

# Local-Colour Literature and Cultural Nations

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Nineteenth-century local-colour literature is a signal instance of a meta-national literary movement that circulated at the margins of dominant cultural capitals and focused on regional, rural, largely oral and pre-modern cultures far from the metropolises. As such, it was a resistance movement to state- or imperial-defined borders and to the homogenising standardisations of modernity that were being foisted upon the regions by the imperial centres. Instead, local-colour authors affirmed the unique, deviant knowledges, dialects, customs and characters of their region, resisting what was in effect ideological colonisation, where the regions were coerced to conform to imposed national or imperial standards in language and ways of thinking. As a peasant woman exclaims in S.C. Hall's *Sketches of Irish Character* (1829), 'I want to put a stop to [these] improvements, as ye call'em... bringin' foreign ways into the country' (1854, 48).

A leading theorist of the origins of European local-colour literature, Rudolf Zellweger, noted that the regions where the genre was focused and took hold were remote from urban centres and cut off from them by virtue of their mountainous, forested or sparsely populated landscapes (1941, 328). Such locales included, for example, Emmenthal, Swabia, Westphalia,

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Bohemia, Alsace, Languedoc, the Scottish Highlands, Western Ireland or Ulster and rural areas of New England. Each of these regions had their own unique culture, traditions and dialects. The local-colour movement thus for the most part proceeded outside national borders and dominant imperial capitals.<sup>1</sup> Tracing its geographical trajectory reveals an alternative literary network, an extra-territorial, meta-national literary field, one that circulated apart from dominant metropolises. Such a reconceptualisation relies on theories developed by Pascale Casanova, following Pierre Bourdieu,<sup>2</sup> and by myself in *European Local-Colour Literature: National Tales, Dorfgeschichten, and Romans Champêtres* (2010).

In *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova visualises an ‘aesthetic map of the world’ (2004, 351), an ‘international literary space’, in which the ‘literary frontiers [...] [are] independent of political boundaries’ (4). Such a map will show the literary world divided into ‘capital’ and ‘province’ (95) with the governing authority, ‘a literary Greenwich meridian’ (352) whose values are those of modernity, located in central literary capitals, notably Paris and London, where the ‘consecrating authorities’ (12) reign. ‘The world republic of letters has [...] its own economy, which produced hierarchies’ (11) made up of separate ‘territories of literature’ (23). Its geography is ‘based upon a capital [...] and peripheral dependencies whose relationship to the center is defined by their aesthetic distance from it’ (12). The local-colour movement may thus, I propose, be seen as a separate literary territory or field that was peripheral to the dominant capitals and designated inferior by the canonical gatekeepers, the ‘consecrating authorities’. ‘[L]iterary works from the margin of the republic of letters are [...] denied and disregarded by those who lay down its laws in the center’ (353).

One might propose, therefore, that instead of following the time-honoured organisation of literatures around nations or empires, whose boundaries constitute their geographical location, one needs to reconceive the worldwide literary landscape according to what one might call *cultural nations*. In his stimulating recent work *American Nations* (2011), Colin Woodard, for example, identifies 11 cultural ‘nations’ in the United States, each of which has its own historically rooted values and traditions. The term *nation*, as opposed to *region*, implies a unifying *cultural identity* among inhabitants who share a common way of speaking (dialect or accent), history, ways of doing things (customs and traditions) and perspectives.

The works of the local-colourists in the nineteenth century were written from within and about these nations, which were embedded within various nation-states. Thus, the American New England local-colourists were writing from within the New England cultural nation; the Scottish local-colourists from and about the Highland cultural nation in Scotland; certain French local-colourists, from the Languedoc cultural nation in France; a German local-colourist from Swabia, the *Schwarzwälder* cultural nation in the German Confederation, and so forth. As the standardising ideologies of modernity took hold, the regional characteristics of these cultural nations were derogated as inferior and sub-standard by metropolitan cultural authorities. The writers in the local-colour school sought to affirm, however, these regional deviancies, performing thus a kind of cultural work of preservation and defence of regional identity. In her recent study of the New England local-colour writers, *La Nouvelle-Angleterre: Politique d'une écriture* [New England: Politics of A Literature] (2012), Cécile Roudeau likewise remarks how in their focus on 'situated' local knowledge (18–19), the local-colourists established points of resistance to universalising taxonomies, establishing the local as 'inalienable' in the commerces and exchanges of modernity (126).

Local-colour literature proliferated throughout the Western world in the nineteenth century. It emerged first in Ireland—then a British colony—in the early 1800s as a colonial literature, with Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800) the founding work in the genre. From Edgeworth in Ireland, the movement transitioned to Walter Scott in Scotland. Scott acknowledged Edgeworth as his primary influence, saying in his 1829 General Preface to the *Waverley* novels:

I felt that something might be attempted for my own country of the same kind with that which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland – something which might introduce her natives to those of her sister kingdom in a more favorable light than they have been placed hitherto, and tend to procure sympathy for their virtues and indulgence for their foibles. (1972, 523)

Scott clearly envisages an imperial audience here (the 'sister kingdom' being England) and his work as a defence of regional eccentricity. At the time, Scotland was part of Britain by reason of the 1707 Act of Union

but resentment of English domination remained strong, especially in the Highlands. That resentment erupted in the 1745–1746 Jacobite uprising, the historical setting for *Waverley*. Repressive cultural legislation ensued upon the defeat of the Scots in the rebellion; Gaelic was banned along with the wearing of tartans and kilts. Resentment was rekindled by the so-called ‘Highland Clearances’ of the late eighteenth century in which vast numbers of Highlanders were displaced from their native habitats by the introduction of large-scale industrial agriculture, billed as a modernist improvement. Scott’s local-colour works may be seen within this context as a defence—albeit at times ambivalent—and appreciation of Scottish regional culture, the Highland nation.

Scott’s and Edgeworth’s dual focus on the regional culture but also on the imperial authority—the ‘sister kingdom’—seen in all subsequent local-colour literature, resembles that found in postcolonial literature where the author attempts to negotiate between the indigenous cultural nation in which she is embedded and the imperial authorities that she wishes to engage. Local-colour writers thus evinced the ‘double vision’ that Bill Ashcroft and others note as characteristic of the postcolonial author (1989, 26): keeping one eye on the hegemonic authority and the other on the native subject, translating, in effect, from the latter to the former. Such was the case with regionalist writers within states or empires, the local-colourists; schooled in the perspectives of modernity by virtue of education or class background, they were also inhabitants of the region who were deeply knowledgeable about native local culture and sympathetic with the indigenous point of view, which as a rule they affirmed in opposition to modernity.

Liz Bellamy proposes in ‘Regionalism and Nationalism: Maria Edgeworth, Walter Scott and the Definition of Britishness’ that the works of both writers ‘are explorations of colonialism, as well as the cultures of the colonized’ (1998, 55). Bellamy notes how Scott in his fiction represented ‘the clash between the old traditional culture [*Gemeinschaft*] and the structures and systems of a new commercial system [*Gesellschaft*],’ (65), seen as ‘the forces of modernity that are destroying the old order’ (66). Rural peasant culture, which is ‘precommercial’ (66), is thus seen as a site of resistance to the colonising forces of capitalist modernity. Both writers were positioned on the cusp between coloniser—the English—and colonised—the Irish and Scot—respectively. To a great extent, their work is devoted to articulating the latter’s perspective; Maria Edgeworth, for example uses an illiterate Irish servant

Thady Quirk as her narrator in *Castle Rackrent*. Thady speaks in dialect and his standpoint comically ironises the behaviour of his Anglo-Irish landlords. At the same time, Edgeworth wrote at least in part to educate the English reader about conditions among the peasantry in Ireland. Edgeworth's subsequent regional works, *Ennui* (1809), *The Absentee* (1812) and *Ormond* (1817) continued to explore the border between traditional vernacular Ireland and Enlightenment modernity.

The regional works of Walter Scott—the so-called *Waverley* novels, which include especially *Waverley* (1814), *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary* (1816), *Rob Roy* (1817) and *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819)—were enormously popular, and despite being published originally in a semi-peripheral regional capital, Edinburgh, they were soon circulating throughout Western Europe and in the United States, betokening a meta-national literary circulation system that operated outside the dominant literary metropolises of London and Paris. From Scotland, therefore, through the influence of Scott's novels, the local-colour genre migrated to German-speaking regions, to France and to the United States. Translations of Scott's novels generally appeared within a matter of months after their appearance in Scotland. His influence was probably greatest in German regions. Indeed, Scott was one of the most popular authors in Germany in the first decades of the nineteenth century (Martino 1990, 170, 220 and 227).

The impact of Scott on German literature was therefore considerable. In particular, he provided a model for the German local-colourists, the writers of *Dorfgeschichten* [village stories], who emerged in the 1830s and 1840s, notably Jeremias Gotthelf (1779–1854), a Swiss-German writer, and Berthold Auerbach (1812–1882), a Swabian, the leading figures in the German regionalist movement, as well as Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797–1848), a Westphalian, and Josef Rank (1816–1896), an Austro-Bohemian, also important progenitors of the genre. As one literary historian notes, 'the representation of [German] folk-life without the example of Walter Scott is hardly imaginable' ['die Darstellung des Volksleben ohne das Vorbild Walter Scott kaum denkbar ist'] (Baur 1978, 195). Auerbach, who has been described as the 'Walter Scott of his hometown' ['Walter Scott seines Heimatsdorf'] (Baur 1978, 195), acknowledged Scott's influence on him, noting, 'I know of no narrative writer whom I hold higher and also Walter Scott has influenced me as no other. I learned from him to see in a literary perspective and to create first Jewish and then peasant life' ['Ich weiss auch keinen

erzählenden Dichter, den ich höher halte, und auch auf mich hat Walter Scott eingewirkt, wie kein Anderer. Ich habe von ihm gelernt, zuerst das jüdische Leben and dann das Bauernleben in dichterischer Perspektiv zu sehen und zu fassen'] (Baur 1978, 195).

Other Scottish and Irish local-colourists, such as Edgeworth, also enjoyed an enthusiastic reception with German readers. *Castle Rackrent* appeared in 1802 as *Schloss Rackrent: Eine Erzählung aus dem Jahrbüchern Irlands vor der Union* [Castle Rackrent: A tale from the annuals of Ireland before the union]. Her *Ennui* was translated as *Denkwürdigkeiten des Grafen von Glenthorn* [Memoirs of Count Glenthorn] in 1814, the same year as a German translation of *The Absentee* appeared. It is perhaps not surprising that these Irish and Scottish works would have had such an appeal, for the historical, political and cultural processes occurring in German-speaking regions during the early nineteenth century paralleled in certain respects those occurring in the Celtic lands. The German provinces, which had their own unique cultures and locally specific dialects, were dominated by a succession of imperial authorities whose direction came from distant metropolises. As in Ireland and Scotland, the German regions resisted the political and cultural control imposed on them by the imperial authorities, whether French, Austrian or Prussian. And, as elsewhere, the cultural hegemony imposed by the empires entailed the introduction of modern ideas and institutions—liberal political theories, Enlightenment methodologies, scientific rationalism and capitalist industrialism—which upset, challenged and often displaced traditional premodern ways of thinking and being.

German regional writing took the form of the aforementioned village stories, *Dorfgeschichten*, or *Bauernromane* [peasant novels]. In addition to Gotthelf, Auerbach, Droste-Hülshoff and Rank, the principal writers in the genre included Alexandre Weill (1811–1898), an Alsatian, who wrote in both German and French; Adalbert Stifter (1805–1868), Austro-Bohemian; Leopold Kompert (1822–1886) and Karl Emil Franzos (1848–1904), both of whom focused on Jewish ghettos in the Austro-Hungarian Empire; Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach (1830–1916), Austro-Moravian; and Gottfried Keller (1819–1890), Swiss. The genre was extremely popular; literally hundreds of collections of village tales appeared in Germany in the nineteenth century; Jürgen Hein (1976) lists nearly 300; Uwe Baur (1978) lists over 90 stories in the 1840s alone.

The French tradition was also inspired, like the German, by the influx of translations of Irish and Scottish works, especially those of the sensationally popular Walter Scott, whose *Waverley* was available in French translation soon after its first publication. Several subsequent editions of the novel appeared through the 1820s. Indeed, it was through the vogue of the *Waverley* novels that the term ‘local colour’ (*couleur locale*) came into common use in France (Hovencamp 1928, 2). All of Scott’s and Edgeworth’s local-colour novels appeared in French translation shortly after they were published in English and were immensely popular. One critic suggests that ‘without Castle Rackrent and [Edgeworth’s] novels of peasant life, who knows if [George Sand’s] *La petite Fadette* would have seen light of day?’ (Raifroidi 1980, 253).

While a succession of monarchs had long since centralised control in Paris, the French Revolution, ideologically driven by the Cartesian perspective of Enlightenment modernity—much of which was formulated in France—strengthened the capital’s control over the provinces in that it ushered in a new zeal for national standardisation. In the early years of the Revolution, the 1790s, for example, a project was established to standardise the language. The results of the so-called Grégoire Inquest [L’Enquête de Grégoire] (Certeau et al. 1975) were published in 1794 as ‘Report on the Necessity and Means of Annihilating Dialects and Universalising Usage of the French Language’ [‘Rapport sur la nécessité et les moyens d’anéantir les patois et d’universaliser l’usage de la langue française’]. A sort of linguistic ‘Highland Clearances’, the project envisaged eliminating regional dialects in favour of a standardised Parisian French. At the same time, various standardised measurements were enforced to supersede diverse local customary practices. A character in Sand’s novel *La Petite Fadette* (1848–1849), for example, mentions having to use metres for the first time (79). As Michel Certeau et al. note in their study of the Grégoire project, its clear purpose was to effect a ‘colonisation of domestic regions’ [‘colonisation de terres intérieures’] (1975, 162). French local-colour literature arose, as elsewhere, at least in part in resistance to this dictated homogenisation.

Lucile-Aurore Dupin, baronne Dudevant (1804–1876), who used the pen name George Sand, has been called the ‘Walter Scott of Berry’, her native region of France (Zellweger 1941, 136). Indeed, perhaps even more than Scott dominated the field in Scotland, Sand towered over the regional genre in France. She may be said in fact to have invented the French ‘roman champêtre’, which is sometimes translated as the ‘rural

novel'. There were, however, other important tributaries of the regional tradition in France, including the realists of the Courbet circle—namely Max Buchon (1819–1869), Jules Husson Champfleury (1820–1889) and Francis Wey (1812–1882)—more or less contemporaneous with Sand but who wrote slightly after most of her peasant novels were published; and the Occitane school, which included Ferdinand Fabre (1827–1898) and Léon Cladel (1835–1892), who wrote some years after Sand. The Courbet school, which was centred in Paris around the great painter Gustave Courbet (1819–1877), located their fiction in their home region of Franche-Comté, the Jura mountain area, while the Occitane writings were set in the southern region of Languedoc. Sand's own peasant novels take place in the central section of France: Berry and Marche. In addition, Emile Souvestre (1806–1854) set his works in Brittany; followers of Alexandre Weill—Emile Erckmann (1822–1899), Alexandre Chatrian (1826–1890) and Daniel Stauben (1825–1875)—situated their work in their home province of Alsace; and, much later, Eugène Le Roy (1837–1907) in Dordogne in southwestern France. With the exception of Sand's Berry, all of these provinces are, significantly, remote from Paris, the metropolitan magnet.

In the United States, the influence of the European local-colour writers was significant, particularly on the women writers of the New England local-colour school: Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896), Rose Terry Cooke (1827–1892), Sarah Orne Jewett (1849–1909) and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman (1852–1930). Especially influential were Scott, Edgeworth, Sand and Auerbach, whose works were available in the United States shortly after their original publication (in translation in the case of Sand and Auerbach). In the work of the New England women, we find rural and village settings not unlike those described by their European forebears: a precapitalist world of use-value production and *mētis* (practical oral knowledge),<sup>3</sup> still largely untouched—though threatened by modernist homogenisation and standardisation. It is a world the writers are themselves emotionally attached to; take seriously for the most part, though at times critically; and whose history and customs they seek to record and preserve. As in the European works, we find numerous eccentric, unassimilated personages treated respectfully or with sympathetic humour and a preponderance of strong women characters: Polly Mariner, for example, in several Cooke stories, Grandmother Badger in Stowe's *Oldtown Folks*, Mrs Todd in Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs*, Mother in Freeman's story 'The Revolt of Mother', and

many others. The American writers also were scrupulous to capture local dialects and often used the frame format developed by the Europeans of an educated outsider transmitting indigenous oral culture and history and committing it to print. The tradition they forged was bequeathed to numerous other writers—mostly women—in other regions or ‘cultural nations’ of the country, including Mary Noailles Murfree (Tennessee), Grace King (Louisiana, Creole culture), Alice Dunbar-Nelson (Louisiana, Creole and African-American cultures), Edward Eggleston (Indiana), Charles Chestnutt (the South, African-American culture), Sui Sin Far (the West coast, Chinese-American culture), Zitkala-Ša (the West, Native American culture), and many others; for further discussion of these writers, see Campbell (2003), Fetterley and Pryse (2003), and Lutz (2004).

The local-colour tradition, therefore, may be seen as having proceeded from Ireland to Scotland to German regions and to France and the United States (and elsewhere).<sup>4</sup> Except in France, where the publishing capital remained Paris, where all authors had to publish and to have connections, the European local-colourists generally published in regional capitals outside the dominant metropolises. In addition to Scott, all the other Scottish local-colour writers, such as Elizabeth Hamilton (1758–1816), Christian Isobel Johnstone (1781–1857), James Hogg (1770–1835), and John Galt (1779–1839), published in Edinburgh. While Maria Edgeworth originally published in London (probably through the English connections of her father), many of the successors in the Irish local-colour movement, for example, William Carleton (1794–1869), published in Dublin. The German writers, except for those in regions of the Austrian Empire, published in regional capitals. Auerbach first published his *Dorfgeschichten* in Stuttgart; Annette von Droste-Hülshoff first published in a local Westphalian newspaper; Jeremias Gotthelf, in Bern and later Zürich. Most interesting was the case of Alsatian Alexandre Weill, who first published his stories in German in Stuttgart; then later translated them into French and added some French stories for an edition published as *Histoires de village* (a French translation of *Dorfgeschichten*) in Paris in 1853 (the German title was *Sittengemälde aus dem elsässischen Volksleben*). In the United States, the local-colourists published in Boston, then the regional capital of New England, instead of New York, which ‘by sheer mercantile superiority [was] the literary capital of the nation, making virtual provinces of the South, the West, and even New England’ (Spiller et al. 1953, 231).

The local-colour movement thus for the most part proceeded outside national borders and dominant imperial capitals. Tracing the geographical trajectory of the movement's evolution consequently reveals an alternative literary network, an extra-territorial meta-national literary field. Unifying these diverse works was a common concern to preserve regional eccentricity against the ideological colonisations of modernity; that is, to the way of life and thinking that accompanied the emergence of capitalist industrialism as the dominant economic system in early modern Western Europe and modern science as the dominant epistemology. Articulated in the philosophical systems of the Enlightenment, modernity found political expression in the formation of the modern nation-states during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. These states were organised around major metropolitan centres (London, Paris, Boston/New York/Washington) where the bureaucratic apparatuses were located that enforced the governing standards, rules, tastes and norms of modernity upon regional locales or cultural nations, which often had variant norms that were rooted in local tradition and lore. Metropolitan control was facilitated by the imposition of a standard national language, as seen in the French Grégoire project, thus reducing provincial dialects to the status of deviant and inferior.

The process of standardisation and normalisation imposed by the advocates of modernity was rooted in the philosophical premises of Cartesian rationalism, themselves reflective of the adoption of the Newtonian scientific paradigm in the seventeenth century, which effected what Edmund Husserl labelled the 'mathematization of the world' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1988, 5). The reduction of reality—including biotic life-forms and the social life-world—to its quantitative properties rendered it machine-like; elided in the process were qualitative, subjective properties, such as colour, taste and emotion. Transforming nature 'into mere objectivity', Newtonian–Cartesian epistemology occasioned 'the disenchantment of the world' (Max Weber's term) and the 'extirpation of animism', according to Frankfurt School critics Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (1988, 5), who viewed the Enlightenment paradigm as a dominative model imposed upon the manifold forms of social and biotic life, requiring the 'subdual of difference, particularities' (22). Necessarily, all that did not fit into the quantitative normalising grid of the scientific model was marginalised, that is, rendered anomalous or invisible, which meant, in the case of deviant humans, voiceless. In the impartiality of scientific knowledge 'that which is powerless has wholly

lost any means of expression' (23). Thus were certain standards of human behaviour established as norms and others characterised as deviant by emerging social sciences, such as sexology.

Much of the animus in local-colour literature is directed against the imposition of these standards, affirming instead regional deviancy as valuable and sometimes superior to the ways of modernity. For example, in many works herbal medicine, an ancient folk tradition that depends upon local ingredients that are particularised for the individual patient, is often held up as superior to modern scientific medicine. See, for instance, Jewett's story 'The Courting of Sister Wisby' (1887), Johnstone's *Clan-Albin* (1815) or Sand's *La Petite Fadette* (1849). Sexual practices stigmatised by the pseudo-science of sexology were presented positively as acceptable behaviour in, for example, Jewett's story of a transgender woman in 'An Autumn Holiday' (1881) or a lesbian romance in Weill's 'Udile und Gertrude' (1840).

In the case of language, local-colour writers were faced with a problem similar to that faced by postcolonial writers: whether to write in the local language/dialect or in the standard language of the nation or empire, Parisian or Ile-de-France French, the King's English, *Hochdeutsch* or standard Northeastern American English. If they wrote in the local dialect, which in most cases was quite different from the standard national tongue, making it virtually incomprehensible to most urban standard-speaking readers, they risked not being read or only being read by regional readers who knew the dialect. But as most rural residents (with the exception of those in New England) were at the time illiterate peasants, that was not a viable option. Local-colour writers thus worked out a compromise solution. Their frame narratives were written in the standard language of the nation or empire, while the characters spoke in the local dialect, albeit with the dialect modernised sufficiently that a person unacquainted with the dialect could understand it. Some writers resorted to footnotes to translate the most arcane dialect passages.

In her prefaces to her local-colour novels, George Sand explains the difficulties such writers faced. In the 1852 'Avant Propos' to *François le champi* [*The Country Waif*], Sand recounts how in her youth she got the material of her novel *Les Maîtres Sonneurs* [*The Master Pipers*], directly from its central character (1928a, i) and that she laboured to tell it in his words but had the problem of readers finding his dialect incomprehensible. Similarly, while she heard first-hand the Champi story told by a *chanvreux* (a hemp-gatherer), she cannot tell it in his language because

her literate (Parisian) readers would not understand the dialect. Her interlocutor suggests that she must narrate it ‘as if you had on your right a Parisian speaking modern French and on your left a peasant before whom you would not want to say a phrase or word that he could not understand’ [‘comme si tu avais à la droite un Parisien parlant la langue moderne, et à ta gauche un paysan devant lequel tu ne voudrais pas dire une phrase, un mot où il ne pourrait pas pénétrer’] (1928a, xxvii). In her *champêtre* novels, Sand ended up using the format adopted by other local-colourists, writing the text in standard French but having characters use a modernised patois in dialogue, with dialect terms explained in footnotes. In her preface to *Les Maîtres Sonneurs*, Sand acknowledges the difficulty in transcribing peasant dialect but says she hopes to capture the indigenous narrator’s style ‘as exactly as possible’ [‘en imitant sa manière autant qu’il me sera possible’], ‘because it is impossible for me to make him talk like us without distorting his mental processes’ [‘c’est parce qu’il m’est impossible de le faire parler comme nous, sans dénaturer les opérations auxquelles se livrait son esprit’] (1928b, ii).

Other local-colour writers attempted like Sand to capture the pre-modern thought patterns of natives. In Jewett’s story ‘Miss Debby’s Neighbors’ (1883), for example, the urban narrator, expressing the viewpoint of modernity with its emphasis on unifying hypotaxis, offers a complaint that the indigenous speaker’s method ‘of going around Robin Hood’s barn between the beginning of her story and its end can hardly be followed at all’ (191). The indigenous narrator is uneducated and her narrative style reflects the oral mentality A.R. Luria famously identified in illiterate peasants, who resisted organising material into deductive or hypotactic patterns. In his study of oral culture, *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Walter J. Ong lays out several features that characterise oral thought and expression, among them that it is ‘additive rather than subordinative’, ‘aggregative rather than analytic’, ‘redundant’ or ‘copious’, ‘empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced’, and ‘situational rather than abstract’ (36–49). All of these features readily describe the narrative technique of not just Miss Debby but of the numerous indigenous Jewett characters who narrate tales within her stories. In this way, aspects of oral culture are embedded or transcribed in print in Jewett’s and other local-colourists’ work: another instance of the author serving as mediator between two cultures—oral and print, premodern and modern. Many, if not all, of Jewett’s and other local-colourists’ embedded narrators similarly speak in the fashion

Ong describes, using primarily parataxis, and at the extreme (as in ‘Miss Debby’s Neighbors’) losing the unifying hypotactic thread of the narration. Significantly, in this story it is the modern author—urban, literate, and educated—who criticises this roundabout narrative tendency, looking vainly for some sort of deductive climax.

Sand’s discussion of dialect use in her own region La Marche indicates how seriously she—like the other writers of local-colour literature—took the issue of accurate dialect representation. One elderly woman, the narrator explains in the novel *Jeanne*, speaks in a local ‘marchois patois’ that is ‘unintelligible to unaccustomed ears’ [‘inintelligible aux oreilles non exercées’] (1844, 40), for the inhabitants of the region use indiscriminately either the regional dialect or an old French dialect, such as they use in Berry, which derives from an ancient version of ‘langue d’oil’ (1844, 39, n. 1). ‘But being that “langue d’oc” was more familiar to the old woman than the “langue d’oil”’ [‘mais soit que la langue d’oc fût plus familière à la vieille femme que la langue d’oil’] (1844, 40), she uses the former. (*Langue d’oc* was a language used in southern and western France before it was suppressed in the late Middle Ages by *langue d’oil*, the northern language, which became the basis for modern French.)

The plot patterns used in many local-colour works reflect the underlying thematics of the clash between the premodern cultural nation and modern metropolitan authority, as well as the dual focus of the authors. Often plots follow the arrival in a rural village of an educated stranger who harbours various misconceptions about the region and its inhabitants, who gradually disabuse him of them. He thus learns to appreciate local ways. Sometimes the educated newcomer is a schoolmaster sent in by federal or national authorities to educate the locals in the ways of modernity; but in a local-colour work, it is generally he who is educated in the ways of the region. Sometimes the educated interloper is a native son who has gone to the city to be educated but who returns disillusioned and comes to appreciate anew the ways of his native land. Occasionally, for example, in Jewett’s *Country of the Pointed Firs*, the visitor, while appreciative of native ways and traditions, realises she is herself too much of a modern to remain in the region and must return to her urban locale. An example of this plot pattern may be made of what is probably the first local-colour story published in the USA, Stowe’s ‘A New England Sketch’ (1834), where we find the characteristic clash between an older rooted vernacular figure, Uncle Lot Griswold, and a young, educated, ‘modern’ figure, James Benton. As schoolmaster,

James is an outsider to Newbury, the ‘Yankee village,’ where Uncle Lot holds sway (33). James is also headed for college (he is 18), which further designates him a representative of modernity, and he speaks in standard English. Uncle Lot, by contrast, speaks in dialect and is educated largely in local knowledges or *mētis*: ‘He had the strong-grained practical sense, the calculating worldly wisdom of his class of people in New England’ (36). As James is courting Uncle Lot’s daughter, he has to overcome the older man’s scepticism about his cocky confidence and claims to authority. In the process, however, ironically, it is James who comes to appreciate the accomplishments and wisdom of the native, Uncle Lot.

Some local-colour stories are constructed as well in layers of narration where an outsider narrator from the metropole comes to a rural region, encounters an insider who tells her tale paratactically in vernacular idiom—a technique notably used by Scott, Sand and Jewett, *inter alia*. This structure is seen, for example in Jewett’s *Pointed Firs* but may also be seen in various stories such as ‘The Courting of Sister Wisby’ (1887) and ‘An Autumn Holiday’ (1881). In ‘Sister Wisby’, for example, an urban I-narrator, wandering in the country (the first few pages read indeed like a nature essay), encounters the herbalist Mrs Goodsoe, who is in the process of gathering ‘mulleins’, a type of herb. The two engage in a meandering gossipy conversation in which the herbalist reveals herself to harbour the typically antimodern attitudes noted above. Her grasp of local knowledge or *mētis* is immediately apparent: when the urban narrator (who speaks in standard English, as opposed to Mrs Goodsoe’s dialect) asks whether the herbalist plans to gather the herb pennyroyal, she is immediately put down: “‘Pennyroyal!’” repeated the dear little old woman, with an air of compassion for inferior knowledge; “‘tain’t the right time, darlin’. Pennyroyal’s too rank now. But for mulleins this day is prime” (1888, 57). When the narrator offers to help her cut the mullein, Mrs Goodsoe tells her how: “‘Now be keerful, dear heart... choose ‘em well. There’s odds in mulleins same’s ther is in angels” (1888, 57). The narrator ‘listened respectfully’ (1888, 57), while Mrs Goodsoe rambles on anecdotally, finally (two-thirds of the way through the story) reaching the main story about ‘Sister Wisby’, which is sparked by a discussion of another herb, ‘Goldthread’, following thus a paratactic associative logic. ‘An Autumn Holiday’ similarly starts out as a nature essay, an I-narrator wandering the countryside with her dog. Eventually (four pages into the story), she comes upon a house where she finds two

women spinning wool. They stop and chat with the visitor and after several shorter anecdotes the main tale emerges (more than halfway through the story), which concerns the transgender woman ‘Miss Daniel Gunn’.

Mrs Goodsoe’s insistence that the herbs be locally grown points to a central tenet of the community ethos celebrated in *Pointed Firs* and other local-colour works. In this preindustrial, predisciplinary environment, time is not measured by the clock, goods are not appreciated for their abstract exchange value, and people are not uprooted and homogenised through mass media stereotypes. Rather, they remain rooted in their own eccentric territory; their produce comes from their own familiar environment—Mrs Todd grows her own herbs and/or gathers them from well-known local habitats. She ministers to people as individuals with histories and not in accordance with abstract symptoms and diagnoses.

Finally, the modern-versus-premodern dialectic in local-colour literature is nearly always mediated literarily through class positions: on the one hand, the peasant, folk and largely oral native culture, which is the subject of the work; on the other, the upper-class, urban and educated elite, who evince the perspective of modernity to which it has accommodated and assimilated primarily through education. The local-colour writer enjoys an intermediate class location, being of a literate upper class but one that is itself quasi-rural and indigenous, and wholly knowledgeable about and usually sympathetic with the provincial cultural nation whose ways are the focus of their work. One might go so far as to propose that local-colour literature is rooted in a transnational premodern peasant culture or nation, with the stipulation that each of these indigenous cultural nations is unique in its own way. An emphasis on such deviant eccentricity is indeed, as noted, a hallmark of the genre. Nevertheless, the genre taken as a whole constitutes an alternative literary field that sui generis spread throughout the Western world in the nineteenth century, a formation that remains relevant as a model of resistance to the quantifying, standardising impetus of Enlightenment development and improvement schemes that, intensified today by homogenising globalisation, continue to threaten cultural and ethnic nations.

## NOTES

1. Throughout I use the term *local-colour literature*, which I prefer to the more commonly used *regional* or *provincial*, because it preserves some of the rustic eccentricity and deviancy of the movement itself. Ian Duncan (2002), using alternative terms, makes the distinction between *provincial* and *regional*, the former closer to what I am labelling local-colour literature in that it embraces resistance to the respective metropolises and their modernist ways. See also Josephine McDonagh (2013).
2. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (1996, 215–234). Bourdieu, however, neglects the local-colour movement. His main reference to regional literature comes in a chart designating the French ‘literary field’ at the end of the nineteenth century, where the ‘rural novel’ is listed as having ‘weak specific consecration’ and ‘high economic profits’ (122). Bourdieu also briefly discusses Léon Cladel, proposing that his turn to regional writing was the result of his failure to succeed in Parisian literary circles (262–264, 388, n. 68) and noting the ‘structural double bind’ (263), i.e. representing peasant culture though himself middle-class, which is characteristic of his and other regionalists’ work.
3. *Métis* is ‘practical, local knowledge’, which is particular to the specific environment in which it evolved. It is transmitted orally and by apprentice practice; see James C. Scott (1998, 316–324). On these writers, see my *New England Local Color Literature* (1983).
4. For a sketch of its appearance in other countries, see my *European Local-Color Literature* (2010, 169–179).

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