

**Literatures of Language: A Literary History of Linguistics in Nineteenth-Century
America**

by

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To my grandmother, Marjory Brokaw Warne, who never stopped reading

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Abstract

This dissertation traces the intertwined history of linguistics and imaginative literature in the nineteenth-century United States. Fiction and travel literature throughout the century gave rise to changing modes of thinking about and documenting language difference. At the same time, new discourses of language study transformed how literary authors represented and reflected on speech in writing. The history of this cross-disciplinary, mutually constitutive relationship has been an understudied topic in both historical linguistics and literary criticism. By reading major works from each field in context with one another—by performing, in other words, a literary history of language study—I seek to understand the profusion of multilingual and dialect literatures and to create a more complete historiography of the discipline of linguistics.

My first chapter examines the work of early US language scholars Peter Duponceau and John Pickering. Alongside their research into various Amerindian languages, I discuss the fiction and travel writing of James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, and Margaret Fuller. Historicizing literary vernacular as part of an emerging, multidisciplinary interest in phonetic transcription, I turn in the second chapter to a number of authors of the Southwestern comic genre: Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, William Gilmore Simms, David Crockett, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, and George Washington Harris. The third chapter focuses on the ethnolinguistic literature of James Russell Lowell and Mark Twain. Alongside their work I examine postbellum linguists William Dwight Whitney and Max Müller, who were beginning to make the case for applying a strict scientific method to the study of language variation. The final chapter follows Lafcadio Hearn, an enigmatic, international travel writer who was responsible for some of the first ethnographic sketches of French and Spanish Creole quarters of New Orleans. These documents reveal a novel retheorization of contact languages and creoles in fin-de-siècle American literature and language study.

Throughout this dissertation, it is my goal both to resurface further cross-disciplinary documents, and to reveal their shared methodological and conceptual approaches to language—approaches that were not simply echoes across a divide, but a collective practice that was part of the nascent disciplinary landscape of language study.

Introduction

In his December 1887 “Editor’s Study” column William Dean Howells urged contemporary writers to abandon that “foolish old superstition that literature and art are anything but the expression of life, and are to be judged by any other test than that of their fidelity to it” (*Harper’s* 154). Borrowing from the “singularly modern” Edmund Burke, he argued that the duty of the author was to move beyond artifice and convention and begin the task of interpreting “human nature” in a more documentary mode. The key terms of Howells’s claim here—fidelity and expression—present a much more complicated demand on the critic than his breezy treatment would suggest. The author’s notion of a “test” of fidelity assumes an objective barometer: literature could be deemed artful based purely on how accurately the “expression of life” was rendered. But for such a test to work it needed an actual object of study, one that could correlate to some notion of the “real” outside of literary convention. For Howells and the realist credo he worked to establish, such expressions were intimately tied to the recording of actual linguistic expressions. In an 1895 “Life and Letters” column, for instance, he admired George Washington Cable for “contriv[ing] to spell the speech of his Creole characters so that you know just how they spoke” (532). The successful textualization of speech differences, then, was one sure way to mark a narrative as authentic, as a document of life as it was really lived, and not simply another imitative piece of romance, pulp, or pabulum for the undiscerning “general reader” (532). Good literature was tantamount to good linguistic documentation.

This dissertation takes as its jumping off point the critical and historical equation between the art of capturing speech in writing and the science of language study. Beginning with the early national writings of figures like Thomas Jefferson, Washington Irving, and Margaret Fuller and ending with the fin-de-siècle creolist and fictional work of Lafcadio Hearn, I explore a diverse set of texts whose central, sometimes self-professed, focus was the representation of the equally diverse array of spoken languages within the moving boundaries of the US. Through the textual depiction of dialect¹ and multilingual speech, and the self-conscious observation and codification of voice, pronunciation, and idiomatic phraseology, these works fully participated in the richly ambiguous discourse shaping the study of language in the US. My dissertation represents a re-historicization of what Amy Strand has called the “cross-fertilization” between literature and nineteenth-century language study—the co-development of disciplinary methods that came to define modern linguistics and constituted the practices associated with literary language and perceptions about its varying degrees of authenticity.

Though I am concerned throughout this thesis with illuminating the shared resources, objects of study, and approaches to speech documentation exhibited by these now separate fields of inquiry, I am not trying to reinvigorate a philological approach to literary texts. I believe wholly in what Michelle Warren has recently cited as philology’s

¹ Howells himself championed the use of the term “dialect” to describe a more fully realized depiction of ethnic and regional varieties of English. But the word “dialect” has, as critic Dohra Ahmad notes, become synonymous with “the language spoken by caricatures” (*Rotten English* 17). In her recent anthology of variant English texts, *Rotten English*, she prefers to use what she considers the more politically neutral “vernacular.” In the end, however, there is no critical consensus in literary historical writing about how or which terms should be deployed. In my own writing, I have opted to use the term “vernacular” when referring to broad uses of slang and/or regional or ethnic varieties of English in *literary texts* and “dialect” when discussing spoken language types that correlate to particularized speech communities. The two terms obviously overlap when it comes to talking about genres like Southwestern humor or “local color” writing, whose underwriting characteristic is the attempt to replicate the particular dialect of a specific locale and its speakers. But, to the extent that it is possible, I try to maintain the distinction between the terms.

capacity to “reach across time and space” and “reveal missing archives” of text and speech (“Relating Philology” 283). My interest, however, is less about interrogating the veracity of such archives in literature and more about understanding how the ideology of the archive of speech itself—the idea that documents of language as it was spoken could illuminate a national, historical, or sociocultural character—achieved literary and linguistic currency. Re-examining central and peripheral texts across literary genres throughout the nineteenth century, I also reveal how the discourse of language study was both supplemented by and constitutive of literary practices revolving around the central notion of objective, authentic documentations of speech. From antebellum travelogues and humorous newspaper writing, to “local color” and other regional, transnational fiction throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, the search for fidelity and accuracy was not merely an abiding literary conceit, but a discursive mode imbricated with the methods and practices of an emerging science of language.

A number of recent critical studies of nineteenth-century US literature have focused on what Nancy Bentley calls the “convergences” between literary texts and disciplines within the social sciences, especially anthropology, ethnography, and ethnolinguistics (*The Ethnography of Manners* 2). Critics like Bentley, Phillip Barrish, and Brad Evans have explored how such multidisciplinary convergences structured socioeconomic status among authors and their audiences. Evans, for instance, sees ethnographic and ethnolinguistic literacy as an essential component of middle-class “chic”—a fashion for out-of-the-way places and exotic characters and speech—constituted and transferred by literary tastemakers in the pages of “quality” postbellum magazines like *Harper’s Monthly*, *Scribner’s*, *The Century*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*

(“Howellsian Chic” 775). For Barrish, the development of a postbellum realist aesthetic was intimately caught up in cultivating a taste for ethnolinguistic objectivity. Fluency in the discourses of language study and the objective, relativist approaches that characterized them offered “a form of cultural capital available to discerning members of the competitive...middle and upper-middle classes” (*American Literary Realism* 17). As Bentley writes, by operating as forms of “expert observation,” fictions of dialect and multilingualism presented audiences with a sense of “mastery over a cultural territory”—mastery that at once constituted and signaled a new kind of intellectual capital and social prestige (2).

Such cultural histories of language study offer a new understanding of how disciplinary constructions of linguistics operated within literary texts and became bound up in structuring sociocultural status. However, one problem with this prestige model of reading dialect and multilingual texts is that it institutes the idea that literatures of language were only an active part of the postbellum rise of realism, rather than an ongoing process throughout the nineteenth century. The generic boundaries of realism, as well as the linguistic concerns that marked realist texts, have frequently been situated as a product of post-Civil War industrialism, cultural migration, geographical expansion, and the anxieties of emerging class consciousness that attended these phenomena. Looking past the projected temporal and generic boundaries of realism, however, we find an abiding concern throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century with “getting speech right.” Authors seeking to document their own sociocultural milieu were deeply invested in replicating speech, and the strategies they used to do so helped shape the

scholarship of linguistic discourse under development in the early national and antebellum periods.

Literary critics have tended to understate the plurality of emerging linguistics in the nineteenth century. Many critical accounts of the convergence of literature and language study rest on a rather tenuous, often anecdotal, account of linguistics in America as a discipline that had already achieved discursive, academic coherence—a uniformity that allowed the field to act as a guarantor of intellectualism in the muddled social arena following the Civil War. In fact the discipline of language science rarely cohered in its methods or practices. “Comparative philology,” “the science of language,” “linguistics”—all were contested terms throughout the nineteenth century that, in the scholarly debates surrounding their use, came to represent both the diversity and the relative incoherence of the field *as a field*. Additionally, there is the tendency to see discursive practices within literary representations of dialect and multilingual speech as a unidirectional borrowing *from* linguistics, rather than a symbiotic or mutually constitutive process. Literary portrayals and discussions of speech forms and variants were not, as they are often characterized, simply echo chambers of or counterpoints to a separate, autonomous discipline, but were instead a formative part of the disciplinary coming into being of the practice of documenting and describing the complex structures of language, and documenting the motivations for its constant change.

The plurality that defines nineteenth-century American linguistics does not preempt claims about its capacity to inflect literary and social prestige. But it does demand a more thoroughgoing historiography that would account for the symbiosis, the nexus of shared means and ends, that existed between the formative domains of

linguistics and literature. By exploring oft-neglected philological and linguistic texts—texts which resonated outside of the disciplinary boundaries they have been assumed to inhabit—I present a pre-disciplinary history that complicates the predominant history of a rigid postbellum, disciplinary category of linguistics discourse.

The relatively scant historiography of linguistics in the recent past has, in part, been responsible for the incomplete account of the discipline, especially in nineteenth-century America. As Michael Kramer writes, American linguistic history has “remained an all-but-neglected area of intellectual history, stomping grounds for a few antiquarians, folklorists, and intellectual historians of language or education” (*Imagining Language in America* ix). Too often, early incarnations of the field have been staged as a creation of the Eurocentric pantheon of Jones, Humboldt, Grimm, and Bopp—figures who have cast an obscuring shadow over the innovative work of their American counterparts. At the same time, the ascendancy of twentieth-century structural linguistics has been told as less a culmination of its philological predecessors than a *sui generis* creation of the twentieth century. To some degree, the disciplinary self-fashioning that took place in the 1920s bears out this conception. In 1926, Leonard Bloomfield, who one year prior had helped found the Linguistic Society of America, wrote “A Set of Postulates for the Science of Language.” The article appeared in the second issue of the journal *Language* and was, Bloomfield anticipated, to become a step toward the “delimitation of linguistics” and a primer on the founding texts of the new academic discipline (quoted in Andresen 2). The author cites works like Edward Sapir’s *Language* (1921) and Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* (1922) as cornerstones that not only offered a defined relativist methodology and a clearly demarcated structuralist object of study, but also, and

perhaps more importantly, lent the practitioners of these methods and objects a “professional consciousness” (in Andresen 2). Linguists could, under the rubric presented by Bloomfield, Sapir, and Saussure, call themselves linguists and know once and for all what they meant.

As more recent linguistic historians like Julie Tetel Andresen, Konrad Koerner, and Dell Hymes have attested, the story of the emergence of a self-conscious field in the 1920s, while certainly an important chapter in the discipline’s academic reception in North America, has tended to elide the complex history of American language study in the nineteenth century. Andresen’s *Linguistics in America* represents one corrective to this elision. Beginning with the 1769 establishment of the American Philosophical Society and ending in 1924, just prior to Bloomfield’s disciplinary pronouncements, Andresen gives a full account of US philology and linguistics as a more plastic field, one, as she writes, “that incorporates the interests and concerns of a Noah Webster (to name but one) and that acknowledges them as valid, even central, to what American linguistic theory and practice has always been and continues to be” (5). Koerner establishes the long history of these “theories and practices,” presenting a more detailed history of concepts like linguistic relativism and language materialism, as well as the mid-nineteenth-century debates over field terminology that helped to differentiate a linguistic science of speech from its text-based philological forebears.² All of this work is connected by a recurrent thesis: the general claim that, as Andresen writes, “the domain of the language sciences, and thus its history, is *not* coextensive with the academic

² See also: E.F. Koerner, *Professing Linguistic Historiography* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1995); “The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis: A Preliminary History and Bibliographical Essay,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2 (December 1992): 173-198; “Linguistics vs Philology: Self-definition of a Field or Rhetorical Stance.” *Language Sciences*. 19 (April 1997): 167-177.

institutionalization of the discipline.... Linguistic activity, in the United States and elsewhere, has always been *plural*, and our history should reflect that plurality” (13).

The thesis of plurality informs my own pursuit of a more encompassing historiography of American language study. I seek to demonstrate how earlier disciplinary fluidity within the study of language allowed for an inclusive practice that was conversant and collaborative with imaginative literatures of language. Just like the highly mobile field of American linguistics, literary genres and subgenres such as early national travel writing, Southwestern humor writing, and postbellum regional and local color fiction were not, I argue, *sui generis* creations within a confined fictional field. Instead, they were texts that operated in multiple domains at once and gave voice to the same conflicts and the same self-conscious methods and practices of coding and understanding speech that occupied language scholars. These texts were “doing linguistics” during a long formative period when the actual pursuit of a science of language was still attempting to articulate a “professional consciousness.” And just as the literary codification of speech participated in the process of this disciplinary articulation, so too did the rigors of a scientific discourse constitute a major force behind establishing the tropes that would come to define later-century realism. By offering a prehistory of these two fields before their twentieth-century disaggregation, I tell the story of their joint enterprise to establish the archival capacity of language, and narrate an alternative historiography of linguistics in the US—one in which imaginative literature is a crucial part of the nexus that would become the discipline of linguistics.

Linguistic Backgrounds

In many ways, the historical conversations that evolved over the scholarly study of speech and its literary representation reveal the development of an increasingly relativist attitude toward language, even (and perhaps especially) within those languages more generally considered marginal, exotic, or primitive. In 1784, Johann Herder wrote that, “[t]he best culture of a people cannot be expressed through a foreign language; it thrives on the soil of a nation most beautifully, and, I may say, it thrives only by means of the nation's inherited and inheritable dialect. With language is created the heart of a people” (quoted in Pollock 505). The idea that a special genius invests languages with the capacity to carry and project cultural and the national identities was repeated throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Early linguists often saw their task as uncovering the history of a language’s “inheritances”: the phonetic and etymological roots that gave rise to its current forms. Such a history, they surmised, would go a long way toward proving the rightness and righteousness of human progress. Of course, there were naysayers who saw only a degenerative Babel in the diversity of languages among and within nations. But both camps believed in the essential link between language and character, both individual and national.

These Herderian ideas had a consistent pull on American thinking about the study and the literary representation of language. Indeed, US literary history is, in part, a history of multilingualism—a history of the politics, science, and literature of language difference. The languages native to America, the tongues transported by waves of immigration and multiple forms of regional English, have all contributed to America’s multilingual history. The confluence of these languages has been attended by an ever-

evolving study of language. As early as Roger Williams's *A Key into the Language of America* (1643), a concerted effort was made to catalogue and understand the linguistic terrain of the Americas. Throughout the eighteenth century, these catalogues grew. Thomas Jefferson sent explorers like Lewis and Clark with lists of words to be collected in the expanding territories of the US. Further abroad, Catherine the Great had called for a comparative dictionary of world languages and enlisted language scholars in Germany, Britain, and the US to aid in the compilation of American Indian languages. By the turn of the nineteenth century, comparative philology had been established with Sir William Jones' celebrated discovery of shared characteristics among Sanskrit and other European languages, and Wilhelm von Humboldt's and Freidrich von Schlegel's essays on the methodology of the new field. As comparative philology (*Linguistik* in Germany) found practitioners in the US, chief among them John Pickering and Peter Stephen DuPonceau, the languages spoken within national borders became material for comparison and evidence for a distant linguistic past. Throughout the middle of the nineteenth century, linguists developed and debated the shape and aims of language study. In the US, where many Native languages lacked a traditional writing system, emphasis was laid on speech and the importance of incorporating spoken tongues into the wider field of comparative philology. This emphasis created a narrowing focus on the individual speaker as a mouthpiece for whole communities of speakers.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the establishment of a more concerted program of language study granted foreign languages and dialects a new documentary value: as the minute exploration and explanation of language operations required the compilation of "linguistic evidence," language became less and less a

transparent medium expressing the essential character or teleological development of a race or nation. Instead, it was beginning to be seen as an organism in and of itself. This new, more materialistic point of view revealed the potential for all languages to have equal expressive capacity, and their own relative structure. This idea became especially pronounced as linguists-cum-philologists began to tap into orality as a primary object of study. Seen as a more unmediated form of language, speech was in its ascendancy by the early nineteenth century as the central object of study of the newly emerging science of linguistics. All the same, in order to thoroughly parse the structures of spoken languages, they needed to be captured as objectively as possible and for as wide an audience as possible. This meant the creation of new codes of textualization—the creation of phonetic and “universal alphabets” that could adequately reproduce speech as it was spoken.

This specific focus on methods of textualization, on orthographically capturing speech in order to study linguistic structures, meant an acute, self-conscious attention to the details of form. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, scholars began to engage in highly self-reflexive conversations about the inscriptions that stood in for particular phonetic, syntactic, or other grammatical features. Sir William Jones, in his groundbreaking *Dissertation on the Orthography of Asiatick Words*, advocates, for instance, that fellow philologists work to develop “a complete system” in which “each original sound may be rendered invariably by one appropriate symbol,” and that they do so “with due regard” to the specific method of coding unwritten or non-Western languages (*Works* v3, 253). Such “due regard” became a categorical imperative for linguistic comparison. Without it, individual studies would have scant value within the

broader field, existing, as Jones puts it, as little more than “method[s] of notation peculiar to” the authors alone (253).

The shift to a more materialistic view of language, and away from what could be called a moralized view, had a deep impact not only on philology and language philosophy, but also on fictional and other narrative literature that attempted to depict speech on the page. Linguistic difference had been thematized in the nation’s literature from its inception. John Adams “Humphry Ploughjogger” letters (1763-1767) spoke through a rural Yankee dialect, making the letters’ political criticisms those of the “common man.” This strategy was repeated throughout the early nineteenth century, with such examples as Seba Smith’s Major Jack Downing, and Thomas C. Haliburton’s Sam Slick. Aside from these explicitly political uses of non-normative language, was a very different mode of language representation, one that was more interested in the aural and structural stuff of language than in making a pointed statement about, or through, its speakers. Travel writing within the new Western territories of the US by authors like Irving and Fuller explored the material differences between the narrator’s language and that of the subjects he or she encountered. This writing was metalinguistic, reflecting on the sound and grammar features of various Native languages and nonstandard dialects. Though not widespread, this kind of writing underscores an important shift toward a more relativist approach in literatures of language.

Such an approach meant that the dialogue of characters was not simply a way of moving plot along, but separate idioms that were interesting for their own sake. Fiction writers and authors of occasional essays, travelogues, and other texts that encounter and develop dialog have frequently been assumed to reproduce such speech as part of an

unwitting process of characterization and voice, or as a thinly veiled effort to deepen the trenches between the “good” and the “bad,” the standard of social elites and the nonstandard of subalterns. The way a character speaks is only important insofar as the dialogic form offers a lens on personality. It need not be accurate or even consistent as long as it constructs a believable, or at least diverting, sense of who the subject is and, perhaps, where he or she comes from. What I reveal through close readings, in conversation with their particular linguistic historiographical context, is that these literatures of language were rarely unwitting in their self-referential attentions to spoken language. The search for authenticity was pervasive. Moreover, this self-reflexiveness points to a heightened sophistication on the part of literary authors and to the need to reconsider imaginative literature as quintessentially conversant with the broad aims and methods of early linguistics. The epistemological category of literature was caught up in the very same pursuits as language study: figuring spoken tongues and approximating this speech with self-conscious attention to formal details.

The Problem of Authenticity

Recent critical accounts of nineteenth-century dialect and multilingual literature have been quick to associate depictions of language with competing national narratives. A diversity of languages and dialects comes to allegorize the democratic union that finds strength in a diverse citizenry, or, conversely, to signify commonly expressed anxiety about the potential for national disunity. These narratives of national multilingualism tend to emphasize language as a figure of social and political debate, rather than a phenomenon that was meaningful to linguists and authors of the day as an independent

object of study. While such study was obviously caught up in the tide of sociopolitics and ideological conflict, it is crucial to literary history that we also acknowledge literature as a field where the work of language science could be practiced.

In many ways, the fallout of the culture wars over the past few decades, as well as the acute focus on identity politics, has made authenticity the chief byword of linguistically interested literary histories. Characters' voices—their vernacular, their polyglot mixtures of patois and foreign tongues, and even their hyperaware, genteel English—all granted access, critics have assumed, to person and place, and to the psychological and sociohistorical conditions that made such people and places worth documenting. This calculus, equating some version of a transcription of spoken language with authenticity was one that Howells worked fervently to put in place in critical columns that appeared throughout “quality” magazines like *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Century*. For Howells as for contemporary literary critics, authenticity and fidelity were just as much a matter of artifice as they were of fact. As Timo Müller has written recently, “authenticity, despite its connotations of trueness and purity, is a construct—a postulated standard of truth that we can at best approximate and that at worst turns out to be a mere chimera” (“The Use of Authenticity” 28). The paradox of authenticity, as a concept that signifies accuracy and artificiality, the “true to life” and the discourses that construct this truth, has long been a focal point in appraisals of dialect and multilingual representation. When Howells praises Cable's Creole fictions as “very charming” because “the underlying study is concealed by an air of the greatest ease and naturalness,” he is praising both the text's accuracy, its “naturalness” of speech, *and* its artifice—the means by which its “studied” aspects are both acknowledged and concealed

within a believable orthography (“Life and Letters” 532). The literary reproduction of speech is caught in the circular trap of the authenticity concept: it enables audiences to know “just how they spoke,” but this knowledge only comes as a result of the artful creation of believability, a contrivance that both constructs the documentary nature of the script and strives to keep its studied scaffolding well hidden. The ambiguities of the literary capture of an authentic speech have led to an array of critical assumptions about the intent and effect of such “literatures of language.” Within criticism of dialect and other multilingual literatures, the underlying question often becomes: was the development of the speech-centered narrative a product of transparent attempts to invest American literature with a fuller chorus of American voices, or was this development motivated by the desire to construct a more easily assimilated version of national language difference?

There is a long tradition of critical consensus when it comes to the idea that literatures of language all engage to some degree in constructing their own versions of an authentic speech. Where scholars have been more divided is in questioning to what ends these constructions are put. On the one hand, many critics have tended to see literature featuring nonstandard spoken languages, whether multilingual or multidialectal, as voicing a radical attack on the discursive power of language standardization. In her 2007 anthology of vernacular English literature, Dohra Ahmad celebrates the anti-authoritarian position that representations of nonstandard speech seem to suggest. The pieces she collects are works of “rotten English,” a phrase coined by Nigerian novelist Ken Saro-Wiwa, and one which the collection takes as its title; they depict languages that “throb vibrantly and communicate more than effectively. They each challenge the hierarchy

implied by ‘dialect’ versus ‘language’ or ‘standard’ versus ‘non-standard,’ insisting that the codes they practice be recognized for their strength, coherence, and communicative capacity” (*Rotten English* 17). In other words, such vernaculars exist at the level of literature as constructions that, precisely because of their constructed coherence, have the ability to challenge the equally fabricated discourse of “standard” language and the socioeconomic, ethnic, and political positions reinforced by such a standard. “What we term Standard English,” Ahmad reminds us, “is after all only one dialect among many—the one that happened to be spoken by the groups of people responsible for compiling dictionaries and assembling grammar manuals” (*Rotten English* 17).

On the other hand, a separate critical camp has argued that writing that attempted to document the voices of ulterior languages or seemingly more radical “common tongues” often did so in the service of a socially conservative agenda. Recent historicist criticism, examining how such literature might structure sociopolitical beliefs about speech difference, has identified writers and readers of these texts as primarily Anglo-European, middle-class ideologues, struggling to define a version of Standard English “in their own image” and in their own best interest. As scholars like Alan Trachtenberg, Richard Brodhead, Eric Sundquist, and Michael North have reasoned, the narratives these authors produced were seeking not to raise the flag of linguistic revolution, but to highlight key differences between socioeconomically and ethnically marginal speakers and white affluent elites. The overall effect of these narratives is described as a mythologizing of speech difference, transforming actual variant or foreign idioms into a safely contained, and safely fictionalized, “time before.”³ As Brodhead writes,

³ See Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 8-9.

literatures of language told the story of dialect and other nonstandard idioms not to celebrate their continued presence within the national register, but “to tell local cultures into...history” (*Cultures of Letters* 121). So doing, this literature helped to reassure emerging social elites that the nation (or, at least, their version of it) had left linguistic differences behind. This critical tendency to see literary speech variants solely as a construction for conservative uses is based on a one-sided, even caricatured, reading of imaginative literature’s participation in linguistic discourse.

In response, my dissertation tells the story of how literatures of language helped to create the idea that speech could be textualized and studied. Fiction writers throughout the nineteenth century saw themselves as engaging in social and linguistic history. They were not simply unwitting participants in the cynical exploitation of speech for the purposes of entertainment or commercial gain. This is evident in the body of texts under examination in this project, texts that not only represent depictions of variant speech, but also offer self-reflexive commentary or other narratorial instances of introspection about their own portrayals of language. In some cases, this self-reflection confirms a socially conservative interpretation. But just as often, it reveals surprising gaps, fissures, and styles of play with linguistic discourse that literary critics have yet to explore in detail. Taken together, this narrative about literatures of language surfaces the layered interactions, the shared constructions, of literary imagination and linguistic science. It is not a story that proffers an over-arching sociopolitical scheme on the part of either scholars or authors of fiction, but one that helps to explain the seeming contradictions of literary interest in dialect and multilingualism as a product of literary participation in both the relativist and objectivist modes of scientific discourse and an acute self-reflection

about this very participation. Ultimately, by bringing together a plural linguistic history with a more inclusive literary history, I seek to revise our notions of the cultural, social, political, and scientific work that authors believed literary imagination to be capable of performing.

To this end, each chapter highlights specific developments in the study of language: the comparative philology of the late eighteenth century and the attendant turn in the US to Native American languages and the development of phonetic alphabets; the mid-nineteenth-century debates over organic understandings of speech, which helped shape the synchronic, twentieth-century discipline of structural linguistics; and the work of fin-de-siècle dialectology, a harbinger of later dialect mapping and modern sociolinguistics. In attempting to surface this shared conversation, each chapter places historiographic treatments of US linguistic developments alongside examples of various literatures of language.

The first chapter, “The Languages of Preservation: Native American Linguistics in the Early National US,” focuses on the rise of a linguistic discipline based on Native language fascination in the first third of the nineteenth century. Early US linguists like Peter Duponceau and John Pickering spent much of their lives arguing for the international importance, and the international equality, of Native languages. Their rhetorical celebrations of these languages dominate the many grammars and treatises they wrote—aimed at audiences both domestic and abroad—and speak to the central place of Native language study as a legitimating subject for the development of the discipline of linguistics in the US. Looking to the travelogues and fiction of James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, and Margaret Fuller, I chart the proliferation of multilingual

fascination crucial to a literati concerned with regionalism, expansion, and the linguistic demands of cultural tourism. Ultimately, I argue that while fascination with the languages of Native America failed to combat the political force of territorial removal policies, it reveals a national literary self-fashioning that commemorated and documented linguistic diversity.

As Amerindian languages fell out of linguistic fashion—due in large part to the ravages of removal and resettlement—vernacular English increasingly became a focal point of language scholarship. Historicizing literary vernacular as part of an emerging literary-linguistic “crosspollination,” I turn in the second chapter to a number of authors and texts in the Southwestern comic genre: Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, William Gilmore Simms, the anonymously authored *Crockett Almanacks* (1835-1856), Thomas Bangs Thorpe’s foundational short story “The Big Bear of Arkansas” (1841), and the “Sut Lovingood” stories of George Washington Harris. Each contributes in a number of ways to the general capture of Southern English vernaculars, and each expresses the iconoclasm, the self-conscious ethnography, and the self-referential struggle (and fascination) with the textualization of spoken English variants. This fiction thus provides several instructive counterpoints to the scholarly work of early phoneticians. It controverts the overall mandate of various phonetic alphabets for dialectal uniformity, offering in its stead an exploration of diverse frontier English dialects beginning to emerge as contested literary and linguistic styles. It also productively thematizes its own transcriptive claims, asking probing questions about the nature of speech representation, delighting in vernacular as a vibrant form and, at the same time, querying the modes by which vernacular is brought before a reading public.

The third chapter, “Beyond Language Anxiety: Local Color and Emergent Language Studies,” examines how a postbellum American readership was being primed to welcome a more objective approach to various English dialects. It was during the decades following the Civil War that the field of linguistics was being formally established in the academy, and broadcasting its findings in more public venues, in the form of lectures, broad publication, and conventions. Figures like William Dwight Whitney in the US and Max Müller in Britain were making various cases for the application of a strict scientific method to the study of language change and variation. One effect of this developing conversation was the increasing presence of a more descriptivist attitude toward non-normative languages in America’s fiction. Tracing the influence of descriptivist language study on dialect fiction of this period, I discuss Whitney’s major texts, especially *Language and the Study of Language* (1867) and *Life and Growth of Language* (1875) and how they paved the way for a fully theorized explanation of English variants and overall language change. In conversation with Whitney, I discuss James Russell Lowell’s and Mark Twain’s ethnographic literatures of language, specifically Lowell’s second series of *Biglow Papers* (1867) and Twain’s “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It” (1874).

Chapter four, “Lafcadio Hearn’s ‘Linguistic Miscegenation’ and Gilded Age Ethnolinguistics,” follows Hearn, an enigmatic, international travel writer most famous for his late-century exposé of Meiji Japan. Less well known are his ethnographic sketches of French and Spanish Creole quarters of New Orleans, and his foray into comparative linguistics with “*Gombo Zhèbes*”: *Little Dictionary of Creole Proverbs, Selected from Six Creole Dialects* (1885). These documents, more than nostalgic

accounts of “local color,” reveal the centrality of contact languages and creoles to post-Reconstruction American literature. Hearn was known for his vitriolic criticism of industrialization and emerging US imperialism. His accounts of creoles and patois offer a more salutary appraisal of what he called “linguistic miscegenation” against the dominant discourse of a monolingual America and reveal the ongoing interaction between literary authors and an evolving ethnolinguistics.

While arranged chronologically, these chapters, taken as a whole, present only a partial history of the literary interfaces of language study. There is no one disciplinary arc that can be singled out as motivating the merged and emergent discourse of linguistics. I choose to focus instead on the “nodes” of shared discourse, rather than tracing a single thematic trope or isolating a unified period of interaction, precisely because the pre-disciplinary arena of linguistics was so dynamic in its complex trajectory through the nineteenth century.

Chapter 1

The Languages of Preservation: Native American Linguistics in the Early National US

Introduction

Language study in the early nineteenth-century US was unavoidably caught up in the ongoing ideological debate over the nation's literary and linguistic independence. Conservative and progressive thinkers alike argued that national literature and national language were enslaved by pandering to Old World norms and, more particularly, by allowing British taste to dictate US custom. Echoing Ralph Waldo Emerson's later literary call to arms in the "American Scholar," William Ellery Channing, in an 1823 oratory before the American Philosophical Society, urged his readers to "rupture" the "increasing intellectual connection between this country and the Old World," rather than "see our country sitting passively at the feet of foreign teachers" ("Remarks on National Literature" 131). Linguist Peter Duponceau was equally adamant that "the advancement of our literature absolutely requires that we should cease to look up so exclusively...to the literature of Great Britain" (*A Discourse* 14). And the poet David Humphreys condemned the "turgid diction, brilliant antithesis, unnatural conceits, affected figures, forced epithets, and, in general... factitious ornament" of lettered men across the Atlantic and sought instead a more "natural and moral" diction (*Miscellaneous Works* 123). The remedy, then, was a return to writing that more closely approximated a "natural" mode, and which repudiated the overgrown conventions of "distorted" speech and "abstract

phraseology” (*Miscellaneous Works* 122). As I explore throughout this chapter, language scholars and literary authors saw the languages of Native America as foundational to the establishment of a narrative of American literary history—a history that was intimately tied to new modes of linguistic discourse. The “Indian Question,” as it would come to be called with Francis A. Walker’s 1874 treatise of the same name, was of central importance to the formative stages of fields like ethnology and anthropology, linguistics, as well as to conceptions of a uniquely American literature.

The sociopolitical debates surrounding the national status of Native Americans themselves form an important backdrop to the literary exploration of Amerindian languages. The period of early nineteenth-century expansion, following the infamous land grabs throughout the Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe administrations, as well as large-scale acquisitions like the Louisiana Purchase (1803) and the Florida Purchase (1821), produced in the literature of the time a rising concern with national origins and progress. Geographical expansion and population migration seemed to analogize human progress. As a model of ever-progressing civilization, the physical expansion of the US could represent the cultural expansion of Eurocentric civility. In the face of such a view, however, was a separate republican idealism sympathetic to the plight of the American Indian populations destroyed and removed by “progress.” Set in motion by the Jefferson administration, but made brutally manifest by Andrew Jackson, the official policy of Indian Removal elicited heated debate over a number of key topics including the contractual land agreements between the US government and various Indian tribes, the citizen status of American Indians, and the overall ethics of removal and resettlement.⁴

⁴ See Robert Vincent Remini, *The Legacy of Andrew Jackson: Essays on Democracy, Indian Removal, and Slavery* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 54-57.

The influence of Native languages on conceptions of American literature was thus complicated by both a desire for independence from British modes and the wide-ranging understandings of Native American cultural status. In his 1815 *North American Review* “Essay on American Language and Literature,” for instance, Channing famously called for an American literature separate from European standards or English emulation and was largely celebratory when it came to Native orality and speechways:

In their original language we have names of places, and things, which are but feebly rendered by our own, I should say by the English. Their words of description are either derived from incidents, and of which they are famed to convey most exact ideas, or are so formed as to convey their signification in their sounds; and although so ridiculous in the English dress as to be a new cause for English satire and merriment, are in themselves the very language for poetry, for they are made only for expression, and their objects are the very element for poetry. (313)

The passage neatly encapsulates the contradictory answers to the “Indian question” as a question of nationality, anthropology, and, more particularly, linguistics. Channing’s synopsis of American Indian languages, as expressive insofar as their words are derived from “incidents” or simple sound association, represents a common view at the time. However, the passage also impugns English as a less apt language for describing the natural world. We see evidence of a general anxiety about artificiality, in this case the artificiality of a language based on British predecessors. In its place, Channing urges, Indian expressiveness, divorced from the caricatures of “English dress,” might become the basis for a new American poetry. This assertion about the literary capacity of Amerindian idioms is based on the fact of Native uniqueness, what the author calls the “peculiarities” of these languages and their speakers:

Its beauties are most of them to be traced to its peculiarities. We are delighted with what appears its haughty independence, although we feel conscious at the same time it has never been submitted by its authors to

the test of comparison. They have not advanced far enough in the diplomacy of letters to hazard a competition with neighboring tribes. They are most perfectly contented with their language, and if it may be so called, their literary tradition. (313)

In this mixture of racialized criticism and cultural exceptionalism, characterized by a lack of “diplomacy of letters,” on the one hand, and a simultaneous “haughty independence,” on the other, we find a provocative contradiction. The figure of the American Indian was for Channing one without civilization, a concept understood in part as a factor of writing, a “diplomacy of letters”; but for precisely this reason Amerindian languages, the author suggests, could become a kind of tabula rasa, wiping clean the slate of British dependency and presenting an ideal model for a new American sense of literary history. While it is the case, as Lucy Maddox remarks, that “nineteenth-century analyses of ‘the Indian question’ almost always end...at the virtually impassable stone wall of the choice between civilization and extinction,” it is also true that language, rather than being threatened by assimilation or extinction, could serve as a nexus for rethinking the very concepts of progress and civilization (*Removals* 8).

A survey of literature on the topic of American Indian languages often produces tracts contradicting the idea of a sophisticated Native language. It is easy to find material concurrent with the period of Indian removal criticizing the lack of those traits associated with true civilization, chief among them a coherent language. The Indian agent Jedediah Morse, father of Samuel Morse, wrote in an 1820 report that it would be best to “let Indians forget their own languages, in which nothing is written and nothing of course can be preserved, and learn ours, which will at once open to them the whole field of every kind of useful knowledge” (*Indian Affairs* 357). Similarly, in his *History of the United States* (1840; 1879), George Bancroft questions the hypothesis that Amerindian tribes

might have descended from a civilized nation state, degenerating into contemporary tribes as a result of migration. He uses language as the primary clue to uncovering the actual state of Indian development:

It has been asked if our Indians were not the wrecks of more civilized nations. Their language refutes the hypothesis; every one of its forms is a witness that their ancestors were, like themselves, not yet disenthralled from nature. The character of each Indian language is one continued, universal, all-pervading synthesis. They to whom these languages were the mother tongue, were still in that earliest stage of intellectual culture where reflection has not begun. (2: 417)

The idea of language as a barometer of a speech community's connectedness (or slavery) to nature is, to modern ears, farfetched. But at the time of Bancroft's writing, it was widely assumed that a language carried with it the marks of human artifice—that language types, or “characters,” directly represented the level of sophistication of a particular people. Philologists at the time went to great lengths to prove the veracity of this idea; though, as we will see, other linguists like Duponceau and his colleague John Pickering were equally eager to debunk this reading of language as so much romantic, Eurocentric pride. The point, then, is not that Bancroft's statements represent a gestalt moment in the development of linguistic thinking, but just the opposite: during the first decades of the nineteenth century, language as an object of study was a conflicted ground on which to make claims about a people, a race, a culture, and their history, or their “progress.” Maddox writes that the rhetoric of the early national period was divided between calls for “civilizing the savages” and a throwing up of hands in the face of inevitable extinction. While an interesting, and generally accurate, argument, this kind of binary historical narrative neglects the deep investments in Indian languages that could

be, at times, complicit with ideologies of extinction, but which were also equally about revealing a novel form of New World civilization.

This chapter focuses primarily on the thirty years between 1815-1845. I choose these beginning and endpoints for two reasons. For one, this period represents what many historians of linguistics consider to be a time of theoretical transition, a *période charnière* or “hinge period” (Andresen 44). As the phrase suggests, it was a time of changing disciplinary thinking: the idea of a universal grammar to be found in compiling the world’s languages gave way to a more comparative approach, often with a nationalistic bent. As Julie Tetel Andresen points out, the period also encompasses the collapse of *idéologie*, the production of the grand, global inventories of the world’s languages, the institutionalization in Germany of historical and comparative schools, the shakedown of the use of the term *linguistics*, and the rise of interest in Sanskrit (*Linguistics* 44). By opening up the possibility of a link between “exotic” languages and those of Europe, the rise in scientific curiosity over Sanskrit prompted a rise in studies of American Indian languages, inaugurated by Thomas Jefferson and others. In the US, Duponceau, a French émigré and amateur philologist who was responsible for compiling Jefferson’s Indian wordlists, had just completed his own *Memoir on English Phonology* (1818). His contemporary, lawyer and Massachusetts statesman John Pickering, had come out with his *A Vocabulary, or Collection of Words and Phrases Which Have Been Supposed to Be Peculiar to the United States of America* in 1816, and four years later would publish his *Essay on a Uniform Orthography for the Indian Languages of North America*, a foundational, if neglected, text for the practice of phonetic transcription. Additionally, the American Philosophical Society had begun to take language study

seriously, establishing the Historical and Literary Committee. The idea of a legitimate US scholarly cadre was being formed.

This period also saw the publication of several travel and fictional documents that emerge as interfaces with Amerindian languages and the sociopolitical debates surrounding the national status of Native America. Irving's *A Tour on the Prairie*, written shortly after his 1832 trip to the Missouri and Arkansas territories, appeared in 1835. Irving, like Cooper, had been impugned in the American press for his supposed lack of patriotism. The *Tour* can be seen as an attempt on his part to regain national legitimacy after having become something of an international, expatriate author. Duponceau's translation of *A Grammar of the Language of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware Indians* had also just come out in 1830, the same year that congress passed the Indian Removal Act, championed by Andrew Jackson as the best method for preserving continental peace and the vanishing nations of the Southeastern tribes (mainly Creeks, Cherokee, and Seminole). One year later, Chief Justice John Marshall declared the Cherokee nation to be a "dependant domestic nation"—a people not separate from (still under federal jurisdiction), but nonetheless uniquely distinct (not beholden to state laws)—in the infamous *Cherokee Nation v. State of Georgia*. Finally, this is also a period, especially following the Indian Removal Act, of intense forced removal and resettlement, perpetrated in most cases for reasons of "preservation." The 1844 publication of Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* represents a fitting bookend, coming as it does after the conclusion of the Sac and Fox wars and the infamous Trail of Tears.

This literature reflects the confluence of more objective appraisals of Native American languages and the complex politics of Removal. Rather than generalizing and

condemning US linguistic and literary encounters with Amerindians as reiterations of imperialism or unthinking ethnocentrism, this chapter reveals both a push toward real bicultural understanding. The move away from characterizations of language as a purely racial (or God-given) artifact and toward a focus on the underlying, shared mechanisms of linguistic meaning-making had profound reverberations not only in the tight circle of linguists in Europe and the US, but also within American literary circles as well. Travel literature in particular was encountering Amerindian languages that, rather than confirming status quo suspicions about racial or national character, served to disrupt entrenched modes of thinking about national and racial inheritance. Setting off for the western territories—an intra-continental alternative to the European Grand Tour—early national travel writing undeniably took shape as an imperial exercise, a journey that helped define the contours of expansion. But these narratives often contain a countervailing element of wonderment, moments of fascination at the languages the authors encounter in their interactions with Native American speakers. Such moments take part in the discipline of language study, and become wrapped up in linguistics' new attentions to the mechanics of language apart from uncritical racialization.

In the sections that follow, I first present an overarching picture of language scholarship as it was being practiced in the US. Beginning with an examination of Jefferson's many writings on Native languages, I move on to discuss in detail the work of Duponceau and Pickering, as well as the European traditions that gave way to an emergent mode of American language study. The last part of the chapter addresses a number of literary accounts of Amerindian languages that reflect of a more complex investment in the actual documentation and study of these languages. The central texts of

these sections—Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans*, Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies*, and Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes*—demonstrate the diverse strategies early national narratives employed in presenting a picture of specific Indian nations and their particular speech. By separating language scholarship and more canonical literary texts into discrete sections I do not mean to imply that they were in fact separate enterprises. Rather, my intent is to reveal the parallel motivations and the parallel effects that both literary and scholarly documents evince in their interactions with and representations of a linguistics of Native America.

Thomas Jefferson and the Field of Indian Language Study

The development of a linguistic discipline in the US occurred only by adopting American Indian languages as objects of study. This adoption was, in a sense, motivated by conflicting impulses, as discussed above, and had conflicting results. On the one hand, the scientific turn to the languages of Native America was seen as a necessity in the face of inevitable Native extinction. It was also a turn that could legitimate US philology at a time when the call for a national literature and national science was at its peak. The intense scientific focus on American Indian languages echoes a similar, contemporary cultural process of lionizing and nationalizing Indian nobility while invoking in the same breath the trope of fated extinction. On the other hand, the result of these deeper linguistic curiosities was a more complex investment in the actual grammar and vocabulary of several Native American languages. The shape of American linguistics in the nineteenth century—its subjects, its methods, its aims—took obvious cues from explosive European interest in language at the end of the eighteenth century. Empress

Catherine II of Russia had initiated the compilation of “exotic” lexicons with her 1787-1789 *Vocabularia Comparativa*, later taken over by the German naturalist Peter Simon Pallas. The *Vocabularia* was concerned primarily with languages of Russia and Asia, and only the four volume second edition (1790-1791) contains words from Native American languages.

It was, arguably, Thomas Jefferson who, in his 1781 *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ignited the philological desire for Native American language comparison and preservation. In a chapter entitled “Query XI, A description of the Indians established in that state,” Jefferson laments “that we have suffered so many of the Indian tribes already to extinguish, without our having previously collected and deposited in the records of literature, the general rudiments at least of the languages they spoke (145).” For Jefferson language was not only a crucial clue concerning American Indian origin and thought, it was the only living structure left that could possibly give way to such information. The only other such structure he argues “is the Barrows, of which many are to be found all over this country” (144). The purposes of these “repositories of the dead” are a “matter of doubt,” and thus become an interesting puzzle for the proto-anthropologist Jefferson (144). Solving the mystery would help to produce a narrative of Indian tradition, and, subsequently, a narrative of origin. The analogy between these repositories of bone and the repositories of language that Jefferson calls for is apparent: each becomes increasingly necessary as death strikes down the American Indian. And in each case, the ultimate goal of tracing of origins is central:

Were vocabularies formed of all the languages spoken in North and South America, preserving their appellations of the most common objects in nature, of those which must be present to every nation barbarous or civilised, with the inflections of their nouns and verbs, their principles of

regimen and concord, and these *deposited in all the public libraries*, it would furnish opportunities to those skilled in the languages of the old world to compare them with these, now, or at any future time, and hence to construct the best evidence of the derivation of this part of the human race. (145, italics in original)

Such “deposits” become, like the barrows, monuments themselves, created by Anglo-America to take account of its native counterparts, constantly characterized as facing the threat of annihilation. Language could be, in the words of philologist Johann David Michaelis, “a kind of archives, where the discoveries of men are safe from any accidents, archives which are proof against fire, and which cannot be destroyed but with the total ruin of the people” (quoted in Gray 115).

Jefferson’s acute interest in locating the “affinity of nations” through their diverse languages is due almost entirely to this drama of extinction (the section begins with a comparative population count that shows, in one instance, a reduction of the “Powhatan confederacy” of tribes by one third in the span of 62 years). Without decrying the destruction of Native Americans by colonials, indeed justifying territorial takeover by reference to colonial “proofs of purchase,” Jefferson is nonetheless explicit about the scientifically motivating force of such threats to Indian existence. His interest, however, is expressed in terms of “derivation,” as seen above. He reiterates the importance of linguistic knowledge as “the most certain evidence of their derivation which could be produced. In fact, it is the best proof of the affinity of nations which ever can be referred to” (146). By “nations” he refers both to established tribal confederacies as well as a possible link to the “red men of Asia”—a going theory initiated by “the late discoveries of Captain Cook, coasting from Kamschatka to California,” who “proved that, if the two continents of Asia and America be separated at all, it is only by a narrow streight” (146).

The very need to trace such derivation, the disunity that language difference indicates, converges, finally, with a naturalized reason behind extinction. Jefferson theorizes that the “radical” language difference among the Northeastern tribes was the result of “their having never submitted themselves to any laws, any coercive power, any shadow of government”—producing, from “antiently [*sic*] three different stocks...so many little societies” (144). The lack of a uniform language in other words was symptomatic of a larger lack of social contract or cohesion. These fragmentary social groups, being essentially “without government,” were inherently lawless and, thus, inherently self-destructive.

The ideology of extinction and preservation cannot be understood outside of the several theories of language vying for prominence during the early national period. Jefferson’s interest in tracing Native American languages back to some original language, Asiatic or otherwise, anticipates the model of historical comparison instituted by Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt in the early nineteenth century. At the same time, his commitment to the idea of a collective language, at the root of the disparate families he finds, speaks to his equal immersion in the Enlightenment theory of *grammaire générale*, which, as Andresen comments, “sought to determine the universal conditions of the construction of utterances” (*Linguistics in America* 72). In the late eighteenth century, the French were the prime movers of this theory of the human mind, arguing, as leading thinker Etienne Bonnot de Condillac did, that the study of such a grammar would demonstrate the essential premise of “reason equally distributed among mankind” (*la raison pareillement distribuée en chaque homme*) (quoted in Andresen 72). Unlike the

Ideologues, as the French school of *grammaire générale* was known, however, Jefferson was not interested in an atemporal explanation of language as a universal phenomenon.

According to historian H.C. Wolfart, “By 1800...two basic obstacles to the study of American Indian languages began to be overcome: the pervading deductivism which had characterized linguistics in the preceding two centuries, and the just as general scarcity of data. Actually, it may well be that both these handicaps are just different aspects of one and the same problem” (Wolfart 154). Indeed the two figures central to the next section, Peter Duponceau and John Pickering, can be seen both as the products and the perpetuators of the increased access to and estimation of Amerindian language data, made available largely through the work of 17th and 18th century missionaries, as well as the famous *Mithradates oder allgemeine Sprachenkunde*. The latter, edited by Johann Christoph Adelung and Johann Severin Vater, includes Pickering among its contributors. The *Mithridates*, as Duponceau reported to the American Philosophical Society in 1819, includes “a delineation of the grammatical character of thirty-four American languages, and the Lord’s Prayer in fifty-nine different idioms or dialects of the savages of this country” (quoted in Wolfart 154). While obviously inflected by the missionary impulse of earlier language work, this compilation nonetheless represents a first foray into data collection of non-classic, “savage” languages. As Wolfart points out, the American Philosophical Society was the engine behind most Amerindian language studies at this time (154). The Committee, established in 1815, was prompted by Jefferson (Society president from 1794-1814), and was largely a result of his acute language interest.

Jefferson's well-known mandate for conducting lexicographical work—most notably as part of the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1803—had a direct impact on the decision of the APS to create the language-centered Committee. It is worth exploring briefly the kinds of interviews conducted during the expedition, as these provided potential models for later linguistic fieldwork, especially that of Albert Gallatin. The most striking aspect of the expedition's Amerindian interviews is that they were often filtered through chains of various other Amerindian and European languages. Alan Hartley gives the following example in his *Lewis and Clark: Lexicon of Discovery*:

While in the Rockies in early September 1805...the captains counceled with the Flathead through a translation chain of five languages—i.e., by the use of Salish, Shoshone, Hidatsa, French, and English, spoken by a half-dozen people in succession from a Flathead tribal leader, to a Shoshone boy, to Sacagawea, to Charbonneau [a French trapper and husband to Sacagawea], to Labiche [an Omaha-French interpreter], to the captains, and then the reverse. (x)

Witnessing an interview between Clark, Lewis, and a Mandan chief (via the translation relays of two French interpreters) the British trader Charles MacKenzie remarked, “I was present when vocabularies were being made of the Mandans; the two Frenchmen had warm disputes upon the meaning of every word that was taken down by the captains. As the Indians could not well comprehend the intention of recording their words, they concluded that the Americans had a wicked design upon their country” (in Ambrose 204). Not only was there room for misinterpretation of the languages themselves, but the whole lexicographical enterprise could be taken for just another kind of colonial threat.

What does this chain of translation say, then, about the business of lexicographical transcription and, indeed, about amateur linguistics as it was practiced at this time? For one, it points up the level of energy the explorers were willing to commit

to the process of transcription. There was a palpable desire to set these languages down in written form, and to use them as a gateway toward understanding Amerindian origins, and the Amerindian mind, as well as opening a way to increased trade and land negotiations. There were economical and political advantages to being conversant in the languages of the Western US Native populations, and the interviews conducted by Lewis and Clark had obvious political motives. The vocabulary questionnaire, created by Jefferson and Lewis prior to the journey, includes terms important to prospective colonization, such as tribal names and distribution, kinds of fur-bearing animals, and other natural resources. But at least half of the questionnaire is composed of basic lexicographical terms—kinship terms, possessives, body parts, number system, etc. There was, then, a simple curiosity at work, prompted by Jefferson’s interest in origins, as well as other pet theories. Jefferson is keen to express his curiosity as a product of his time and place, as he writes in a letter to Benjamin Smith Barton, dated September 21, 1809:

I have now been thirty years availing myself of every possible opportunity of procuring Indian vocabularies to the same set of words. My opportunities were probably better than will ever occur again to any person having the same desire. I had collected about fifty, and had digested most of them in collateral columns. (quoted in Pilling 261)

The pride he expresses in these collections give us one motivation for the encounters and conversations he required during his administration. The vocabulary of collection and procurement, however, smacks of an objectification of the languages as only so many artifacts, and not necessarily as grammatically complete systems. As Mary R. Haas has remarked, “Throughout the nineteenth century the most critical problem in regard to the American Indian languages was to find some method of classifying them” (“Grammar or

Lexicon” 239). Jefferson himself was largely interested in tracing the historical path of Amerindian tribes through their languages. Conjectures that North American Indians had come from Asia, or represented a lost tribe of Israel, or that certain tribes (the Mandan were especially singled out) were descendants of Middle Ages Welsh explorers in the New World, were being circulated based on at best spurious evidence. But such conjectures proved stimulating enough that high-profile figures like Jefferson would embark on proving or debunking them. The scenes above also reveal the absence of any methodological rigor in the data collection of this early fieldwork. Grammatical context was less important than one-to-one translation, and phonetic accuracy could not even be pretended at given the length of the relays, not to mention the lack of any set phonetic alphabet. All this was about to change, however, at the hands of early linguists like Duponceau, Pickering, and Gallatin.

Defining a Field: Peter Duponceau and John Pickering

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the reasons for philological interest in American Indian languages had begun to change, and along with this shift in motivation came a shift in outright racial essentialism. Rather than a cut and dried difference—a civilized race on the one hand, and a barbaric one on the other—the borders were becoming fluid. Several factors were at work. Philosophical appraisals of civil society, especially those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and other social theorists, had produced the “noble savage,” a figure that promoted the growing nostalgia for an easy existence within the natural world, especially apropos of US settler culture. The American Indian was at the center of political and rhetorical debates that, on one hand, revered the natural

capacities, the essential liberality of Native American life-ways; and, on the other, denigrated their stubbornness and their savagery when it came to relinquishing “property” for the sake of encroaching Anglo-American settlers. Similar proto-ethnological debates were also developing during the early nineteenth century⁵. With the discovery of advanced Amerindian civilizations in Mexico, it was conjectured that the North American tribes actually represented a degenerate race leftover from this grand period. This theory of degeneracy, while no less racist, challenged the neat, developmental timeline moving from savagery to barbarity to civility.

In the midst of these debates, the mounting call for detailed expositions of Indian languages was made most notably by Peter Duponceau (1760-1844). In his native France, his nearsightedness cut short his family’s military aspirations for him and he was instead sent to seminary school. Completing his studies quickly but dissatisfied with the priesthood (and with his fellow classmates, who frequently referred to him as “L’Anglois” for his English proficiency and for his habit of carrying English classics with him) he left for Paris at age fifteen. Shortly afterward he signed on as an aide to Baron von Steuben. Traveling with the Baron to the US in 1777, Duponceau achieved the rank of major as aide-de-campe. During this time he was stationed at Valley Forge and, along with von Steuben, wrote the foundational *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States* (1779). He was later tapped for his language skills as assistant foreign secretary in Washington’s administration, resigning soon after to practice law in Philadelphia. Like Pickering, Duponceau was recognized as a polyglot and a scholar while maintaining his language “hobby” through law. In 1791

⁵ See Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

he became a member of the American Philosophical Society, being recognized for his work on Pennsylvanian history and especially his *Memoir on English Phonology* (1818).

Duponceau's initial curiosity in Indian languages came from correspondence with Moravian missionary and proto-ethnologist John Heckewelder. Here he is responding to Heckewelder's *An Account Of The History, Manners And Customs Of The Indian Nations Who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania And The Neighboring States* (1819), propounding the "polysynthetic" forms (a word he coined for the compound morphemes that characterize many American Indian lexicons) of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware:

Wulahalessohalian! THOU WHO MAKEST ME HAPPY!... How delighted would be Moore, the poet of the loves and graces, if his language, instead of five or six tedious words slowly following in the rear of each other, had furnished him with an expression like this, in which the lover, the object beloved, and the delicious sentiment which their mutual passion inspires, are blended, are fused together in one comprehensive appellative term? And it is in the languages of savages that these beautiful forms are found! What a subject for reflection, and how little do we know, as yet, of the astonishing things that the world contains. (Heckewelder 405)

Duponceau's enthusiasm is admittedly couched in the language of "savagism" (Rosenwald 11). It was the contrast between the "beautiful forms" and the perception of the original, "aboriginal," speaker that made the Delaware that much more astonishing. However, in another example, from Duponceau's 1830 translation of German missionary David Zeisberger's *A Grammar of the Language of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware Indians*, the author concludes his introduction by proclaiming that "all languages have a regular organization, and none can be called *barbarous* in the sense which presumption has affixed to that word" (96). Yet, while desiring linguistic parity, the author also invokes the Eurocentric binary of natural/developed—a binary that he seems previously to dismiss, commenting:

In the idiom before us [Delaware] we have an example of what nature can produce, unaided by the theories of science and the refinements of art. To assign each its proper share in the composition of such noble instruments as the languages of men is not among the least important questions which philology presents to our inquiry. (96)

Assigning a “proper share” of grammatical and lexical complexity to Native American languages was central to Duponceau’s desire to resurface the 18th century translation. But this share, the story that these languages could tell about their structure and origin, could only be one of nature, and not of anything like civilization. Again, however, it was precisely the natural status of these “unaided languages” that made them the essential subjects of American philology. Promoting the idea of comparison between Delaware and the languages of Europe,⁶ Duponceau offers what is arguably a more transnational outlook on the status of Native American languages within the field of comparative philology:

[Delaware] deserves to be thoroughly investigated. The result it is true, will be mortifying to our pride; but that pride, which makes us ascribe so much to our own efforts, and so little to the silent and unperceived operations of nature, is the greatest obstacle that we meet in our road to knowledge, and we cannot proceed very far in the discovery of natural causes while we remain disposed to attribute every thing to our so much boasted civilization, our limited sciences, and our mimic arts. (96)

If comparative philology was to gain legitimacy as a rational science, especially in the US, it would be on the basis of examining the natural facts of language. (The mid-century debates over whether philology represented a natural or a moral science had not yet erupted; but we see here the beginnings of this eruption.) Delaware, as one example, represented the perfect candidate for a language stripped of artificiality. While mortifying to the pride of an enlightened civility, this American language was a necessary and model subject.

⁶ See Andresen 45-46.

But Duponceau was also a member of the linguistic⁷ school of thought that descended from the likes of French Ideologue Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, who had argued for the existence of a universal theory of mind via an exploration of the world's languages. In his 1830 translation of *A Grammar of the Language of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware Indians* for the American Philosophical Society, Duponceau is careful to make the claim that Indian languages differ only in their strategies for expression, not in their overall quality:

I am not an enthusiastic or exclusive admirer of the Indian languages, and am far from being disposed to assert that their forms are superior to those of others. Comparisons on such subjects appear to me idle, and can lead to no useful results. Language is the instrument of thought and must always be adequate to its object. Therefore no language has yet been and probably never will be found, destitute of forms; for without them none can exist. (95)

The assertion of parity between American Indian and European languages thus becomes instrumental to the idea of a more formal and more mechanical study of languages.

Rather than searching for origins based on differential family trees, the science of language had to more fully acknowledge and theorize the inherent structures of language removed from national or racial bounds. Nonetheless, the fact that for Duponceau “language is the instrument of thought” meant that it was impossible to renounce the cultural basis of linguistic development.

⁷ There is some debate about the terms at work during the formative period of early nineteenth-century linguistics. For the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century language scholar, *linguist* referred primarily to anyone with a facility for learning languages, rather than someone engaged in a systematic appraisal of language in the abstract. As Andresen points out, “Although Bopp and Grimm might have realized that they were moving away from the literary orientation of traditional philology, they made no attempt to divorce themselves from it openly and, indeed, regarded themselves as ‘philologists’” (41-42). While somewhat anachronistic, I use *linguistics* to refer to the kinds of studies produced and promoted by Pickering and Duponceau, as they were moving away from text-based philology.

Because of this perceived relationship between language and thought, typological classification, rather than simple lexical listing of Indian languages began to achieve primacy in U.S philology. Duponceau was the first to theorize about the structural uniqueness of Amerindian languages. In an 1819 report to the Historical and Literary Committee he made the dramatic claim that “a wonderful organization...distinguishes the languages of the aborigines of this country from all other idioms of the known world” (“Report” xi-xx). Calling such “wonderful organization” “polysynthesis,” he set out to make a sweeping classification of Amerindian languages “from Greenland to Cape Horn” based on the appearance of “those comprehensive grammatical forms which appear to prevail with little variation among the aboriginal natives of America.” More specifically, he describes a polysynthetic language as “that in which the greatest number of ideas are comprised in the least number of words”—a form of linguistic condensation that the author takes “to be the general character of the Indian languages (“Report” 130). Though committed to the idea of a uniform language structure based on polysynthesis, which he saw extended throughout the New World, Duponceau was also keenly aware of the differences between language families, indeed of the very existence of such families of Native American languages. He was the first to propose a four part segregation of the languages of the North Eastern Indians. To quote Pickering:

According to Mr. Duponceau,...the various Indian dialects on the Northern Atlantic side of America may be classed under four principal stocks or families: 1. The Karalit, or language of Greenland and the Esquimaux; 2. The Iroquois, called by some of the early French writers the *Huron*; 3. The Lenni-Lenape, called by the French Canadians, Lenape, and by us, the Delaware; 4. The Floridian, or Southern stock. (quoted in Haas, *Language* 133)

Popularly, linguistics of this period has been thought of as concerned chiefly with etymologies and lexicons, but as we can see from Duponceau, it was the structural make up of these languages that began to excite attention in the field.

Along with Duponceau, John Pickering (1777-1846) was one of the more internationally recognized linguists in the US. Like Duponceau, Pickering spent his professional life practicing law in his home state of Massachusetts. Neither was yet part of the movement toward professionalizing academic scholarship in the US, though Pickering was asked to take on the Hancock Professorship of Hebrew and later the Eliot Professorship of Greek at Harvard, positions which were both declined (Edward Everett subsequently took over the latter post). Nevertheless, Pickering's interest in language was acute. His reputation as a polyglot was commented on by fellow Harvard classmate, the lawyer and abolitionist Charles Sumner, as reported in William Prescott's 1846 memoir:

It is certain that he was familiar with at least nine [languages],—the English, French, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, German, Romaic [Modern Greek], Greek, and Latin; of these he spoke the first five. He was less familiar though well acquainted, with the Dutch, Swedish, Danish and Hebrew; and had explored with various degrees of care the Arabic, Turkish, Syriac, Persian, Coptic, Sanscrit, Chinese, Cochin-Chinese, Russian, Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Malay in several dialects, and particularly the Indian languages of America, and of the Polynesian Islands. ("Memoir" 219)

A stint as a legal apprentice in Spain and England also contributed to the international bent of much of his writing, especially *Essay on a Uniform Orthography for the Indian Languages of North America* (1820), arguably one of the first attempts at an international phonetic alphabet. But his first publication was a more nationally confined, if not specifically nationalist venture, prompted by his time in London: the 1816 *A Vocabulary*,

or Collection of Words and Phrases Which Have Been Supposed to Be Peculiar to the United States of America. Here Pickering offers what Boston lawyer and member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Dudley Atkins Tying, called “the foundation of American correctness, . . . forming a new Era in our Language” (quoted in Read 272); though Pickering himself was less pedantic about the extent and intent of the English vocabulary. For Pickering, the vocabulary aimed not simply to be an antidote to provincialisms within the realm of polite and public speech. Instead his particular collection gathered together “words, *the legitimacy of which had been questioned*; in order, that their claim to a place in the language might be discussed and settled” (vi). But above all, he sought to make such collections a legitimate engagement of the Academy of Arts and Sciences. The first few lines of the *Vocabulary* make this clear:

The preservation of the *English language* in its purity throughout the United States is an object deserving the attention of every American, who is a friend to the literature and science of his country. It is in a particular manner entitled to the consideration of the Academy; for, though subjects, which are usually ranked under the head of *Physical Science*, were doubtless chiefly in view with the founder of the Academy, yet, our *language* also, which is to be the instrument of communicating to the public the speculation and discoveries of our countrymen, seems necessarily “to fall within the design of the institution.”

Pickering’s *Vocabulary* thus becomes a platform with which the author proclaims, first, the importance of language preservation, in the face of corruptions to “purity,” and, second, the need to view language study and comparison as a version of, or at least akin to, “*Physical Science*.” Whether or not language study, particularly comparative philology, would (or should) become an institutionally recognized science was a debate that continued to rage into the postbellum period, culminating with the infamous and sometimes acid conflict between William Dwight Whitney and Max Mueller. For our

purposes, however, the focus on preservation and purity are most germane, because it was Pickering's subsequent publication, the *Essay on a Uniform Orthography for the Indian Languages of North America*, that reveals his desire for uncorrupted preservation of subaltern languages, as echoed in the following proclamation:

Until a few years past...these neglected dialects, like the devoted race of men, who have spoken them for so many ages, and who have been stripped of almost every fragment of their paternal inheritance except their language, have incurred only the contempt of the people of Europe and their descendants on this continent; all of whom, with less justice than is commonly supposed, have proudly boasted of the superiority of their own more cultivated languages as well as more civilized manners. But, at length...we are beginning to inquire into the history and character of our fellow-men of this continent, and to investigate the wonderful structure of their various dialects; which, indeed, to the philosophical inquirer, will now perhaps be found to be the most curious and interesting of all the languages of man. (7-8)

Pickering was concerned with the uses to which Indian language study would be put. During an address to the American Oriental Society, he made the binary of aesthetics and utilitarianism more explicit:

[T]he question will again be coldly asked—of what utility is this knowledge? To which the answer must ultimately be—because a *natural* desire for such knowledge has been implanted in man by his creator for wise purposes...and no man is willing to throw aside, as useless, these and a thousand other particulars of the past generations of his race, although he cannot demonstrate their direct applicability to any common purpose that would in popular language be denominated practically *useful*” (“Address” 59).

The utilitarian's question is shrugged off by deferring to a higher cause: “*natural* desire” to create permanent representations of such speech. Such desire was natural precisely because the speakers of these languages were seen to be disappearing. A language archive was needed if for no other reason but posterity. However, we can also see the more institutional desire for such an archive in an 1820 *North American Review* article:

If, indeed, our only motive in the study of languages were to repay ourselves by the store of learning locked up in them, we should be but poorly rewarded for the labour of investigating the Indian dialects...[?] but if we wish to study human speech as a science, just as we do other sciences, by ascertaining all the facts or phenomena, and then proceeding to generalize and class those facts for the purpose of advancing human knowledge; in short, if what is called philosophical grammar is of any use whatever, then it is indispensable to the philologist of *comprehensive views*, to possess a knowledge of as many facts or phenomena of language as possible; and these neglected dialects of our own continent certainly do offer to the philosophical inquirer some of the most curious and interesting facts of any languages with which we are acquainted.” (quoted in Andresen 43, my emphasis)

The “comprehensive view” that Pickering refers to bears resemblance to the universal grammar promoted by the French school of *idealogie*. But, as Andresen points out, “[w]e are at a delicate point here...for Pickering...was deeply influenced by the new German science,” which emphasized a more mechanized view of language. In other words, Pickering’s advocacy for a scientific possession of “as many facts or phenomena” of American Indian languages as possible, represents, whether he intends it or not, a movement toward a theory of language operation independent of race. At the same time, Pickering’s desires also become less a matter of universal grammar and more a matter of consolidating language borders.

The hybridity of Pickering’s proclamation—its combination of Condillac’s universality and a Herderian *volkgeist*, a national character “stored up” in a national grammar—affords some idea of what linguists like Pickering and Duponceau hoped to accomplish in preserving Indian languages. Faced with the almost certain deterioration of tribes at this time (the Creek Wars had only just abated, resulting in a decided victory for Andrew Jackson and his Southern Militia, as well as the removal or death of the Creek), preservation of languages offered a mode of preserving Indian national character.

Republican ideals could be maintained by scientific recording, if not by political mandate. Of course, this dream of linguistic and “spiritual” preservation also takes part in the same racism as the political perpetrations it was reacting against. The alien-ness of American Indian languages created, in part, its scientific value. As Cheyfitz puts it: “Within its history, Anglo-American imperialism has alienated the world outside the West in the form of the other, so that it could dream the other’s redemption in the form of the self” (*Poetics* xiv). The redemption offered by linguistic preservation—transcribing the ephemeral, migratory, oral language of removed Indian nations—was also equally an imperial project, a stopgap that never questioned the forces behind disappearance or the potential for such transcription to ease the atrocities of removal. In the next section, I explore the redemptive efforts of James Fenimore Cooper to preserve Indian characters and Indian languages in his fiction. Here again, language becomes the centerpiece for new forms of Native representation, illustrating the ways linguistic documentation became integral to the enterprise of creating a national literary history.

James Fenimore Cooper and the Legacy of Language

James Fenimore Cooper has been at the center of attention regarding representations of Indian languages during the early national period, so much so that his strategies and biases often overshadowed, and continue to overshadow, the work of other authors. Surveying Cooper’s contemporary reception it is obvious that he commanded extensive national attention, despite his expatriate status, drawing innumerable comparisons to Sir Walter Scott as well as criticism for the idealization of his Indian characters. In an 1828 *North American Review* article, Lewis Cass (future secretary of war during the Jackson

administration, and central to the implementation Indian Removal policy) argues that Cooper's Indians "have no living prototype in our forests" ("Structure of Indian Languages" 376). The author, he continues, depends too much on Moravian missionary John Heckewelder for his prototype—a prototype that softened the edges of the actual figure, "the fierce and crafty warriors and hunters, that roam through our forests" (376). Cass is careful to draw out the distinction between Cooper's Amerindian characters and those he has had contact with, arguing that such characters "may wear leggins and moccasins, and be wrapped in a blanket or buffalo skin, but they are civilized men, and not Indians" (376). Such criticisms were commonplace, and pointed up the basic Euro-American perceptions of Native American language and culture. Indian languages could be either musical, often metaphorical, vehicles for expression, or the bestial, guttural sounds of a near unintelligible and uncivilized tongue. Either way, as Maddox makes clear, Native American languages more often than not became added proof of savagism:

white observers consistently concluded that because of the limitations of his or her language, the most complex intellectual maneuver any Indian (of whatever language group) could manage was the construction of a simple metaphor, or occasionally an analogy; the Indian could not speculate about things that have no visible form, nor comprehend national ideas. (24)

This synopsis does not consider, however, that the metaphor-heavy speech of Indian characters was often attributed not to Amerindians themselves but to Cooper. In another *North American Review* article, William Josiah Snelling, evaluating the autobiography of Chief Black Hawk in 1835, found the work of "unquestionable" authenticity, barring the frequent use of figurative language—a characteristic he blamed on Cooper:

The only drawback upon our credence is the intermixture of courtly phrases, and the figures of speech, which our novelists are so fond of putting into the mouths of Indians.... The term *pale faces*, often applied

to the whites in this book, was, we think, never in the mouth of any American savage, excepting in the fanciful pages of Mr. Cooper. There are many more phrases and epithets of the like nature, and we only mention them, because we think it time that authors should cease to make Indians talk sentiment. (69)

Cooper's work exemplifies all of these perceptions, becoming a site of contradictory representational strategies, in terms of a more general Indian character, but also, more particularly, in terms of language.

Eric Cheyfitz's provocative reading of *The Pioneers* provides one way of thinking about the effect of such representations. In *The Poetics of Imperialism*, Cheyfitz argues that the notion of the *translatio imperii*, or "transfer of rule," is a discursive part of literal and literary translations. Imperial rhetoric, he claims, translated lands into property, translated the figurative other into the literal or proper self, and had the ultimate goal of turning the savage into the civilized: "Europeans imagined that this domination would take place through the persuasive powers of eloquence, which would translate Native Americans fluidly in European terms. But persuasion necessarily failed from the beginning. For the kind of translation Europeans imagined was never a possibility, except through force and fraud" (xii). With *The Pioneers*, such translation does not occur through literal transformations of one language into another, but rather by rendering the native figures metaphorical or simply unreal. For instance, at the end of Cooper's romance, Oliver Edwards, masquerading as a half-breed throughout, is revealed to be literally white. Only through his unveiling is he able to marry the judge's daughter and claim his property, which as Cheyfitz points out, has been "deeded to his family by the Indians, who...were judged legally incapable of such deeds by the Marshall Court in the same year in which Cooper published his formative frontier romance [(1823)]" (14).

Cheyfitz concludes that such translations from the metaphoric Indian to the literal, white colonial are constitutive of, and complicit in, the practices of removal, despite Cooper's own testimony to the contrary. However, while presenting a macroscopic view of translation as a tool of US colonialism, this reading avoids direct encounter with language, and does little to surface the aims of such encounters.

Lawrence Rosenwald, in a recent article on Cooper gives a more microscopic view of linguistic representation in *The Last of the Mohicans*. As Rosenwald demonstrates, several points in the novel invoke the musicality of the Mohican language. One passage, describing a conversation between father and son, Uncas and Chingachgook, serves as a fitting example:

It is impossible to describe the music of their language, while thus engaged in laughter and endearments, in such a way as to render it intelligible to those whose ears have never listened to the melody. The compass of their voices, particularly that of the youth, was wonderful; extending from the deepest bass, to tones that were even feminine in softness. The eyes of the father followed the plastic and ingenious movements of the son with open delight, and he never failed to smile in reply to the other's contagious, but low laughter. (200)

Rosenwald claims that the focus on the physical sounds of the language, over and above its actual meaning, uncovers a subtle racism at the root of Native American linguistic representation. Despite Cooper's declamations against Indian dispossession, there is no denying his linguistic emphasis on the sounds of Indian speech over the language's intelligibility; nor can we downplay his other recurrent representations, scenes of seemingly magical translation between Anglo and Native American, which rely on easy understandings of gesture and other extra-lingual behavior (expressions, postures, etc.). But the story that Cooper tells about Delaware and other native languages—that these languages, while musical and aesthetically pleasing, are semantically destitute when

compared to the languages of Europe—is not the only story that was being told during the time of its publication.

Cooper himself engages in depictions of Indian speech offered as proof of semantic parity, sometimes even superiority. In one scene from *The Last of the Mohicans*, the ever-pedantic Natty Bumppo holds forth on the difference between European and Indian naming practices:

I'm an admirator of names, though the Christian fashions fall far below savage customs in this particular. The biggest coward I ever knew was called Lyon; and his wife, Patience, would scold you out of hearing in less time than a hunted deer would run a rod. With an Indian 'tis a matter of conscience; what he calls himself, he generally is—not that Chingachgook, which signifies Big Serpent, is really a snake, big or little; but that he understands the windings and turnings of human natur', and is silent, and strikes his enemies when they least expect him. (60)

There are clear suggestions of a native ideal here—“what he calls himself, he generally is”; there are also obvious metaphoric resonances in the name itself. But the point we are to take from this Euro-American appraisal, from a character who makes clear again and again that he “has no cross in his blood, although he may have lived with the redskins long enough to be suspected” (31), is not one of racial superiority, but of a capacity for Indian languages (in this case, Delaware) to signify complex meaning as effectively, if not more so, as any “Christian” tongue. Of course, if Chingachook’s language demonstrates his complex understanding of human nature, it also signifies his silence, and his potential for violent action.

Rather than dismissing these instances as easy idealizations of native character or further evidence of a belligerent attitude toward subaltern languages, we need to confront the fact of the contradictory attitudes toward native languages in Cooper’s text, and in the literature throughout the Removal period. For such contradictions speak volumes about

the fraught nature of Removal, about the systemic belief in a native fatality that Removal both perpetuated and was perpetuated by. They also give us a foothold for understanding more deeply the linguistic trends of this period. As one case study, Washington Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies* offers insight into the way language could be used to invoke a subaltern cultural character—one that exemplifies a more sympathetic approach to Indian languages, but at the same time cannot escape the codified modes of representing Indian speech and behavior.

Washington Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies*

Written between 1830 and 1834, and begun shortly after Washington Irving's return from his European tour, *A Tour on the Prairie* could arguably represent a trial of nationalism for the author: whether he was, as he wrote in his introduction, "to be taken, as a favoured child, to its bosom; or repulsed as a stranger, and a changeling" (7). However, while we can see evidence of Frederic Jackson Turner's familiar notion of a "crucible of the frontier," the expedition does not unambiguously take part in the overt mythification, or dehumanization, of this Americanist tradition. It is not simply to regain a national identity, or authorial legitimacy, that Irving sets off on his tour. His was more of a fact-finding mission, a chance for contained adventure in the form of tourism; and fitting subject matter for producing the his mainstay sketches.

Even before he'd returned to the US, Irving had been anticipating such a journey. He'd had his friend Henry Brevoort Jr. send material about Native Americans while he was abroad. He had read the first three Leatherstocking books of Cooper (*The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827)), as well as George Catlin's

Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians. And so, in 1832 when he met Henry Ellsworth, Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Oklahoma territory, and chief overseer of the removal of the Southeastern tribes to lands west of the Mississippi, Irving was primed for the trip. In a letter to his brother Peter, he recalls his anticipation shortly before setting out to Fort Gibson, in what is now eastern Oklahoma:

The offer was too tempting to be resisted: I should have an opportunity of seeing the remnants of those great Indian tribes, which are now about to disappear as independent nations, or to be amalgamated under some new form of government. I should see those fine countries of the “far west,” while still in a state of pristine wilderness, and behold herds of buffaloes scouring their native prairies, before they are driven beyond the reach of a civilized tourist. (xx)

While I argue for a rereading of Irving that highlights his investment in subaltern languages, *A Tour* in no way escapes the apparent dictates of American colonial attitudes. Indeed, the text opens with a series of obfuscations about the situation of several American Indian tribes: “These are the hunting grounds of the various tribes of the Far West. Thither repair the Osage, the Creek, the Delaware, and other tribes that have linked themselves with civilization, and live within the vicinity of white settlements” (9). The action of “repairing” to the “Far West” elides the horror that was the result of the Indian Removal Act, as does a subsequent passage in which Irving relates his traveling party’s role as superintendents of resettlement:

Our party was headed by one of the commissioners appointed by the government of the United States to superintend the settlement of the Indian tribes migrating from the East to the West of the Mississippi. In the discharge of his duties he was thus visiting the various outposts of civilization. (10)

Here Irving establishes his part as an expeditionist among the government-sanctioned overseers of a “migration.” He is thus comfortably couched within a double-elision of the atrocities of Jackson-era Indian Removal policies: naturalizing resettlement as a “repairing to” and a “migration,” and situating himself as a guest among superintendents. He also reiterates the Marshall court’s concept of “domestic dependant nations” in “linking” these tribes to civilization without allowing for their own sovereignty: they are contiguous with “white settlements,” and this seems to be the sole fact that defines their civilized existence.

While Irving’s own use of language erases his authorial involvement with forced removal, it is his observation of the language use and style of another party-member, Antoine, that provides a window on his strategies for linguistic representation. *A Tour on the Prairies* is marked by an absence of dialogue. Few conversations are directly recorded, and those that are often contain only one or two laconic statements. Given the journal-like quality of Irving’s tourist sketches, this is not surprising. What we have to gain from this lack of direct recounting, however, is an acute fixation not on *what* is said, but *how* it is spoken. In describing the French Creole guide Antoine, “the squire, the groom, the cook, the tent man, in a word the factotum” of the expedition, we are told that he is, by his own account, “without morals, without caste, without creed, without country, and even without language; for he spoke a jargon of mingled French, English and Osage” (11). Known familiarly as “Tonish,” he is a man of all work who is also a man of no national, racial, or class markers. Most interesting in Tonish’s personal account is the idea that he has shed any claim to rank or nation not through absence, but through excess, through hybridity, specifically in his borrowed Indian traits (aside from the mixture of

Osage in his language, we also learn that he has “an Indian wife and a brood of half blood children”). Self identifying as outside of caste, creed, and country, does not stop him from being described by Irving as “a personage of inferior rank,” “a little swarthy, meagre, wiry French Creole...a kind of Gil Blas of the frontiers, who had passed a scrambling life sometimes among white men, sometimes among Indians” (11). Nor does it stop him from being understood. Irving’s introduction of Tonish includes a passage about his most prominent characteristic, his penchant for lying and exaggeration:

He was, withal, a notorious braggart and a liar of the first water.... In the midst of his volubility, he was prone to be seized by a spasmodic gasping, as if the springs of his jaws were suddenly unhinged, but I am apt to think it was caused by some falsehood that stuck in his throat, for I generally remarked that immediately afterwards there bolted forth a lie of the first magnitude. (11)

Tonish’s speech, a peculiarly New World hybrid, is never given direct orthographic representation. Instead, we learn that his speech is, like his identity, prone to exaggeration, to contradiction, to becoming “unhinged.” The “volubility” producing such contortions of the jaw can be read as braggadocio, but also as his multiple fluency, his patois.

There are striking parallels between Tonish’s speech “pathology” and the popular characterization of American Indian languages at the time. Lewis Cass, Secretary of War and Bureau Chief of Indian Affairs during the Jackson administration (the height of Indian removal), remarks on the unintelligibility of the Huron or Wyandot language, as opposed to Duponceau’s appraisal:

Mr. Duponceau’s opinion of the harmony and music of the Wyandot language struck us as remarkable. Of all the languages spoken by man, since the confusion of tongues at the tower of Babel, it least deserves this character. It is harsh, guttural, and undistinguishable; filled with

intonations, that seem to start from the speaker with great pain and effort.”
(in Andresen 86-87)

Equally disparaging is earlier commentary by James Burnet, a Scot more familiarly known as Lord Monboddo, and one of Noah Webster’s influences. In his 1774 *Of the Origin and Progress of Language*, Burnet writes that “primitive languages” necessarily mimic the guttural sounds of animals, adding that speakers of these languages “never shut their lips in speaking; which is the case of every animal that utters only natural cries” (in Andresen 86). For Cass and Burnet, the languages of Native America are barely languages at all. At most, they are communicative only to the degree that they transmit pain, or reference the very pain of speaking.

For Irving however, even while declaiming against the half-breed tendency to lie, there is nonetheless a fascination with Tonish’s ability to use hybrid language to tell stories. While Irving takes part in a kind of linguistic racism, finding in Tonish’s French-Osage speech a reason, or at least an apt vehicle, for his tale-telling, throughout the journey “gasconading” Tonish is presented as a counterpoint to the presumed silence of Native America. Rather than the quiet but fatal nobility of Cooper’s Indian characters, Tonish is garrulous, overly talkative, and able to gain the confidence of the militia men through verbal manipulation. Above all, he is often described simply as “amusing.” As we will see in the next chapter, the ability of various dialects to amuse becomes central to their literary representation. There is obvious condescension in Irving’s own amusement, but nonetheless, it motivates his frequent reliance on the oral escapades of this particular hybrid figure.

Silence is a central part of Irving’s mythification of Native America. This speechlessness contrasts both the volubility of characters like Tonish and the intense and

public speechifying of figures, for example, like John Ross, in defense of Cherokee sovereignty, or Elias Boudinot, declaiming against Cherokee removal. In an early scene in the text Irving describes another attendant, Beatte, a “half-breed” Osage. Beatte comes to stand for the plains Indians generally in the following portrayal:

Thus equipped and provided, an Indian hunter on a prairie, is like a cruiser on the ocean, perfectly independent of the world, and competent to self protection and self maintenance. He can cast himself loose from every one, shape his own course, and take care of his own fortunes.... He maintained a half proud, half sullen look, and a great taciturnity.... His whole demeanour was in perfect contrast to our vapouring, chattering, bustling little Frenchman. (18)

Posing taciturnity in opposition to a servile, if amusing, volubility, Irving suggests that keeping quiet is paramount to maintaining independence, “self protection and self maintenance.”

However, Irving is equally interested in the modes of speech that the Osage and other tribes actually do engage in. In the following passage, describing a scene of Osage “chanting,” we find many conflicting characterizations:

When they had made their supper they stretched themselves, side by side, before the fire and began a low nasal chaunt, drumming with their hands upon the breasts by way of accompaniment. Their chaunt seemed to consist of regular staves, every one terminating, not in a melodious cadence, but in the abrupt interjection huh! uttered almost like a hiccup. This chaunt we were told by our interpreter Beatte related to ourselves; our appearance, our treatment of them, and all that they knew of our plans. (26)

The description contains several noteworthy elements. For one, the framework of poetry operates just as it does in Duponceau’s earlier appraisal. By talking about “regular staves,” Irving grants the song a Western context, allowing for later wonderment at the language’s capacity for expression. Also, the difference between the “interjection huh! uttered almost like a hiccup” (a much remarked commonplace in Cooper’s *Last of the*

Mohicans) and the European aesthetic of the “melodious cadence,” introduce a physicality already seen in the author’s descriptions of Tonish’s hybrid dialect. Indeed, the passage transitions from a focus on the purely physical—nasal sounds, chest drumming, and hiccupping—to the revelation of complex meaning, which, we are told, is completely wrapped up in perceptions of the travelers. This meaning is only available through Beatte, whose translations provide the expeditionists with the Indians’ impressions of their European guests. In this way, Irving sets up all the necessary ingredients for outsider wonderment at the speech of savages.

In a subsequent passage Irving provides a clear sense of such wonderment, commenting on the almost supernatural ability of the Osage language to produce meaning: “This mode of improvising is common throughout the savage tribes; and in this way with a few simple inflections of the voice, they chaunt all their exploits in war and hunting, and occasionally indulge in a vein of comic humour and dry satire, to which the Indians appear to me much more prone than is generally imagined” (26). Guy Reynolds, in his 2004 essay “The Winning of the West: Washington Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies*,” comments on Irving’s tendency for reification of the Indians he encounters and notes a paternalism in the author’s narrative, which treats native peoples in the Jacksonian model as his “red children.” He sees Irving’s focus on Indian comedy, satire, and “buffoonery” as an example of such paternalism. But in the above passage, though there is mention made of “comic humour” and “dry satire,” there is none of the obvious condescension of Jackson’s rhetoric. Instead what we see is an uncanny conception of Indian speech: “a few simple inflections of the voice” can refer to any number of events, and all modes of locution. The ideological frame behind this supernatural sound-sense

relationship cannot be attributed to any overt paternalism. Rather, the attribution of this uncanny logic, of this special language in which thought and narrative are conveyed through scant modifications of voice, reflects Irving's lay notion of contemporary Indian linguistics, promoted admittedly through a version of exoticizing, cultural wonderment. His assessment of language is an agonistic one, refuting the "generally imagined" barbarity of popular estimates and replacing such superficial appraisals with a documented account of linguistic complexity.⁸

By way of comparison, we find in Duponceau's *A Grammar of the Language of the Lenni Lenape or Delaware Indians* a similar desire to confront and correct Eurocentric prejudice. In his introduction to the text, Duponceau takes issue with an anonymous 1826 publication in the *North American Review*. The article, representing the "prejudices that have been so long entertained against the languages of savage nations," falls under attack for being a particularly homegrown, national expression of such bigotry (*A Grammar* 78). In particular, it is the "frontier settlements" of the US that, for the linguist, too often oppose an "enlightened" view of Native American language:

[I]t is not in Europe alone that we find persons disposed to disparage every thing that belongs to the American Indians. The same spirit prevails, I am sorry to say in a much higher degree, among many in this country, particularly those who inhabit our frontier settlements, where causes of difference too often arise between the two races. (78)

⁸ In Irving's journals from this period we find some examples of the author's collection of Osage words and phrases as a further heightening of the picturesque. But these also represent a fascination with the expressive capabilities of the lexicon, as the following October 1, 1832 entry exhibits:

Camp after sunset in a beautiful grove at the foot of immense trees—by a brook opposite a prairie—moonlight—owl hoots—prairie wolf howls—barking of dogs—beef, roast ducks, and prairie hens—others boiled. Fine effect of half moon among lofty trees—fire of camp with guides, Indians and others round it—dogs lying on grass—waggons—tents by fire light—groups of attendants lying at foot of trees and round fires. Farm in neighborhood—Mr. Summer—river—Little Osage—*Ugatagakuge monsahn*—meaning "where there is much dogwood." (*Journals* 3:121)

Duponceau, like Irving, finds fault in the small-mindedness of the Euro-American frontier. The anonymous author of the article becomes the representative of this narrow view, and it is his attempt to “depreciate the unfortunate Indians” and their speech that represents the highest offense. For Duponceau such an act represents an abhorrent lack of scientific and aesthetic sense. He concludes his critique of the author with several telling admonishments. First, he calls him out for his presumably scant knowledge of the languages and their speakers, due in large part to not having “ever resided with any of them” (81). Such long-term exposure is essential, Duponceau urges, because of the relative differences among individual languages, but also because of the variations in codes used to address whites and those used among other indigenous speakers. “It is a well known fact,” he writes, “that even Indians, who are much in the habit of conversing with white men, will adapt their forms as much as possible to the construction of our own language, expecting thereby to be better understood” (81). This adaptation differs greatly from how “Indian orators express themselves when addressing their tribes” (81). But more than the prejudice of a single writer, Duponceau worries that such shortsighted judgments will “make an impression on those who have not leisure to investigate the subject” (81). In the end, Duponceau, much like Irving, is interesting in surfacing a new relativistic understanding of “the forms of the languages of the American Indians [which] have begun to attract attention” (81). He sees his task as broadcasting this more progressive attitude by making Amerindian linguistic complexity known, assuring readers that “the more [Native languages] are known, the greater astonishment they will excite in unprejudiced minds” (81). In both the documents of Irving and Duponceau we learn that without this sense of wonder, and without scientific and aesthetic knowledge of

another ethnolinguistic order, depreciation and the violence underwritten by such depreciation become status quo.⁹ In the final section, we find that Margaret Fuller maintains a similar investment in an “unprejudiced” stance and in the aura of otherness available in the languages of Native America.

Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*

Margaret Fuller has in the past few years become central to the multilingualist trend in US literary history of the antebellum period. Her status as a translator, widely known at the time, was threatened after her death when her literary executor, brother Arthur Fuller, “purged her books of the translations they contained, and her book-length translations passed out of print” (Boggs 31). *Summer on the Lakes* suffered considerably under this editorial hand, as did her translations of Goethe, Johann Eckermann, and others. But why attempt to efface Fuller’s multilingualism? Colleen Glenney Boggs provides one answer: “At a time,” she argues, “when increasing numbers of immigrants were coming to the United States in the wake of European revolutions and US imperial expansion was taking aggressive militaristic form, Fuller’s silencing coincided with a xenophobic backlash

⁹ In some instances, however, Duponceau was explicit about the possible military application of language learning. His was not simply an enterprise of the mind; it had direct bearing on Indian removal. Introducing his translation of Zeisberger’s Delaware *Grammar*, he remarks that:

Several gentlemen, particularly of the army, who are stationed or reside in vicinity of the Indian country, and consequently have much intercourse with the aborigines, have expressed a wish that Mr Zeisberger’s Work should be given in as ample a form as possible, as it would be of great use to them in studying not only the language of the Delawares, but also those of the Chippeways, Menomonies, and other cognate idioms. Therefore it is to be considered that it is not only intended as an exhibition of the forms of Indian dialects in a scientific point of view, but also as a guide to those who may be engaged in the study of this language. (93)

No mention is made as to the possible interactions that such language learning would foster, though these could take on obvious authoritative shape as the military became a major policing force during the period of western resettlement. More interesting to note, though, is the contrast of a scientific “exhibition” on the one hand, and a “guide” on the other; the first a passive shadowbox of exotic forms, the latter an active participant in policy and policing.

against the foreign, accompanied by an epistemological shift” (“Margaret Fuller’s American Translation” 31-32). For Boggs, this shift takes the form of both a transcendental focus on universality—a specifically Emersonian desire for a metaphysical “pure language”—and fears over the potential for disunion in an ever-expanding national territory. She argues further that Fuller should be seen as a centerpiece of a more cosmopolitan multilingualism, based on her attitude toward translation, which privileged translation’s relational, dialogic capacity over culturally essentializing erasures. It is an astute thesis that fills in part of the picture of contemporary philosophical thought on the uses of translation.

But rather than envisioning such linguistic plurality as simply opposed to the monolith of Transcendentalism or national xenophobia, we can also see Fuller’s commitment to multilingualism as participating in an early national discourse surrounding the collection and transcription of “other” languages, particularly those of Native America. Fuller’s transcriptions of Native American folktales, as told by Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, as well as her own ambiguous appraisal of Native American languages, are an essential part of the wider discourse of American Indian language study represented in the work of the authors already discussed. While Fuller’s discourse did engage in a celebration of language difference, it did so only with the ideology of extinction and preservation as a backdrop. Though we might desire a celebratory and multicultural Fuller, we have, finally, to take her at her word when she invokes the ideology of native extinction. There is a darker side to translation, which in a Native American context allowed for the representation of native speech and culture as fundamental to the American nation only with the reassurance that actual Native

Americans would never have access to similar representation. In *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature* (2000), Werner Sollors discusses the potential dangers of translation, warning that while sometimes necessary and “helpful tools,” translations “can also be treacherous once they become substitutes for originals” (10). Such translations, with their attendant erasures, occurred throughout colonial and national periods of US interactions with Native Americans, and in all forms of American literature.

Turning Fuller’s translations of both German and Native American speech in the context of early US linguistics, we can begin to understand the investments the author made in translation and transcription, and the ideological and scientific underpinnings of these investments. *Summer on the Lakes* was a departure for Fuller. It was her first book-length work, and her first attempt at anything like a travelogue. Since 1840, she’d been co-editing the *Dial* with Ralph Waldo Emerson. She had also just completed a translation of Johann Eckermann’s *Gunderrode* in 1842, and an essay, “The Great Lawsuit. Man *versus* Men. Woman *versus* Women,” early in 1843, which would later appear in the *Dial*. The trip was begun in May of 1843 with an invitation from friends James Freeman and Sarah Ann Clarke. Beginning and ending in Buffalo, NY, her journey covered much of the Great Lakes region, from Niagara Falls to Mackinac Island, west to Milwaukee, and through northern Illinois—territory then considered the far western frontier of the country. The narrative itself is arranged as a series of travel episodes and includes much of her early Transcendentalist and feminist social commentary.

The overall plan for writing a book-length account of the trip was not on Fuller's mind when she set out. It was only later, and partially at the behest of Emerson, that the author thought of compiling her "impressions" of the summer into anything like a fully formed narrative. Explaining the purpose of the book, she comments in the introduction:

I have not been particularly anxious to give the geography of the scene, inasmuch as it seemed to me no route, nor series of stations, but a garden interspersed with cottages, groves and flowery lawns, through which a stately river ran. I had no guide-book, kept no diary, do not know how many miles we traveled each day; nor how many in all. What I got from the journey was the poetic impression of the country at large; it is all I have aimed to communicate. (*Summer* 41-42)

Summer on the Lakes has never been an easy narrative to classify precisely because of this impressionism. Though it took part in the rise of the popular travelogue form in the mid-nineteenth century, the text shares only distant resemblance to works like Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home—Who'll Follow* (1839) or Eliza Farnham's *Life in Prairie Land* (1846). Rather than focusing on the journey itself as these books do, Fuller's narrative is more readily characterized by its refusal of a clear path, its collaging and its lack of a center. It is sometimes a picturesque description of the landscape of Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan, as well as the people she stayed with; sometimes autobiographical journaling; and sometimes amateur ethnography. The text also becomes an archive for Fuller's reading and her translation. Early in the text she provides a rather long account of the reading she undertook in preparation for the trip, including George Catlin's *Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians* (1841), Washington Irving's *A Tour of the Prairies* (1835), Benjamin Drake's *The Life and Adventures of Black Hawk: with sketches of Keokuk, The Sac and Fox Indians, and the late Black Hawk War* (1840), and Black Hawk's own *Autobiography* (1833), among others. One of the

more striking examples of her translation is a roughly twenty-page section of Justinus Kerner's *Die Seherin von Prevorst (The Seer of Prevorst)* (1829), a medical apology for animal magnetism representing Kerner's encounter with the prophetic Friederike Hauffe. With divergences like this, the book cannot be said to partake of the rhetoric of a purely Anglocized "crucible of the west." Instead, through translation and transcription, the text becomes a site of cultural intermixture. At the conclusion of the Kerner translation, Fuller comments on the multilingualism and multiculturalism she finds "at the root" of the American West:

Do not blame me that I have written so much about Germany and Hades, while you were looking for news of the West. Here, on the pier, I see disembarking the Germans, the Norwegians, the Swedes, the Swiss. Who knows how much legendary lore, of modern wonder, they have already planted amid the Wisconsin forests? Soon, soon their tales of the origin of things, and the providence which rules them, will be so mingled with those of the Indian, that the very oak trees will not know them apart,—will not know whether itself be a Runic, a Druid, or a Winnebago oak. (102)

Here she makes explicit the place of "foreign" translation. If the West was going to be a crucible, fostering a new sense of nationality for Americans, it was not going to be a place of monolithic or monolingual English dominance. The "tales of the origin of things" would, in Fuller's revisionary imagination, be allied to no single nation, culture, or language, but would, rather, be a complex mythos, rooted in a complex of languages and peoples. At the same time, the comment that "the very oak trees will not know them apart" becomes not just a metaphor for cultural cohesion, but also a way of erasing the violence that had brought these cultures into the same geography. Fuller's ideal of "mingling" thus shares some of the problems of predecessors like Cooper, in which the rhetoric of the ideal Indian figure, and of inveighing against historical dispossession, simultaneously enables the erasure of contemporary imperial violence. Fuller is equally

keen to revise the essentializing literary use of Native American imagery and language, which by this time had become “somewhat stale,” as she writes in poem toward the end of the narrative (115). With ironic use of Cooperesque tropes she offers the further objection that “Wampum and calumets and forests dreary, / Once so attractive now begin to weary” (*Summer* 115).

Fuller’s text exhibits a confusing mixture of sympathy and condescension in its physical and linguistic portrayals of Native America. Her encounters in *Summer on the Lakes*, particularly the Chippewa and Ottawa nations, are often marked by indignation at the political and moral treatment of “the first-born of the soil,” and one of resignation: a throwing up of hands in the face of Anglo-American chauvinism. “Our people and our government,” are, Fuller deems somewhat ironically, “the fated agents of a new era” (*Summer* 114). However, late in the book, decrying the treatment of Native Americans by the government, the “felon trader,” and the missionary, Fuller concludes not with a sweeping declamation against these “sinning bodies,” but instead offers a peculiar paean to Edward Everett, governor of Massachusetts. Everett, in November of 1837, had hosted a deputation of the Sac and Fox nations, recently removed from Wisconsin territory to lands west of the Mississippi. His speech, which Fuller transcribes in full, generally mimes the rhetoric of paternalism and condescension, though he does address his audience with the refrain “Brothers!”—attempting to transform the father-child relationship into one of a kind of family parity: “Brothers! as you entered our council house, you beheld the image of our great Father Washington. It is a cold stone—it cannot speak. But he was the friend of the red man, and bade his children live in peace with

their red brethren” (quoted in *Summer* 119). In her poem praising Everett’s speech, Fuller frames the Native American as a “Samson” whose:

...stately form shall soon be seen no more
Through all his father’s land, th’ Atlantic shore
Beneath the sun, to *us* so kind, *they* melt,
More heavily each day our rule is felt;
(*Summer* 115, italics in original)

Expressed in these lines is the same kind of fatalism that underwrote the very “heavy rule” of removal and resettlement that the author wants to condemn.

The ambiguousness of these seemingly conflicting positions—cultural empathy on the one hand, and a naturalized account of racial extinction on the other—was nothing new at the time. Throughout the period of Removal, moral outrage had been coupled with a fatalistic exasperation over the declining numbers and vanishing tribes brought on by contact with Anglo-Americans. Alexander H. Everett (brother of Edward Everett), in an 1838 report from the Office of Indian Affairs, declaims “[t]he treatment which these tribes have received from the whites, and from the governments of the United States, and the particular states,” but is nonetheless ready to attribute declining populations to a more naturalized fate brought on simply by contact:

If these aboriginal nations of America should continue to waste away, as they have done since the country was occupied by Europeans, in a few generations to come, they will scarcely be found, except in the pages of history, and in the traditions and monuments which they may leave behind. (*Princeton Review* 66)

Political frustration—especially contemporary decisions by the Marshall Court to deny Cherokee in Georgia sovereign status—added to the trend of turning “the pages of history” into an ethically neutral ground where tradition and culture could be preserved. Fuller, for her part, did not offer direct representations of Chippewa or Ottawa speech in

her text. Nevertheless, she did seek out translations like those of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (Bame-wa-was-ge-zhik-a-quay), the granddaughter of Chippewa chief Waub Ojeeg and the major translator contributing to her husband Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's *Algonic Researches, comprising inquiries respecting the mental characteristics of North American Indians* (1839), a collection of Chippewa legends and folktales widely popular at the time. In one instance Fuller inserts one of Johnston Schoolcraft's translations, which had "not before appeared in print," and which for Fuller, gave "a fine sense of the lively perceptions and exercise of fancy, enjoyed by [the Chippewa] in their lives of wood-craft" (125). The tale concerns a hunter, Muckwa, who marries a bear and conceives two children by her, one bear-like, the other human. Eventually the hunter reverts to his human ways, killing his sister-in-law, also a bear, and is forced to return to his own people. Fuller concludes the tale with this comparison:

We have a nursery tale, of which children never weary, of a little boy visiting a bear house and holding intercourse with them on terms as free as Muckwa did. So, perhaps, the child of Norman-Saxon blood, no less than the Indian, finds some pulse of the Orson in his veins. (121)

The translation serves the overt purpose of revealing a shared mythos. The tale itself is an account of cultural interaction which, while taking place between radically different groups, is also transacted through an unencumbered "intercourse." At the same time, the tale is one that reminds Fuller of the nursery, and it is the "*child* of Norman-Saxon blood" who is compared with the Indian. In a sense, Fuller desires both a transparency of Anglo and Native American exchange, without the violence that she continually abhors. And yet, we find her simultaneously repeating the paternalism that enables such violence. Hers is a desire for Native American affiliation that refuses to abandon—linguistically and culturally—European primacy.

In another instance, Fuller reveals her equivocal commitment to Native American speech as one that desires authenticity and “literality” at the same time that it must condemn these voices to a self-destructive fate. After giving an account of a frontier trader’s successful attempt to “tame” Keg-way-no-wut, a Chippewa Indian who “rode over rough shod” the trader in refusing to make equal exchanges with him, Fuller offers as corroboration of the moral “superiority of the white man,” an “Indian orator at Mackinaw,” who makes the following remark: “This...is the difference between the white and the red man; the white man looks to the future and paves the way for posterity” (122). Fuller’s response: “This is a statement uncommonly refined for an Indian; but one of the gentlemen present, who understood the Chippeway, vouched for it as a literal rendering of his phrases; and he did indeed touch the vital point of difference. But the Indian, if he understands, cannot make use of his intelligence. The fate of his people is against it, and Pontiac and Philip have no more chance, than Julian in the times of old” (123). The requirement of literal translation of authentic representation is prompted by the “uncommon refinement” of the speaker’s words. But it is a requirement, finally, that serves only to undermine Fuller’s previous expressions of a multilingual common ground, reverting to the discourse of fatalism and extinction. It would seem that, for Fuller, translating verifiable speech was only necessary to the extent that extinction was a foregone conclusion.

For the linguists, the ethical value of language preservation was in part predicated on a similar need to see the speakers of these languages as a disappearing race. With this view as a kind of ideological backdrop, the wide array of emerging grammars like those of Duponceau as well as primers like John Pickering’s, become part of a nationally and

internationally legitimate science. Transforming transcription into an ethics, and transforming Native American languages into the predominant subject of this ethics, was necessary to expanding the frontiers of American linguistics.

Chapter 2

Beyond the Frame: “Phonetic Fever” and Early National Southwestern Humor

Introduction

Speaking before a college literary society in 1834, Daniel Drake lauded the “new and strange forms” of English that had begun to surface in the southern and western peripheries of the country. Migration had given way, he wrote, to a varied tapestry of regional, colloquial expression: neologisms, homespun metaphors, and other changes to lexicon and diction that added to “the great reservoir of spoken language” (*Discourse on the History, Character, and Prospects of the West* 29). Drake predicted that this groundswell of vernacular American English, while “inferior in refinement,” would in time become “superior in force, variety, and freshness,” and lend a new vitality “to the language of the mother country” (29). He also spoke hopefully of an attendant trend which saw these vibrant expressions “taken up by the pen, transferred to our literature, and widely disseminated” (29). The actual means of this transference and dissemination, however, were by Drake’s account still largely a matter of writers of “little education,” penning pieces for those “whose taste is for the strong rather than the elegant,” and who sought “any mode of expression” that could be considered “striking and original, whatever may be the deformities in its drapery” (29). The ambivalence of Drake’s lecture—its celebration of a vigorous regional vernacular coupled with its aversion to the “deformities” by which such expressions were broadcast—captures much of the recent critical spirit that has plagued the early national writers who attempted to represent in

textual form American English vernaculars that had only before been seen as a “reservoir” of speech.

Vernacular writing in the first half of the nineteenth century is often given short shrift in the literary history of dialect. The antebellum, so the dominant story goes, was a time of “eye dialect”—the flagrant misspellings of authors later panned as “Phunny Phellows.”¹⁰ It was a period marked by the emergence George Washington Dixon’s “Zip Coon” and other minstrel and blackface performances: vernacular routines that worked to deepen racial and class division, to keep abjected races and “backwoods” classes “in their place.” Above all, these antebellum writers are characterized as comedians and satirists who poked fun at their subjects and who used humor as a way of reinforcing the more serious business of norming the nation’s language. As Jonathan Arac summarizes, “vernacular serves national language standardization, protests to the contrary notwithstanding” (“Babel and Vernacular” 6).

Narratives featuring more concerted examples of vernacular American English began to flourish in earnest in the 1830s with the development of Southwestern humor writing. A product of the increasingly popular sporting newspaper of the antebellum, these part-fiction, part-documentary texts centered on characters and plots set in the area defined by America’s Southwestern frontier—Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. And they quickly became a popular national phenomenon. Broadcast in local and regional papers like the *New Orleans Picayune*, as

¹⁰ The term originated with the *Phunny Phellow*, an American humor magazine that ran from 1859-1876. The magazine was often the punching bag for commentators critical of what they saw as vulgar, low-brow wit. William Dean Howells, for instance, chastised the “clownish antics” of the periodical, “which were not very creditable to their culture or to our taste,” in the February 1870 *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (463). With its demonstrative emphasis on misspelling, the phrase became a catch-all for American humor writers in general.

well as national weeklies like William T. Porter's influential *New York Spirit of the Times*, this early humor writing depicted a cast of characters that has since become part of iconic Americana. Larger-than-life types like Mike Fink and Davy Crockett were first given textual treatment in these pieces. The unique sporting heroes of oral literature and folklore found themselves newly rendered in writing, preserved against the monotony of inexorable "civilization."

Focusing on this mythicization of the frontier, literary historians have frequently opted to see humorists as aiders and abettors of the conservative national language standards that dominated scholarly and literary conversations in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Citing early examples like Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's 1835 *Georgia Scenes*, as well as later popular tales like Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (which appeared in the author's first collection of stories in 1867), critics have noted the recurrence of a narratorial frame: the use of an "unadorned" Standard English narrator as guide and commentator to the frontier cast of folksy, rowdy, bull-roarers, who speak regional varieties of English inflected by grammatical solecisms, phonetic oddities, malapropisms, and nonsense "codswallops." The presumed ubiquity of the frame device has led criticism of Southwestern humor to focus almost exclusively on the sociopolitical work performed by the capture and representation of character types through a caricatured version of their speech. George Phillip Krapp established the longstanding linguistic criticism of the genre in *The English Language in America* (1925). Krapp relegates the literary dialect of the frame tale to the status of "General Low Colloquial"—a generic, conventionalized literary pastiche rather than a fully realized representation of actual regional speechways (1: 237-38). Such

treatment has become standard and has as much to do with the socioeconomic status of the authors as it does their techniques for representing linguistic vernacular. As Franklin J. Meine's "genre-defining" anthology, *Tall Tales of the Southwest* (1930), further argues, the Southwestern authors "were not professional humorists, but debonair settlers engaged in various tasks: lawyers, newspaper editors, country gentlemen of family and fortune, doctors, army officers, travellers, actors—who wrote for amusement rather than for gain" (xvi). In other words, they were upper class dabblers, not dedicated literary men, and certainly not concerted ethnologists or linguists.

The sociocultural differences between the early humorists and their subjects, signaled by an assumed narrative segregation of "proper" English text and "low" vernacular dialogue, led to perhaps the most pervasive critical theory about the frame tale: the idea that it was a convenient stratagem used to draw a "disinfectant" line between received propriety and debased social and linguistic offense. In his influential political analysis of the frame, Kenneth S. Lynn terms this line the "*cordon sanitaire*," claiming that "the frame device became the structural trademark of Southwestern humor...because it suited so very well the myth-making purposes of the humorists" (*Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* 64). Transforming linguistic difference into comedy and fable, the humorists quarantined the speakers of an abject frontier language as matters of fiction rather than fact. "The frame," Lynn concludes, "was a convenient way of keeping...first-person narrators outside and above the comic action, thereby drawing a *cordon sanitaire*...between the morally irreproachable Gentleman and the tainted life he described" (64).

The fact is, however, that these kinds of “contain and displace” criticisms run counter to the presence of a more documentary mode within the pages of antebellum humor writing. There was, of course, a steady stream of fanciful “screamers” and yokel send-ups in the Southern papers, but for the authors who have become central to the genre, and to this chapter—Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, William Gilmore Simms, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, and George Washington Harris—myth-making and tall-talkers were far from the only stock in trade. Instead, many tales of the Southwest saw the everyday life of the frontier on full display. In his role as editor and ad hoc curator, William Porter was vocal about the ethnological intent of the humor pieces appearing in the *Spirit of the Times*. The “Prospectus” that opens the first issue of the paper, promises not only to satisfy his readers’ “appetite for pleasure, and indulgence,” but also to offer writing that would “paint ‘life as it is,’ without the artificial embellishments of romance” (quoted in Justus 230-231). Porter was especially keen to corral topics, places, and people neglected by “the politicians, the theologians and the literati of our country” (in Justus 231). In other words, vernacular humor was not simply envisioned by its promoters as an “indulgent” slapstick medium, but as a narrative type that could render accurate accounts of a peripheral America outside the scope of the romantic, propriety-obsessed literati.

Early humorists themselves were equally concerned with announcing their work as a vibrant amalgam of documentation and fiction which, for all its flights of fancy, represented actual encounters of life on the sociocultural margins of the country. Longstreet, a Georgia native whose tales appeared in Southern newspapers throughout the 1820s and 30s, and who helped inaugurate the popularity of the form, wrote in the

preface to his 1835 *Georgia Scenes* that the stories contained therein were “combinations of *real* incidents and characters” and included more than fanciful “stretchers” in their depiction of scenes that were “literally true” (iii, emphasis in original). Others followed suit: from the purportedly firsthand accounts of Davy Crockett in the *Crockett Almanacks* (1834-1856), to the self-conscious ethnographic reportage of Louisiana author Thomas Bangs Thorpe, the individual works that construct the genre of Southern humor attest to a documentary style that lent the backwoods whopper a legitimate form. Mingling fiction and folklore, whimsy and a thoroughgoing expression of the realities of geography, community, and idiom, the frontier persona became at once a character type and a reputedly authentic vehicle for regional ethnography and ethnolinguistics.

A large part of this documentation of the “real” and the “true” converged on speech as the surest way to capture the character and characters of the region. Much of the literature that found its way into the pages of the *Spirit of the Times* and other like-minded serials fulfilled the humorists’ documentary mission by attempting phonetic and syntactic transcriptions of the Southwest backwoodsman’s particular dialect. Indeed, the enterprise of Southwestern humor can be seen as a wholesale effort to narrate in writing the oral literature of the early frontier. By attempting to create a conventionalized “language of speech”—a language that utilized both lexical and phonetic inventions and representations—these narratives participated in a very different kind of work from the cultural work of English standardization. Instead they were helping to consolidate the importance of textually encoding speech as a dynamic literary material that could act as a sign of documentary authenticity.

The newspaper humorists were not always boosters of what other critics, scholars, and lexicographers saw as deviant idioms. The dialects of the frontier had received only scant attention in the early decades of the nineteenth century and most of this attention was tinged with suspicion. Even Noah Webster, who maintained a reputation as a maverick lexicographer, was critical of “provincial accents,” fearing that they would confuse foreign visitors and disrupt the “uniformity and purity of *language*.”¹¹ The humorists found themselves in a tenuous position: their general populism often meant a posture antithetical to overweening “book-larnin’”—as the humorist Johnson Hooper’s well-known character Simon Suggs proclaimed, “Well, mother-wit kin beat book-larnin, at any game!” (*Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* 49). At the same time, writers were wary of alienating audiences who might disapprove of linguistic antics if perceived to be the authors’ own. While suspicious of pedantry and prescription, their iconoclasm was often couched in the distanced role of the observer: they were listeners and reporters more than they were active participants in the speech being depicted. It was, perhaps ironically, their very ambivalence about the propriety of frontier dialect that converted their expositions of this speech into documentation, rather than caricature or pastiche. Through the stature of the proto-ethnographer position they sought to reproduce as literature the linguistic realities of their regional settings and characters as a means of painting “life as it is.” Their ambivalence about writing in vernacular English was in most cases trumped by a greater desire to unearth the dialectal forms they encountered, either as natives of the Southwest (as was the case for figures like Longstreet, Simms,

¹¹ See Thomas Gustafson, *Representative Words: Politics, Literature, and the American Language, 1776-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 314.

and Harris), or as long-time residents (Thorpe, who spent some twenty years in Baton Rouge before returning to his native New England, being a prime example).

Their dialects were not necessarily portrayed through strict notational accuracy, but by enabling regional vernaculars to become the predominant medium of their literature, propelling their Southwestern speakers into the narratorial space of the texts, allowing dialect speakers to tell their own stories without, or with only minimal, trappings of a Standard English frame.¹² Long before postbellum dialect and local color fiction by the likes of Mark Twain, Charles Chesnutt, and Joel Chandler Harris, the Southwestern humorists were creating narratives that not only featured speakers of regional dialect, but also enacted the near-total dominance of the text by a nonstandard English narrator. By taking note of phonetic and morphosyntactic variance, lexical invention, and the prosodic, suprasegmental rhythms of emergent vernacular, and by positioning this coded speech at center stage within their work, humorists effected the first attempts at inscribing regional varieties of American English and constructing the documentary importance of such transcriptions.¹³

The paradox of the humorists' emphasis on writerly, transcriptive practices in texts meant to express spoken language has not escaped the attention of critics. "It is easy to overlook the central irony at the heart of Southwestern humor," Justus warns, concluding that "a body of writing that valorizes speech only emphasizes writing itself as the originating mode.... What we are expected to regard as an innocent transparency is a

¹² "This form is arresting," as critic James Justus writes, "not because of the obvious differences between the spoken English of the principals, but because *the narrator gives over his space to the storyteller*" (*Fetching* 382).

¹³ As Justus points out, the Northeastern writers Thomas C. Haliburton (1796-1865) and Seba Smith (1792-1868), whose respective Yankee character-commentators, Sam Slick and Major Jack Downing, were arguably the first writers of a sustained regional English to reach a national audience in the early 1830s (*Fetching* 354 n2).

calculated, composed, hyperconscious system that draws attention to itself as a vehicular agent” (5). Working from the context of the growing speech-centered examinations of early national language study, we might argue instead that hyperconscious emphasis on textuality is not an example of irony or subterfuge, but an integral part of many of the genre’s productions. The vernacular performances of subjects like Thorpe’s “Big Bear,” the Davy persona of the *Crockett Almanack’s*, and other trickster types like Harris’s Sut Lovingood were striking for the self-referentiality with which they underscored the process of this inscription.

Highlighting the textualization of spoken English, humorists signaled, sometimes pointedly, though more often inadvertently, the idea that variation did not necessarily equate to corruption. In their textual reproductions of spoken idioms, they far outpaced the more conservative work of early national phoneticians and other linguists, who, despite the increasing complexity of the alphabetic apparatuses used to transcribe various world languages and the emerging comparativism that underwrote new approaches to orality, were still hamstrung in their exploration of vernacular variance by the cultural ideal of a uniform national English. The generic conventions of vernacular writing thus serve as significant counterpoints to both the ongoing national language debates of the early nineteenth century and to the overall conceits of the authentic regional voice that shaped later literary dialectal realism. Southwestern humor writing does not so much mirror that of linguists as it recasts the ideology of speech documentation, turning the oral focus beginning to dominate language study onto the regional English of the frontier—in effect, demanding that such regional variation be considered along the developing horizontal, comparativist axis that had begun to reorient linguistic approaches

to non-Western languages. Viewed from the wider lens of early national “phonetic fever” what we find in this literature and its narrative conceits is an alternative vernacular medium that productively questions the status quo concept of speech variation as uncouth and in need of correction and that pursued a self-reflexive course through the process of inscribing these variants for national audiences.

Early National “Phonetic Fever”

Southwestern humor writing grew up during a period of dramatic change within the inchoate field of language study. The initial decades of the early national era can be characterized as a time of “phonetic fever”: an array of phonetic alphabets began appearing during the period, from the early reformist spellers of Benjamin Franklin and Noah Webster, to more concerted philological undertakings—so-called “universal alphabets” proposed by central figures like Sir William Jones, the “founding father” of comparative philology, as well as later US contributors like William Thornton and John Pickering. While many early national linguists attempted to constitute a historically and geographical diverse code for representing speech sounds, they were still largely supportive of strict standardization of American English. One implicit argument of these texts was that speech variation necessitated a more complete typology of orthographic forms of representation: the range of possible linguistic sounds was not easily confined to the twenty-six Roman characters of the English alphabet; speech was varied to the extent that it pushed beyond the capacity of traditional textual capture, and, thus, a new orthographic mode was necessary. The corollary of these texts, however, was even more focus on the need to police variation: if new phonetic alphabets revealed the fecundity of

speech, they also showed how dangerously overgrown American idioms had become. Many of the early national alphabets that appeared were touted as both universal and orthoepic, concerned with creating both the widest phonetic net possible and, at the same time, with making sure that correct pronunciation became the end that justified the alphabetic means. And most phoneticians of the era accompanied their alphabets with the hope that by deploying a new, more accurate orthography, the nation could halt the process of variation in its tracks.

As shown in the last chapter, studies of the oral languages of Native America by “armchair scholars” like John Pickering and Peter DuPonceau were instrumental in shifting attention away from written sources as the only subject matter available to comparative philology. The 1820s and 30s saw the widespread development of a speech-centered science of language as a direct response to the conservatism of Eurocentric, text-based studies and an equally Eurocentric disparagement of Amerindian oral languages. In bearing witness to the profound complexity of Amerindian languages, language scholars promoted the study of “human speech as a science,” as Pickering wrote in an 1820 *North American Review* article. For Pickering, it was through the immediacy of speech that the “facts or phenomena of language” were more fully revealed. While perhaps mundane to modern readers, the idea that oral language represented a structure that could undergo “phenomena”—that speech could experience systemic changes and that these changes could be charted through methodical study—was an early national revelation.

DuPonceau’s reaction to Pickering’s own examination of these phenomena (in his 1822 introduction to the re-issued version of John Eliot’s 1666 *The Indian Grammar*

Begun) reveals the extent to which an inchoate linguistic science had only just begun to tap into speech forms as a core object of study: “The idea of the phenomena of language is new and beautiful,” he writes, “It will give rise to more new ideas and things than you are aware of.... Could jealousy enter into my composition, I should be jealous of that idea, which I would give much to have conceived and developed as you have” (M.O. Pickering 313).

The German-born American scholar Francis Lieber, whose *Encyclopedia Americana* (1830) attempted to capture the contemporary trends of early national linguistics, would provide conclusive statements about the new oral terrain that the science of language was beginning to chart. In an entry on “Language,” possibly penned by DuPonceau, the writer argues that “speech alone is properly entitled to the name of language, because it alone can class and methodize ideas, and clothe them in forms which help to discriminate their various shades, and which memory easily retains” (VII: 410, in Andresen 116). The equation of speech to clothing highlights, in part, the nature of this “oral turn”—its intent to lend speech a material form, give it substance, and, thus, give it standing as a storehouse of the “facts and phenomena” of language on equal footing with textual representations. In Lieber’s entry on “Philology” itself, we find more emphasis on phonology, “the study of speech sounds and their graphic representation,” as an important branch of the science of language (quoted in Andresen 102).

This emphasis on speech as originary language, or as a more authentic “voice of the people” has antecedents that stretch as far back as Plato’s *Phaedrus* and extend into late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Romantic obsessions with the immediacy of voice and the notion that speech accessed a more vital picture of a “common people.”

For the early national linguists, however, what was more important was the fact that speech was so malleable, that its “various shades” rendered the particularity of ethnic and regional linguistic modes much more readily than conventionalized literary writing; and, in the case of purely oral languages, speech was the sole source of linguistic data. The point for Lieber and his antebellum colleagues was not the foreclosure of the written document as a philological object of study. Rather, these early scholars were trying to promote speech as a material form that needed to be documented and analyzed precisely because in it alone was found the complex differentialization of linguistic forms.

Opening up the science of language to speech meant a new accounting of phonetic and grammatical systems that had escaped the attention of text-based philologists. One effect of this turn to orality, as we saw in chapter one, was a more progressive, more comparativist, acceptance of non-Western languages, particularly Amerindian speech. Again, Lieber’s *Encyclopedia* is instructive here, making the bold claim under the “Language” entry that “Languages were made for the purpose of communication between men, and all are adequate to that end” (VII: 416, in Andresen 116). With this newfound relativism, the period leading up to Lieber’s *Encyclopedia*, also saw rising attention to the need to catalog phonetic variation. Under the “Philology” entry, the editor and his contributors are hopeful that this new focus on speech and its “graphic representation” will “lead to a universal phonetic alphabet” (in Andresen 102).

The preceding decades had seen several such attempts at this “perfect alphabet.” Sir William Jones’s foundational *Dissertation on the Orthography of Asiatick Words in Roman Letters*, while certainly not the first undertaking, arguably had the most impact on late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century comparative philology. The intent of his

Orthography was to transcend the “disgracefully and almost ridiculously imperfect” English spelling often employed by his peers. He complained that “every man, who has occasion to compose tracts on Asiatick literature, or to translate from the Asiatick languages, must always find it convenient and sometimes necessary, to express *Arabian*, *Indian*, and *Persian* words or sentences, in the characters generally used among *Europeans*; and almost every writer in those circumstances has a method of notation peculiar to himself” (quoted in Lepore 50). This kind of representational inconsistency and idiosyncrasy, he charged, had been the true stumbling block in the discovery of the common Indo-European language connecting Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin. With his own orthography established he could make the foundational claim that “No philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source” (50).

Jones’s *Orthography* was a key component in the construction of what would become in 1888 the International Phonetic Alphabet.¹⁴ But the intervening years saw an increasing fervor for the creation of phonetic alphabets. Aside from the well-known (and widely criticized) spelling reforms of figures like Benjamin Franklin and Noah Webster, or the “pronouncing dictionaries” made popular by John Walker’s highly regarded, and heavily reissued, *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language* (1791), there appeared throughout the last decade of the eighteenth century and far into the nineteenth century a vast array of alphabets that sought to represent not simply the orthoepy—the correct pronunciation—of words and speech sounds, but also to

¹⁴ The IPA was formalized under the direction of French linguist Paul Passy and a group of linguists later known as the International Phonetic Association. See International Phonetic Association, *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association : A Guide to the Use of the International Phonetic Alphabet* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 194-196.

delineate a code for capturing the entire scope of the human voice. In 1792 William Thornton, better known as the designer and architect behind the Capitol building rotunda in Washington D.C., proposed a new alphabet of thirty letters that he hoped would capture the true phonetic range of American English. The alphabet was featured in his book, *Cadmus: Or, a Treatise on the Elements of Written Language*, which received the prestigious Magellan prize from the American Philosophical Society. Thornton, a British émigré to the US born in the West Indian island of Tortola, had contrived the alphabet not specifically as a reform to English spelling, but as a tool for transcribing the African languages spoken among slaves in Tortola. He envisioned his phonetic system, which he called “the reduction of the language to the eye,” as a universal alphabet, fit to transcribe the speech of “hundreds of nations whose languages are not yet written,” and foresaw a utopian end: if more nations would adopt his alphabet, he wrote, “languages would in time assimilate as knowledge became more diffused by intercourse,” concluding that “all the world” would then “seem more nearly allied” (in Lepore 49).

With his stateside reception, Thornton became much more proprietary about his creation. The American Philosophical Society prize submission, written in his peculiar phonetic script, was addressed “Tu Ð□ Sitiznz ov Norø Am□rika,”¹⁵ and a sanguine Thornton foresaw great things “if this [alphabet] were to be adopted by the AMERICANS, AND NOT BY THE ENGLISH” (in Lepore 44). One prospective outcome was purely commercial: “the best English authors would be reprinted in America, and every stranger to the language, *even in Europe*,...would purchase the American editions”

¹⁵ H.L. Mencken poked fun at Thornton’s phonetic spellings in *The American Language* (1921), waxing incredulous that “This new alphabet included *e*’s turned upside down and *i*’s with their dots underneath” and giving the apocryphal example: “Di Amerike languids,” he argued, “uil des bi az distint az de government, fri from aul foliz or enfilosofikel fasen (46).

(in Lepore 44). Another effect, however, undermines the purely transcriptive potential of his new code, as Thornton envisions that “Dialects would be utterly destroyed, both among foreigners and peasants” (in Lepore 44).

The dual stance here, encompassing both the descriptive capacity of his phonetic alphabet and a call for the eradication of vernacular difference, reveals a trend that continued throughout the early nineteenth century. Pickering, for example, in his 1820 *An Essay on a Uniform Orthography for the Indian Languages of North America* (modeled on William Jones’s earlier treatise) wrote that the “neglected dialects” of Native America, no less than their speakers, “have incurred only the contempt of the people of Europe and their descendents on this continent” (7-8). His text was meant as a corrective to such neglect, a tool that might be used “to investigate the wonderful structure of their various dialects” (8). Only four years prior to his *Uniform Orthography*, however, Pickering had published a separate collection titled *A Vocabulary, or Collection of Words and Phrases Which Have Been Supposed to be Peculiar to the United States of America* (1816). The collection opens with “An Essay on the Present State of the English Language in the United States”—an article striking for its retrograde boosterism of “pure” English, and its fears over the increasing corruption of the American idiom. He begins the essay with a call to arms: “The preservation of the *English language* in its purity throughout the United States is an object deserving the attention of every American, who is a friend to the literature and science of his country” (9). Pickering proceeds in an anxious vein, fomenting fear about the possibility that “our countrymen,” who “speak and write in a *dialect* of English, which will be understood in the *United States*,” might find themselves nearing a time “when *Americans* shall no

longer be able to understand the works of Milton, Pope, Swift, Addison, and other English authors, justly styled classic, without the aid of a *translation* into a language, that is to be called at some future day the *American* tongue!" (9-10).

The threat of a singular "American tongue" and the subsequent need for "the preservation of the English language in its purity" thus spur Pickering's nearly 200-page collection of Americanisms. The text, mainly a compilation of neologisms and outmoded words to which US speakers "affix a *new signification*," is shot through with citations from British and American sources offering pointed criticism of these "peculiarities" and their proliferation (20). For instance, Pickering marks the word "Awful," meaning "disagreeable, ugly," as a piece of New England cant, and cites a "late English traveller" who comments on several occurrences of the word heard during his travels. This unnamed critic chastises the "*country-people*" in "Vermont and other New England states" for their "use of many curious phrases and quaint expressions in their conversation, which are rendered more remarkable by a sort of *nasal twang* which they have in speaking" (42). Pickering concurs with the Englishman, complaining of the "*drawling* pronunciation" found in New England (42n). He then offers the telling admission that, while "[o]ur peculiarities in *pronunciation*... would afford a subject for many remarks,... it is not within the plan of the present work to notice them" (42n). This passing glance at pronunciation is accompanied by the wishful observation that such a study "is becoming less necessary every day; as there is a general and increasing disposition to regulate our pronunciation" through the use of pronouncing dictionaries like Walker's (42n). American English vernacular thus becomes for Pickering a matter

of purely lexical oddities, rather than a complex phonetic and morphosyntactic system in need of further study.

What we find, then, from this overview of the “phonetic fever” permeating the early national period is that linguists’ search for a universally interpretable orthography was often accompanied by a desire for linguistic uniformity, for a “right way of talking” and the notion that other subaltern idioms would be subsumed into a national tongue. In the face of this prescriptivism the works of Southwestern vernacular humorists emerge in retrospect as a kind of supplement to the productions of these scholars. If Lieber, Pickering, DuPonceau and their contemporaries were responsible for more thoroughly instituting the idea that languages of all sorts, produced by all races, were not to be judged along a hierarchical axis, it was the Southwestern humorists who implemented this ideology by seeking out and more thoroughly representing the English vernacular of the southern and western peripheries of the early national US.

Southwestern Humor Beyond the Frame

For Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, one of the genre’s earliest practitioners, active seeking and active recording was an inherent part of the literary process. He describes his *Georgia Scenes* (1835), which became the model for many subsequent frame narratives, as more than “a mere collection of fancy sketches,” claiming that the work has a “higher object than the entertainment of the reader” (*Judge Longstreet* 164). The intent, rather, “was to supply a chasm in history which has always been overlooked—the manners, customs, amusements, wit, dialect, as they appear in all grades of society to an ear and

eye witness to them” (164).¹⁶ The statement emphasizes Longstreet’s documentarian desires for his work. Rather than simplistic, condescending set-pieces pitting high against low, gentleman against “backwoods barbarian,” Longstreet positions his writing as the filling-in of a sociohistorical lacuna. He also makes an explicit claim about the importance of bearing aural and visual witness to his subjects. Dialect, in other words, is not merely “flavor” added onto the characterization of his fictional cast, but an essential part of ethnographic, documentary representation. Obviously, statements of authorial intent do not nullify the critique represented by *cordon sanitaire*, but they do help to refashion Southwestern humor as a potential contributor to the growing ethnographic and linguistic pursuits beginning to flourish in the 1830s and 40s.

Longstreet’s claims to being “an eye and an ear witness” to the habitus and speech of the folk are by no means unique. In a similar vein, the frontier novelist William Gilmore Simms while acknowledging the vernacular author’s “desire to appear correct,” emphasized “the greater desire to be original and true” (quoted in Parks 114). An ardent critic of US reliance on British tastemakers, Simms saw Southwestern folklore and speech as defining literary elements that snubbed imitation and elitism by offering more regionally-oriented, ethnographic documents in their place. In an August 1844 oration he outlined a national “intellectual independence” as a literary enterprise tied to the textualization and preservation of specific people and their language, and looked forward to a literature (modeled on his own) that would depict the “self-speaking” of unique American voices. Underscoring the distinction “between writing for, and writing from one’s people,” Simms advocates for the latter, concluding that “[t]o write from a people,

¹⁶ Writing in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Edgar Allen Poe called the story collection an “omen of better days for the literature of the South.” See Justus 326.

is to write a people—to make them live—to endow them with a life and a name—to preserve them with a history forever” (*Views* 12). Thus, where phoneticians and spelling reformists looked forward to the eventual leveling of American English, to a homogenous speech expunged of its vernacular extremes, humorists like Longstreet and Simms, while recognizing the “desire to appear correct,” were even more desirous of a literature that could capture the ethnolinguistic diversity of the frontier.

It could be said that by taking on the privileged position of the ethnographer, these authors effectively screened themselves from being cast as subversives, willingly eroding the standards of spoken and written English. And in some instances they made an effort to dissociate themselves from their vernacular productions. In the preface to *Georgia Scenes* Longstreet was anxious to assure “those who have taken exceptions to the coarse, inelegant, and sometimes ungrammatical language which the writer represents himself as occasionally using” that this voice was “accommodated to the capacity of the person to whom he represents himself as speaking” (iv). He was, in other words, simply switching codes for the sake of his “yokel” subjects (and for the sake of entertainment). But for all the caginess of the disclaimer—which in its turgid diction strikes one as more performative than candid—it becomes clear that Longstreet was both capable of speaking a demotic, frontier English, and eager to capture this form as a means of authenticating himself and his other characters.

Moreover, the narrative distance that separates the author from his subjects is seldom as pronounced as he or his critics make out. Throughout the stories that comprise *Georgia Scenes*, Longstreet does not simply concoct a narrator-persona removed from the action and conversation of the text, but casts himself (often taking the name “Abram

Baldwin) as an integral character. One early story, “The Dance, A Personal Adventure of the Author,” finds Longstreet caught up in a country “frolick” in “one of the frontier counties” of Georgia and speaking, he writes, in his “native dialect” (12, 22). Many other tales in the collection feature scenes, settings, characters, and voices borrowed directly from Longstreet’s early life in rural Georgia.¹⁷ Indeed, the author makes a point of highlighting his intertwining of real and fictitious in the book’s preface. His sketches, he writes, “consist of nothing more than fanciful *combinations* of *real* incidents and characters,” and he further admits to “throwing into those scenes...some personal incident or adventure of my own, real or imaginary, as it would best suit my purpose; usually *real*, but happening at different times and under different circumstances from those in which they are here represented” (iii). The amalgam of ethnography, autobiography, and textualization of oral literature in Longstreet’s “fanciful combinations” results in a text that frustrates critical condemnation of the tales as fictional quarantines of speech.

The self-conscious declarations of Longstreet and Simms also reveal the development of a literary conceit that linked ethnographic and ethnolinguistic documentation to a more authentic national literature. Writing that featured reproductions of regional voices could claim to be adding to a literature “from the people” precisely because this literature represented the textualization of the idiomatic, regional speech of the people. Where critics suspicious of elitist claims to language documentation have seen only a policing of plural voices, there is in fact a need to

¹⁷ David Rachels has written convincingly of the autobiographical nature of *Georgia Scenes* in “A Biographical Reading of A.B. Longstreet’s *Georgia Scenes*,” in M. Thomas Inge and Edward J. Piacentino, eds., *The Humor of the Old South* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001) 113-129.

consider the value of such claims as earnest, and to interrogate how and why writers like Simms and Longstreet would feel compelled to offer not just a slapstick vernacular cast, but self-professed documents of dialect.

To take one example, Simms's often neglected frontier novel, *Guy Rivers: A Tale of Georgia* (1834), we find a consistent strain of ethnographic attention to speech, characterized by both lexical and phonetic renderings and descriptions. Throughout the text Simms takes careful note of the spoken nuances of the Georgia frontier, often interrupting the narrative to interject a definition of unfamiliar terminology. As the story's protagonist, a young plantation farmer from South Carolina named Ralph Colleton, winds his way into the gold-rich hills of North Georgia, the reader is treated to a number of lexical definitions particular to the region:

The *trace* (as some public roads are called in that region) had been rudely cut out by some of the earlier travellers through the Indian country, merely *traced* out—and hence, perhaps, the term—by a *blaze*, or white spot, made upon the trees by hewing from them the bark.... It had never been much travelled, and...had, therefore, become, at the time of which we speak, what, in backwood phrase, is known as a *blind-path* (274).

These lexicographical moments are repeated throughout the book, with frequent asides offering interpretations of local words such as “stands,” “thrip,” “fugleman,” and “sulkey” (283-284), as well as vernacular expression like “up a stump” (380). In addition to translations of regional words and phrases, Simms also parses the phonetic and syntactic constructions that make up the dialect of many of his frontier characters. In one instance, Mark Forrester, a frontiersman living in the settlement of Chestatee, describes to Colleton a Yankee peddler known for swindling other residents: “Why, he kin walk through a man's pockets, jest as the devil goes through a crack or a keyhole, and the money will naterally stick to him, jest as ef he was made of gum turpentine. His very

face is a sort of kining [coining] machine. His look says dollars and cents; and its always your dollars and cents, and he kines them out of your hands into his'n" (52). These bracketed glosses of phonetic spellings are an equally consistent part of the narrative. The effect is a romance inflected by moments of instruction in the regional speechways of the North Georgia mining settlements. The picaresque narrative, while focused on the constant adventures of Colleton and his clashes with outlaw types, tells through these sideline interjections another more linguistically invested story, one that becomes a resilient primer on the ethnolinguistic diversity of the frontier.

The novel, the first in a series of Simms's Border Romances, which include *Richard Hurdis* (1838), *Border Beagles* (1840), and *Beauchampe; or, The Kentucky Tragedy* (1842), represents itself a kind of borderland between romance and realist documentation. Simms was especially concerned with how the form of the romance could achieve status as a truthful recording of social practices, with speech being the focal point. As Mary Ann Wimsatt remarks, the author "theorized about romance throughout his life" (*The Major Fiction* 36), transforming the mythic and moral paradigms of romancers like Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper in "striking ways, in order to make plain the peculiar conditions of southern culture" (38).¹⁸ In an August 12, 1841 letter to *Magnolia* magazine editor Philip C. Pendleton, Simms wrote that the writer's goal was to "speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In this, in fact, lies the whole secret of his art. *A writer is moral only in proportion to his*

¹⁸ For more on Simms and his development of a realist mode, see Jan Bakker, "Simms on the Literary Frontier; or, So Long Miss Ravenel and Hello Captain Porgy: *Woodcraft* Is the First Realistic Novel in America," in John Caldwell Guilds and Caroline Collins, eds., *William Gilmore Simms and the American Frontier* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1997) 64-78; and Caroline Collins, "Simms's Concept of Romance and His Realistic Frontier," in *ibid.*, 79-91.

truthfulness” (*Letters* I:259). The statement deserves to be taken seriously as one that values “speaking the truth” (and we might note here the centrality of spokenness in Simms’s remarks) over and above easy moralizing. The trend in criticism of the novel’s languages (and Simms’s oeuvre in general) has been to take these kinds of self-conscious claims about documentation as so much subterfuge. The humorist’s urge to document, it is argued, results in a romantic text whose ultimate moral message was the condemnation of frontier idioms as a threat to the status quo of the antebellum South. In a now familiar critical turn, David W. Newton writes that the novel “reveals . . . underlying anxieties about the dangerous power that words can have in a democratic society” (“Voices Along the Border” 138). To the extent that the linguistic polyglossia of the frontier can be said to symbolize the “social chaos” of this border space, the argument is provocative as a sociocultural critique.

However, such criticisms, endemic to the critique of the romance as a whole, should not preempt the equally valid reading that Simms’s careful transcriptions were more than tropes, more than a moralizing containment of linguistic or cultural difference. As self-professed versions of “speaking the truth,” these dialectal depictions were also self-aware attempts to set down in writing speech that had been ignored both in the literature of the Northeast and by phoneticians and scholars who professed a wariness of Americanisms and the threatening polyglossia of the Anglo-American borderland. Newton himself observes that Simms’s “[r]epresentations of speech . . . reinforce our awareness as readers of just how malleable language actually is, how the forms of words are susceptible to change, especially along the Southern frontier where social conventions and cultural institutions have little power to fix established forms and meanings” (122).

Yet, despite the profound ethnographic and ethnolinguistic potential seen here, he persists in seeing such representations solely as indications of elitist anxiety. The process of coding speech in fictional texts like Simms's was, however, not a zero-sum game: authors were not either celebrants of linguistic diversity or elitist curmudgeons seeking to further distance themselves from an abject speech. They could, and did, hold to seemingly socially elitist positions *and*, for the sake of greater narrative truth, seek to make their portrayals of language as accurate as possible. Despite the generic and sociocultural framework of Simms's romances of the frontier, his actual accounts of its speech maintain a resilient realism.

The author's phonetic, syntactical, and lexical portrayals of North Georgia English can be seen as examples of what Edward E. Baptist terms "accidental ethnography": Southwestern humor writing that "incorporated elements of folk culture" in its portrayals of "everyday speech" ("Accidental Ethnography" 1362). Elaborating further, Baptist writes that "[e]ven when authors consciously made 'countrymen' the butts of jokes" the realist demands of the genre betrayed any "attempts at total class control within the text" (1363). Ethnographic and ethnolinguistic representations persisted, even in cases of socioeconomic or ethnic chauvinism, precisely because Southwestern humor writing was built on the folkloric impulse to conscript the oral culture of its subjects. Add to this the fact that authors, Simms and Longstreet among them, were often more invested in utilizing folk culture and folk speech to signal both their commitment to regional truth and their own anti-elitism and what we find is a generic form that effectively blurs the line between ethnographic document and tall-tale, the real and the "stretched," and one that deserves to be read as a complex conglomerate

of folkloric caricature and phonetic and syntactic documentation. Indeed, the work of these writers would help to institute the burgeoning interest in an objective approach to dialectology that permeated the last decades of the nineteenth century.

In many cases, the form of the humorists' texts find the tall-talker and the biographical/ethnographical "real" merged, and the space of the narrative was given over completely to the vernacular speaker. Such texts abandoned the safety of the Standard English frame and opted instead to present the direct address of character to reader without the buffer of "correct" commentary or introduction. Vernacular vehicles like the mock letter to the editor, a form employed by William Tappan Thompson and C.F.M. Noland, extended the Ploughjogger variety of simple misspellings and eye dialect and rendered speakers-cum-letter-writers as savvy regional commentators (Justus, *Fetching* 354). Of course, this kind of idiomatic impersonator was not necessarily a vehicle for accurate oral transcription. And yet, by conjuring up the nexus of vernacular speaker as author, writers sought to maintain the believability of their creations. In doing so they transformed the artifice of impersonation into an effort to retain authenticity—and again, the turn to a well-wrought vernacular became the favored strategy.

Such a turn was certainly the case with the collection of tales surrounding the embellished exploits of that icon of icons, Davy Crockett. During his career in Congress (1827-1831, 1833-1835) Crockett was the hero—and often the victim—of numerous newspaper accounts of his "colorful personality and his coonskin humor" (Blair 42). Unauthorized biographies and other tales purported to be true appeared throughout his congressional run, notably the anonymous *Sketches and Eccentricities of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee* (1833) (later revealed to have been written by Mathew St.

Clair Clarke¹⁹). Crockett himself responded to these “counterfits” with a similarly titled *A Narrative of the Life of Col. David Crockett of Tennessee* (1834) (written with the aid of fellow congressman Thomas Chilton). Along with Crockett’s widely covered and forever controversial death in 1836 at the battle of the Alamo, such documents helped to cement his demigod status as an American folkloric hero.

But the literature surrounding Crockett was also performing another task: converting specific regional speech and its textual representation into a sign of authenticity.

Emerson would recognize the power of this turn in a strictly literary context, predicting in an 1843 *Dial* essay that

Our eyes will be turned westward, and a new and stronger tone in literature will be the result. The Kentucky stump-oratory, the exploits of Boon and David Crockett, the journals of western pioneers, agriculturalist, and socialists, and the letters of Jack Downing, are genuine growths, which are sought with avidity in Europe, where our European-like books are of no value” (in Henry Nash Smith, *The American Writer and the European Tradition* 68).

In the case of Crockett himself, the backwoodsman’s Tennessee speech was transformed into a sign of genuine authorship. Because Crockett’s image, his “brand,” had such cultural capital at the time, he often found himself prone to an early national version of intellectual property theft. Like Clarke’s purported autobiography, other works attempted to use the Crockett brand—his image, his name, and, most importantly, his speech—to sell subscriptions. As we will see, by equating the capture of vernacular English with an “ethnography of the real,” and a cue to authenticity, these early works of Southwestern humor and folklore cemented a linguistic calculus equating vernacular representation and realism that extended well into the nineteenth century.

¹⁹ The work was originally attributed to James Strange French (a Virginian novelist) by Edgar Allen Poe, in the August 1836 volume of the *Southern Literary Messenger*.

It was the hugely popular *Crockett Almanack* (1835-1856) that did the most to propagate the vernacular of Crockett's outlandish capers. And it did so on a national scale. Like most other almanacs of the time, the *Crockett Almanack* contained diverse astronomical calculations and meteorological predictions; however, rather than being confined to a specific geographical location, the *Almanack* cited data "calculated for all States in the Union," indicating its intended widespread audience. By the end of its run in 1856, there were over fifty "annual" editions of the *Almanack*. It had changed publishing houses numerous times, listing printing imprints in Nashville, Boston, Baltimore, New York, New Orleans, and several other cities along the Eastern seaboard—again emphasizing the extent to which the text had found a national audience (as Walter Blair writes, "few homes were without one") (*Crockett* 3). In other words, these were not texts meant solely to promote Southwestern celebrations of regionality or, alternatively, Northeastern literati snobbery.

Throughout the 1840s and 50s, the almanac became a kind of clearing house for antebellum frontier ribaldry, recounting the tall-tales of "part-myth, part-man" figures like Mike Fink and Kit Carson, in addition to the increasingly racy (and frequently racist) whoppers of Crockett's posthumous backwoods biography. And indeed, by the middle of the century Crockett's life-as-legend had become a cottage industry,²⁰ with frequent reprints of his own *Narrative*, Clarke's biography, and other tales found in the "catchpenny" press throughout the US. In the *Almanack's* beginnings, however, during

²⁰ This "Crockett craze" would be repeated at the end of the 19th century with the publication of six Beadle & Adams dime novels featuring the folk hero's hunting escapades, as well as a popular melodrama, *Davy Crockett; Or, Be Sure You're Right*, running from 1872-1896, and shown over two thousand times until the death of its lead actor and creator, Frank Mayo, put an end to the enterprise (Blair, "Introduction" 4). And again, Disney Studios 1954-56 television release of "Davy Crockett" saw the resurgence of a similar coonskin fever, one that would result in the sale of seven million records of the show's theme song, and an overall merchandising boon producing a total gross of \$400 million in the two-and-a-half years that the program aired.

the latter half of the 1830s, it was still in an inchoate stage, and the generic conventions of American folklore documents, and Crockett folklore specifically, were not yet firmly in place. Within the broad humor of the tall-tale and the send-up of Crockett himself there was still space for an ambiguous ethnography, a documentary style that purported to be recording “real speech” as uttered by Crockett and his compatriots.

Like the frontiersman’s heroic persona, the tales published in the *Crockett Almanacks* existed in an equivocal realm between truth and fiction. This ambivalent status helps to foreground the ways that imaginative literature drew from and helped to establish the correspondence between the graphic representation of speech and a notion of a regionally authentic language—a correspondence that was becoming central to the epistemological terrain of early linguistics, and one that pushed the boundaries of this terrain in its exploration of the “facts and phenomena” of Crockett’s Tennessee vernacular.

The *Almanack’s* authorship and publication history were, and still are, shrouded in mystery. During 1835 and 1836, the first two years of its run, the almanac was sometimes issued with the imprint, “Printed for the Author,” indicating collaboration with Crockett himself. Many of these editions also announced their copyright by “Davy Crockett in the District Court of Tennessee” (though the use of the popular moniker “Davy”—which Crockett himself never used in his own authored works—makes this claim questionable at best). Despite scant evidence, the assumption that Crockett was involved in the production of the almanacs has frequently attended criticism surrounding their production. As late as 1970, historian Robb Sagendorph speculated that the first two compilations “are perhaps in [Crockett’s] own backwoods, boisterous, and amusing

idiom,” while noting that the “others were published by his heirs in Nashville, Tennessee” (*America and her Almanacs* 239). It is this equation between the actual Crockett’s “amusing idiom” and the graphical cues of the text itself that create the aura of an authentic document. Of course, the content of the tales—exaggerated yarns of obvious myth-making—seem to belie any attempt at realism. But these texts offer a complexity that transcends the simple recounting of canebrake whoppers. What they document is not simply Crockett’s surreal encounters with an outlandish frontier, but the speech of Crockett the storyteller, especially the phonetic, grammatical, and suprasegmental elements that came to define such speech. In other words, it is precisely because the narratives depicted in the *Crockett Almanacs* maintained a questionable authorship that they required the stylistic authority of oral encoding.

The first issue of the *Almanack* presents a short (auto)biography, told in a peculiar mix of Standard English and a Southwestern vernacular.²¹ It is filled with instances of “a”-prefixing (“I continued in this down-spirited situation for a good long time, until one day I took my rifle and started a hunting” (7)); solecisms (“This news was worse to me than war, pestilence, or famine; but I still knowed I could not help myself” (6); and “so to know her mind a little on the subject I began to talk about starting, as I knowed she would then show some sign from which I could understand which way the wind blowed” (8)); the appearance of distinctive Southwestern codswallops (“Just a little distance below them, there was a fall in the river, which went slap-right straight down slantindicular with a descent of *sixty feet* (4); phonetic renderings (“My eyes! here was a pretty

²¹ All excerpts are from Davy Crockett, *The Crockett Almanacs*, ed. Franklin J. Meine (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1955).

predickymment! I knowed they were panthers, and that they would be easier to master if it wasn't for their divilish sharp claws and teeth" (9); and outright "eye dialect" ("I gained lots of *applaws*" (38, emphasis in original)). Such nonstandard devices are a consistent element of the texts and work both to heighten their entertainment value and to highlight their speech-centered authenticity.

With the aid of prefatory material presented in a first person version of Crockett's Southwestern vernacular, the producers of the texts hoped to solidify their authentic origins. For instance, in the 1836 preface, titled "'Go Ahead' Reader" (after Crockett's widely publicized catchphrase "Be always sure you are right, then Go Ahead"), the author writes:

I had no idee when I first begun to write for the public that I should have such luck. I begin to think I've hit on the right track, and so I keep on. I don't doubt I shall not only be able to tree a little change, but also a little fame into the bargain. It is'nt every member of Congress that knows how to *authorise* as well as to speechify. And it remains to be larnt whether I shall go down to posteriors with the most credit as a Congressman, or a writer. (*Crockett Almanacks* 41)

The passage is representative of much of the writing found in the *Almanacks*, and is provocative for a number of reasons. First, while it contains only a handful of phonetic renderings of vernacular English (obvious examples are "idee" and "larnt") or grammatical improprieties ("*authorise*"—notably highlighted for effect), what is striking is the fact that the material contains no Standard English frame. Crockett (or, better, the Crockett persona) is the purported "I" of the narrative, and this first person perspective is carried throughout the various editions of the *Almanacks* without incursion from "schoolbook" prose. Only once, after Crockett's death in 1836, do we find the actual author(s) of the narratives breaking with this more immediate, frameless model; and even

this break of character is performed simply to perpetuate the myth of autobiographical transcription. In the 1837 *Almanack*, an “Explanatory Preface” offers a brief explanation for the “anomaly” of Crockett’s posthumous publication, assuring readers that “Col. Crockett had prepared the matter for this year’s Almanac before he went to Texas,” and adding the further windfall—“from a careful perusal of his manuscript writings”—that “there is enough to make six almanacs after the present one” (*Crockett Almanacks* 82). It becomes obvious from the orchestrations of both the vernacular voice of the narrative and the metatextual assertions about the *Almanack*’s authenticity that its producers sought to portray Crockett’s voice as a means of underscoring the correspondence between the text and actual speech, and between this speech and an authentic voice. In this way, the *Almanack* clearly participates in the activity of “clothing” speech in a material form, in presenting a document of vernacular that its creators hoped would be viewed as authentic, not because they wished to segregate Crockett himself as a debased speaker of non-standard English, but because they saw the implicit value of this speech as both a “seal of genuineness” and for its potential commercial (and, by extension, sociocultural) appeal.

Of course, even with all of the work that went into keeping the illusion of an originary document alive, we might still question the extent to which the *Almanacks* invoke Crockett’s speech as a legitimating force. After all, what the narrator is doing in the “Go Ahead” preface is “writ[ing] for the public,” not “speechifying.” We see clear evidence of this kind of attention to the act of writing throughout the Crockett preface as the narrator makes a case for his legacy—his “posteriors”—as a writer, rather than a congressional talker. We might surmise from such positioning that the text works to elevate the written document above purely oral forms of expression, that it is reinforcing

a hierarchical distinction that values writing and debases speech. And yet, the vernacular form that the text takes, a form meant at least in part to echo the aural and grammatical structures of speech, refutes such simplistic “lines in the sand.” As such, the narrative actually marshals the signs of orality—the phonetic truncations and variant pronunciations, the grammatical incongruities and idiomatic expressions—as a means of legitimating the text itself. In turn, the imaginative realm of Southwestern humor, and the *Crocket Almanacks* in particular, affirm the legitimacy of vernacular through the self-conscious approximation of speech forms as textual narrative devices.

In addition to the frequent appearance of these now iconic voice markers, the narratives seldom include a Standard English narrator. The *Almanac* tales, though often held up as originary documents of the Southwestern frame narrative, are for the most part lacking this “sterilizing” apparatus. It is thus hard to characterize the narratives as attempts to police cultural or linguistic propriety. Indeed, the sense that such textual encoding was not only novel but also threatening to established literary standards can be seen in the outcry the *Almanacks* provoked from newspaper critics, especially those in the Northeast. The October 17, 1836 *New Hampshire Patriot* called the *Crocket Almanack* “disgusting trash,” lacking the “tone of elevated and healthful moral sentiment” of *Poor Richard’s*, and, unlike this text, wholly devoid of “right views of human duty, as well as habits of good order, economy and virtue” (3). Another New Hampshire publication, the August 24, 1839 *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*, was even more offended, lashing out at the “miserable pamphlet” for being “filled with senseless, profane, indecent stories, directly calculated to promote vice, and make bad men worse” (2). The author

ends the critique with a final jab at the *Almanack* for being “low in language [and] indecent in taste” (2).

By encoding speech in writing, and by calling attention to this encoding process, the Southwestern tales were explicitly *authorizing*—in all senses of the term—vernacular English as a literary mode and as a legitimate dialect, with the result that established literary conventions and their Northeastern defenders saw little to enjoy and much to abhor. This is perhaps more particularly the case with the *Crockett Almanacks*, which employ the Crockett persona as a direct narrator, rather than a secondary character whose speech is offset by quotation within the texts, but the point still holds for many other examples of vernacular humor, even those that maintain a more conventional frame typology.

One corresponding example, Thomas Bangs Thorpe’s frequently anthologized²² “The Big Bear of Arkansas,” relates the story of its protagonist, “Big Bear” Jim Doggett, through the perspective of a more typical Standard English narrator. The story, which first appeared in the *Spirit of the Times* in 1841, represents the quintessential frame tale—with its aloof narrator, its “bull-roaring” raconteur protagonist, and its acute attention to the prosodic, phonetic, and morphosyntactic structures of speech. In 1932, critic Bernard DeVoto would confirm the story’s centrality to the Southwestern comic genre, giving the name “the Big Bear School” to the antebellum authors (Blair 48). “The Big Bear of Arkansas” is distinct from tales found in the *Crockett Almanacks* in its self-conscious depiction of the divide between the unnamed narrator of the story and the backwoods

²² As J.A. Leo Lemay points out, “The story has been reprinted in nearly every anthology devoted to American humor or specifically to Southwestern humor. All of the standard modern anthologies include it” (*Big Bear* 321). Anthologies of note include: Franklin J. Meine, *Tall Tales of the Southwest* (New York, 1930) 9-21; Walter Blair, *Native American Humor (1800-1900)* (New York, 1937) 337-348; Kenneth S. Lynn, *The Comic Tradition in America* (New York, 1958) 110-123; as well as several recent collections.

character of Doggett. And yet the net effect of its vernacular appropriation is strikingly similar: as the drama unfolds what we find is not a narrative condescension toward vernacular English, but self-referential fascination with the very process of textualizing speech forms and linguistic variants, and with what it means to enlist and encode such speech for the sake of both entertainment and ethnographic realism.

On its surface, the first part of the story presents a straightforward account of the Standard English narrator's detachment from and observation of his rowdier subjects—a narratorial distance perfectly in keeping with the critique of *cordon sanitaire*, and the ethnic and socioeconomic elitism that such distance entails. This narratorial stance also invokes the ethnographic aims that permeate much of the Southwestern comic genre. In fact, Thorpe's text goes further than the stories in the *Crockett Almanacks* in its illustration of the complex significance of many of the genre's conceits: creating texts that presume both to record speech from a privileged ethnographic position and, at the same time, to legitimate regional vernacular as proto-realistic narrative mode. Thus, "The Big Bear" can be read as a self-reflexive thematizing of the very tensions that reside within this dual effect of vernacular writing—emerging as a drama that works to erode the distance between the observer narrator and his vernacular subject, and between Standard English narration and vernacular tale telling. In essence, the story represents both a recording of the protagonist's idiom and its ultimate "takeover" of the text itself.

Early on, the narrator sets himself apart from the "heterogeneous character" of his shipmates as he embarks on an "up-country" Mississippi steamboat northbound from New Orleans (43). As Thorpe writes, he "made no endeavors to become acquainted with my fellow-passengers" (43). He is instead, we are told, a "man of observation," content

to “read the great book of character so favorably opened before him”—an indication of the “text-centric” nature of the narrator’s early foray into the ethnography of his subjects (71). Saying as much, he proceeds to take stock of his fellow passengers, a myriad group ranging from “the wealthy Southern planter and the pedler of tin-ware from New England” to “the land speculator, and the honest farmer,” as well as a “‘plentiful sprinkling’ of the half-horse and half-alligator species of men, who are peculiar to ‘old Mississippi’” (43).

This seemingly elitist detachment is troubled at the same time by a more pressing thematic undercurrent within the narrative—a self-reflexivity that surfaces the struggles of Thorpe’s story to come to terms with the textualization of “Big Bear” Doggett’s vernacular voice and the powerful immediacy of his speech. By exploring the story’s deeper motifs, what we find is not a fiction that sanitizes Southwestern speech, but a complex, self-aware exploration of the very process of encoding spoken, regional forms of language, and the “authorization,” the ennobling, of non-standard speech created by such codification. Viewed this way, the progression of the story, moving from the narrator’s early observations of the “ship of fools” to Doggett’s oral takeover of the narrative, can be read as a story of vernacular’s ascendance (if also its somewhat brash intrusion) onto the literary-linguistic scene.

The story is acutely aware of the separation between text and speech. This division is enacted as an actual physical distancing of the narrator, who, upon encountering his steamboat subjects, seeks shelter behind the textual material of the “latest papers” and begins “more critically than usual” to “examine[] its contents” (43). At this point in the story, we read, the urbane narrator is “busily employed in reading”

while his companions are “more busily still employed, in discussing such subjects as suited their humors best” (43). The narrative thus sets up the topos of a division between the written and the spoken—the narrator, while immersed in the business of the textual document, is surrounded by the oral discussion of his shipmates, but can offer only an abstracted description of their dialogue.

Doggett’s entrance, however, overturns this conventional division and the narrative detachment that it signifies. We hear the “Big Bear’s” voice before we are actually introduced to him. And the introduction, for our narrator and his companions, is presented as a moment of acute shock: they are “most unexpectedly startled by a loud Indian whoop uttered in the ‘social hall’” (43). This disembodied voice, characterized strikingly as Native American (an echo perhaps of its heightened orality as well as its “other” status²³), interjects itself not only into the “social hall” of the ship, but also into the textual contours of the narrative itself. The “whoop” is followed by a “loud crowing,” which Thorpe writes was “quite common in that *place of spirits*,” a phrase whose double entendre—referring both to drink and to the ghostly, disembodied origins of the voice itself—is emphasized through italicization (emphasis in original 43). One effect of this appearance of the spectral whoop and crow is to signal the keen orality of Doggett’s speech to come. Where the narrative has up to this point been focused on segregating the textual and the spoken, the impact of these sounds marks a turning point from the privileged perspective of the narrator to the vernacular protagonist of Doggett himself.

²³ Philip Deloria explores this identification with Indianness as a strategy for signaling Euro-American authenticity in *Playing Indian*. See especially chapter three on “Literary Indians and Ethnographic Objects.”

Doggett's dramatic entrance is attended by the first actual quotation in the text, signaling his central position as speaker, as well as his eventual dominance as the mouthpiece of the tall-tales that follow. Proceeding his initial wordless shouts, Doggett makes an equally startling physical and verbal appearance. We read that he "stuck his head into the cabin, and hallooed out, 'Hurra for the big Bar of Arkansaw!'" (43). His exclamation announces more than his emergence in the text, however, it also conditions a celebratory air—the narrative's overall exaltation of the vernacular hero and his speech. While the actual lexical and phonetic features of this initial statement are not profoundly different from Standard English, the use of the colloquial interjection "Hurra," as well as the phonetic rendering of "Bar" for "bear" and the phonetic spelling of "Arkansaw," indicate in their variance from the preceding text both a turn to a more concerted focus on recording the oral productions of Doggett, and a kind of transference of power from Standard English narration to the vernacular idiom. As J.A. Leo Lemay has argued, Thorpe's story ultimately reveals "the superiority of the loquacious gamecock of the wilderness" ("Text, Tradition, and Themes" 323); and Thorpe himself provides additional valorization of the loquacious Doggett, who upon entering the scene, is described by the narrator, as "the hero of these windy accomplishments" (43). It is essential here to note that Doggett's presumed superiority, his eventual dominance over "the urbane narrator" and his later interlocutors becomes a matter of his "loquaciousness," his "windy" speech.

At the same time, the text does signal a certain ambivalence and anxiety about this vernacular "takeover." After the protagonist's initial bull-roaring announcement, "all conversation dropped," and "in the midst of this surprise," we read, "the 'big Bar' walked into the cabin, took a chair, put his feet on the stove, and looking back over his shoulder,

passed the general and familiar salute of ‘Strangers, how are you?’”(43). Following this salute, he “expressed himself as much at home as if he had been at ‘the Forks of Cypress,’ and ‘prehaps a little more so’” (43). Doggett’s physical and verbal presumption of familiarity, with his posturing, his manifestation of a “homey” atmosphere, and the vernacular metathesis represented in “prehaps,” produces not only a “drop” in conversation, but also incites a sharp-edged, albeit short-lived, astonishment and anger among the other passengers (43). This tension soon gives way, however, to a transition into acceptance: “in a moment every face was wreathed in a smile” as “[t]here was something about the intruder that won the heart on sight,” and, it is presumed, “on sound” as well (43).

Doggett is introduced to the ship’s inhabitants and engages in a series of interchanges with various travelers, including a “Yankee,” a “cynical looking hoosier,” and a “gentlemanly foreigner,” (a man suspected of being English based, as the narrator writes, on “some peculiarities of his baggage”) (43). These interlocutors question the Big Bear’s claims about Arkansas’s natural fecundity: “a wild turkey weighing forty pounds,” potatoes and beets that grow overnight, and an overall largess and largeness bestowed by the land and its place. “Arkansaw is large,” Doggett boasts, “her varmints ar large, her trees ar large, her rivers ar large, and a small mosquito would be of no more use in Arkansaw than a preaching in a canebrake” (43). These whoppers do more than represent the spirit of backwoods bullroaring, however. They also work to heighten the prominence of the region as a natural and a spiritual place set apart from other locales and other people.²⁴ Ultimately, the size and unique qualities of Arkansas’s productions

²⁴ Lemay draws a convincing comparison between these boasts and early American promotional tracts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writing that “[s]uch exaggerations were characteristic of the

become manifest in Doggett himself, and his stories of bear hunting in the new state become the sole focus of the remainder of the narrative. As Lemay comments, “Thorpe makes the gamecock of the wilderness immediately dominate the crowd on board the boat” (324). Throughout the story he is referred to as ‘our hero,’ and, Lemay concludes, “though the tone of these references may be mocking, the authorial voice behind the supercilious persona is not” (324).

This heroic stature and reverential treatment extends as well to Doggett’s speech, which is represented not as dashed-off “flavor,” but as a folkloric object that demands an impartial ear and eye. To this end, Thorpe’s text offers moments of acute self-awareness concerning questions about the act of dictating, and making permanent, an oral form that derives power from its orality, from its impermanence. We see this kind of ethnographic self-reflection less in the use of phonetic spelling—which is admittedly spare—than in the pronouncement the narrator makes about the importance of accurate global and prosodic speech representations. We read that the Big Bear’s “manner was so singular, that half of his story consisted in his excellent way of telling it, the great peculiarity of which was, the happy manner he had of emphasizing prominent parts of his conversations. As near as I can recollect, I have italicized them, and given the story in his own words” (43). These italicizations offer a kind of modal reorientation of the character’s speech designed to more closely approximate Doggett’s “happy manner” of talking. Doggett himself announces the importance of the author’s forays into

earliest American promotional tracts. By the early seventeenth century, the anti-American literature commonly burlesqued these ‘lubberland’ motifs, and so later promotion tracts, like Nathaniel Morton’s *New English Canaan* (1636), John Hammond’s *Leah and Rachel* (1656), and George Alsop’s *A Character of the Province of Maryland* (1666), mocked the tradition within the promotion tracts themselves. Burlesques of the tracts...are thereafter a common motif of American literature. And much of the material and humor of Thorpe’s story is directly descended from this tradition” (324).

ethnographic storytelling. At one point in the story, just before beginning the long account of his mythic “Big Bear” hunt, he commends the narrator for simply being willing to seek out these folk stories, the implication being that most have simply passed them off as whimsical whoppers of little merit. “But in the first place, stranger, let me say, I am pleased with you, because you ain’t ashamed to gain information by asking, and listening” (43). The act of listening, of inquiry, is in the end another dominant motif in “The Big Bear of Arkansas.” We understand from Doggett’s praise of the narrator and from Thorpe’s own reflections on the sound and rhythms of his character’s speech, that impartial listening is essential in order “to gain information”—in terms of both ethnography and the act of reading itself. Such testaments of accuracy and impartiality reveal Thorpe’s early commitment to the documentation of speech. They also represent a first glimmer of the deployment of realist self-reflection designed to mark the text as a capture of spoken rhythms apparently at odds with normative practices. Stories like “The Big Bear of Arkansas” are thus essential to tracing later realist deployments of textualization of speech.

A similar self-reflection permeates George Washington Harris’s understudied Sut Lovingood stories. The late antebellum tales expose the many formal and thematic components of Southwestern vernacular literature that emerge when viewed through the lens of early national language study. While appearing later than the other narratives I examine in this section, these texts reflect a culmination of the genre’s many innovations: its anti-authoritarian and anti-prescriptivist stance, its positioning of regional English vernacular as a legitimate narrative voice, and, most of all, its self-reflexive account of the process of “writing speech.”

Harris grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee and was a contributor throughout the 1840s to Porter's *Spirit of the Times*, writing broad humorous pieces on hunting and sporting set in the eastern mountains of his home state. But it was not until the 1867 publication of his popular story collection, *Sut Lovingood, Yarns Spun by a Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool*, that he achieved national recognition as an adept author of vernacular humor. The pieces in the collection are admittedly difficult to read, not only for their heavily manipulated orthography, but also for what Andrew Silver has rightly called their "racist invective, pornography, and outright sadism" (*Minstrelsy and Murder* 49). Sut is, to be sure, an incendiary figure, representing in the words of Edmund Wilson "all that was worst in the worst of the South" (quoted in Silver 50). The character has routinely been panned as the ventriloquist's dummy to Harris's reactionary politics, a trickster type who comes to represent the roguish spirit and the patriarchal racism of the "ideal Old South" (Silver 53). At the same time, Harris has also been celebrated as the vernacular predecessor to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn and William Faulkner's Jason Compson, one whose unorthodox language "jumps the frame" and inaugurates the dialectal realism that would later characterize both postbellum local color writing and the vernacular experimentation of the early twentieth century. As Stephen Ross writes, "Harris's special legacy to American literature is his almost total use of the yokel as narrator. He lets Sut do virtually all the talking, moving the authority of a 'reported' tale away from the educated 'frame' to the rustic himself" ("Jason Compson and Sut Lovingood" 238). Both of these lines of approach, the denunciatory and the celebratory, despite their sociocultural and aesthetic insights, have tended to sidestep critical and historical inquiry into the actual vernacular form that Harris's text takes, and the ways that it prompts

questions about the very transcriptive mode employed. In many ways the conversations that Harris creates between his vernacular character and his own narrator persona, “George,” enact similar dialogs that had been occurring below the surface of his Southwestern predecessors’ work. This dialog thus becomes a kind of temporal pivot point, a moment in which the text looks forward to figures like Twain, Charles Chesnutt, and Joel Chandler Harris, and backward to a similar self-reflexiveness evidenced throughout the Southwestern humor writing of the antebellum.

Despite his relative obscurity today, Harris’s contemporaries marked something special in the vernacular “turn” of Sut’s speech. In an article for April 1882’s *The Century* magazine, Henry Watterson commented that the character “tells his own story in the wildest East Tennessee jargon, being a native of that beatific region, and is, of course, the hero of his own recitals” (886). Watterson figures Sut as less a fictional character than an actual speaker from an actual locale. Such characterization was one effect of Harris’s move to let Sut “tell his own story” by removing the Standard English frame.

Unlike contemporaneous spellers and pronouncing guides, Harris does not condemn Sut’s language as a corrupted form, but works to promote it both as a viable storytelling medium and as an accurate transcription of actual speech. By ushering Sut into this unmediated position, he signals the legitimacy of the character’s English vernacular and the orthographic “oddities” used to represent it. Watterson remarks that the “orthography is really original” and “not at all imitative,” and reasons that it is a “genuine transcription” as the “author of the book lived and died among the scenes he describes” (886). This sense of the genuineness of the text is, thus, a combined product

of Harris's status as a native to the region, the promotion of Sut as a biographical figure, and the orthographic strategies the author uses to capture the speech of his character.

Harris's work represents more than a straightforward recognition and elevation of regional English. His text also self-referentially engages important questions about the process of textualizing speech as a storytelling conceit and as a strategy for signaling a novel sense of ethnographic authenticity. The title page of the collection is the first cue that reveals its overall concern with the materiality of speech and the link between ethnographic realism and the textual encoding of the storyteller's voice. It is, we read a series of "yarns spun"—a phrase indicative of the idiomatic tales to come. Moreover, the subtitle informs us, these tales are "Warped and Wove for Public Wear." The metaphors of fabric and clothing, while ostensibly referring to the actual telling of the tale, also point up the process of transforming Sut's speech into a text. The tales are "spun" in the sense that they are told by the folk figure of Sut, but they are also given textual materiality in that they are written down, authored by Harris. This dual telling of orality and textuality is further indicated by the inclusion of two bylines: one referring to Sut in the colloquial—"by a Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool"—and the other to Harris himself. Again, the effect is to signal both the oral "tale spinning" of the folk narrator and the writerly act of authoring that captures these tales in their immediacy.

While there were other non-fictional texts that began to appear in the mid-nineteenth century that recognized ethnic and regional differences in American English—texts like John Bartlett's 1848 *Dictionary of Americanisms* and Samuel Kirkham's *English Grammar in Familiar Lessons*²⁵—these works were also consciously focused on

²⁵ Kenneth Cmiel points out that Kirkham "was among the first American linguists to indicate some awareness of ethnic variation" ("A Broad Fluid Language" 919). His best-selling *Familiar Lessons* also

policing “proper” modes of speaking, rather than presenting descriptive, objective occurrences of variant linguistic forms as interesting in their own right, or, more to the point, in considering the textual modes for recording such variances. It is this self-conscious conversation that represents one of vernacular humor’s profound contributions to the discourse of language studies.

A more obvious example of this conversation appears in the preface to *Yarns Spun*, which opens with an actual dialog between the author and his trickster protagonist about the need for a legitimating introductory gesture. Harris, taking on the persona of “George,” writes: “You must have a preface, Sut; your book will then be ready. What shall I write?” (ix). Sut’s response, which dominates the remainder of the preface, is profound not only for its status as a face-to-face dialog—insinuating the equal footing of narrator and subject, as well as giving the character standing as a kind of biographical figure—but also for the metatextual and self-referential questions it poses about the act of speech transcription, about the ethnographic approach to and use of vernacular English, and about the locus of authority in texts that presume to “speak for another” through the textual encoding of that other’s speech. He replies: “Well, ef I must, I must; fur I s’pose the perduktion cud no more show hitself in publick wifout hit, than a coffin-maker cud wif out black clothes. . . . But ef a orthur *mus*’ take off his shoes afore he goes into the publick’s parlor, I reckon I kin du hit wifout durtyin my feet, fur I hes socks on” (ix).

The rumination is striking first as a dialog concerned with the function of the preface as a literary apparatus. As Sut insinuates, the preface takes shape as a textual cue of literary

made a point of illustrating various provincial phrasings. For instance, Kirkham writes that “*The keows be gone to hum, neow, and I mer goin arter um*” was the New England equivalent of “*The cows are gone, and I am going after them*”; and offers the Irish-English “*Let us be after pairsing a wee bit*” as a variant of the “correct” “*Let us parse a little*” (quoted in Cmiel 919).

propriety—it is a gesture meant to ingratiate the work with its parlor-room audience.

However, the vernacular dialog that Harris employs turns the preface on its head, calling into question the need for such propriety and poking fun at the conventional expectation.

The rumination is also striking as it attempts through its self-referential transformation of the character into an interlocutor, as well as its flagrant misspellings and more concerted orthographic manipulations of the character’s phonetic and syntactical variations, to establish the idea that what readers are encountering is not simply quoted text but an actual voice. Sut’s next comment does more to condense the preoccupations of vernacular writing with the textuality of speech and the tensions implicit in the positioning of the speaker as both a character and a legitimate producer of phonetic knowledge:

Sumtimes, George, I wishes I cud read an' write, jis' a littil; but then hits bes' es hit am, fur ove all the fools the worild hes tu contend wif, the edicated wuns am the worst; they breeds ni ontu all the devilment a-gwine on. But I wer a-thinkin, ef I cud write mysef, hit wud then *raley* been my book. I jis' tell yu now, I don't like the idear ove yu writin a perduckshun, an' me a-findin the brains. (x)

Sut’s speech invokes the iconoclasm that is a recurrent theme in the Southwestern vernacular genre. He calls into question the authority of “the edicated wuns,” and thus destabilizes in the substance of his commentary precisely what is being called into question by the phonetic form his words take: by whose authority, he implicitly asks, are standards (especially linguistic ones) set? The text is also evocative for its self-reflexive musings on the process of encoding speech and the effect such encoding has on subject-speakers. In Sut’s wish to “write myself,” to make the work “*raley*...my book,” he raises provocative questions about the equation of authenticity and speech even while enacting that very equation in the phonetically rendered code of his words. In other words, Sut

appears as an authentic vernacular character who questions his own representation by Harris. These textual acrobatics supply a conversation that was missing from earlier transcriptive work of language scholars. While deploying a combination of phonetic and morphosyntactic depictions and more obvious examples of eye dialect (“tu” for “to,” “yu” for “you,” etc.), Harris also supplements his transcriptive dialog with another metatextual dialog about the power differential between transcriber and speaker.

In looking further back to earlier examples of Southwestern humor writing, we find many of these same self-referential expressions present in the texts—a concern with the process of lending speech a novel material form, and of producing a version of orthographically rendered vernacular that at the very least assumes an air of accuracy. It is easy to dismiss these early conventions of comedic vernacular as conventions only, borrowings that perpetuate non-existent forms of speech, or that invent English vernacular as a way of dismissing the frontier’s lower class, its disruptive addition to a national picture of propriety. But throughout the many examples explored in this chapter what is found is an ongoing attempt to assert vernacular realism as an index to actual ethnographic and folkloric documentation. Humorists were beginning to model dialog that approached literary speech from the position of the documentarian, and helped to bring into focus the generic gains to be had in importing such models. They show little compunction about authorizing non-standard forms of speech as central to the task of tale-telling and particularly suited to disaggregating American letters from both the perceived “stuffiness” of the literary Northeast and the European inheritances of “highfalutin” literary modes. “By their own choice,” Justus argues, “their kind of writing was of marginal significance to any national agenda that would either repress or

unleash deviant language” (*Fetching* 362). In other words, it was precisely because the popular Southwestern humorists were peripheral to the high-toned ideological debates over “the future of American language and literature” that they could experiment more fully with subaltern voices. They were not apologists for deviance, or defenders of propriety, but quite simply documentarians of an Anglo-European frontier where no one had yet dared to “take up by the pen” differences of speech and community.

Chapter 3

Beyond Language Anxiety: Local Color and Emergent Language Studies

Introduction

It was inevitable that the use of dialect should grow with the wider diffusion of the impulse to get the whole of American life into our fiction. This impulse, partly conscious and partly unconscious, is what has given us the rank we shall be found hereafter to have taken in the literature of our age, and which, whether it has given us great American novels or not, has expressed the national temperament, character, and manner with a fulness not surpassed by contemporary fiction in the case of any other people. It may be said to have begun where our literature began, in New England, and Lowell's accurate and exquisite study of the Yankee dialect in the Biglow Papers was the first work of the kind that was truly artistic, or of the effect that I mean.

—William Dean Howells, 1895

According to Howells, dialect literature is national literature. The dominant thesis of his June 8, 1895 “Life and Letters” column is that dialect set American literature apart, gave it “rank” by granting it a nationally unique voice, expressive of a nationally unique “temperament, character, and manner” (531). It is unfortunate, then, Howells writes later on in the article, that the “general reader” has developed a “disgust for ‘dialect’,” and, in a fit of generic fatigue, “has ‘got tired’ of it” (532). Because, if readers have gotten tired of anything, it is not dialect, but the baleful misspelling and frivolous burlesque of mere vernacular comedy. “Probably,” he concludes, “if [the reader] would or could acquaint himself with the difference, he would find that he had been suffering less from dialect than he supposed, and more from orthographic buffoonery” (532). Howells refuses, however, to “attempt [the] enlightenment” of his readers when it comes to the essential difference between the two. Instead he offers a tautology: good dialect literature is

“artistic,” it is composed of “carefully distinguished local accents and locutions” rather than “wild grotesqueries” of spelling (532). How to distinguish “careful” artistry from “wild” comedy? The one is literary, Howells tells us, the other is not; dialect literature is a document of “the whole of American life,” while vernacular buffoonery is just tiresome. Such circularity is the byproduct of Howell’s dual claims for dialect: first, in a bit of literary-historical sleight of hand, to assert dialect literature as a sui generis genre defined against its own clownish, non-literary shadow; and secondly, to deploy this whole-cloth category as the sign of an exceptional national canon.

Critical appraisals of dialect literature have gone to great lengths to question the second claim. The idea that this writing stemmed from an impulse to populate American fiction with real American voices represents the fundamental baffle to dialect criticism, past and present. From George Krapp’s 1925 *The English Language in America* to Gavin Jones’s more recent *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (1999), critics have asked how speech that seemed so peculiar to a local region, to a local color, to different nationalities or marginal races, could become the transcendent symbol of a unified “national temperament.” The overwhelming answer has been that dialect authors created a version of this real America using rather unreal speech forms. Like a collection of Americana, dialect fiction put quirkiness on display, highlighting linguistic whimsy, oddity, and otherness as a symbol of national exceptionality. It was, however, otherness couched in fiction. Language difference, so this line of reasoning goes, was simultaneously broadcast and domesticated within the pages of literature and made palatable to a mono-vocal, mono-racial, mono-classed audience. Yet, in arguing that dialect fiction was more fiction than dialect, that it was a

socio-cultural containment strategy rather than a commitment to the study of actual English variants, we have been inclined to accept Howells's circular argument about dialect literature's exceptionality. In our search for a narrative that would explain the emergence of dialect on the literary scene, we have implicitly encouraged the idea of dialect writing as a discrete category rather than a diverse set of practices informed by an equally complex universe of language theory and study circulating in the postbellum period. And, in perpetuating the hazy emergence of a genre, we have overlooked Howell's oddly specific last statement in the above epigraph, referring to James Russell Lowell's *The Biglow Papers* (2nd series, 1867) as a founding document of dialect literature.

Howells's commentary about Lowell's *Papers* offers an entry point for rethinking the composite forces that resulted in a new conception of dialect literature as a genre and a national literary emblem following the Civil War. While concerned with the "great American novel" as an outgrowth of the impulse toward dialect, Howells's founding document of this form is actually a series of fictional letters and satirical poems written in dialect and published piecemeal in *The Atlantic Monthly* throughout the War. The form of the novel, in other words, was not immediately essential when it came to the foundations of "our literature." What mattered was the presence of dialect speech. Howells does not refer to *The Biglow Papers* as a poetry collection, never mind a novel; he calls the text an "accurate and exquisite study."²⁶ A study, in this instance, entails a

²⁶ There were, of course, many potential definitions of "study" circulating in the period. The *OED* (2nd edition) offers several that might apply, including: "mental labour, reading and reflection directed to learning, literary composition, invention, or the like"; "the cultivation of a particular branch of learning or science"; and "mental effort in the acquisition *of* (some kind of learning); attentive reading *of* (a book, etc.), or careful examination or observation *of* (an object, a question, etc.)." The wider signification of the word is interesting to note as it becomes a kind of catch-all that could apply to multiple disciplines. In the case

methodology, a strategy for studying and for measuring the degree to which the subject matter has been accurately portrayed. Such methodological rigor, Howells indicates, is what makes a work “truly artistic”: accuracy and exquisiteness are equated; the rigor of science can be witnessed in this new literature and can be used to assess its aesthetic merits.

This small passage works against the grain of Howells’s tautological assertions about the emergence and the role of dialect literature. It speaks subtly about the fluidity of writing that incorporated dialect, and about how this writing could exist between, or outside, the boundaries of still-nascent genres. It also offers more specific terms for distinguishing the artistry of literary dialect: such writing, Howells implies, works by enlisting the ethos of scientific objectivity and by conforming to the demands of linguistic accuracy. But why did this new barometer of objective accuracy appear at this postbellum moment? What contributed to the idea that dialect changed with Lowell, that it was, as Howells implies, beholden to document actual voices and disavow lazy buffoonery? Rather than repeat the assumption of a distinct dialect canon, I seek to examine what lies behind this assumption: the ideological and disciplinary forces that resulted in the conception of a separate literary field.

The generic and disciplinary fluidity of Howells’s slight literary history of Lowell exposes two similarly mutable categories in the immediate post-War environment of *The Biglow Papers*: the idea of “the literary” and the still-formative discipline of linguistics. Literature, at this time, was a conceptual category still very much under construction. The term had not yet shed its more general late-eighteenth-century meaning, which

of Howells’s particular use, the word and its modifiers occupy the semantic space between objective rigor and aesthetic grace.

included not only original, imaginative work in prose or poetry, but also travel, history, philosophy, natural science, and almost any other subject deemed worthy of writing about.²⁷ While monumental works like *The Scarlet Letter*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Moby-Dick* now form the prototype for the literary narrative, there was, especially in the social, political, and cultural tumult that followed the War, no instituted form that dominated an imaginative idea of “the literary.” This plastic status requires, as Jonathan Arac has written, “acknowledging the problem of ‘genre,’ that is, the problem of defining different kinds of writing” (*Emergence* 2). How such “different kinds of writing” incorporated concepts within the emergent field of linguistics, and how this incorporation consolidated and re-theorized what it meant to write dialect literature are the key questions motivating this chapter.

As we saw in the previous chapter, mid-nineteenth-century linguistics was a disciplinary changeling, still grappling with fundamental questions about subject matter, method, and its relative place among the other sciences. Early in the century, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Franz Bopp, and others had insisted that a true science of language would focus on structural comparisons and analyses rather than criticism or explication of obscure classical texts. Scientists of language were responsible, as the recurring phrase went, for studying language, not languages. The tenets of what came to be called “comparative philology” or “comparative grammar” (a term introduced by Schlegel in 1803) precipitated a decades-long conversation about what to call this fledgling field and what its true objectives were as a science. The discussion persisted at least into the 1860s, when, as we shall see, prominent scholars in

²⁷ In *The Emergence of American Literary Narrative, 1820-1860*, Jonathan Arac examines the emergence of the twentieth-century notion of “American literature” as a generic consolidation that forgets the many conceptual categories once included under the umbrella of “literature.” See especially pp 2-5.

Germany, Britain, and the US had still not rallied around a definitive field descriptor and were still engaged in a heated debate over just what kind of science the science of language was.

Dialect literature demands further interrogation as a participant in the strange and often uncategorizable “different kinds of writing” that populate the immediate postbellum era. Incorporating field recordings, etymologies and vocabularies, and a new, often self-announced, rigor when it came to representing nonstandard forms of spoken English in a written format, these texts merged the scientific with the literary. Such works are not, however, simply amalgamations of preset genres and disciplines; they are not merely “cross-disciplinary” or “hybrid” texts, because they begin to appear at a moment when neither literature nor linguistics had been fully encapsulated by generic or disciplinary institutions—the professional organization, the journal, the academic department—or the discourses that accompanied these institutions. Instead, they can be seen as part of a larger literary-linguistic field of “emergent language studies”: works that would traditionally be considered imaginative literature, but that were also invested in speech transcription, in understanding the phonological and grammatical constructs of spoken language, and in tracing its etymological origins. While their focus was the material of language itself, the mouthpieces for that language were fictional characters, poetic narrators, and the like. Ultimately, these texts are not just reflections of a professional, political, generic, or disciplinary ideology, but studies that draw freely from a much less compartmentalized literary and scientific environment, and offer one lens through which to see the aggregation of disciplinary and generic discourses.

The central literary case studies in this chapter are precisely those “different kinds of writing” which are not easily pigeon-holed by twenty-first-century categorization, and which demand a more careful appraisal of the generic and disciplinary blending possible at this time. Each example, from James Russell Lowell’s second series of *The Biglow Papers* and Edward Eggleston’s *The Hoosier School-Master* (1871) to Mark Twain’s “A True Story Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It” (1874), exhibit elements that unsettle what we have come to think of as literary narrative by including linguistic material meant to be informative and instructive, rather than simply entertaining. Paratextual material such as prefaces, introductions, and footnotes, as well as underlying, and often self-consciously announced, claims toward documentary or non-fictional status, all contribute to the “studied aspect” these texts transmit. In almost all cases, the aim of such paratexts was to point up the fact that the work of dialect was not “hap-hazard,” as Twain remarks in his well-known preface to *Huckleberry Finn*, but “pains-taking,” that it was defined by methodological attention to actual voices and actual lingual constructions: that it was in fact a form of linguistic scholarship in action.

Dialect writing throughout the 1860 and ’70s was intertwined with the ideological concepts introduced by high-profile figures like William Dwight Whitney and Max Müller, and generated access to the regional speech of the US more artfully and more exactly than Noah Webster, John Russell Bartlett, or other lexicographers of the time. And authors (as well as reviewers and other language scholars) saw their work as an intrinsic part of this linguistic conversation. Unlike the caricatures of antebellum vernacular humorists—the Artemus Wards, and Petroleum V. Nasbys who became the convenient whipping-boys of critics—James Russell Lowell’s Hosea Biglow was not

simply a straight-shootin' Yankee fiction, he was a representative of the New England *lingua rustica*. Similarly, Edward Eggleston's Bud Means and the rest of the Flat Creek characters in *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* were not merely comic caricatures, but were seen as authentic depictions of Southwestern Hoosier speech.

The next section begins with a brief overview of the history of anxious attitudes toward language difference in the late nineteenth century, examining how this cultural ideology has dominated the history and social theorization of dialect literature and linguistics. In addition to the narrative of anxiety, I propose a deeper historical examination of mid-nineteenth-century linguistics as a public enterprise. Rather than an insular and fully formed academic discipline, the science of language was actually a pursuit that took place in public forums and was talked about widely in publications like the *New York Times*, the *North American Review*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. This wider public conversation about language structures was a key part of the emergent language studies developed by the literature of the period, as we will see in examinations of the paratextual arguments and the more general textual assertions made by the major figures of postbellum dialect fiction. Indeed, these arguments parallel contemporary claims being made by Whitney and Müller throughout the 1860s and '70s. Their claims reached the public by way of their public lectures and their spirited debate within the pages of the *North American Review*. The lectures and the debate are explored in detail before moving into an analysis of more imaginative language studies put forward in the narratives of Lowell, Eggleston, Twain, and others.

Authenticity and Anxiety

The ideological milieu that literary historians have highlighted during the aftermath of the Civil War is one of anxiety over language difference, over speech that veered from what was thought of as “standard.” The tale is a familiar one: following the mass migrations and immigrations of Reconstruction, the postwar surge in communication technologies, the rise in public education, and increased access to newspapers, journals, and other print media, linguistic anxiety over a standard American English was at its peak. Language mavens and newspaper critics hotly debated a standardized spelling system that would move beyond the vagaries and peculiarities of Webster; others argued over the extent to which English was “omnivorous,” and whether “useful foreign words” should be “granted [...] full citizenship” (Schele de Vere 4); there was widespread fear over the corruptive effects of “low” speech and slang as urbanization brought class echelons closer and closer together. Above all, according to the story being told by literary historians, anxiety reigned over those who counted themselves speakers of “standard” English, and this anxiety had a direct impact on the shape of the literary market.

One group of mid-Victorian language watchdogs, the verbal critics, has come to represent the public face of fear directed at speech variation in the US. Most often associated with regular newspaper columns outlining the failures of contemporary speech and speakers, verbal critics saw themselves as the standard-bearers of good English. Works like G.W. Moon’s *Bad English Exposed* (1868), Richard Grant White’s *Words and Their Uses* (1870), and William Mathews’s similarly titled *Words: Their Use and Abuse* (1876) were tremendously popular throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century. Such texts were dedicated to a notion of language borrowed from past romantic

ideas about the intrinsic connection between language and nation. For the critics, language was not simply a means of communication, it was *representative*—language, and the words, word-parts, and other grammatical structures that it comprised, was a living thing, imbued with national, racial, even spiritual significance. As such, any affront to language, through misuse, mispronunciation, or, worse, corruption through contact with foreign or ethnically isolated speakers, became an affront to the whole character of the nation. As White wrote: “Although to the individual words are arbitrary, to the race or the nation they are growths, and are themselves the fruit and the sign of the growth of the race or the nation itself, and have, like its members, a history, and alliances, and rights of birth, and inherent powers which endure as long as they live, and which they can transmit, although somewhat modified, to their rightful successors” (*WTU* 14).

Language provided the outward signs of national and racial health—its propriety was a symptom of national health, just as its corruption was a sign of national malaise. And, while certain speech could be “somewhat modified,” any use deemed unseemly by this impromptu pantheon was unfit for the nation’s “rightful successors.”

The relationship between language forms and social anxiety was given a more directly psychological bent as early as the 1860s, with the work of neurologist George M. Beard. His major thesis concerned what he termed neurasthenia—a form of social hysteria he thought peculiar to the newly-industrialized US (William James would later refer to neurasthenia as “Americanitis”), and stemming in part from the adoption of vulgar practices on the part of “the finely organized man and woman of position, dignity, responsibility and genius” (in Jones 75). One of the practices Beard saw as symptomatic of this nervous American elite was corrupt speech—in the mouths and in the print organs

of the leisure class. Beard's nervous conditions led to "compressed idioms, elisions, and the simple rapidity of utterance"; the neurasthenic's voice was characterized by its "softness, faintness, want of courage and clearness of tone," and its resemblance to "the peculiar voice of the deaf" (in Jones 75). He also saw "the periodical press [and] the telegraph" as contributors to the decline of good elocution, as these technologies brought low forms more and more into the public limelight. Again, however, what is emphasized in psycho-social analyses like Beard's is language as representative, a symptom by which to gauge the social health of the country.

Arguments like Beard's and those of the verbal critics have often been used as the starting place for the literary history of postbellum dialect literature. If the corruptions of "vulgar" speech were so anxiety-producing, why, goes the recurrent line of questioning, was such speech so commonly found in the literature of a middle-class readership? What positive gain was to be had in these forays into the jungles of solecism, mispronunciation, and sustained regional and ethnic versions of English? Early literary historians answered these questions by downplaying or dismissing the representative truth of dialect in late nineteenth-century literature. Critics like Krapp and H. L. Mencken argued that the social illness represented by dialect literature was not a matter of actual misuses of language, or of representations of a real language counterculture. Rather, dialect and local color literature threatened the bastion of belles lettres because it was, simply, a fantasy created for commercial appeal. These stories, Krapp would write, were not a "reflection and echo of an authentic folk interest in literary expression" ("Psychology of Dialect Writing" 522), but "a realm of literary pretense designed for sophisticated readers" (*Strange Talk* 47). Such readers, Krapp insisted, "stand superiorly aloof from

popular life,” comfortably slumming it, linguistically and otherwise, within the pages of regional and ethnic dialect fiction.

In offering more nuanced answers to this question, recent critics like Alan Trachtenberg, Richard Brodhead, and Gavin Jones effectively revived the theory of a culture of linguistic anxiety. Each argues that by the last decades of the nineteenth century, dialect speech had become a *de rigueur* element of a middle-class literature. Their explanations for the phenomenon build on the idea that such fiction turned dialect into a discrete production of time and space—dialect was part of an American past and stemmed from the nation’s quaint corners. For Trachtenberg, such dialectal nostalgia rendered it harmless for an American middle-class audience searching for specific touchstones of high culture. Brodhead extends this claim, revealing how such a show of nostalgia could become elegiac, relegating contemporary, dynamic ethnic communities to a national past, even as they sought to become part of the national present.²⁸

Dialect English, in other words, offered a shorthand experience of an endangered local exotic—an immersion in the voices of out-of-the-way locales—and it did so through visual manipulation of speech on the page. “Eye dialect,” the use of spelling to signal low, substandard, or simply alternative pronunciation, was widespread in the US before and after the Civil War, as discussed in the last chapter. Much attention has been paid to postbellum dialect writing because of the generic “solidification” of realism—especially as propounded by figures like William Dean Howells, Henry James, and Mark

²⁸ In *Cultures of Letters* the story of dialect becomes the story of different Englishes cordoned off in order to quell the threat of ethnic and lingual heterogeneity. Brodhead rehashes the narrative that has often been deployed to explain the popularity of regional fiction: the increase of “translocal agglomerations,” big business, Reconstruction industrialization, and corporate consolidation meant the gradual subsuming of “agrarian and artisanal orders into a new web of national market relations” (120). These developments had profound effects on the desires of a reading public nostalgic for a backwater America. And regional literature offered just the “cultural elegy” that this readership was looking for.

Twain. But putting such writing in the context of its development—from its beginnings in the political and humorous work of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to the more documentary, more exploratory, work of minority authors of the antebellum—a general evolution from pastiche, exaggeration, or send-up to self-announced attentions to accuracy, and methodologically rigorous exercises in linguistic depiction emerges. As much as dialect and local color literature were caught up in the business of cultural tourism, these forms were equally a part of the “cross-fertilization” of literature and linguistics. What we see are the underpinnings of a movement to accept linguistic difference as a central part of American literary production, in many cases specifically on the grounds that such difference was worthy of scientific study.

Aside from the socio-political story of dialect, then, there is another, more subterranean story to tell, and that is the story of emergent language studies that merged the categories of “the literary” and “the linguistic,” just when these categories were beginning to coalesce around professional and institutional principles. The story of dialect literature is one that brings together questions about what constitutes a literary genre, what constitutes a piece of disciplinary writing (or writing of a piece with discipline), and, more broadly, how the modern concept of literature has obscured the multiform writing that existed between the now rigid categories of genre and discipline.

Linguistics in Formation: Postbellum Linguistic Materialism

Critical concentration on anxious attitudes has coincided with the general neglect of the public face of linguistics: the lectures, discussions, and debates that contributed to the formation of the field, and that were occurring in public settings and widely read

publications. Until recently there have been very few efforts to chart the development of general linguistics in the US in the nineteenth century, or, as Julie Andresen suggests, “up to now, the tradition of American linguistics [...] has been assumed *not* to exist” (*Linguistics in America* 11). Andresen’s work represents a corrective to this absence. Literary historians have likewise made gains toward a fuller account of philology’s wider impact.²⁹ And yet, there still remains the nagging sense that US language study was simply an echo of its European forebears, and was the purview of only a specialized few.

Such shortsighted characterization has a long history. But looking briefly at one historical example of this characterization we can see the extent to which linguistic discussion maintained public relevance and public dissemination. In a spirited 1874 column ridiculing the American Philological Association’s fifth annual convention, a *New York Times* reporter writes that “philology seems to be a subject peculiarly unfitted to profit by conventions. Politics, morals, religion, social science, and even physical science, all seem much more suitable for discussion *viva voce*, and much more likely to be benefited by debate, or interchange of views” (“Philology” 3). The field most concerned with understanding the changing terrain of linguistic communication, it seems, was least suited to talk about its discoveries to a large audience. The story told here about philology’s disconnectedness from public discourse continues to plague the field, and continues to dominate conventional histories of the discipline. The above article, however, offers, even in its condemnations, an illuminating contradiction: the story of

²⁹ See especially: Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight Over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991). Julie Tetel Andresen, *Linguistics in America 1769-1924: A Critical History* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990). Richard Bailey, *Nineteenth-Century English* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

philology's "unfittedness" for the public convention is told in the very public forum of the *New York Times*. Not entirely unwittingly, the author makes the claim that because "all analysis of language is necessarily so minute, and [...] needs such careful and sedate consideration," it is a discipline better suited to the lecture hall and the professional journal than the convention. At the same time, the author is himself engaging a public discussion about fit and unfit topics for the field, and the "right" venue for discussion of these topics to take place. The article, that is, affirms the need for careful analysis of language and takes pride in the abundance of "philological ability [and] acquirement in the country," even while condemning such acquirement as potentially stultifying and obscure.

One aim of this chapter is to debunk the narrative of obscurity and insularity that has prevented the discipline of linguistics from being seen as a significant part of wider social valuations of language. While the *Times* writer devalues the benefits of public philological debate, it was in fact such discussions of the nature of the discipline that helped make the scientific study of language a topic of widespread conversation. This conversation largely concerned the general disciplinary underpinnings that would define the field's approach to language.

During the 1850s, scholars like August Schleicher proposed a more thorough distinction between philology and linguistics. For Schleicher, philology was about "investigating the thought and cultural life of a people" (Koerner, "Linguistics vs Philology" 170). By contrast, 'Linguistik' would concern itself "with the natural history of man" (170). Language, for Schleicher, was a natural artifact, "outside the realm of the free will of the individual" (quoted in Koerner 170). As such, it required a natural

science to understand how phonetic and grammatical parts created meaning, as well as how words and word parts changed over time and space. The assertion of linguistics as a natural science and language as a natural artifact signaled a reorientation of what “language” meant to the science of language. ‘Philologie’ dealt with ‘Kritik’—“individual interpretations of (largely) historical texts”—while ‘Linguistik’ was best equipped to deal with oral speech alone (170). While now a commonplace in modern linguistics, the distinction was at the time a radical one. Speech became language unfiltered by artificial propriety, literary convention, or other top-down cultural dictates. Unlike a planned text, speech was spontaneous, and was, therefore, a better representation of organic, rather than artificially controlled, linguistic structure. Regional and ethnic dialects, idiomatic expressions, foreign borrowings—all of these became essential to language under the newly formulated language science, because they were undeniably central to the development of every language. Whether the presence of such variants was a good thing or a bad one became a wholly unimportant question. The question was how to account for the structural mechanisms behind variation and “growth,” not how to stop it.

By cordoning off the conventions of culture, mid-century linguists made the field more receptive to popular idioms—to everyday speech. For many, making speech the central object of study carried with it the mandate to appeal to a more popular audience, and to engage in scientific conversations without recourse to the artifice of jargon. In the US, William Dwight Whitney saw “the language of plain and homely fact” as both a fit object of study and the best way to broadcast linguistic findings to a popular audience (*Language and the Study of Language* 10). He was careful not to fall into the trap of

specialist jargon, opening his 1867 published lectures, *Language and the Study of Language*, with the declaration that linguists should “strive, above all things, after clearness, and... proceed always from that which is well-known or obvious to that which is more recondite and obscure” (10). A few sentences later, he turns from the mode of address to his actual source examples, remarking that these “examples...will be especially sought among the phenomena of our own familiar idiom; since every living and growing language has that within it which exemplifies the essential facts and principles belonging to all human speech” (10). Effective science could draw conclusions from “homely” language because the principles of change, if not the individual changes themselves, were universal across linguistic structures. At the same time, “homely” address made linguistic discoveries accessible to a wider audience—the same community that was effecting ongoing language change. Whitney’s central position as a public linguist, as well as his emphasis on non-normative languages and a materialist approach to these languages, makes him a revelatory figure in the context of a more rigorous dialect literature. His centrality, and the linguistic materialism he helped to popularize, is the subject of the next section.

Whitney’s General Linguistics

Asked in 1894 to deliver an appraisal of Whitney’s life work at a Philadelphia memorial meeting for the philologist, Ferdinand de Saussure declared that Whitney’s most important contribution to linguistic science was his thesis of language as a human institution, one which is “not founded on a natural connection of things” (quoted in Jakobson xxxiv). As Saussure rightly surmised, it was Whitney’s commitment to

language as the ever-changing convention of a speech community that so revolutionized the field of linguistics. Where many philologists and verbal critics before (and after) him had conceived of language as a mirror of thought, and, in turn, as a racial marker supporting ill-founded race hierarchies, Whitney saw language simply as a social tool. Introducing his first major treatise on the study of language, he swept away old prejudices about the racial inheritance of language and crowned social convention as the defining force of linguistic meaning. “Race and blood,” he claimed, “had nothing to do directly with determining our language. English descent would never have made us talk English” (*LSL* 14). Language, rather, was “an institution...the work of those whose wants it subserves” (48).

The force of Whitney’s conventionalist theory of language changed the face of linguistic study. It presumed that dialects of English were more than aberrations of speech. Instead, all spoken languages could be understood *as dialects*, in lateral, not hierarchical, relation to each other. “The science of language” he writes, “has democratized our views on such points as these; it has taught us that one man’s speech is just as much a language as another man’s; that even the most cultivated tongue that exists is only the dialect of a certain class in a certain locality” (*LSL* 163). All languages were equal when it came to their structural efficiency and their capacity to describe the material world and create meaning, and, thus, all languages and all dialects of those languages were necessary objects of study.

Whitney's views were made public in his widely announced lecture series.³⁰ First delivered in March 1864 as "On the Principles of Linguistic Science," the lectures were again delivered that December before a wider audience at the Lowell Institute in Boston, under the new title, "Language and the Study of Language"; they would be further revised and published under the same title in 1867. The lectures succeeded in bringing to a general audience the fundamental tenets of Whitney's version of a material science of language. The force of the lectures can still be seen in three fundamental tenets of modern linguistics and sociolinguistics, all of which revolve around the central pole of his institutional model. Firstly, the theory presumed that use governed the dynamic development of language. This meant that words and other structures lived and died by the law of their usability, and not some more ethereal judgment about propriety or the aesthetics of an underlying linguistic type.³¹ This focus on use seems commonplace now, especially in sociolinguistics, but at the time scholars were still largely committed to the idea of language as a God-given artifact, in some stage of advancement or decay, and reflective of the relative "progress" of its speakers and their civilization. Secondly, Whitney's use-based theory completely overturned the idea that language must have some kind of telos, an ideal form. Instead, as he would claim again and again, language changed constantly, and its speakers changed it to meet their specific communication

³⁰ Newspapers like the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* announced the lectures in their pages; the latter, in its March 19, 1864 "News Paragraphs" section, notes the upcoming Smithsonian Institute series, offering the cheeky "Hope the Congressmen will attend" at the end of the announcement (3).

³¹ Language typology of the mid-nineteenth century was largely a matter of arranging world languages into a hierarchy that favored morphosyntactic elements predominant in the languages of Western Europe. As linguist William Croft has written, "The typological classification of languages at the time differs from the modern concept of typological classification in two important respects. First, the classification recognized only a single parameter on which languages varied, the morphological structure of words. Second, it was conceived as a classification of languages as a whole, not parts of a language.[...] In this view, each human language has its organic unity which manifests an 'inner form' (a point of view which at the time had clear connotations of cultural superiority)" (*Typology and Universals* 46).

needs. Language was decidedly not, as Romantic pundits like Johann Gottfried Herder would have it, a wholesale outgrowth of nation or race. Thirdly, without the ideological checks and dams of idealism, Whitney's institutional model could move dialect variants and other minority speech onto center stage as the root of language variation and change. According to Whitney, such change, which had long been the bane of verbal critics, was not only unstoppable, it was essential to what he called the "life and growth of language."

Linguistic materialism—the treatment of the varieties and structural components of language as objects of study rather than symbols of character or culture—thus emerged as an alternative paradigm to anxiety and prescription. A number of linguists, headed largely by Whitney, saw the merits of documenting and describing, without overt social agenda, the phonetic, etymological, and syntactic variations, including so-called misuse, that made language a dynamic object of study. As the essential dynamism of spoken language became an accepted thesis, such documentary and descriptive practices were seen as the mark of good science.³²

Whitney's desires for the new science corresponded to what he saw as the "restless and penetrating spirit of investigation...of the nineteenth century, with its insatiable appetite for facts, its tendency to induction, and its practical recognition of the unity of human interests" (*LSL* 3). Together with the equally nineteenth-century impulse toward "juster and more comprehensive views of the character and history of human speech" (3), linguistic science in the postbellum era was at once open to multiple forms and multiple sources of speech, as well as multiple practitioners. Whitney attests to this

³² The era of Humboldt and Bopp had inaugurated this objective focus on the compilation of word forms and other data. Indeed, what came to be known as 'comparative philology' was defined by its descriptive grammars and morphosyntactic comparisons among languages and language families. What Whitney and his colleagues (including Müller) pioneered was an equal commitment to spoken dialects as the *sine qua non* of so-called literary languages.

“wide net” policy, professing that “no dialect, however rude and humble, is without worth, or without a bearing upon the understanding of even the most polished and cultivated tongues” (6). Given this ideological dilation of linguistics’ object(s) of study, it becomes “a matter of course” that “linguistic material” should be “gathered in from every quarter,” and that “literary, commercial, and philanthropic activity [should combine] to facilitate its collection and thorough examination” (3).

In reviewing the published lectures, the *New York Times* touted the appropriateness of the tone to its intended audience, remarking that “Prof. Whitney has done well in retaining a method of exposition which is fitted to obtain as wide popular acceptance for the subject as is compatible with its scientific character” (“Philosophy of Language” 2). The *Times* review also parroted much of Whitney’s basic argument about linguistic science and the need for “a wide-based foundation of facts”; it is, the reviewer continues, “only by a large comparison of tongues and dialects that the laws of linguistic growth could be apprehended” (2). The reviewer claims along with Whitney that widescale language comparison was possible only with the development of modern “liberality”: “the very spirit of antiquity was by its exclusiveness and self-sufficiency shut out from that liberality of inquiry needed for the right understanding of the nature of speech.... [N]ot only has the discovery of new lands and tongues...enormously widened the circle of facts in the domain of tongues, but it has inspired a catholic and cosmopolitan temper highly favorable to just and comprehensive views of the character and history of human speech” (2). The general reader was thus treated to a redaction of Whitney’s more detailed lectures—one that exemplifies the increasing public awareness

of newly emerging “liberal” language ideologies and underscores the need for a revised, and more relativized, perspective toward language difference.

The lecture series exhibits the first detailed overview of Whitney’s linguistic materialism. However, these views did not go unchallenged. The specifics of Whitney’s ideas emerged out of the larger context of competing narratives of language development, represented in large part by his contemporary Max Müller.

Whitney and Müller: The Battle for an Object of Study

The debates that erupted in the 1860s and 1870s between Whitney and Müller, often in the pages of the *North American Review*, propelled two central questions about language and linguistics into a wider public sphere: How did language begin and, as Whitney phrased it, “Why do we speak as we do?” At stake in offering the decisive, or at least dominant, answers to these questions was more than personal or professional pride (though the attacks would become increasingly *ad hominem*); the answers here would dictate comparative philology’s ideological place in the public eye and in the academy, its situation as either a human or a natural science. The “winner” would also be responsible for administering a kind of scholarly seal of approval to wider considerations of diverse languages, and for answering the question of how linguistic variation functioned as a key component of language development.

Also central to the debate was what Whitney called “the essential character of the study of language, as distinguished from the study of languages” (*LSL* 10). In answering the question “Why do we speak as we do?” would linguistic science focus on individual languages as the constructions of national or cultural forces, or would it begin with the

premise that language was a universal construct with universal modes of change?

Whitney responds that a science of language should ask “not how we speak, or should speak, but for what reason; pursuing its search for reasons back to the very ultimate facts of human history, and down into the very depths of human nature” (*LSL* 10). The relativist bent of his answers suggests how the changing methodological and ideological terrain of postbellum linguistics could affect, and be affected by, similar changes in the language philosophies that underwrote dialect literature in the US. Moving the focus of linguistic science away from simply learning and transcribing various languages (and making judgments about the “rationality” of those languages) to a more comparativist study of all linguistic structures as equally rational and equally influential, rendered dialect a figure not of disdain, something to be condemned and corrected, but an object of scientific value.

Max Müller’s “Science of Language” lecture series was a key text promoting the popularization of linguistics and a more exacting appraisal of what the field’s objects and aims as a science were to be. By 1870—nine years after their first public delivery—*Lectures on the Science of Language* had gone into six editions, and they would be revised and reissued throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century. Set in the Royal Institution of Great Britain, “a forum established in London in 1799 for the genteel popularization of natural science,” the series drew such notable audience members as John Stuart Mill and chemist Michael Faraday (Alter 63). For Müller, the main purpose of the lectures was to “mold [the] public’s understanding of what language study meant for modern civilization,” a task, writes historian Stephen Alter, that “he accomplished more successfully than any other individual in the nineteenth-century English-speaking

world” (63). Even Whitney admitted that the lectures and their subsequent publication were “[f]or many....their first introduction to linguistic study; and doubtless to a large proportion of English-speaking readers...still the principal and most authoritative text-book of that study, as regards both methods and results” (“A Criticism” 1). Whitney disparaged the lectures as being “not so much *on* the science of language as *about* it” (“Müller’s Lectures” 565). But, in fact, this kind of meta conversation about the field’s aims was a central part of its more public profile, a conversation Whitney himself engaged in frequently.

Müller, like all linguists at the time, was concerned with general aims of the field, with how nineteenth-century “liberality” would affect the pursuit of linguistic knowledge. He proclaims linguistics “a science of very modern date,” but regrets that the field’s modernity has led to a general murkiness about its objectives. “Its very name” he writes, “is still unsettled, and the various titles that have been given to it...are so vague and varying that they have led to the most confused ideas among the public at large as to the real object of this new science” (*Lectures* 14). Müller maintains that rather than the cumbersome and confusing “comparative philology,” or the “somewhat barbarous...name of *Linguistique*,” the science of language should simply (if flat-footedly) call itself the “science of language” (14).

Above all, Müller was committed to demonstrating a version of linguistics backed by popular religious thinkers, a science of language that could be enlisted to unveil the spiritual workings behind the production and intent of language. In this he was also allied with German idealist thinkers like Herder, Kant, and others, who had argued that language was more than the development of “the bleating of herds” into “vocal

articulations” agreed upon by a community, as Boston’s *Universalist Quarterly* put it (quoted in Alter 62).

Ultimately, the lectures can be seen as an attempt to bridge the widening gap between the idealism of the German school and what Müller perceived to be a growing threat of linguistic materialism, which he saw as a stance that refused to acknowledge the transcendent, spiritual energy implicit within human language. Indeed, the major points of contention in the Müller-Whitney clash encapsulate a complex ideological terrain that had persisted at least since Locke, and which had become even more volatile with the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) and the religious backlash it precipitated. Müller was a vocal proponent of “linguistic natural theology,” a widely-accepted idea in the mid-Victorian era that language was a unique spiritual gift to humanity, and that its origins came from “within the soul” (Alter 58).³³ The foundation of the natural theology thesis was that language was a product of humanity’s innate, God-given capacity to respond to a kind of logos in the natural world. Whitney saw the idealism of this camp, with Müller as its figurehead, represented as a blockade to a true science of language, one that embraced linguistic dynamism and cared little for romantic notions of a perfect language.

Another of Whitney’s frustrations with Müller concerned the issue of language origins. Müller was a proponent of what had come to be called the “ding-dong” theory of origins, characterized by the idea that the first human words were produced “by a kind of percussive resonance between the mind and its surroundings” (Alter 89). Whitney criticized the theory on two fronts. He was skeptical about the nebulous claim of

³³ Johann Gottfried Herder had famously taught that language was more than a tool for social communication, as Locke had claimed, and that the connections between things in the world and the words used to refer to them were more than arbitrary agreements made by a community of speakers.

“resonance,” and chastised Müller for assuming that the human mind was “at the outset a kind of bell; and that, when an idea struck him, he naturally rang” (89). And, secondly, Whitney saw the position as untenable as it required uniquely inventive speakers: if language was the invention of its first speakers, then these speakers must have had a peculiar genius, one that was no longer reflected in contemporary parlance. Borrowing as he did from Charles Lyell and the theory of geological uniformitarianism, which posited constancy of change as a driving force and the basic notion that “the present is the key to the past,” Whitney scoffed at any exceptional account of “first speakers.” The trouble with the “ding-dong” theory was that it granted primeval speakers a unique ability for such “verbal resonance”; the uniformitarian in him questioned why such uniquely endowed speakers were not also a modern phenomenon (89). Whitney’s own belief was that imitation, and not invention, was the more likely mode of speech origins. He considered imitation in keeping with uniformitarian principles; it directed word formation in the here and now and was “a behavioral tendency that could be read back to the beginning of human existence” (quoted in Alter 89).

The debate over origins is worth noting not only because it gave way to a more publicly and lasting debate over the nature of language study in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but also for the terms discussed. Whitney’s preference for the imitative theory reveals his allegiances to Lyell, but it also lent itself to increased valuation of non-normative speech. If imitation was the engine of language development, then, for one, there was no objective basis for linguistic-cultural hierarchy—if all primeval languages were established through imitative means, then all were, in this sense, created equal; and, for another, it followed that all forms of language had the capacity to

effect change—their own and that of others. No one “standard” of linguistic efficiency existed to which other languages or other dialects deferred. The “special genius” basis of Müller’s “resonance” theory lent itself to the opposing view, that certain cultures of speakers were predisposed to the artful creation of representative words.³⁴

Müller’s idealism did not necessarily mean a complete disavowal of naturalized language change or growth. Indeed, the differences between Whitney and Müller were rarely as profound as their similarities. Müller was a firm supporter of the idea that spoken dialect, rather than received elite or literary languages, formed the basic engine of linguistic development. “It is impossible,” he remarks in the lectures, “to exaggerate the importance of the constant undergrowth of dialects” (70). Such “undergrowth” was an essential topic for the science of language: “Literary idioms, such as Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Gothic.... are the royal heads in the history of language. But as political history ought to be more than a chronicle of royal dynasties, so the historian of language ought never to lose sight of those lower and popular strata of speech from which these dynasties originally sprung, and by which alone they are supported” (61). Popular vernacular, in other words, invigorated the conservatism found in “dynastic” literary languages and, as far as it was possible, needed to be cataloged and analyzed along with texts written in a traditional literary form. Whitney was equally wide-ranging in his description of the “material and subject of linguistic science,” which, he writes, “is language, in its entirety,” an all-encompassing category that includes “all the accessible

³⁴ Müller would eventually renounce the theory as his own, claiming that he had merely included it for consideration within his lectures. In his 1871 *North American Review* article on Müller’s lectures, Whitney calls him out for foisting the theory on the German linguist Karl Ludwig Heyse, commenting, “Here is either disingenuousness or remarkable self-deception.... We defy any person to read the exposition of the theory as given in the first editions, and gain a shadow of an impression that it is not put forward by him as his own” (quoted in Alter 90).

forms of human speech, in their infinite variety, whether still living in the minds and mouths of men, or preserved only in written documents, or carved on the scantier but more imperishable records of brass and stone” (*LSL* 6).

In the end, the differences that separated Whitney and his Victorian colleague were more a matter of form than of fundamental disagreement. This, of course, did not stop the debate from becoming by the mid 1870s an international cause célèbre.³⁵ The underlying significance, however, is that each public scholar became a champion of dialect and of an increase in the collection of documents of non-normative languages, and each demoted the concerns of language propriety as being outside the purview of their version of linguistics.

And yet, despite this consistent call for the collection of variant “specimens,” what we find during this immediate postbellum period is a dearth of scholarship dealing directly with regional and ethnic dialect speech. Looking at the American Dialect Society’s 1889 bibliography of “more serious essays” on dialect, we find very few studies in the 1860s and 70s that chart regionalisms, ethnic variants, or non-standard speech in general (*Dialect Notes* 1:13). The bibliography draws a line between scholarship and imaginative writing, and makes a point of leaving out “slang and works written in dialect” (1:13). In doing so, however, it neglects most of the documents that were engaged in detailed expositions and analyses of dialect at this time. By turning to postbellum works like James Russell Lowell’s *The Biglow Papers*, we can see how the line dividing scholarship and imaginative writing was not as clear-cut as the ADS makes out. What is revealed in the erasure of this division is the presence of “different kinds of

³⁵ See Stephen Alter, *William Dwight Whitney and the Science of Language*. (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins U Press) 174-206, for a more detailed overview of this debate.

writing,” texts that emerged out of more fluid literary and linguistic fields of production, and overlapped precisely at that textual site we call “dialect literature.”

Dialect at the Crossroads: James Russell Lowell and *The Biglow Papers*

The period that surrounded Whitney’s lectures saw a marked change in the structure of literary dialect narratives. Novels and poetry collections began appearing with detailed introductions about the vernacular used, appendixes that included grammars and vocabularies, and footnotes that offered etymologies and regional variants of particular word forms. Overall, there arose a new generic trend toward the self-conscious announcement of specific dialect mastery, the professed desire to familiarize audiences with vernacular words and structures, and a general move away from vernacular for comedy’s sake. Richard Brodhead has dismissed these kinds of quasi-scientific apparatuses as means of “produc[ing] the foreign only to master it in imaginary terms” (*Cultures* 136-137). Rather than confronting the complexity of a dialect, its roots in immigrant enclaves, its class- or race-oriented significance, and, overall, its potential to interrogate the presence of a standard national English, these texts, Brodhead argues, rendered foreign tongues and unfamiliar regional forms into a kind of generic folk argot, one that could be quarantined through the process of fictionalization. But to reduce the actual work, and the claims to a linguistic investment in these languages, to only so much socio-political sleight of hand, is to miss the emergence of a striking new text that merged the linguistic with the literary, that presumed to record speech for the sake of fiction, but also for the sake of creating an archive of plural speech practices in the US. The various “paratexts” employed—the introductions, vocabularies, and notes—form, in the words of

Gérard Genette, “a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text” (*Paratexts* 2). Such paratexts evince an emphasis on the materiality of language, a more disinterested approach that was, nonetheless, still coupled with an overt sense of proper and improper. These changing strategies toward dialect representation, the linguistic seriousness with which dialect was treated, help to explain the trend that would continue throughout the late nineteenth century of associating regional and ethnic speech not with the comical but with the ethnographic and the documentarian. James Russell Lowell’s second series of *The Biglow Papers* (1867) represents the first example of the postbellum texts that made ample use of paratextual devices to legitimate this more serious approach toward dialect.

The first poems in Lowell’s Biglow series appeared in the *Boston Courier* in 1846 and were later collected in 1848. They told a story of disaffection with US expansionism and the nation’s exploits in the U.S-Mexican War. Recounted in Hosea Biglow’s “racy Yankee dialect,” the *Papers* were popular not only for their Whiggish criticism, but also for the novel voice of Biglow himself. Following the success of the first series, Lowell reprised Biglow’s work and his voice, writing poems in *The Atlantic Monthly* throughout the Civil War that chastised the South for its cultural and commercial dependence on slavery, and inveighed against the violence of the War on both sides. The professed aim of the second series of *The Biglow Papers*, as well as its subsequent critical appraisal, makes it a key example of what I am calling an emergent language study: dialect writing that reveals the fluid disciplinary boundaries that existed between language studies and imaginative writing. It represents a blending of etymological and phonetic discourse with a series of poems and letters of political satire. It also demonstrates how imaginative

dialect literature could develop the linguistic position introduced by Whitney and his contemporaries: the idea that language could be separated from cultural suppositions about its speakers and studied as an object, a communicative tool that was not simply a reflection of good or bad breeding, propriety or impropriety, but which had a long, complex past, and was motivated by paradigmatic phonetic and syntactic features. The treatise-like introduction to the *Papers* thus operates duly: as a piece of scholarship that would set Lowell apart from his literary vernacular predecessors, and as an exploration of an emergent disinterested attitude being propounded by fellow linguists and fellow fiction writers.

As we saw in the epigraph from Howells that began this chapter, Lowell's *Papers* were viewed as the watershed dividing a past vernacular literature from its more rigorous postbellum future. The *Papers* signal a difference, both generically and disciplinarily, in the author's complex incorporation of new language theories becoming available in the last half of the 1860s. In many ways the body of the *Papers* can be seen as an outgrowth of the vernacular writing of the period, dominated by the comic tradition of the frame tale. This narrative device, a staple of writers like Sam Slick (Thomas Chandler Haliburton) and Artemus Ward (Charles Farrar Browne), was structured around a central narrator whose own prose was in keeping with standard spelling and grammar. The comic effect of the narrative depended almost entirely on both the ridiculousness of the dialect speech and the incongruity of the narrator's standard English and corresponding social propriety. Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" (1867), with its unnamed narrator speaking an "unadorned" English, and the "garrulous old Simon Wheeler" as its vernacular star, is probably one of the best known examples of the

form. By the time of Lowell's first series of *The Biglow Papers*, the frame tale had become standard in the penny-press and so-called "story" papers, and readers would have been familiar with the conceit of a Hosea Biglow and his upright editor Homer Wilbur, whose often long-winded letters, peppered with superfluous Latin, French, and German, introduce each of the poems, and provide a standardized frame for Biglow's dialect.

Treating dialect literature as a uniform canon, a mode operating to extinguish rather than highlight difference, George Krapp would disparage the pastiche literary dialect of the frame tale as "General Low Colloquial" in his *English Language in America* (1925), calling it "the speech of the careless or uneducated English speaker everywhere" (235). Rather than a regionally or ethnically distinct speech, Krapp claimed, authors of dialect were simply offering a skeletal version of bad speech as a specialized cultural argot. Dialect, in other words, was largely a conceit of the commercially-minded hack, whose representation of speech relied not on factual documentation but on a fictional convention. Brodhead gives further nuance to Krapp's criticisms, noting that such a generic literary dialect, coupled with the device of the frame, allowed a standard-speaking audience to identify "its own nonethnic status with its social superiority" over the dialect speaker (*Cultures* 136).

The Biglow Papers, however, cannot be so easily dismissed as just another example of a "whitewashed" generic colloquial. While the orthographic characteristics of Biglow's speech on the page are perhaps more consistent and even more sparing than his predecessors, they do not stray in a dramatic way from other vernacular representations prior to 1866. What is striking in the final published version is not so much the form of Lowell's political and satirical use of dialect as the compendious

introduction that accompanies it. It is a jarring paratext: a nearly ninety-page manifesto, deeply invested in an etymology and phonetic analysis of Biglow's speech that highlights both its regional specificity and its foreignness, and, by extension, that of his New England contemporaries. Rather than eliding the foreign—the French, Italian, and German constructions that inform Biglow's Yankeeisms—Lowell's research reveals the many shared paradigms that exist among these languages. He writes, for example, in validating the fact that “[o]ur people say *Injun* for *Indian*,” that the “tendency to make this change where *i* follows *d* is common” and cites “[t]he Italian *giorno* and the French *jour* from *diurnus*” (46). And several pages later he claims that “*to put*, in the sense of *to go*, as *Put!* for *Begone!* would seem our own, and yet it is strictly analogous to the French *se mettre à la voice*, and the Italian *mettersi in via*” (57). This kind of international, interlingual comparison has been muted by critics who want to see Lowell (and a wholesale dialect literature) engaging in the sociopolitical work of consolidating national literature precisely by voiding its language of foreignness.

The seeming contradiction of enlisting dialect—language defined by its difference from a standard—as a tool of consolidation, of national sameness, has given rise to an ambivalent criticism. Gavin Jones, for one, cites the preface of *The Biglow Papers* as a text “suffused with the language and assumptions of Romantic nationalism,” and argues that Biglow's dialect becomes “a higher moral language” that the author can deploy to criticize “the rhetoric and politics of American expansionism, slavery, and racism” (*Strange Talk* 42). At the same time, Jones writes, “dialect has a deeper racial mission to authenticate the Anglo-Saxon roots of the nation's culture,” and thus dialect is at once “an ethical language” and an “ethnic language: the one seeks to overturn racial

boundaries, the other to confirm them” (42-43). This seeming ambivalence becomes the critic’s stopping point, as it thematizes the very ambivalence of “questions of race and nationhood” at large in the late nineteenth century (43).

However, bracketing for the moment the provocative racial implications of Lowell’s use of dialect, we can begin to see how the ambivalence of *The Biglow Papers* and its incorporations of a New England dialect actually have as much to do with the opposing conceptualizations of language in contemporary linguistic discourses as they do with ideologies of race and nation.

Lowell does begin the introduction on a note of uncertainty, writing: “When I began to carry out my conception and to write in my assumed character, I found myself in a strait between two perils. On the one hand, I was in danger of being carried beyond the limit of my own opinions, or at least of that temper with which every man should speak his mind in print, and on the other I feared the risk of seeming to vulgarize a deep and sacred conviction” (10). Lowell fears, in other words, that the medium of Biglow’s Yankee dialect would “carry beyond” the author’s message, that it would take on an unintended symbolic meaning. And he fears also that the mere sight of dialect on the page would prompt knee-jerk condemnations of vulgarity. The treatise that follows becomes, then, a means of both legitimating the inclusion of these seeming vulgarities, and showing them to be not so vulgar after all. We can begin to see how the strategies Lowell uses to dissociate dialect from vulgarity expand on the thesis that Whitney proposes in his lectures—that language is first and foremost an institution, a medium, a tool for expression, and not a cultural symbol. Lowell takes the emerging warrant of contemporary language studies—the concept of naturalized language change and the

underlying need to perceive and describe language as an objective material—and expands on it by offering detailed explications of particular speech forms as these existed in the mouth of a fictional figure.

The introduction integrates the Yankee dialect of Hosea Biglow into a larger linguistic discourse along two channels: the etymological and the methodological. Lowell spends some sixty pages drawing comparisons between the so-called “vulgarisms” of rural New England and words from an assortment of medieval and early modern English texts. He finds, for example, the “Yankee preterites” “*risse* and *rize* for *rose* in Middleton and Dryden, *clim* in Spenser, *chees* (*chose*) in Sir John Mandevil, *give* (*gave*) in the Coventry Plays.... *Shew* is used by Hector Boece, Giles Fletcher, and Drummond of Hawthornden,” and so on (32-33). This kind of comparative work, historicizing terms condemned as base Americanisms and reaffirming their Old World etymology, was a fairly common method for combating the notion of a peculiarly American vulgarity, as Elsa Nettels has discussed.³⁶

Leaving behind the superficial intent of granting these “vulgarisms” a legitimate Anglo-Saxon past, however, we find something much more profound embedded in the etymological story Lowell tells. Throughout the introduction Lowell makes a distinction between the judgments of verbal critics and the work of the etymologist, arguing that the present-day criticisms of such usage critics were all well and good, but that their verdicts should not be confused with etymological or grammatical consistency. In one instance Lowell carefully distinguishes the prescriptive critique of a presumed Yankeeism, “illy,” from his own descriptive etymology:

³⁶ Elsa Nettels, *Language, Race, and Social Class in Howells's America* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky,) 43-45.

And why not *illy*? Mr. Barlett says it is “a word used by writers of an inferior class, who do not seem to perceive that *ill* is itself an adverb, without the termination *ly*,” and quotes Dr. Messer, President of Brown University, as asking triumphantly, “Why don’t you say *welly*?” I should like to have had Dr. Messer answer his own question. It would be truer to say that it was used by people who still remembered that *ill* was an adjective, the shortened form of *evil*, out of which Shakespeare ventured to make *evilly*. The objection to *illy* is not an etymological one, but simply that it is contrary to good usage, a very sufficient reason. (41)

The passage condenses some of the key traits of the emergent language study, and exhibits some of the seeming contradictions that have so harried critics of dialect literature. It is, for one, a demonstration of Hosea Biglow’s representative status: *illy*, writes Lowell, is a term “with which we were once ignorantly reproached by persons more familiar with [Lindley] Murray’s grammar than with English literature” (41). Here the plural “we” ostensibly includes the whole of the New England “lingua rustica,” and signals the fact that Lowell envisions Biglow not as a comic caricature, but as a voice culled from the speech habits of actual speakers. And his reference to Murray’s *English Grammar* (1795) cues not only his disdain for school-master textbooks, but also the implicit position that a different, more rigorous etymology could be the antidote to such texts, and could be more in keeping “with English literature.”

Indeed the passage becomes a kind of imaginary roundtable, posing the spurious arguments of people like Murray and John Russell Bartlett—whose *Dictionary of Americanisms* (1848) had dominated the lexicographical market for colloquial speech³⁷—with those of a more objective etymology and a more descriptive grammar. Lowell’s point is not simply that “illy” conforms to archaic expressions, or that it finds analogies in

³⁷ Interestingly, Bartlett, along with ethnologist Albert Gallatin, had also helped to found the American Ethnological Society in 1842, and had produced an early narrative ethnographic text, *A Personal Narrative of Explorations and Incidents in Texas, New Mexico, California, Sonora and Chihuahua* (1854). His *Dictionary* was a major source for compilers of the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

a respected Shakespearian past. The implication is that there is a necessary distinction between “proper” language as a product of cultural dictates, and a language that could be deemed syntactically and phonetically sound. “Good usage” could be a “very sufficient reason” to condemn or condone speech practices, but identifying such usage was not tantamount to a comprehensive grammar or an etymology understood from the disinterested viewpoint of the science of language. The subtextual message of the passage is that etymology should not be concerned with passing judgments about “writers of an inferior class,” that its task was, rather, to treat speakers of seemingly corrupt “cant” as competent users of a fully-realized language. In issuing this rejoinder to verbal criticism, he not only enlists Whitney’s idea that “no dialect...is without worth,” he mobilizes it as a warrant that underwrites the turn to Biglow’s speech as the foundation for a more “vigorous” literature. He practices through imaginative writing, in other words, what a pre-disciplinary linguistics had only just begun to preach.

Where the first channel emphasizes a more disinterested etymology of Biglow’s speech, the second highlights the methodological rigor behind the phonetic representation of this speech. In addition to the network of etymologies included in the introduction, Lowell discusses in detail particular phonetic forms found in Yankee speech. He mentions how “[t]he Yankee has retained something of the long sound of the *a* in such words as *axe*, *wax*, pronouncing them *exe*, *wex* (shortened from *aix*, *waix*)” before going on to cite orthographic parallels found in historical authors: “I find *wex* and *aisches* (*ashes*) in [Thomas Love] Peacock, and *exe* in the Paston letters. Chaucer wrote *hendy*. Dryden rhymes *can* with *men*, as Mr. Biglow would” (33-34). He refers to the Yankee habit of “shorten[ing] the *u* in the ending *ture*, making *ventur*, *natur*, *pictur*, and so on”

and opines that he is “inclined to think it may have been once universal”; and, further, that the form is “certainly...more elegant than the vile *vencher*, *naycher*, *pickcher*, that have taken its place, sounding like the invention of a lexicographer with his mouth full of hot pudding” (36).

This last jab at the lexicographer as a mealy-mouthed inventor of speech rather than a true documentarian reveals in part what Lowell wanted from his introduction: a descriptive representation of speech, which could transcend the anxiety of verbal criticism (despite his own reactions to the more approved, if vile, “*vencher*, *naycher*, *pickcher*). There is no doubt that the superficial intent of this phonological discourse, interwoven with its literary etymologies, is to shore up the Anglo-Saxon lineage of these speech sounds, and, as a corollary, a way for Lowell to signal his expertise, his familiarity with the Yankee-isms of New England. But simply calling the introduction a vehicle for surfacing a mono-racial past, for instating an “ethnic language” that would efface the true foreignness of a composite America, is to ignore Lowell’s production of a rubric for determining dialectal accuracy, one that draws on new developments within linguistic research that emphasized a disinterested, descriptive stance. The strength of this rubric—that objective research was the assured path to dialectal artistry—would persist into the 1870s, 80s, and 90s, making scholarly rigor the barometer by which to measure an author’s imaginative productions, as well as creating a canon that future dialectologists in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century would come to rely on.³⁸

³⁸ Michael Ellis, for one, in “Literary Dialect as Linguistic Evidence: Subject-Verb Concord in Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature,” relies on Lowell, among others, to make a convincing case for the inclusion of literary dialect as a potential corpus that could “provide important clues” about “the regional distinctiveness” of various dialects “at a relatively early stage in their development, and about possible changes in these dialects since the early nineteenth century” (129).

Even at the outset reviewers affirmed that Lowell's Biglow was not only an ideal critic, whose colloquial speech offered a biting satire of the Confederacy, but also a representative speaker of a more serious version of the Yankee dialect. A June 1866 *Atlantic Monthly* review, panning Richard Grant White's collection *Poetry, Lyrical, Narrative, and Satirical, of the Civil War* (1866), lamented that White had included only one of Lowell's Biglow poems ("and that not the best") ("Review" 774). The author of the review goes on to describe *The Biglow Papers* as a work "in which there is so much of the national hard-headed shrewdness, humor, and earnestness," using the poems as a counterpoint to White's tepid anthology" (775). It was this presumed earnestness that captured early critical and readerly attention. Introducing his 1871 edition of *The Hoosier School-Master*, Edward Eggleston pronounced Lowell "the only one of our most eminent authors and the only one of our most eminent scholars who has given careful attention to American dialects" (6). The appraisal was echoed by other contemporary reviewers in the US and England, who routinely cited Lowell's scholarship as a turning point for a new, more serious dialect literature. William Dean Howells, in an 1867 *Atlantic Monthly* review, saw Biglow as a speaker of "genuine vernacular," the vocal embodiment of "the type of a civilization," and opposed him to the vernacular of that "moralized merry-andrew" Petroleum Nasby (125).

Reviewers also responded warmly to the breadth of research that characterized the introduction to the *Papers*. The *New Englander and Yale Review* called "the valuable, as well as diverting, introduction in which Mr. Lowell talks about language and style ...the best part of the volume" (181). And back at the *Atlantic* Howells wondered adoringly "how anything so curiously learned and instructive could be made so delicious," adding

that “[m]ost of us will never appreciate fully the cost of what is so lightly and gracefully offered of the fruit of philological research; but few readers will fail to estimate aright the spirit which pervades the whole prologue” (125).

Despite the confidence Howells and the *Atlantic* had in Lowell’s audience, there was still lingering doubt that the rigorous “spirit” of the introduction might not be enough to keep the comic vernacular tradition sufficiently at bay. Lowell had not helped himself on this score when, writing as Biglow, he submitted a postscript to the last of the letters that informed the editor that he might “spall an’ punctooate thet as you please,” and offered the following justification for employing “funattick spellin’”: “it kind of puts a noo soot of close onto a word... an’ takes ’em out of the prissen dress they wair in the Dixionary. Ef I squeeze the cents out of ’em, it’s the main thing, and wut they wuz made for; wut’s left’s jest pummis’” (123). While the lexicographical iconoclasm here was in keeping with the themes found in Lowell’s introduction, the implication of whimsical spelling, Howells fears, “may give the impression that it is not a dialect in which he writes his poems, but a language which he misspells and perverts by caprice or through ignorance, and thus discredit something of Mr. Lowell’s exquisite introductory discourse” (123). The admission of arbitrary spelling found in the poems’ language might lend “[t]he feeble critic-folk” further ammunition in their claims that Lowell is merely another Artemus Ward, engaging in the same “clownish tricks in orthography” (123).

In the end, the fact remained that Biglow was not the creation of caprice or “laboriously fantastic orthography,” but something more exquisite in direct correlation to the new linguistic discourse of the introduction. The positive reception of Biglow as a

speaker of “genuine vernacular” and Lowell as a scholar of this vernacular would be followed by the increasing deployment of paratextual demonstrations of language expertise, as well as a more disinterested stance toward language as a dynamic material that required expert handling, not facile condemnation.

We can see examples of the kinds of reverberations of such paratextual blending of discipline and genre in the arguments made by subsequent authors working with nonstandard English-speaking characters. Popular works like Charles Leland’s *Pidgin-English Sing-Song, or Songs and Stories in the China-English Dialect* (1876) and Hans Breitmann’s *Ballads* (1884) included lengthy glossaries designed to help readers decipher the “strange speech” of their speakers. George Washington Cable produced a number of non-fictional pieces that dealt with French and Spanish Creole culture in New Orleans for the *The Century Magazine*. Published separately in 1886, “The Dance in Place Congo” and “Creole Slave Songs” are careful studies not only of the typology of African-American dance and song, but also the vernacular that Cable terms “African-Creole Dialect.” Much more than one-offs of cultural tourism, Cable’s studies present songs in a phonetic script of his own rendering, and make a profound argument for the influence of such songs and their particular dialect on the speech of the “French master-caste.”³⁹ And Joel Chandler Harris, in his introduction to *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1880), sought to separate his work from the stigma of vernacular humor and “the intolerable misrepresentations of the minstrel stage” by declaring that the speech of Uncle Remus was “at least phonetically genuine” (quoted in Jones 44). Genuineness of speech was thus not merely the fictional creation of a special national argot, but something that could be gauged as a matter of phonetics and a matter of investment in linguistic research.

³⁹ See Jones 118-119.

This new measurement of the genuine and the artistic prompted Edward Eggleston to add extensive footnotes and an introduction to the 1892 library edition of *The Hoosier School-Master*, explaining the foreign and archaic origin of many of the Hoosier terms enlisted in the text. Eggleston alludes to Lowell urging him “to ‘look for the foreign influence’ that affected the speech of the Ohio Rivers country” and dedicated this later edition of the *School-Master* to him. In his introduction he calls attention to the existence of “distinct traces of the North-Irish in the idioms and in the peculiar pronunciations,” and notes that “[o]ne finds also here and there a word from the ‘Pennsylvania Dutch,’ such as ‘waumus’ for a loose jacket, from the German *wamms*, a doublet, and ‘smearcase’ for cottage cheese, from the German *schmierkäse*” (22). In another instance, Eggleston gives a footnote spanning nearly two full pages on the phonology and etymology of “dog-on,” a word which, he writes, “like many of the earmarks of this dialect...came from Scotland, presumably by way of the north of Ireland” (45 n1). He cites examples from John Jamieson’s *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1879), John Orchard Halliwell’s *A Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words* (1846), and J. M. Barrie’s dialect novel *Little Minister* (1891), finding in this last “that the word has precisely the sense of our Hoosier ‘dog-on,’ which,” he writes, “is to be pronounced broadly as a Hoosier pronounces dog—‘daug-on’” (45 n1).

In his self-congratulatory way, Eggleston cites his novel as “the file-leader of the procession of American dialect novels,” claiming further that “[f]or some years after the appearance of the present novel, my own stories had to themselves the field of provincial realism” (7). Eggleston awards himself the distinction of being an early pioneer of realism entirely on the basis of his paratextual demonstration of a more rigorous approach

to the dialect of “the southern part of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois” (7). The point of the scholarly paratext was, then, not only to signal a literary difference from an unexacting comedic vernacular, but also to denote writing that approached language from the disinterested viewpoint emerging in the discourse of linguistic science, and to do so precisely as a means of signaling the “real.” *The Hoosier School-Master*, with its reliance on set-pieces of sentiment and romance—the sickly orphan, the innocent but much-abused heroine, and the ever-noble, ever-sacrificing protagonist—hardly fits the prototype of gritty realism; and yet it makes claims to a generic vanguard position based on the text’s, and especially the paratext’s, descriptive, materialist attitude toward language.

As the ill-defined category of literary realism began its consolidation in the 1870s and 80s, this approach would become the sine qua non of realist literature. The ability to separate Howells’s “orthographic buffoons” from the etymology and phonetics of Lowell, Harris, Eggleston, and others who laid claim to the linguistic stance, would come to distinguish the vulgar from the accomplished, the purely comedic from the acutely serious. But the borderline was not always drawn as clearly, or announced as loudly, as it was in texts like *The Biglow Papers* or *The Hoosier School-Master*. To return to Howells’s “Life and Letters” column that began this chapter, we see the author struggling to define just what such a difference consisted of. For Howells, these differences are more a matter of form and intent rather than measurable traits: carefulness and the intent to report rather than invent are the characteristics of an attitude toward language, not the features of the dialect itself. This attitude is, moreover, one that focuses on “accents and locutions”—objective, material aspects of the language under consideration—rather than

on a symbolic lambasting of speakers based on figurations of their speech. Attitude and approach are, thus, precisely the characteristics that mark reality from whimsy and grotesquery. While setting out only vague parameters for drawing these distinctions, his message is clear: good art is at very little remove from disinterested ethnographic and dialectal research.

Further on in the article, after giving a brief account of authors like Cable and Harris, who are deemed to be writing in “dialect of a genuine sort,” Howells mentions “one brief essay in negro dialect by Mark Twain,” calling the “little story” a thorough portrait of her speech. This “little story,” titled “A True Story Told Word for Word as I Heard It” (1875) becomes another nexus point in the chapter, one that reveals its own incorporation of emerging linguistic attitudes, as well as assertions of realism tantamount to the “word for word” recording of speech.

Mark Twain’s own assertion of this new linguistic attitude, his disinterested descriptions of language features, his treatment of dialect as a material medium rather than an inherent cultural symbol, was not clear-cut, and was at times submerged by the demands of socio-political propriety. But his emergence as an author equated with the realist dialect novel demands attention as a product of his own early blending of language science and generic literary expectation.

Breaking the Frame: Twain’s Self-Conscious Dialects

Twain has become for many the fortunate son of linguistically informed dialect literature, and his broad view of language diversity in the US continues to be championed. As Seth Lerer writes, “His concern with the relationships of speech and nationhood place him on a distinctively American philological trajectory running from Noah Webster to H. L.

Menken. His writings constantly reflect on the nature of regional dialect, on differences between languages, and on the discipline of linguistic study itself” (*Inventing English* 207). One reason critics, including myself, place Twain on this “philological trajectory” is that he so self-consciously asserts the accuracy and care with which he crafted his characters’ speech. The well-known “Explanatory” that prefaces *Huckleberry Finn* lays claim to “a number of dialects” present within the text, including “the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods Southwestern dialect; the ordinary ‘Pike County’ dialect; and four modified varieties of this last.” Twain disavows a slapdash vernacular, and emphasizes that “[t]he shadings have not been done in a hap-hazard fashion, or by guesswork; but pains-takingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.” The cataloging of dialect variations mirrors (or mimics) the typology of the dialectician. The “Explanatory” marks the text as a canvas of nuanced representations of regional speech. The contrast of “hap-hazard” and “pains-takingly” offers the reader an assertion that real work went into the documentation of these languages. In effect, this brief preface “functions as a promise of authenticity” (Smith 431).

In this section, I examine the self-conscious ways in which Twain deploys dialect English, transforming the traditional frame tale into a vehicle for rigorous language scholarship. First, however, it is essential to chart the seeming contradictions that trouble any assertion about his “liberality” or progressiveness when it comes to his attitudes toward linguistic difference. Twain’s relationship to dialect and non-standard language was often conflicted, especially when it butted up against the perceived needs for a standard speech; as he wrote, “A nation’s language is a very large matter. It is not simply

a manner of speech obtaining among the educated handful; that manner obtaining among the vast uneducated multitude must be considered also” (“Concerning the American Language” 265). In contributing a unique voice to this “very large matter,” Twain was pulled in what seems at first like opposing directions. As a writer laying claim to a position in the pantheon of New England’s elite, he was compelled by the conservative powers that be to uphold the rightness of standard English. In this sense, much of his vernacular writing can seem like so much satire—satire used to further dissociate outlier forms of English from a standard. And yet, as an innovator of the long-form dialect novel, Twain was obviously committed to a discourse that resisted the pedantry of would-be standard-bearers. This apparent contradiction has often been a sticking point for critics attempting to crack the code of Twain’s unique language philosophy. However, in the context of postbellum language studies, which increasingly dealt with the problem of linguistic propriety by reducing it to a problem of arbitrary mandates, Twain’s self-announced attention to dialect representation emerges as a subset of linguistic scholarship. This form of representation called for new levels of expertise, and ushered in authenticity as a central term—one which had rarely been a part of the literary conversation about the genre of dialect literature.

In the vein of Whitney’s contemporary lectures, Twain engages in a conversation that draws from verbal criticism and more relativist stances emerging in language science, acknowledging the necessity of a standard, all the while seeing this standard as an arbitrary convention established by a cultural elite. In adding to this conversation, Twain also engaged in some philological exploits of his own. His 1882 “Concerning the American Language” (“a chapter which,” Twain remarks, “was crowded out of *A Tramp*

Abroad [(1880)]”) is a paean to differences in American English from its Old World predecessors. Replying to a compliment from an Englishman that “Americans in general did not speak the English language as correctly as [Twain] did,” Twain replies that he “did not speak English at all—I only spoke American” (265). His national pride in the American idiom is manifested in a brief philological treatment that includes the “large matter” of speech difference among various regions and classes of speakers. He boasts of the “many alterations in our pronunciation” and the introduction of “new words among us and [the] changed [...] meanings of many old ones” that have come about with “the spread of our people far to the south and far to the west” (265). This basking in the diversity of American speech gives way to a phonetic primer on the variants that continue to distinguish the two Englishes. The dropping of the initial ‘h’ in the British, he notes, is largely a phenomenon of the “uneducated masses,” but, he continues,

if the signs are to be trusted, even your educated classes used to drop the *h*. They say *humble*, now, and *heroic*, and *historic*, etc., but I judge that they used to drop those *h*’s because your writers still keep up the fashion of putting *an* before those words instead of *a*. This is what Mr. Darwin might call a ‘rudimentary’ sign that an *an* was justifiable once, and useful—when your educated classes used to say *’umble*, and *’eroic*, and *’istorical*. Correct writers of the American language do not put *an* before these words. (266-267)

Twain enumerates the “signs” of a changing speech standard through an analysis (albeit cursory) of British writing. His reference to the use of *an* in writing as a “‘rudimentary’ sign” not only marks his familiarity with inductive linguistic science, but also his seeming belief in a changing standard: dropping *h*’s is not simply a lower class phenomenon, but a past marker of what had been an elite British English standard. This study in miniature becomes, in other words, a thesis about the dynamism—the “fashion”—that lies behind correct speech. At the same time, the anecdote ends with the

assertion that “[c]orrect writers of the American language” do not drop their *h*’s and do not use *an* before *h*-initial words, an imperative that echoes the diatribes of verbal criticism. The conclusion that Twain reaches about such correct writers is at odds, then, with the more radical subtext that linguistic correctness is always in motion, that no writer or speaker can at any one moment lay claim to a perfect language.

“Concerning the American Language” presents a contradictory *mélange* of philologically-inspired inclusiveness and conventional verbal criticism, and becomes an apt lens on Twain’s attitudes toward language variation and language propriety. On the one hand, the piece affirms the critical view that Twain fostered more than a casual interest in contemporary linguistics, and a belief in the capacity for linguistic study to embrace national language diversity. On the other, it reveals a much more conservative side of Twain’s take on English standards. In the end, however, the essay is noteworthy in its refusal to make any definitive statement about correctness. Instead, it presents a dialogue revealing the linguistic complexity of the question of a standard, and highlights a more materialist study as one antidote to simplistic claims about correctness.

In seeking to reconcile the competing discourses of propriety and objectivity, Twain critics have usually granted more weight to one side or the other. Much of the motivation behind studies like David Carkeet’s “The Dialects of *Huckleberry Finn*” and Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s *Was Huck Black?* (1994) comes from a well-founded desire to see Twain’s representations for their consistency and their adherence to real-world speech. Carkeet for example offers a deft catalog of the phonological and syntactical markers at work in the language of both Huck and Jim, noting differences between the two speakers, such as the fact that “Jim’s dialect [...] shows the *done*-perfect construction

(*she done broke loose*), deletion of the copula, and an *s* suffix on second-person present-tense verbs” (317). Fishkin famously claims that Huck’s idiolect actually has its origins in the speech of several influential African-American figures in Twain’s life, particularly the speaker featured in the author’s obscure short piece “Sociable Jimmy” (1874). She cites several similarities between the monologue offered by Jimmy and Huckleberry Finn’s own narrative voice, including lexical invention, the repeated occurrence of “a-” prefixed to participles, replacing adverbs with adjectives, and the elision of syllables, as evidence of a more than coincidental pattern of shared speech behavior. Fishkin’s conclusion, less sensationalist than the title would suggest, is that Twain’s direct use of African-American forms of English signals an underlying “African-American tradition” within “*mainstream* literary history” that has gone unacknowledged for too long (143). Her claim rests on the basic assumption that Twain was indeed committed to getting a version of African-American English right, even, and perhaps because, this speech was transferred to a white protagonist.⁴⁰

At the other end of the spectrum, critics like David Sewell have uncovered a general conservatism and an ongoing commitment to standard English that seems to plague Twain’s dialects. Sewell goes so far as to call Twain’s “explicit comments on language [...] disappointing” for their conventionality (*Mark Twain’s Languages* xi). Examples of such conservatism abound. In *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), for instance, Twain chastises the “infelicities” of the New Orleans idiom for its use of “‘like’ for ‘as,’ and the addition of an ‘at’ where it isn’t needed” (168). His observations, far from the objectivity of an ethnographic linguistics, chide such solecisms; he writes: “You hear

⁴⁰ See Roberta Seelinger Trites, “The Multiple Voices of Mark Twain.” *The Lion and the Unicorn*. 18 (1994) 224-226.

gentlemen say, ‘Where have you been at?’ And here is the aggravated form—heard a ragged street Arab say it to a comrade: ‘I was a-ask’n’ Tom whah you was a-sett’n’ at” (168). Here, the “ragged street Arab,” a description that marks this character as a pariah of both race and social class, is depicted speaking in much the same vein as Huckleberry Finn or Tom Sawyer (“a-” prefixing, elision and truncation, and the unnecessary use of “at”), where the “gentleman” speaks in an unadorned standard.

Nonetheless, his criticism was equally directed at elite speakers. On Twain’s return to the US in 1900, after nine years of traveling and living abroad, he was struck by the unpolished grammar of even the nation’s staunchest defenders of English. As he commented at a New York Woman’s Press Club tea:

I was recently asked what I had found striking in this country since my return. I didn’t like to say, but what I have really observed is that this is the ungrammatical nation. I am speaking of educated persons. There is no such thing as perfect grammar and I don’t always speak good grammar myself. But I have been foregathering for the past few days with professors of American universities and I’ve heard them all say things like this: ‘He don’t like to do it.’ Oh, you’ll hear that tonight if you listen, or ‘He would have liked to have done it.’ (*Mark Twain Speaking* 346-7)

Though the passage is directed at an educated elite, the point is clear: ungrammaticality is not only problematic, it is nationally embarrassing, even more so because it has been committed by those who should know better.

Statements like these have polarized scholarship on Twain’s linguistics; or, at best, have led to the conclusion that Twain was simply ambivalent in a period of ongoing ambivalence toward language variation. However, Twain’s descriptive dialects and his conservative policies do not necessarily contradict one another; each position actually shares the common ground of the author’s search for a version of expertise, as both a transcriber of regional and ethnic dialects and as a representative of American English

propriety. In fact there is nothing to suggest that Twain saw his dialect pieces as corruptions of good English, or as anything other than separate instances of the self-conscious quest for effective communication. The ideology that underwrote this quest is characterized by a dedication to language as an object of study: to dialect difference, to the autonomy of local speech variants and their importance to, if not a multilingual America, then at least a nation of multiple Englishes, serving no other tastemakers than those of their own speakers and their language's capacity for communication.

Twain shared with Whitney an essential pragmatism, and an essential anti-idealism when it came to his own linguistic ideology. His comments above, despairing of the ungrammatical missteps of gentlemen and uneducated alike would seem to belie such a stance in their seeming desire for an ideal English. But Twain's sometimes stodgy injunctions are tempered by the more pervasive idea that language was an inherently imperfect medium. Another instance from *Life on the Mississippi* serves as a condensation of his position. Traveling through the Mississippi River Valley, Twain hears an outsider, a "Westerner who would be accounted a highly educated man in any country," utter the phrase "never mind, IT DON'T MAKE NO DIFFERENCE, anyway." The author remarks that such speech was the product of "careless habit" and implies a level of affectation to the unwarranted adoption of regional grammar. He continues:

No one in the world speaks blemishless grammar; no one has ever written it—NO one, either in the world or out of it (taking Scriptures for evidence on the latter point); therefore it would not be fair to exact grammatical perfection from the peoples of the Valley; but they and all other peoples may justly be required to refrain from KNOWINGLY and PURPOSELY debauching their grammar. (107)

While on the surface the passage suggests that the double negative "it don't make no difference" is the true crime, what Twain finds truly reprehensible is the intention, or lack

thereof, of the “careless habit” behind the phrase. The particular dialect of “the peoples of the Valley” (here, the Mississippi River valley of southeastern Missouri) does not represent an affront to “grammatical perfection” because, Twain suggests (as we found in “Concerning the American Language”) the standard of perfection is, at root, a fiction. The task of any communicator is not perfect speech or writing measured against a static ideal, but KNOWINGLY and PURPOSELY working to get “*their* grammar” right. While the possessive here could signify a collective, national language, in the context of Twain’s site-by-site travelogue, it also takes on the significance of a particular, *local* possession. In the end, this is the work Twain commits himself to—that of getting each local grammar right, of not knowingly debauching the individual grammars of his speakers.

It is a version of expertise that takes its cues from the increasingly public profile of a linguistic embrace of difference and dynamism, as well as a methodology judged by its descriptive objectivity. Twain’s desire to affect dialectal accuracy is of a piece with the articles by Whitney and others, which were appearing in the same publications as Twain’s own works.

In November 1874, Twain’s “A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It” appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Along with his *New York Times* piece “Sociable Jimmy,” also appearing in November of 1874, this was Twain’s first major foray into disinterested dialect writing—or, at least, writing that was self-described as a direct transcription. Each piece exists on the borderline of the vernacular frame narrative. These two pieces might also be placed, much like Cable’s later ethnographic sketches, on a borderline between reportage, transcription, and imaginative fiction, as each is based on

actual encounters between Twain and the central speakers in his accounts; and each is indicated by the author to have a basis in fact. In the case of “A True Story,” the character “Aunt Rachel” is based closely on Mary Ann Cord, a former slave and the cook in the household of his in-laws, Theodore and Susan Crane, with whom Twain spent many of his summers. “Sociable Jimmy,” meanwhile, is the avatar of William Evans, a six- or seven-year-old boy who waited on Twain at the Paris House Hotel in Illinois, during an 1871 lecture tour.⁴¹ The effect of situating each narrative within the context of a newly emerging linguistic science allows for a reading that not only exemplifies literature at the crossroads of language science, but also gives us a better sense of how the literary output was being transformed by a new rubric of materialism called for by public linguists like Whitney.

In both “A True Story” and “Sociable Jimmy,” the dialect speakers, rather than being positioned for comical mishap, become the central storytellers. Like the more traditional frame narrative, each account is set up in standard orthography and grammar by a “straight man,” presumably Twain himself. But unlike this form, each piece quickly moves into a sustained narrative voiced by the two dialect speakers. And, once begun, these stories never transition back to the original narrator or standard grammar and spelling. The dominance of the dialect voice reflects Twain’s concerted interest in documentation. As Twain biographer Ron Powers points out, Twain took assiduous notes during his interview with Evans in preparation for “Sociable Jimmy,” and “worked the notes up into a 1,824-word sketch, of which all but 328 words were dialogue, nearly

⁴¹Powers gives this account of the meeting: “As he sat in his room at the Paris House Hotel awaiting his dinner, the door opened and a six- or seven-year-old Negro boy entered, bearing the entrée, a prairie chicken. Sam learned his name, William Evans—in the sketch, it became ‘Jimmy’—and invited him to sit down. The ensuing conversation soon had Sam taking notes (in a nice irony) on the flyleaf of *uber*-white guy Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *New England Tragedies*” (*Mark Twain* 314).

all of it the small boy's" (*Mark Twain* 314). The narrative weight given to dialect is crucial as it marks a key difference between these documentary sketches and the frame tale of an Artemus Ward or Twain's own vernacular send-ups, seen in works like *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches* (1867).

"A True Story" is particularly striking in this regard, and in the self-consciousness with which Twain refers to voice and speech, to the necessity of dialectal autonomy, and to voiding the vernacular tale of its comic inheritance. The story records Aunt Rachel's account of her dramatic separation and reunion with her son. After Twain sets the scene—"sitting on the porch of the farm-house" with "'Aunt Rachel' sitting respectfully below our level"—he is prompted by this character's mirth to ask "Aunt Rachel, how is it that you've lived sixty years and never had any trouble?" (591). Her response is to pause and let pass "a moment of silence." She then "turned her face over her shoulder toward me, and said, without even a smile in her voice:—'Misto C—, is you in 'arnest?'" (591). This is the moment, at the very outset of the story, when the audience becomes aware of the seriousness of this particular dialect English. The expectation up to this point has presumably been for a generic lampoon in the style of a frame vernacular piece. In the set-up, surrounded by Twain and his companions, Aunt Rachel "was being chaffed without mercy, and was enjoying it," just as the reader anticipates a similar enjoyment at her expense (591). But now her voice is devoid of any lightheartedness, and her question to Mr. Clemens signals her own "'arnestness." Twain, too, registers this moment and its gravity: "It surprised me a good deal," he writes, and, more importantly, "it sobered my manner and my speech" (591). His own reaction is a stuttering attempt to rephrase the original question: "Why, I thought—that is, I meant—why, you *can't* have had any

trouble” (591). His insistence is caught up in the need to see her as “a cheerful, hearty soul” who could become the object of burlesque play (591). Instead, the account takes on a new sobriety of manner, and a new, more serious attitude toward speech. As she begins her tale, “[s]he faced fairly around, and was full of earnestness. ‘Has I had any trouble?’” she restates, and then: “Misto C—, I’s gwyne to tell you, den I leave it to you” (591).

Several points are worth noting in this brief passage. First, in turning to face her questioner, Aunt Rachel transforms the group on the porch into an audience. She is decidedly not the object of fun now; she is fully in charge of the monologue to follow. Indeed, the last instance of the narrator’s standard English describes Aunt Rachel’s new posture: she “had gradually risen, while she warmed to her subject, and now she towered above us, black against the stars.” The story belongs to her in her overwhelming presence; the generic frame is done away with just as any authoritative English standard recedes, or is overpowered by Aunt Rachel’s own “mighty frame and stature” and that of her speech. The point is made finer by her “I’s gwyne to tell you, den I leave it to you.” With this phrase, the reader, and “Misto C—,” become objective observers of both the monologue and its medium. Here is the instance at which the genre of vernacular or local color writing becomes a bearing of witness to both story and speech. Rather than a return to a standard English commentary, a neat summing up of what moral lesson is to be gained, and a comfortingly familiar reassertion of standard phonology and grammar, Twain presents Aunt Rachel’s speech as a fully-realized “word for word” document. By refusing to frame the dialectal voice, Twain refuses the easy domestication and easy condemnation of this voice, creating instead a story that urges more disinterested

observation, and, in the service of such observation, leaves Aunt Rachel's last word to her.

It is this kind of self-conscious attention to language, even more than the consistency or accuracy of the actual lingual representations, that constitutes Twain's descriptive turn. As we have seen, this self-consciousness can be manifested as an overt attention to standards of propriety; but, more radically, it can also be marshaled to bring a new objective stance to bear on language variation—not in an anxious mode, but as a method of creating fiction that could archive individual speech practices. The turn away from a comic mode and toward the more somber themes of “A True Story” required a written voice that at the very least gave the impression of careful attendance to actual speech. The story maintains a level of consistency that imbues Aunt Rachel's speech with the aura of authentic documentation. It was precisely this kind of document that linguists called for. And it was precisely this claim to an authentic speech that became the most contentious aspect of the dialect genre.

James Weldon Johnson famously inveighed against the presumption that writers were representing real voices—in his case, the voices of African-American speakers—and actual experience in his preface to *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922). He charged that “Negro dialect is at present a medium that is not capable of giving expression to the varied conditions of Negro life in America, and much less is it capable of giving the fuller interpretation of Negro character and psychology. That is no indictment against the dialect as dialect, but against the mold of convention in which Negro dialect in the United States has been set” (42). In 1922, when Johnson's edition came out, the “mold of convention” dictating the representation of African-American

speech had long been set by the traditions of minstrelsy both in performance and on the page.

Equating presumed dialectal accuracy with an equally presumptuous cultural fluency, critics of the genre have gone to great lengths to reveal the inaccuracies, the inauthentic voice, in works like Twain's. But this line of attack misses the important rhetorical milieu of an emergent linguistics during the postbellum period. The rhetoric of figures like Whitney heightened the public presence of language variation, and prompted more complex questions about the national place of dialect and multi-lingualism. In discussing the rise of a linguistically informed sensibility toward regional and ethnic language variations, I have aimed not to further interrogate the truth of authenticity claims, but rather to unearth the linguistically motivated rhetoric that created a difference in the literary representation of dialect. The fact that a call for authentic dialect speech, or signs of the "work" of dialect, begin to appear in conjunction with the formation of the American Philological Association (1869) and the American Dialect Society (1889), and with Whitney's public pronouncements about the nature of language and language study, points to the important symbiotic relationship between discourses of linguistics and the literary marketplace. These institutions inflected the claim of authenticity with the cultural capital of a quasi-science. While there were undoubtedly other contributing factors—the increasing trend of intra-national tourism and travels to the "local exotic," for instance—it was the dialectological and ethnographic stance of its authors that gave dialect literature a marketable cachet. But the trend was less cynical than such a conclusion would suggest. Twain's transformation of Aunt Rachel's speech into a legitimate language had everything to do with the increasing interest in linguistic

difference as a natural phenomenon that needed charting, precisely as it was being written into a scientific discourse. In this way, Twain's manipulations of the vernacular frame, his self-conscious dialect, becomes another instance of Howells's notion of an "exquisite study"—an emergent linguistics that came in the guise of imaginative literature, and changed the course of each field by establishing a new barometer to measure aesthetic and documentary success.

Chapter 4

Lafcadio Hearn's "Linguistic Miscegenation" and Gilded Age Ethnolinguistics

Introduction

Lafcadio Hearn's first full treatment of the Creole French of New Orleans appeared in an 1882 *City Item* article, titled simply "The Creole Patois." Here he writes that "the creole patois is the offspring of linguistic miscegenation," elaborating further that "philological harvesters" could "trace back the origin of the creole to the earlier ages of Latin-American slave colonies, showing how the African serf...made to himself [a] marvelous system of grammar" (*Ethnographic Sketches* 127). Merging his aesthete's formal concerns with a more probing ethnography, he concludes that the patois "possesses a strangely supple comeliness by virtue of the very intercrossing which created it" (127). The passage is profound for its re-envisioning of a language almost universally condemned as nothing more than a corruption of "good" French. For Hearn, though, the claim reflects a commitment not only to Creole French as a fully realized language in its own right, but also a more salutary appraisal of miscegenation as a sociocultural process. Throughout Hearn's imaginative and his journalistic writing, we find an author fascinated by these sites of ethno-linguistic "intercrossing" and interpenetration—sites where one landscape echoes another halfway across the globe, and where ethnic and linguistic mixture defines the Creole populations that became the centerpiece of his writing in the South, and New Orleans in particular.

Hearn is an author who constantly found himself on the margins: culturally, geographically, and canonically. His penchant for nomadic life and his self-confessed “worship” of what he called (in a routinely cited 1884 letter to W. D. O’Connor) “the Odd, the Queer, the Strange,” found him in search of peripheral sites where novelties of speech, of people and character, seemed to flourish. This self-appraisal has long haunted Hearn’s full acceptance into the late nineteenth-century literary canon. Despite what many early biographers and critical receptions have claimed, and even despite his own attestations, however, Hearn was not simply an author of the exotic or a mere documentarian of curios. As revealed in many of his works throughout the Gilded Age of the 1880s and 90s—his ethnographic sketches of Creole French speakers in New Orleans, his foray into comparative linguistics with the collection of creole proverbs in *Ghombo Zhèbes* (1885), and his novellas of transnational *creolité* in Louisiana, *Chita* (1889), and the West Indies, *Youma* (1890)—Hearn was in fact seldom content with fleeting tourism or passive observation. Viewed within the contexts of emerging cultural relativism in the fin-de-siècle, as well as the formative disciplines of ethnolinguistics and dialectology, Hearn’s work productively questions what it meant to excavate and depict speech practices, especially as representations of racial and linguistic heterogeneity.

Alternately a newspaperman, travel writer, and novelist, Hearn is probably best known today for his fin-de-siècle travelogues of Japan, which include *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* (1894), *Out of the East: Reveries and Studies in New Japan* (1895), *Kokoro: Hints and Echoes of Japanese Inner Life* (1896). Looking at the progression of these titles, we find a pattern that comes to define his writing—a development that proceeds from “glimpses of the unfamiliar” and moves toward increasing access:

“reverie,” “study,” an echo of “inner life.” Stefan Zweig calls Hearn’s books on Japan “something totally unique in the world of art, a miracle of transplantation, of artificial grafting” (in Cott xiv). In Japan, Hearn’s official “grafting” occurred in 1895, when, after marrying a woman by the name of Setsu Koizumi, he renounced his British citizenship⁴² and took the name Yakumo Koizumi. It is also in Japan, much more so than the US, that his works have become classics of the late nineteenth century.⁴³ But long before this, in the many other sites of his transplantation—in Cincinnati, New Orleans, and Martinique—Hearn had established himself as a writer who sought to engage his subjects as a kind of chameleon insider, combining an emerging fascination with ethnic and linguistic pluralism with the muckraker’s sensationalism, the impressionist’s eye for color and landscape, and, as a member of the post-Reconstruction “local color” movement, the regionalist’s ethnography of people and speech.

While this work has achieved some recent attention—a Library of America collection, edited by Christopher Benfey, was issued in February 2009, and several collections of his reportage in New Orleans have found their way into print over the last few years—Hearn’s place in the US literary canon has been on consistently shaky ground. This is due in part to the recurring pattern that characterizes his critical reception: one of faint praise touting him as an exceptional stylist, but damning him as essentially nothing more than an obscurantist of the exotic. Kenneth Rexroth notes, for instance, that “[a]t the turn of the century, Hearn was considered one of the finest, if not

⁴² While many critics in Hearn’s day and at present refer to him as an American or an “American expatriate” author, Hearn was never officially a US citizen, despite the nearly twenty years he spent in the country.

⁴³ As S. Frederick Starr remarks, “Even today, every Japanese child reads Hearn in school. His home in the Japanese city of Matsue is a museum, and Japanese publishing houses regularly reissue his works, which are rightly considered classics” of the late Meiji era. (*Inventing New Orleans* xv).

the finest, of American prose stylists” (*Buddhist Writings* xi). But in the end, it is his “appreciation for the exotic and the mysterious” that becomes for Rexroth “as unmistakably nineteenth century as the fine prose idiom with which it is consistent” (xi). Further back, in a September 1890 “Editor’s Study” column spotlighting Hearn’s *Youma: The Story of a West-Indian Slave*, William Dean Howells would call him “a man born to do the work he is doing,” urging that Hearn’s was “a positive talent that vividly distinguishes itself from all others, and joys in its life and strength” (“Editor’s Study” 642). But Howells seems unable to resist calling the novel out as a slight piece of literature, “more fitly call[ed] a poem,” and one that might “be better for him to paint...than to write” for its “tropical landscapes and natures” and its “local color,” however “luxuriously given” (642).

Recently, however, Hearn has found a more sympathetic, if limited,⁴⁴ audience, especially within the field of folklore studies. Simon Bronner, for one, celebrates what he calls Hearn’s “ethnographic style”: a mode of writing that depicts “apparently unusual customs and settings in ethnic districts...making [readers] feel as if they were experiencing a scene themselves” even (and especially) “the very scenes that repulsed them” (“‘Gombo’ Folkloristics” 160). Bronner illuminates how Hearn’s ethnographic style led to his attention “to both linguistic creolization and cultural hybridization,” forms of admixture which suggested “that folklore in its essence represents hybridization, and that this process amounts to a racial and cultural development or improvement” (144). Such appraisals help to resituate Hearn as a voice offering more than simplistic tales of an exotic America.

⁴⁴ Alexander Nazaryan writes in his recent *The New Criterion* review of the Library of America release, *Lafcadio Hearn: American Writings*, that Hearn’s modern supporters “would fit comfortably into a Toyota Corolla” (“Going Native”).

And more positive estimates of Hearn's ethnographic contributions, while few and far between, were not altogether absent from his Gilded Age reception. Several of Hearn's contemporaries found his attentions to "unusual customs and settings," and his facility with multilingual representation and translation,⁴⁵ an apt complement to the literary Northeast's conception of local color literature. His "exotic and mysterious" subjects attracted the particular attention of Charles Coleman Jr., whose article, "The Recent Movement in Southern Literature," in the May 1887 *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, gives a lengthy account of an emerging cohort of regional Southern writers. The author characterizes this inchoate movement by its use of dialect and non-English languages, and its portrayals of peculiar regional customs and ethnically inflected descriptions of people and place. George Washington Cable tops the list, with his "polyglot pages...where French creoles, Spanish creoles, Irishmen, Germans, negroes, and 'Américains' meet together, and essay to converse in English" (838). Coleman's article became a "who's who" of the local color phenomenon, with accounts of Cable, Charles Egbert Craddock (pen name of Mary Murfee), Thomas Page, and Joel Chandler Harris. Hearn was the last author represented in the exposé, and his position in this esteemed pantheon seems out of place given his Anglo-Greek background and the relatively few years he had spent in the South. Justifying Hearn's mention, Coleman proposes an emotional, rather than actual, blood-tie to the region: when Hearn arrived in New Orleans, he writes, "the Southern blood in his veins answered with a thrill, and he

⁴⁵ Throughout his career in New Orleans, Hearn produced several translations of Théophile Gautier, Pierre Loti, and Charles Baudelaire, as well as the New Orleans French weekly, *Le Carillon*. See Cott 110; and Sybil Kein, *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2000) 127-128.

determined to remain” (855; Rothman 265). Despite this confirmation of Hearn’s regional belonging, however, Coleman’s literary praise is confined to the writer’s rendition of “Eastern stories and legends in English poetical prose,” in one of his first literary publications, *Stray Leaves from Strange Literature* (1884). He calls the volume an “exquisite exotic, gathered from the rich treasures of ancient Egyptian, Indian, and Buddhist literature.... heavy with the perfume and glamour of the East” (855). Given the internationalist (and, more particularly, orientalist) bent of the work, especially against the backdrop of the article’s more typical, and rigidly national, examples of local color, Hearn’s collection stands out as a tenuous example of Southern literature. Clearly for Coleman there was some analog, some other exotic “perfume” that made the collection and its author resonate as peculiarly Southern. But why include this spotlight on Hearn and his peripheral work in an essay that attempts to circumscribe and typologize central examples of the local color genre?

The answer lies in this very peripherality, and in the corresponding peripherality that characterized the post-Reconstruction, Northeastern conception of the Southeastern United States as a region apart from literary, and linguistic, normativity. There exists even today, as W. J. Cash has written, “a profound conviction that the South is another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation” (quoted in Stecopoulos 2). Recent criticism of Gilded Age local color literature has focused on this conflation of the intensely regional with the otherworldly and exotic. Questioning the national motivations and desires behind the trend, critics have argued that by targeting the nation’s geographical and sociopolitical margins, its racial, spatial, and linguistic peripheries, local color writing helped to shore up a constricted version of national normativity.

Local color, the argument goes, put in relief a national ideal characterized by Anglo-Saxonism, by the metropol, and by a murky but powerful idea of Standard English. As Jennifer Rae Greeson writes, “the genre by definition explodes the notion of the ‘local’ that is its ostensible subject; in producing the ‘local’ for consumption by a supra-local audience, local color writing necessarily exceeds its geographical designation” (502). Local color was, in other words, anything but localized. The intended audience of such writing was not other “locals,” but a national and metropolitan audience hungry for the spatial nostalgia the hinterlands seemed to offer. But such nostalgia, in presenting the local as abject, ultimately “ratifies the hegemony of the ‘national’ as a standard,” as Judith Fetterly has observed, and becomes, in Eric Sundquist’s formulation, a response to “an era of industrial progress and heightened materialism” (501).

Recently, critics like Amy Kaplan and Richard Brodhead have begun to examine “the ethnographic dimensions of the genre,” emphasizing “the connections between intra-national regional and extra-national imperial exoticisms” (quoted in Greeson 502). In the words of historian Harilaos Stecopoulos, “US imperialism and US regionalism” become intimately connected by a shared desire: to “produce colonial geographies within and without the putative borders of the nation” (*Reconstructing* 11). This production often meant marking such territory as a geographical and socio-political outland in need of modernization. Local color writing frequently “created narratives that explained the underdevelopment of a region as the product of the inferiority of its native inhabitants” (Greeson 503). Peripheral geographies and marginalized races went hand in hand, and each beckoned to the expansionism, the repressed colonialism, of a nation feverishly seeking to cement its international image as an imperial power.

With the rise of such transnationalist positions, and the related tendency toward broadening the category of US literature, literary historians have increasingly chastised old-guard versions of an American canon as “myopically Anglocentric” and exclusionist, and one that obscures the realities of a multilingual national tapestry (“Language Ideologies” 293). The antidote to such parochialism has been to focus more and more on multicultural and multilingual aspects of US literatures—to recover a plurality of writing from a more globalist perspective.⁴⁶ But as Michael Boyden and Helder De Schutter point out, this kind of criticism often engages the problem of language difference using the very terms of the parochialism it seeks to discount (293). In desiring a more varied picture of American multilingualism, that is, literary history has tended to create a romantic picture of particular language enclaves set in contradistinction to a national Anglocentrism.

Examining Hearn’s oeuvre more closely, however, we find a writer of much more ethnographic nuance, much more sensitivity to emerging modes of cultural and linguistic relativism, than the banal exoticism that Coleman’s report suggests, or the antagonism and parochialism of more current critical appraisals of local color. The story of Lafcadio Hearn, like many of the stories that I have sought to tell throughout this dissertation, is the story of a writer working with ever-changing modes of narration—in this case, the generic expectations of local color—to create a more exacting and more complex picture of the ethnographically and linguistically mixed terrain of Louisiana.

At the time of Coleman’s article Hearn had made only brief forays into the “quality” literary world of his Northeastern contemporaries, placing brief travel pieces in

⁴⁶ See for instance Werner Sollors, *Multilingual America: Translationism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature* (New York: NYU Press, 1998).

Harper's Weekly and *Harper's Bazar*, as well as *Scribner's Magazine*. He had, however, firmly established himself as a journalist in New Orleans, first for the small upstart paper, the *City Item*, and later for the city's flagship daily, the *Times-Democrat*. His personal, detailed sketches of New Orleans and surrounding Southeastern Louisiana were filled with accounts of the city's various ethnic communities, especially enclaves of European, West African, and Caribbean Creole French speakers. The work Hearn did for the city's dailies is unique not only for his resistance to telling the story of these groups as a story of racial or ethnic inferiority, but also for the impressive breadth of his subjects. His overall production while in New Orleans is overwhelming, with contributions (many without attribution) numbering in the thousands. Biographer Milton Bronner comments that "[f]ew if any of Hearn's 'news letters' made any pretence at giving news" ("Letters from the Raven" 159). Instead, his reporting veered from local politics to confronting the city from a more global vantage point and in a more characteristically ethnographic style. Hearn's subject matter represents the constantly roving eye of his generalism and autodidacticism. With titles ranging from explicitly ethnolinguistic and sociological accounts (titles like "Missionary Linguistics," "Latin and Anglo-Saxon," "The Last of the Voudoos," and "Jewish Emigrants for Louisiana") to more fanciful and dramatic pieces of impressionism (such as "Complaint of a Creole Boarding House Keeper," "The Flower-Sellers," and "A Dream of Kites") Hearn becomes an apt focal point for discussions of the ethnographic and ethnolinguistic practices of local color writing. Despite their ostensible classification as reportage, these pieces were heavily influenced by the author's passion for the impressionism of French writers like Gautier, Flaubert, Maupassant and Loti, as well as his interest in Creole French ethnology, and represent a

unique mixture of imaginative literature and ethnographic objectivity. Such a “mélange” approach equally characterizes his specific exploration of Creole French. He bemoans the absence of “systematic efforts” in the US “to collect and preserve the rich oral literature of the Creole parishes,” and it is through his vast, combinatory reporting that he was able to portray a number of Creole French songs and proverbs in an effort to correct this absence.

Hearn’s new approaches to ethnic and linguistic “intercrossings” are arguably informed by early developments of Boasian cultural relativity and the contemporaneous rise of the “culture concept.” As S. Frederick Starr has remarked, “The late nineteenth century was the age *par excellence* of archaeology and anthropology [and] Hearn was fully part of this pan-European movement in the social sciences and arts” (*Inventing New Orleans* xix). Indeed, Hearn’s multi-genre approach to language appears entirely of a piece with an era that saw ethnographic documents like Frank Hamilton Cushing’s many articles on the cultural peculiarities of the Zuni in popular magazines like *Harper’s Monthly* and *The Atlantic* throughout the 1880s, or Jacob Riis’s textured depictions of tenement squalor in the photo-essays of *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), and Franz Boas’s early articulations of cultural relativism in works like *The Central Eskimo* (1888). Brad Evans has discussed the relationship between these kinds of ethnographic documents and literary accounts of “out-of-the-way” people and places as part of the “prehistory” of cultural pluralism and the specifically anthropological concept of culture. For Evans, the high literary culture of late nineteenth-century local color is founded on the same principle as modern ethnographic and anthropological notions of ethnic culture—a principle he terms “eccentricity” (*Before Cultures* 30). The term refers to

subjects that exist in each field of discourse as outliers, socially and geographically. These eccentric subjects, he writes, fulfill a desire among US audiences for “an antimodern ‘Other place’ and ‘Other people’ where whites can go to restore themselves” (43). Ethnographic, local color writing, in other words, presented a palliative for audiences wary of the emerging US expansionism in the lead-up to the turn of the century. However, by positioning the local colorist-*cum*-ethnographer as a domesticator of difference, as someone who sanctioned expansion politics by making new imperial subjects familiar to hesitant imperialists, this model once again replicates the binary opposition of outside and inside, normative whites and Other races and ethnicities—the same homogenizing view of ethnography and local color that other recent critics of the genre have put forth. Hearn, on the other hand, while sometimes complicit in similar romantic celebrations of otherness, was far more focused on alternatives to homogeneous conceptions of linguistic and sociocultural development.

As astute as Evan’s and others’ appraisals of local color are, they tend to favor an antagonistic view of the genre at the expense of much of this writing’s complex participation in the discourse of ethnographic and linguistic study. And it would be no hard task to find evidence throughout Hearn’s staggering New Orleans oeuvre that would suggest a desire to consign the city’s multilingual and multi-ethnic populations to a forgotten yesteryear, to exoticize and debase the heterogeneity that defined (and continues to define) the city. But such a reading does a disservice to his equally outspoken attitude about the vitality of linguistic intermixture, an attitude that intertwines his journalist sketches and his imaginative creations with a novel approach to language study. As we will see in the sections that follow—on the author’s journalistic sketches,

on the discipline of dialectology contemporary to his own work, and on his imaginative and documentary depictions of racial and linguistic miscegenation—Hearn is a figure who continually troubled the facile categorization of race, place, and language, and who implicitly questioned the very types of literature authorized as definitions of these categories. In *Gombo Zhèbes*, where the proverb becomes a mode that speaks to the cross-cultural inventiveness of language and metaphor, and in *Chita*, which is an amalgamation of travel writing and fiction, ethnography and tragedy, he reveals the multilingual peripheries of Louisiana's Creole population, peripheries that come to define not only the region, but also a more general ideology of racial and linguistic miscegenation. And he does so as a figure who straddled the growing divide between language and literature, between early academic ethnolinguistics and dialectology, and strictly imaginative fiction.

While Hearn has been routinely ignored because of his general uncategorizability and his own exoticism, it is precisely these many blendings of discipline and genre that reveal his significance to literary history, and that illustrate, more generally, how literary works participated in the vanguard of folkloristic and ethno-linguistic study, specifically in the vein of a more modern cultural pluralism. In part, this chapter represents a literary historical recovery of Hearn. But more importantly, it seeks to employ the author as a lens on the ways that literature, as a discursive category whose borders have always been dynamic, informs the history of linguistic pursuits, and grants the often myopic accounts of language difference found in Gilded Age ethnolinguistics and dialectology a much wider scope.

An “Odyssey” to New Orleans

Hearn’s fascination with multiple forms of mixture arguably found its fullest canvas for expression in New Orleans. Here, he found a city “that resembles no other city upon the face of the earth,” yet one that “recalls vague memories of a hundred cities”—a cosmopolitan space which “owns suggestions of towns in Italy, and in Spain, of cities in England and in Germany, or seaports in the Mediterranean, and of seaports in the tropics” (“At the Gate of the Tropics” 7). This interpenetration of geographies, a uniqueness formed out of a kind of transnational urban collage, made the city universally appealing for its ability to grant the traveler “some memory of his home—some recollection of his Fatherland—some remembrance of something he loves”—the mixture of geographies, in other words, was not homogeneous or Other, but instead held out the possibility of a new more cosmopolitan sense of home (7). Hearn also found in New Orleans a provocative if unsettling mixture of old and new, of atavistic fables and newfangled machines in the garden. In the same November 1877 *Cincinnati Commercial* article from which the above scenes appear, Hearn wrote disconcertingly about “a terrible exhibition of the power of... machinery,” witnessed in the “huge cotton press at the Cotton Landing a nightmare of iron and brass” (9). The presses, which dominated New Orleans’ Cotton Exchange, reminded Hearn of “the anatomy of some extinct animal,” but also resembled “the monster cotton presses of India”: a picture of industrialism that combined the prehistoric with the global, an admixture of both time and place.

Against this looming, multivalent symbol he juxtaposes his search for a more vital New Orleanian literary history—in this particular case, the origins of a “charming little story, ‘Père Antoine’s Date Palm,’ written by Thomas Bailey Aldrich” (10). When Hearn

finally discovers the palm, it is growing in a “dusty wood-yard, with no living green thing near it”; its owner informs him that he has never heard of Père Antoine or Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and the author departs “mourning for my dead faith in a romance which was beautiful” (12-13). This collocation of death and beauty—influenced, no doubt, by his early and intense reading of the French Romantics like Gautier and Baudelaire⁴⁷—comes for Hearn to define the city itself, which he describes in another *Commerical* article as a place that “is fading, moldering, crumbling—slowly but certainly...in the midst of the ruined paradise of Louisiana” (quoted in Cott 118). It is this same romance of death and beauty, and beauty in death, that brings him to his abiding passion for *creolité* in New Orleans, its French, African, and West Indian Creole inhabitants, and its speakers of a unique form of Creole French. Initially, he describes the language as “a plant that has almost ceased to flower, though the green has not yet departed from its leaves” (Cott 138). Here, a certain salvage ethnology—similar to that seen in the first chapter as the central force behind American Indian language collection and description—informs much of his subsequent linguistic work with Louisiana Creole French. However, as we will see, the author’s extended stay in New Orleans would transform the mentality of salvage into a richer understanding of the continued vibrancy of creolization as an inherent process of both the language and its speakers.

In part, Hearn’s penchant for the kinds of intermixture represented in New Orleans echo his own racially and culturally plural upbringing. Hearn’s biography reveals a series of uprootings, and attempts to adapt and adopt the speechways and habits of the many surrogate locales he would call home. He arrived in the US in 1869 at age

⁴⁷ See S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Inventing New Orleans: Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001) xix.

nineteen. An émigré from Ireland, he was marked as outsider not only by his immigrant status, but also for his short stature, dark complexion, and a slight deformation to his left eye caused either by a childhood accident or an altercation with a schoolmate (neither story has been confirmed, although Hearn claimed the latter).⁴⁸ The story of his early life is equally one of marginalization, constant travel, crossover, and miscegenation. His father, Charles Hearn, was an Irish surgeon in the British Army. He met Hearn's mother, Rosa Antonio Cassimati, a native of Greece, while stationed in the Ionian Islands, and the two were married in 1849. Hearn was born in June of 1850, on the isle of Lefkada, for which he was named, and bestowed with what he would later call his "meridional" identity (Bisland 276; Rothman 266). Two years later, after his father was reposted to the West Indies, Lafcadio and his mother traveled to the extended Hearn clan's home in the suburbs of Dublin. The two were adopted only reluctantly into the family, suspicious of Rosa's darker complexion, her difficulty speaking English (as well as her difficulty being understood by the Greek interpreter, who struggled with her Ionian dialect), and her Greek Orthodox religion (Cott 13).

Shunned by the Hearn family, and later by Charles himself, Rosa soon returned to Greece. The Hearn family had the marriage annulled on a technicality: because she was unable to write, Rosa was not considered a legal signatory to the marriage contract. After her departure in 1856 Lafcadio would never see his mother again. Now dubbed "Patrick" by the xenophobic Hearn family, he was trundled off to a great-aunt, Sarah Brenane, living in Dublin. Brenane, a Catholic renegade of the Hearn clan, attempted to groom Lafcadio as her heir presumptive. This plan soon soured, however, when Lafcadio discovered a

⁴⁸ See Jonathan Cott, *Wandering Ghost: The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

passion for the “gods and...demigods, athletes and heroes, nymphs and fauns and nereids, and all the charming monsters—half man, half-animal—of Greek mythology” (quoted in Cott 21). Growing wary of the idolatry of her next of kin, Brenane shipped him off to Catholic school in Rouen, France. Here, Hearn would learn French well enough to later enable his work translating novels and stories by Gautier, Maupassant, and others into English (Cott 26). Later, after his father’s death abroad and several years spent floundering in English and French boarding schools, Hearn was abruptly disinherited. His consolation gift was a one-way ticket to the US, where he was “dropped,” as he writes, “moneyless on the pavement of an American city to begin life” (quoted in Nazaryan 74).

The city was Cincinnati at the height of Reconstruction, a boomtown renowned for its hard-bitten and ethnically diverse shipyards and the burgeoning meat-packing industry that earned it the nickname “Porkopolis.” If Hearn’s upbringing reflects the continued motifs of sociocultural, racial, and linguistic intercrossing, Cincinnati would become the laboratory in which he more fully incorporated these themes into his prose works. Homeless and destitute, Hearn eventually found work as a typesetter for a local newspaper. But his talents as a writer would soon land him a reporting job at the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, covering the levees and meat-packing sectors of Bucktown, where much of the city’s African-American population lived and worked. Hearn became enthralled here with what he called the “pariah existence” of Bucktown’s inhabitants (Cott 100). He began enthusiastically accumulating the songs and stories of its Irish and African-American dockworkers, a passion that would spark his lifelong interest in the collection and translation of multilingual lyrics and poems. It was also here, early in

1874, that Hearn met and fell in love with Alethea “Mattie” Foley, an ex-slave of mixed Irish and African-American descent who had been working in the boarding house that Hearn rented. Disregarding Cincinnati’s strict anti-miscegenation laws, the two were secretly married. The marriage would cost Hearn his job at the *Enquirer*, which, citing the reporter’s “deplorable moral habits,” fired him in August 1875 (Cott 82). His fame as a sensationalist of the city’s outer reaches soon landed him another position at the rival *Commercial* newspaper, and for a while the couple seemed to prosper despite the need for seclusion and constant secrecy. Ultimately, however, their relationship buckled under the pressures of his constant work and the subterfuge required by the illicit marriage. After a painful separation, forlorn and looking for an excuse to leave, Hearn took on correspondence work for the *Commercial*. In the fall of 1877 the paper sent him to New Orleans to cover the imbroglio that had resulted from Rutherford Hayes’s tenuous 1876 presidential election, a bid the latter secured only after promising to withdraw Federal troops from the state and the South in general. The withdrawal, part of the Compromise Act of 1877 that marked Reconstruction’s official end, would find the Federals marching north just as Hearn had turned his sights on the South.

When Hearn left for New Orleans in 1877 he had already established himself as an adept author of urban life, especially scenes of racial tension and cultural mixture. John Cockerill, Hearn’s editor at the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, wrote that “[h]e loved to write of things in humble life. He prowled about the dark corners of the city, and from gruesome places he dug out charming idyllic stories. The negro stevedores on the steamboat-landings fascinated him. He wrote of their songs, their imitations, their uncouth ways, and he found picturesqueness in their rags, poetry in their juba dances” (in

Gould 29-30). Early Cincinnati stories like “Levee Life: Haunts and Pastimes of the Roustabouts, Their Original Songs and Peculiar Dances” and “Dolly: An Idyl of the Levee” feature biographical accounts of the downtrodden of the city’s Ohio River shipping industry—stevedores and longshoremen, prostitutes and dancehall denizens, both white and black. But these pieces also reveal an early ethnographic interest in songs of the levees. Many of these songs present facile renditions of African-American English dialect (“Gambling man in de railroad line, / Saved my ace an’ played my nine”) (*Ethnographic Sketches* 39). At the same time, however, they illustrate modes of speech variation in zones of sociocultural and racial intersection.

In New Orleans, Hearn traversed the *faubourgs* and lived in boarding houses among the city’s Creole population, visiting its brothels and eventually learning enough Creole French to converse with its citizens. It was here that he established himself, as David Barber writes in *The Atlantic*, as a “minor writer’s minor writer.” But rather than simply consign Hearn to minor status, literary historians should reclaim him as a figure whose very peripherality enabled a more complex amalgamation of the generic mode of local color with linguistic practice. What we find with Hearn is an author merging the topoi of “local color”—its isolation of peculiar customs, of particular speakers and speech, its wistful (and often wishful) nostalgia for a vitality and authenticity represented in the regional communities it depicts, under threat from monocultural modernity—with a surprisingly positive view of creolization. What the author does, in effect, is to use the generic expectations of local color not to uphold a national, monocultural ideal, but to issue an alternative model for considering creolization as an inherent and positive force defining both ethnographic and linguistic development.

Gilded Age Linguistics and the American Dialect Society

In order to fully appreciate the contributions Hearn made to the linguistic discourses of the late nineteenth century, it is necessary to present a more complete overview of the subjects and methods that underwrote the emerging disciplines of ethnolinguistics and dialectology. In this section, I chart the ideological terrain of the field as it responded, often in progressive ways, to more conservative conceptions of language variation and hybridization.

In the decades leading up to the turn of the 20th century, two competing models for explaining language change had come into prominence: the neogrammarian and the dialectological. Following scholars like Whitney and Schleicher, the Neogrammarians—a subset of linguists loosely knit by their stance toward phonological changes in language—carried forward the traditions of a comparative philology based on phonetic analysis. The Neogrammarian slogan, as announced in Hermann Osthoff and Karl Brugmann’s 1878 “Neogrammarian manifesto” *Morphologische Untersuchungen auf dem Gebiete der indogermanischen Sprachen*, was that *sound laws suffer no exceptions* (Campbell 188). In other words, internal laws governing how linguistic sounds developed were uniform and constant within a language. Rules for phonological shifts, such as Grimm’s Law (the so-called Germanic sound shift) or Verner’s Law (which accounted for exceptions to the sound shift), were useful for reconstructing languages and past language relationships. However, they did not (and could not) account for changes occurring in cases of linguistic contact. While there was “nothing inherently hostile to language contact and borrowing in the comparative method,” the Neogrammarian stance

was simply unconcerned with external, social factors—specifically with cross-language borrowings or fully-fledged creoles—that might contribute to language change (188).

It was up to late nineteenth-century dialectologists to begin forging models that could account for borrowings among different languages. Dialectology's slogan, attributed to Swiss linguist Jules Gilliéron, was that *each word has its own history* (“*chaque mot a son histoire*”)⁴⁹: phonemes, morphemes, and lexemes had to be analyzed on a case-by-case basis. Wide-sweeping sound changes could perhaps be generalized for some phonological shifts, but these generalities could not account for particular, regional phonetic and lexical differences, nor could they account for unique borrowings among diverse communities existing at the crossroads of multiple languages. In opposition to the Neogrammarian family tree, which was supported by the notion of regular and exceptionless sound change, dialectologists proposed the so-called “wave theory.” Linguists like Johannes Schmidt and Hugo Schuchardt offered that rather than discrete “daughter” languages branching off from “parents” in predictable ways, language relationships were better compared to waves on the surface of the water. Under this model, language types were analogous to stones thrown into the water. The stone created a center that dispersed water in waves and radiated outward. As these waves crossed other waves (other languages) they created new patterns, new trajectories. Thus, with wave theory, dialectal change through borrowing became a central principle, as did the idea of linguistic regionalism and the need for more accurate maps of language geography. Family trees could only account for broad historic change, but when it came

⁴⁹ See Lyle Campbell. *Historical Linguistics*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999. pp188-191; and William A. Kretschmar, Jr. “Dialectology and the History of the English Language” in *Studies in the History of the English Language: A Millennial Perspective*. Eds. Donka Minkova and Robert Stockwell. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002. p 84 for a discussion of the origins of this phrase.

to ongoing, on-the-ground variation within and between languages, there was really no such thing as a neatly compartmentalized language attributable to an equally isolated speech community. Instead, languages were organic growths constantly colliding, creating mutual change through interaction. And particular speech communities in particular geographic regions were at the heart of this interaction.

During this early stage of the field, however, dialectologists were still focused primarily on monolingual studies, circumscribed by national boundaries. The 1870s and 80s would see the emergence of an increasing number of such geographic dialect work. One of the earliest practitioners was Georg Wenker, who began to compile his *Deutscher Sprachatlas* in 1876. Wenker sent out a list of forty model sentences to some fifty thousand schoolmasters in Germany and Austria, asking them, along with their native-speaking students, to translate these into local dialects (Francis 430). Twenty years after Wenker's German investigation, Gilliéron, along with fieldworker Edmond Edmont, embarked on a pioneering survey of the French language. The results of their examination, which involved visits over a four-year period to some six hundred sites, and collections of nearly two thousand items from each, were published as maps in thirteen volumes beginning in 1902 (Francis 430). Gilliéron and Edmont's *Atlas linguistique de la France* would become the primary model for subsequent language atlases in Europe.

A similar study appeared in England in 1889 with the English phonetician Alexander Ellis's *The Existing Phonology of English Dialects* (part of his monumental treatise *On Early English Pronunciation* (1869-1889)). Ellis would put out a more popular abridged version in 1890 titled *English Dialects—Their Sounds and Homes*. Here he writes that his aims are to “give a general conception of the nature of and

localities of the different ways of speaking English among our peasantry” (*English Dialects* 1). This task was becoming difficult, he admits, as the kinds of speech he was looking for—“a genuine organic formation...handed down from mother to child without any reference to books”—was becoming increasingly rare. Several “influences” are offered for the growing scarcity of such genuine dialect: “the influence of railways (which allow the constant shifting of the population), of domestic service (which brings the children of dialect speakers...into close connection with the educated classes) and, worst of all for this investigation, of widely diffused primary education (which introduces as much as possible the system of received speech, and fights with dialect as its natural enemy)” (2).

Similar efforts were occurring across the Atlantic as well, most notably in the early publications of the American Dialect Society. The Society was founded in 1889 at Harvard University, where Francis James Child, one of the first scholars to hold the title of Professor of English, became its founding president. Child was well known for his collection of English and Scottish ballads as well as his research into the literary dialects of Chaucer. The footprint of his folk interest and his populism is felt everywhere in the early directives of the Society. In the first volume of *Dialect Notes*, the Society’s journal, Child was adamant that “[t]he real life of language is found only in the folk-dialects” (*DN* 1:4). The particular focus of the ADS, adds founding member E.S. Sheldon, would be “[s]mall towns of a homogeneous and stable population,” considered “in general the best field for reliable investigation” (*DN* 1:4). According to another prominent Society member, Benjamin Ide Wheeler, these dialects “are not corruptions of the standard

language, but are the native and natural growths, while the ‘standard’ is either imported or semi-artificial” (*DN* 1:4).

In effect, the populism of the ADS turned the tables on the widespread call for a standard American English: rather than a necessary, unifying force for universal communication, members of the ADS saw Standard English coming from an undefined outside—it was imported from somewhere as a “semi-artificial” template for speech, one that would ultimately snuff out the “native and natural growths” of folk English. Dialect was not corrupting a standard, the standard was corrupting American dialect.

Nativeness and homogeneity became the watchwords of the early Society: homogeneity created the semblance of a stable field of study, and nativeness presupposed the organicity—the idea of “natural growths”—prized by postbellum language scholars still anxious about the place of linguistics within the academic sciences. And yet, this scientific need for a static, homogeneous, but still organic speech community did not equate to a neglect of the dynamic interlingual and intercultural traffic that defined Gilded Age America. The ADS’s dialect research at this time, while often fostered by nostalgia for a homogeneous folk speech, was not immune to the dynamism that linguists were positing at the center of dialectal variation. The ADS and its members frequently commented on the language alteration brought on by immigration, internal migration, or the transportation and communication explosion of the late nineteenth century. Harvard historian and Society member Albert Bushnell Hart writes early on in the first volume of *Dialect Notes* that “there are two kinds of dialects, one the native English left to itself and developing alone; the other, the kind which show an influence of other tongues” (9). These “other tongues” are represented throughout the first volume of the Society’s

journal, with examples like H. Tallichet's "A Contribution to a Vocabulary of Spanish and Mexican Words Used in Texas," in which the author examines the language of "surveyors, cattlemen, prospectors, land agents, and old settlers on the border, who used the words introduced as they would words already naturalized in English" (185).

Sheldon, for his part, would note in an article titled "What is a Dialect?" that "[w]e have many traces of English dialects in this country, and of Scotch as well, as we also have in some parts...traces of other European languages among those who speak English, notably of German, Spanish, and French" (293).

These early studies reveal an acute interest in the collection and analysis of dialect forms that diverged from received standards even while circumscribed by national norms and national boundaries. During the late nineteenth century, the geography of dialect was, perhaps necessarily, largely hemmed in by the nation. At the same time, such efforts toward mapping language variation would set the stage for contributors like Hearn to treat patois and creole languages as legitimate variants. While dialect studies and collections of the late nineteenth century often faced inward from national borders, the idea that *each word has its own history* lent itself to a broader transnational view of linguistic intermixture.

Dialect collection and mapping would persist well beyond the 19th century, giving rise, through the stewardship of Hans Kurath, to the American Linguistic Atlas Project, and to later sociolinguistic projects like *The Atlas of North American English* (Labov et al.). There were of course others interested in the profusion of linguistic difference within the US. Franz Boas, for one, contributed not only to the study of various Native American languages, but also to a new approach that sought to avoid racialization of

linguistic difference in favor of, if not yet a fully-fledged cultural relativism, at least a new form of careful, objective observation. An early essay, “On Alternating Sounds” (1888), was a direct rejoinder to the idea that certain languages could be deemed primitive because of the perceived habit of alternating sounds in the same word from utterance to utterance. Boas countered that the habit lay not with the speakers, but with the listeners: transcription of speech revealed “that sounds are not perceived by the hearer in the way in which they have been pronounced by the speaker” (48), and further, that the “vocabularies of collectors...bear evidence of the phonetics of their own languages” (51). In other words, an observer’s native language had a direct impact on how sounds were heard.

Despite Boas’s work in language difference and his early “cultural particularism,” he continued to sponsor the “separation of homogeneous culture as a geographical unit,” as Bronner argues, rather than “the kind of cultural heterogeneity that marks complex...societies” (“Gombo Folkloristics” 144). Boas ultimately took the position that “the integrity of homogeneous cultures was compromised by outside contact” (Bronner 144). As we will see, Hearn’s embrace of ethnolinguistic and literary alterity, particularly in the creolized sites of New Orleans, would generate a similar Boasian objectivism. In Hearn’s case, however, what we find is an emphasis on a different kind of preservation, not of homogeneous cultural groups, but of the mixture and intercrossings of the French Quarter’s African-American, West Indian and French Creole populations and their language.

Contamination and Creolization in the Crescent City

New Orleans was, using Evans's term, eccentric in all senses. Geographically it was situated on the periphery of the continent, away from the traditional cultural centers in the Northeast; its history was one of racial admixture, occupied by peoples of the Antilles, Latin America, the Philippines, Acadians, marooned ex-slaves from Africa and the Caribbean, enclaves of Chinese and Malay fishermen. As a port city defined by importation and exportation, it was seen as a place of commercial importance and cosmopolitan cultural adoptions; but, equally, it was a site prone to foreign contamination. This explains the dualities that come to define the city in the late nineteenth century—its advanced urbanity and its Old World anti-modernity, its simultaneous standing as a “city of the world” and an intensely regional American hinterland. As Greeson argues, “If New Orleanians wrote about themselves during the city's commercial heyday using the language of centrality and access—‘the gateway to the future’—the local-color writing that arose in the following decades mobilized the opposite tropes: peripherality, exceptionality, and atavism.... [A]uthors found their prime export in romantic, exoticized visions of place” (488).

In the summer of 1878, just after Hearn's arrival, New Orleans experienced a yellow fever epidemic of profound proportions. In all, the Mississippi Valley lost nearly 20,000 people during the outbreak, some 4,600 in New Orleans alone. One-fifth of the city's population fled to less “miasmatic” climes to the north, leaving behind commercial losses in the millions (“Only our mosquitoes keep up the hum of industry,” the *New Orleans Picayune* would report). By October, the epidemic had been quelled, but its aftermath had far-reaching implications, both for national health infrastructure in the US—one outcome was the establishment of the National Board of Health in 1879—and

for a broader conceptualizing of New Orleans as a border city prone to contamination by foreign sources. The correlation between contagion and immigration and other forms of foreign occupation has been discussed by Margaret Humphreys, who, calling outbreaks like the 1878 epidemic “panic diseases,” explains that such diseases “were foreigners threatening the safety of the home place” (“No Safe Place” 851). “Many Americans responded to the influx of foreign immigrants from the 1880s to the 1920s with a kind of nativist panic,” she argues further; in effect, diseases like yellow fever corroborated nativist fears about “the very contagion of foreignness” (852).

The connections between New Orleans as a site of international influx and as a place rife with disease are also caught up in the drama of speech, of “other tongues,” that Hearn began to depict in the late 1870s and early 1880s. A March 9, 1879 article called “The City of Dreams” diagnoses what Hearn dubs New Orleans’ “special mania,” one “which distinguishes it from other cities, . . . the mania of ‘talking to one’s self’” (*Inventing* 134). The article follows those who “perambulate their native streets conversing only with themselves,” asking the recurrent question, “What do they talk about?” (134). Hearn finds that “[b]efore the epidemic [...] the majority of these conversations with airy nothings were upon the subject of money” (135). “Then came the burning summer with its burning scourges of fever,” he continues, “and the mutterers [...] talked more than ever to themselves and to the shadows, to the vast void above and to the whispering trees that drooped in the mighty heat” (135). And what they spoke of was the product of the yellow fever epidemic: “They spoke of the dead—and muttered remembered words uttered by other tongues” (136). The link binding the themes of death, of talking to oneself, and “words uttered by other tongues” remains implicit, but

one point is clear: the intense isolation of these “mutterers” is both a symptom and a potential further cause of mental and physical disease. The process of creolization, of what Hearn would term “linguistic miscegenation,” was not, for him, the extension of the disease analogy, but rather the isolationist act of “[c]onversing only with themselves” was the true affliction.

The idea that languages could infect one another, and moreover, could deteriorate the purity of American English, became acute in the later decades of the nineteenth century. In part this concept of linguistic contamination was a byproduct of the linguistic scientist’s support of language as an organic entity, a “life and growth.” On the strength of this metaphor, people like William Chauncey Fowler, whose *English Grammar* (1868) was the first English language textbook to be used in US colleges, could argue for what Dennis Baron calls a “germ theory of language decay” (*Grammar and Good Taste* 163). For Hearn, however, creolization became a process wholly dissociated from contamination or corruption, a process that modeled new, salutary aggregations of speech and speakers. As such, Hearn’s work redefines his contemporaries’ more conservative views of the language and the racial ambiguities it subsumes.

In response to the ideology of racial, linguistic, and “miasmatic” corruption that dominated Northern portrayals of New Orleans and its inhabitants, Hearn turned to a more salutary metaphor: the folk pharmacy of Louisiana’s African-American Creoles. His search for Creole songs and sayings often brought him into contact with medicinal recipes administered throughout the Vieux Carré (French Quarter) and other Creole *faubourgs* by “colored nurses of Louisiana” and by practitioners of the preeminent

religion of creolization: voodoo.⁵⁰ In the follow-up to his “Los Criollos” article he includes several examples of Creole French songs discovered during his peregrinations through the Quarter. The author delights in the “odd little Creole songs,” but is less enthusiastic about the lack of effort made to collect them. Comparing other Creole sites in the Caribbean, he writes that the “Creoles of the Antilles seem to have felt more pride in the linguistic curiosities of their native isles than the Creoles of Louisiana have manifested,” and cites the “fine collections of Creole legends and proverbs...and an excellent grammar of the dialect” published in Trinidad (here he refers to John Jacob Thomas’s *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar*, mentioned above). After calling out his fellow Louisianans for their neglect of the language, he recounts the more sanguine heritage of Creole French within the racially mixed quarters of the city. “Happily,” he writes, “all the ‘colored Creoles’ are not insensible to the charm of their maternal dialect, nor abashed when the invading *Amerikain* superciliously terms it ‘Gombo’” (*Inventing* 38). And in the passages following he offers a comparison between the heritage of the creole language of the region and the voodoo charms and medicines of this equally creolized religion:

There are mothers who still teach their children the songs—heirlooms of melody resonant with fetich words—threads of tune strung with *grisgris* from the Ivory Coast. So likewise, we need not doubt, are transmitted the secrets of that curious natural pharmacy in which colored nurses of Louisiana have manifested astounding skill—the secret of fragrant herb medicines which quench the fires of swamp fever, the secret of miraculous cataplasms which relieve congestions, the secret odorous *tisanes* which restore vigor to torpid nerves—perhaps also the composition of those love philters hinted at in Creole ballads. (*Inventing* 38)

⁵⁰ As Robert Farris Thompson writes, voodoo, which was “first elaborated in Haiti...is one of the signal achievements of people of African descent in the western hemisphere: a vibrant, sophisticated synthesis of the traditional religions of Dahomey, Yorubaland, and Kongo with an infusion of Roman Catholicism” (quoted in Cott 140).

The passage is striking for the parallels it draws between linguistic transmission and the transmission of “secrets of that curious natural pharmacy”—a link that not only heightens the associations of Creole French as a language indebted to African speakers, but also revels in the healthful effects wrought by both the medicinal and the linguistic products of creolization. There is an obviously racialized component in the use of words like “fetich” and “*grisgris*,” words that signify the sacred charms of West African and New Orleanian religious practices. Here, however, the appearance of these ethnically charged terms is not to point up the threat of contamination, but precisely the inverse: the Creole tunes, with their shamanistic importations, “restore vigor” and “relieve congestion” like the pharmacon to which Hearn compares them. The notion that language health was one dividend of such multilingual intercrossings echoes similar pronouncements made by Lowell regarding the capacity for his Yankeeisms to invigorate a stale literary English. The difference of course is Hearn’s surprisingly pluralistic (and progressive) deployment of the metaphor of health as an outcome of racial and linguistic miscegenation. Striking, too, is the fact that he includes this analogy immediately following the presentation of his own translations of more Eurocentric Creole songs reputedly sung before the early nineteenth-century court of the infamous American playboy Bernard Marigny de Mandeville. The effect of Hearn’s placement of these songs alongside his exposition on the vibrant heritage of African-American Creole populations is both to further muddle any easy “racial dichotomy of black and white” and to signal the importance of understanding the language as a product of mixture, a *tisane* of European and African speakers.

A Creole Signifier

The term *creole*—as a signifier of both ethnicity and language—condenses the contradictory attitudes toward New Orleans’ potentially miscegenated landscape: the anxieties (and often unexpressed desires) surrounding the intermixture of races and languages. As a term of race, *creole* has never achieved a stable definition. An early text in which the word appears, Jorge Juan and Antonio de Ulloa’s *A Voyage to South America* (1748, trans 1760-72), contains two noteworthy, conflicting usages, as cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “The Whites,” the authors write of the inhabitants of colonial Colombia, “may be divided into two classes, the Europeans, and Creoles, or Whites born in the Country” (I. I. iv. 29); a few pages later, this separate classification appears: “The class of Negroes is...again subdivided into Creoles and Bozares” (I. I. iv. 31). Likewise, in Louisiana, *creole*⁵¹ referred to someone of European origin, usually French or Spanish, born in the region; at the same time it could also signify anyone of a mixed racial heritage (Jones 116). During the post-Reconstruction era this state of perpetual ambiguity led to a campaign to “purify” *creole* and render it a term of strictly European significance. But there were also those, Hearn among them, who saw creole ethnicity and creole patois as a productive flashpoint for more progressive conceptions of cultural mixtures, and who sought to preserve the ambiguity of *creole* and the process of creolization.

⁵¹ Believed to be “a colonial corruption” of the Spanish *criadillo*, meaning “bred, brought up, reared” (*OED*). Washington Irving, for one, in his 1836 *Astoria*, called a French Creole interpreter “one of those haphazard wights of Gallic origin, who abound upon our frontier, living among the Indians like one of their own race” (286). Here, the term maintains its Eurocentric focus, but is complicated by the ethnic blending of “living among the Indians like one of their own race” (an ambiguous construction similar to that seen in *A Life on the Prairies*, discussed in the first chapter).

Very little had been written about the Creole French language in New Orleans when Hearn first arrived in the city. Alfred Mercier's *Étude sur la langue créole en Louisiane*, which would be published some few years later, in 1880, defined Creole French as a patois at least partially dependant on African borrowings. But just as important, Mercier showed the dominant presence of the language, and its African heritage, within the white French enclaves of Louisiana. As Gavin Jones writes, "Mercier considered Creole French to be a black creation that was both logically consistent and highly attractive to whites" (115). Mercier looked back fondly on his early years of creole immersion: "[T]here are [...] among us," he writes, "those who have exclusively made use of the dialect of the negroes to the age of 10 or 12 years; I am one of those" (quoted in Jones 115). As a native Louisianan, essayist and novelist, Mercier did much to surface the formative importance of Creole French among upper-class New Orleans whites, but his work was by far the exception rather than the rule.

Much more often, the linguistics of Creole French concerned its status as a mongrel lingua franca, a means of communicating with "children and domestics," but by no means a fully fledged language. Philologist J. A. Harrison followed up on Mercier's study in 1882, writing in the *American Journal of Philology* that:

The notable *differentia* of the Creole patois is that it is a dialect that has sprung up almost entirely by the ear. Illiterate white folk and Africans of the purest blood, catching by ear the more or less indistinct utterances of the landed and commercial aristocracy around them, have reproduced in their own way, otographically, so to speak, the message delivered to their far from fastidious sensorium, producing a dialect resembling French in a fashion that suggests the relation between the *Æthiopica* of Uncle Remus and current English. (286)

Harrison's project here is twofold: on the one hand he seeks to evacuate Louisiana Creole French of all traces of racial or linguistic miscegenation. It is a language of "[i]lliterate

white folk and Africans of the purest blood”—a debased language, perhaps, but not one that need entail any racial mixing. At the same time, he subtly employs the contamination analogy to provide an origin narrative of Creole French. It is a *sui generis* language, which “has sprung up” not through complex interactions of phonetic, morphemic, and lexical features from West African and French languages, but through corrupted mimicry. A “far from fastidious sensorium”—faulty hearing, in other words—is the basis for the patois. While Harrison later refers his readers to a more sympathetic text, John Jacob Thomas’s *The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar* (1869)—a work that argues against seeing the Creole French of Trinidad and Tobago as “*only* mispronounced French” (iv)—he persists in furthering the idea that the patois was simply an idiom of inaccuracy. The author does not wholly discount an African influence on the development of Creole French. In one instance he refers to the “thick lips—the aural myopia—not of one, but of tens of thousands of individuals” who “gave birth to these winged Ethiopianisms, the delight of the French quarter of New Orleans and the nursery babble of countless Creole homes” (286-7). But, as is obvious from this passage, his musings on such “Ethiopianisms” become little more than the repetition of racist equations of language and character: the “word-fragments and débris of conjugation” that the “French negro of Louisiana...weaves into an ingenious and intelligible scheme” is, finally, “interesting psychologically,” but not linguistically.

Alcée Fortier, professor of Romance languages at Tulane University and a noted creole folklorist, would continue in the same vein as Harrison in “The French Language in Louisiana and the Negro-French Dialect,” featured in the 1884-1885 *Transactions of the Modern Language Association of America*. Fortier finds interesting the fact that “the

ignorant and simple Africans have formed an idiom entirely by the sound,” and makes a similar correlation between what he terms “Negro-French” and its speakers. The language is, according to Fortier, the outcome of a “great facility” that “American blacks of the South” have for “imitating the sounds of nature,” combined with “a wonderful aptitude for music” (102). Overall, echoing the facile “primitivist” arguments made by philologists at the beginning of the nineteenth century, this attitude toward Creole French becomes, as linguist Michel DeGraff asserts, part of a long tradition of “creole exceptionalism,” of treating the language as “a special class...apart from ‘normal/regular’ languages” (“Against Creole Exceptionalism” 391).

It would be disingenuous to say that Hearn’s work on creole ethnography and linguistics wholly controverts the racialism of his age. But set off from the above attitudes, what we find is a body of literature that works subtly and effectively to present another perspective on miscegenation as a positive model for both racial and linguistic variation and development. Indeed it was Hearn’s later novel, *Youma: The Story of a West-Indian Slave* (1890), which, as the title suggests, recounts the tragic story of a Martiniquan slave, interspersed with dialog in the Creole French of the West Indies, in which the term *creolization* first appears in English (*OED*). Throughout *Youma*, Hearn offers examples of Martiniquan Creole French, and makes a case for the social and aesthetic benefits of creolization. A decade before this, Hearn was just embarking on an examination of the phenomenon, but he did not balk at making outright claims for the benefits of such mixture. As Christopher Bongie notes, “Recalling commonplace nineteenth-century views about degeneration of ‘white’ Creoles...Hearn’s formulation reverses them, identifying the process as ‘refining’ rather than degenerative, and in this

respect marking a new and potentially more positive stage in the apprehension of ‘the phenomena of creolization,’ laying the foundation for a communitarian thinking that would question the racial categorizations and cultural sectionalism [...] inherited from the Victorians” (157).

While Hearn was not initially interested in an exacting phonetic, morpho-syntactic, or lexical analysis of the language, he was nonetheless a pioneer when it came to the representation of heterogeneity within the Louisiana Creole speech community, and more broadly, within folklore studies of New Orleans’s inhabitants. As Bronner writes, Hearn “took the idea of heterogeneity further [than his contemporaries], suggesting that folklore in its essence represents hybridization, and that this process amounts to a racial and cultural development” rather than an affront to racial purity (144). It is, however, difficult, if not impossible, to condense his position toward Creole French into one overarching statement. He is passionate about the language because, as he writes, it “must die in Louisiana”—it is speech on the edge of extinction, due to what he calls “the great social change”: forces epitomized in New Orleans by the influx of Northern capital, the domineering of Southern Democrats, and, more generally, the monolingualism he saw as the inevitable conclusion of American modernization. With this perceived threat hanging over the head of creole speakers, Hearn saw his early duties as a reporter, a writer of “sketches,” to be those of salvage. Much like the so-called salvage ethnology that marked the antebellum collection of Native American languages, Hearn’s ethnographic and linguistic ambitions upon first making contact with the French Quarter and its “patois speaking inhabitants” was similarly motivated. In 1882, Hearn

wrote a piece for the New Orleans *City Item* titled simply “The Creole Patois”; the article captures many of his desires for the idiom. Opening the article, he writes that:

Although the pure creole element is disappearing from the *Vié faubon*, as creole children called the antiquated part of New Orleans, it is there nevertheless that the patois survives as a current idiom; it is there one must dwell to hear it spoken in its purity, and to study its peculiarities of intonation and construction. The patois-speaking inhabitants—dwelling mostly in those portions of the quadrilateral farthest from the river and from the broad American boundary of Canal Street, which many of them never cross when they can help it—are not less *bizarre* than the architectural background of their picturesque existence (*LFA* 126).

Here we find a counter to the Anglo-Saxon nativism and revisionist quarantining of much post-Reconstruction literature. Rather than excising foreign or non-Anglo elements from his sketch, Hearn attempts instead to sequester and highlight a “pure creole element.” Of course, such sequestration can read like yet another attempt to make the local color of New Orleans seem simply quaint, a commodified piece of eccentricity, but not a fully functional or fully formed cultural group. But Hearn’s repetition of the theme of “dwelling”—on the part of both observer and the Creole subjects themselves—undercuts this kind of reading. Writing about Creoles in New Orleans and about the “peculiarities of intonation and construction” of Creole French requires more than observation and study; it requires one to become a fellow dweller. Hearn’s affection for the “Odd, the Queer, the Strange, the Exotic” is undoubtedly on display here, especially in his comparison of the “*Vié faubon*’s” inhabitants with the quarter’s “*bizarre*...architectural background.” And the well-worn idea of environmental influence on character and speech is also present in his references to the speakers’ “picturesque existence.” But what becomes the most prominent feature of the article is the idea that prior literary,

linguistic, and ethnographic studies have been inadequate to the task of truly navigating and explaining the language, place, and people of the Louisiana Gulf.

Hearn would make the call for “philologists to rescue some of [the creole tongue’s] dying legends and curious lyrics, to collect and preserve them, like pressed blossoms, between the leaves of enduring books.” At the same time, he saw the “intercrossing” that produced the creole patois as part of the very modernizing processes at work in New Orleans. In this regard, Hearn found a sympathetic colleague in George Washington Cable. While in Cincinnati, Hearn had encountered Cable’s “Jean-ah Poquelin” in *Scribner’s Magazine*, a story that recounts the haunting clash between the title character, a Creole indigo farmer and smuggler, and the modernization (and xenophobia) attending Reconstruction-era Louisiana. On arriving in New Orleans, Hearn determined to meet the author and the two began an extended friendship that resulted in several collaborations of creole folkloristics. They met, as Jonathan Cott describes, “two or three nights a week to swap Creole poems and stories, then strolled through the Old Quarter to observe Creole street dancers and stop to listen to many of the black singers, as Cable notated the melodies and Lafcadio wrote down the words” (Cott 156). These collaborations found their way into the mainstream through Cable’s articles in *The Century Magazine*: “Creole Slave Songs” and “The Dance in Place Congo.” While Hearn remained uncredited for his work in documenting the songs of African-American and West-Indian singers depicted in these pieces, his fervor for such collection would later find a platform in *Gombo Zhèbes*, discussed below. Hearn would maintain his personal and working relationship with Cable for much of his time in the Crescent City. Indeed, when Cable found himself under attack from conservative white Creoles,

who reacted with vitriol to his suggestion that the Creole French of the city owed as much to an African and West Indian influence as it did to its European forebears, Hearn was quick to support both the author and his assertions.⁵² In 1884, Cable published *The Creoles of Louisiana*, a work containing much of the author's intensive research on the language and the various ethnic groups who represented themselves as Creoles. In the text, Cable claims that "Creole" "was adopted by—not conceded to—the natives of mixed blood, and is still so used among themselves" (41). This notion of active adoption worked to destabilize the myth of cultural purity among white Creoles that persisted after the Civil War. Discussing Cable's work on creolization, Gavin Jones argues that the author's claims "undermined the hegemony of white language by appropriating, and remotivating, the term *Creole* as a badge of ethnic identity" (*Strange Talk* 117).⁵³

Seven years before the publication of Cable's Creole compendium, in the December 3, 1877 *Cincinnati Commercial*, Hearn had produced a similar thesis in an article titled "Los Criollos," one of several pieces he wrote on French and African-American Creoles for the newspaper. While describing as a "common error" the use of the term Creole to designate "a mulatto, quadroon or octoroon," Hearn also points out that the confusion stemmed from the fact that New Orleans' "colored element... call themselves Creoles, and desire to be so called"—an act of appropriation that actively blurs racial boundaries in much the same way that Creole French acted to disrupt notions of linguistic purity. Throughout the essay Hearn seems to delight in the confusion wrought by the polysemy of the term *creole*, noting how "Ladies at Washington have been known to faint while conversing with Southern Senators at a reception, because the

⁵² See Cott 416n

⁵³ See especially 117-122 for a discussion of Cable's Creole folkloristics within the context of scholarship by Mercier, Harrison, and others.

honorable and distinguished gentlemen accidentally observed in the course of the conversation that they were Creoles” (*Inventing* 31). And he stresses that the ambiguity of *creole* “is not even confined to the...Northern States, but flourishes, curiously enough, even in the South” (195).

In all, Hearn is less interested in cementing a strict correlation between the signifier and its racial and linguistic referents than he is in further complicating the word’s usage history. He quotes at length from Alexander Dimitry, “a Greek gentleman of New Orleans,” who “[a]fter some severe allusions to the inadequateness of the definitions by Webster and Worcester,” offers a long etymology of the term. From Dimitry we learn that “the word *criollo*, a creole, is an invention of Spanish born parents, to denote their children, begotten and born in America” (the word is actually believed to derive from a variant of the Spanish *criadillo/criado*—“bred, brought up, reared”⁵⁴) (*Inventing* 199). Hearn moves on to cite “one of the most profound jurists of Spain,” V. de Soloranzo, who is the main source used by Dimitry in his own exposition. This chain of citations works to befuddle more than it does to clarify, as we encounter a bit of circular logic from Soloranzo (in a mixture of Spanish and English) who states that Creoles are those “in the two Indies...born of Spanish parents, because in those countries it is the custom to call them Creoles” (199). Hearn himself is cagey about the application of the term in Louisiana, remarking that “Creoles of New Orleans and of Louisiana (whatever right any save Spaniards may have originally have had to the name), are all those native-born who can trace back their ancestry to European immigrants to or European colonists of the State, whether those were English, Dutch, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Portuguese, Russian, or Sicilian” (202). African ancestry is a

⁵⁴ *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989

glaring lacuna in this list, which seems to affirm the Eurocentric opinions of his sources about the “right” designation for *creole*. But when Hearn turns to discussion of the particular patois of Louisiana Creole French, he readily admits incorporation of African languages into its lexicon and structure: “This Louisiana patois is partly comprehensible for one cognizant of the French language; and I have been able myself to make some translations of it into English from the columns of *Le Carillon*. In some parishes, I am told, it is more difficult to understand than others, owing perhaps to its being there more compounded with real African words than elsewhere. It is a matter of difficulty to imagine where many Creole words could possibly come from except from African dialects” (204-205).

Several later articles for the New Orleans *Times-Democrat* pick up the topic of linguistic mixture from a more strictly scientific perspective, and present a narrative of Creole French that draws productively on the topoi of the nostalgic “speech islands” (literal and figurative)—shared by the ADS—and a more pluralistic view of creole grammar as both unique in its construction and yet culturally unexceptional in its capacity for expression. Hearn also attempts to expand the subject matter included under the umbrella of “linguistic and anthropological” discourses, to make a more profound case for the inclusion of work typically considered frivolous or outside the fray of serious scholarship. The first article in the series, “Some Notes on Creole Literature” (June 13, 1886), displays the author’s thorough investment in contemporary creole scholarship. He reviews a “tiny work just published by the well-known folklorists, MM. Gaidoz and Sebillot at Paris, entitled *Bibliographie des Traditions et de la Litterature populaire des Frances d’outre-mer*,” calling it a work that should “prove valuable to those interested in

the subject of Creole dialects and Creole customs,” and one that should “open the eyes of the student to the importance, linguistic and anthropological, of the literature considered” (*American Miscellany* 154). Hearn’s erudition is on display here as he notes the absence in the bibliography of “some fifty titles” of “Creole dialect-literature proper,” as well as “magazine articles and newspaper curiosities” (154). Among these lacunae he includes “the Creole stories contributed...in French to *Melusine* [a French philological journal] by Loys Bruyère, as specimens of Guyana Creole”—which according to Hearn’s own accounts were in fact attributable to Louisiana’s African-American Creole population.⁵⁵ The point, however, in addition to exhibiting his catholic reading of Creole French scholarship and pan-Caribbean literature, is one of expanding the overall definition of “creole literature” to include both imaginative literature as well as the songs and stories of strictly African origin.

The next day’s edition of the *Times-Democrat* (June 14, 1886) would find one of Hearn’s clearest rejoinders to the perception of African-American Creole French as a simplistic lingua franca produced by corrupted mimicry. He begins the article, titled “The Scientific Value of Creole,” with a comparison of the language to other dialects of colonial contact, arguing that “the patois of the old French slave-colonies was something very different” from the “*langue franque*” of these zones in that it possesses “a perfectly defined grammatical system, and absolutely symmetrical construction” (*American Miscellany* 159). The comparison represents a progressive reframing of the language and allows for a more complex treatment of Creole French and the oral literature it produced. The creole tongue, he writes, has developed out of the “exceptional

⁵⁵ One of these stories, “*Compère Tigre et Compère Bouki*,” was in fact translated by Hearn for the New Orleans *Item*, according to Albert Mordell (*American Miscellany* 157n).

conditions” of “the slave-system” and has resulted not only in “an admirable medium for expression,” but also “a peculiar oral literature” (160). Accompanying his claims for the grammatical complexity of the creole is a parallel celebration of “the novelist,” who, he remarks, is responsible for first bringing the “romance” of “[t]he old plantation life of the colonies...and the dialect which was invented by their slave populations” into the fold of “ethnological and philological interest” (159). By ushering in the novel as an ur-piece of ethnology, Hearn emphasizes the equally “intercrossed” function of imaginative literature and paves the way for his own fictional and non-fictional contributions.

Hearn would elaborate on his appraisal of both the grammar and the general aesthetics of Louisiana Creole in yet another *Times-Democrat* article in October of 1886. Responding to the recent publication of Fortier’s *MLA* piece (“The French Language in Louisiana and the Negro-French Dialect”), Hearn chastises the author’s “affectation” and “hypersensitiveness” in referring to the Creole French of Louisiana as “Negro-French.” Working from a paradigm of racial hierarchy, Fortier uses the label to quarantine the African elements of the creole and keep at bay white Creole fears about racial contamination. Hearn, on the other hand, calls *creole* an “admirably significant” expression, precisely because it implies “not only a form of language, but also the special conditions which gave the language existence” (*American Miscellany* 164). In other words, creolization, and the system of slavery that gave rise to it, is necessarily both an ethnic and linguistic process, and turning to “euphemisms” like the racially charged “Negro-French” is not only disingenuous, it does real damage to the discipline of creole studies. Hearn is thus careful to correct the missteps that Fortier makes based on his narrow view of the language. Reacting to the author’s contention that the “Negro-

French” use of the dative case “is very rare” (with the implicit accusation that such case systems were only available to more “civilized” languages), Hearn responds: “we have reason to fancy that the ‘dative’ ...is anything but rare: the writer of this has heard repeatedly [*sic*]. Examples in current Creole songs are numerous” (166-167). And he proceeds to give several examples from his own collection of verses, such as the following:

*La reine à moin, ye mandé pou’ moin;—
Bonsoir dono: li temps mo allé....*

*Quand mo passé magazine bonbons,
Tchor à moin sauté, bouche à moin coulé....*

Through the inclusion of such verses, with their dative instances highlighted for effect, Hearn exemplifies the value of a more pluralistic approach to the language, as well as a more catholic understanding of what counts as viable subject matter for creole studies. He ends the piece with a general ethnolinguistic call to arms, citing the need for more such examples, “whether colloquial expressions in daily use, or cullings from that oral literature of the negroes which is passing away unwritten” in order to “produce something really noteworthy, which philologists on both sides of the ocean might feel serious interest in” (167).

In effect, what Hearn accomplishes in his newspaper reviews of the understudied productions of linguistic creolization and his ethnographic writing on African-American Creole oral literature is twofold: the increased awareness of the complexity and relativist equality of Creole French as a language of heterogeneity—and not racially divided hierarchy—and a widening of the types of discourse that could count as subject matter for creole scholarship and for ethnolinguistic studies themselves. Literature, in other words,

was both an apt object for the illustration of linguistic features and a medium particularly suited to the collection of heterogeneous Creole French voices. Hearn's own forays into such collection, in his imaginative fiction and his folkloristic collection of creole proverbs, would demonstrate the full extent to which the "literary" participated in the process and the representation of creolization.

"Gombo" Linguistics

In 1885, hoping to gain more national attention and much needed funding, Hearn set about compiling a series of Creole French proverbs as a memorabilia pamphlet for the New Orleans Exposition.⁵⁶ The collection, *Gombo Zhèbes*, was subtitled a "Little Dictionary of Creole Proverbs, Selected from Six Creole Dialects," and represented the first such dictionary of its kind in the US. Along with *Gombo Zhèbes*, Hearn had created another piece of pioneering ethno-folkloristics: a cookbook, *La Cuisine Créole*, which has been called "America's first regional cookbook," and which the author also hoped to capitalize on during the Exposition. These works were accompanied by an expanded reprint of Hearn's 1882 *Item* article on "The Creole Patois" in the January 10 and 17, 1885 editions of *Harper's Weekly*.⁵⁷ The first part of this essay contains his remarks on

⁵⁶ Its full title, the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, speaks to the internationalist and industrial motifs that dominated the fair, which featured exhibits from Mexico, Venezuela, and Japan, as well as domestic displays from the states. The Expo ran from December, 1884-June, 1885.

⁵⁷ *Harper's* dedicated several articles hyping the economically troubled New Orleans Expo. In the January 17, 1885 edition, for example, a brief article, "At New Orleans," attempts to boost flagging interest in the national event. The author of the piece announces the "gratifying information that the attendance at the Exposition is daily increasing. Not only is greater interest apparent among the citizens of New Orleans, as the various exhibits assume development and order, but the number of visitors from other parts of the country augments from day to day" (39). Hearn himself contributed similar complimentary articles for *Harper's* describing many of the international exhibits, including "The New Orleans Exposition: The Japanese Exhibit" (January 31, 1885), "The East at New Orleans" (March 7, 1885), and "Mexico at New Orleans" (March 14, 1885). These pieces reveal both the extent to which the national eye was turned on New Orleans during the Exposition, and the particularly internationalist bent of its many displays. In this it

the “creole patois” as “the offspring of linguistic miscegenation,” and it serves as a fitting backdrop to the longer form collection of *Gombo Zhèbes* (27). Hearn writes in the *Harper’s* article that his own exposition of Creole French is intended merely “to reflect the spirit of existing things rather than to analyze the past, to sketch local peculiarities and reflect local color without treating broadly of causes” (27). *Gombo Zhèbes*, however, would give the lie to this reductive “reflection,” revealing the importance for Hearn of metaphors like “miscegenation” and “intercrossing”—metaphors that speak to the essential heterogeneity and transnationality of Creole French outside of the constricted national region.

He opens the book with another metaphor, one which draws on his exploration of New Orleans’ Creole culinary world: the rich, dense stew that is “gombo” itself. The opening serves to describe the dish—“compounded of many odds and ends”—as a term applied to the Creole French of the city (“residents of New Orleans seldom speak of it as ‘Creole’: they call it *gombo*”) and to chart the parallels between the many varieties of *gombo* and the equally diverse forms of the language (3). The introduction also narrates how increasing familiarity with the language can open up the possibility for further insight into the complex intercrossings involved in its development. Hearn begins by identifying the reactions of the casual traveler to the city: “Any one who has ever paid a flying visit to New Orleans,” he writes, “probably knows something about those various culinary preparations whose generic name is ‘Gombo’” (3). In contrast, those who have “remained in the city for a season...have become familiar with the nature of ‘gombo file,’ ‘gombo fèvi,’ and ‘gombo aux herbes’”—a more detailed typology of the dish, in other

was similar to the better-known 1893 Columbia World’s Fair in Chicago, which likewise featured a pageantry of worldwide representatives of various nationalities and ethnic groups.

words, is had through prolonged dwelling in the city. Thus Hearn situates his own familiarity with both the cuisine and the language as proof positive of the insider's view of his "essay at Creole folklore" (3). More striking, however, is Hearn's appraisal of his own work when compared to that of other scholars. He concludes that his text "can only be classed as 'gombo zhèbes'": "it is a Creole dish, if you please, but a salmagundi of inferior quality" (3). His self-deprecation notwithstanding, the mixing of metaphors here is fascinating as it brings together the motifs of language and genre under the aegis of creolization: the text of *Gombo Zhèbes*, like the language that falls under the same moniker, is "compounded of many odds and ends," at once a scholarly primer filled with paratextual devices (bibliography, detailed footnotes, and a subject index) and a literary presentation of the oral proverbs of pan-Caribbean and pan-African Creole French. In effect, Hearn's work, as an emergent language study, represents a more progressive and more public synthesis of Creole French just as the language itself—as seen in the proverbs that follow—is a complex synthesis of West Indian, African, African-American, and French forms. And unlike the scholarship that Hearn cites, his 'gombo' text results in a productive complication of the containment and hierarchical classing of race and language.

Evans has argued that Gilded Age folklorists often construed their task as one of collecting "specimens," both objective and textual. This "object-based epistemology" helped to disrupt the dominant ethnographic concept of racial hierarchy, contributing to the development of the modern culture concept and the notion of cultural relativity and pluralism attendant upon it. Rather than an "'index' of the morals or customs" of a racial group, such artifacts, he writes, "were only pieces of the puzzle, miscellany, and

fragments—pieces, nonetheless, that suggested by their very fragmented nature the existence of a more complex interaction that had been shaped from a long history of accretion and transmutation across places, races, languages, and time” (*Before Cultures* 64). The insight is profound, and it helps to situate Hearn within the context of the changing folkloristic terrain. However, by focusing on Creole French and the very process of racial and linguistic creolization, Hearn did not merely suggest such transmutations through implicit means, he actively sought them out and, equally, sought to represent them through his transliterations, translations, and the copious notes that explained their formation. *Gombo Zhèbes* comprises 352 Creole proverbs, arranged alphabetically rather than by any racial typology. The strategy confirms Hearn’s commitment to a version of the language based not on facile categorization or hierarchy, but on Creole expression as a body of literature that links transnational and interracial sites together: “the effect of the collection,” as Bronner remarks, “was to connect Louisiana folklore to a larger Creole-speaking world” (172).

Blurring these boundaries, Hearn enacts the racial and linguistic ambiguity of the concept of *creole*, as discussed in articles like “Los Criollos.” Throughout *Gombo Zhèbes* he makes references to both the Eurocentric version of the term and explicitly African and West-Indian influences. On the one hand, he mentions that a “very fair knowledge of comparative Creole grammar and pronunciation may be acquired, by anyone familiar with French” through Eurocentric works like Alfred Mercier’s *Les Saint-Ybars* or M.C. Baissac’s “beautiful little stories,” “Recits Créoles” (5). On the other hand, he includes a long discussion of the dynamic phonetic influence of African and West Indian speakers. For instance, he writes that the “French sound of *u* was changed

into *ou*; the sound *en* was simplified into *è*; the clear European *o* became a nasal *au*; and into many French words containing the sound of *am*, such as *amour*, the negro wedged the true African *n*, making the singular Creole pronunciation *lanmou*, *canmarade*, *janmain*” (4). The bold assertion about the phonetic manipulation on the part of African speakers is novel for its direct nod to the principle of intermixture and its unqualified representation of Creole French as a language derived from the active participation of interracial speakers. We find more specifically etymological examples of Hearn’s complication of race and language categorization in his explanation of the proverbs themselves. For instance, detailing the origin of the word *goumé* in the proverb *Cabritt pas connoit goumé, mais cui li batte la charge* (“The goat does not know how to fight; but his hide beats the charge”), he offers a dual history: “*Goumé*, or in some dialects, *goumein*, is...a verb of African origin. Still we have the French word *gourmer*, signifying to curb a horse, also, to box, to give cuffs” (12). Such duality defers (and defies) the straightforward classification of the term along racial lines. By holding out the possibility for both an African and a French etymology, Hearn reflects the ambiguity of the very concept of *creole*, implying that there is perhaps more value in his ‘gombo’ approach to language than the more rigid hierarchies of his contemporaries.

In addition to this kind of etymological ambiguity, the collection itself blurs generic boundaries of local color and ethnolinguistic compilation. Especially in the many notes to the various proverbs and their particular creole idiom, we find a series of stories in miniature that work to disrupt a purely “object-based epistemology,” a classification of the text as a mere museum piece or cabinet of curios. For Hearn, the context and application of the proverbial sayings are central to a full understanding of their function

within creolized culture. “While some of these proverbs are witty enough to call a smile to the most serious lips,” he writes, “a large majority...depend altogether upon application for their color or their effectiveness; they possess a chameleon power of changing hue according to the manner in which they are placed” (4). In presenting and explaining the history of particular words and phrases, the author does more than compile cultural artifacts, he recounts the manifold, context-driven forces behind them, and, in many cases, the miscegenated terrain in which they exist. In one example, describing the proverb *Capon vive longtemps* (“The coward lives a long time”), he provides an extensive parsing of the uses of *capon*:

The word *capon* is variously applied by Creoles as a term of reproach. It may refer rather to stinginess, hypocrisy, or untruthfulness, than to cowardice. We have in New Orleans an ancient Creole ballad of which the refrain is:

Alcée Leblanc
Mo di toi, chère,
To trop capon
Pou payé ménage!
C'est qui di ça,—
Ça que di toi chère,
Alcée Leblanc!

In this case the word evidently refers to the niggardliness of *Alcée*, who did not relish the idea of settling \$500 or perhaps \$1,000 of furniture upon his favorite quadroon girl. The song itself commemorates customs of slavery days. Those who took to themselves colored mistresses frequently settled much property upon them.... [S]uch dowries formed the foundation of many celebrated private lodging houses in New Orleans kept by colored women. (13)

The narrative here extends the boundaries of etymology and the folkloristic collection of “specimens.” Through its free-associative use of poetry and historical account, the explanatory note tells the story of the word as a story of linguistic and racial miscegenation. And in situating the word in its contemporary and historical context, and deploying, if implicitly, the dialectological claim that *each word has its own history*,

Hearn merges the ethnolinguistic text with a form of local color reportage. In doing so, he suggests how such mergers were essential to fully acknowledging and disseminating the story of creolization: linguistically, racially, and historically. Three years later, he would embark on a more imaginative enterprise, the novella *Chita: A Memory of Last Island*, a work that equally merged local color and ethnography, and produced a fuller tapestry of Louisiana's ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity.

***Chita*, Tragedy, and Heterogeneity**

The novella first appeared in the April 1888 edition of *Harper's Monthly* and was published as a book in 1889. The plot revolves around an 1856 hurricane that resulted in the destruction of a small resort island, L'Île Dernière, some hundred miles southeast of New Orleans. According to Cott, Hearn first heard the tale that would become *Chita* from George Washington Cable, who remained uncredited in both publications of the story; indeed, the novella was a large part of the two friends' bitter parting shortly after its appearance (193).

Chita tells the story of a tragic heroine, caught in a storm of physical and sociocultural upheaval. The title character, a girl of Creole French background, has survived the ravages of the storm that destroyed most of L'Île Denière and its aristocratic Creole vacationers, including her parents. She is adopted by a Spanish couple living an idyllic if hardscrabble life fishing the waters of the Gulf coast. Her adoption by and absorption into this new life on the ethnically plural periphery of Southeastern Louisiana represents the "eye" of the novel's tragic storm. Its true tragedy is felt when Chita's father, Julien, who has survived the hurricane believing both wife and child to be dead,

returns to scene of the storm. As a doctor and a victim himself of tragedy, he has delivered his life over to healing victims of another storm: yellow fever (during an epidemic previous to the perilous 1878 outbreak). Contracting the disease himself, he retreats one last time to the Gulf, only to find himself on his deathbed in the hands of his long-lost daughter. Guessing her identity, but not wanting to further compound her own loss, he commits a final act of sacrifice by remaining silent to the end.

In the preface to the most recent edition of *Chita*, Delia LaBarre calls the novella “the culmination of all Hearn’s studies and writings while in Louisiana,” and declares it “the quintessential Creole novel, even in its demi-novel form” (x). The narrative is full of Creole French, Spanish, Italian, and Tagalog dialog, often untranslated, and relies heavily on Hearn’s linguistic researches in New Orleans and the surrounding Southeastern Louisiana coast. Despite its arguable “quintessence,” however, and despite its direct borrowing from Cable, the novella shares few of the qualities characterizing that of Hearn’s better-known colleague. Where Cable’s work, notably his first novel *The Grandissimes* (1880), is largely centered in New Orleans and focused on the caste system that structured French Creoles’ sociocultural interactions, Hearn is much more interested in unearthing the ambiguities of creolization and ethnic heterogeneity at a further remove from both the city and the dominance of Eurocentric understandings of *creolité*.

Hearn’s career as a journalist and erstwhile travel writer is strongly felt in the first part of *Chita*. Indeed, the first third of the novella is dedicated to romantic and impressionistic descriptions of the landscape and people framing the narrative. In many ways it would be easy to pan these descriptions as participating in the local color strategies of exoticizing difference, of authorizing an internal colonialist ideology by

rendering multiethnic difference and spatial peripherality inferior. But the novella denies such a reading in its very refusal to allow ethnographic and ethnolinguistic observation to stand in as an index of racial character. As with *Gombo Zhèbes*, what we find instead is an insistence on intermixture: an attempt to destabilize comfortable notions of racial categorization through the continual portrayal of L'Île Dernière and the surrounding coast as a site of racial and linguistic heterogeneity. And, again, it is precisely the generic intercrossing of local color, reportage, travel writing, and ethnolinguistic study that enables this heterogeneous mode and the defamiliarizing presentations of language, place, and people that it constructs. We see Hearn's heterogeneous mode immediately in *Chita's* opening passage: "Travelling south from New Orleans to the Islands," he writes, "you pass through a strange land into a strange sea, by various winding waterways" (3). He addresses a second person "you," invoking a point of view common to travel literature, but seemingly out of place for the opening of a piece of fiction, and one that urges readers to identify as travelers themselves, entering into this "strange sea" through a maze of bayou canals and streams. The implication here is that to travel from metropol to outland is to find oneself in an indeterminate and confusing landscape, a text scored by "various winding waterways." Such confusion is further emphasized as we are introduced to the inhabitants of this peripheral zone, where "[u]nder...emerald shadows curious little villages of palmetto huts are drowsing, [there] dwell swarthy populations of Orientals,—Malay fishermen, who speak the Spanish-Creole of the Philippines as well as their own Tagal, and perpetuate in Louisiana the Catholic tradition of the Indies" (5). While Hearn's description of the fishermen emphasizes race, the ultimate effect is neither to mark the village as a site in need of imperial possession nor to paint a picture of

inferiority. Instead, in this welter of transnational creoles and other languages, as well as religious adoptions and adaptations, he reveals subjects who are inventive practitioners of heterogeneous forms of language and religious tradition.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the scene that narrates the aftermath of the hurricane. Once the storm has passed, “swift in the wake of gull and frigate-bird,” Hearn writes, “the Wreckers come, the Spoilers of the dead,—savage skimmers of the sea,—hurricane-riders wont to spread their canvas-pinions in the face of storms” (31). These “savage skimmers” are given more specific national ties; they are “Sicilian and Corsican outlaws, Manila-men from the marshes, deserters from many navies, Lascars, marooners, refugees of a hundred nationalities,—fishers and shrimpers by name, smugglers by opportunity,—wild channel-finders from obscure bayous and unfamiliar *chênières*, all skilled in the mysteries of these mysterious waters beyond the comprehension of the oldest licensed pilot...” (31). Here, the Gulf reveals the extremes of its multinational make-up. Rather than simply the itinerant French and Spanish Creole populations of its resort islands, the coast becomes truly transnational, more a conglomeration of expats and pirates than it is a safely colonized contact zone. Of course, Hearn does recur to the language of savagism in calling these populations “savage skimmers of the sea.” But the emphasis here is not on a facile containment of diverse peoples under the umbrella of savagery. What is instead emphasized is the mixture of geographic and ethnic backgrounds: Sicily, Corsica, Manila, India, Afro-America. Hearn also spotlights the specific knowledge these groups have of the coastal marshes. Not only are they revealed to exist as intermixed enclaves within national boundaries, but they are shown to know the physical composition of these boundaries better than anyone else. Indeed, Hearn

performs two related operations in this passage—he makes the Gulf Coast an unfamiliar territory—highlighted by the use of the French term *chênières*—more foreign than national, more mysterious than “comprehensible” by even the “oldest *licensed* pilot” (in other words, by those with state-sponsored approval to navigate these waters); and he transforms the various marginal “outlaws” into the true familiars of this borderland. In effect, he imbues these transnationals with the unique power to define “the mysteries of these mysterious” boundaries of the nation. Hearn keeps both familiarity and inferiority at bay, undercutting the idea that the nation can comfortably contain its pluralistic makeup within a singular, knowable territory.

Language becomes the key instrument for Hearn’s defamiliarizing of the Coast. Prior to this episode, the French phrases of the Creoles had been translated in the text. In the scene of plunder that follows, the Spanish, Italian, and Tagalog exclamations of the outlaws remain untranslated. Instead, Hearn engages in a critical dialogue, one that is unsparing in its critique of the pirates, but that is equally arch in its approach to the obsession with international “*objets de luxe*” that define the plundered aristocracy:

There is money in notes and in coin—in purses, in pocketbooks, and in pockets: plenty of it! There are silks, satins, laces, and fine linen to be stripped from the bodies of the drowned,—and necklaces, bracelets, watches, finger-rings and fine chains, brooches and trinkets.... ‘*Chi bidizza!—Oh! chi bedda mughieri! Eccu, la bidizza!*’ That ball-dress was made in Paris by—But you never heard of him, Sicilian Vicenzu.... ‘*Che bella sposina!*’ Her betrothal ring will not come off, Giuseppe; but the delicate bone snaps easily: your oyster-knife can sever the tendon.... ‘*Guardate! chi bedda picciota!*’ Over her heart you will find it, Valentino—the locket held by that fine Swiss chain of woven hair—‘*Caya manan!*’ And it is not your quadroon bondsmaid, sweet lady, who now disrobes you so roughly; those Malay hands are less deft than hers,—but she slumbers very far away from you, and may not be aroused from her sleep. ‘*Na quita mo! dalaga!—na quita maganda!*’...Juan, the fastenings of those diamond ear-drops are much too complicated for your peon fingers: tear them out!—‘*Dispense, chulita!’...*” (32).

The passage, while disturbing for its violence and its seeming indictment of the Italian and Malaysian plunderers, is, under an alternate reading, a tour de force of Hearn's heterogeneous mode. In narrating the vicious pirating of the storm's Creole victims, the author brings together a disturbing array of transnational artifacts: French gowns and Swiss chains of hair, as well as transliterations of Italian dialect and Tagalog speech. While on the surface the text reads as a denunciation of piracy, and, by extension, of the racialized perpetrators, the effect of this conglomeration is to reveal precisely how tragedy and loss productively expose the heterogeneous productions—commercial and linguistic—that haunt the Gulf Coast.

Chita is unique for this use of the topos of loss. The tragedy of the novella can be read in part as the tragedy of deteriorating Creole customs and speechways: Chita and her father, as the sole survivors in the family, are each witnessed in the process of either being subsumed into another ethnic and speech community, in Chita's case, or consumed by disease, as with her father. And the destruction of L'île Dernière itself has been called by Jefferson Humphries "a story...of disastrous loss as well as of closure"—both physically, in the island's complete annihilation, and allegorically, as it points to the demise of an antebellum Creole aristocracy. (*Chita* xvii). But scenes like the one above help to refute the idea that the author was simply seeking to elegize dying French Creole culture. Almost without exception, scenes of such loss are accompanied by a chorus of transnational voices, creoles, and linguistic mixture, suggesting that in the vacuum left by the disappearance of a rigid, Eurocentric notion of creolization, what we are left with is not absence, but the emergence of a more heterogeneous picture of *creolité* in the Gulf. Further on in the story, in a scene describing the encounter between the recently rescued

Chita and a group of men from a local search party, we are presented with yet another mélange of languages and dialects as each member attempts to communicate with the girl. The captain of this party, after his men have tried questioning Chita in English, German, and “several Italian idioms,” finally implores his companion Laroussel, “the only Creole in this crowd,” to “talk to her! Talk *gumbo* to her!” (54). The ensuing dialog, which also goes untranslated, finds Laroussel cajoling Chita to remember her family name. Ultimately, despite the girl’s fluency with Creole French, his efforts are unsuccessful, as Chita exclaims, “*Mo pas capab di’ ça;—mo pas capab di’ laut nom....Mo oulé; mo pas capab!*” (“I’m not able to tell you that,—I’m not able to tell you my other name....I want it! I’m not able to!”) (56). The cry represents one of Chita’s first full statements in the narrative, and fittingly it is an exclamation that constitutes the loss of her family name, even as we are exposed to what the search party captain calls “the infernal languages spoken down this way” (54). Later, after being adopted by the Spanish Viosca family, Chita’s loss of a strictly Eurocentric Creole identity and subsequent gain of a more thoroughly creolized habitus and language becomes more palpable as she takes the name of the couple’s long deceased daughter, Conchita, and is taught to speak the Castilian Spanish of her new parents. It is, perhaps ironically, the shedding of her past Creole French self that invites a more fully realized creolization. We read that “with the acquisition of another tongue, there came to her also the understanding of many things relating to the world of the sea”—especially the “fables and the sayings of the sea,—the proverbs about its deafness, its avarice, its treachery, its terrific power,—especially one that haunted her for all time thereafter: *Si quieres aprender a orar, entra en el mar* (If thou wouldst learn to pray, go to the sea)” (77-78).

The lessons taught by her linguistic adoption are further embodied by her physical transformation: “Her delicate constitution changed;—the soft, pale flesh became firm and brown, the meagre limbs rounded into robust symmetry, the thin cheeks grew peachy with richer life” (86).

This constant collocation of Eurocentric Creole loss and more linguistically (and perhaps physically) heterogeneous emergence is heightened in the novella’s final scenes, in which Chita is reunited with her father at the coastal site of “Vioscas Point.” Julien, having come to convalesce after contracting yellow fever during his rounds of doctoring in the city, finds himself (through pure happenstance) in the Vioscas’ care. Chita’s first—and last—meeting with her father is marked by another multilingual mixture. Her first words—“*M’sieu-le-Docteur, maman d’mande si vous n’avez besoin d’que’que chose?*” (“Doctor, sir, mamma asks if there isn’t something you need?”)—are described as “the rude French of the fishing villages, where the language lives chiefly as a *baragouin*, mingled often with words and forms belonging to many other tongues” (100). While seeming to denounce Chita’s speech as a another kind of “gombo” in its deployment of the Breton term *baragouin*, the text actually enacts a similar *mélange* as it proceeds in alternating Creole French, Spanish, and English dialog. In his last fevered delirium, Chita’s father “moaned, sobbed, cried like a child,—talked wildly at intervals in French, in English, in Spanish” (106). And in his multilingual cries, and in Chita’s Spanish and “*baragouin*” speech, we find a final confirmation of Hearn’s use of tragedy, local color ethnography, and ethnolinguistics to surface not the loss of heterogeneity, of new linguistic adoptions and adaptations, but its continued persistence.

Conclusion

The trend in literary criticism toward increasing interdisciplinarity has invigorated the study of imaginative texts featuring dialects and other languages. Amy Strand has written convincingly of the shared objects of study seen in the early work of the American Dialect Society and postbellum literary representations of dialect. The “cross-fertilization” between these two fields opens up a useful interdisciplinary history of dialect study in the late nineteenth century. Strand writes that “[s]ince its inception, the society has expressed various interdisciplinary interests, particularly working across language studies and literary studies” (“Notes” 115). Where Strand explores the ways that the ADS was “doing” literary criticism, I have sought the flipside of this kind of interdisciplinarity—a literary history that accords the status of linguistics to literary productions. Fiction and other imaginative literatures that worked to expose language variation were, as I have shown, an integral part of the scholarship of linguistics in the nineteenth century.

The discovery of shared methodologies throughout the postbellum is not surprising, but expected, especially given the rhetorical framework that defined linguistic investigations within the literature of the post-war periods, and those preceding them. Writers throughout the nineteenth century were keenly aware of trying to construct the scientificity of their productions, whether such constructions manifested as self-conscious announcements of a more disinterested point of view, paratextual constructions like the elaborate indexes, footnotes, and vocabularies that populated many postbellum dialect

works of fictions, or, as was the case with Lafcadio Hearn, an actual folkloristic approach to creoles and dialects in direct conversation with the ethnographic and ethnolinguistic work of academic peers. Fiction writers did not merely reflect a scientific interest in language; they actively sought to institute and improve upon what was still a fledgling and plural academic pursuit. Literary texts not only intersected with linguistics, but actually helped to create an interest in dialects, creoles, and multilingual contacts, and actively cemented a more objective, relativist approach to these “other” languages.

Literary history of dialect and multilingual narratives can also prove to be an important backdrop for new developments in recent dialectology. Over the last three decades, the field of dialect research has paid increasing attention to the impact of what Richard Bailey calls the “Ideologies, Attitudes, and Perceptions” of language.⁵⁸ One basic tenet of this developing branch of “folk linguistics” or “folk dialectology” is the idea that speakers’ perceptions about lexicon, morphosyntax, and phonetics are an important part of how demographically diverse variants of a language grow or contract (or “drift,” to use Sapir’s formulation of the process of dialect variation⁵⁹). Much of the modern practice of linguistics and sociolinguistics is based on the idea that the sounds and structures of speech are, to speakers and casual observers, the product of largely unconscious processes. However, in a 1944 *Language* article, Leonard Bloomfield noted the existence and potential impact of “secondary and tertiary responses” to language—examples of speakers’ metadiscursive beliefs about their own speech and reactions to

⁵⁸ Richard Bailey, “Ideologies, Attitudes, Perceptions,” in Dennis R. Preston, ed., *Needed Research in American Dialects*, Publication of the American Dialect Society 88 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003) 123-150.

⁵⁹ See Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt, 1921); also Theo Vennemann, “An Explanation of Drift,” in *Word Order and Word Order Change*, Charles N. Li (ed), (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975) 269-305.

those beliefs (Bailey 136).⁶⁰ The article was provocative as it turned attention to the idea that such self-awareness could play a part in the formation of linguistic variance. But it was not until the 1964 UCLA Sociolinguistics Conference, as Nancy A. Niedzielski and Dennis R. Preston explain in their monograph on the field, that folk linguistics received its first scholarly call to arms (*Folk Linguistics 2*). Here, Henry Hoenigswald offers a presentation entitled “A proposal for the study of folk-linguistics.” In the paper, Hoenigswald cites that linguists

should be interested not only in (a) what goes on (language), but also in (b) how people react to what goes on (they are persuaded, they are put off, etc.) and in (c) what people say goes on (talk concerning language). It will not do to dismiss these secondary and tertiary modes of conduct merely as sources of error. (Hoenigswald 20, in Niedzielski and Preston 2)

Hoenigswald urges researchers to collect “folk expressions for various speech acts and...the folk terminology for, and the definitions of, grammatical categories such as *word* and *sentence* (*Folk Linguistics 2*). He also suggests “that particular attention be paid to folk accounts of the correcting of linguistic behavior, especially in...relation to accepted ideas of correctness and acceptability” (2). In a 1996 *Language Awareness* article, Preston furthers the call to investigate “the modes of folk linguistic awareness,” focusing on how both “the concern for ‘language correctness’” and other “sociocultural rather than strictly linguistic facts” have produced an array of beliefs that reveal significant semantic, syntactic, and phonological knowledge among lay speakers (72).⁶¹ He expresses the need for an in-depth understanding of language awareness among non-

⁶⁰ Also see: Leonard Bloomfield, “Secondary and Tertiary Responses to Language,” *Language* 20 (1944) 45-55.

⁶¹ See Dennis Preson, “Whaddayaknow?: The Modes of Folk Linguistic Awareness” *Language Awareness* 5.1 (1996) 40-74. Also see Niedzielski, Nancy A., and Dennis Richard Preston. *Folk Linguistics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000/1999.

linguists, “not only for its independent scientific value but also for the undeniable importance it has in the language professional’s interaction with the public” (“Whaddayaknow” 72). What speakers know about their own dialects and idiolects, as well as what they believe about the formations of regional and accented speech styles, is for Preston a “dynamic area of study” that promises to play “a central role” in sociolinguistic understandings of language change and variation.⁶²

This kind of folk knowledge deserves to be studied not only as a factor influencing linguistic data collection, but also as a phenomenon (at least in part) rooted in and disseminated by literatures of language. Preston himself acknowledges the potential for a shared terrain between folk linguistic studies of dialect performance and literary history of dialect texts. “Students of the representation of dialects in literature,” he notes, “have long been aware of the value of the limited use of “authentic” material in “artistic performance” (“Whaddayaknow” 66). He goes so far as to suggest the possibility that “imitators”—both in speech and in writing—“are sensitive to phonological ‘rules’” (67). In many ways, my own claims about the value of literatures of language in nineteenth-century America are motivated by a similar acknowledgement of the linguistic sensitivity that dialect and multilingual authors exhibit in their depiction, their “imitation,” of speech in writing. With this sensitivity in mind, I would advocate for a cross-disciplinary reconsideration of how literary dialect and other forms of language in literature might operate as modes of folk linguistic awareness. Literary history can add much to the conversation about the presence and the effects of metadiscursive, non-specialist accounts of language precisely because imaginative writing has been (and

⁶² Preston is especially intrigued by the insights that modes of folk awareness might offer in the “particularly mysterious” question of “style-shifting” (Whaddayaknow 71).

remains) a major conduit for formulating and broadcasting this kind of linguistic folk awareness.

Because of the striking potential for authors to project (wittingly or unwittingly) dialectal accuracy, I have aimed to move beyond a literary historical perspective that sees writers' representations of language as consistently complicit with reactionary or elitist principles. Following the culture wars of the last three decades, literary history has seen a refreshing trend toward canonical inclusiveness. More and more, so-called minor and minority authors have been rediscovered and re-analyzed against the institutions that initiated their forgetting in the first place. With such continued inclusiveness, multilingualism has emerged as a concept that might reinvigorate the ways we define and historicize American literature as a transnational (and translingual) pursuit. However, one shortfall of this otherwise positive tendency has been the increase of a brand of literary history marked by an acute antagonism toward seemingly reactionary creations of the past: a historicist finger-pointing that sees certain literary enterprises solely in light of their culturally conservative work, their maintenance of status quo power structures, and their constitution and reproduction of elitist belief systems. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, it is not hard to find evidence of literary chauvinism within the domain of language representation. But by emphasizing past intolerance (often, it would seem, purely for the sake of distinguishing a more enlightened present) we do a disservice to the actual complexity of linguistic discourse in the nineteenth century. Just as today, diverse arguments about a proper national language flourished within and without the academy. Nineteenth-century literatures of language have served all sides of this debate, just as popular culture and social science are today marshaled to expose

seeming linguistic aberrance or, alternatively, to refute knee-jerk judgments about what is or is not proper for one person, or one group, to speak.

Ultimately, a more comprehensive literary history reminds us that linguistic self-reflection is not the special purview of the twenty-first century. Authors, scholars, and critics, while very often concerned with the usage, elocution, and pronunciation that would determine a standard English, were also in many other instances aware of the arbitrariness of such arbitrations. As William Dean Howells wrote in an 1886 “Editor’s Study” column, “It has always been supposed by grammarians and purists that a language can be kept as they find it; but languages, while they live, are perpetually changing” (325). And charting and reflecting on these changes was equally the task of both scientific and imaginative discourse. Seen in this light, literatures of language, while obviously culpable in shaping linguistic ideology, also offer a more complicated picture of the forces that would ultimately lead to innovations like the new terrain of folk linguistics.

I turn, by way of concluding, to a more contemporary instance of such linguistic self-awareness. The Caribbean Canadian writer, M. Nourbese Philip, in her 1993 essay “The Absence of Writing or How I Almost Became a Spy,” presents a short autobiography of her writing life, specifically as an “African artist from the Caribbean and the New World” speaking and writing in a “Caribbean demotic” English. Philip refers to the need for self-consciousness on the part of writers “working in any of the demotic variants of English,” especially given the often politically charged, value-laden choices these authors must make. In concluding her essay, she writes that the

forced marriage between African and English tongues has resulted in a language capable of great rhythms and musicality; one that is and is not

English, and one which is among the most vital in the English-speaking world today. The continuing challenge for me as a writer/poet is to find some deeper patterning—a deep structure, as Chomsky puts it—of my language, the Caribbean demotic. The challenge is to find the literary form of the demotic language. As James Baldwin has written, “Negro speech is not a question of dropping s’s or n’s or g’s but a question of beat.” At present the greatest strength of the Caribbean demotic lies in its oratorical energies which do not necessarily translate to the page easily.... To keep the deep structure, the movement, the kinetic energy, the tone and pitch, the slides and glissandos of the demotic within a tradition that is primarily page-bound—that is the challenge. (498-499)

The tradition of self-reflection that Philip displays here is one, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, with long roots. It speaks to the constant inquiry on the part of writers about what it means to codify a spoken tongue on the page. Philip’s challenges in representing an oral form that maintains its vibrancy even when “page-bound” are challenges that were frequently met with similar care and similar expressions of linguistic responsibility by writers of various backgrounds in the nineteenth century. By engaging in this discourse of self-reflection, Philip not only continues a tradition of linguistic self-awareness within the enterprise of literary imagination, she also engages in a novel form of folk linguistic awareness. Revealing how seemingly discipline-specific concepts like “deep structure” can make sense of the challenges of literary speech, she transforms Chomsky’s theoretical formulation into a fungible term that applies in diverse domains outside of a strict transformational grammar. In effect, Philip productively disrupts the disciplinary confines of such terms. She prompts us to consider the use that literature made and continues to make of linguistics, as well as how literatures of language like her demotic poetry and her self-conscious discussions of this demotic mode might continue to inform a disciplinary realm encompassing popular, literary, and academic ideas of dialect and multilingual speech.

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