personality.


88 Ibid., 291.
As I have begun to show, an abundance of archival material suggests that McClure and Cather conceived of and produced the autobiography with an eye toward its serial publication in *McClure’s*. McClure owed money to the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company, which his autobiography was meant to help pay. The new editors of *McClure’s* owed a conceptual or symbolic debt to McClure’s past labor, for the McClure brand was inextricably linked with its creator and his celebrity. Cather’s role as a ghostwriter came about because of her past employment with McClure’s and her friendship with her former employer. Her professional and personal ties to McClure and the magazine also informed her work planning illustrations for the serialization. Yet these details do not find their way into the autobiography. Neither Mackenzie nor the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company are mentioned. Cather’s name appears once, in the serialized autobiography’s epigraph: “I wish to express my indebtedness to Miss Willa Sibert Cather for her invaluable assistance in the preparation of these memoirs.”89 In contrast with the book version’s prefatory mention, this epigraph singles out Cather, but her role as ghostwriter was neither labeled as such nor further described. Nor is she a character in McClure’s life story.

At first glance, in fact, *My Autobiography* appears to be a typical story of an individual’s cultural assimilation and financial success. Upon closer analysis, it is very much a narrative of personal and professional indebtedness. A reading of the serial version of the text in conjunction with its bibliographic codes solidifies this point. *My Autobiography* offers two intertwining interpretive frames: McClure as a solitary individual and McClure as someone born of professional connections and personal loyalties. The serial version of the autobiography, in particular, treats individual dynamism and cooperation as currencies that had to work in tandem with each other for

the McClure syndicate to succeed. A parallel can be drawn between the narrative’s individual-collective dichotomy and the socially constructed relationship between economic and symbolic capital. Like economic capital, individual zeal has purchasing power; it motivates risk-taking, borrowing, speculative labor, and investment. Cooperation requires and bolsters trust. It creates an inner circle that invariably produces symbolic capital for its members and central figure. Credibility, in turn, can motivate additional monetary risk-taking.

The text’s autobiographical dualism is evident from the first page of the serial (October 1913), which accentuates ties between the magazine and its founder (Figure 2.1). A masthead typography “McClure” with a superscript c and additional spacing between Mc and Clure differentiates the McClure brand from the historical person’s surname, but the proper name S.S. McClure unites each instance. The possessive proper noun McClure’ and the possessive pronoun My augment this association and further invite readers to conflate the magazine’s brand name with the personality who founded it, the person who ostensibly authored his life story. These associations do not tell the full story of mutual indebtedness between McClure and the magazine’s new editors, but they do gesture at the enormous interpretive power of the serial autobiography to rekindle the sense that this magazine owed an indescribable debt to McClure and the countless others who had contributed to his ostensible success. Bibliographic codes frame the narrative as an explanation of the magazine’s origin and editorial personality.
The duality of the text—which can be at least partially attributed to Cather’s ghostwriting—is reinforced by autobiography’s generic elements. As Lejeune has argued, an autobiography derives its narrative tension from a basic distance between “self then” and “self now.” The degree to which Cather’s ghost negotiates this gap can often account for the autobiography’s complexity and literary-ness. As a result, humanistic individualism permeates the genre. The I pronoun may narrate any number of collective acts, but its basic grammar creates an epistemological center with supporting characters in its orbit. Conventional autobiographies are therefore also narratives of self-examination. They are often written at the end of a person’s life to accentuate or evaluate a series of noteworthy actions, admirable accomplishments, or tough decisions. Some
offer to provide detailed perspectives on known events or sets of events. Alternatively, some express a desire to tell unknown stories, call attention to issues, or effect political changes. In any case, the text offers a performance of reflection or, what Judith Barrington calls *musing.* By this I mean to suggest that genre is “an invitation to form”—to use Claudio Guillen’s often-quoted phrase—while simultaneously, publishing industry professionals, reviewers, and general readers are likely to internalize expectations. Genre, of course, being only one of many expectations that might act upon a reader.

This thesis, antithesis, synthesis formula is consistent with Philippe Lejeune’s assessment of the autobiography’s basic effect: reconciling a known personality with a swirl of fragmentary experiences. McClure the boy, McClure the student, McClure the immigrant, McClure the peddler, and McClure the editor—narrative fashioning renders coherent the otherwise fragmentary episodes of human experience and “gives each person,” writer and reader alike, “the opportunity to believe that he is a complete and responsible subject.” An autobiography holds in suspension and eventually attempts to resolve a basic contradiction: that “telling the truth about the self, constituting the self as a complete subject” is a “complete fantasy.” Audience investment in the autobiographical genre depends on this temporary suspension of disbelief. The very idea

---

90 The appeal of the autobiography, in this sense, is that the reader has already heard of the author (or the experience he or she is discussing) through some primary public role. P.T. Barnum, Frederick Douglass, Benjamin Franklin, Helen Keller all wrote autobiographies within this frame.

91 Douglass published the story of his escape from slavery with the hope that it would make abolition more likely. He revised and expanded his autobiography throughout his life. These subsequent rewrites suggest a more reflective autobiographical motive.

92 For an explanation of musing, see Judith Barrington, *Writing the Memoir* (The Eighth Mountain Press, 2002).


95 Ibid., 131–132.
of a true self is problematic, but, “once this precaution has been taken, we go on as if we did not know it.”96 That said, audience approval—the evaluation of a pleasing or displeasing autobiography—is often a question of the degree to which the main character and narrator resemble (or come to resemble) a known persona, and the comprehensiveness with which narrative addresses the known events in the autobiographical subject’s life. The autobiographical pact heightens expectations for resemblance.97 A form of ironic symbiosis exists, in other words, between the autobiography’s production history and generic category. The genre often takes a collective self and generates unity; the ghost supplies a subtext of collectivity to counter the illusion of unity.

Cather’s direct and sparse writing style delivers an understated yet romantic account of McClure’s life.98 McClure immigrates to the United States—a “young country for Youth”—and discovers Virgil, Carlyle, and Emerson.99 His business acumen, according to the autobiography, stems only from his zeal for adventure and novelty. His “dream” to run a butcher shop is shattered, and the “adventure” of peddling coffee pots gives way to the realities of poor sales.100 As editor of the Knox College newspaper, McClure describes himself as a risk-taker acting primarily on instinct. His

96 Ibid., 131.
97 By Lejeune’s standard, if we doubt that the narrator is the author is the protagonist, we no longer read the narrative before us as an autobiography: “Autobiography does not include degrees: it is all or nothing” (13).
98 When McClure was nine, his widowed mother settled near her two brothers outside of Valparaiso, Indiana, so McClure also considered himself a child of the Midwest. McClure’s story invokes the Horatio Alger myth and, to quote Christopher Wilson, the Progressive Era trope of “a new editor or publisher, characteristically an immigrant … or a regional ‘outsider’ … trained outside the established gentry and literary circles of the Gilded Age” breaking “into the enterprise of words by introducing a new fascination for office rationalization, efficiency, and expertise.” Wilson, The Labor of Words, 19.
100 Ibid., 55, 107.
commencement oration discusses enthusiasm and lasts “exactly five minutes.” He explains why he resigned his editorship of the Wheelman: “I could not edit a magazine where I shared the authority and responsibility with another man.” McClure’s independent nature and his restless enthusiasm comprise the root characteristic of his personality and the driving force that eventually explains his success readings the codes of a capitalist society and working them his advantage.

Meanwhile, the narrator offers consistent appreciation for cooperative labor. When McClure sells takes to the rural roads to sell coffee pots, he draws his brother John into his “restless and disintegrating orbit”; their venture, however, comes to a conclusion when John refuses to “peddle another day.” Similarly, McClure had Albert Brady at his side when he works as a traveling microscope salesman the summer of his junior year. My Autobiography consistently pairs an anecdote of McClure’s zealotry with a show of friendship or loyalty. In this sense, My Autobiography shares an important element with The Americanization of Edward Bok (1920) as Glass interprets it. In this editor’s autobiography, Bok “builds his own identity out of the metonymic traces of … other, more illustrious authors.” Whereas Bok’s public image emerges from “the contradiction in the performative practice of personality”—namely an eccentric, third-person narrator—McClure’s identity is dualistic precisely because of collaborative labor that authored him.

101 Ibid., 135.
102 Ibid., 160.
103 Ibid., 102, 112.
104 Glass, Authors Inc, 43.
105 Ibid., 47. Although Glass does not emphasize this point, Bok’s public image could be seen as the result of collaborative momentum in a sense quite similar to the case I have made for Howells’s.
The serialization’s combination of illustrations and photographs—with respective documentarian and myth-forming representational modes—adds to the narrative’s interplay of individualism and indebtedness (Figure 2.2). Photographs of McClure at various ages, his family members, and places significant in his life story add to the text’s autobiographical pact.

Figure 2.2: An example of a page pairing an illustration (top left) of McClure reading as a young boy with a photograph (bottom right) of Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. “My Autobiography” Installment 3, McClure’s Magazine, 41.8 (December 1913): 98-99.

The first installment, in particular, uses no drawings and eight family photographs, as if to affirm the narrative’s commitment to truth telling. More specifically,
photographs of Irish ancestors and the house in Frocess where McClure was born affirm the subgenre of immigrant autobiography. This rapidly growing subgenre tended, in William Q. Boelhower’s words, to produce “identity as cultural fusion.”

From his humble beginnings in a “two-room stone house, with an earth floor and a thatch roof” in Ireland, to a young school boy who “never tired of” his math and history lessons, to a young entrepreneur with preternatural business acumen, the ghost effortlessly straddles a generic identity somewhere between assimilationist autobiography and the rags-to-riches narratives of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Beginning with the second installment, drawings by Frederic Dorr Steele are interspersed with McClure’s autobiographical photographs. Steele was a well-known magazine illustrator of the period who was appearing in McClure’s simultaneous to his depiction of Sherlock Holmes for an Arthur Conan Doyle short story in Collier’s. Steele’s style and preference for depicting the young McClure, frames the autobiographical speaker as an inquisitive, enthusiastic dreamer. The serial’s second installment begins with an illustration of McClure as a boy. He lies flat on his stomach and reads a book by the light of a small window (Figure 2.3).

---


107 “My Autobiography” Installment 1. McClure’s Magazine 41.6 (October 1913): 34, 39.
This image recalls a motif of Cather’s invention: a tendency to describe McClure’s enthusiasm using metaphors of light and heat. “When I wrote my [graduation speech on enthusiasm]” the autobiography states, “I had a clear picture in mind … of a man out in the open on a dark night, and before him, on a hilltop, a light shining. Between this man and that light there were woods and brambles and sloughs and marshes and deep rivers. But the man who so unconscious of all this that it seemed to him he could already put out his hand and touch the light. This kind of man, I felt, would in some
fashion get what he started out for.” In this extended metaphor, the man with enthusiasm transcends darkness and a hazardous path to reach illumination. Subsequent depictions describe light, heat, and electricity as elements embedded in McClure’s consciousness. One of Steele’s sketches on the facing page portrays McClure and his brother John walking by the light of the moon between two towns in rural Indiana, an event described in the narrative seven pages earlier. As a result of this bibliographic code, the figures become associatively linked not only to the McClure’s days as a peddler but also to the central metaphor of his graduation speech.

\[108\]

Steele’s illustrations collectively highlight the autobiography’s iconic qualities. They invite readers to pay attention to the places where McClure strikes out to find adventure or pursue some untested novelty. Yet, as in the image of McClure and his brother walking, McClure is seldom alone. *My Autobiography* portrays McClure as a brilliant risk-taker who inspires loyalty but cannot succeed without his friends’ support. As editor of the *Knox Student*, for example, McClure faces a veritable coup d’état and escapes only because one of his friends comes to his aid. Some of the students had made “a motion to depose me” but, when “Albert Brady got up and announced that he had been
empowered to vote twenty-six proxies, the meeting went no further.”

Brady’s gesture shows his loyalty to McClure, but his ability to vote twenty-six proxies suggests both Brady’s willingness to corral others on McClure’s behalf as well as a connection to an unseen public as the symbolic roots of McClure’s power.

Granted, these are the tenets of a hierarchical relationship. McClure is the hero, and Brady is a lackey. Yet McClure’s individualism, his mythic self, cannot function without figures like Brady, his brother John, and most significantly, Cather. What the Brady anecdote renders symbolically is made overt in the autobiography’s later chapters: that McClure’s enthusiasm matters because it was rooted in some instinct that only perpetual motion or the energy of a crowd of strangers could awaken. Yet, this very inexplicableness made his enthusiasm irresistibly transmittable. Describing his syndicate years, the narrator says, “I never got any ideas sitting still.”

As editor of McClure’s Magazine: “I had but one test for a story, and that was a wholly personal one—simply how much the story interested me. I always felt that I judged a story with my solar plexus rather than my brain; my only measure of it was the pull it exerted upon something inside me.”

As Cather’s ghost indicates, McClure saw himself as a kind of everyman, an editor whose ability to read the populace contributed to his success.

Lincoln Steffens’s autobiography repeats and exaggerates this aspect of McClure’s self-image by recalling a time when McClure took a quick glance at one of Steffens’s manuscript reviews and tossed it into a waste basket. “All I ask of you is whether you like it or not,” McClure said. “I want to know if you enjoy a story, because, if you do, then I know that, say, ten thousand readers will like it. If Miss Tarbell likes a

---

109 Ibid., 124–125.
110 Ibid., 182.
111 Ibid., 204.
thing, it means that fifty thousand will like it. That’s something to go by, but mostly I go by myself. For if I like a thing, I know that millions will like it.”

Cather’s ghost similarly praises McClure’s longtime literary editor Viola Roseboro’ for her “singularly open mind toward the manuscript bag” and advocated for her choices “with as much sureness and conviction as if she had known what the end was to be in each case.” Early on, Cather saw in McClure that quality of contagious zeal that comes across in the ghostwritten autobiography. She once told her former mentor and Will Owen Jones, editor of the *Nebraska State Journal*, “If he were a religious leader people would go to the stake for him.” Her comparison to a religious figure is double-edged, for prophets and charlatans alike inspire such loyalty. Her comment stands as an interpretation of McClure’s root nature in an infant form: unpredictable enthusiasm with an undeniable allure.

McClure’s frenetic personality explains why he was so willing to take exaggerated financial risks and make grand gestures of faith or confidence in the people he believed in. “My qualifications for being an editor were that I was open-minded, naturally enthusiastic, and not afraid to experiment with a new man. The men I tried did not always make good; but when they failed it never hurt anybody, and when they succeeded it helped everyone concerned.” Such actions can return economic and symbolic dividends, but, despite its ostentatious, individualistic overtones, loyalty

---


115 When seeking an editor worthy to refine the Mary Eddy Baker biography into a coherent, publishable account, McClure found in Cather the most suitable candidate, although, as she prepared to ghostwrite McClure’s autobiography, she told her former employer that she never felt she had lived up to his expectations for the Eddy project.

generated and reciprocated is the only thing that makes the system function. The regenerative capacity of McClure’s boom and bust formula depends on the ease with which he pivots between expressions of economic and symbolic capital. My Autobiography reports that Rudyard Kipling once said, “McClure, your business is dealing in brain futures.” Like Cather’s religious metaphor, Kipling’s line has a double-edged nature. It expresses McClure’s investment in and appreciation for the human mind, yet it also framed McClure as ultimately not that different from a stockbroker or a speculator. Only the commodity is different. Cather’s ghost integrates the metaphor with ease and, in so doing, contributes to the conversion of McClure’s entrepreneurial personality into a non-monetary version of itself. Whatever reputation for finance McClure earned was merely a product of his enthusiasm’s various forms.

To elaborate, Cather’s ghost speaks of McClure’s “wide acquaintance with writers” as his “real capital” when he “founded Mcclure’s Magazine without money.” When talking about the syndicate, he uses the word scheme with no negative connotation. McClure shows no consternation when discussing money: “I started to go to college with fifteen cents in my pocket; I went to Boston to get a job with $6 as my whole capital; I was penniless when I founded the syndicate.” Discussing McClure’s Magazine’s inception, he says syndicate matter was “a great fund of material to draw from.” (208). To go beyond the autobiography, Lyon indicates that McClure titled a sixteen-page prospectus for the Century Company, “Schemes to bring in the ducats,” a turn of phrase that “must have grated on the genteel sensibilities” of Roswell Smith and Century Editor

118 Ibid., 234.
119 Ibid., 254.
120 Ibid., 208.
Richard Watson Gilder, according to Lyon. This prospectus led Smith to dismiss McClure but also included the idea that led McClure to found the McClure Syndicate.

To the extent that My Autobiography produces a unified self, it does so by crafting the story of a maverick enthusiast whose ability to see and appreciate potential empowers him to invest in ideas and people. Those people, in return, invest money, trust, and labor in McClure’s vision. In a manner parallel to the way economic capital and symbolic capital can be exchanged for one another, embedded and disembedded systems of owing and repayment work in tandem. In 1894, for example, when McClure’s magazine neared financial collapse, John S. Phillips convinced his father to mortgage his house in Galesburg to and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who had benefited greatly from McClure’s generous purchases of work for McClure Syndicate, loaned McClure a sum of $5,000—according to the autobiography, “He believed in the magazine and in me.” In turn, monetary debt can lead to indebtedness. Phillips’s monetary expression of loyalty, or Doyle’s numerically calculable act of trust, can produce further loyalties and a deeper sense of sentimental indebtedness, expressed in this instance in the form of retrospective narrative gratitude; McClure’s autobiography not only recognizes but publicizes these acts and therefore participates in the very regenerative cycle it attempts to depict.

The autobiography tells of how McClure “corresponded with a number of colleges, and got up and printed a pamphlet” called The History of Western College Journalism. Using inclusion as a lure, he garnered unpaid submissions from area colleges, then “went to the public library” to look over “the advertising in all the big magazines.” He wrote to prime likely advertisers and “got advertising enough to make a

---

121 Lyon, Success Story, 49.
123 Cather and McClure, My Autobiography, 216, 217.
small sum of money.”\textsuperscript{124} The monetary reward, however, is not the point of the tale. “One of these advertisements,” McClure secured from “the Pope Manufacturing Company,” which formed the basis for McClure to go to Boston after graduation and get a job in one of Pope’s rinks teaching people to ride bicycles.\textsuperscript{125} McClure’s zeal made an impression and led Pope to instill trust in the newcomer. Sufficiently impressed with McClure, Pope tapped the recent college graduate to edit \textit{The Wheelman}, a new monthly magazine devoted to bicycling.

McClure’s gumption earned him the job, but his capacity to carry it out owed directly and indirectly to his friendships. McClure had little magazine experience; in college, “they were too expensive to buy.”\textsuperscript{126} While visiting Phillips’s house, however, he had come upon a copy of \textit{Century} at the beginning of the serial run of William Dean Howells’s \textit{A Modern Instance}. McClure “followed it to the end with an intense interest.”\textsuperscript{127} His familiarity with \textit{Century} led McClure to recall that the magazine had published a piece on bicycling, “A Wheel around the Hub.” He proposed \textit{The Wheelman} reprint this article, and Pope sent him to New York to buy the stereotype plates. These plates dictated \textit{The Wheelman}’s entire typography, for the lead article had to match the rest of the magazine. It had the “\textit{Century} idea of makeup throughout.”\textsuperscript{128} Whatever McClure felt he owed Phillips for the exposure that introduced him to Howells and the \textit{Century} (the autobiography’s mention suggests gratitude, at minimum) spread outward into a more conceptual indebtedness to the Century Company. This exchange was somewhat reciprocal, for McClure generated profits for an otherwise valueless piece of

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 136.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 136–137.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 149.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 150.
the *Century* archives and paid a very public homage to the monthly magazine and bolstered its credibility in the process. Much more directly, McClure “talked to Colonel Pope about John Phillips and my own brother John, and he told me to go ahead and send for them.”\(^{129}\) They all worked together and “lived in one room somewhere in Boston.”\(^{130}\) Perhaps McClure’s feelings of appreciation motivated his nepotism, but his friend and brother’s assistance with the magazine no doubt created additional layers of indebtedness.

These regenerative codes of owing and repayment account for how McClure secured a job with the Century Company after quitting the *Wheelman*, how he was able to found his newspaper syndicate from a position of relative anonymity and failure, and how the collective labor of McClure and his associates generated *McClure’s Magazine*. To begin, when McClure left *The Wheelman*, he went to New York, where Roswell Smith gave him a “cordial welcome” and “talked to us as if he were an old friend.”\(^{131}\) This gesture in itself illustrates how symbolic capital can extend the status of a trusted friend to a professional insider. Roswell Smith used his connections to set McClure up with De Vinne Press, at $25 per week and extended Mrs. McClure a job with Century Dictionary for an addition $15 per week.\(^{132}\) Finding “everything about the work” distasteful, McClure soon moved to the Century Company but found he had traded in the feeling of “a man in prison” for the “imprisonment in office routine.”\(^{133}\) He describes his firing as an act of generosity: “Mr. Smith called me in, and said he didn’t think I would ever get very far working for the Century Company; that I did not seem to be fitted to work to

\(^{129}\) Ibid.

\(^{130}\) Ibid., 156.

\(^{131}\) Ibid., 160.

\(^{132}\) Ibid., 161.

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 163, 164.
advantage in the offices of a big concern.” He mentions his severance package and Smith’s offer to take him back if he could not find a new position. McClure adds: “This was certainly a generous proposition.” The autobiography downplays McClure’s dismissal, in other words, and emphasizes the degree to which McClure’s personality traits made him ill-fitted for a subordinate position. Roswell Smith merely forces McClure to realize his potential. The exchange, as a result, leaves McClure feeling indebted to the person who dismissed him, a sentiment that was palpable enough to earn Smith mention by name in McClure’s acknowledgements.

Going further, the autobiography describes the syndicate converting symbolic capital to economic capital in order to gain momentum. The syndicate’s depended on a basic participatory Catch-22. An author’s confidence could come only from his or her belief in the syndicate’s ability to sell work for attractive prices, and an editor’s confidence could come only from the belief that McClure had already secured high quality authors. Either, if already established, would ensure the other. McClure’s letters to authors represented editor cooperation and predetermined, and his letters to editors, likewise, boasted that authors the likes of had already signed on. The autobiography reports “cool” replies from editors but “immediate and enthusiastic replies” from authors, for authors has little to lose by sharing material with a business that met a basic threshold of trustworthiness and promised to secure increased prices for

\[134\] Ibid., 165.

\[135\] Ibid., 166.

\[136\] A rising system of professional communication allowed McClure to create the illusion that he was more established than he really was: “If I were going to launch a new venture, I had, of course, to have a New York address.” Ibid., 167. McClure and his wife lived in the New York apartment but represented it as the syndicate’s business address. They launched the syndicate by sending letters to editors and authors, so the illusion of a well-funded, New York establishment could remain intact. The entire process was enabled by a postal system that allowed direct communication with newspapers and authors but did not yet demand signifiers of professionalization such as typewritten correspondence and professional stationery.
written work. For the first story he sold, McClure reports paying H.H. Boyeson $250, while payments from newspapers yielded only $200. After selling new work, McClure “paid Boyeson part of what I owed him, and lived on the rest, paying him a little more, as I could.” In other words, McClure’s method functioned because his authors tolerated becoming debtors while McClure remained in perpetual debt:

Week after week and month after month I fell short in this way, and got deeper into debt. I got along by paying authors $10 or $20 on my account. I paid out little less than I collected, and my actual working capital was the money I owed authors. I made no secret of this, and the men who wrote for me were usually willing to wait for their money, as they realized that my syndicate was a new source of revenue which might become very profitable to them. And it did.

The borrowing and repayment system that made the syndicate succeed invested in authors who showed promise. Many of McClure’s writers had little or no status or consumer appeal but could, if supported, grow reputations that would eventually drive profits and bolster the syndicate’s legitimacy retroactively. Hence, McClure could take credit for discovering Doyle, Kipling, Stevenson, and others, despite the fact that they were published elsewhere before he bought stories from them. Successful sales to newspapers encouraged other newspapers to buy stories, and the idea of McClure’s success produced monetary gain. The entire enterprise was an exercise in speculative debt trading, a near-Ponzi scheme that produced the commodities it initially claimed to represent. McClure’s sleight of hand, however, could only work because his enthusiastic nature allowed him to invest without restraint in the future he imagined, which allowed him to harness the renewing power of debt and repayment.

The autobiography balances McClure’s seemingly mystical foresight by framing his labor against an emotional struggle and by crediting much of his success to good

137 Ibid.
138 Ibid., 169.
139 Ibid.
fortune. “I was sure enough of the idea, but I was not sure that I could carry it out,” McClure states. “There seemed no chance for anything new. Surely, I used to tell myself, if the thing were worth doing, somebody would have done it before. I used to go out and look at the city,anguishing about the thing. New York looked full; the world looked full.” Despite these gestures, the narrative unavoidably underlines McClure’s prophetic nature, for his ability to take a leap of faith in the face of all his doubts only makes him seem all the more courageous and dedicated to his own identity as a visionary whose talents evade even his own understanding. The autobiography also works backward from 1913 and chooses its anecdotes based upon the assumption of a reader expecting to hear about McClure’s “adventures” with the likes of James M. Barrie, Doyle, Kipling, George Meredith, and Stevenson. The autobiography’s idiosyncrasies—abbreviated descriptions of muckraking, a surprising amount of detail pertaining to McClure’s favorite recipes—complicate this characterization, but, in each case, McClure’s unpredictable enthusiasm is the uniting element. The ghosted McClure performs its autobiographical subject’s frenetic personality with tangents on unexpected subjects.

Similarly, the autobiography attempts to recapture the air of uncertainty that surrounded the creation of *McClure’s Magazine* but does so with due deference to the established fact of the magazine’s success, and without ever mentioning McClure’s recent ousting from his magazine. The autobiography reports that the McClure syndicate, “after eight years” was “only $2800 ahead.” McClure used syndicate profits (and material previously published by the syndicate) to make his magazine and drew upon John S. Phillips’s $4,500 investment. The autobiography emphasizes that McClure founded the magazine during the Panic of 1893: “There was certainly never a more inopportune time to launch a new business. … How to keep alive was the question. Small

140 Ibid., 171.
141 Ibid., 208.
businesses were being wiped out every day. There were weeks when I used to look in the paper every night to see whether we were posted in the list of bankrupts.”142 In this moment of crisis, Phillips convinced his father to mortgage the family house in Galesburg, and Conan Doyle loaned McClure $5,000 at a critical moment. McClure began 1896 with a debt of $287,000 but was realizing profits of $5,000 a month by that time, the implication being that *McClure’s Magazine* came to exist because of its ability, like McClure himself, to manage and benefit from economic debt and indebtedness. The magazine was, after all, an extension of McClure’s personality: “I usually forgot my financial anxieties, even when we were in our direst straights, in the pleasure I always got out of the editorial end of my work—hunting new ideas and new writers, and, as it were, introducing them to each other.”143 In monetary terms, the magazine was teetering on the edge of financial failure, yet McClure’s enthusiasm, according to the autobiography, was a kind of reserve capital that allowed the publication to thrive.

This example summarizes succinctly the way in which *My Autobiography* narrates renewal through owing, both economic and symbolic. The two currencies work in tandem with each other to promote regeneration precisely because one can be traded in for another when the time is right. Here again, intraconversion informs my analysis of the collaboration. Money can generate credibility without the appearance that credibility has been purchased, and credibility can lead to financial profits without the credible party needing to soil his or her reputation by appearing too transactional. But I have alluded to McClure’s autobiography not merely as a book about owing but as a book with renewing energy unto itself, born out of dynamic nature of owing and repaying. If, in *My Autobiography*, the central conflict is McClure’s unpredictability, resolution comes from the idea that whatever chaos his editorial staff had to endure was the price for a dynamic

142 Ibid., 214.
143 Ibid., 212.
and culturally significant set of enterprises. By narrating a series of “loans” and “payoffs,” the autobiography becomes a kind of extended gratitude narrative and even further, an act of reciprocation. The public shared story of indebtedness is, in a way, the gift repaid. Embedded in the autobiography, in fact, in an anecdote that emphasizes the degree to which narrating an achievement adds value to it. McClure admits to “a desire to set forth modestly our own triumphs” when preparing his history of Midwestern college journalism, but that modest desire speaks to a much deeper assumption about the relationship between labor and narrative.\(^{144}\) To realize its full significance, a deed must be narrated, even when codes of secrecy prevent that deed from being stated explicitly. In the case of McClure’s autobiography, the ghost portrays McClure’s indebtedness and simultaneously attempts, in its own way, to begin to repay.

### Indebtedness and Reciprocity in

*My Ántonia* and *The Professor’s House*

Several scholars have established connections between experience as ghostwriter and her fiction. Thacker traces overt retellings of the autobiographical exchange in “Ardessa” and “Her Boss,” two short stories authored in the immediate wake of the ghostwriting project but published in the twenties. Thacker credits the ghostwriting for the emergency of Cather’s autobiographical realism, particularly in *My Ántonia* and *The Professor’s House*. Similarly, as Susan J. Rosowski notes, the autobiographical impulse pervades *The Song of the Lark* (1915).\(^{145}\) Johanningsmeier suggests that Cather’s close

\(^{144}\) Ibid., 136.

\(^{145}\) Susan J. Rosowski, *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather’s Romanticism* (U of Nebraska Press, 2001), 63. Cather eventually (and famously) criticized this novel by quoting and agreeing with William Heinemann’s rejection letter to her. He said she had succumbed to the “full-blooded method, which told everything about everybody”; according to Heinemann, this was “the wrong road”; according to Cather, “too much detail” is an excess “apt … to become slightly vulgar.” Willa Cather, “My First Novels, There Were Two,” in *Willa Cather on Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 96.
ties to McClure make he and his wife the likely prototypes for Mr. and Mrs. Henshawe in Cather’s *My Mortal Enemy* (1926). Zitter connects the autobiography to Cather’s later work through her concept of multi-biography. Williams generalizes that Cather, “over and over again, both in her fiction and in her public descriptions of herself as a writer … portrays herself as a listener whose writing is merely an artless transcription of what she heard—as if she is always ghostwriting someone else’s story.” Guy Reynolds links Cather’s role as ghostwriter to “the immediacy of a voice” in her later work that “seems to readers to be a guarantee of authenticity.” Cather’s work for McClure and *McClure’s Magazine* created a distinct model for creating connections between journalism and her literary texts.

Likewise, I argue that the cycle of indebtedness I have been discussing did not end with Cather’s role as ghostwriter. Although several scholars have already shown that Cather’s fictions recall the collaborative project, I show that they also reflect the cycle of owing and repayment that led up to it. Scenarios pervade where kinship leads to literary production and exchange, where indebtedness motivates action and reaction, and where reciprocation provides comfort but not closure. In other words, while a historical record of private and professional reciprocities suggests the renewing effect of owing and repayment, so, too, do the form and content of Cather’s most significant literary works. Reading Cather’s narratives as nuanced “reciprocity texts” indicates a significant structural attribute of the U.S. publishing industry during this period (and perhaps later), for only in a culture of disembedded exchange can embedded and disembedded owing


147 Williams, “Hiding in Plain Sight: Willa Cather and Ghost Writing,” 3.


149 Ibid., 6.
and repayment can turn collaborative labor into a textual form of intraconversion. The
owing and paying cycle that motivated McClure to produce an autobiography and
informed Cather’s role as ghostwriter crosses not only from “editor” to “author” but from
interpersonal action to narrative framing.

To illustrate how Cather’s formal and thematic treatment of indebtedness
exemplifies the collaborative momentum that is the focus of my dissertation, I will
provide a pointed reading of three key scenes in Cather’s oeuvre, all revolving around
owing, and all intended to show how indebtedness forms a significant presence in the
author’s post-ghostwriting oeuvre. The first of these scenes—from *O Pioneers!*—
provides a pre-ghostwriting and straightforwardly disembedded portrayal of debt. *My
Ántonia*, in contrast, offers embedded exchange as its central framing device. *The
Professor’s House* amplifies the connection between narrative structure and exchange by
making it the only explanation for the novel’s most significant act of formal
experimentation.

In *O Pioneers!* debt is decidedly disembedded, which is to say it is governed by
market practices and requires no trust or personal ties. A third-person narrator
establishes that the protagonist Alexandra Bergson, a Swedish immigrant, has a special
affinity for the land, confidence in its potential to thrive. She is the eldest of four children
and her terminally ill father’s favorite; as a result, she stands to inherit a leadership role
from him. The narrator notes that John Bergson spent the first part of his life “getting

---

150 Cather drafted the manuscript in the fall of 1912, only a few months after she had agreed, in principle, to
collaborate with McClure on the autobiography without taking payment. McClure suggested the pair spend
a few months in London working on the autobiography but Cather declined. She was confident, she told
McClure in [June?], that she could work on the autobiography and her fiction simultaneously.

151 Interpretations of *O Pioneers!* have largely focused on Cather’s feminism, her queering of sexuality in
the novel, her treatment of European immigrant groups, and her ecocritical aesthetic. See D. Laird, “Willa
Cather’s Women: Gender, Place, and Narrativity in *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia*” (1992); Helen Wussow,
“Language, Gender and Ethnicity in Three Fictions by Willa Cather,” *Journal Article by Helen Wussow;*
*Women and Language* 18 (1995); B. Rundstrom, “Harvesting Willa Cather’s Literary Fields,”
into debt” and had finally gotten out of it, while others on the prairie—bad farmers, according to Alexandra—had managed to fall permanently into debt during the same fruitful period. Alexandra chooses to buy up as much land as she can, and her decision ultimately pays off. The novel’s principal conflicts arise when Alexandra’s childhood friend Carl returns from Alaska. The two oldest of her three brothers presume they will marry, which would allow him to take over the property. Meanwhile, Alexandra’s youngest brother Emil tries to keep at bay his sexual attraction to a young Bohemian woman Marie, who is married. In a moment of weakness they act on passion and consummate their attraction. Frank discovers them entwined post-coitus and murders them in a blind rage. The novel closes with Frank’s imprisonment and Alexandra deciding to marry Carl.

Cather completed the bulk of this novel before the most significant work of ghostwriting had taken place. As a result, the scene in which the novel’s protagonist decides to take on a mortgage provides a baseline to read later texts. In the wake of her father’s death, Alexandra decides to wager heavily on her belief that the land can grow and prosper. She hatches a “scheme” to borrow for six years and purchase “upwards of 1,400 acres.”152 She tells her brothers, “It’s not the principal I’m worried about, it’s the interest and taxes. We’ll have to strain to meet the payments. But as sure as we are sitting here to-night, we can sit down here ten years from now independent landowners, not struggling farmers any longer.”153 Oscar and Lou, the two oldest of her brothers, are incredulous; they press Alexandra to explain her confidence. “I can’t explain that,” she says. “You’ll have to take my word for it. I know, that’s all. When you drive about all

---

152 Willa Cather et al., *O Pioneers!* (University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 65.
153 Ibid.
over the country, you can feel it coming." Alexandra’s self-assuredness recalls McClure on the hilltop, apprehending that light in the distance as something well-within reach.

Alexandra’s idea of debt is disembedded in two important ways: foremost, debt is justifiable precisely because it is impermanent. Borrowing is a means to an end, and Alexandra’s plan for positive results involves a fixed end date. Secondly, Alexandra’s conception of debt depends completely upon pre-existing market practices, institutional norms. Consistent with today’s classic definition of investment logic, debt is merely a dollar value and, when repaid, its significance expires. Underlining this feature of debt in *O Pioneers!* is the fact that Alexandra articulates her “scheme” to buy up land at the end of Book I, and, at the outset of Book II, the narrative action has flashed forward sixteen years, to a moment when the land is cultivated and thriving. Alexandra’s plan to borrow and buy has paid off, and Oscar, Lou, and Alexandra have long since divided the property into independently and holdings. Unnarrated but implied is the fact that Alexandra was successful in securing a second mortgage. The plot action excludes Alexandra going to the bank, filling out a form, or talking to a representative of her chosen financial institution. The bank functions as an invisible facilitator, a means by which Alexandra is able to invest in the future of the land and its people. This narrative absence suggests that the financial instruments are irrelevant. Alexandra for a time owes money to some unnamed bank, but she does not feel indebted to the banker who approves her loan or the institution who holds the note on her properties.

Consistent with Polanyi’s observation that no economy can completely disembed, the exchange cannot operate fully in financial terms. Alexandra’s credibility as a landowner overlaps with her role as family leader, and both roles are deeply tied to her

---

154 Ibid.

155 Or Cather’s reluctance to engage with these issues.
sex. Oscar and Lou claim their manhood makes them the true owners of the land. According to Oscar, “The property of a family really belongs to the men of the family, no matter about the title. If anything goes wrong, it’s the men that are held responsible.”

Of course, the men have no legal ground to stand on. Their sentiments are subordinate to the market exchange, backed by mortgage and deed, which makes Alexandra the landowner of record. By this time, the land has long-since been divided among them, and Alexandra is said to own her share of the land.

Alexandra faith that the land is also a form of symbolic investment. She believes the land (which is personified) will allow its homesteaders to prosper, and the means by which she articulates her faith is by investing, financially, in the property. The dollar value she risks is a manifestation of her emotional connection to the land. At no point, however, would a reader claim that Alexandra possesses $400 or $5,000 or $10,000 of faith. Alexandra’s feelings are compatible with but not reducible to market activity. Alexandra later suggests, “We come and go, but the land is always here. And people who love it and understand are the people who own it—for a little while.” Her faith in the land relative to her brothers’ doubts, in other words, is an equally embedded claim that Alexandra is the land’s most fitting steward, but this sentiment is yet again a matter of symbolic importance, not legal proprietorship. Meanwhile, Alexandra’s ideas about true ownership point to the artificiality of capitalism’s property ownership system in the face of something as large and uncontrollable as the Nebraska prairie. The market’s dominance suggests a disembedded exchange, with embedded practices persisting in a subordinate position.

---

156 Cather et al., *O Pioneers!*, 152.


158 Cather et al., *O Pioneers!*, 272–273.
In contrast to *O Pioneers!, My Ántonia* thematizes embedded exchange. The first-person narrative of Jim Burden tells of the protagonist’s travels, as a boy of ten, from the east to the prairie in the wake of his parents’ death. He lives with his grandparents and befriends their Bohemian immigrant neighbors, the Shimerdas. Ántonia Shimerda is several years older than Jim, but their relationship is coded to offer the possibility of a sexual subtext or a complicated friendship. After Ántonia’s father commits suicide, she first tries to help her brother run the homestead by working their fields. Later, she is forced to work as a hired girl in town to survive. Jim leaves town for college and eventually goes to Harvard and becomes a lawyer. Ántonia has a child out of wedlock but eventually marries a Czech farmer and has many children. Jim briefly reunites with Ántonia when they are much older and realizes they share “the precious incommunicable past.” The novel is framed by a brief introduction explaining the origin of Jim’s narrative.

This introductory framing device represents the locus of several interpretive maneuvers: it situates Jim Burden as the proper narrator, sets up the story’s autobiographical realism, and, because the unnamed author figure notes Burden’s “naturally Romantic and ardent disposition,” establishes an unreliable narrator, whose presence arguably inaugurates the experimental or modernist phase of Cather’s career.

All of these interpretive possibilities, however, hinge upon the vignette’s ability to

---


161 Cather, *My Ántonia*, xi.
convey indebtedness, for the frame introduction is centered on an example of an exchange whose systems of value cannot be expressed in monetary terms. A fictionalized author, unnamed but often presumed to be a textual version of Cather herself, encounters a long-unseen childhood friend on a train bound for Nebraska. They both live in New York but never see each other because Jim’s job as a lawyer for “one of the great Western railways” means he is “sometimes away from his office for weeks” and, the unnamed author confesses, “I do not like his wife.” The travelers discuss their mutual friend Ántonia and agree that, “more than any person we remembered … seemed to mean to us the country, the conditions, the whole adventure of our childhood.” Jim revives the author’s affection for Ántonia but also levels an accusation that initiates the novel’s plot action:

‘I can’t see,’ he said impetuously, ‘why you have never written anything about Ántonia.’

I told him I had always felt that other people—he himself, for one—knew her much better than I. I was ready, however, to make an agreement with him; I would set down on paper all that remembered of Ántonia if he would do the same. We might, in this way, get a picture of her.

The unnamed author figure dismisses Jim’s implicit criticism, but the adverb *impetuously* suggests that Jim has somehow questioned the writer’s authority and legitimacy. Her status as author and “voice of the prairie” suggests an intrinsic obligation to represent their mutual friend adequately. By initiating a contract with Jim, the author figure transfers authorial identity (expertise and authority) to her fictional male character and establishes herself as a mediator of the text. In other words, a bargain of sorts acts at once to mitigate and fulfill the author figure’s sense of indebtedness.

162 Ibid., x.
163 Ibid.
164 Ibid., xii.
If this were a disembedded exchange, the author figure would be in breach of contract but, because the agreement is an act of collaborative literary labor that claims status outside the realm of commercial production, the nature of what remains unpaid is much more difficult to quantify. Behind the “fiction” of this disavowal is the notion of “the real Cather” re-obtaining ownership of the entire text, but the “text proper” of My Ántonia as we see it is said to be Jim’s narrative, “substantially as he brought it” to the author. Roman numerals in the introduction counting down the Jim-as-narrator text’s ascending Arabic numerals add material weight to the textual fiction of Jim Burden as author and Cather as mediator. The introduction therefore recalls the preface of McClure’s autobiography formally, topically, and bibliographically.

By reenacting an exchange hinging upon unclear and not-easily-reconciled indebtedness as a story of obligation, My Ántonia’s introduction establishes that the text owes something conceptually to the ghostwriting experience. This association begins with Cather’s method of presentation. According to Thacker, the “intimate connection” Jim shares with Ántonia “had its first full textualization after Cather first listened to McClure’s story … and then, her own hand invisible in the text, recreated McClure and his experiences in My Autobiography.” Thacker, abiding by a longstanding ban on quoting Cather’s private correspondence in print, alludes to several letters in which Cather made overt connections between the two projects. In light of recent changes in

165 Ibid., xiii.

166 There is no indication the parallel between the introduction and McClure’s acknowledgements page was intentional, but Cather did want the preface to appear directly before the narrative proper, as she told Ferris Greenslet in a letter. Willa Cather to Ferris Greenslet, June 20th [1918], Harvard bMS Am 1925 (341) folder 7 of 45. Also, the fact that Cather delayed writing the introduction until after completing the rest of the book perhaps suggests its importance. By the time she sent it to Greenslet, she was also sending back 27 corrected galleys of other sections of the novel. Ibid. My thanks to Associate Professor of Digital Projects (University of Nebraska, Lincoln) and Willa Cather Archive Editor Andrew Jewell for assistance with these details.

167 Thacker, “It’s Through Myself That I Knew and Felt Her,” 128. Thacker points out that even the titles My Autobiography and My Ántonia are semiotic lookalikes.
Cather’s estate allowing those letters to be quoted, those connections warrant reiteration. To her former employer Will Owen Jones, she wrote that ghostwriting the autobiography gave her confidence to write. In the same letter, she explains that her connection to the material went much deeper: “At first I found it awfully hampering to try to be Mr. McClure all the time, but in the end it got to have a kind of fascination to work within the limits and color of that personality I knew so well. Ever since then I have had a sort of nagging wish to try the experiment again.”

Cather revisits the emotional and conceptual territory of the autobiography, reproducing the effect of narrating from a man’s first-person point of view. Thematic commonalities linking Cather’s ghostwriting experience and *My Ántonia* are only heightened by the method of presentation shared by both texts.

In *My Ántonia*, then, it is all the more significant that the introduction hinges upon a *broken* promise of reciprocity between two friends. Jim arrives at the author’s “apartment one stormy winter afternoon with a bulging legal portfolio sheltered under his fur overcoat.” Jim asks about his ostensible collaborator’s version of the story, and she must “confess that mine had not gotten past a few straggling notes.” Jim leaves the manuscript for his friend but insists, “Don’t let it influence your own story.” The introduction ends with the author’s confession: “My own story was never written, but the following narrative is Jim’s manuscript.” The narrator does not dwell on this detail nor does she express guilt over her breach of reciprocity, and the word *never*, bookended with the passive construction “was never written,” distances the narrator from the debt while

168 Ibid.

169 Cather, *My Ántonia*, xiii.

170 Ibid.

171 Ibid.

172 Ibid.
the phrase “my own” echoes and returns to the thin distinction between my as sentimental subjectivity and my as possession implicit in the novel’s title My Ántonia. The author’s rhetoric seeks to distance her from what has taken place, but the facts persist: Jim fulfills his end of the bargain, while the author figure does not fulfill hers. His warning that his friend not let his version influence her own story suggests that Jim, at least, has every expectation that she will fulfill the contract.

Alternatively, an imbalance in possession informs the fictional author’s decision to share Jim’s manuscript with her reading public. Cather resolves the debt by giving away the gift, a gesture that suggests a desire for embedded exchange. In this sense, it is significant that an established author figure passes an enthusiastic amateur’s manuscript to the public with an endorsement of its authenticity and importance. The unnamed author figure thus operates as visible publicist and invisible collaborator; the word substantially suggests any number of edits, but whatever labor has been performed as also been erased. The mediator (whether bank, editor, annotator, or ghostwriter) becomes a stand-in for the necessity of prestige-producing labor and the threat posed when “story” is reduced to pure commodity. The frame introduction’s narrator performs an act of secondary literary labor that staves off this threat by making the story available for public viewing from the position of deep personal attachment to Jim and his subject matter. As estranged friends and former denizens of the West living in New York City, the travelers share in common a geographical identity and a class-inspired worldview; their shared experiences represent “a kind of freemasonry,” according to the frame narrator, and this shared membership gives the author figure the right, somehow, to take possession of Jim’s story. Deep personal ties allow the object of transaction to function without being reduced to a commodity, or, more appropriately, Jim and the author’s freemasonry

---

173 Ibid., x.
allows the commercial object to function as a commodity without acting like a commodity. In *My Ántonia*, the market remains dominant, but pockets can exist where deep personal ties transcend monetary accounting. Simultaneously, market dominance means that embedded subcultures play a part in legitimating the culture’s commodity-driven exchange systems.

*The Professor’s House* amplifies and refines the dream of embedded exchange expressed in *My Ántonia*. In book I, “The Family,” Godfrey St. Peter is a professor at an unnamed Midwestern university in the small town of Hamilton. He has recently published a multivolume history of Spanish exploration in North America and has achieved a national reputation for his work. At the novel’s start, his family has purchased a new house almost completely moved, but St. Peter is reluctant to pack up his study. He scorns middle class consumption and technological progress. His two daughters Kathleen and Rosamond are grown and married, and his relationship with wife Lillian is strained. The first book details the various ways each character was affected by Tom Outland, a former student of St. Peter’s who died in the First World War. Book II, “Tom Outland’s Story,” is an inset first-person narrative of Outland’s set years before he comes to Hamilton. He narrates discovering of a large cache of undisturbed Hopi ruins, as well as his failed efforts to convince the Smithsonian to take an interest in them. Tom and his friend Roddy Blake have a falling out after Roddy sells the artifacts to a German collector. Book III, “The Professor,” returns to St. Peter. He is alone in his old house, and his family is traveling through Europe. One night, realizing the pilot on his heater has blown out, he contemplates allowing himself to die. He is happened upon by the old family seamstress Augusta and survives. As he waits his family’s return, he decides he has learned to live without delight.

The novel’s most distinct feature is probably its structure, which establishes an authorial narrator (a disembodied, third-person voice), then shifts to a first-person narrator with “Tom Outland’s Story,” and finally reestablishes the third-person narrator...
in the novel’s third section. In Cather’s words, this “experiment in form” inserts the nouvelle into the roman. She states, “I tried to make Professor St. Peter’s house rather overcrowded and stuffy with new things; … Then I wanted to open the square window and let in the fresh air that blew off the Blue Mesa.” The idea behind this shift is that the reader, after hearing extensive details about the various ways in which Tom’s legacy affects a range of characters who outlived him, somehow gains access to the real Tom, in spite of his death. According to Guy Reynolds, Outland’s story is an example of the “thereness” of a voice that inhabits much of Cather’s work: “We read the prose; we seem to hear a voice; we believe in the authenticity of the persona; we are led to believe in the character.” My Ántonia’s introduction, to quote a letter Cather wrote to Will Owen Jones, is “a device” that colors the narrative with “a certain mood and certain personal feelings throughout it.” As a device, “the more frankly it is presented as such, the better.” In The Professor’s House, the changeover from authorial to testimonial is embedded in the novel’s three-part structure and, as a result, the “thereness” of Tom’s voice is more difficult to explain logically. The effect has impact only if the reader suspends his or her initial disbelief.


177 Cather to Will Owen Jones, 20 May 1919, Cather Papers.
Tom’s status as “long deceased” also amplifies the weight of St. Peter’s obligation, since it allows Outland’s name to function as a symbolic commodity. At the start of Book I, “The Family,” Outland has long since met his death serving overseas during the First World War, and Outland is the object of competing descriptions partly due to his absence, and partly because he has become a posthumous celebrity. Cather explains, “Before he dashed off to the front, this youngster had discovered the principle of the Outland vacuum, worked out the construction of the bulkheaded vacuum that is revolutionizing aviation.” Outland patented his invention, and rights to that patent went to St. Peter’s daughter Rosamond—his fiancée, now “virtually his widow”—when Tom was killed. Louie and Rosamond have used their newfound riches to promulgate Tom’s name and publicize his contributions to science: “It’s our first duty in life,” Louie says, “to use that money as he would have wished—we’ve endowed scholarships in his own university here, and that sort of thing. But our house we want to have as a sort of memorial to him.” Their “country house … on the wooded shores of Lake Michigan” is named Outland and will be a tribute to Tom and “all the sources of his inspiration.”

His legacy has become a commodity and generated widespread feelings of indebtedness. Like McClure, Tom’s surname has been transformed into a brand name. McClure was forced to sign a contract that removed him from his editorship and forbade the use of his name as editor for twenty years. Similarly, at the center of The Professor’s House is someone who has been reduced to posthumous celebrity, a surname become brand name in the form of Louie’s country estate. Such a brand name, like McClure’s, straddles the line between suggesting monetary worth and symbolic capital.

178 Willa Cather et al., The Professor’s House (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 42.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid., 43.
181 Ibid., 40, 43.
Tom’s death also augments a sense of his ethereal genius. Where McClure displayed ease converting his enthusiasm to profit, Outland was pure visionary, a man reaching across the wilderness to “touch the light,” to use Cather’s phrasing in My Autobiography. Tom, like McClure, had a fiery and luminous creative imagination. St. Peter thinks, “the boy’s mind had the superabundance of heat which is always present where there is rich germination. To share his thoughts was to see old perspectives transformed by new effects of light.” Similarly, “the light in Outland’s laboratory used to burn so far into the night.” St. Peter’s son-in-law Scott McGregor finds himself “talking uphill” when he tries to recollect Outland and concludes, “Sometimes I think he was just a – a glittering idea.” The Outland vacuum, the symbol of Tom’s innovative capacity, is similarly abstracted and ethereal. Steven Trout calls the Outland Vacuum a “gap or void where Cather’s ordinarily sure-footed imagination could find no purchase.” Outland’s genius stems purely from some unaccounted-for inner quality, like McClure’s editing acumen. His status as a scientist recalls McClure as coffee pot peddler, microscope salesman, and advocate for the bicycle. The Outland vacuum is a physical manifestation of futurity, much like the objects McClure sold as a peddler.

The key difference between the vacuum and McClure’s innovations is that Outland invents the device, but does not sell it. In fact, it was Louie, “an electrical engineer by profession” who “began to sense the importance of what Outland had been doing[,] … called in the assistance of experts and got the idea over from the laboratory to the trade,” while Tom’s physics professor Doctor Crane ignored Tom’s results, which

182 Cather and McClure, My Autobiography, 139.
183 Cather et al., The Professor’s House, 258.
184 Ibid., 89.
185 Ibid., 110.
186 Ibid., 271.
“weren’t as interesting scientifically as [he had] expected them to be.” Whatever entrepreneurial qualities McClure possessed that Outland lacked seem to have found their way into Louie Marsellus. Further, St. Peter “couldn’t see Tom building ‘Outland’ or becoming a public-spirited citizen of Hamilton.” Cather splits the inventor and the entrepreneur into two categories: Outland highlights the abstract: his hands “never handled things that were not the symbols of ideas.” Louie signifies the quotidian; he knows how to “manage” money and can tolerate the “meaningless conventional gestures” associated with success. St. Peter even reflects that one of Tom’s “sentimental superstitions” was “that he must never on any account owe any material advantage to his friends, that he must keep affection and advancement far apart.” Outland’s life was, from a certain point of view, untouched any questions of commercial debt or repayment. His estate, in the hands of others (especially Louie), is hopelessly entwined with such matters. Tom’s “identity,” in others’ eyes, includes both.

Indebtedness, secondary literary labor, and narrative structure merge in the final chapters of Book I, “The Family.” Directly before “Tom Outland’s Story” begins, St. Peter elects to remain at home while the rest of his family sails for Europe. St. Peter is isolated, and memories of Outland predominate, particularly because St. Peter has decided to take on a scholarly project dedicated to Tom’s memory, to act as different kind of ghost laborer. Cather explains:

It was his plan to give part of this summer to Tom Outland’s diary—to edit and annotate it for publication. The bother was that he must write an introduction. The diary covered only about six months of the boy’s life, a summer he spent on the Blue Mesa, and in it there was almost nothing about Tom himself. To mean

---

187 Ibid., 42, 145.
188 Ibid., 261.
189 Ibid., 261.
190 Ibid., 169.
anything, it must be prefaced by a sketch of Outland, and some account of his later life and achievements. To write of his scientific work would be comparatively easy. But that was not all the story; his was a many-sided mind, though a simple and straightforward personality.\textsuperscript{191}

St. Peter’s scholarly work on the diary, in other words, informs the narrative’s shift to “Tom Outland’s Story.” But the “Tom Outland’s Story” we read is not the text of the diary. The professor recalls that, the summer after Tom graduated from college, he finally told St. Peter “the story he had always kept back … a tale of youthful defeat.”\textsuperscript{192} On this note, Book I concludes and Book II, “Tom Outland’s Story,” commences. Book II is the story behind the story. The diary is merely an historical artifact, the thing St. Peter must frame in order for it to “mean anything.” What the text is supposed to mean, neither the narrator nor St. Peter explains. To quote Guy Reynolds, the precise formal status of an inset narrative like “Tom Outland’s Story”—who wrote it, whether it is spoken or written—is “suggestively indeterminate.”\textsuperscript{193} What the passage does convey, however, is a deep sense of indebtedness to Outland and his legacy. While St. Peter plans to give his time to the project, but the repetition of “he must” and “it must” underscores the fact that St. Peter’s task is not altogether altruistic.\textsuperscript{194} The word bother further suggests both the difficulty of the task and the weight of obligation. He is committed, in some way, to an attempt to tell “all the story.” St. Peter feels a duty to do justice to do the work, to convey Outland’s mind in all its multiplicity.

St. Peter’s desire to depict Tom fairly, in his totality, flows from the professor’s affinity for and indebtedness to his former student. This emotional situation revisits and amplifies Cather’s motivation when acting as McClure’s ghostwriter. Godfrey prides

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 168.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 173.
\textsuperscript{193} Reynolds, “Willa Cather as Equivocal Icon,” 6.
\textsuperscript{194} Cather et al., The Professor’s House, 168.
himself on refusing remuneration for his role in Outland’s invention—“my friendship with Outland is the one thing I will not have translated into the vulgar tongue”—but his friendship with the boy unavoidably caused him material gain.\textsuperscript{195} Outland helped increase St. Peter’s scholarly reputation, which is the currency that allows him to accrue wealth and status. Cather explains: “By the time [St. Peter] had got as far as the third volume,” of his scholarly project \textit{Spanish Adventures}, “into his house walked a boy who had grown up there, a boy with imagination, with the training and insight resulting from a very curious experience; who had in his pocket the secrets which old trails and stones and water-courses tell only to adolescence.”\textsuperscript{196} That Tom has secrets “in his pocket” suggests their worth and how carefully he guards them. St. Peter’s series gained little attention at first but, “with the fourth volume … a few young men, scattered about the United States and England” became “intensely interested in his experiment.”\textsuperscript{197} The fifth and sixth volumes sparked “interest in lectures and in print” and his two last volumes “brought him a certain international reputation and what were called rewards—among them, the Oxford prize for history, with its five thousand pounds.”\textsuperscript{198} This sum paid for St. Peter’s new house. Lillian, despite resenting Tom, owes her new house largely to his influence. St. Peter, likewise, benefits materially from Tom’s legacy despite his efforts to resist diminishing him to a commodity.

The financial benefit St. Peter receives qualifies as a component of indebtedness rather than mere debt because no institutional contract colors the exchange. The weight of St. Peter’s obligation transcends economic and professional debt into an arena much more difficult to quantify. “Just when the morning brightness of the world was wearing

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 259.

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 34.

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
off him,” Cather states, “along came Outland and brought with him a kind of second youth.” The verb *brought* associates this second youth with the other objects Outland brought with him to Hamilton: turquoise jewelry and ancient Hopi pottery. The qualifier “a kind of,” meanwhile, indicates the narrative’s inability even to describe the gift properly. The value of such a gift cannot be established, but its gravity cannot be denied. St. Peter’s friendship with Tom is entwined with St. Peter’s sense of mortality, his emotional attachment to life itself. As such, it is difficult to read St. Peter’s desire to publish Tom’s diary as anything but some attempt to confront the weight of indebtedness, even if his gesture would never qualify as repayment. Since “the public” seems somehow to possess Outland, repayment, too, would seem to involve St. Peter refining or ideally, perfecting, their idea of him. Such a sentiment, while never voiced directly, would hold true to Tom’s “dream of self-sacrificing friendship and disinterested love,” an ideal Tom had gotten “down among the day-labourers,” according to St. Peter. Tom brought to the university in much the same way that he brought St. Peter a kind of second youth.

Much about St. Peter’s summer plans remains untold. What the narrator means by “edit and annotate,” we never learn. We never see a completed version of the preface to which he refers. His editorial and authorial labor, like Cather’s while ghostwriting and the unnamed author figure in *My Ántonia*, remains obscured. The inserted first-person tale, “Tom Outland’s Story” takes the plot action from the small town of Hamilton, Illinois in the 1920s to the deserts of the American Southwest several years prior and, in so doing, Book II, “Tom Outland’s Story,” resurrects its eponymous narrator. Disembodied authorial narrator and protagonist Godfrey St. Peter seem to collaborate across time. The word *dream* conveys the duality of a false reality (as in a dream while

---

199 Ibid., 258.
200 Ibid., 169.
sleeping) and idealistic aspiration. Cather’s depiction has elements of both. Such a duality also approximates the novel’s relationship to embedded exchange.

In sum, it is clear from these three examples that Cather’s treatment of indebtedness and exchange in My Ántonia and The Professor’s House stand in contrast to the way O Pioneers! portrays debt. Beginning most demonstrably with My Ántonia, Cather’s work becomes interested in how indebtedness functions. The author’s unpaid debt (the other half of the Ántonia story) persists as a textual absence. While the act violates western gift giving practices in the sense that the exchange is not reciprocal, offering up the story to strangers does keep the gift itself alive. Similarly, in The Professor’s House, Cather renders ineffable the exact nature of what is owed and renders impossible any hope of direct repayment. These narratives, as a result, engage critically with the topic of indebtedness.

From Mauss to Bourdieu to Hyde, gift theory texts uphold that articulating gratitude, often publicly, is an essential part of gift exchange, but homage can also function as an act of rhetorical reciprocity. A cycle of indebtedness like one I have been describing can never know the closure of a transaction completed. When a writer like Cather fictionalizes her own sense of indebtedness, she simply adds to the spiral of indebtedness by directing repayment outward to new recipients. The original object, repackaged and distributed, implicates new parties who, in turn, may begin to feel indebted, or they may simply emerge with more of an investment the idea of indebtedness. Cather’s narratives, as such, do more than depict indebtedness. They engage in acts of defining authorial identity in terms of embedded exchange.

**Conclusion: Owing “Something” to Miss Cather**

In March of 1914, McClure’s longtime friend and former business partner John S. Phillips wrote to McClure to congratulate him on the success of the autobiography’s serial run. “It is a wonderfully fine piece of work that you are doing in that
autobiography,” he wrote. “It is so humanly interesting, and written with truth and simplicity. I suppose that you owe something to Miss Cather, but it seems you just the same.” In referring to Cather, Phillips used the word *owe* to convey his comprehension of Cather’s part in the autobiography he had begun to read. His letter also stresses the unquantifiable nature of indebtedness in a case like this one. McClure owes *something*, but precisely what he owes resists quantification.

In a sense, this chapter asks what can and cannot be owed and, in turn, what can and cannot be repaid. Phillips was expressing an individual reaction to McClure’s autobiography, but his sense of what McClure might owe Cather stands in tension with his claim that McClure’s identity seem to inhabit the portrayal, whatever Cather’s role may have been in the authorial process. To ask what McClure owed Cather, or to what degree the portrayal owed itself to her work, is to consider the culturally constructed systems of owing and reciprocity that inform collaborative labor and define authorial identity. I have shown the extent to which an economic debt spiral informed Cather and McClure’s collaboration. I have also argued an appreciation of indebtedness or symbolic capital is required to makes sense of that collaboration. Further, collaboration itself facilitated the exchange of economic and symbolic capital. This collaborative momentum is a distinct feature of *My Autobiography* and Cather’s later fiction.

In this chapter, I have used an iconic act of partnership—ghostwriter and autobiographical subject—to expand my sense of collaborative momentum beyond my first chapter’s case study of Howells. In my next chapter, I will focus on a collaborative structure that depended upon triangulations among author, publisher, and literary agent. As a result, my analysis of D’Arcy McNickle’s experiences with the apparatus of literary

---

201 Phillips to McClure, 19 March 1914, McClure Papers.
discovery and debut will address the signature middle men of the first half of the twentieth century and their effect on modern authorship.
CHAPTER III
DISCOVERY OF THE MONTH:
D’ARCY MCNICKLE
AND THE APPARATUS OF LITERARY DEBUT

Introduction

In August 1935, D’Arcy McNickle got word from his New York literary agent Ruth Rae that *Esquire* magazine had named him its “Discovery of the Month” for September. His short story “Meat for God,” appearing in that issue, was his first professionally published work of fiction. This detail is one among many routinely invoked by McNickle scholars such as Birgit Hans, Louis Owens, and John Purdy to characterize the young, cultural outsider engaged in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to assimilate into a highly-professionalized white subculture. Other details include that D’Arcy McNickle amassed dozens of rejection letters in the nine-year period during which he strove to find a publisher for his first novel, which was originally titled *The Hungry Generations* and was published as *The Surrounded* (1936). That his agent Ruth Rae who finally sold the novel to Dodd, Mead and Company.¹ That *The Surrounded* was a critical success and a commercial disappointment.² McNickle’s status as a “Discovery of the Month,” however, is a provocative classification that deserves additional discussion. His experience being categorized as a discovery speaks to his anonymity in a literary culture governed by institutions of renown and his potentially-marketable identity as a newcomer, if properly guided.


² The manuscript began as *The Hungry Generations*, took brief form as *Dead Grass*, and was published finally as *The Surrounded*.
Rae’s strategy to ensure the success of McNickle’s first novel was also deeply invested in the idea of McNickle as a sensation or novelty. “Please don’t let’s have publicity men or any other people on your book,” she wrote him, outlining her plans. “I want you to be the reviewers’ ‘discovery’.3 She compared her plans for The Surrounded with her client Archie Binns’s well-received debut novel Lightship (1934), which was “a fine, forcefully written, and highly original novel” and “justly labeled one of the ‘discoveries’ of the year,” according to Forum and Century.4 Rae summarized some of her efforts to assure those reviewers would “discover” McNickle: “Everyone I know in the reviewing business has been called on the phone by me to tell them I’ve a new first novel coming thru. A copy of the book has been sent to every magazine and paper in the country, even the one you spoke of in Montana.”5 In other words, though Rae wanted readers to perceive The Surrounded as a critical discovery parallel to Lightship, her efforts to ensure reviewers paid attention to the book were, according to her, extremely aggressive. Rae was attempting, as one Covici, Friede reader put it several years before, to “work up a good ballyhoo” for the novel.”6

In this chapter, I want to take a closer look at McNickle as a literary discovery and a young author trying to make himself discoverable. Integral to this process were his relationships with two literary agents and numerous publishers. My approach attempts to bring together two disparate scholarly conversations, one preoccupied with McNickle’s “continued refinement of his perception of Native cultures,” especially his role “as a storyteller in a sense very similar to that of a tribal storyteller” and the other, informed by

3 Ruth Rae to D’Arcy McNickle, 1 February 1936, D’Arcy McNickle Papers, The Newberry Library, Chicago.

4 Review of Lightship. Forum and Century 92, No. 6 (December 1934): 5. Lightship was also the 1934 recipient of the Prix Femina Americain.

5 Ruth Rae to D’Arcy McNickle, 1 February 1936, McNickle Papers.

6 Manuscript Report, 23 October 1934, McNickle Papers.
a history of the book methodology, concerned with the cultural systems that codified twentieth-century authorial identity and credibility. By bringing these two conversations together in the form of a print culture-centered study of McNickle’s struggles to establish himself as a professional author and a Native American, I hope to add something new to both scholarly circles. The existing scholarship on McNickle has not yet dealt with his publishing industry experience in context, or thoroughly recognized the role intermediaries like his agents played in the construction of his literary identity. Studies of twentieth-century authorship, including James English’s *The Economy of Prestige* and Loren Glass’s *Authors, Inc.*, have not yet accounted for the limits and failures of institutional systems designed to convert credibility to profit and vice versa.

My argument fleshes out McNickle’s role as a would-be object of literary discovery and his eventual effort to redefine his role as a writer in terms of the discovery experience he crafted for his readers. McNickle is an important example of how institutions of discovery functioned in the early twentieth century, and how triangulations among authors, agents, and publishers mediated literary consecration. The exceptional aspects of McNickle’s story—the duration of his struggle, his identity as a Native American, the sheer number of avenues he tried in order to become established, and his eventual failure to achieve the kind of success he desired—make him an ideal example for this chapter. His story represents an exaggerated but still emblematic example, for he was making use of the same apparatus as others of his time period, only more so. To strengthen this point, I will frame my analysis of McNickle with the story of the literary

---


8 Their respective studies of authorial celebrity and prize winning, necessarily, have gravitated to those institutions’ most prominent (and therefore most successful) examples. Bourdieu does address the potential merits associated with a writer who uses his or her identity as a “cursed artist” to play upon “the ambiguity of the criteria of success” but observes that “the repetition of negative sessions makes the voluntarist prolongation of adolescent in determination more and more untenable.” Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 219.
agent’s rise as an integral figure in literary discovery. I hope to gesture, in so doing, at the degree to which literary discovery, as we know it today, in fact emerged from triangulated relations among agent, author, and publisher. Modern institutions of literary career launching grew out of preexisting conventions but were distinct from their antecedents in their strong ties with increasingly formalized codes of professionalism and labor division, as well as their connections to a now-dominant culture of large-scale production. Analyzing McNickle’s fiction in the second part of this chapter, I will trace the way The Surrounded reacts to cultural institutions of literary discovery by narrating the tragedy of failed mediation and gesturing at reciprocal encounter as a better alternative.

**McNickle and (Native) American Authorship**

With this chapter, I am attempting to bring together two scholarly conversations, the first of which has attempted to account for McNickle as an aspiring writer and emergent Native American voice. Even though Birgit Hans and others have categorized McNickle as one of “that group of early Native American novelists comprised of Mourning Dove, John Joseph Mathews, John Milton Oskison, and others,” he was also, at one time, one of countless struggling writers living in New York City who was looking for his big break.\(^9\) His launching as a literary aspirant has not been fully detailed.

Scholars have discussed McNickle’s relationship with a mainstream, bourgeois, and white marketplace foremost to account for the development of the author’s Native American identity. John Purdy suggests that McNickle’s “power as a writer” came only when he “shed his attempts to write fiction in keeping solely with the styles and concerns of other contemporary American novelists” and began to use “tribal verbal arts to shape

his writing, thus giving his works an engaging quality that marks them as distinctive but also as precursory of more recent works by American Indian novelists.”

Owens, who is otherwise critical of Purdy’s claim that *The Surrounded* represents a “positive ‘Indian’ vision,” likewise argues that the six-year period between the Harcourt, Brace rejection and McNickle’s successful placement of the manuscript with Dodd, Mead and Company saw McNickle transform from “a writer of the West” and “not of Indians primarily” to “a writer whose subject was very specifically the Indian caught up in the oppressive and often brutal attempts of a militant and millennially minded culture—that of Euroamerica—to eradicate totally the native cultures they were displacing.”

Both arguments set McNickle’s transcendence as a Native American novelist against the norms and expectations of his cultural context. In other words, McNickle’s long road to publication is generally enlisted to characterize his power relationship with the white society with which sought to gain status.

Scholars have also used a handful of well-known details about McNickle’s publishing history to frame new interpretations *The Surrounded*. Robert Dale Parker’s analysis hinges on the idea that McNickle was working on his first novel while he “vainly sought hard-to-find employment in the market economy that would not support his ambitions as a novelist,” but his argument is ultimately concerned with reinterpreting *The Surrounded* in relation to the “changing gender identities and the effects of the expanding market economy.”

James Ruppert, whose argument about *The Surrounded* hinges upon its successful “use of allegory and storytelling” to set the implied reader “into a position

---


of a synthesizing audience through which the reader connects to the external world,” argues that McNickle “made a virtue of necessity” upon facing editorial rejection “and richly layered his narrative closer to what he perceived to be a publishable novel.”\textsuperscript{13} The critical interventions are significant but have relied on previous scholars’ primary research rather than further detailing McNickle’s publishing industry experiences.

Birgit Hans’s work on the process by which McNickle revised “The Hungry Generations” to publish \textit{The Surrounded} is the best effort to date to account for McNickle’s experiences with “those years in New York City” that represent a “crucial period” in McNickle’s development.\textsuperscript{14} Hans focuses on the key differences between one of the early-1930s manuscript of \textit{The Hungry Generations} and the 1936 published version of \textit{The Surrounded} to argue that the manuscript was “a part of McNickle’s earlier years of complete assimilation,” whereas the published version has a “more cohesive and unified” plot and extensive material on “Flatheads’ reservation life.”\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{The Surrounded}, in other words, is “much more complex, disturbing and accomplished than ‘The Hungry Generations’ and anticipates very clearly the Native American Renaissance that began with Momaday’s \textit{House Made of Dawn} thirty years after its publication.”\textsuperscript{16} Despite Hans’s efforts, many details of McNickle’s crucial developmental period remain underreported or subjected to much less analytical scrutiny

\begin{footnotesize}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 183.
\item McNickle and Hans, \textit{D’Arcy McNickle’s The Hungry Generations}, 2.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
than they merit. In particular, McNickle’s agents have remained obscure, partly because information about them is difficult to obtain. By analyzing McNickle’s relationship with the publishing industry’s varied apparatus of literary debut, my chapter takes an important step toward this goal.

**Breaking into Literature:**

**Anonymity, Credibility, and Market Practices**

Analyzing McNickle’s experience from a print culture perspective raises potential difficulties; if nothing else, a white publishing culture labeling a Native American writer their “discovery” raises certain ironies. A reductive study of McNickle’s engagement with New York publishers would have the potential to oversimplify the author’s depiction of indigenous identity as a mere consumer product or to narrate McNickle’s journey toward publication as an ethnic outsider transcending a white marketplace. Instead, I want to tell the story of a complex human being negotiating well-established systems of classification and accreditation. A range of experts, especially publishers and agents, filled the role of separating writers with promise from a much larger body of literary hopefuls. My analysis, therefore, begins with a detailed examination at discovery itself as an institutional concept. Where others have examined the practices and mechanisms deployed to establish credibility among commercially successful and avant-garde writers, I will focus on the systems that ushered an unknown writer like McNickle into a debut authorial position at this particular historical moment.

My work builds upon the existing scholarly conversation about how cultural practices—including the actions of individuals, institutions and texts—mediate novelty as

---

17 Ruth Rae is often cited as the agent who placed *The Surrounded* with Dodd, Mead; to my knowledge, no study of McNickle has even made mention of Maxim Lieber. He is not discussed in Dorothy R. Parker’s biography of McNickle.
a particular form of symbolic capital. Pierre Bourdieu addresses the “logic of change” as it pertains to a “dialectic of distinction.” In nineteenth-century France, with the emergence of “art for art’s sake,” an interdependent opposition arose between the commercial market (the field of large-scale production) and the avant-garde (the field of restricted production). These oppositions have tended to be generational and, over time, the radical tends to become mainstream, paving the way for a new avant-garde. “To impose a new producer, a new product and a new system of taste on the market at a given moment means to relegate to the past a whole set of producers, products and systems of taste, all hierarchized in relation to their degree of legitimacy.”18 (159-160). As critics like Glass and Aaron Jaffe have shown, similar hierarchies structured the U.S. publishing marketplace in the first half of the twentieth century. McNickle, of course, did not emerge from an artistic coterie; his status as a newcomer was instead mediated by his identity as a Native American writer.

James F. English’s work on the cultural prize in The Economy of Prestige (2005) represents an important effort to add nuance to Bourdieu’s overall argument about the role generational rivalry plays in defining a literary status quo and avant-garde. In his analysis of how the modern cultural prize balanced monetary rewards and artistic credibility, English aims to surpass Bourdieu’s “essentially modernist map of cultural fields” while preserving his nuanced account of the “games and mechanisms and stratagems by which [cultural prizes] assert themselves.”19 In doing so, he significantly notes what Bourdieu fails to appreciate fully, that cultural value “cannot emerge in a political vacuum, the participants uncolored by and indifferent to prevailing hierarchies of class, race, gender, or nation.”20 English’s emphasis on the intraconversion of

19 English, The Economy of Prestige, 8.
20 Ibid., 27.
economic and symbolic capital is also relevant to McNickle, for he emphasizes "particular symbolic fortunes" to be "cashed in" and "particular economic fortunes" to be "culturally 'laundered'"; simultaneously, "the very barriers and rates of exchange, in terms of which all such transactions must take place, are continually contested and adjusted."  

Although a distinction like Esquire's "Discovery of the Month" differs from the Pulitzer Prize or the National Book Award in that it is a distinction of inauguration rather than establishment, it performs a similar function by situating McNickle's legitimacy in the murky territory between artistic merit and marketability.

My point in establishing the relevant contributions of Bourdieu and English is that the very idea of being discovered is endemic to a literary (or artistic, or filmic) subculture dominated by anonymity and renown. In such a system, flow between symbolic and economic capital is of the utmost importance, for one's status as a literary discovery operates as both a distinction of prestige and a classification as a marketable product. To be discovered, one must operate in a literary marketplace dominated by obscurity. As with my other chapters, I would point to the second half of the nineteenth century as a critical period of transition in establishing such a marketplace; the rise of the profession of authorship and the expansion of literary celebrity, as traced by Christopher Wilson and Loren Glass respectively, accelerated public apprehension that the ideal of genteel and therefore individual courtesy between aspirants and editors was being replaced by a new system that treated anonymous contributors as an indiscernible mass with an infinitesimal number of talented writers obscured by the crowd.

The linkage between these overall changes and an increased interest in literary discovery is demonstrated by the sheer number of pieces discussing the best strategies a literary aspirant could use to achieve prominence that were published in American

\[21\] Ibid., 10–11.
periodicals in the run-up to the turn of the century. Essays like “How to Get a Hearing,” “Breaking into Literature,” and Jack London’s well-known “The Question of a Name” are but a few examples among many. Suggestively, the label “literary discovery” was extremely common during the late nineteenth century; the phrase appeared often in book reviews, advertisements, and literary gossip. Verbiage ascribing the act of discovery or labeling the person responsible for discovering an author was often obscured or downplayed. For example, author Charles G. Norris’s contribution to *My Maiden Effort: Being the Personal Confessions of Well-known American Authors as to Their Literary Beginnings* (1921) refers to the idea of being “discovered by posterity,” which is a phrase that implicitly avoids naming the person or institution doing the discovering. Being discovered was the process by which a talented writer, obscured by the crowd, gained enough attention to be ushered to the literary forefront by the experts who encountered him, but that process emphasized the product, not the middle men who helped produce it. As a result, authors essentially attempted to produce themselves as objects worthy of discovery while an ethereal notion of a discoverer lurked in the background of the literary imagination. This ideal of artistic discovery demonstrably shaped McNickle’s understanding of his identity as a literary aspirant.

London’s “The Question of a Name” offers a useful summation of the turn-of-the-century ideal of literary discovery. His author-centered description of this process is particularly important because of the literary celebrity London eventually achieved. Arguably, his view of the literary marketplace became the dominant and doubtless the

22 J.F. Willing, “How to Get a Hearing,” *The Ladies’ Repository* 28 (June 1868): 444–446; Jeannette L. Gilder, “Breaking into Literature,” *The Independent*, 7 September 1911, 529; Jack London, “The Question of a Name,” *The Writer* 13, no. 12 (December 1900): 177–180. This brief list of examples is not meant to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on discovery during this length period of time. Instead, I merely wanted to gesture at a few examples of this tendency at various moments during this time period.

23 Authors’ League of America, *My Maiden Effort: Being the Personal Confessions of Well-known American Authors as to Their Literary Beginnings* (Pub. for the Authors’ League of America by Doubleday, Page & Company, 1921), 183.
most widespread myth of American authorship. “The Question of a Name” depicts the marketplace as a dysfunctional system that could be vanquished, metaphorically, by the right kind of perseverance. London’s celebrity status converged across two systems: a popular marketplace fueled by personality and sensation and a code of literary credibility built upon a romantic conception of the solitary and heroic author. Both systems demanded that the young writer “do the impossible”—write “better work than even the named are turning out”—and do it again and again.  

London’s future-tense narrative of how writers succeed is cluttered with figurative language, which suggests that he is rehashing an often-reimagined cultural narrative:

> Many people are capable of doing the impossible only once. The critics know this. They will keep silent; but bear this in mind, they will remember him. Let him continue to do the impossible, and they will gather faith in him—likewise those arbiters of success, the editors. They are always on the lookout for budding genius. They will not be hasty, but they will keep an eye upon him, and suddenly, one day, like a bolt out of a clear sky, they will swoop down upon him and carry him away to Olympus. Then he will possess a name, prestige, be a Somebody. 

In this passage, the critics’ and editors’ metaphoric silence is coupled with an invocation of faith, as if the literary marketplace has a churchlike quality to it. The term *arbiter*, in contrast, emphasizes the editor’s economic role. The cliché of the “budding genius”—an ironically organic “dead” metaphor—speaks to the overall process by which authors like London folded the rhetoric of the marketplace in with Romantic preconceptions about authorial genius. London continues this folding process to explain the moment of success, for he turns to the simile of a lightning bolt and, in so doing, emphasizes both the speed at which the market moves and the extent to which the editor resembles Zeus, the god of sky and thunder, and figures success as Olympus, a specific but mythic place. His model establishes ironic disdain for the institution of discovery; the author performs the real

---


25 Ibid.
labor and the editor rides in, godlike, to take credit. His scornful description speaks directly to the power critics and editors wielded in a turn-of-the-century literary marketplace where anonymity among the masses was rapidly becoming perceived as the most significant obstacle to literary success. It also speaks to the degree to which a discovery, often, was a produced market sensation rather than an anonymous genius suddenly unearthed.

Contrasting London’s version of events with McNickle’s experience reveals an important shift. According to London, editors and critics played the most important roles in literary discovery. London’s work recognizes that these mediators had unprecedented power in assigning literary status and expresses the fear that, without an inside edge, success was exceptionally difficult. McNickle, similarly, began his literary career by submitting work to New York publishers and literary magazines. McNickle’s New York experience was characterized by members of the publishing industry encouraging the writer while attempting to produce him as a kind of literary sensation. Along the way, McNickle had two literary agents acting on his behalf: Maxim Lieber and, after Lieber had failed to produce results, Ruth Rae. McNickle’s enlistment of such agents to facilitate his first publication points to a publishing industry sea change. By the 1930s, there was space for an agent, especially a less-established one like Rae, to operate as an ambassador of literary debut. The anecdote also signals a shift toward commercialism, for the agent was primarily an expert with regard to markets. As agents

26 Contemporaneous articles in The Literary World and The Writer also credit the editor with this role. An unsigned editorial in The Literary World warns, “As for discovering and training authors, the editor under the new system has inducements that lie entirely the other way; namely, to find as many authors as possible whom the public has already discovered and accepted for itself.” Studies in Literature, The Literary World, February 27, 1891, 192. This comment, of course, suggests an old system where the editor did have incentives to discover writers. Ellery Sedgwick, in The Writer states: “Let the contribution go on its merits. If you are unknown, all the greater is the editor's satisfaction in discovering you—that is, if you will pardon the expression, if you are worth discovering, and always provided that he has the intelligence to know it.” Ellery Sedgwick, “Editorial Talks with Contributors,” The Writer 14, no. 11 (November 1901): 183.
took on duties more closely tied to the editorial side of book publishing, they influenced the strategies young writers used to penetrate the publishing marketplace.

**From Commanding Prices to Discovering Talent:**

**The Literary Agent as an Emerging American Profession**

McNickle’s experience of an agent facilitating his literary debut bears a resemblance with contemporary ideas about literary success, where the literary agent is seen as the primary gatekeeper. Judith Appelbaum’s *How to Get Happily Published* remarks that “even experienced authors seem to believe … “a magic wand is basic equipment for literary agents,” the assumption being that, “at a word from an agent, offers pour in, advances rise, promotion plans expand, ad budgets skyrocket.” As Appelbaum’s how-to manual suggests, the literary agent has become the signature go-between of the modern American publishing industry. The agent is seen as a marketer, a gatekeeper, and a guardian of literary success. The ideal of literary discovery, in fact, is deeply entwined with the agents and his or work. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that institutions marketing authors as literary discoveries played a pivotal role in defining the agent’s job description. Just as writers like Jack London found a voice in the literary marketplace by offering strategies for coping with an impersonal literary field, the agent’s role took on additional dimensions in reaction to an overcrowded marketplace.

Between 1890 and 1945 in the United States, the agent evolved from an expert in transatlantic copyright, to a broker in the magazine marketplace, to a representative of not-yet-established literary talent. In this third phase, the agent was also a key figure in handling subsidiary rights of established or emerging writers. Both of McNickle’s agents,

---

Rae and Lieber, dealt in magazine work, subsidiary rights, and discovery, whereas old
guard agents of this period did not traffic in discovery. As early as 1892, Walter Besant,
conductor of the *The Author* (UK) was reacting to a reader’s “false impression” that, “to
one who has already succeeded … a literary agent is of no use” and that “a literary agent
is able to persuade editors and publishers to take work they would otherwise refuse.”
On the contrary, Besant explained, “it is when a man has reached a certain stage of
success that his agent comes in.” Paul Revere Reynolds is often cited as the first
American literary agent. He refused to take on unproven talent and even said in a
refusal letter to a writer recommended by Upton Sinclair that he made his living
“handling an author’s work that has already made some place for himself.” He worked
exclusively on commission, so he only represented authors whose work he thought he
could sell. The early economic conditions of the literary agent, in other words, made it
less likely that he or she would represent a writer who had not yet achieved a certain
measure of success.

Early agents did perform two types of labor that deserve to be closely associated
with discovery, both of which underline the fact that discovery itself was often less about
an author’s transition from total anonymity to total fame and closer to what public

29 Ibid. In the 1890s, British publisher William Heinemann infamously castigated the agent as an interloper
who focused on already-established talent. In 1910, he said the literary agent originated as an unofficial
ambassador of literary debut and took on the role Besant describes as they became established: “In his
capacity as the helper of the beginner he may have rendered a useful service, as long as his presence was a
surprise, his existence undefined, he may, not infrequently, have been able to find with publishers or with
the editors of magazines, etc., a place for books and contributions which up till then had been homeless.’
30 This statement deserves skepticism. He was actually preceded by British agents operating within the
United States Also, as early as the 1820s, many individuals in the United States functioned as literary
agents well before the profession formally emerged (West 81).
31 PRR to Upton Sinclair, 29 September 1919, Paul Revere Reynolds Records, 1899-1980, Rare Book &
Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.
relations professionals today refer to as rebranding, or, to use Bourdieu’s terminology, the recasting of an author’s capital from one field (e.g., avant-garde legitimacy) to another (e.g., mainstream popularity). Paul Revere Reynolds exemplifies the first of these duties, overseeing transatlantic publishing contracts. Born in Boston in 1864 and educated at Harvard, Reynolds wanted to be a writer but abandoned that pursuit after working briefly as a reader for *Youth’s Companion*. In 1891 he moved to New York, where he became a publisher’s agent for Cassells (a British firm) and helped place British titles for American publication and vice versa. He was responsible for offering newspaper publisher O. M. Dunham first refusal on British books that might interest them, and he served as a general intermediary between Cassells in England and American publishers or authors. Subsequently, he established similar relationships with Heinemann, Sampson Low, and Constable. Reynolds thus began primarily as a specialist in transatlantic copyright, benefiting from the expansion of the book trade enabled by the Chace Act of 1891 and the availability for the first time of reciprocal copyright between the United Kingdom and the United States.  

The second type of discovery-related labor American agents performed—certifying an author’s arrival as an established figure—occurred only after agents like Reynolds shifted away from making money through arrangements with British publishers and began working as “double agents,” claiming to represent publishers and authors equally. According to James Hepburn, Reynolds was the “most important early literary agent in America” and was of particular interest because “in a much more conspicuous way than his fellows he was a double agent, serving both publishers and authors.”

32 West, *American Authors and the Literary Marketplace Since 1900*, 83. Christopher P. Wilson describes the way literature, as a result of the “initial spark” of the bill, “became defined as legal property,” subject to “managerial collaboration and supervision,” expanding, both directly and indirectly, the need for professionals like Reynolds. Wilson, *The Labor of Words*, 74.

1895 he represented authors as well as publishers and typically earned a 10 percent commission on material sold. These commissions soon became his primary source of income, specifically from placing British and American authors’ writings in commercial magazines.  

Frederick Lewis Allen, who penned a commissioned “biographical sketch” of Reynolds (published posthumously in 1944), observes that the shift to mass market magazines provided Reynolds “a new market and a profitable one; and by stiffening the editorial competition for the work of popular authors it was slowly fortifying the position of the literary agent in America.” By the nineteen-teens, Reynolds was well known to authors, editors, and publishers; his dossier of clients included Stephen Crane, Arthur Conan Doyle, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Rudyard Kipling, Frank Norris, Upton Sinclair, Booth Tarkington, and H. G. Wells. He took a lead role in deciding where to submit his clients’ work, determining his clients’ required price, and keeping his clients up to date on where their work had been declined or accepted.

Reynolds and other agents were quick to warn writers that no expert could sell an unsalable piece of work, but they billed themselves as experts on available markets, especially useful for “an author who cannot afford the time to study the contents of magazines in order to know which is most likely to want the kind of thing which he

34 Ibid., 74; West, American Authors and the Literary Marketplace Since 1900, 84.
35 Frederick Lewis Allen, Paul Revere Reynolds: A Biographical Sketch (Scranton, PA: Privately Printed, The Haddon Craftsmen, 1944), 39. Allen was hired by Reynolds’s wife to write this account, and he conducted the research for the book without ever explaining his intentions to Reynolds. The book was privately printed after Reynolds died. Allen dedicates an entire chapter of his biography to the so-called magazine revolution of 1893, when Cosmopolitan, McClure’s, and Munsey’s began to sell their product for five to ten cents. These new magazines relied on ad revenue as their major source of income, and each soon boasted between 500,000 and one million readers.
36 Ibid., 71. In the context of a national magazine marketplace vetting literary aspirants, the work of becoming known was ostensibly up to the author alone; the agent came in only once this process was well underway. This seems to be the norm as described by London and depicted through his autobiographical novel Martin Eden (1909).
writes.” As a result, the moment when an author could attract an agent was associated with a certain kind of status in the mainstream publishing establishment. To be represented by Reynolds signaled a form of literary success, a stage in a writer’s career when he or she had earned the privilege of a manuscript broker. Reynolds’s son and eventual successor at the helm of the family business Paul Revere Reynolds Jr. recalls in his memoir *The Middle Man: The Adventures of a Literary Agent* (1971) that Gertrude Stein once contacted Reynolds for representation, enclosing with her letter “a caricature of her which *Punch*, the leading British humor magazine, had published. … She wrote that is she was important enough to be burlesqued by *Punch*, wasn’t she important enough for my father to accept as a client?” Stein’s idea of being worthy of Reynolds was tied to her importance, as expressed by her mass media recognition. Reynolds rebuffed Stein on the grounds that “he was unable to understand what she was trying to do with her writing, and hence he was not the person to handle her work,” a reply that indicates his own desire to balance reputation and mainstream accessibility.

---


38 Reynolds’s status as this type of agent however, required certain restrictions in his practices. He did not deal in poetry unless handling it as a small part of an author’s larger body of work for sale. “The commission is so small,” he said of poetry in a letter to Sinclair, “that it doesn’t pay.” 19 January 1905, Reynolds Records. This is not to say that Reynolds exclusively represented authors who would maximize his commissions. He was equally interested in his own professional legitimacy, which required profitable as well as prestigious clientele.


40 Ibid. The early stages of an avant-garde author’s career would typically fall outside these boundaries, for the unwritten rules of the restricted field of cultural production demanded that such authors reject consumer culture and produce experimental writing that would initially struggle to find an audience. In January 1907, Stein also showed a version of *Three Lives* to Flora May Holly, who replied, “I doubt very much if I could find a publisher who would consider these three stories for book publication,” adding “the characters themselves would not appeal to a large audience.” James R. Mellow, *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company* (Macmillan, 2003), 127. Stein was later represented by Paris literary agent William Aspenwall Bradley and then his widow Jenny. For more information on the Bradleys, see Mellow, *Charmed Circle*; Gertrude Stein, Carl Van Vechten, and Edward Burns, *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, 1913-1946: 1913-1935* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).
between the most respected authors and the most profitable ones made an agent’s job both difficult and important. Since Reynolds used his understanding of the existing market to place short stories and serial novels, his choices affected his authors’ exposure, the kinds of venues they would be associated with, and the kinds of readers they would be most likely to reach. The money authors received from publishing in magazines meant they could make less profitable (and possibly more reputation-driven) choices when publishing their books. The agent gradually took on an increasing role in shaping these position-takings.

For the change in an agent’s job duties to occur, the agent first had to become enough of an institutional fixture to be broadly regarded as legitimate. In 1893, British publisher William Heinemann penned a “scathing portrait of the literary agent” in a series of letters for the Athenaeum.\(^4^1\) Heinemann’s “The Middleman as Viewed by a Publisher” begins with the remark that a middleman is “generally a parasite” and “always flourishes.”\(^4^2\) In the agent’s case, he does so by finding an author who is “just beginning to succeed” and promising him to “double, triple, increase his income tenfold if he will only allow you ten percent.”\(^4^3\) The agent, in so doing, “refutes any argument” that the author “owes anything to the publisher for his success.”\(^4^4\) According to Allen, “the respectable publishers of the nineties” fell in with Heinemann and “looked upon agents as pests, as contemptible interlopers.”\(^4^5\) Mary Ann Gillies echoes, “publishers almost


\(^{42}\) William Heinemann, “The Middleman as Viewed by a Publisher,” Athenaeum, November 11, 1893, 663.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Reynolds Jr., The Middle Man, 90.
uniformly condemned the literary agent as an unwelcome, opportunistic interloper.”

The agent’s reputation remained precarious throughout the early 1900s, especially with regards to his relations with book publishers.

To combat widespread distrust of agents, professionals like Reynolds began to adopt a code of ethics to differentiate legitimate agents from so-called hacks. Allen claims that “the feeling against agents . . . died because there were men acting as agents who were incorruptible.” In a 1916 letter to Wilbur Daniel Steele, Reynolds tries to convince Steele to take him on as an agent using his market expertise and ability to handle part of the author’s workload as his major selling points:

I have sold stories of authors like Booth Tarkington, Mary Robert Rinehart, Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews, Richard Washburn Child, Fannie Hurst, Gouverneur Morris, H. G. Wells, Henry Kitchell Webster, and so forth. I have only sold their work because I got them more money than they’ve got themselves. I am sure I could do this for you if you’d let me try!

At the heart of Reynolds’s pitch is the promise of more money, but Reynolds knew all too well that his offer did not appeal exclusively to the greed of authors. By using the phrase “I could do this for you” Reynolds invites a prospective client to put something bothersome in the agent’s hands. In this sense Reynolds is selling liberation. Further, in order to convince authors to take him on, Reynolds had to convince them he was reputable and trustworthy. If authors had to spend as much time guarding themselves against sneaky agents, the appeal of a proxy would be lost. Hence the mention of his top clients, which asserts his credibility and his status as a top tier agent.

Allen’s biographical sketch of Reynolds similarly frames the legitimate agent as a professional untainted by salesmanship’s worst attributes. He explains, “Though his life

---


48 Reynolds to Wilbur Daniel Steele, 15 January 1916, Reynolds Records.
work has consisted in selling, his technique is far removed from that suggested these days by the word salesmanship. He elaborates that Reynolds was able to name high prices not through high-pressure methods but rather, “because editors know that through long experience he has gained an almost uncanny knowledge of his markets and of the sum which any particular manuscript can be expected to bring.” Of course, these strategies necessarily varied from client to client based on the kind of work they produced and where they were willing to publish. Since agents acted as intermediaries naming prices on behalf of authors, they could conduct disinterested negotiations and effectively turn the tables on editors. They could also offer writers’ work to those who could pay what that writer commanded. For some authors he focused on maximizing their profit potential by selling their work at progressively higher rates to whatever venues would make both author and agent the most money. For others, he worked within a frame of respectability, following the authors’ wishes, but simultaneously ensuring higher prices than the authors could have negotiated by themselves.

Most importantly, Reynolds and his ilk differentiated themselves from the so-called hack agents who charged young and unsuspecting literary aspirants a fee for representation rather than a commission for work sold. Reynolds Jr. recalls his father’s

49 Allen, Paul Revere Reynolds, 85.

50 Ibid., 85–86.

51 Ibid., 86.

52 Dorothy Canfield Fisher was able to command $20,000 for a serial novel, $2,000 for a short story in the 1910s and 1920s, and Booth Tarkington in the 1910s was commanding up to $30,000 for a serial novel sight unseen, and up to $3,500 for a short story. A client like Tarkington could command top rates in part because he wrote the kind of material that Reynolds could sell to newspapers. Yet Reynolds also represented Willa Cather who, despite being a well-respected, widely-known writer, did not have nearly as much commercial appeal as writers like Tarkington and Fisher. For example, Cather garnered less than $3,500 for her novel Death Comes for the Archbishop in 1926.
disdain for these “pseudo agents” who took fees from unknown amateurs. He explains, “The pseudo agents make their living by charging amateur authors a fee for the reading of each of their manuscripts. An amateur who pays the fee hopes the pseudo agent will sell his manuscript to a publisher.” His digression about pseudo agents points to a desire to differentiate the respectable work of the legitimate agent from the suspicious activities of hack pretenders. These hacks did in fact represent unknown authors but assured themselves a living through a practice that most agents found objectionable. By charging reading fees, agents were assured a living whether their clients ever published anything. Such an agent had no incentive to represent a client fairly or remain persistent with a piece that had accrued a handful of rejections. Worse, agents like these need possess no understanding of the market or insider knowledge and could prey upon literary hopefuls whose work had no chance of ever being accepted.

In the United States, the agent could act as the facilitator of literary debut when the practice of representing speculative talent became economically viable and professionally legitimate, which meant that an agent had to find a way to make money off an unproven author or defray his or her costs by making a significant amount off eventually-successful clients without being castigated as a parasite or hack.

“Don’t Let’s Have Publicity Men”:

53 Reynolds Jr., *The Middle Man*, 18–19.

54 Reynolds Jr. spends an entire chapter early in his book describing his father’s profession as he encountered it as a young apprentice.

55 Responding largely to these pseudo agents, Reynolds Jr. along with several literary agents, founded the Society of Authors Representatives in 1928. His father’s practices were essentially a model for the organizations’ Canon of Ethics. The ethical agent, according to an SAR pamphlet, “deducts his commission and pays the balance to the author promptly”; “charges the author with no expense incurred by the normal operation of his office”; “maintains separate bank accounts so that monies due to authors are not commingled with the agency’s working funds”; “treats the financial affairs of his client as private and confidential”; and “does not advertise his services.”
McNickle, Rae, and the Gendered Literary Agent

Before analyzing McNickle’s individual experiences, I want to focus on his agent Ruth Rae in the context of the transformations I have been documenting. She was operating at a time when the literary agent’s role in career-launching had begun to take shape. It was also the period when the nation’s most famous authors were represented by larger literary agencies, which had been established in Reynolds’s wake and continued to grow in size during the teens and twenties. Rae, meanwhile, was a woman in a profession dominated by men. She was also a lesser-known, self-employed professional who showed signs of anxiety about her own status in the literary marketplace. In one letter to McNickle, Rae refers to such worries about her image: “Sold the Archie Binns play yesterday and finally he is convinced that I’m an agent who works after all. Three years on that play! I don’t think I’ll ever have difficulties with him again.”56 Of course, this one piece of evidence could simply point to a troubled relationship with one client. I hope to show, instead, that Rae was at something of a disadvantage as an agent, but that this troubled status also guided her toward unproven, promising clients.

I began this chapter with a letter Rae wrote to McNickle in February 1936, in which she asks McNickle not to have “publicity men” and “other people” working alongside her.57 I return to this letter now because it suggests one aspect of how Rae saw herself in this system. After her appeal to avoid publicity men, she alludes suggestively to the kind of treatment she expected McNickle to receive once he had emerged as a sensation:

You will have to come to New York just as soon as the reviews break. If the book does half of what I expect it to, you’re going to have all kinds of people after you to make your plans and offer you all kinds of suggestions. They’ll even tell you I’m a lousy agent and how many things I haven’t done that I might have done.

56 Rae to McNickle, 17 January 1936, McNickle Papers.
57 Rae to McNickle, 1 February 1936, McNickle Papers.
They’ll want you for radio, too, and it wouldn’t surprise me at all if someone came along and suggested you have your picture taken in a halo of colored feathers. All things (but the feathers) will have to be handled as they come along.\(^58\)

This forward-looking description signals Rae’s worry about another agent castigating her to poach her newly successful client. She anticipates strategies commonly used toward this end and points specifically to McNickle’s Native American identity. She enlists the image of a halo of feathers to show imagined publicity men and agents’ shallow understanding of American Indians in contrast to her own close connection to her friend and client. Yet, in so doing, she also signals her own awareness of his potential as an Indian sensation. Overall, her letter implies that she is aware of a system of professionalism that viewed her as less legitimate than other agents and characteristically, invokes her ability to operate as a more intimate mediator as her most significant asset. What I’m trying to suggest, then, is at least a preliminary connection between Rae’s hierarchical position and her willingness to put her energies behind an unproven client.

Discovery emerged first as the role of the less-established agent, a category Rae fit by virtue of her unproven record and her status as a woman. Eventually, literary debut became the province of any agent, but this process took time.

Information about Rae is not easy to find. Like the most legitimate agents of her day, Rae did not advertise her services in periodicals of the 1930s and did not charge young authors to read submissions. Beyond her relationship with McNickle, no scholarly work about Rae has been published. There is no major archive of her correspondence and no biographical information about her available in print. McNickle’s biographer Dorothy R. Parker identifies her only as a “young New Yorker” and suggests that, circa 1935, her “enthusiasm and faith in his work provided a welcome antidote for his bruised ego” (53). A 1930 U.S. Census entry for the “apartment house” at 325 W. 45\(^{th}\) Street, New York,

\(^{58}\) Ibid.
NY, identifies Rae as a female, 34-year-old head of household with two parents of Russian ancestry and no college education. She identified herself as a manager in the motion picture industry rather than a literary agent. Rae had no fewer than five years’ experience when she met McNickle. And she was eight years older than he was. Aside from the fragment, archival evidence (much from the McNickle materials at the Newberry Library in Chicago) provides the most complete portrait of Rae. Her correspondence with McNickle suggests a nuanced understanding of how to approach publishers, how to advocate on behalf of a client, how to navigate the complexities of a book contract, and how to pursue a contract for a film adaptation of a book. Her letterhead, however, does not affiliate her with an agency but instead gave only her name in capital letters, her address of 221 West 42nd Street, and her telephone number. She kept at least semi-regular office hours but once remarked, in a letter to McNickle, that none of her clients “seem to have any money to pay me my penny commissions” and that “every other day finds me in a state of stew wondering whether the lock is going to be changed on my door at both the house and the office.” Although the Depression may have played a role in Rae’s financial woes as much as it did McNickle’s, Rae seems to have been teetering on the edge of financial collapse on several occasions and further appears to have abandoned the profession between 1939 and 1947.

Understanding Rae’s role in literary New York involves a closer look at her horizon of possibilities as an unproven, independent, female agent in a profession dominated by men. One agent whose career forms a direct basis for comparison is Flora


60 The archive of the *New Yorker* at the New York Public Library indexes Rae as author’s representative to Binns and Felix Riesenber.

61 Rae to McNickle 17 January 1936, McNickle Papers.

62 See Parker, *Singing an Indian Song*, 118.
May Holly. Her business records have been preserved, so information about her life and career is available to an extent that such information about Rae is not. I do not mean to suggest that Holly and Rae had identical experiences or that all women agents had the same challenges and opportunities, but the similarities between these two agents are deeply suggestive of a specific category of professionalism. Remaining unmarried for her entire life, Holly began her career by taking a “six months’ course in typewriting, shorthand and business training.” After a short-lived position at *The Churchman*, she worked as an editorial assistant on the staff of *The Bookman from 1896 to 1905. Upon leaving *The Bookman, she established a business as an independent authors’ and publishers’ representative. She had a range of bestselling clients, including Gertrude Atherton, Whitman Chambers, Lucille Edgerton, Edna Ferber, and Guy Gilpatrick. She also famously sold *Sister Carrie* on behalf of Theodore Dreiser.

Since hers was a predominantly male profession, she was the subject of some notoriety. In a piece she wrote for *Independent Woman* in 1920, for example, she offered advice to women of the working world; there were “many high places for women in business” if they dispensed with any “timidity in wishing to assume responsibility.” There existed a clear institutional bias against women as financially savvy professionals, but Holly expressed confidence that women could overcome a stereotype that was primarily the result of women’s own behavior. Although Holly without a doubt reached a level of success that Rae never enjoyed, she saw herself as an alternative to major agencies of the period. In reply to John C. Legler’s decision to drop her as an agent, she wrote, “I knew when you succeeded in selling two stories I had returned that you had

---

63 Flora May Holly, “How One Woman Made Good,” *The Independent Woman*, May 1920, 9. Flora May Holly Papers, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division. For many years, Holly was a close friend and companion of the author and editor, Arthur Bartlett Maurice. He was formerly editor of *The Bookman* (joint editor 1899 to 1909 and editor through 1916) and when on to serve as literary editor of the New York *Herald* and the New York *Sun*. He died in 1946.

64 Ibid.
decided you wanted a better agent, and there are plenty of them.”\textsuperscript{65} She predicted that her work on Legler’s behalf would be of continuing benefit to him. She wrote, “I pave the way for the next agent” and “now that you are started another agent will undoubtedly find you a profitable client.”\textsuperscript{66} She also included an explanation for status in the literary marketplace. “In taking on a new writer an agent of course realizes that it may be a gamble and some time before any real money is made. But I happen to be the type of agent who is interested in new writers, and willing to take that gamble.”\textsuperscript{67} Holly’s reply suggests the most significant feature of publishing industry that was growing rapidly and becoming ever more institutional. \textsuperscript{68} The writer, upon facing rejection, required one type of professional, an agent willing to take a chance on an unproven talent. That same writer, upon succeeding, might improve his or her career by then moving to a new agent whose legitimacy would add to a writer’s status. Holly thus exemplifies an important feature of any agent willing to bet on literary unknowns. Because of her lower status in the literary marketplace, she was vulnerable to her most successful clients trading up for a more well-known agent once they had experienced some success. Rae was no doubt articulating the same worry when she warned McNickle he would have “all kinds of people after you” telling him she was “a lousy agent.”\textsuperscript{69}

Holly’s position was insecure enough that she supplemented her income with modest forays into the realm of editorial feedback. In addition to offering services placing magazine submissions, Holly charged lesser-known clients for advice on revising and

\textsuperscript{65} Holly to John C. Legler, 17 November 1941, Holly Papers.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{68} Her reply was also, perhaps, somewhat strategic. She expressed disappointment with Legler’s decision but also took him up on his offer to her allow her to continue selling remaining stories still in her possession, which meant at least one additional commission on his work.

\textsuperscript{69} Rae to McNickle, 1 February 1936, McNickle Papers.
marketing their work. Rather than charging a fee to act as an agent, as the “pseudo agents” did, Holly provided editorial feedback on the viability of the submission and agreed to try and sell it only if it was up to par. She charged a reading fee of $2-3 in much the same way that the Author’s Society and the Writer’s Literary Bureau charged for expert feedback. Holly made no promises about trying to place such work with magazines, unless she thought it was good enough to sell, in which case she would then collect her standard commission. Data suggesting Holly’s financial struggles as an independent agent in a male-dominated profession is yet another lens through which to examine Rae’s professional identity, for Rae’s frustrations with clients who couldn’t pay her “penny commissions” and consistent financial difficulties may in fact speak more to her market position than her individual competence as an agent. 70 Such pressures led agents like Holly and Rae to rest some of their financial hopes on unproven literary talent.

Holly can also perhaps help us map Rae’s confidence in saying she expected “to make lots of money” on McNickle, especially if she were able to sell his book to Hollywood. 71 Rejecting work by Noel Coward in 1922, Holly wrote: “I was very sorry to return your other manuscripts, but I am sure you will understand and believe that I want very much to continue to represent and to see all your new stories. Don’t forget that I also place books, motion pictures and plays.” 72 Coward later stated, famously, that “all of my plays excepting ‘Calvacade’ have been vulgarized, distorted, and ruined by movie minds.” 73 When Holly did represent an author’s film rights, she coordinated her efforts with Nan Blair of the Zeppo Marx Agency. Since Holly was primarily a book and

70 Rae to McNickle 17 January 1936, McNickle Papers.
71 Rae to McNickle, 16 October 1935, McNickle Papers.
72 Holly to Coward, 2 March 1922, Holly Papers.
magazine agent and Blair worked in Hollywood, the two worked together whenever one of Holly’s clients submitted a manuscript that she thought could be adapted to film for profit. They agreed to share “the usual 10% so that it does not cost the author any more to have two agents in this movie game.”\textsuperscript{74} Although Blair essentially poached Edgerton in 1941, she and Holly worked together on many occasions. As the literary and film industries coalesced, systems of anonymity, discovery, and celebrity became more institutionalized and codified by mass cultural representations.\textsuperscript{75} Simultaneously, as the monetary rewards of stardom increased, agents had a greater incentive to speculate on unproven talent.\textsuperscript{76} Such financial appeal, then could begin to suggest why Rae listed her occupation as a manager in the motion picture industry, and not as a literary agent, in her 1930 census questionnaire.\textsuperscript{77}

\textbf{Discovering McNickle and Fashioning McNickle as a Discovery}

In 1925, a 21-year-old D’Arcy Dahlberg left the University of Montana, without graduating, with the plan of finishing his bachelor’s degree at Oxford. Discovering Oxford would not transfer many of his credits, he left for Paris and then New York City in May of 1926. There he began submitting short stories and his novel manuscript titled “The Hungry Generations” to New York publishers.\textsuperscript{78} In 1933, Harry Block of Covici,\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{74} Holly to Coward, 16 January 1939, Holly Papers.

\textsuperscript{75} It is also suggestive that literary discovery’s status within the agent’s job description arose concurrent with a steady expansion of the scope of literary agents’ duties between 1890 and 1945 that, suggestively, brought New York literary labor into steady contact with Hollywood, the new beacon of celebrity culture.

\textsuperscript{76} In his lifetime, F. Scott Fitzgerald earned $8,397 in book royalties for \textit{The Great Gatsby}. Harold Ober sold the movie rights for a total of $18,910.


\textsuperscript{78} Hans postulates, “McNickle probably returned from Europe with the first version of \textit{The Surrounded} in his suitcase” (Re-Visions 183).
Friede rejected the manuscript with strong encouragement to resubmit. That summer, Maxim Lieber began showing his work to publishers. In November of 1933, Dahlberg changed his name to McNickle to acknowledge his biological father and enrolled as a member of the Flathead Tribe. In the Summer of 1934 he revised “The Hungry Generations” heavily and renamed it “Dead Grass.” In Spring of 1935, frustrated with Lieber, he asked Rae to circulate his work. She had success that spring with “Meat for God” and facilitated the acceptance of his novel manuscript, now “The Surrounded,” in December of 1935. By this time, McNickle had left for Washington, D.C., first taking a position with the FSA (September) and eventually placed with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (February 1936). Between 1932 and 1936, the would-be writer was constantly in financial distress; he applied for several extensions with the IRS to delay paying back taxes and even tried to borrow $25 per month from the Author’s League to pay for groceries. His hardships, according to Robert Dale Parker, had a profound impact on the novel he toiled over for almost nine years.

Although it may be tempting to see Rae as McNickle’s confidante amid an uncaring literary marketplace, it is important to complicate this reading with the nuances that characterized McNickle’s experiences. The archival evidence is clear if interpreted with an appreciation of publishing industry norms of the 1920s and 30s. From the outset, his rejections came with steady encouragement, much of it focusing on the merits of his Native American subject matter. Whereas Dorothy R. Parker emphasizes that the young writer’s “frustration in getting his novel published was matched over the years by his growing pile of rejection slips,” many of McNickle’s refusals included a personal

79 Parker, Singing an Indian Song, 45.

80 Some time circa 1927, McNickle spent seven months in Philadelphia working as a used car salesman (Dorothy Parker 32).
response.\textsuperscript{81} Such replies were in fact a sign of authorial progress. Parker no doubt provides an accurate description of McNickle’s emotional state, but her invocation of his “pile of rejection slips” emphasizes their impersonality and interchangeability over the individual attention each editor gave to McNickle’s submissions.\textsuperscript{82} The rejections he tended to receive were the very replies, short of acceptance, Douglas hoped to receive.

Publishers generally saw McNickle as a promising young aspirant. His Salish heritage, along with the “Indian” content of his submission, only added to his potential cachet, if they were handled in a manner those publishers found acceptable. The promise of McNickle’s talents earned him considerations not offered to other young writers. Pearce explained that “so great” had been the publishers’ interest in McNickle’s novel that he was “departing from our usual custom in quoting extracts from our confidential reports” in order to guide his revisions.\textsuperscript{83} The readers’ report excerpts are hopeful about the work but agree with the overall comment that “everything is in favor” of the book “except the telling.” Focusing almost completely on matters of style and technique, the reviewers call the draft “slow, explicit, over-labored ... too consciously poised, and compressed” with “a lack of forcefulness, of human warmth.”\textsuperscript{84} The reviewers detected in McNickle’s work an “unfinished quality”; one reader reported that McNickle had drawn “soil-novel silhouettes” instead of “human creatures.”\textsuperscript{85} Pearce’s letter casts “Miss

\textsuperscript{81} Parker, \textit{Singing an Indian Song}, 53.
\textsuperscript{82} Perhaps the most iconic detail used to characterize McNickle’s anonymity in the face of a harsh and uncaring marketplace is an April 1929 rejection letter from Charles A. Pearce of Harcourt, Brace, and Company. The letter opens with the salutation “Dear Miss Dahlberg.” McNickle was then using his stepfather’s surname of Dahlberg rather than that of his biological father’s, but Owens uses the gender confusion of this letter to emphasize McNickle’s strained relationship with mainstream publishing companies. Owens concludes: “despite their confusion about the author’s gender, Harcourt, Brace’s declaration would prove prophetic.” Owens, \textit{Other Destinies}, 61.
\textsuperscript{83} Pearce to McNickle, 26 April 1929, McNickle Papers.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
Dahlberg” as a promising beginner and himself as the messenger of his reviewers’ expert opinion. Their critique of McNickle was one that other editors and publishers echoed in more than fifty rejection letters between 1927 and 1935. Pearce explained that he intended the excerpts to “indicate not only the feeling we have had towards this manuscript but also that we will be glad to see any studied revision of the present manuscript and any future writing that you undertake.”  

Pearce and his readers (as quoted by Pearce) appear in this letter as publishing industry experts offering helpful suggestions to a beginner with great material and not enough training. To an aspiring writer of this period, a refusal with this much encouragement to resubmit and share more material rated as a sign of potential professional progress and not failure.

In 1927, Lee Foster Hartman, associate editor at Harper and Brothers, wrote, “I am impressed with your literary possibilities.” In 1930, Lenore Marshall of Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, writing to reject The Hungry Generations, called it “an unusually interesting and well written novel” and referred to a face-to-face meeting he had with McNickle the previous week. Six months later, when McNickle inquired about submitting a revised version of The Hungry Generations, Marshall replied: “I remember you, and I remember liking The Hungry Generations. I am glad you are rewriting it now. Do be sure to send it to me when it is completed.” Several examples, in other words, suggest McNickle having difficulty placing his work with publishers but succeeding at capturing editors’ and publishers’ individual attention and receiving ample encouragement and feedback. Harry Block went so far as to recommend McNickle for a Bread Loaf fellowship, citing the author’s “novel dealing with Indian reservation life”

86 Ibid.
87 Hartman to McNickle, 10 November 1927, McNickle Papers.
89 Marshall to McNickle, 16 September 1930, McNickle Papers.
and “great deal of unusual ability” as McNickle’s strengths, whereas “his work still needs
critical guidance of a kind which is beyond either the province or the power of a general
publisher to give him.”90 McNickle did not receive the fellowship; Morrison wrote in
May 1935 that he was “very sorry indeed” to inform McNickle that he was “not one of
the candidates finally chosen for fellowships at the writers’ conference this year.”91 It was
one more rejection letter among many and further incentive to entrust his literary fortunes
to Rae, which he apparently did with abandon within weeks of this letter.92

Of course, there’s something patronizing about responses like Pearce’s. “It is so
nearly all that one needs,” one Harcourt reader said of The Hungry Generations, “that it
would be a shame to publish it in this state.”93 Editorial judgments, as a rule, establish
hierarchical relationships between writers and publishers. In McNickle’s case, that
relationship seems to have been based on some notion of McNickle’s inexperience as an
aspirant. The same reviewer concludes: “Perhaps the author needs a year of brooding;
further experience in ‘method.’”94 Precisely what would signify his maturation was not
explicit, but it may have pertained to the judgment summarized by Lenore S. Marshall of
Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith that “your picture of the father and the mother on the
Indian Reservation is a very real and moving one,” but the sections dealing with
Archilde’s time in Europe and afterward “deal with matter which is more familiar to the
general reader, and they did not seem to me to come up to the beginning.”95 It is not clear

90 Block to T.H. Morrison, 18 March 1935, McNickle Papers.
91 Morrison to McNickle, 6 May 1935, McNickle Papers.
92 Two weeks prior, he had written to Rae about “arranging for me to meet Burton Roscoe” with an
unabashed “ulterior purpose in mind,” to find “some damn kind of job, at once.” McNickle to Rae, 19 April
1935, McNickle Papers.
93 Pearce to McNickle, 26 April 1929, McNickle Papers.
94 Ibid.
95 Lenore S. Marshall to McNickle, 5 May 1931, McNickle Papers.
that Marshall was reading McNickle as an “Indian” writer with some trouble depicting the white world and the white point of view, but he was reading McNickle’s depiction of “Indian” material as his strength. The most common verdict for McNickle was that he had literary potential but needed proper molding. On one level, such a judgment could simply refer to an established rite of passage by which young writers became professionals. Yet, in McNickle’s case, the process could also reflect a desire to see McNickle establish credibility as a Native American while tempering his novel’s condemnation of its white characters. Either way, refusal is integrally tied to the idea of discovery, for a publisher can rebuff an aspirant for opaque reasons and leave the work of becoming satisfactory wholly in the hands of the aspirant. The process thus resembles authorial agency while ultimately satisfying the publisher’s market needs.

As I have already suggested in the general sense, agents facilitated these processes in several ways. Specifically, McNickle’s introduction to Maxim Lieber was a direct result of his many rejections. In February 1933, Harry Block of Covici, Friede declined “The Hungry Generations” but showed interest in publishing a revised version. He gave McNickle a deadline of May 15, which McNickle met. Two weeks later, however, Block wrote: “I am very sorry to say that the changes you have made have not been sufficient to make the book publishable yet.” He invited McNickle to his office to “have another talk with you about the manuscript.” A month later, Block wrote a referral to Maxim Lieber, a New York literary agent who represented Louis Adamic, Alvah Bessie, Erskine Caldwell, Langston Hughes, and Nathanael West. Lieber was a Polish American Jew who had come to the United States as a child. He served in World War I and later founded the Lieber and Lewis Publishing Company (bought by Albert Boni in 1923). He then served as head of publishing for Brentano’s from 1926 to 1930, a

96 Block to McNickle, 27 February 1933, McNickle Papers.

97 Block to McNickle, 31 May 1933, McNickle Papers.
post he left to found his literary agency. Lieber went on to boast clients like Saul Bellow, John Cheever, Carson McCullers, and Thomas Wolfe. He fled the country in 1950 after Whittaker Chambers named him as an accomplice to espionage in his testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee. As an agent, his clientele included several writer who would now be associated with the high modernists but also other writers of African American, Chinese, Slovenian, and European Jewish descent.98

Lieber wrote to McNickle in June of 1933 that he was “glad to read the script with a view to negotiating a contract for its publication.”99 By November of the same year, however, Lieber wrote: “I have begun to despair of ever selling ‘The Hungry Generations’. I have tried it around everywhere as the enclosed card will show but without success.”100 Lieber also read several of McNickle’s short stories. Of “Man’s Work,” he concluded that the “tempo is painfully slow and, for the amount of incident, the piece is unnecessarily long. I seriously doubt if it would be acceptable to any magazine.”101 His evaluation of “The Wedding Night,” in contrast, was more positive: “[It] is a much better story, and I shall likely offer it for publication.”102 Lieber wanted to discuss edits to the story, including its “very weak and inconclusive ending” before taking “any action” on its behalf.103 In June 1934, McNickle asked Lieber to return copies of his work, and he replied with a general criticism:

They all have fine stuff in them, as all your work, but they have one fault in various degrees. This is your predilection for the trick ending. That somehow

---


99 Lieber to McNickle, 14 June 1933.

100 Lieber to McNickle, 22 November 1933, McNickle Papers.

101 Lieber to McNickle, 13 September 1933, McNickle Papers.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.
makes the reader feel cheated and breaks up the reality of what you’ve depicted so well. It’s almost as if to say “See, dear reader, I was fooling you all along.”

Lieber was forthcoming with specific editorial advice. Having formerly worked as a publisher and co-edited an anthology of short fiction, he was an agent better suited to the norms of the 1930s than the traditional practices of agents like Paul Revere Reynolds. Due primarily to lack of evidence, it is difficult to characterize his relationship with McNickle, but it does seem to be the case that McNickle did take at least some of Lieber’s feedback to heart, as Lieber criticized that “Matty’s suicide isn’t built up enough to seem justifiable or real.”

The posthumously published version of the story taken from a draft in the McNickle archives, includes no such suicide. The character in question, referred to only as Matilda, witnesses the gruesome death of her chicken at the hands of a hawk but is “cheerful and full of prospects” when the narrator leaves her ranch house. Of course, the surviving draft could have pre-dated a version McNickle showed to Lieber, but the removal of a problematic conclusion after Lieber’s strong warning against it seems far more likely.

Apparently moving away from his association with Lieber, McNickle resubmitted his latest version of “The Hungry Generations” (now titled “Dead Grass”) to Covici, Friede and received an acceptance in October 1934, pending more revisions. This time, Block gave McNickle manuscript reports to guide his revisions. One reader’s report, similar to Harcourt all those years before, questioned McNickle’s “tendency to see the whites in unrelieved black, as unmitigated villains in the piece.” The story needed “more shading” and “an effort to understand the white characters as well as he does his

104 Lieber to McNickle, 12 June 1934, McNickle Papers.
105 Ibid.
107 Ibid., 64.
Indians.”

Purdy questions the weight of this feedback, arguing that “one cannot be certain that the manuscript read by Covici and Friede was identical to the published novel” but that this version “appears to have been very similar” to the version Rae sold to Dodd, Mead. A copy of this particular draft has not survived, so Purdy bases this estimation on plot points discussed in the manuscript report and what he sees as a short duration between the two events. His conclusion, however, is flawed in two important respects. First, in actuality, more than a year passed between the receipt of this report and Rae’s sale of the manuscript to Dodd, Mead. Second, McNickle’s contract with Covici, Friede was valid only if his revisions satisfactorily addressed the readers’ criticisms. Although McNickle does not seemed to have changed the novel’s major events, which word-level manipulations of point of view and free indirect discourse—one of the text’s most distinguishing traits—could very well be directly attributable to this stage of revisions.

In the Spring of 1935, McNickle turned to Rae for assistance with his literary prospects. Covici, Friede issued its final verdict in early February, and an undated scrap of paper in the McNickle archives, circa March 1936, lists addresses and phone numbers for Ruth Rae and Marian Saunders, as well as a list of men who work for publishers, including Burton Roscoe. In April 1935, McNickle wrote to Rae: “You spoke to me the other day of arranging for me to meet Burton Roscoe and I wonder if this might not be

---


109 Purdy, Word Ways, 38.

110 Purdy also refers to an “initial printing” of “Dead Grass,” which I have not been able to verify. My understanding is that the manuscript never reached this stage of publication. Ibid.

111 The majority of these touches are demonstrably absent from the now-published version of The Hungry Generations, which Hans argues must be “one of the earliest versions under the first working title.” McNickle and Hans, D’Arcy McNickle’s The Hungry Generations, 17. Evidence demonstrably suggests that manuscript predates the summer 1934 revision McNickle titled “Dead Grass,” but Hans offers no supporting details to associate the surviving manuscript with a particular moment between April 1929 and June 1934.
carried out even now.”  

112 McNickle admitted “an ulterior purpose” with regard to the introduction. “I must find some damn kind of job, at once, and I suppose it is always possible that he might just know of something in the way of editing, Ms. reading, etc.”  

113 By the end of May, she had sold what was to be his first published short story, “Meat for God,” to *Esquire*. Rae, in comparison with Lieber, was less established, but she saw McNickle as an unknown with vast potential, a fact which seems to have encouraged him.  

114 Rae’s persistent work on McNickle’s behalf—including her strategy of presenting McNickle as a discovery waiting to be discovered—were arguably the most important factors in the launching of his literary career. McNickle did decide that he needed to revise his work and develop better publishing industry connections in order to succeed, but he also began to question the values of publishing houses like Harcourt, Brace and Covici, Friede. Hans summarizes McNickle’s emerging suspicions: “In his opinion, they were afraid of the financial failure of a novel dealing in a new way with the theme of the American Indian.”  

115 Block made the same point, overtly, in his letter to McNickle upon finally rejecting *The Surrounded* in 1935. Despite Block “urging its acceptance here almost daily for the last two weeks,” he explained, there had arisen “a very sharp division of opinion” between the book’s supports and “those who think that its sale will be a very disappointing one.”  

116 His candor was meant to explain to McNickle why the publishing contract had not

---

112 McNickle to Rae, 19 April 1935, McNickle Papers.

113 Ibid.

114 During this period, Rae also represented McNickle’s wife Joran, who went on to publish three translations of Norwegian writer Gosta of Geijerstam in 1937, 1938, and 1939, and a memoir under her maiden name (after her divorce) called *Birchland: A Journey Home to Norway* in 1939. Parker, *Singing an Indian Song*, 267.


116 Block to McNickle, 5 February 1935, McNickle Papers.
materialized. “I feel that our rejection of the book is mistake,” he added, making his
dissent from the official Covici, Friede decision as apparent as possible.\textsuperscript{117} McNickle
developed hostility toward those members of the publishing industry who avoided risks
and sought to rewrite his Indian identity to adhere with market expectations, but he also
gravitated toward to the professionals he saw as his allies opposed to a system with these
dysfunctional priorities. Detailing his incomplete degree at the University of Montana, as
well as his years of studying “independently in England and France,” Hans argues that
McNickle’s “formal education” gave him “the tools that he used so successfully
throughout his life, but it also continued to encourage his complete assimilation.”\textsuperscript{118} A
similar statement might be made of McNickle’s years of professional initiation.

Implicit in any analysis of McNickle’s relations with New York publishers is
nothing less than a question about the author’s “authenticity” as an early representative of
Native American literature. The manuscript record does indicate that McNickle attained
confidence as a novelist only when he came to terms with the conflicting value systems
of his boyhood and ancestral roots, his assimilationist education, and his later
professionalization. I would argue that his negotiation of these conflicts was more
nuanced than the existing scholarship would suggest. The fact that much of McNickle’s
“improvement” as a writer was a direct result of feedback from editors, publishers, and
agents complicates an assertion that is otherwise true to the textual differences between
\textit{The Hungry Generations} and \textit{The Surrounded}.\textsuperscript{119} McNickle’s emerging aesthetic
benefitted from a mixture of support and rejection from a range of industry professionals.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} McNickle and Hans, \textit{D’Arcy McNickle’s The Hungry Generations}, 11.

\textsuperscript{119} Hans hones in on this complexity, finding irony in the fact that “The Hungry Generations” appears to
articulate McNickle’s “unquestioning acceptance of mainstream American values of the time.” Ibid., 2. In
her earlier work on the manuscript, she says the novel “would have fit very comfortably into the group of
eyear novels had he managed to get it published before he started serious revisions in 1934.” Hans, “Re-
visions,” 183.
The collaborative momentum furnished through his relationships with professionals like Block and Rae, in particular, shaped his evolution as a writer. Additionally, the moments when McNickle rejected his rejecters by revising on his own terms were also vital to his development.

“Musician by Birth and a Printer by Accident”:

Cultural Exchange in *The Surrounded*

Critics have noted that the possibility of cultural recognition forms a central formal and topical concern in McNickle’s debut novel. Where they have differed is whether the novel is ultimately trapped by commercial tropes of Indian identity or able to transcend them. Hans argues that “The Hungry Generations” articulates “the need to absorb the Euro-American point of view,” whereas *The Surrounded* tells a “more complex story that no longer moves along by defending the need for complete assimilation at all cost.”¹²⁰ Purdy, likewise, represents *The Surrounded* as the result of McNickle reconciling himself to his indigenous identity. Owens, positioning himself against Purdy, argues that *The Surrounded* remains bound by a “Euramerican view of the Indian.”¹²¹ According to Owens, McNickle never offers a means of escape from that imprisonment. Though Hans, Purdy, and Owens offer different conclusions about the novel’s success in transcending a Euro-American perspective, their responses all attempt to navigate the unique way the third-person narrator moves among a constellation of principal characters. The relative possibility of “final meaning” in a narrative structured foremost by perspectival multiplicity is arguably the central question of the published novel.

---


Reading for the novel’s dialogic relationship with the politics of literary debut can bring a new perspective to this debate. I do not wish to read *The Surrounded* as an allegory for the modern publishing industry, nor do I wish to suggest any deliberate effort on McNickle’s part to encode a reading of the publishing system into his text. Rather, I want to read *The Surrounded* as a narrative in dialogue with the aspect of its historical context most adjacent to the novel’s production: a rapidly changing publishing and publicity infrastructure. Continuing the efforts of Birgit Hans and others, I would suggest that McNickle’s nine-year experience pursuing leads, forming professional relationships, and working to be discovered and to become discoverable forms the basis for a provocative lens in close-reading *The Surrounded*. Far from functioning as a rehash of the so-called professional lessons of his budding literary career, however, McNickle constructs a rebuke of publishing industry values that is necessarily born from his ambivalent initiation within that system. The novel expresses the need for a model of cultural exchange that belies commercial usurpation and breaks from the power imbalances that tainted the history of contact, removal, assimilation, and allotment. The most important components of this process are the novel’s use of free indirect discourse, its deployment of silence as symbolic defiance, and its rebuke of two dominant models of artistic value—nationalist productivity and artistic retreat—both of which are ultimately encourage Native American assimilation and subordination. These three narrative elements collectively dwell upon the impossibility of genuine communication in the face of a culture-wide power imbalance and gesture at a model of mutual discovery that moves beyond these limitations.

*The Surrounded* tells the story of Archilde Leon, a mixedblood Indian living on the Flathead Reservation in Montana. His white father Max Leon and Salish mother Catharine are estranged and live in separates houses on the same property. The early parts of the book narrate Archilde’s return from Portland and his conflict with Max, who harbors the hope that one of his mixedblood sons will prove himself worthy of taking
over his ranch. Archilde, having learned to play violin at an Indian boarding school, considers leaving to complete his studies. Leon’s friend Father Grepilloux convinces Archilde to stay and study with Father Cristadore. While hunting, Archilde, Catharine, and Archilde’s brother Louis are confronted for the unlawful killing of a doe. The game warden kills Louis as he reaches for his rifle, and Catharine retaliates by splitting the warden’s skull with a hatchet. Archilde and his mother bury the warden and return with Louis’ body claiming to know nothing of who shot him. Max falls ill but reconciles with Archilde before dying. Sheriff Dave Quigley spends the spring searching for the game warden’s body and after Catharine dies, Archilde is afraid of being blamed for the game warden’s murder. He flees to the mountains with his two nephews and a young mixedblood woman named Elise, but they are tracked down and cornered by Quigley and Indian Agent Horace Parker. Elise kills Quigley before she and Archilde are forced to surrender.

My argument considers *The Surrounded* in relation to “The Hungry Generations,” as the surviving manuscript provides the best evidence to link publishing industry experience to text and vice versa. Hans summarizes of plot differences between this draft and *The Surrounded*. Common plot elements include Archilde’s return to Montana, the death of Louis and the game warden, and Archilde’s reconciliation with Max. The two drafts diverge at their mid-points, for “The Hungry Generations” sees Archilde go to France to study violin and return to Montana to become a farmer. He is arrested for the game warden’s death but defends himself in court and wins his freedom. In *The Surrounded*, the time between the game warden’s death and Archilde’s eventual capture includes his experience of the Sun Dance ceremony, the development of his relationship with Elise, and his flight to the mountains. “The Hungry Generations” ends with an image of assimilation: Archilde and his nephews back on their farm cutting hay. *The*
Surrounded closes pessimistically: “Archilde, saying nothing, lifted his hands to be shackled.”

One aspect of the manuscript’s evolution that Hans does not emphasize is McNickle’s development of point of view and free indirect discourse. Both versions have third-person, limited omniscient narrators who primarily follow Archilde’s experience but shift to Max’s in several early chapters. The published version of The Surrounded, however, delivers numerous chapters that reflect other characters’ points of view, including Max, Catharine, Father Grepilloux, Modeste, and Indian Agent Horace Parker (See Table 1). The Surrounded also delves into secondary characters’ interiority more readily at specific moments when the third-person, limited omniscient narrator is presumably depicting another character’s point of view. Finally, in several important places, The Surrounded also offers a disembodied narrator whose voice is closer to an objective historian. The narrator in these moments is able to convey information that no individual character in the book would necessarily possess. At other times, a “voice of the group” is used to depict Native American ceremonies. Dwelling in particular on the novel’s deployment of free indirect discourse, I want to show that the narrative structure of The Surrounded rebukes the singularity of the apparatus of literary discovery that sought to reduce McNickle and his Native American material to a talisman of symbolic capital.

---

122 D’Arcy McNickle, The Surrounded (Alburquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), 297. For a detailed chart of these similarities and differences, see McNickle and Hans, D’Arcy McNickle’s The Hungry Generations, 19.
### Table 1: Free Indirect Discourse in *The Surrounded*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Opening/ Dominant Perspective</th>
<th>Additional Perspective Sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 1-3</td>
<td>Archilde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 4-5</td>
<td>Father Grepilloux</td>
<td>Historian, Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>Archilde</td>
<td>Max, inset stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 7-8</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>Archilde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 9-10</td>
<td>Archilde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 11</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 12</td>
<td>Archilde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 13</td>
<td>Catharine</td>
<td>Archilde, Max</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 14-15</td>
<td>Max</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 16</td>
<td>Archilde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 17-18</td>
<td>Max and Archilde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 19</td>
<td>Catharine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 20-22</td>
<td>Max and Archilde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 23</td>
<td>Historian</td>
<td>Modeste, Group perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 24</td>
<td>Group perspective</td>
<td>Archilde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 25-31</td>
<td>Archilde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters 32-33</td>
<td>Indian Agent Horace Parker</td>
<td>Archilde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 34</td>
<td>Elise</td>
<td>Archilde</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: A full list of every sentence level drift to a character’s interiority is too extensive to include. This table gives an overall picture of narrative identification generalizes across larger portions of the narrative. Often, a chapter will begin by following one character’s actions and will shift to another character, as noted in the column titled “Additional Perspective Sections.”

Like James Ruppert, I want to suggest that the strength of the novel is found in its plurality. His reading of *The Surrounded* is structured by Wolfgang Iser’s four principal perspectives: the implied author, the implied reader, the plot, the main character or
characters. In order for the implied reader to locate interpretive meaning, “all perspectives must be merged and each redefined by the others.” The implied reader “sees more completely than any character, including Archilde.” Historically, readers may have seen Archilde’s fate as a pessimistic statement, but the text gestures at an implied reader who concludes that “human value is created by the protagonist’s struggle” rather than its negative outcome. In arguing that the implied reader must internalize each distinct perspective and generate a unified reading of the text, Ruppert argues that an implied reader must respond to textual multiplicity by synthesizing disparate perspectives. Thus his reading reestablishes a privileged and fixed interpretation of the text as a rebuke of white injustice inflicted upon Native Americans.

Unlike Ruppert, however, I want to suggest that a reader’s difficulty pinning down authorial judgments is the essence of McNickle’s epistemological stance. A range of disparate prejudices, each invoking a kind of interpretive finality, conflict with each other and thus create an atmosphere of mutual distrust and combative communication. Parker thinks that Quigley is “too downright” and “one of the last survivals of the ‘Old West’, one who carried with him out of the past a grudge against all Indians.” This description indicates not only Quigley’s prejudices, but also Parker’s expectations for those prejudices. The narrator channels Max’s inner voice with the sentiment that, “after forty years, he did not know these people and was not trusted by them.” After Archilde’s flight to the mountains, it is stated that Parker “could not take chances in an

---

124 Ibid., 99.
125 Ibid., 95.
126 Ibid., 99.
128 Ibid., 75.
affair of this sort” and that he “no longer trusted the boy.”¹²⁹ The shifting third-person narrator’s free indirect discourse conveys how each sentiment is “true” within its own subjective context. By juxtaposing these counter-balanced positions of prejudice and mistrust, however, the narrative essentially critiques the impulse to make totalizing and prejudicial judgments. Rather than reconciling the characters’ various finalities with an authoritative finality, a reader is invited to emerge critical of an overly determined worldview.¹³⁰

Free indirect discourse on the sentence level only augments the effect I am describing. Although whole section preoccupied with a secondary characters’ perspective represent the most obvious differences between “The Hungry Generations” and The Surrounded, McNickle also edited scenes that carry over to the final draft with particular attention to characters’ interiority. In Archilde’s first encounter with Max Leon, for example, his father asks what he has been doing and what has become of his fiddle:

“I have no fiddle now. I gave it to a friend.”
“In a card game, perhaps?” There was a slight smile.
“No, it was a present.”
“Then you don’t play cards?”
“No.”
“What kind of Indian are you then?”
Archilde shrugged his shoulders. His confidence was failing him. It was just as it had always been in recent years; after a few more thrusts from Max he would be helpless before him. He had thought it would never happen again.
“You haven’t many answers, but tell me this, have you any money after working, as you say?”
Archilde showed his money. He wanted to refuse, out of defiance, but he showed his money.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Ibid., 281–283.

¹³⁰ Much of the evidence I am using to support my analysis of certainty in The Surrounded can also be read within the context of the tragedy of intercultural miscommunication. These disparate interpretations are reconcilable if one considers McNickle’s miscommunication theme a specific statement about the impossibility of communication when power creates an imbalance of perceptive finality.

Lines such as “His confidence was failing him” and “He wanted to refuse, out of
defiance, but he showed the money” show Archilde’s inner struggle. A few lines later,
Leon predicts his son will “blow your money on a good time and then go on living off
me,” the narrator states that this insult “was more than [Archilde] could stand.” The
free indirect discourse, allying the narrator here with Archilde, suggests a validation of
his indignation. A moment later, however, the narrator offers another perspective of the
same events: “His eyes looked closely at the boy. At least he had not slunk away like a
whipped dog. The narrator’s use of the boy—the adults’ preferred designation for
Archilde—suggests that the narrator is relating Leon’s internal reaction to Archilde’s
angry outburst. The internal consolation beginning with “at least” also belongs to Max.
This brief shift, concluding the chapter subsection, provides narrative reinforcement to an
imbalance of power between father and son.

Comparing this scene from The Surrounded to its manuscript counterpart suggests
that this interiority effect is a result of and a response to the nine-year experience of
rejection McNickle went through to publish The Surrounded. The version of this scene
included in Hans’s critical edition of “The Hungry Generations” does not include any of
these identifiers:

“What kind of Indian are you then?”
Archilde shrugged his shoulders.
“Perhaps your luck is bad,” his father laughed.
“No, I’ve never tried it.”
“At any rate, you are a good liar.”
Archilde shrugged his shoulders again.
“You haven’t many answers. But tell me this, have you any money left after
working, as you say?”
“Yes. I have money.” He took the money out of his pocket but kept it out of

132 Ibid., 7.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
his father’s reach.\textsuperscript{135} Although both scenes favor Archilde as a point of reference, \textit{The Surrounded} offers a much stronger sense of the characters’ interiority—Archilde and Leon’s. Edits like these suggest possible attention to Pearce’s reader’s criticism in 1929 that McNickle’s characters were “soil-novel silhouettes” rather than “human creatures,” as well as Block’s manuscript report criticizing McNickle’s “tendency to see the whites in unrelieved black, as unmitigated villains in the piece.”\textsuperscript{136} Long sections associated with Leon, Grepilloux, and Parker, in particular, may be a reflection of the latter criticism.

Additional examples of McNickle’s sentence-level revisions suggest that McNickle’s use of free indirect discourse emerged as he revised “The Hungry Generations” and renamed it \textit{The Surrounded}. The following table provides six sentence by sentence comparisons, each adding to the narrator’s willingness to depict inner conflict or unstated emotional struggle. My examples favor the first third of the book where most of the plot action remains the same from manuscript to published novel:

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Original} & \textbf{Revised} \\
\hline
\textit{The Hawk Is Hungry & Other Stories, 52.} & \textit{McNickle and Hans, The Hawk Is Hungry & Other Stories, 52.} \\
\textit{Pearce to McNickle, 26 April 1929; Manuscript Report, 23 October 1934.} & \textit{Pearce to McNickle, 26 April 1929; Manuscript Report, 23 October 1934.} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}
Table 2: Examples of Revisions from Scene Action to Interiority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“The Hungry Generations”</th>
<th>The Surrounded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She [Catharaine] was sitting on the ground and had to look up to see his face. “So you have come back,” she said. (49)</td>
<td>Then she [Catharaine] looked up. A sigh escaped her and a quick smile multiplied the many lines of her face. Here he was, the best of her sons, and the youngest, home again after a year—but would he stay? She had only a faint idea of where he had been; the world out that way was so unlike Sniél-emen; she had even less of an idea of what he did when he went away. But never mind. Here he was again. She smiled quickly, a little at a distance; she did not wish to embarrass him with her attention. “So you have come back,” she said. (1-2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archilde was drawing pictures on the new hat he had just bought. In front he had drawn a lean buffalo bull feeding on a hillside. (65)</td>
<td>Archilde was drawing pictures on his hat, making pictures out of his head, or maybe remembering pictures he had seen somewhere. In front he drew a lean buffalo bull. (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[section begins] Max had his car backed out of the garage and was polishing with a rag. It was a sky blue color with nickel trimmings that flashed in the sun. (66)</td>
<td>[section begins] To Max Leon, the years had brought change and they had brought anger. It was well enough to possess land and to have sold off his cattle just before the range was thrown open to settlement; all that was his gain, but his was not a temperament to rejoice and sing praises over mere gain. He thought of his losses and he thought most of all of his humiliations. But no! That was a lie! He was not humbled! (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Next page] As it was his big blue automobile, nickel trimmed, the gaudiest of the machines which had just opened a new age … (26)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“The Hungry Generations” | The Surrounded
---|---
The old lady had hit him in the head with the hatchet.  
Archilde fainted. At least he grew nauseated and leaned against a tree with no strength to move or speak.  
He recovered in a moment and stood looking at his mother. A feeling of intense revulsion and hatred came to life in his breast, and he had an impulse to drive her away. He was ashamed of being an Indian and part of her. Perhaps what sickened and enraged him was that he saw in a flash the difficulties that would follow her action. She had placed him in jeopardy.  
The game warden was quite dead. The old lady was sitting down beside Louis, rocking back and forth and moaning. (104)  
[scene continues]

“That’s Louis. We found him yesterday—or I guess it was the day before. Shot.”  
Max understood at last and drew back. (109)

“That’s Louis. We found him yesterday, day before I guess. Somebody—shot—him.” It was all he could think of saying.  
Max’s heart sank. Something was wrong. His eyes turned from his son’s face. (133-134)


One example that begs explanation in light of the trend I am describing is the double murder at the heart of both versions’ plot. The description of the deaths remains quite similar, but The Surrounded cuts several sentences detailing Archilde’s emotional response to the events, especially Archilde’s “feeling of intense revulsion and hatred” for his mother and his shame at “being an Indian and part of her” (104). At first the omission
of these lines may seem like a move away from interiority, but one particular criticism from Pearce’s 1929 letter offers a possible explanation to this apparent discrepancy, for a reviewer specifically criticizes McNickle’s handling of interiority: “The deep thoughts of Archilde do not come out as deep thoughts; too seldom does one feel inside of him, for all the explicitness.”¹³⁷ In “The Hungry Generations,” the narrator tells the reader what Archilde is feeling and analyzes some of the possible reasons for those feelings. The revised version in The Surrounded, in contrast, depicts his feelings through indirect discourse or otherwise removes the “explicitness” of emotional labeling.

These moments of free indirect discourse suggest more than the obvious, that McNickle revised in accordance with his reviewers’ concerns. In retrospect, His revisions certainly seem to answer specific criticisms, but they also add power and symbolic weight to the book’s central intercultural conflicts. When Max asks Archilde, “What kind of Indian are you, then?” his inference is that Archilde’s abstinence from card-playing strikes at the heart of his Indianness.¹³⁸ Jeri Zulli aptly points out the danger of reading The Surrounded in terms of a monolithic “Native” perspective.¹³⁹ Leon’s perspective, meanwhile, shows no hesitation in using the language of expectation to evaluate his son’s maturity and Indianness. The shrug of Archilde’s shoulders indicates indifference, but the free indirect discourse indicates the words are “thrusts from Max” and shows Archilde struggling to remain silent.¹⁴⁰ His utterances, however poorly- or well-constructed, have inherently different value than Archilde’s. His relationship to language is that of a warrior wielding a whip or a blade. In contrast, when sufficiently provoked, Archilde “had to

¹³⁷ Pearce to McNickle, 26 April 1929.
¹³⁸ McNickle, The Surrounded, 6.
¹³⁹ Ibid., 7.
speak out in anger and so confess his helplessness."¹⁴¹ Leon maintains emotional control and therefore can regulate his words. Further, the brief episode exemplifies the implication that language itself disarms Archilde while simultaneously arming Leon because of a previously-established social and historical context.¹⁴² Countless utterances deployed throughout multiple forms of mass media all metaphorically side with Leon.

Free indirect discourse plays a role, therefore, in delivering what I have labeled as the second feature of McNickle’s response to the systems of discovery he encountered as an aspiring author: emphasis, in *The Surrounded*, on silence as symbolic defiance. In the face of a linguistically-constructed power relationship, non-communication becomes a kind of defiance. Silence itself has power. This point is not lost on Archilde, who struggles to keep silent in response to his father’s taunts and spends his days in Parker’s custody saying nothing: “He would not let another see his inward feeling. A tight mouth, hard eyes—no one should know.”¹⁴³ The novel further develops a theme of symbolic defiance in relation to an expected verbal register. Catharine adopts a similar strategy by refusing to speak English in court; she instead swears at and shames the interpreter for “going against his people.”¹⁴⁴ When the judge swears back and pounds his gavel, she “pretended she didn’t understand.”¹⁴⁵ In “The Hungry Generations,” in contrast, Archilde’s exonerating witness is Agnes, who recalls the substance of Catharine’s deathbed confession to the game warden’s murder.¹⁴⁶ In another section not present in


¹⁴² Hans points out that the English language promises an apt pupil the tools for success, but mastery is also a sign of “complete assimilation.” McNickle and Hans, *D’Arcy McNickle’s The Hungry Generations*, 11.

¹⁴³ McNickle, *The Surrounded*, 149.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 162.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Also in *The Surrounded*, Mike is accused of “acting defiantly” at boarding school because he has been wetting his bed. We are told that “No words were said” as the prefect takes him out of line and marches him away. Ibid., 189.
“The Hungry Generations,” Archilde’s uncle Modeste tells a story of white-Indian contact. He ends the story with the expression “Ies choopminzin,” translated parenthetically as “I stop talking to you.”147 According to Purdy: “McNickle does not have Modeste end the story but merely stop talking to allow thoughtful reflection, by characters and readers alike. … The device highlights the fact that its end has yet to be determined.”148 Both scenes add to McNickle’s treatment of the idea—absent from “The Hungry Generations”—that silence itself is a kind of symbolic power.

I want to suggest, further, that McNickle’s enlistment of this particular brand of defiance functions as a symbolic response to a cultural apparatus of literary debut that sought to put a figurative headdress on McNickle in order to establish him an acceptable Indian author. The novel’s conclusion, wholly absent from “The Hungry Generations,” best explains this connection. Archilde’s capture at the hands of Quigley and the Indian agent is often read for its defeatism. Responding to the closing line—“Archilde, saying nothing, extended his hands to be shackled”—Owens argues that “the shackles are those of his national myth; he is imprisoned by America’s image of the Indian.”149 As a choice specific to Archilde-as-character and a decision pertaining to the novel’s overall closure, the act harks back to Modeste’s “I stop talking to you.”150 The Surrounded, like Modeste’s tale, resists closure. Archilde’s silence is defiant not only of his inevitable arrest for a crime he did not commit, but also in response to publishers who seemed most

147 Zulli, “Perception in D’Arcy MCNickle’s The Surrounded,” 174.
148 Purdy, Word Ways, 51.
149 McNickle, The Surrounded, 297; Owens, Other Destinies, 77.
150 Purdy also links the conclusion of the novel to the end of Modeste’s story, noting that “McNickle does not finish Archilde’s story; he merely stops “talking” to us: Ies choopminzin.” Purdy reads this abrupt conclusion as “a reaffirmation of traditional ways to gain and employ … the knowledge necessary to act and react.” Purdy, Word Ways, 78.
interested in “the tragic implications of Archilde’s failure” and the fact that it was “becoming easier and easier to put across books with the primitive American appeal.”

“The Hungry Generations” affirms Native American assimilation, but The Surrounded gives voice to a pessimistic view of cultural contact: Archilde fails to communicate with his teachers, his priest, and his own father. Horace Parker, the “Indian agent,” is a study in failed mediation, and the novel concludes at the precipice of Archilde’s all-but-guaranteed trial and execution for a murder he did not commit.

Although I agree partly with Owens’s statement that Archilde’s tragic fate is as tied up in Western stereotypes as his exoneration is in “The Hungry Generations,” Ruppert and Purdy convincingly show that the omission of the trial and the verdict signal at the possibility of other paths, elusive as such alternatives may be. The fact that The Surrounded ends with an act of symbolic defiance rather than merely a defeated protagonist adds to the argument that the novel’s conclusion resists the urge to render Archilde as a familiar primitive commodity.

In attempting to gesture at a third possibility for Archilde as a symbolic force if not a character, McNickle engages in a debate that has recurred in several of my chapters: the validity of fiction as a pragmatic or political form versus its status as a form of expression solely concerned with aesthetic innovation or so-called perfection. Two competing professional identities articulate this debate in The Surrounded: the musician and the printer. Archilde’s music teacher Mr. Duffield—a “musician by nature and a printer by accident”—occupies a position in the disparate worlds of artistic expression and professionalism by maintaining a shallow pretense.152 McNickle explains that Duffield was an orderly in the administration building of the Indian Boarding school Archilde attended from age ten to fourteen. The school has a standing policy of not

151 Manuscript Report, 23 October 1934, McNickle Papers.
152 McNickle, The Surrounded, 90.
paying for pure musical study: “If Indian boys wished to make a big horn bellow, the Government would pay for it, but that was as far as it would go.”

Duffield shirks this policy, when he finds a student with “any musical ability,” by having him enrolled in the printing department. Duffield receives no additional pay for his mentoring, which he sees as “a small matter” because printing is Duffield’s livelihood and music his passion. Duffield, like the violin, straddles two worlds. In his case, however, two categories of labor are distinct from one another. Printing has nothing to do with music, or vice versa. With Duffield, there exists no real threat of monetization; his musical nature is allowed space as long as he fulfills his duties as a school printer. Meanwhile, as an apprentice, Archilde learns nothing about printing.

Duffield’s precise duties as a printer are not detailed, but a school like Archilde’s presumably retained a printing press for a range of purposes, some internal and administrative and others related to external promotion and publicity. The Carlisle Indian Industrial School, founded in 1879 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, is the most well-known assimilationist school in American history. Its student newspaper, Indian Helper, sought to ascribe assimilationist ideas to Indian speakers. According to Amelia V. Katansky “the link between print culture and Carlisle’s pedagogy of oppression was so strong” that printing operates as the dominant metaphor of assimilationist education. “At Carlisle, education was a process of imprinting, and those who controlled the printing process …

153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
156 Meanwhile, the only persona paid to teach music is the band director, “a ladylike old man with a white mustache” whose mention as a feminized object of scorn reinforces Robert Dale Parker’s argument about underlying associations between commercialism and masculinity (90). McNickle’s principal rebuke, however, focuses on the tight alliance between school funding and patriotism.

deeply believed in their power to edit and rewrite Indian identity.” Duffield may not be an outright propagandist, but he is most certainly operating one of many machines that allow Archilde’s boarding school to function. McNickle offers no sense that Duffield has an artistic connection to printing. The fact that Archilde learns nothing about printing, meanwhile, situates Archilde’s distance from a productive or professional citizenship model in contrast to an equally westernized trope of difficult but cloistered artistic activity.

A proper model of mutual discovery would need to reconcile the division of aesthetic and professional as depicted through Archilde’s experiences as a violinist. Archilde’s musical ability enters the storyline in the novel’s opening paragraphs. Returning from Portland, Oregon, he explains that he “played my fiddle in a show house” to earn a living. His use of the word fiddle in this instance over violin, which dominates the novel’s later mentions, accentuates the low nature of his employment, as well as its ties to monetary need. As if to prove his validity as a musician (or a man) to his mother, he shouts “They paid me this money. Look!” Archilde’s mother “barely looked” at the money; it “meant nothing to her,” for “an Indian boy, she thought, belonged with his people.” The instrument and its import in Archilde’s life are therefore immediately established as signifier for white culture and Archilde’s attempt at assimilation. The instrument has a double-edged symbolic function, for it represents his

---

158 Ibid.
159 Duffield is wholly absent from “The Hungry Generations.”
160 McNickle, The Surrounded, 2.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid. In “The Hungry Generations,” the same information is conveyed without a sense of Catharine’s interiority. “She barely glanced at the money, then turned her eyes to the timber again. ‘Indian boys should stay home,’ she said with a slight sigh.” McNickle and Hans, D’Arcy McNickle’s The Hungry Generations, 50.
school superintendent Mr. Snodgrass’s advice to “make yourself valuable and win success” but, as such, implicitly signifies Archilde’s temptation to turn away from his Indian identity. In “The Hungry Generations,” Archilde turns away much more dramatically with his trip to Paris to study violin. There his relationship with Claudia serves as a device to discuss aesthetic principles, namely the conflict between the “polish, smoothness, quietness, [and] decay” of European civilization “the spirit” in need of “refinement” that Archilde possesses. In The Surrounded, Archilde does not travel to Europe, but he does attempt to reconcile disparate worlds of artistic expression and professionalism before ultimately abandoning both.

Competing metaphors of sound characterize the difference between printing and music and further indicate the presumed binary between productive and perhaps propagandistic literary production and art for art’s sake. In the morning, the press fills the top floor of the administration building with “the sound of galloping horses.” In the afternoon, the same room is filled with music. McNickle describes the way “Archilde’s blood froze” as he listened to the violin “go from a growl to a scream.” Although both are organic metaphors, one is animalistic and rhythmic and the other is humanized, suggesting perhaps the promise of liberal individualism over a more overtly capitalistic or nationalistic model of assimilation. In contrast, when Archilde tells of his experience at the Oregon boarding school, he calls his story a “long recital,” as if to convey the close association, by this time, between Archilde’s musical ambitions and a well-rehearsed set of socially-imposed ideals.

Neither is a viable template for Archilde, for “printer” and

---

163 McNickle, The Surrounded, 94.
165 McNickle, The Surrounded, 91.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., 159.
“musician” are identities rooted in western ideals of mind-body dualism, individuality, and valuation.

The drums of the Salish people’s Sun Dance ritual perhaps offer an alternative to Duffield’s ideal of musicianship. The sun dance itself is “an expression of their exultation at being alive” that “sang their pride, their conquests, their joys.” In Archilde’s time, the dance is “no longer an endurance test” but his people enjoy it “because it brought so many of them together.” The drums, along with “vices chanting in unison,” are “a sound to quicken the blood.” Purdy notes that, throughout the Sun Dance ritual, Archilde sees things “as someone not conversant with Salish culture would,” employing white, outsider analogies. He also produces “valuable observations” that create space for McNickle to depict and analyze the ceremony and, in so doing, feels more connected to his people than ever before.

The Sun Dance’s drums do not necessarily argue against the idea that the binary that envelopes Duffield and influences Archilde is a powerful one. They do gesture, however at an unrealized third path for Archilde. White intolerance of the unrestrained version of the celebration adds to this interpretation. McNickle explains that the sun dance changed because of pressure from white authority. The practice “could not be tolerated in later years” because its “barbarous demands on strength offended those who came to manage the affairs of the Indians.” If these Indians had wished to express their joy for ten hours a day “like a factory or office worker,” that would have been “all

168 Ibid., 203.
169 Ibid., 204.
170 Ibid., 218, 212.
171 Purdy, Word Ways, 66.
172 Ibid.
Likewise, although Archilde’s remark that “the drum no longer disturbed the surrounding mountains” at the end of the ceremony may suggest a fundamental conflict between drumming and nature, Archilde also adds that the earth “cleansed and restored itself.” If one reads the surrounding mountains as both the basis of McNickle’s title and the figurative presence of white constraints on indigenous possibilities, however, we can read the drums themselves as a persistent disturbance to those who seek to manage Indians’ affairs. Access to an alternative model of literary creation and identity—one which is neither based on productivity nor artistic escape—is itself a threat to the “shackles” of Archilde’s national myth that Owens describes.

In describing Archilde’s interpretation of the Sun Dance, Purdy offers what may be the best possible summary of Archilde’s response to America’s image of the Indian: “Archilde does not proselytize; he discovers.” The version of discovery Purdy ascribes to Archilde is fundamentally distinct from the apparatus of debut that produced McNickle as a potential literary discovery. Where Archilde’s is suddenly opened up to a new way of looking at his ancestors, himself, and his world, New York publishers and McNickle’s two literary agents were invested foremost in shaping McNickle and his work to meet expectations and standards. Even the title “Discovery of the Month” speaks to the unending need to brand new talent a discovery unendingly, to satisfy some market craving for new talent. With a discovery each month or each week or each day, it is difficult to imagine many of those discoveries having a lasting effect on the field of cultural production. Of course, in order to attain entry in the New York publishing scene, McNickle had to participate, to some extent, in his own commodification. Upon being named Esquire’s “Discovery of the Month,” for example, Rae asked McNickle to provide

174 Ibid.
175 Ibid., 232.
176 Purdy, Word Ways, 66.
a 200-word biography of his background and accomplishments. A carbon of the biographical paragraph, typed but not signed, is collected with McNickle’s papers:

D’Arcy McNickle
Born 1904, on Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana, of Irish and French-Canadian (with Indian cross) parentage.
Educated in government Indian school, public schools, and the University of Montana; later private study in England and France and courses at Columbia University.
Residing in New York since 1926; work on encyclopedia, hack-writing, manuscript reading, etc.
He has written (or tried) plays, short stories, poetry (long and short), a novel, and several false starts. His novel has had good recommendations from publishers’ readers and advisors. It deals with the mix-up in an Indian Half-breed boy’s mind. *Meat for God* is the first published work the author has had.177

This brief biographical summary is concerned with establishing McNickle’s legitimacy in two ways. First, since the “Discovery of the Month” feature required its subjects to be previously unpublished, the biography concerns itself with legitimating McNickle’s authorship through his education and previous work experience, details which position him at the threshold for discovery without negating his identity as a newcomer. A detail like “good recommendations from publishers’ readers” perhaps accomplishes this effect more completely than any other statement. Second, the biography situates McNickle’s Indianness with four references to his ties to Native American culture: his birth on the “Flathead Indian Reservation,” his “Indian cross” parentage, his experience at a “government Indian school” and his novel’s discussion of “an Indian Half-breed boy.” Nothing in the biography is factually false, but the summary is very much constructed to emphasize some details over others. The biography leaves out McNickle’s failure to graduate from the University of Montana, his time in Philadelphia, his name change, and his marriage. By publically claiming and emphasizing his Salish identity, McNickle was allowing his authorial legitimacy to be judged, in part, by his ethnicity. With the

177 D’Arcy McNickle, 200-word biography. n.d. [adjacent to and seemingly in reply to a letter from Ruth Rae, 27 May, 1935], McNickle Papers.
publication of *The Surrounded*, he was also urging his readers to be critical of such processes.

**Conclusion: Seeking Permission**

Throughout McNickle’s experiences with literary discovery, McNickle was also discovering himself. In making revisions to *The Surrounded*, McNickle consulted two published versions of Native American oral narratives he wanted to incorporate in a storytelling scene not present in at all in “The Hungry Generations.” He advised Rae of his efforts to secure permission for both tales, “The Thing That Was to Make Life Easy” (in Marius Barbeau’s *Indian Days in the Canadian Rockies*) and “The Story of Flint” (in Helen Fitzgerald Sanders’s *Trails Through Western Woods*). He had a letter of permission from Barbeau but not Sanders. “It is difficult to see how a myth or folktale can be copyrighted,” he wrote Rae, “especially when it comes so close to yourself as this does to me. However, I don’t want to let it delay publication and if necessary I’ll cut it out or write something in its place.” An adapted version of Sanders’s tale was ultimately included in *The Surrounded*, as was a note (written by McNickle) acknowledging Barbeau and Sanders. In his letter to Rae, McNickle noted the oddity of what he was doing. He was asking for permission to access and participate his own cultural tradition, one historically governed by oral fluidity and transmission without ownership. No matter how successfully McNickle summoned an indigenous sensibility in constructing *The Surrounded*, as an author, he had to translate his work into the language of the publishing industry’s institutional norms.

A letter of permission and a published acknowledgment mediated McNickle’s access to an oral tradition not properly accounted for by the system of authorial

---

178 McNickle to Rae, 28 November 1935, McNickle Papers. Purdy discusses the differences between Sanders’s, Barbeau’s, and McNickle’s versions of these tales. See Purdy, *Word Ways*, 52.
origination. The question left unanswered in this situation, and present if not resolved through this chapter, is to what degree and to what effect McNickle’s adaptation and reaction to market norms can ultimately be said to shape his identity as a Native American author hoping to be discovered. In situating himself as a discovery, McNickle was engaging in a collaborative relationship designed to facilitate the construction of symbolic capital and its conversion to economic capital. In order for these processes to exist in the form McNickle experienced them, the professional American literary agent had to emerge in response to the establishment of international copyright. That agent then had to grow in legitimacy in reach to the point that facilitating literary debut, in triangulation with publishers and aspiring writers, fell under his or her purview. As my analysis of Rae and Holly has shown, these practices were as dependent on the agent’s legitimacy as they were on the author’s or the publisher’s. McNicke’s case was representative of widespread norms in the sense that his adaptations to some market concerns and resistance to others were very much emblematic of any author’s range of choices in a system like this one. His case was extraordinary in that his launching involved the politics of naming and shaping his Native American identity. A response to that pressure to become discoverable carries over to The Surrounded. Archilde is hemmed in by expectations, but is able to represent, if fleetingly, an alternative to the mode of discovery McNickle experienced as an aspiring writer.

Thus far in my dissertation, I have focused on collaborative momentum as it pertains to interactive labor and authorial identity. I have drawn on material from periodicals and books, as well as publishing industry records and correspondence. In my final chapter, I want to turn to a case study—focused on The New Negro: An Interpretation (1925)—that locates the materiality of a book as its primary site of collaboration. In doing so, I hope to emphasize the importance of bibliographic analysis to my argument. My previous chapters have featured case studies of collaborative momentum in relation to Howells’s individual literary persona, Willa Cather and S.S.
McClure’s authorial partnership, and a triangulated relationship among McNickle, his agent, and his publisher. I conclude this dissertation with a case study that involves an indeterminately large number of collaborators functioning as middle men.
CHAPTER IV
IRREPRESSIBLE ANTHOLOGIES, COLLECTIBLE COLLECTIONS:
BIBLIOPHILIA AND BOOK COLLECTING IN *THE NEW NEGRO*

It is with that mixture of fear and relief that attends the final grapple with undefeated burden that I draw near to the file of anthologies under which or the prospects of which my shelves and I have sympathetically groaned for months. When the field so narrow as mysticism, when a form so confined as the sonnet, when it seems so humble as the dog, when period so reduced as a year, can arouse the selected impulse, the heyday of the anthology has come. It meets every kind of want—once so shy is not to have achieved once, once so tenuous as not to have discovered thereof being. The old anthology which chose for everybody and for all time is given place to the current type which uses for somebody and for the hour.

—O.W. Firkins, “The Irrepressible Anthology”

**Introduction**

It was November 1917 when O.W. Firkins wrote of “The Irrepressible Anthology.”¹ In his review he evaluated fourteen poetry collections, including William Stanley Braithwaite’s *Anthology of Magazine Verse for 1916*, Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson’s *The New Poetry: An Anthology*, *The Oxford Book of Mystical Verse*, *The Golden Book of Sonnets*, *Some Imagist Poems*, *The Little Book of Modern Verse*, and even *The Dog’s Book of Verse*. Almost a decade before the publication of Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* (1925), Firkins was noting a sea change in the marketplace of anthology making. An old model “chose for everybody and for all time,” while the new anthology form chose “for somebody and for the hour.”² I am not the first scholar to notice that the period of literary production most commonly referred to as modernism was occasioned by a range of collating, collecting, and updating, nor am I the first scholar to link this sense of concurrent identity formation to the preponderance of literary collections and

---


² Ibid.
anthologies beginning in the nineteen-teens and extending into the 1920s and 30s. Yet Firkins points to something that has evaded many: the degree to which the “current” type of anthology had dislodged the apparent permanence and authority of its archaic antecedent.

_The New Negro_, like many other anthologies of the period, is deeply invested in its own sense of contemporaneousness. The “younger generation” of African Americans termed the New Negroes were “vibrant with a new psychology,” and African American migration from countryside to city had initiated a “new dynamic phase” of African American history. Yet the Negro’s “full initiation into American democracy” was only beginning to materialize. He was on the verge of a “spiritual Coming of Age.” The New Negro’s implied future constituted a kind of electrifying momentum, as expressed by Locke’s choice to quote Langston Hughes’s “Youth” in his introduction: “We have tomorrow/ Bright before us/ Like a flame.” The idea of the New Negro’s continuous development implied a need for additional updating as the years passed. Yet simultaneously, the anthology expresses a desire to be permanent, both expressively and materially. To represent something critical, vital, and enduring. Not merely to sample but to embody the sensibility of this new generation, to articulate something irrepressible and to assemble a collection worthy of being collected in turn.

---


5 Ibid., 16.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 5. Lns. 1-3.
To appreciate Locke’s efforts at material collectability, I must return to the version of *The New Negro* most closely related with his collaborative work of 1925. As George Bornstein and Anne Elizabeth Carroll have pointed out, the most widespread edition of Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* differs significantly from the Albert and Charles Boni first edition. German-born artist Winold Reiss’s “The Brown Madonna” has been removed from the frontispiece and the phrase “Book Decoration and Portraits by Winold Reiss” is erased from the title page. The title is altered from *The New Negro: An Interpretation* to read *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (Figure 4.1).

![Figure 4.1: The title page of the 1925 first edition of *The New Negro* (left) is markedly different from the title page of the Touchstone edition (1997), which remains the most widely circulated presentation of the anthology (right).](image)

---

8 The Simon and Schuster and Touchstone editions, widely circulated in libraries and classrooms, also changes Locke’s initial title of *The New Negro: An Interpretation* to *The New Negro*, adding the subtitle *Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* to the paperback cover.
In noting these changes, Bornstein emphasizes that *The New Negro* “declared itself a domestically biracial enterprise from the first, a hybridity that has been airbrushed out of its successive reprints.” Carroll argues that the graphic elements of the anthology provide a “compelling, coherent impression of the New Negro,” while their interactions with more complex verbal representations of race play an important role in the work the anthology is doing as a whole. Implicit in both arguments is the idea that a particular edition of a book is a material and an historical document with more to convey than the words on each page, and that *The New Negro* in particular is the kind of book with a distinct and significant materiality.

One significant difference between the first edition and its contemporary counterpart not underlined by Bornstein or Carroll is directly relevant to the anthology as a carefully crafted physical object. By removing Reiss’s frontispiece and his position on the title page, the later edition also erases the book’s first and clearest example of decorative continuity. Reiss’s signature, a block-printed version of his name with a distinct letter S, appears in the bottom, right-hand corner of “The Brown Madonna.” Across from this signature, on the title page, several instances of the letter S (portraits, Charles, and Reiss) mirror his signature in the frontispiece.

---


Reiss provided images for *The New Negro* and designed its book decorations. He also designed the signature fonts for the cover, dust jacket, title page, and front matter headings. The S of Reiss’s signature, in other words, becomes a “signature” grapheme of the entire collection.\textsuperscript{11} Other continuities and artistic frames include the use of primitivistic wood-cut book decorations as headers and footers for submissions and a triangular graphic that appears on the book cover, the dust jacket, and to delineate section changes. These artistic elements, according to Carroll, “unify the volume.”\textsuperscript{12} The use of signature type and a decorative motif creates a bridge between the visual and verbal content of the anthology. In this way Reiss’s work recalls Walter Crane, one of the most influential children’s book designers of the late nineteenth century, who frames book

\textsuperscript{11} The signature S also appears on the spine of the dust jacket and, significantly, in the word *Survey* on the cover of *Survey Graphic’s* special issue, “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro.”

\textsuperscript{12} Carroll, *Word, Image, And The New Negro*, 164. They also tie the anthology, visually, to the special issue of *Survey Graphic* that also used these decorative motifs.
design as an intervention in the history of language, for “the letters of our alphabet were once pictures, symbols, or abstract signs of entities and actions, and grew more and more abstract until they became arbitrary marks.”

I3 Ideas and words became “more abstract until the point is reached when the jaded intellect would fain return again the picture-writing, and welcomes the decorator and illustrator to relieve the desert wastes of words marshaled in interminable columns on the printed page.”

I4 Book design reminds us that every element of the book has the potential to operate as a visual element. Likewise, every conceptual item in The New Negro is made manifest by the convergence of book decoration and typographical components.

One might counter that changes to later editions as I have begun to describe are insubstantial, an improvement, or an inevitability of republication. Recognition of the materiality of its first edition, and its distinct and even unique decorative elements, however, gestures at a powerful connection between the anthology and modern book collecting. As Jerome J. McGann has argued, modernists such as Pound used book design to articulate “commitment to a fully materialized understanding of language.”

I5 Similarly, Megan Benton has shown that the 1920s and 30s saw the rise of “a seemingly insatiable market for fine books, whose desirability lay less in their content than in the beauty, extravagance, status, or scarcity of the edition.”

I6 Modernism as we know it, the preponderance of limited, fine, and bibliophilic editions and issues in the 1920s and 30s, and book collecting are deeply intertwined cultural phenomena. A bibliographic and

---


I4 Ibid.


contextual analysis of *The New Negro* can reveal the extent and significance of these intersections.

By using a term like intersections, I am aware that a central question is left unanswered. In short, who is the middle man? As I noted in my introduction, one of the advantages of analyzing linguistic and bibliographic codes in tandem is their potential to reveal the physical book as a site of collaboration. Left murky is the full extent of each collaborator’s role. What may in the end be appealing about this case study is that, from a certain point of view, almost everyone involved in the creation, design, and distribution of *The New Negro* can be seen as a kind of go-between.

Often viewed as the major creative force behind the anthology, Alain Locke attempts to mediate and speak on behalf on the New Negro as a group. Albert and Charles Boni, Jewish New York publishers, stand as middle men between Locke and any number of potential audiences. Boni’s production department, facilitating book design elements such as paper selection and typography, affect the physical form of the linguistic codes of the anthology. Reiss, with his name on the title page, seems to have as much creator status as Locke but ultimately claims the role of more than an artist. As book designer, he is a middle man between Locke and the history of book design and the interpreter of the European artistic tradition on behalf of African American literature and art. If Locke is granted creative primacy, any and all contributors can be seen as go-betweens or conduits to a network of African American intellectuals whose labor led to the publication of *The New Negro*.17 *Opportunity*, the organ of the National Urban League, facilitated sales of *The New Negro* by discounting it when bundled with subscription. Other booksellers, collectors, and indirectly, the entire field of technical discourse about book collecting and fine printing mediate the anthology. The list goes on

17 For more information on this “network of intellectual figures and institutions,” see George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Harvard University Press, 1995), 391.
and on. A group effort of this magnitude immediately summons questions about the cultural construction of a privileged authorial creator.

In this chapter, I will continue my analysis of the literary middle man’s effect on authorship in America by showing how book collecting and bibliophilia informed *The New Negro*’s urgency and permanence. My case study of the creator-intermediary as bibliophile and book collector includes an historical perspective on modern book collecting and emphasizes connections to the New Negro movement of the 1920s and 30s. I see African American bibliophiles such as Alain Locke and Arthur Schomburg as distinct from the dominant white American and European book collecting traditions, but I also hope that an analysis of their distinctiveness will gesture at the larger subject of the modern creator-intermediary as learned collector. I then turn to an analysis of Locke’s *The New Negro* as a book arts project structured by efforts to produce an object worthy of being collected. My chapter closes with an analysis of how the anthology’s book design interacts with the positions on materiality and collecting at play in the anthology’s prose and poetry.

I argue that the publishing history of *The New Negro* and an analysis of the book as a physical object show the anthology’s strong ties to bibliophilic materialism. While *The New Negro* has many commonalities with fine press books of the 1920s and 30s, the key difference was that Locke and his collaborators were attempting to balance modernist and primitivist book design with bookmaking and typographic elements that had previously been used to appeal to conservative, old world connections. I show that *The New Negro*’s ties to the culture of bibliophilia and collecting extend to its paratextual and textual content, which is particular significant in that Locke’s revised version of the central tenets of book collecting and bibliomania become one of the central philosophies of collecting governing the part-whole relationship of written and visual material arranged in the anthology itself. Particularly crucial to this process is the section titled “The Negro Digs up His Past.” By contrasting a book collecting and bibliophilic
perspective with the more generalized literary history and ethnographic collecting drives at work in the anthology, I illustrate that the exchange of economic and symbolic capital, in this case, involved the construction of present-day identities by engaging with and contesting physical possession of the past.

**The Harlem Renaissance and the History of the Book**

Several analyses of the Harlem Renaissance and *The New Negro* have employed book studies or bibliographic methodologies in pursuit of their central claims, yet the connections central to my work have not been discussed. Elinor Des Verney Sinnette’s biography of Arthur Schomburg is a partial exception, as it includes a brief section on Schomburg’s friendship with Locke and his bibliographic work for *The New Negro*.\(^{18}\)

Studies of *The New Negro* as a literary anthology have linked the book to ethnography, folklore, modernist collage, and white and black periodicals of the time period. Nevertheless, the idea of book collecting and bibliophilic book design has been, at most, a side note. Scholars more directly concerned with book collecting and bibliophiles have not paid attention to *The New Negro*, save Jerome McGann, who points out that the most influential works of the Harlem Renaissance (including *The New Negro*) “display the profound effect produce by the graphic and bibliographic revolution at the end of the nineteenth century.”\(^{19}\) McGann, however, makes this point briefly in a chapter dedicated to Ezra Pound.

That said, three scholarly approaches to print culture and the Harlem Renaissance provide a starting point for my reading of book collecting in and around *The New Negro*.

---


\(^{19}\) McGann, *Black Riders*, 81.
Foremost, George Hutchinson’s *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (1995) and Jeremy Braddock’s *Collecting as Modernist Practice* (2012) situate *The New Negro* in relation to its contemporary print culture. Hutchinson tells the story of “cultural politics of the journals and publishing houses” that produced the Harlem Renaissance.²⁰ Hutchinson engages in an extensive analysis of how “the network of intellectual figures and institutions that had been instrumental in the American cultural nationalist rebellion” provided the occasion for Locke’s special issue of *Survey Graphic*, which he eventually expanded and revised as *The New Negro*, and offers an interpretation of the anthology framed by this history.²¹ Braddock focuses on “the central role of the collection within modernism” and extends his analysis to *The New Negro*.²² Braddock notes Schomburg’s identity as a book collector but does not take up the question of whether the impulses and imperatives of the bibliophile may constitute a distinct collecting aesthetic that informs *The New Negro* or similar anthologies. Both turn toward the interdisciplinary space generally referred to as the history of the book or book studies to document, respectively, the institutionalization of “intellectual frameworks” that shaped *The New Negro*, and the “cultural field” of anthologies and aesthetics of collecting that surrounded it.²³

Ann Elizabeth Carroll and Rachel Farebrother exemplify a related approach to *The New Negro* and its print culture: connecting the New Negro movement and Locke’s anthology to established norms of word and image juxtaposition and arrangement. Carroll argues that “the participants in the Harlem Renaissance mastered a range of innovative

---

²⁰ Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 125.
²¹ Ibid., 391.
²² Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, 1.
²³ Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 26; Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, 156. Lawrence S. Rainey’s work on modernism also informs my perspective on the distinct systems of credibility and distinction in the 1910s, 20s, and 30s. See Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism*. 
strategies” of collective representation. By neglecting the “collaborative, illustrated magazines and anthologies” and their combined use of word and image, scholars have missed the opportunity to appreciate these complexities. In turn, Rachel Farebrother focuses on connections to modernism and collage. Building upon Hutchinson’s initial work linking the Harlem Renaissance to the central concerns of Boasian ethnography, Farebrother interprets The New Negro’s interdisciplinary format and interplay of multiple editorial voices with a “wider attempt to rethink concepts of democracy.” Collage practices mediated one of the Harlem Renaissance’s central questions: “How to represent African Americans socially and aesthetically as a group with a shared sense of identity while preserving a space for individual complexity.” A better understanding of the modernist collage aesthetic, she argues, provides contemporary critics with a way to “interpret the complex patterning of cultural pieces” in texts like The New Negro.

My third interpretive model is methodological rather than topical. It is best expressed by the work of Jerome McGann and George Bornstein. McGann and Bornstein both use the term “bibliographic code” as a label to distinguish a book’s linguistic features from its physical features. Bornstein’s Material Modernism answers McGann with an attempt to examine modernism “in its original sites of production and in the continually shifting physicality of its texts and transmissions.” Scholars should no

25 Ibid.
26 Farebrother, The Collage Aesthetic in the Harlem Renaissance, 52.
27 Ibid., 49.
28 Ibid.
29 Benton suggests that fine press editions often blurred the line between physical and linguistic codes. She states: “A designer’s personality and artistic vision pervaded a book; typography blended into illustration.” Benton, Beauty and the Book, 103.
30 Bornstein, Material Modernism, 1.
longer approach modernism’s physical texts as “transparent lenses offering us unproblematic access to authors or works.” 31 Carroll, likewise, offers a reading of the interplay between image and language in *The New Negro* by returning to the first edition of the anthology as her primary site of analysis. Viewing a book as an historical object “makes clear that there is much more to be learned about the New Negro than can be communicated by the texts in the book.” 32 My analysis of *The New Negro*’s ties to artistic book design integrates a bibliographic approach with a socio-cultural analysis of modern book-collecting and bibliophilic impulses.

**The New Negro as a Bibliophilic Edition**

The publishing history of *The New Negro* and an analysis of the book as a physical object support my reading of the anthology as a project informed by bibliophilic materialism. Understanding this feature of the anthology, however, requires a basic overview of how Locke came to edit *The New Negro*, and how his ideas about the new generation of African Americans with a “transformed and transforming psychology” differed from other critics of his time. 33 Hutchinson’s work provides the best narrative of *The New Negro*’s “gestation” in the “middle-class black intellectual circles” that he discusses in previous chapters of his book. 34 The Harlem Renaissance was closely identified with “two specific reform organizations”—the NAACP and National Urban League. 35 W.E.B. Du Bois, editor of *The Crisis* (the organ of the NAACP), and Jessie Redmon Fauset, *Crisis* literary editor, harbored a particular view of racial uplift through


32 Ibid., 160.


35 Ibid., 128.
national reform: “To the extent that *The Crisis* could be characterized as “assimilationist” at times in its ultimate vision of the United States, its idea of assimilation entailed the “blackening” of the national culture, a process it recognized as having begun before the founding of the nation itself and apparently accelerating the early twentieth century.\(^{36}\) *Opportunity*, in contrast, aligned itself with the views of sociologist Robert E. Park in so far as it “insisted upon carefully investigating facts and publicizing them, matter-of-factly, to shape public opinion” in contrast to “the more polemical *Crisis.*”\(^{37}\) By the mid-twenties, *Opportunity* took center stage and *The Crisis* became “increasingly peripheral” to the literary movement it had helped foster.\(^{38}\)

While *The New Negro* was partially “a product of the competition between *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*,” it also represented collaboration between black intellectuals and well-known white patrons of the Harlem Renaissance such as Paul Kellogg, editor of the Pittsburgh-based monthly magazine *The Survey*, and leftist publishers Albert and Charles Boni.\(^{39}\) This convergence of interested parties was perhaps most visible at the 1924 Civic Club Dinner ostensibly intended as “a tribute to Jessie Fauset” and the launching of her novel *There is Confusion* but viewed by Locke and *Opportunity* editor Charles S. Johnson as “a coming-out party for a younger group of artists writing, for the most part, in a different vein.”\(^{40}\) Locke served as master of ceremonies for the dinner, an event largely credited with initiating Locke’s role as guest editor of the March 1925 graphic number of *The Survey*, a special issue subtitled “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro.” The success of this issue led Albert and Charles Boni to pursue a book version, edited by

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 145.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 169.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 167.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
Locke, which was to be more ambitious in geographical scope and in the amount of material included.

Although *The New Negro* was notably politically restrained in contrast with the work presented in *The Survey*, both documents highlight Alain Locke’s political and literary aesthetic in contrast to forbears such as Du Bois. A graduate of Harvard and the first Rhodes Scholar of African American descent, Locke admired Du Bois but differed with him on several key issues. With *The New Negro*, Locke attempted to balance the interests of multiple parties, including white patrons and publishers, allies of *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*, and more politically minded followers of campaigns such as Garvey’s Back to Africa Movement. According to Hutchinson, “Overall, Locke was a more thoroughgoing cultural pluralist than Du Bois.”

Locke’s introduction to *The New Negro* emphasizes that, “the Negro too, for his part, has idols of the tribe to smash. If on the one hand the white man has erred in making the Negro appear to be that which would excuse or extenuate his treatment of him, the Negro, in turn, has too often unnecessarily excused himself because of the way he has been treated.” In connection with his criticism of black and white people’s habits of mind, Locke wanted Harlem to function as an example of a national movement, not a distinct phenomenon in itself. “Here in Manhattan,” he writes, “is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. … Each group has come with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another.”

---

41 Ibid., 39. Hutchinson also notes Locke’s “overt resistance” to viewing “African America as a ‘nation within a nation’.” Ibid., 397.


43 Ibid., 6.
“American wants” and “American ideas.” As Bornstein does in brief, I mean to suggest that the bibliophilic elements of *The New Negro* were yet another aspect of this pluralistic vision.

Most demonstrably, *The New Negro’s* connections to bibliophilia and book collecting were a continuation of existing design aesthetics and an amplification of the work that other artists and editors had begun to do. Carroll discusses, at length, the way *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* used graphical material to augment essays and news stories. “Despite the differences between *The Crisis* of the 1910s and *Opportunity* in the early 1920s,” she argues, “both reflected the importance of the arts and representing African-Americans in the years leading up to and constituting the Harlem Renaissance.” Carroll focuses on the duality of meanings presented when image and text work in tandem. By “pairing the arts,” Du Bois and Johnson “showed their readers a true understanding of the subject or information gleaned from multiple sources.”

Caroline Goeser reads Aaron Douglas’s book illustration work “as a hybrid medium that connected visual imagery with literary text and commercial enterprise” but does not offer analyses of book decorations or typography. Her concern, instead, is the degree to which “illustration participated more fully than the more traditional visual media in the burgeoning modern consumer economy.” Although both Goeser and Carroll’s work is vital to understanding the way media mixing informed visual possibilities for African American print culture, I am particularly interested in the way design elements—typography, page decorations,

44 Ibid., 12.


46 Ibid., 116.


48 Ibid.
and icons generally disregarded as space fillers—work in tandem with book covers, dust jackets, and illustrations as sites of interpretation bridging the presumed gap between text and image.

The key point here is to see book design and decoration as a category of labor that resides somewhere between illustration and the mechanics of book production. Early book design and decoration, prior to the invention of the printing press, was fully integrated with the process of creating a manuscript. In the age of mechanical reproduction, publishing houses begin to establish manufacturing departments with a central “manufacturing man” in charge of overseeing “the processes of typography, or type composition, or the setting of type—customer or printing—photo-integrating or other methods of reproduction—designing—die-cutting—and binding, all of which are involved in transforming in a script into the completed book as it reaches the reader.”

Over time, “the ‘manufacturing man’ became the ‘production manager’ in the ‘production’ department.” The manufacturer would often engage an illustrator and provide “a set of early proofs of the book from which to select the points for situations to illustrate.” If the book was to have a decorative cover or dust jacket, “a designer would be ‘employed to furnish a suitable cover design’ subject to the manufacturer’s approval.” With the advent of the fine press movement, a publisher hired a high-profile book designer to oversee the creation of a harmonizing design aesthetic for an individual book project. Such a designer might select paper, provide illustrations or engage an illustrator, design the book cover and/or its dust jacket, select or design a typeface, and

---


52 Ibid., 28.
even determine factors such as cover material, type of binding, page dimensions, margins, and leading. Whereas a production editor was a publishing industry professional coordinating a collaborative operation, a book designer like Elmer Adler was an artist with enormous individual authority. As periodicals and magazines became more graphic in nature, they, too, established production departments.

As Goeser and Carroll have pointed out, *Opportunity* began as a magazine that employed visual material in a particularly directed way. Charles S. Johnson, as editor of *Opportunity*, used visual material in a manner compatible with his training under sociologist Robert E. Park, to emphasize “facts and objectivity” to “persuasively present their findings about African Americans’ experiences and identity.” Photographs served as “documentary evidence in articles on a variety of subjects, including the social conditions of urban black workers, the individual achievements in education of middle-class blacks, as well as the benefits of racial contact between white and black children.”

By 1925, however, a distinct page design with Reiss’s decorative signature at the center had become an important aspect of *Opportunity’s* editorial identity.

To begin, Reiss designed covers for *Opportunity’s* January, February, March, and April 1925 issues. The January and February covers are counterparts, both featuring a geometrically abstracted representation of a face. The main difference between the two is the use of a black and blue color scheme for January and black and orange color scheme for February. Both covers use Reiss’s signature $S$ in listing the price of the magazine as 15 cents (Figure 4.3).

---


54 Goeser, *Picturing the New Negro*, 75.
Reiss’s distinct primitivism appears on the header for the magazine’s editorial page for every issue through October 1925 (Figure 4.4). Starting in May, *Opportunity* featured a new table of contents page, also in Reiss’s characteristic style (Figure 4.5). In August, the magazine slightly modified its decorations for “Editorials” and for the running header. The new motif featured a repeated black square with white space design. In November, *Opportunity* discontinued its table of contents page and changed its masthead once more, this time departing from Reiss’s design aesthetic. *The New Negro* went on sale the following month.
Figure 4.4: *Opportunity*. Editorial page (August 1925).

Figure 4.5: *Opportunity*. Table of contents page (May 1925).
Relevant to the connection between *Opportunity*’s graphic aesthetics and *The New Negro*’s bibliophilic design was the magazine’s use of a Reiss decoration for its monthly book review feature titled “Book Shelf.” In March 1925, perhaps to accommodate its one-column size, the section had only an image of a book shelf to introduce it. The next month, a similar image of a shelf was wrapped in a Reiss header decoration. The title “Book Shelf” was indicated only on the table of contents page. In October, the magazine changed this graphic once again, substituting the words *Book Shelf* for the book shelf icon. This version of the book review section eventually disappeared but reappeared as “Our Book Shelf” in August 1928 with a new Reiss-style decoration, this time with a typeface to match. None of these decorations are credited as Reiss’s work. Instead, it is as if his artistic sensibility permeates the magazine.\(^55\) The book shelf image, as a heading for the magazine’s book review section, in particular echoes the aesthetic and political principles Locke articulated to differentiate the physicality of *The New Negro* from the fine press movement.

![Figure 4.6: The 1925 version of *Opportunity*’s book review department, titled “Book Shelf” and later “Our Book Shelf.”](image)

\(^{55}\) As late as 1928, Reiss’s influence on the magazine’s design motifs remained apparent. The banner for “Editorials” is not credited to Reiss but bears his signature S and geometric primitivism. Banners for “The Dark Tower” (Sept. 1928, 271), “Survey of the Month” (Sept. 1928, 280), “Labor” (Oct. 1928, 311), and “The Theatre” (Oct. 1928, 312) also show his involvement or influence.
The Harlem issue of *Survey Graphic* was another extension of Reiss’s presence in the depictive world of the New Negro. As Carroll points out, the special issue of *Survey Graphic* had several elements in common with other special issues of the magazine that featured “visual displays of subjects.”

In particular, the May 1924 issue on Mexico featured a display of Mexican “types” by Winold Reiss that prefigured Reiss’s portraiture.

---

for the Harlem number.\textsuperscript{57} Reiss’s role with the Harlem number, however, went much
further than his involvement with the Mexico special issue. While Reiss provided three
portraits and a drawing of Cuernavaca for the May 1924 issue, the Harlem number
 Included cover design, five imaginatives, and thirteen portraits by Reiss.\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore,
Reiss’s work for the special issue on Mexico contained material previously published in
\textit{Arts and Decoration, Century,} and \textit{Hearst’s International}.\textsuperscript{59} His work for the Harlem
number had never before been published. Like his covers for \textit{Opportunity,} Reiss’s
signature \textit{S} appears in the design for the Harlem number, along with a typographical
motif featuring single and double triangles in several letterforms (Figure 4.9). The
magazine title of “Survey Graphic” on the cover of the March 1925 issue, in fact, is
modified to bear his mark. It is as if Reiss’s artistic personality comes to determine the
magazine’s brand identity. With \textit{The New Negro,} Locke and Reiss took a step further
with the integration of design elements and editorial content, designing the dust jacket,
the book cover, and book decorations. He also contributed seventeen color portraits,
including the frontispiece.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{58} Jeffrey C. Stewart, \textit{To Color America: Portraits by Winold Reiss} (Washington, DC: Smithsonian

\textsuperscript{59} See M.D.C. Crawford, “Draughtsmanship and Racial Types” \textit{Arts and Decoration} 15.1 (May 1921): 28-30;
Katharine Anne Porter, “Where Presidents Have No Friends” \textit{Century} 104.3 (July 1922): 373-384; and
Lincoln Steffens, “Gringo Cat and Mexican Goldfish” \textit{Hearst’s International} April 1922. 36.

\textsuperscript{60} For more information on Aaron Douglas’s book design work as an extension of Reiss’s, see Goeser,
\textit{Picturing the New Negro,} 17–56.
As a literary and artistic project, then, *The New Negro* was both informed by and fundamentally distinct from the editions most associated with what Megan Benton calls a “craze” of finely made books for two decades after World War I.⁶¹ A fine press can be commercial or private but is defined by its dedication to high quality and artistic taste. The desirability of these books “lay less in their content than in the beauty, extravagance, status, or scarcity of the edition.”⁶² Their most common attributes includes fine paper, distinct typography, a small print run, extravagantly large sizes, wide margins, and

---


⁶² Ibid.
optimized leading. Such books were sometimes released as limited or numbered editions or issues, and their prices were generally higher than trade editions.

Figure 4.10: Reiss’s design of the dust jacket and the book cover for the first edition of *The New Negro*.

Albert and Charles Boni were very much associated with bibliophilic design as Benton describes it. They founded their publishing firm in 1923, the same year Jean Toomer’s *Cane* was brought out by Boni and Liveright.\textsuperscript{63} Albert Boni and Horace Liveright founded their publishing venture in 1916. The firm’s profit model was based upon the Modern Library, which published British work in the United States. The company was known as one of the major publishers of modernist work, including several major African American writers. Hutchinson calls Liveright “the flashiest and riskiest of all the New York publishers.”\textsuperscript{64} (After 1923, Albert and Charles Boni continued to publish fine press and trade editions by modern writers, many African American. Even the Boni brothers’ trade editions—such as Sara Bard Field’s *Barabbas: A Dramatic Narrative* (1932), R. Emmet Kennedy’s *Mellows: Negro Work Songs, Street Cries, and

\textsuperscript{63} The Bonis also bought the Maxim Lieber’s publishing company (Lieber and Lewis) in 1923.

\textsuperscript{64} Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 369.
Spirituals (1924), Upton Sinclair’s Mountain City (1930), and Arthur Symons’s complete translations of Baudelaire’s prose and poetry (1926)—had distinct, high quality designs, although rarely to the extent of The New Negro.

![Image of Albert and Charles Boni cover design, 1926-1932.](image)

Figure 4.11: Albert and Charles Boni cover design, 1926-1932.

Details about The New Negro’s publication suggest a high quality and durable trade edition with more attention to material form—or what McGann terms the “visible language” of a book’s physicality—than the average trade, without invoking extravagance and scarcity the way that well-known fine press books of the period did. The New Negro had a first edition run of 3,000 copies and was offered to the general public for a price of $5.00, or bundled with a year-long subscription of Opportunity for a total of $6.00. The book is an octavo, bound with quarter cloth and paper-covered, colored boards with buckram back. Clubs, libraries, and schools were invited to apply for discounted rates for The New Negro and R. Emmet Kennedy’s Mellows: Negro Work Songs, Street Cries, and Spirituals (1925).\(^{65}\) The initial run of The New Negro sold out in

---

\(^{65}\) Albert and Charles Boni Promotional Materials, n.d. [1925], Alain Locke Collection, Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Library, Howard University.
the first two years, and a “new and revised edition” was published in 1927. As of June of 1929, 3,958 copies had sold. By June of 1931, the total was 4,442.66

![The New Negro Dust Jacket](image)

Figure 4.12: Dust jacket for *The New Negro*, new and revised edition, 1927.

Two fine editions—one undertaken by Albert and Charles Boni and one advertised alongside *The New Negro* in *Opportunity*—make for a fruitful comparison. Albert and Charles Boni in 1929 issued a limited edition (1,100 numbered copies) of Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. First released in 1927, the book that had already sold more than 300,000 copies as a trade. The limited edition was designed by Elmer Adler of Pynson Printers and illustrated by Rockwell Kent. *Opportunity*’s 1926 limited edition folio of six Langston Hughes poems with drawings by Aaron Douglas was also priced and marketed as a fine press book. An advertisement in *Opportunity* described

66 These may have been satisfactory sales figures in relation to the print run but paled in comparison with the Harlem issue of *Survey Graphic*, which exhausted its entire first edition and offered a limited second edition of the monthly issue, with total sales exceeding 30,000 copies, “thanks in large part to mass purchases by Albert Barnes, George Foster Peabody, and Joel Spingarn for free distribution to students and organizations.” Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 369.
the folio as “a superb and unique gift for lovers of art and poetry” and described the “white woven deckle edge paper with a heavy Murillo cream cover.” Advertisements for *The New Negro*, in contrast, referred to its “numerous three color illustrations and half-tones” as well as its buckram binding, but emphasized content over paper type or book design. Its appeal was that of a “significant book” about a “new figure on the national canvas.”

The print run and price of *The New Negro* likewise positions it as an item aimed at the intellectual middle class. A list price of $5 was less than most fine editions. The limited edition *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* sold for $25.00. The Opportunity Art Folio, despite being comprised of only six poems, sold for $3.00. A survey of *Publisher’s Weekly* winter booklist for 1926 suggests that most trade editions priced for a wide audience had list prices of $1-3. A letter from W.E.B. Du Bois to Albert and Charles Boni addresses *The New Negro*’s high price:

I am sorry that printing and publishing costs so much today because I should like to see this volume in the hands of many readers, but even as it is perhaps there are enough of us, white and black, in America, who recognize the pressing importance and poignant meaning of problems of race contact in America to buy and own a volume which expresses the main facts with peculiar completeness.

---


70 Even the Boni brothers offered trade editions for as little as half the anthology’s price, as evinced by the back cover of the March 2925 issue of *Survey Graphic*, which listed *Black Cameos* at a price of “$2.50 net at all book stores.”

71 “Mid-winter Book Index” *Publisher’s Weekly*. Jan. 2, 1926. 47-73. A sample of the first 50 entries suggests an average price of $2.60 with a low of 35 cents and a high of $10.

This assessment is noteworthy in that the Boni brothers used a photographic reproduction of Du Bois’s letter, in full, with their promotional materials for the book. If this decision reveals a marketing strategy, it involved allowing Du Bois’s recommendation to acknowledge the relatively high price of the book while simultaneously suggesting that the content of the volume and not its material extravagance made the anthology a worthwhile expenditure. Du Bois’s letter also links the high price to a restricted set of readers who could distinguish themselves and their commitment by buying a relatively expensive book.\textsuperscript{73}

The amount of attention afforded to \textit{The New Negro}’s design and construction, however, suggests a strong commitment to bibliophilic if not fine press attributes. I have already discussed Reiss’s book design as an extension of his magazine work, but a more detailed analysis of his design motif for the anthology is warranted. The dust jacket, front matter, book decorations, and portraiture interact with other aspects of the book’s design to highlight the edition’s attention to balance between the book as physical object and the anthology as a figurative collection of material. Hutchinson traces Reiss’s aesthetic to \textit{Jugendstil} (‘youth style’), a German brand of art nouveau that “sought to break down distinctions between fine and applied arts.”\textsuperscript{74} Art nouveau’s association with the fine press and book arts movement are well-established. William Morris is perhaps the most iconic bridge between the two. With the Kelmscott Press, he “modeled a way to price and sell his work without unduly compromising the anticommercial, even anticapitalist, principles of his bookmaking enterprise.”\textsuperscript{75} Reiss’s particular ties to art nouveau perhaps informed the Democratic message of his 1930 publication \textit{You Can Design}, co-written by

\textsuperscript{73} Megan Benton includes the prices and print runs of 300 sample fine press editions from the 1920s and 30s. Prices range from $1.00-$135.00. Sample print runs range from 300 to 2,000. For more information, see Benton, \textit{Beauty and the Book}, 206, 243.

\textsuperscript{74} Hutchinson, \textit{The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White}, 399.

\textsuperscript{75} Benton, \textit{Beauty and the Book}, 167.
Albert Charles Schweizer. In the foreword, they write: “Whether you realize it or not, the power of creating forms and patterns lies within you, and you should give yourself the pleasure that comes from this kind of self-expression. … Your inner self derives enormous satisfaction from designing.”\textsuperscript{76} The book ties design concepts to book decoration, architecture, advertisements, and home decoration.

![Figure 4.13: “Ornamental frames” from Reiss’s You Can Design (1930)](image)

Reiss’s design for \textit{The New Negro} was a mixture of unique elements and signature imagery associated with the artist’s work in magazines such as \textit{Arts and Decoration, Century, Modern Art Collector, Scribner’s}, and especially \textit{Opportunity}\.\textsuperscript{77} Reiss saw the Harlem Renaissance as “aesthetic revival of African forms.”\textsuperscript{78} His duotone book decorations make heavy use of geometric shapes and primitive icons, including Africanized masks, human faces, and animals. They appear as headers for editorial


\textsuperscript{77} According to Benton, “Original art or hand embellishment was the rarest and most extravagant form of inscribing human endeavor upon which fine printing was premised.” Benton, \textit{Beauty and the Book}, 75.

\textsuperscript{78} Stewart, \textit{To Color America}, 60.
content and fill white space at the end of several pieces. By way of explaining and perhaps justifying the decision to include Reiss’s design motif, Locke wrote a three-paragraph “Notes to the Illustrations” to be placed with the “Who’s Who of the Contributors” section of the anthology’s back matter. He argued that Reiss had created an abstract and representative portrayal of “the soul and spirit of a people” by following the “simple but rare process of not forcing an alien idiom upon nature.”\textsuperscript{79} The New Negro’s design elements were aimed at using an ethnographic process to access the past and establish terms for future work.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.14.jpg}
\caption{A book decoration used as a header in \textit{The New Negro}.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{79} Locke, \textit{The New Negro}, 419.
Figure 4.15: A book decoration used as a header in *The New Negro*.

Figure 4.16: A book decoration used as a footer in *The New Negro*. 
The key difference was that, instead of using book design to appeal to a conservative, old world connection, Reiss attempted to merge conservative bookmaking and typographic elements with a modern and primitivistic book design and artwork to produce unified “graphic interpretation of Negro life.”

Both Carroll and Hutchinson focus on the ethnographic quality to the *Survey Graphic* issue, and both raise the problematic nature of Reiss’s representational strategies. Critics have often noted, in particular, that Jessie Fauset “worried about the primitivist slant of Reiss’s portraits” and “remained Reiss’s most outspoken critic.”

In her submission for *The New Negro* “The Gift of Laughter,” Fauset derided Reiss’s work. “Surely you can’t quite expect me to publish the paragraph on Reiss,” Locke wrote. “It isn’t because I violently disagree—for we are all entitled to our opinions, but for two other very pertinent reasons.”

Criticizing the artist featured through the volume would discourteous, he argued, and “the point is irrelevant to the subject under discussion.” Almost a decade later, inflamed by Locke’s review of *Comedy, American Style* (1933), she generalized, “Your malice, your lack of true discrimination and above all your tendency to play safe with the grand white folks renders you anything but a reliable critic.”

Fauset had argued that Locke’s choice of a white, European artist compromised the validity of a project designed to emphasize African American self-portraiture.

Reiss’s work indicates a balancing act between the anthology’s white and black audiences. Robert E. Washington argues that Locke and others faced a fundamental

---

80 Ibid.

81 Hutchinson also traces the inclusion of Aaron Douglas in the book version as response to criticism directed at Reiss’s role (398).


83 Alain Locke to Jessie Fauset, n.d. [August 1925], Locke Papers. Locke added, “Lift that paragraph, if you will, for the review of the book after it comes out.”

84 Jessie Fauset Harris to Alain Locke, Jan. 9, 1933, Locke Papers.
predicament when it came to “white American interests” for they had “sparked and supported the 1920s black literary ferment.” Figures like Locke sought an ideology that would allow them to profit from white primitivism and exoticism for “favorable recognition by white American elites was the yardstick most middle-class blacks used to determine whether blacks were making racial progress.” The New Negro in this sense can be linked to one of the central tenets of ethnography as described by James Clifford. With the emergence of an “art-culture system,” museums and other sites of modernist collection come to provide a space where “exotic objects are contextualized and given value in the West.” Locke follows this pattern in the sense that he expresses a desire to differentiate the New Negro from the “Old Negro” who had “long become more of a myth than a man” and “more of a formula than a human being” in the eyes of the white mainstream. Meanwhile, the fine press elements frame and validate the interpretive claims of the anthology. Yet this hybridity is itself distinct, for fine press editions of the twenties generally convey a desire to escape all ideological and political stances. In Benton’s words, “They are typically deemed beautiful but benign relics of a golden age of bookcraft, touching if self-indulgent gestures of book love. They seem idealistic and disinterested, produced—and preserved—far from the din of commercial publishing and everyday society.” The New Negro is not vulnerable to this distorted sensibility about


86 Ibid., 46.


88 Locke, The New Negro, 3.

89 Benton, Beauty and the Book, 5.

Similarly, Reiss’s efforts to reduce black identity to a geometrical idiom interact with a typeface associated with the supposed Golden Age of European bookmaking. The body text of *The New Negro* makes use of a modern Caslon font, while the running header on facing pages features the long serifs of Caslon old style italic. Robert Bringhurst has called the Caslon family “the typographical epitome of the English baroque.” A wide range of modern Caslon types were popularized in the 1910s and 20s. Knopf’s editions included the statement that Caslon “brought the old-style letter to its highest perfection.” McGann notes similar effect in *A Draft of XXX Cantos*, where the interplay of modern Caslon and “aggressively vorticist” initials causes the typeface to “function as the sign of an earlier historical or stylistic moment.” Something related occurs with *The New Negro*, but the question Eurocentric and Africanistic interaction further complicates the relationship between modernity and classicism. The anthology’s book design attempts to pay homage the European fine press tradition while simultaneously distinguishing itself from it. Analyzing this connection only emphasizes the ideological nature of all book design.

As Bornstein states, “Locke resolutely insisted on both the excellence of Reiss’s work and the integrity of his own inclusive vision.” What is more significant is that his defense of Reiss and his decision to expand Reiss’s role for *Survey Graphic* fit with other efforts to make *The New Negro* a unique material object worthy of collecting. In a commentary for *Opportunity* titled “To Certain of Our Phillistines,” Locke defended

Reiss and criticized what he argued was an essentially racist argument against Reiss’s inclusion in the anthology. He would not defend the idea of “being new-fangled for the sake of being so.” Reiss’s work was “deliberately conceived and executed as a path-breaking guide and encouragement” to a “new foray” of younger African Americans. His work was “not meant to dictate a style to the younger Negro artist, but to point the lesson that contemporary European art has already learned—that any vital artistic expression of the Negro theme and subject in art must break through the stereotypes to a new style, a distinctive fresh technique, and some sort of characteristic idiom.” Locke’s defense of Reiss, in other words, differed from the central idea of the mainstream fine press movement, “to restore luster to the cultural entity of the book as well as to ennoble readers’ experiences of particular texts.” Albert C. Barnes similarly argued in his essay for Survey Graphic and later The New Negro, that art for “the white man” had “become exotic, a thing apart, an indulgence, a something to be possessed.” Locke wasn’t defending a sacred or ideal book form. He was a defending an aesthetic that merged the book’s form with its content.

---

95 Ibid., 155.
96 Benton, Beauty and the Book, 33.
Locke’s response for Opportunity ends with the beginning of the month’s “Book Shelf” feature, which was at this time signified with one of Reiss’s characteristic designs wrapped around a graphical representation of a bookshelf and no wording to indicate the section title, apart from its listing on the table of contents page. While there’s no evidence to suggest a deliberate pairing of Locke’s work with a border associated with Reiss’s aesthetic, the effect is a juxtaposition that celebrates the very idea of celebrating the book, as long as such a celebration occurred within the context of a legitimate social purpose, in much the same way that Reiss’s book decorations frame individual pages of the anthology as celebrated art objects. The page is thus a zone of visible but obscured collaboration. The nature of the intervention, but not its effect, is clouded by the
anonymity of the individual responsible for the layout decision and by the possibility of accidental juxtaposition. To appreciate the collaborative aspect of such an occurrence, critics must rely on the magazine’s bibliographic codes.

Ultimately, the central tenets of the fine press movement informed *The New Negro* by making book design and physicality clear priorities, which is precisely how fine press printers like Elmer Adler had hoped to shape modern book publishing. According to Benton, fine printers “meant to make a difference to all books and all readers” by creating new standards for bookmaking as an art form. *The New Negro* was not as classically lavish as many of the typical fine press books of the period—as Locke said, “Let others who have more cause to be decadent and blasé than we, be eccentric and bizarre for the sheer need of new sensations and renewed vigor.” Nevertheless, a bibliographic analysis of *The New Negro* suggests as much emphasis on book’s physical design as there was on its editorial content. McGann, describing Pound’s *Cantos*, states, “the physical presentation of these three books thus constitutes a display of their meanings.” This point goes beyond the idea that “writing ought to look handsome or attractive” to suggest that so-called ornamental features can carry historical meanings. In the case of *The New Negro*, Locke and Reiss attempted to create a motif that would characterize the new generation of African American writers and artists, as well as their relationship with a trans-continental heritage. Unwittingly, they also signified materially one of the central problems of the Harlem Renaissance: a desire to validate black identity

---

98 One might even wonder if Locke could have had a part in arranging this associative pairing, but I have no evidence of this possibility either.


100 Locke, “To Certain of Our Phillistines,” 156.


102 Ibid., 77.
by venerating classical European literary and artistic conventions while simultaneously transcending them.

**Making Matter and Material**

As my analysis has already begun to show, *The New Negro*’s ties to the culture of bibliophila and book collecting extend to its paratextual and textual content. Book design was often regarded as a chance to allude to the central theme or merit of a book. Walter Crane wrote of frontispiece design, “The whole secret of the book should not be let out, but rather played with or suggested in a symbolic way, especially in any ornamental title-page.”

In the case of *The New Negro*, Reiss’s geometrical abstractions on the title page approximate the anthology’s relationship with modernity. Yet I think another symbol says more about the volume as a whole. On the volume’s dedication page, a hand-drawn illustration of sheet music to accompany the traditional song lyric “O, rise, shine for thy light is a’ com-ing” forms a decorative bridge between text and paratext. Similar hand-drawn musical notation appears in Locke’s “The Negro Spirituals” and “B’rer Rabbit Fools Buzzard.” While the notation itself is always legible, several of these images bear evidence of hurried or inaccurate pen strokes. Just as many fine press books included statements about the history of the typeface used for the volume, or discussed the fact that the type was set by hand on handmade paper, the images of musical notes represent the influence of an individual human hand. Carroll argues that the musical is one of many features that emphasizes “the significance of African-American folk culture.”

Simultaneously, the hand-drawn notation recalls Benton’s comment that a book’s status as handmade became “a sign of value more than quality per se.”

---

103 Crane, *Of the Decorative Illustration of Books Old and New*, 287.


notation suggests a commitment to a grounded relationship between cultural producer and cultural product, as do Reiss’s hand drawn fonts for section titles. Such is the essence of the bibliophilic book: the strongest possible connection between physical form and stored material.

Figure 4.18: The New Negro, dedication page.

The written information contained in the front and back matter such as Locke’s foreword, contributor biographies, and various bibliographies at the end of the volume foremost represent an amplification of the connection between matter and material. Locke points to this fact in the foreword to the anthology the “wide range of the acknowledgements of the material here collected” as evidence of the movement he intends to describe and validate. The foreword establishes one plane of continuity

106 Locke, The New Negro, x.
between front matter and content. Locke adds that “we speak of the offerings of this book embodying” the “ripening forces as culled from the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance.”\textsuperscript{107} Locke’s metaphor of a new black consciousness as ripening fruit speaks to the physical manifestation of an otherwise conceptual shift. His use of the word \textit{embodying} further connects the book’s physical form to this manifesting process. As Farebrother states, “Locke grapples with a dilemma that has implications for the Harlem Renaissance more broadly: the question of how to represent African Americans socially and aesthetically as a group with a shared sense of identity while preserving a space for individual complexity.”\textsuperscript{108} His point is that the front and back matter of the anthology add legitimacy to the representations of the collected material.

This blend of matter and material reinforces connections to the culture of bibliophilia and book collecting. I have gestured to Gerard Genette’s argument that paratexts such as prefaces and indices function as “thresholds of interpretation” for a central “text” with elevated status but, in the case of an anthology like \textit{The New Negro}, much of the collection’s material bears a resemblance with what we might otherwise consider paratextual commentary. The first edition of \textit{The New Negro} begins with a frontispiece and title page (or we might arguably count the spine or cover as paratexts), proceeds to a copyright page and a dedication, and then includes “acknowledgements,” “foreword,” “contents,” “illustrations,” Locke’s essay “The New Negro,” Albert C. Barnes’s “Negro Art and America,” and William Stanley Braithwaite’s “The Negro in American Literature,” which is accompanied by an image of the title page for Jupiter Hammon’s \textit{An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York} (1787). In the strictest sense, the text properly begins with Locke’s “The New Negro,” as this is the point at which Arabic numeral pagination replaces the Roman numeral pagination of the front

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., xi.

\textsuperscript{108} Farebrother, \textit{The Collage Aesthetic in the Harlem Renaissance}, 49.
matter. However, all three of these early essays might well be considered general statements on or interpretations of the sections of the anthology to follow, “Negro Youth Speaks,” which showcases fiction, poetry, drama, and music by black writers. Where other works would establish definite hierarchies between text and paratext, this volume blurs distinctions between essays about the New Negro movement and examples of literary and artistic work by black writers.

As with the front matter, the back matter contributes to the interpretive architecture of the collection as a whole. In a sense, it is supplemental material or commentary on the “true” text. Simultaneously, it is integral to the book project as a whole. The section titled “Who’s Who of the Contributors” validates the contributors’ legitimacy by listing their publications and labeling their professional identities. Each entry offers some explanation of the contributor’s profession or major preoccupation in lieu of a recognizable job category. Locke is “editor and contributor”; Barnes is “art collector and connoisseur”; Braithwaite is “poet, journalist, editor, and pioneer anthologist”; and Arthur Schomburg is “author and book collector.”109 These entries exemplify the process by which the anthology elevates book collecting and connoisseurship to the status of a profession or calling. Further attributions such as Schomburg’s label as the co-founder of the Negro Society for Historical Research and Locke’s mention of his role in the “bibliographical section of Negro-Americana” only augment the legitimating effect of the contributor biographies. “Who’s Who of the Contributors” is itself a kind of argument about the validity of the New Negro movement, which adds to the structuring effect between paratext and text.

Locke’s detailed subsection of “Who’s Who of the Contributors” titled “Notes to the Illustrations,” likewise, represents a site of continuity between back matter and

anthology material. Locke describes the extent to which Reiss “painstakingly collaborated” on the book project with “both decorative and representative art.”\textsuperscript{110} Locke labels Reiss a “folklorist of the brush and palette” and speaks of the virtue of the “decorative elements” in terms of its ties to the “pattern of the culture from which it sprang.”\textsuperscript{111} Such interpretive claims stand completely outside the realm of a standard contributor biography. Locke’s entry defends Reiss’s role designing and providing illustrations for the anthology. What’s more, it reiterates a defense Locke had already twice articulated: once in “To certain of Our Phillistines” and again in an essay for The New Negro titled “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts,” in which Locke upholds European-born artists such as Reiss and Auguste Mambour. “Notes to the Illustrations” closes with a sense of what is “about to be done for the Negro and Africa” thanks to Reiss.\textsuperscript{112} In doing so, it links ancestry to the present moment and the present moment to an immediate future, a kind of afterword effect that renders the back matter of the anthology an integral part of the book’s social argument.

The “final word” of The New Negro comes in the form of a series of bibliographies, one compiled by Schomburg, one compiled by Arthur Huff Fauset, and five more “compiled by the editor.”\textsuperscript{113} The effect of these paratexts, according to Carroll, is to suggest that the inclusivity of the anthology by no means suggests that the collection is exhaustive:

Their extensiveness is evidence of the wealth of material produced by black people in the United States in the importance of their cultural contributions. These

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 419.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 420.
lists also ensure that *The New Negro* is merely a starting point for readers, the first step in growing knowledge about and understanding of African-Americans.\(^\text{114}\)

By alluding to hundreds of other important books, these bibliographies encapsulate Locke’s democratic vision of the New Negro. It should be noted, however, that a bibliography is very much a document aimed at recording and consolidating a particular kind of historical consciousness. True to form, the anthology’s bibliographies record authors, titles, publishers, places of publication, and dates of publication. They concretize the volume’s sense of Democratic values by reinforcing a materially grounded view of literary production.\(^\text{115}\)

**Digging up the Past:**

**Book Collecting, Black Bibliophiles,**

**and *The New Negro***

To recap, book decoration in the 1920s and 30s, by virtue of its level of ornamentation, could convey monetary value or, by virtue of the level of care invested in its production, that the material presented by a given edition was in other ways precious. By branding the anthology with his signature S, Reiss was also marking the anthology as a distinct iteration of both individuality and collectivity. Artistic design meant individual attention, and individual attention implied importance. Further, the decorative motif of a book such as *The New Negro* could aim for a fundamental harmony between material form and literary content. The paratextual matter of *The New Negro*—in so far as any of its material can be designated paratext rather than text—further reinforces the volume’s bibliophilic metanarrative. In other words, the various bibliographic features of the book

\(^{114}\text{Carroll, Word, Image, And The New Negro, 186.}\)

\(^{115}\text{For the purposes of tabulating royalties, Locke and the Boni brothers agreed that shares of the royalties would be divided up between contributors by the number of pages they had filled. In making these calculations, he was clear that the “Bibliographical material” was “counted in.”}\)
articulate a desire to become collectible, to enshrine its multi-generic texts as both vital
and durable. Adding to this overall metanarrative are several essays in the collection that
argue for a sense of history informed by bibliophilia and book collecting. The editorial
content of the volume, in other words, comments upon the kinds of collecting
philosophies that inform the book as a collaborative project.

Among the various philosophies of collecting showcased in the anthology, book
collecting has not received the level of scholarly attention that ethnography, or collecting,
and collage have. This lack of scholarly attention is surprising because book collecting as
a practice overtly informs the text and can help explain the ideological expectations of an
anthology like *The New Negro*. According to Thomas C. Battle, Black bibliophiles and
collectors have played a major and largely overlooked role in the collection and
preservation documentary and cultural heritage of people of African descent.”116 The
edited volume *Black Bibliophiles and Collectors* and Elinor Des Verney Sinnette’s
biography of Arthur Schomburg remain the two most apparent exceptions to this
generalization. *Black Bibliophiles and Collectors* includes as an appendix titled a
“Gallery of Bibliophiles,” in which both Schomburg and Locke are included. Locke is
described as an “avid collector of African art and books related to people of African
descent.”117 Schomburg, in turn, is described as the son of a black mother and German
father. Born in Puerto Rico, “the search for his own identity led him to a foremost lay
historian, lecturer, and collector of books and other materials to document the history of
people of African descent.”118

117 Ibid., 211.
118 Ibid., 210.
Sinnette’s biography of Schomburg further charts the collector’s bibliophilia, which developed after his move to New York City in the 1890s. There he befriended John Edward Bruce, a journalist and book collector known as Bruce Grit who had been born into slavery in 1856, who became a kind of “surrogate father” to Schomburg. Together, along with three other original members, they formed the Negro Society for Historical Research in 1911. That year, Bruce invited Locke to be the society’s first guest lecturer. Locke and Schomburg soon became close friends. As Sinnette explains, “the self-taught historian and bibliophile and the young Rhodes scholar clearly viewed the historical destiny of the black race from the same perspective.”\(^{119}\) Schomburg “compiled bibliographies and suggested books for Locke to read and purchase, as well as patiently pursuing elusive sources of information in reply to Locke’s research queries” and Locke provided Schomburg with “editorial assistance.”\(^{120}\) In 1916, Schomburg and others attempted to form a Negro Book Collectors Exchange, but the organization never materialized.\(^{121}\) In 1926, Schomburg sold his book collection to the New York Public Library but continued to add to it with additional purchases. It eventually contained 5,224 volumes, 3,000 manuscripts; 2,000 etchings and paintings; and several thousand pamphlets. In 1940, two years after Schomburg’s death, the Division of Negro Literature, History and Prints at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library was renamed the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. To this day, the collection remains a central component of his legacy.

Schomburg and Locke’s version of bibliophilia and book collecting differed from the ostensibly mainstream and tacitly white version of the sensibility and practice. A central tenet of most books on book collecting from the 1920s and 30s was that a book


\(^{120}\) Ibid., 46, 47.

\(^{121}\) Ibid., 73.
collector’s particular choices were an expression of his individuality. Jean Baudrillard’s assertion, “what you really collect is always yourself” was true of the modern book collector. As Paul Jordan-Smith writes in *For the Love of Books: The Adventures of an Impecunious Collector* (1934), “A library reflects one’s prejudices, one’s limitations, one’s personality. …The wise collector may look at one of his books and say, ‘These are mine, and I am theirs.’ A library that fails to mirror its owner’s personality has neither life nor meaning.” John T. Winterich goes so far as to assert, “A man who considers books primarily as investments or speculations is not a collector.” Book collecting centuries prior had been “exclusively the recreation of a gentleman” and had therefore developed as an activity marked by self-indulgence. Fine books, according to Benton, operated as “remnants of American gentility.” Book collecting manuals urged prospective collector’s to develop a niche or specialty by letting their personal interests guide their choices. West writes, “There is no limit to the fields open to collectors, and sooner or later most collector’s specialize,” but the range of presumed potential interests, however, often reflected a bias toward American and European writers, and subjects associated with middle or upper class interests and activities. This emphasis on specialization is similar to the processes by which, in ethnography, “the persona of the fieldworker was validated, both publicly and professionally” in part by focusing on

---


123 At least two book collecting manuals of the 1930s used the word *impecunious* in their titles, a word that distinguishes the implied reader as intellectual and not wealthy. Both volumes link their titles to the Great Depression.


particular institutions rather than attempting to understand a whole culture.\textsuperscript{128} Yet the validation and specialization in ethnography were defined and supervised by exterior systems. Book collectors and bibliophiles used their habits and practices as participatory distinctions.

Despite a clear emphasis on individual idiosyncrasies, bibliophiles did articulate a coherent set of values to construct a sense of group identity and account for the “mild sort of madness” that occupied such a central place in their lives.\textsuperscript{129} Foremost among the traits attributed to book collectors was their shared love of scavenging. Jordan-Smith writes appreciatively of the enthusiasts “who begrime their fingers in shabby stacks and poke their noses in crackling black folios of another century.”\textsuperscript{130} Winterich maintains that a book collector does not collect magazines, as they take up too much space.\textsuperscript{131} Rarity is a commonly discussed topic, for the relative scarceness of a book was likely to increase its demand, and therefore its price. Books were more likely to be desirable if they were fine specimens, but not every expensive book was destined to become the object of a collector’s want. Jordan-Smith writes, “We love books for their wisdom, their beauty, the pleasures they afford, and the comfort they give: they open doors to the only freedom we may know.”\textsuperscript{132} Perhaps the most vital characteristic shared by bibliophiles was their collective inability to articulate fully their fascination with books.

What idiosyncratic enthusiasm, love of rummaging, appreciation of scarcity, disinterest in money, and attention to fine construction have in common is the view that

\textsuperscript{128} Clifford, \textit{The Predicament of Culture}, 30, 31.

\textsuperscript{129} West, \textit{Modern Book Collecting for the Impecunious Amateur}, 4.


\textsuperscript{131} Winterich, \textit{A Primer of Book Collecting}, 6.

\textsuperscript{132} Smith, \textit{For the Love of Books}, 5.
an object’s material distinctiveness and its capacity to embody something spiritually transcendent are inextricable. In describing books as doorways to freedom—or openness by way of enclosure—Jordan-Smith points to what Bill Brown has called an “inside/outside dichotomy” by which “literary modernism structures the doubleness of objects.”¹³³ This version of accessing an abstract ideal through a concrete object re-emphasizes the importance of the material thing rather than justifying the abandonment of physicality as object becomes idea. According to Walter Benjamin: “Dates, place names, formats, previous owners, bindings, and the like: all these details must tell him something—not as dry, isolated facts, but as a harmonious whole; from the quality and intensity of this harmony he must be able to recognize whether a book is for him or not.”¹³⁴ Linking such a desire to ethnography, Clifford notes, “Expectations of wholeness, continuity, and essence have long been built into the links Western ideas of culture and art.”¹³⁵ Yet Benjamin’s “Unpacking My Library” closes with the speaker assembling a dwelling with “books as the building stones” and disappearing inside it, “as is only fitting.”¹³⁶ For Benjamin as book collector, only the concreteness of the properly conceived physical object can provide this disappearance. The book becomes a dwelling place and a refuge partly because of its representative capacity and partly because it exists as a physical thing capable of arrangement and assemblage.

In contrast to the materially rooted desire to disappear into books (or pass through them to somewhere else), black bibliophiles such as Locke and Schomburg advocated for relationship with books that connected materiality to history, and history to racial


¹³⁵ Clifford, The Predicament of Culture, 233.

¹³⁶ Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library,” 492.
progress. Just as Locke’s “To Certain of Our Phillistines” rejects newness for its own sake, Schomburg rejected fetishizing the past for sheer sake of glorifying a bygone “Golden Age” of books. According to Sinnette, “Schomburg was unique among his fellow black bibliophiles, and collectively they were unique among the wider community of book lovers and collectors.”\textsuperscript{137} Black bibliophiles were not motivated solely by a desire to “own rare books and treasures” but were united, instead, by a common cause.\textsuperscript{138} Books could offer archeological evidence that peoples of African American descent had been misrepresented by the consolidators of history. They could offer alternatives to the dominant racial prejudices of the day. Schomburg still had the characteristic zeal and eccentricity of a white bibliophile. He “ferretted through bookstores, storage warehouses, auction galleries, secondhand stores, and anywhere he thought he might locate material.”\textsuperscript{139} Yet his motives stood in direct contrast those most commonly associated with white collectors.

Editorial content in \textit{The New Negro} invokes and repositions bibliophilia and book collecting in three important ways: by establishing a type of collector in contrast to the ethnographer or dabbler, by articulating a sense of book-centered materiality, and by espousing a socially-grounded aesthetic of physicalizing the past. The nexus of this conceptual work is the section titled “The Negro Digs up His Past.” Farebrother argues, “The openness of the anthology forms lends itself to expressing democratic values because the inclusion of diverse voices creates a collage-like effect of multiplicity in unity.”\textsuperscript{140} The same can be said of this particular section, which includes, in order: Schomburg’s essay of the same name, Arthur Huff Fauset’s “American Negro Folk

\textsuperscript{137} Sinnette, \textit{Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, Black Bibliophile & Collector}, 75.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{140} Farebrother, \textit{The Collage Aesthetic in the Harlem Renaissance}, 52.
Literature,” a Reiss image titled “African Phantasy: Awakening,” a portrait by Reiss titled “Ancestral: A Type Study,” two folk tales collected by Fauset (“T’appin” and “B’rer Rabbit Fools Buzzard”), Countee Cullen’s poem “Heritage,” and Locke’s “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts.” The section starts with a reproduction of the title page of a book from Schomburg’s collection and includes several photographs of African sculptures, some of which serve as book decorations and others that accompany Locke’s essay. A footnote cites the Barnes Foundation Collection as the source of such illustrations. The material and historical sensibility I want to underline also appears elsewhere in The New Negro, but its most important enunciation is in this particular section.

The New Negro positions the ideal collector somewhere between the trained ethnographer and the elitist dabbler. Schomburg’s essay “The Negro Digs up His Past” criticizes alternative models of archeological boosterism, including “the vagaries of rhetoric and propaganda” and “the puerile controversy and petty braggadocio with effort for race history first started.”141 The “rash and rabid amateur,” he states, “has glibly tried to prove half the world’s geniuses to have been Negroes.”142 Schomburg’s essay, according to Sinnette, was “a distillation” of his philosophy of collecting and historical research.143 It echoed Barnes’s critique dilettantism, which he rearticulated in his preface to the Barnes Foundation’s anthology (1929), expressing not only “the high seriousness of his institution’s educational mission” but also “the degree to which that mission aimed entirely to reconstruct the cultural economies governing the experience and meaning of art.”144 Barnes invoked such seriousness in expressing a modernist notion of totality

141 The New Negro, 231, 236.
142 Ibid., 237.
143 Sinnette, Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, Black Bibliophile & Collector, 114.
144 Braddock, Collecting as Modernist Practice, 109.
through representation. Like white book collectors, Barnes thought that the collector’s individuality expressed through genuine commitment could produce a transcendent relationship between owner and object.

Meanwhile, Schomburg sought to enlist bibliographic expertise to contest African Americans’ place in history. In so doing, his essay articulates an idiosyncratic version of book-centered materiality. Rather than stirring up the “sand of controversy,” African Americans’ efforts needed “more of the dust of digging.” 145 This archeological metaphor underscores Schomburg’s emphasis on a new set of values and practices validated “partly through the corrective influence of the more scientific study of African institutions and early cultural history.” 146 As important as this corrective influence had been, Schomburg also invokes the passion of the book collector to emphasize the “crucial truths to document and establish.” 147 Similarly, Fauset’s “American Negro Folk Literature” presents the folklorist in contrast to Joel Chandler Harris, whose uncle Remus stories, despite being well known, “were not folktales but adaptations.” 148 Legitimating folklore as a conduit to cultural insight, he argues, “It is not necessary to draw on sentiment in order to realize the masterful quality of some of the Negro tales: it is simply necessary to read them.” 149 In contrast to Harris as cultural adapter, Fauset offers himself as faithful collector. A note to the folk tale “T’appin” explains that this tale and “B’rer Rabbit Fools Buzzard” were “collected by Mr. Fauset in the South, August, 1925.” 150 Where Schomburg’s materiality offers a physical conduit to the now-abstracted past, folkloric

145 The New Negro, 237.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid., 232.
148 Ibid., 239.
149 Ibid., 241.
150 Ibid., 245.
documentation attempts to capture the current abstractness of oral tradition and physicalize it.

Both Schomburg and Fauset offer models of book materiality based upon its use value in service of cultural work. Schomburg, foremost, articulates a socially-grounded aesthetic of physicalizing the past. This aesthetic carries with it a view of the present moment as future history. His essay opens with the claim that “the American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future.”151 Further, “From neglected and rust-spotted pages comes testimony to the black men stood shoulder to shoulder in courage and zeal, and often on a parity of intelligence and talent, with their notable white benefactors.”152 Schomburg’s use of the term rust-spotted suggests that these insights, while valuable, have not always been valued. Fauset echoes this perspective by calling attention to the rootededness of the folklore he has collected. “T’appin” carries a bibliographical epigraph “Told by Cugo Lewis, Plateau, Alabama. Brought to American from West Coast Africa, 1859.”153 These concretizing details contribute to the idea of Fauset as faithful mediator and a collector of culture legitimated by his adherence to established scientific practices. They also record the deep historical roots of the folk tales and how recent his intervention as collector was. Contesting the past required engaging with the physical page and a new relationship with the present.

Also in “The Negro Digs up His Past,” Cullen’s poem “Heritage,” engages with the book as a materialized symbol of an untold past. Braddock provides an extended analysis of Cullen’s poem as an engagement with the question of African past “through the unavoidable conditions of its prior mediation in modernist art.”154 With making

151 Ibid., 231.
152 Ibid., 233.
153 Ibid., 245.
154 Braddock, Collecting as Modernist Practice, 188.
connections to modernism as his driving interpretive aim, Braddock describes Locke as the “exacting editor of the poem” in a manner comparable to Pound’s interventions with *The Waste Land*.\(^{155}\) Contrasting his own reading with Walter Benn Michaels’s, he argues that “Heritage” is more a poem about “the conditions of availability of the African past” than has been appreciated.\(^{156}\) Of particular significance to both readings are Cullen’s lines, to answer the question “What is Africa to me?”

Africa, the poems states, is “A book one thumbs/ listlessly till slumber comes.”\(^{157}\) As Benn Michaels notes, this metaphor at first seems to diminish the importance of Africa in the poetic speaker’s life. By extension, this would render the book as an object of shallow engagement. But the next stanza reveals Cullen fighting to “Quench my pride and cool my blood/ Lest I perish in their flood.”\(^{158}\) Cullen later meditates on his Christian identity and difficulty of reconciling his desire to turn the other cheek with his grief and anger at the legacy of slavery. Braddock posits further that the book being described is *Anthologie Nègre*, a book Locke named “the bible of [the Apollinaire] coterie.”\(^{159}\) He also claims that Cullen’s lines about “Quaint, outlandish heathen gods / Black men fashion out of rods, / Clay and brittle bits of stone, / In a likeness like their own” can be interpreted as a reference to “the African collections of Paul Guillaume.” What Braddock does not do is connect his reading of the poem to the book as a distinct site of material access. Instead he emphasizes the book and the collection as allusions to two modes of collecting: art an anthology. With Cullen’s poetic trajectory in mind, however, the book becomes the physical manifestation of Cullen’s surface desire to remain unaffected by his

\(^{155}\) Ibid., 185–186.

\(^{156}\) Ibid., 190.

\(^{157}\) *The New Negro*, 250. Lns. 11-12.

\(^{158}\) Ibid. Lns. 28-29.

\(^{159}\) Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice*, 189.
past and the untold story—he is “three centuries removed/ From the scenes my fathers loved”—that might have connected Cullen to his heritage.\textsuperscript{160} In this sense, Africa, the book one thumbs, is not the same Africa with which Cullen hungers to connect. Yet the book he possesses stand in for the book he does not and thus serves as an emblem of his emotional struggle.

The section of \textit{The New Negro} titled “The Negro Digs up His Past” closes with Locke’s essay, “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts,” which I have already discussed in connection to Locke’s efforts to defend Reiss’s collaborative role in the anthology. Circling back to Reiss, however, seems an appropriate way to conclude this chapter on the influence of bibliophilic design and book collecting on \textit{The New Negro}. This is the essay in which Locke claimed \textit{Anthologie Nègre} had been “the bible” for “poets like Guillaume Appolinaire and Blaisé Cendrars.”\textsuperscript{161} Their goal, he states, was the “artistic re-expression of African idioms in poetic symbols and verse forms.”\textsuperscript{162} Further, according to Locke, “The African spirit, as we said at the outset, is at its best in abstract decorative forms. Design, and to a lesser degree, color, are its original \textit{fortes}.”\textsuperscript{163} Although Locke’s primary goal in this essay was to discuss the ancestral arts, he also makes a case for contemporary book design as an expression of that tradition. Through Reiss, who is certainly a problematic mediator, Locke attempted to express this claim with the anthology’s book design elements.

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{The New Negro}, 252. Lns. 69-70.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 261.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 267.
Conclusion

Early in this chapter, I articulated a central question behind my analysis of *The New Negro*, bibliophilia, and book collecting. Put simply, who is the middle man? By way of preview I offered the argument that, in a way, everyone involved in the creation, production, and distribution of the anthology could own that title. Now, I want to phrase the same question in new way. Put simply, who is the author? *The New Negro*’s ties to bibliophilia and book collecting call attention to this very question. Reiss, through his portraiture and book design, practices elevated creative agency. Contributors such as Schomburg, Fauset, and Cullen, articulate distinct but related versions of materiality through and around the book. Locke emerges as an author figure most conspicuously as an essayist but also as an editor of Cullen’s work and a tour guide through (or curator of) the contributors’ work. Yet each example only further complicates our idea of the author and casts a light on how interdependent all the various authors of a book like *The New Negro* really are. To a degree, the same can be said of any anthology. Less obviously, the same can be said of any book. The anthology’s bibliographic codes call heightened attention to the materialization of the book as a coequal site of interpretation available to critics only because of collaborative labor. These nods to bibliophilia are apparent in the book decorations and the cover design, but they are also rearticulated throughout the collections paratextual and textual content. Collectively they suggest the book collector’s idiosyncratic seriousness as model for engaging with past and present. They suggest a need to contest the past by repossessing physical objects, both books and other artifacts. They suggest the need for an authorial creator imbued with the best qualities of one of modernity’s most inconspicuous yet abundant middle men: the educated eccentric who collects antiquities to experience a connection to an abstracted but still vital past.
APPENDIX:
WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS,
EDITOR FIGURE ACTIVITIES, 1890-1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title and Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prefaces and Other Introductory Matter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td><em>South-Sea Idyls</em>, by Charles Warren Stoddard, introductory letter by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td><em>The Poems of George Pellew</em>, edited, with an introduction by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td><em>Main-Travelled Roads</em>, by Hamlin Garland, introduction by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td><em>Memoirs of Edward Gibbon</em>, preface by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td><em>Master and Man</em> by Count Leo Tolstoy, translated by A. Hulme Beaman, introduction by W. D. Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td><em>Recollections of Life in Ohio, from 1813 to 1840</em>, by William Cooper Howells, with an introduction by William Dean Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td><em>Lyrics of Lowly Life</em> by Paul Laurence Dunbar, with an Introduction by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td><em>Maggie, a Child of the Streets</em>, by Stephen Crane, an appreciation by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary on the Profession or Public Collaborations with Other Writers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td><em>The Art of Authorship</em>, compiled by George Bainton, contribution by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td><em>Advice to Young Authors, To Write or Not to Write</em>, edited by Alice R. Mylene, contribution by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td><em>The Niagara Book, A Complete Souvenir of Niagara Falls</em>, containing sketches by Howells (with Mark Twain and Nathaniel Southgate Shaler)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td><em>Fame’s Tribute to Children</em>, edited by Mrs. George L. Dunlap and Martha S. Hill, contribution by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>“The Man of Letters as a Man of Business”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td><em>The Book-Lover's Almanac for 1895</em>, A statement on woman suffrage by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td><em>The Authors Club Dinner to Richard Henry Stoddard. At the Savoy, New York, March 25, 1897</em>, reprinted from the Mail and Express, New York, Issue of March 26, 1897, letter by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td><em>A Library of the World's Best Literature, Ancient and Modern</em>, edited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
by Charles Dudley Warner, contribution on Tolstoy by Howells

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td><em>American Prose Selections With Critical Introductions by Various Writers</em>, edited by George Rice Carpenter, contribution on George William Curtis by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td><em>The Blindman’s World and Other Stories</em> by Edward Bellamy, prefatory sketch by Howells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td><em>Kiplingiana</em>, Howells contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td><em>Modern Eloquence</em>, reprint of a speech by Howells</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Regular Columns for Periodicals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Column</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1886-1892</td>
<td>Author of “The Editor’s Study” for <em>Harper’s Magazine</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>Editor in Name Only for <em>Cosmopolitan</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Begins “Life and Letters” essay review column for <em>Harper's Weekly</em> (March 30, 1895-February 26, 1898)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898-1899</td>
<td>Essay Review Column “American Literature” for <em>Literature</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Collections of Reprinted Material from Periodicals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td><em>Criticism and Fiction</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td><em>My Literary Passions</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td><em>Impressions and Experiences</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td><em>Literary Friends and Acquaintance</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES

Archival Collections

Papers of Willa Cather 1899-1949. Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.


Alain Locke Collection, Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Library, Howard University.


Secondary Materials


America, Authors’ League of. My Maiden Effort: Being the Personal Confessions of Well-known American Authors as to Their Literary Beginnings. Pub. for the Authors’ League of America by Doubleday, Page & Company, 1921.


———. “The Middleman as Viewed by a Publisher.” *Athenaeum*, November 11, 1893.


———. “An Editor’s Relations with Young Authors.” *Youth’s Companion*, September 5, 1895.


Mylene, Alice R. *Advice to Authors: To Write or Not to Write*. Boston: Cooperative Literary Press, 1891.


“Studies in Literature.” *The Literary World*, February 27, 1891.


Thompson, Adele E. “What the Editor Wants in Fiction.” *The Editor* 4, no. 4 (October 1896): 123–126.


