

derives from nuances that may not register on an outsider's radar screen. Pawley also takes time to acknowledge the tremendous historical potential of local records that are unknown beyond their own city limits. Her discovery of the Sage Public Library records was totally serendipitous. "Only the library director knew that they were [in the storeroom] and understood their significance" (224).

Although Pawley wisely restricts her conclusions to Osage itself and resists the temptation to leap to claims about national reading patterns based on one community case study, she documents how local residents participated in and understood themselves as part of broader religious, political, and cultural communities. Given the precision of her data, it is likely that those who are interested in these broader communities will begin to take Pawley's findings into account. Like ancestral DNA, Pawley's data will show up in successive generations of interpretations of American social history. Any synthesis of American social history must prove itself against evidence such as that distilled from Pawley's research and similar local records.

Christine Pawley's *Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late-Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa*, was a co-winner of the Benjamin F. Shambaugh Award, recognizing the most significant books on Iowa history published in 2001.—*Editor*

*Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, by Stephanie Foote. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001. vi, 218 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Reviewer Tom Lutz is professor of English at the University of Iowa. His books include *American Nervousness, 1903* (1991) and the forthcoming *Cosmopolitan Vistas: Regionalism and the Making of Literary Value*.

Two equal and opposite interpretations of regionalist art and writing—one that it is all urban elite fantasy, the other that it is localist, populist politics by other means—have coexisted since the 1890s, and one or the other has dominated academic discussion now for decades. Stephanie Foote's *Regional Fictions* is the first book-length attempt to reconcile the two, which helps make it the most sophisticated and complex reading of regionalism to date, although one that fails to fulfill its promise. To the question in the title of her introduction, "What Difference Does Regional Writing Make?" she seems to answer, well, very little. The reason is somewhat predictable in this age of critical scolding: local color writing doesn't immediately affect "the unevenly

distributed economic and political access of various kinds of subjects" (178). This may or may not be true, but to claim it wrecks havoc with Foote's attempted synthesis.

Foote begins her introduction by arguing against the idea that regional fictions are "minor" texts that avoid or elude addressing the ravages of modernity. Instead, she writes, regional fictions try "to transform rather than to passively resist the meaning of the social and economic developments of late-nineteenth-century urban life" (3). Regionalism constructs a fantasy national past, an image of "an earlier, generative community" (6) against the backdrop of increased immigration and great anxiety about the strangers in our urban midst. The rural characters' accented dialect makes them "doubles" (6) of urban immigrants, but (and here the argument begins to slip) this doubling of the foreigner and the yokel represents not a true engagement with contemporary realities, but an evasion of them. "Regional writing gave strangers with accents literary recognition at exactly the moment that accented strangers in the form of immigrants were clamoring for recognition and representation in the political arena" (5), and so deflects those legitimate political demands. The "self-estrangement" Foote attributes to non-immigrant Americans in the face of immigration (and which she assumes motivates regional fiction) is thus not cured: "The solidity of the simple 'primitive' folk of the region is not an antidote to, but instead an alibi for, alienation and self-estrangement" (15). What began on page three as strategies developed to transform modernity have morphed by page 15 into alibis. The promised novel approach to the genre reverts to the old story of city folk, alienated and anxious, wreaking their racist, classist wills against the Other yet again.

Luckily, the six chapters that follow are considerably more successful, straying sometimes far from the concerns of the introduction to discuss diverse issues of local labor, capital markets, specific regional histories, populism, discrepant cosmopolitanisms, race, representation, and literary form. The first four chapters discuss classic local color texts by the likes of Sarah Orne Jewett and Hamlin Garland. The last two chapters discuss the "urban local-color fiction" of Jacob Riis and Alfred Henry Lewis. To find the topic of immigration central to these latter texts is not surprising, but Foote also demonstrates ably and convincingly its importance to the classic texts. Her readings of Gertrude Atherton and Harold Frederic, who have received very few sustained examinations of late, are particularly valuable. Much of what she writes about Riis's racial ideas has been said before, but she convincingly shows that Riis uses many of the same rhetorical and narrative strategies as the local colorists in his journalistic writing, a

point both well taken and well made. Foote's discussion of Lewis's understudied *The Boss* demonstrates her great skills as a reader, as she lays out the multiple themes and contexts of this Tammany Hall novel. The move into questions of the public sphere and its implications for regionalist representation here are provocative and fresh.

Readers interested in the literary and cultural history of Iowa (or the Midwest) will find little new here, and the reading of Hamlin Garland is far from satisfying on its own terms. But those interested in literary regionalism will find a wide-ranging exploration of most of the current issues in the field. What it lacks in terms of an original through-argument it more than makes up for in its suggestive forays off the main-traveled roads of regionalist criticism.

*Dictionary of Midwestern Literature*, Volume 1, *The Authors*, general editor Philip A. Greasley. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. 666 pp. Illustrations, appendix, index. \$59.95 cloth.

Reviewer Ronald Weber is professor of American Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of *The Midwestern Ascendancy in American Writing* (1992).

My biased view is that the Midwest, the neglected middle child of American regions, needs all the attention it can get. So I'm inclined to cheer the appearance of even something as ordinary as a dictionary—in this case, a *Dictionary of Midwestern Literature*, the first volume of Indiana University Press's planned three-volume project treating midwestern literary matters. Admittedly, a regional reference book can seem of minor importance at a time when global perspectives rule the day. Beyond this, in the world of literary scholarship, regional concerns—especially midwestern literary concerns—have long been at the far margin of interest. The tide may be turning (a vast *Encyclopedia of the Midwest*, produced at Ohio State University, is scheduled for publication in 2004), yet even if it isn't, the *Dictionary* is, among other things, a reminder of the scope and depth of writing by midwesterners.

Put together by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature, an academic group based at Michigan State University, the *Dictionary* has entries on some 400 midwestern authors, past and present, the well known and the largely unknown, ranging from the popular newspaper columnist Franklin P. Adams to the contemporary poet Amy Jo Zook (writing as Amy Jo Schoonover). The entries provide basic biographical information, a discussion of significance—meaning significance for the literature or culture of the Midwest—a short listing of selected works, and suggestions for further reading. Philip A.

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