

Dialects of the Tribe
The Unexpected Origins of American Literary Modernism

BY

MIKA TURIM-NYGREN
B.A., University of Florida, 2009
M.A., The University of Chicago, 2010

THESIS

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Defense Committee:

Walter Benn Michaels, Chair and Advisor
Peter Coviello, English
Nicholas Brown, English
Jennifer Ashton, English
Kenneth Warren, The University of Chicago, English

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Maureen Turim, who went this route before me; to my father, Scott Nygren, who was my inspiration to keep going; and to my partner, Benedikt Diemer, who walked it by my side.

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SUMMARY

Although Huckleberry Finn has always been celebrated for sounding as lifelike as a “real boy talking out loud,” Mark Twain himself thought that “the moment ‘talk’ is put into print” it turned into a “corpse” on the page, “nothing but a dead carcass.” This dissertation takes up the problem of translating living speech into a modern literary language, which so obsessed American writers from 1868-1898 that dialect became almost synonymous with literary ambition – for Twain as well as for the African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, the Yiddish-speaking Jewish socialist immigrant Abraham Cahan, and the local-color “miniaturist” Sarah Orne Jewett, who has since become a major focus in the field of queer studies.

No one could have promoted this kind of writing more fervently than Atlantic editor William Dean Howells, who championed dialect as the “life that language has on the lips of men.” And yet when Howells encountered the one dialect he considered more impressive even than Twain’s – Stephen Crane’s Maggie (“Mr. Crane can do things that Clemens can’t”) – he was dismayed to discover that it made language look not like it was living but like it was dying: “language itself decays in their speech.” Literary historians have largely continued to characterize dialect in Howells’s terms – as the effort to transcribe talk “as we speak it” – even while they have often expressed skepticism about his underlying nationalist ambition “to get the whole of American life into our fiction.” This dissertation argues, by contrast, that dialect could only achieve its literary aims by becoming “inarticulate,” as Howells called Crane’s dialect – which is to say, unspeakable. I argue that the obsession with reproducing real talk led to the production of a distinctively literary language, one that belonged on the page rather than in anyone’s mouth. As dialect writers became increasingly successful at phonetic mimesis, the very artificiality of the effort to put speech into print began to interest them more than the natural-

sounding authenticity that had been their original motivation. Any real-life accent that dialect represented – whether African-American or Jewish-American – was thus transformed into modernist literary prose irreducible to any particular demographic. Understanding dialect in these terms not only produces a new sense of the importance of the literary among the late 19th-century writers whose motivations are more commonly understood as mimetic, but also reveals the crucial role dialect writers played in engendering the modernist projects of the first half of the 20th century, long after the enthusiasm for phonetic accents had died out — from William Carlos Williams’s claim that his poetry came “out of the mouths of Polish mothers,” through Gertrude Stein’s sense of writing as “They are all of them repeating and I hear it,” all the way to T.S. Eliot’s Mallarméan desire to “purify the dialect of the tribe.”

INTRODUCTION

I. Dialects of the Tribes: From Sholem Aleichem to Joel Chandler Harris

My interest in American dialect literature developed, paradoxically enough, out of my interest in the Yiddish writer Sholem Aleichem. Sholem Aleichem may have died in New York, but he wrote his most famous work – *Tevye der Milchiger*, Tevye the Dairyman (1894), which became the basis for *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964) – entirely in and about the old country (in this case, part of the former Russian Empire). When Sholem Aleichem was writing in the 1890s, it was still completely plausible to imagine that Yiddish, and not Hebrew, would become the national language of the Jewish people, and *Tevye* was written to help bring that vision to fruition. I was struck by the idea that the People of the Book could only become a distinctly modern people by transcribing a distinctly oral language: Yiddish, or *mamaloschen* (mother tongue), which was often derided as a “jargon.”

Of course, Zionism was far from the only context in which the voice of the people proved instrumental in the rise of the modern nation-state. What interested me about *Tevye* was, in fact, true in the American context as well, as a fortunate coincidence allowed me to realize. Sholem Aleichem is often referred to as the “Jewish Mark Twain,” and so I became interested in what these two authors had in common. The answer, it turns out, is quite a lot (both were addicted to terrible business investments, for instance, which forced them to keep writing at a breakneck pace even after they had become international bestsellers). The most important overlap between them, however, was that both managed to invent narrators – Tevye and Huck Finn – whose rambling, unrefined, idiosyncratic, irreverent, and incredibly funny style of speaking formed the basis of a prose style unlike any the world had ever seen. Both Tevye and Huck sound just like a real person talking out loud – so much so that they are celebrated to this day as emblems of the

Jewish and of the American people. Yet the irony is that Huck and Tevye could only manage to speak for their respective nations by having their distinctively oral language translated into something that could be read on the page.

Once I realized that the linguistic quirks that made Tevye's language so unprecedented (ancient Aramaic puns about modern pogroms, subtle Lithuanian parodies of Russian military pomposity) would take me far more than two years of Yiddish language study to be able to read in the original, I decided to focus my attention on Twain instead. Once I did, I realized that Twain was just the tip of the iceberg when it came to dialect writing in America. In the second half of the 19th century, every writer in the country seemed determined to capture their own version of local speech in print, which meant that dialect fiction quickly turned into the era's "dominant form of literary production."¹ Dialect not only became popular; it also became essentially synonymous with literary prestige. For that reason, I thought of the dialect movement as one of the clearest examples in literary history of Bourdieu's theory of the field of restricted production.² According to Bourdieu, nonpopular works of literature can attain cultural value, even if they never make their authors much money, so long as they are produced and disseminated within a restricted sphere of authors, editors, and critics whose aesthetic judgments come to bestow a certain kind of cultural cachet.

Since Bourdieu's theory formed the basis of my understanding of aesthetic autonomy – as in the distinction between a work of art and a mere commodity – I was fascinated by this moment when the restricted sphere of American high literature seemed to condense so tightly around a single genre. When literary merit became more or less a matter of phonetic transcription, what did that do to literary ambition? How did America's most ambitious authors – who of course had their *own* ambitions for American literature – respond? And when literary

value was so thoroughly divorced from the market, what did that do to the way literature was capable of *thinking*? When these works of dialect literature were at least partially freed from the need to commodify themselves, how were they able to *think through* the country's most urgent problems – political, legal, economic, and social – in a way that no other mode of cultural expression could?

While my current project is obviously limited in scope, I want to signal my interest in future projects that would take the insights I have acquired in my study of American dialect literature from 1868-1898, and see what purchase they might provide in comparative artistic, cultural, and linguistic contexts. I am especially interested in the possibility of a comparative literary study, given that I read in French, German, and Yiddish, and that my sense is that Yiddish literature in particular has never received quite this style of comparative attention (for various cultural and historical reasons, when Yiddishists do comparative work, they tend to restrict themselves to Yiddish and Hebrew alone). In the American context, I am also quite interested in early 20th century vernacular dance – Earl Tucker's "Snakehips," Gilda Gray's "Shimmy," Ann Pennington's "Black Bottom" – and the parallels that might be drawn between "Negro dance" (the Cakewalk, the Charleston), "Negro music" (ragtime, the blues), and "Negro literature" at this moment when colloquial expression becomes so crucial to the history of art.

My dissertation begins with a kind of case study in the dialectics of dialect literature. Chapter One, "Twain's Modernism: The Death of Speech in *Huckleberry Finn* as the Birth of a New Aesthetic" (published in *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 8.1, and

since nominated for the 1921 Prize in American Literature), makes the case that although *Huckleberry Finn* has always been celebrated for sounding as lifelike as a “real boy talking out loud,” Mark Twain himself thought that “the moment ‘talk’ is put into print” it turned into a “corpse” on the page, “nothing but a dead carcass.” When Ernest Hemingway called *Huckleberry Finn* the origin of “all modern American literature,” it was because Twain was the first American author to work through the problem of transforming the way ordinary people talked into a distinctly literary language – one that belonged on the page rather than in anyone’s mouth. The irony is that while Twain’s incredibly natural style is famous for sounding just like real talk, Hemingway’s incredibly unnatural style (“Blow it if thou needest to”) is infamous for sounding like nothing of the sort. Yet Twain’s iconic naturalist prose style nevertheless proved absolutely instrumental in the development of Hemingway’s equally iconic modernist prose style.

Chapter Two, “Howells’s Nationalism: Birthright Citizenship and the Birth of Dialect,” charts the evolution of dialect literature from its earliest appearance into a full-blown national movement, promoted above all by William Dean Howells, the so-called “Dean of American Letters.” I argue that dialect in America emerged in perfect tandem with the concept of birthright citizenship – not just in terms of chronology (1868-1898), but also in terms of the mental gymnastics required to reconceptualize American identity from a matter of *jus sanguinis* (“of the blood”) to a matter of *jus soli* (“of the soil”). When American law proved itself incapable of demonstrating how American soil was supposed to magically transform the sons and daughters of immigrants into distinctly recognizable Americans, American literature stepped in to perform the imaginative labor of *jus soli*. Dialect counted as “characteristic American literature,”

according to its practitioners, because it was “rooted in the soil” and hence emerged “as naturally as the grass or corn or flax grows.”³

Thus not just for Howells, but also for the country as a whole, dialect literature “expressed the national temperament, character, and manner” at certain key junctures in national life.⁴ After the Haymarket bombing in 1886, for instance, when German anarchists like August Spies were suddenly thrust into the national spotlight, dialect literature stepped in to adjudicate which kinds of accents belonged within America’s borders – and which did not. Similarly, when mass immigration in the 1880s and 1890s threatened to turn New York City into an unrecognizable Babel of foreign speech, dialect literature stepped in to domesticate the city’s most terrifyingly alien tongues. Specifically, Abraham Cahan’s Yiddish-American dialect in *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* ensured that the “sweat-shop parlance” of recent immigrants could count as the kind of ethnic dialect that was compatible with national identity, rather than as the kind of class dialect that was not at all compatible with the nation. In all of its various guises – racial, regional, ethnic – dialect served to smooth over the differences between Americans that might stand in the way of national unity: north vs. south, Black vs. white, local vs. foreigner, and most significantly the country’s founding difference between Native vs. native-born. Every printed accent, no matter its origin, counted as an interchangeable version of speaking like a good American. Only when writers tried to paper over a different kind of difference entirely – namely, the structural difference between workers and their bosses – did the dialect project start to run into problems.

Chapter Three, “Crane’s Un-Naturalism: Repetition, Automatism, and the Death of Dialect,” takes up the dialect movement in its dying years, when most readers had long since “got tired” of it (as even Howells had been forced to admit). At this critical juncture, Stephen

Crane, much like Mark Twain before him, had come to realize that there was nothing remotely natural about putting talk into print. Unlike Twain, however, Crane responded by making his dialect seem as patently *unnatural* as possible. This move flummoxed Howells, because at first glance, Crane's dialect looked just like the kind he most admired: Howells praises it as the "absolute slave of reality," even as he senses, somehow, that "language itself decays in their speech." The key to Howells's confusion is that Crane's dialect may be only mildly misspelled, but because it repeats the same colloquial phrases over and over – word-for-word and letter-for-letter – it forces the reader to confront how unnatural phonetic spelling actually appears on the page. Given that Howells was involved in a last-ditch effort to resuscitate the dialect movement by getting writers to reproduce speech as "unconsciously" as they possibly could, Crane's literalized interpretation of this kind of unconscious or automatic repetition proved devastating for Howells's literary ambitions (and indeed for his nationalist ambitions as well). Putting Howells's politics aside, however, from a purely literary perspective – which is to say, from Crane's perspective – the death of dialect turns out to represent the birth of a modernist literary language.

Chapter Four, "Dunbar's Artfulness: The "Black Voice" and the *Other* Death of Dialect," makes the case that Howells's infamous response to Paul Laurence Dunbar ("purely *black* verse," "purely and intensely black") was motivated less by his commitment to racial superiority (as real as that may have been) than by his commitment to absolute racial difference. After Crane had so thoroughly destroyed Howells's conception of the way dialect was supposed to work, Howells seized upon his hope that Dunbar's race made the "race-life" of his dialect feel *real* like never before. What Howells failed to anticipate was that such a radicalized account of racial dialect swung all the way back around from the *jus soli* logic of shared birthplace to the *jus*

sanguinis logic of blood heritability. Dunbar's dialect may derive from the distinctly 19th-century poetics of nation, but it introduces the distinctly 20th-century poetics of race. Dunbar's blatantly inconsistent spelling ("Ez hit makes its way in glory") shows that he was fully aware of his own mastery of racial realism, but more importantly, he wanted to prove that what he was doing was indeed an expression of his artistic mastery, and not an expression of his racial identity. For Howells, what mattered about Dunbar's Black dialect is that it sounded more authentic than Joel Chandler Harris's ever could; for Dunbar, what mattered about it was that it was just as much of a literary-historical style when he wrote it as when Harris wrote it.

If I had had time to compose a fifth chapter, "Jewett's Miniaturism," it would have been about Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896). Jewett, like Dunbar, takes up the already-exhausted form of dialect literature and manages to do something surprisingly fresh with it. My intuition is that Jewett's originality is related to what critics have always referred to as her talent as a "miniaturist." Henry James, for instance, called *The Country of the Pointed Firs* a "beautiful little quantum of achievement," whereas William Dean Howells praised her "gentle" and "delicate" art: her "voice is like a thrush's in the din of the literary noises that stun us so." One analogue that seems relevant is Mary Cassatt, who brought impressionism's attention away from the raucous boat party, and into the intimate sliver of space between mother and child. Another comparison that springs to mind is Anzia Yezierska, whose immigrant fiction focuses not on the intensely public spectacle of Ellis Island but instead on the tiny apartment dramas of flowerpots and window dressings. My thoughts on Jewett are obviously still unformed, but my instinct is that there is a specifically gendered dynamic at play here: all three of these women take an established genre or mode and reinvent it within a domestic context, and what is so

striking about their choice of sentimental subjects (motherhood, falling in love, family lore) is that their treatment is surprisingly unsentimental in the mere *smallness* of its expression.

Finally, the ideal version of this dissertation would have ended with a coda – “In What Sense is *Uncle Remus* American Literature?” – which would have addressed the other figure who turned out to play a surprisingly significant role in my account of late 19th century American literature: Joel Chandler Harris. While most critics today dismiss *Uncle Remus* as an irredeemably racist text, at the time, Harris’s peers were fully ready to credit Harris’s claim that Uncle Remus’s language was as “phonetically genuine” as could be.⁵ Mark Twain, for instance, called Harris the “only master” of “negro dialect” that “the country has ever produced.”⁶ As I argue in chapter one, Twain also borrowed from Harris’s characteristically Black phrases to create Huck Finn’s language – which means that if we credit Hemingway’s claim that Twain is the origin of “all modern American literature,” then it follows that Harris must be the original origin of that origin.

Paul Laurence Dunbar, meanwhile, not only agreed with Twain that the author who “best represents the race” is none other than “Joel Chandler Harris,” but also proved just as eager to learn from the old master. As I argue in chapter four, Dunbar was willing to write in Harris’s style because he considered it a literary-historical genre like any other. So when a critic like James Weldon Johnson claims that Dunbar’s “conventionalized dialect” is “artificial folk stuff” because it has “its origin in the minstrel traditions” rather than “actual Negro life,” he is in some sense missing the point, because Dunbar *wanted* his Black dialect to be read as a literary style, and not as an expression of his race. The irony is that Johnson actually agrees with Dunbar about Harris’s literary-historical significance: he calls “the Uncle Remus stories” the “greatest body of folk lore that America has produced,” praising their “originality,” “artistic conception,” and

“universal appeal and influence.” It is just that Johnson disagrees with Dunbar about who deserves the credit for them: Johnson insists that Remus’s tales merely happened to be “collected by Joel Chandler Harris,” and that they are in fact “creations by the American negro.”⁷

Putting aside the question of whether *Uncle Remus* counts as *American* literature, then, a better question might be: Does *Uncle Remus* count as *African American* literature? For Dunbar, the answer was yes, because he believed that “negro poetry” included “all that is written by whites who have received their inspiration from negro life.” For Johnson, who believed that “American Negro Poetry” had to come from “American Negro poets,” the answer is ironically *also* yes, because he insists that *Uncle Remus* did not come from Harris’s pen at all, but from the mouths of Black men and women. Like the “slave songs” that were developed over the course of generations, and that were merely popularized by the “Fisk Jubilee Singers,” the Uncle Remus stories are said to have “sprung from American soil” of their own volition. In this sense, Howells does leave behind a certain kind of literary legacy, even after his dialect project died out. So long as authors are driven to pursue the “genuine folk stuff” – regardless of whether what they mean by that is American national identity (like Howells) or African American national identity (like Johnson) – the logic of *jus soli* lives on.

CHAPTER 1

1. **Twain's Modernism: The Death of Speech in *Huckleberry Finn* as the Birth of a New Aesthetic**

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Ernest Hemingway, in one of the most influential judgments of American literary criticism, wrote that "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*... There was nothing before." Of course, Hemingway's objections to every writer before Twain – Poe's prose was "dead," Melville's "wrapped in... rhetoric," and Thoreau's unreadable – have not been influential at all.⁸ And the fact that Hemingway didn't even bother to disparage anyone who was not a white man only emphasizes that his version of the American canon would hardly be endorsed today. But Hemingway's praise of Twain has nevertheless proven remarkably persistent. Even William Faulkner, who hardly made a rule out of agreeing with Hemingway, echoed him on this count, calling Twain the "father of American literature."⁹ More importantly, the terms Hemingway used to praise Twain have endured: whatever objections we might make to *Huckleberry Finn*, its prose is definitely not dead, pompous, or the slightest bit unreadable. Critics may disagree over the politics of the novel, but they almost always agree that what makes its prose so lively is that it "sounds like a boy talking," as one put it, or in the words of another, that it "strikes the ear with the freshness of a real boy talking out loud."¹⁰

But if following Hemingway this far seems entirely reasonable, the fact that it's Hemingway we're following should also raise some questions. For unlike other critics who

praise *Huckleberry Finn* for how natural its speech sounds, Hemingway clearly couldn't care less whether it sounds natural or not. Hemingway's own writing, after all, is notorious for patently unnatural dialogue. *For Whom the Bell Tolls* doesn't contain a single line that sounds like it could ever have been said out loud; "Blow it if thou needest to" is equally unimaginable in Spanish (since the dialogue is in English) and in English (since the dialogue is pretending to be in Spanish).¹¹ When Hemingway praises *Huckleberry Finn* as the foundation of modern American literature, then, we have to assume that his reasons have nothing to do with its fidelity to the phonetics of speech. So if we want to think seriously about Twain – not just in terms of his importance to American literature, but in terms of Hemingway's account of that importance – the invocation of real boys talking can only take us so far.

In fact, the basic argument of this essay will be that Twain's contribution to modernism lay not in capturing the sound of a real voice, as critics have long assumed, but instead in working to make the *sound* of that voice irrelevant. Ever since Richard Bridgman pointed out that Huck's was the first vernacular in American literature to be freed from quotation, we've known how deeply Huck's language affected the development of an American prose style. But critics have failed to take the full measure of what it means that Huck's language could only ever exist on the page. Twain inaugurated the prose standard Hemingway would define as American – not dead and pompous, but fresh and unaffected – by incorporating homegrown accents without falling into the obvious affectation of transcribing what was literally said. No one need ever have spoken like Huck for us to recognize his language as a version of our national language. Hence the claim that "all modern American literature" derives from Twain: Hemingway's own writing, which very purposefully does *not* attempt to mimic real speech, nevertheless takes advantage of a kind of oral inflection that aligns it with the American prose standard he ascribed to Twain.

Hemingway manages to develop his completely artificial style out of Twain's completely non-artificial one because Hemingway, like Twain, invents a purely literary version of orality.

To explain what I mean by literary orality, let me give a quick example. Consider Huck's "by and by," which crops up repeatedly throughout the novel as a reminder that Huck is still narrating. Huck's "by and by" derives from "bimeby," a longstanding dialect catchphrase that had become firmly associated, by Twain's era, with Black speech patterns, both in fiction (i.e., Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus*) and in philology (i.e., James Harrison's 1884 article "Specimen Negroisms"). But whereas writers like Harris defended their use of "bimeby" by claiming that it was "phonetically genuine," with "spelling as nearly as possible to the ordinary mode of pronunciation," Twain uses the cleaned-up "by and by" instead, which allowed him to create the impression that someone was speaking aloud without worrying too much about how exactly that person sounded.¹² When Twain steals "bimeby" as a shorthand for oral delivery, paradoxically, he transforms his prose into something new. And once Hemingway recognizes this distinctly literary orality in Twain, he is able to consolidate it into a literary language that would shape the project of American modernism.

My claim that Huck's language represents a stylistic choice, rather than a literal transcription, has been anticipated by several critics. In particular, I am indebted to Richard Bridgman for his linguistic analysis of "the necessary limits [Twain places on] dialect," such as cutting back on undecipherable misspellings.¹³ But although Bridgman flirts with the idea that Twain's "patterning" and "word-play" anticipates the work of modernists like Gertrude Stein, he quickly abandons this line of thinking, instead doubling down on the notion that "one cannot insist too much on the verbal quality of *Huckleberry Finn*" and maintaining that Twain's "desire was, as always, to approximate the accents of the speaking voice in prose."¹⁴ In doing so,

Bridgman only reinforces the existing critical consensus that Huck's language "comes... from the spoken word" (in Leo Marx's phrase), from "the intonations of the speaking voice" (in Lionel Trilling's) – or as Ralph Ellison would put it in his influential "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," from the "sharp naturalism" of its "flexible colloquial language."¹⁵

Ellison may have agreed with previous critics that Huck sounded entirely natural, but his intervention had the effect of making the question of Huck's speech irrelevant altogether, since Ellison's most important claim about Twain's language was that prioritizing "technique for the sake of technique" obscured what really mattered about the novel.¹⁶ For Ellison, Twain's novel inaugurated American literature not because of its technical skill, but because it foregrounded "the major moral problem in American life," which was the failure of American democracy to account for "the human Negro."¹⁷ So even though Ellison praised Hemingway for "extend[ing] Twain's technical influence upon our fiction," he simultaneously condemned Hemingway's myopic focus on Twain's "compulsive minor rituals of... prose."¹⁸ And although Ellison's position continued to evolve – just seven years later he would lament the "bias and shortsightedness" of his 1946 essay¹⁹ – the terms of his original critique proved persistent as well: postwar Twain scholars had to account for the novel's morality, regardless of whether they wound up praising or condemning it. Those who praised it claimed that the novel's interracial friendship reflected the triumph of "American moral values" over the false standards of society.²⁰ Those who condemned it argued that the novel's moral failure ultimately reflected America's failure to confront its own racist past.²¹ But regardless, paying attention to Twain's technique came to seem like a distraction.

My purpose in calling attention to the split between moral and technical readings of the novel is not so much to come down on the side of the technical as to argue that these terms are not as incompatible as they seem. In fact, as we will see, Ellison himself would one day come to believe that technique constituted the means through which writers made their moral intervention in the world. And once we see the moral and the technical as intrinsically linked categories, then understanding Twain's technical accomplishment in terms other than reproducing speech will force us to reconsider his moral contribution as well. Huck's "by and by" takes a phrase that was widely recognized as a racialized depiction of speech, and transforms it into a prose style that would become just as widely recognized as "purely American."²² The question of the novel's morality thus turns out to have less to do with how Black and white voices speak *to* one another, and more to do with the way a white voice comes to speak *for* all Americans. Part of what makes Twain's novel "modern" is the way it takes a minority accent – the same kind of accent that demonstrated nothing so much as just how deep the country's divisions ran – and turns it into a literary language capable of representing the country as a whole. In this sense, Twain's modernism would prove significant not just in the American context, but in the larger drama of the rise of the nation-state, as literary modernists everywhere grappled with what it meant to try to imagine the vision of One Nation, One Language, One People.

* * *

The best way to explain why Twain's departure from natural speech carries moral implications is, paradoxically, by turning to a critic for whom Twain's ability to capture a natural voice is paramount. Shelley Fisher Fishkin traces Huck's linguistic origins to the "real conversation" of an "*actual*" Black boy named Jimmy, which for the first time makes Huck's voice into the measure by which the novel's moral intervention should be judged.²³ That is,

Fishkin argues that hearing a Black inflection from Huck's lips demonstrates "how African-American voices have shaped our sense of what is distinctively 'American' about American literature."²⁴ And while it's true that what Fishkin considers 'Black' about Huck's speech goes well beyond phonetics, including his "cadence, syntax, and diction," she is only able to frame *Huckleberry Finn* as indebted to the African-American creative tradition by insisting that a "vital part" of Huck's language derives from "recorded" and "recycled" Black talk as it "really existed."²⁵ Fishkin shifts what counts as moral about the novel from the way it treats a Black character like Jim to the way it elevates a Black dialect like (purportedly) Huck's, which turns the technical question itself into a moral question – one that hinges on the accuracy of the novel's Black speech.²⁶

But what if Twain was never trying to recreate an authentic sense of speech to begin with? The irony is that it's not at all clear that Twain would have agreed with his critics on this count. In fact, Twain didn't believe print could *ever* fully capture speech, either in appearance or in actuality. This might seem counterintuitive. After all, Twain was obviously invested in the verisimilitude of his written dialect, boasting – however jokingly – that Huck's dialect had been rendered "painstakingly."²⁷ Twain also insisted, however, that "the moment 'talk' is put into print you recognize that it is not what it was when you heard it," meaning that speech rendered on the page was "nothing but a dead carcass" or a mere "corpse."²⁸ For Twain, written dialect was an uncanny valley: the closer dialect got to living speech, the more patently unlikelike and artificial it became.

Twain's decidedly mixed feelings on dialect posed a problem for him because, at the exact moment that he was trying to turn himself into the kind of "Literary Person" who "appear[s] in a [literary] magazine," the booming popularity of 'local color' had turned dialect

into what Richard Brodhead has called the era's "dominant form of literary production."²⁹ Thus Twain, who was so eager to get his name in "the Atlantic" that he was willing to take a substantial pay cut ("the awful respectability of the magazine makes up"), found himself having to cater to the dialect tastes of *Atlantic* editor William Dean Howells.³⁰ Howells may have been a sympathetic reader who already believed Twain was "quite worthy of the company of the best," but when Twain submitted his first pair of stories to the *Atlantic*, Howells was only willing to accept the dialect tale, adding, "I wish you had about forty of them."³¹ And while Twain was probably all too happy to churn out formulaic dialect stories for Howells, he also must have seen within the vogue for dialect the possibility of producing something genuinely new: a version of printed talk that would not be consigned to die on the page, but would be capable of reinvigorating literary language itself.

What Twain came up with was a dialect that no longer pretended to reproduce real talk directly. Three aspects of *Huckleberry Finn* bear this out. First, as previously mentioned, Twain uses existing dialect conventions, rather than speech, as the source of Huck's language. Second, Twain dramatically reduces the phonetic misspellings found in previous literary dialect in order to create a more readable aesthetic, which makes it apparent that his prose has been cut off from speech. Third, Twain inverts the narrative frame found in other dialect fiction, shifting Huck's language outside the quotation marks that had previously contained it, which breaks all ties with the spoken word. Rather than representing real speech, Twain reinvents printed 'talk' as a specifically literary mode. Only by framing Twain's technical innovation in these terms can we understand how Twain, the most unliterary of authors, originates the most literary of modernist prose styles.

To start, Twain relied on previously published dialects as a shortcut in creating his own, a detail which has been hard to fully appreciate for those invested in proving how unprecedentedly natural Huck's voice sounds. In particular, critics have framed Huck's free-and-easy delivery as "worlds removed" from the cripplingly misspelled dialect of Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus*, which is so difficult to decipher that it has come to seem – to contemporary readers at least – like a racist caricature of Black speech.³² But Twain thought Uncle Remus's accent was as authentic as it got. In interviews, he praised Harris's dialect as "absolutely scholarly;" in his published material, he called Harris a "fine genius," the "only master" of "negro dialect" that "the country has ever produced."³³ Indeed, Twain was such a fan of *Uncle Remus* that he read it aloud to his children every night until all of them "knew [the] book by heart."³⁴ Twain's intense admiration, taken together with his confession that he lacked the patience for the "exceedingly difficult" work of "acquir[ing] a dialect by study and observation," suggests that he wouldn't have exactly minded if Huck's dialect ended up looking a lot like Uncle Remus's.³⁵ After all, Twain clearly thought of Harris's dialect as so carefully copied from life that it was as good a model as the real thing.

Linguists of the period seemed to agree with Twain about Harris's accuracy: James Harrison's 1884 article "Specimen Negroisms," for instance, draws its examples not just from conversation, but from "black dialect as rendered by writers" such as "J. C. Harris."³⁶ For a critic like Fishkin, discovering that Harrison's 'specimens' appear frequently within *Huckleberry Finn* proves nothing so much as Twain's fidelity to actual Black speech.³⁷ But when Twain uses the terms that Harrison documents, he inevitably links Huck's speech with the language of Uncle Remus that is so often taken to be its opposite. Take Huck's "by and by" (85 times) for Remus's "bimeby," (102 times), as well as Huck's "powerful" (15 times) for Remus's "pow'ful" (4

times); Huck's "studying" (9 times) for Remus's "study en study" (5 times); Huck's "considerable" (36 times) for Remus's "considerbul" (2 times); Huck's "lonesome" (15 times) for Remus's "lonesome" or "mighty lonesome" (13 times); Huck's "disremember" (1 time) for Remus's "dis'member" (2 times); etc.

Harris was hardly the first American writer to make use of this kind of colloquial language. As early as 1848, John Russell Bartlett's *Dictionary of Americanisms* had documented terms like "bime-by," "powerful," and "disremember" as "peculiar to the United States," bolstered by citations from the antebellum fiction in which they appeared.³⁸ But when Harris uses the same phrases ("pow'ful," "dis'member"), it is with a motivation that would have been inconceivable to antebellum writers, who had dabbled in dialect only in the form of "generic distortions" that made accuracy basically "irrelevant."³⁹ Harris, in contrast, strove to document a dialect "wholly different from that of the Hon. Pompey Smash and his literary descendants" because, whatever objections one might make to it, "it is at least phonetically genuine."⁴⁰ In other words, in *Uncle Remus* – the text Twain loved so much that he had it memorized – an old dialect convention like "bimeby" takes on a new role. In Harris's own words, it comes "to embody" the "genuine flavor of the old plantation," which is to say it is meant to represent a specifically racialized accent.⁴¹

For all Huck gets praised as a "real boy talking," then, Remus's voice represents a much more serious attempt to get real speech into print. It was Harris who made it his ambition "to record, not to recount" a genuine American voice, and to do so through exactly the kind of painstaking linguistic research that Twain had never been able to stomach.⁴² It was Harris who insisted that he was "perfectly serious" about capturing speech "without embellishment and without exaggeration."⁴³ Yet what's striking is that no one today would claim *Uncle Remus* to be

the foundation of all modern American literature, which suggests that whatever made Twain matter to someone like Hemingway, it can't have been the authenticity of his talk. After all, in Twain's own opinion, Harris had already succeeded in getting down the sound of real speech. And given that Huck borrows the same phrases used by Harris, what makes his language unprecedented in American literature can't be that he was the first to sound like someone talking out loud.

We can start to see what set Twain apart in shifts like the one from "bimeby" to "by and by," which demonstrate that he had to have been after something other than the phonetic mimicry that mattered so much to someone like Harris. Indeed, in revising the manuscript of *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain removed idiosyncratic spellings and grammatical oddities nearly as often as he added them in.⁴⁴ Above all, Twain reduced misspellings in Huck's narration to strike what one critic has called the "correct degree of incorrectness," signifying Huck's dialect instead through neologisms, portmanteaus, and colorful imagery.⁴⁵ One calculation puts "dialect spelling" at a mere "1% of [Huck's] total narrative."⁴⁶ My point here is not just that Twain stylized Huck's voice; rather, it's that in the context of the local color movement, which relied on the premise that dialect representation *should* always be as phonetically accurate as possible, Twain's stylization represents a significant innovation in that it severs his dialect from the same speech it purports to recreate. If Huck used "bimeby" just like Uncle Remus did, after all, the source of Huck's voice would still ultimately be speech – it would just be speech at one remove, filtered through Harris's transcription. But since Huck uses "by and by" instead, we get a new version of speech in print, now divorced from the aim of capturing sound that Twain considered so impossible.

On some level, it's obviously contentious to claim that Twain – the same author who proposed, however jokingly, that all literary “talk [should] sound like human talk” – avoided mimicking the sound of speech himself.⁴⁷ But consider that, unlike Henry James, Twain refused to dictate his work; the one exception was Twain's autobiography, which he justified by saying, “That is not literature, that is narrative. You can't write literature with your mouth.”⁴⁸ Consider also that, unlike Harris, Twain drew a distinction between recounting a story orally and crafting one on paper. On the lecture circuit, Twain found himself having to rework Huck's pacing and emphasis so that it could be delivered successfully at the lectern. For instance, “That was so – I couldn't get around that, no way” became “That was *so* – yes, it was *so* – I couldn't get around *that*, no way.”⁴⁹ Huck's appeal stems from his amusing manner of speaking, and yet trying to read his voice out loud paradoxically destroys the comedy.

If Twain began by borrowing, and then simplifying, previous dialect, his third innovation lay in inverting dialect's usual frame. Previously, to establish the premise that a dialect tale had been spoken out loud, writers had introduced a convenient listener to frame the story. Twain, as Richard Bridgman was the first to point out, eliminated this listener by putting Huck in charge of narration instead, which moved dialect out of the realm of represented speech for the first time. Bridgman's crucial insight was that Huck's dialect escaped the “special arena” of dialogue where dialect had always previously been “quarantined,” at which point it “surged over the quotation marks to flood [the] narrative” itself.⁵⁰ But as I have already suggested, although Bridgman identifies *Huckleberry Finn* as a decisive shift in colloquial representation, he doesn't yet realize what moving dialect outside of dialogue means for the history of the novel. Bridgman still frames Twain as a “realistic writer” who is invested in the “correctness” and “fidelity” of his dialect capturing the sound of “what he heard,” even though Bridgman recognizes that what

Twain is doing isn't strictly phonetic mimesis.⁵¹ In Bridgman's account, Twain essentially eliminates the narrative frame, flattening the narrative into one long, uninterrupted speech. But once Huck's language moves to the other side of the quotation marks, it no longer functions as represented speech at all, which creates a new representational space within the novel.

To understand the significance of Twain's inverted frame, we have to consider another novel that was just as influenced by Harris's work – but with very different results. Thomas Nelson Page's *In Ole Virginia* (1887), published one year after *Huckleberry Finn*, aimed to perfect the phonetic accuracy that Harris had always tried to capture. But Page soon ran into the same problem that Twain had: namely, as Page put it, "It [was] impossible to produce the exact sound" of speech through any "phonetic arrangement" of letters on the page.⁵² Whereas Twain responded to the problem by abandoning sound altogether, Page tried to compensate by strengthening the narrative frame to emphasize the role of the listener as much as possible. Page's speakers, even when delivering long monologues, constantly pay tribute to their audience with interjections such as "Hi! don' you know?," "You's hearn 'bout dat?," or "D' yo' ever heah 'bout dat? Heish! Didn' yo'?", reminding the reader that the speaker is performing solely for the amusement of a white listener.⁵³ Contrast this with Harris, who narrowed the narrative frame until all that remained was an endless series of open-quote marks, broken only by a rare dialogue tag such as, "...said Uncle Remus, scratching his head with the point of his awl."⁵⁴ Harris was so confident about dialect's phonetic power that he allowed the listener to fade to a mere implication; Page was so anxious about dialect's phonetic failure that he constantly advertised the listener's presence. Page, who was once declared a national treasure by President Wilson, eventually fell out of favor for much the same reason as Wilson himself: his obvious racism. But

before anyone even worried about Page's racism, the obvious artificiality of Page's reinforced frame had already proved a dead end in American literature.

In this context, Twain's accomplishment lay in moving dialect outside of dialogue, where it no longer had to count as a speech performance at all. What's key about this shift is that it created, almost as if by accident, a new representational space in the novel. When dialect had been framed by a listener, it had simultaneously been framed by the standard English used to narrate the listener's actions. When Twain turned dialect itself into a framing device, however, he displaced standard English – which, in turn, didn't disappear so much as shift just out of frame.⁵⁵ Huck is only funny because we know he phrases things in a way most people wouldn't, because his description of life with the Widow as “dismal regular and decent” is something no “decent” person could dream up.⁵⁶ In Bahktinean terms, Huck's narration always continues to be viewed “through the eyes” of the standard, even when that standard is nowhere in sight.⁵⁷ And in much the same way that Huck's language looks different from the standard English that *doesn't* appear on the page, it also looks very different from the spoken dialect that *does* appear right next to it. In dialogue, Huck may say “git” and “nuther,” but in narration he uses “get” and “another” (a distinction Twain clearly intended, as indicated by his manuscript annotation “Huck says Nuther”).⁵⁸ Unlike Page, who reinforced the frame that separated standard English from dialect, Twain carves out a new space between the two – which turned out to be the space of the purely literary.

Now, when we return to Hemingway's judgment that *Huckleberry Finn* forms the origin of “all modern American literature,” we can see precisely what Hemingway would have considered so ‘modern’ about Twain: namely, Twain took the natural-sounding speech that defined his own era, and transformed it into an early version of the self-consciously literary

language that would define Hemingway's. As Michael North points out, it wasn't at all uncommon for modernists like Hemingway to be attracted to dialect more generally, because colloquial speech seemed to offer them an escape from literary convention. The problem was that embracing slang risked replacing an outdated linguistic standard with equally formulaic new one.⁵⁹ What Twain offered Hemingway – perhaps even more so than writers more commonly considered proto-modernists, like Stephen Crane – was a way out of this dialectic. Twain never tried to counter dead prose with living talk, which he knew would die as soon as it entered print, and thus would require the endless pursuit of new varieties of slang. Instead, Twain introduced Huck's uniquely literary talk, which – as a prose style differentiated from both the standard and from speech – was marked by its necessary relation to the page.

For Hemingway, Twain helped solve a significant formal problem undergirding the transition from realism to modernism, which is the “problem of dialogue” in the novel. As we have seen, the difficulty of transcribing talk had already begun to trouble writers like Twain and Page, even at the height of realist literary production. Ben Lerner, one among many authors to cite Hemingway as an enabling precedent, defines the “problem of dialogue” as the way that dialogue threatens to break the verisimilitude needed to hold the novel's world together, because the reader can so easily tell that printed dialogue doesn't live up to the experience of conversation.⁶⁰ The dilemma is “how false and theatrical so much supposedly realistic dialogue feels because it doesn't represent the simultaneity or fragmentation of actual speech.”⁶¹ In other words, whenever writers try to get their dialogue to look more realistic – by using dashes to evoke a speaker's stutter, for instance, or by using frequent line breaks to imply that two people are talking over one another – their effect is ironically just the opposite of their intention. Instead

of the din and confusion of conversation, the reader gets language that is too carefully arranged to seem anything but artificial.

According to Lerner, Hemingway comes up with a solution that “virtualizes” his spoken exchanges, which is to say, that displaces “actual speech” somewhere off the page.⁶² In Twain’s case, literary talk had come to seem believable by sounding as natural as possible, even as it avoided the literal sound of speech. In Hemingway’s case, it came to seem believable by sounding as *unnatural* as possible, essentially declaring that this was *not* how the conversation could have actually sounded. Huck’s language masquerades as a transcription of real speech; Robert Jordan’s language announces itself as anything but. When Jordan uses words like “thee” and “thou,” his dialogue seems so stilted to a native-English reader that she automatically assumes it has been translated by the narrator from a foreign language. Jordan’s archaisms guarantee that his dialogue can only be interpreted as a substitution for the real thing, not a recreation of it. This is why Lerner argues that Hemingway’s “medievalism” is not just a stylistic quirk, but in fact the formal device that makes Hemingway’s whole project of virtualization possible.⁶³

While the medievalism Lerner cites is most associated with *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), Hemingway actually began experimenting with pseudo-translation as early as *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). When the novel’s protagonist, Jake, takes up with a Parisian prostitute, she asks him, “How are you called?” and complains, “This is no great thing of a restaurant.”⁶⁴ These non-idiomatic translations are the novel’s way of insisting that although the woman’s printed language is English, she ‘really’ talked in French. The reader, along with Jake, cannot help but experience her speech as a foreign tongue. Contrast this with the novel’s use of French itself: when Jake’s prostitute orders, “Dites garçon, un pernod,” it says nothing equally to the reader

who does not speak the language (it comes across as jargon) and the reader who does speak it (it comes across as fluency).⁶⁵ Only when Hemingway provides Jake's literalized translation of her words, as when she asks if Jake is "going on a party," does the language itself carry a claim to the authenticity of Jake's experience as an expatriate.⁶⁶

Subsequently, in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), Hemingway virtualized not just translated language but the very act of translation. In an exchange that comes right after the novel's protagonist, Frederick Henry, has won over his love interest, Miss Barkley, Henry's romantic rival Rinaldi says, "You have the pleasant air of a dog in heat."⁶⁷ Rinaldi's wisecrack is presented in language no native English speaker would ever use, implying that the printed English is standing in for a joke that was originally delivered in Italian.⁶⁸ Yet Henry couldn't have been the one to translate this Italian himself, since Henry "did not understand the word[s]" at the moment when they were spoken and had to ask, "Of a what?"⁶⁹ Here, Hemingway shifts the space where translation occurs from reported speech to omniscient narration. This means that "foreignness" of foreign language is no longer felt subjectively (Jake's experience), but rather objectively, as an inherent property of language (in Bakhtinian terms, the language becomes foreign when viewed "through the eyes" of another). The novel presents Italian as fundamentally incommensurate to English, regardless of how well Henry might learn to speak it. Indeed, the drama of *A Farewell to Arms* revolves around just this problem of switching between languages. Frederick Henry explains his decision to fight for Italy, rather than his native England, with the sole justification that he already "spoke Italian;" in the end, however, he is forced to desert when "speak[ing] Italian with an accent" becomes likely to get him shot as a suspected German spy.⁷⁰ If the way Frederick Henry sounds (or rather, doesn't sound) when speaking Italian is what

controls the levers of the novel's plot, then the way that Hemingway avoids the sound of Italian entirely is what governs the novel's prose style.

For an explanation of what I mean by this oral prose style, take the very first dialogue exchange of *A Farewell to Arms*. Henry's Italian military captain mocks the idea of priestly celibacy with ribald jokes such as "Priest every night five against one."⁷¹ While the captain's euphemism for masturbation might seem easy enough for Henry to understand, the narrator complicates matters by adding that Henry's captain spoke "pidgin Italian for [Henry's] doubtful benefit, in order that [Henry] might understand perfectly, that nothing should be lost."⁷² If the innuendo is simple, the linguistic joke about Henry's "doubtful benefit" is a bit more complex. First, it's "doubtful" that Henry would need "pidgin" to understand in the first place, given Henry's fluent translation of the rest of the conversation, which includes a complex theological debate. Second, the "benefit" that "nothing should be lost" is itself "doubtful," considering that Hemingway certainly believes that something is always lost when translating between languages, just as certainly as something is lost when transcribing speech to print. Hemingway's technical success in *A Farewell to Arms* consists of leveraging the first loss of meaning (the loss caused by translation) against the second loss of meaning (the loss caused by transcription). That is, Hemingway uses non-standard English to imply the presence of translated Italian, which projects a sense of Italian speech that exists independently of the text itself. Virtualizing this Italian speech allows it to project a full sense of its own meaning – both as Italian *and* as speech.

By the time Hemingway develops his most famously idiosyncratic prose style in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, then, he is using virtualization to push not just the limits of verisimilitude, but the limits of language itself. Hemingway deploys translated dialogue here to make otherwise empty rhetoric mean something more like what it's supposed to. When the novel's protagonist

Robert Jordan proclaims, “For us will be the bridge and the battle,” he admits that “he felt a little theatrical but it sounded well in Spanish.”⁷³ Contrast this with Frederick Henry, who Hemingway tells us was “embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain.”⁷⁴ Jordan may believe in the good of the partisan cause “no matter how trite it sounded,” but it is only through phrases that “sounded wonderful in Spanish” that he manages to give voice to his convictions in a way that keeps his overblown rhetoric from ringing hollow.⁷⁵ Of course, it is precisely how the words *sounded* in Spanish that Hemingway doesn’t give us: lofty partisan ideas about “resolution” reach us only from the distance of implied translation – as does Jordan’s confession, made “quite formally in Spanish,” that “I care about her [Maria] very much.”⁷⁶ In virtualizing the language used to talk about these romantic ideals, Hemingway projects a sense of earnestness that is at least partially sheltered from the disillusionment that such words usually evoke.

For Whom the Bell Tolls makes the most out of this new power of virtualized language by merging translated dialogue with indirect discourse, reproducing the leap from quoted dialect to narrated dialect that Twain used in *Huckleberry Finn*. At times, Hemingway simply reports that Jordan is “thinking now in Spanish,” as when staring along his gun sights at a man he may have to shoot: “thou art dead now in thy youth.”⁷⁷ But more frequently Hemingway dissolves the boundary between speech and thought altogether, as when Anselmo speaks in “old Castilian,” the “dialect that Robert Jordan could just follow,” and the account Jordan gives of his own interpretation of Anselmo’s speech is that it “went something like this”: “I this and that in the this and that of thy father. I this and that and that in thy this” (quotation marks in original).⁷⁸ Anselmo’s dialogue becomes so thick with unknown vocabulary and censored expletives that it almost stops functioning as quoted speech at all. Instead, the tenor of Robert Jordan’s thought

seeps into the space demarcated to serve as Anselmo's quotation, as Jordan willfully misinterprets the characteristic Castilian dental fricative (th) as "this" and "that." Hemingway reworks the sound of Anselmo's speech – the ceaseless repetition of his Castilian lisp – to produce the opposite of Anselmo's actual words. Instead of Anselmo's undoubtedly colorful language, Hemingway gives us a series of curses so formulaic that they are recognizable as generic insults even with all their descriptors blanked out.

In the case of Jordan's internal monologue, translation might seem to serve the same purpose it did in *A Farewell to Arms*: it indicates an expat's impression of a foreign tongue, which is at least plausibly a realistic aim.— But by this point Hemingway is clearly after something else, since the translations that we associate with Jordan color not just his own thoughts but also those of the novel's native Spanish speakers. Anselmo thinks, "That gave thee too much emotion and thee ran blubbering;" Maria thinks, "Don't offend anyone and make useless risks;" Andr  s thinks, "That to-morrow should come and that I should be there."⁷⁹ . These non-idiomatic thoughts cannot possibly be read as 'realistic;' what they do instead is virtualize the otherwise inexpressible: a cause worth dying for. Hemingway's literary orality enables him to project a novelistic world that is not just as believable as our own, but in certain crucial ways more believable.

For better or for worse, Hemingway's prose style would prove enduring in American fiction. It is in a certain sense appropriate, then, that when Hemingway called *Huckleberry Finn* the origin of modern American literature, he simultaneously inaugurated a new literary paradigm: in the future, much of American literature would stem from Hemingway himself. Even Faulkner once credited Hemingway as "the best we've got," echoing Hemingway's own claim that *Huckleberry Finn* was "the best book we've had."⁸⁰ And today, when Ben Lerner cites

Hemingway as a model for his own experimental mode of narration, it testifies to the persistence of Hemingway's influence. My point in tracing this literary history is not to champion Hemingway's centrality within the American canon, which will always be up for debate. Rather, I want to emphasize that within the restricted field of American letters,⁸¹ which is to say among those authors who have considered themselves Hemingway's literary rivals, even those who have expressed skepticism about Hemingway's value have also recognized that he contributed to the development of modernism in a way that is impossible to ignore. Hemingway provided a solution to the problem of dialogue that had long plagued nineteenth century realists, and the oral prose style that Hemingway invented to do so, despite looking nothing like Twain on the page, nevertheless owes Twain a vast technical debt.

There is no figure who can better illustrate Hemingway's literary-historical significance than, ironically, Ralph Ellison himself, who eventually came to believe that the very thing that made him care about *Huckleberry Finn* in the first place – its moral values – could have only had a meaningful impact on twentieth century modernism thanks to Hemingway's grasp of the novel's technique. Originally, in 1946, Ellison objected that Hemingway's "blindness to the moral values of *Huckleberry Finn*" made it a problem that "equally as much" of American literature derived from Hemingway as from Twain.⁸² But by 1964, Ellison had changed his mind, arguing that the "impelling moral function" that he so admired about Twain's novel could "be found operating" just as unmistakably in Hemingway's writing, even if in Hemingway it "had gone underground, had become *understated*."⁸³ Ellison's change of heart came about in response to critics who thought that African-American novelists like Ellison should prioritize "ideological militancy," which Ellison was convinced was a line of reasoning that would inevitably lead to a "defense... of bad writing" or at least "an irresponsible attitude toward good writing." In the

final analysis, Ellison insisted that the only ambition a writer was always *required* to fulfill was the ambition to create beautiful prose: “the writer’s obligation... is best carried out through his role as writer.”⁸⁴ And it was this stance that ultimately led Ellison to claim Hemingway as his own “true father-as-artist,” as the “ancestor” who made Ellison’s entire literary generation realize that a writer’s intervention in the world “lies precisely in his possession of technique.”⁸⁵ So even though Ellison had once believed that any writer who could plausibly be called American had to engage explicitly with the thorny problem of race, he wound up entirely committed to the idea that the American writer’s foremost responsibility lay in developing, just as Hemingway so famously had, “new possibilities of language which would allow it to retain that flexibility and fidelity to the common speech which has been its glory since Mark Twain.”⁸⁶

Ellison illustrates perfectly why Hemingway’s debt to Twain matters to American literature, but as should be obvious by now, he can’t help us understand the nature of that debt, since Ellison – just like other critics who have traditionally been invested in Huck’s language – continues to think that what matters about that language is its “fidelity” to “speech.” But once we see that what makes Huck’s language *new* is that it is freed from speech, then we have to come to grips with what it really means to claim, as Ellison ultimately does, that Twain’s morality is bound up in his technique. For my claim that Twain was uninterested in capturing ‘real’ Black and white voices doesn’t mean that Twain’s novel sidelines the question of race in America. Quite the contrary. Twain liberated orality for use as a literary language by placing Black speech in a white mouth – a fact which should intensify, rather than diminish, our moral questions about his work. Huck’s language, however stylized, remains rooted in characteristic speech patterns intended to make racial difference visible on the page. Jim may get the last spoken word of the book, when he says that Pap “ain’t a-comin back no mo,” but it is Huck’s slightly cleaned-up

version of Jim's phrase – that books are too much trouble to write and he “ain't a-going to no more” – that makes the leap from dialogue into narration, and from there into the history of the novel. Twain's prose style only overcomes the problem of patently artificial dialogue through a narrator capable of absorbing, mastering, and repurposing racialized expressions for his own ends. And all modern American literature born of Twain derives from this fantasy of a single narratorial voice capable of safely containing the racial other.

Twain's modernism was far from a uniquely American response to uniquely American race relations. In the late nineteenth century, writers everywhere found themselves confronted with the same problem as Twain: how could they transform their country's various accents into a literary language that might represent the population as a unified whole? The same political problem that was then plaguing the emergent nation-state – that of linguistic difference within a supposedly homogenous population – became a formal problem for literary modernism to address. In America, this formal problem revolved around Black dialect, because although Black speech represented America's the most plausible version of a native tongue, Black dialect in literature also served to make the color line of Jim Crow visible on the page – producing inevitable tensions between the disunity of race and the unity of nativism. But elsewhere this formal problem could look quite different. In France, for instance, the tension between separatism and nationalism took shape as Frédéric Mistral attempted to elevate the local language of Provençal into poetry. And in the Ukrainian shtetl, the tension between cultural and political Zionism took shape as Yiddishists like Sholem Aleichem strove to carve out a distinct space for Yiddish literature, separate from both the Hebrew that Zionists embraced, and the host languages like German that assimilationists adopted. These Yiddishists attempted to virtualize the Jewish nation itself – i.e., to project a sense of Jews as a people even in the absence of any

physical homeland – which is in some sense the purest version of the literary modernism I am describing.

All of this is to say that when Twain puts Black speech in a white mouth, it might be tempting to interpret the result as a kind of minstrelsy or racial masquerade. But if we focus on these specifically American cultural contexts, we miss the larger story of literary modernism's participation in the emergence of modern nationalism. In the era of One Nation, One Language, One People, literature played a critical role by transforming the kind of minority speech that most threatened national cohesion into the kind of literary language that most strengthened it. If we want to take seriously the notion that *Huckleberry Finn* is the first modern American novel, then asking whether the novel's use of racialized dialect overcomes racial disparities or perpetuates them is the wrong question.⁸⁷ To be clear, my aim is not to rescue Twain from critics who find his racial politics problematic. On the contrary, situating Twain within the rise of modern nationalism should leave us more troubled than ever, as the consequences of that nationalism have been – and continue to be – catastrophic. My point is just that we can only grasp what makes *Huckleberry Finn* “modern” by understanding how its language works, which is not by capturing racialized speech but by making a space for the purely literary. What Hemingway saw in Twain mattered both because it formed the basis of an American prose style, and because it thematized the tension between, on the one hand, the many different ways Americans actually speak, and on the other, the way they might be imagined to speak with one voice: the voice of a people.

CHAPTER 2

2. Howells's Nationalism: Birthright Citizenship and the Birth of Dialect

[March] put out his hand to him.

"Lindau! Isn't this Mr. Lindau?" [...]

The old man took his hand, and made a mechanical movement with his mutilated arm, as if he would have taken it in a double clasp. He laughed at himself. "I wanted to gif you the other handt, too, but I gafe it to your gountry a goodt while ago."

"To my country?" asked March, with a sense of pain, and yet lightly, as if it were a joke of the old man's. "Your country, too, Lindau?"

The old man turned very grave, and said, almost coldly, "What gountry hass a poor man got, Mr. Marge?"⁸⁸

In William Dean Howells's 1890 novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, this is the dialogue that first introduces us to Lindau, a poor German immigrant who years ago taught German literature to the novel's protagonist, Basil March. On display are Lindau's socialist politics, which are relevant to both the novel and my reading of it, but more immediately relevant here is his language. Howells was committed to the way a character like Lindau would have 'really' sounded out loud, which he tried to capture using phonetic or transliterated spelling.⁸⁹ Howells's motivation "to tell just how he has heard men talk" leads him to fill *Hazard* a whole range of transliterated accents, or as he called them, dialects.⁹⁰ Of course, Howells was far from the only American writer of his day to write dialect fiction – one scholar has gone so far as to call it the era's "dominant form of literary production" – but no one did more than Howells to promote the genre.⁹¹ As editor of *The Atlantic*, he not only urged well-known contributors like Mark Twain and Sarah Orne Jewett to write as many dialect stories as possible, but also helped launch the careers of many previously unknown dialect writers, including Abraham Cahan and Paul Laurence Dunbar.

The great value of transliterated speech, Howells thought, was that it could make American literature more distinctly American. He had been obsessed with this goal since at least

1865, when his disdain for Walt Whitman's style (which he found "rude and formless") was made more acute by his admiration for Whitman's project (which he characterized as giving "general utterance" to the "passional principle of American life").⁹² Howells would go on to devote his career to fostering a "literature in America" that looked nothing like England's, encouraging writers to reject the way "Shakespeare's men talked... or Thackeray's... or Dicken's" in favor of "the dialect, the language, that most Americans know."⁹³ We can measure his success by the horrified response of Henry James, who declared that "the invasive part played by dialect" in "American fiction of the day" had no equivalent, "nothing like any such predominance," in England.⁹⁴ James may not have meant it as a compliment, but to Howells it certainly would have sounded like one: he believed that dialect fiction in America "expressed the national temperament, character, and manner with a fulness not surpassed by contemporary fiction in the case of any other people."⁹⁵ In Howells's eyes, dialect not only gave America its first national canon, it made that national canon more fully and intrinsically nationalist than that of any other country.

The problem for Howells was that dialect's success proved to be its downfall. As more and more American authors capitalized on the explosive popularity of dialect, readers started to grow tired of the whole transliterated-spelling gimmick. Even James Russell Lowell – author of the country's first dialect bestseller, *The Bigelow Papers* (1861) – started to find the obsession with American speech exhausting. When Howells published a series of essays on the colloquialisms known as "Americanisms" in the 1870s, Lowell wrote in to complain that he was "tired to death" of such "laborious demonstrations that we have a right to our mother tongue."⁹⁶ By the 1890s, Howells realized with dismay that "the disgust for 'dialect'" had "overtaken the general reader," leaving him struggling to "justify" dialect to those who had "got tired" of it.⁹⁷

In 1897, one “long-suffering professional critic” even proclaimed that the “day of dialect” was “dead indeed,” the “death-proofs so plainly written, and the epitaph so deeply cut, that the resurrection of the late unlamented” was utterly impossible.⁹⁸

Howells fought as hard as he could to bring dialect back to life, because he was convinced that American literature would perish without it. “Our inherited English” needed to be “constantly freshened and revived from the native sources,” he argued, or else it would become as “decrepit” as the “fading civilization” it was trying to escape.⁹⁹ He acknowledged that much of the dialect still getting published was doomed to “perish monthly in our magazines,” but he insisted that was still preferable to imitating “British... classics,” which were “for the most part dead” already, “as dead as the people who wrote” them.¹⁰⁰ As late as 1902, Howells’s advice “directly to our novelists” was to “keep on working, even if your work is not long remembered.”¹⁰¹ Regardless of whether anyone was actually reading all the dialects coming out, what mattered was getting more of them out there. Howells’s vision of “our decentralized literature” required such “fidelity to our decentralized life” that what he was envisioning was a national canon in which the voice of literally every citizen could be heard.¹⁰² It was precisely dialect’s boundless potential for growth that made Howells think of it as the literary equivalent of American pluralism – or as he so famously put it, “democracy in literature” – which meant that the project of dialect would never be complete.¹⁰³

A. **“The cotton-boll has broken into speech”: American Dialect and the Logic of the American-Born Citizen, 1868-1898**

Howells’s expansionist theory of dialect literature was best articulated – in lightly satirized form – by his friend (and favored *Atlantic* contributor) Mark Twain in 1895:

Does the native novelist try to generalize the nation? No, he lays plainly before you the ways and speech and life of a few people grouped in a certain place – his own place – and that is one book. In time, he and his brethren will report to you the life and the people of the whole nation – the life of a group in a New England village; in a New York village; in a Texan village; in an Oregon village; in villages in fifty States and Territories; then the farm-life in fifty States and Territories; a hundred patches of life and groups of people in a dozen widely separated cities. And the Indians will be attended to; and the cowboys; and the gold and silver miners; and the negroes; and the Idiots and Congressmen; and the Irish, the Germans, the Italians, the Swedes, the French, the Chinamen, the Greasers; and the Catholics, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, the Baptists, the Spiritualists, the Mormons, the Shakers, the Quakers, the Jews, the Campbellites, the infidels, the Christian Scientists, the Mind Curists, the Faith-Curists, the train-robbers, the White Caps, then Moonshiners. And when a thousand able novels have been written, there you have the soul of the people, the life of the people, the speech of the people; and not anywhere else can these be had.¹⁰⁴

As Twain observed wryly, giving every American a voice meant *everyone* – from “Idiots” to “Congressmen,” from “Methodists” to “moonshiners,” because Howells would never let the “native novelist” rest until “he and his brethren” had hunted down “a hundred” – no, “a thousand” – versions of “the speech of the people.” The dialect project is, in essence, endless: even an author as talented as Twain could only hope to contribute “one book” about “his own place,” and promise vaguely that the rest “will be attended to... in time.”

As a solution to the problem of capturing American life, Howells’s transliterated speech may have met with a certain degree of skepticism, as Twain’s mockery suggests. Yet the problem itself – as in, what made American life count as American in the first place – was a serious one. Howells argued that American authors attempting the “expression of America in art” shouldn’t “try to write Americanly,” but should simply “speak true American” as the “born Americans” they were.¹⁰⁵ As it turned out, however, it was precisely whether being “born

American” made someone count as a “true American” that was the heart of the problem.

Throughout the second half of the 19th century, the principle of birthright citizenship came up again and again in the American legal system. Could former slaves count as full citizens?

(Congress under Reconstruction tried to guarantee that they could, but the spread of segregation laws soon relegated them to second-class citizens.) Could Native Americans? (Westward expansion kept trying to force them from their own land.) What about Chinese “coolies?” (Calls to ban them grew as native-born workers found themselves unable to compete with such cheap imported labor.) In Howells’s lifetime – as the legal definition of citizenship expanded, as immigration rates exploded, as racial animus increased – it is easy to see why the question of what it meant to be “born American” seemed so urgent.

The whole premise of the “born American” only really gained traction following the end of the Civil War, when Congress’s efforts to protect the rights of newly emancipated slaves brought America’s confused and competing notions of citizenship to the fore. The framers of the Constitution may have referred to something called a “natural born citizen” – as in the kind of American eligible to run for President – but they failed to give a legal definition to “natural,” or, for that matter, “citizen.” As Carrie Hyde has persuasively argued, “definitional poverty” of “citizenship” in the days of the early Republic engendered an “unregulated,” “inconsistent,” and “contradictory” account of a “term-turned-concept whose meaning has never been a self-evident truth.”¹⁰⁶ In theory, citizens were indeed “born American,” just as they had been “born British” under the English Common Law. In practice, however, some newborns inherited the status of their father (thanks to the doctrine of coverture, which gave husbands property rights over their wives), while others inherited the status of their mother (thanks to the doctrine of *partus sequitur ventrum*, which gave enslavers property rights over the children of enslaved women). As Hyde

puts it, “nativity” proved to be an “exceptionally unreliable predictor” of citizenship.¹⁰⁷ Perhaps most notoriously, when Dred Scott sued for his freedom in 1857, the Supreme Court took the astonishing step of declaring his birthplace irrelevant: “the opinion of the majority of the court... held that a person of African descent cannot be a citizen of the United States,” whether “born in this country” or not.¹⁰⁸

The Civil War put the question to the test: did Americans become American because they were born that way, or bred that way? To put it in legal terms, was citizenship a matter of *jus soli* (of the soil) or *jus sanguinis* (of the blood)? Chattel slavery had been a matter of inherited blood, but emancipation was not necessarily the end of *jus sanguinis*, which continued to affect American jurisprudence. On the one hand, with the 1866 Civil Rights Act, Congressmembers did swing the balance toward *jus soli* by granting the “same right[s]” to “all persons born in the United States... of every race and color.”¹⁰⁹ On the other hand, they fell back into *jus sanguinis* by immediately carving out an exception in the form of “Indians not taxed.” What’s more, as Edlie Wong has argued, the 1866 Civil Rights Act was passed at least in part thanks to the logic of “Chinese exclusion,” which held that “black inclusion” was the best means to prevent foreign-born “coolie-slaves” from being able to claim any legal rights whatsoever.¹¹⁰

When Congressmembers began to debate the 14th Amendment, which famously enshrined the *jus soli* rights of “all persons born or naturalized in the United States,” those who opposed the bill made sure that the logic of *jus sanguinis* continued to make itself felt.¹¹¹ “We ought to exclude others besides Indians not taxed,” one Senator argued, because Indians were “much less dangerous and much less pestiferous” than certain immigrants who “invade [our] borders,” “infest society,” and “impose” themselves “as trespassers wherever they go.”¹¹² He was talking about the Gypsies and the Chinese, whom he insisted would always be “of a

different race, of different religion, of different manners, of different traditions, different tastes and sympathies” than white Americans who shared the same “blood and lineage.”¹¹³ The blood logic of Sinophobia was so pervasive that even those arguing *against* Chinese exclusion continued to rely on it: “Children of Mongolian parentage” would never crowd out American workers, they insisted, because the Chinese “do not bring their females” and “all return to their own country at some point or other.”¹¹⁴ It should come as no surprise, then, that the 14th Amendment wound up perpetuating precisely the blood logic it purported to overturn: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, *and subject to the jurisdiction thereof*, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.”¹¹⁵ The ambiguity of the phrase “subject to the jurisdiction thereof” was exactly what lawmakers liked about it: it managed to exclude the kinds of people Congress had always considered undesirable (Natives, overly-foreign foreigners) without having to specify who, exactly, was getting left out.

The 14th Amendment obviously had enormous consequences, and yet in an important sense it marked the beginning, rather than the end, of the debate. Baked into it was the notion that Native Americans could never count as native-*born* Americans – a problem that would lead to decades of protracted legal battles (*Elk v. Wilkins*, 1884; Indian Citizenship Act, 1924). It also opened the door to various Chinese Exclusion Acts (1880s-1890s), which carved out exception after exception to the principle that American soil automatically protected those lucky enough to have been born on it. Not until 30 years after the 14th Amendment would the Supreme Court clarify, in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* (1898), that native birth did, in fact, meant *everyone*, Wong Kim Ark and his fellow Chinese Americans included. Even then, the Court only decided in favor of Ark because there was no means of denying him citizenship that wouldn’t equally “deny citizenship to thousands of persons of English, Scotch, Irish, German, or other European

parentage, who have always been considered and treated as citizens of the United States.”¹¹⁶ To make sense of the reasoning here, it’s important to know that the Supreme Court in the 1890s considered itself bound by the doctrine of legal formalism, which was a school of thought so committed to the notion that the law derived objectively from first principles that legal rulings had to be as rigidly and methodically formulated as mathematical proofs.¹¹⁷ Thanks to legal formalism, the Court felt as if it had no choice but to admit all “children born, within the territory of the United States, of all other persons, of whatever race or color” in order to preserve the rights of those it considered white.¹¹⁸

All of this is to say that long after Lee’s surrender, the battle over what it meant to belong to America waged on – and in that conflict, dialect literature had a crucial role to play. In an important sense, the problem of American nationality was impossible to solve by any means of American jurisprudence. As Carrie Hyde has argued, when the 14th Amendment made nationality dependent on “natural” birth, it grounded citizenship in fundamentally “extralegal” terms – namely, the “natural law,” as in the principle long used by abolitionists to try to dismantle the man-made laws of enslavement. The 14th Amendment leaned heavily on this notion of an order of justice transcending all human knowledge, which meant that when it was passed, the “fantastic harmony between nature and the nation... that the Natural-Born Citizen Clause registers” became more “fantastical,” not less. In this context, literature became the only realm in which it was possible to allegorize the transformative power of the soil in the making of American citizens. Dialect’s job was to take foreign-sounding speech and frame it as having emerged from deep within the American landscape. Some accents were native, some were not – and it was the work of dialect to adjudicate the difference.

The formative period in which birthright citizenship took shape – i.e., the thirty year span between the 14th Amendment and *Wong Kim Ark* (1868-1898) – turns out to be the exact same period spanning the birth and death of the dialect movement. Before the Civil War, dialect existed only as a gimmick; after reunification, it took on a much more earnest cast. The first serious dialect story, according to Howells himself, was Bret Harte’s “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” which was published in August 1868 – four months after the ceasefire at Appomatox began the peace process, and three months before the ceasefire of the *Shenandoah* brought it to a close. I will have more to say about this striking story of native birth in a moment, but for now, suffice to say that it inspired writers from coast to coast to try their own hand at spoken accents, sparking a self-consciously collaborative effort to document the entire nation. Critics have long argued that the dialect movement can be explained as a response to the end of the war, because it documented innocuous regional differences in a way that made it possible to imagine that far deeper differences between north and south could also coexist. While there is certainly truth to this argument, it cannot account for the sheer magnitude of the dialect movement, which encompassed not just different regions, but also different races, immigrant groups, and classes. As the Cambridge History of American Literature put it in 1918, “Why dialect should have been used so sparingly by American writers before the Civil War and why it should have become so constituent a part of American fiction immediately after the Civil War are questions not easily answered.”¹¹⁹

That dialect should have been *so* popular, for *so* long, throughout *so* many different permutations, suggests that what precipitated the anxiety over the nation’s ability to represent itself was not the Civil War so much as emancipation – or to put the point more precisely, all the emancipated African Americans who were suddenly designated “born American” citizens. In the

crisis of birthright citizenship that ensued, what was at stake was not just the lingering divisions of the recent past (north/south, enslaved/free) but also the most active divisions of the present moment (Native/settler, Black/white, Chinese/Anglo). Another way of putting this is that while the war between the states was obviously a crisis for America, the subsequent war between *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* was a crisis for the nation-state *as such*. Without a coherent account of the distinction between citizen and noncitizen, the nation lost the sense of boundedness it needed to justify its own. In postwar America, the deeply unstable definition of “Americanness” blurred those boundaries so essential to conceptualizing national sovereignty – which meant that the nation suddenly had need of a national canon in a way it never had before.

Howells, for one, was convinced that American literature only began to think of itself *as such* after the war. He even made the rather astonishing claim that writers like Hawthorne, Emerson, and Poe did not count as American writers, because it was “only after the Civil War that we really began to have an American literature.” As he insists,

As soon as the country began to feel its life in every limb with the coming of peace, it began to speak in the varying accents of all the different sections – North, East, South, West, and Farthest West; but not before that time.¹²⁰

Howells’s personification here is telling: he figures “the country” as a living, embodied creature with the power to “speak” its “life” directly into language. It’s as if the time is so ripe and the landscape so fertile for American literature that a national canon cannot help but blossom into being. As Howells insisted, “literature must be native to the soil... essentially of the people of the land and time in which it is produced.”¹²¹ Dialect was the best possible evidence that Americans had “transplanted” the English language onto “racier soil,” where, “by a sort of natural selection,” it took on the “national cast” of the country’s “best common speech.”¹²² American law required its citizens to have been born somewhere on American soil; American

literature, at least as conceived by Howells and his circle, required its texts to have been written in some distinct accent *of* that soil.

Indeed, Hamlin Garland, Howells's friend and protégée, took great pains to make the connection between dialect and the soil as explicit as possible. American literature was "rooted in the soil," he claimed, because its authors "stand among the corn-fields and... dig in the peat bogs," where they write "as naturally as the grass or corn or flax grows."¹²³ Garland dismisses the entirety of antebellum literature as a "forced rose-culture" imported from England, insisting that only the "free flowering of native plants" counts as "characteristic American literature."¹²⁴ Garland could not have been more literal in making the case that dialect was the natural language of the nation, indexical to the earth from which it grew. Whenever writers recorded the "actual speech of the people of each locality," he proclaimed, it meant that the "corn has flowered, and the cotton-boll has broken into speech."¹²⁵ All Howells's and Garland's agricultural metaphors add up to something more than rhetorical flourishes: they literalize the claim that dialect was the "life... of our own soil and air," transplanted directly onto the page.¹²⁶ Dialect, in short, provided the *jus soli* of American literature.

It can hardly come as a surprise, then, that Bret Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp" – the story Howells credits for having "sounded" the "first note" of "all the local parlances" — makes its case for native birth in practically literal terms.¹²⁷ In Harte's story, the rough-and-ready mining town of Roaring Camp experiences a "commotion" when a "very sinful woman" named "Cherokee Sal" goes into labor: "the situation was novel... a birth was a new thing... this was the first time that anybody had been introduced *ab initio*. Hence the excitement."¹²⁸ Of course, the conceit of a town that has never before witnessed childbirth makes for a thrilling frontier fantasy, but Roaring Camp also serves as an allegory for a brand-new reconceptualization of

American citizenship – one emerging, as the story puts it, “*ab initio*” [from the beginning]. It seems far from coincidental, then, that within the story, the baby’s birth instantiates the rule of law for the previously lawless frontiersmen. Although these men are all “criminal[s]” and “fugitives from justice,” when “Cherokee Sal” dies in childbirth, they experience their “first spasm of propriety – the first symptom of the camp’s regeneration.”¹²⁹ Soon they find themselves invoking “authority and *ex officio* complacency” as they christen the child “according to the laws of the United States and the State of California.”¹³⁰ Their collective act of naming – and the unspoken logic behind it, which is that the child is just as likely to be the offspring of any of the men in camp – marks a repudiation of *jus sanguinis* if there ever was one. In short, it is an “Ingin baby” that turns the town’s frontiersmen into good American citizens.¹³¹

It can hardly be considered an accident that Harte’s figure for native birth here is, in fact, Native. After all, in America, birthright citizenship involved taking a British legal precedent (*jus soli*) and instituting it on stolen tribal land, where it applied to European newcomers (no matter how recently they had arrived), but not to the Natives they were displacing (no matter how many generations their ancestors had lived there). In Harte’s deeply imperialist parable, the settlers of Roaring Camp – whose only connection to the soil is premised on their prospecting claims – become heroes only by dispossessing the Native woman who might otherwise have asserted a prior claim to the land. Indeed, they literally take up residence inside her womb. As a stand-in for America’s indigenous peoples, she is painted as both the first of her kind (she is said to suffer the “primal curse” of Eve) and the last (when she dies, she is said to have “passed out of Roaring Camp... forever”).¹³² Her act of conception is what allows the settlers to conceptualize themselves as the territory’s original progenitors, making her story very much a national retelling of Genesis. Her death, in turn, is what the settlers take unchallenged control of her territory –

which is why her demise is said not to have “disturbed them much, except” as a cause for “speculation” (itself a term with intensely exploitative connotations in the context of the gold rush).¹³³ In the legal realm, implementing *jus soli* over *jus sanguinis* required obscuring the fact that in North America, nobody descended from British bloodlines could really be said to be “of the soil” at all. In the literary realm, for Harte to claim that he had captured the “flavor of the soil” in the form of a “peculiarly characteristic,” “dialectical” “Western American literature” required obscuring the fact that *any* kind of English spoken on the frontier would have had to have come from someplace else.¹³⁴ So when Harte’s story says of Cherokee Sal, “Perhaps the less said of her the better,” what Harte needs to remain unsaid ultimately has less to do with her morals (about which, personally speaking, “he could really see nothing objectionable”) than with the stubborn fact of her existence.¹³⁵

Thirty years later, when Harte updated the story that had made him famous with a foreword that explained his motivations for writing it, he was far more explicit about the fact that the “peculiar and romantic” West of his youth was only made possible through Native erasure. To “pioneers” like himself, he claims, “the promised land itself presented the singular spectacle of a patriarchal Latin race who had been left to themselves, forgotten by the world, for nearly three hundred years.”¹³⁶ In Harte’s retelling, Natives had already been “forgotten” by humans and nature alike, long before any settlers could have possibly encountered them. Natives endure just long enough to personify the “land itself” and then conveniently vanish from view, leaving behind a “continent almost unexplored” for any white man with “faith, courage, vigor, youth, and capacity for adventure.”¹³⁷ It wasn’t just birthright citizenship, in other words, that relied on “excluding Indians not taxed.” From the beginning, American dialect literature was equally dependent on Native erasure.

By 1898, when Hamlin Garland began writing his fictionalized autobiography *A Son of the Middle Border*, Natives had been so successfully scrubbed from the record that he is able to claim, without a trace of irony, that his “sons of the border” are as “native American as their names indicated” – by which he meant that their names come from English woodlands and Scottish fortresses (“Dudleys, Elwells, and Griswolds... McIldowneys and McKinleys”) rather than, say, Algonquian rivers.¹³⁸ In a perfect encapsulation of the imperialist logic of *jus soli*, the very surnames that might be said to suggest an ancestral British homeland are instead reimagined as indigenous to the American landscape. Garland elides the difference between “native-born” Americans and the First Nations they dispossessed by making “native American,” quite literally, mean *white*.

In this context, it makes sense that for Harte, “The Luck of Roaring Camp” becomes a tragedy not when “Cherokee Sal” dies, but when her half-white baby does. The baby’s birth was what had first forged a link between the camp – which had always “looked suspiciously on strangers” – and an imagined community beyond its own borders; the baby’s death, in turn, destroys their “only connecting link to the surrounding world,” which turns out to spell a death sentence for the entire town.¹³⁹ As soon as the miners hear that the baby has drowned – “‘He is dead,’ said one” – all of them start dropping like flies.¹⁴⁰ Another miner, known only as “Kentuck,” responds, “Dead?... Yes, my man, and you are dying too,” and then, as if to prove the point, promptly passes away, saying of the babe, “Dying... he’s a taking me with him.”¹⁴¹ Like Cherokee Sal, “Kentuck” is said to have “drifted away... forever,” marking the end of Roaring Camp’s “golden summer” of “luck” and “prosperity.”¹⁴² The story turns out to be a cautionary tale about the fate awaiting the nation without the fiction of *jus soli* to sustain a sense of shared belonging.

Even after Harte's story ends, the parable of *jus soli* continues, in the sense that "The Luck of Roaring Camp" – much like the birth it depicts – is conceptualized as acting to Americanize all those who come into contact with it. Harte makes the connection between the baby and the story as explicit as possible by giving both of them the same name: the story ends with a miner "holding The Luck of Roaring Camp in his arms;" all along, meanwhile, the reader has been holding "The Luck of Roaring Camp" in her hands.¹⁴³ Just in case anyone happened to miss the analogy, in 1897, Harte's foreword spells it out as explicitly as possible. Harte describes in detail the labor pains that were required to bring forth what he calls his "little foundling of Californian literature."¹⁴⁴ "Like its own hero," Harte writes, his story "was born with an evil reputation," "anathematized" as "the offspring of evil" by critics who thought that its publisher's reputation had "been ruined by its birth."¹⁴⁵ Far from apologizing for his literary bastard, however, Harte insists that he had no choice but to scandalize his readers – whom he characterizes as fans of "English journals" and thus "half foreign in their sympathies" – because "his first efforts toward indicating a peculiarly characteristic Western American literature" were so unlike anything found in "New England habits and literary traditions."¹⁴⁶

Harte's ambition to capture a distinctly Western "flavor of the soil" suggests his intense sympathy with Howells's project – and indeed, Harte credits Howells's *Atlantic* as the only publication that understood what he was trying to do with the "Luck" when he first wrote it back in 1868. At the time, most prospective publishers found the story "so indecent, irreligious, and improper" that they could hardly be "induced to continue its perusal."¹⁴⁷ Only *The Atlantic* responded to the story in "flattering terms" – indeed, making their desire known, "with an enthusiasm that half frightened its author," for as many more like it as possible.¹⁴⁸ In his official review, Howells reframed the "robust vigor and racy savor of the miners' vernacular" not as a

weakness but as the story's greatest strength, and indeed as proof that Harte should be considered a "unique figure in American authorship."¹⁴⁹ In other words, Howells played the role of midwife in delivering Harte's "peculiarly characteristic Western" voice to the masses; as soon as that voice had "secured a hearing... throughout the American Union," in turn, it spurred authors all over the country to try recording their own.¹⁵⁰ In every sense possible, the dialect movement was born from the founding fiction of native birth. Harte's "Ingin baby" established the precedent – long before Howells or anyone else would explicitly articulate it – that dialect counted as the literary equivalent of being born on American soil.

All of this is to say that at the exact moment the American legal system found itself coming to rely more and more on the principle of birthright citizenship, it also found itself utterly incapable of articulating the logic that governed it. Only American literature was able to perform the work of justifying *jus soli* to the American public, which it did by disguising and eliding the antagonisms that might have otherwise threatened to destabilize the entire premise of national belonging: white/nonwhite, citizen/foreigner, settler/Native. Of course, a number of 20th-century critics have been tempted to read Howells's nationalist literary project as democratic, inclusive, even utopian. However naïve his ambition, they argue, his grand chorus of American voices prefigures the commitment to multiculturalism that informs so much of literary criticism today. On the one hand, it's obviously true that Howells's ambition of expanding the dialect genre to include as many different kinds of Americans as possible demonstrates a certain commitment to pluralism. On the other hand, this version of pluralism required ignoring the underlying conflicts that might make one person sound different from another to begin with. In Howells's account of American literature, dialect could only succeed by making antagonism disappear – a notion that would one day come back to haunt him.

B. Speaking American “Shtyle”: Immigrant Dialect and the *Jus Soli* of Language

As important as Harte may have been in the conception of the dialect tale, the dialect movement quickly outgrew him. It was, in fact, such an “intensely decentralized” project, in Howells’s words, that “the justification of dialect is to be found not in this quarter or that, but everywhere,” diffused throughout “the whole body of our authorship.”¹⁵¹ In a legal context, the logic of *jus soli* had proven useful because it meant any kind of American would count as just as American as any other; in a literary context, it proved useful because it ensured that any accent, from any corner of the country, would count as a representation of the country as a whole. Gavin Jones has characterized this function of dialect as its “synechdochal capacity to capture the essence of the nation.”¹⁵² No matter how different a Louisianan Creole might sound from an Indianan Hoosier, in other words, both could serve equally well as plausible versions of “real” American language. Indeed, as critics such as TK have argued, in the years following the Civil War, regional dialects played a crucial role in reconciling a deeply divided nation. Regardless of where these accents originated – north or south, slave state or free – they turned into metonyms for a single, unified country as soon as they appeared on the page. When authors transcribed their state’s idioms, they weren’t documenting irreconcilable differences; they were participating in the project of *E pluribus unum*.

Howells’s commitment to dialect stemmed in part from imagining that this principle – that any accent grounded in the soil was just as American as any other – was capable of making other kinds of difference seem just as inconsequential. Take, for instance, his response to Paul Laurence Dunbar, whose work he praised as “expressions of a race-life from within the race.”¹⁵³ In his 1896 review of Dunbar’s *Majors and Minors*, Howells skipped right past Dunbar’s

standard-English “Majors,” focusing almost exclusively on his dialect “Minors” instead. Critics in more recent decades have devoted their energy to rescuing Dunbar from what they see as Howells’s racial essentialism – some by offering a more nuanced account of Dunbar’s Black dialect (its signifying practices, its syncopated rhythms, etc.), others by arguing for the merits of Dunbar’s standard-English verse. No one, however, has paid much attention to Dunbar’s *other* dialects – no one except for Howells, who felt duty-bound to “speak particularly” of Dunbar’s “non-negro dialect pieces,” insisting that Dunbar’s “ear... for the accent of his neighbors” (“the middle-south whites”) was, in fact, just as good as “for that of his kindred” (“the middle-south negroes”).¹⁵⁴ As I will argue in Chapter 4, Howells ultimately concluded that Dunbar’s Black dialect was compelling for entirely different reasons than his white dialect was, but for now, what matters is that he considered Dunbar equally accurate at rendering *both* – which meant that any of his “Minors” could serve equally well as a stand-in for all that was distinctly American.¹⁵⁵ In Dunbar’s hands, Black and white dialect become functionally interchangeable.

As the 19th century drew to a close, the question of how to make Americans’ differences somehow remind them of all that united them became a matter of practical urgency, as the nation swelled with millions of new immigrants, all of whom seemed to speak in strange and unfamiliar ways. From the moment the 14th Amendment was first introduced, the problem of citizenship it had set out to solve – that of newly-emancipated slaves – had been bound up with another, equally fraught problem – that of newly-arrived foreigners. And the literature of *jus soli*, like the law of *jus soli*, had always been just as concerned with the problem of immigration. In “The Luck of Roaring Camp,” for instance, after the baby dies, the miners fail their final test of citizenship by turning their backs on “immigration” of any kind.¹⁵⁶ In a more general sense, Richard Brodhead has argued that when dialect writers dug up the strangest backcountry accents

they could find, they allowed American readers to imagine that even the most unfamiliar-sounding voices could, in fact, join the American chorus. If the Indiana Hoosier and the Louisiana Creole counted as part of the country, perhaps the Slav and the Neapolitan could one day belong, too. In this sense, even the most homegrown accent “might be said to stage a detour into foreignness,” as Brodhead puts it, because colorful regional sayings offered readers a safe analogy for the foreign tongues that were really troubling them.¹⁵⁷

In late nineteenth-century America, the fear of foreign speech was so pervasive that even Howells had his misgivings. From a certain kind of nativist perspective, of course, foreign accents seemed flat-out un-American; but what was even more disconcerting about these accents was the fear that ordinary Americans would not be able to understand them at all, which threatened to destroy the bedrock of public discourse on which the nation had been founded. According to Gavin Jones, in places like New York, the “seemingly impenetrable ethnic neighborhoods” cropping up everywhere provoked such “cultural anxiety” that commentators feared the city was turning into “a modern-day Babel.”¹⁵⁸ In much the same vein, in *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, Howells’s New York novel, the protagonist Basil March feels a “vague discomfort” every time he realizes that immigrants “of Germanic, of Slavonic, of Pelasgic, of Mongolian stock [now] outnumber the prepotent Celts,” especially when he overhears “the jargon of their unintelligible dialect.”¹⁵⁹ Because March finds immigrant customs “as alien to the American manner as anything in continental Europe,” he becomes increasingly convinced that the city is facing a “fierce struggle for survival, with the stronger life persisting over the deformity, the mutilation, the destruction, the decay of the weaker.”¹⁶⁰ Howells might as well have said it was the city’s *language* that was struggling to survive in the midst of so many “unintelligible” foreign “jargon[s]”. For someone like Howells, who had always considered

dialect the “life of literature,” the “stronger life” of immigrant speech did indeed threaten American letters with “mutilation” and “decay.”¹⁶¹

Howells’s anxieties made him more determined than ever to show America’s reading public that speaking with an accent could make someone count as *more* American, not less – and he got the chance to make his case when he discovered Abraham Cahan, a “struggling immigrant writer” who was so eager to break into English-language publishing that he was willing to do almost anything the famous editor asked. It was Howells who directed Cahan to write his first novel, *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896); Howells even came up with the title on Cahan’s behalf. It should come as no surprise, then, that Cahan’s novel manages to deliver exactly what Howells wanted: an immigrant dialect that sounds less like a foreign tongue than a charming new take on city slang. From the beginning of the novel, Cahan’s protagonist, Yekl, proclaims his admiration for anyone who “speaks English like a stream,” or even better, “speaks English like one American born.”¹⁶² Yet ironically enough, Yekl makes these declarations not in English, but in Yiddish (which, we are supposed to understand, has been translated into English for the benefit of the reader). The only time Cahan renders Yekl’s speech phonetically is when Yekl mispronounces a word in English – like, for instance, when he urges “*greenhornsh*” like his wife to “learn to speak American *shtyle* very fast.”¹⁶³ When we compare Yekl’s unusual dialect to the kind of dialect Cahan uses in his next novel, we can appreciate just what language it is that Yekl speaks. In *The Imported Bridegroom* (1898), when Cahan transcribes his immigrants’ Yiddish phrases, he does so *in* Yiddish, just as they would have sounded out loud (“show a *treif* gendarme a *kosher* coin,” “what a *chariff!*... what a *bokki!*,” etc.).¹⁶⁴ The contrast makes it clear: what the “imported bridegroom” speaks is a foreign language, imported wholesale from the old

country along with his “leather-bound folio volumes” of “Hebrew books;” what Yekl speaks is a uniquely American dialect, one that could only have been acquired stateside.¹⁶⁵

Cahan’s sense of humor comes through clearly here: for all Yekl strains to speak English like a local, what he manages to produce is not English or even American but “American *shtyle*,” which is to say a “mutilated English” as distorted as the “broken Russian learned among the Povodye soldiers” back in the old country.¹⁶⁶ No matter how often Yekl flaunts his beloved Americanisms – from “vot’sh de used a makin’ monkey beesnesh?” to “You can betch you’ bootsch!” – no one could ever mistake him for someone “American born.”¹⁶⁷ The point for someone like Howells, however, is that no one could mistake him for an “imported bridegroom,” either – which is to say, an “old country... child of the Law” who cannot even unpack his “Babylonian Talmud” without falling into “humming the words, in that peculiar sing-song, accompanied by indescribable controversial gesticulations.”¹⁶⁸ Yekl may bungle the way he talks about “boxing” (“He *tzettled* him in three *roynds*”) or “baseball” (“*tony peoplesh* play it,”) but every time he opens his mouth, he proves which side of the Atlantic he’s on (“Once I live in America... I want to know that I live in America. *Dot’sh a’ kin’ a man I am!*”).¹⁶⁹ Yekl’s unmistakably American idiom is as pure a phenomenon of this country as any other dialect ever written on American soil: it is native in a way Yekl himself will never be.

Now we can understand just why Howells would have been so enthusiastic about proclaiming Cahan “a writer of foreign birth who will do honour to American letters.”¹⁷⁰ Cahan had overcome the divide between foreign and native speech that had threatened to be dialect’s undoing. In his glowing review, Howells praised Cahan for capturing the “very Russian Hebrews of Hester Street translated from their native Yiddish into English,” as in translated from their mother tongue into a natively American language.¹⁷¹ It would be hard to overstate just how much

Cahan mattered to Howells. When Cahan published *The Imported Bridegroom*, Howells even made the astonishing claim that “No American fiction of the year merits recognition more than this Russian’s stories of Yiddish life.”¹⁷² When we recall that 1898 was the same year that saw the publication of Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*, Stephen Crane’s “The Open Boat,” and Charles Chesnutt’s “The Wife of His Youth,” we can appreciate just how peculiar Howells’s estimation of Cahan really was. No one else has ever echoed his sense of the value of Cahan’s dialect – not other critics, who rejected it as a “most hideous jargon” that had no “place in literature,”¹⁷³ and not even Cahan himself, who denounced it as a “cheap” form of “gibberish” and resolved to “avoid such ‘dialect’ in my subsequent English stories.”¹⁷⁴ For Howells, however, what was at stake was less the merits of Cahan’s prose style than the possibilities Cahan had opened up within the field of American fiction. Cahan marks a significant turning point in Howell’s conception of *jus soli*: from now on, what would make a work of literature American was not that its author was born here, but that its *language* was.

C. **“What gountry hass a poor man got?”: The Haymarket Trial and the Repudiation of *Jus Soli***

In addition to his considerable literary ambitions for dialect, Howells would have also had more personal reasons for wanting to make an immigrant accent sound more American – especially if that accent happened to be a German one. Ever since the Haymarket affair, when a group of German anarchists were subjected to public trial in the summer of 1886, Howells had been deeply troubled by how easily his fellow Americans seemed to assume that anyone who spoke with a foreign accent was guaranteed to hold anti-American views. The background to the trial was that a peaceful worker’s rally – held in Chicago, in Haymarket Square, on May 4, 1886 – suddenly turned violent when a bomb was thrown into a crowd of policemen. Nobody knew who had thrown it, but suspicion quickly turned against the anarchists who had drawn the crowds in the first place – especially the headline speaker, August Spies, who had the misfortune of being German-born. Even though Spies had specifically called for nonviolent protest at the rally, his speech that night had also encouraged “working men [to] arm themselves for defense” against the “barbarism” and “bloody work” of the police – and the press was quick to turn his colorful rhetoric into inarguable proof of his crimes.¹⁷⁵

In the coverage that followed, reporters tried to make Spies and his fellow anarchists sound as alien as possible. The *Chicago Tribune* called them “organized foreign assassins [sic].”¹⁷⁶ Even *Harper’s Weekly*, Howells’s own employer at the time, ran a Thomas Nast cartoon titled “Those Foreign Savages,” depicting a horde of shadowy figures bearing down on Uncle Sam, firing their pistols at the American flag that he is struggling to hold aloft. They also called the anarchists “brutal ruffians, all of whom seem to have been foreigners.”¹⁷⁷ “All” was stretching the truth: one of the anarchists, Albert Parsons, could trace his American lineage all

the way back to the Mayflower. What this kind of rhetoric really expressed was a collective sense that anarchism itself was an unforgivably foreign ideology. The police captain on the case argued that since the “German socialism... that led directly to the Haymarket massacre” had emerged from the “political situation in the old country,” it was a form of “alien revolt” with no intrinsic relation to American soil: it was, in fact, a “German plant” attempting to infiltrate “our garden,” which made it “a weed to be plucked out by the roots and destroyed.”¹⁷⁸ The *jus soli* rhetoric here is suggestive: if anarchism were ever to find fertile ground in America, then like an invasive species, it would choke out the native growth that made the country so uniquely what it was.

It should come as no surprise, then, that when August Spies faced the court in August of 1886, the fact that he spoke with an accent – even a slight one – was taken as an indication of his certain guilt. There is a certain irony in this, in the sense that Spies, unlike Yekl, spoke English nearly as well as a native: the *Chicago Tribune* called him “no mean speaker” despite his “slight accent;” the *New York Times* clarified that “Spies speaks English as well as anybody, save that he has a German accent;” and a contemporaneous historian concurred that “Spies speaks with a marked accent, but very distinctly.”¹⁷⁹ Yet for all that his English-language skills helped him, Spies might as well have been speaking pure Hauptdeutsch: the state’s attorney, for instance, insisted on framing the case as a battle of “ignorant, lying foreigners” against “law-abiding and intelligent American-born citizens.”¹⁸⁰

It is perhaps no accident, then, that Spies’s trial came to rest on the question of his distinctive accent. Malvern Thompson, a witness for the prosecution, alleged that he had overheard two of the anarchists – August Spies and Michael Schwab – conspiring in an alleyway before the bombing. Thompson claimed to have caught the words “police” and “pistols,” and the

question, “Do you think one will be enough, or hadn’t we better go and get more?”¹⁸¹

Thompson’s account relied on the premise that he “could recognize [Spies’s] voice” by ear alone: “They may have been out of sight, but not out of hearing,” he insisted.¹⁸² The defense tried to poke holes in Thompson’s story – “Don’t you know that Mr. Schwab can speak but very little English, and he and Mr. Spies always talk German when they speak together?” – but Thompson held firm: “It was in English, because I didn’t understand German.”¹⁸³ In all likelihood, Spies’s guilt was always a foregone conclusion, but thanks to Thompson’s testimony, his prosecution wound up relying to a surprising degree on the way Spies sounded when talking aloud: enough like someone native-born to be understandable, but enough like someone foreign-born to strike the listener as distinctly unfamiliar. This was, of course, exactly the kind of accent that Howells was hoping to turn into a version of speaking like a good American – and so the fact that in Spies’s case it turned out to be just the opposite must have felt particularly devastating. As Spies put it, his only transgression was the “monstrous crime” of having been “born a foreigner.”¹⁸⁴

When Howells read Spies’s account of the trial, he was so disturbed that he immediately forwarded a copy to his editor at *Harper’s Weekly*, George William Curtis (the same man who had already done so much to paint the anarchists as “foreigners” himself). Howells had hoped to get Curtis to publish something in defense of the anarchists, but Curtis flatly refused, so Howells reluctantly took the initiative on his own. He became the only major American writer to do so – and his readers were outraged. As Howells put it, they “abused me as heartily as if I had proclaimed myself a dynamiter.”¹⁸⁵ The whole point for Howells, however, was that he thought he had been defending American values, not anarchist ones. In his private letters, he continued to insist that even those who were “playing a lawless part” in the country should never be “killed...

for their opinions.”¹⁸⁶ For him, the Haymarket trial was “the greatest wrong that ever threatened our fame as a nation,” because if it were true that anarchists like “poor Spies” had indeed been “tried for [their] speech,” then allowing them to be executed would undermine American democracy more than anything the anarchists themselves could have ever devised.¹⁸⁷

Howells’s emotional plea on Spies’s behalf may have made it hard for the American public to believe that Howells was not, in fact, an anarchist himself. Yet nothing could better prove that Howells never “found Anarchy very thinkable, as a political system” than the fact that he insisted on defending Spies on the basis that he was a good American citizen.¹⁸⁸ After all, the only categories Howells had ever found “thinkable” were American and un-American. When the case against Spies boiled down to “They were foreigners; they were not citizens,” and Spies countered that he “probably [had] been as good a citizen” as anyone else, Howells instinctively rushed to take Spies’s side.¹⁸⁹ What Howells missed in his eagerness to embrace his fellow American was the fact that Spies had no desire to be considered a citizen at all. For Howells, the problem with trying Spies as a foreigner was that he should have been tried as an American; for Spies, the problem with being tried as a foreigner was that he should have been tried as an *anarchist*. In the last speech he would ever give, Spies proclaimed that “Anarchism is on trial!” and willingly declared himself guilty: “your honor, very well; you may sentence me, for I am an anarchist.”¹⁹⁰ In other words, Spies refused to claim any of the privileges of American citizenship, not because he felt any allegiance to Germany, but because he was opposed to the very concept of “the ‘State’ – the political State,” proclaiming it a holdover from “barbaric antiquity.”¹⁹¹ For him, the operative terms were not American vs. un-American, but instead “wage workers” vs. “the ruling classes.”¹⁹² Spies’s point was that, as an anarchist, he could never

be either a citizen *or* a foreigner, because his affiliation with the “workingmen and women” of the world positioned him completely outside the paradigm of national affiliation.¹⁹³

The reason Howells had such a hard time wrapping his head around Spies’s anarchism is because it was predicated on a kind of antagonism – class struggle – that made it impossible to imagine being poor as just another version of being American. In principle, of course, there was no reason that the logic of *jus soli* couldn’t be expanded to accommodate Americans from different class backgrounds. In Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), for instance, it is the protagonist’s “great success” in the “great school of business” that makes him a “real American;” whereas in Hamlin Garland’s *A Son of the Middle Border*, it is “the crudest form of manual labor” that proves that the “American farmer” is of a piece with his “typically American soil.”¹⁹⁴ Under nationalism, the working man embraces national belonging as the one thing he has in common with all other Americans, regardless of his income. Under anarchism, however, the working man recognizes the exploitation of his labor as the one thing he has in common with workers all over the world, regardless of his country of origin. For Howells, then, Spies presented a real problem, because Spies stood for a kind of division – class division – that could never be made to fit within the boundaries of the nation-state.

We can see a version of this problem in the passage from *A Hazard of New Fortunes* that I started with. The novel presents us with a fictionalized account of the Haymarket affair, with Lindau playing the role of August Spies, and Basil March serving as Howells’s proxy.¹⁹⁵ So it makes complete sense that when Basil March asks whether America isn’t Lindau’s “country, too,” Lindau echoes Spies by rejecting the very premise of the question: “What gountry hass a poor man got?”¹⁹⁶ What *is* strange about Lindau’s response – since it’s transcribed for us phonetically – is that its message is exactly the opposite of what phonetic speech had always

been intended to convey. Dialect, as a form, had always meant something like, *speaking natively proves that you belong to your country*. But what Lindau says is that he *has* no country – or more precisely, since he is speaking as a socialist (“where you find gabidal... you findt the smell of tears and ploodt!”), he says that a *poor man* has no country.¹⁹⁷ Lindau perfectly articulates the problem that Haymarket had come to pose for Howells: anarchism, or indeed any politics based in class struggle, posed a challenge to nationalism that *jus soli* – and by extension dialect – was totally incapable of resolving.

It turns out to be no accident that Lindau speaks such a dense, indecipherable jargon. His language is not, in fact, a dialect at all – by which I mean that it is not just another variant of speaking like an American, but an utter failure to sound anything like one. When Howells says that Lindau speaks in a “German-English voice,” he means that quite literally. Whenever Lindau calls out “Komm” or “Hier” – close cognates in both German and English – his listeners literally can’t tell which language he’s speaking.¹⁹⁸ Unlike Yekl, whose talk of boxing and baseball demonstrates nothing so much as where he lives now, Lindau’s German interjections prove that he has never really left the old country behind. His “heavy German accent” is in fact *so* heavy that Howells has to give his readers clues about how to decipher it.¹⁹⁹ For instance, when Lindau says of his tenement hovel, “Idt is not very cay, heigh?”, March has to supply the meaning of “cay” through context clues by replying, “It might be gayer.”²⁰⁰ Lindau’s political diatribes are even harder to decipher than his small talk. When Lindau hears socialism called an “un-American doctrine,” for instance, he becomes nearly unintelligible:

“On-Amerigan!” he roared, and, as he went on, his accent grew more and more uncertain. “What iss Amerigan? Dere iss no Ameriga any more! You start here free and brafe, and you glaim for efery man de right to life, liperty, and de bursuit of habbiness. And where haf you entedt? No man that vorks vith his handts among you has the liperty to bursue his habbiness. He iss the slafe of some richer man, some gompany, some gorporation, dat crindt him down to the least he can lif on, and that rops him of the marchin of his

earnings that he knight pe habby on. Oh, you Amerigans, you haf cot it down goldt, as you say! You ton't puy foters; you puy lechislatures and goncrossmen; you puy gourts; you puy gombetitors; you pay infentors not to infent; you attertise, and the gounting-room sees dat de etitorial-room toese'n't tink."²⁰¹

At the very instant Lindau proclaims himself “On-Amerigan” by deliberately excluding himself from the body politic (“you Amerigans”), his “accent” literally becomes “more and more uncertain” until it is all but incomprehensible to an American audience.

Lindau serves, in other words, as a pure embodiment of the “unintelligible dialect” of New York’s immigrant underclass; March even characterizes him as “a perfect Babel of strange tongues.”²⁰² So when March says of Lindau, “I don’t always like his way of talking,” or “I’m sorry to hear [him] talk so,” or “I hate to hear him... talking in that way,” he might as well be talking about Lindau’s accent as his political views.²⁰³ After all, what makes March so anxious about life in the Bowery is the looming threat of “mutilation,” and Lindau’s language is hardly less mutilated than his appearance. Lindau, as we have seen, is introduced by means of the “mutilated arm” with which he tries (and fails) to shake March’s hand; later on, “his mutilation” (“that pathetic mutilation!”) becomes a stand-in for all his socialist convictions.²⁰⁴ We learn that Lindau lost his hand defending the Union – not because he had any concern for the fate of the country, but because he was so deeply concerned for the fate of his fellow man being held in bondage. As March explains, “Lindau was fighting the anti-slavery battle just as naturally at Indianapolis in 1858 as he fought behind the barricades at Berlin in 1848.”²⁰⁵ Of course, it is only Lindau’s commitment to international socialism that makes it possible for him to imagine that abolitionists at Antietam and artisans in Alexanderplatz were, in fact, fighting the same enemy: namely, those among the landed classes determined to keep exploiting their workers at any cost.

Before Lindau ever says a word, then, his mutilated arm already silently proclaims his politics; once he does start to speak, his mutilated language fulfills the same function. No matter *what* he says, it's *how* he says it that marks him as a dissident. Howells's logic here comes from the decades he spent defending "subtly shaded accents of the vernacular" against what he derisively called "burlesques of the lexicon."²⁰⁶ Howells's dialect project had always relied on the distinction between "natural" accents ("faithfully reported," "unconscious," "genuine") and "artificial" ones ("vulgarity," "grotesquery," "wanton distortion").²⁰⁷ Dialect was a national language because it was a *natural* language: in Garland's terms, it took on "actual speech" and rendered it "as naturally as the grass or corn or flax grows."²⁰⁸ In contrast to this kind of indigenous growth, Howells painted artificial dialect as a kind of invasive species: "the trick of grotesque orthography was the invention of Thackeray, who... was, at any rate, the first to use it elaborately. It was easily caught, and it naturally spread to [this] country."²⁰⁹ Another way of saying that Lindau's accent can never count as an American dialect is to say that no one would ever mistake it as sounding the least bit natural. When Howells depicts Lindau using exactly the kind of "grotesque orthography" that he would normally reject as a foreign "trick," it is because he thinks of Lindau's politics as fundamentally foreign to the American way of life.

In almost every way imaginable, Lindau is a perfect copy of Spies. March even quotes from Spies's own defense testimony when he calls Lindau "as good an American as any of us."²¹⁰ Yet there is one striking difference: unlike Spies, whom we know spoke "English as well as anybody," Lindau can barely be said to be speaking English at all. Critics have long recognized *Hazard* as an exercise in historical revisionism, arguing that Howells was moved to fictionalize the Haymarket affair to help him reconcile his deep grief for "poor Spies" ("poor Lindau") with his equally deep faith in American democracy. Indeed, after Lindau is murdered

by the cops, March comes up with a retroactive justification Lindau's death by claiming that Lindau's attempt to defend striking workers counted as "trying to obstruct the law."²¹¹ What I want to call our attention to is the fact that in Howells's version of the story, Lindau's accent really *is* enough to convict him, quite apart from any of the actions he may or may not have taken against the police. Lindau speaks like a "poor man," which is to say like the proletarian revolutionary he is. His mutilated English is Howells's means of making Spies's anarchism visible on the page.

That Lindau serves as the figure of what it means to count as a poor man rather than as an American allows us to make sense of the novel's otherwise inexplicable premise that Lindau has deliberately *chosen* to be poor. Lindau scandalizes Basil March – who has spent months scouring the city for the most elegant flat he can possibly afford – by voluntarily consigning himself to a "tenement."²¹² Lindau explains this decision only by saying that when he tried to move to "Creenvidge Willage,"

I foundt I was begoming a liddle too moch of an aristograt... I was beginning to forget the poor!... zo I zaid I better take myself in time, and I gome here among my brothers – the becears and the thieves!²¹³

Not only does March find this logic impossible to understand, he cannot imagine why Lindau is trying to live on such a tight budget to begin with, since his war injury – his "mutilation" – means he should have been getting "a pension, twelve dollars a month, or eighteen, from a grateful country."²¹⁴ The problem, it turns out, is not the VA administration, but Lindau's pride:

I renounce my bension, begause I would sgorn to dake money from a goferment that I ton't peliefe in any more... I would *sdarfe* before I dake a bension now from a rebublic dat iss bought oap by monobolies, and ron by drusts and gompines, and railroadts andt oil gompanies.²¹⁵

Much like Spies claiming that he would rather be found guilty as an anarchist than declared innocent as an American citizen, Lindau insists he would rather be suffering along with the rest

of the working class than benefiting from his status as an American war hero. It is as if Howells had finally grasped why Spies's politics made the question of his national affiliation irrelevant, and had brought the same logic to bear within the realm of literature. If a poor man has no country, Howells reasoned, then a poor man should also have no dialect, since dialect is, after all, the form that gives a man his country. After all, the whole point of dialect was to smooth over the differences between Americans that might stand in the way of national unity (like the difference between Native and native-born). Dialect literature served to flatten antagonism into equivalence. In the case of *class* difference, however, the very act of distinguishing between workers and bosses was predicated on acknowledging the fundamental antagonism between them. Thus for Howells, class dialect became a kind of contradiction in terms, one that he figured in the form of misspellings so dense and bewildering that they could barely be accommodated to the act of reading.

Just in case anyone missed the distinction he was trying to draw between a "genuine" national dialect and Lindau's broken imitation, Howells drives the point home by juxtaposing Lindau's dialogue against exactly the kind of regional accents that *could* easily represent the country as whole. Colonel Woodburn, for instance, speaks in a "soft, gentle, slow Southern voice" (filled with frequent "Yes, madam"s), while Mr. Dryfoos speaks in a rough-and-tumble "Out West" lingo (peppered with irreverent "ain't"s).²¹⁶ When men like Woodburn and Dryfoos move to New York, they may not sound exactly like locals, of course, but they are still very much recognizable as Americans. Even though native New Yorkers can tell that the Woodburns are "Southern people" by their "accent," they are charmed to realize that "we're like one family with the Woodburns."²¹⁷ Howells plays up just how easy it is to recognize Woodburn and Dryfoos as all-American types by keeping their accents surprisingly light and easy to decipher:

“I bid you good-night, madam,” says our stereotypical Southern gentleman; “we got a big home that we ain’t at home in,” says our equally clichéd folksy Midwesterner.²¹⁸ Contrast these folksy aphorisms with Lindau’s broken speech, which is littered with eye-dialect (“iss,” “eyess,” “heigh”) and bewildering malapropisms (“pig pugs” (big bugs), “bratty pusy” (pretty busy), “It sheers my hardt” (cheers my heart)).²¹⁹ When Howells’s more plain-spoken characters make fun of Lindau’s mispronunciations – “he’s accepted with ‘blayzure,’ that’s what he says,” or “*I* don’t believe in his ‘brincibles’” – it is a sign that Lindau’s language literally has no place in the nation.²²⁰

As we might have predicted, Lindau’s failure to speak like a good American proves to be his fatal flaw. When Lindau gets his first opportunity to conduct class warfare – at a dinner party, of all places – it’s not just *what* he says, but *how* he says it, that gets him into such trouble. The topic of discussion is March’s literary magazine, *Every Other Week*, which turns out to be a barely-veiled allegory for the American way of life: the magazine is run through “self-government,” which, as March puts it, is “something in literature as radical as the American Revolution in politics.”²²¹ By this point, Lindau has been happily contributing to the magazine for months (translating “foreign periodicals,” obviously). So when he learns over champagne toasts that Mr. Dryfoos – a natural-gas tycoon who boasts of “breaking up the union” – is the magazine’s angel investor, he is naturally horrified to realize where his paychecks have been coming from.²²² Lindau hisses to March, “in German,” that Dryfoos is “an ‘infamous traitor;’” again, “in German,” that he has the “heart of a tyrant;” and yet again, “in German,” that his “vile treason” is “shameful! shameful!”²²³ Paradoxically enough, the only time Lindau becomes easy for the reader to understand is when he starts speaking an entirely different language. It makes

sense that Lindau's German is translated into flawless English on the page: it is, after all, the language he *would* have been speaking if he had remained loyal to his national homeland.

Unfortunately for Lindau, Dryfoos turns out to have understood his every word. As we only later learn, Dryfoos's own "father was Pennsylvania Dutch," as Dryfoos puts it.²²⁴ Of course, there's a wonderful irony to all this: only in America was the *Deutsch* of Rhineland immigrants ever called "Dutch," which means that the exact same speech that makes Lindau seem unmistakably foreign makes Dryfoos seem more American than ever. Even though Lindau and Dryfoos share the same tongue, they never do manage to speak the same language: Lindau's "voarking-man" is Dryfoos's "red-mouthed labor agitator;" Lindau's "unionss" are Dryfoos's "secret societies."²²⁵ After the dinner-party fiasco, Lindau loses his job; after the strike that follows, he loses his life. Just in case anyone missed the moral of the story, Howells turns Lindau's murder into an object-lesson on the perils of speaking like a "poor man": those among Lindau's acquaintance who are present at the scene notice only a "tall, old man" until they recognize Lindau by the sound of his accent: "Glup the strikerss—they cot no friends!"²²⁶ The police, hearing this taunt, pick Lindau out from the crowd and (as if following orders) instantly club him to death. It's hard to imagine a clearer allegory of Spies's trial: Lindau cries out defiantly in his unmistakable accent, and is executed by representatives of the state as a result. Of course, in Howells's retelling, what makes Lindau so instantly recognizable is that his accent is not subtle at all, but as heavy-handed as Howells can make it. When March says of Lindau that "he died in the cause of disorder," it is his disorderly speech as much as his disorderly protest that convicts him.²²⁷

All of this is to say that *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1889) was motivated by nothing if not Howells's need to understand the nature of the threat Spies posed to the nation. I want to

offer a quick coda to this reading, which is the confirmation of it we find in the opening of Howells's very next novel, *An Imperative Duty* (1891), which is nominally about a tragic mulatta, but which opens with a diatribe against the poor that has nothing to do with its heroine. The novel's voice of scientific authority, Dr. Olney, who is equally "struck by the almost American look of the poorer class in Liverpool" and the almost "English look" of the poorer classes "in Boston," rapidly deduces "an approach from all directions to a common type among those who work with their hands for a living."²²⁸ The poor, in other words, belong not to "the English type or the American type, but the proletarian type."²²⁹ What makes the poor so distinctively proletarian is that they sound as un-American as Lindau: "they were given away by their accent for those primary and secondary Irish who abound with us."²³⁰ Dr. Olney, "looking at them scientifically," finds that although these "secondary Irish" might *look* nothing like the "strong, sturdy, old-world peasants" of the previous generation, they still *sound* as "Old World" as ever: "their voices were at once coarse and weak."²³¹ Listening to their noise and commotion – which is said to "vex the ghost of our poor old Puritan Sabbath" – Dr. Olney finds himself doubting whether these Irish will ever join "the elder American race."²³² After trying and failing to understand their accents (represented on the page through heavy eye-dialect like "ahl right," "wahsn't," and "annyway"), Dr. Olney concludes that "they seem more foreign to our intelligence, our way of thinking, than the Jews – or the negroes even."²³³

As Dr. Olney's conclusion suggests, Howells would soon become fascinated by a different kind of domestic foreigner altogether: the "American Negro" of "pure African type."²³⁴ In the 1880s, Howells's encounter with Spies had forced him to conclude that the logic of nation and the logic of class could never be reconciled; in the 1890s, his encounter with Paul Laurence Dunbar made him cling to the desperate hope that the logic of nation and the logic of race *could*

somehow be reconciled. For the time being, however, Howells's most pressing problem was that he had diagnosed, with perfect accuracy, why the "proletarian type" could never count as an "American type" – but he could not begin to imagine what might be done about it.²³⁵

D. Altruria, the Arbeiter Zeitung, and a Socialism “wholly without ‘tendentiousness’”

Despite his best efforts to kill off a fictionalized version of Spies, Howells continued to be plagued by the political problem that Spies represented – namely, that a politics grounded in class difference would always threaten the sense of national belonging he held so dear. As the decade of the 1890s unfolded, he became increasingly plagued by an accompanying literary problem – namely, that the effort to make dialect sound more and more natural was, contrary to all his expectations, producing printed accents that looked more artificial than ever. As writers put more effort into imitating specific phonemes, readers had to expend more effort on deciphering the idiosyncratic misspellings on the page. Back in 1878, Howells may have been able to treat the difference between “natural” and “artificial” accents as self-evident, but by 1895 he was forced to admit that efforts to transcribe the American language “naturally, or as we speak it” had led to an untenable situation: “the general reader... fancies dialect an invention of the author’s to harass and perplex him.”²³⁶ Under these circumstances, Howells’s commitment to natural-sounding speech would, paradoxically enough, require a high degree of artifice: “consider how little dialect [you] can get on with,” Howells advised authors; aim for an “aesthetic anesthetic” that might “palliate the worst immediate effects of the dialect” and “carry the general reader through... in a state of unconsciousness.”²³⁷ Coming from the man who had always claimed that nothing could be more charming than discovering a new variety of printed speech, this sudden call for concealment was striking.

A Hazard of New Fortunes had left Howells struggling with a two-pronged problem: in the future, American literature would have to find some means of escaping Lindau’s speech, both in terms of its socialist critique *and* its dense indecipherability. It was precisely this challenge

that inspired Howells to write *A Traveler from Altruria* (serialized 1892-1893; published 1894), which represents his take on the genre of the socialist utopian novel (which had become surprisingly popular at the time, thanks to the success of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888)). Howells began *Altruria* the instant he wrapped up *Hazard* (1891) and *An Imperative Duty* (1891-1892), which tells us something about his sense of urgency. Howells's fantasy of a socialist utopia turns out to be a world in which no one sounds the slightest bit like Lindau. Mr. Homos, the "traveler from Altruria" himself, is said to speak "in very good English, but with an accent," a characterization that could have been lifted straight from newspaper coverage of Spies.²³⁸ Yet despite sounding just like Spies, Mr. Homos turns out to speak nothing like him. As Mr. Homos patiently explains to the Americans who gather to gawk at him, in Altruria, the revolution (or rather "Evolution") came about "without a drop of bloodshed" when the "leaders of the proletariat ceased to counsel strikes, or any form of resistance... against the government," at which point they were able to "vote their ideas into laws" in one "great, peaceful campaign."²³⁹ In other words, the version of socialism that Mr. Homos is peddling is as "inoffensive" as Howells can possibly make it.²⁴⁰

For all Mr. Homos protests to his American audience that he is a "foreigner," "so alien to you in all the traditions and habitudes that I find it very difficult to get on common ground with you," he inspires a surprising degree of "respect" and "gentle bonhomie," even when he is talking to "bloated bond-holder" "banker" types.²⁴¹ The reason his audience is so easily convinced is because what Mr. Homos is advocating is simply anarchist ends by American means: once the "workingmen stop fighting, and get down to voting," his listeners concede, well, "nothing can be more American than that."²⁴² It is hard to imagine anything more unlike Spies's account of "class struggle," which cannot be fought without "riots and bloodshed." As Spies

insisted at his trial, “I should like it better if it could be done without violence, but you, gentlemen, and the class you represent, take care that it cannot be accomplished otherwise.”²⁴³ If, in Howells’s mind, Spies sounded far too much like a good American to be spouting such un-American ideas, then Mr. Homos serves as a kind of historical corrective: here, at last, we have a socialist who sounds like a good American in *every* sense of the phrase – indeed so much so that every time Mr. Homos addresses the public, he gets suspected of being “an American in disguise.”²⁴⁴ If Lindau is Howells’s version of a Spies who actually deserved execution, Mr. Homos is his version of a Spies who deserved nothing of the kind. The absolute clarity of Mr. Homos’s speech represents Howells’s fantasy of an America whose democratic pull was so powerful that there was no antagonism it could not overcome – not even the most radical antagonism of class division.

Of course, the fact that Howells doesn’t even try to give us Mr. Homos’s “accent” on the page tells us something about just how hard this fantasy was to sustain, even for someone like Howells. What he needed was a real-life Mr. Homos, as in someone who could deliver a suitably “inoffensive” version of socialism in a suitably American accent – and he found exactly what he was looking for in Abraham Cahan. We have already seen the way Cahan managed to give Howells a version of Mr. Homos’s *accent*: as foreign as Yekl’s dialect might sound, it is nevertheless an unmistakably American form of speech. What I want to call our attention to now is the way Cahan also manages to give Howells a version of Mr. Homos’s *politics*: Yekl’s “sweat-shop parlance” is, in essence, class warfare without the warfare.²⁴⁵ The “operatives of the cloak-shop” where Yekl works sound exactly the same as their “boss,” who hands out new commissions with the admonishment, “*Vell*, do you appreciate it at least?”²⁴⁶ In other words, the heavy Yiddish accent that *could* have been turned into a divisive class dialect is made to sound

like a unifying ethnic dialect instead. It is only because Jake and his boss, a “dwarfish little Jew,” share such a “strongly Semitic” heritage that they mangle their English phrases in exactly the same way: “it is *no used*, ” says the boss; “it is *nu used*, ” says Jake.²⁴⁷ No wonder that Jake is one of the boss’s “‘chance-mentshen,’ i.e., favorites.”²⁴⁸

That Cahan should have been the author enlisted to take the sting out of socialism for Howells may come as a surprise. After all, among scholars of Jewish-American letters, Cahan is best known as the founder of the *Forvertz*, a Yiddish-language socialist paper that he ran for a whopping forty-three years (and did so, by all accounts, with a dictator’s iron fist). There, in 1911, he would boast that he had personally “turned the tide” for a number of unions through his “active support of [their] strike” in his paper: “by our daily bulletins we kept the masses in line until the final victory, by which conditions were vastly improved, hours shortened, and wages raised.”²⁴⁹ Nor was Cahan new to labor organizing. As far back as 1890, we see him publishing socialist *Sedres* (sermons) in the voice of *Der prolitarischer magid* (the proletarian preacher):

'Va-yakel Moyshe': 'Moshe assembled the children of Israel and said to them, *sheyshes yomim tasu melokho*,' you shall not work for the bosses more than six days a week, the seventh day you shall rest... But what is actually the case? The children of Israel work eighteen hours a day... and have no *shabes*, and no Sunday off. Ay, you may ask, can't they die from exhaustion? Indeed, die they do. But there is one commandment they do fulfill: Moses tells them in today's *sedre* that on the seventh day they shall not light fire. This they observe an entire week: there is nothing to cook, thank God, and no fire to cook with.”²⁵⁰

As Cahan’s colloquial style suggests (even in translation), he was a fervent believer in “writing Yiddish the way people spoke it.”²⁵¹ He wanted to reach not just the educated elite, who were accustomed to a more conventional *daytschmerisch* (Germanized) style, but also the Jewish working masses, who were more likely to hail from Lithuania or Belarus than from Berlin or Vienna. It should come as no surprise, then, that Cahan admired Howells, and Howells’s dialect project, greatly. In 1889, he even published a panegyric to Howells in the *Workman’s Advocate*,

in which he not only calls Howells a “true realist,” but also adds that Howells’s “fidelity to the real” means that – whatever he might publicly profess to believe – he “cannot help embodying” socialist ideals in his novels.²⁵²

So when Howells and Cahan met in 1892, they both thought they were meeting someone that they had long been dying to talk to. In a perfect twist of fate, Howells would never have reached out to Cahan at all if he hadn’t been conducting research for the manuscript that would become *A Traveler from Altruria*. Howells wanted to interview Cahan to get a perspective from one of New York’s most prominent labor organizers (or “walking-delegate[s],” as *Altruria* calls the “source of the discontent among our proletariat”).²⁵³ He was astonished to learn that Cahan wrote fiction, and even more astonished to find his fiction so palatable: “He is a Socialist, but his fiction is wholly without ‘tendentiousness,’” he gushed.²⁵⁴ Cahan, for his part, was more than willing to tweak his fiction to suit the great editor’s tastes, especially if it was supposed to help him appeal to a mass American audience. So while Jake, like Cahan, does belong to a union, he is also so chummy with his boss that his collective bargaining efforts sound more like a party than a protest: “Jake and his shopmates had warded off a reduction of wages by threatening a strike, and were accordingly in high feather.”²⁵⁵ Howells found this all very patriotic: Cahan’s protagonist may have still been “very anxious to be Americanized in every way,” he wrote, but Cahan himself was “already thoroughly naturalized to our point of view: he sees things with American eyes.”²⁵⁶

Howells might as well have said that for all his rabble-rousing, Cahan *doesn’t* see the world with socialist eyes – or at least, that he shuts those socialist eyes when he is writing to suit an American audience. It is only because Cahan stops railing against “the bosses” in his colloquial Yiddish, and starts writing about agreeable little “Jewish sweat-shops” in his

colloquial Yiddish-American dialect instead, that Howells is willing to declare him America's foremost "rising star of realism."²⁵⁷ In Howells's estimation, Yekl has nothing in common with Lindau, the "poor man" of the "tenements;" instead, he is a proud member of the "Hebraic race," whose life in New York "all passes in the region of Hester Street" (the hub of Ashkenazi immigrant culture at the turn of the century).²⁵⁸ In Yekl's mouth, working-class speech turns into an ethnic dialect, which is to say, a kind of hyper-localized regional dialect – in other words, just another harmless version of speaking American. Hence why Howells goes into such ecstasies over Cahan's "English," calling it, "in its simplicity and its purity... simply marvelous."²⁵⁹ As we well know by now, no one has ever agreed with Howells about the "purity" of Yekl's language; most find it awkward, if not outright embarrassing. It is only in comparison to Lindau that Yekl sounds like a perfect marvel of "simplicity."

What is especially fortuitous for Howells in this moment is that *Altruria*, the novel he devoted to his fantasies of escaping Lindau's mangled speech, wound up introducing him to a real-life alternative to that speech in the form of Cahan. Howells's luck turned out to be Cahan's misfortune: even as Howells embraced *Yekl* as the future of American literature, Cahan grew to regret ever writing it. Before they met, Cahan had been so convinced that Howells was secretly a fellow-socialist that he had translated parts of *Altruria* into Yiddish for the *Arbeiter Zeitung*. In the end, however, it was Howells who managed to convert Cahan into a fellow-American instead. By 1917, we find a contrite Cahan apologizing to the postmaster general for having dared to oppose America's entry into World War I, insisting that it has always been "the policy of the Jewish Daily Forward... to stand for strict obedience to the laws of the land," and assuring the officer that he would "permit nothing to be done that may be interpreted as advocating or encouraging disobedience or defiance in any shape, way or form of any law promulgated by the

government of the United States.”²⁶⁰ Of course, Cahan had good legal reasons for writing this pledge of allegiance: he needed to preserve the *Forvertz*’s second-class mailing privileges or else the magazine would go bankrupt. In this sense, it is possible to argue that the Cahan now prostrating himself before the “government of the United States” is the same Cahan who once railed against that government as *Der proletarischer magid*: his central aim was still to reach to as many working-class readers as he could. At the same time, it is also possible to argue – as indeed a number of critics persuasively have – that Cahan grew far more conservative over the course of his career than his admirers on the left have ever been willing to acknowledge.²⁶¹

What we can say with confidence is that nothing could have delighted Howells more than hearing that Cahan’s paper – one of the most widely circulated socialist dailies in the country – had come to swear its “strict obedience to the law of the land” and its undying allegiance to the “government of the United States.” When he first read Cahan’s ethnic dialect, Howells was so excited that he naively assumed that all the problems facing dialect had been resolved. So confident was he that he paired his overly effusive review of *Yekl* in the *New York World* with an equally enthusiastic review of Stephen Crane’s *Maggie*, another novel about “New York Low Life in Fiction” that seemed to feature surprisingly easy-to-read immigrant accents. In his evaluation of *Maggie*, however, Howells notes – as if in passing – that Crane’s dialect leaves him with an inexplicable sense of “decay.” And given that it was precisely this sense of “decay” that had filled March with such dread in Lindau’s tenement, it is safe for us to assume that Howells’s problems had, in fact, just begun.

CHAPTER 3

3. “Language itself seems to decay”: Stephen Crane’s *Maggie* and the Death of Dialect

The future of American literature, Howells was now convinced, depended on applying Abraham Cahan’s model to each of America’s ethnic immigrant communities in turn. The setting for such a project would obviously have to be New York – that Babel of a city so filled with foreign speech that even Howells was made uneasy by the “unintelligible dialect” of the “vast hive of populations swarming... on the West Side.”²⁶² Once Cahan had demonstrated that immigrant accents could indeed be domesticated, however, Howells redoubled his efforts, “as a very interested spectator of New York,” to support the “growth of our literature in Americanism” and make its “fidelity to our decentralized life... a little more constant” by getting all of New York’s ethnic dialects into print.²⁶³ To date, writers had been “rather late in striking this ungainly metropolis,” but that just “left the field open for others” to “go further” in documenting all the city’s “East-Side types—Irish, German, negro, and Italian.”²⁶⁴ Howells’s parallel syntax here is instructive: for a “German” dialect and a “negro” dialect to count equally toward a work’s “Americanism,” then an immigrant accent (like Cahan’s) and a racial accent (like Dunbar’s) would have to count as interchangeable versions of speaking like a good American, just like regional accents from Mississippi to Maine already did.

Thus to claim that for Howells, the “New York ghetto might constitute a region, indeed might seem as regional... as the American Southwest,” is almost understating the case.²⁶⁵ Howells wanted nothing so much as *to constitute* New York as a region – that is, to turn the kind of speech whose “pronunciation” had been so dangerously “corrupted by the mixture of races in the poorer quarter” into the kind of harmless regional dialect that could join the American chorus.²⁶⁶ If the “rank life of that mixture [of races]” had come to produce “phrases in the streets

of New York” that were “as strange” to the native-born listener “as some whose speakers did not believe themselves to be speaking English,” then, Howells was sure, it was now more urgent than ever for dialect writers to try to domesticate New York’s strangest phrases in print, because the only way to render them familiar was by turning them into analogues for the country’s best-known regional dialects.²⁶⁷ This is why the turn of the century found Howells, in essay after essay, compulsively rehearsing his account of dialect’s literary history in explicitly geographic terms: Howells wanted to ensure that dialect literature made the transition from the Western frontier of Bret Harte to the final frontier of New York City.

Howells’s literary ambitions for New York led him to pair two authors that only he could have ever thought to put together – Abraham Cahan and Stephen Crane – in a double review entitled “New York Low Life in Fiction,” which ran in the *New York World* on July 28, 1896. Although the two authors in question had received wildly different critical receptions (most readers had never heard of Cahan, while Crane was only too notorious), they were linked in Howells’s mind because he thought of both as equally representative of the “attempt to represent the life of our streets,” as in “the parlance of the class” of those streets.²⁶⁸ Of course, I have already discussed Howells’s enthusiasm for Cahan at length, but what I want to emphasize now is what it means that so few literary critics have devoted equal attention to *both* halves of this review. Scholars of Jewish-American literature only seem to care about Howells’s exuberant praise for Cahan; scholars of literary naturalism (and literary modernism) only seem to care about Howells’s rather more complicated response to Crane. So extreme is this division that it is almost impossible to find a reprint of “New York Low Life in Fiction” that does not leave out one author or the other. Siloing Cahan in this way has come at a real cost to literary criticism. It is only in the context of Howells’s overly effusive praise for Cahan that we can begin to make

sense of his thoroughly ambivalent response to the author that most critics are more familiar with today.

Most readers of “New York Low Life in Fiction” tend to assume that Howells’s objection to Crane was the same as every other critic of his era: the “impossibility to cultured ears of a parlance whose texture is so largely profanity,” as Howells himself put it.²⁶⁹ Certainly Howells has developed a kind of critical notoriety as an old-fashioned prude. As I discussed in chapter 2, however, Howells was actually far less squeamish about profanity than most publishers of his era: back in 1870, he had been willing to defend the “racy savor” of Bret Harte’s tale of bastardry when no one else would come near it.²⁷⁰ Now, in 1896, Howells proved just as willing to defend Crane’s “damns and curse yehs,” insisting to “cultured ears” that they were just like what “may be heard by any listener in the streets of certain quarters of the city.”²⁷¹ After all, for Howells, fidelity to life always took first priority: if indeed “that is the way they *talk*,” he argued, then Crane had no choice but to obey the “fealty of his own nature” and “report them as they spoke no less than as they looked.”²⁷² When Crane found himself struggling to defend his novel against charges of obscenity, he realized just how much he needed Howells’s protection. In Crane’s own words,

“Maggie”... made me the friendship of Hamlin Garland and W. D. Howells, and the one thing that makes my life worth living in the midst of all this abuse and ridicule is the consciousness that never for an instant have those friendships at all diminished.²⁷³

Howells, for his part, could certainly understand why so many would have been so put off by Crane’s blasphemous language; he may have even sympathized with their outrage. so long as Crane’s subject was the “inarticulate and blasphemous life” of New York’s “semi-savage poor,” however, Howells would continue to defend Crane’s language as the “aspect and accent as well as the spirit of the tragically squalid life he sang.”²⁷⁴

For Howells did consider *Maggie* a masterpiece of realism, calling it “a wonderful book,” simply “splendid,” the “best thing [Crane] did” in his entire career.²⁷⁵ It is *Maggie*’s dialect, naturally, that draws Howells’s praise: he calls it the “best tough dialect which has yet found its way into print,” celebrating its literary-historical significance as the first true “New York dialect” in American fiction (*Yekl*’s dialect, in comparison, is merely a “jargon”).²⁷⁶ Howells even ranks Crane above Mark Twain, whose dialect tales he considered of the highest “capital quality,” insisting, “Mr. Crane can do things that Clemens can’t.”²⁷⁷ Strangely enough, however, it is Cahan’s work that Howells insists most “merits recognition,” and Crane’s, conversely, that “will probably remain unknown.”²⁷⁸ If anyone could have had a hand in influencing which author would become more famous, of course, it would have been Howells, which is why it is so striking to see him doing everything he can to promote Cahan’s success. Even as he more or less tacitly acknowledges Crane as the better writer, he dismisses Crane’s novel as “hopeless” and “tragical,” focusing instead on Cahan’s novel, which he finds much more “charming.” *Yekl* is “not only delightful in itself but in its promise of future work,” Howells insists, which means that Cahan has “bound himself by the very excellence of what he has done to do much more that is better still.”²⁷⁹ It is as if Howells is playing at being an investor, and has decided, for his own personal reasons, to short-sell Crane and place a futures contract on Cahan.

We can start to get a sense of what those reasons might be from Howells’s rhetoric, which pits “hopeless” Crane against “charming” Cahan in a battle over the “final language [to be] spoken by the New Yorker” in the future.²⁸⁰ His review transitions directly from the fear that *Maggie* inspires on this front (“with the mixture of races the spoken tongue may be a thing composite and strange beyond our present knowledge”) to the hope that *Yekl* offers instead (“perhaps we shall have a New York jargon... interlarded with Russian, Polish, and German

words, as their present jargon is... with American slang”).²⁸¹ As I discussed in my previous chapter, Cahan’s dialect played a major role in reassuring Howells that even the most “composite and strange” sounding foreign vocabulary could be accommodated within the American language as trendy new slang words. In the case of *Yekl*, Cahan happened to have captured American words in immigrant mouths rather than the other way around (acting “*chicken*,” talking “*shop*,” etc.), but it wasn’t at all far-fetched for Howells to predict that the Yiddish spoken by immigrants like Cahan would soon be infiltrating American speech in return (*schtick*, *schlep*, *schmooze*, *schmuck*, etc.).²⁸²

Cahan’s dialect made it seem like foreign-born immigrants and native-born Americans would inevitably start to sound more and more like one another; Crane’s dialect made it seem like immigrants would never start to sound even the slightest bit less foreign. As Howells famously said of Crane’s characters, “they are almost inarticulate; not merely the grammar, but the language itself, decays in their speech.”²⁸³ Howells tried to make sense of Crane’s strangely decaying dialect by drawing attention to the kind of exaggerated misspellings he had always associated with artificiality: he notes, for instance, that in *Maggie*, the “Theta sound, so characteristic of English, disappears altogether, and the vowels tend to lose themselves in the obscure note heard in fur and stir.”²⁸⁴ Howells’s linguistic analysis is true enough, as far as it goes, but what he doesn’t seem able or willing to acknowledge is that Cahan’s characters speak exactly the same way. Yekl repeatedly mispronounces “that’s all” as “*dot’sh ull*”²⁸⁵ – dropping the theta, swallowing the vowel, and lisping the sibilant besides. The same kind of phonetic spelling that seems “marvelous” to Howells when it appears in *Yekl* strikes him as “inarticulate” when it shows up in *Maggie*, even if Howells himself struggles to articulate exactly why.

The best way to make sense of Howells's tortured response to Crane is to remember that Howells had always imagined dialect as a kind of living force: printed accents were the "language of our life," "our decentralized life," "our national life," the "life of... our own soil," which meant that when these accents were captured in print, they became the very "life of literature."²⁸⁶ As I discussed in my previous chapter, after the Haymarket trial had turned August Spies's foreign accent into an automatic death sentence, Howells became even more committed to the notion that American speech was tantamount to American life. He called dialect "life talk," the "life that language has on the lips of men," indeed the very opposite of "lifeless paraphrase."²⁸⁷ All of his *jus soli* rhetoric about printed accents growing and flowering so naturally in America depended on the fantastical notion that dialect could almost literally breathe life onto the page. Yet when Howells tries to read Crane's accomplishment in these terms – as a "study of East Side life," as the "life of our streets," as "New York low life in fiction" – all he can seem to see is death: "language itself... decays in their speech." To Howells's dismay, Crane's dialect made language look not like it was living but like it was dying.

Howells's logic here relies on the series of cascading assumptions I have been tracing throughout this entire dissertation. To sum up: the dialect movement was in existential crisis ("the disgust for 'dialect' has overtaken the general reader").²⁸⁸ Howells's strategy to keep dialect literature going involved defending "genuine" dialects ("carefully distinguished local accents") against "artificial" ones ("grotesque orthography").²⁸⁹ Genuine dialects could stand in for America because they grew so organically out of local conditions, as if they had sprouted straight from the soil ("characteristic American literature" meant that "the cotton-boll has broken into speech").²⁹⁰ Artificial dialects could never stand in for America because they were stereotyped exaggerations created by outsiders ("the trick of grotesque orthography was the

invention of Thackeray”).²⁹¹ *A Hazard of New Fortunes* lays out the whole schema: the German immigrant Lindau speaks an artificial dialect; the Pennsylvania-Dutch native Dryfoos speaks a genuine one. You can tell because Dryfoos sounds so natural (“it ain’t any use to try to stop a thing like that”), and Lindau sounds so stilted (“No bension of mine was efer fetoedt”).²⁹²

The problem Howells now suddenly ran into was that Crane refused to be categorized as either “natural” or “artificial.” Crane’s dialect is as genuine as could be – Howells calls it the “absolute slave of reality” – and yet somehow, it doesn’t *sound* natural to him at all.²⁹³ On the contrary: it strikes him as “inarticulate,” “obscure,” and “strange.” The irony here is that, by most measures, Crane’s dialect is far easier to decipher than Cahan’s. In *Maggie*, a phrase like “Git deh hell outa here,” for instance, contains more phonetically spelled words than standard ones, but there’s no confusion as to what it’s supposed to mean.²⁹⁴ Crane’s dialect seems like it should be the perfect embodiment of Howells’s dialect ideal: an “aesthetic anesthetic” that could be apprehended by the reader intuitively, as if “in a state of unconsciousness.”²⁹⁵ That Howells experienced it as very much the opposite demonstrates that his “aesthetic anesthetic” was about much more than just spelling.

Howells’s conception of American literature was grounded in the premise that writers could absorb dialect directly from their local surroundings, without any deliberate effort to “try to write Americanly.”²⁹⁶ It was precisely because he imagined dialect as a natural language in every sense of the word – inevitable, irrepressible, indexical – that he could theorize it as the mode giving form to actual American life. Yet for writers, Howells’s conception of dialect produced a set of impossible demands. If they simplified their phonetic spelling to make it easier to read, they would be accused of inauthenticity. If they tried to render phonetic speech exactly as it sounded out loud, the result would be all but illegible on the page. The very attempt to

sound natural only made dialect seem more artificial, stilted, and manufactured than ever. Essentially, the problem was that experiencing dialect with one's eyes was far more disruptive than experiencing it with one's ears. As Howells put it, the "general reader... rarely notices peculiarities in the speech of people about him, and so fancies [written] dialect an invention of the author's to harass and perplex him."²⁹⁷ On the one hand, he advised writers to use dialect "unsparingly" whenever it allowed them to capture "a precious artistic effect;" on the other hand, he insisted that remaining "friends" with the "general reader" meant seeing "how little dialect you can get on with."²⁹⁸ After all, if writers failed to strike the right balance, regardless of whether they used too much phonetic spelling or too little, the onomatopoetic conceit would fall apart: readers, instead of absorbing dialect "in a state of unconsciousness," would become all too conscious of the writer's deliberate efforts to craft something that would appeal to them. This was especially true in the 1890s, when years of wading through dialect had left readers so exhausted that they had come to find the slightest misspelling repellent.

Howells was becoming increasingly convinced that what dialect needed was to somehow escape the problem of consciousness altogether. "Where [dialect] has been unconscious," he mused in 1895, "it has been perhaps all the more genuine."²⁹⁹ If anything, he was understating the case: dialect *had* to be absorbed unconsciously, along every link in the chain (soil, speaker, writer, reader), if it were to succeed in bringing "life of... our soil" onto the page. If anyone were to look too closely into the transformation of "our national life" into "the life of our literature," and realize just how much work went into constructing the illusion of national belonging, then the metaphysical spell of *jus soli* would be broken. Hence why Howells repeatedly urged American novelists to abandon "literary consciousness," and instead write as "unconsciously" as they possibly could.³⁰⁰ His ideal was the "modern book so unconscious" that "there is no thought

of style,” “no more attempt at... ceremonious prose,” “not a moment wasted in preening and prettifying.”³⁰¹

In fact, Howells was far from the first figure in American letters to be drawn to the idea of writing without any conscious attempt to control what emerged. The prominent American psychologist William James (or “my dear James,” as Howells called him),³⁰² claimed in 1889 that “writing automatically” was not only possible but scientifically verifiable, in the sense that the automatic writer’s “hand-consciousness” became so far removed from normal awareness that they could no longer feel a pinprick: “*the hand and the arm of the automatic writer are (in certain instances) anesthetic.*”³⁰³ Of course, what James meant when he referred to an “automatic consciousness” was far more extreme than anything Howells intended for the dialect writer to cultivate. All the same, Howells was clearly interested in “instantaneous mental processes,” such as the question of “just where the will-power comes from when you wink your eye, or wiggle your little finger.”³⁰⁴ He was just as deeply invested in making dialect as “unconscious” as it needed to be for audiences to forget that anyone had exercised any volition in transcribing it at all. What Howells wanted, in other words, was a version of dialect that worked like automatism. As per usual, Howells’s disciple, Hamlin Garland, made the case for automatism even more explicitly: if the world was to believe that dialect “means a statement of life as indigenous as the plant-growth,” then inevitably “it must go in, it *will* go in, because the writer [who] naturally carries it with him half unconsciously” surely could “not stop to think whether it will interest the reader or not.”³⁰⁵ Writing like a “born American,” it turns out, required rendering phonemes so unthinkingly, so instinctually, that no one could possibly imagine there had been any choice in the matter at all.³⁰⁶

When Howells calls Crane the “absolute slave of reality,” it is because he thinks Crane has finally managed to record dialect as if he were a complete automaton. We have already seen him defend Crane’s profanity in very similar terms: Crane didn’t *decide* to make his characters say “damn,” Howells insisted; he was simply “forced through the fealty of his own nature” to “render an absolute devotion from an absolute knowledge.”³⁰⁷ As it turns out, the problem for Howells wasn’t that he was wrong about Crane; it was that he was exactly right. Crane’s dialect disorients him not because it is *unnatural*, but rather because it is *too* natural, *too* indexical, *too* purely automatic. Crane’s characters speak so unthinkingly that their talk turns into nothing more than a bodily reflex, like a cough or a moan. Their conversation reads like a parody of automatism, composed of mindless phrases repeated so relentlessly that everyone starts to sound like a broken record. Take when Pete brags to Jimmie about his prowess as a bouncer:

I says: 'Git deh hell outa here an' don' make no trouble,' I says like dat! See? 'Git deh hell outa here an' don' make no trouble'; like dat. 'Git deh hell outa here,' I says. See?"...

'Deh hell,' I says. Like dat! 'Deh hell,' I says. See? 'Don' make no trouble,' I says. Like dat. 'Don' make no trouble.' See?...

Dat's what I says teh dem: 'Don' come in here an' make no trouble,' I says, like dat. 'Don' make no trouble.' See?³⁰⁸

Pete’s response is utterly rote, devoid of the slightest trace of planning or premeditation. Its very repetitiveness is a sign that he could not have possibly helped saying these exact things under these exact circumstances. He speaks as a Bowery man, in a Bowery tenement, about distinctly Bowery concerns. Crane literalizes what it would look like to let a locality speak, and the result is the exact opposite of what Howells had anticipated: no matter how natural one of Crane’s phrases might look the first time we encounter it, by the time we see it printed for the third or fourth time in a row, we can’t help but be reminded that we have just seen the exact same configuration of letters on the page. Once recycled so obsessively, these dialect phrases

essentially stop functioning as onomatopoetic devices at all. The phonetic spelling of a phrase like “Git deh hell outa here” may invite us to imagine the way the phrase might have sounded out loud, but its repetition recalls us to the act of reading, drawing our attention to words we are experiencing with our eyes rather than our ears. Even Pete’s refrain is “See?... See?... See?” It’s as if Crane is actively reminding us that we are reading lines on the page, where we can see for ourselves how strange *any* word looks once it is written out over and over, let alone words spelled in such an idiosyncratic way. As Howells’s psychologist friend William James would have put it, any time “we look at an isolated printed word and repeat it long enough, it ends by assuming an entirely unnatural aspect.”³⁰⁹ Howells’s highest dialect ideal (“aesthetic anaesthetic”) has been transformed into his worst dialect nightmare (“wanton distortion”) – not because Crane betrayed his instructions, but because he followed them all too well.

Crane’s emphasis on *seeing* strikes at the fundamental paradox of dialect: transliterated spelling calls the reader’s attention, by definition, to the visual appearance of the words and letters on the page. Yet for dialect to succeed – for it to sound “natural” – the reader has to be prevented from focusing on the deliberate misspellings that look so strange on the page. By the 1890s, the absurd premise that dialect could somehow be *read* without being *seen* had become all but untenable. Crane’s solution was to expose what it had become impossible any longer to deny: that dialect, by definition, was designed to be *looked at*. His unmistakably repetitive dialect confronts the reader with the bare fact of its printedness, which frees Crane from the impossible burden of trying to prove that his dialect had been composed without the slightest consideration of how it would be experienced by the reader.

That Crane’s prose insists upon its own writtenness has long been the argument of art historian Michael Fried, who claims that Crane’s project was governed, above all, by the

“problematic of the *materiality* of writing.”³¹⁰ By this, Fried means the difficulty of trying to recreate a sensory experience, like seeing a face or hearing a voice, within a print medium that cannot possibly map onto that experience in an illusionistic way.³¹¹ According to Fried, the “ultimate impossibility” of ‘seeing’ through print came to pose a particular problem for literary impressionists like Crane, who were motivated by the desire, “before all, to make the reader see.”³¹² Fried argues that the “deeply conflictual nature” of Crane’s literary impressionism drives him to create a body of work that “*obsessively and multifariously thematizes writing*,” as in the “fear of writing, by which I mean a fear of being forced to acknowledge... the reality of the text as writing.”³¹³ In Fried’s account, Crane’s work both constantly evokes, *and* constantly represses, the material constraints of writing that made literary impressionism such a fraught project: ink (figured as smoke, blood, disfigurement); paper (figured as flat earth, empty skies, upturned faces); letters (figured as lines of ants or marching soldiers), etc. Some might find it implausible, of course, to find irruptions of the “scene of writing” lurking behind Crane’s every word, but even those who remain unconvinced by Fried’s psychological symbolism can acknowledge the fundamental insight of his reading: Crane’s prose both foregrounds the materiality of writing, on the one hand, and continues to operate as a believable representation of sensory experience, on the other.

Almost a century before Fried would publish his provocative account of Crane, Howells himself anticipated precisely this sense that Crane’s prose has both a high degree of verisimilitude *and* a high degree of artifice. It is striking, in fact, how similar Howells and Fried sound when they talk about Crane: Howells claims that “the effort to imagine, to divine, and then to express ends often in a huddled and confused effect;” Fried, meanwhile, argues that Crane’s “major emphasis on acts of *seeing*” makes it all but impossible to come up with any “coherent

totalizing interpretation” of his narratives.³¹⁴ Like Howells, who struggled to understand his own reaction to Crane’s “composite and strange” language, Fried finds himself “simultaneously fascinated and horrified” by Crane’s “bizarre,” “almost insane” prose style.³¹⁵ “The Crane essay,” he confesses, “came as a surprise,” especially since he had set out to write about a different subject entirely (i.e., the realist painter Thomas Eakins).³¹⁶ All he knows is that “from the first,” his encounter with Crane left him “swept away, dazzled, stunned, as by the most incandescent poetry – I had never imagined that prose could do what Crane’s so palpably did.”³¹⁷

That Fried should have been so surprised by his sudden obsession with Crane is, in my mind, entirely a function of how he came to the text: as an art historian, his focus is “chiefly visual” (colors and shapes, figures and faces, lines of sight, spatial configurations, etc.).³¹⁸ Because of this, he takes only a passing interest in Crane’s dialect, grouping it in with an “entire battery of specific textual effects” through which “an initial foregrounding of the signifier is more or less instantaneously subsumed in a powerful representational effect.”³¹⁹ When we approach Crane from Howells’s perspective, however, what stands out immediately is how forcefully Crane’s dialect actually *resists* being subsumed. For reasons Howells could not understand, Crane’s dialect simply refuses to be absorbed as easily as a dialect marred by so few misspellings should be. It seems “composite and strange” because it gives us a totally believable version of naturalism that nevertheless calls attention to its own artificiality.

It is this dialectic – naturalism vs. artfulness – that drew Fried to Crane to begin with, and in particular to some of Crane’s most astonishingly “visual” narratives: “The Upturned Face” (1900), “An Experiment in Misery” (1900), “Death and the Child” (1897), and “The Monster” (1898). What matters about *Maggie* (1893) is that it allowed Crane to work through this natural-artificial dialectic in specifically *aural* terms, years before he developed his more mature prose

style as a literary impressionist. It was only because Howells was so obsessed with dialect that he was able to see the same thing in Crane that Fried saw, which is to say, Crane's *unnaturalism*. Of course, because Howells was so invested in the question of natural-sounding speech, what filled Fried with delight filled him with despair. Yet the irony is that Howells's overwhelmingly negative response turns out to explain Fried's overwhelmingly positive one – not because of Howells's concern with dialect, which does not interest Fried, but because of Howells's concern with absorptiveness, which very much *does*. When we remember that Fried was one of the first critics to write about absorption and theatricality in regard to the history of realism, it suddenly makes perfect sense why he would have found himself so “irresistibly” drawn to Crane.

Absorption, as Fried characterizes it, is the principle that a painting should be so antitheatrical – as in so oblivious, unselfconscious, and self-contained – that viewers would be able to lose themselves completely in their contemplation in it. In Friedean terms, then, Howells's dialect crisis is an absorptive crisis in the sense that the late 19th-century reading public had begun to perceive dialect as being directed *at them*, instead of seeing it as a natural, unconscious, reflexive gesture on the part of an authentically American author. Dialect could only do the work of *jus soli* if it seemed to flow from the soil onto the page of its own accord. That Howells's solution was the kind of “aesthetic anesthetic” associated with the phenomenon of automatism aligns his account of dialect literature with Fried's account of French realist painting. According to Fried, French painters in pursuit of realistic effects grew so desperate for “ever more intense and specific manifestations of absorption” that they began to “analogize everything that [was] unconscious or... automatic” about the enterprise of painting itself.³²⁰ In other words, however idiosyncratic Howells's account of American literature may have been, his

account of dialect turns out to be totally in line with the larger problematic of absorption in the history of realism.

Once we understand Howells's project in absorptive terms, we can see that Fried's interest in Crane reproduces, in effect, his interest in Edouard Manet, albeit in a very different register. Like Crane, Manet found himself confronting a "crisis" in the "antitheatrical tradition" in which maintaining the "supreme fiction" that the audience for a work of art did not exist had become all but untenable.³²¹ Unlike the realist painters who turned toward automatism as the solution, however, Manet's solution was to "make the painting in its entirety... *face* the beholder as never before," an effort that was "at once theatrical and antitheatrical" because it was so clearly addressed toward the abstract notion of *being looked at*, rather than toward the individual person doing the looking.³²² Manet's "radicalization of theatricality" inevitably produced a sense of "disorientation": critics sensed that his artwork refused to be read in absorptive terms, but could not figure out why.³²³ Howells, as we know, was equally disoriented by Crane's unprecedented prose style (which even a sympathetic critic like Hamlin Garland found "singularly creative," indeed too "singular" to "easily understand or measure").³²⁴ However absorptive Crane's dialect might have appeared to Howells at first ("the absolute slave of reality"), its relentless repetition forced Howells to confront the bare letters marching before his eyes ("language itself decays").³²⁵ In Friedean terms, Howells was trying to make dialect seem fully automatic; what Crane gave him was a dialect that radicalized the premise of automatism itself. When we look at Pete's mechanically reproduced speech on the page ("See?... See?... See?"), it becomes almost hard *not* to see Crane's dialect as a deliberate effort to confront the reader with the bare fact of its own printedness. As soon as we approach Crane in this way, we can appreciate why Fried would have been so "irresistibly" drawn to him: just as Manet's "pure

facingness” was essential to the origins of French pictorial modernism, Crane’s pure printedness was essential to the origins of American literary modernism.³²⁶

Howells could never have articulated his sense of Crane in these terms, of course, and yet his intuition that “language itself seems to decay” in Maggie’s mouth shows his awareness that *Maggie* did indeed mark the end of a certain kind of literary naturalism. In Howells’s terms, Crane’s prose spelled the death of dialect – not by abandoning accents, as Howells had always feared, but by draining those accents of all life on the page. As we saw in “New York Low Life in Fiction,” it was hard for Howells to admit that he found *Maggie*’s dialect so lifeless, because it looked so similar to the kind of dialect that he was always trying to promote. He had no such difficulty condemning Crane’s next novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), which is much more blatant in its mind-numbing repetition of inane dialect phrases. Although the country seemed united in preferring Crane’s war novel over his notoriously sordid urban fiction, Howells refused to give up the fight. He insisted that *The Red Badge* “wronged the finer art” of *Maggie*, a work so “altogether superior” in its “representations of life” that its “greater fidelity cannot be questioned.”³²⁷ *The Red Badge*, in contrast, he calls “floundering,” “huddled,” and “confused.”³²⁸ Why? “The narration repeats itself.”³²⁹ Indeed it does— or to be more precise, the *dialogue* repeats itself. Every command gets “repeated up and down the line.”³³⁰ Every soldier can be counted on “to repeat a statement he had heard going from group to group.”³³¹ The onslaught starts with the first battle: first an infantryman shouts “Here they come! ... Here they come! Here they come!”; then the general cries, “You’ve got to hold ‘em back! ... you’ve got to hold ‘em back!”; and finally the colonel is literally reduced to a stammer: “A-all r-right, General, all right, by Gawd! We-we ‘ll do our—we-we ‘ll d-d-do-do our best, General.”³³² The soldiers seem doomed, like player pianos, to keep emitting the same preprogrammed phrases over and over

again. Everything they say gets “repeated in dismay,” or to put it more acutely, “repeated with desperate menace.”³³³

For such repetition *does* menace Howells’s most basic assumptions: that dialect captures “life talk” in all its “local” specificity. On Crane’s battlefield, there is not a shred of regional identity to be found. Both union and confederate soldiers call their comrades “good feller;” both union and confederate soldiers tell each other, “Ah, go t’ hell.”³³⁴ When everyone is made to pass around the exact same phrases, it becomes impossible to tell who might belong to the Army of Northern Virginia and who to “304th N’ York.”³³⁵ For Howells, the Civil War only mattered to literature because that was when the country suddenly started to care about the “varying accents of all the different sections – North, East, South, West, and Farthest West,” but there is no “north” and “south” in *The Red Badge of Courage* – quite literally, in that the words never appear in the novel.³³⁶ The soldiers are categorized only as “gray” or “blue,” and their native accents are as indistinguishable as the “gray mists” and “blue smoke” of the battlefield.³³⁷ The “carefully distinguished local accents” meant “to get the whole of American life into our fiction” have turned to death on the page instead.³³⁸

In *The Red Badge of Courage*, no one speaks more automatically than the dying soldier, who is quite literally unconscious of the words coming out of his mouth. When the youth comes across his wounded friend Jim Conklin, the “spectral soldier” who wanders “like one who goes to choose a grave,” Jim’s approaching demise turns both men into sad echoes of themselves.³³⁹ The youth is said to have “stuttered and stammered” the same syllables – “Oh, Jim – oh, Jim – oh, Jim –” – that farther down, he can “still” only mechanically repeat: “Oh, Jim – oh, Jim – oh, Jim –”³⁴⁰ Jim, meanwhile, is said to have “reiterated... in a bewildered way” how he got injured: “B’jiminey, I got shot – I got shot. Yes, b’jiminey, I got shot.”³⁴¹ The youth tries to help the

“doomed soldier” by insisting, “I ‘ll take care of yeh, Jim! I ‘ll take care of yeh! ... Yes – yes – I tell yeh – I’ll take care of yeh, Jim!”³⁴² But Jim is even more insistent in his refusals: “No – no – no – leave me be – leave me be – ... No – no – leave me be – leave me be –”; and again, “No – no – don’t tech me – leave me be – leave me be –”³⁴³ As the youth witnesses Jim’s death throes, described tellingly as a “spectacle of gradual strangulation,” they both repeat their lines one last time: “Jim – Jim – Jim –” and “Leave me be – don’t tech me – leave me be –”³⁴⁴ Finally, in an ironic reversal, after Jim dies at last, his lifeless cadaver seems as capable of speech as ever (“the mouth was open and the teeth showed in a laugh”), while it is the still-living youth who is struck dumb (“his tongue lay dead in the tomb of his mouth”).³⁴⁵ This perfect mirroring – Jim’s dying words, the youth’s deadened responses – makes it abundantly clear that Jim’s dialect is dying not because he is, but because it was already dead the moment it landed on the page.

Crane’s exhausting repetition of dialect phrases stages, as dramatically as possible, the futility of trying to turn dead letters into a form of living speech. His objection to dialect was precisely the same, in other words, as the one we saw Mark Twain making back in chapter one:

the moment ‘talk’ is put into print you recognize that it is not what it was when you hear it; you perceive that an immense something has disappeared from it. That is its soul. You have nothing but a dead carcass left on your hands.”³⁴⁶

What Twain managed so masterfully to disguise, Crane unabashedly lays bare: each of his repeated phrases becomes a figure for the inevitable death of speech on the page. In the aftermath of Jim Conklin’s death, we find yet another dying soldier “repeat[ing] dreamfully” to himself, “Well, he was a reg’lar jim-dandy fer nerve, wa’n’t he... A reg’lar jim-dandy... Well, he was a reg’lar jim-dandy... Well, he was a jim-dandy, wa’n’t ‘e?”³⁴⁷ It’s as if the real casualty of the scene is not, in fact, Jim Conklin, but the phrase used to sum up his sad existence: “a reg’lar jim-dandy.” If this colorful phrase had appeared only once, as it would have in any other work of

dialect fiction, it might have come across as vivid, lifelike, believable; but when it is repeated in this inane manner, it comes across as so lifeless that it becomes all but impossible for us to imagine that anyone could have ever really said such an absurd-sounding phrase out loud.

What is so striking about the *death of dialect* in Crane (as in phonetic phrases repeated until they lose all onomatopoeic power) is that it is figured quite literally as a *dialect of death* (as in vocalizations emitted reflexively by dying bodies). Nowhere does Crane lay this dynamic out more explicitly than in “An Experiment in Misery” (1895), which, far from coincidentally, was published the same year as *The Red Badge of Courage*. In this short tale, the protagonist – who is also referred to only as “the youth” – spends the night in a pitiable flophouse, where he finds himself haunted by the “strange effect of a graveyard where bodies were merely flung.”³⁴⁸ Not a single line of dialogue is exchanged over the course of this long night; instead, the men – or rather their “corpse-like” bodies – utter only “guttural cries, grunts, oaths.”³⁴⁹ The story’s climax comes when one of them “of a sudden began to utter long wails that went almost like yells from a hound, echoing wailfully and weird through this chill place of tombstones where men lay like the dead.”³⁵⁰ Crane’s strangely amorphous passive-voice construction (“that went almost like yells from a hound”) strips these wails of any conscious intention whatsoever, while his disconcertingly unfamiliar made-up adverb (“wails... echoing wailfully”), insists that they are nothing *but* wails, emerging unconsciously, from deathlike slumber, as a purely reflexive reaction to the stimulus of a nightmare. It is hard to imagine a purer form of automatism.

The denouement of “An Experiment in Misery” proceeds to spell out, quite literally, the devastating consequences of such automatism for dialect. In the morning, the youth escapes the dreadful flophouse where “men lay like the dead,” only to find himself pursued by a man the text refers to only as “the assassin,” who seems dead set on making sure his voice is heard: “I’ll be

hully, bloomin' blowed if there wasn't a feller with a nightshirt... Yessir! A nightshirt! A hully white nightshirt!... A hully, bloomin' white nightshirt!... A hully white nightshirt," he is said to have "continuously repeated," with "unnatural glee."³⁵¹ Crane's strangely spelled word, "hully," comes so close to a pure representation of sound that it is almost illegible on the page (wholly or holy? Or a pun on holey?). Repeating it so many times in a row is like the nail in the coffin: all this word serves to do is to remind the reader, over and over, that the print on the page has become all but incomprehensible. It is as if Crane's real "experiment" in "An Experiment in Misery" was to prove to Howells that automatically repeating speech on the page produced nothing but the "grim tragedy" of death in print.³⁵² It seems almost too perfect, for instance, that as the tale closes, we are told that, for "the youth," the "roar of the city in his ear was to him the confusion of strange tongues, babbling heedlessly."³⁵³ New York as babble, New York as Babel: just like Lindau and his "perfect Babel of strange tongues," Crane's characterization of the city could not be more calculated to prey upon Howells's worst fears.

All of this is to say that, properly speaking, Crane's dialect *does* embody Howells's ideal. It delivers an automatic and unadulterated transcription of pure auralness, only to force Howells to confront what such a dialect would actually look like. It is precisely because Crane's dialect is the most natural Howells has ever seen that it is also the most artificial one imaginable. In Friedean terms, Crane's mechanically repeated dialect – like the flat, confrontational stare of the barmaid in Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, which allegorizes the gaze of the beholder that it itself must confront – serves as a "real allegory" of its own production.³⁵⁴ This holds true regardless of whether or not Crane himself was aware of his own role in the dialectical undoing of dialect.. At the same time, there is compelling evidence that Crane thought deeply about the problematic of automatism in relation to his own artistic practice. His 1897 novel *The Third*

Violet – trashed by critics at the time as a “silly love tale” of “idle vacuousness”³⁵⁵ – concerns a romance so boilerplate that it’s hard to imagine Crane being much invested in the plot (wherein our hero, a starving artist, defies his dirt-poor origins to win the stunning heiress of his dreams). Crane seems much less invested in his characters than in the problematic of painting, which he treats as explicitly analogous to the problematic of writing (Hawker, the painter, constantly discusses aesthetics with his “writing friend,” Hollie).³⁵⁶ Crane characterizes Hawker at work in strikingly absorptive terms: “he gets so absorbed in a beastly smudge of paint that I really suppose he cares nothing for anything else in the world.”³⁵⁷ We can see this absorptiveness play out in both extremes of Hawker’s artistic practice, from his lapses into mindless torpor (“he stared at the canvas in a meditation so profound that it was probably unconscious of itself”), to his sudden bouts of frenzied gesticulation (“His hair disheveled, his eyes gleaming... attacking... fiercely, mercilessly, formidably... his arm moved with the energy of a strange wrath”).³⁵⁸ Even his easel is called “his painting machinery.”³⁵⁹ To be capable of describing artistic practice in such automaton-like terms, Crane has to have been at least peripherally aware of the problematic of absorption in realist painting, and of the role of automatism for artists trying to surmount it.

Of course, it still seems unlikely that Crane would have understood his own project in terms of a deliberate effort to dismantle Howells’s. After all, early in his career, Crane famously insisted that his “little creed of art... was identical with the one of Howells.”³⁶⁰ Yet in context, it seems clear that Crane, much like Cahan before him, was just trying to get on the influential editor’s good side. Back in 1893, when Crane had been forced to resort to self-publication to get *Maggie* printed, he was so desperate to promote his novel that he sent Howells a copy, only to then berate him for not reading it fast enough: “Having received no reply I must decide that you think it a wretched thing?”³⁶¹ Just ten days later, Crane was again unabashedly “badgering

[Howells] for recommendations” to help him find work.³⁶² Howells declined to write Crane any such letter of recommendation, telling him that as much as he “admired [his] literary skill,” he “could not agree with [him] in all points of theory,” not to mention the fact that “personally [he] know nothing of [him].”³⁶³ In response to this snub, Crane began to flatter Howells every chance he got: he declared “Howells and Garland” his “literary fathers,” and staunchly parroted the party line that “the nearer a writer gets to life the greater he becomes as an artist.”³⁶⁴ He even tried to ingratiate himself to Howells by sending him a copy of *The Red Badge of Courage* inscribed with the following tribute:

To W.D. Howells this small and belated book as a token of the veneration and gratitude of Stephen Crane for the many things he has learned of the common man and, above all, for a certain re-adjustment of his point of view victoriously concluded some time in 1892.

As soon as Howells published “New York Low Life in Fiction” in 1896, however, with its public endorsement of *Maggie*, Crane quickly dropped the flattery. When Crane wrote to Howells to express his “gratitude” for the review, he did so in shockingly derisive terms:

I always thank God that I can have the strongest admiration for the work of a man who has been so much to me personally for I can imagine the terrors of being indelibly indebted to the Chump in Art.³⁶⁵

Crane couches the insult as a counterfactual, but his contempt nevertheless comes through: Howells is the “Chump in Art” whom Crane has been forced to appease for the sake of his own personal advancement. In the same letter, Crane ridicules Howells’s beloved *Yekl*, quipping that he “would like to know Mr. Cahan” if only to ask him “how in the name of Heaven” he came up with such a thing, and gloating that he has “the delicious feeling of being some months ahead of [Cahan] in the recognition, critically.”³⁶⁶ Afterwards, Crane more or less avoids the topic of Howells altogether; an 1899 letter, for instance, mentions only that a recent novel by “Mr. Howells... has disappointed me.”³⁶⁷

There's a certain irony to Crane's hostility here, in the sense that although Howells differed from Crane on matters of taste, he was also probably the most astute reader that Crane could have hoped for. Garland, for instance, certainly failed to appreciate that Crane was doing anything different than dialect writers had always done: in *Maggie*, he called the dialect "another locality finding voice," and in *The Red Badge of Courage*, he insisted that "it literally came of its own accord like sap flowing from a tree."³⁶⁸ The irony is that Garland's over-the-top praise for Crane – "remarkable," "brilliant," "a present-day Poe"³⁶⁹ – it reveals nothing so much as his inability to appreciate what made Crane so unprecedented. Yet even Garland sensed there was something wrong with the direction Crane was going:

Men cannot go on doing stories like "The Red Badge of Courage." The danger with such highly individual work lies in this — the words which astonish, the phrases which excite wonder and admiration, come eventually to seem like tricks. They lose force with repetition, and come at last to be absolutely distasteful. "The Red Badge of Courage" was marvelous, but manifestly Crane could not go on doing such work. If he wrote in conventional phrase, his power lessened. If he continued to write in his own phrases he came under the charge of repeating himself.³⁷⁰

To Garland, Crane's prose seems to "lose force with repetition," but what his blind devotion to dialect prevents him from recognizing is that it is precisely by "repeating himself" that Crane could be said to join the literary-historical ranks of someone like Poe. It was not Crane who "could not go on" after *The Red Badge of Courage* – it was the dialect movement itself.

For proof, we need only note that Crane *does* go on, immediately after the publication of *The Red Badge of Courage*, with another "New York book that leaves 'Maggie' at the post": *George's Mother* (1896). "It is my best thing," he boasted (which is, tellingly, the same phrase he would use in *The Third Violet* to describe his automaton painter's "deadly scuffle" of a painting: "[He] said it was [his] best thing.").³⁷¹ The novel, which is set within the same Bowery slum as *Maggie*, follows the misadventures of Maggie's neighbor George, but Crane's real

interest is not so much George as it is George's "nearness to death," as in his perpetual "preparing for the coming of death."³⁷² In other words, Crane was drawn to the Bowery for the same reason as the battlefield: in both cases, the constant "coming of death" serves as a figure for the death of dialect itself.³⁷³

George's Mother plots George's descent into alcoholism, which drives a wedge between him and his dying mother, who is determined to bring her son to Jesus before she goes to him herself. Yet ironically enough, the more George and his mother argue, the more similar they sound: the "babbling" "cries and screams" of George and his drinking buddies ("No, no! I don't know it, I tell yeh! I can't! I don't know it! I tell yeh I don't know it! I've forgotten it, I tell yeh! No—no—no—no!") sound just like the "wild babbling" and "stammering, incoherent cries" of his ailing mother: ("I want t' know what yeh want here! I want yeh t' git out! I don't want yeh here! I don't feel good t'-day, an' I don't want yeh here! I don't feel good t'-day! I want yeh t' git out!... Go away! Go away! Go away!")³⁷⁴ At the moment of the mother's passing, both mother and son are reduced to mere echoes of one other: "Georgie?... Georgie! Georgie!" she cries, while he sobs in return, "Mother—mother—... Mother—mother—...Mother! Mother!"³⁷⁵ It is "the youth" and the dying soldier all over again – except with one key difference. In *The Red Badge*, when everyone sounded exactly the same, we may not have been able to tell northerners from southerners, but the one thing we knew for certain was that everyone on the battlefield was definitely American. In *George's Mother*, when everyone sounds exactly the same, what we lose is the ability to tell immigrants from native New Yorkers – which is to say, to tell where someone was born based on their accent.

It is no accident that the novel refuses to reveal where George's mother originally comes from. Of course, critics have certainly tried to guess (Howells, for instance, called George and

his mother “folk of country origin,” while others have thought of them as “Irish-American” or simply “ethnic”), but the point is that Crane himself couldn’t have cared less.³⁷⁶ George’s friends may have come to the states from countries like Ireland or Germany (there’s “O’Connor, ‘a course! an’ Schmidt! an’ Woods! Then there’s Zeusentell!”), but they all sound the same in the end (“Spring it! Spring it!... let 'er go! Whatter yeh 'fraid of? Let 'er go,” they cry in unison).³⁷⁷ When Howells called for writers to capture the voices of “East-Side types—Irish, German, negro, and Italian,” this couldn’t have been further from what he had in mind.³⁷⁸ In Howells’s version, ethnic accents were supposed to be interchangeable – in the sense that any one of them could count as American as any other – but they were never meant to become *indistinguishable*. For Howells, the point of dialect was to turn difference into equivalence; for Crane, it was to deny that there was any meaningful difference at all.

In this sense, *George’s Mother*, despite bearing little relation to *Maggie* in terms of its plot, does turn out to function as a kind of sequel: it provides a meaningful conclusion to the kind of dialect Crane had been chronicling ever since his “howling urchins” first opened their “Devil’s Row throats.”³⁷⁹ *Maggie* opens with a telling dialect exchange:

“Run, Jimmie, run! Dey’ll get yehs,” screamed a retreating Rum Alley child.
 “Naw,” responded Jimmie with a valiant roar, “dese micks can’t make me run.”³⁸⁰

Now, throughout the novel, Crane was careful not to call anyone “Irish,” and yet his use of the word “micks” proved a fatal mistake. The 1896 edition of the novel changed “micks” to “mugs,” but the damage had already been done.³⁸¹ Critics insisted on reading *Maggie* as a “portrayal of Irish immigrant life” – one filled with “portraits of Irish Americans,” or “impoverished, slum-dwelling Irish-Americans,” or “poverty-stricken immigrants of Irish descent.”³⁸² *George’s Mother* gives Crane the chance to correct the record: George has no discernable ethnic identity. As the text emphasizes, he might as well be German as Irish. For proof, we need only compare

George's generic mispronunciations ("Is this all I git when I come home I'm being fired? Anybody 'ud think it was my fault") to the stereotypically thick brogue Crane uses when he is trying to make a character sound distinctly Irish ("I moind the toime whin yea was a wee bit of a girrl").³⁸³ By Crane's own standards, George doesn't sound Irish at all. On the contrary, he sounds just like everyone else in the Bowery – which is to say, he sounds like a poor man.

It seems almost too perfect that *George's Mother* ends with George gradually growing numb to the sound of his mother's voice, as "he became so that he could not hear the chatter from the bed," and instead growing aware of another sound entirely: "an endless roar, the eternal trample of the marching city, came mingled with vague cries."³⁸⁴ It is hard to imagine a clearer callback to the "roar of the city" that sounded the final note in "An Experiment in Misery." What becomes "vague" and "mingled" in this "endless roar" are, of course, all those ethnic accents Howells thought it was so important to distinguish. Another way of saying this is that the "roar" of the city is "eternal" in exactly the same way as the "eternal woman, with a rag and a pail of suds," who never seems to stop scrubbing the tenement's hallways. Her misery could be any worker's misery, her complaint any worker's complaint. Crane had finally succeeded in giving the city a voice; the only problem for Howells was that it wasn't an American voice at all. It was the voice of the working class, which meant that it would always be the same, "endless" and "eternal," all around the world.³⁸⁵

All of this is to say that Crane's first three novels, written within the short span of three years, can be taken together as a kind of trilogy: each serves to advance Crane's sense of what accented speech ought to do on the page. In retrospect, we can see that Maggie speaks the way she does not because of where she was born, but because of how she grew up – poor, desperate, and uneducated. As Howells eventually admitted in his private correspondence, the "type" she

represents is not the Irish but the “semi-savage poor.”³⁸⁶ The second we see this, it suddenly makes sense why Howells would have sensed that “language itself decays” in Maggie’s mouth. To Howells, the tenements meant nothing if not “the deformity, the mutilation, the destruction, the decay” of speech, a place where the voices of “the poor” were reduced to “inarticulate lamentation.”³⁸⁷ When Howells describes *Maggie*’s characters, too, as “almost inarticulate,” it is a sign that he apprehends – however imperfectly – that Crane’s dialect, too, is inextricably linked to class.

Howells may not have been happy about the class dialect he saw in Crane – but the fact that he *was* able to see it makes him, in some sense, the best critic Crane ever had. Today, even scholars who are attentive to the way class works in Crane still tend to mischaracterize *Maggie*’s dialect as an ethnic accent. Alan Slotkin, for instance, calls it a “peculiarly class-centered dialect,” yet continues to insist that it be understood in relation to the Bowery’s “regional background,” even though for Crane, the Bowery is not so much a recognizable region as it is an abstracted class signifier.³⁸⁸ Gavin Jones, meanwhile, recognizes that *Maggie*’s dialect is “slum speech” or “decayed slum talk” that enters into “class dialogue” with more socially sanctioned forms of speech.³⁸⁹ Yet Jones continues to insist that Crane’s class dialect works no differently than the speech of other “subaltern cultural groups,” because Maggie and her kind should be considered “virtually an ethnic group in their own right.”³⁹⁰ The case I have been making, however, is that Crane demonstrates precisely why being poor is *not* the same as being Irish. The Irish can always become proud Irish-Americans; the poor, as long as they think of themselves *as* poor, can never become proud members of the nation.

What’s strange about the emergence of class in Crane that it seems to come out of nowhere. As Howells himself put it, while Crane may have managed to shed “some light on the

poor, sad life he knew so well in New York,” he nevertheless “had no plan for it, perhaps not even any hope without a plan.”³⁹¹ In this, he could not have been more unlike Howells, who *did* have a specific plan for improving the lot of the American worker (just not an anarchist one). That was why he turned to Abraham Cahan, and to Cahan’s vision of a sweat-shop where workers could celebrate “having warded off a reduction of wages by threatening a strike” without having to resort to actually carrying one out.³⁹² In comparison to *Yekl*’s rose-colored version of labor relations, *Maggie*’s seems especially grim: here, workers in the “dreary place of endless grinding” respond to “unpaid wages” simply by “grinding out” the same number of “eternal collars and cuffs” as before.³⁹³ Yet the very word Crane uses to characterize this endless work – “grinding” – turns out to explain his otherwise inexplicable interest in it. The reason Maggie resents her factory “machine” is because it threatens to turn her into a “mere mechanical contrivance” herself.³⁹⁴ Crane was fascinated by the modern industrialized factory because of its power to turn human beings into mere automatons: George, too, is described going “t’work” with a “mechanical scowl” and a “mechanical frown.”³⁹⁵ Whatever Crane’s interest in real-life labor conditions may have been, it was his interest in automatism that motivated him to *represent* those conditions on the page. As implausible as it might sound that Crane would have wanted to invent a class dialect, then, it’s not at all implausible to imagine that he would have wanted to invent an *automatic* dialect. It just so happens that the most quintessentially automatic dialect he could come up with was that of the industrial wage slave.

In political terms, Crane was no radical, yet in aesthetic terms, he was as radical as they come, in the sense that his radically automatic dialect produced a prose style so unprecedented that it outraged the literary establishment of his day. The only thing his bewildered critics could agree upon was that it was unlike any they had ever seen before. Even sympathetic critics like

Howells were perturbed to find that Crane's writing did "not seem to relate directly to the work of any other writer;" Garland agreed, adding that he had "never known a man whose source of power was so unaccounted for."³⁹⁶ The irony is that Crane's radical prose proved far more devastating to Howells's nationalism than anything that August Spies could have done. Howells responded to dynamiters with defiance; it was only when Crane came after dialect that he was truly devastated. Crane may well have been aware that his work would destroy the literature "of the soil" that Howells had devoted his life to. There is infinite suggestion, for instance, in the fact that Maggie is said to "blossom in a mud puddle," yet has no connection to the soil from which she emerges: "none of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins."³⁹⁷ Nor is *Maggie* the only text in which Crane repudiates the logic of *jus soli* in surprisingly explicit terms. In the winter of 1895, on assignment for the *Nebraska State Journal*, he reported the tragedy of the "completely American" farmer devastated by recent droughts:

This vast tract was now a fit place for the nomads of Sahara. And yet, for the most part, there was no wavering, no absence of faith in the ultimate success of the beautiful soil. Some few despaired at once and went to make new homes in the north, in the south, in the east, in the west. But the greater proportion of the people of this stricken district were men who loved their homes, their farms, their neighborhoods, their counties. They had become rooted in this soil... They could not move all the complexities of their social life and their laboring life. The magic of home held them from traveling toward the promise of other lands. And upon these people there came the weight of the strange and unspeakable punishment of nature... And then was the time that from this district came that first wail, half impotent rage, half despair.³⁹⁸

In Crane's apocalyptic account, what we hear is the "roar of the city" all over again – or rather, the roar of the countryside. Farmers whose lives are too "rooted in the soil" and in the "magic of home" to try to "make new homes" elsewhere find themselves struck down by the "unspeakable punishment of nature": no amount of magical thinking, Crane implies, can overcome the material conditions of a "dead land." "Faith" in the "beautiful soil" has finally failed – and in that moment, "the country died."³⁹⁹ It makes perfect sense that the beleaguered American farmer, as a

figure for the exhaustion of *jus soli*, would be reduced to a poor man precisely because he clings to the worn-out ideology of the soil; just like it makes perfect sense that Maggie, as the figure for a poor (wo)man having no country, would have no connection whatsoever to the soil beneath her feet.

Even if Crane had not registered Howells's preoccupations in the slightest, however, we would know that *Maggie* marked the end of *jus soli* in literature from Howells's reaction alone. Maggie's language was nowhere near as mutilated as Lindau's had been, but to Howells, both counted as equally "inarticulate," because both stood for the fundamental antagonism of class difference. For Howells, the whole point of dialect was to reconcile the country's most intractable oppositions – Native/settler, north/south, black/white, native/foreign – within the all-encompassing pluralism of the nation. His remarkable devotion to Cahan showed how badly he wanted class difference to work the same way. What Crane forced Howells to acknowledge was that the distinction between boss and worker was *structural*, not cultural – which is to say that it was predicated on material conditions that no amount of pluralism could paper over. At the same time that Maggie's language marked the irruption of the pure materiality of print (a kind of materiality that refused to be subsumed within literary representation), it also marked the irruption of the pure materiality of class (a kind of materiality that refused to be subsumed within the representation of the nation). Howells responded to *Maggie* with dismay because it forced him to finally acknowledge that dialect, as a literary movement, could never do what he wanted it to do: it could never make class difference disappear.

Howells may have been a poor critic of Crane's work (in that he preferred Cahan's), but he was nevertheless an excellent reader of it. As Howells himself put it, he was "aware of [Crane's] power" in a way that "it is doubtful if [Crane was] quite in the secret of himself."⁴⁰⁰

Howells understood, far more clearly than anyone else possibly could have, why *Maggie* had to spell the death of the dialect movement. Crane proved that class dialect was not an “artificial” or false dialect, as Howells had previously believed (and had indeed tried to prove by giving us Lindau’s “mutilated” speech); on the contrary, it was the most “genuine” dialect imaginable, as in the most quintessentially automatic of them all. Of all Crane’s peers, only Howells had the capacity to recognize this fact and work through its implications. If dialect was the literary form that was equivalent to the logic of nationalism, then the only reasonable conclusion to draw from Crane’s example was that the logic of nationalism was *not*, in fact, democratic pluralism, as Howells had previously believed, but rather the consolidation of class interests. It seems to have taken Howells some time to come to this unwelcome realization, just like it had taken him some time to wrap his head around the anti-nationalism of August Spies. What’s clear is that by 1900, when Crane died, Howells’s enthusiasm for Crane had waned so dramatically that he declined to contribute a single word toward his obituary (which is especially striking when we remember that he wrote more than two hundred pages in honor of Twain’s death!). Howells’s only excuse is that over the years, he and Crane had been “getting at each other less than ever.”⁴⁰¹ What Howells seems to have only belatedly realized was that his endorsement of *Maggie* proved, in some meaningful sense, that Spies had been right all along: namely, that the purpose of the nation was to concentrate the country’s wealth by keeping workers like Maggie and George grinding away as mindlessly as possible.⁴⁰²

Howells’s vision for the country ultimately fell apart, however, not because he was wrong about politics but because he was wrong about literature. His ambition to turn “life talk” into the “life of literature” was so unsustainable that even Mark Twain, one of his closest allies, privately complained that “the moment “talk” is put into print you recognize that it is not what it

was when you heard it,” leaving behind “nothing but a dead carcass... a pallid, stiff and repulsive cadaver.”⁴⁰³ The same complaint crops up in *Maggie*, albeit in narrative form: Pete takes Maggie to see a “ventriloquist” who makes his puppets “say funny things” (an apt description of the dialect writer if there ever was one). She asks, “Do dose little men talk?” The answer, of course, is no. “It’s some damn fake,” Pete replies. “See?”⁴⁰⁴ In much the same way, Crane forced his readers to “see” that phonetic accents were “fake,” as in artificially constructed, by their very nature. His perverse solution to the problem of dialect – that “life talk” always wound up dying on the page – was to preemptively kill it off himself. Other dialect writers, of course, came up with their own techniques to avoid, suppress, or overcome the lifelessness of printed talk. Twain, for instance, moved Huck Finn’s dialect out of quotation marks and into narration, where it would essentially *have* to belong on the page rather than in anyone’s mouth. As I argued in chapter one, critics who disagree about nearly everything else in *Huckleberry Finn* have always agreed that Twain’s prose style sounds as natural as a “real boy talking out loud,” whereas critics who could not disagree more vehemently about the merits of *Maggie* have always agreed that Crane’s prose style sounds nothing like ordinary human language.⁴⁰⁵

Yet the contrast between Twain and Crane shouldn’t blind us to what they have in common. Although neither of them took Howells’s nationalist ambitions for dialect all that seriously, both of them *were* seriously invested in their own, specifically *literary* ambition for dialect, which was to make it into something more compelling than a literal transcription of talk. Their novels reveal that, contrary to Howells’s expectations, dialect could only succeed as a literary language by breaking away from the living speech that it purported to recreate. Both Twain and Crane create a purely literary orality, which is to say, a language that clearly comes from the spoken word, but is nevertheless marked by its necessary relation to the page. Twain

accomplished this by allowing dialect to suffuse almost imperceptibly into narration; Crane accomplished this by repeating dialect until readers couldn't help but notice the letters on the page. In other words, Twain's version suppresses its own writtenness, whereas Crane's version flaunts it. Consequently, in the eyes of someone like Howells, the politics of these two writers came to seem totally opposed. Twain's dialect served the national interest by artificially smoothing over racial conflict (as critics such as Jonathan Arac have argued).⁴⁰⁶ Huck's language takes the kinds of characteristically Black speech patterns that demonstrate that America is nowhere near as unified as it likes to imagine itself, and transforms these speech patterns into a voice that everyone can celebrate as "purely American."⁴⁰⁷ Crane's dialect, conversely, undermined the national interest by insisting on the unassimilability of class. Maggie's language takes the kinds of working-class speech patterns that prove that class difference is as real in America as it is anywhere else in the world, and transforms these speech patterns into a voice that no one could ever imagine as the voice of the nation.

Yet all that matters from a literary perspective is that both Twain and Crane designed their dialects *for the purposes of being read*. In both cases, their dialect is properly literary in that it is acutely aware of the need to wrestle with its own ontological status as literature. Thus as deeply imbricated as both authors may be in the rise of modern nationalism, there is another sense in which they could also be said to escape from Howells's nationalist paradigm altogether: by carving out a space for the purely literary, which is to say, a space committed to thinking through the essence of the literary as such.

CHAPTER 4

4. **The Other Death of Dialect:
Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Soulful Song" and the Modernist Dialect of Race**

Towsah, stop dat ba'kin', hyeah me!
 Mandy, mek dat chile keep still;
 Don't you hyeah de echoes callin'
 F'om de valley to de hill?
 Let me listen, I can hyeah it,
 Th'oo de bresh of angel's wings,
 Sof' an' sweet, "Swing Low,
 Sweet Chariot,"
 Ez Malindy sings.⁴⁰⁸

Although first published as part of Paul Laurence Dunbar's breakout collection, *Majors and Minors* (1895), "When Malindy Sings" drew such a disproportionate amount of the attention that Dunbar soon reissued it in a collection all its own, *When Malindy Sings* (1903). Part of the poem's enduring appeal is that it offers such a rich allegory for the musicality of Dunbar's own poetry – its prosody, its rhythms, its "echoes." In this sense, "When Malindy Sings" is itself echoed by the rest of *Majors and Minors*, which reverts again and again to the conceit made explicit by the title: that Dunbar's poems are more or less songs in disguise. From birds to banjos, musical expression forms a common trope linking Dunbar's standard-English "majors" (e.g., "The Meadow Lark," "Premonition," "The Lesson," "Preparation," "A Corn-Song," and "The Poet and his Song") with his dialect "minors" (e.g., "A Banjo Song," "The Ol' Tunes," and "Deacon Jones' Grievance"). Dunbar could not be more explicit about his commitment to the ancient notion of the poet as the one called upon to sing: even his dedication traces his development from his "first faint pipings" to his "later songs."⁴⁰⁹

So it should come as no surprise that the conceit made clear in the case of Malindy – that her song comes not from herself so much as from nature ("hyeah de echoes callin' / F'om de valley to de hill") or from God ("hyeah it, / Th'oo de bresh of angel's wings") – turns out to

animate so much of *Majors and Minors*.⁴¹⁰ In Dunbar's opening poem, "Ione," for instance, we find the muses figured as a "singing throng":

...Then first I saw the need and might
Of that fair band, the singing throng
Who gifted with the skill, divine,
Take up the threads of life, spun fine,
And weave them into soulful song.

They sung for me, whose passion pressing
My soul, found vent in song nor line.
They bore the burden of expressing
All that I felt, with art's design,
And every word of theirs was mine...⁴¹¹

There is something more at play here than the poet's prototypical claim of divine inspiration. According to the speaker, so enormous is the "burden of expressing" his "soul" that he has "need" of "divine" intervention to give it "art's design." What it means for Dunbar to think of his own poetry in this way – as "soul" turned into "soulful song" – will be relevant to my own reading of Dunbar, but it is also surprisingly relevant to the response of one of his earliest critics, William Dean Howells.

I say "surprisingly" because Howells's 1896 review of *Majors and Minors* is usually remembered for entirely different reasons – namely, Howells's fixation on "Mr. Dunbar's race."⁴¹² When Howells singles out "When Malindy Sings" for praise, it is because, as he claims, it has none of the "too easy pathos of the pseudo-negro poetry of the minstrel show" and is, on the contrary, "purely and intensely black."⁴¹³ Obviously, no one could dispute that Howells cared a great deal about Dunbar's "black skin."⁴¹⁴ Yet the question of *why* Howells would have cared so much has remained a source of some confusion. On the one hand, some critics consider Howells's review evidence of his failure to overcome the prevailing racism of his era. As Shelley Eversley has argued, Howells's delight upon finding Dunbar's "race traits strangely accented"

reflects a growing cultural obsession in the 1890s with the figure of the “real negro,” an archetype from vaudeville whose dark skin was supposed to guarantee the “black racial authenticity” of his minstrel performance.⁴¹⁵ In this context, it is easy to mistake Howells as just another white patron obsessed with the color of Dunbar’s skin (like another early supporter of Dunbar, who involuntarily exclaimed, upon seeing Dunbar for the first time, “Thank God, he’s black!”).⁴¹⁶ On the other hand, there are certain critics who read Howells’s review as a good-faith effort to promote the kinds of minority writers that had been previously been underrepresented in literature. Elsa Nettels, for instance, argues that Howells’s review only singles out Dunbar’s race in an attempt “to reconcile the seemingly contradictory principles of unity and diversity.”⁴¹⁷ What neither perspective manages to explain, however, is why Howells – a man whose lifelong literary project it was to turn all the country’s “Irish, German, negro, and Italian” voices into interchangeable versions of good Americans – would suddenly insist that Dunbar was nothing if not an incarnation of “pure African type.”⁴¹⁸

It may be obvious enough what Howells means by the claim that Dunbar *looks* like a “pure African” (“thick, outrolling lips,” etc.), but it is less obvious – even to Howells himself – what he might mean by the claim that Dunbar *writes* like one.⁴¹⁹ As I began to suggest in chapter two, it was only because Howells had all but given up on domesticating the Irish – in the sense that he had come to think of their “proletariat type” as fundamentally incompatible with national belonging – that he now found himself drawn to an entirely different category of “adoptive citizen”: the “American negro.”⁴²⁰ For Howells, part of the appeal of someone like Dunbar was that he counted as an obvious outsider (in the sense of “pure African type”), and yet at the same time as an obvious insider (in the sense of a peculiarly American racial landscape).⁴²¹ Five years before he ever encountered Dunbar, Howells had in fact devoted an entire novel to the

significance of “pure negro type” in America: *An Imperative Duty* (1891).⁴²² I will have more to say about this astonishing novel in a moment, but for now, suffice to say that Howells – quite aside from whatever his personal views on race may have been – would have also had his own, distinctly literary reasons for wanting to bring the figure of the “black poet” to light, and that these reasons had everything to do with his lifelong ambition to make American literature more quintessentially American.⁴²³

To briefly recap, Howells spent his entire literary career promoting the idea that dialect, with all its phonetically-transcribed accents, was America’s “life talk,” by which he meant that it “expressed the national temperament, character, and manner with a fulness not surpassed by contemporary fiction in the case of any other people.”⁴²⁴ As a literary language, dialect was supposed to transform “our decentralized life” into “our decentralized literature.”⁴²⁵ When Howells praises Dunbar’s Black dialect poems as the “expressions of a race-life from within the race,” then, what matters to him is not the *race* of “race-life” so much as the *life* of it.⁴²⁶ Howells cared about Dunbar’s racial identity in exactly the measure that it made the life of the “American negro” seem believable on the page. While there is no question that Howells was in some sense invested in white supremacy, then, his enthusiasm for Dunbar was motivated less by a commitment to racial superiority than by a commitment to pure racial difference. For Howells, Dunbar’s “black voice” served an essential function in American literature: it made the outmoded genre of dialect seem believable again to the American reader. Yet what Howells failed to anticipate was that the racialized dialect he hoped would rescue his nationalist project would in the end destroy it. As Dunbar himself understood quite clearly, the emergence of a modernist dialect of race would usher in an entirely new era – one in which it was no longer even remotely plausible to think of a Black accent as the voice of the nation.

When Dunbar's "little book of verse, dateless, placeless, without a publisher" made its way onto Howells's desk, in defiance of all the odds, it could not have come at a more critical juncture in Howells's career.⁴²⁷ Howells published his influential review of *Majors and Minors* on June 27, 1896, just one month before he published his equally influential review of Stephen Crane's *Maggie* on July 26, 1896. As I argued in my previous chapter, Howells's deeply conflicted response to *Maggie* marked his growing anxiety that the dialect movement was coming to an end. Again, to recap, Howells in the 1890s was desperate to overcome "the disgust for 'dialect' which has undoubtedly overtaken the general reader" because it threatened to derail his plans for the "growth of our literature in Americanism."⁴²⁸ By the turn of the century, even the famed "Hoosier poet" James Whitcomb Riley (who was, by all accounts, the inspiration for Dunbar's white Midwestern accents) was bemoaning the "wilful forgery" that passed for dialect these days, which he called a "rank abomination" that served only to "maim, cripple, and disfigure language."⁴²⁹

Howells's dialect project, as we know from chapter two, was predicated on the notion that American fiction only came into its own as a distinctively national literature when its authors began to write the way ordinary Americans talked. The problem was that if readers had become too repelled by dialect to absorb it as "unconsciously" as they would real-life speech, then the country would lose the only language it had for making American identity visible on the page. Howells's solution was an accent so "unconscious" that "it must go in, it *will* go in, because "the writer [who] naturally carries it with him half unconsciously" would in turn "carry the general reader through... in a state of unconsciousness."⁴³⁰ It was only when Howells encountered Stephen Crane – the one writer he considered such an "absolute slave of reality" that it was as if Crane were "forced" by his "fealty" to "render an absolute devotion from an

absolute knowledge” – that he realized to his dismay that such a literal repetition of real speech produced not life but death on the page: “language itself decays in their speech.”⁴³¹ The very faithfulness that Howells had hoped would subsume the printedness of printed talk only made it seem more unnatural than ever – which is to say, even more painfully obvious to all the readers who had “got tired of it” long ago.

In the context of this dialect crisis, Howells was amazed at how authentic Dunbar’s accents still managed to sound. For one thing, as he notes, “certainly [Dunbar] has reported as faithfully” as any white author the “non-negro dialect” of “his simple white neighbors,” the “middle-south whites.”⁴³² He finds Dunbar’s white dialect “good, very good” – nothing like the decay he sees in Crane. Yet when it comes to the dialect of Dunbar’s “middle-south blacks,” he is so struck by the “novelty of the achievement” that he can barely focus on anything else. Howells admits that his obsession with what he calls the “negro pieces” is difficult to justify in literary terms – “I am speaking of him as a black poet, when I should be speaking of him as a poet.” Yet he devotes nearly all his critical attention to poems like “When Melindy Sings,” which he reprints nearly in full, lamenting only that he cannot “give the whole” of “such a black piece as this.” Howells ties himself into knots trying to prove that Dunbar’s literary merit both *is*, and *is not*, a measure of his racial identity. On the one hand, Howells insists that he would have recognized the “artistic quality” of Dunbar’s work regardless of his race: “his excellences are positive and not comparative.” On the other hand, he keeps reverting to the claim that what matters most about Dunbar is that he is the “the first man of his color” to “represent [his race] in art.”⁴³³

The notion of “pure African type” may have struck Howells particularly forcefully in regard to Dunbar, but the concept itself was hardly new to him: five years earlier, he had devoted

an entire novel to the question of “pure negro type” in America. *An Imperative Duty* – serialized in *Harper’s Monthly* in four monthly installments from July-October of 1891, then reprinted in book form in 1892 – is Howells’s racial-passing novel. In Howells’s account, what is at issue in the race problem is neither civic nor social equality: Dr. Olney, Howells’s protagonist and more or less his proxy, tells himself that “colored people” already have “the same civil rights as ourselves,” which means that even though they might sometimes seem to “keep to themselves,” they are “just as free” to do otherwise.⁴³⁴ For Howells, the real challenge was to make sure that people who might *look* completely African could still *count* as completely American, because he considered the descendants of slaves much better stand-ins for the country than some of the immigrants that had only recently become a part of it. In the very first chapter of *An Imperative Duty*, Dr. Olney returns to America after five years abroad only to find that in the intervening years, “our civilization” has been overrun by “the Irish.”⁴³⁵ These “adoptive citizens who look so much like brigands” are so “openly mercenary” in their “eagerness for fees” that they remind Dr. Olney of the “poorer class in Liverpool.”⁴³⁶ In other words, properly speaking, they are “not the English type or the American type, but the proletarian type.”⁴³⁷ His distaste for these Irish interlopers makes him all the more appreciative of America’s traditional “negro waiters,” who may in all honesty be “just as greedy of money,” but have always “clothed [their] greed in such a smiling courtesy” that their presence is the “one aspect... which struck Olney as altogether agreeable [upon] getting home.”⁴³⁸ Soon Dr. Olney is proclaiming the “negroes” to be “the most agreeable, the most interesting feature” of the entire country.⁴³⁹

Dr. Olney’s opinion is more than just personal preference; it is an expression of his deep and uncompromising “patriotism.”⁴⁴⁰ According to Howells’s nationalist logic, if the success of the nation depended on the poor thinking of themselves as belonging to their country rather than

to their class, then the presence of class-conscious Irish could only make America less American, whereas the presence of deferential “negroes” could only make it more so. Predictably enough, Howells figures this distinction as a difference in their respective dialects. The voices of “the Irish” sound offensively “coarse and weak,” because they speak the language of class, marked by pointless eye-dialect (“annyway”) and dumb, mechanical repetition (“Yes, sor... Yes, sor”).⁴⁴¹ The voices of “the colored people,” in contrast, resound with “gentleness and gentility,” because they speak the dialect of nation, marked by faithful rendering of folk idioms (“they’s a kind of an evenin’ meetin’ at ouah choach”) and precise shading of local color (“I noticed you at the cawnah,” says the “colored” Bostonian).⁴⁴² Howells’s careful rendering of racial dialect expresses his commitment to the Americanness of African Americans – which is to say, the Americanness of workers who are not at all inclined to engage into class warfare.⁴⁴³ Nothing pleases Dr. Olney more about the “colored people” he sees than their total lack of animosity: “they all look hopeful and happy, even in the rejection from their fellow-men;” “all alike seemed shining with good-nature and good-will, and the desire of peace on earth.”⁴⁴⁴

The Black worker thus emerges for Howells as a kind of solution to the problem of the immigrant worker, which had been plaguing him ever since the Haymarket Affair of 1886, as discussed in chapter two. In an important sense, this was true not just for Howells, but also for the country. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, Northern industrialists “systematically recruited African-American strikebreakers from southern mills” to combat the efforts of organized labor among their own “proletariat types.”⁴⁴⁵ As economic historian Warren Whatley has argued, Black workers made for more or less ideal strikebreakers – at least from the perspective of industrialists looking to exploit them: they were already trained in the industries that could least afford a sudden halt in production (coal, iron, steel), yet were also willing to accept wages far

lower than such skills would normally command in the North. Not only did Black workers require far less on-the-job instruction than recent immigrants, they were also far less likely than recent immigrants to sympathize with the demands of organized labor, since American unions had become notorious in Black communities for their racially discriminatory membership rules. Every time local chapters voted to exclude Black members from their ranks, it made the already daunting prospect of finding a good job all but impossible for Black workers – unless, that is, they were willing to cross a picket line. Precise data is to come by, but published accounts show that “African-American strikebreakers were used in almost every major confrontation between capital and labor” between the Civil War and the New Deal, including the Homestead strike of 1892, which headlined papers from New York to Sacramento, and the Pullman strike of 1894, which brought 10,000 Black strikebreakers to Chicago’s stockyards.⁴⁴⁶ Even when only a fraction of the strikebreakers in a given instance were Black, those Black workers stood out so starkly in a crowd that they drew a disproportionate amount of the attention. For employers, one especially perverse incentive of hiring Black strikebreakers was that if class warfare turned into race warfare – as it did in both the Pullman and the Homestead strike – the state militia would get called in to restore the peace, which almost always worked in employers’ favor.⁴⁴⁷

The prospect of a “race of strike breakers,” in the words of Booker T. Washington, quickly captured the national imaginary.⁴⁴⁸ In 1905, AFL founder Samuel Gompers even threatened that “if the colored man continues to lend himself to the work of tearing down what the white man has built up, a race hatred far worse than any known will result.”⁴⁴⁹ Even Dunbar, who rarely addressed labor politics directly, was sufficiently intrigued by the phenomenon of the Black strikebreaker to explore the matter in fiction. In his tale of a West Virginia coal mining town, “At Shaft 11” (1898), all the workers are already so “contented and happy” that the union

is little more than a front for racism.⁴⁵⁰ When the union's leadership is asked about their bargaining position, the miners "severally fumbled [their] hat and looked confused," but when "several car-loads of Negroes" arrive, they know exactly what to chant: "Run the niggers out."⁴⁵¹ Dunbar's critique of the labor union is, in essence, that of the Black worker excluded from its ranks: "Have you not been treated like men? What more do you want? What real grievance have you? None."⁴⁵² Later, in 1903, Dunbar even went so far as to claim that whites-only unions were little better than lynch mobs: "We [Black workers] may not work save when the new-come foreigner refuses to, and then they, high prized above our sacrificial lives, may shoot us down with impunity."⁴⁵³ His sympathies lay with the Black strikebreakers being treated like cannon fodder, not with the union members whose violent resistance to anyone who dared to cross the picket line ended up looking far too similar to the racially-motivated bloodshed of the Klan.

As we saw in chapter two, Howells had once been much more sympathetic to the plight of the working class, both in real life ("poor Spies," 1886) and in literature ("poor Lindau," 1889). Yet once Howells realized that the true "proletarian type" could never be convinced to "vote their ideas into laws," his thinking came to look a lot more like Dunbar's.⁴⁵⁴ Of course, there is plenty to debate when it comes to Howells's complicated relationship to class.⁴⁵⁵ What I want to emphasize is that even when we find Howells most engaged in labor politics, his objective is always "a peaceful solution of the labor troubles," because what disturbed him most was not the exploitation of labor so much as the violence with which workers opposed it.⁴⁵⁶ He was more sympathetic to class suffering than to class struggle, which meant that he never lost faith in the country's founding myth that "most of the ills" workers imagined "might be averted by honest work and unselfish behavior."⁴⁵⁷ In this context, it seems only obvious that Howells would have responded to his crushing defeat in the Haymarket Affair by transferring his

sympathies from the rabble-rousing union worker to the dutiful Black worker willing to replace him.

When Howells turned his attention to actually writing about Black people, however, it was not their class position that concerned him so much as their social one. Economically speaking, the end of slavery created a certain labor problem – at least for the South, which had become reliant on unpaid Black labor (i.e., enslaved people). In the North, as we have seen, it created a certain labor *solution*, in the sense it gave Northern industrialists access to a vast new reserve army of labor (i.e., formerly enslaved people). Yet the more pressing issue for Howells was that the end of slavery created the same problem, socially speaking, in both the North *and* the South, in the sense that emancipation forever changed the meaning of race in America. Enslaved people, who had previously been defined by their bondage, were suddenly transformed into Black people, who were defined solely by their race. In the postwar decades, American legislators produced an avalanche of new laws trying to figure out how to separate Black people from white people, but the escalating effort to enshrine racial difference into law only begged the question: what did it actually mean for someone to count as Black?⁴⁵⁸

This turns out to be the exact question at the heart of *An Imperative Duty* (1891), the novel that got Howells so interested in race in the first place. The novel's heroine, Miss Aldgate, has grown up blissfully unaware that her mother was an "octoroon," and yet the instant she is told the truth – that her grandparents were a "slaver" and "his slave" – she "somehow instantly realize[s]" what it means: "that – that – I am – *black*."⁴⁵⁹ Even though her friends try to convince her that she looks "as white as... any one," her conviction is unshakeable: "I have that blood in me," she cries, and "it is the same thing!"⁴⁶⁰ Her belief in the distinctiveness of "that blood," despite all visual evidence to the contrary, puts her well ahead of the rest of the country. It would

not be until 1896, for instance, that the Supreme Court would infamously declare itself “powerless to... abolish distinctions based upon physical differences” in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, even though the plaintiff in question, Homer Plessy, was so light-skinned that he had had to alert the conductor as to the existence of his so-called “physical differences” for him to get arrested in the first place.⁴⁶¹ It took decades longer for the one-drop rule to become the official law of the land. Even in Virginia, the state most infamous for its commitment to the “racial integrity” of white people, someone like Miss Aldgate would not legally count as Black until 1924.⁴⁶² What is so striking about *An Imperative Duty*, then, is that Howells makes Miss Aldgate’s race matter far more to her than it does to the law – and more especially, more to her than it does to the man who wants to marry her: our old friend Dr. Olney.

As opposed to Miss Aldgate, who thinks it is just a matter of “how many generations would carry her back” to “a horrible old negress, a savage stolen from Africa,” Dr. Olney insists that “the chances of atavism, or reversion to the black great-great-great-grandfather are so remote that they may be said hardly to exist at all.”⁴⁶³ The lovers find themselves at an impasse. He “can’t accept” her desire to “live so miserably with them;” she “can’t understand” how she could possibly do anything else: “You don’t understand. My grandmother was a slave.”⁴⁶⁴ In desperation, he tries to convince her that she should really think of herself as more white than Black: “All I ask of you is the fifteen-sixteenths or so of you that belong to my race.”⁴⁶⁵ When she finally gives in to his pleading and “drop[s] her head with a sob on his shoulder,” Dr. Olney congratulates himself on having “literally rescued her from her own thoughts of herself.”⁴⁶⁶ Only belatedly does he realize that the one-drop rule cannot be overcome so easily. The novel concludes with his melancholy acknowledgement that “his love... failed to make her happy,”

because nothing he says can “reason her out of” her sense that she “ought to suffer shame” about the “one-sixteenth.”⁴⁶⁷

Many critics, sensing how preposterous Howells finds the blood logic of the one-drop rule, have been content to read the successful resolution of the novel’s marriage-plot as a more or less happy ending: Howells sees nothing wrong with racial passing, ergo Miss Aldgate decides to pass. Yet the fact that her marriage turns out to be such a failure, weighed down by “despondency” and “remorse,” suggests that the novel is not about *challenging* Miss Aldgate’s logic so much as *understanding* it.⁴⁶⁸ Howells himself may have been more aligned with Dr. Olney’s view of race, but his novel is much more concerned with Miss Aldgate’s.⁴⁶⁹ Indeed, the bulk of his narrative is devoted to Miss Aldgate’s extraordinarily intense struggle to come to terms with her own racial origins. Her “affinity” to Black people is something she already feels deeply, but only “in some occult, dreadful way.”⁴⁷⁰ What she needs – what Howells needs – is some way to picture her “solidarity of race” without violating the standards of literary realism, which is to say, with as little recourse to the “occult” as possible.⁴⁷¹

Miss Aldgate’s race only becomes *real* to her when she wanders into a “colored church,” where she makes it her “duty” (one might even say her “imperative duty”) to find some way to “concentrate and intensify the fact [of her race] to her outward perception,” and then “to reconcile herself to it, by realizing and owning it with every sense.”⁴⁷² At first, “every sense” seems arrayed against her. The *sight* of the congregants’ “sad, repulsive visages of a frog-like ugliness” make them feel “more akin” to her than ever, but only in a way that is more phantasmagorical than ever: one is a “goblin,” another a “catfish.”⁴⁷³ The *smell* of “blackness” is even worse: as “the musky exhalation of their bodies thickened the air” and “she began to taste the odor,” she experiences such “a frantic refusal of their claim upon her” that she is overcome

by an appalling vision of herself as an antebellum overseer: “I should have whipped them, too. They are animals; they are only fit to be slaves.”⁴⁷⁴ Only “when she shut her eyes, and heard their wild, soft voices” does she find herself suddenly “rapt by the music from her frenzy of abhorrence.”⁴⁷⁵ The *sound* of the “black voice,” it turns out, is just the antidote she needs to shut out all the “occult, dreadful” imagery crowding her brain.⁴⁷⁶ As long as she “kept her eyes shut, listening,” and did “not venture to look around” at the “sight of their faces” that “would harden her heart against them,” she is completely swept away by the “sound of the lecturer’s voice.”⁴⁷⁷

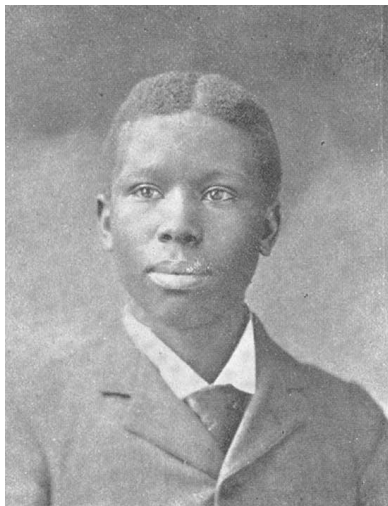
It is no accident that Miss Aldgate’s church lecturer is described as so “entirely black” that he looks more “like a thick, soft shadow” than a real person.⁴⁷⁸ As a “wavering blur” of “black from head to foot,” he is the purest possible personification of “pure negro type” imaginable.⁴⁷⁹ Indeed, he serves as a mouthpiece for the entire race: “if our white brethren could only understand – and they’re gettin’ to understand it – that if they would help us a little more, they needn’t hate us so much.” Miss Aldgate is instantly converted to his anodyne message of “love,” but the point is that it matters far less to her *what* the lecturer says than *how* he says it: with a “plangent note, like some rich, melancholy bell.”⁴⁸⁰ It is only because his voice is unbelievably “rich and tender, with those caressing notes in it which are the peculiar gift of his race,” that for once in her life she “did not feel anything grotesque in it.”⁴⁸¹

In the context of Howells’s literary career, it makes perfect sense that his best approximation of the concept of radicalized race would be the Black voice. After all, Howells understood the appeal of racialized speech as deeply as anyone. That is why he responded to Thomas Nelson Page – whose work he acknowledged was tainted with the “colour of something cruel” – with exuberant praise for having “so honestly employed the negro parlance.”⁴⁸² When it came to literary merit, Howells thought that any believable dialect was justification in itself. So it

makes sense that of all the “hundred ways” Miss Aldgate’s race “might come out,” the one Howells chooses to emphasize is the one that was most familiar to him already: “I can hear it in her voice at times – it’s a *black* voice!”⁴⁸³ The irony, of course, is that Miss Aldgate’s purportedly “black voice” never gets represented on the page. Even when she speaks to the Black churchgoers whom she identifies with so strongly, her dialogue only emphasizes how white she sounds in comparison: upon being told, “*I’m a-goin’ to choach,*” she responds, “Yes, yes. That’s what I mean. I want to go to your church.”⁴⁸⁴ The advantage of the “black voice” was that it allowed Howells to illustrate the notion that ‘blood will tell’ without violating his own standards for realistic fiction. After all, nothing is more “peculiarly repulsive to such men as Olney” (read: Howells) than the kind of “morbid” racial fantasies that got “mentioned in the books, but vaguely,” without “a great deal of absolute fact.”⁴⁸⁵ Yet at the same time that the “black voice” solved one representational problem for Howells, it created another: he had invented a form that he could not manage to put into print.

Now we can understand exactly why Howells would have responded to “Mr. Dunbar’s race” with such enthusiasm: here, at last, was “pure African type” translated directly into “purely and intensely black” literary language. In *An Imperative Duty*, Howells had designed his ideal of aesthetic representation – as in the “rich, melancholy” Black voice – only to have it, like Pygmalion’s statue, suddenly come to life in front of him. Understandably, Howells is smitten. Turning from one “black piece” to the next, he gushes, “I hope the reader likes as much as I like, the strong full pulse of the music in all these things.”⁴⁸⁶ Dunbar had finally succeeded in bringing the “lyrical” Black voice to the page: what had “hitherto been inarticulately expressed in music... now finds, for the first time in our tongue, literary interpretation of a very artistic completeness.”⁴⁸⁷ It is as if the church “singing” that appealed so much to Miss Aldgate had

become suddenly and most vividly *real*. Even Dunbar's photo [Fig. 1], "with [its] race traits strangely accented," is eerily similar to Howells's description of Miss Aldgate's "entirely black" church lecturer, whose "absolute sable was relieved only by the white points of his shirt-collar." As soon as we see Dunbar this way – as a version of the church lecturer brought to life – we can instantly appreciate why Howells would have found such a "heightened... appeal" in Dunbar's "negro face": it served to authenticate his "negro pieces" as realistic in a sense nobody could ever deny.⁴⁸⁸



[Fig. 1: Dunbar as the "absolute sable" church lecturer brought to life]

Howells's review guaranteed that *Majors and Minors* would henceforth be taken seriously as a work of literature, but only in the radically racialized terms Howells had set. From this point on, whether Dunbar liked it or not, his "soulful song" would be synonymous with his "black voice." This "black voice" solved certain representational problems, not only for Howells, but also for American literature as a whole. On the one hand, it made racial *essence* believable in a significantly new way, in the sense that it provided a concrete figure for the abstract blood logic of the one-drop rule. On the other hand, it made racial *dialect* believable in a significantly new way, in the sense that any accent written by such a "pure negro type" automatically counted

as a “purely black” language. Previously, when a white writer like Thomas Nelson Page had written a racial dialect, he had to appear to be recording Black voices “unconsciously” to make them seem realistic. The point about a Black writer like Dunbar, however, was that *his* version of racial dialect remained convincing even if it had obviously taken conscious effort to compose.

When Howells says of Dunbar’s “rhythm” that “what is of larger import... is what is conscious... in it,” his point is not so much that Dunbar’s dialect *is* conscious, but that it certainly well could be.⁴⁸⁹ No matter how conspicuously Dunbar has manipulated his spelling to meet the demands of meter and rhyme, “we know the portrait to be undeniably like.” The reason Howells calls Dunbar’s *Minors* “infinitely more valuable and significant” than if they “had been written by a white man” is because only a “black poet” could have written a “negro dialect” so innate, intrinsic, and immanent to his very being that it was no longer remotely possibly to experience it as being aimed at the reader. All of Howells’s confused attempts to account for the “novelty of [Dunbar’s] achievement” boil down to his conviction that Dunbar’s “black piece[s]” did not need to be written by a “black poet” to make them so palpably *accurate*, as in true to life, only to make them so palpably *authentic*, as in believable even to the most skeptical of readers.⁴⁹⁰ In effect, Howells radicalizes racial dialect to serve the purposes of realism.⁴⁹¹

Up to this point, my argument about Dunbar has been governed by Howells’s review of *Majors and Minors*, which obviously reflects Howells’s distinctive account of American literature. Once we understand the way racialized realism works in his account, however, what instantly becomes clear is that racialized realism could hardly be said to originate with Howells, nor even with the kind of writer who was at all likely to share Howells’s perspective on the race question. Dunbar himself lays out a very similar logic in the poem with which I began. “When Malindy Sings” opens by admonishing “Miss Lucy,” a conventionally trained white singer, that

she has no hope of competing with Malindy's singing: "You ain't got de nachel o'gans / Fu' to make de soun' come right."⁴⁹² Miss Lucy will never be able to sing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" the way Malindy does, because Malindy's artistry comes from deep within her "nachul" being.⁴⁹³ She sings her Black spirituals as only a Black singer could – with the implication being that Dunbar, too, executes his Black "Minors" as only a "black poet" could. When Dunbar describes Malindy "a-wa'blin'," the racial dialect he uses to do so works the same way as that "wa'blin'" itself: no amount of "practice" by a white person could possibly "make de soun' come right," because what makes it feel *real* is his race.⁴⁹⁴ In other words, Howells's position – that Dunbar's mastery of racialized realism provides clear proof of his literary merit – is one that Dunbar himself shared. It's just that for Dunbar, demonstrating his mastery of racialized realism marked the *beginning*, rather than the *end*, of his literary ambitions. As we can tell from the astonishing variety of poems that make up *Majors and Minors* – from high-minded neoclassical odes to contemporary political elegies, from double-voiced plantation satires to simple singsong refrains – Dunbar aspired to master every literary form he possibly could.

So confident is Dunbar that he already has racialized realism figured out that he flaunts his ability before our very eyes. If the point of "When Malindy Sings" is that the "real melojous music" coming from a Black artist sounds more like "raal right singing" than anything a white artist could ever produce, nothing could better prove the point than the fact that Dunbar spells "raal" and "real" completely differently from one stanza to the next.⁴⁹⁵ If Dunbar's "direct and fresh authority to do the kind of thing he is doing" comes down to his ability to *speak* his race, exactly as he "felt it and found it to be," then even the most blatantly obvious inconsistency ("Ez hit makes its way in glory") cannot damage his credibility in the slightest.⁴⁹⁶ In this sense, he is the exact opposite of Stephen Crane, who was so consistent in his dialect spellings that Howells

called him the “absolute slave of reality.”⁴⁹⁷ As I argued in my previous chapter, Howells intended this phrase as a compliment, because he thought that a perfect imitation of real life would have to produce the most natural-sounding dialect imaginable; what he realized to his dismay, however, was that such literal, letter-for-letter repetition only called attention to how *unnatural* printed accents actually looked on the page (Well, he was a reg'lar jim-dandy fer nerve, wa'n't he... A reg'lar jim-dandy... Well, he was a reg'lar jim-dandy... Well, he was a jim-dandy, wa'n't 'e?).⁴⁹⁸ In this context, Dunbar's blatantly inconsistent spelling offered a kind of solution to Crane's mechanically consistent spelling, in the sense that Dunbar's inconsistencies make it abundantly clear that *his* credibility comes from something other than his phonetic accuracy. Another way of putting this is that there is no need for Howells to call Dunbar the “absolute slave of reality,” because Dunbar already speaks directly from the “heart of primitive human nature in his race.”⁴⁹⁹ It makes perfect sense that Howells's interest in Dunbar waxes almost directly in proportion as his interest in Crane wanes. For the first time in the history of dialect, Howells had discovered a writer who could serve as the mouthpiece, rather than the mediator, of the natural world.

By 1900, Howells had become so committed to racialized realism that we see him expressing enthusiasm even for a Black author who otherwise violated his standards for verisimilitude. In his review of Charles Chesnutt, Howells calls the prose style “weak and uninstructed,” lamenting the way it “degenerates into satire, with a look in the reader's direction which the author's friend must deplore.”⁵⁰⁰ In other words, Chesnutt winks at the reader far too knowingly to meet Howells's standards for natural-sounding narration. Yet because Chesnutt also “sees his people... and shows them as he sees them,” Howells ultimately decides that he “belongs” to the “good school, the only school” of “nature.” In Howells's eyes, Chesnutt's

“inalienable race” automatically makes him a realist, because it renders the question of his mimetic ability all but irrelevant:

As far as his race is concerned, or his sixteenth part of a race, it does not greatly matter whether Mr. Chesnutt invented [his stories'] motives, or found them, as he feigns, among his distant cousins of the Southern cabins. In either case, the wonder of their beauty is the same.

To see the country's greatest champion of realism suddenly claim that it no longer “matters” whether or not a story seems “invented” is nothing short of astonishing – and even more astonishing is the fact what Howells comes to this conclusion based solely on Chesnutt's “sixteenth part of a race.” Just a few years earlier, as we saw, Howells could barely wrap his head around why “one-sixteenth” of “that blood” should prevent Miss Aldgate from considering herself “as white... as any one.”⁵⁰¹ Yet if Howells had once found Miss Aldgate's “solidarity of race” with “the blackest... negress” anything but self-evident, he had since become a fervent believer in Chesnutt's “sad solidarity” with “the blackest negro,” because for him, the question of Chesnutt's literary merit hinged entirely on “whether we consider [his stories] merely as realistic fiction, apart from their author, or as studies of that middle world of which he is naturally and voluntarily a citizen.”⁵⁰² As the former, “their appeal” as “works of art... cannot always be allowed;” as the latter, their “unerring knowledge” of racial life “in its peculiar racial characteristics” ranks with that of “such an inside witness as Mr. Paul Dunbar.”⁵⁰³ What Howells's response to Chesnutt shows us is how quickly the logic of racial realism itself becomes radicalized, in the sense that it is no longer attached to any ordinary sense of verisimilitude whatsoever.

It is worth noting here to note that Chesnutt himself was hardly so sure about the “mere matter of racial sympathy,” as he phrased the issue in *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901). In that novel, Chesnutt's proxy, the appropriately light-skinned Dr. Miller, finds the “color line” so

“arbitrary” that even though he tries to cultivate “a certain expansive warmth” toward “his people... in spite of their obvious shortcomings,” he secretly finds them “just as offensive” as anyone else.⁵⁰⁴ When Dr. Miller is forced to ride Jim Crow in Virginia, he simply cannot bring himself to believe he has more in common with the “noisy, loquacious, happy, dirty, and malodorous” field hands in the “colored car” than with his medical colleague Dr. Burns over in the “white” section of the train.⁵⁰⁵ When it comes to “men of culture” like Dr. Miller and Dr. Burns, the narrator insists, “the similarities are vastly more important and fundamental than the differences.”⁵⁰⁶ Surprisingly enough, Howells seems to be of the exact same mind. In his review of Chesnutt, Howells fully acknowledges that life among the “paler shades” is not so “very different” from his own life in “polite white society.”⁵⁰⁷ He even goes so far as to caution his white readers that it is “wiser to recognize that they are like us,” with all “the same social ambitions and prejudices” (which is fair enough, given that Chesnutt’s proxy, Dr. Miller, and Howells’s proxy, Dr. Olney, share the same contempt for the working class).⁵⁰⁸ Howells’s point is simply that Chesnutt would be best advised to “own his color” anyway, because it is his color, and his color alone, that makes his stories worthy of being mentioned in the same breath as “Mr. Dunbar among the truest of our poets.”⁵⁰⁹

Chesnutt may have given Howells the opportunity to make his case for racialized realism as forcefully as possible, but Howells had long since reached the conclusion that it was better to own racial difference than deny it. As soon as Howells got the chance to revise his initial review of Dunbar in 1898, he retracted his original claim that God had “made of one blood all nation of men,” and proclaimed instead that “it appears to me now, that there is a precious difference of temperament between the races which it would be a great pity ever to lose.”⁵¹⁰ What is striking about Howells’s commitment to “precious difference” is that it may have been new to him, but it

was hardly exclusive to him – nor indeed exclusive to white writers like him. At almost the exact same moment as Howells, and in almost the exact the same terms, we find W.E.B. Du Bois vigorously championing the “essential difference of races,” and wholeheartedly rejecting the notion that “out of one blood God created all nations.”⁵¹¹

In his 1897 essay “The Conservation of Races,” Du Bois defends the “essential difference of races” on the basis of their “spiritual, psychical, differences” that run “deeper” than any “physical differences of color, hair and bone.”⁵¹² As Anthony Appiah has argued, Du Bois’s redefinition of race is a bit misleading in the sense that it is still fundamentally grounded in biological difference, but for Du Bois, the point of redefining race as a set of “spiritual ideals” is that it allows him to present Blackness as an asset rather than an hindrance.⁵¹³ Whereas the average “American Negro” wanted nothing so much as to “lose [the] race identity” that made them the target of endless “race prejudice,” Du Bois argued that they should embrace it instead, because it was only by joining together in “race solidarity” that they could hope to fulfill their higher calling.⁵¹⁴

For the development of Negro genius, of Negro literature and art, of Negro spirit, only Negroes bound and welded together, Negroes inspired by one vast ideal, can work out in its fullness the great message we have for humanity.⁵¹⁵

Because Du Bois considered it the “distinct mission” of the “Negro people” to “speak to the nations of the earth a Divine truth,” he believed it was the “duty of [all] Americans of Negro descent, as a body, to maintain their race identity” at all costs.⁵¹⁶ Perhaps more importantly, at least for my purposes, he believed it was the duty of all American authors of such “Negro descent” to express this “race identity” in their writing as forcefully as possible. Du Bois insists that it is “absolutely imperative” for writers to develop a “Negro school of literature and art” in order to bring the “full spiritual message” of the “Negro spirit” to fruition.⁵¹⁷

Just as Du Bois believed in the “essential difference” of race, as exemplified by the distinctiveness of “Negro literature,” Howells believed in the “precious difference” of race, as exemplified by the “innate distinction” of the “American negro... in literature.”⁵¹⁸ Indeed, when we look back at Howells’s earliest attempt to give form to “precious difference” on the page, it seems almost too perfect that Miss Aldgate should have first encountered the “black voice” in a “colored church.”⁵¹⁹ Even if all we were doing were following the basic logic of Du Bois’s “essential difference,” we would already be able to appreciate how Howells’s “black voice” serves as a kind of analogue for Du Bois’s “Negro spirit,” but in context, it is almost eerie to see how spiritual Howells’s depiction actually is. Miss Aldgate is attracted to the “black voice” precisely because it speaks directly to the “trouble in her soul.”⁵²⁰ It comes to her from a man who looks much like a spirit himself (“soft shadow,” “wavering blur,” “no discernable features”), and who sounds much like Du Bois.⁵²¹ When he preaches, “our college needs help... let us pray,” it is clear that his voice is very much a mouthpiece for the “development of Negro genius,” just as Du Bois would have understood it.⁵²²

Yet if Howells and Du Bois are almost eerily aligned when it comes to the spiritual dimension of race, they could not be more opposed in their thinking on the national dimension of race. For Howells, as we might expect, championing the “American negro... in literature” was entirely a matter of advancing “American civilization.”⁵²³ What mattered to him about Dunbar’s dialect poems was that they were “distinctly his contribution to the body of American poetry;” what mattered to him about Chesnut’s dialect stories was that they were distinct contributions to the “department of literature where Americans hold the foremost place” (i.e., dialect).⁵²⁴ For Du Bois, in contrast, “Negro literature” mattered only in the sense that it advanced the “full, complete Negro message of the whole Negro race,” of which “the 8,000,000 people of Negro

blood in the United States of America” formed only a small fraction.⁵²⁵ In Du Bois’s own words, thinking of “Negro literature” as an expression of the “Negro spirit” absolutely required thinking of world history as the evolution “not of nations, but of races.”⁵²⁶

All of this is to say that Howells made a drastic miscalculation when he tried to make Dunbar’s “black poems” serve the interests of American literature. As we know, Howells only turned to racialized realism because dialect was on the brink of exhaustion, and he could not imagine an American literature without it. The problem for Howells was that while Dunbar’s race may have made his dialect sound genuinely authentic, it did so in a way that ensured that it no longer sounded like an expression of his native land at all. (On the contrary: Dunbar’s “Minors” speak the language of the deep South; Dunbar himself was born and bred in Dayton, Ohio). Howells had always thought of printed accents as the literary equivalent of being born on American soil, but – as Du Bois himself could have told him – as soon as we think of “When Malindy Sings” as a “purely and intensely black” poem, what it speaks to us is not the *jus soli* logic of native birth, but the *jus sanguinis* logic of blood heritability. Howells wanted Dunbar’s Black voice to serve as the voice of the nation; what he got instead was the voice of the tribe. Du Bois, of course, would have been delighted by the thought that Dunbar’s poems expressed his race rather than his nation, but what matters for the purposes of my argument is that Dunbar himself has no interest in expressing either. For him, the Black voice is not an expression of identity, but a literary-historical genre. “Negro poetry,” according to him, includes not only that “which is written by negroes,” but “all that is written by whites who have received their inspiration from negro life.”⁵²⁷ When he argues that the author who “best represents the race” is none other than “Joel Chandler Harris,” it is a mark of his conviction that “Negro literature” has

nothing to do with the development of “Negro spirit,” and everything to do with the development of literary history.⁵²⁸

Dunbar, much like Stephen Crane before him, clearly understood the implications of what Howells was asking him to do far better than Howells did himself. Yet if Crane the syndicated reporter could afford to take a mocking tone with Howells (“I can imagine the terrors of being indelibly indebted to the Chump in Art”), Dunbar the former elevator boy had to be far more careful not to risk offending the great editor.⁵²⁹ Back in June 1896, when Howells first reviewed of *Majors and Minors*, Dunbar was completely taken aback. Before he wrote to Howells to thank him, he took two full weeks to perfect his phrasing. The resulting letter has been read by most critics at face value (i.e., as a simple expression of gratitude). Yet there is a certain ambivalence in Dunbar’s observation that “it has taken time for me to recover from the shock of delightful surprise.”⁵³⁰ Whether delightful or otherwise, Dunbar’s “shock” is beyond the scope of what he can possibly get Howells to understand: “you yourself do not know what you have done for me,” he insists, notably refraining from spelling out what it is, exactly, that Howells does not know. When Dunbar does finally express the nature of his objection to Howells’s review, he does so in such an obsequious tone that it is easy to overlook his complaint entirely: “I have written my little pieces... but it seems hardly by my volition,” which means that “my greatest fear is that you may have been more kind to me than just.” Dunbar might have reason for modesty, but the context I have been tracing, what should strike us about these comments is how perfectly they encapsulate Howells’s assumptions about the Black voice (innate, intrinsic, intuitive, etc.). Dunbar presents himself as such “a poor, insignificant, helpless boy” that his “little pieces” can “hardly” be considered a matter of “volition.” Once we read Dunbar’s letter this way – as a kind of caricature of the logic of racialized realism – then we have

to interpret his “fear” that Howells has been “more kind... than just” as a serious, if subtle, critique of Howells’s position.

When Dunbar suggests that Howells’s review will serve him as an “incentive to more careful work,” it is his way of insinuating, as forcefully as he dares, that Howells has read his work entirely wrong.⁵³¹ In Dunbar’s own estimation, his dialect poems *do* show promise – but so too do all his *other* poems. The implication is that any critic attentive to the “careful work” that went into Dunbar’s wide variety of poetic forms would have had to read the dialect poems the same way as all the others: as an expression of his literary ambition, *not* his personal racial identity. To be clear, what is at stake here is more than just a bruised ego. What Dunbar is objecting to is not so much Howells’s account of *Majors and Minors* as it is Howells’s account of literary history. Dunbar understood his work to be part of an extensive dialect tradition that included not just Black authors like Charles Chesnutt, but also white authors like Joel Chandler Harris and James Whitcomb Riley. More importantly, he thought of himself as equally indebted to authors who never wrote in dialect at all – like his literary hero John Keats, whose influence can be traced throughout *Majors and Minors* in poems like “Ione” (or “Ode to Ethiopia,” for that matter).

Although Howells may have thought of Dunbar exclusively in terms of his “contribution to the body of American poetry,” Dunbar himself was at least as concerned with his contribution to British poetry. When we find him complaining the following year that “Mr. Howells has done me irrevocable harm in the dictum he laid down regarding my dialect verse,” it is precisely because Howells’s review had proven so influential (“one critic says a thing and the rest hasten to say the same thing”) that Dunbar is “afraid that it will even influence English criticism.”⁵³² It is easy to assume that Dunbar reacted to Howells’s “dictum” with dismay because he wanted to

be recognized for his odes written in time-honored English tradition, not for his so-called “jingle[s] in a broken tongue.”⁵³³ His estranged wife Alice Dunbar Nelson certainly thought so: “say what you will, *or what Mr. Howells wills*, about ‘feeling Negro life esthetically, and expressing it lyrically,’ it was in the pure English verse that the poet expressed *himself*.”⁵³⁴ While there is plenty that could be said about Dunbar Nelson’s notion of “pure English verse” that is the product of the “poet himself” – as opposed to Howells’s notion of “purely black” verse that is the product of the “black poet” – it is important to recognize that for Dunbar, the distinction between dialect and standard English was in some sense beside the point. Howells’s “dictum” did him “irrevocable harm” not because it limited him to writing in dialect, but because it limited the way that his dialect would be read: as a testament to his race, rather than his place in literary history. By Dunbar’s assessment, if a neoclassical poem like “Ione” linked him to a master of classical form like Keats, then a dialect poem like “When Malindy Sings” ought to link him to a master of phonetic form like Harris.

Dunbar was in fact so disturbed by the notion that Howells’s review would prevent his poetry from being read in properly literary-historical terms that he decided to turn from poetry to the unexpected field of prose. As he wrote to Howells in 1897 from London, where he was embarking on his first lecture tour, “although I distrust my ability very much, I am hard at work upon a novel,” adding:

If I once get really started in the literary line, no more readings for me – forever. I have had my fill of readings and managers. If I can make my living by my pen I will not use my voice. This will be hard I know but I have not entirely lost heart.⁵³⁵

Dunbar found “readings” to be the “sort of work which [he] despised” not only because he was forced to perform “between dancing girls from the vaudeville and clowns from the varieties,” but also because he longed to be “hard at work” at something distinctly “in the literary line.” It is one

thing to imagine that Dunbar would rather be reciting his standard-English poems than his dialect poems; it is quite another to imagine that he would rather be writing a novel than doing either. Dialect work was not just degrading for Dunbar, it was a waste of his time, because it forced him to keep returning to a representational problem that he had already solved. Dunbar was aware that anything he wrote in dialect was essentially guaranteed to succeed (“the press here has been universally kind”); he was equally aware that anything he wrote in the form of a novel was essentially guaranteed to fail (“I am wondering what they will say about my book, they are so conservative here”). The point for him was that it was precisely the possibility of failure that made novel-writing a properly literary endeavor, in the sense that negative reviews would prove that he was finally being measured by his literary merit rather than by his race.

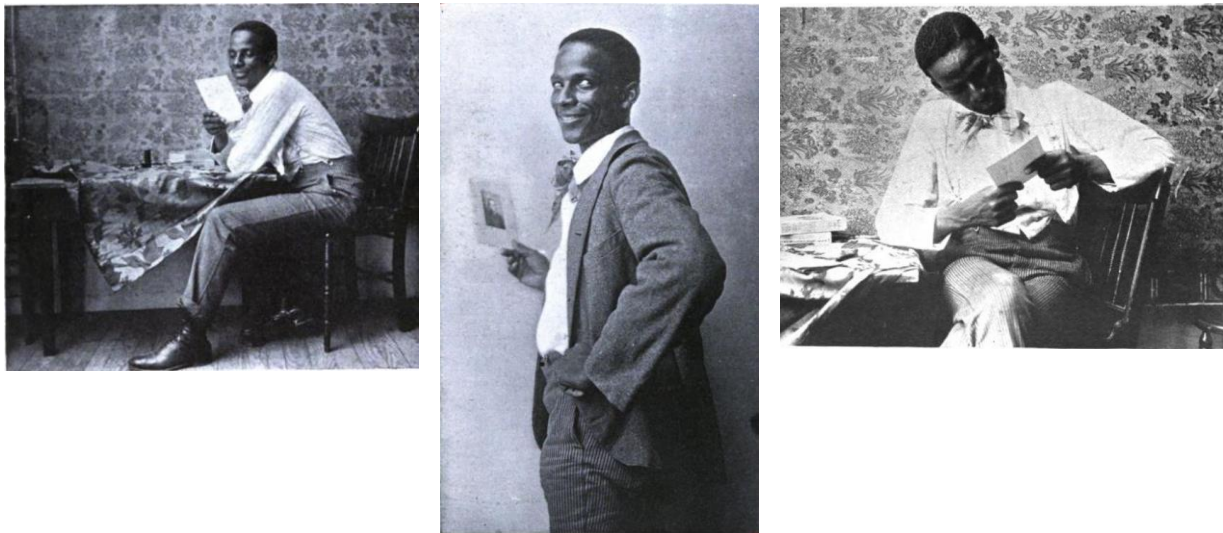
It is no accident that Dunbar – the man hailed by Booker T. Washington as the “Poet Laureate of the Negro race” – wound up devoting so much of his late career to prose. Between 1898 (the year Howells first proclaimed the “precious difference” of race) and 1904 (the year Dunbar’s failing health forced him to seek his mother’s care), Dunbar published four novels and four substantial short story collections.⁵³⁶ Predictably, Dunbar’s stories about antebellum Black culture proved much more popular than his novels about contemporary white society, but the point is that no matter how poorly his novels were received, Dunbar refused to stop trying. On the contrary, he turned from one unexpected genre to the next, as if determined to discover the right avenue for his talents. His first novel *The Uncalled* (1898) is a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age in which the whole family speaks a rural Ohioan dialect; his second, *The Love of Landry* (1900), is a Colorado cowboy romance in which neither the metropolitan heroine nor her Western beau speak in dialect all. The same author who had once filled *Majors and Minors* with

an astonishing array of poetic forms remained as committed as ever to trying his hand at as many literary forms as possible.

Of course, if Dunbar's ambition was to keep working on the problem of the novel, that meant he would have to confront the problem of what kind of writing he *would* be able to sell – and in this regard at least, Howells's influence helped him more than it harmed him. When Howells suggested that “a book of entirely *black* verse from [Dunbar] would succeed,” Dunbar took the marketing advice to heart, publishing six such books in seven short years (*Poems of Cabin and Field*, 1899; *Candle-Lightin' Time*, 1901; *When Malindy Sings*, 1903; *Li'l' Gal*, 1904; *Howdy Honey Howdy*, 1905; *Joggin Erlong*, 1906).⁵³⁷ As a commercial strategy, the gambit paid off: Dunbar's standalone dialect volumes proved so popular that they make up most of our original editions of his work. On the one hand, there is a reason Dunbar's dialect volumes are rarely mentioned anymore: they pander to plantation stereotypes in a way that critics have tended to find regrettable at best. On the other hand, there is a sense in which these dialect volumes expose the problem with Howells's demand for “book[s] of entirely *black* verse,” even as they simultaneously work to fulfill that same demand.

Every one of Dunbar's dialect volumes is illustrated by photographs of Black characters posed in antebellum costumes, as if Dunbar is responding to the claim that his poems are “purely black” by showing Howells what it would really look like to make “pure African type” visible on the page. We can begin to understand the significance of these photos for Dunbar by examining one of the very dialect poems he pairs them with. “The Photograph” (1904) describes a “pictyiah” of a “gal” named “Sal” whose indexical “photygraph” (“Dat's de very way she be”) manages to certify the undeniable Blackness of the speaker describing it (“ez sho' 's my face is black”).⁵³⁸ In much the same way, the photographs that accompany “The Photograph” [Fig. 2] certify the

undeniable Blackness of the literary language they are intended to illustrate. Instead of showing us Sal, they show us the poetic speaker holding a photo of Sal – a move that all but forces the reader to recognize that the indexical logic operating within “The Photograph” applies just forcefully to the poem’s illustrations themselves. In the same way as the speaker finds himself looking at the photo of Sal *within* the poem, the reader finds herself looking at the photos of the speaker *outside* the poem – and so if the photo of Sal is used to certify the speaker’s racial authenticity, then it follows that the photos of the speaker must certify Dunbar’s racial authenticity in exactly the same way.

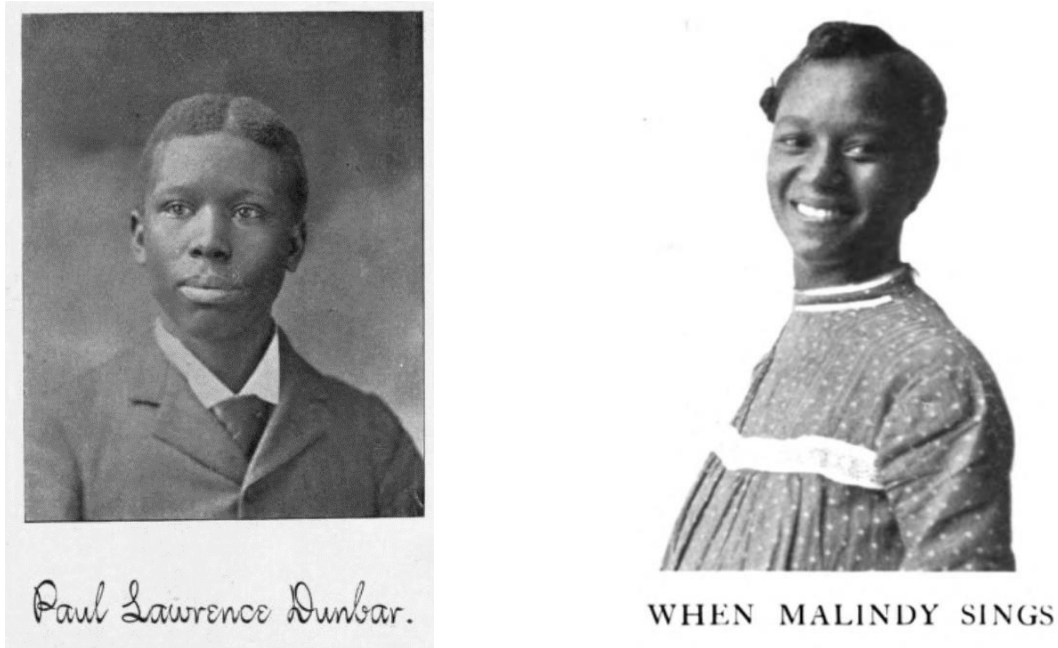


[Fig. 2: The Photographs of “The Photograph”]⁵³⁹

If the logic of “The Photograph” sounds familiar to us, it should: it is the same logic with which Howells reacted to Dunbar’s photograph, “with [its] race traits strangely accented.” When Dunbar takes up Howells’s logic, it is only to turn it against him: if Dunbar’s photograph of “pure African type” certifies his language as “purely black,” then the photographs accompanying

“The Photograph” certify the poem as a pure representation of race, and nothing else. In *sounding* “purely black,” the poem can no longer *speak* pure American.

To put the point a bit more sharply, when Dunbar republishes “When Malindy Sings” in 1903 at the head of its own dialect volume, the literary language of the poem changes, even though the words on the page remain exactly the same. Back in 1895, of course, “When Malindy Sings” had appeared right alongside poems written in white dialect. The reason it was plausible for Howells to imagine that Dunbar’s Black dialect counted as American language was that Dunbar juxtaposed the accents of his “middle-south negroes” with those of his “middle-south whites.” Another way of putting this is that the Black dialect that appears in *Majors and Minors* is essentially a regional dialect (i.e., a southern plantation dialect), just like the white dialect featured alongside it (i.e., a rural Ohioan dialect). When Dunbar republished “When Malindy Sings” eight years later, however, this time it was surrounded by “entirely *black* verse” and illustrated with an entirely Black photograph, which was captioned not “Malindy” but “When Malindy Sings,” as if what the image was meant to represent was not the poem’s central character but the poem itself.⁵⁴⁰ The parallels to Dunbar’s own frontispiece portrait in *Majors and Minors* could not be more striking [Fig. 3]. In its original incarnation, “When Malindy Sings” could at least plausibly be read as a work of American poetry; in its reinvented form, it cannot possibly be read as anything but “negro poetry.” It has become, in every way possible, the blood logic of race made over into literature.



[Fig. 3: The “pure African” author and the “purely Black” poem]

In creating such an intensified version of racialized realism, of course, Dunbar could hardly be said to be resisting Howells’s demand for “entirely *black* verse.” Both Crane and Dunbar had managed to come up with a dialect that allowed Howells to pay tribute to their considerable literary ability (however confused his account of it may have been), but whereas Crane’s version defied Howells’ expectations, Dunbar’s version only confirmed them. Yet paradoxically, it is precisely Dunbar’s decision to double down on the Black voice that allows him to challenge Howells’s account of literary history. With his illustrated volumes, Dunbar takes an important thread of literary-historical development (racialized realism) and works it through to its logical conclusions (literal indexicality). In this sense, he makes what Howells may or may not have liked about the idea of “entirely *black* verse” irrelevant, because in Dunbar’s hands, the Black voice absolutely refuses to be read in nationalist terms.

In fact, Dunbar had no more desire to be considered an American poet than a “negro poet.” In the same interview that saw him praising Harris, when he is asked what quality makes

“poetry written by negroes... native and African and in every way different from the verse of Anglo-Saxons,” Dunbar begins by rejecting the premise of the question.⁵⁴¹ When his interviewer insists that there must be “a certain tropic warmth” to “African” poetry “if it is to be genuine, a thing apart,” Dunbar makes his point even more forcefully: “It is inevitable. We must write like the white men. I do not mean imitate them; but our life is now the same.”⁵⁴² Dunbar’s point is that even when his poems sound most like those of a Black poet, he is, in fact, still writing like “white men”—or rather, “like *the* white men,” by which he does not mean that his dialect is written in the same style as Harris’s (“I do not mean imitate them”), but that it *functions* as just as much a style for him as it did when Harris wrote it.

When Harris rendered the phonetics of plantation speech, critics praised his skill at capturing an oral tradition that came from outside him; when Dunbar did the same thing, critics assumed that he was speaking from *within* that tradition, even though Dunbar (unlike Harris!) had never once set foot on a southern plantation. Today, of course, critics are more likely to consider Harris’s dialect culturally appropriative than praiseworthy, but the point for Dunbar is that he would have wanted his own version to be considered at least as appropriative. According to Dunbar, whenever he is forced to write “scenes on plantations in the south,” the “dialect” he ends up producing is just “a certain kind of poetry” – as in the rather outdated kind – and what he wanted was to invent something different.⁵⁴³ As he tries to explain to his obtuse interviewer, “There are great questions in my mind regarding the forms of poetry” – questions like, “Do you think it is possible now to invent a new form? Have the old ones completely exhausted the possible supply?” Critics have long considered poems like “An Ante-Bellum Sermon” proof of Dunbar’s considerable skill as an ironist, but what I am arguing is that there is a certain irony embedded in every instance of Dunbar’s “entirely *black* verse.” When Dunbar engages in the

same kind of cultural appropriation as Harris – when it is a matter of a *Black* author doing the appropriation – it functions as a repudiation of the very notion of racially distinctive language. What emerges from Dunbar’s pen might look like a pure expression of racial distinctiveness, but what it represents is an account of literary history in which racial distinctiveness matters so little that a Black author can be as much of an outsider to Black culture as a white one.

Like Crane, Dunbar understood that the urgent need for “new form[s]” in literature meant that it was time for dialect to die; and like Crane, he responded to Howells’s desire to keep dialect alive at all costs by exposing the flaws in Howells’s logic. Whereas Crane literalized the demand for “unconsciously” repeated dialect in a way that made it no longer sound *natural* at all, Dunbar literalized the demand for “purely black” dialect in a way that made it no longer sound *national* at all. Seen in this light, it is hard not to be struck by how much Crane and Dunbar actually have in common – from their vast literary ambitions, to their distinctly modernist literary sensibilities, to their eerily synchronous literary careers.⁵⁴⁴ Yet by the time both of them died young of tuberculosis (Crane at 28, Dunbar at 33), Dunbar had arguably gotten much less of an opportunity than Crane to see his literary ambitions through to fruition. Much like the main characters in his last novel, *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), the best Dunbar can seem to hope for is a return to the “old plantation.” His final poetry collection, *Joggin’ Erlong* (1906), is a literal replica of his previous dialect volumes: all but one of its twenty poems are reprints. Meanwhile, his short story collections (*Folks from Dixie*, 1898; *The Strength of Gideon*, 1900; *In Old Plantation Days*, 1903; *The Heart of Happy Hollow*, 1904) recycle a number of the most stereotypical tropes from plantation fiction, leading some critics to dismiss Dunbar’s prose fiction as the literary equivalent of playing Uncle Tom.

Yet in the context I have been tracing, what is most striking about Dunbar's short stories is how often they thematize the kind of "extreme spiritual activity" that first brought Miss Aldgate to the steps of her "colored church" (even though Dunbar himself seemed to find the "wild, emotional religion of most of [the] race" hard to take seriously).⁵⁴⁵ Over and over, Dunbar writes about Black preachers who sound just like Miss Aldgate's church lecturer; the only difference is that in Dunbar, the "black voice" always fails at its mission. "Ol' Brothah Pakkah," a typical "Americanized African" pastor with "sweat... pouring down his black face," preaches with such "eloquence" and "power" that all believe he "sholy is full of de spirit" – that is, until a "pack of cards" comes flying out of his pocket, "grinning wickedly face upward."⁵⁴⁶ (They are not his, but the effect is ruined nonetheless.) Another would-be preacher, "Brothah Gidjon," seems "early destined" for "spiritual significance" because of his "good, clear voice," which enables him to "lead a hymn... even when he had to improvise both words and music."⁵⁴⁷ Yet even Gidjon's "wonderfully sweet, flowing, natural bass" goes to waste when he decides to remain loyal to his old masters all throughout the war, long after the "spirit of freedom" has lured his entire flock away.⁵⁴⁸

In contrast, Dunbar's most effective preacher speaks a language that does not resemble Gideon's "best singing voice" in the slightest.⁵⁴⁹ His 1904 story "Old Abe's Conversion" (1904) pits Abram Dixon, a "plantation exhorter of the ancient type," against his own son, Robert, whose "ambition to take a college course" has transformed him into an entirely different kind of preacher than his father.⁵⁵⁰ Whereas Abram's dialect-inflected "torrent of speech" gets "dem people moanin' an' hollerin' all over de church," Robert's "spiritless" standard-English remarks fall so flat they "never fetched an amen."⁵⁵¹ Yet it is precisely Robert's ability to speak "in the simplest possible manner" that winds up making a "new convert" of Abram in the end.⁵⁵² In

Abram's "little Southern town," the congregation may burst into hallelujahs whenever Abram "dashe[s] blindly into speech, coherent or otherwise," but in Robert's "city church," Robert needs to "appeal to reason" if he hopes to rescue his "black boys" from the courtroom judge known for giving them "brief attention and long sentences."⁵⁵³ In contrast to Abram's theological mission ("teachin' dem to die decent"), the salvation Robert offers is more "practical" in nature: he aims "to save them from the first contact with the prison and all that it means."⁵⁵⁴ Robert's modern style of preaching wins out over what his father calls "good strong doctern" not because of *what* Robert says, but *how* he says it: "as simply and as quietly as if he were not in church."⁵⁵⁵ It is Robert's *rejection* of Black speech, not his mastery of it, that allows him to carry out *his* mission.

Crucially, Robert rejects his father's "ancient" style not because he has any particular antipathy toward it ("even to himself he did not say, 'But my way is the better one'"), but simply because the realities of the modern metropolis call for a different approach ("He had learned new ways. They had retained the old").⁵⁵⁶ In this, Robert echoes Dunbar's own attitude toward the so-called "black voice." At the start of his career, Dunbar had made no real objection to writing in dialect; by the turn of the century, he had come to object quite strongly, but only because dialect was outdated, not because it was inferior. Once we understand Robert and his preaching as a proxy for Dunbar and his poetry, then we can look to Robert's "low voice" as a figure for the kind of language that Dunbar *does* think is ready to meet the demands of the new century.⁵⁵⁷ As opposed to Abram, who still speaks the old language of racial difference, Robert speaks the new language of racial justice: his "whispered consultation" in the courtroom where "many of his race appear as prisoners" is entirely responsible for getting the unfair judge to rescind his unfair judgment.⁵⁵⁸ Dunbar may frame the injustice of the case in sentimental terms ("Abram's heart

bled” for the “little, wobegone fellow hardly ten years of age” who has been “charged with stealing cakes” because he was “hongry”), but what is at issue is clearly the more fundamental legal inequities of Jim Crow: “there is no reformatory for black boys here, and they may not go to the institutions for the white; so for the slightest offence they are sent to jail.”⁵⁵⁹ In the end, Robert’s rejection of Black speech is precisely what enables him to build a better future for the “black boys” of the city, as distinct from both the “squalor” of the north and the “old-time” ways of the south.⁵⁶⁰ What “Old Abe’s Conversion” suggests is that Dunbar does believe in something like “Negro literature” after all. It is just that Dunbar cares less about whether an author speaks *from* the race than whether they manage to speak *for* it.

When we return now to Dunbar’s claim that “negro poetry” includes “all that is written by whites who have received their inspiration from negro life,” we can appreciate just what he intended “inspiration from negro life” to entail. Thomas Nelson Page did not count: “You mean Paige? Yes, I left him out with intention. His attitude is condescending, always.”⁵⁶¹ For Howells, Page’s skill at rendering “negro parlance” may have been sufficient compensation for “something cruel” in his prose; but for Dunbar, it was Page’s “attitude,” not his accent, that was the final measure of his ability to represent race on the page. Another way of saying this is that for Howells, Dunbar’s work mattered because it “made the strongest claim for the negro in English literature that the negro has yet made;” but for Dunbar, making a literary “claim” for the “negro” had absolutely nothing to do with being one.⁵⁶²

To borrow Kenneth Warren’s terms, Dunbar’s conception of “Negro literature” was overwhelmingly “instrumental,” as in “written to achieve a social end” (or, in Dunbar’s case, a literary end, which for him amounted to the same thing), as opposed to “indexical,” as in written to provide “evidence of the inner nature and capacity of the Negro race.”⁵⁶³ That Dunbar should

have so emphatically rejected the indexical function of “Negro literature” is remarkable in its own right, since, as Warren points out, “African American literary practice” under Jim Crow was by and large “unavoidably oriented” toward an “index of racial progress,” which means that we almost inevitably see “the instrumental and the indexical intertwine.”⁵⁶⁴ Even more remarkable, however, is that Dunbar rejects the indexical function of “Negro literature” precisely because he sees indexicality as an active barrier to achieving his instrumental ends.

We can see just why Dunbar felt so strongly in this regard by looking at his response to the notorious Wilmington Massacre of 1898, “Recession Never” (which was so uncharacteristically vehement that *McClure’s*, which had originally solicited the article, declined to publish it).⁵⁶⁵ When Dunbar denounces “race spirit in the United States,” he means something very different by it than Du Bois: in Dunbar’s version, “race spirit” refers to recent “race riots... over the bodies of murdered men, women, and children.”⁵⁶⁶ Hence whereas Du Bois responded to the Wilmington Massacre as a matter in which “we” (i.e., “the negroes”) ought to confront the “attitude” of the “the mass of the nation,” Dunbar responded to it as a matter in which “we” (i.e., the “American people”) ought to muster the “calmness, justice, breadth, and manliness which should characterize a great nation.”⁵⁶⁷ As Dunbar argued, “for so long a time has the black man believed that he is an American citizen that he will not be easily convinced to the contrary,” especially now that “public opinion has shifted” to accommodate the idea that “the negro” is indeed “a man with a man’s full powers.”⁵⁶⁸ When Dunbar rejects the distinctive literary power of the “black voice,” and insists that he should be understood as having the exact same exact relation to literary merit as any white author who ever made a name for themselves in American literature, it is his means of proclaiming himself “a man with a man’s full powers” – or to put the

point more sharply, an *author* with an *author's* full powers. At least in literature – if not in politics – he could already lay claim to the racial equality otherwise denied him.

While Dunbar and Du Bois shared an overarching mission of racial uplift, then, their opinions about how to make race literature serve that mission could not have been more different – as Dunbar himself noted in his 1903 essay “Representative American Negroes” (albeit in characteristically subtle terms).⁵⁶⁹ There, Dunbar approaches the topic of Du Bois with certain reservations: “what shall be said,” he wonders, about a man who “looms” so large, “so distinctively big”?⁵⁷⁰ He is willing to admit that Du Bois has a “certain power;” in politics, his “contribution to the discussion of the race problem” is “invaluable,” and in literature, “the rhythm of his style, his fancy, his imagery” makes him fully worthy of “the name of poet.” Yet what strikes Dunbar most forcefully regarding “Dr. DuBois” is that he “impresses one as having reduced all life and all literature to a perfect system.” This might sound like an innocent compliment, but it is worth noting that from Dunbar’s perspective, Du Bois had indeed “reduced... all literature to a perfect system,” in the sense of a pure expression of racial identity – whether it was a matter of “Negro literature” expressing nothing but the “Negro spirit,” or of “Japanese literature” expressing nothing but the “Japanese spirit.” In this context, Dunbar’s commentary sounds like an exercise in plausible deniability: those of Du Bois’s mind will interpret the phrase a “perfect system” to mean that Du Bois has flawlessly executed his vision; those of Dunbar’s mind will interpret the phrase to mean that Du Bois’s approach to literature is too reductive to truly advance the interests of the race.

Given the subtlety with which Dunbar expresses his view on race literature, here and elsewhere, it can come as no surprise that Howells is far from the only critic who wound up misinterpreting it. James Weldon Johnson, in *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1931

edition), would be the first to claim that Dunbar's dialect verse betrayed the true aims of "American Negro poetry," because the kind of "conventionalized dialect" Dunbar adopted "had its origin in the minstrel traditions," which forced Dunbar, despite his "innate literary distinction," to fall back "stereotyped ideas" of a "narrow and unnatural literary mold."⁵⁷¹ In other words, when it comes to Dunbar's dialect, Johnson comes to the exact opposite conclusion as Howells – yet he can only do so because he relies on the exact same understanding of artificial and genuine speech as Howells. Ironically enough, Johnson critiques the "traditional dialect" of Howells's era in terms that sound like they could have been come straight from Howells himself: there is a "vital distinction," Johnson insists, between the "genuine folk stuff" of "actual Negro life," as in the "common, racy, living, authentic speech of the Negro," and the "artificial folk stuff of the dialect school," as in the "false minstrel tradition" written "chiefly to entertain an outside audience."⁵⁷² Johnson may shift the goalposts when it comes to distinguishing between "artificial" and "genuine" dialect, but his desire to do so in the first place is nothing but a continuation of Howells's project.

We can see Howells's logic at play even more clearly in Johnson's 1912 novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which concludes with the narrator deciding to pass in order to marry the white woman he loves – although, of course, only after he fulfills his "duty" to tell her of the "drops of African blood in [his] veins."⁵⁷³ It is Miss Aldgate's "imperative duty" all over again – only by this time, there is no longer any doubt that the innate, inimitable, incomparable lyricism of the Black voice stands for the blood logic of race. In Johnson's version, the tragedy of passing is not so much that the narrator cannot get over his "dread" of his "secret's being found out," but that he "cannot repress" his ambition to become a great ragtime composer, which so haunts him ("a vanished dream, a dead ambition, a sacrificed talent") that the

whitewashed “Chopinesque” arrangements he composes as a white man literally pale in comparison.⁵⁷⁴ What Johnson thinks is lost when the narrator chooses to play like Chopin instead of like Joplin is exactly what Howells thinks is lost when Dunbar chooses to write like Keats instead of like Chesnutt. Yet as we know, for Dunbar, there was nothing to be gained by imitating a Black artist, just like there was nothing to be lost by imitating a white one. Dunbar would have seen no reason why Johnson’s narrator shouldn’t have tried to realize his vast musical ambitions in classical measure rather than ragtime swing, because in his mind, it was precisely the ability to access any aesthetic form one pleased that was the true measure of artistic ambition.

To this day, critics continue to debate whether Dunbar embraced “the mask” of racial minstrelsy, or whether he managed in some meaningful sense to subvert it. What I have been arguing is that if we are to take Dunbar’s own account of his literary project seriously, then neither answer is correct, because Dunbar would have rejected out of hand the premise that his racial identity mattered at all. When contemporary critics focus on linking Dunbar’s dialect to quintessentially Black art forms (i.e., what Johnson would call the “genuine folk stuff”) – whether that be the rhythm of the blues, the call-and-response of gospel song, or the metrical repetition of the plantation spiritual – their work essentially perpetuates the logic of racialized realism, rather than reading Dunbar on his own terms.⁵⁷⁵ It is obvious that Dunbar hated having to write “entirely *black* verse;” it is equally obvious that he elected to do so anyway. What is less obvious is what it means that Dunbar, unlike Howells, was able to anticipate what “purely black” poetry would mean for the future of American literature. The Black voice may have emerged from the distinctly 19th-century poetics of nation, but it brought about the distinctly 20th-century poetics of race.⁵⁷⁶ Every modern American writer who came afterwards – Black *and* white –

would have to grapple with the consequences. Dunbar matters not just because he marks the moment of transition, but because he was the first to grapple with the poetics of race and nation – not by endorsing one or the other, but by seeking to refuse either alternative.

Epilogue

IV. In What Sense is William Dean Howells American Literature?

That William Dean Howells features so prominently in this dissertation may come to some as a surprise. It certainly did for me. When I first started this project, I was not particularly interested in Howells – but I *was* interested in Howells’s incredible influence over American letters (or at least that subset of it he referred to as “the fine art of high literature”).⁵⁷⁷ As editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Howells shaped American literature of the late 19th-century to an astonishing degree. If dialect literature, as I discussed in my introduction, In this sense – as a kind of organizing principle or institutional force – Howells seemed to me like a kin puppetmaster.⁵⁷⁸ Howells’s reign over the field of American literature, which lasted over thirty years, ensured that his favorite genre – dialect fiction written in transliterated local accents – became essentially synonymous with high literary production. It also ensured that his favorite authors – dialect pioneers like Bret Harte, George Washington Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, and Mark Twain – came to dominate not just *The Atlantic*, but every literary magazine in the country. As Howells consolidated and crystallized the country’s taste for dialect, he was able to elevate numerous authors who would never have previously been associated with high literature – from queer studies icons like Sarah Orne Jewett, to ethnic studies icons like Yiddish-American writer Abraham Cahan and African-American writer Paul Laurence Dunbar. It was in some sense inevitable, then, that if my ambition was to write about the dialect writers that *I* considered the most ambitious (Twain, Harris, Jewett, Cahan, Dunbar, Crane), I would find myself almost inexorably drawn into Howells’s sphere of influence, just as my authors themselves had been.

What came as a surprise was the realization that Howells’s fiction *also* fascinated me – not because Howells was an especially gifted *writer* of American literature, but because he was

an incredibly astute *reader* of it. In novels such as *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890) and *An Imperative Duty* (1891), Howells not only allegorizes the most significant developments in American literature over the course of his career (often in far clearer terms than he ever managed to articulate as a literary critic); he also anticipates the most pressing literary problems that would determine the direction of American literature for decades to come. The irony about Howells's gift for divination is that he lands, more often than not, on the "wrong" side of literary history, in the sense that he keeps trying to return American literature to a version of naturalism that had long since run its course. Yet it is precisely Howells's resistance to innovation that allows him to perceive certain developments *within* naturalism that would prove to be its undoing. As the dialectics of dialect gave rise to the first glimmers of American literary modernism, Howells was the only critic at the time to notice what was happening – even if it was only because he was doing everything in his power to try to prevent it.

At the same time, I want to emphasize that this dissertation is no more a literary history of naturalism than it is a monograph on the novels of William Dean Howells. When I write about the greatest challenges confronting American dialect literature, it is because they serve as a figure for the greatest challenges confronting America as a nation – and indeed the nation-state as such. This whole project originated in the attempt to think through the relationship between folk language (as in "one nation, one language, one people") and literary representations of that kind of language, whether it be the native Occitan of Frédéric Mistral, the vernacular Low German of the Brothers Grimm, the rural Russian of Alexander Pushkin ("One ought to learn the Russian language from the village-women"), the "peasant dirt literature" (乡土文学) of Lu Xun (Mao's favorite author), the secularist Hebrew of Mendele Mocher Sforim, or the colloquial Yiddish of Sholem Aleichem.

In the 19th century, in many different national contexts, we find authors trying to write the way ordinary people speak – and always with the ambition of making their country's national literature more distinctly national. When we consider the example of Hebrew and Yiddish in particular, where the ambition was to create a nation out of *nothing but printed speech*, we can appreciate just how foundational literary orality was to the formation of the modern nation-state. And when we expand our perspective to include not just colloquial speech in literature, but also primitivism in painting, or jazz vernaculars in dance, or plantation spirituals in music, we can see the same kind of transformation taking place everywhere at the turn of the 20th century. As national identity became the organizing principle of modern life, it fell to artists to take the kinds of folk idioms that had previously been considered fit only for the lower orders of society, and transform them into art forms capable of representing the entire nation as never before.

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- ¹ "The era" as in the 1870s-1890s. See: Richard Brodhead, "The American Literary Field, 1860-1890." In *The Cambridge History of American Literature Vol. 3*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9-62.
- ² Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," chapter one of *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
- ³ Hamlin Garland, "Local Color in Literature," *Crumbling Idols* (1894), 59-60 (ch 5). Garland goes on to mention "The Provençal, the Hun, the Catalanian, the Norwegian" as other examples of national literatures around the world that were simultaneously in the process of transforming their local accents into a literature with international standing.
- ⁴ Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harpers Weekly* 39 (June 8, 1895), 532-533.
- ⁵ Harris, *Uncle Remus*, 4.
- ⁶ Twain, *The Complete Interviews*, 135; Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, 1883 (Reprint, New York: The Heritage Press, 1944): 274, 274, 275, 274. Twain even tried his hardest to persuade Harris to join a dialect reading tour with himself and George Washington Cable. See: Twain, *The Complete Interviews*, 135.
- ⁷ Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, 10
- ⁸ Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa*, 1935 (Reprint, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 17; 15-16.
- ⁹ William Faulkner, "Faulkner's Speech at Nagano, August 5, 1955," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1982): 309.
- ¹⁰ Leo Marx, "The Pilot and the Passenger," *American Literature* 28, no. 2 (May 1956): 140; Stone qtd. in Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13.
- ¹¹ Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, 1923 (Reprint, Oxford: Alden Press, 1958), 412 (ch. 43).
- ¹² Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, 1880 (Reprint, New York: Hawthorn Books, 1921), viii; James Russell Lowell, *The Bigelow Papers* (London: Trübner & Co, 1861), lxii.
- ¹³ Richard Bridgman, *The Colloquial Style in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 50.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 85, 113, 118.
- ¹⁵ Leo Marx, "The Pilot and the Passenger," 140; Lionel Trilling, "The Greatness of Huckleberry Finn," in *Huck Finn Among the Critics: A Centennial Selection*, ed. M. Thomas Inge (Ann Arbor: University Publications of America, 1985): 91; Ralph Ellison, "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," 1953, in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 35.
- ¹⁶ Ellison, *ibid.*
- ¹⁷ Ellison, *ibid.*, 36, 35. There is, of course, another influential account of what matters about the novel's technique, which is Toni Morrison's essay, which focuses not on the novel's speech but on its "silences." Morrison's account was written in 1996, when many school boards were trying to ban *Huckleberry Finn* due to its use of racial epithets. The threat to ban the novel is part of what motivates Morrison to argue that what's *not* on the page can prove even more fruitful to close reading than what *is*. Morrison frames the novel's technical achievement in terms of its structural absences, or what she calls its "withholdings at critical moments" that give the novel its unmistakable sense of tragedy. See: Toni Morrison, "Introduction." *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1996), xxxv. But even Morrison agrees that what makes the novel's "language"

one of Twain's "major feats" was that it is "persuasively aural." See: *ibid.*, xxxiii. In other words, she frames her reading as totally compatible with readings that prioritize Twain's use of natural-sounding speech.

¹⁸ Ellison, "Twentieth-Century Fiction," 34, 40.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24. Ellison wrote "Twentieth Century Fiction" in 1946, but only published it in 1953, at which point he made sure to distance himself from what he called "an unpublished piece written not long after the Second World War" that "remained very much as I wrote it." See: *Ibid.*. Critics are divided on what Ellison might have come to regret about the essay. Some see a move to rescue Hemingway: "Ellison could have only intended the phrase 'bias and shortsightedness' to refer to his treatment of Hemingway." See: Brian Hochman, "Ellison's Hemingways," *African American Review* 42, No. 3/4 (Fall - Winter 2008): 527. Others argue that Ellison must have no longer believed that Jim had been portrayed as a full human being (Ellison would later claim that any humanity within Jim was obscured by a "stereotype mask" that fitted Jim into the outlines of the minstrel tradition;" see: Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," 1958, in *Shadow and Act*: 50). Regardless, Ellison's own admission that he had come to realize that "Twentieth-Century" reflected "perhaps as much about me as a member of a minority as it [did] about literature" tells us that the essay can't speak to the category of "literature" that had mattered so much to Hemingway's assessment of *Huckleberry Finn*. See: Ellison, "Twentieth Century Fiction," 24.

²⁰ Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination*, 1950 (Reprint: New York: New York Review Books, 2008), 107, 113. As Jonathan Arac argues, Trilling's influential essay, among others, contributed to *Huckleberry Finn*'s midcentury "hypercanonization" as a narrative of growing racial tolerance, which created the false impression that the nation's hardest Civil Rights battles were already in the past. See: Jonathan Arac, *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), vii.

²¹ Jane Smiley, for instance, claims that *Huckleberry Finn* turns a slave's desire for freedom into fodder for comedy, in contrast to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which takes slaves' desire for freedom very seriously. For Smiley, then, Twain's centrality in the American literary canon proves that America has always undervalued the moral contributions of its female writers. See: Jane Smiley, "Say it ain't so, Huck: Second Thoughts on Mark Twain's 'Masterpiece,'" *Harper's Magazine* (January 1996): 61-67.

²² The claim that "Huck's language is purely American" comes from M. Thomas Inge's summary of a century of Twain scholarship; Inge adds that this "purely American" prose style must have been what Hemingway intended by his "often quoted but seldom explained statement" about Twain as the founder of the American canon, but doesn't offer an account of what this American literary language might entail. See: M. Thomas Inge, *Huck Finn Among the Critics: A Centennial Selection*. (Ann Arbor: University Publications of America, 1985), vii.

²³ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 21, 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9. Fishkin is motivated in part by Toni Morrison's call for critics to acknowledge American literature's debt to African-American voices.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21, 27, 120, 27, 29.

²⁶ Another means of resolving the divide between moral and technical interpretations of the novel comes from Stacey Margolis, whose influential essay, "Huckleberry Finn: Or, Consequences," responds to criticism that Twain should be held responsible for the "social consequences" of his novel in American racial politics. Margolis argues that the structure of *Huckleberry Finn* anticipates precisely this notion of considering people accountable for the unintended harm they cause, which reinforces the idea that the form of the novel can help us think about its moral implications. See: Stacey Margolis, "Huckleberry Finn: Or, Consequences," *PMLA* 116, no. 2 (March 2001): 329-43.

²⁷ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 1884 (Reprint, New York: A Glass Book Classic, 1994), iv. I am certainly not the first to suggest that Twain didn't intend for his Explanatory note about dialect to be taken seriously. Gavin Jones interprets Twain's Explanatory as a "burlesque" of the pretension to "utter realism" found

in other local color writing. See: Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 3. Similarly, David Carkeet points out that “Pike County” dialect that Twain references was in fact the “stock” language of popular balladry, which means that Twain was implying that his dialect owed as much to “different writers” as it did to “actual linguistic features of the Pike County area in Missouri and Illinois.” See: Carkeet, “The Dialects in Huckleberry Finn,” *American Literature* 51, no. 3 (Nov. 1979), 325.

²⁸ Twain qtd. in *Mark Twain: The Complete Interviews*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), x; Twain qtd. in Sydney Krause, “Twain’s Theory and Methods of Composition,” *Modern Philology* 56, no. 3 (February 1959): 168.

²⁹ Mark Twain, “My Debut as a Literary Person,” 1898, in *My Debut As A Literary Person: With Other Essays And Stories* (New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2008), 11; Richard Brodhead, “The American Literary Field, 1860–1890.” In *The Cambridge History of American Literature Vol. 3*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 47.

³⁰ Mark Twain to C.W. Stoppard, February 1, 1875, In *Mark Twain’s Letters, Vol. 1*, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine (New York: Harper Publishers, 1917), 248. Twain had previously been published in a variety of newspapers, and had also used a subscription model to self-publish longer works such as *Innocents Abroad*, but desperately longed to break into the more prestigious literary-magazine world of Boston and New York.

³¹ Howells qtd. in Abigail Holstein, “Howells Rediscovered,” *The Atlantic* (Dec. 2005); Howells qtd. in *Mark Twain’s Letters, Vol. 1*, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine (New York: Harper Publishers, 1917), 223. Most critics have assumed that Twain shared Howells’s commitment to natural-sounding speech. But Howells himself certainly didn’t think so. Although he admired Twain’s writing deeply, Howells recognized that Twain never seriously tried to “report the phrase... of everyday life,” as Howells thought all writers should aim to do. See: Howells, *Criticism and Fiction* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1892): 10. After Twain died, Howells wrote, “I do not see any proof in [Twain’s] books that he wished at any time... to reproduce life,” and criticized Twain’s tendency to “burlesque the lighter colloquiality,” which produced “inadequate caricature” instead of believable conversation. See: Howells, *My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticisms* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1910), 155, 151, 153.

³² Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?*, 100.

³³ Twain, *The Complete Interviews*, 135; Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, 1883 (Reprint, New York: The Heritage Press, 1944): 274, 274, 275, 274. Twain even tried his hardest to persuade Harris to join a dialect reading tour with himself and George Washington Cable. See: Twain, *The Complete Interviews*, 135.

³⁴ Twain, “Chapters from My Autobiography,” in *The North American Review* 186 (1907): 328.

³⁵ Twain, *The Complete Interviews*, 134.

³⁶ Harrison qtd. in Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?*, 42. Also: Fishkin, 100.

³⁷ I am clearly indebted to Shelley Fisher Fishkin for her previous work linking Harrison’s article to Huck’s language. But whereas Fishkin claims that the Black idioms in Huck’s voice come from the way African-Americans really spoke in Twain’s day, giving Huck a naturalism that is “worlds removed” from Harris’s “inherently suspect” dialect, I am struck by the irony that the Black dialect in question derives in part from Harris’s writing itself. See: Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?*, 100, 95.

³⁸ John Russell Bartlett, *Dictionary of Americanisms: A Glossary of Words and Phrases Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States* (New York: Bartlett and Welford, 1848), 32, xxii. Bartlett’s dictionary is the “classic example” of the many encyclopedias of American slang produced in Twain’s era, and ran to three editions in total: “1848, 1859, 1877.” See: Michael G. Crowell, *John Russell Bartlett’s Dictionary of Americanisms*, *American Quarterly* 24.2 (May 1972), 228, 229.

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- ³⁹ Bridgman, *Colloquial Style*, 48, 50. As Bridgman documents, it was only once other local color writers – like Harris – had seriously tried to capture the phonetics of speech that a consciously stylized dialect “on the edge of colloquial normativity” – like Twain’s – came to represent a departure from literary norms. See: *Ibid.*, 51.
- ⁴⁰ Harris, *Uncle Remus*, 4.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, viii. To be clear, Harris’s version of the “old plantation” is obviously tainted by his racist ideology; what I want to emphasize is not the historical authenticity of Harris’s account, but the *claim* to authenticity Harris is making through Remus’s speech. This claim to authenticity matters because it re-inscribes a word like “bimeby” as a signifier of Black speech in the American literary tradition, in contrast to its earliest use by Southern humorists, who place it in the mouths of white characters, such as a “very illiterate” and “extremely ignorant” Mississippi planter, among other white speakers. See: Henry Clay Lewis, *Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana “Swamp Doctor,”* 1843 (Reprint, T.B. Peterson, 1858), 44, 50. See also: William Tapper Thompson, *Major Jones’s Courtship* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1844); Johnson Jones Hooper, *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1845). Harris was moreover not the first writer to depict a Black character saying “bimeby.” See: Baynard Rush Hall, *Frank Freeman’s Barber Shop* (New York: C. Scribner, 1852), 25; John W. Page, *Uncle Robin, in his cabin in Virginia, and Tom without one in Boston* (Richmond, VA: J.W. Randolph, 1853), 26. However, he was the first to insist that a word like “bimeby” only mattered if it accurately captured the sound of Black speech.
- ⁴² Julia Collier Harris, *The Life and Letters of Joel Chandler Harris* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), 159.
- ⁴³ Harris, *Uncle Remus*, vii.
- ⁴⁴ Sydney Krause, “Twain’s Theory and Methods of Composition,” *Modern Philology* 56, no. 3 (February 1959): 176.
- ⁴⁵ Victor Doyno, *Writing Huck Finn: Mark Twain’s Creative Process* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 56.
- ⁴⁶ Lowenherz qtd. in Walter Blair, “Was Huckleberry Finn Written?” In *The Critical Response to Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Laurie Champion (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), 109.
- ⁴⁷ Mark Twain, “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses.” *North American Review* (July, 1895), 2.
- ⁴⁸ Twain, *The Complete Interviews*, 589.
- ⁴⁹ Bridgman, 16.
- ⁵⁰ Bridgman, *The Colloquial Style in America*, 46, 22, 110.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 87, 108.
- ⁵² Thomas Nelson Page, *In Ole Virginia* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895): viii. Despite conceding that print could never fully reproduce speech, Page doubles down on Harris’s phonetic commitment with a pronunciation guide that attempts to “aid the reader” with “rules” such as “The final consonant is rarely sounded.” See: *Ibid.*, 4. At the same time, Page continues to represent this unsounded final consonant visually using apostrophe and elision, as in “gittin’,” “callin’,” “nothin’” “prodjickin’,” etc. See: *Ibid.*, 2-3. By trying to recreate speech in these multiple competing ways, Page only reinforces the idea that print will never be able to adequately represent sound..
- ⁵³ Page, *In Ole Virginia*, 4, 40, 13.
- ⁵⁴ Harris, *Uncle Remus*, 70 (ch. 15).

⁵⁵ Of course, many African-American writers also experimented with various framing devices for dialect, often managing to subvert Harris's presumptions about 'natural' African-American speech in the process. Frances E. W. Harper's 1892 novel *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*; Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1896 *Lyrics of Lowly Life*; and Charles Chesnutt's 1899 *The Conjure Woman* all represent Black dialect as a language beyond the full comprehension of white listeners. My aim is not to downplay these authors' contributions, but to emphasize that what makes Twain "modern" has less to do with coming up with *new* meanings to Black speech (whether through signifying, sarcasm, or tricksterism) than it does with coming up with a new *alternative* to speech.

⁵⁶ Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 2 (ch. 1).

⁵⁷ Mikhael Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 286.

⁵⁸ Twain qtd. in Carkeet, "The Dialects in Huckleberry Finn," 328. Huck's spoken dialect differs from his narration in a variety of additional ways. Huck's dialogue is heavier with ellision ("stead," "s'pose," "le's" [let's]) and borderline eye-dialect ("git," "cretur," "fur," "nuther"). In contrast, Huck's narration relies more frequently on rambling constructions ("by and by," the repetition of "and" to form lists) and homespun figurative language ("riding high like a duck," "The river looked miles and miles across," "all still and Sunday-like"). Twain further insists upon the distinction between Huck's narration and his spoken dialogue through the conceit that Huck has written, not recited, his story; Huck concludes only when "there ain't nothing more to write about," complaining about "what a trouble it was to make a book" and signing off with a flourish borrowed from the epistolary novel: "Yours Truly, Huck Finn." See: Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 295.

⁵⁹ Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 86, 87. According to North, even when modernist writers embraced natural-sounding dialect as a means of "triumphing over dead convention," their "attack on convention" turned out to be "itself a convention." In other words, since the same black dialect that felt liberating to white modernists like Ezra Pound felt stifling to African-American modernists like James Weldon Johnson, the supposed "language of rebellion... was transformed into a barrier as rigid as the standard itself." See: *Ibid.*, 86, 87, 131. North is clearly right that African-American dialect was necessary to the development of American literary modernism. But while it's totally plausible for North to claim that an author like Pound used Harris's dialect to "play at self-fashioning" through "racial masquerade," North's argument can't apply to Hemingway, who found Twain's dialect useful specifically because it was *already* divorced from its racialized roots by the time Twain wrote it. Hemingway thus means something very different than North by calling Twain "modern": for Hemingway, Huck's voice matters not because it's a black voice but because it isn't a voice at all.

⁶⁰ Lerner qtd. in Gayle Rogers, "An Interview with Ben Lerner," *Contemporary Literature* 54, no. 2 (June 2013): 234.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 234. To clarify, Lerner uses the term "virtualize" here to refer to a kind of reported speech that is capable of projecting a fully believable world, versus "actual" recorded speech that is all too obvious in its struggle to seem realistic. This clarification is necessary because elsewhere Lerner uses the term "virtual" (which he borrows from Alan Grossman) quite differently. In the context of poetry, Lerner distinguishes between the "actual" poem on the page, which is necessarily imperfect, and the "virtual" *Poem* that the artist would like to create, which would be so perfect that it could fulfill poetry's impossible mission of bridging human sympathies across time and space. See: Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

⁶³ Lerner, "An Interview," 234. Lerner is interested in Hemingway's strategy in part because he wound up imitating it. "One thing that prevented me from writing a novel for a long time," Lerner explains, "was that I didn't have a good solution to the problem of dialogue," which he calls one of the novel's "central technical problem[s]." See: *Ibid.* But thanks to Hemingway, Lerner was able to come up with his own method of 'virtualizing' speech. In *Leaving the Atocha Station*, the first-person narrator Adam Gordon constantly questions whether he has correctly translated speech (the Spanish that he hears) into text (the dialogue that appears on the page in English), hedging

his interpretations with phrases such as “Then she might have described...” or “...is probably what I said.” See: Ben Lerner, *Leaving the Atocha Station* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2011), 13.

⁶⁴ Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1926), 16 (ch. 3).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 14 (ch. 3).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929), 35 (ch. 5).

⁶⁸ Additional examples of Hemingway’s purportedly translated Italian in *A Farewell to Arms* include the use of the archaic “Until I see thee” to imply informal address, the present-tense conjugation “I see you to-morrow” to imply the immediate future, and the term “Nothing” to imply *de nada*, used to mean something like “Not a problem” See: *ibid.*, 5 (ch. 21), 110 (ch. 15), 49 (ch. 7).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 35 (ch. 5).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 (ch. 5), 236 (ch. 30).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 15 (ch. 2).

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, 45 (ch. 3).

⁷⁴ Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 196 (ch. 27).

⁷⁵ Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, 157 (ch. 13), 192 (ch. 15).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 88-89 (ch. 9), 90 (ch. 9).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 267 (ch. 22).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-15 (ch. 1).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 414 (ch. 43), 421 (ch. 23), 346 (ch. 34).

⁸⁰ William Faulkner. *Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962*, ed. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 21.

⁸¹ I mean “restricted field” in the sense of Bourdieu’s “field of cultural production.” Bourdieu explains the creation of cultural value as a kind of prestige made possible through the joint efforts of a small circle of artists, all creating art primarily for the judgment of their fellow-artists, rather than primarily for commercial sale on the open market. See: Pierre Bourdieu, “The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed,” in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (London: Columbia University Press, 1993): 29-73.

⁸² Ellison, “Twentieth Century,” 35, 34.

⁸³ Ralph Ellison, “Hidden Name and Complex Fate,” 1964, in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 164. In “The World and the Jug,” also written in 1964, Ellison goes so far as to claim that “Hemingway was more important to [him] than [Richard] Wright” because Hemingway “wrote with such precision... of wing-shooting” that Ellison could learn enough from him to keep food on the table. Indeed, even when it came to race, Ellison says that Hemingway taught him more about seeing the world than Wright did, which helps explain why Ellison says Hemingway comes closer “to the feeling of the blues” than Wright does. See: Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 140.

⁸⁴ Ellison, "The World and the Jug," 132-33.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 140-41; Ellison, "Hidden Name," 163.

⁸⁶ Ellison, "Hidden Name," 165.

⁸⁷ Dialect criticism has traditionally been framed in terms of whether dialect could resist, or merely reinforce, existing social hierarchies (including racial hierarchies). William Dean Howells was the first to claim that dialect offered a form of "Democracy in literature" that would defy the "aristocratic spirit... now seeking to shelter itself in aesthetics." See: William Dean Howells, *Criticism and Fiction* (1891), XXVII. Conversely, George Krapp was the first to take the opposing position, arguing that since America didn't have any forms of speech recognized by linguists as true dialects, the literary dialects depicted by American writers were no more than highbrow exaggeration on the part of self-aggrandizing elites. See: George P. Krapp, "The Psychology of Dialect Writing" (1926). In other words, for Howells, dialect deflated aristocratic pretensions; for Krapp, it bolstered them. Since then, critics have tended to fall into one of these two camps – or have tried to split the difference. See, for instance, Amy Kaplan, *The Social Contruction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Elsa Nettels, *Language, Race, and Social Class in Howell's America* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988); Jones, *Strange Talk*; Brodhead, "The American Literary Field."

⁸⁸ William Dean Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1960), 77.

⁸⁹ "Transliterated" is perhaps a more accurate term than "phonetic" because since a misspelling like "hass" doesn't necessarily attempt to recreate the way the word might have been pronounced so much as serve as a reminder that it was spoken aloud in the first place. The kind of misspelling that "means nothing to the ear, though it may mean something to the eye" has been defined as "eye-dialect" by George P. Krapp (as in: "I" vs. "eye"). See: George P. Krapp, "The Psychology of Dialect Writing" (1926). What appears more frequently in works by Howells, however, are misspellings that can't quite be categorized as eye-dialect (it is *possible* to imagine a subtle difference in pronunciation between "has" and "hass"), but can't quite be categorized as phonetic transcription, either. A misspelling like "hass" is thus a pure mark of the ambition to evoke the sound of speech in print – an ambition quite distinct from questions of linguistic accuracy.

⁹⁰ William Dean Howells, *Criticism and Fiction* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), 10 (ch. 2).

⁹¹ "The era" as in the 1870s-1890s. See: Richard Brodhead, "The American Literary Field, 1860–1890." In *The Cambridge History of American Literature Vol. 3*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9-62.

⁹² Howells, "Walt Whitman's Drum-Taps," *The Round Table* 2 (11 November 1865): 147-8. Reprinted in Walt Whitman, *The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Kenneth M. Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁹³ Howells, "Professor Barrett Wendell's Notions of American Literature," *The North American Review* vol. 172, no. 533 (April 1901): 623-640; Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, 104 (ch. 18).

⁹⁴ Henry James, "American Letter, July 9, 1898," reprinted in *Henry James' Literary Criticism*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984), 699.

⁹⁵ Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harpers Weekly* 39 (June 8, 1895), 532-533.

⁹⁶ The "Americanisms" series of essays that Lowell was responding to were written by the philologist and Shakespaeran Richard Grant White. See: Elsa Nettels, *Language, Race, and Social Class in Howells's America* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 9.

⁹⁷ Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harpers Weekly* 39 (June 8, 1895), 532-533.

⁹⁸ T. C. De Leon, "The Day of Dialect," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 60 (Nov. 1897), 679-683.

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- ⁹⁹ Howells, *Criticism and Fiction* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891), 134-136 (ch. 22); Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harpers Weekly* 39 (June 8, 1895), 532-533.
- ¹⁰⁰ Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, 145-146 (ch. 23).
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 145.
- ¹⁰² William Dean Howells, "American Literary Centers," *Literature and Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), 177.
- ¹⁰³ Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, 187 (ch. 33). When it comes to the phrase "democracy in literature," some critics tend to focus on the political *intent* behind the phrase (was Howells being utopian or hypocritical in calling for 'more' democracy?), but the case I'm making is that Howells was using "democracy" in a more structural sense (every possible citizen is included within the category denoted as "American")
- ¹⁰⁴ Mark Twain, "What Paul Bourget Thinks of us," *The North American Review* 160, No. 458 (1895), reprinted in *How to Tell a Story, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1898), 188-189.
- ¹⁰⁵ Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, 137 (ch. 22).
- ¹⁰⁶ Carrie Hyde, *Civic Longing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 6-7.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹⁰⁸ Justice John McLean writing for the minority opinion in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 US 393 (1856).
- ¹⁰⁹ "An Act to protect all Persons in the United States in their Civil Rights, and furnish the Means of their Vindication," 39th Congress, April 9, 1866.
- ¹¹⁰ Edlie Wong, *Racial Reconstruction: Black Inclusion, Chinese Exclusion, and the Fictions of Citizenship* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 6, 3.
- ¹¹¹ U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 2.
- ¹¹² Edgar Cowan, US Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*. 39th Cong, 1st sess. (May 30, 1866), 2891.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, John Conness.
- ¹¹⁵ U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 2 (emphasis mine).
- ¹¹⁶ *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, 169 U.S. 649 (1898).
- ¹¹⁷ As scholars including Lisa Siragnian have shown, legal formalists believed that the law derived its legitimacy from its flawless consistency – which meant that the *inconsistency* the Court had previously shown in its application of jus soli was very much a problem for them.
- ¹¹⁸ *United States v. Wong Kim Ark.*
- ¹¹⁹ William P. Trent, *Cambridge History of American Literature* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1917-21), 360.
- ¹²⁰ Howells, "American Literary Centers," *Literature and Life*, 175.

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- ¹²¹ William Dean Howells, interview with Joyce Kilmer, *Literature in the Making* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917), 10.
- ¹²² *Literature and Life*, ch 4 (Irving)
- ¹²³ Hamlin Garland, "Local Color in Literature," *Crumbling Idols* (1894), 59-60 (ch 5). Garland goes on to mention "The Provençal, the Hun, the Catalanian, the Norwegian" as other examples of national literatures around the world that were simultaneously in the process of transforming their local accents into a literature with international standing.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60, 62.
- ¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.
- ¹²⁶ Howells, *Literature and Life*, 153.
- ¹²⁷ Howells, "American Literary Centers," 175-176.
- ¹²⁸ Bret Harte, "The Luck of Roaring Camp," *The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Tales* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1906), 1-2
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, 6-7
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4, 8.
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*, 1, 4.
- ¹³³ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, xi-xii.
- ¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, xiv.
- ¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, xvii.
- ¹³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹³⁸ Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), 21.
- ¹³⁹ Harte, 12,
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 13, 11, 12.
- ¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xvi.
- ¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

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- ¹⁴⁶ Ibid., xii.
- ¹⁴⁷ Ibid., xiii.
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., xvi.
- ¹⁴⁹ William Dean Howells, "Reviews and Literary Notices: The Luck of Roaring Camp," *Atlantic Monthly* 25 (May 1870), 633-35.
- ¹⁵⁰ Harte, xii, xv.
- ¹⁵¹ Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harpers Weekly* 39 (June 22, 1895), 580-581.
- ¹⁵² Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 51.
- ¹⁵³ Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harpers Weekly* (June 27, 1896), 630.
- ¹⁵⁴ Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harpers Weekly* (June 27, 1896), 630.
- ¹⁵⁵ By claiming that Howells thought of black and white accents as equally good representations of America's distinctiveness, I am not trying to claim that Howells thought in any way of blacks and whites as equal. On the contrary, when Howells embraced Black dialect as just another way of making American literature more American, it amounted to a misrepresentation of the aims and ambitions of African-American writers that can only be considered horrifying.
- ¹⁵⁶ Harte, 12.
- ¹⁵⁷ Richard Brodhead, "The American Literary Field, 1860-1890," in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 56.
- ¹⁵⁸ Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 137, 131, 138.
- ¹⁵⁹ Howells, *Hazard*, 156, 155, 154.
- ¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 255, 156.
- ¹⁶¹ Howells, "XXIV. Heine," *Literature and Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), 210.
- ¹⁶² Abraham Cahan, *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1896), 3, 111.
- ¹⁶³ Ibid., 87.
- ¹⁶⁴ Abraham Cahan, "The Imported Bridegroom," *The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of the New York Ghetto* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898), 8, 68.
- ¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 87, 3, 57.
- ¹⁶⁶ Cahan, *Yekl*, 22.
- ¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 40, 4, 111.
- ¹⁶⁸ Cahan, *The Imported Bridegroom*, 57-58.

¹⁶⁹ Cahan, *Yekl*, 4, 10, 9.

¹⁷⁰ William Dean Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction," *The New York World* (July 28, 1896), 18.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² William Dean Howells, *Literature* (December 31, 1898), 51.

¹⁷³ This anonymous reviewer deeply resented "being asked to give [*Yekl*] a place in literature because it represents still another dialect alleged to be spoken on the east side." According to him, all Cahan was good for was informing "us that the Russian-Polish-Lithuanian-Bessarabian Jews that swarm and seethe in Suffolk and Hester streets have adopted a set of catch phrases from American talk, mostly slang, which they mispronounce most vilely and repeat like parrots in season and out of season." See: "In Yiddish Dialect," review of *Yekl* by Abraham Cahan, *Commercial Advertiser* (August 1, 1896), 14. Qtd in Aviva Taubenfeld, "Only an 'L': linguistic borders and the immigrant author in Abraham Cahan's *Yekl* and *Yankel der Yankee*," in *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 154.

¹⁷⁴ Qtd. in Elsa Nettels, *Language, Race, and Social Class in Howells's America* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 98.

¹⁷⁵ Spies's speech was in fact dedicated to disproving that "the anarchists were responsible for the bloodshed yesterday," a reference to a previous confrontation in which several workers had been killed by police during a strike at the McCormick Reaper Works. Hence why Spies's rhetoric walks the line between outrage and the need to remain nonviolent: "No, make no idle threats. There will be a time, and we are rapidly approaching it, when monsters who destroy the lives and happiness of the citizens (for their own aggrandizement) will be dealt with like wild beasts. But that time has not yet come." See: A. Vincent Theodore Spies, "The Riot at McCormick's: The Speech Delivered by August Spies at the Haymarket, May 4, on the Occasion of the Bomb Throwing," *The Great Anarchist Trial: The Haymarket Speeches as Delivered on the Evening of the Throwing of the Bomb at Haymarket Square, Chicago, May 4, 1886*, ed. Albert R. Parsons (Chicago: The Chicago Labor Press Association, 1886), 5, 4.

¹⁷⁶ *The Tribune*, qtd. in *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman, Second Edition*, Carl Smith (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 150.

¹⁷⁷ *Harper's Weekly* (May 15, 1886; July 24, 1886), reprinted in "William Dean Howells, George William Curtis, and the 'Haymarket Affair,'" by Clara Kirk and Rudolf Kirk, *American Literature*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (January 1969), 487-498.

¹⁷⁸ Michael J. Schaack, *Anarchy and Anarchists: A History of the Red Terror and the Social Revolution in America and Europe* (Chicago: F. J. Schulte & Company, 1889), 22, 25, 27, 25-26.

¹⁷⁹ "They are to Die: The Motion for a New Trial for the Reds Overruled," *Chicago Tribune* (October 8, 1886); "In the Law's Grip," *The New York Times* (May 6, 1886); Fremont O. Bennett, *Politics and Politicians of Chicago: Cook County, and Illinois. Memorial Volume, 1787-1887. A Complete Record of Municipal, County, State and National Politics from the Earliest Period to the Present Time. And an Account of the Haymarket Massacre of May 4, 1886, and the Anarchist Trials* (Chicago: Blakely Printing Company, 1886), 432.

¹⁸⁰ August Spies, "Spies, August, 1855-1887: Autobiography," *The full autobiographies of each of the Haymarket martyrs: eight Chicago anarchists who were sentenced to death and in whose memory we celebrate May Day, International Workers' Day*, ed. Philip S. Foner (reprinted from *Journal of United Labor, by Knights of Labor*), 89.

¹⁸¹ "Malvern M. Thompson (first appearance), dry goods clerk employed at Marshall Field & Co.," *The People of the State of Illinois vs. August Spies et al.* (July 27, 1886), 314.

¹⁸² Ibid., 325, 326.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 321, 322.

¹⁸⁴ August Spies, letter to John Greenleaf Whittier, qtd. in *The Haymarket Tragedy* by Paul Avier (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 340 (footnote 22).

¹⁸⁵ Howells, *ibid.*, 340 (footnote 24).

¹⁸⁶ William Dean Howells, letter to William Cooper Howells (July 10, 1892), in *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells: Vol. II*, ed. Mildred Howells (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 25; Howells, letter to William Cooper Howells (November 13, 1887), in *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells: Vol. I*, ed. Mildred Howells (New York: Doubleday, Duran & Co., 1928), 402.

¹⁸⁷ William Dean Howells, *New York Tribune* (November 6, 1887); William Dean Howells, letter to William Mackintire Salter (December 1, 1887), reprtd. in “William Dean Howells’s Unpublished Letters About the Haymarket Affair,” by Howard A. Wilson, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)* Vol. 56, No. 1 (Spring 1963), 16-17.

¹⁸⁸ William Dean Howells, letter to William Mackintire Salter (December 25, 1887), reprtd. in “William Dean Howells’s Unpublished Letters About the Haymarket Affair,” 19.

¹⁸⁹ “Address of August Spies” (October 7, 1886), 12.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁹² Ibid., 28, 14.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 36.

¹⁹⁴ Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (New York: BiblioBazaar, 2007), 350, 329; Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), 263, 361, 467.

¹⁹⁵ In his 1909 introduction to the novel, Howells insinuates that when he wrote the novel – “very rapidly” in “spring of 1889” – he had Haymarket in mind. Since the novel was first published, he writes, “the poor have not often forgotten themselves in violences such as offered me the material of tragedy and pathos in my story.” Spies executed Nov 1887; Howells got letter from Harper’s Sept 1888 encouraging him to do a series of sketches that would “be a powerful presentation of the life of our great metropolis” – but he declined and instead decided to do a novel (*Hazard*), which he began Oct 1888 (letters demonstrate); first installment published March 1889.

¹⁹⁶ Howells, *Hazard*, 77.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 272.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 158-159.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 285.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 160.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 272.

²⁰² Ibid., 154, 126.

²⁰³ Ibid., 298, 163, 273.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 77, 249, 78.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 77.

²⁰⁶ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 8, 1895).

²⁰⁷ William Dean Howells, "Poganue People, and Other Novels," *The Atlantic Monthly* vol. 42 (Jul-Dec. 1878), 430-431; Howells, *Life and Letters* (June 8, 1895; June 22, 1895). Howells actually uses the same criteria for natural and artificial dialect as critics who had come to despise dialect. Compare Howells's rhetoric to that of editor Thomas Cooper de Leon (an unrepentant Confederate), who denounced the "craze" for dialect because he believed that writers had run out of authentic dialects, leading to "badly copied," "unnatural," and "uncouth" accents unfit for "the better-bred classes of society." Howells would have disagreed with de Leon that there was nowhere left for dialect to go, but he would have fundamentally agreed with de Leon's premise that any possible "good in dialect" could only come from capturing "naturally arising" accents. See: Thomas Cooper de Leon, "The Day of Dialect," *McBride's Magazine* Vol. 60 (July-December 1897), 679-683.

²⁰⁸ Garland, *Crumbling Idols*, 74, 59.

²⁰⁹ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 8, 1895).

²¹⁰ Howells, *Hazard*, 273.

²¹¹ Howells, *Hazard*, 390-391.

²¹² Ibid., 158.

²¹³ Ibid., 160-161

²¹⁴ Ibid., 78.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 272-273.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 145, 149, 183, 310.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 112.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 109, 97, 151.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 249.

²²⁰ Ibid., 97, 96.

²²¹ Ibid., 281,

²²² Ibid., 123.

²²³ Ibid., 122, 124, 122.

²²⁴ Ibid., 265.

²²⁵ Ibid., 124, 129, 124, 130.

²²⁶ Ibid., 233.

²²⁷ Ibid., 273.

²²⁸ William Dean Howells, *An Imperative Duty* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), 2.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., 3.

²³² Ibid., 3, 2.

²³³ Ibid., 14, 23.

²³⁴ William Dean Howells, "Introduction," *Lyrics of Lowly Life* by Paul Laurence Dunbar (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898), xvi; William Dean Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harper's Weekly* (June 27, 1896), 630.

²³⁵ William Dean Howells, *An Imperative Duty* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), 2.

²³⁶ Howells, "Pogane People, and Other Novels," 1878; Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 22, 1895), 581.

²³⁷ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 22, 1895).

²³⁸ William Dean Howells, *A Traveler from Altruria* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1894), 1, 3.

²³⁹ Ibid., 272, 270, 226, 266.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 120.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 50-51.

²⁴² Ibid., 227, 226.

²⁴³ "Address of August Spies" (October 7, 1886).

²⁴⁴ Howells, *A Traveler from Altruria*, 253.

²⁴⁵ Cahan, *Yekl*, 17.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 1, 16.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 27-28, 5, 16, 98.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 17.

²⁴⁹ Paul Anderson Poole, "Abraham Cahan: Socialist—Journalist—Friend of the Ghetto," *Outlook* (1893-1924) 99:1 (October 28, 1911), 467.

²⁵⁰ Abraham Cahan [as Der proletarishker magid], "Di Sedre," *Di Arbeter Tsaytung* (March 14, 1890), 2. Trans. and reprtd. in Tony Michels, "'Speaking to Moyshe': The Early Socialist Yiddish Press and Its Readers," *Jewish History* 14: 1: The Press and the Jewish Public Sphere (2000), 60.

²⁵¹ Michels, "Speaking to Moyshe," 56.

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- ²⁵² Cahan, "Realism," *Workman's Advocate* (1889), qtd. in Hana Wirth-Nesher, "Shpeaking Plain" and Writing Foreign: Abraham Cahan's Yekl," *Poetics Today* 22:1 (Spring 2001), 46.
- ²⁵³ Howells, *Altruria*, 44.
- ²⁵⁴ Howells, "American Literary Centers," *Literature and Life*, 178.
- ²⁵⁵ Cahan, *Yekl*, 96.
- ²⁵⁶ Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction," 18.
- ²⁵⁷ Cahan, *Yekl*, 23; Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction," 18.
- ²⁵⁸ Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction," 18.
- ²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶⁰ Abraham Cahan, "A Personal and Confidential Letter to Louis Marshall" (1917), in Tony Michels, *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary History* (New York: NYU Press Scholarship Online, March 2016), part II, chapter 15.
- ²⁶¹ See, for instance, Richard S. Pressman. "Abraham Cahan, Capitalist; David Levinsky, Socialist." *Studies in American Jewish Literature* Vol. 12 (1993): 2–18; and Seth Lipsky, *The Rise of Abraham Cahan* (New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2013).
- ²⁶² William Dean Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1960), 242, 241.
- ²⁶³ William Dean Howells, "American Literary Centers," *Literature and Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), 177.
- ²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 177-178.
- ²⁶⁵ Hana Wirth-Nesher, "Shpeaking Plain" and Writing Foreign: Abraham Cahan's Yekl," *Poetics Today* 22:1 (Spring 2001), 50.
- ²⁶⁶ William Dean Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harpers Weekly* 39 (June 8, 1895), 532-533.
- ²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶⁸ William Dean Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction," *The New York World* (July 28, 1896), 18.
- ²⁶⁹ Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction."
- ²⁷⁰ William Dean Howells, "Reviews and Literary Notices: The Luck of Roaring Camp," *Atlantic Monthly* 25 (May 1870), 633-35.
- ²⁷¹ Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction;" Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 8, 1895).
- ²⁷² William Dean Howells, "Frank Norris," *North American Review* 175 (December 1902), 770-771.
- ²⁷³ Stephen Crane, letter to John Northern Hillard (January 1896), reprtd. in *Stephen Crane: Letters* (New York: New York University Press, 1960), 109.
- ²⁷⁴ Howells, "Frank Norris."

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- ²⁷⁵ William Dean Howells, interview with Edward Marshall, "A Great American Writer," *Philadelphia Press* (April 15, 1894), 27; Howells, "Frank Norris."
- ²⁷⁶ Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction."
- ²⁷⁷ William Dean Howells, *My Mark Twain* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910), 20; William Dean Howells, qtd. in Thomas Beer, *Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters* (New York, A. A. Knopf, 1923), 97.
- ²⁷⁸ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 8, 1895).
- ²⁷⁹ Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction."
- ²⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ²⁸¹ Ibid.
- ²⁸² Abraham Cahan, *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1896), 9, 111.
- ²⁸³ Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction."
- ²⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁸⁵ Cahan, *Yekl*, 10, 51, 152, etc.
- ²⁸⁶ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 8, 1895); Howells, "American Literary Centers," 177; Howells, *Literature and Life*, 153; Howells, "XXIV. Heine," *Literature and Life*, 210.
- ²⁸⁷ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 22, 1895); Howells, "American Literary Centers," 174; Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 8, 1895).
- ²⁸⁸ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 8, 1895).
- ²⁸⁹ William Dean Howells, "Poganue People, and Other Novels," *The Atlantic Monthly* vol. 42 (Jul-Dec. 1878), 430-431; Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 8, 1895).
- ²⁹⁰ Hamlin Garland, "Local Color in Literature," *Crumbling Idols* (1894), 62 (ch 5).
- ²⁹¹ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 8, 1895).
- ²⁹² Howells, *Hazard*, 286, 92.
- ²⁹³ Howells, "Frank Norris."
- ²⁹⁴ Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets: 1893 Edition* (New York: D.C. Heath and Company, 1968), 16 (chapter 5). In fact, Crane worked out his dialect with an extremely light hand: his only manuscript revisions were "yeh" for you and "dat" for that, a far cry from the garbled misspellings of other dialect writers. See: Alan R. Slotkin, "You as a Multileveled Dictional Device in Stephen Crane's Representation of Bowery Dialect in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*," *South Central Review* (Linguistics and Literature edition) 7:2 (Summer 1990), 40-53.
- ²⁹⁵ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 22, 1895).
- ²⁹⁶ William Dean Howells, *Criticism and Fiction* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), 137 (ch. 22).
- ²⁹⁷ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 22, 1895).

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Howells, *Literature and Life*, 180; Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, 138.

³⁰¹ Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, 43-44.

³⁰² William Dean Howells, letters to William James (October 7, 1902; June 8, 1910), *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells: Vol. II*, ed. Mildred Howells (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 161, 284.

³⁰³ William James, "Notes on Automatic Writing," *Essays in Psychical Research* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 40, 37.

³⁰⁴ William Dean Howells, *An Imperative Duty* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), 42, 61.

³⁰⁵ Garland, "Local Color in Art," *Crumbling Idols*, 64-65.

³⁰⁶ Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, 137 (ch. 22).

³⁰⁷ Howells, "Frank Norris."

³⁰⁸ Crane, *Maggie*, 16.

³⁰⁹ William James, "The Perception of 'Things': Perception and Sensation Compared" (Chapter 19), *The Principles of Psychology, Volume 2* (New York: Courier Corporation, 2012), 80.

³¹⁰ Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), xiii.

³¹¹ That is to say, in another medium, like painting, a portrait of a person's face can appeal to our eyes in the same phenomenological manner as their real face would (even if we know, logically speaking, that this is only an illusion). In print, however, a representation of a face can only succeed in making us imagine a face if it manages to make us forget that what we are looking at is – in the most literal sense – ink impressions on a page.

³¹² Fried, *Realism*, 115, 119.

³¹³ Ibid., 115, 118.

³¹⁴ Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction;" Fried, *Realism*, 114, 142.

³¹⁵ Fried, *Realism*, 107, 197, 106.

³¹⁶ Intro to What was literary impressionism; preface to Crane book xiii

³¹⁷ Michael Fried, *What Was Literary Impressionism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), intro.

³¹⁸ Fried, *Realism*, xiv.

³¹⁹ Fried, *Literary Impressionism*, 13, 15.

³²⁰ Michael Fried, "Painter into Painting: On Courbet's 'After Dinner at Ornans' and 'Stonebreakers,'" *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (Summer, 1982), 648.

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- ³²¹ Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism: Or, The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 405, 407, 404.
- ³²² *Ibid.*, 266, 406.
- ³²³ *Ibid.*, 406.
- ³²⁴ Hamlin Garland, "Stephen Crane: A Soldier of Fortune," *The Saturday Evening Post* (Philadelphia), 173:1 (July 7, 1900), 16-17.
- ³²⁵ Howells, "Frank Norris;" Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction."
- ³²⁶ Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, 249.
- ³²⁷ Howells, "American Literary Centers;" Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction."
- ³²⁸ Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction."
- ³²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³³⁰ Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage and Other Stories*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 34.
- ³³¹ *Ibid.*, 95.
- ³³² *Ibid.*, 34-35.
- ³³³ *Ibid.*, 10, 64.
- ³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9 and 59, 77 and 135.
- ³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.
- ³³⁶ Howells, "American Literary Centers," *Literature and Life*, 175.
- ³³⁷ Crane, *Red Badge*, 8, 9, 94, 99.
- ³³⁸ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 8, 1895).
- ³³⁹ Crane, *Red Badge*, 57.
- ³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.
- ³⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴² *Ibid.*
- ³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 59.
- ³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.
- ³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 61, 62.
- ³⁴⁶ Mark Twain, letter to Edward Bok (December 1888), reprtd. in *Mark Twain: The Complete Letters* (Hastings, UK: Delphi Classics, 2017).

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- ³⁴⁷ Crane, *Red Badge*, 62-63.
- ³⁴⁸ Stephen Crane, "An Experiment in Misery" (1895), *The Open Boat and Other Stories* (London: William Heinemann, 1898), 213, 218.
- ³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.
- ³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 218,
- ³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 221-222.
- ³⁵² *Ibid.*, 219.
- ³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 225.
- ³⁵⁴ Michael Fried, "Chapter 5: Real Allegories, Allegories of Realism: *The Wheat Sifters*, *The Painter's Studio*, and *The Quarry*, with an Excursus on *The Death of the Stag*," *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 148.
- ³⁵⁵ "Book Notices," *Bachelor of Arts* 4 (May 1897), 511.
- ³⁵⁶ Stephen Crane, *The Third Violet* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 13.
- ³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 160, 159.
- ³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.
- ³⁶⁰ Stephen Crane, letter to Lily Brandon Munro (1896), qtd. in Robert Wooster Stallman, *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 648.
- ³⁶¹ Stephen Crane, letter to William Dean Howells (March 28, 1893), in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, ed. R. W. Stallman and Lillian Gilkes (New York: New York University Press, 1960), 16.
- ³⁶² Stephen Crane, letter to William Dean Howells (April 8, 1893), in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, 18.
- ³⁶³ William Dean Howells, letter to Stephen Crane (April 8, 1893), in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, 18.
- ³⁶⁴ Stephen Crane, letter to Lily Brandon Munro (March, 1894); Crane, letter to editor of *Leslie's Weekly* (November, 1895), in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, 31, 78.
- ³⁶⁵ Stephen Crane, letter to William Dean Howells (August 15, 1896), in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, 127-128.
- ³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶⁷ Stephen Crane, letter to Thomas Hutchinson (1899), in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, 250.
- ³⁶⁸ Hamlin Garland, "'An Ambitious French Novel and a Modest American Story' by Hamlin Garland," *The Arena* (June 1893), xi-xii; Hamlin Garland, "Stephen Crane – A Soldier of Fortune by Hamlin Garland," *The Saturday Evening Post* 73:4 (July 28, 1900), 16-17, both reprtd. in *The Complete Works of Stephen Crane* (New York: Delphi Classics, 2014).
- ³⁶⁹ Garland, "Stephen Crane – A Soldier of Fortune.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Stephen Crane, letter to Hamlin Garland (November 15, 1894), reprtd. in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, 41; Crane, *The Third Violet*, 159, 195.

³⁷² Stephen Crane, *George's Mother* (New York: Edward Arnold, 1896), 113, 172.

³⁷³ Indeed, Crane reinforces the connection between *The Red Badge of Courage* and *George's Mother* by constantly comparing George's tenement to a "decaying battlefield." Each drunkard's "battleful voice" resounds with "battleful clamour." The mother, meanwhile, is a "soldier," a "little intent warrior," who raises a "strange war-chant, a shout of battle" in a "battleful way," and so on ad nauseum: "the battle was again in full swing," "each morning [she] fought a battle," a "little battle," a "critical battle," "the flurry of a battle," etc. That Crane uses as strange a word as "battleful" to describe both George and his mother fuses his drunken dialect with her deathbed dialect, and both with the dialect of the dying soldier. See: Ibid., 101, 98, 115, 165, 146, 23, 21, 115, 23, 86, 147, 20.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 81, 168, 86, 173, 174.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 174, 172-173.

³⁷⁶ Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction"; *The American Experience with Alcohol: Contrasting Cultural Perspectives*, ed. G.M. Ames and Linda A. Bennett (New York: Springer Publishing, 1985), 115; Laura Hapke, *Labor's Text: The Worker in American Fiction* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 109.

³⁷⁷ Crane, *George's Mother*, 81, 85.

³⁷⁸ Howells, "American Literary Centers," 177-178.

³⁷⁹ Crane, *Maggie*, 1.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Critics such as Gavin Jones have assumed that changing "micks" to "mugs" was simply a matter of propriety, of a piece with the other revisions to the 1896 text cutting expletives like "hell" and "damn." While it is true that "mugs" is less aggressively profane, it is also true that it is less aggressively ethnic. See: Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 145.

³⁸² Alfred Kazin, qtd. in *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets, and Other Tales of New York* (New York: Penguin House, 2000), bookjacket; Robert M. Dowling and Donald Pizer, "A Cold Case File Reopened: Was Crane's Maggie Murdered or a Suicide?," *American Literary Realism* 42.1 (Fall 2009), 38; Donald Vanouse, "Stephen Crane's Depictions of Irish Americans," *Stephen Crane Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2009): 2-9; Stephanie Tsank, "Inside Mary Johnson's Mouth: Sensing the Slums in Stephen Crane's Maggie: A Girl of the Streets," *Eating the American dream: food, ethnicity, and assimilation in American literary realism, 1893 – 1918*, Dissertation, University of Iowa (Summer 2018), 26.

³⁸³ Crane, *George's Mother*, 150-151; Stephen Crane, "Irish Notes," 1903, in *The O'Ruddy: A Romance, Completed by Robert Barr* (New York: Honeycomb Press, 2011), 270.

³⁸⁴ Crane, *George's Mother*, 175, 176.

³⁸⁵ Before Crane, previous local color writers, like Mary Noailles Murfree, had certainly featured dialect speakers who lived in poverty. But when Murfree's hardscrabble Appalachians spoke in an accent, readers knew that it wasn't primarily their poverty that had produced their speech – it was their birthplace. And as Richard Brodhead argues, the fundamental purpose of regionalist writing like Murfree's was to capture "historically endangered"

American accents that would soon disappear. These accents appeared in print only with the awareness that they would soon be wiped out by the dual forces of modernism – the newspaper and the railroad – which, by circulating both standard English and its speakers, would inevitably standardize America’s national speech. In contrast, the difference between standard English and working-class speech would only be exacerbated by the modern forces of industrialization. See: Richard Brodhead, “The American Literary Field, 1860–1890.” In *The Cambridge History of American Literature Vol. 3*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9-62.

³⁸⁶ William Dean Howells, letter to Cora Crane (July 29, 1900), in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, 306.

³⁸⁷ Howells, *Hazard*, 156.

³⁸⁸ Alan Slotkin, “You as a Multileveled Dictional Device in Stephen Crane’s Representation of Bowery Dialect in ‘Maggie: A Girl of the Streets,’” *South Central Review* 7.2 (1990), 40–53.

³⁸⁹ Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk*, 145, 150, 147.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8, 142.

³⁹¹ Howells, letter to Cora Crane (July 29, 1900), in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, 306.

³⁹² Cahan, *Yekl*, 96.

³⁹³ Crane, *Maggie*, 18, 23.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15, 23.

³⁹⁵ Crane, *George’s Mother*, 146, 130.

³⁹⁶ William Dean Howells, qtd. in Garland, “Stephen Crane: A Soldier of Fortune;” Garland, “Stephen Crane: A Soldier of Fortune.”

³⁹⁷ Crane, *Maggie*, 14.

³⁹⁸ Stephen Crane, “Waiting for the Spring” (*Nebraska State Journal*, Winter 1895), reprtd. in *Prairie Schooner* 38.1 (Great Plains Issue, Spring 1964), 15-26.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ Howells, letter to Cora Crane (July 29, 1900), in *Stephen Crane: Letters*, 306-307

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid*

⁴⁰² Maggie not only marks the exhaustion of dialect as a vehicle for literary nationalism; it also marks the exhaustion of *jus soli* as a vehicle for American belonging. American soil had always been a patchwork of expansions, carveouts, and exceptions, but after the Spanish-American War of 1898, the notion of the “territory” became more fragmentary than ever, making the fantasy of a coherent, unified landmass all but impossible to sustain. In the wake of such unabashed imperialist expansionism, the principle of democratic pluralism at the heart of the dialect movement produced its own undoing, because it embraced some forms of difference only at the expense of ignoring others – like the distinction between an Irish man and a poor man. Once Maggie demonstrated that some forms of antagonism could never be assimilated, Howell’s grand collaborative project of nation-building died.

⁴⁰³ Twain qtd. in *Mark Twain: The Complete Interviews*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), x; Twain qtd. in Sydney Krause, “Twain’s Theory and Methods of Composition,” *Modern Philology* 56, no. 3 (February 1959): 168.

⁴⁰⁴ Crane, *Maggie*, 21 (all quotes here).

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- ⁴⁰⁵ Stone qtd. in Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13.
- ⁴⁰⁶ Jonathan Arac, *Huckleberry Finn as Idol and Target: The Functions of Criticism in Our Time* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).
- ⁴⁰⁷ The claim that “Huck’s language is purely American” comes from M. Thomas Inge’s summary of a century of Twain scholarship. See: M. Thomas Inge, *Huck Finn Among the Critics: A Centennial Selection*. (Ann Arbor: University Publications of America, 1985), vii.
- ⁴⁰⁸ Final stanza of “When Malindy Sings,” in Paul Laurence Dunbar, *Majors and Minors* (Toledo, OH: Hadley & Hadley, 1895), 140.
- ⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.
- ⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ⁴¹² William Dean Howells, “Life and Letters,” *Harper’s Weekly* (June 27, 1896), 630.
- ⁴¹³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*; Shelly Eversley, *The Real Negro: The Question of Authenticity in Twentieth-Century African American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2, 5.
- ⁴¹⁶ Dr. Henry A. Tobey, qtd. in Lida Keck Wiggins, *The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (Naperville, IL: J.C.Nichols & Co., 1907), 48.
- ⁴¹⁷ Elsa Nettels, *Language, Race, and Social Class in Howells’s America* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 81.
- ⁴¹⁸ William Dean Howells, “American Literary Centers,” *Literature and Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), 178; Howells, “Life and Letters” (June 27, 1896).
- ⁴¹⁹ Howells, “Life and Letters” (June 27, 1896).
- ⁴²⁰ William Dean Howells, *An Imperative Duty* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), 2, 3; William Dean Howells, “Introduction,” *Lyrics of Lowly Life* by Paul Laurence Dunbar (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898), xvi.
- ⁴²¹ William Dean Howells, “Life and Letters,” *Harper’s Weekly* (June 27, 1896), 630.
- ⁴²² William Dean Howells, *An Imperative Duty* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), 93.
- ⁴²³ Howells, “Life and Letters” (June 27, 1896).
- ⁴²⁴ William Dean Howells, “Life and Letters,” *Harpers Weekly* 39 (June 22, 1895), 580-581; Howells, “Life and Letters,” *Harpers Weekly* 39 (June 8, 1895), 532-533.
- ⁴²⁵ Howells, “American Literary Centers,” *Literature and Life*, 177.
- ⁴²⁶ Howells, “Life and Letters” (June 27, 1896).

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁴²⁸ William Dean Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harper's Weekly* (June 8, 1895); Howells, "American Literary Centers," *Literature and Life*, 177.

⁴²⁹ James Whitcomb Riley, *Neighborly Poems and Dialect Sketches* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1897), 202.

⁴³⁰ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 22, 1895).

⁴³¹ William Dean Howells, "Frank Norris," *North American Review* 175 (December 1902), 770-771; William Dean Howells, "New York Low Life in Fiction," *The New York World* (July 28, 1896), 18.

⁴³² Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 27, 1896).

⁴³³ Ibid. (for all quotations within this paragraph).

⁴³⁴ Howells, *An Imperative Duty*, 5.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 7, 25. Howells's description of the Irish was in fact so negative that the serialized version of the story raised an "Irish howl," forcing Howells to omit his most egregious insults from the subsequent print edition.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 3, 4, 2.

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⁴³⁸ Ibid., 4, 5.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 27, 26.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 2, 14, 23-24.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 5, 89.

⁴⁴³ Howells's conviction that Black workers in America could never be convinced to unionize was one that Dunbar actually shared, even if for Dunbar it was more of a cause for dismay than elation. As Dunbar says bitterly in 1898, even when it comes to the chronically unemployed class of "idle, shiftless Negroes," one can be sure that "they are not Anarchists; they never will be. Socialism has no meaning for them." See: Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Negroes of the Tenderloin," *The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader*, ed. Jay Martin & Gossie Hudson (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Company, 1975), 40.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 26, 6.

⁴⁴⁵ Warren C. Whatley, "African-American Strikebreaking from the Civil War to the New Deal," *Social Science History* 17.4 (Winter 1993), 538.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 529; "Homestead Strike: Topics in Chronicling America," Library of Congress Research Guides online [<https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-homestead-strike>].

⁴⁴⁷ As soon as we picture this scenario to ourselves – troopers escorting African Americans through hordes of white locals intent on keeping them out by force – we can appreciate the irony of the situation. Industrial factories were some of the first American institutions to undergo police-mandated integration, not because the government had any commitment whatsoever to racial equality, but because it had such a strong commitment to economic inequality.

⁴⁴⁸ Booker T. Washington, “The Negro and the Labor Unions,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 1913), 756-767.

⁴⁴⁹ Samuel Gompers (1905), qtd. in Elliot Jaspin, *Buried in the Bitter Waters: The Hidden History of Racial Cleansing in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 63.

⁴⁵⁰ Paul Laurence Dunbar, “At Shaft 11,” from *Folks from Dixie* (1898), reprtd. in *The Complete Stories of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, ed. Gene Andrew Jarrett and Thomas Lewis Morgan (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 66.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 67, 68, 69.

⁴⁵² Dunbar’s mouthpiece for this little speech is, tellingly, the miners’ boss, who insists he has a “right to earn” as much as he can because he has contributed “capital, enterprise, and energy” to the miners’ efforts. See: *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁵³ Paul Laurence Dunbar, “The Fourth of July and Race Outrages,” 1903, reprtd. in *The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader*, 50-51.

⁴⁵⁴ Howells, *An Imperative Duty*, 2; William Dean Howells, *A Traveler from Altruria* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1894), 266.

⁴⁵⁵ How could the same man who responded to the Haymarket anarchists of 1886 with such sympathy – boasting of “openly befriending those men who were civically murdered in Chicago for their opinions” – also claim that “in a land where journeymen carpenters and plumbers strike for four dollars a day... the wrong from class to class has been almost inappreciable”? See: William Dean Howells, letter to Hamlin Garland, January 15, 1888, qtd. in Clara Kirk and Rudolf Kirk, “William Dean Howells, George William Curtis, and the ‘Haymarket Affair,’” *American Literature* 40.4 (Jan 1969), 487; William Dean Howells, *Criticism and Fiction* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891), 128.

⁴⁵⁶ William Dean Howells, letter to George Curtis, August 10, 1887, reprtd. in Clara Kirk and Rudolf Kirk, “William Dean Howells, George William Curtis, and the ‘Haymarket Affair,’” 489.

⁴⁵⁷ Howells, *Criticism and Fiction*, 129.

⁴⁵⁸ We can get a sense of the anxiety this question provoked by looking at the U.S. Census Bureau’s evolving definition of race:

1850: Where the person is black, insert the letter B; if mulatto, insert M.

1870: Be particularly careful in reporting the class Mulatto. The word is here generic, and includes quadroons, octoroons, and all persons having any perceptible trace of African blood.

1890: Be particularly careful to distinguish between blacks, mulattoes, quadroons, and octoroons. The word ‘black’ should be used to describe those persons who have three-fourths of more black blood; “mulatto,” those persons who have three-eighths to five-eighths black blood; “quadroon,” those persons who have one-fourth black blood; and “octoroon,” those persons who have one-eighth or any trace of black blood.

⁴⁵⁹ Howells, *An Imperative Duty*, 46, 73, 74.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 74.

⁴⁶¹ U.S. Supreme Court, *Plessy v. Ferguson* 163 U.S. 537 (May 18, 1896).

⁴⁶² Racial Integrity Act of 1924, Virginia General Assembly; originally Senate Bill 219, by W. A. Plecker, State Registrar of Vital Statistics, "The New Virginia Law to Preserve Racial Integrity," *Virginia Health Bulletin* 16.2 (March 8, 1924).

⁴⁶³ Howells, *An Imperative Duty*, 86, 38.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 144, 142, 144, 140.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 149, 143.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 149.

⁴⁶⁹ The best evidence that Howells is, indeed, motivated by his desire to understand Miss Aldgate's views on race is that her storyline makes no sense if the only point of the novel is that she winds up passing after all. To begin with, the prose style associated with her is highly unusual for Howells, who, in all his years championing literary realism, showed almost no interest in psychological realism. His sudden stylistic shift only makes sense once we realize Miss Aldgate's *inner* life is nothing but a figure for the *American* life Howells cared about so deeply. Miss Aldgate is a perfect emblem of a proud American: she spends her years abroad "always homesick," "always eager to meet Americans," "always proclaiming her patriotism." The point of all her "patriotism" is that her belief in "that blood" is just as American as she is. Hence why Howells devotes such attention to her psychological "torment," which he sums up as, "there seemed two selves of her, one that lived before that awful knowledge, and one that had lived as long since." The version of Miss Aldgate that never thought all that seriously about race is a figure for antebellum America; the version that is completely obsessed with foregrounding race is a figure for the country under Jim Crow.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 103, 88, 92.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 93, 92.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 93, 94

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 95, 94.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 93, 92, 93.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 93, 95.

⁴⁸² William Dean Howells, "The Southern States in Recent American Literature," *Literature* (Sept. 1898), qtd. in M. Thomas Inge, William Dean Howells on Southern Literature," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 21.4 (Fall 1968), 291-304.

⁴⁸³ Howells, *An Imperative Duty*, 53.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 89.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 38, 52, 37.

⁴⁸⁶ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 27, 1896).

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ <https://www.bu.edu/cas/magazine/fall09/jarrett/essay-jarrett.pdf>

⁴⁸⁹ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 27, 1896).

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid. (all quotes this paragraph).

⁴⁹¹ To be clear, my argument here is fully compatible with Shelley Eversley's claim about predominating minstrel trope of the "real negro" in the 1890s. My point is simply that Howells promoted the "real negro" he saw in Dunbar not because he was invested in making *minstrelsy* more believable, but because he was invested in making *literature* more believable. See: Shelly Eversley, *The Real Negro*, 2.

⁴⁹² Dunbar, "When Malindy Sings," *Majors and Minors*, 140.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 140, 138.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 139, 138.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 139, 138.

⁴⁹⁶ Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 27, 1896); Dunbar, "When Malindy Sings," *Majors and Minors*, 138.

⁴⁹⁷ William Dean Howells, "Frank Norris," *North American Review* 175 (December 1902), 770-771.

⁴⁹⁸ Crane, *Red Badge*, 62-63.

⁴⁹⁹ Howells, "Frank Norris;" Howells, "Life and Letters" (June 27, 1896).

⁵⁰⁰ All quotes this paragraph: William Dean Howells, "Mr. Charles W. Chesnutt's Stories," *The Atlantic* (May 1900).

⁵⁰¹ Howells, *An Imperative Duty*, 143, 74.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 85, 86; Howells, "Mr. Charles W. Chesnutt's Stories."

⁵⁰³ Howells, "Mr. Charles W. Chesnutt's Stories."

⁵⁰⁴ Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1901), 60-61.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid, 60, 55.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁵⁰⁷ Howells, "Mr. Charles W. Chesnutt's Stories."

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ William Dean Howells, "Introduction," *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898), xvii.

⁵¹¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," *The Sociological Souls of Black Folk: Essays by W. E. B. Du Bois*, ed. Robert A. Wortham (New York: Lexington Books, 2011), 111.

⁵¹² Ibid., 113.

⁵¹³ Anthony Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race," *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 ("Race," Writing, and Difference, Autumn 1985), 21-37; Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," 116.

⁵¹⁴ Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," 115, 116.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 114.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 115, 116, 118.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 116, 114.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 111, 114; Howells, "Introduction," *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, xvi.

⁵¹⁹ Howells, *An Imperative Duty*, 53, 103.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 53, 92.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 92-93.

⁵²² Ibid., 95; Du Bois, 114.

⁵²³ Howells, "Introduction," *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, xvi.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., xix; Howells, "Mr. Charles W. Chesnutt's Stories."

⁵²⁵ Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races," 114, 115.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., 114, 112.

⁵²⁷ Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Negro in Literature" (1898), interview by *New York Commercial* (no by-line), Paul Laurence Dunbar Collection, Reel IV, Box 16, OHS, reprtd. in *In his Own Voice: The Dramatic and Other Uncollected Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, ed. Herbert Woodward Martin and Ronald Primeau (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002), 207.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Stephen Crane, letter to William Dean Howells (August 15, 1896), in *Stephen Crane: Letters* (New York: New York University Press, 1960), 127-128.

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- ⁵³⁰ Paul Laurence Dunbar, letter to William Dean Howells (July 13, 1896). in *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells: Vol. II*, ed. Mildred Howells (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 67-68 [all quotes this paragraph].
- ⁵³¹ Ibid.
- ⁵³² Benjamin Brawley, *Paul Laurence Dunbar, Poet of His People* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: Kennicat Press, 1967), 60.
- ⁵³³ As his 1903 poem "The Poet" laments, "But ah, the world, it turned to praise / a jingle in a broken tongue." See: Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Poet," *Lyrics of Love and Laughter* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1908), 82.
- ⁵³⁴ Alice Dunbar-Nelson, qtd. in Shirley Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 124.
- ⁵³⁵ Paul Laurence Dunbar, letter to William Dean Howells (April 26, 1897), Howells Collection, Harvard University, reprtd. in James B. Stronks, "Paul Laurence Dunbar and William Dean Howells," *The Ohio Historical Quarterly* 67.2 (April 1958), 104-105.
- ⁵³⁶ Dunbar wrote 95 short stories in all, mostly in the genre of plantation fiction; "At Shaft 11" is a notable exception.
- ⁵³⁷ William Dean Howells, letter to Ripley Hitchcock (July 29, 1896), qtd. in Gene Jarrett, "'Entirely Black Verse from Him Would Succeed': Minstrel Realism and William Dean Howells," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 59. (March 2005), 494-525.
- ⁵³⁸ Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Photograph, *Li'l Gal*, illustrated with photographs by Leigh Richmond Minder of the Hampton Institute Camera Club (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1904), 110, 112, 113.
- ⁵³⁹ Ibid., 110, 111, 113.
- ⁵⁴⁰ Paul Laurence Dunbar, "When Malindy Sings," *When Malindy Sings*, illustrated with photographs by the Hampton Institute Camera Club (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1903), 9.
- ⁵⁴¹ Specifically, Dunbar's response is: "You forget that for two hundred and fifty years the environment of the negro has been American, in every respect the same as that of all other Americans." If at first this sounds more like an endorsement of Howells's nationalist vision than a dismissal of it, keep in mind that Dunbar has a very different definition of "American" than Howells. For Howells it meant particularity, as in the distinctly personal circumstance of local setting; for Dunbar it meant universality, as in the broadly shared experience of national life. Proclaiming his work "American" is just another way of saying that it "will not be exotic or differ much from that of the whites." See: Dunbar, "Negro in Literature" (1898), 206-207.
- ⁵⁴² Ibid.
- ⁵⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴⁴ Both Crane and Dunbar self-published their first, commercially unsuccessful works in 1893 (*Oak and Ivy; Maggie*). Both followed up these initial commercial failures with breakout works in 1895 (*Majors and Minors; The Red Badge of Courage*). Both then composed semi-autobiographical novels in direct imitation of Howells's prose style (*The Uncalled*, 1898; *The Third Violet*; 1897). Both of these were universally panned by critics. Both authors recovered from this humiliation with acclaimed short story collections in 1898 (*Folks from Dixie; The Open Boat and Other Stories*). Finally, both settled into writing styles that were so distinctly recognizable that no one could possibly mistake who had written them (Dunbar's plantation-dialect rhyming sing-song poems, Crane's color-laden literary-impressionist tales of destruction).

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- ⁵⁴⁵ Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Lafe Hallaway's Two Fights," *The Complete Stories*, 465; Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Faith Cure Man, *The Complete Stories*, 183.
- ⁵⁴⁶ Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Trousers," *The Complete Stories*, 221, 223,
- ⁵⁴⁷ Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Strength of Gideon," *The Complete Stories*, 88, 87, 86, 88.
- ⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 88, 92
- ⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.
- ⁵⁵⁰ Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Old Abe's Conversion," *The Complete Stories*, 344.
- ⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 346, 347, 346.
- ⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 348, 349.
- ⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 344, 347.
- ⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 345, 346, 348.
- ⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 345, 346.
- ⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 344, 345.
- ⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 348.
- ⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 348, 347.
- ⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 347-348.
- ⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 347, 346. It is worth noting here the distinct contrast between "Old Abe's Conversion" (1904) and Dunbar's novel *The Sport of the Gods* (1902). In the latter, we also see a father-and-son pair serving as figureheads for the "old negro" and the new "negro youth." In *The Sport of the Gods*, however, the son, Joe, still speaks the same dialect as his father, Barry (albeit slightly lightened up). It seems hardly a coincidence, then, that in *The Sport of the Gods*, both Joe and Barry wind up in jail, where "little Joe" finds himself locked away for life. Without the kind of language that will allow him to make his voice heard before the law, he has no power to rescue Barry from returning to the "old days" on the "old plantation," which Dunbar paints as bleak indeed: "it was not a happy life, but it was all that was left." See: Paul Laurence Dunbar, *The Sport of the Gods* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1902), 26, 117, 250, 1, 66, 255.
- ⁵⁶¹ Dunbar, "Negro in Literature;" Howells, "The Southern States in Recent American Literature."
- ⁵⁶² Howells, "Introduction," *Lyrics of Lowly Life*, xix-xx.
- ⁵⁶³ Kenneth Warren, *What Was African American Literature?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 11, 10.
- ⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 10, 12.
- ⁵⁶⁵ Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Recession Never," *The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader*, 36-39.
- ⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 36, 38.

⁵⁶⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negroes of Wilmington, N.C." (unpublished manuscript), 1899, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, MS 312; Dunbar, "Recession Never," 39.

⁵⁶⁸ Dunbar, "Recession Never," 39.

⁵⁶⁹ Paul Laurence Dunbar, "Representative American Negroes," *The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader*, 51-59.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁵⁷¹ James Weldon Johnson, "Preface," *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1931), reissued (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1983) 7, 4, 34, 4.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 40, 4, 6, 4, 6, 81, 4.

⁵⁷³ James Weldon Johnson, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, 1912 (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 149.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 153, 154, 147.

⁵⁷⁵ See, for instance, John Keeling, "Paul Dunbar and the Mask of Dialect," *The Southern Literary Journal* 25.2 (Spring 1993), 24-38; Aldon Lynn Nielsen, "'Purple Haze': Dunbar's Lyric Legacy," *African American Review* 41.2 (2007): 283-288; Joanne M. Braxton, "Dunbar, the Originator," *African American Review* 41.2 (2007): 205-214.

⁵⁷⁶ Inasmuch as dialect could be said to have an afterlife in the 20th century, it takes the form of heavily racialized accents that no one could possibly imagine standing in for the nation. On the one hand, we find ethnographic accents executed with almost sociological precision – a trend we can trace from, say, Charles Chesnutt's 1901 *The Marrow of Tradition* to its apotheosis in the 1930s works of Zora Neale Hurston. On the other hand, we find stereotypical accents exaggerated to the point of caricature – a trend that might be said to begin with Thomas Dixon's 1902 *The Leopard's Spots*, and to culminate with Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot corresponding as "Brer Rabbit" and "Old Possum" in the twenties and thirties. Yet whether serious or insincere, tragic or comic, quasi-scientific or patently exaggerated, what these 20th century accents had in common was that they were no longer at all invested in trying to make the Black voice into a version of speaking like an American.

Ellen Glasgow's 1900 *The Voice of the People*, which begins as a full-fledged dialect tale and ends largely as a standard-English narrative, illustrates the death of the dialect movement almost too perfectly. Along the range of 20th century racialized accents, it contains both extremes– in the sense that the early chapters are filled with dialect that diagrams every possible sociological rung of Southern society, and the final chapters wrap up with dialect that functions as nothing more than slapstick minstrelsy. At first, the two main characters, who are introduced to us as children, speak in Southern dialects inflected by their class positions – landowner ("I'm 'bliged to have a bosom friend") and tenant farmer ("There ain't nothin' in peanut-raisin"), respectively. After attending school, however, they lose their accents entirely, meaning that dialect gets relegated to side characters like "Uncle Ish," a vestige of "old times" who is literally called an "antiquity." Glasgow makes racial dialect a matter of mockery, as when we are told that Uncle Ish can't possibly manage to care for himself as a freedman: "I ain' had so much ter eat sence I'se gone off, en I ain' had much uv er roof ter kiver me, en I ain' had nuttin' ter w'ar ter speak on – but, fo' de Lawd, Marse Tom, freedom it are er moughty good thing." In a novel obsessed with the distinction between the old and the new South (a "new era" with its "new woman" and "new negroes"), it's clear that dialect very much belongs to the past. See: Ellen Glasgow, *The Voice of the People* (New York: A. L. Burt Company, 1902), 62, 10, 223, 224, 189, 60, 309, 337, 406.

⁵⁷⁷ William Dean Howells, qtd in Richard H. Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 79.

⁵⁷⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," chapter one of *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

APPENDIX

Publishing Agreement

Chapter 1 represents a published manuscript (Mika Turim-Nygren. "Twain's Modernism: The Death of Speech in Huckleberry Finn as the Birth of a New Aesthetic." *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 8.1 (Spring 2020): 123-145) for which I was the sole author. Please see the attached publishing agreement for copyright permissions.

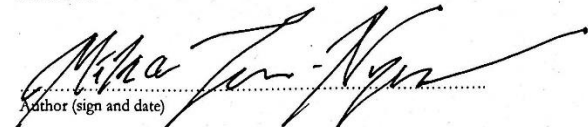
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Author (sign and date)

850 Quincy St NW, Apt 604
Home Address
Washington, D.C. 20011

Mika Turim-Nygren

850 Quincy St NW, Washington, D.C. 20011 | 352-262-0255 | mturim-nygren@bhsec.bard.edu

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in English	Spring 2021
University of Illinois at Chicago	
Dissertation: <i>Dialects of the Tribe: The Unexpected Origins of American Literary Modernism</i>	
Committee: Walter Benn Michaels (adviser), Peter Coviello, Nicholas Brown, Jennifer Ashton, Kenneth Warren (University of Chicago)	
M.A. in the Humanities	Spring 2010
The University of Chicago	
Thesis: "Breaking Boundaries: Ritual and Repetition in Everything Is Illuminated"	
B.A. in English	Spring 2009
University of Florida, Summa Cum Laude, Honors Program	
Honors Thesis: "Proto-Zionism and the Land in 19th-Century Fiction"	

PUBLICATIONS

"Twain's Modernism: The Death of Speech in Huckleberry Finn as the Birth of a New Aesthetic." <i>J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists</i> 8.1	Spring 2020
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GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND AWARDS

1921 Prize in American Literature, "Twain's Modernism," ALS (<i>Nominated</i>)	Summer 2020
Quarry Farm Fellowship, Center for Mark Twain Studies (<i>Invited</i>)	Summer 2020
Naomi Prawer Kadar Language Scholarship, Tel Aviv University	Summer 2017
Graduate Student Council Travel Award, University of Illinois at Chicago	Spring 2014
University Fellowship (2 years of funding at \$25,000 each), University of Illinois at Chicago	2010 – 2015
University Merit Scholarship (\$20,000), University of Illinois at Chicago	Summer 2017
University Scholars Program Research Grant (\$2,500), University of Florida	2008 – 2009
Phi Beta Kappa (induction ceremony speaker), University of Florida	2008
National Merit Scholar Fellowship (\$24,000), University of Florida	2005 – 2009

TRAVEL AND CONFERENCES

CAA (College Art Association) Annual Conference, Chicago	February 2020
"Black and White in Willem de Kooning's Light in August," with collaborator Becky Bivens	
Naomi Prawer Kadar International Yiddish Summer Program	Summer 2017
Tel Aviv University	

Marxist Reading Group Conference	March 2014
“Bourdieu’s Restricted Field: Theorizing the Universal Aspirations of Yiddish Literature.”	
University of Florida	
Society of Cinema and Media Studies Chicago Conference	March 2013
“Tevye: Language, Sound, and the Resonance of Ritual in the late Yiddish Cinema”	

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Bard High School Early Colleges DC

American Literature Faculty

G(EN)Der: Utopias/Dystopias Beyond the Gender Binary	Spring 2021
World Literature II (10 th Grade)	Spring 2021
World Literature I (10 th Grade)	Fall 2020

University of Illinois at Chicago

Graduate Instructor

Women and Literature: Novel Forms for Novel Needs	Fall 2018
Academic Writing I: Campus Controversies	Fall 2018
Academic Writing II: Writing About Protest in America	Spring 2018
American Literature and Culture: Speaking ‘True’ American	Fall 2017
Academic Writing I: Campus Controversies	Fall 2017
Introduction to Multi-Ethnic Literature in the U.S.	Spring 2016
Academic Writing I: Campus Controversies	Fall 2015
Academic Writing II: Dark Secrets of History	Spring 2014
Academic Writing I: Travel Writing and the World	Fall 2014

Graduate Teaching Assistant

American Literature: Beginnings to 1900, Peter Coviello	Spring 2015
English Literature II: The History of English Literature, 1660-1900, Lisa Freeman	Fall 2014

Roosevelt University

Adjunct Instructor

Writing II: Argumentation, Analysis, Research	Spring 2011
Writing I: Writing Practice	Fall 2010

University of Florida

Teaching Assistant

AIM Summer Program: Writing, Organization, Argumentation	2007 - 2009
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LANGUAGES

English – native
French – reading, writing, conversational
German – reading, conversational
Yiddish – reading

