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# Journalism, Letters, and Nation: The Newspaper Letters of Samuel Bowles's Across the Continent (1865)

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JOURNALISM, LETTERS, AND NATION:  
THE NEWSPAPER LETTERS OF SAMUEL BOWLES'S  
*ACROSS THE CONTINENT* (1865)

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Katrina J. Quinn

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

December 2007

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Title: Journalism, Letters, and Nation: The Newspaper Letters of Samuel Bowles's  
*Across the Continent* (1865)

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Newspaper publisher Samuel Bowles set out on a trip in the early summer of 1865 to see and write about the United States of America. A leading figure in journalism and in political discourses before and after the Civil War, Bowles shared his experiences in a series of thirty-two letters, addressed to the readers of his influential Massachusetts newspaper, the *Springfield Republican*. The letters were subsequently compiled into a book, *Across the Continent: A Summer's Journey to the Rocky Mountains, the Mormons, and the Pacific States, with Speaker Colfax*, and constitute an engaging narrative of adventures from the plains of Kansas to Salt Lake City, Utah, through the Rocky Mountains, to the Pacific Coast and the Pacific Northwest. The letters resonate with the personality of the author and bring textual snapshots of 1865 America to life.

Although Bowles's letters may, in other contexts, be dismissed as ephemeral newspaper articles, the *Across the Continent* letters suggest something more enduring, something more important to the often disparate studies of journalism, literature, and American nationality. This study, therefore, bridges these discourses to establish Bowles as a literary journalist writing in the form of the newspaper travel letter with implications for an ideology of nationalism that was only just emerging in the wake of the Civil War. It is the first critical study of Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters to adopt a literary

perspective. Chapter One provides historical background and contemporary commentary on Bowles to establish his influence in 1865. Building on existing approaches to letters and letter-writing, known as epistolary theory, Chapters Two and Three introduce and explore the form of epistolary journalism, using Bowles's letters of *Across the Continent* to illustrate and support my critical model. Chapter Four then suggests that many of the same qualities that make Samuel Bowles's letters function as epistolary texts also place Bowles within a tradition of early literary journalism. Finally, Chapter Five examines ways that Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters articulate the new ideology of nationhood emerging in the wake of the Civil War.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It's hard to come away from a project like this without an appreciation for the subject of the study. Sam Bowles has become more real for me than many of the "real" people I know. As he has introduced me to the nation as it appeared from that stagecoach in 1865, I've grown in an appreciation for his mastery of language and politics. Self-taught and self-made, he embodied in many ways the spirit and the opportunity of the nation he loved so much. It's a shame more people don't know about Sam Bowles.

While some of his views may be dated, our twenty-first century world needs more people like Sam Bowles. Recent trends in public discourse seem to discourage us from discussing issues in a frank and honest way; they tend to discourage us from choosing one side of an issue for fear of offense. Journalists and scholars should be willing to take on controversial subjects and voice opinions. Standards of justice, and standards of right and wrong, deserve strong advocates.

For the completion of this project, I must first thank my mother, Ann Roberts Jesick, M.D., who traveled almost every Thursday (doctor's day off) to care for my children.

Significant thanks are also due to Dr. Karen Dandurand, my adviser and project director, who suggested to me one day in 2004, "How about Sam Bowles?" I am also grateful to the outstanding faculty members at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) who have supported my efforts throughout my doctoral program: Dr. James Cahalan, Dr. Ronald Shafer, Dr. Susan Gatti, Dr. Kenneth Sherwood, Dr. Gail Berlin, Dr. David Downing, Dr. Martha Bower, and Dr. Malcolm Hayward.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my colleagues in the Communication Department at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania for their support during this dissertation process and for taking a chance on an “ABD.” I also owe a debt of gratitude to my former colleagues in the Journalism Department at IUP: Prof. Randy Jesick (also my father), Dr. Raymond Ankney, and Dr. Stanford Mukasa. To them I acknowledge that this text is not in Associated Press style.

I would also like to express appreciation to the American Journalism Historians Association, the History Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, and the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters, which have invited me to present portions of this study at their scholarly conferences.

And finally, my work here would not have been possible were it not for the patience and love of my children, Tyler, Jordan, and Ryan, who no longer have to ask, “Mommy, when will your big paper be done?”



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## CHAPTER 1

### “SOMETHING TO SAY AND THE ABILITY TO SAY IT:” SITUATING SAMUEL BOWLES

Newspaper publisher Samuel Bowles set out in the early summer of 1865 to see and write about the United States of America. As a leading figure not only in the profession of journalism but also in the political discourse of the nation both before and after the Civil War, Bowles (1826-78) was part of what turned out to be an historic, four-month trip. To share his experiences of the country and its people, he composed a series of thirty-two letters, addressed to the readers of his influential Massachusetts newspaper, the *Springfield Republican*. Bowles’s letters were subsequently compiled into a book, *Across the Continent: A Summer’s Journey to the Rocky Mountains, the Mormons, and the Pacific States, with Speaker Colfax*. Resonating with the personality of the author and bringing textual snapshots of 1865 America to life, the letters constitute an engaging narrative of adventures from the plains of Kansas to Salt Lake City, Utah, through the Rocky Mountains, to the Pacific Coast and the Pacific Northwest.

Bowles’s philosophy of the newspaper in modern society and its place in the evolution of nations is fundamental to our understanding of his work in *Across the Continent*. In an 1875 editorial, Bowles expresses his perspective of the *Republican’s* place in the history of journalism and identifies the role of the newspaper within a broader history:

[The newspaper] is, and is to be, the high priest of History, the vitalizer of Society, the world’s great informer, the earth’s high censor, the medium of public thought and opinion, and the circulating life blood of the whole human

mind. It is the great enemy of tyrants, and the right arm of liberty, and is destined, more than any other agency, to melt and mould the jarring and contending nations of the world into that one great brotherhood which, through long centuries, has been the ideal of the Christian and the philanthropist. Its mission has just commenced. (*Republican* 15 Apr 1875)

As the nation expanded dramatically during the nineteenth century, and as thousands of people settled unfamiliar new lands west of the Mississippi, the task of writing about the West was daunting. Pioneer Elizabeth Dixon Smith acknowledged this problem in a letter of 1847: “O that I had time and talent to describe this curious country” (qtd. in Holmes 1: 127). Luckily, Bowles had both time and talent, as well as a newspaper through which to communicate. His trip was designed for the express purpose of observing and writing about the “curious country,” pursuing, in part, his newspaper’s great mission. And while Bowles acknowledges the shortcomings of language to capture an aesthetic moment in the Rocky Mountains or the inspiring landscape of Yosemite, he also engages the structures of narrative literature and the dynamics of epistolary writing to express most fully the complex human experience of his trip across the continent.

Bowles’s choice of the letter form was calculated, and he is quick to differentiate his *Across the Continent* letters from other forms of literature popular in the nineteenth century. “They are not a Diary of a personal journey; nor a Guide-Book; nor a Hand-Book of statistics,” he writes to his traveling companion Schuyler Colfax in an introductory letter to the book. Unlike these other literary forms, the epistolary form allowed Bowles to communicate his experience and energize his text in unique ways. While the letter form itself was common in the nineteenth century—just consider the

thousands of pioneers whose primary personal contact with home and loved ones was via posted letter—*these* letters, printed in a newspaper, circulated to thousands, and written by the inimitable Bowles, were uncommon indeed. The story written by Bowles, this project will show, was largely the story of the nation, and his epistolary structure engages readers as participants in the unfolding story.

The *Across the Continent* letters were not Bowles's first venture into a nontraditional, epistolary format. At the age of nineteen, Bowles took the opportunity of a convalescence in the South to compose a series of letters to his readers back home. The letters, according to *Springfield Republican* historian Richard Hooker,<sup>1</sup> diverged significantly, in both content and form, from the material normally found in the paper. "No reader could compare [the early letters] with other series of travel letters, longer and more verbose, from the Middle West and South, which the *Weekly Republican* had printed from time to time in the preceding twenty years without recognizing that they conformed to a different standard of newspaper excellence," Hooker writes. "Within a column 'Young Sam' gave more information and more vivid impressions than older writers had given in three times that space, when they diluted their facts with the thin gruel of pious moralizing" (42). Hooker's assessment of those early letters suggests Bowles's innate sense for news, the effectiveness of his style, the combination of narrative and reporting, and the diversity of content which later characterized his letters in *Across the Continent*.

During the nineteenth century, in fact, the newspaper travel letter was a common feature of American newspapers. As a literary form, newspaper travel letters became

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hooker, son of Bowles's oldest daughter, Sallie, wrote *The Story of an Independent Newspaper: One Hundred Years of the Springfield Republican*, in 1924.

standardized to a point that readers would have a set of expectations concerning content and general structures, according to Carol Marie Greene. Expected content and structures would include the initial journey or a ritualistic passage away from home, land or water travel, an itinerary of places to visit, accommodations, events, description of people and places, and concluding rituals before the return home. Greene argues that the genre combines nineteenth-century journalism, customs of nineteenth-century travel, travel writing, and ideologies of travel that are intellectual, experiential, and spiritual as well as physical. Janet Gurkin Altman's scholarly work with epistolary novels leads her to form similar conclusions about the power of letters: "To write a letter is to map one's coordinates—temporal, spatial, emotional, intellectual—in order to tell someone else where one is located at a particular time and how far one has traveled since the last writing" (Altman 119). But unlike the fictional works Altman studies, newspaper letters like Bowles's construct a map in real time and space.

Newspaper travel letters are not the only literary tradition within which to consider Bowles's *Across the Continent*. Throughout the nineteenth century, the public devoured all sorts of literature concerning unknown regions of the country. Indian captivity narratives, which had first appeared in the seventeenth century with the *Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), continued to be a popular genre through the closing of the frontier in the late nineteenth century. Often written by or about women, captivity narratives were enormously influential in establishing ideological constructions of the West, generally presenting a view of the frontier as a threatening wilderness, inhabited by strange, though not uniformly brutal, native people. Starting with Rowlandson's tale, the genre was influential in establishing

a dichotomy of the religious, civilized European settlers and the ungodly, uncivilized “Other.” Popular captivity narratives of the nineteenth century included *Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824), recorded by James Seaver, and *Life Among the Indians: Being an Interesting Narrative of the Captivity of the Oatman Girls, Among the Apache and Mohave Indians* (1857), which was written by a pastor named Royal B. Stratton and sold 30,000 copies.

Other literary works that shaped public perceptions of the American West prior to Bowles’s trip in 1865 include journals and narratives of those who went on their own volition to explore or find adventure on the lands of the West. Often preserved in meticulous journals and written by men, prominent works of exploration and adventure include *Views of Louisiana, Together with a Journal of a Voyage up the Missouri River, in 1811* by Henry Marie Brackenridge (1786-1871),<sup>2</sup> a lawyer, judge, and Congressman born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and *The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike to Headwaters of the Mississippi River, Through Louisiana Territory, and in New Spain, During the Years 1805-6-7* by Zebulon Pike (1779-1813) in 1810. Geographer and geologist Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (1793-1864) was another well-known adventurer who made several excursions into territories west of the Mississippi River in the early nineteenth century. Schoolcraft published several of his journals, including *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansaw* in 1821.<sup>3</sup> Challenging in many respects

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<sup>2</sup> Brackenridge followed in the frontier footsteps of his father, Hugh Henry Brackenridge (1748-1816), who settled in Pittsburgh in 1781, when it was a village of 400 residents. Founder of the University of Pittsburgh and the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, now the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, the elder Brackenridge’s satiric novel, *Modern Chivalry* (1815), is considered the first important fictional work of the American frontier. Henry Adams called it “a more thoroughly American book than any written before 1833,” and Martin Bucco called it “the first important western fiction.” For more information, see Martin Bucco, “The Development of Western Literary Criticism” in *A Literary History of the American West* (1283).

<sup>3</sup> The full name of Schoolcraft’s published journal is *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansaw, from Potosi, or Mine a Burton, in Missouri Territory, in a South-West Direction, toward the*

the images of Native Americans presented in Indian captivity narratives, wealthy artist George Catlin (1796-1872) made many trips to the West in the 1830s to pay witness to the tribes of Native Americans whose way of life, he already perceived, was doomed. In 1841 he published *Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, in two volumes, with about 300 engravings. Finally, among the most popular adventure books of the Old West was historian Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail: Sketches of Prairie and Rocky-Mountain Life* (1846). By the end of his life, Parkman was regarded by many as one of America's great historians and a leader in the development of narrative history (Rosenthal ix).<sup>4</sup>

Prefiguring Bowles's work in other ways were the personal journals and letters of female pioneers, who were particularly talented at documenting their trips. Among the earliest surviving journals of the century is that of Margaret Van Horn Dwight, who recorded a trip from Connecticut to New Connecticut, or Ohio, in 1810. Mollie Dorsey Sanford's journal is one of many personal accounts of settlement in the West—in this case, settlement in Nebraska and Colorado Territories from 1857 through 1866. Kenneth L. Holmes made a substantial contribution to the preservation and dissemination of nineteenth-century women's private texts in the publication of the *Covered Wagon Women* series, a collection of previously unpublished letters and journals, covering the years 1840 through 1890. It must be noted that for the most part, these texts were not publicly distributed in the nineteenth century and did not, therefore, constitute what

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*Rocky Mountains; Performed in the Years 1818 and 1819*. During the time Schoolcraft was tramping through the Ozarks, potential settler John Stillman Wright published cautionary letters from his 1818-1819 trip to what was then considered the "West"—Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and parts of Kentucky. The resulting book, *Letters from the West; or a Caution to Emigrants*, documents his disillusionment after finding so much of the territory already in the hands of disreputable speculators.

<sup>4</sup> Parkman was so widely respected that Theodore Roosevelt's four-volume history of the frontier, *The Winning of the West* (1889-1896), was dedicated to him.

would have been considered a body of literature by nineteenth-century readers. Rather, they are representative of countless private discourses, an ongoing nineteenth-century phenomenon of private inscription and communication that collectively exerted an enormous influence on emerging ideological constructions of the West.

Stories of travel in the West also found a place in the fiction and non-fiction works of professional writers. Among the literary figures who recorded their trips west of the Mississippi are Washington Irving, who published *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835), a personal account of a month in the open air of Oklahoma; Caroline Kirkland, whose *A New Home; Who'll Follow?* (1839) was a sensation for its humorous sketches of her Michigan frontier neighbors; and transcendentalist and journalist Margaret Fuller, who went on a “working vacation” to the Great Lakes, writing *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*. Midcentury journalists also visited the West and wrote articles for their papers. These writers included Fitz Hugh Ludlow, whose articles were published in the *New York Evening Post* and other papers in 1859<sup>5</sup> and *New York Tribune* publisher Horace Greeley.

When Bowles made the trip by overland stage in 1865, following in the literary footsteps of these and other writers, and treading in the physical footsteps of thousands of pioneers, his trip received unusual attention, in large part because he was in the company of three other prominent men: Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and future Vice President Schuyler Colfax; William Bross, Lieutenant Governor of Illinois and editor of the *Chicago Tribune*; and Albert Richardson, famed Civil War correspondent and writer for the *New York Tribune*. Colfax (1823-85) was a Congressional

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<sup>5</sup> Ludlow’s work was compiled into book form—perhaps emulating Bowles’s success—in 1870. The book, *The Heart of the Continent: A record of travel across the plains and in Oregon, with an examination of the Mormon principle*, relates Ludlow’s travels with famed artist Albert Bierstadt across America to San Francisco, Yosemite, California, and Oregon.



representative from South Bend, Indiana. As a young man with an interest in politics, Colfax was a contributor to Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* and became the editor of the *South Bend Free Press* at age 19. Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1854, he was chosen as speaker in 1863 and elected Ulysses S. Grant's vice president in 1868. During the time of the trip, Colfax was enormously popular and viewed by many as a potential Republican nominee for the presidency.<sup>6</sup> Bowles's second traveling companion was William Bross (1813-90), the popular and outspoken lieutenant governor of Illinois from 1865-69. Bross was editor and part-owner of the *Chicago Tribune*. After the Chicago Fire of 1871, he became a passionate ambassador of Chicago and the city's "most tireless spokesperson," traveling the country to raise money and support (Boehm 24). The third traveler, Albert D. Richardson (1833-69), was an author and journalist, particularly well-known for his coverage of the Civil War and the western frontier. During the war, he was captured by the Confederates and spent twenty months in prison. He wrote about his experiences in the book *The Secret Service, The Field, The Dungeon and The Escape* (1865). He also wrote a book detailing, in part, his travels with Bowles in 1865, entitled *Beyond the Mississippi* (1867).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Seven years later, Colfax became embroiled in the Crédit Mobilier scandal and was not renominated to appear on the presidential ticket. The Crédit Mobilier scandal of 1872 involved the Union Pacific Railroad and the Crédit Mobilier of America construction company, which was the sole bidder for certain construction contracts funded by federal subsidies. The company also gave cheap shares of stock to members of Congress who agreed to support additional funding. Although Colfax was not convicted of specific wrongdoing, his career was irreversibly damaged.

<sup>7</sup> The full title of Richardson's book, in true nineteenth-century verbose style, is *Beyond the Mississippi from the great river to the great ocean. Life and adventure on the prairies, mountains, and Pacific coast. With more than two hundred illustrations...1857-1867*. At the age of thirty-six, Richardson was shot at the *Tribune* by the ex-husband of actress Abby Sage McFarland, with whom he was romantically involved. Richardson survived for a week after the November 25 attack, during which time he and McFarland were married by Henry Ward Beecher.

This trip came at a unique moment in American history, just a few weeks after the formal end of the Civil War and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theater.<sup>8</sup> The group was interested in learning about and generating informed public interest in the West, and in encouraging economic development and investment. Of particular interest were the developing mining industry and the lagging construction of the transcontinental railroad, as well as the tenuous relations of the federal government with Mormons and Native Americans. Because construction on the rail line across the continent was in its early stages, Bowles took the train more than fifteen hundred miles from Springfield through Chicago to Atchison, Kansas. There he and his companions boarded an overland stage which would carry them more than two thousand miles, until they could pick up a train line again at Placerville, California. Beginning May 21, 1865, the trip took them through Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California to the Pacific, and then north through Oregon and Washington to Victoria, Vancouver Island. The group then returned to San Francisco from which they departed by steamship to travel through the isthmus of Panama to New York City. Bowles's last letter, detailing the departure from San Francisco and the steamship passage, was dated September 23, from New York. Clearly, Bowles's trip in 1865 was more than a typical summer holiday. What it turned out to be, however, may have been more than even he could have known.

Although Bowles's letters may, in other contexts, be dismissed as ephemeral newspaper articles which would recede into the shadows of history with the next day's paper, the *Across the Continent* letters suggest something more enduring, something

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<sup>8</sup> In what is commonly regarded as the formal end of the Civil War, General Robert E. Lee surrendered the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865, at the home of Wilmer and Virginia McLean in the town of Appomattox Court House, Virginia. Nevertheless, surrender of additional Confederate divisions continued until June 23. President Abraham Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. on April 14, 1865.

more important to the often disparate studies of journalism, literature, and American nationality. This study, therefore, bridges these discourses to establish Bowles as a literary journalist writing in the form of the newspaper travel letter. I argue that beyond his immediate interests in advancing the influence and success of his paper and in promoting settlement and investment in the West, Bowles's letters contributed to an ideology of nationalism that was only just emerging in the wake of the Civil War. I also demonstrate how these letters function according to theoretical models of the letter as literature, known as epistolary or critical letter theory, and suggest a correspondence between epistolary theories and literary journalism.

Primary sources for this study include the writings of Bowles and contemporary reviews and articles. Secondary sources fall into four loosely-defined areas: critical letter theory; history, including journalism history, political history and national history; criticism on literary journalism; and historiography of nationalism and nation-building in the 1860s. Historical and scholarly resources on Bowles are limited, leaving ample ground, however, for new scholarly work. In existence are two biographies, including the nineteenth-century, two-volume George S. Merriam biography and a revisionist dissertation published as a book in 1986, as well as Hooker's history of the Springfield Republican and a limited number of journal articles. Bowles is most regularly cited in histories of American journalism but also in literary circles as a correspondent and family friend of Emily Dickinson.<sup>9</sup> He is also occasionally named as one of the influential public figures associated with the founding of the Republican Party in the 1850s.

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<sup>9</sup> Of particular note is Richard B. Sewall's *Life of Emily Dickinson*, in which Chapter 21 (463-511) is devoted to Bowles and his relationship with Dickinson and her family.

This project, in short, is the first critical study of Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters to adopt a literary perspective. It begins with historical background on Bowles to establish his influence in 1865. Making this case is important to my overall study because it will support my claim that Bowles's *Across the Continent* was an important element in the discourse of nationalism. Were it not for his early death, Samuel Bowles might be more widely known as one of the nation's greatest pioneers in the field of journalism. At 18 and following in his father's footsteps, Bowles became editor of the weekly *Springfield Republican*, which was to become under his leadership one of the nation's best and most influential newspapers. Without a single subscriber or advertiser, Bowles initiated an ambitious daily publication schedule, beginning in 1844, which made the *Republican* the first daily paper in the state outside of Boston (Merriam 1: 21). To generate copy and sustain readership, Bowles looked for more than just the usual stories reprinted from elsewhere. For the first time in Springfield, local politics, business, and social news found their way onto the pages of the newspaper. As a reporter as well as editor, Bowles dedicated himself to new standards for the evolving profession of journalism, working late into the night to be sure stories were properly written and publication was timely.

Bowles was editor of the *Republican* for thirty-three years. During that time, he established a reputation for independent journalism—backing candidates, taking sides in controversial issues, and exposing the questionable practices of local businessmen. As early as 1856, Horace Greeley, renowned editor of the *New York Tribune*, declared that the *Republican* was “the best and ablest country journal ever published on this continent.” A leader in establishing modern notions of a socially-responsible profession, Bowles had

a firm view of the role of the press in society, which he articulated in a letter in 1875: “It shall be the conservator of public morals, the guardian of the public treasury and the watch and ward of the general interest. . .” (Merriam 2: 337). Plagued by delicate health throughout his entire life, Bowles died of a stroke at his home at the age of 51. The paper reported his last words: “I may die, but *The Republican* will live” (*Springfield Republican*, 4 Feb 1878).

### *The Press in Early America*

Understanding Bowles’s place in journalism history is necessary for a thorough understanding of his *Across the Continent* letters. The *Springfield Republican* came to prominence in an era marked by unprecedented influence of the press in the nation’s political realm, but it was during the colonial period and the years of the early Republic that American newspapers first occupied a central and influential position in the ideological framework of the new nation. Although the first colonial newspaper appeared in America in 1690, the first regularly-published newspaper in North America did not appear for another fourteen years. The *Boston News-Letter* carried brief items of local interest as well as more extensive news gathered in Europe, transported by ship, and finally published weeks or months after the fact. Additional papers followed in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, including Benjamin Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette*, which he founded in Philadelphia in 1729.

Because many colonists had come to the shores of America to find freedom of religion and liberty of expression, the press in the New World assumed from the start an important ideological role as a public voice. Freedom of the press represented liberty and

democracy for the people. An early case of libel brought by the colonial government in New York tested this principle after John Peter Zenger's *New-York Weekly Journal* carried news critical of the British governor in 1734.<sup>10</sup> After eight months in jail, Zenger was found innocent when the jury ruled that so long as an account was true, newspapers had a right to criticize the government. The Zenger case, the most notable challenge to freedom of the press to be brought under colonial rule, established the legal precedent that protected freedom of the press as a fundamental American right and as a departure from British law.

Additional colonial papers followed, and about thirty papers, mostly supported by political interests, were published in the American colonies by 1760. But until the eve of the Revolution, these newspapers were significant more for the liberty of thought which they represented than as a cultural or ideological force, for rarely did circulation of these early papers exceed fifteen hundred copies. Readership was generally confined to the educated classes and those directing economic and political institutions. Nevertheless, newspapers made information available to a wider proportion of the population than might be expected of a primarily agrarian society. The mere existence of the press during the colonial and early national periods meant that any citizen capable of reading or with access to a reader could become informed on issues of business and politics.

Following a colonial period in which the periodical press was not particularly circumspect in the political orientation of the material it printed, tensions during the Revolutionary era initiated a new political consciousness for the press. Publishers and editors who resisted loyalist forces redefined their papers as sites in which substantive

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<sup>10</sup> The German-born Zenger (1697-1746) was defended by Philadelphia lawyer Andrew Hamilton, brother of Alexander Hamilton, first U.S. treasury secretary. The case was also notable because Andrew Hamilton instituted the practice of arguing a case directly to the jury.

discourses of nationalism and patriotism could flourish. According to historians Bernard Bailyn and John B. Hensch, early newspaper printers gradually recognized and exercised these new political muscles: “Responding to and perhaps also promoting a new belief that sharply antagonistic opinions might properly be articulated in the public forum, printers in America began to discard their neutral trade rhetoric, in order to behave aggressively and unapologetically as partisans.” In short, papers had to choose sides. Bailyn and Hensch emphasize the broader historical result of this Revolutionary-era change for the profession of journalism since, for the first time, “it was insisted that printers were not mere ‘mechanics’ but men of independent intellect and principle” (45).

As newspapers increasingly became a regular and active part of early American life, the ideological import of a free press for the young country was noted by contemporary observers and national leaders. In 1782, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, in his famous *Letters from an American Farmer*, noted that the new generation of Americans turned to newspapers as one of the key entry points to citizenship: “As citizens it is easy to imagine, that they will carefully read the newspapers, enter into every political disquisition, freely blame or censure governors and others” (Crevecoeur III 58). In 1786, Thomas Jefferson, one of the most outspoken advocates of a free press, wrote, “Our liberty cannot be guarded but by the freedom of the press, nor that be limited without danger of losing it” (University of Virginia Library). Early political debates—such as those calling for the Constitutional Convention of 1789—were carried on through the press.<sup>11</sup> The founding fathers formally protected the freedom of the press—the only mass medium to be so protected—as a Constitutional privilege under the U.S. Bill of

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<sup>11</sup> See Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (1791-1792): “Numerous publications, in pamphlets and in the newspapers, appeared, on the propriety and necessity of new modelling the federal government.”

Rights, ratified in 1791. In George Washington's fourth annual message to Congress in 1792, he asserted his "full conviction of the importance of facilitating the circulation of political intelligence and information" in light of information that "some provisions in the law which establishes the post office operate, in experiment, against the transmission of news papers to distant parts of the country." The following year, the relationship of press and post was codified by the Post Office Act of 1793, which allowed newspapers to exchange issues with each other without postal charges.

This relationship of post and press was particularly important to newspapers on the western frontier, where residents depended on the quickly expanding postal service for the ability to obtain news and political discourse from the rest of the country. As settlers moved beyond the Appalachians and onward to the West, they took their presses with them. Newspapermen were known to travel with a press and equipment hitched to the back of a horse or tied to a boat. The first newspaper west of the Appalachians, in fact, was established in Pittsburgh in 1786, a full thirty years before the incorporation of the city.<sup>12</sup> The *Missouri Gazette*, launched in 1808, was the first paper published west of the Mississippi River, when St. Louis was little more than a village with a population of one thousand.<sup>13</sup> The creation of a newspaper in a new frontier town marked a critical stage in its evolution. It provided evidence that standards of living had evolved to a point that residents could become self-reflexive or at least have time to tell their own stories.

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<sup>12</sup> Founders John Scull and Joseph Hall "had their small press brought by wagon across the Alleghenies while their paper stock was transported by packhorse train to Pittsburgh, then a village of three hundred people. When they ran out of paper, they had to borrow the cartridge paper used in ammunition shells from the commandant at Fort Pitt to keep publishing" (Dary 6).

<sup>13</sup> Dary writes that although there were not enough people to support an independent newspaper, Meriwether Lewis, governor of the Missouri Territory, "encouraged (Joseph) Charless to start one since St. Louis did not have a printer of any sort, and Lewis needed someone to print the laws of the territory. . . . The first issue had 174 subscribers who had paid, or promised to pay, the annual subscription price of three dollars in cash, or had pledged four dollars in such produce as flour, corn, beef, or pork" (3-4).



Significantly, most Western editors were not writers by trade and relied heavily on news from established eastern newspapers to supplement those local materials they managed to collect. Most operated independently or with limited assistance in small towns and with small budgets. Local news, usually concerning crimes or elections, was carried infrequently if at all. An informal system of domestic news sharing was in place, according to David Dary, as early as 1813 when articles from eastern papers appeared regularly in western papers. This “scissors and pastepot” journalism,<sup>14</sup> in fact, dominated most papers beyond the Mississippi until the 1850s. “Until then editors relied almost solely on exchange papers for hard news,” Dary writes, and thus publication for many papers in the West was irregular, depending on the arrival of the post (Dary 127).<sup>15</sup> Papers supplying news of the East and of Europe arrived by steamboat, stage, or, for Californians, by ship around Cape Horn. During the first half of the century, Western papers were established as far south as Texas (1812 in Spanish and 1819 in English), as far west as California (1846), and as far north as Wisconsin (1855). *The Deseret News*, published in Salt Lake City, Utah, by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), began in 1850. When Samuel Bowles traveled through the Mormon territory in 1865, he noted that the “Gentiles,” or non-Mormons, had also started an “able and prosperous” daily paper, the *Union Vedette*. Bowles also found four daily and four weekly papers in Colorado and even papers in remote mining towns, such as the prosperous daily paper in two-year-old Austin, Nevada.

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<sup>14</sup> We still recognize this moniker in our computer-based word-processing world as “cut and paste.”

<sup>15</sup> “News from Europe was about three months old by the time Charless printed it [in Missouri]. News from the Atlantic coast might take six to eight weeks to arrive in St. Louis; newspapers from Indiana Territory took two or three” (Dary 128).

Because it facilitated the supply of a significant portion of the material in these early frontier papers, the rapid expansion of the U.S. Postal Service was closely tied to the expansion of newspaper readership throughout the country well into the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> But postal service expansion also coincided with broad social and technological changes during the industrial revolution that would profoundly affect the newspaper industry in three fundamental ways. First, the technological underpinnings of newspaper production were dramatically improved as expensive hand-made paper was replaced by less-expensive machine-made paper, and as steam-powered presses replaced mechanical presses and allowed publishers to produce as many as four thousand newspapers an hour (Campbell 273). Second, the expansion of the working class meant that literacy, liquid income, and even leisure time became available to significant portions of the population, resulting in new markets for the press. Finally, newspapers directly benefited from developments in communication technology spurred by the industrial revolution. Complementing improvements in transportation and roads during the early years of the nineteenth century, the first telegraph line was set up between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Maryland, in 1844. Transportation liberated communication from land travel and made information a distinct commercial product which newspapers could obtain and print more quickly.

Samuel Bowles noted that the telegraph, by which the *Republican* first received news in 1846, launched a new era for the press and the nation. The debates of Congress,

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<sup>16</sup> In his first state of the nation address to Congress on December 6, 1825, John Quincy Adams noted the creation of 1,040 new post offices and the dramatic expansion of mail service over more than 1.5 million new miles. With the creation of additional and more efficient mail routes, Adams noted, the improved distribution of newspapers would be one of the major advantages enjoyed by the nation. He encouraged the continued expansion of the postal service “ ‘til the circulation of the mail shall keep pace with the spread of our population, and the comforts of friendly correspondence, . . . and the lights of the periodical press shall be distributed to the remotest corners of the Union, at a charge scarcely perceptible to any individual, and without the cost of a dollar to the public Treasury” (Richardson 36).

he wrote in an editorial on January 4, 1851, are in the editor's hands "hundreds and thousands of miles from the Capitol, before the members who participated in them have eaten their dinner; a speech is under his eyes before the hurrahs it awakened have died away." In prescient language he continued:

A few years more and a great thought uttered within sight of the Atlantic will rise with the morrow's sun and shine upon millions of minds within sight of the Pacific. The murmur of Asia's multitudes will be heard at our doors; and, laden with the fruit of all human thought and action, the newspaper will be in every abode, the daily nourishment of every mind.

With reductions in production costs, improved technology, and increased literacy, newspaper circulation soared as cheaper papers became available to a larger proportion of the population. The early nineteenth century saw the introduction of the largest and most influential papers of the era, according to Richard Campbell, including the *New York Sun* and the *New York Morning Herald*. From an audience of 80,000 readers of 650 weekly and 65 daily papers operating across the United States in 1830, newspaper circulation soared to 300,000 readers by 1840 with 1,140 weeklies and 140 dailies (Campbell 273-75). By 1835, in fact, the cultural authority of the press had evolved to such an extent that Alexis de Tocqueville emphatically stated, "In the United States, each separate journal exercises but little authority; but the power of the periodical press is second only to that of the people" (95). Although he notes the limitations of the press due to what he believes to be the dubious personal caliber of newspapermen he had met, Tocqueville nonetheless believed the power of the aggregate press to be immense, particularly in the political realm:

[The press] causes political life to circulate through all the parts of that vast territory. Its eye is constantly open to detect the secret springs of political designs, and to summon the leaders of all parties in turn to the bar of public opinion. It rallies the interests of the community round certain principles, and draws up the creed of every party; for it affords a means of intercourse between those who hear and address each other, without ever coming into immediate contact. When many organs of the press adopt the same line of conduct, their influence in the long run becomes irresistible; and public opinion, perpetually assailed from the same side, eventually yields to the attack. (94-95)

Identifying the press as a discursive intermediary through which citizens may participate in the political life of their country, Tocqueville foreshadows Benedict Anderson's perspective that it plays an important role in the coalescence of an imagined national community.

Historian Jeffrey L. Pasley goes one step further, in *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*, by arguing that the press, led by a cadre of influential editors such as Samuel Bowles, was not just a reporter for the American political system but its central institution. Pasley explains that through widening dissemination of information in the nineteenth century and an emerging editorial voice that lent critical perspective to the news, "newspapers and their editors were purposeful actors in the political process, linking parties, voters, and the government together, and pursuing specific political goals. Newspapers were the 'linchpin' of nineteenth-century party politics" (3). The expanding influence of the press, he argues, existed not only because newspapers were the only form of mass media

but also because specific cultural factors that shaped nineteenth-century politics expanded their role. For example, newspapers disseminated information about and offered critical assessments of political events and activities since few individuals, then as now, could actually attend. Furthermore, because it was considered inappropriate for political candidates to campaign for themselves, according to Pasley, “newspapers conducted many if not most of the opinion-shaping activities we now call campaigning: communicating a party’s message, promoting its candidates, attacking their opponents, and encouraging voters to turn out at the polls” (4). In fact, the historical context in which the *Springfield Republican* emerged afforded Samuel Bowles a larger voice in national political discourse than we might expect. From the 1790s on, Pasley explains, “no politician dreamed of mounting a campaign, launching a new movement, or winning over a new geographic area without a newspaper. . . . Through most of the nineteenth century, party factions battled furiously to control key newspapers” (9).

At the helm of these papers was generally an individual who, acting as a protector of national principles and an ideology of liberty, held a cherished place in the national ideology. This individual also wielded broad personal power in the editorial function of the paper, as newspaper staffs were small. In some cases, the newspaper was so intimately linked with the individual at its helm that the paper was considered to represent his or her personal philosophies. And so they often did. Carl Russell Fish wrote in 1913 that, unlike the editors of the early twentieth century, editors of the antebellum period generally owned their own papers, and “therefore . . . exerted a greater personal influence than either their predecessors or their successors” (282). Pasley elaborates: “The central role of newspapers in nineteenth-century politics made

newspaper editors the most pivotal and characteristic political figures of the era, if not necessarily the most respected or best remembered today” (13). So while newspapers represented a forum for public voices, as Thomas Jefferson insisted, and represented the main channel of communication between government and the citizenry, the editors were in charge. “Each editor was his party’s principal spokesman, supplier of ideology, and enforcer of discipline in the area and political level he served,” Pasley explains. “In a very real sense, he was the party’s face and voice” (13). By the 1860s, when Samuel Bowles joined Schuyler Colfax for a trip across the continent, the political power of newspaper editors was still substantial. Mark Wahlgren Summers states that journalists of that decade continued to wield their greatest influence in politics: “Newspapers were more than echoes of party organizers, much less objective reporters of political affairs. They proclaimed themselves a power in their own right” (26).

### *Influence of the Springfield Republican*

The history of newspapers and their intimate relationship with political forces in the first one hundred years of the nation resulted in a unique context in which Samuel Bowles and other newspaper editors could come to exceptional prominence in national affairs. The *Springfield Republican* was launched following a remarkable flatboat trip in 1824 from Hartford, Connecticut, to Springfield, Massachusetts, by Samuel Bowles’s father. The senior Bowles, who had worked with printers in New Haven and Hartford, was invited by the Springfield Anti-Federalists to launch a new paper that would diversify the political perspectives represented in the local press. The first issue—single-handedly written, produced, and managed by Bowles—appeared September 8, 1824, with

250 subscribers paying \$2 a year. The fledgling paper survived and, during the next fifteen years, expanded, even while contending with stiff competition from as many as five local papers and larger papers from Boston and New York. Over the next several decades, the *Springfield Republican* “crushed or absorbed the other local weeklies” through a “thorough system of local intelligence [which] gradually made it indispensable to readers of western Massachusetts” (Johnson 513). By the early 1840s circulation had grown to 1,200.

In 1844, the younger Samuel Bowles revived an earlier proposal to launch a daily version of the paper, promising to assume the additional workload himself. The first daily edition appeared March 27, 1844. Although the experiment of a daily paper began slowly, attracting only two hundred subscribers by 1846, its transition from an afternoon to a morning paper in December 1845 initiated a period of rapid growth during which it became the primary source of information for many along the Connecticut River valley. In 1848 the *Republican* absorbed the *Springfield Gazette*, its principal competitor, and “established its supremacy in western Massachusetts” (Johnson 514).

In an editorial on December 31, 1851, Bowles reiterated his high ambitions for the paper: “What we aim to make, is a Daily and a Weekly newspaper, not only better suited to the wants of the citizens of the four Western counties of Massachusetts than any Boston or New York journal can be, but beyond that, one *cheaper* in price than a journal of any pretensions can be obtained from either of the great cities.” Bowles made an early nod toward objective journalism but also staked a broad claim to the appropriate scope of his paper: “After the news, which is the great distinctive object of the *Republican*, and to which all other things must bend, we aim to discuss politics, morals, religion, physics,—

anything in fact which editors may discuss now a days—as honestly, frankly, fairly and intelligently as our abilities, knowledge and time will admit.”

Because of the political role of newspapers in general and Bowles’s tendency to take positions on controversial issues, it is in the arena of politics that Bowles may be best remembered by American historians. Bowles entered the political arena during the 1848 election in an editorial raging against the “Free Soilers,” a renegade political party, which had nominated a former president whom Bowles cynically dubbed “Martin Van Ruin” (Weisner 58). Although the paper had long been associated with the Whigs, Bowles asserted the paper’s political independence after 1854-55, when he editorialized that the Whig party was “dead.” In a February 3, 1855, editorial, he stated,

Wherever and whenever the success of men or of parties can advance those principles and purposes, the Republican will boldly advocate such success; whenever men and parties are stumbling blocks to the triumph of those principles, they will be boldly opposed and denounced. . . . The independent press of the country is fast supplanting the merely partisan press. Parties are taking their form and substance from the press and the pulpit, rather than the press and pulpit echoing merely the voice of the party.

In the mid-1850s, Bowles also voiced disdain for the “Know-Nothing” party, comprised of a motley array of politically discontented and previously unaffiliated constituencies including both Southern pro-slavery and Northern anti-slavery groups. The party planned to espouse a platform that avoided the slavery issue altogether in the interests of maintaining its unlikely alliance. But from its purportedly confidential 1855 Philadelphia convention, daily reports were issued, containing practically verbatim the



detailed proceedings of the previous day. Reports printed in three newspapers—Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*, the *Atlas* of Boston, and the *Springfield Republican*—were all written by Samuel Bowles. While some contemporaries, including Bowles’s biographer George S. Merriam, doubted Bowles’s ethics when he induced delegates to break their oath of silence, others believed he was fulfilling the responsibility of the press to principles of liberty and democracy. Richard Hooker, for instance, writes that many believed “an oath of secrecy, when taken mutually by politicians, becomes to the journalist the password of a conspiracy against the public interest” and that Bowles prefigured twentieth-century journalists and their perspectives on the obligations of public officials (75). The reports emanating from the secret Know-Nothing convention established the reputation of the *Springfield Republican* and national fame for editor Samuel Bowles. According to Bleyer, it was about this time that Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune* offered Bowles a position as editorial writer and head of its Washington bureau, the first of several offers from other papers to acquire Bowles and his talents.

But with the exception of a six-month stint in Boston, Bowles remained in Springfield while his national political role expanded. As the collapse of the Know-Nothings approached, the *Republican* called for a new political party. Bowles and other prominent figures met to discuss the formation of a new party—the Republican Party—which first won Congressional seats in 1854 and which would establish dominance with the nomination of Abraham Lincoln of Illinois for president in 1860. Civil War historian Eric Foner states that in the years leading up to the Civil War, the moderates within the Republican Party, usually former Whigs, “disliked sectional antagonism, and believed the

government had interests and purposes which transcended the slavery controversy” (*Short History* 205). Foner lists seven influential moderate Republicans who took the lead in the early years of the party, including Schuyler Colfax of Indiana, Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, John Sherman of Ohio, and Samuel Bowles of Massachusetts (*Short History* 205).

Bowles not only had things to say but also the means to say them. By 1860, the circulation of the daily edition of the *Springfield Republican*, primarily covering Western Massachusetts, reached 5,700, while the weekly *Republican*, in 1860, reached a circulation 11,280 “of which 7,271 was in Massachusetts, and the other 4,000 distributed over almost every state and territory in the Union” (Bleyer 261). News and editorials originally published in the *Republican* were reprinted in papers from New York to Chicago. “Although the weekly never attained to a circulation approximating that of the weekly edition of the *New-York Tribune*,” Bleyer writes, “Bowles, like Greeley, had a large following of faithful readers throughout the North and West” (261). And Bowles realized that national circulation of the weekly meant a broader readership and larger influence. Another early newspaper historian, James Melvin Lee, claims that the influence of editorial writing reached its highest levels during the decade of 1850-60 and lists Bowles as one of the nine “editorial giants” of the day (276). The *Springfield Republican*, he noted, “even before the war . . . had become one of the most influential papers of the provincial press” (319).

During the Civil War, the paper doubled its number of subscribers, and its price went from two cents to four cents. The Civil War also accelerated the pace of transformation of the American press from a political organ to a news-gathering industry

because it evoked a public demand for front-line news, eyewitness reports, and other timely information. The largest papers could afford to send correspondents to the front lines, but smaller papers—including the *Springfield Republican*—relied on accounts generated by the other papers. Unsatisfied with merely reporting the happenings of the war, Bowles added commentary and analysis, further advancing his reputation as a discerning commentator and keen political observer. Following the Civil War, Bowles kept his eyes on a reunified North and South, urging a level-headed policy toward the South. In an 1867 editorial, for example, Bowles argued that disenfranchisement of the rebel white southerners “is as great a folly . . . as omission to enfranchise is wickedness toward the negroes. There can be no real, no true, no lasting reconstruction in the South that does not include all classes of its people” (*Republican*, 18 Mar 1867).

Early in the twentieth century, newspaper historian and journalist Oswald Garrison Villard notes that Bowles has been awarded by some the distinction of being the greatest of American editors (282).<sup>17</sup> Villard called Bowles one of “the journalists who have profoundly stirred the conscience of America” in a nostalgic invocation of the age of the great editors who “either owned their own journals or were given a complete freedom of expression” (313-14). Villard also credits Bowles for his commitment to moral causes—a dedication, he believes, that helps to explain the power of the greatest newspaper editors of the nineteenth century.

The scandal-ridden completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869 crowned a period characterized by widespread political and economic corruption during which Samuel Bowles and the *Springfield Republican* solidified a reputation for independent

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<sup>17</sup> Villard (1872-1949) is notable in his own right. Grandson of the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, Villard, like his father before him, owned the *New York Evening Post* and *The Nation*.

journalism. Following the Civil War, the Reconstruction process was tainted by reports of waste and corruption. Northern cities as well were plagued by corruption, as exemplified by the Tammany Hall scandal in New York City. The railroad, supported generously through the land grants and subsidies of the Railroad Acts of 1862, 1864, and 1866, spawned a continuous stream of suspicion and allegations concerning the misappropriation of federal funds reaching to the highest levels of government. The situation culminated in the 1872 Crédit Mobilier scandal, in which the fraudulent company channeled millions of dollars not only to its founders but to politicians purportedly engaged in the cover-up. Much to Bowles's dismay, his *Across the Continent* companion Schuyler Colfax was implicated. The *New York Sun* called it the most "damaging exhibition of official and private villainy and corruption ever laid bare to the gaze of the world" (4 Sept 1872). As a nation, Americans looked with dismay toward the two Grant administrations (1869-77) as an irretrievably reprobate structure of patronage and deceit. In the *Republican* of November 17, 1871, Bowles published a scathing assessment of the political world following the Civil War:

We ought to know by this time . . . that what good men will not do for love of their country, bad men will do for love of themselves, whether it be to run caucuses, or manage elections, or hold office. . . . What is the result? That the whole framework of our government, from top to bottom, is being eaten out and worn away by a dry rot; that we have almost come to look upon self-seeking and place-hunting and thieving the public money as matters of course, disagreeable to be sure, but inevitable; that in this free democratic country, politician has become a term of reproach.

This battle against corruption and the fulfillment of the sacred role of the press in maintaining a free and functioning democracy defined the last ten years of Samuel Bowles's life. It was during these years that Bowles made the *Republican* one of the outstanding examples of independent journalism, placing the public welfare above party and personal affiliations. During this decade, newspaper historian Bleyer writes, "Bowles acquired a nation-wide reputation as a fearless, independent journalist, and his editorial opinions were constantly quoted in other newspapers throughout the country" (267). Bleyer goes on to say that Bowles justly claimed a leading role for the *Springfield Republican* in the new movement toward independent journalism. Bowles clearly saw himself and his mission in this light. Writing in an editorial December 20, 1872, he said, "In the Political Revolution, . . . as in the growth of this Higher Journalism,—that promises so much for itself in elevation and enlargement of power, and so much for the public in a nobler leadership and a wider instruction,— THE SPRINGFIELD REPUBLICAN may honorably claim to have been both a pioneer and a prophet." Bowles dutifully aimed his expository arrows at both local and national corruption, and his reputation magnified the implications of his accusations—which were usually made by name.

Bowles paid a personal price for his principles. Merriam writes, "All his readers recognized Mr. Bowles's power, but all by no means admired him. He gave frequent and wide offense" (Merriam 1: 203). This hostility was illustrated most vividly during a late-December visit to New York City in 1868, when Bowles was arrested and thrown in jail at the request of James Fisk, Jr., a celebrated speculator and American railroad financier openly criticized in the *Republican*.<sup>18</sup> Although Fisk had clearly attempted to embarrass

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<sup>18</sup> Fisk and financier Jay Gould attempted in 1869 to corner the gold market, leading to a day of nationwide financial panic, September 24, 1869, known as Black Friday.

or harass Bowles with the cooperation of a dishonest judge, the plan backfired and “succeeded only in giving to Samuel Bowles and the *Republican* the most valuable advertising they ever received” (Hooker 105). The event was covered extensively in the *Republican*, the New York press, and beyond. To remind the modern reader just what a sensation was caused by Bowles’s arrest, it is useful to refer to the contemporary record of journalism historian Frederic Hudson, who in 1873 ranked the event alongside other notable historical events of censorship and oppression: “The time when journalists were dragged through the streets to Tyburn<sup>19</sup> . . . or put in the pillory as with Defoe,<sup>20</sup> or had their papers burned by the common hangman as with Zenger, has passed with the Anglo-Saxon race.” But in incidents like the arrest of Sam Bowles, Hudson saw “a glimmering of despotism. . . . The whole affair,” he wrote, “was a gross outrage on the rights of a citizen and the freedom of the Press” (141, 583).

Amid such an era of outrageous corruption, historian Mark Wahlgren Summers claims, Bowles stood out:

[R]eliable reporting and a reputation for temperate utterance gave journalists their power. No better illustration of quality’s importance could be found than the influence of the *Springfield (Mass.) Republican*, edited and published by Samuel Bowles. . . . [O]nly the *New York Tribune* could match its high reputation among Republicans in the late 1860s. (23)

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<sup>19</sup> The Tyburn is a stream in London after which the village of Tyburn, standing at the West end of present-day Oxford Street, was named. From the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries, the Tyburn gallows was the primary execution site in Middlesex County—and the final destination for many troublesome journalists and other offenders.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Defoe (1660?-1731) is often considered the father of modern journalism. An ill-timed satire, *The Shortest Way with Dissenters* (1702), however, resulted in his imprisonment.

Bleyer notes that as partisan forces again characterized the press during the scandals following the Civil War and Reconstruction, “Bowles maintained an unusual degree of political independence in the editorial policy of the *Republican*” (259). Early historians agreed. George Henry Payne writes, “The time had now come for warfare on this corruption, and in the reconstruction period, the *Springfield (Mass.) Republican*, under Samuel Bowles, became a journal of national influence, through its vigorous and continued denunciation of corrupt leaders and their connection with politics” (328). By 1873, circulation of the *Republican* had expanded to 25,000—larger at the time than any of the Boston papers. That same year, Frederic Hudson wrote that the *Republican* was

one of the most influential provincial journals in the United States. Its vigor of management, and its central position in Massachusetts, gives it this power over other journals published in the interior. . . . It has an opinion of its own, and utters it whenever it chooses to do so. . . . The *Republican* is emphatically a New England institution. (582-83)

During this time, Bowles’s influence in shaping national politics continued. In 1872, Bowles and a group of three other influential newspaper editors “congregated at Cincinnati, to make a President of the United States” (*New York Times*, 9 April 1876; emphasis added). The incident was remembered four years later when the *Times* reported a New York City meeting between Bowles and Murat Halstead of the Cincinnati *Commercial*. “When it was announced yesterday that these eminent President-makers had met at the Brevoort House,” the *Times* wrote, “there was of course a flurry in political circles. It was not supposed that the fate of the nation rested in their hands, but

their peculiar genius for upsetting things and making a row generally was so well known that their meeting was a matter of some public interest.”

Bowles’s final illness, commencing with a stroke in early December 1876, was followed closely by the New York City press, with almost daily reports published by the *New York Tribune* and the *New York Times*. Although bound to be inordinately laudatory, commentary following Bowles’s death in 1878 can indicate the extent of his influence and the place of the *Springfield Republican* among contemporary papers.

Prominent among the tributes is a passage from Horace White of the *Chicago Tribune*:

As Mr. Bowles was a model of what I conceive to be the highest aims of journalism, so was he a prince of the journalistic art. No American journal during the last ten or twenty years has been more diligently studied by editors than the *Springfield Republican*. This is the crucial test of a public journal. . . . He possessed an analytical faculty which enabled him at all times to spy out the grains and kernels of important fact in the midst of endless chaff. . . . In all that constitutes taste in journalism,—good taste, condensation, dress, perspicuity, and elevation of tone,—Mr. Bowles was *facile princeps* among his contemporaries. (qtd. in Merriam 2: 442-43)

Henry Watterson, in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, spoke of Bowles’s contributions to American journalism: “To say of a man that he edited the model provincial newspaper in the most newspaper-reading country on the globe, that he gave this provincial newspaper national influence and importance, and that he was a statesman rather than a politician, is to say all that could be claimed for a journalist. Yet it is no more than of right belongs to Samuel Bowles” (qtd. in Merriam 2: 449). Villard called Bowles “a genuine newspaper



personality, a man with something to say and the ability to say it,” and a man who could “lift his paper into the front ranks of American dailies, make it respected, admired, and feared by the politicians . . . ” (191).

### *Contemporary Responses to the Trip Across the Continent*

In 1865, the struggle to preserve the nation moved away from the battlefield and into the realms of politics and discourse. With peace negotiated between the North and South, the nation turned its attention to victory on another front: the West. During the 1860s, Kansas, West Virginia, Nevada, and Nebraska were admitted to the Union, and the transcontinental railroad was completed at Promontory Summit, Utah, in May 1869. Thus Bowles’s trip to the West, beginning in May 1865, came at a critical moment in American ideological history. “The trip to California, as one chapter of national history ended and another began, proved a wise newspaper venture,” according to Richard Hooker, who claimed that Bowles traveled more than any other of the great journalists of his time.<sup>21</sup> “Mr. Bowles came back the best informed editor in the East on the Far West, its problems, its needs, and its leading figures. He had seized an opportunity to qualify himself to give his editorial page a broadly national note in a new period” (Hooker 136). From the beginning, Bowles had committed his paper to bringing his readers into contact with the wider world, and the trip in 1865 was consistent with that vision. The trip promised to provide unique material to be printed in the *Republican*, fulfilling Bowles’s commitment to journalism that embraced both local and national communities.

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<sup>21</sup> Despite and at times because of his ill health, Bowles made numerous trips to Europe and the American West, including his early trip to the South during the winter of 1844-45. In fact, *Across the Continent* was just the first of Bowles’s popular books of travel in the West. Subsequent works include *The Switzerland of America: Colorado, Its Parks and Mountains* (1868) and *Our New West: Records of Travel Between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean* (1869).

Beyond a personal interest in obtaining unique and insightful material for his paper, the 1865 trip provided an opportunity for Bowles to convey knowledge of and spark capital investment in the West. In an open letter to Speaker Colfax, printed as an introduction to the *Across the Continent* volume, Bowles clearly states his intentions concerning westward expansion and his eastern readers, confirming what many of his contemporary critics considered an expansionist agenda. Specifically, he intended to portray “the social and material developments of the several States and Territories we visited,—their present and their future, their realization and their capacity; and to develop to the people of the East and to the Government their share in the interests and hopes of the West,—what duties they had to perform, what benefits they might hope to reap” (v). But despite his intention to depict the West as a region teeming with economic opportunity, Bowles insists that his reports are marked by objectivity, intelligence and “Truth-speaking.” He lists the qualifications which he brings to his task, including “intelligent interest and enthusiasm,” the “trained eyes and ears and the educated instincts of journalism,” and an “independence and integrity [of] observation” (v).

Bowles was keenly aware of the impact his trip could have on economic and political discourses. Politically, his letters establish a new ideology of nationalism in the wake of Civil War. Part of Bowles’s strategy was to bolster financial investment by cultivating a sense of connectedness between the East and the West. Through extensive description of the land and its industries, Bowles attempted to dispel images of West as a barren and inhospitable desert, even while tackling issues of difficulties and dangers. He goes to great lengths to illustrate the economic potential of Western lands as they emerged from the uncertain days of mining into a new era of agriculture, manufacture,

and trade. Bowles's letters familiarize readers with the topography and convey the grandeur of the American continent; they establish familiar relationships with people of the West; and they pointedly discuss poorly-understood threats of the West, including Mormons and Native American Indians.

The substantial impact of the trip across the continent and Bowles's letters in particular is due not only to the wide circulation of the *Republican* and *Across the Continent*, but also to extensive attention to the trip in the press. In addition to the *Springfield Republican*, portions of the letters were printed in other publications.<sup>22</sup> Letters by Bowles's traveling companions on the trip also appeared in the press, and while the nature of those letters is beyond the purview of this study, it is important to note that the trip itself was the subject of national attention throughout the summer and into 1866, in part because of the reports of Colfax, Bross, and Richardson. Publications which reprinted portions of Bowles's letters included the *Boston Globe*, the *New York Times*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* as well as other publications as diverse as *Scientific American* (11 Nov. 1865), which ran a portion of Bowles's letter twenty-seven, detailing the economic downturn of California's Mariposa County, and the *Ohio Farmer* (22 July 1865), which carried Bowles's admiring description of Schuyler Colfax from letter five.

When *Across the Continent* was published in November of 1865, it achieved immediate popularity. According to contemporary accounts, the book sold 10,000 copies in its first three months, and, according to George S. Merriam, the book eventually sold

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<sup>22</sup> Because of the disparate quality of nineteenth-century newspaper archives, particularly for those papers published on the frontier or for short periods of time—namely, those publications which were quite likely to have reprinted material from Eastern papers—it may be impossible to ever fully determine the extent to which Bowles's letters were reprinted across the country.

15,000 copies, with a second edition published in 1866. *Across the Continent* was advertised widely and aggressively in publications such as the *New York Tribune*, the *New York Times*, the *New York Observer and Chronicle*, and *The Round Table* well into 1866. Contemporary articles indicate that the book was widely anticipated following the trip, and it quickly became a topic of press and public interest. In November 1865, the *New York Evangelist* predicted *Across the Continent* would be “a volume of great interest and permanent value.” The *Boston Transcript* called it “one of the most popular books of American travel that have appeared for years, both on account of the interest and novelty of its facts, and the freshness, vigor, and accuracy of the style of statement” (qtd. in *The Round Table* 13 Jan 1866). And even more enthusiastically, *The Nation* stated, “We cordially recommend everybody who wants a most valuable contribution to the social and political philosophy of the day, in the form of one of the most entertaining records of travel we have ever lighted upon, to buy and read this book”<sup>23</sup> (11 Jan 1866).

A sampling of contemporary reviews also reinforces the notion that the trip recorded by Samuel Bowles in *Across the Continent* was an event of national importance, that the functioning of the text rested on both its public journalistic and private epistolary features, and that the results had significant implications for popular conceptions of nationalism. An April 1866 review in the *North American Review*, for instance, states that although the trip was initially planned for “recreation, health and observation, . . . as it proceeded it grew to dimensions of public significance” and “soon became *quasi* public in its character.” The reviewer notes that Bowles’s accounts were widely reprinted in the

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<sup>23</sup> At least one account proves explicitly that the public did buy and read the book. In Worcester, Massachusetts, *Across the Continent* was the subject of a series of public readings which, “taking us over the line of the coming Pacific Railroad, and through the wondrous scenes of the Pacific slope of the Continent, . . . [promise] to give us much entertainment and instruction” (*Circular* 19 Feb 1866).

East and in the Pacific States. Furthermore, the reviewer identifies the epistolary nature of the newspaper letters collected in *Across the Continent* by suggesting that they are not addressed to the indistinguishable consumers of mass media but “to a circle of friendly readers, and with almost the familiarity and directness of private correspondence.”<sup>24</sup>

Among the epistolary features highlighted is “a personality of tone and manner, which, alike in the descriptions of scenery and society and in the discussion of grave social and material questions of public and even of national interest, produces a fresh and agreeable impression.” The *Brooklyn Daily Union* agreed:

The volume is one of the most interesting, and, to Americans, altogether the most valuable book of its kind published in this country. Though written for a newspaper, the style of the letters possesses a charm newspaper letters seldom attain—combining ease and grace, the genial flow of incident and the ingenious weaving of valuable fact and clear and attractive description, with substantial statement and formidable statistics; such a combination is at once unique and interesting. (qtd. in *New York Times* 22 Mar 1866)

A January 14, 1866 review of *Across the Continent* in the *New York Independent* focuses on the literary aspects of the text and commends Bowles for his fair-minded and ethical approach to controversial issues, particularly the treatment of Chinese immigrants in California. The reviewer compares *Across the Continent* favorably to other examples of contemporary travel writing by noting, “[Bowles] has given us a sprightly, entertaining narrative of the adventures of his party, and a clear, reliable description of the condition and prospects of the numerous states and territories traversed by him. The book is not an ordinary, gossiping story of travel, but is filled with valuable and well-presented

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<sup>24</sup> Epistolarity of the newspaper travel letter will be examined in Chapters Two and Three.

information.” A reviewer in the *Philadelphia Age* declared, “Impartial criticism will unhesitatingly accord to him the merit of having published the best record of travel that has emanated from an American pen during the present century” (qtd. in *New York Times* 22 Mar 1866). Likewise, the *Boston Post* declared *Across the Continent* to be “the marked book of American travel of the year. We know of nothing which gives a better picture, drawn in finer lines, than this of the great western portion of our continent.” The *North American Review* predicted, “The ride across the continent will hereafter take its place amongst the recognized pleasure-trips” (Apr 1866).

An extended review was also offered in Boston’s *Christian Examiner* in May 1866. In a section entitled “Geography & Travels,” the editor writes, “Mr. Bowles’s work needs no aid of ours to secure it popularity or just appreciation.” The review notes the popular appeal and broad dissemination of the book in a short time: “By the felicity of its topic, and the intelligence and grace with which it is handled, this book has made its way ‘across the Continent.’ ” Because of its appeal to Americans of all interests and throughout all sections of the nation, the reviewer suggests ways in which *Across the Continent* was integrated into discourses of nationalism:<sup>25</sup>

Read with instruction and delight on this side the Great Plains, it will be swallowed with the utmost avidity on the other side, where a lively description of their scenery and life, by a competent hand from the Atlantic Slope, is relished beyond the conception of those who have not visited the self-exiled pioneers of the western rim of the American Continent.

Significantly, the passage not only acknowledges Bowles’s capability to articulate a story of America for all Americans but also appropriates his perspective that citizens of both

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<sup>25</sup> The implications of *Across the Continent* for discourses of nationalism will be examined in Chapter Five.

East and West are embraced by the umbrella of nationalism. This passage, for instance, rhetorically appropriates the residents of the western part of the nation as “self-exiled pioneers.” The Western land itself is later characterized in a similar fashion, as the Pacific Slope is said to have been “expatriated” from Eastern lands by the “nightmare of a monotonous desert between.”

Several newspaper reviewers shared the perspective that *Across the Continent* could present a remedy for the ignorance and conjecture that dominated popular conceptions of the West in 1865, particularly related to the Mormon question, mining, the railroad, and Native American Indians. A review in *American Literary Gazette and Publishers' Circular* of February 15, 1866, states, “A large portion of the United States west of the Mississippi River is yet unexplored, and is almost unknown. Even to an American, books of personal adventure on that *terra incognita* are no less novel and interesting than if the traveler were wandering on the other side of the globe.” With an eye toward ways in which *Across the Continent* enriches an understanding of the nation, the reviewer suggests that the most valuable parts of the book provide information on people, manufactures, institutions, mining, and agriculture of the West. A reviewer for the *Herald* of Utica, New York, agreed: “No one can pretend to a complete knowledge of our country, or to any definite knowledge of the western half of it, who has not read *Across the Continent*” (qtd. in *New York Times* 22 Mar 1866). And a writer at the *New-York Economist* urged, “emigrants who intend to settle in any of the far western States or Territories should read it before selecting their new homes, as well as capitalists who propose to invest in mining schemes, and politicians desirous to be posted on the

resources and wants of the trans-Mississippi region” (Feb 1866). *Across the Continent* clearly addressed many of the questions Americans were asking about the West.

Another perspective common to many of the reviews of *Across the Continent* in 1865 and 1866 was an appreciation of its literary qualities and related implications for the reader. The *San Francisco Bulletin* notes the effects of Bowles’s literary style of communication: “Mr. Bowles relates his experience so pleasantly, so genially, so free from the taint of snobbery and affectation that it refreshes one to read him. . . . His style is a model of graceful English—polished, yet pointed—elegant, yet bristling with pith and antithesis” (qtd. in *New York Times* 22 Mar 1866). The *Christian Examiner* of May 1866 astutely notes implications of *Across the Continent* for ideologies of a unified nationhood through literary strategies that in the twenty-first century would clearly qualify as characteristics of literary journalism:<sup>26</sup> “Mr. Bowles’s book brings California and the Pacific Coast nearer home than any previous work on the subject; because, approaching it by the Plains, he carries his readers with him step by step all the way, allowing no foreign territory or barren ocean to break the sense of a continuous and united country.”

Not all reviews were as complimentary. An unflattering review in the April 1866 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, attributed to the well-known writer and abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson, finds *Across the Continent* to be merely the latest in a series of journalistic travel books. “Since Mr. Greeley set the example,” Higginson begins, “it has been the manifest destiny of every enterprising journalist to take an occasional trip across the continent, and personally inspect his subscribers.” The review goes on to note “the eloquence which rises to sublimity over mining stock, and dwindles to the verge of

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<sup>26</sup> The place of *Across the Continent* in the canon of historical literary journalism is argued in Chapter Four.



commonplace before unmarketable natural beauties.” Higginson merely concedes that “it is the best book on the theme it handles, for it is the latest; . . . and this will retain its place only until the coming of the next editorial pilgrim.” Another uncomplimentary review of *Across the Continent* was published in the April 1866 *New Englander and Yale Review*. While the review commends Bowles for the breadth of the information he provides, it severely criticizes his writing style with shocking exclamations:

We have rarely read a book written in such a slipshod style! It fairly smells of the stage-coach! The greater part was undoubtedly written in one; and we marked, till we were tired, passage after passage which bears unmistakable marks of having been dislocated, as is [sic] was being put on paper, by some unlucky bounce of the coach as it sank and rose on the rough roads over which the party seem to have been whirled at break-neck speed.<sup>27</sup> It is a great pity that the book did not receive a careful revision after the author returned to New England.

In a letter to his friend Charles Allen, Bowles admitted after the release of *Across the Continent* that his revisions of the letters were few—and deliberately so: “I don’t regret that I declined to ‘pad and powder’ the letters. . . . [I]t was more honest and fair to let it all stand, correcting of course such errors as my revision and your suggestions have discovered. The book made itself; it is a newspaper book; I am a newspaper writer, and not a book writer; and I don’t aspire to be other than I am” (qtd. in Merriam 2: 47).

Overall, however, contemporary reviews of *Across the Continent* suggest an enthusiastic reception from the public, widespread attention and readership, and a prescient appreciation of the qualities that should make the text an object of interest in

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<sup>27</sup> In Chapter Two, I suggest some possible causes of these perceived “dislocations.” See page 68.

modern scholarly pursuits. Because of the history of the American press preceding 1865—from its place at the heart of American democracy to its role as the central institution of the American political system in the nineteenth-century—Bowles had the power to ideologically engage a national audience as few others ever would. But the influence of the *Across the Continent* letters also hinges on the text and its construction, incorporating textual elements of epistolarity, journalism, and literature.

The remainder of this study will explore these elements and implications of the text for the nation in 1865, beginning with a critical look at nineteenth-century epistolary journalism in Chapters Two and Three. These chapters will adapt and apply models of epistolary theory to the form of the nineteenth-century newspaper travel letter. Chapter Two considers constitutional elements of the letters, the modification of journalistic form to accommodate epistolary content, and dimensions of sonance and vocality enabled within the newspaper letter form. Chapter Three further explores epistolary journalism to determine how newspaper letters correspond to and diverge from critical approaches to the letter as literature, previously applied to private letters. These structures include dimensions of presence and absence, public and private, and personal and political. In Chapters Two and Three, I answer questions such as the following: How can nineteenth-century newspaper travel letters negotiate the requirements of journalism and personal letter writing? What rhetorical and narrative strategies comprise this functioning? And how do theories of epistolarity hold true for these newspaper letters?

Chapters Four and Five expand on this critical work by suggesting a correspondence with literary journalism and exploring implications for nationalism. Chapter Four explains how many of the same qualities that make Samuel Bowles's letters

function as epistolary texts also place Bowles within a tradition of early literary journalism. The chapter offers an overview of critical theories concerning literary journalism and, through textual evidence, places Bowles within that tradition. Finally, Chapter Five examines ways that Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters reflect an ideology of nation immediately following the Civil War. Drawing on complementary epistolary and journalistic features of *Across the Continent*, Chapter Five provides information concerning theoretical models of nationalism and suggests ways that Bowles's work can be interpreted according to those models. In particular, the chapter considers passages in which Bowles directly articulates a philosophy of nationhood as well as those passages in which he indirectly supports the work of ideological and economic nation-building through approaches to landscape, citizenry, and internal challenges to national sovereignty.

With things to say and the ability to say them, Samuel Bowles has much to tell us as Americans in the twenty-first century. So, armed with expectations and questions, encouraged by contemporary reviews, and with a character no less colorful than Samuel Bowles as our guide, I now turn to the classic text that is *Across the Continent*.

## CHAPTER 2

### NINETEENTH-CENTURY EPISTOLARY JOURNALISM: EPISTOLARY THEORIES, STRUCTURE, AND CONTENT OF THE FORM

One traveler, about to embark on a journey to the West in 1865, concluded a letter home with these words:

[A]nd so, dear friends all, we sail out into this vast ocean of land. I shall think of you with every joy, and, possibly with selfish longing, with every pain. Do you think of me when the June roses open, with the dew of July mornings, with the fragrant cool of an August evening shower, when the katy-dids sing in September; and, God willing, I shall be with you again ere the maples redden in October.

The writer was none other than newspaper editor Samuel Bowles, and this passage concluded the first of the newspaper letters written during his remarkable trip across the continent (9). It doesn't sound much like a newspaper article—but, then, what is it?

An approach to Samuel Bowles's *Across the Continent* must clearly find its starting point in form. The newspaper letter lies at the intersection of journalism and epistolarity, assimilating traditions of journalistic writing as well as the discursive functionality of personal correspondence. At first, the integration of these genres seems unlikely. Journalism—the gathering, writing, and dissemination of news—constitutes a fundamental component of our American democracy that enables an informed citizenry. Because of its primary conceptualization as a one-way communication linking geographically or otherwise affiliated publics, it carries expectations for style and content unique to this function, including criteria for broadly engaging and relevant content,

widely accessible language and tropology, and standardized structure and formatting. The author, furthermore, is generally situated as an uninvolved observer, although literary journalism, as we shall see, allows for a significant departure from this prescribed role. Conversely, the private letter implies a limited readership and constitutes an interpersonal communication of “news” that is generally written because of its individual or local significance, and in which the author may be an implied or explicit character. Personal letters also carry expectations for style and content that are unique to the form but which are reinvented according to the needs and capabilities of each writer and in every act of writing. When a journalist deliberately chooses to write in the form of a letter, however, the result is a text that carries traces of both forms and that functions uniquely because of these complementary structures. The journalist’s choice of the letter is not accidental. From the conception of an idea, to the accumulation of content, to the writing process itself, the composition of a newspaper letter differs profoundly from the composition of a typical newspaper report. And the resulting text is different, too. Within the newspaper letter form, what the journalist can convey and the rhetorical strategies available to convey it mark a dramatic departure from traditional journalistic writing.

Because I will refer to private letters or correspondence and newspaper letters throughout this discussion, these terms need clarification. By private letters or correspondence, I mean to identify those letters which are conceived as communication between individuals and which are not composed with the intention or expectation of public distribution. By using the term *private*, I do not suggest that private correspondence may not have been expected by its author to be shared, or that it did not, in fact, become public in the course of time. However, I do mean to establish a term by

which I can differentiate between those letters written by an individual as a private correspondence to another individual from the newspaper letter, written with the intention of a broad, public readership. Private letters have been the subject of critical investigations known as epistolary theory, which seek to uncover formulaic structures and textual functionality implicit to the letter-writing and -reading processes.

The other term central to my argument is “newspaper letter,” by which I mean to identify those letters written by journalists to be published in the newspaper, and which I will also identify by way of shorthand as epistolary journalism. For purposes of this study, I have restricted my attention to newspaper letters of the nineteenth century, and particularly to the representative—but not typical—letters of *Across the Continent*, published during an era in which the newspaper letter form was common. Although they took the form of correspondence—with many of the expected structures and discursive features of private letters—newspaper letters, like other material published in the paper, were expected to relate newsworthy material. Newspaper letters often took the form of travel letters, reporting information from distant locations such as Europe or remote areas of the United States. Readers could expect that the letters would convey news but in a personal way, providing the journalist’s own experiences and opinions in addition to information typically found in newspaper articles. Excluded from this study and not meant to be implied by the term “newspaper letters” are letters to the editor and novels constructed as a series of letters, commonly called epistolary fictions, which are not composed with the same expectations for content, form, and function. Unlike personal correspondence and epistolary fictions, newspaper letters have not received the critical attention needed to begin to understand the form.

An understanding of the structure, content, and rhetorical functionalities of the newspaper letter form is central to a study of *Across the Continent*. By adopting a course of correspondence with his readers in place of traditional reporting, Bowles embraced a literary form in which he could incorporate not only the chronological events of the overland journey but also snippets of conversation, stories and rumor, lengthy analysis—from Bowles’s point of view, of course—of economics and commerce, personal reactions to people, places, and events, and even a side-splitting joke or thinly-veiled insult. To frame a critical approach to the material in *Across the Continent*, Chapters Two and Three of this study represent an initial effort to theorize the nineteenth-century newspaper letter, using established theories of epistolarity for personal or private letters as a springboard. I will attempt to show that works of epistolary journalism like Samuel Bowles’s occupy an unmapped literary ground in which a fusion of epistolary and journalistic structures results in a distinct textual form. I will argue that while the requirements of the journalistic context demand certain modifications to epistolary structure, content, and function, epistolary elements are clearly present and transformed in ways that can be identified and theorized. More pointedly, I will attempt to answer questions such as the following: How do theories of epistolarity hold true for these newspaper letters? In what ways do these public letters mimic personal correspondence? And, what rhetorical and narrative strategies comprise this functioning? To illustrate my claims, I will call upon Samuel Bowles and his great epistolary collection, *Across the Continent*.

*Letters, Newspaper Letters, and Relevant Critical Perspectives*

This chapter's argument builds upon works of epistolary criticism which historically have focused on private letters and epistolary fictions. *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications* is William Merrill Decker's outstanding work of critical letter theory in which he theorizes letter writing in its structural sense and also examines the rhetorical and historical contextualization of the epistolary act. Decker demonstrates that the letter genre is both broadly and variously defined. He considers the genre to contain epistolary texts written for but not receiving exclusively private consumption and often containing fragments of other literary genres. Epistolary texts are characterized by letter-writing conventions as well as authorial idiosyncrasies that lend a significant diversity to the genre—and yet, the activity of letter-writing itself is a clearly identifiable and self-conscious activity. In other words, an individual self-consciously composes a letter, although the structure, content, and style of the finished product may be widely divergent. To delineate the genre, then, Decker chooses a minimal definition: “By familiar letter . . . I wish to designate texts that at some point in their histories are meant to pass in accordance with some postal arrangement from an addresser to an addressee, and that in some way inscribe the process by which an author personally addresses a specific readership” (22).

An earlier study of private letters pursues an argument which positions the letter as a performance as well as a text. In *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter*, Bruce Redford demonstrates how the personal or familiar letter is structured according to a conversational paradigm (2), an enterprise that favors the voice of the author even as text conveys information about the world. He



states that “[t]hrough a variety of techniques . . . the letter-writer devises substitutes for gesture, vocal inflection, and physical context.” These rhetorical techniques, Redford believes, makes the act of letter writing a performance as well as a text. He asks, “How does the eighteenth-century letter-writer—committed to ‘prattling upon paper,’ in [Samuel] Johnson’s phrase—capture the artful spontaneity of conversation?” (5) This is done by the best letter-writers, Redford argues, because of several advantages including cultural consensus, which allows for recognition of culturally-shared signs, allusions, and so on, to bring the context of the original source into the text of the familiar letter. Cultural consensus also encompasses shared “assumptions, attitudes, and acquaintances.” Indeed, Bowles’s *Across the Continent* is lavishly enhanced by performative elements through which he communicated to his contemporary readers, and by textually-encoded dimensions of sonance and vocality, features that will be explored later in this chapter.

Another important study is provided by Janet Gurkin Altman in *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Although Altman’s study focuses on epistolary fictions, she explores structures and functionality of letters which transcend the fiction/non-fiction divide, including several “scales of polarity” related to the letter as text. These scales allow Altman to approach letters through paradigms including 1) a continuum of bridge/barrier, or the letter as distance breaker and distance maker; 2) a continuum of confidence/non-confidence, or the letter’s capacity for transparency—as in the case of a confession or personal narrative—as well as opacity—for instance, when it is used as a mask or weapon; 3) a continuum of writer/reader, or how the epistolary situation evokes simultaneously the acts of writing and reading, even within the same letter; 4) a continuum of private/public, or how the privacy of the writer is exposed to a public vis-à-

vis the audience of a reader; 5) a continuum of I/you, here/there, and now/then, or a present or temporal consciousness which creates an illusion of the present, including an oscillation between past and future; 6) a continuum of discontinuation/continuation of each letter within a chain of dialogue; and 7) a continuum of unit/unity, continuity/discontinuity, or coherence/fragmentation of self-contained artistic units but also a fragment of ongoing dialogue (186-87). Although differently systematized by other critics, these scales present a useful rubric through which to approach not only fictional letters, as in epistolary fictions, but real letters as well, upon which epistolary fictions are modeled.

Additional studies of epistolary fictions are offered by Linda S. Kauffman in two works, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* and *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction*. While principally a feminist study that considers gender and authorship, *Discourses of Desire* also explores the ideas of intertextual referentiality and evolution within the epistolary genre and searches for commonalities among disparate epistolary texts. Kauffman's *Special Delivery* expands on ideas introduced in her first book but focuses on defamiliarization of the epistolary mode. "Rather than imposing a foolish generic consistency," she writes in the prologue, she emphasizes the "modal transformation" imposed by each of her subject texts (xi). In particular, Kauffman's model is germane to a study of newspaper letters because of the way it predicts variations on epistolary forms according to the motivating context of the writing act. It is my opinion that the context surrounding the composition of a newspaper letter, particularly its publication venue and public audience, initiates an epistolary form

which is in many ways a natural variation upon the fictional or non-fictional private letter.

Considerations of context associated with the writing act are more fully pursued in Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *On the Margins of Discourse: The Relation of Literature to Language*, to which both Decker and Redford refer. Smith argues that written language, in the case of a poem, for instance, is "an imitation or representation of an utterance" occurring in a context and also as a result of that context. "In other words, the historical 'context' of an utterance does not merely surround it but *occasions* it, brings it into existence" (23-24). The particular context for an act of writing includes internal and external environmental factors, as well as personal and cultural conditions, that allow a certain idea to, first, occur and, second, to be articulated in a particular way. To apply this idea to epistolary texts, when a letter-writer states a location and date of composition, he or she evokes a context. When the letter-writer provides additional textual evidence of time and place, explicit reference to the epistolary act, and rhetorical structures including tropologies that summon a broader temporal or experiential framework, the context is even more powerfully sustained by the epistolary text. Redford believes the letter can occupy both of Smith's categories as it belongs to a verifiable historical context and simultaneously creates a context for reading that does not depend on any knowledge or association outside the letter to understand and appreciate what is going on.<sup>28</sup>

Smith's argument also offers a second compelling consideration for a study of newspaper letters and, particularly, for those of Samuel Bowles. Because written text may be "an imitation or representation of an utterance," it may convey elements of

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<sup>28</sup> This idea of a textually sustained context encompassing author and readers harmonizes with Benedict Anderson's paradigm of an imagined community, with broad implications for nationalism. These ideas will be more fully explored in Chapter Five.

vocality—such as we might identify in cases of spoken tropes. Closely related to Redford’s model of the letter as performance, I mean to suggest that in the case of a newspaper letter that is composed as a correspondence with a particular readership, the act of composition includes a mental image of the intonation of the language as it is conceived by the author, and textual elements may allow this vocal intonation to be recreated in the mind of the reader. In this case, a linguistic context of the newspaper letter includes not only language and tropology, but manifestations of that language within systems of orality that can be detected and decoded by the reader.

These critical approaches to epistolarity provide a useful framework through which to approach the public letters of nineteenth-century journalists. But they are necessarily just a starting point, and an examination of the requirements of newspaper publication is also necessary to theorize the form. William Merrill Decker expressly excludes public letters from consideration in his study—namely, those published in newspapers or pamphlets as well as epistolary fictions, instructional and conduct books, and philosophical letters of life and travel such as J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters of an American Farmer* (1782). Although Decker does agree that public letters of newspapers and pamphlets “engage something of a genuine epistolary process,” and that “[w]riting of this kind often grows out of, leads to, and overlaps with private correspondence,” and that “the public letter is adept at mimicking the confidential tone of the private exchange,” he states, “the conventions and expectations that distinguish the private from the public occasion remain firm” (24).

I take exception, however, to Decker’s point. In an endnote, Decker cites Michael Warner’s *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-*

*Century America* to substantiate his exclusion of public letters, but the example which Warner draws upon to make this claim is limited in its application. Warner's argument rests on a letter published in Maryland as a pamphlet in 1727 entitled "A Letter from a Freeholder, to a Member of the Lower House of Assembly." Warner is right to differentiate a text of this kind from a personal letter. He claims that the addresser and the addressee in this case are defined and mediated by their public roles and do not relate or communicate as men, per se. He further suggests that the broader discourse in which the published pamphlet figures as an artifact transcends the addresser's and the addressee's individuality, in part because the process of publication places the discourse within the realm of politics. Warner goes on to argue that the depersonalization of the participants in the letter communication means that "their exchange can be read and participated in by any number of unknown and *in principle unknowable* others. No catalogue of empirical readers will exhaust the implied sphere of this discourse" (40).

But all public letters cannot be considered to belong to a common literary form with functional consistencies, for a clear demarcation can be drawn between this public-letter-published-as-pamphlet and public newspaper letters such as those written by Samuel Bowles. First, unlike the freeholder in Warner's letter, who, Warner maintains, potentially embraces any number of similarly-situated participants within an established realm of public discourse, Bowles emphatically occupies the position of author—neither as a representative of a larger group, nor as a reporter, but as an individual who is friend, neighbor, and confidante of his readers—who is, in fact, none other than Samuel Bowles. This emphatically-identified authorial presence within the text is possible within the newspaper letter form as it cannot be possible in the public-letter-published-as-pamphlet

because of the insistence of writers such as Bowles on his subjective voice within the text and other rhetorical strategies to be explored in Chapter Three. An examination of contemporary reviews of *Across the Continent*—even those which were critical of Bowles or which placed him within a tradition of journalistic travel writers—demonstrates that readers’ perceptions of this authorial voice were strong and personal.<sup>29</sup>

Second, while Bowles is fully aware of the political implications of his trip across the continent, the political context of the trip does not obscure the author, compromise his individuality, or mediate his relationship with readers. Where formal, impersonal rhetoric is found in Warner’s public-letter-published-as-pamphlet,<sup>30</sup> Bowles’s familiar personal voice alternates with what was then Bowles’s equally familiar journalistic voice in a recurring oscillation that the epistolary form embraces but which the more structured public-letter-published-as-pamphlet cannot accommodate. Bowles’s political statements in *Across the Continent* are couched in this oscillating voice, of which both manifestations are equally his. Political comments are therefore spoken in his voice, as his opinion—albeit the political opinion he wishes for the public—and not as a text subsumed by larger political discourses.

Finally, I disagree with Warner’s statement that because the position of addressee may be occupied by “any number of unknown and *in principle unknowable* others,” this multiplicity violates the epistolary nature of the text as discourse. I would argue instead that the multiplicity of addressees in the case of a newspaper letter may function in

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<sup>29</sup> For specific examples, see Chapter One.

<sup>30</sup> A brief selection from the text, as presented by Warner, can illustrate this formal, impersonal rhetoric: “Thus, Sir, I have given you very candidly my Thoughts on the Proposals for a *Tobacco-Law*; and I am so far from making any apology for the Trouble I have given you, that I tell you in plain and honest *English*, that it is your Duty . . . to endeavour to the utmost of your Power, that the Publick may receive the Benefit of ‘em. . .” (Warner 41).

profound ways to actually create communities among unacquainted readers who recognize a common relationship with the author. Furthermore, the idea that individuals who are unknown to each other may share a position as members of a community is a fundamental principle of *Imagined Communities*,<sup>31</sup> in which author Benedict Anderson insists that relationships can exist despite the unknowability that Warner impugns. It is my contention, therefore, that among the various forms of published letters, the nineteenth-century newspaper letter possesses distinctive and dynamic epistolary features that energize the text in unique ways. And while some aspects of private correspondence are modified in the newspaper letter form, critical epistolary paradigms must be considered to account for the form's functions.

In the days before electronic and digital technologies allowed for instantaneous communication, letter writing was a regular tool by which individuals maintained relationships and conveyed information, in both the private and public spheres. As a result, letters figured in newspapers from the earliest days of the English-language press. While newspapers and periodicals often published material drawn verbatim and translated from foreign papers and reports, some news was acquired in the form of letters from foreign and domestic sources. The authors of these letters came to be called, appropriately, correspondents. Even the first issue of Sir Richard Steele's and Joseph Addison's distinguished *Tatler*, of April 12, 1709, incorporated news obtained by letters from the Continent. Professional foreign correspondents existed as early as 1725 when *Farley's Bristol Newspaper* employed a correspondent in Philadelphia. In the late

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<sup>31</sup> Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* provides a strong case for the emergence of national communities among individuals who are largely unknown and unknowable to each other. This idea is explored more fully in Chapter Five, which examines implications of Bowles's letters for an emerging sense of nationalism in the wake of the Civil War.

eighteenth century, as local news assumed a more prominent place in the press, and with unprecedented international implications of the momentous foreign events of the era—namely, the French and American Revolutions—both foreign and domestic correspondents became more common, and the permanent role of newspaper correspondents, acting as the eyes and ears of their readers, became formalized.

This relationship of correspondents and their newspaper readers complemented the important social role assumed by the press in the nineteenth century. In their essay “Periodical Literature in Social and Historical Context,” Susan Belasco Smith and Kenneth M. Price argue that periodical literature, more than books, is a reflection and product of the cultures in which it is produced, and that periodicals play a central role in communication—not only in disseminating information but also in creating rhetorical structures as well as expectations for literature on the part of the reading public. During the nineteenth century, which is the primary focus of their study, “The periodical—far more than the book—was a social text, involving complex relationships among writers, readers, editors, publishers, printers and distributors” (3). Perhaps no form better represented the complexity of these relationships than the nineteenth-century newspaper letter. As it embraces other genres, constructs a relationship of intimacy between a distant writer and multiple readers, and reflects a diversity of subject matter and discursive strategies, the newspaper letter clearly challenges critical readers, particularly as they consider broader theories of epistolarity.

The production process of the newspaper places certain restrictions on the form of all newspaper writing, including newspaper letters, and necessarily influences their conceptualization, composition, and final published form. First, unlike private



correspondence, which may be written and posted or delivered at the will of the writer, newspapers run on a production schedule with deadlines that compound the limitations posed by the delivery schedule of the postal service. Second, because of their mass readership and in most cases an overriding economic requirement for accessibility by as many members of a public audience as possible, reporters tend to choose language that is broadly familiar and not dependent on literary tropes or external allusions which participants in personal communication may bring to private correspondence. And while twenty-first-century readers may tend to find nineteenth-century newspaper reporting laden with emotionalism or moral pedantry, the subject matter was still considered to be news; trifles of daily living, which might comprise the whole of a personal letter, would generally be excluded from the pages of a newspaper. Third, once material is provided to a paper, it is subject to the constraints of space and format as determined on a daily basis by other news and, in particular, advertising, which expanded dramatically during the nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup> An editor is empowered to make corrections or changes to any text provided for publication, or to shorten or divide pieces that prove too long for the available space. Handwritten letters, then, were visually transformed by the technology of the printing press to appear in newsprint. In its published form, material provided to the newspaper was presented in a standardized typeset formatting, with standardized fonts, column width, and headline structure, creating a consistent, depersonalized appearance for the various published pieces.

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<sup>32</sup> Although the first newspaper advertisement to appear in America was printed in 1704, it was not until the penny press era of the 1830s that extensive advertising was encouraged. The move was an economic strategy that allowed newspapers like the *Springfield Republican* to establish editorial independence from commercial and political interests which had previously supported and controlled the newspaper industry. Although the partisan press accepted advertisements, it was more likely to restrict advertisers based on moral or commercial interests. The penny press, on the other hand, was more liberal in the advertising it would accept in the interest of keeping the cost of each issue low—as low as one penny.

By these processes, the letters of nineteenth-century journalists might be expected to be transformed into journalistic texts. But the newspaper letter negotiates the literary space between private letters and journalistic writing in a kinetic way, drawing and retaining structures from the private letter and yet modifying them to fit the journalistic milieu; accommodating content that typifies the personal letter and which the newspaper might otherwise neglect; and oscillating between the personal voice of the author and the voice of the journalist within an epistolary text that lays claim to both. I will now more closely examine each of these features of the newspaper letter form.

#### *Adaptation of Epistolary Structures in the Newspaper Letter*

Although Bowles would have had to conform to many of the specific requirements of journalistic writing, his letters contain letter-writing structures which distinguish them from traditional press reports and demonstrate an amalgamation of the epistolary and journalistic forms. First, in contrast to news reports, which generally begin with an originating city and date in a structure known as a dateline, all of Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters begin by listing the date and location of composition above the body of the letter, a structure which characterizes private letters. This structure was consistently used when Bowles's letters were published in their entirety in the *Springfield Republican* and other papers but was less frequently used when papers only partially reprinted the letters. In these cases, the text was often preceded by introductory notes or a paragraph from the editor, introducing the selected passage. Second, in contrast to standard letter-writing conventions, nineteenth-century newspaper letters tend to bypass a salutation of the reader. While personal salutations such as "Dear Mother" or "Dear

Father” may have been virtually universal in the private letters of American pioneers and others during the mid-nineteenth century, this structure does not appear at the head of any of Bowles’s *Across the Continent* letters. Rather, following the date and originating city, Bowles plunges directly into his topic, more in accordance with journalistic than epistolary form. Bowles’s letters also exclude typical epistolary structures by which the salutation of private correspondence is often extended into the body of the letter, including forms such as an inquiry into the reader’s wellbeing or an apology related to the time elapsed since the prior communication.

One functional commonality between the newspaper letter and the private letter is the potential to be read either as a distinct text or as part of a larger, ongoing discourse. This double functionality, in the case of the private letter, means that each letter can be read as a textual snapshot of the moment of the epistolary act, in which case meaning must be constructed from the limited scope of the individual letter and its context, or as part of an ongoing dialogue between addresser and addressee, in which case meaning is constructed over time and in the presence of other acts of writing. The newspaper letter, similarly, can be approached in these antithetical ways, and Bowles’s *Across the Continent* letters illustrate this double functionality. Each of the letters can be read independently, as a representation of a personal experience and commentary on a limited range of topics. The presence of headlines accompanying the letters in both the newspaper and the book form suggests that each letter can stand alone, as it did in its original published newspaper form, to address various issues and provide adequate context. Context, in this instance, would also include the material environment of the newspaper itself, with its columns of type and collection of news. The letter, within this

context, becomes simultaneously an artifact of news items, as one among the various contents of the day's paper, and an anomaly among the news, a text demarcated precisely because of its dissimilarities from the news. However, first, because of the serial nature of Bowles's letters during 1865, and, second, because of their collection in a book bearing one unifying title, a concurrent interpretation of the letters as constituent elements within an ongoing discourse is also possible. The collection of the letters as a book with headlines which emphasize the roles of the letters within a larger narrative that encompasses a trip across the continent vitiates the structural parameters of the individual letters by assigning them a place in a larger, titled work. Features of Bowles's letters support such an approach, particularly in letters which begin with accounts of the route since the last letter, which contain intertextual references to preceding activities and letters, and which express allusions to the ongoing act of writing.

As a result of these conflicting or complementary ways of examining the parameters of Bowles's letters, internal headlines take on a new connotation. Both in the newspaper and in the book, each letter begins with a headline or title which purportedly identifies the primary topic of the letter or a series of topics in the order presented. In few cases, however, does the headline fully predict the content of the letter. In *Across the Continent*, the book version of the letters, an "Index to Contents" precedes the letters and lists, in addition to titles, various subheadings that facilitate reader reference. The relatively short, nine-page letter one, for instance, bears the title "From Massachusetts to the Missouri" but contains the following thirteen subtopics: "The Railroad Ride behind; the Stage Ride before—Spanning the Continent—Vitality of Men of the West—The Chicago Wigwam five years ago: History since—Cleveland and Chicago, and their new

Life—Atchison and its History and its Position—Pomeroy and Stringfellow—The Trade over the Plains—Speaker Colfax and his party for the Overland Journey—The Indians break the Line—Senator Foster and the Indian Question—Agriculture in the West—Coach off: Good-bye.” Letter thirty-two, the concluding and longest letter, contains thirty-four distinct subtopics, all under the deceptively simple headline, “The Voyage Home by Steamship and the Isthmus.” These listings, a bow to publishing conventions for books of the nineteenth century, serve to illustrate the incongruous relationship of headline to text and the inability of Bowles’s letters to fully assume a journalistic mode—in other words, to assume a mono-thematic structure which could be contained within a headline that purportedly delineates content.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes, editors found it appropriate to assign a different headline to portions of Bowles’s letters reprinted in their papers, but only when the corpus of the original letter was examined could the headline and content correspond.

Structural considerations of the closing of nineteenth-century newspaper letters also demonstrate the amalgamation of the epistolary and journalistic forms. First, in contrast to many personal letters, which generally end with a commendation and signature, letters written in the newspaper letter form may be variable in the structure of their concluding lines. In a private letter, commendations such as “sincerely” or “your devoted husband” are frequently present and function to identify and reinforce a relationship of addresser to addressee, with particular relevance to that relationship within the rhetorical space of the letter. Moreover, the author’s signature, which would typically be found at the conclusion of a private letter, usually appears at the top of the newspaper

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<sup>33</sup> The variegated potentialities for content within the newspaper letter form will be explored later in this chapter.

letter—in the structure known today as the byline—or is eliminated altogether, as when Bowles’s letters were reprinted and accompanied by an introductory paragraph provided by an editor. In contrast to personal letters, a typeset name accompanying a newspaper letter, like the rest of the physical letter itself, was depersonalized by the act of publication. With font style and size corresponding to the rest of the printed letter and other articles in the paper, publication transformed Bowles’s handwriting and eliminated an important manifestation of authorial presence. As a result, the publication format and typeset structure of the signature represents a significant departure from the private letter.<sup>34</sup>

Without a structural closing comprised of commendation and signature, and within the context of ongoing epistolary discourse, nineteenth-century newspaper letters could be concluded in a variety of ways. A selection of the closing passages of Samuel Bowles’s letters can illustrate this variety and be usefully contrasted. Passages range from the strongly epistolary, to the eloquently literary, to the surprisingly abrupt. The closing passage of the first letter, for instance, a portion of which introduces this chapter, is indubitably faithful to the epistolary model. The passage acknowledges the moment of the epistolary act, the author’s emotional response to the closing of the letter, a longing for the absent reader and the shared New England landscape which he has left behind, and a sentimental looking ahead to a time of reunion. The passage interrupts a preceding reflection on the declining state of local orchards with an abrupt change in voice and an intimate, direct address of the absent reader. Much like concluding passages of private

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<sup>34</sup> William Merrill Decker and other epistolary critics discuss how the physical form of the private letter, imprinted with traces of the author—including handwriting, ink, tears, perfume, or other physical elements—represents one of the central manifestations of the author’s presence to the reader. Dynamics of presence and absence will be more fully discussed in Chapter Three.



Not only does this typographical trick accommodate the publication parameters of the newspaper, but it also preserves in an ingenious way the effect of a handwritten signature. By using reduced-size capital letters for initials, and by positioning the initials at a distance from the preceding text, the effect is comparable to what we might find in a private letter, signed at the bottom. The spatial effect in the newspaper column is impressive and demonstrates a conscious invocation of the epistolary model. It furthermore calls upon the reader to acknowledge his or her familiarity with the author by requiring him or her not only to interpret the meaning of the initials “S. B.” but also to acknowledge the capability to do so. The initials and the devotional term “your” comprise an extraordinary textual act of intimacy during an era when it was not unusual for even familiar letter writers to use their full names to sign letters, even when addressed to their closest friends and relations.<sup>36</sup>

Bowles chooses other epistolary conventions to close the letters of *Across the Continent*. After describing the warm reception afforded Speaker Colfax and his party at the various stops along the route, Bowles closes letter two with a report of his personal condition. “For myself, I enjoy the grand ride much better than I expected; but for the remaining twinges of sciatica, it would be unalloyed pleasure; and the anticipated sleepless night rides prove but small inconvenience” (17). At the end of letter seven, after Bowles and his party have arrived in Salt Lake City, he discusses his imminent

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<sup>36</sup> The examples of this phenomenon are plentiful, but a few will illustrate a remarkable contrast to Bowles’s assumption of familiarity with his readers. Stephen and Mariah King, emigrants to Oregon in 1845, signed letters to their parents and siblings, “From your affectionate Children Stephen and Mariah King” (Holmes I, 45). The Quaker emigrant Rachel Fisher Mills, another emigrant to the Oregon Territory in 1848, wrote to her “Much respected Parents & often thought of Brothers & Sisters” but signed the letter formally with the names of both her and her husband: “Wm. A. Mills Rachel Mills” (Holmes I, 108). In 1854, Elizabeth Hutchinson signed a letter to her sister, “Your affectionate Sister Elizabeth E. M. Hutchinson” (Holmes VI, 28). In letters to his wife from various locations in the West, John Boizard signed some of his letters formally, as in a letter written July 12, 1859, from Fort Ridgely, Minnesota, and signed, “Your husband, John O. Boizard” (Dickinson 19-20 and 6, 10, 21).



plans: “We remain here for a full week. The grass is too green; the trees too new to our eyes; . . . the curious social and wonderful material developments of this city and Territory too rare and remarkable; and the hospitality of the people, Mormon and Gentile, too generous and inviting, to permit us to leave hurriedly” (78). Letter eleven, the last to be written from Salt Lake City, concludes with a departing salutation not to the reader but to the city, and one last humorous strike at its polygamous culture:

But adieu to Salt Lake and many-wive-and-much-children-dom; to its strawberries and roses; its rare hospitality; its white crowned peaks, its wide-spread valley, its river of scriptural name, its lake of briniest taste. I have met much to admire, many to respect, worshiped deep before its Nature,—found only one thing to condemn. I shall want to come again when the railroad can bring me, and that blot is gone. (113)

Letter sixteen, written from San Francisco on July 4, concludes with another epistolary convention, a reference to the group’s upcoming activities:

Next Monday,—after a crowded week of sight-seeing and hospitality in San Francisco and vicinity,—we retrace our steps as far as the mountains on a more northern route, and thence into the most interesting gold-quartz mining region, and on along the valleys on the eastern slope of the Sierras north to Oregon, and back, through British Columbia, and by the ocean, the first of August. (168)

Other closing passages demonstrate how the prominent use of literary conventions—including metaphors, personification, and sensory images—can distinguish the newspaper letter form from strict news reporting. As Bowles prepares to leave

Washington Territory to return to California, he favorably compares the mild climate to New England's, but his closing thoughts in letter twenty—laced with an air of homesickness—poetically draw back to the East:

I do not wonder the emigrants hither find new health and life and much happiness in [the climate's] great evenness; but I do not yet recognize that which would compensate me for the loss of our slow, hesitating, coying spring times, our luxuriously-advancing, tender, red and brown autumns, aye, and our clear and crisply-cold winter days and snow-covered lands, with the contrasting evergreens, the illuminated sky, the delicately fretted architecture of the leafless trees, the sunsets, the nerve-giving tonic of the air. Surely there is more various beauty in the progress of a New England year than any which all the Pacific Coast can offer. (211-12)

Letter twenty-four, "The Great Theme: The Pacific Railroad," concludes with a passage that combines elements of epistolarity—notable here in a direct address of the readers—with literary conventions, including an analogy of the Civil War and the transcontinental railroad as complementary stages of nation-building:

Men of the East! Men at Washington! You have given the toil and even the blood of a million of your brothers and fellows for four years, and spent three thousand million dollars, to rescue one section of the Republic from barbarism and from anarchy. . . . Lend now a few thousand of men, and a hundred millions of money, to create a new Republic; to marry to the Nation of the Atlantic an equal if not greater Nation of the Pacific. Anticipate a new

sectionalism, a new strife, by a triumph of the arts of Peace, that shall be even prouder and more reaching than the victories of your Arms.<sup>37</sup> (273)

While many of Bowles's letters end with epistolary or literary conclusions or with elements of both, some letters end with virtually no conclusion at all. Letter eight, for instance, describing an evening of entertainment with non-Mormon or, in the contemporary phrase, "gentile" leaders, ends suddenly: "The enjoyment of this social entertainment of music, conversation, dancing and refreshments, was sadly and only broken by the announcement during the evening of the sudden death of the territorial governor, Judge Doty, formerly of Michigan and Wisconsin" (88). Perhaps Bowles's intention was for the reader to imagine the entertainment ended just as abruptly as his letter, but no further information is ever provided about the conclusion of the evening or the death of the judge.

The conclusion of letter ten is also abrupt, but perhaps in a more satisfactory way that does not fully diverge from the preceding content. After describing a night at the Mormon theater built and funded by Brigham Young, Bowles adds supplementary information which, in the modern-day journalistic format of the inverted pyramid, could have been eliminated at an editor's discretion: "During the winter season, performances are given twice a week; and the theater proves a most useful and popular social center and entertainment for the whole people. Its creation was a wise and beneficent thought" (104). Letter seventeen, ending on the topic of Portland, Oregon, and its people, lists a few individuals with whom Bowles's eastern readers might be familiar and mentions a few of the town's established industries. In his concluding line, Bowles writes,

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<sup>37</sup> This passage, and others related to new conceptualizations of the nation, will be more fully examined in Chapter Five.

“[A]ltogether Portland has the air and the fact of a prosperous, energetic town, with a good deal of eastern leadership and tone to business and society and morals” (183).

Finally, the epistolary journalism form allows for concluding narrative structures that resemble the construction of a modern-day feature story. In feature writing, journalists identify a feature angle from which a topic is explored, and the end of the story is used to reinforce this angle, generally by referring to the lead of the story or by providing a narrative conclusion. At the end of letter twenty-three, which recounts the grand dinner with Chinese leaders of San Francisco and Bowles’s gastrically-motivated escape to an American restaurant supplying more familiar fare, Bowles ends with a punch-line: “This is how I went to the grand Chinese dinner, and went out, when it was two-thirds over, and ‘got something to eat’” (254). A punch-line also concludes the narrative presented in letter twenty-seven. The long letter describes the mining industry in general and provides extensive detail concerning the adventure of Bowles and his companions in a mine in Amador County, California. It concludes with a good-natured, “But if I prolong this story any further, you will almost wish I had never got out of that [mine] shaft!” (320)

#### *Adaptation of Epistolary Content in the Newspaper Letter*

Structural elements of newspaper letters are only part of the way they constitute a distinct epistolary form; as the preceding examples suggest, content can be surprisingly consistent with forms of private correspondence, in which the personal and the daily are often privileged. Decker’s *Epistolary Practices* reminds us of the different cultural context for letter writing before telecommunications, in which letter exchange was a

central part of daily life—but letters of the era also provide evidence that daily life was a central part of the letter exchange. Decker notes, “[L]etter writing is an intensely metonymic discourse inasmuch as it typically abounds in the registry of quotidian ‘realist’ minutiae that become more or less explicitly significant in reference to the addressee’s absence” (15). Letters of nineteenth-century travelers regularly address subjects such as the weather, conditions and especially the inconveniences or dangers of traveling, the quality of accommodations and food, the changing landscape with its concomitant plant and animal life, people encountered during the trip, background information and gossip associated with people and places, and an assessment of the economic climate of new regions as measured by agricultural abundance and especially prices. Some or all of these topics could be included in any one individual letter, often with little or no discernible structure and with or without transitions. Nineteenth-century journalists writing in the newspaper letter form may demonstrate this discursive oscillation with frequent alternation among various subjects. Like private letters, this feature of epistolary journalism may result in a letter with the unlikely combination of topics revealed by the copious subtitles listed in the *Across the Continent* book and account for the “dislocations” of passages noted by the uncomplimentary review in the April 1866 *New Englander and Yale Review*.<sup>38</sup>

Like much private correspondence from the westward trails in the mid-nineteenth century, the body of many of Bowles’s letters begins with an account of the author’s journey since the previous letter. Readers familiar with the private letters of westward pioneers and those familiar with the popular nineteenth-century travel books would not have been surprised to find such structures in Bowles’s letters. According to Carol Marie

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter One, page 40.

Greene, nineteenth-century newspaper travel writers regularly included a ritualistic account of the travels which preceded the letter's inscription. Bowles's first letter, written from Atchison, Kansas, charts the route traveled from Massachusetts and previews the longer route yet to come. The letter begins, "A week of leisure traveling ends the first or railroad stage of the great overland trip across the Continent. It is 1,425 miles by railroad from Springfield to Atchison, via Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago, and the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad through northern Missouri" (1). Letter two, entitled "From the Missouri to the Platte," continues this leading structure: "A trifle short of two days has borne us two hundred and fifty miles, riding night and day, to this point" (10). This letter begins as a continuation of the dialogue Bowles has begun with his readers in the preceding letter and proceeds to describe the roads west of Atchison, followed by an account of some of the people, events, and scenery along the way.

Bowles often uses a similar structure in the midst of his letters as well to keep his readers apprised of the group's progress. In letter seventeen, written in present tense and with a series of participial and prepositional phrases, Bowles recounts a trip through California: "On through a like productive country, crossing streams. . . , along roads bordered with fences and trees, by farms and orchards. . . , we make our first night ride, passing in the gray morning the prosperous little town of Red Bluffs. . ." (171). By providing a present-tense account of the journey, Bowles recreates his own unfolding experience for the readers and structurally provides a transition from topic to topic.

Like other nineteenth-century travelers, Bowles's letters include descriptions of the inconveniences—and especially the discomforts and dangers—of traveling. In letter fourteen, "The Ride through the Sage Brush and the Great Basin," Bowles describes a

whirlwind trip out of Salt Lake City and into Nevada, which covered four hundred miles in fifty hours, or two-thirds the normal time, and another two hundred miles in twenty-two hours, or fourteen fewer than expected. Bowles reports,

[T]he jolts of the rocks and the “chuck holes” of the road, to which the drivers in their rapid progress could give no heed, kept us in a somewhat perpetual and not altogether graceful motion. There was certainly small sleep to be enjoyed during this memorable ride of three days and nights; and though we made the best of it with joke and felicitation at each other’s discomfort, there was none not glad when it was over. (136-37)

A similar event is documented in letter nineteen, “Through Washington Territory.”

Bowles recounts a two-day drive of ninety miles, with eleven people packed into a seven-person wagon:

Off we bounced into the woods at the rate of three to four miles an hour. . . . Most unpoetical rounding to our three thousand miles of staging in these ten weeks of travel, was this ride through Washington. The road was rough beyond description; . . . the hight [sic] and depth are fully equal to the length of it. Those who worked their passage, by whipping lazy mules whose backs they strode, and paid twenty dollars for the privilege, made the best time, and had the laziest of it. Yet since, I observe, with tender memories of hard saddles, they ‘stand and wait,’ instead of sitting upon wooden chairs. (199)

Like many writers of travel letters, Bowles discusses the nature of accommodations during the trip, particularly when they leave much to be desired. Early

in the trip, Bowles finds that at many of the establishments welcoming travelers, “floors are oftenest such as nature offers only; and, as at some of the Washington hotels, the spoons at the table do not always go around” (21). In letter six, “A Sunday in the Mountains,” Bowles describes his own party’s accommodations during an unexpected twenty-four-hour delay in Virginia Dale, Colorado:

Lodgings are not extensive in this locality; the Speaker borrowed a bed; two slept in the coach; and two of us rolled ourselves up in our blankets and took the floor. I hit upon a board whose hard side was accidentally put up; and what with this, and hungry and dry and noisy stage drivers coming in at from two to four A. M., and less vociferous but quite as hungry invaders of our bodily peace in the form of vermin, the night brought more of reflection than refection—to us. (57)

From Washington Territory, Bowles generally reports comfortable accommodations in letter nineteen, but notes “one or two most illustrious exceptions, where the meals consisted of coarse bacon, ancient beans and villainous mustard,—and where, o’ nights, the beds could e’en rise and walk with fleas and bedbugs” (201).

Also reflecting a negotiation of the journalistic and epistolary forms are the ways in which Bowles provides information on agriculture and economics. Although readers might expect a report of economic conditions in journalistic accounts of the West, Bowles’s letters incorporate another distinct form of economic report: a ritualistic cataloguing of foods, prices, and commodities with an uncanny resemblance to the forms of private letter writers.<sup>39</sup> Like a shopping list or a personal budget, the enumeration of

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<sup>39</sup> Pioneer letters contain a similar cataloguing structure when describing agricultural produce of the West. Betsey Bayley wrote of Oregon, “The country produces almost all kinds of fruit—whortleberries,



many items, whether at a meal or at the market, represented a focus on the minutiae of daily living that is privileged in the epistolary form. For instance, in letter three, Bowles comments on the availability of food and the quality of meals between Fort Kearney, Nebraska, and Denver:

Our meals at the stage stations continued very good throughout the ride; the staples were bacon, eggs, hot biscuit, green tea and coffee; dried peaches and apples, and pies were as uniform; beef was occasional, and canned fruits and vegetables were furnished at least half of the time. Each meal was the same; breakfast, dinner and supper were undistinguishable save by the hour.

(21)

While in Colorado, Bowles writes extensively of the need for widespread irrigation but explains that in the meantime, eastern canned fruits and vegetables supply many tables. “The extensive and common use of these imported productions of our eastern orchards and gardens in all the country west of the Missouri River, is most astonishing,” he writes. “They are on every table; few New England housekeepers present such a variety of excellent vegetables and fruits, as we find everywhere here, at every hotel and station meal, and at every private dinner or supper.” To fully illustrate the variety of produce available in Colorado, Bowles provides a comprehensive list: “Corn, tomatoes, beans, pine apples, strawberry, cherry and peach, with oysters and lobsters, are the most common; and all of these, in some form or other, you may frequently find served up at a single meal” (64). In letter nineteen, “Through Washington Territory,” Bowles notes

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blackberries, thimbleberries, strawberries, etc. The first year we came here strawberries bloomed all winter.” Bayley’s accounts are also dappled with textual illustrations to enliven the narrative. For instance, “Vegetables do well; cabbage will grow all winter. I have seen heads of cabbage branch out from an old stalk that was three years old” (Holmes 37).

that on the Pacific Coast, even towns of five hundred inhabitants boast restaurants with French and Italian cooks. He is clearly impressed:

If there is one thing . . . which the Pacific Coast organizes most quickly and completely, it is good eating . . . . When the Puritans settled New England, their first public duty was to build a church with thrifty thought for their souls. Out here, their degenerate sons begin with organizing a restaurant, and supplying Hostitter's stomachic bitters and an European or Asiatic cook.<sup>40</sup> So the seat of empire, in its travel westward, changes its base from soul to stomach, from brains to bowels. (201-02)

Just like pioneers who preceded and followed him, Bowles was struck by the exorbitant prices charged for common goods in areas beyond the reach of the rail lines. To illustrate his point, he lists the price of common items several times during his journey. From Denver, for instance, he reports in letter three,

Here is a specimen of the prices to-day: potatoes twenty-five cents a pound or fifteen dollars a bushel; flour fifteen and twenty cents a pound; corn eighteen cents a pound or ten dollars a bushel; mechanics and laborers eight and ten dollars a day; beef forty cents a pound, and hams forty-five to fifty cents; girls as house servants ten dollars a week.<sup>41</sup> (22-23)

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<sup>40</sup> Bitters were commonly used to resolve digestive ailments such as indigestion or "dyspepsia." Doctor Hostetter's Celebrated Stomachic Bitters was manufactured by David Hostetter of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, beginning in 1853. The manufacturer claimed the product "cured dyspepsia, colic, dysentery, ague, bilious fevers, and diarrhea." A rising temperance movement in the late nineteenth century increased sales of the product, which was largely alcohol, to average annual retail sales surpassing \$1,000,000 between 1862 and 1883 (Young 134).

<sup>41</sup> Pioneer Anna Maria King, a native of Massachusetts who emigrated to Oregon in 1845, reassured her family that her new homeland held great economic promise. As evidence, King provided an inventory of local prices: "[T]he best wheat I ever saw and plenty of it at 75 cents and \$1.00 a bushel; potatoes 25 c. peas \$1.00 per bushel, corn 50 c, beef 6 c and 8 c, pork 10 c. sugar 12½ c. molasses 50 c. tea 75 c sheeting from 16 to 25 c. calico from 10 c to 50 c. and salt is 1 c a pound, and other things accordingly." King goes

At other locations in Colorado, however, Bowles reports, food and other commodities seem more reasonable for 1865: “Flour twenty cents a pound, meal twenty-three cents, hams fifty cents, lard forty cents, syrup five dollars per gallon, . . . milk fifty cents per quart, best cigars fifty cents each, printing paper sixty-eight cents per pound, daily paper, per year, twenty-four dollars, weekly seven dollars. . .” (65). From Salt Lake City, in letter ten, Bowles reports the “ruling rates” for twenty-three items, including food, lumber, and labor (101-02). From San Francisco, in letter twenty-nine, Bowles illustrates the cost-of-living difference between East and West coasts: “[I]t costs about as much to live in San Francisco in gold as it does in Boston and New York in greenbacks”—that is, the three dollars in gold required for a night at a top-notch hotel in San Francisco was approximately equivalent to four dollars and fifty cents for similar accommodations in New York and Boston (340). Twenty-four food commodities in San Francisco are listed in the letter, some at prices not altogether different from prices our modern retail stores charge—“butter seventy-five cents a pound, eggs seventy cents a dozen”—but most other products at rates much more reasonable than found in intervening territories such as Colorado—for instance, “apples four to ten cents a pound, peaches five to ten cents a pound . . . chickens seventy-five cents apiece, . . . rabbits thirty-seven cents a pair, fresh salmon eight to twelve cents a pound. . .” (341-42).

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on to list the prices for other commodities and labor, noting that even without currency, “Wheat is raised without trouble and will fetch anything, the same as cash. A wagon from \$100 to 150, 100 dollars for a yoke of oxen, \$50 for a cow. And work will fetch anything you want at from \$1 to \$1.50 a day, a dollar a hundred for making rails, and so on” (Holmes 43, idiosyncratic spelling, spacing, and syntax retained here and throughout). In 1847, pioneer Phoebe Stanton, a native of Virginia on her way to Oregon, wrote about the cost of goods in Missouri. “[L]ast Saturday we layed bye and the men went 6 miles to Town on the Desmoin river kesoqua and bought provision 5 cts a pound for pork one dollar and seventy five cts for flour 7 cts rice 10 cts sugar” (Holmes 88). From her new home at North Bend Farm in Marion County, Oregon, Stanton wrote of the “fair prospect” of her farm. “Wheat is worth one dollar pr bushel oats 60 cts potatoes 1 dollar pr bus. Good work horses are verry high good American cows are worth from 50 to 60 dollars a piece good sheep is worth from 7 to 8 dollars a head hogs are verry cheap” (Holmes 91).

Unlike journalistic articles, which tend to identify individuals based on their involvement in newsworthy events, the newspaper letter form privileges the acknowledgement of people familiar to readers, a regular feature of private letters. When the writers of private letters mention familiar people whom they have discovered in remote locations, that naming functions to reinforce social ties among spatially and temporally severed communities. The mention of a familiar name invokes images of a previous state of presence, and a full name and identifying information may or may not be given, depending on assumptions of familiarity resulting from this previous relationship. The letter-writer's identification of an absent person initiates an intellectual reconnection of community embracing writer and reader, around the image of the absent individual. This rhetorical connection is particularly strong when the success of an absent individual reflects positively as an outcome of the time when the community was intact. The invocation of familiar names, therefore, has the rhetorical potential to re-establish community among individuals who share neither physical nor temporal space by invoking a shared but removed mutual presence. The potential for this invocation to establish an imagined connection among individuals is exponentially multiplied when the allusion is made in the context of a public newspaper letter, through which a community of writer, absent individual, and many recollecting readers is reconstructed.<sup>42</sup>

Bowles's letters of *Across the Continent* are studded with remarks concerning those to whom eastern readers have a personal connection, creating a broad national community. For instance, Bowles finds the superintendent of the Gould & Curry mine in Virginia, Nevada, to be Charles L. Strong, whom he identifies by his personal ties to

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<sup>42</sup> This "imagined community" will figure prominently in my arguments concerning nationality in Chapter Five.

Bowles's readers. In letter fifteen, Bowles writes that Strong is "a native of Easthampton in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, brother of the brave General Strong who fell in leading the black troops upon the forts of Charleston, and the nephew and adopted son of Mr. A. L. Strong of that village" (148-49). Another familiar face is discovered beyond Shasta, Oregon, where Bowles and his party stopped at a hotel called The Tower House, the proprietor of which is Levi H. Tower. Bowles reminds his readers that this is the individual "whom you Springfield people of fifteen and twenty years' residence will remember as a prominent armorer, foreman of the Eagle Engine Company, and a popular young man, up to 1849, when he cast in his fortunes with the first emigration to California." Filling in on the experiences of this former neighbor, Bowles notes that Tower "keeps his Springfield memories green, and is yet a bachelor"<sup>43</sup> (173). At Salem, Oregon, the state capital, Bowles writes, "here I met our old democratic brother editor of Westfield, Massachusetts, Mr. Asahel Bush,<sup>44</sup> who has made a fortune here. . . . [H]ere, too, Mr. Reuben Boies, of Blandford origin and Chicopee residence, has grown into just distinction" (181). In Portland, Oregon, Bowles finds the Rev. S.H. Marsh,<sup>45</sup> "son of President Marsh of the Vermont university" (183).

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<sup>43</sup> According to Shasta County, California, records, Levi H. Tower (1820(?)-65) died later that same year of typhoid fever. A bachelor during Bowles's visit, Tower had been married to Mary Jane Shuffleton in 1852, the fourth marriage recorded in Shasta County. The Towers had the dubious distinction of obtaining the first-known divorce in the county, however, in 1854. Active in politics and an advocate of the transcontinental railroad, Tower built the three-story Tower House, which became famous for its gardens and orchards (*Dictionary of Early Shasta County History*).

<sup>44</sup> Asahel Bush II (1824-1913) is recognized as one of the prominent figures in Oregon history. He founded the *Oregon Statesman* newspaper and later the Ladd and Bush Bank, both of which still operate in Salem, Oregon. During his lifetime, Bush amassed a fortune. When he died in 1913, his estate was the largest to have come under provision of the state inheritance tax law up to that time. The Bush House is now a public museum (Asahel Bush House Museum).

<sup>45</sup> Sidney Harper Marsh (1825-79), was Pacific University's first president from 1853 to 1879. Pacific University, on a related note, was founded in part by daring pioneer letter-writer Tabitha Brown, who left Missouri for Oregon in 1846 at the age of 66.

More examples follow. In letter twenty-four, “The Great Theme: The Pacific Railroad,” Bowles mentions the successful engineer Theodore Dehune Judah, who had been “an assistant engineer in the construction of your Connecticut River Railroad in Massachusetts, and married a Greenfield lady” prior to surveying a route for the Central Pacific through the Sierra Nevadas<sup>46</sup> (267-68). In Oakland, California, Bowles notes that “Major Ralph W. Kirkham,<sup>47</sup> whom Springfield sent to West Point a generation ago, and has been proud of ever since, has the most elegant house and home to be found anywhere on the Pacific Coast” (276). And in San Francisco, Bowles writes, “I found our friend, Rev. Horatio Stebbins,<sup>48</sup> of the Unitarian church here, holding on by main strength to a side hill that runs up at an angle of something like thirty degrees” (289). Bowles also discovers Donald McLennan,<sup>49</sup> owner of the “oldest and most successful woolen mills, whom Bowles describes as “an indomitable Scotch-Yankee, . . .who learned his business among the mills of Middlesex County, Massachusetts.” In letter twenty-six, Bowles tells the story of McLennan, who headed west with a few dollars in his pocket, and whose business was worth more than half a million dollars in 1865 (298).

Few series of personal letters are complete without their share of gossip, and Bowles’s *Across the Continent* is no exception. In letter twenty-seven from Mariposa, California, Bowles notes that he has encountered an old neighbor, S. D. Bosworth, originally of Springfield, Massachusetts, who was living in the former cottage of “the

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<sup>46</sup> Judah (1826–63) died of typhoid fever at the age of 37 following steamship passage from the Pacific Coast to New York City. His wife was daughter of John J. Pierce of Greenfield, Massachusetts.

<sup>47</sup> Ralph Wilson Kirkham (1821-93) achieved a high reputation for valiant service in the Mexican-American War, and continued his distinguished military service until retiring at the rank of brigadier-general.

<sup>48</sup> Stebbins (1821-1902), a native of Massachusetts and a Harvard graduate, became a prominent citizen of San Francisco after moving there in 1864. He was a trustee of the College of California, later the University of California, and contributed to the establishment of Stanford University.

<sup>49</sup> McLennan is listed in the Great Register of San Francisco for 1867 as 44 years old.

notorious Lola Montez,”<sup>50</sup> a controversial dancer who had been exiled from Europe.

“The town is full of scandals concerning her. Intelligent gentlemen who met her confess to her intellectual power and impressive conversation, and to her fascinating manners.”

Like any responsible letter-writer with an eye toward the morals of his readers, however, Bowles is clearly telling only part of the Lola Montez story—and that much couched in euphemism and evasion (309-10). Deftly, Bowles quickly turns to another local resident, an old horse, whose story surely assured his readers that Grass Valley had not entirely fallen to perdition:

An old horse . . . goes around alone with a milk-wagon, stopping before the doors of his customers, and nowhere else, and delivering his daily allowances to each with unvarying fidelity. But the really wonderful thing about this story is that Grass Valley should have a population that can be trusted to help themselves to milk, and not take, any of them, more than their allotted share. (310)

In letter seventeen, “Overland to Oregon,” Bowles introduces the well-known General John Bidwell,<sup>51</sup> a newly-elected congressman from Chico, California, with a gossiping story of a failed romance and subsequent success in agriculture. With waggish overtones, Bowles contends, “. . .General Bidwell still seems a young man, is fresh and handsome and of winning manners,—a bachelor, and intends to keep house in

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<sup>50</sup> Lola Montez (1818?–61), whose original name was Marie Dolores Eliza Rosanna Gilbert, was born in Ireland but became an international celebrity in the mid-nineteenth century. A mediocre but racy dancer, she became the mistress of King Louis I of Bavaria in the 1840s. Her influence over the king allegedly helped to provoke the Revolution of 1848. After being banished from Bavaria, Montez resided in the United States where she was married twice. She then spent several years in Australia, much to the chagrin of its moral residents. She died, penniless, in New York City.

<sup>51</sup> General John Bidwell (1819-1900), a member of the first group to travel by wagon train to California from Independence, Missouri, fought in the Mexican-American War, and ran for president of the United States on the Prohibition Party ticket in 1892. He was later married to Annie Ellicott Kennedy, who was active in the suffragist and prohibition movements.

Washington during his congressional term, and do I not equally interest farmers, statisticians and the ladies of our capital's society?" (170-71) And, from Mariposa County, California, Bowles writes in letter twenty-seven a sympathetic account of landscape architect and writer Frederic Law Olmsted,<sup>52</sup> who spent two years in California managing the Mariposa Estate, an ill-fated gold-mining venture of General John C. Fremont.<sup>53</sup> Olmsted, Bowles writes, "is going home disgusted . . . . It is all a sad, vast ruin,—a magnificent gentleman, holding his head high, but wearing his last year's clothes, and dining around with his friends." Bowles concludes that mismanagement both in California and on Wall Street, compounded by disappointing output of the mines, is best illustrated "in the sincere boast attributed to its most gallant but never thrifty original owner. 'Why,' said General Fremont, 'when I came to California, I was worth nothing, and now I owe two millions of dollars!'" (310-12)

Finding updates on the weather, travel and accommodations, prices, familiar people, and gossip associated with people and places, Bowles's readers might have believed his letters were as well designed for the post office as for the printing press. The details of the trip, deftly recorded throughout Bowles's text, not only contribute to the appeal of the letters but also support an interpretation of epistolary journalism in which the personal and the daily are often privileged, much like private correspondence.

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<sup>52</sup> Landscape architect Frederic Law Olmsted (1822-1903) published a series of journalistic accounts of trips through the antebellum South. Among his most prominent landscape design projects are the campuses of Yale and Stanford Universities, the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, and New York City's Central Park.

<sup>53</sup> General John C. Fremont (1813-90) achieved a great reputation as one of the initial explorers and surveyors of the American West. Fremont fought in the Mexican-American War, achieved wealth—and subsequently lost it—in the California Gold Rush, and was selected to be the Republican Party's first candidate for United States president in 1856.



*Textually-Inscribed Sonance and Vocality in the Newspaper Letter*

The epistolarity of the newspaper letter form provides for a variety of textually encoded sounded features I will identify as sonance, when more directly related to sound, or as vocality, when more directly related to the voice of the author. Complementing Bruce Redford's argument that private letters are in multiple ways performance as well as text, these features support the communication of meaning from addresser to addressee by suggesting inflections and other sounded elements normally incorporated in oral communication. In many ways, these elements are present in private letters and account to some degree for dissimilarities within the genre, as individuals develop personalized rhetorical strategies to express themselves and their experiences in unique textual ways. Moments of sarcasm or subtle humor, words or phrases which carry traces of meaning from shared experience, even the writer's assumption of a role which incorporates authority or humility—all may be conveyed through textually-inscribed sonance and vocality. To decode this latent meaning, a reader must be aware that he or she is reading a text composed in a form that permits sounded components and an authorial voice or voices that might convey multiple meanings. It is easier, of course, when a reader approaches a letter from someone he or she knows intimately and with whose oral performative style he or she is familiar.

Within the form of epistolary journalism, however, features of sonance and vocality are present as well, although consideration must be given to the ways these features can be effectively conveyed to a broad readership that might not possess the same intimate knowledge of the author as the readers of a private letter. Samuel Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters provide ample opportunity to examine how sonance and vocality may

emerge within the form of epistolary journalism. Bowles, a widely read and popular newspaper editor, would have been a somewhat familiar character, especially to his northeastern readers; in other words, those who had heard Bowles speaking or who were regular readers of the *Springfield Republican* may have grown accustomed to the particular cadence of his language. But that familiarity cannot explain how dimensions of sonance and vocality still resonate with twenty-first century readers, who can, I would argue, largely discern the authorial voice. How is this possible?

It is my contention that the multivocality manifest within Bowles's newspaper letters is facilitated by the use of oscillating, textually-inscribed authorial voices, voices which represent a significant way by which epistolary journalism negotiates the requirements and expectations of journalistic publication and the rhetorical possibilities of epistolary writing. Whereas nineteenth-century reporting tended to privilege a single authorial voice,<sup>54</sup> even as it may have conveyed the voices of others via quotes or paraphrase, the newspaper letter form permitted journalists like Bowles not only to adopt a liberal approach to the contents of a letter but also to express those varied elements in the textually-embedded voices which would most effectively transmit the author's meaning. Just as the writers of personal letters are free to adopt a variety of voices to convey good or bad news, humorous or tragic stories, or personal or public information, journalists writing in the newspaper letter form are free to inscribe voices which may or may not be found in other journalistic texts. Potential voices within the newspaper letter

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<sup>54</sup> By asserting an authorial voice for nineteenth-century journalists, I do not mean to imply that the author was expressly present as a character or as a narrator in hard news columns, but that he or she tended to maintain a single identity or perspective within each article, through which news was articulated. This may be contrasted to twentieth-century journalism, in which journalistic writing conventions tend to deprivilege an authorial voice in favor of an ostensibly objective rendering of the news. Literary journalism, it must be noted, represents a significant departure from this practice.

include the spectrum between a more formal, reportorial voice and a more informal, familiar voice—both or all of which are enabled in the newspaper letter form.

Both a formal and an informal voice are clearly discernable in Bowles's *Across the Continent* newspaper letters. While numerous formal passages in the letters explore economics, commerce, technology, society, and politics, it was the informal, conversational voice of Bowles's letters that contemporary reviewers noted,<sup>55</sup> and to which they partly attributed the appeal of the book. Initially established through salutation of the reader, use of the first person voice, and direct address of the reader through pronouns such as "you" and "your," Bowles's familiar tone is often heard in narrative and digressive passages, particularly those laced with humor or irreverence. When Bowles reports economic trends through a lengthy report on mining or commerce, for instance, the formal language and style he uses signals a more impersonal or reportorial voice and results in a particular tonal effect. When Bowles reports the price of a chicken, on the other hand, the reader hears echoes of private letter writers or, in fact, his or her own voice, and a more informal voice emerges, concerned with the economics of daily living rather than the macroeconomics that concern the reporter. Similarly, if Bowles provides an analysis of investment opportunities or agricultural production, the reader may recognize a reportorial voice. When Bowles digresses into a flattering or unflattering story about a local farmer the reader may know, an informal, conversational voice tends to dominate.

Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters strikingly demonstrate regular fluctuation between the informal or conversational voice and the more formal, reportorial voice. The alternation of voices may take place between letters, lending each letter a distinctive

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<sup>55</sup> For specific examples, refer to Chapter One.

flavor or perspective. It may also take place, potentially, in succession within each letter, creating for the reader a sense of discursive oscillation between voices and among subject matter. The alternation between Bowles's reportorial and conversational voices can be subtle or dramatic, and the voices, notably, can even interrupt each other. In letter four, "The Rocky Mountains and Their Gold Mines," for instance, the shift between voices is explicit. After a literary passage on the natural "panorama of perpetual beauty" surrounding Denver, presented in what I would characterize as a highly subjective informal voice, Bowles unambiguously signals a change: "Leaving nature for the material, beauty for booty, fancy for fact, I come to speak of the mineral wealth and development of this section of the Rocky Mountains." The letter then turns to an account of the mining industry and an assessment of the evolution of related settlements in what I would characterize as a distinctly more formal, reportorial voice (33). Letter twenty-three, "The Chinese: Grand Dinner with Them," also identifies a shift from an informal to a formal voice. The letter, dated August 18, 1865, begins with an intimacy characterizing a private letter, as Bowles comments on his personal condition following the dinner. But the voice is transformed abruptly to correspond with the ensuing report detailing demographic, economic and social conditions of the Chinese in California. The transformation from informal to reportorial is apparent and abrupt: "[W]hile I am full of the subject,—shark's fins and resurrected fungus digest slowly,—let me write of this unique and important element in the population and civilization of this region. There are no fewer than sixty to eighty thousand Chinamen here. . ." (238).

Letter fifteen, "The Silver Mines of Nevada—Austin and Virginia City," demonstrates the way Bowles's inscribed voices can actually interrupt each other. The

letter concludes with a set of ten conclusions and precautions, offered to the readers, concerning the mining wealth of the region and the possibilities of reaping a financial benefit. In general, the enumerated points are formal and thorough, supported with rich illustrations and somber advice. Bowles's formal, reportorial voice is easily identified. For instance, "The Comstock Ledge ore is, with small exceptions, much more simple in its combinations than that at Austin, and requires only to be crushed and amalgamated to extract the bullion. . ." (151). But at the end of advisory point number nine, concerning investments with established mining companies, Bowles's informal voice interrupts his reportorial voice. He begins: "[B]e content with twenty-five per cent. return for your money. If it yields more, give it away in charity," and concludes, "if less, or even nothing, don't swear nor mention it to your wife." And, as if yielding to the informal, conversational voice and the humor it can convey, the tenth point of advice in the letter is presented entirely as a direct address of the reader—with a mild punch-line: "And finally,—though the subject, like the veins, is inexhaustible,—if you read so far as this, and make profitable use of these suggestions, 'remember the printer,' when the dividends come in" (158).

A significant feature of these alternating voices is the potential to convey textually-encoded inflections that may be decoded by the reader. These elements of sonance reveal moments of sarcasm or irreverence when the words alone may suggest a different message. Discussing the fauna of the Great Plains in letter two, for instance, Bowles notes the appearance of the plover, a small bird related to the sandpiper. In the midst of a typical epistolary cataloguing of the many animals encountered on the trail, Bowles's matching of lyricism and cynicism concerning this particular creature

represents a tonal shift, recreated in the mind of the reader: “[W]e catch frequent glimpses of . . . the plover, paired as in Paradise, and never divorced even in this western country of easy virtue and cheap legislation” (13). In another passage brimming with lyricism and self-deprecating humor, textually-encoded sonance is enabled by an informal, conversational voice. Bowles’s language is animated with inflection in the mind of the reader as he describes his anticlimactic experience passing over the great Continental Divide:

It was no more than a ‘thank-ye-marm’ in a New England’s winter sleigh-ride, yet it separates the various and vast waters of a Continent, and marks the fountains of the two great oceans of the globe. But it was difficult to be long enthusiastic over this infinitesimal point of mud; the night was very cold, and I was sore in unpoetical parts from unaccustomed saddles, and I got down from all my high horses, and into my corner of the stage, at the next station.

(75)

Bowles’s account of his extended stay among the Mormons at Salt Lake City becomes particularly rich through the oscillation of clearly-differentiated formal and informal voices. As his company initially enters the Great Salt Lake Valley, Bowles is introduced to a polygamous Mormon bishop, whom he describes in letter eight with a rhetorically volatile and sonorous combination of epistolary minutiae and satirical censure: “[He] gave us bitters and breakfast, the latter with green peas and strawberries, and then, leaving wife number one at his home, went on with us into the city for parochial visits to the other three, who are located at convenient distances around the

Territory” (81-82). The letter continues on to describe the party’s reception by the Mormons in Salt Lake City. Bowles characterizes the reception as “excessive if not oppressive,” and suggests by the choice of vocabulary and subversive humor in the passage that he would choose the latter term:

First “a troop cometh,” with band of music, and marched us slowly and dustily through their Camp Douglas. Then, escaping these, our coach was waylaid as it went down the hill by the Mormon authorities of the city. They ordered us to dismount; we were individually introduced to each of twenty of them; we received a long speech; we made a long one—standing in the hot sand with a sun of forty thousand lens-power concentrated upon us, tired and dirty with a week’s coach-ride: was it wonder that the mildest of tempers rebelled?—transferred to other carriages, our hosts drove us through the city to the hotel; and then—bless their Mormon hearts—they took us at once to a hot sulphur bath . . . and there we washed out all remembrance of the morning suffering and all the accumulated grime and fatigue of the journey, and came out baptized in freshness and self-respect. (83-84)

Other aspects of Bowles’s experience with the Mormons, however, are written in a clearly reportorial voice, one which contrasts distinctly with the informal voice heard in the preceding passage. Analyses of political and social implications of polygamy, for example, receive extensive treatment in this formal voice, as does the sophistication of social and agricultural structures in the Salt Lake Valley. In describing the distribution of the Mormon population in the Salt Lake Valley, for example, Bowles writes in letter nine, “[T]he Mormon settlements extend one hundred miles . . . into Idaho on the north,

and perhaps two hundred miles into Arizona on the south, clinging close, through their entire length of six hundred to seven hundred miles, to a narrow belt of country hardly more than fifty miles wide” (92). Later, in letter twelve, he reports the outcome of a recent election: “Judge Kinney, who was sent here as judge by President Buchanan, and becoming agreeable to the Mormon leaders, was sent to Congress by them when superseded in his judgeship by Mr. Lincoln. . . .” (121). And even sensitive issues such as polygamy are reported in Bowles’s more formal voice, as in letter eleven:

“Ultimately, of course, before the influences of emigration, civilization and our democratic habits, an organization so aristocratic and autocratic as the Mormon church now is must modify its rule. . . .” (108).<sup>56</sup>

But Bowles’s reportorial voice is regularly and conspicuously abandoned. In fact, the fluctuation of voices is so clear, and sometimes so abrupt, that the reader is sensitized to the fusing of the journalistic and epistolary forms within the text. Contrast the preceding passages, bearing a formal vocality, to passages written in the informal voice, as when Bowles describes the appearance of Brigham Young in letter eight or when he assesses his own potential for becoming a Mormon in letter thirteen. In letter eight, Bowles writes, “He is a very hale and hearty looking man . . . handsome perhaps as to presence and features, but repellent in atmosphere and without magnetism. In conversation, he is cool and quiet in manner, but suggestive in expression; has strong and original ideas, but uses bad grammar. . . .” (86). In letter thirteen, he explains that Young objects to polygamy for those men who do not have the ability to keep their wives “in

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<sup>56</sup> It was not until twenty-five years later that Bowles’s prediction would come true. In 1890, a manifesto by the church’s fourth president, Wilford Woodruff, prohibited members of the church from entering into polygamous unions but did not challenge those plural marriages already in existence. A second manifesto, issued in 1904, restated the church’s opposition to the practice and promised excommunication for those performing or entering into plural marriages.



sweet and loving and especially obedient subjugation. So there is no chance for you and I, my dear Jones, becoming successful Mormons!” (125) Also in letter thirteen, Bowles offers a gossiping account of the infamous Porter Rockwell,<sup>57</sup> one of the “characters of Mormondom” whom Bowles describes to be “as mild a mannered man as ever scuttled ship or murdered crews.” After the visitors declined an offer to call on the notorious “avenging angel,” Bowles quips with audible satire, “I really do not think that any anxiety for our lives entered into our declination of his hospitality. . . .” (128-29).

An informal voice dominates a passage of letter nineteen, written from Washington Territory, where Bowles finds the ferns to be “delicious, . . . more of them, and larger than you can see in New England” (200). As the passage continues, however, Bowles is, in the words of Ezra Greenspan, “solicitous of his readers’ interest and character” (Greenspan 143), shown by his clearly alluding to but not stating an expletive: “But the settlers apply to [the ferns] other adjectives beginning with d, for they vindicate their right to the soil, in plain as well as forest, with most tenacious obstinacy, and to root them out is a long and difficult job for the farmer” (200). With this gesture toward a mutual understanding of appropriate language, Bowles simultaneously acknowledges the mores of eastern culture, reveals the frustration and character of the western farmers, and capitalizes on the rhetorical sidestep as an opportunity to display his subtle sense of humor. A similar structure of omission is found in letter twenty-seven, “Mining in California: Its Varieties, Results and Prospects.” The omission is associated with

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<sup>57</sup> Orrin Porter Rockwell (1813?-78) was an infamous figure in his day, as well known as legendary figures such as Jesse James and Wyatt Earp. He was a frontiersman and a vigilante, and a follower of Mormon leader Joseph Smith. In 1869, during a return visit of Schuyler Colfax to Utah, Porter allegedly told the crowd, “I never killed anyone who didn't need killing.”

Bowles's formal discussion of the ecological ravages of the mining industry in California—a discussion which wouldn't be complete, apparently, without a tactful recounting of a story concerning the deserted mining camp of Yuba Dam:

[W]hen we came to a sign over the 'grocery' . . . indicating that this was "Yuba Dam," we thought of the famous anecdote connected with this name, from its repetition, without the benefit of spelling, to an inquiring colporteur,<sup>58</sup> and were fain to confess that the profane compound fairly represented the spirit of the lawless miner. (309)

In letter twenty, "Puget Sound, and Vancouver's Island," the informal voice again dominates in Bowles's description of a dinner held in Victoria. He illustrates the international character of the residents there with an anecdote:

[T]here was what the French call a "grand dinner," the eating whereof lasted from seven to ten P.M., and the speaking whereat continued from ten to three A.M.,—the result of which was that all little international differences and accounts were amicably adjusted, Andy Johnson and Queen Victoria were married . . . .<sup>59</sup> "And what a bloody country that would be," exclaimed an enthusiastic Britisher at one of the clock in the morning. (210)

Bowles's account of his trip to Yosemite on horseback, related in letter twenty-two, "The Yosemite Valley and the Big Trees," bears considerable evidence of its epistolary form and a conversational voice. With little in the way of newsworthiness but much in the way of entertainment value, Bowles's description of the way he and his companions passed the time while traveling is amusing and delightfully informal:

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<sup>58</sup> A colporteur is a traveling book salesman usually offering Bibles and other devotional literature.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Johnson (1808-75) was seventeenth president of the United States (1865-69). Queen Victoria (1819-1901) was the longest-reigning British monarch (1837-1901).

Our companions from San Francisco proved rich in song and sentiment; good-nature flowed and overflowed; fatigue was forgotten in joke and raillery; and digestion aided by sturdy laughter. We “kept marching through Georgia” with Sherman;<sup>60</sup> we serenaded the “sweet lady” till she must have pined for a chance to sleep;<sup>61</sup> we put John Brown’s soul over its familiar road at least twice a day;<sup>62</sup> had “a day of jubilo” with our colored brothers equally often;<sup>63</sup> helped “the turkey gobbler to yank the grasshopper from the sweet potato vine” oftener than he could possibly have been hungry;<sup>64</sup> grew steadily barbaric and dirty; laughed at dignity; and voted form and ceremony a nuisance. (232-33)

Arriving in San Francisco after several weeks touring Oregon and Washington Territory, Bowles also dispenses with the formal reportorial voice in letter twenty-one, “San Francisco: Mr. Colfax and his Reception in the Pacific States.” His inscription of an informal voice parallels the process of unwinding in a “Friscoe” hotel:

It is refreshing to stretch on a wide bed at the Occidental, after tangling your legs over night in the corner of a “mud wagon,” or cramping them in the narrow berth of a steamer. It is . . . much, indeed, to know that no brass bands

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<sup>60</sup> “Marching Through Georgia,” a march written by Henry Clay Work in 1865, celebrates General William Tecumseh Sherman's March to the Sea in 1864. Although it was popular with northern veterans after the war, Sherman is alleged to have developed a contempt for the song because it was played at virtually all his public appearances.

<sup>61</sup> “Sweet Lady, Awake! A Serenade” is a ballad written by John Tyler (1790-1862), president of the United States (1841-45), in 1843.

<sup>62</sup> “John Brown’s Body Lies A-Moulderin’ in the Grave” was originally composed by Union soldiers from Massachusetts in 1861. Several lyric variations on the tune exist, including “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” by Julia Ward Howe.

<sup>63</sup> “Day of Jubilo” was a Negro Spiritual of unclear origin.

<sup>64</sup> “A Grasshopper Sat Upon a Sweet-Potato Vine” was a well-known popular song of the nineteenth century.

lie in wait for us, no hoarse cannon hold a horrid welcome for tender nerves,  
no midnight dinners vex dyspeptic stomachs. (213)

As his discussion of San Francisco continues, Bowles's conversational voice dominates the text, allowing him once again to prioritize personal and amusing material over the strictly newsworthy. The first feature of the city to be addressed, in fact, is not its politics, demographics, or commerce, but its "let-you-alone-iveness"—which he finds particularly valuable after weeks on the road with the eminently popular speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Bowles then digresses not into news but into an anecdote about the people of western Nevada, the "Washoe people," who find their "chief incentive to piety in the assurance that thus, when they die, they will come here [to San Francisco]; just as good Bostonians count Paris their paradise." He dismisses the Washoe theory, however, because he finds the constantly eroding sand hills of San Francisco to be "just about as far away from all traditional and imaginative ideas of the Garden of Eden as it is possible for ugly fact to be" (213-14).

While these representative passages demonstrate how sonance and vocalicity are discernable in the *Across the Continent* letters, manifestations of spoken language are also present when Bowles directly comments on pronunciation and dialect. By the time he has arrived in Denver, Bowles finds that "Mexican terms prevail," and provides some examples in letter three: "an inclosure for animals is called a 'corral;' a house of turf and mud is of 'adobe;' and a farm-house or farm a 'ranch'" (21). In an early description of his traveling companions in letter five, Bowles tells his eastern readers that his companion Albert D. Richardson wears black broadcloth and "'biled shirts' (the western

phrase for white under-clothes)” (48). From Salt Lake City, Bowles records a travel delay due to “‘pesky sarpints,’ as they [Native Americans] are not unnaturally reckoned by everybody in the West”<sup>65</sup> (67). In letter twenty-one from San Francisco, he writes,

[A] “drink” at an aristocratic San Francisco bar is two bits (twenty-five cents), at a more democratic establishment one bit (ten cents). There is no coin in use less than a dime (ten cents); one of these answers as “a bit”; two of them will pass for two bits, or twenty-five cents; but the man who often offers two dimes for a quarter of a dollar is voted a “bummer.” (218)

Pronunciation is a concern for Bowles when it comes to some California locations, for which he provides readers phonetic spellings, including the “San Jose (Ozay)” and the San Joaquin “(pronounced San Walk-in)” valleys (275-76). Bowles’s discussion of Yosemite in letter twenty-two reminds the modern reader that sometimes considerations of sonance may be hidden to us today: “The name that has attached to this beautiful valley is both unique and euphonious. It rolls off the tongue most liquidly when you get the mastery of its pronunciation. Most strangers render it Yo-se-mite, or Yo-sem-ite; but the true style is Yo-sem-i-te” (233). From Virginia Dale, Colorado, in letter six, Bowles provides a more colorful list of colloquialisms and a valuable etymology of at least a small part of our twenty-first century American idiom:

Some of the vernacular of the mountains is sufficiently original and amusing to be reported, also. A “square” meal is the common term for a first rate one; “shebang” means any kind of an establishment, store, house, shop, shanty;

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<sup>65</sup> Bowles’s report of the western term for Native Americans also invokes the familiar nineteenth-century folk song, “The Pesky Sarpent,” about a “comely youth” on “Springfield Mountain,” who was bitten in the heel by a snake.

“outfit” has a wider range, your handkerchief, your suit of clothes, the cut of your hair, your team, your whole possessions, or the most infinitesimal part or item thereof; and “affidavit” signifies anything else that these other terms do not cover. (66)

Finally, just before departing by steamship to New York, Bowles devotes part of letter thirty-one to “slang phrases and idioms” of the Californians. “Few or none of those I noticed in Colorado are known here,” he writes. “Each section has a set of its own.” Among the eighteen terms highlighted in the section are the following:

“You bet” is one of the most common here; it is a strong affirmation or approval, as the “That’s so” of the East. “Get” or “You get” is go, go along, clear out; drivers shout this to their horses. “Get up and Git,” and “Get up and Dust,” are enlarged, emphasized forms of the same. . . . The mines furnish many new phrases: “Pan out” for turning out or amounting to; as, a man will “pan out” good or bad. . . . “Peter out” is coming to nothing, failing, giving out altogether. . . . (367-68)

With vocabulary, sound, and pronunciation at the tip of the reader’s tongue, sonance and vocality supported the readers’ experience of Bowles’s letters as a form of personal and personalized communication.

While this chapter has attempted to review constitutional elements of newspaper letters, the modification of journalistic form to accommodate epistolary content, and dimensions of sonance and vocality enabled within the newspaper letter form, it has not explored other central features of epistolary theories, expressed by Janet Altman as “scales” and by other critics as “dichotomies.” As a result, I now turn from form to

function. Chapter Three expands upon the structural ideas of Chapter Two to explore the way binary theoretical structures of public and private, presence and absence, and personal and political are reflected in the nineteenth-century newspaper letter.

## CHAPTER 3

### NINETEENTH-CENTURY EPISTOLARY JOURNALISM: BINARY PARADIGMS AND THE NEWSPAPER LETTER FORM

By 1865, many thousands of people knew Samuel Bowles, both in New England and across the country. And the thirty-two letters which documented his trip across the continent provided them an unusual glimpse of the private side of the public man they knew so well, an intimacy that was embedded in the text of the letters. But despite acerbic comments about Heber Kimball's wives or candid revelations about his own upset stomach, Bowles was, after all, brilliantly writing in a public forum, adopting a composite form that let him accomplish communications goals that were different from what might be accomplished by either the journalistic or the epistolary mode exclusively. Chapter Two considered constitutional elements of the letters—how they incorporate structures of private correspondence, embrace epistolary content that journalistic publication might deprivilege, and accommodate elements of sonance and vocality. Chapter Three, now, will consider the ways the theoretical scaffolding surrounding private correspondence fits around epistolary journalism. This chapter will consider theoretical dimensions of presence and absence, public and private, and personal and political, and the ways in which the public newspaper letter corresponds to or diverges from these binary epistolary models.

#### *Dimensions of Presence and Absence in the Newspaper Letter*

The interplay of presence and absence is one of the primary critical structures of epistolary theories. For private correspondence, in fact, conditions of presence and



absence, first, enable the letter, and, second, are negotiated by the letter. Most conspicuously, the expression of an individual via private letter is precipitated by some form of absence of addressee from addresser. The absence may be due to travel or a permanent relocation; it may be the result of an argument or death. The letter may be delivered promptly, may be delayed, or may be lost or never sent. In any case, the physical letter itself not only represents to some degree a contiguity of addresser with addressee upon receipt but also establishes rhetorical images of presence of addressee to addresser in the act of writing. While the letter may express regret at the absence, it often invokes images of a presence—recollections of halcyon days of shared experience, or projected desires for a moment of physical or spiritual reuniting in the future. Significantly, presence is textually inscribed and may be actualized by the letter's delivery—a sequential presence of a text to the participants in the correspondence. Decker explains this function as a metonymic function of language particular to the epistolary text, through which “a complex social contexture is built and sustained despite the miscarriage of mail and the specter of the dead-letter office” (Decker 15). Some letter writers, furthermore, inscribe images of the reader in the act of reading, textually unifying the temporally displaced acts of a present writing and a future reading. Elizabeth Hewitt expresses this idea concisely: correspondence is both a symptom of and a “corrective tool” for separation (Hewitt 54). But just as a letter confirms a distance, the actualization of a physical presence of addresser with addressee often eliminates the conditions under which the act of letter-writing was evoked in the first place. Elizabeth Hewitt notes that these complicated relationships, often invisible in other forms of literature, are central operatives in epistolary forms (Hewitt vii).

The theoretical models that address the multivalent interplay of presence and absence in private correspondence are largely applicable to epistolary journalism because newspaper letters presume and simultaneously mitigate a state of absence with many of the same techniques used by private letter writers. Mass media, after all, is grounded in the philosophy that ideas and events occur in the absence of many of those to whom they are important. Agents of the media, by virtue of their broad distribution across national and even international geography, serve their publics by bringing accounts of ideas and events into their presence via newspapers and other channels. But while the dissemination of news among geographically-fixed media outlets is virtually as old as the outlets themselves, the idea of the “roving reporter” gained momentum as the means of travel and timely communication evolved, particularly in the nineteenth century. With the coming of the railroad and advances in the efficiency and reliability of the postal service, Samuel Bowles and other journalists increasingly took to the road, assuming a state of absence, from which they could deliver a sense of a remote “there” into the present “here” of their readers.

The dichotomy of presence and absence is boldly inscribed by Bowles from the very first letter in a passage briefly discussed in Chapter Two. When Bowles writes at the end of letter one, “I shall think of you with every joy,” he is writing in the model of the private correspondent, absent from a familiar reader, and reassuring him or her that despite geographic separation, the image of the reader will be continually *present* within the author’s mind. In fact, textual evidence does suggest that Bowles carried a sense of the readers’ presence with him throughout the trip, an image that functioned as a stable geographic, moral, and perceptual reference point informing his experiences. Another

way letter one reveals the interplay of presence and absence is found in the same passage, when Bowles writes, “Do you think of me. . .” (9). Again, Bowles evokes the model of a private correspondent by asking the *reader* to cognitively invoke *his*, Bowles’s, presence, even as he promises the same. Significantly, however, the image Bowles suggests for his readers is one that is literally grounded in the natural essence of New England—in the blooming roses, the dewey mornings, the cool evening showers, and the singing katydids—which was so intimately a part of Samuel Bowles. The passage concludes with a utopian scene of reuniting, also embedded in an image of nature: “and, God willing, I shall be with you again ere the maples redden in October.” An invocation of natural signs of presence in this very first letter is prescient, as geography—the natural landscape of the continent—will prove to be both the functional separator and, here, the metaphorical interface of writer and reader. The consistent invocation of place is a central feature of the *Across the Continent* series of letters, as Bowles proceeds in his passage across the continent. With a prefatory notation of the increasingly remote origin of each letter, absence is geographically intensified, and yet, as Bowles gradually recedes into the interior of the continent, presence is routinely inscribed.

One of the ways in which Bowles continually inscribes a presence of his readers is by ascribing to himself the gaze of his absent readers. By positioning himself as the eyes and ears of his readers, Bowles constructs a fascinating rhetorical illusion of the readers’ presence *with him* in the West. For instance, Bowles’s choice of language in letter seventeen transforms a portion of his journey into a present-tense eyewitness account that actively draws the readers into the unfolding action of letter: “Now the valley grows narrow, . . . we are winding among the hills and following up and down

narrow valleys. . .” (172). In letter twenty-seven, Bowles expressly invites his readers to participate in a trip down into the extensive Gould & Curry gold mine of California—again, an invitation to an imaginative presence: “Come now with me, and let us have the sensation of a visit into the abyssmal depths of the mines themselves” (315). While in the “here” of San Francisco, described in letter twenty-six, Bowles again invites his readers to inhabit his sensory experience as he surveys the city from a nearby hill. Bowles guides the gaze of his readers with explicit directions: “Here is the old Mission quarter, there the soldiers’ camp, yonder, by the water, the bristling fort, again the conspicuous and generous Orphan Asylum, . . . and to the left of that still, the two Jewish Cemeteries. . .” (290-91). The tropology of embodying the gaze of the absent reader is repeated dramatically in letter twenty-eight, “Social Life in San Francisco: The Women: Religion and Ministers,” as Bowles and his companions drive out to the Cliff House for breakfast and an opportunity to watch the sea lions on the rocky shoreline below.<sup>66</sup> In this passage, Bowles embodies the gaze of his readers and inscribes his own experience with possessive and personal pronouns as though it were the authentically-present experience of the reader: “You strain your eyes for Sandwich Islands and China,—they are right before you; no object intervenes, and you feel that you ought to see them” (321). As if to reinforce the paradigm of seeing and critical discourses of voyeurism, Bowles incorporates the use of binoculars: “An opera-glass brings [the seals] close to you upon the hotel piazza, and there is a singular fascination in sitting and watching their performances” (322).

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<sup>66</sup> The famous Cliff House, located west of San Francisco on the coast, was rebuilt most recently after a fire in 1907 and still exists as a property of the National Park Service.

The use of pronominal forms to construct an inclusive experience for his readers also characterizes Bowles's account of the California geysers in letter twenty-five, "Country Excursions: The Geysers: Vineyards, and Agriculture," in which he constructs a multivalent sensory experience of presence. Bowles projects his experience onto his reader, inscribing a personal physiological experience of the hot and sulphurous environment through the pulsating use of second person pronouns:

You grow faint with the heat and smells; your feet seem burning; and the air is loaded with a mixture of salts, sulphur, iron, magnesia, soda, ammonia . . . . You feel as if the ground might any moment open, and let you down to a genuine hell. You recall the line from Milton, or somebody: "Here is hell,—myself am hell."<sup>67</sup> And, most dreadful of all, you lose all appetite for the breakfast of venison, trout and grouse that awaits your return to the hotel. So you struggle out of the ravine, every step among tiny volumes of steam, and over bubbling pools of water, and cool and refresh yourself among the trees on the mountain side beyond. (281-82)

Bowles also occupies the gaze of his readers during a meeting with Brigham Young in Salt Lake City. In the concluding paragraph of letter eleven, Bowles describes Young's reactions during a conversation concerning slavery and national reconciliation with Colfax. After he plainly reports Young's comments concerning the rebel leaders—that if he had been president he would have put two rebel leaders "where they never would peep"—Bowles adds confidentially for the benefit of his absent readers a striking description of what they could never see for themselves: Young's body language:

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<sup>67</sup> Bowles was almost right. The quote is indeed from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but Satan actually said, "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell" (*Paradise Lost*, 4.75).

He uttered this sentiment with such a wicked working of the lower jaw and lip, and such an almost demon-like spirit in his whole face, that, quite disposed to be incredulous on those matters, I could not help thinking of the Mountain Meadow massacre of recusant Mormons,<sup>68</sup> of Danites and Avenging Angels,<sup>69</sup> and their reported achievements. (113)

Bowles also inscribes a presence with his readers in letter eighteen as he invites his readers to join him in both intellectual response and an imagined physical journey:

“When an enthusiastic Oregonian told me the Columbia River was the largest of the continent, and watered a wider section of country than any other,” he begins,

I thought of the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi, and smiled with mild incredulity. But unroll your map, and trace its course . . .; then sail with me up and down its mile and a half wide sweep of majestic volume . . .; see what steam boats already navigate its waters . . .; and listen to the wide plans of the navigators . . .,—do all this, and we will make our bow together to the Oregonians and their great river. (184-85)

Letter nineteen, from Washington territory, begins with a similar passage directly addressing the reader and his or her map: “Unless you have been studying geography lately, you will need to open your map to follow us in our journey northward” (198).

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<sup>68</sup> The Mountain Meadows Massacre, according to the *Encyclopedia of American History*, was “the worst slaughter of white civilians on the westward trek.” In September 1857, a wagon train of some thirty families, traveling through Utah, was attacked multiple times by groups of Mormons and Native Americans. More than 130 people were believed to be killed, with only seventeen of the youngest children spared.

<sup>69</sup> The Danites and the Avenging Angels were two names for the same organization, founded by Mormons in June 1838 during a time of persecution in Missouri. The precise relationship of this infamous vigilante group to church hierarchy, however, is unclear. For more information on this topic, see Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (2003).

A second way in which Bowles regularly inscribes presence to his readers is by representing the unknown of the West—its land and people, its past and future—in terms of the known and present East. My perspective here harmonizes with and yet to some extent inverts Annette Kolodny's argument in *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*. Kolodny argues that women settling the American continent, excluded from the prevailing male-centered tropologies of the American frontier, projected familiar symbolic contexts onto otherwise unknown terrains. By approaching their new environments through this type of fantasy, these women “made those terrains their own” and enacted “relational paradigms on the landscape” that would make settlement in new lands a continuation of, rather than a departure from, their earlier experiences (Kolodny xii). Just as these women attempted to define the newly-found unknown “here” in terms of a known but absent “there,” so did Bowles represent the West to his readers. Recounting his individual experiences in the West, Bowles's letters textually evoke familiar paradigms that help him represent experiences to absent readers. But the paradigms are specifically inscribed not for Bowles himself as he confronts an unfamiliar landscape, but for his readers in the East, who may not have and possibly would never set foot in the West. Of course, images did not have to perfectly conform to eastern models but were constructed by a measure of similitude or difference. This strategy helps readers not only more accurately to construct images of the landscape and people, but also to bring the unknown into the familiar symbolic realm of the known. By establishing a symbolic referent within the experience of his readers, Bowles could help readers to see the West as a derivative of what was present or familiar to them in the East.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This intimate symbolic interplay of there and here, furthermore, admitted the possibility that easterners

The success of this discursive device, however, depends on the reproducibility of images or referents to create meaning. In a discussion of the periodical text as the meeting point of the participants in communication, Ezra Greenspan examines a popular periodical series appearing in *Putnam's Monthly* in the 1850s and later published as a book, Edmund Quincy's fictional *Wensley: A Story without a Moral*. Greenspan calls the author and readers partners in a narrative collaboration who must share in the creation of meaning. *Wensley* capitalizes on rhetorical questions that assume and draw upon a shared experience, textual references which reflect a common tropology, and direct address of the audience to present "a rhetorically foregrounded mode of presentation that openly negotiates a collaboration between . . . author/narrator and . . . readers" (Greenspan 142). Significantly, Greenspan's argument suggests that a degree of familiarity *must* exist between the author, Quincy, and his readers in order for appropriate signs to be chosen. For instance, questions which are assumed to be rhetorical are grounded on a tacit recognition of shared experience, a recognition of cognitive familiarity. At the core of the familiarity between author and readers in the case of *Wensley* is the common meeting-ground represented by *Putnam's Monthly*, a discursive space that provides a context for collaboration.

Greenspan's arguments expand the collaborative model beyond private letters in a direction which clearly resonates for the epistolary discourses of Samuel Bowles's *Across the Continent*. While *Putnam's Monthly* represented a shared space for Quincy and his readers, the *Springfield Republican* provided a shared space for Bowles and his readers. Intimately familiar with the rhetorical and experiential structures which his readers could

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could create relationships with the unknown by transferring and replicating existing relationships with the known. This relationship and its implications for nationalism will be further explored in Chapter Five.



bring to the text, Bowles capitalized on shared meanings by incorporating symbolic references throughout the *Across the Continent* letters. In fact, Bowles can assume a greater familiarity with the far-more localized readers of the *Springfield Republican*, many of whom he knew personally, and others with whom he shared a higher level of intimacy and experience than Quincy could claim for the widely dispersed readers of *Putnam's Monthly*. With an expectation for the experiential and rhetorical structures that his readers could bring to the text, Bowles composed his letters with them in mind and depended upon their contributions in order for his text to make sense.

Textual evidence may clarify how Bowles attempted to represent the West through symbolic structures familiar to his eastern readers. Following an account of the Nebraskan animal life and landscape which he describes in letter two, Bowles clearly articulates his intention to reproduce his personal experience in the minds of his absent readers, through its confluence with and divergence from familiar paradigms:

Add to these [images of flora, fauna, and landscape] a constant breeze, tempering the sun to a most grateful softness, and bearing an inspiring tonic to lungs and heart; sunsets and sunrises that rival Italy or the Connecticut valley; a twilight prolonged as in England; and a dryness and purity to the atmosphere, that you certainly know not in New England, and guards the most exposed against colds,—and you may form some idea of the life of our senses and sensibilities so far on this excursion. (14)

As he writes from Denver in letter four, Bowles establishes a metaphorical comparison of the New to the Old World, by reminding readers of a previous trip he took to Europe. As in other letters, Bowles defines the Western landscape—unknown to many except by

“youthful, vague, mythical knowledge”—in terms of a known European landscape, the Alps: “When the Pacific Railroad is done, our Switzerland will be at our very doors,” he predicts.<sup>71</sup> But the renowned landscape of the Old World, at least in this passage, takes second stage to the beauties of the New:

All my many and various wanderings in the European Switzerland, three summers ago, spread before my eye no panorama of mountain beauty surpassing, nay none equaling, that which burst upon my sight at sunrise upon the Plains, when fifty miles away from Denver; and which rises up before me now as I sit writing by the window in this city. (31-32)

In this passage, Bowles again becomes the subjective “eye” of the eastern readers and invites us to join in his act of looking through a window. The scene that is viewed is then recreated, as if painted and framed, for the reader, but it is an invitation to accept his authority to direct our gaze that precedes the invitation to engage in his visual experience, which he plots for his distant readers:

From far south to far north, stretching around in huge semi-circle, rise the everlasting hills, one upon another, one after another, tortuous, presenting every variety of form and surface, every shade of cover and color, up and on until we reach the broad, snow-covered range that marks the highest summits, and tells where Atlantic and Pacific meet and divide for their long journey to their distant shores. (32)

Bowles continues by directing our attention to the dominant features of the landscape before us, as we peer with him through the window: “To the North rises the king of the

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<sup>71</sup> In fact, letters of Bowles’s 1868 trip to the Rockies were collected in a book entitled *The Switzerland of America*.

range, Long's Peak, whose top is fourteen thousand six hundred feet high; to the South, giving source to the Arkansas and Colorado, looms up its brother, Pike's Peak, to the hight [sic] of thirteen thousand four hundred feet. These are the salient features of the belt before us. . ." (32).

Boldly, Bowles inscribes a discourse of the visual arts in the preceding passages—noting textures, shades, and proportion—to communicate and familiarize what his sight perceives. Invocation of visual images helps the reader to cognitively conjure the landscape with the help of popular artists. Of the Nebraska landscape described in letter two, Bowles notes, “over all and illuminating all . . . an atmosphere so pure, so rare, so ethereal, as pictures every object with a pre-Raphaelite distinctness,<sup>72</sup> makes distant things appear near, and sends the horizon far away in an unbounded stretch of slightly rounding green earth” (14). Bowles also invokes an image of the popular nineteenth-century artist Albert Bierstadt in letter eighteen,<sup>73</sup> during a voyage up the Columbia River in Washington Territory. Bowles notes that while magnificent views of Mount Hood can be found all along the river's course, “that which Bierstadt has chosen for its perpetuation on canvas, and which is thus familiar to eastern eyes, is the most complete and impressive, and is recognized upon the steamboat.”<sup>74</sup> Then, in deference to the metaphorical power represented by the shared symbol of Bierstadt's mountain, Bowles

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<sup>72</sup> The term “pre-Raphaelite” refers to an influential group of mid-nineteenth-century avante garde painters associated with John Ruskin who emphasized precise, almost photographic representation of even humble objects. Their landscapes were characterized by bright colors and even lighting so that pictures might appear almost flat.

<sup>73</sup> The German-born Bierstadt (1830-1902) attained great popularity for his landscape paintings of the American West during the second half of the nineteenth century. Bierstadt culled material for his work during several journeys to the West, often using the new technology of photography to capture images to be painted later.

<sup>74</sup> Margaret Fuller, in her travel narrative, *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*, has a similar experience of recognition upon her first approach to Niagara Falls—thanks entirely to the influence of contemporary paintings.

proceeds to describe not the mountain itself but the painting: “In it, the mountain seems to rise, apart, out from an upward-going plain, snow-covered from base to summit, oppressive in its majesty, beautiful in form, angelic in its whiteness,—the union of all that is great and pure and impressive” (191). A description of the actual mountain is never provided, and Bowles’s letter moves on to address the disputed altitude of Hood and some of its regional competitors.

Yosemite represented an obligation for Bowles to apply tropological strategies to adequately convey the size and appearance of the natural formations he found, which otherwise could not be fully conveyed. In letter twenty-two, “The Yosemite Valley and the Big Trees,” Bowles expressly invites his readers to construct an image of Yosemite as a derivative of geography they know: “Now imagine,—can you?—rising up, sheer and sharp,. . .irregularly-flowing and variously-crowned walls of granite rock, thrice as high as your Mounts Tom and Holyoke, twice as high as Berkshire’s Graylock” (225).<sup>75</sup> Other allusions follow. To describe the stunning rock formations in the valley, Bowles describes the effects of intermingled light and dark shades, “and you know where the Zebra and Dr. [Henry Whitney] Bellows’ church were borrowed from.”<sup>76</sup> Bowles also compares Yosemite’s massive rocky domes to “your State-house dome, and bigger than the entire of a dozen State-houses.”<sup>77</sup> Another substantial rock formation in the

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<sup>75</sup> Rising roughly 1,000 feet in elevation, Mount Tom and Mount Holyoke are parts of the low-lying Holyoke Range in the Connecticut River valley of Western Massachusetts. Mount Graylock, at 3,491 feet, is the highest peak in Massachusetts and part of the Berkshire Mountain Range.

<sup>76</sup> The allusion, likely unclear to twenty-first century readers, is to Boston-born and Harvard-educated Henry Whitney Bellows (1814-82), who was a recognized leader in the Unitarian Church, particularly in New York City, during the mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>77</sup> The Massachusetts State House, designed by Charles Bulfinch and located atop Boston’s Beacon Hill, was first completed in 1797. Originally covered with wood shingles, the dome was refurbished with copper in 1802 and gilded in 1861.

Yosemite valley is compared to a northern New England landmark that would have been familiar to his readers, New Hampshire's Mount Washington (226).<sup>78</sup>

Facing a landscape which could not be textually represented in its fullness, Bowles depended on the power of rhetorical images to resonate with his readers—even when the referent was not landscape itself. As a result, one interesting method by which Bowles represented the unknown in terms of the known is through anthropomorphic representations of western landscape. One of the natural structures most admired by Bowles is the Church Butte, described in letter seven, which he calls “one of the most curious single specimens of this natural architecture.” But Bowles describes it not in terms of the desert materials which comprise it nor by an account of its setting along the trail, but in terms of its resemblance to structures upon which his readers could build an image: artifacts of human architecture. As the traveler approaches, Bowles writes,

it appears the most marvelous counterfeit of a half-ruined, gigantic, old-world Gothic cathedral . . . . The Milan or the Cologne cathedral, worn with centuries, ill-shapen with irregular decay, could not have looked more the things they are or would be, than this did. Everything belonging to the idea was there in some degree of preservation. Porch, nave, transept, steeple, caryatides, monster animals, saints and apostles, with broken columns, tumbled roof, departed nose or foot, worn and crumbling features, were all in their places, or a little out, but recognizable and nameable. (76)

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<sup>78</sup> Mount Washington, “Home of the World’s Worst Weather,” is the highest peak in the Northeast at 6,288 feet.

Similarly, Bowles describes Utah's Echo Canyon in letter eight as "a very miniature Rhine valley in all but vines and storied ruin" (81). In letter eighteen, from a boat on the Columbia River, Bowles invokes another artifact of human architecture:

. . . [T]he rocks grow higher and sharper; and their architecture, by fire and water, assumes noble and massive forms. The dark, basaltic stones lie along in even layers, seamed as in the walls of human structure; then they change to upright form, and run up in well-rounded columns, one after another, one above another. Often is rich similitude to ruined castles of the Rhine. . . .

But in this case, at least, Bowles finds that nature surpasses the architecture of human hands, with "fashions and forms, too massive, too majestic, too unique for human ambition and art to aspire to" (187-88).

Descriptions of cultural practices, institutions and idiosyncratic western character were also occasions when Bowles employed mutually-shared signs to communicate with his readers. During the party's stay in Salt Lake City, recounted in letter ten, Speaker Colfax and his traveling companions are invited to a performance at the local theater, which Bowles directly contrasts with theaters in eastern cities with much larger populations: "No eastern city of one hundred thousand inhabitants,—remember Salt Lake City has less than twenty thousand,—possesses so fine a theatrical structure. It ranks, alike in capacity and elegance of structure and finish, along with the opera-houses and academies of music of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Cincinnati" (103).<sup>79</sup> An amusing episode constructed with an allusion to eastern culture comes as part of Bowles's discussion of the status of women in the society of San Francisco

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<sup>79</sup> Bowles also comments on the quality of the performance: "[A]nd the performances themselves, though by amateurs, by merchants and mechanics, by wives and daughters of citizens, would have done full credit to a first-class professional company" (103).

presented in letter twenty-eight, “Social Life in San Francisco: The Women: Religion and Ministers.” Since the epistolary form allows for the integration of anecdotal items, Bowles suggests “[a]nother ‘society’ item, and we will pass on.” He continues: “The common dining hour being five and six o’clock, the women are denied the esthetic [sic], gossiping tea-party, so peculiar to New England. The ‘lunch party’ is their substitute.” Bowles compares the food and the participants to eastern referents (326).<sup>80</sup> In letter five, Bowles compares Western hospitality to that of the East: “[W]e find that neither the graces nor the culture of life are confined to the East. They flourish here among the Rocky Mountains as beautifully as in the parlors of Boston, or the sweet groves of the Connecticut Valley” (50). In letter fourteen, he describes horses of the overland stage as “horses that would shine in Central Park and Fifth Avenue equipages” (135). Using local or public figures as reference points is part of the tropology Bowles shares with his readers. Noting trees of southern Oregon in letter seventeen, Bowles states, “they do not rob your Connecticut valley of its precious elms; to their individual beauty no tree here can offer successful rivalry” (175-76). In letter fifteen, he compares laborers of the Nevada silver mines to those of the East, concluding, “The miners as a class are of a higher grade than eastern laborers, and they offer many individuals fit for the upper places in the business” (157).

These descriptions were inevitably clearer when drawn upon the familiar forms of eastern models.

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<sup>80</sup> Bowles emphasizes the gender-delimited confidentiality of the women’s lunches: “I have never even so much as seen through a crack in the door one of these California feminine lunch parties; but confidential confessions lead me to give them a high place in the social features and distractions of the life of the town. And yet for high art in the line of the delicate but industrious scandal-mongering and the virtuous plotting against masculine authority, that we are wont to attribute to these exclusive gatherings of our dear sisters. . .” (326).

### *Public and Private Dimensions of the Newspaper Letter*

In addition to dimensions of presence and absence, conflicting states of public and private are among the central critical considerations of epistolary theories. Decker states that intimacy is one of the primary enablers of private correspondence: “Although a large portion of epistolary communication has always been businesslike and relatively impersonal, letters are inevitably associated with intimacy. . . . Such intimacy commonly assumes the existence of a certain confidentiality as its enabling condition” (5). The private letter establishes an intimacy that transcends distance.

In traditional newspaper reporting, however, intimacy is unlikely to be established between the journalist and the readers for several reasons. First, intimacy between author and reader is restricted because journalistic articles tend to convey information that is distinct from the author, aside from his or her witness or reporting thereof. Second, journalistic articles tend to be written structurally and stylistically according to journalistic convention, further reducing any evidence of the individuality of the author within the communication. The author in these cases serves merely as a channel through which news is conveyed and does not necessarily retain textual artifacts of his or her individuality as a sender in the communication process. In many cases, in fact, it is plausible that any number of reporters could write essentially identical articles about any piece of news. Third, because journalistic texts are generally written by an unfamiliar or even undisclosed author, the first-person authorial *I* is unlikely in many pieces of journalistic writing. Finally, because the texts are communicated and accessed in a public forum and because journalistic articles are generally written without an inherent



acknowledgement of—let alone explicit identification of—the reader, the author is unlikely to acknowledge, imagine, or pursue an intimacy with his or her readers.

With a vision of a public mass readership, therefore, newspaper letters can be expected, generally, to invert the public/private dichotomy of private correspondence beginning with the act of composition. The anticipation of a public readership influences the act of composition in four fundamental ways. First, the author would be expected to select topics to be conveyed in the letter based on considerations of newsworthiness and the tastes of the broad readership, not on personal preference. Second, the public newspaper letter is ostensibly written to a group of strangers rather than to intimate associates, further delimiting subject matter and favoring a formal authorial voice. Third, the public nature of the newspaper letter would be expected to draw upon standard vocabulary and a tropology which must be accessible to individuals across the social and rhetorical community, suggesting an overall tendency toward formality. Finally, the content of newspaper letters—in contrast to the content of letters to intimate friends or family—may require supplemental explanatory passages or identification for effective communication to a diverse community of readers.

Epistolary journalism, however, revises these structures to allow for an intimacy of author and reader, and it is helpful to examine Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters to discover how he rhetorically inscribes a private discourse in the midst of a public medium. Constitutional elements—such as an identification of the author, an integration of epistolary content, and the use of an informal, conversational voice discussed in Chapter Two—comprise part of the picture. But the newspaper letter form also negotiates the boundaries of public and private through, first, calling upon the reader to

be a partner in creating meaning; second, directly identifying and addressing the reader with intimate language; and, third, inscribing the exclusion of others—groups implicitly or explicitly excluded from the discourse.

A sense of intimacy in discourse can be enhanced when authors and readers recognize or construct meaning upon shared experiences, when they ascribe to common values, and when they acknowledge mutual acquaintances. Fragmentary references to people—by first name or nickname, for instance—or to shared experiences demand that the reader contribute profoundly to the construction of meaning of a particular text. This is a system of signs by which meaning is possible only with consensual agreement, grounded in shared experiences and prior communication. For private letter writers, it is unnecessary to provide full identification for “mother” or “uncle Wm” because meaning is established in a larger discursive context which incorporates addresser and addressee and which precedes the letter itself. Typical letter-writing features such as first-name references to people or prompts toward semiotic collaboration, such as “Remember when. . .,” reinforce close relationships and community between addresser and addressee by highlighting commonalities and drawing the mind of the reader to places of intersection with the author. For the writers of private letters, the assumption of a shared language informs the act of composition. The writer assumes the reader shares his or her understanding of these terms and includes little or no additional identification.<sup>81</sup> Those

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<sup>81</sup> Mary M. Colby, for instance, a native of New England and a pioneer to Oregon in 1850, wrote her brother and sister about conditions in Missouri and that it would be nice to have them and “Mr Pettys folks some evening and se how folks live [in] Missouri.” In a letter written two years later from Oregon, Mary writes, “Frances Ann looks like her father and she you no must be pretty for Sabrina said he was Allen James looks as Brother John used to.” She also inquires about “my old friends in H[averhill] and Newtown is Mrs Crowell alive if so give my love to her ask her if she has forgot when she and I sat up with Old maid Greenough my love to Mrs Sweet and all old friends” (Holmes 2: 48-52). Eliza A. Ground, another pioneer to Oregon Territory in 1853, demonstrates a similar structure in referring to individuals familiar to her readers—namely, her brother and sister: “the connection are al well,” she writes.

who are not participants in the ongoing discourse, on the other hand, including and especially those of us who may be identified as “post-posted readers,” in the words of Janet Gurkin Altman, are likely to be excluded from the knowledge systems in which these rhetorical structures have meaning. Instead, readers who are not intimately engaged in the discursive context of a letter must rely on footnotes or scant textual evidence to decode these signs and are largely excluded from this dimension of intimacy with the author.

Throughout *Across the Continent*, Bowles refers to shared experiences and signs that command an intimate collaboration with his readers. These features are particularly present when Bowles identifies individuals the reader may remember as former neighbors or prominent citizens, as previously discussed in Chapter Two. In letter six, “A Sunday in the Mountains,” for instance, Bowles and his party found that an interruption in the stage line resulted in a day of rest in Virginia Dale, Colorado, which fell, coincidentally, on a Sunday. Bowles took the opportunity to write a letter, beginning with an allusion to a famous Massachusetts anti-sabbatarian: “There are no aristocratic distinctions between the days of the week west of the Missouri. The Broad Church rules here, and so broadly that even Saint Burleigh of your modern Florence [Massachusetts] would find hearty welcome” (56). A journalist and staunch abolitionist, Charles Burleigh was known to many of Bowles’s New England readers for his writing and personal eccentricities.<sup>82</sup>

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“Thomas [H]utcheson is gone to the umquo with his brother Robert to look at the country . . . mack Timmons lives three or fore miles from here . . . charles wells lives out here . . . hendrilks lives in Oregon the singing teacher.” She closes her letter with salutations for “matilda smith James and mary Butler and all inquireing friends” (Holmes 6: 21-22). In a February 8, 1854, letter from Eliza’s sister Margaret B. Smith, also an emigrant to Oregon, to her family in the East, she provides updates on “the rest of the folks”—obviously folks familiar to her readers. Some of those mentioned in the letter include the “Lides,” “Mr . . . and Miss Haley,” Sarah, Monroe, Wright, and Mary (Holmes 6: 23-24).

<sup>82</sup> Charles Calistus Burleigh (1810-1878) was a notable but eccentric abolitionist and journalist who became well-known as an antisabbatarian after being arrested in West Chester, Pennsylvania, in 1847, for

The subversive courtesy title “Saint” would have added a bit of humor to the description.<sup>83</sup> For instance, in letter six, Bowles reassures his readers from Colorado that his observations concerning the consumption of alcohol in the West—at least early in the trip—seem to contradict popular perceptions of lawless westerners: “The high price and terrible quality of whisky and other liquors in all these distant Territories are operating as a very effective temperance agent. I see very little of them or their effects anywhere” (65-66). In letter eighteen, in a passage describing Oregon and its residents, Bowles uses a metaphor to reinforce the notion that Oregon’s economy and culture has been built wisely and soundly—unlike its wildly reckless neighbor to the south—and that its people “seem sure, not of organizing the first State on the Pacific Coast, indeed, but of a steadily prosperous, healthy and moral one,—they are in the way to be the New England of the Pacific Coast” (197). Other examples already discussed include Bowles’s account of Lola Montez and the citizens of Grass Valley, California, and his circumvention of expletives.<sup>84</sup>

In letter four, “The Rocky Mountains and Their Gold Mines,” Bowles writes about his personal experience of the mountains, not just as a journalist examining their beauty and resources and not just as a traveler making his way through, but as a departed neighbor of Springfield, just “two weeks from home,” engaged in a personal experience

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selling antislavery literature on a Sunday. Burleigh wore a long beard which he vowed not to cut until the end of slavery.

<sup>83</sup> The following comment, however, designed at the time to continue the humorous sketch of the religious radical, entwines religious skepticism with racist typologies, as Bowles notes that Burleigh would not only have been welcomed by the Sabbath-neglecting westerners but also by “our red brethren, who would rate his scalp with its ornaments at the value of a dozen of the ordinary sort.” But, “be the motive fear for our scalps or fear for our souls,—we followed the fashion of our forefathers, and slept through the day, . . . clambering up a high rock in the evening to view the landscape o’er of valley, stream, snow-clad mountain, and far-distant plain, and,” with typically self-effacing wry humor, “closing out our observances with a more hearty than harmonious rendering of our small repertoire of psalm tunes” (56-57).

<sup>84</sup> See pages 78 and 88-89.

to be shared in confidence. By noting that he is just “two weeks from home,” Bowles places his experience of the great Western mountains in proximity to “home” and reconnects in space and time with those far absent. His experience is a personal one to which readers can, perhaps, relate: “How the mind runs back to one’s youthful, vague, mythical knowledge of the Rocky Mountains in their actual presence!” Readers are asked to inventory their own perceptions of the mountains and to consider those images as youthful, vague or perhaps mythical. In place of those perceptions, the reader is asked to substitute a personal, experiential model—personal and experiential through Bowles’s own presence in and intimate experience of the far distant landscape:

I am sporting familiarly under their shadows, following tediously up their sides, galloping in the saddle around their summits, drinking from their streams, playing snow-ball in June with their imperishable snow banks, descending into their very bowels, and finding companionship and society as various and as cultured and as organized as in New England. (31)

And as a reminder that this experience is real and human, Bowles characteristically offers a sketch of the physiological realities that attest to his experience: “All this seems dream-like, yet weary head and sore feet and stern statistics testify to the reality.”

The dichotomy of public and private discourse in Bowles’s letters is also negotiated by regular efforts to directly address the reader and draw him or her into the action. This strategy is often signaled by the use of first-person pronouns, particularly the repeated use of the inclusive plural “our,” and a repeated, direct address of the reader. Janet Gurkin Altman describes this pronominal relativity as “perhaps the most distinctive aspect of epistolary language” as it represents the impact of two parties in the text and

their cognitive and spatial relationships. The “I-you” relationship inscribed in the letter is manifest, Altman says, in language:

Those works that we perceive as being the most ‘epistolary,’ as cultivating the letter form most fully, are those in which the “I-you” relationship shapes the language used, and in which *I* becomes defined relative to the “you” whom he addresses . . . . The “I” of epistolary discourse always situates himself vis-à-vis another; his locus, his “address,” is always relative to that of his addressee.

(118-19)

Altman’s description of the “I-you” relationship can be appropriately applied to epistolary journalism as well. In the *Across the Continent* letters, Sam Bowles emphatically occupies the “I” position. Bowles occupies “I” by emphasizing his personal and reportorial voices, by expressing opinions, and by privileging his personal experience above a generalized experience. But the “you” is there, too, intimately sharing and contributing to the text—both known and interpolated by the text—and Bowles calls them into his images, into a presence with him in the text, and into an intimacy within this very public discourse. And although the “you” is occupied by a multiplicity of readers, each is called individually to respond to and integrate personal experience with the letters.

A sense of intimacy is also generated when Bowles poses rhetorical questions or constructs hypothetical situations to which it is clear he already knows his readers’ response. In letter eight, for instance, Bowles relates a day he and his companions enjoyed on the banks of the Great Salt Lake, but qualifies his use of the term “picnic” for his readers back home, “if picnic can be without women for sentiment and to spread

table-cloth, and to be helped up and over rocks. Can you New Englanders fancy a ‘stag’ picnic?” (85) But Bowles is clearly impressed with the great lake, and enumerates its many qualities in letter ten, asking his eastern readers to “count up all these features for a watering-place; and where will you find a Newport, a Saratoga or a Sharon that has the half of them?”<sup>85</sup> He concludes with an invitation: “So, ye votaries of fashion, ye rheumatic cripples, ye victims of scrofula and ennui, prepare to pack your trunks at the sound of the first whistle of the train for the Rocky Mountains, for a season at Salt Lake City” (99).

Other letters also provide examples of an intimacy of author and readers. Letter thirteen, written from Austin, Nevada, but expanding upon Bowles’s experiences among the Mormons, commences with additional information concerning polygamy and illustrative examples sure to entice his readers into a personal response to the issue. With characteristic satire and intimacy he writes, “Polygamy introduces many curious cross-relationships, and intertwines the branches of the genealogical tree in a manner greatly to puzzle a mathematician, as well as to disgust the decent-minded” (123). In letter thirteen he notes one young merchant who took three sisters for his three wives. “There are several cases,” Bowles confides, “of men marrying both mother (widow) and her daughter or daughters; taking the ‘old woman’ for the sake of getting the young ones; but having children by all.” He calls upon his readers, in conversational voice, “Please to cipher out for yourselves how this mixes things,” and “Consider, too, how these children of one father and many mothers,—the latter often blood relations,—are likely to become

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<sup>85</sup> Newport, Rhode Island, a fashionable summer resort during the nineteenth century; Saratoga Springs, New York, fashionable during the nineteenth century as a spa; and Sharon, Massachusetts, located 22 miles south of Boston. According to the Sharon Historical Society, “From the 1800s until the 1940s, Sharon was a summer resort to which people would come to stay at inns and hotels to enjoy the clean air and the Lake [Massapoag].”

crossed again in new marriages. . .” (123). Letter thirteen continues with an account of Brigham Young and his wives—but with a twist: Bowles invites his readers to envision themselves in the same situation, using direct address and the distinctive language of New England: “Down East,<sup>86</sup> you know, many a husband calculates on stealing into heaven under the pious petticoats of his better wife; here the thing is reversed, and women go to heaven because their husbands take them along” (124). Bowles notes that Mormon men are measured by the number of wives they can maintain “in sweet and loving and especially obedient subjugation,” and that Young objected to “multiplying wives for men who have not this rare domestic gift.” He ends with direct address of the reader: “So there is no chance for you and I, my dear Jones, becoming successful Mormons!” (124-25)

This passage demonstrates how Bowles also establishes a personal intimacy with his readers through an invocation of an Other—a person or group of people subtly or explicitly not party to the correspondence, public as it may be. The exclusion of these Others from the discourse reinforces the notion of an *inclusion* on the part of the reader. From this perspective, Bowles may be characterized as possessing a characteristic of private letter writers: an assumption of confidentiality as an enabling condition of the discourse. Most prominent among those assumed to be excluded from the correspondence were indeed the Mormons, and his extensive treatment of the renegade group and its singular culture through eight letters offers many opportunities to consider how Bowles’s public newspaper letters were shaped by an assumption of confidentiality. Could Bowles have honestly believed that the letters would not reach Mormon eyes and ears? It seems unlikely, and yet the text reveals personal observations and, in several

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<sup>86</sup> In New England parlance, “Down East” ironically refers to Maine.



cases, unmistakably critical comments concerning individuals in the Mormon kingdom that suggest a presumed exclusion.<sup>87</sup>

Bowles inscribes a distance between the author and reader—present to each other—and the excluded Mormon Other. His first mention of Brigham Young in letter eight, for example, includes a delicate rhetorical isolation of Mormon culture and customs: “In Mormon etiquette, President Brigham Young is called upon; by Washington fashion, the Speaker is also called upon, and does not call—there was a question whether the distinguished resident and the distinguished visitor would meet” (86). The phrase “in Mormon etiquette,” which precedes first mention of the Mormon leader’s name, maps relationships of inclusion and exclusion. In contrast, “Washington fashion” invokes a more sophisticated, democratic set of behaviors. The stalemate between Young and Colfax is settled, Bowles reports, as familiarly-labeled “President Brigham” called upon the Speaker. Bowles is quite complimentary of Young’s decision to yield the question and states that he “graciously came to-day with a crowd of high dignitaries of the church, and made, not one of Emerson’s prescribed ten minute calls, but a generous, pleasant, gossiping sitting of two hours long.” Bowles’s description of Young, on the other hand, is not so flattering, and through a description laced with subjective and uncomplimentary details, it clearly suggests the intimacy he assumed in this epistolary act.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> In fact, Bowles’s accounts of his visit to Salt Lake City became commonly known among Mormons. In an article entitled “Views of Mormondom,” for instance, written by “A Mormon Elder” and printed in the October 1, 1866, issue of *The Galaxy: A Magazine of Entertaining Reading*, the author notes Bowles’s work as part of the popular discourse on the issue of the Mormons. The author claims to have been present during the Colfax party’s visit, and comments on Bowles’s account of the Mormons and their society: “As for Mr. Bowles . . . he painted to the hospitable citizens (for such they with repeated emphasis called them) a view of Salt Lake City as the Jerusalem of America, to which, when the Pacific railroad was completed, tourists from all parts of the continent would come up yearly to eat strawberries! His picture was highly colored, and very likely pleased himself more than the Mormons, who have long ago toned down to a solid self-satisfaction over their works” (210).

<sup>88</sup> See Chapter Two, page 87.

Additional passages establishing the Mormons as Other are easily found. In comments regarding the wives of Brigham Young in letter thirteen, for instance, Bowles indulges in a candid assessment that presumably could only be shared in confidence with his eastern readers: “Considering his opportunities, the head of the Church of Latter Day Saints has made a rather sorry selection of women on the score of beauty.” Relating gossip of the first score, moreover, Bowles calls the youngest wife Young’s “present pet, . . .obtained, they say, after much seeking. . .” (126). In letter ten, Bowles describes a dinner to which he and his companions are invited, and which illustrates the abundance of commodities available to the Mormon population. According to Bowles, the host provided “as rich a variety of fish, meats, vegetables, pastry and fruit, as I ever saw on any private table in the East; and the quality and the cooking and the serving were unimpeachable.” But while the fare was comparable to the rich tables of the East, Bowles notes one substantial difference with a rhetorical wink to his understanding reader: “The wives of our host waited on us most amicably, and the entertainment was, in every way, the best illustration of the practical benefits of plurality, that has yet been presented to us” (102-03).

Bowles’s descriptions of Brigham Young’s followers further illustrate an intimacy with his newspaper audience from which the Mormon Others may be presumed excluded. The first of Young’s followers to be identified is Heber C. Kimball, a man Bowles characterizes in letter eight as “the most notorious” because of his “vulgar and coarse speech.” Kimball is also described as “unctuous in his manner as Macassar hair oil, and as pious in phrase as good old Thomas a Kempis” (87). Bowles does not state whether or not Kimball actually used Macassar, a popular Victorian-era aromatic hair

product, but it would have been familiar to his readers because of its tendency to soak into the back of upholstered furniture from the heads of those who used it. The image thus conveys a distinct, sensory-laden image of Kimball which would have been unflattering to say the least. The contrast with the devout monk Thomas à Kempis, of course, exaggerates the irony of the portrait. Bowles's description also invokes scenes of western Massachusetts: "He [Kimball] has a very keen, sharp eye, and looks like a Westfield man I always meet at the agricultural fairs in Springfield"—surely leaving Bowles's readers wondering, "Who could the Westfield man be?" Additional comments concerning Kimball are also provocative. In letter thirteen, the satirical portrait of the second president and prophet of the church, Heber Kimball, is surpassed in subversive humor only by Bowles's semantically-grounded appraisal of his wives: "Kimball, who in church and theater keeps the cold from his bare head and the divine afflatus in by throwing a red bandanna handkerchief over it, is even less fortunate in the beauty of his wives; it is rather an imposition upon the word beauty, indeed, to suggest it in their presence" (126).

Other companions of Young were also described with a freedom that mimics a private correspondence and acknowledges a reader who shares cultural values and linguistic symbol systems. Another of Young's associates to be described was Dr. John M. Bernhisel,<sup>89</sup> an "old, small man, venerable, and suggestive of John Quincy Adams, or Dr. Gannett of Boston, in his style" (87).<sup>90</sup> Although Bowles depends on his readers to complete the images of "two or three others of the company [who] have fine faces—such

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<sup>89</sup> Dr. John Milton Bernhisel (1799-1881) was an early member of the Mormon church, acting as personal physician to Joseph Smith. He moved with the other members of the church to Utah following Smith's death and later represented the interests of the church before the U.S. House of Representatives.

<sup>90</sup> Adams (1767-1848) was the sixth president of the United States from 1825-29. Ezra Stiles Gannett (1801-71) was minister of the Unitarian Arlington Street Church in Boston, 1824-1871.

as you would meet in intellectual or business society in Boston or New York,” he draws an unbecoming portrait of the remainder of the party—suggesting, of course, the exclusion of the Mormon Other from the discourse. The strength of the remaining Mormon leaders, he notes,

seems to lie in narrowness, bigotry, obstinacy. They look as if they had lived on the same farms as their fathers and grandfathers, and made no improvements; gone to the same church, and sat in the same pew, without cushions; borrowed the same weekly newspaper for forty years; drove all their children to the West or the cities; and if they went to agricultural fairs, insisted on having their premiums in pure coin. (87)

The use of third-person pronominal forms “they” and “them” in passages such as this contrasts profoundly with those passages that employ first and second person pronouns that embrace Bowles and his readers. Thus the construction as well as the content of these passages reinforce the distancing and exclusion of the Mormon Others from the discourse—even as they invite the eastern readers in to share the joke.

Also moving into the realm of gossip and impression and facilitated by an exclusion of a Mormon Other, Bowles’s descriptions of Brigham Young’s children and the common people of the church are candid. The oldest son, Brigham Jr., is described in letter thirteen as weighing “two to three hundred pounds,” but, like the other sons, shows “no marked sign of [his] father’s smartness.” The second son, John, is described as “poor” and “puny,” with “several wives and an inordinate love for whiskey.” Bowles concludes by stating, “Brigham’s dynasty will die with himself” (127). To describe the

physical appearance of the bulk of the Mormon population in letter twelve, Bowles summons an eastern referent:

The audiences at the Tabernacle to-day and last Sunday, and at the theater last night, were what would be called common-looking people. The handsome girls were few; the fine-looking women even fewer; intelligent, strong-headed men were more numerous; but the great mass, both in size, looks and dress, was below the poorest, hardest-working and most ignorant classes of our eastern large towns. (117)

Sharing these frequently uncomplimentary and humorous illustrations reinforces the sense of intimacy and the familiar relationships between Bowles and his readers, and clearly assumes the Other status of the Mormons, despite the likelihood—and eventual reality—that they would read the column as well. As a hallmark of the epistolary journalism form, Bowles focuses on his New England-bred personal responses—not an objective reporting of facts—when he recounts his first experience of a polygamous household. “We have had a peep into a moderate Mormon harem,” he wrote, “but being introduced to two different women of the same name, one after another, was more than I could stand without blushing” (86). And in letter ten, Bowles notes that the single-story adobe houses had “as many front doors as the owner has wives” (100).

Uncomplimentary and humorous comments concerning the quality of Mormon preachers in letter twelve also reinforces the sense of intimacy and the familiar relationships between Bowles and his readers. Of Samuel W. Richards, originally of Massachusetts, Bowles writes with colorful adjectives, “[H]is discourse was a rambling, unimpressive exhortation, such as you may hear from a tonguey deacon in any country

Baptist or Methodist meeting-house” (118). Similarly, of the great Mormon president, Bowles brazenly writes,

Brigham Young’s preaching to-day was a very unsatisfactory, disappointing performance. . . . [H]is address lacked logic, lacked effect, lacked wholly magnetism or impressiveness. It was a curious medley of scriptural exposition and exhortation, bold and bare statement, coarse denunciation and vulgar allusion, cheap rant and poor cant. (118-19)

Bowles goes on to summarize the statements presented in the speech and quickly dispels any possibility that his readers might ascribe to Young a sophisticated theology.<sup>91</sup>

Bowles concludes the account by stating, “A good deal of boasting” and a “sharp denunciation of the ‘few stinking lawyers who lived down in whiskey street, and for five dollars would attempt to make a lie into a truth,’ were the only other noticeable features of this discourse of the president of the church of the Latter Day Saints” (120). Within the intimate discursive space of the newspaper letter, it is easy for Bowles to paint this unimpressive picture.

### *Personal and Political Dimensions of Newspaper Letters*

Passages concerning Bowles’s reactions to Brigham Young and the Mormons prompt the final theoretical consideration of this chapter: how the epistolary journalism form provides a context in which personal and political discourses intersect. In his

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<sup>91</sup> The material Bowles chooses to relate to his readers calls us to consider the extent to which he paraphrased Young’s comments. For instance, while listing Young’s points in defense of polygamy, Bowles reports that he stated, “in England now, if a man wanted to change his wife, he had only to offer her at auction and knock her off for a pot of beer or a shilling, and marry another.” But readers are left to wonder if this might not be Bowles’s own humorous paraphrase of Young’s argument. Lending a degree of credibility, however, is the subsequent sentence, in which Bowles parenthetically reports that a member of the crowd protested: “(This last statement called out a voice of dissent from an English working-face in the audience)” (119-20).

prefatory letter to Schuyler Colfax, Bowles was clear in his political intentions for the letters:

[T]hey aim to give, with compactness and comprehensiveness, the distinctive experiences of the Overland Journey; to describe, as vividly as I may, the various original scenery that the route and the country offer; to portray the social and material developments of the several States and Territories we visited,—their present and their future, their realization and their capacity; and to develop to the people of the East and to the Government their share in the interests and hopes of the West,—what duties they had to perform, what benefits they might hope to reap. (v)

Among Bowles's political priorities—or, as he called them in his introduction, the “pressing public themes” he addressed—were the completion of the Pacific railroad, the nation's relationship with the Mormons, and the need for development of and investment in Western mining. But presented in the form of letters, communicated with a sense of intimacy, and interlaced with personal comments and experiences, where does the personal discourse end, and where does the political discourse begin?

This question may be addressed by considering the way political discourses can be present in private letters both as subject matter and as an implication of the epistolary act. For private letter writers, for whom personal experience generally dominates the epistolary text, political commentary can still enter in. Frequently limited in size and scope, the political content of private letters is often introduced and related to the personal content of the letter. For instance, the letters of nineteenth century pioneers and other settlers on the frontier include political comments on the federal government's

relationship with Native Americans—generally, when the writer or her companions did or did not come into contact with them. Their letters may include political comments on wars or other national events—generally, when the writer or his companions or neighbors were somehow affected. And their letters may include political comments on public figures, economic conditions, and social structures—generally, when the writer or his or her family or companions were personally involved. When present, political commentary is often truncated due to other characteristics of the form, especially the common fluctuation of subject matter within or between letters. That is, political commentary is likely to be adopted and discontinued as casually as any other subject matter. When the writers of private letters engage in direct political commentary, therefore, it is usually prompted by and constrained within the expected parameters of private correspondence. For many private letter writers, then, political content is subsumed within the personal narrative.

Beyond content and direct political commentary, however, private letter writers may enter into political discourse at another level, by rhetorically assuming power through authorship and self-definition embodied by the letter. In other words, private individuals may engage in a political act when they inscribe their own voice, regardless of the particular subject matter which they address. In an introduction to the first volume of Kenneth L. Holmes's *Covered Wagon Women*, for example, Anne M. Butler states that simply by inscribing their experiences in letters and journals, the women on the Western trails engaged in a political act, affirming their experiences and validating their perspectives. "[E]ach sentence and notation transcends its literal rendering and links these women to the political, social, and economic forces of the era," Butler writes. And



the political import is not restricted to any single author, she says: “The depth and the range of these documents give voice to thousands of nameless, silent pioneer women who left no letters and diaries” (7). By claiming the power of an authorial “I,” these private letter writers invoked political discourses about who could speak about what. In the case of the American frontier, women’s letters represent a substantial modification to the traditional, male-dominated narrative, at least in their re-reading.<sup>92</sup> Upon initial writing, however, it may be argued that political implications of most private letters are limited within the private exchange. In general, then, the political dimensions of authorship in private letters, like express political content, are subsumed within the personal discourse.

Some private correspondence, it must be noted, clearly challenges this model, privileging political discourse virtually to the exclusion of the personal. Elizabeth Hewitt discusses these political letters in *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865*, in which she argues that prior to the Civil War, it was not uncommon to find correspondents negotiating a discursive space shared by private, philosophical, and political discourses when authors perceived a potential for public dissemination. She explains that between 1792 and 1861, correspondence was often characterized by an “insistent rhetoric that depicts American letter-writing as the means by which both national and familiar consensus are to be established” (6-7). According to Hewitt, letters by prominent public figures such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson exemplify a conscious appropriation of the letter form as a mode in which to work out principles of the early republic. William Merrill Decker studies a similar interplay of personal and

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<sup>92</sup> The subject has been pursued extensively in recent years as female narratives of the frontier—most often inscribed as letters and journals—have received increasing scholarly attention, most notably in Annette Kolodny’s *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*.

political discourses in the ostensibly personal letters of Henry Adams<sup>93</sup> and argues that such authors believed that the potential for public readership increased the political import of their messages. A consciousness of public distribution and a privileging of political discourse is then manifest in more formally structured and verbally sophisticated letters. The letter itself, perceived by the author as transcending the limited relationship of addresser and addressee, is consequently inscribed as a conscious political act. In these cases, personal content is often deprivileged or even avoided in the interests of political discourse.

Whereas the majority of private correspondence strongly privileges either personal or political discourse, epistolary journalism represents a unique confluence of personal and political dimensions in which the personal can be transformed into political. This transformation is enabled, first, by the implications of mass readership. When something happens to a person and it is communicated in a letter to another individual, it is primarily personal. But when something happens to a person and it is communicated to thousands, it is inherently political. The transformation of personal discourse into political discourse is further enabled when newspaper correspondents deliberately seek out personal moments that can be transformed into political discourse. Bowles's extensive attention to the Mormon question reflects this dynamic. Although Bowles comments on his personal experiences and reactions to the Mormons and their culture, he simultaneously makes and reinforces broader assumptions of propriety and ethics before a mass audience. When he relates the content of a sermon or speech by

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<sup>93</sup> Henry Brooks Adams (1838-1918) was great-grandson of John Adams and a noted historian, journalist, and novelist. His most famous work was *The Education of Henry Adams*, published posthumously in 1918.

one of the Mormon leaders, his retelling positions the local text in the larger critical context of national discourses.

A third way epistolary journalism enables the transformation of personal discourse into political discourse exists because of the uniquely constituted authorial “I.” In the private letter exchange, the “I” alternates with each letter, as writers respond to each other. With each letter, the author claims the power of authorship for the duration of the text. But for epistolary journalism, the “I” is stabilized not only in individual letters, but throughout the series. Observations and perspectives offered by the author, while free to be discussed among his or her readers, are not contested by an epistolary reply, one which might offer a different perspective voiced by a different “I.” This stabilization of the authorial “I” results in a concentration of discursive power for that critical perspective he or she represents. For the *Across the Continent* letters, the “I” is stabilized in Samuel Bowles, whose authorial “I” is particularly suffused with authority because of his role as a newspaper publisher and outspoken public figure. His authority is further enhanced when he engages the reader in his experiences, as discussed earlier in this chapter. As the eyes and ears of his audience, Bowles’s “I” can metonymically represent a corporate self, operative within a relationship of intimacy.

This model, demonstrating the way personal discourse may be transformed into political discourse in the epistolary journalism form, can be applied to all of Bowles’s letters. For example, letter one begins with personal reminiscences. “It is five years since I was last in the West,” he writes. “Then I came [to Chicago] to attend the Convention that nominated Mr. Lincoln for President. How long ago that seems!” But Bowles goes on to poetically express the change from those dim memories through a time

of dramatic change for the nation. It is a personal story of remembrance, but one seething with political import. As in a personal letter, he draws his readers into the story and makes a personal story not solely personal but also political, the experience of a corporate self, and he speaks on behalf of all those he represents:

Personal preferences were lost and won there [at the 1860 Republican convention in Chicago], life-long ambitions wrecked, new combinations created, and old ones shattered, whose significance was little understood then. What century of other history has held such revolutions, has wrought such influences on the present and the future of the world, as these five years! What five years of all life, of ours or anybody's else, would you or I exchange for even our witness of these? (2)

The interplay of personal and political discourses can also be studied in Bowles's account of the Chinese, related in letter twenty-three, "The Chinese: Grand Dinner with Them," discussed briefly in Chapter Two. Bowles received approbation from contemporary readers for the sympathetic way in which he discussed the situation of the Chinese in California. The January 14, 1866 review of *Across the Continent* in the New York *Independent*, for instance, mentioned in Chapter One, commends Bowles for his approach to the controversial issues surrounding the Chinese, many of whom had come to California to work in the mines or on the railroad. Despite the personal commentary contained in the letter, Bowles's approach to the issue, the reviewer noted, was politically significant:

The author has the fairness and courage to advocate the claim of the Chinese who dwell in the Pacific states to be considered and treated as men. In

California the Chinaman is even more despised than is the negro in some parts of the Atlantic states. The course of treatment pursued toward these people by California politicians, which consists in legislating them into a pariah class, is as far removed from justice as it is from the dictates of common sense. Mr. Bowles deserves honor for having espoused in some degree the cause of these unfortunate heathen.

While in California, Bowles had the unusual opportunity not only to observe but to socially interact with the Chinese community. Letter twenty-three from San Francisco includes extensive reporting on the social, economic, and political conditions of the Chinese as well as clear praise for their accomplishments. “The Chinese that come to these States are among the best of the peasantry from the country about Canton and Hong Kong,” he writes (246). But while he praises them for the attainments of their civilization, “in some of which they are models for ourselves,” Bowles also finds that in some respects they are tied to “the ignorance of a simple barbarism” (247). At length, Bowles discusses the effects of prejudice, the requirements of democracy, and their impressive social organization, including organized labor practices.

The account of the Chinese, however, is punctuated by the “grand dinner” which takes place on August 18, 1865—a personal experience which is transformed and incorporated into a political discourse. Bowles describes the precision of the seating and the service, the strict protocol through three courses, and the bounty of the table as a narrative illustration of the preceding political commentary. Arrangements for the dinner were determined through enough negotiation “to have sufficed for a pacification of Kentucky politics, or the making of a new map of Europe,” but when all was said and

done, the feast “went as smooth as a town school examination that the teacher has been drilling for a month previous” (248). The dissimilarity of the cultures is also apparent, as Bowles emphasizes the difficulty of communication between the groups,<sup>94</sup> and relates his own substandard chopstick management and dissatisfaction with the food. While Bowles’s companion Governor Bross indulged heartily in the meal, Bowles writes, he believes his personal experience to be the “best commentary to be made upon the meal, as a meal.” Although he arrived hungry, “the one universal odor and flavor” of three courses of food caused him to lose his appetite. But Bowles found, to his great surprise, a friend who had also been a guest at the dinner, and who greeted him with, “‘B——, I knew you were suffering, and were hungry—let us go and get something to eat—a good square meal!’” and the two went to an American restaurant where they gratefully ate mutton chops, squabs, and potatoes (248-254). The quotidian nature of these details, as well as Bowles’s meticulous account of the Grand Dinner, highlights the potential of epistolary journalism to embrace both personal and political discourses.

### *Conclusion*

Chapters Two and Three represent an attempt to understand the ways in which works of epistolary journalism harmonize and diverge from private letters, traditional journalism, and theoretical models of epistolarity. Both constitutional and theoretical considerations comprise this approach, an attempt to understand the form and its rhetorical possibilities. By adopting a course of correspondence with his readers in place

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<sup>94</sup> Despite the presence of an interpreter, Bowles tells his readers, most of the conversation was managed through the modicum of English possessed by the Chinese hosts, “though handshaking and bowing and scraping and a general flexibility of countenance, bodies and limbs had a very large share of the conversation to perform” (249).

of traditional reporting, Bowles embraced a literary form in which he could inscribe a text that is neither fully private nor fully public; which represented discourse among people who are neither fully present nor fully absent to each other; and which contained a discourse that is neither fully personal nor fully political. Building upon this discussion of epistolary journalism, Chapter Four will examine how many of the textual elements that are meaningful within the epistolary paradigm also operate as features of literary journalism.

## CHAPTER 4

### PLACING *ACROSS THE CONTINENT* WITHIN THE TRADITION OF LITERARY JOURNALISM

If any literary genre has an expected life span shorter than the letter, it might just be the newspaper article. But what is it about *Across the Continent* that made it such a popular text in its own day and, as I contend, a legitimate object of literary study today? In this chapter, I argue that many of the same qualities that make Samuel Bowles's letters from *Across the Continent* function as epistolary texts also place Bowles within a tradition of early literary journalism, a form which Jack A. Nelson characterizes as "writing that endures and remains of interest" (41). I also intend to suggest more broadly that nineteenth-century epistolary journalism, as a literary form, and *Across the Continent* in particular have fair claim to a place within the canon of literary journalism. This chapter will offer an overview of critical theories concerning literary journalism and, through textual evidence, place Bowles's work within that tradition. While a framework for consideration of literary journalism has been somewhat stabilized by scholars in the field, consideration of historical predecessors by the academy is relatively sparse—with few individuals regularly cited, for instance, between Daniel Defoe and Mark Twain. This chapter will argue that Samuel Bowles should be added to the list.

#### *Definitions of Literary Journalism*

Consideration of literary or "new" journalism expanded in the late twentieth century as scholars and practitioners analyzed narrative and rhetorical features of the journalistic writing they considered to be "literary." In *A Sourcebook of American*



*Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre*, editor Thomas B. Connery seeks to identify a tradition of literary journalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and establish a critical approach to the genre. Connery looks at literary journalism as “a distinct literary form, a type of cultural expression that can be defined and characterized” (xi). Connery’s introduction, “Discovering a Literary Form,” is particularly valuable as he attempts to establish a critical approach to literary journalism that is distinct from conventional scholarly approaches to journalism or fiction, focusing not only on what is written but also on how it is written. He defines literary journalism in a way that I will show applies to Bowles’s *Across the Continent*, as “nonfiction printed prose whose verifiable content is shaped and transformed into a story or sketch by use of narrative and rhetorical techniques generally associated with fiction. The themes that then emerge,” he continues, “make a statement, or provide an interpretation, about the people and culture depicted” (xiv).

Related perspectives from other scholars carry additional implications for a study of Samuel Bowles as a literary journalist. Ben Yagoda stresses that literary journalism must be qualified first by an emphasis on “journalism,” particularly as it implies a commitment to truth and “a process of active fact-gathering—not just working from memory or sensory observation but doing what reporters call reporting” (13). John C. Hartsock tackles the interplay of newswriting and literary technique in his expansive critical review of 2000, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form*. This unprecedented study of literary journalism is a critical history that examines epistemological and contextual issues, including language and consciousness as well as external culture. Hartsock defines literary journalism as a

distinct literary form which may accommodate a diversity of texts, including books. According to this model, literary journalism may be considered to include a text that “reads like a novel or short story except that it is true or makes a truth claim to phenomenal experience” (1). Norman Sims adds consideration of “narrative techniques that free the voice of the writer, and high standards of accuracy” to these models (3). Sims focuses on literary journalism as a matter of choice on the part of the writer. Journalists choose nontraditional forms, he says, when conventional structures impose limitations on story:

To use a conventional format would have allowed form to override story. . . . In other words, for these writers . . . , the inverted pyramid was not the best form and conventional reporting methods were not adequate. The writers did not want just to get the attention of readers and inform them, but also to make them think and feel. The task was not simply a matter of providing data, but of conveying character and feeling. (2-3)

To Sims, an interest in generating a response on the part of the reader informs the writer’s decision to liberate form.

Scholars in the field have attempted to standardize criteria used in distinguishing and theoretically approaching the form. Thomas Connery, for instance, cites various criteria for literary journalism, including patterns of reality and verifiable details, but also a subjectivity on the part of the author to explore context and consequences. Literary journalists, he explains, are not so much driven by journalistic trends or considerations of newsworthiness as by an interest in the human experience:

[L]iterary journalism . . . conveys impressions, ideas, and emotions and draws upon themes and motifs identified by the writer and revealed in the details of an event or in the manners, morals, and actions of people. . . . Because literary journalists have a different purpose than mainstream journalists, the facts and particulars they gather are largely different from those found in mainstream journalism. (6)

Further clarifying the form of literary journalism, Hartsock lists specific constitutional criteria of the form, including dialogue, scene construction, concrete detail, a description of activity, careful word selection, tropology, and a textual presence of the subjectivity of the author. Like Connery, Hartsock emphasizes that literary journalism inherently springs from the journalistic function, with a focus on reporting.

Journalist Mark Kramer adds to the understanding of literary journalism and a study of Samuel Bowles by devoting greater attention to the voice of the author. Kramer states that literary journalists alternate between a narrative mode and direct address to the reader. This “mobile stance,” according to Kramer, is another feature of literary journalism by which an author “repeatedly looks directly at the reader, comments, digresses, brings in associative material, background, previous events—not necessarily personal ones—then reengages the story” (31). By adopting a personal voice, a journalist couples his professional discipline with a personal sensitivity. Like Connery and Hartsock, Kramer emphasizes the importance of accuracy and understanding, based on thorough research and investigation. Journalists accomplish this in several ways, according to Kramer, including immersion in the world they are investigating, communication with traditional and nontraditional sources, and research into the broadest

causes and consequences. With an eye toward the larger life lessons which can be drawn from a story as well as stylistic considerations for the writing, journalism quickly becomes literary.

### *Historical Overview of Literary Journalism*

With attention focused on twentieth-century journalists such as Norman Mailer,<sup>95</sup> Truman Capote,<sup>96</sup> Joan Didion,<sup>97</sup> and Tom Wolfe,<sup>98</sup> whom many consider to embody the “new” journalism, scholars tend to look to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for the seeds of the modern literary journalism. John C. Hartsock claims that literary journalism first appeared between 1870-1914, perhaps in reaction to the emergence of standards of objectivity so central to modern journalistic practice. Students of literature will also note that the naissance of literary journalism coincides with the realist and naturalist movements in literature. Authors such as Stephen Crane and Jack London, known today primarily as writers of fiction, are, not surprisingly, also listed among early literary journalists. Thomas B. Connery notes that their new, literary style explains why Crane’s articles, for instance, “were labeled ‘studies’ or ‘travels’ or ‘stories’ or ‘scenes’ when they appeared in newspapers: such prose no longer fit the content requirements of conventional newspaper accounts” (8).

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<sup>95</sup> Norman Mailer (b. 1923) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning American novelist, journalist, playwright, screenwriter, and film director. He was one of the founders of *The Village Voice* in 1955 and is the author of many famous works, including *The Executioner's Song* (1979).

<sup>96</sup> Truman Capote (1924-84) wrote non-fiction, stories, novels, and plays, including *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958) and *In Cold Blood* (1965), which he labeled a "non-fiction novel."

<sup>97</sup> Joan Didion (b. 1934) is known as a journalist, essayist, and novelist. Some of her works include *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968) and *The White Album* (1979).

<sup>98</sup> Tom Wolfe (b. 1931) is a best-selling author and journalist whose works include *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) and *The Right Stuff* (1979).

With a somewhat different perspective, Karen Roggenkamp explores the new journalism as it blossomed in the 1890s, with special emphasis on the literariness of pieces in the *New York Sun*, the *New York World*, and the *New York Journal*. Like Hartsock, Roggenkamp theorizes literary journalism according to a model which strongly resembles realistic fiction. But because the new journalism “narrated the news with an eye toward character, plot, setting, dialogue, dramatic pacing, and other literary elements,” it often took the form of what we now refer to as the sensationalist press or yellow journalism (xiii). Roggenkamp notes that expectations for journalism differed in the nineteenth century in a way that predisposed readers to embrace a narrative form of news. She quotes an 1894 advice manual for aspiring journalists, for instance, which suggested, “If you have a simple, sensible, breezy style with a sparkle in it, the newspaper reader will forgive a great deal of inaccuracy in your matter” (qtd. in Roggenkamp xiii).

Roggenkamp’s work invites consideration of a wide array of nineteenth-century writing for inclusion in the catalogue of literary journalism, many of which have traditionally been placed in the literary categories of fiction and nonfiction. Mark Twain’s *Roughing It* (1872), which Jack A. Nelson places among the outstanding examples of early literary journalism, is an example of this type of genre-bending text. Variousy categorized as fiction, humor essay, travel literature, personal narrative, or semi-autobiography, *Roughing It* can find a comfortable home in the category of literary journalism, which embraces the breadth of Twain’s style. “A natural and fluid connection existed between literature and journalism in terms of style and profession,” Roggenkamp writes, “and editors and reporters alike self-consciously reinforced the ideas

that one textual venue bled into the other and that the pages of the newspaper contained within them a particular literary aesthetic” (xiv).

Twain, Henry David Thoreau, and Augustus Baldwin Longstreet are among the nineteenth-century writers who have been cited among the precursors to modern literary journalism. Hartsock includes works such as Twain’s *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) and *Innocents Abroad* (1869), Thoreau’s *Cape Cod* (1865), and Longstreet’s *Georgia Scenes* (1835) as relevant examples. Interestingly, both Thoreau’s and Longstreet’s works were initially published in newspapers. Also included are writers such as Rebecca Harding Davis (“Life in the Iron-Mills,” 1861) and Hamlin Garland (*Main-Travelled Roads*, 1891).<sup>99</sup> Hartsock emphasizes the parallels between literary journalism and literary genres of realism and naturalism, although he stipulates that “the techniques of literary realism and naturalism were long practiced in nonfiction narrative forms—including premodern narrative literary journalism” (46).

Though they are few, the predecessors of these nineteenth-century writers have not been entirely neglected. Kevin Kerrane identifies Daniel Defoe as “a great factual storyteller, perhaps the first true modern literary journalist” (17). He cites pieces like *The Storm* (1704), the “first modern work of ‘disaster journalism,’ ” according to Kerrane and Yagoda; and *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725), a tract on executed criminal Jonathan Wild. Kerrane also cites James Boswell for *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) with its fully developed scenes, conversation, and the author’s full immersion in the action—even to the point of manipulating events for the sake of his story. Hartsock also includes Boswell in the

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<sup>99</sup> Davis (1831-1910) is considered a pioneer of literary realism for her writing about the plight of women, African Americans, immigrants, and other groups. Garland (1860-1940) was a novelist, essayist, and short story writer. He won a Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1922 for *A Daughter of the Middle Border*.

circle of early literary journalists, but excludes *Tatler* and *Spectator* editors Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele, who wrote, he claims, in a discursive rather than a literary mode.<sup>100</sup> Although Connery cites Defoe as a precursor of literary journalism for his fictionalized works such as *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) and acknowledges that related examples can be found in periodicals from the 1840s, he names Mark Twain as the earliest example of a prolific and consistently literary journalist (xii).

Whether or not Twain and the others should be considered full-fledged literary journalists or merely “precursors” is unsettled, but the continuing debate concerning a pedigree for literary journalism certainly indicates a need to examine more closely the field of candidates and forms which might qualify. Based on criteria suggested by Connery, Kramer, and other scholars of literary journalism, I believe a case can be made that many of the essential characteristics of Samuel Bowles’s *Across the Continent* and comparable works of epistolary journalism qualify as literary journalism.

Sam Bowles provides a unique case study because of his unconventional approach to journalism and his motivation for this series of letters in particular. As a proponent of a new objective journalism, independent of the biases and constraints of political affiliation, Bowles was an innovator in style and perspective, so when it came to finding a form which could adequately communicate the story he saw unfolding during his trip across the continent, Bowles did not feel restricted to traditional newspaper forms. Like other late-nineteenth-century and twentieth-century examples of literary journalism, the *Across the Continent* letters demonstrate the transformation of information into a literary text by use of narrative and rhetorical techniques generally

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<sup>100</sup> By discursive, Hartsock refers to writing that carries many of the features of literary journalism, but which lacks a unified narrative structure.

associated with fiction. Character and scene development, an attention to detail, a variety of literary forms, attention to word selection and sentence construction, the foregrounded subjectivity and involvement of the author in the story—all are present in Bowles's letters. At the same time, Bowles does not abandon the reportorial function, as evidenced by extensive passages on topics such as mining, culture, and transportation, which will be explored below. Scholars of literary journalism emphasize the author's intentions to stimulate informed feelings in their readers and to represent ideas or a philosophy which exists beyond the facts of a story. And epistolary journalism was the form which allowed Bowles to do this.

#### *The Epistolary Journalism-Literary Journalism Connection: Content*

A significant overlap exists between the content enabled by epistolary journalism and the content expected of literary journalism. Scholars of literary journalism examine how the form encourages an association of literary features—such as character development, scene development, detail, and dialogue—with information derived from reporting techniques. Rather than simply reporting the news and related information, literary journalists seek to create a sensory and experiential context for the news. By accommodating detailed description as well as objective information, the epistolary journalism form can also accomplish this goal.

One reason scholars of literary journalism may hesitate to include epistolary journalism in the lineage of the form, however, is the succession of subject matter within each letter. As discussed in Chapter Two, newspaper letters can be characterized by an oscillation among many of the same topical elements as personal correspondence. Such



topics may include recent events and future plans, updates on mutual friends, rich descriptions of landscape, gossip, stories, and the quotidian details of daily life. By alternating between various topics within the letter, scholars might argue, Bowles is writing in a discursive rather than a narrative mode—comprising a miscellany of topics without a unified narrative line or overarching discursive goal.

I would suggest, however, that the range of subject matter comprised by each letter and by the letters as a corporate whole does indeed support an overarching narrative of the trip and the story of a nation. In his prefatory letter to Schuyler Colfax, in fact, Bowles characterizes the book as a “story” (v). When Bowles illustrates the discomforts of the stagecoach or the prices of commodities carried by the stage lines, for example, he is not making isolated small talk; he is contributing to a narrative about the need for a transcontinental railroad. When he describes a new or prospering town, or when he discusses successes in agriculture or mining, Bowles is not making arbitrary comments; he is encouraging settlement and investment in the West. And when Bowles introduces familiar names or represents the West in terms of the East, he is actually writing a narrative of nationhood. I would also indicate that in the context of a trip across the continent, a multiplicity of themes is the only way, in fact, to create a coherent and accurate depiction of the nation. Like the trip itself, the nation is comprised of many people, places, cultures, foods, markets, and landscapes—all of which can be integrated into the letters. An attempt to represent the experience through a discursive isolation of topics may have proven inadequate. The letters, in this view, would be interpreted as portions of a larger, unified narrative, comprising the whole experience of the transcontinental trip. In fact, Bowles states in his prefatory letter to Schuyler Colfax that,

despite his summer-long efforts to learn and convey an experience of the continent, “yet it were impossible adequately to represent all the strange features, all the rare capacities of this new half of our Nation.” And after thirty-two letters, he finds “a margin still against me,” with much more to tell than the pages of the letters would permit (ix).

Bowles’s *Across the Continent* letters abound in passages that harmonize with expectations for the content of literary journalism, particularly through attention to scene construction, concrete details, dialogue, and thorough reporting. Chapter Three argues that one of the ways Bowles continually inscribes a presence with his readers is by positioning himself as their eyes and ears in the West. To make this possible, he must construct scenes and events through copious details and vivid imagery. To adequately construct a multivalent experience for his readers—whether in a dingy tavern, within a mine shaft, or atop a mountain—Bowles incorporates multisensory information, concrete details, and narrative action. In letter two, for instance, relating the party’s passage across the Great Plains, Bowles constructs an image that includes variegated sensory and experiential components for the reader. Details of the topography, the feel of the breeze and the sun, the hunger of empty stomachs, and the appearance of the sunset complement elements of action: scampering wildlife, constantly passing wagoners and tradesmen, and, notably, a fiery, gusting, drenching storm:

First came huge, rolling, ponderous masses of cloud in the west, massing up and separating into sections in a more majestic and threatening style than our party had ever before seen in the heavens. Then followed a tornado of wind. Horses, coach and escort turned their backs to the breeze, and bending, awaited its passing. . . . Next fell the hail, pouring as swift rain, and as large and heavy as

bullets. The horses quailed before its terrible pain. . . . [I]t bit like wasps, it stunned like blows. . . .

The scene illustrates Bowles's literary-style scene construction and precise attention to detail—features common to works of literary journalism.

Other passages similarly illustrate similar construction. In letter twenty-five, Bowles's description of the geysers in California, discussed in Chapter Three, for example, includes colors, textures, temperatures, smells, sounds, topography, and the resulting physiological effects of a walk in the steamy, malodorous air (279-82). In another example, found in letter twenty-seven, Bowles describes conditions in what seems to be an underground city during an unnerving excursion into the Gould and Curry mine:

Many of the chambers or streets were deserted; in others we found little coterie of miners, picking away at the hard rock, and loading up cars of the ore . . .

Some of the chambers had closed in after being worked out of ore . . . but many of the open passages were stayed or braced open still with huge frame work of timber. . . . And in many of the passages, such is the outward pressure into the vacuum, that these timbers, as big as a man's body, are bent and splintered almost in two. Great pine sticks, eighteen inches square, were thus bent like a bow, or yawned with gaping splinters; and the spaces left in some places for us to go through were in this way reduced so small that we almost had to crawl to get along. (318)

Another type of scene is constructed in letter thirty-two aboard ship as Bowles and his companions, beginning their trip home, head south from California:

The weather . . . grows hot; flannels come off; . . . the close and crowded state-rooms turn out their sleepers on to the cabin floors, the decks, everywhere and anywhere that a breath of air can be wooed; . . . you have to pick your way at night about the open parts of the ship, as tender visitor to battle-field at Gettysburg. The languor of the tropics comes over you all; perspiration stands in great drops, or flows in rivulets from the body; a creamy, hazy feeling possesses the senses; working is abandoned; reading becomes an effort; card-playing ceases to lure; dreaming, dozing and scandal-talking grow to be the occupations of the ship's company,—possibly scandal-making, for the courtesans become bold and flaunt, and the weak and impudent show that they are so. (373-74)

In this passage, Bowles chooses to convey content that is not so much factual as experiential. Bowles constructs the scene not as a momentary snapshot but as a living, sensory experience that readers can reconstruct for themselves. Surely, in the absence of universal air conditioning, readers in 1865 could respond to “a creamy, hazy feeling,” for instance, with some degree of familiarity.

Attention to character development is another feature of fiction which can distinguish literary from traditional journalism and which is facilitated by the epistolary form. Bowles does a remarkable job creating impressions of the people he meets along the route—from the fiery Mormon vigilante Porter Rockwell, to the widely-respected Oregon pioneer Jesse Applegate<sup>101</sup>; from the penurious but beloved General Fremont, to

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<sup>101</sup> Jesse Applegate (1811-88), a pioneer to Oregon during the Great Migration of 1843, was a highly-respected citizen and active in local politics. In letter seventeen from Portland, Bowles wrote, “Oregon ought surely to send Jess Applegate to Washington, and the general testimony is that she would, were he

the mythic Brigham Young and the other Mormon leaders. Bowles is also careful to paint complex portraits of his traveling companions. It was standard fare of travelers to describe their companions in their personal letters, and also a liberty journalists can take in the literary journalism form. In letter four, with attention to both his responsibilities as a journalist as well as his prerogative within the epistolary form to express subjectivity, Bowles offers his personal impressions of the men as well as objective information, beginning with Speaker Colfax:

Mr. Colfax is short, say five feet six, weighs one hundred and forty, is young, say forty-two, has brownish hair and light blue eyes, is a childless widower, drinks no intoxicating liquors, smokes *a la* General Grant, is tough as a knot . . . and is the idol of South Bend and all adjacencies. . . . He certainly makes friends more rapidly and holds them more closely than any public man I ever knew; wherever he goes, the women love him, and the men cordially respect him; and he is sure to be always a personal favorite, even a pet, with the people. (45-46)

Bowles describes Lieutenant-Governor Bross primarily in terms of his relationship with his companions. Bross is “cheery in temperament, enjoying rough, outdoor life like a true, unspoiled child of Nature; . . . enthusiastic for all novel experience, we all give him our heartiest sympathy and respect and constitute him the leader of the party.” The profile is thoroughly laced with Bowles’s characteristic humor and personal observations. He calls Bross “our best foot” whom “we always put . . . foremost, whether danger, or dignity, or fun is the order of the occasion.” Because Bowles is writing in a familiar epistolary mode within the form of the newspaper letter, he relates a standing

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not so implacably hostile to all the helping arts of politician and place-seeker, which is of course only another reason why she should do what she yet does not” (177).

joke of the party: “Governor Bross was born in New Jersey,—and so says he never can be president, as the Constitution requires that officer to be a native of the nation” (46-47).

The third member of the party, journalist Albert Richardson, a Civil War hero and a past participant in the wild life of the Old West, is depicted romantically:

[Richardson] does not chew tobacco, disdains whiskey, but drinks French brandy and Cincinnati Catawba, carries a good deal of baggage, does not know how to play poker, and shines brilliantly among the ladies. He is a young widower of less than thirty-five, of medium size, with a light complexion and sandy hair and whiskers, and is a very companionable man. (48)

Descriptions of the party, then, come full circle to Bowles himself, but the author demurs with a rhetorical sleight-of-hand: “Looking-glasses are banished from overland baggage, and the fourth member of the party must, therefore, remain unsketched” (49).

Another of the characteristics which distinguish literary from traditional journalism is an incorporation of dialogue. Extended dialogue is not common in *Across the Continent*, although more limited quotes appear regularly. But an extended discussion between Brigham Young and Schuyler Colfax does appear in letter eleven, integrating dialogue with Bowles’s voice.<sup>102</sup> The exchange is presented without the use of quotation marks, beginning with Young’s inquiry concerning the government’s intentions for the Mormons and polygamy:

The Speaker replied that he had no authority to speak for the government; but for himself, if he might be permitted to make the suggestions, he had hoped the prophets of the church would have a new revelation on the subject, which would

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<sup>102</sup> *New York Herald* publisher Horace Greeley spoke with Brigham Young in 1859 and published what has come to be regarded as the first “interview” story in the American press.

put a stop to the practice. . . . Mr. Young responded quickly and frankly that he should readily welcome such a revelation; that polygamy was not in the original book of the Mormons; that it was not an essential practice in the church, but only a privilege and a duty, under special command of God. . . . (111-12)

Bowles incorporates additional speakers as the dialogue continues:

The discussion, thus opened, grew general and sharp, though ever good-natured. Mr. Young was asked how he got over the fact that the two sexes were about equally divided all over the world, and that, if some men had two, five, or twenty wives, others would have to go without altogether. His reply was that there was always a considerable proportion of the men who would never marry, who were old bachelors from choice. But, retorted one, are there any more of such than of women who choose to be old maids? Oh yes, said he, most un gallantly; there is not one woman in a million who will not marry if she gets a chance! (112-13)

Shorter passages conveying dialogue appear occasionally throughout *Across the Continent* as part of narrative passages. “Look at your watch,” stage driver Clark T. Foss told the Colfax party before a treacherous mountain descent described in letter twenty-five. “When we wondered at Mr. Foss for his perilous and rapid driving down such a steep road,” Bowles continues, “he said, ‘Oh, there’s no danger or difficulty in it,—all it needs is to keep your head cool, and the leaders out of the way’” (280). Following a discussion of the status of women in the West, appearing in letter twenty-eight, Bowles quotes a local resident: “‘It is the cussedest place for women,’ said an observant Yankee citizen, some two or three years from home, and not forgetful yet of mother, sister and

cousin,—‘a town of men and taverns and boarding-houses and billiard saloons’” (324). And in letter twenty-seven, from Austin, Nevada, where Bowles and his companions were to stay for only three days, he relates a discussion with local residents which led to a series of expeditions into the local mines: “But [three days] is nothing, said the disappointed people; you can’t begin to see our mines in that time; you better have staid away. Well, come on, was the reply; show us what you can in three days, and then let us see what is left that is new and strange” (316).

Finally, scholars of literary journalism agree that even when content includes extended descriptions of scene and character and narrative structures, the form is grounded in solid reporting. In his introductory letter to Speaker Colfax, Bowles states his reportorial goals, that his intention in undertaking the trip was to see, study, and describe the country “to acquit ourselves more intelligently, . . . each in our duties to the public,—you in the Government, and we as journalists” (iii-iv). Bowles states that he was particularly qualified for the duty because he brought interest, enthusiasm, “and the trained eyes and ears and the educated instincts of journalism” (v). *Across the Continent* bears considerable evidence of Bowles’s reportorial acumen. Historical background is woven into the story; he seeks out developments which are timely and relevant; he pursues interviews from multiple sources; he thoroughly presents information, even when it conflicts with his personal opinions; and he cites sources when appropriate.

Bowles’s more formal, reportorial voice generally signals those moments when he is focusing on his reportorial responsibilities, but even then Bowles does not lose sight of his larger narrative. Extended discussions of mining, economics, communication, and other topics are regularly integrated into Bowles’s narrative. Mark Kramer expects such



digressions in literary journalism. He states that the author may bring related material and background information to the midst of his or her story. It is one of the ways Bowles can adequately convey the largely unfamiliar information concerning the West, and another way story determines form. Following four unusually lengthy paragraphs on the mining industry in letter twenty-seven, for instance, Bowles abandons the reportorial voice for that of the intimate correspondent and pulls his text away from the reportorial and back to narrative. Bowles resumes the story by inscribing an image of the readers: “Do not complain, my reader, that this letter is getting dull with dry fact and statistics; consider the mass of figures and ‘disgusting details’ that I have before me, and have spared you, and be grateful” (315).

Bowles’s “truth claim,” in the words of John Hartsock, is both explicit and implicit, resting in his public intentions for the trip and in the use of a first person voice that positions him as witness and the text as testimony. The letters, he writes in his prefatory letter, “serve . . . to convey true ideas of the country we passed through” (ix). The truth claim of his narrative rests, furthermore, on his responsibility to communicate accurately to his readers. He speaks of the “independence and integrity” he brought to the project and dispels any notion of a hidden or selfish agenda (v). He also states that his obligation to speak truthfully to eastern readers was not displaced by an obligation to speak flatteringly of people in the West. They “need nothing but the Truth,—none of them asked us to tell other than the Truth” (ix).

*The Epistolary Journalism-Literary Journalism Connection: Language*

A link between epistolary journalism and literary journalism can also be demonstrated in the author's freedom in the use of language. The literary and epistolary forms liberate authors from dominant forms of journalistic writing to select and arrange words for literary effect more than for traditional journalistic conciseness. These forms allow for the integration of other literary forms, including poetry, narrative, and figurative language. These forms, as well as careful word selection and even, at times, a poetic sensitivity to sound and cadence, characterize Bowles's letters from *Across the Continent*. In letter eighteen, Bowles inscribes the beauty of the Columbia River valley through metaphor and personification:

River and rock have striven together, wrestling in close and doubtful embrace,  
—sometimes one gaining ascendancy, again the other, but finally the subtler  
and more seductive element worrying its rival out, and gaining the western  
sunshine, broken and scarred and foaming with hot sweat, but proudly  
victorious, and forcing the withdrawing arms of its opponent to hold up eternal  
monuments of its triumph. (185-86)

In letter sixteen, Bowles delivers his impressions of another breathtaking natural scene, Lake Tahoe, with metaphorical language and a literary allusion to Shakespeare:

The surging and souging of the wind among the tall pines of the Sierras came  
like sweetest music, laden with memories of home and friends and youth. Brass

bands begone, operas avaunt! . . . All human music was but sound and fury  
signifying nothing, before such harmonies of high nature.<sup>103</sup> (165)

Rich, compound adjectives mark a nostalgic passage in letter twenty, examined in Chapter Two, that was written as Bowles prepared to leave Washington Territory. To compare the mild climate of the Northwest to that of New England, Bowles uses language loaded with emotive images like “our slow, hesitating, coying spring times” and “our luxuriously-advancing, tender, red and brown autumns.” Metaphorical constructions—such as “the delicately fretted architecture of the leafless trees” and “the nerve-giving tonic of the air”—reinforce the literary dimension of the passage (212).

And, lest we think his selections accidental or convenient, Bowles comments on language in a letter to his friend Charles Allen,<sup>104</sup> dated November 23, 1865, written during the process of compiling the letters for publication. Responding to Allen’s suggestions for revision to the text, Bowles reveals his careful consideration in choosing each word:

Webster has it *transhipped* and *fullness*, and so the book. Don’t you hope to deprave us up here with your ancient spelling! “Unkempt” I used in the broader sense that is coming over it, of slouching and untidy . . . . But I can’t give up “aboundingness.” I know it is new, but it fits, and “abundance” doesn’t. . . .

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<sup>103</sup> From *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5:

SEYTON: The queen, my lord, is dead.

MACBETH: . . . Out, out, brief candle!

Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more: it is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing.

<sup>104</sup> Charles Allen (1827–1913) was a Harvard-educated lawyer from Greenfield, Massachusetts, who served as the Massachusetts attorney general and on the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

You see I am not learned in grammar, syntax, and prosody; my ear and my habit are my only guides. (qtd. Merriam 2: 46).

Bowles's careful word selection is complemented by careful sentence construction evident in his description of a long, tedious stage ride through the Wasatch Mountains and into Echo Canyon in letter eight:

So we rolled rapidly through summer and winter scenes, with sky of blue and air of amber purity, and when the round moon came up out from the snowy peaks, giving indescribable richness and softness to their whiteness, we kept on and on, now up mountain sides, now along the edge of precipices several hundred feet high, down which the stumble of a horse or the error of a wheel would have plunged us; now crossing swollen streams, the water up to the coach doors, now stammering through morass and mire, plunging down and bounding up so that we passengers, instead of sleeping, were bruising heads and tangling legs and arms in enacting the tragedy of pop-corn over a hot fire and in a closed dish; and now from up among the clouds and snow, we tore down a narrow canyon at a breakneck rate, escaping a hundred over-turns and toppling on the river's brink until the head swam with dizzy apprehensions. (81)

Written in a single, very long, rhythmic sentence, Bowles's text structurally reproduces the motion of the stage and its effects on the travelers as they rolled on and up and along and down.

Mimesis of literary forms also characterizes Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters, comprising poetry, allegory, and narrative. As demonstrated in preceding passages, poetry seems to emerge from Bowles's pen regularly, particularly with regard

to the passing landscape. Spectacular scenery or dramatic manifestations of nature's power—such as the hail storm discussed earlier—are regularly conveyed through poetically-styled language. But it is not limited to the grandiose subject; even the alkali dust of the desert beyond the Salt Lake Valley, which Bowles characterizes in letter fourteen as “thick and constant and penetrating beyond experience and comparison,” is fodder for the poetic muse: “It filled the air,—it was the air; it covered our bodies,—it penetrated them; it soared to Almighty attributes, and became omnipresent. . .” (136). With effective economy, Bowles relies on poetic language to convey the intensity—and intimacy—of an experience with alkali dust.

Brief and extended narrative digressions, which are a common element in private correspondence, are regular features of Bowles's letters. Letter fifteen begins with an allegory of the birth of Nevada:

California, mature at eleven, plants a colony in 1859-60, which ripens into a new State in 1864. Nevada is the first child of California. As bachelor uncles and fond friends sometimes think children are born in order to wheedle them out of silver cups; so Nevada sprang into being under like metallic influence. And if she promised to give, rather than to get, she fails yet to keep full faith. . . .

(141)

Another example appears in letter thirteen to complement Bowles's assessment of the conditions of women within Mormon society. The story works as a type of parable to illustrate Bowles's perspective. Bowles depicts “a clerk or other man, with similar limited income, who has yielded to the fascinations and desires of three or four women, and married them all.” This man, Bowles suggests, might “[make] his home with number

one” while the rest live elsewhere, eking out a living however they can. And each wife, Bowles suggests, would seek to be as charming and generous as possible during his visits “so that her fraction of the dear sainted man may be multiplied as much as possible” (125).

Appearing in letter fourteen is an example of Bowles’s longer narrative digressions, the story of Hank Monk, a noted stage driver who had memorably delivered Horace Greeley across rough stage roads in 1859. The story was offered as consolation to Bowles and his companions following an uncomfortable and bouncy ride, and Bowles transcribes it at length for his readers. When Greeley suggests that the stage make better time, the driver replied, “keep your seat Mr. Greeley, and I will get you through in time.” Bowles continues:

Crack went his [Monk’s] whip; the mustangs dashed into a fearful pace, up hill and down, along precipices frightful to look at, over rocks that kept the noted passenger passing frantically between seat and ceiling of the coach;—the philosopher soon was getting more than he bargained for; and at the first soft place on the road, he mildly suggested to the driver that a half an hour more or less would not make much difference. But Monk was in for his drive and his joke, and replied again, with a twinkle in his left eye, after a fresh cut at his mustangs, “Just keep your seat, Mr. Greeley, and you shall be through in time.”

By sharing a narrative which he describes as “classic with all the drivers and all travelers on the road,” Bowles capitalizes on the flexibility of literary journalism to more thoroughly extend the personal experience of the West to his readers (137-38).

*The Epistolary Journalism-Literary Journalism Connection: Authorship*

Personal, active, and subjective, the author is another principal link between epistolary journalism and literary journalism, and *Across the Continent* provides a useful case study. Chapters Two and Three explore the multivalent possibilities for authorship within the epistolary journalism form. And literary journalism, like epistolary journalism, represents a significant departure from expectations for authorship in traditional journalism, allowing for an author who is discursively present in the text and personally engaged with content. With an opportunity to engage and respond, the author inscribes voice and announces his or her presence through participation in the story.

Bowles is present in the *Across the Continent* letters at several levels. First, because the news was generated by his personal travels, his participation in the trip was an *a priori* condition of the text. As a travel writer, Bowles is inherently a reporter and a participant—a quality of the literary journalism form. Norman Sims, in fact, notes that travel writing and memoir, forms that were particularly popular in the nineteenth century, are “forms that traditionally allow writers more voice. Standard reporting hides the voice of the writer, but literary journalism gives that voice an opportunity to enter the story, sometimes with dramatic irony” (3).<sup>105</sup> As contemporary newspaper reports show, moreover, the trip itself really *was* news, with the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and three prominent public figures undertaking a dramatic venture. Eastern papers reported, initially, on the impending trip and, later, on the unfolding trip.

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<sup>105</sup> Sims suggests that travel writing is a form that has expanded the boundaries of literary journalism, and others suggest the new journalism should be more broadly interpreted to include various forms of nonfiction prose and personal memoir. Some possibilities include works of exploration such as George Catlin’s *Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians* (1841) and Clarence King’s *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1872), environmental works such as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), and nonfiction nature writing such as Annie Dillard’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974).

Newspapers across the country reprinted Bowles's letters, and thus each new stage of the trip contributed to public discourse.

Second, Bowles is also present in the text as an author because he writes in his particular voice or voices. As discussed in Chapter Two, a more formal, reportorial voice and a more informal, conversational voice are clearly discernable in Bowles's *Across the Continent*. Facilitated by the epistolary journalism form, the oscillation of these voices allows Bowles to assume the discursive tone that best communicates his story. These voices, unified by the discursive "I," are both inherently and distinctly voices of Sam Bowles. While the "I" is stabilized, it is disparately manifest, and operates as a "mobile stance"—to adopt the phraseology of Mark Kramer—that highlights the presence of the author and his perspective in the text. When using a personal, intimate voice, Kramer argues, the author assumes a narratory role:

The narrator of literary journalism has a personality, is a whole person, intimate, frank, ironic, wry, puzzled, judgmental, even self-mocking—qualities academics and daily news reporters dutifully avoid as unprofessional and unobjective. . . . The genre's power is the strength of this voice. (28-29)

While Kramer identifies the alternating authorial stances as a "narrative mode" and "direct address to the reader," I share his perspective that the oscillation of voices operates as a discursive tool that engages the reader. With epistolarity grounded in textual correspondence of one individual to another, direct address of the reader is an inherent part of the form, and a critical link with literary journalism. Previous chapters demonstrate how Bowles directly addressed his readers, using second person pronominal forms. Direct address contributed to a textually inscribed relationship of intimacy within



which Bowles could express, in the words of John Hartstock, a “heightened and at times foregrounded subjectivity” that distinguishes literary journalism (54).

One of the most anticipated portions of the trip, and one that inspired significant discourse among the public, was the party’s confrontation with the Mormons, which can be used to illustrate the variety of positions Bowles can take, even in a single letter. In addition to background information which he presents and the narrative account of his stay in Salt Lake City, Bowles also offers a subjective assessment of the experience, choosing language that clearly positions him as a subjective agent of perception. Letter eleven begins with Bowles’s personal reactions to his stay in Salt Lake City. “Our visit here closes in the morning,” he writes. “It has been very interesting, instructive and gratifying to us.” Phrases such as “to increase my appreciation,” “to evoke congratulations,” “to excite wonder,” and “to enlarge my respect” convey a personal subjective experience. Ironically, this personal response launches a letter that presents a candid, comprehensive assessment of the “Mormon question” and offers a prescription for the federal government in its dealings with the group in the future.

*Across the Continent*, in fact, is rich with examples that demonstrate how Bowles actively and subjectively enters the story—both implicitly, as a present witness and reporter, and explicitly, as a character in the action. As a witness and reporter, he brings the eyes and mind of an easterner to bear on scenes and events in the west. He can communicate and interpret these things in a way that is meaningful and resonant with his primarily eastern readers. As a character in the action, he can report with insight and sensitivity about the things going on around him. Bowles doesn’t just report on the Chinese dinner; he tells us what it looked, smelled, and felt like—or *feels* like, as he

attests that he is, at the time of writing, still “full of the subject.” Bowles doesn’t just talk about mining and the construction of a mine shaft; he tells us about psychological responses to fear and the physiological sensations of groping through the dark. Bowles doesn’t just report on the conditions of the road or the accommodations along the stage route; he tells us what it was like to be jostled, bumped and whipped along, and what really went bump—or squeak—in the night.

### *Conclusion*

When scholars go in search of a pedigree for twentieth-century literary journalism, epistolary journalism presents a tempting field for study. With proclivities toward narrative content, a liberal use of literary language and tropology, and an author who is present, active, and subjective, epistolary journalism encourages the communication of news that is not just limited to a who, what, where, and when, but of news that is also relevant to larger discourses. Literary and compelling, *Across the Continent*, in particular, should be considered part of the history of literary journalism, for the way it draws readers’ attention to social and political issues of enduring relevance and interest. Continuing study is necessary, however, to fully understand the contributions epistolary journalists may have made to epistolary journalism.

## CHAPTER 5

### WRITING A NEW NATION: INSCRIBING A DISCOURSE OF NATIONHOOD IN *ACROSS THE CONTINENT*

In letter sixteen, exactly half-way through *Across the Continent*, Samuel Bowles writes from San Francisco on July 4, 1865. It is an auspicious day. Having spanned the continent in seven weeks, Bowles took the opportunity to reflect on the trip as a whole. The trip had provided Bowles the opportunity to see the country from coast to coast, and, through the epistolary journalism form, to communicate an experience of continuity and unity to his readers. Indeed, with letters published in newspapers across the country, with thousands of copies of *Across the Continent* ultimately sold, and with an assured place in the public discourse of the post-Civil War years, Samuel Bowles helped turn the eyes of the nation upon itself:

Across the Continent! The Great Ride is finished. Fifteen hundred miles of railroad, two thousand of staging, again sixty miles of railway, and then one hundred and fifty miles by steamboat down the Sacramento River, and the goal is reached, the Continent is spanned. Seven weeks of steady journeying, within hail of a single parallel line from east to west, and still the Republic! Still the old flag,—the town is gay with its beauty to-day,—still the same Fourth of July,—better than all, still the same people, with hearts aglow with the same loyalty and pride in the American Union, and the same purpose and the same faith for its future. (159)

What Bowles saw, and what he wanted his readers to see and to know and to feel was a new and unified nation. He wanted them to mark an independence day, after years of

Civil War, that would embrace beneath the flag a single people, a single nation with a history and a future. Bowles himself believed the trip would promote a sense of nationalism and states this belief at the end of letter twenty-one. Colfax's journey, Bowles writes, "surely will be important and useful in intertwining the bonds of business and of political union, of profit and of patriotism, among the widely separated States of the Nation" (222). But Bowles's efforts, through his widely reprinted letters and thousands of copies of *Across the Continent*, preserved and transmitted images of nationalism in another way. With theoretical models of nationalism in mind, this chapter will consider passages in which Bowles directly articulates a philosophy of nationhood, as well as those passages in which he indirectly supports the work of ideological and economic nation-building through approaches to landscape, a profile of the citizenry, and challenges to national sovereignty. It will also discuss the ideological lynchpin and guarantor of Bowles's philosophy of nation, the transcontinental railroad. Building on a framework of epistolary and literary journalism, this chapter will explore how *Across the Continent* provided evidence of a new nationhood for the readers of 1865.

### *Inscribing Nation*

"A nation may be said to consist of its territory, its people, and its laws. The territory is the only part that is of certain durability. One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth forever. It is of the first importance." So Abraham Lincoln conceived of the nation in his State of the Union Address of 1862. But while the land provides the geographic boundaries for the United States, the lines on a map cannot make a nation. Residents have to manifest a sense of belonging and

recognize an ideology of nation before it can authentically exist. To explain this process and Bowles's role in articulating a new nation in 1865, this study, like many other scholarly approaches to nationalism, begins with Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Anderson argues that because a nation encompasses so many individuals into a corporate body, a sense of nationalism develops largely in the absence of those with whom an individual shares the nation. As a result, the ideologies and the relationships necessary for the genesis of nation must be imagined: "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6).

Historian Eric Hobsbawm supports Anderson's paradigm of the imagined community. Although it is imagined, Hobsbawm argues, the recognition of the community engenders a desire among citizens to seek out evidence of its existence: "Merely by dint of becoming a 'people,' the citizens of a country . . . found themselves seeking for, and consequently finding, things in common, places, practices, personages, memories, signs and symbols" (90). Armed with this evidence, individuals affirm and recreate in reality the community that was once merely imagined. Often what the members of a nation seek for—evidence of their nationhood—they find in written form. Pamphlets like Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776) and the United States Declaration of Independence, to cite just two prominent examples, can be perceived as textual documents that articulate an ideology of nationhood in which all citizens ostensibly have

a part. But these are only two examples of a large body of written discourse, including letters, through which the founding principles of the nation were defined.<sup>106</sup>

A place where the nation possibly first exists, therefore, is in the realm of ideas, and, consequently, it may first reveal itself in the pages of a newspaper. Benedict Anderson acknowledges a central role for the newspaper in the evolution of nationalism in several ways. First, it creates a rhetorical space shared by disparate populations within the nation. Second, it chronicles otherwise unrelated experiences as though they form a chronological narrative that is the imagined story of a nation. And third, it engenders a mass daily ceremony of shared consumption.<sup>107</sup> Along with the development of the novel in eighteenth century Europe, the newspaper, according to Anderson, played a central role in discerning the nation by “[providing] the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation” (24-25). As a result, a newspaper can be considered a place where the philosophy that informs a nation can be worked out.

By presenting and re-presenting an imagined community on behalf of that community, scholars seem to suggest, newspapers are important barometers of and laboratories for the business of nation-building. And as the process of nation-building

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<sup>106</sup> Epistolary journalism can represent one form of this discourse of nation. Elizabeth Hewitt argues, more specifically, that letter writing served to circulate political and philosophical thought among individual citizens, and that letter writing was used in the early Republic for theorizing social intercourse and therefore the new nation: “Early republic and antebellum American writers turned to the epistolary form (as both praxis and theory) as the generic form by which to engage topics of philosophical and political correspondence” (3).

<sup>107</sup> The morning newspaper ritual described by Anderson is striking and familiar: “The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing . . . creates this extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption (‘imagining’) of the newspaper-as-fiction. . . Each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. . . At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life” (35-36).

continues to evolve, the newspaper keeps pace, providing an evolving space for discourse. Historians regularly cite the rise of modern mass media—initially and particularly the newspapers—as a means by which American nationalistic images were disseminated and by which related discourses were triggered. While political theorists, clergymen, and educators advanced theories of nation from pens and podiums throughout the early years of the United States, for instance, newspapers brought those ideas to the people. Susan-Mary Grant states that the expansion of publishing and the rise of literacy in nineteenth-century America resulted in an environment in which the printed word was intimately incorporated into personal ideological and social discourses. According to Grant, “Political speeches, religious sermons, and public orations, were not only listened to by mass audiences but also widely reprinted in newspapers and periodicals, as well as appearing individually as pamphlets and collectively in anthologies and edited volumes” (9-10). Thus, even in a pre-electronic and pre-digital age, ideas and symbols could achieve remarkably broad circulation in printed form. Alexis de Tocqueville recognized this potential when he wrote, “[N]othing but a newspaper can drop the same thought into a thousand minds at the same moment” (202). In fact, Tocqueville acknowledged the power of widely disseminated ideas to construct an imagined community around common interests and paradigms: “[The press] rallies the interests of the community round certain principles, and draws up the creed of every party; for it affords a means of intercourse between those who hear and address each other, without ever coming into immediate contact.” When many newspapers adopt similar perspectives, Tocqueville believed, they have a tremendous influence on public opinion (94-95).

As the mass media circulates ideas and symbols related to the nation, it supplies individual citizens paradigms through which to understand their own lives as individuals and citizens. Eric Hobsbawm identifies the newspaper as the means by which “popular ideologies could be . . . standardized, homogenized and transformed,” but then stresses the role these ideologies play in structuring an individual’s relationship to the nation. Hobsbawm emphasizes the capacity of the mass media “to make what were in effect national symbols part of the life of every individual, and thus to break down the divisions between the private and local spheres, in which most citizens normally lived, and the public and national one” (141-42). Stuart Hall suggests that, as individuals incorporate nationalistic ideas into their ontology, those ideas carry the potential to profoundly alter or predict reality:

[T]he circle of dominant ideas *does* accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others; its classifications do acquire . . . the inertial authority of habit and instinct. It becomes the horizon of the taken-for-granted; what the world is and how it works, for all practical purposes. Ruling ideas may dominate other conceptions of the social world by setting the limit to what will appear as rational, reasonable, credible, indeed sayable or thinkable, within the given vocabularies of motive and action available to us. (44)

As individuals construct and convey a conception of nation in written texts, they organize a sense of nation that has the power to define reality for its individual members. To be a nation, then, citizens participate in and share imagined relationships that find their being in written works and public discourses, texts which carry the potential to construct reality.



*The State of the Union*

To understand the role Bowles played in articulating a truly national nationalism, it is helpful to explore the ideas of nation as they existed before the Civil War and the particular circumstances that made the country ripe for a discourse of nation in 1865. Antebellum conceptualizations of the nation were not clearly or consistently articulated. Merle Curti, a pioneer in the study of American patriotism, argues that sentiments known as nationalism prior to the Civil War were roughly equivalent to class and regional interests.<sup>108</sup> Disunity, which was clear between populations of North and South, was also exacerbated by the primary loyalty of many Americans to section and state and by staunch differences of opinion, even among northerners, on the question of abolition.<sup>109</sup> “The country had developed as a federation of small units, and local traditions and prejudices had left their imprint,” Curti states (159). For southerners, according to Anders Stephanson, nationalism “turned by degrees into a code word for oppressive majoritarianism” (30). The ideological strength of sectionalism before the Civil War, Stephanson argues, was accentuated by westward expansion, as battles over “slave” and “free” territories raged: “[T]he problem festered ominously, always present when admission of new states (one every 2.5 years on the average) or annexation of territory

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<sup>108</sup> Curti cites a writer in the *Continental Monthly* who declared, “to one, the Nation exists that he may make wooden clocks and sell them. To another, to get good crops to market, to another, to make money in stocks” (qtd. in Curti 161).

<sup>109</sup> Curti cites a letter of famed journalist and abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, who voiced her strong disapproval of the United States, so long as it tolerated slavery: “Unless it ceases from this iniquity, I say, deliberately and solemnly, ‘May the curse of God rest upon it! May it be trampled in the dust, kicked by the rebels, and spit upon by tyrants . . . . When it [the United States] treats the colored people with justice and humanity, I will mount its flag in my great elm tree . . . but, until then, I would as soon wear the rattlesnake upon my bosom as the eagle” (qtd. in Curti 150-51).

appeared on the political agenda” (29).<sup>110</sup> Once the war began, Lincoln’s 1863 proclamation also provoked a degree of white working-class antagonism toward the newly-emancipated slaves, who many feared would take jobs traditionally filled by poor whites. Another wartime challenge to nationhood was the low morale of many soldiers, whose letters periodically expressed resentment or even anger toward those not involved in fighting.<sup>111</sup>

The Civil War, however, sparked a transformation of the discourse of Union into a discourse of nation—a nationhood expressed in terms of destiny, divine intention, and moral principles—as northerners were mobilized for battle. In other words, language that represented the country as a “union of states” before the war, reflecting the dominant ideology of the time, was replaced by language that identified the country as a “nation” during and after the war. This rhetorical transformation was significant because it reflected a new ideology which, in the words of Eley and Suny, attained “the symbolic power to map or classify the world” for northerners (Eley and Suny 31n). At enormous personal and social costs, northerners were called to “defend the most essentially American value—the dignity of human life, the democratic participation of all men in the decisions that governed their destiny” (Curti 168). But while many espoused the principle of democracy, it was a difficult task to motivate northerners to sacrifice and

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<sup>110</sup> According to Susan-Mary Grant, “The Republican Party in the 1850s was engaged in, and was partly the result of, a process of national construction by which the American national idea became associated with the North in general and the Republican Party in particular” (9).

<sup>111</sup> Curti cites a letter of an enlisted working man, Elias Modlin, of March 29, 1863: “I would like to see those of my friends that are going to California: though it seems that they want to ‘flee in time of trouble.’ If a man is able to emigrate to California, it seems to me he might do something for the old flag.” (162, qtd from Leonard Brown, *American Patriotism* [Des Moines, 1869] qtd. in Curti 341). New York soldier Samuel Budd wrote on October 25, 1863, “I see by your note that there is considerable patriotism in you, but if you should serve one year in the ranks of the country’s defenders, your patriotism would be at a low ebb. We no longer look on it as a war for country but as a great speculation in which each one is trying to make as much as he can” (qtd. in Curti 162). New York volunteer Charles Benton wrote, “. . . [W]hoever announces that he enlisted because he loved his country is sure to become the target for the shafts of ridicule” (Matthews and Wecter 143).

fight to preserve a nation of which many had at best a nebulous conception. As a result, patriotic symbols and images were infused into national discourses during the Civil War. Melinda Lawson explores this phenomenon at length in *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (2002). Lawson states that patriotic discourses disseminated in the press contributed significantly to the nationalism of many Americans. Most notable, in her opinion, was Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address of November 19, 1863, which most Americans found reprinted in their local papers.<sup>112</sup> Patriotic treatises and broadsides were also common throughout the war, including Edward Everett Hale's *The Man Without a Country*, a short story published anonymously in the *Atlantic Monthly*, in 1863 (Lawson 63, 123-28).

Increasing attention to the idea of nation was also apparent in the writings of Civil War-era preachers, poets, and other intellectuals who urged and enshrined patriotic conceptions of the nation in effusive poetry, sermons, and books. Paul C. Nagel argues that the Civil War functioned as a national sacrifice by which the American conscience would be cleansed. Nagel cites Samuel L. Caldwell, future president of Vassar College, who predicted the war would evoke "a consciousness of nationality, of a Providential calling and destiny, something deeper than geography, or trade, or constitutional agreement, a soul of Americanism." The statement was part of a sermon on June 6, 1861, before a regiment of Rhode Island volunteers. Defending freedom, Caldwell told the

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<sup>112</sup> Although Lincoln's address was widely reprinted, it met with mixed reviews. The *Harrisburg* [Pennsylvania] *Patriot and Union* was clear in its disapproval: "We pass over the silly remarks of the President; for the credit of the Nation we are willing that the veil of oblivion shall be dropped over them and that they shall no more be repeated or thought of" (20 Nov 1863). Bowles's *Republican*, on the other hand, was complimentary: "Surprisingly fine as Mr. Everett's oration was in the Gettysburg consecration, the rhetorical honors of the occasion were won by President Lincoln. His little speech is a perfect gem; deep in feeling, compact in thought and expression, and tasteful and elegant in every word and comma. Then it has the merit of unexpectedness in its verbal perfection and beauty . . . Turn back and read it over, it will repay study as a model speech. Strong feelings and a large brain are its parents" (20 Nov 1863).

soldiers, would finally evoke “that mysterious sentiment of nationality” (136). In many texts, ideas of atonement and cleansing were ideologically connected to a sense of national destiny and hope, and an optimism which took hold of the nation in 1865. In his 1871 essay “Democratic Vistas,” Walt Whitman reflected on the power of the idea of nation to transform an abstraction into action: “The People of their own choice, fighting, dying for their own idea, . . . not for gain, nor even glory, nor to repel invasion—but for an emblem, a mere abstraction, for the life, for the safety of the flag.” Whitman notes that his Civil War experiences with wounded and dying soldiers in the Patent Office Hospital in Washington, D.C. provide him unusual insight into the true patriotism of the “unnamed, unknown rank and file” (Whitman 377).

Clearly, the idea of the nation had become an irresistible motivational force for many individual citizens. In his journal of 1864, Ralph Waldo Emerson comments on the ideological transformation of nation over the course of the war, as manifest in the dedication of the soldiers: “Before the War our patriotism was a firework, a salute, a serenade for holidays and summer evenings, but the reality was cotton thread and complaisance. Now the deaths of thousands and the determination of millions of men and women show it real” (Emerson 10: 79). Similarly, James Russell Lowell also wrote about the evolving nation which, he believed, had not been fully tested before the Civil War:

[W]hat splendid possibilities has not our trial revealed even to ourselves! What costly stuff whereof to make a nation! Here at last is a state whose life is not narrowly centered in a despot or a class, but feels itself in every limb; a

government which is not a mere application of force from without, but dwells as a vital principle in the will of every citizen. (Lowell, *Writings*, 5: 211-12)

The war, in the view of Lowell and others, was not only the means to protect the nation but also evidence of its ideological power.

Although effusive passages such as these tend to construct a simplified picture in place of what was really a complex and variable condition, the nation nevertheless did take on new importance for many Americans during the Civil War. As a result, the summer of 1865 dawned as a moment of renewed patriotism and optimism.<sup>113</sup> Americans looked to find meaning in their national sacrifice, and the ideologies expressed by national spokesmen—including Lincoln, Hale, and, as I will show, Samuel Bowles—were important formulations that helped Americans make sense of their experience. These discourses were crucial to the germination of renewed American nationalism. “References to ‘the Nation’ and ‘the great Republic’ filled the public prints of the time,” historian Morton Keller writes. “Publicists, intellectuals, and politicians indulged in a rhetoric of triumphant nationalism” (39). In Keller’s view, 1865 was the year in which nation and victory acquired precise rhetorical resolution. And, not surprisingly, he cites Samuel Bowles and his trip across the continent as the turning point in the discourse of nationalism. According to Keller, “The lesson of the seven weeks’ trip turned out to be the lesson of the Civil War” (39). Cleansed, sanctified, and re-

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<sup>113</sup> Melinda Lawson recalls the Grand Review of May 23-24, 1865, in which 150,000 northern troops paraded through Washington D.C. in an emblematic display of victory and nationhood. Despite an exclusion of black troops and a disparity in the appearance of the various regiments, the ideological import of the scene was powerful. Lawson writes, “The symbolism was unmistakable: a far cry from the ragtag collection of local boys who had presented themselves to their states for service in 1861, this disciplined, orderly army, now marching in synchrony down the streets of the country’s capital, represented the new American nation” (180).

imagined, the new nation set about the business of nation building with Samuel Bowles as a guide.

Bowles's letters, published in the *Springfield Republican* and across the country, added something to the discourse of nationalism that literary or philosophical writers might not necessarily add: *evidence* of the imagined community that was to be the new nation. Writing in the epistolary and literary journalism forms, Bowles personally entered the story of the developing nation, physically traversing its landscape, assessing its condition, meeting its citizenry, and imagining its future. He provided his readers with an eye-witness account of the nation, its resources, and its beauty. He provided all these things, and more, from an intentionally constructed position as a private correspondent which allowed him to establish an intimate relationship with his readers. As a journalist writing in the form of literary journalism, he could stake a claim for truthfulness and yet infuse his text with his personal opinions and observations.

It is within the text of *Across the Continent*—present and absent, personal and political, public and private—that Bowles inscribes a rhetorical place in which the new community of the nation could be imagined. For instance, while Bowles is physically absent from his readers, he creates a textual presence, as discussed in Chapter Two, that transcends the geography of the continent. As the eyes and the ears of his absent readers, he familiarizes the nation—in terms of its geography, citizenry, and other components—and nurtures a sense of community. Through a text in which personal and political discourses intersect, Bowles can draw political import for the nation from his personal experiences. As a citizen of the nation, Bowles writes to citizens of the nation; as a hopeful American, he writes to hopeful Americans. His personal experiences of the

nation become evidence for those looking to confirm the new conceptions of nation promulgated and necessitated by the sacrifices of the Civil War. And most dramatically of all, in its revision of public and private discourses enabled by the epistolary journalism form, within a relationship of intimacy between Bowles and his readers, and reinforced by recognition of familiar people and familiarized places, the text embodies the imagined community that Benedict Anderson calls a nation.<sup>114</sup>

To support his claim that Samuel Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters represented a turning point in the discourse of nationalism, Morton Keller cites only two examples. Keller cites, first, Bowles's introductory letter to Schuyler Colfax in which he writes, "[O]ur party were almost the first who had ever traveled Across the Continent simply to see the country, to study its resources, to learn its people and their wants, and to acquaint ourselves more intelligently, thereby, each in our duties to the public,—you in the government, and we as journalists" (Bowles, *Across the Continent* iii-iv). Keller also notes Bowles's comments upon arriving in San Francisco: "Greater the wonder grows at the extent of the Republic; but larger still our wonder at the mysterious but unmistakable homogeneity of its people" (159). The remainder of this chapter, however, will consider Bowles's work more thoroughly to determine how he articulates a new nationalism through passages pertaining to landscape, the citizenry, and challenges to national sovereignty.

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<sup>114</sup> As Elizabeth Hewitt argues, correspondence represents an alternation between absolute intimacy, in which the other is "co-extensive with our idea," and radical solitude, in which the other is "withdrawn from our sight" (56). To broaden this framework, we may draw in Emerson's concepts of self-reliance vs. oversoul; the underlying tension in American political thought of states' rights vs. federalism; and ideas of radical individualism vs. national fraternity, or *e pluribus unum*. "Friendship and love offer an ideal political model because, according to Emerson, in perfect friendship or love, there is ultimately no distinction between the interests of the one and the interests of the many" (Hewitt 63).

*Evidence Found: Landscape*

It may have been obvious to Americans in the nineteenth century, perhaps more so than to us today, that landscape was simultaneously the greatest barrier and the greatest promise of the nation. Since the days of the earliest European explorers to the New World, landscape has been at the heart of the story of the nation. It was more than territory demarcated on a map, however, that was, in Lincoln's words, "of certain durability," for ideologies of space, wilderness, and frontier are central constructions of America and Americanness. Whether they were explorers, visitors, captives, or settlers, those who wrote about their experiences of America often centered their narrative on personal experiences of the land.<sup>115</sup> Bowles's *Across the Continent* is, after all, fundamentally a journey narrative, as he and his companions retrace the steps of thousands of explorers, traders, pioneers, adventurers, and others who had gone before—albeit in less comfortable and secure conditions—mile by mile across the great North American continent.

Bowles believed that an accurate vision of America was rooted in a personal experience of the land, such as that provided by his trip across the continent in 1865. A land-centered ideology of Americanness is evident beginning with his first letter from the trail: "How this Republic, saved, reunited, bound together as never before, expands under such personal passage and footstep tread; how magnificent its domain; how far-reaching

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<sup>115</sup> In *The Journey Narrative in American Literature: Patterns and Departures*, Janis P. Stout explores basic patterns of American journey narrative, roughly corresponding in periods of ascendance to chronological historical eras. The five patterns are narratives of exploration and escape; the home-founding journey; the return; the quest; and lost and wandering. While Stout limits her consideration to works of fiction and poetry, her conclusions may and should be applied to works of literary nonfiction as well. For a thorough investigation of how these journey narratives often constructed the land as a female that was to be explored, conquered, mined, etc., see Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975).



and uprising its material, moral and political possibilities and promises!” (1) While Bowles demonstrates an appreciation for the aesthetic qualities of the natural landscape, the overriding theme of his letters is the unbounded potential of the land for future economic, social, and political development.

With his eastern readers in mind, and with an eye toward encouraging settlement and economic investment in the West, Bowles discusses the economics of landscape within a hierarchical structure of nation and nature, characterized by degrees of utility, productivity, safety, and value. His assessments uniformly reflect this hierarchy of civilized nation over wilderness, associating civilization with value-laden terminology such as “improvement” and “progress.” In letter two from Fort Kearney, Nebraska, for example, Bowles describes the crossing of the great plains, the “Central Desert of the Continent,” in economic terms: “No land could be richer; no sight could more deeply impress you with the measureless extent of our country, and its unimproved capacities, than that which has been steadily before us for these two days” (13). And while a casual observer may find the plains “almost uninhabitable” at first glance, Bowles lends a different perspective. The coarse grass which grows there, he tells his readers, is outstanding food for livestock, making the area a site of *deferred* economic value. “This is its present use and its future value,” he writes in letter three. “Then—when railroad shall supersede cattle and mules—it will feed us with beef and mutton, and give wool and leather immeasurable. Let us, then, not despise the Plains; but turn their capacities to best account” (19). The suggestion that the territory of the United States should be improved or somehow “turn[ed] . . . to best account” reflects Bowles’s perspective that while the

nation may be the “treasury of the world,” according to Abraham Lincoln, the responsibility lay with the land’s human inhabitants to make its highest potential a reality.

In many cases, this potential was to be realized by mining. Before the Colfax party departed on its trip across the continent, in fact, Lincoln instructed Schuyler Colfax to tell the miners “that I shall promote their interests to the utmost of my ability; because their prosperity is the prosperity of the Nation” (qtd. in Willard H. Smith 207).<sup>116</sup> For Bowles, too, mining was not only a procedure for extracting precious metals from the land but also an engine in the evolution of American civilization and a promise of nationhood. For readers, mining functioned as a metonymic representation of the process by which the American people would extract economic value from and on behalf of their nation, a process of funding national evolution on the foundation of the western landscape. Evidence was found in Colorado, where Bowles links mining with the evolution of civil society and a promise for the future of the entire nation. In letter four, Bowles describes the Colorado mining towns as “thriving, orderly, peaceable, busy, supporting two of them each its daily paper, with churches and schools, and all the best materials of government and society that the East can boast of” (34). Bowles sees a similar potential in the remote silver mines of Utah and predicts in letter nine that the state will offer an attractive opportunity for investment:

[E]re long such an interest and excitement in regard to [the mines] . . . will give Utah a new population and rapid growth, and place her among the first of the mining States. The antecedent, achieved development of higher agricultural

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<sup>116</sup> President Lincoln, in fact, met with Schuyler Colfax to discuss the trip just hours before he went to Ford's Theater on April 14, 1865. “Don't forget, Colfax,” the president said, “tell those miners that that is my speech to them [that western resources should be quickly developed], which I send by you. Let me hear from you on the road, and I will telegraph you at San Francisco. Pleasant journey and good bye” (qtd. in Smith 207).

capacities, her settled population and her gathered and organized civilization, will then prove of a great advantage and be properly appreciated. (97)

Like Colorado, Utah will become a valuable partner in nation-building as a result of its land-based development.

Bowles is clear, however, that for long-term sustainability, mining must be undertaken with order and restraint. He voices regret in letter twenty-seven for irresponsible mining practices in California, where the exploding gold industry has brought damage to the surrounding environment: “Tornado, flood, earthquake and volcano combined could hardly make greater havoc, spread wider ruin and wreck, than are to be seen everywhere in the path of the larger gold-washing operations” (308). In letter thirty, he offers a word of caution: “No investments, I repeat, should be made in mines in this region, except after the most intelligent and complete study of the whole subject . . .” (349). Understanding that some easterners have been the victims of fraud associated with western mines, Bowles reassures them that proper inquiries will result in profitable investments.

The economic value of the nation’s land, according to Bowles, could also be secured by other processes, particularly agriculture. When Bowles and his party approached the Mormon settlement at the Great Salt Lake from Fort Bridger in northeastern Utah, for example, he found the region to be distinguished by surprising agricultural productivity. In letter eight, Bowles describes the region as an amalgamation of the natural and the civilized, “marked wonderfully by nature, and marked now as wonderfully in the history of civilization by its people, their social and religious organization, and their material development” (79). Bowles credits thoughtful human

settlement with the blossoming of the valley. In fact, Bowles spends a portion of letter fourteen relating theories that propose ecological modification of the region as a result of its human settlement. Bowles refers to some theorists who “contend that with the occupation and use of the country, rains will multiply”—and he suggests that “the observations of the Mormons give a faint encouragement to this idea” (138). In letter twenty-nine from California, Bowles writes of his surprise at the size and abundance of fruits and vegetables, although “the fastidious Yankee, who never forgets his home or his mother’s pies and preserves, insists that the quality of the fruit and vegetables is below that of the productions of the orchards and gardens of the Middle States and New England. . .” (337-38). In California, Bowles and his companions also visit vineyards—of as many as five thousand acres of land and a million vines—and farms harvesting grain in quantities that would “astound an Eastern farmer.” In letter twenty-five, Bowles lists specific statistical examples of grain harvests and provides additional data on production of other agricultural products. “Nothing is wanting to the agriculture of California,” he writes, “but a steady and extensive market” (284, 285-87). Aware of hardships and adverse natural conditions which made initial development of western lands a profound challenge for many settlers and developers, Bowles nevertheless found evidence to show that the land was at the service of the nation and its enterprising citizens.

Despite a preference to express the value of landscape in economic terms, and despite overriding intentions of encouraging settlement and economic investment in the West, Bowles does reveal an appreciation of the natural world that appears to transcend economic considerations. Bowles provides his absent readers access to some of the

continent's most beautiful and impressive natural features, including the stark plains, the rolling prairies, the dominating Rockies, and especially the Yosemite Valley. His letters familiarized the landscape for his contemporary readers through a textual inscription of their presence with him in the West and with rhetorical connections to the East and Europe. By inviting his readers to participate in his personal experience of the changing landscape of the nation, Bowles nurtured a recognition of a contiguous, "unique land," in the words of Merle Curti, upon which the story of a unique people was formed and written.

Environmental historian Alfred Runte discusses the important role of journalists, like Bowles, and other writers who articulated images of western American landscapes for mid-nineteenth-century eastern audiences. In *National Parks: The American Experience*, Runte argues that the land not only united the nation in a physical sense but also constituted the foundation of an evolving national cultural heritage that was distinct from Europe. Runte's theory, known as monumentalism, suggests that spectacular landforms, found primarily in the American West, served as counterpoints to the ancient ruins and landmarks that visually marked the cultural heritage of Europe, providing Americans with a cultural heritage that was as grand as—and older than—that of Europeans. And because most Americans would never see their western monuments for themselves, Runte explains, they took possession of them through the popular works of explorers, artists and newspaper correspondents.

Not surprisingly, Runte lists Bowles among the "more articulate spokesmen" of this group and links Bowles's letters from the trip in 1865 to the evolution of monumentalism and broader nationalistic attitudes toward the landscape (12-13). Runte

also highlights the way that Bowles's use of familiar, "culturally-inspired" descriptions—one of the hallmarks of the epistolary journalism form—effectively introduced readers to the scenery of the West and encouraged support for preservation (20). Bowles's letter from Yosemite, perhaps, best illustrates this dynamic. The letter draws in aspects of epistolary and literary journalism that make it an extremely effective tool of communication: visual construction of the valley and its breathtaking features, comparisons to known landscapes of the East and Europe, literary language that allows Bowles to inscribe rhetorical representations, direct address, and assumption of the eyes and ears of the reader. "Only the whole of Switzerland can surpass it," Bowles writes of Yosemite. "[N]o one scene in all the Alps can match this before me now in the things that mark the memory and impress all the senses for beauty and for sublimity" (224). He writes that Yosemite's Nevada Falls is "the fall of falls,—there is no rival to it here in exquisite, various, fascinating beauty; and Switzerland, which abounds in Water-falls of like type, holds none of such peculiar charms" (229). Yosemite, Bowles believes, should and will be a source of pride for all Americans, and one which compares to the best Europe has to offer.<sup>117</sup>

Runte calls this sentiment scenic nationalism (20). Because of the way Bowles and others communicated the natural wonders of the continent, Runte claims, Americans could recognize a distinct and substantive contribution to world culture for the first time in their nation's history. "Although Europe's castles, ruins, and abbeys would never be eclipsed, the United States had 'earth monuments' ... that had stood long before the birth

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<sup>117</sup> Runte also notes that Bowles's perspective on natural preservation "demonstrates how cultural anxiety turned appreciation of the West into bona fide efforts to protect it" (13). When Bowles writes from Yosemite in letter twenty-two, for instance, he notes approvingly that Congress had ceded the remarkable territory to the state of California "for reservation and preservation as a spot for public resort and popular enjoyment" (223). Yosemite became a state park June 30, 1864, and a national park October 1, 1890.

of Christ,” Runte explains.<sup>118</sup> “Thus the natural marvels of the West compensated for America’s lack of old cities, aristocratic traditions, and similar reminders of Old World accomplishments” (22). This very sentiment can be found in Bowles’s letter twenty-two, when he traces the ancient origins of California’s big trees:

They began with our Modern Civilization; they were just sprouting when the Star of Bethlehem rose and stood for a sign of its origin; they have been ripening in beauty and power through these Nineteen Centuries; and they stand forth now, a type of the Majesty and Grace of Him with whose life they are coeval. (237)

Ancient, grand and—in Bowles’s perspective—analogue to Christ himself, the big trees were *living* monuments and a source of cultural pride for a nation of sacred destiny.

Runte’s historiographic approach to concepts of western landscape helps to clarify Bowles’s work in another way, for even when expressing an admiration of natural phenomena—“unimproved” as they might be—Bowles tends to anthropomorphically express the value of natural formations in terms of human science and architecture. The mountains of Yosemite, which Bowles compares to the Massachusetts Statehouse and Gothic cathedrals, are only one example. As his stage passes through Bridger’s Pass, from the Atlantic to the Pacific slopes of the Rockies, Bowles describes mountain walls that are “carved and fluted by wind and sand and rain into all and every shape that architecture ever created, or imagination fancied . . .” (74). Bowles finds the effects of high winds, blowing sands, and sharp rains to be “miracle-workers” but not miracles of

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<sup>118</sup> Runte uses Albert Richardson’s phrase “earth monuments” from his 1867 book *Beyond the Mississippi* (i).

nature with inherent value; instead, Bowles sees the magnificence of nature as it reflects structures created by humans:

[T]he tall, isolated rocks, that surmount a hill, sometimes round, but always even and smooth as work of finest chisel; the immense columns and fantastic figures upon the walls of rock that line a valley for miles; the solitary mountains upon the plain, fashioned like fortresses, or rising like Gothic cathedral, and called *buttes* . . . separated from their family in some great convulsion of nature; the long lines of rock embankment, one above another, formed sometimes into squares like a vast fort, and again running along for miles, a hundred feet above the valley, looking like the most perfect of railroad embankment, with the open space occasionally for a water course;—these and kindred original fashions of nature, with details indescribable and picturesque, constitute the sole redeeming feature for scenery of the country I have been describing, and are a constant excitement and inspiration to the traveler. (75-76)

In the search for a unique national identity, the natural monuments of the Western landscape were evidence found.

*Evidence Found: Citizenry*

Among the significant characteristics of the nation's landscape not yet discussed is the steady flow of human travelers, emigrants from the East looking for homes and traders and businessmen in long trains of wagons and carts. Traders and other businessmen described in letter two followed the settlers to mining and agricultural towns to bring supplies and conduct business. "Their numbers and the amount of goods they are



hauling, give you an idea of the magnitude and importance of the commerce across these Plains, that neither bare figures, nor parts of speech can impart” (15). Even more impressive, Bowles finds, are the wagons and carts of pioneers busily preparing for the trip West. In letter two, Bowles describes them as though they are setting off on a mythic journey: “As they move along in the distance, they remind one of the caravans described in the Bible and other Eastern books” (14). But farther along the trail, the picture is not so optimistic. “We pass with pity the emigrant’s slow wagon and the mule train,” Bowles writes, incredulous, in letter seven. “It is a wonder how people can go alive through this country at the rate of only twelve and fifteen miles a day, and finding food and drink as they go. But they do, year by year, thousands by thousands” (73).

The images Bowles draws of the pioneers, marking the nation with their footsteps on their way to the West, are just part of a larger ideology of citizenry articulated in *Across the Continent* that ties all Americans into the fabric of a national identity based on an experience of the land. Bowles’s descriptions of the citizenry foster a national identity by combating stereotypes of westerners, by establishing a relationship among all Americans, and by identifying a unified national character that embraces both East and West. In his very first letter, Bowles explains that he is impressed with America’s purpose-full people – growing only greater in personal power and activity as they grow fewer in numbers. We think our Yankee leaders have active brains and comprehensive hands; but the pioneers in the commerce and in the civilization of the West impress you as men of broader grasp and more intense vitality. The very breadth of their field expands them. (2)

Prominent among the many frontier settlers Bowles finds to admire are the miners of the Rocky Mountains, who “worked with the energy and enterprise of the American people, stimulated by the great profits sure to be realized from wise and persevering use of the opportunities” (41). With a citizenry such as this, Bowles claims in letter four, the full potential of the landscape—that is, a landscape paired with economic development and the accoutrements of civilization—will be realized for all Americans:

The western half of the American nation will fast move forward in civilization and population. . . . This wilderness will blossom as the rose, and the East and the West will stand alike equal and together, knowing no jealousy, and only rivaling each other in their zeal for knowledge, liberty and civilization. (41-42)

Bowles dedicated himself to strengthening very personal trans-continental relationships of individuals with the nation, both for easterners and westerners. As discussed in Chapter Two, when the writers of private letters mention familiar people whom they have discovered in remote locations, that naming functions to reinforce social ties among spatially- and temporally-severed communities. The letter-writer’s identification of an absent person initiates an intellectual reconnection of community embracing writer and reader, around the image of the absent individual. The invocation of familiar names, therefore, has the rhetorical potential to re-establish community among individuals of the East and the West who share neither physical nor temporal space. The potential for this invocation to establish an imagined connection among individuals is exponentially multiplied when the allusion is made in the context of a public newspaper letter, through which a community of writer, absent individual, and many recollecting

readers is reconstructed. In letter five, Bowles presents the imagined community as a sustainable and nurturing condition for all Americans:

Everywhere, too, I find old friends and acquaintances from the Connecticut valley; and nowhere do I find them forgetting old Massachusetts, or unworthy her parentage. . . . I see personal activity and growth and self-reliance and social development and organization, that not only reconcile me to the emigration of our young people from the East to this region, but will do much to make me encourage it. To the right-minded, the West gives open opportunity that the east holds close and rare; and to such, opportunity is all that is wanted, all that they ask. (50-51)

Challenging established stereotypes and fostering a sense of national fraternity, the new story Bowles writes for America incorporates westerners who were not distinct from but an integral part of the nation. The trajectory of settlement and development was clearly westward, and the steady flow of emigrants ensured expanded economic, cultural, and political influence for lands west of the Mississippi. As a result, it was essential for Bowles to incorporate westerners into an imagined community to write the story of a new nation.

Bowles's detailed descriptions of the people he finds in the West emphasize qualities which mark them not solely as emigrants or westerners but as "American." Early in his trip, Bowles introduces his readers to the renowned General Patrick Connor,<sup>119</sup> a man who represented the new nation, both in terms of its past and in terms of its future. "General Connor has a personal history characteristic of America," Bowles

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<sup>119</sup> Born in Ireland on St. Patrick's Day, Patrick Edward Connor (1820-91) was one of the most widely-known military men of the Old West, particularly renowned for his involvement in suppressing Native American attacks during the 1860s.

writes in letter three (27). Born in Ireland, Connor came to America as a child with his parents, enlisted in the military, worked as a miner and a farmer, re-enlisted, and rose to the rank of brigadier general, in charge of a significant portion of the territory of the West. Most important, Connor was regarded as a person who could bring order from chaos, a task with which the nation was wrestling, both on the level of political landscape as well as in the realm of ideology. Metaphorically a representative of the nation, in his personal history, but also a living representative of the nation as a military commander in the West, Connor was tasked with resolving the two great challenges of nationhood: Mormons and Indians. A believer in the manifest destiny of the nation and the potential of the people to make it a reality, Bowles was confident in Connor, whom he regarded as “the most fit and efficient for restraining the Indians, for protecting and developing the interests of government and people, for settling the Mormon problem, for giving order and unity to the incoherent and chaotic social and material life of all this vast region” (26).

The characteristics reflected by Connor and his archetypal story reveal several of the traits that Bowles values in residents of the West and for the nation as a whole. His assessments prefigure Frederick Jackson Turner’s description of the frontiersmen in “The Significance of the American Frontier,”<sup>120</sup> written nearly thirty years later. Turner identified the qualities that he felt characterized the pioneers—including individualism, antipathy to control or government, a strong work ethic, selfishness, coarseness, strength,

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<sup>120</sup> Turner (1861-1932) first presented “Significance” in Chicago to a meeting of the American Historical Association at the World’s Columbian Exposition on July 12, 1893. His philosophy, in part, derived from an 1890 report of the U.S. Census which deemed it was no longer meaningful to speak of a “frontier line,” formerly identified as the line between settled areas and those defined as wilderness—bearing a population of fewer than two persons per square mile. Subsequent criticism of Turner’s thesis may challenge many of its basic claims, but it merely reinforces the resonance it found with nineteenth-century cultural perceptions of the frontier and popular support for models of organic nationhood.

acuteness, inquisitiveness, practicality, inventiveness, resourcefulness, mastery of material things, restlessness, buoyancy, exuberance, freshness, confidence, and a “scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons” (Turner 53, 54-55, 59). Just as Turner theorized that the frontiersmen regenerated a new and distinctly American civilization on the frontier, Bowles finds that settlers incorporate an experience of the West into their inherent Americanness, as he writes in letter five from Denver, using noticeably gender-inclusive language:

Most agreeable of all our experiences here are the intelligent, active, earnest, right-minded and right-hearted young men and women we meet; people, many of whom have been here for years, but, instead of losing anything of those social graces that eastern towns and cities are wont to think themselves superior in, have not only kept even pace in these, but gained a higher play for all their faculties, and ripened, with opportunity and incentive and necessary self-reliance, into more of manhood and womanhood. (50)

Bowles’s analogy between the growth and maturation of young Americans and the development of the nation echoes what Merle Curti and others call an “organic” conceptualization of the nation. Various intellectuals during the Civil War era, building upon earlier German models of nationalism, promoted concepts of the nation as an evolving moral being, the highest form of human association and civilization, and a seedbed for individual freedom and fulfillment. Much of the nationalistic discourse during and after the Civil War adopted this structure, in which the organic body of the nation has a birth and growth, and transcends section, state, economics, politics, race, and conflict. The idea of evolution is also featured in Turner’s “Significance” essay, as he

identifies the American frontier as “the line of most rapid and effective Americanization,” where wilderness at first masters the colonist, but gradually where the colonist brings civilization (Turner 33). Turner traces the social evolution of the frontier from Indians and hunters, through the coming of traders and establishment of, in turn, pastoral ranch life, subsistence farming, denser farm settlements, and finally manufacturing and advanced social structures. Only with the evolution of a stable community can the hallmarks of a properly civilized society appear—including schools, hospitals, orderly governance and the power of law, regular trade, organized religion, newspapers, and even the arts.

Bowles seems to grasp this sense of evolution in his comments about the people and communities of the West. In *Across the Continent*, Bowles defines the progress of a settlement or town according to the same evolutionary process that Turner suggested in 1893. In his first letter of the trip, Bowles comments on Chicago’s dominance among cities of the “North-west,” noting a distinct transition from an earlier stage of physical development to the current stage of aesthetic development, including art, literature, and philanthropy (2-3). Upon reaching Atchison, Kansas, Bowles traces its history precisely along the lines later codified by Turner. “It was first settled and possessed by border ruffians of the worst type,”<sup>121</sup> he writes in his first letter, and then was inhabited by more reputable businessmen before becoming home to the railroad lines and U.S. mail service to the West (3-4).

Bowles finds more evidence of the evolution of the nation in Austin, Nevada, a mining town only two years old but bearing signs of civilization sure to appeal to his

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<sup>121</sup> Bowles does not use “border ruffians” in a generic sense; rather, the term was used in the years preceding the Civil War to identify pro-slavery agitators who had come to Kansas Territory from Missouri.

eastern readers. As evidence of Austin's fidelity to the nation, Bowles reports in letter fifteen that the town cast nearly two thousand votes in the presidential election of 1864. Bowles also finds "the best French restaurant . . . since New York," a daily newspaper, and other amenities of civilized town life, including boot-blacks, barbers and baths that are "luxurious and aristocratic to the continental degree" (142). Compared to Austin, the town of Virginia, Nevada is mature at five or six, demonstrating a more sophisticated citizenry: "[Virginia] puts its gambling behind an extra door; it is beginning to recognize the Sabbath, has many churches open, and closes part of its stores on that day. . ." (146). Citizens of Portland, Oregon, Bowles reports in letter seventeen, are even more closely aligned with their eastern counterparts: "[T]hey keep Sunday as we do in New England, and as no other population this side of the Missouri now does. . ." (183).

Part of the challenge of writing a national narrative that found pride in its citizenry was the pervasive popular-culture imagery of westerners as immoral, impulsive, violent, and—at best—*different* from what easterners imagined themselves to be. The nineteenth century, according to Arthur K. Moore, was characterized by a mythology of the frontiersmen that took its root in journalism, literature, personal accounts, and rumor. The citizens of the Far West inherited many of the ideological formulations which had evolved around the residents of the earlier frontiers, especially the Transappalachian frontier states of Kentucky and Tennessee. With his popular *Leatherstocking Tales*, published between 1823 and 1841, James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) established a narrative of the frontier and the frontiersman, and reflected the ambiguous relationship between the "civilized" East and the outlying "wilderness." Frontiersmen Daniel Boone (1734-1820) and Davy Crockett (1786-1836) became almost mythic figures for their

highly-embellished exploits on the frontier. Not as well-known in the twenty-first century is T.B. Thorpe (1815-78), a Southwest humorist whose colorful short stories and sketches of the American West, including “The Big Bear of Arkansas,” were so popular in the nineteenth century that they were translated into French, Italian, and German.<sup>122</sup> Perceived to be reckless and lawless, the westerners presented a challenge to easterners facing a quickly-expanding national map.

Aware of the complex stereotypes surrounding westerners, Bowles does not naively neglect those elements of western culture which he found to be disagreeable, but rather places them within a more balanced—and hopeful—conceptual framework. He is hopeful, for instance, that Oregon will escape the instability and debauchery brought on by California’s rapid development: “The uncertainty, the recklessness, the gambling habit which the varied and fickle results of gold mining throw over the whole business and morals and manners of a community,” he writes in letter eighteen, “are very great obstacles to a real and permanent prosperity, and growth in high civilization” (197). He also finds that San Francisco suffers from the domination of materialism and “masculineism” and from the lack of proper homes and their influences (323).<sup>123</sup>

Although it is true that images of the West were constructed primarily around a male- and youth-dominated culture, Bowles finds evidence that challenges the stereotypes of popular culture and which familiarizes the unknown in terms of the known. In letter five from Denver, Bowles reports, “I see less drunkenness; I see less vice here among these towns of the border, and of the Rocky Mountains, than at home in

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<sup>122</sup> For a comprehensive study of this image, see Moore’s *The Frontier Mind: Cultural Forces That Shaped the West*.

<sup>123</sup> Bowles observes, “There are probably more bachelors, great lusty fellows, who ought to be ashamed of themselves, living in hotels or in ‘lodgings,’ in this town, than in any place of its size in the world” (323).



Springfield” (50). In letter twenty-eight, Bowles reports that San Francisco’s gamblers “give way graciously to the progress towards decency and respectability, and join in outward observance of the Sabbath, help to build churches, and make orderly the street life of the town” (327). In another attempt to familiarize the citizens of San Francisco, Bowles explains in letter twenty-eight that they demonstrate an amalgamation of East and West:

The New England elements are clearly dominant here and through the whole Pacific Coast region; softened from their old Puritanic habits—marrying themselves to the freer and more sensuous life of a new country with a cosmopolitan population, but still preserving their best qualities of decency of order, of justice, of constant progress upward in morality and virtue. (327)

And from Colorado, in letter six, he reports that, connected with a substantial decrease in the state’s population, “The adventurers are gone. What remain are the substantial, the earnest, who have cast in their lot with the Territory, are satisfied with its promise, and are wisely working for the construction of a State and their own estate” (59). The evolution of Colorado represents, to Bowles, the potential of the West to contribute to the community of the nation:

Never was progress in wealth, in social and political organization, in the refinements of American home life, more rapid and more marked than in the brief history thus far of Colorado. . .contributing largely, as she has steadily done even as a Territory, to the common profit of the nation. . . . And she is destined to be permanently a profitable partner in the household. (59-60)

Bowles finds a new American on his trip across the continent in 1865, not the bawdy explorer or frontiersman who so regularly tramped through popular culture. In fact, in spite of a frequently hazardous overland journey, a difficult or hostile environment, and logistical barriers to commerce and communication, the settlers of the West, Bowles finds, are admirable and accomplished, as he writes in letter sixteen:

I long ago gave up being surprised at any victories of the American mind and hand over raw American matter. Still, Nevada and California, with towns and cities of two to fifteen years' growth, yet to-day all full-armed in the elements of civilization, wanton with the luxuries of the senses, rich in the social amenities, supplied with churches and schools and libraries, even affecting high art, are wonderful illustrations of the rapidity and ease with which our people organize society and State, and surround themselves with all the comforts and luxuries of metropolitan life. The history of the world elsewhere offers no parallels to these. (161)

Defined by a battle against nature and distinct from their European forbears, the westerners Bowles depicts are hardworking, ambitious, and evolving. They are distinctly American.

*Evidence Found: Challenges to National Sovereignty*

Whereas the Irish-born General Connor represented the ability of the nation to successfully incorporate diverse populations within its realm, his story also suggests the efforts made by the new nation to exert its political and ideological authority over its citizens. In the wake of the Civil War, the Mormons and the Native American Indians

posed the most significant but not the only challenges to national sovereignty. Feelings of antagonism still ran deep among many loyal to the Confederacy,<sup>124</sup> and the country faced additional challenges in the integration of new European immigrants and the newly emancipated slaves. But during the 1860s, former Confederates returned to their seats in Congress, new educational initiatives were designed to assimilate new European arrivals,<sup>125</sup> and African Americans moved into political leadership roles, commercial enterprises, and even elected office. Meanwhile, dissent on the frontier—primarily in the form of Mormons and Native Americans—came to represent immediate and persistent barriers to new conceptualizations of the nation.

In the twenty-first century, we have lost sight of the intense social and political discourse surrounding the Mormons, a religious group founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith, Jr. In the nineteenth century, the group faced political and military persecution, fleeing its base in Nauvoo, Illinois, after Smith and his brother, Hyrum, were killed by a mob. Brigham Young led the group to Utah in 1846, where they established several settlements, including Salt Lake City. To the nineteenth century American, and to the readers of Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters, the Mormons were thus a paradox: a reminder of a wayward, resistant element within the congealing post-war nation, and yet a success story of civilization, culture, economics, and political order on the frontier. Controversy settled on their polygamous practices, openly practiced by Young and his

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<sup>124</sup> Dissent related to the southern rebellion extended to the frontier states, but in letter thirty-one Bowles notes a swelling sense of loyalty to the nation, even on the remote Pacific Coast: "There was here, as in the East, a sudden and contagious uprising of the people for the government and the Union, that swept all discussion before it, and saved these States from anarchy, and the Republic a unit. . . . California, Nevada and Oregon are now apparently as fixed and decided in the possession of the republican or Union party, as the average of the States of the East."

<sup>125</sup> O'Leary explains that patriotic organizations worked toward "100 percent Americanism," particularly through educational efforts, for the immigrant working classes. The effort was designed to promote a "transcendent patriotism" among the diverse groups whose initial national identification may have been other than American (O'Leary 61-62).

followers after the exodus to Utah, and by the 1860s, the festering Mormon question became one of the mainstream political and ideological discourses of the nation.

To Bowles, the capitulation of polygamy to American political, legal, and cultural authority was a primary concern for his trip and for the future of the nation. Attention was directed toward the issue not only to demand Mormon compliance but as an ideological point at which the young nation would test its resolve, a point at which the relationship of western settlements to eastern authorities would be charted, perhaps determining the future relationships of other western settlements to the federal government. If the Mormons could continue in what Bowles termed their “peculiar institution,”<sup>126</sup> would other elements of resistance among the frontier settlements be tolerated? Furthermore, the question of polygamy was foremost in Bowles’s mind not only because it was a curiosity of the Mormon culture but also because it represented a line of conflict between Constitutional protection of religious practices and the moral authority of the national government.

In three letters—letter eleven, “The Polygamy Question,” letter twelve, “The Mormon Wives: Our Last Day in Salt Lake City,” and letter thirteen, “Social Life Among the Mormons”—Bowles reports extensively on the issue, including a transcription of the dialogue between Brigham Young and Schuyler Colfax on the subject.<sup>127</sup> Bowles is clear about the implications for the Mormon women and their society: “Now as before, here as elsewhere, [polygamy] tends to and means only the degradation of woman. By it and under it, she becomes simply the servant and serf, not the companion and equal of man; and the inevitable influence of this upon all society need not be depicted” (107). Bowles

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<sup>126</sup> “Peculiar institution” was a euphemistic term used to refer to slavery.

<sup>127</sup> This conversation is discussed in Chapter Four, pages 149-50.

was equally clear, however, in the conclusions he draws and the responsibilities he identifies for the nation. He writes in letter eleven that “Mormonism is not necessarily polygamy,” and that the nation may oppose it without interfering with the existence of the Mormon church, or interfering with fundamental principles of religious liberty (107). After offering his suggestions for a stern federal policy, Bowles also notes in letter eleven that the ongoing evolution of the nation will ultimately bring polygamy to an end:

Ultimately, of course, before the influences of emigration, civilization and our democratic habits, . . . [the Mormon church’s] most aristocratic and uncivilized incident or feature of plurality of wives must fall first and completely before contact with the rest of the world,—marshalled with mails, daily papers, railroads and telegraphs. . . . The click of the telegraph and the roll of the overland stages are its death-rattle now; the first whistle of the locomotive will sound its requiem; and the pick-ax of the miner will dig its grave. Squatter sovereignty will speedily settle the question, even if the government continues to coquette with it and humor it, as it has done. (108)

Bowles believed that while polygamy may have presented a Constitutional challenge to the nation, both social and political forces would peacefully and inevitably bring it to an end.

Native American Indians, however, presented a second and perhaps a more immediate threat that Bowles doubted could be handled with the same diplomacy as the Mormon question. Because Native American resistance often took the form of physical attacks on settlers and travelers—unlike the Mormons, whose resistance took the form of a social practice within their own community—the discourse of resolution adopted a

rhetoric and strategy of physical suppression. Bowles notes reports of Indian attacks on both military units and civilians along the stage route, some resulting in an interruption of mail or commerce, in destruction of private property, and occasionally in injuries or deaths.<sup>128</sup>

Antagonism between North and South following the Civil War was healed—at least in part—as former Confederates joined northern armies against their common enemy, the Plains Indians. In letter two, Bowles notes this phenomenon, which he finds to be evidence of a unified, transcendent national spirit:

Among the present limited number of troops on the Plain are two regiments of infantry, all from the rebel army. They have cheerfully re-enlisted into the federal service. We passed one of these regiments on the road yesterday. . . . They were all young but hardy looking men; and the Colonel, who is of course from the old federal army, testified heartily to their subordination and sympathy with their new service. They are known in the army as “whitewashed rebs,” or as they call themselves, “galvanized Yankees.” (11)

But Native Americans, unlike the cheerful and contrite Confederate soldiers, were not characterized by “subordination and sympathy,” and were not, therefore, entitled to lay claim to membership in the nation. Bowles’s attitude toward the issue is problematic. In his early letters, while still seemingly under a threat of attack on the stage route,

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<sup>128</sup> In letter one, Bowles points out that a pair of senators representing a joint committee of Congress had set out on an expedition to visit all the Indian territories in an effort to examine “the condition of the Indians and their relations to the whites, and report facts and suggestions, with a view to a more intelligent and effective Indian policy.” He also points out the hypocrisy of the senators’ generous escort of more than 100 cavalymen, sent to protect them from the very people with whom they are attempting to build relationships.

Bowles regrets the continuation of hostilities. In letter one, he writes, “Whoever shall discover and cause to be put in practice a policy towards our Indian tribes, that shall secure protection alike to them and the whites, and stop indiscriminate massacre on both sides, will prove the greatest of national benefactors” (8). But the reports Bowles hears from the frontiersmen suggest that settlement with the Indians is unlikely and that another policy would be required: extermination. “This is dreadful if true; and I cannot believe it,” Bowles writes. “The Indians have great provocation for their bad faith and their massacres in our own bad faith to them, in the systematic manner they have been plundered and cheated and every way abused by officers of the government, and the coarsest of the border men.” But if the policy of extermination were to be adopted, Bowles believed, “the sooner it is adopted, and carried out, the better,” to avoid mounting violence and casualties on both sides (8).

Bowles revisits the issue in letter thirty-one, in a discussion of the tribes of the Pacific Coast complicated by conflicting images and conclusions. In his discussions with citizens of the Pacific Coast, Bowles finds consensus that the settlers have originated much of the conflict with the Indian tribes,<sup>129</sup> but that the Native Americans exhibit limited potential for meaningful citizenship. Compared to the Mormons, who have developed a sophisticated, if wayward, society in the West, some tribes appear to be “poor, dirty, squalid” (366). Those living in California, Oregon, and Washington, on the

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<sup>129</sup> In letter thirty-one, Bowles lists the offenses of the white settlers against the Indian tribes, but reaches a dreadful conclusion: “The great Oregon Indian war of some years ago was clearly provoked by whites, as a means of speculating in supplies for carrying on the war against them. The lust of coarse white men for their women; the introduction of whiskey among them; abuse and maltreatment in various ways are the origin of a good many Indian outrages, and these lead into almost necessary wars of extermination. . . . But this ought not to be necessary, and need not, if our Indian department were both vigorously and wisely administered.”

other hand, Bowles reports, are “a shade civilized, industrious in small degree, farming a little, fishing a good deal . . . but fading out fast” (366). No matter what the condition of the Native Americans, however, Bowles concludes that the responsibility of the evolving nation must be to protect its perpetually traveling, trading, and settling citizens. In the midst of the evolving nation, the Native Americans had little hope of survival.

The identification of groups that did not fit into the new concept of nation—such as the Mormons and Native Americans—is not a surprise. Geoff Eley and Ronald Suny state that national cultures are constructed not only around a recognition of common material, cultural, and spiritual interests, but also around systems of negative distinction: “The positivity of the nation presumes the existence of a variety of unassimilated (or unassimilable) ‘Others’—whether external . . . or internal, in relation to differences of race, ethnicity, religion, and, of course, class” (25). The existence of unassimilable Others, or Others who would have to accept dictates of the nation, reifies the essential unity of the conceptual nation itself. As discussed in Chapter Two, Bowles makes extensive efforts to establish community between people of the East and the West by finding familiar people and re-imagining a truly national community, even as “others” are excluded from the discourse. Bowles was clear in letter sixteen of the mounting evidence of nationhood:

Greater the wonder grows at the extent of the Republic; but larger still our wonder at the mysterious but unmistakable homogeneity of its people. San Francisco. . .thinks the same thoughts, breathes the same patriotism, burns with the same desires that inspire New York and Boston. . . . Sacramento talks as you



do in Springfield; Nevada, over the mountains, almost out of the world, anticipates New England in her judgments, and makes up her verdict, while those close to the 'Hub of the Universe' are looking over the testimony.<sup>130</sup> (159-60)

*The Great Theme: The Pacific Railroad*

After inscribing a discourse of nationalism, after identifying the transcendent spirit of the citizens, after exploring economics and diversity and even the Mammoth Lager Beer Saloon, Bowles identifies the transcontinental railroad as the great theme of his trip and the great bond of the nation.<sup>131</sup> The railroad figures in *Across the Continent* as a powerful multivalent image: a physical connection of East and West as well as a metaphor for the new nation. As a physical connector, the railroad would bring East and West into closer proximity as human and commercial transport could span the nation in days or weeks rather than weeks or months. It would enable the realization of the nation's economic potential by connecting western landscapes, with their mineral and agricultural wealth, to markets in the East, while simultaneously providing eastern manufactures a direct passage to new markets in the West. The railroad would also mean closer ties to eastern civilization and civilizing influences and an acceleration of the evolution of the West in terms of morality, religion, and culture.

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<sup>130</sup> In a phrase originally attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Boston is known as "The Hub of the Universe."

<sup>131</sup> The railroad had been authorized by the Railroad Act of 1862, and construction began from Sacramento in 1863 and Omaha in 1864. Another bill in 1864 augmented territorial grants and financial support from the federal government, but progress was initially slow due to corruption and construction difficulties. The railroad was completed nevertheless on May 10, 1869, at Promontory Summit, Utah, years ahead of schedule.

But Bowles envisions the railroad as an equally powerful ideological connection between East and West, a representation and guarantor of the nation itself. “Here is present bond of union and means for perpetuating it,” he writes in letter twenty-four (257). Upon the railroad—which was still an *imagined* connection to the East in 1865—the citizens of the western states built their imagined community with landscape and culture and fellow citizens of the nation. Even in its imagined state, the railroad was the means by which spatial and temporal distances were ideologically dissolved. In letter twenty-four, Bowles writes that the status of the railroad is the first inquiry of all whom he meets in the West and that to westerners it represents more than spikes and rails:

[The railroad] is the hunger, the prayer, the hope of all these people. Hunger and prayer and hope for “Home,” and what home can bring them, in cheap and ready passage to and from, of reunion with parent and brother and sister and friend, of sight of old valley and mountain and wood, of social influence, of esthetic elevation, of worldly stimulus and prosperity. “Home,” they all here call the East. . . . Home is not here, but there. The thought of home is ever rolled, like a sweet morsel, under the tongues of their souls. (256)

If the railroad was to be the ideological antidote for a perpetual state of absence among citizens of the West, it would be the centripetal force by which the “there” and “here” of East and West could be joined in a transcendent community of the nation, in which all citizens were to be members in measured proximity.

Decades before Bowles made his trip to the West, the railroad itself, as technological invention, carried enormous symbolic weight for Americans. Bowles’s philosophy regarding the railroad, articulated so clearly in *Across the Continent*, built

upon deep-rooted discourses in which technology was regularly linked to progress and abundance. According to Leo Marx, by the 1830s, the locomotive had become a national obsession. “It is the embodiment of the age,” he writes in *The Machine in the Garden*, “an instrument of power, speed, noise, fire, iron, smoke—at once a testament to the will of man rising over national obstacles, and, yet, confined by its iron rails to a predetermined path. . .” (191). For Bowles, of course, the path was westward and toward a beneficent, unified nationhood. But the broader ideological import of the railroad is germane, for it functioned metonymically as a symbol of power and progress for Bowles’s readers, and as evidence of the new nation’s ability to transcend and embrace landscape, citizenry, and dissention. Marx cites John Stuart Mill’s perspective that “[t]he mere visible fruits of scientific progress, . . . the mechanical improvements, the steamengines, the railroads, carry the feeling of admiration for modern, and disrespect for ancient times. . .” (qtd. in Marx 192-93). Bowles’s philosophy did not fully correspond with this perspective, however, because one of the advantages he imagined for the transcontinental railroad was a reconnection with the past, a reimagining of the present as an evolution of older models of Americanness. It was progress and change, to be sure, which were facilitated by the railroad, but they were to be built upon the foundations of the moral, political, and social structures of the East.

Bowles is realistic in his letters about the challenges which lay ahead for the crews of the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific Railroads because even their struggles were analogous to the challenges of ideological nation-building. For the railroads as for the nation, landscape posed both the greatest barrier as well as the greatest enabler of the project. Letter twenty-four is dedicated to exploring the difficulties related to the

construction of the railroad, including the challenges of spanning the Sierras, of obtaining adequate supplies and labor, and of finding competent leadership. But with an eye toward the long-range benefits for the nation, Bowles puts the financial and human cost of the railroad into perspective for his eastern readers, capitalizing upon the emotional commitment of the nation inspired by the Civil War. Writing at a unique moment in the history of the nation, Bowles conflates the discourse of patriotic nationalism inspired by the war with the discourses of organic progress and technology. After years of fighting, an outlay of millions of dollars, and the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of lives, he writes in letter twenty-four, the transcontinental railroad—at only a fraction of the cost dedicated to war—represented the ultimate fulfillment of the sacrifice: “This is the cheapest, surest and sweetest way to preserve our nationality, and continue the Republic a unit from ocean to ocean” (257). He argues that the railroad would “marry to the Nation of the Atlantic an equal if not greater Nation of the Pacific” (273). Its construction, he suggests, would be a way not only to link the nation across a wide landscape, but also to diffuse any additional sectional antagonism that might emerge. The railroad would complete and sustain the unification of all American people, states, and regions into a single nation and serve as the single, most powerful symbol of the nation.

### *Conclusion*

Samuel Bowles’s trip to the Pacific was one of the major national events of 1865 due to an unlikely combination of circumstances: a nation saved by bloody Civil War; a trip conducted with the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, under the auspices of the late and martyred president; an articulate national spokesman with an intimate

audience of thousands; and a national story largely waiting to be written. Features of epistolarity allowed Bowles to include readers in the discourse he was writing, to incorporate them into an imagined community with their fellow citizens, and to make the many “theres” of the trip seem like “heres” of the nation.

In many ways, *Across the Continent* seems to capture both the mood and the trajectory of this unique historical moment. Bowles provides the evidence many Americans needed to confirm—and thence to enact—their imagined community following the Civil War. Bowles is decidedly optimistic about the prospects for nation-building, despite challenges of landscape, culture, and politics. The war had protected something larger than just a union of states: it had defended an idea of nation that transcended region and state, and which Bowles found alive and well:

It is this that is the greatest thing about our country; that makes it the wonder of nations, the marvel of history,—the unity of its people in ideas and purpose; their quick assimilation of all emigration,—come it so far or so various; their simultaneous and similar currents of thought, their spontaneous, concurrent formation and utterance of a united Public Opinion. This is more than extent of territory, more than wealth of resource, more than beauty of landscape, more than variety of climate and productions, more than marvelous material development, more than cosmopolitan populations, because it exists in spite of them, and conquers them all by its subtle electricity. (160)

This was “genuine patriotism” which he found among citizens of the West (217), and a spirit that could only be defined as national and American.

## CONCLUSION

### SAMUEL BOWLES: NOT JUST FOR THE HISTORY BOOKS

On a steamy summer night in 2007, driving west through Pennsylvania toward mountains and a brilliant sunset, I was thinking of dust. Surely, like many others whose single intellectual work for a period of years occupies a central place of interest and excitement, I was not unusual in allowing my imagination to construct a scene—dusty or not. Here’s my vision: a hand writes in elaborate script, “May 21, 1865.” The camera, suddenly jostled, slowly pans up, out the window of the rolling stagecoach, to reveal a dusty Atchison, Kansas. The scene is displayed in aggregate: bustling people and loaded carts drawn by oxen; men on horseback and bonneted women carrying paper-bound packages and leading shoeless children; former soldiers—marked, perhaps, only by a blue or gray cap—traveling quietly and alone. We hear the cacophony of a great business transpiring: the grinding of wagon wheels on the dirt road, shouts of rough-hewn traders and frustrated travelers, snippets of excited conversations, barking dogs.

Abruptly, the motion of the stagecoach comes to a halt in front of a nondescript wooden building, and our view turns slowly back to the passenger we have not yet seen—yet whose perspective has been ours—to behold the image of Samuel Bowles. Quietly, he places ink and paper and pen into his new but unpretentious leather bag and turns to greet his ebullient companions, emerging from the building. But while he heartily joins in conversation, his role is primarily that of an observer, and our perspective is largely his. He sees male and female emigrants, preparing for their journey

west: strong, excited, worried. Perhaps his voice, disconnected from the action on the street, can be heard as individual faces in the crowd are now discerned by the camera:

How this Republic, saved, reunited, bound together as never before, expands under such personal passage and footstep tread; how magnificent its domain; how far-reaching and uprising its material, moral and political possibilities and promises! There is no such knowledge of the nation as comes of traveling it, of seeing eye to eye its vast extent, its various and teeming wealth, and, above all, its purpose-full people—growing only greater in personal power and activity as they grow fewer in numbers. . . . The very breadth of their field expands them.

*(Across the Continent 1-2)*

One of the important lessons we should draw from Samuel Bowles's *Across the Continent* is that he was writing a story not of mythic pioneers or legendary frontiersmen but of ordinary Americans, common people whose uncommon undertakings charted the course of economic, social, and ideological growth for a nation. Characterized by flaws and weaknesses, and plagued by difficulties and suffering, the emigrants whom Bowles met in Atchison—and saw again in wagon trains and scattered settlements of every type—would achieve amazing things. Returning to my fanciful movie scene, we have to note the visual contrast between what we know to be the emigrants' collective accomplishments and their individualized experiences of worry, struggle, hope, and fear. Their common humanity with us makes their survival and the expansion of the nation all the more remarkable.

To most Americans, the story of Samuel Bowles is unknown. His name rarely appears in history books or in scholarly journals. Most individuals have never knowingly

received a letter from him . . . until now. In a profound way, we are among the readers addressed by Samuel Bowles's letters. Not familiar or envisioned, as were his *Springfield Republican* subscribers, but as Americans. Like his eastern readers in 1865, we cannot know what the stage ride through the Rockies was like, except through his eyes. We cannot experience the depths of an 1865 gold mine, except through his words. We depend on him, as did his readers in Springfield or Boston or New York, to create an image of America and Americans in 1865. And subtly, we are incorporated into the imagined community he inscribed.

On July 4, 2007, saturated with the letters of Bowles and an evolving idea of the nation, I sat watching fireworks with hundreds of other Americans in a public park in Indiana, Pennsylvania. In the midst of patriotic music blasted inharmoniously from ancient loudspeakers and drowned out regularly by the reverberations of firework blasts, Bowles's July 4 letter from San Francisco seemed strangely relevant. "[S]till the Republic!" he wrote one hundred and forty-two years earlier from the other side of the continent. "Still the old flag, . . . still the same Fourth of July; . . . still the same people, with hearts aglow with the same loyalty and pride in the American Union, and the same purpose and the same faith for its future" (*Across the Continent* 159). And there, in fact, we were: strangers, mostly, but people in that park and all across the nation, now recognizing in that moment—deferred, admittedly, by time zones—our common citizenship in the great American nation.

Nearly a century and a half after his trip across the continent, Samuel Bowles does have relevance as we strive again to define the nation. Discourses of American identity, a place for "others" within our borders, protection of our natural resources, local



versus national interests—the very discourses of *Across the Continent*—sound hauntingly familiar, as all remain contentious issues in the twenty-first century. As we struggle to redefine our nation, texts such as Bowles’s *Across the Continent* must not be dismissed or relegated to the “dustbin of history,” for they embrace a patriotic nationalism that is essential if we want to preserve the nation, even while we seek to renew it.

From the beginning of this project, one of my hopes has been to broaden the legacy of the inimitable Samuel Bowles, “rescued,” as he says, “from the destined oblivion of daily journalism to figure in covers” (*Across the Continent* v). I hope that in some small way, I have succeeded in doing so. Encouraged by an increasing familiarity with Bowles and his intellectual and political acumen, and increasingly convinced of his national importance in 1865, I believe this study opens a new field for literary consideration, both in subject and strategy. Bowles’s letters, the result of an unlikely confluence of author, history, text, and nation, reflect both the spirit and the trajectory of the nation in 1865. As a series of newspaper travel letters, Bowles’s writings from the West appeared in a journalistic forum, yet engaged the literary conventions of fiction, nonfiction travel narratives, first-person accounts of life and exploration in the American West, and countless private discourses conducted by personal letter. Bowles’s work stands apart from other literary works of its kind because of the public stature of the participants as well as the metaphorical significance of a trip from ocean to ocean. Scholarly work should be dedicated to Bowles’s work as part of a tradition of trans-continental travel narratives ranging from Lewis and Clark to Bowles and, eventually, to various modern figures such as well-known broadcast journalist Charles Kuralt and

lesser-known travel writer William Least Heat-Moon.<sup>132</sup> This study also prompts new consideration of individuals often categorized as early nature writers or environmentalists—including such diverse figures as Henry David Thoreau, Clarence King, and Theodore Roosevelt—whose popular travel writings may correspond with the theoretical framework I have provided for Bowles. I also plan to expand this study into the framework of historical public relations practice to determine how conceptualizations of the American West influenced the evolution of federal policy concerning the protection and preservation of public lands as national parks and forests. Closer examination of these and related works could shed new light on the travel narrative form and promote an understanding of the evolution of textual constructions of Americans and Americanness—ideas that form a central discourse of *Across the Continent*.<sup>133</sup>

This project also prompts consideration of Bowles's other books of letters about the West. In twelve letters written during the late summer of 1868, *The Parks and Mountains of Colorado: A Summer Vacation in the Switzerland of America* records Bowles's return to Colorado with Colfax and Bross. According to James H. Pickering, *Switzerland of America* appeared when Bowles "stood at the very height of his journalistic career," and owed much of its success to the author's personal reputation. When the letters were published in book form in 1869, Pickering states, they collectively "came to occupy an important place in the developing literature promoting the scenic wonders of Colorado and the Rocky Mountain West" (9). *Switzerland of America*,

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<sup>132</sup> Kuralt (1934-97) began his widely-acclaimed "On the Road" segments for Walter Cronkite's *CBS Evening News* in 1967. He published several books, including *On the Road with Charles Kuralt* in 1995. Heat-Moon (b. 1940) is a photographer and former professor of English at the University of Missouri-Columbia. He published *Blue Highways: A Journey Into America* in 1982.

<sup>133</sup> For more information on the form, see Janis P. Stout's *the Journey Narrative in American Literature: Patterns and Departures* (1983).

however, is not just another *Across the Continent*; rather, it presents a view of the West that is different than the earlier work, owing in part to the composition of the traveling company, among whom were Bowles's oldest daughter, Sallie, Colfax's fiancée, Ellen (Nellie) Wade, and other friends and family members. The difference is also due in part to a less strenuous tour of fewer than four weeks in Colorado and the practical advantages of rail transportation. Despite different circumstances of the trip, *Switzerland of America* was modeled on the success of *Across the Continent* and offers a remarkable opportunity to apply the theoretical framework for epistolary and literary journalism presented in this study.

In his third book, *Our New West: Records of Travel Between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean*, also published in 1869, Bowles combined portions of *Across the Continent* and *Switzerland of America*. In an introductory letter, Schuyler Colfax characterizes *Our New West* as a "new and more permanent work" that has been "amplified, revised, and illustrated." He predicts that the new book will promote nationalism by "strengthen[ing] the patriotic ties which bind together such distant regions, as the Atlantic and Pacific States, into one harmonious Republic" (*Our New West* ix). In another introductory letter, William Bross highlights a pragmatic application for *Our New West*, which he regards as a new, expanded edition of *Across the Continent*:

[Bowles's] work should be carefully read by every tourist before he sets out upon his journey; and it will be consulted by him with great advantage at every stage of his progress. The information it has imparted to the Nation has, in my judgment, been immensely more varied and valuable than they have derived

from all previous sources put together. Certainly no former work has ever circulated so widely among the people, and they have profited largely by the new, varied and most valuable facts it contains. (*Our New West* xi)

For their impact on national discourses and ideas in 1869 and for their form and structure according to both epistolary and literary journalism models, *Switzerland of America* and *Our New West* deserve additional study.

Further study of *Across the Continent* is also warranted to reveal all Bowles has to say about ideological constructions of race and gender, as well as culturally idiomatic practices such as eating and entertaining. Despite a dedication to the philosophy of Manifest Destiny, Bowles's approach to race is complicated. From a semantic point of view, his approach must be considered as part of an evolving philosophy in which he recognized, by 1869, a composite American "race" that "will present on the North American Continent . . . a triumph of Man" (*Our New West* viii). Within this context, Bowles's perspectives on Native Americans—characterized by sympathy as well as antagonism—and his nuanced assessment of the Chinese population must be further explored. Bowles's perspectives on gender, in addition, are also surprising and complex. Known as an advocate for women's social and political rights, Bowles was keenly aware of the conditions of women he encountered during his trip in 1865. In addition to his extensive commentary on the Mormon women in *Across the Continent*, Bowles makes frequent observations concerning the ability of women to survive and, at times, thrive despite the difficulties of life in the West.

From a critical perspective, this project invites additional work in the area of epistolary journalism and, I hope, challenges scholars of epistolary writing to reconsider

their blanket approach to newspaper letters. Of particular interest are the works of other nineteenth-century journalists who wrote in the form of the newspaper travel letter, particularly work by Bowles's companions on the overland trip. Theoretical models of epistolary journalism could also be usefully applied to popular nineteenth-century correspondents such as journalist and author Lydia Maria Child, whose letters from New York City from 1841 to 1843 were widely read and reprinted; and by journalist Grace Greenwood, who published a collection of letters entitled *Greenwood Leaves*, in 1852, and who followed Bowles to the West and published the resulting letters in *New Life in New Lands*, in 1873. The critical approach to epistolary journalism presented in this study may also be expanded to nineteenth-century newspaper letters that were not written as part of an extended or collected series, and to texts written by obscure or anonymous individuals. The challenges of such a study would include trying to determine if and how an author attempts to establish a relationship with his or her readers and how liberally he or she could apply the epistolary and literary techniques that made Samuel Bowles's letters so personal and compelling. Comparisons of texts across a temporal field, furthermore, could reveal an evolution of the epistolary journalism form.

As the movie of my mind draws to a close, we might again see a hand that writes in elaborate script. This time, however, the hand writes at the bottom of a letter, "Sincerely. . . Samuel Bowles." As the hand carefully places ink and paper and pen into a well-worn leather bag, the camera draws back to show Bowles stand and approach the rail of his steamer to get a better view of New York harbor, "never more beautiful . . . on [a] soft September morning" (*Across the Continent* 386). After more than four months crossing plain and prairie, desert and mountain, farmland and wilderness, he looks upon

the city with understandable ardor. But the scene is not yet complete, for the story is not just his, but the story of the nation. So as the camera pans back from New York harbor to the approaching ship, we do not find Bowles, but immigrant families arriving from Italy or Germany or Ireland, aboard a different vessel but looking with the same ardor, the same understanding of the American nation, and with hope in its promise. This time, as the camera's eye finds the shore, we see evidence of the immigrants' hope in a different New York harbor, marked by the Statue of Liberty and the immigration station at Ellis Island.<sup>134</sup> As the camera returns a third time to the approaching vessel, we find the ship now carries twentieth-century Russians, Jews, and eastern Europeans, seeking freedom and safety in a new nation, looking with ardor at a growing city and the promise it represents. A final return of the camera to the approaching craft finds not the rail of a ship but the windows of an airplane, out of which people from all regions of the globe peer hopefully toward America.

I am left with another question, one which I perceive to be both interesting and important: Who in the twenty-first century carries on the legacy of Samuel Bowles? It seems there are too many voices in the marketplace of ideas. The mass media is, indeed, massive, and with the convergence of broadcast and print media, internet, and advertising, individual voices tend to get lost. On the other hand, modern media allow for a diversity of opinion and voice that was not possible in the nineteenth century. These voices, perhaps, will lead to a new vision of America for the twenty-first century—but none, I dare say, can fully replicate the epistolary, journalistic, literary voice of Samuel Bowles.

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<sup>134</sup> The Statue of Liberty was dedicated October 28, 1886. The immigration station at Ellis Island opened January 1, 1892.

LIST OF LETTERS  
FROM *ACROSS THE CONTINENT*

- 1 .....“From Massachusetts to the Missouri” (May 21), from Atchison, Kansas
- 2 .....“From the Missouri to the Platte” (May 24), from Fort Kearney, Nebraska
- 3 .....“Through the Plains to the Rocky Mountains” (May 29), from Denver
- 4 .....“The Rocky Mountains and Their Gold Mines” (June 2), from Denver
- 5 .....“Of Persons, Not Things” (June 3), from Denver
- 6 .....“Sunday in the Mountains” (June 5), from Virginia Dale, Colorado
- 7 .....“From Denver to Salt Lake—Through the Rocky Mountains” (June 12),  
from Salt Lake City
- 8 .....“The Way Into Utah: Reception by the Mormons” (June 14), from Salt  
Lake City
- 9 .....“Mormon Materialities” (June 16), from Salt Lake City
- 10 .....“Salt Lake City and Life There” (Saturday, June 17), from Salt Lake City
- 11 .....“The Polygamy Question” (June 18), from Salt Lake City
- 12 .....“The Mormon Wives: Our Last Day in Salt Lake City” (June 18), from  
Salt Lake City
- 13 .....“Social Life Among the Mormons” (June 22), from Austin, Nevada
- 14 .....“The Ride Through the Sage Brush and the Great Basin” (June 28)\*, from  
Virginia, Nevada
- 15 .....“The Silver Mines of Nevada: Austin and Virginia City” (June 27)\*, from  
Virginia, Nevada
- 16 .....“The Continent Across: The Ride Over the Sierras” (July 4), from San  
Francisco
- 17 .....“Overland to Oregon” (July 20), from Portland, Oregon

- 18 .....“The Columbia River: Its Scenery and its Commerce” (July 23), from Portland, Oregon
- 19 .....“Through Washington Territory” (July 26), from Olympia, W.T.
- 20 .....“Puget’s Sound and Vancouver’s Island” (July 28), from Victoria, V.I.
- 21 .....“San Francisco: Mr. Colfax, and his Reception in the Pacific States” (August 2), from San Francisco
- 22 .....“The Yosemite Valley and the Big Trees” (August 11), from Yosemite Valley, California
- 23 .....“The Chinese on the Pacific Coast: Our Grand Dinner with Them” (August 18), from San Francisco
- 24 .....“The Great Theme: The Pacific Railway” (August 20), from San Francisco
- 25 .....“Country Excursions: The Geysers, Vineyards and Agriculture” (August 28) \*, from San Francisco
- 26 .....“Of San Francisco: Business Matters” (August 26) \*, from San Francisco
- 27 .....“Mining in California: Its Varieties, Results, and Prospects” (August 28), from Mariposa, California
- 28 .....“Social Life in San Francisco: The Women: Religion and Ministers” (August 30), from San Francisco
- 29 .....“Climate and Productions: Cost of Living: Currency Question: The Mint” (August 31), from San Francisco
- 30 .....“The Mining Questions Again: General Review” (September 1), from San Francisco
- 31 .....“The Farewell Festivities: Politics and Politicians” (September 2), from San Francisco
- 32 .....“The Voyage Home by Steamship and the Isthmus” (September 23, 1865), from New York

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\* Sequence of dates is inconsistent for letters fourteen and fifteen, and twenty-five and twenty-six.



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