

# Teaching Hometown Literature: A Pedagogy of Place

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**M**ore and more, the authors in my literature courses have become not just those I teach to my students, but ones that have been unearthed by them, from the environs of their own hometowns, which they then teach to me. The novels of John Burgan “really hit home,” wrote undergraduate English major Scott Gibbons of Vintondale, Pennsylvania (population 497 in 2005 and shrinking), “because I have played in places that he writes about, which really pulls me into his writing.”<sup>1</sup> Drawing from his own experiences, as well as his interview with exiled Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, master’s student Motasim Almwaja taught me and his classmates that “Arabs leave their hometowns because of political restrictions, but they keep rooted to their places.” Doctoral student Matt Babcock declared: “Jerome, Idaho will always be who I am: intellectually, artistically, spiritually, in terms of family and identity, my town, my state, the land of desert and canyon—we breathe the same dusty air.” On the other hand, his classmate Courtney Ruffner from Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania confessed that “like many others, I have lost my sense of hometown with the passing of my mother.” As I also explore in this essay, hometowns can be meaningful not only positively, but also negatively: they can be lost via change and sometimes even be nightmares to escape.

In this essay, I explore a distinctive way of teaching literature—by focusing on the hometowns of authors, beginning with a hometown author of my own, including well-known writers as read from the perspectives of their home places, and moving on to authors from the hometowns of my students. I argue for hometown literature as a new way of reading and organizing literature and, even more important, for a

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hometown pedagogy that draws students powerfully into what they learn and how they learn it. The following work is informed especially by regionalism and bioregionalism; ecocriticism; and place studies. I define hometown authors as ones who not only grew up in their hometowns, but wrote about them.<sup>2</sup> A writer need not have been born in the hometown for that place to be the central place of his or her upbringing and writing. For example, Wendell Berry was born in Louisville, Kentucky, but Louisville means little to him. Clearly, Port Royal, Kentucky is his real hometown—the place of his nurturing, the place to which he rededicated himself and that he made the center of his life and writing. I was born in Dayton and spent the first four years of my life in Miamisburg, Ohio, but I consider Cincinnati my hometown. Many of our students have had similar life experiences, having moved from one town to another in their early youth, and have perhaps even written papers about some of these experiences in earlier composition courses. Hometown literature includes not only novels, short stories, poetry, and plays, but also nonfiction. I assign books of essays by Scott Russell Sanders, Jamaica Kincaid, and others, and my students' hometown texts have included memoirs and local histories.

Why teach hometown literature? First, studying well-known authors by focusing on the many connections between their hometowns and their writings helps students understand how social contexts affect the production of literature. Teaching hometown literature also helps students better understand their own identities because part of who we are is determined by where we are from and where we are now. It deepens students' knowledge about their own hometowns—those areas' histories, geographies, strengths and weaknesses, and connections to other places. Instructors have long been teaching courses on particular regions inhabited by their students, but here I want to extend our reach beyond regionalism to hometowns both national and international in range.<sup>3</sup> Doing so helps students better appreciate the lives and writings of literary authors, in part by resurrecting authors and works thought to be “parochial.”<sup>4</sup> One might ask, “Don't our existing literature courses already qualify as hometown literature?” True, a great many of the world's writers qualify as hometown authors, and so the very wide range of candidates makes text selection for hometown literature very flexible and open. Yet it's one thing to move quickly past authors' biographical headnotes into other themes—or even to often intertwine those themes with authors' backgrounds—and quite a different practice to make hometowns the focus of understanding authors' writings throughout an entire course. It's also unusual to make students' projects on their own hometown authors the culminating objective of the course.

My students' hometown authors have ranged from the canonical to the obscure—from John Updike and William Carlos Williams, for example, to authors I'd never heard of before, such as Vintondale's John Burgan. Romance author Galen Foley's novels are far inferior to Updike's, but my undergraduate student Jillian Jones

got more excited when she was able to exchange emails with Foley than she had ever been when reading the classics. Jillian wrote about how Foley's upbringing in suburban Pittsburgh was reflected even in novels set in very different places, and, in the case of this author and many others my students have researched, we were able to talk in class about both literary values and the importance of place. We discussed the ways in which Updike's novels are much better than Foley's, but also how the Pennsylvanian hometowns of both authors have indelibly marked their writings. Some students find hometown authors who they feel are first-rate, yet relatively unknown, which gets us into conversations about the politics of who makes it into the canon and who does not and why.

My hometown literature courses are not confined to obscure authors. Indeed, we do not read Galen Foley or John Burgan together as a class; our shared readings are focused on famous hometown authors about whom students write throughout the course. The course concludes with students' research and final papers on their own hometown authors and their presentations about these authors to the class. When the students from a particular class are overwhelmingly from my university's region, the course features our region's authors. My own adopted hometown of Indiana, Pennsylvania—where I have now lived longer than I did in my formative hometown of Cincinnati—figures considerably in this essay, not only because most of my students and I live here, but also because a pair of accomplished authors from Indiana wrote significantly about this place and about place in general: George R. Stewart and Edward Abbey. In a class with students from throughout the United States, my course is national in emphasis, but at the same time focused on students' particular places. In the case of a class including students from other countries, the course reaches out globally, although each of the other courses also integrates authors from other countries to broaden our perspectives.

Hometown literature can and should go global, or “glocal,” reminding us that every place on the globe is also local.<sup>5</sup> Hometown literature also cuts across not only the traditionally national divisions of literature, but also the typical separation of “world” literature from British and American literatures. Even established courses that range internationally—courses on global literature, for example, or European texts in translation—do not focus on students' own places. As detailed later, my international students have brought to our attention their own hometown authors. In a single course, I have included, among other works, James Joyce's *Dubliners*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*, Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, and William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*—not the typical grouping of such texts that are usually taught in separate courses. In Kincaid's *A Small Place*, she warns tourists visiting Antigua about the silent, scathing views of them held by native Antiguanans. I have also included films set both close to our campus (*All the Right Moves*, filmed in Johnstown) and far away (the powerful Australian film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*). *All the Right Moves* is not a

cinematic classic, but it hits home for my undergraduates, some of whom can watch it as a home movie.<sup>6</sup> *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, based on Doris Pilkington's book of the same name, is her true story of the uprooting by the Australian government of her mother Molly and Molly's two sisters from their aboriginal mother and their home in western Australia. These three young sisters were uprooted because they were thought to be impure, as children whose father was white, and thus in need of "improvement" at an imprisoning boarding school. What more powerful images of home could there be than the scene of Molly and her sisters being wrenched from the arms of their mother? How dramatic and moving a return home might we ever hope to see than the concluding scene in which they run back into the arms of their mother and grandmother, after their 1,200-mile walk home?

#### REGIONALISM, BIOREGIONALISM, ECOCRITICISM, AND PLACE STUDIES

What I bring to hometown literature, even when we're talking about a big city or a rural place instead of a town, is a synthesis of bioregionalism, ecocriticism, and place studies—three approaches that came of age together, mutually support each other, and open up new ways that are very useful in my thinking and my teaching. I outline them here briefly in terms that we can teach our students as well as clarify for ourselves, interspersing connections to my teaching as I go, because theory and practice should not be separated, especially when discussing teaching. Then I move on to concepts of "home" and my particular pedagogical practices in more detail.

These are growing, changing bodies of knowledge. Regionalism, for example, has moved a long way from "local color" into bioregionalism and internationalist border studies. Almost all introductions to literary theory exclude ecocriticism.<sup>7</sup> Ecocriticism has generally been isolated in the pages of *ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment)* and the rare special issues of just a few other journals.<sup>8</sup> Since the rapid rise of ecocriticism beginning in the early 1990s—as reflected in the exponential growth of ASLE (the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment)—*College English* has published two articles on ecocomposition, which spun off from ecocriticism at century's end, but none on ecocriticism.<sup>9</sup> Place studies, for a long time more the province of geographers, has been even further from the view of most literature instructors. Thus, some historical background is in order.

It seems fitting, in this essay on hometown literature, to point out that one of the few *College English* articles, and certainly the earliest, to argue for the importance of local place and region in teaching literature, "The Regional Approach to Literature" (1948), was penned by a Berkeley professor who grew up in my second, adopted hometown: George R. Stewart from Indiana, Pennsylvania. In 1993, *ISLE* was founded here in Indiana by my former colleague at Indiana University of Pennsylva-

nia (IUP), Patrick D. Murphy, before that chief ecocritical journal moved on to the University of Nevada, Reno in 1995.<sup>10</sup> Our small college town seems to have been a hotbed of literary and ecocritical activity—even though Stewart, Abbey, Murphy, and *ISLE* all left here for sunnier climes.

In his pioneering pedagogical essay, Stewart argued for a new definition of regionalism in ecological terms: “A closer definition of regionalism would require the work of art not only to be nominally located in the region, but also to derive actual substance from that location. [. . .] It will come from the natural background” (371). Describing his teaching in ways that speak to us now, over a half-century later, he told of reading aloud lines from Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* that depict the month of May as one of natural birth, full of “fresshe floures.” Stewart found that these lines left his students in California cold because May marks the beginning of the dry season in California, with its drought and fires, that does not end until sometimes as late as November (373). But then he read the poem “Autumn Evening” by Robinson Jeffers—a Californian transplanted from the Pittsburgh suburb of Sewickley, Stewart’s own birthplace before he moved at age two to Indiana. The poem expresses how the “Cool of the late September evening / Seemed promising rain, rain, the change of the year.” His students easily related to Jeffers’s poem because “if you are a Californian, you will not need to have pointed out to you in an hour’s lecture [. . .] that late September may bring rain, the end of the summer drought, and the change of the year.” He concluded that “in writings which are the product” of the student’s own region, “the student finds a quicker and easier and more immediate appeal,” because the regional approach eliminates the barrier of place (374). There are also “emotional advantages” that help break down “what may too often be called a kind of resistance to good reading,” because now the student can say, “I have walked here; I have climbed this pass; I too have seen the little clouds run south in September!” (375). Stewart’s exclamation here is indeed very close to the quotation from Scott Gibbons with which I began this essay and to the declarations of many of my other students. Stewart anticipated by decades the bioregionalist advice to “think global, act local,” devoting himself to a pedagogy through which he invited his students to read locally and think globally.

A great many subsequent developments in regionalism, ecocriticism, and place studies reinforce George R. Stewart’s argument and further support my own case for teaching hometown literature. Regionalism has come a long way from its etymology—rooted, like “regal,” in the Latin word *regis* (Dainotto 7), suggesting that a region was merely a piece of land ruled by the king. Regionalism has also had to overcome both its original American definition, as part of imperialist expansion, and the longstanding critical bias against it.<sup>11</sup> Beginning with Bret Harte’s “The Luck of Roaring Camp” in 1868 and his other accounts of California mining camps, “local color” writing became very popular in the late nineteenth century. But, almost seem-

ingly because it was so popular, local color became a condescending, pejorative term among critics.<sup>12</sup> After Harte and Mark Twain, much local color literature was written by women. Judith Fetterley has exposed how female regionalists in the late nineteenth century were marginalized by male critical neglect and condescension and left in the shadow of male-dominated “realism” because they were women and wrote short stories and sketches rather than the “great American novel” (where “great” assumes “male”).

Especially for students who may have read some local color authors in their survey courses, we need to stress to them that regionalists now bring to the table decidedly new-fashioned perspectives, and we can come to see that, arguably, all literature is regional and that regions are not merely subdivisions of states and nation. National literatures can no longer be so neatly separated. For example, rather than examine the culture and literature of southern California and other southwestern U.S. border areas in isolation from northern Mexico, we can cross the border in order to consider a “Greater Mexico” that includes the parts of the United States that were taken from Mexico and subsequently Latinized by Mexican immigrants and their offspring. Gloria Anzaldúa advanced this vision two decades ago in her important book *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. More recently, Krista Comer has examined “Greater Mexico” and posed a question much in the air these days: “How might we in regional studies pursue postnational thinking?” (116). Regionalism within the United States has come to be a critical category not subsumed by nationalism but virtually replacing it—as nowhere better exemplified than in *The Literary History of the American West*, which, at 1,353 pages in its first edition, was “longer than most literary histories of the United States as a whole” (Kowalewski 9).

The sponsor of that huge book, the Western Literature Association (WLA), was the source for the beginnings of ASLE, the main forum today for ecocriticism and ecocritical pedagogy. This is one example of the strong connections between regionalism and ecocriticism. During the 1990s, ecocriticism grew in determined, steady, and then rapid fashion.<sup>13</sup> By 1996, there was an *Ecocriticism Reader*, in which Cheryll Glotfelty offered the first (albeit brief) history of ecocriticism since the early 1970s (“Introduction” xvii–xviii). On the other hand, many leading nature writers, mostly recognized separately in Robert Finch and John Elder’s *Norton Book of Nature Writing*, have yet to make their appearance in mainstream, canonical anthologies, such as the American and British Nortons, that dominate survey courses.

At this point, a reader might well ask, “What’s so new about all this ‘ecocriticism’? Haven’t literary scholars been writing about nature in literature since at least the time of Wordsworth?” The answer is yes, but with a big difference. A great many earlier critics treated nature, “setting,” and “landscape” as themes in the works of many authors, including Wordsworth. But in the 1991 book *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*, which he wrote just as ecocriticism came

into its own, Jonathan Bate sought to examine nature in Wordsworth's poetry all the way down to the ground, as the root of where we can find meaning rather than as merely another "theme."

We need to explain to our students that the real motivating force in ecocriticism, as with virtually everything else environmentalist, goes back to the first Earth Day in April 1970. Environmental historians take this as the turning point in contemporary "environmentalism," as that word has been used since then.<sup>14</sup> I didn't fully believe these historians—after all, John Muir had been writing his books and lobbying presidents a century earlier—until I happened across a 1952 journal entry by Abbey in which he called himself a "devout environmentalist." At first, I excitedly thought that Abbey was ahead of his time, invoking "environmentalism" two decades before Earth Day. But then I read on and saw that what he meant is that people are shaped by their social environments and nationalities (*Confessions* 61)—a philosophy that dates back to the eighteenth century—and realized that the word "environmentalist" as we understand it now was simply not available to Abbey in 1952.

As we also need to clarify for our students, the fullest synthesis of ecocriticism and regionalism is bioregionalism: the belief that lands are best demarcated not by state and national borders, but by rivers and mountains and other parts of the natural world, and that we should live and take action based on this principle. Bioregionalism has been a vital influence not only on ecocriticism, but on place studies. Nature writers such as Wendell Berry helped take the lead.<sup>15</sup> Bioregionalism is an interdisciplinary movement that is not limited to literature and philosophy, but also very activist and pragmatic, as reflected in perhaps the most popular bioregionalist collection, one very fittingly named for my subject: *Home! A Bioregional Reader* (Andruss et al.).<sup>16</sup> As the influential Kansas bioregionalist Wes Jackson puts it, in talking about home in the ecological sense, "Our homecoming majors" need "the most rigorous curriculum and the best possible faculty, the most demanding faculty of all time" because they will need to know their whole ecosystems (103).

What if neither bioregionalism nor ecocriticism seem to speak to a student from, say, a gritty, inner-city Philadelphia neighborhood? Here's where the field of place studies becomes most useful. It sets us up to examine any place from any point of view, whether literary, ecological, sociological, economic, or in any other way. We can use it to show students that their home places need not be located beside a flowing stream, within a clearly visible watershed and ecosystem, for them to be able to analyze their own places and understand how they shaped both their hometown authors and themselves. Place studies came of age during roughly the same period as both bioregionalism and ecocriticism.<sup>17</sup> The best introduction is geographer Tim Creswell's *Place: A Short Introduction*, which is as accessible as its title suggests; at the same time, it is not just an introduction, but also a critique of the whole field that brings in a wide range of perspectives. My doctoral student Marsha Walker attests

that Creswell “does an excellent job of helping me understand hometown literature and the essence of space/place/home.” Her classmate Rachal Ward brought in a prompt asking us to apply an idea from Creswell to Berry’s *The Long-Legged House*, and her classmates were very responsive: “‘Place and memory are, it seems, inevitably intertwined’ (Creswell 85). What are some examples from Berry’s essays that illustrate how place and memory are related?”

In such books as *Space and Place*, Creswell’s mentor, Yi-Fu Tuan, staked out the turf of place studies. Tuan emphasizes that home is and has been fundamental to people not just throughout the United States, but around the world. He argues that this attachment was central for the ancient Greeks and Romans, for the New Zealand Maori warrior who asked “to be conducted first to the border of his tribal territory so that he could look upon it once again before death” (155), for Native American tribes that migrated but loved each of their places and worshipped “the earth as mother” (156), and for the Hammer family of Davies County in northwestern Illinois: “Young Bill Hammer and Dorothy, married in 1961, went to California for their honeymoon but quickly returned because, as Dorothy put it, ‘It’s so unreal to be gone’” (160). As Creswell writes, “For Tuan, geography is the study of Earth as the home of people. [. . .] Home is an exemplary kind of place where people feel a sense of attachment and rootedness. [. . .] Home is where you can be yourself. In this sense home acts as a kind of metaphor for place in general” (24).<sup>18</sup>

Hometown authors do not match up simply with a homogeneous home city; their particular neighborhoods and circumstances help shape who they are. In *Hoop Roots*, John Edgar Wideman portrays his upbringing on the rough-and-tumble playground basketball courts of the decaying Pittsburgh area of Homewood: “Playground hoop, like Homewood stories and music, is also rooted here, in the vital remnants of African-derived folk culture and in the dynamics of struggling for survival in a hostile land” (172). It was there that Wideman’s nephew—the son of Wideman’s brother Robbie, who is serving a life sentence in a Pittsburgh prison—was murdered in a drive-by shooting (“Noted”). Yet just a few streets away, in affluent Shadyside, Annie Dillard grew up around the same time as Wideman; in *An American Childhood*, she recounts her visits to the Homewood Library (80–85). Wideman’s Pittsburgh is working class and African American; Dillard’s is white and genteel. Such differences are evident even in small towns and rural areas. During his boyhood, Edward Abbey’s family wandered from one rented house to another in scattered locations throughout Indiana County. But George Stewart lived in a comfortable house in the center of Indiana, as did his distant relative, Jimmy Stewart. The actor’s father, a Princeton graduate like both George and Jimmy, was proprietor of the town hardware store and his house looked down on the town from a cozy hilltop neighborhood.

Like place studies, ecocriticism and regionalism have given more attention in recent years to urban places, not just rural ones. In contrast to Gertrude Stein’s

famous claim about Oakland—that “there is no there there”—the ecocritic Lawrence Buell reminds us that “there never was an is without a where” (Writing 55). Years ago, former ASLE president John Tallmadge found himself moving reluctantly to my own hometown of Cincinnati, finding it initially an alienating and unappealing space, in contrast to the beautiful place that he had left behind. Over time, however, he was able to find and relish nature even in the big city and ended up writing *The Cincinnati Arch: Learning from Nature in the City*, which is as expressive about the city as Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* and Edward Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire* were about rural places.<sup>19</sup>

One effective classroom tool that I use to visualize such movements from one place to another is Google Earth. First, we fly around the globe to the different hometowns of the authors that we read together, focusing in enough to show even the topographies of those regions. I can zoom right onto the Bloomington house of Scott Russell Sanders, where he lives next door to an old acquaintance of mine. I am able to focus in on the Kentucky River near Port Royal, where I once sat on Wendell Berry’s porch interviewing him, and then move to the sharply different landscape of Leslie Marmon Silko’s northwestern New Mexico. I play clips from my taped interviews with Berry and Silko, connecting their voices to their places. Here dialect matters: one student brought in a handout on “Pittsburghese” while we were reading books set there, and I often play a video segment on Appalachian dialect when we’re reading James Still and Gurney Norman. Then we take a second tour on Google Earth, as we tour my students’ hometowns around the United States and also to the foreign countries of some of them. Each add their voices as we go, telling us where the “bad” side of the tracks is in their Pennsylvania town or what those Mississippi fields are like. Or we can whoosh from one place to another while a highly mobile student explains what it was like to move from one hometown to another. Not only is this simply fun, but it gives students a vision of what they are reading and learning about and where they are from. Various media help enliven hometown literature as they do any course. I play a video segment about Joyce’s Dublin, complete with his face, his voice, and a Joyce scholar reading from his work in a Dublin pub. I always get authors’ faces up on the video display, pulling them from the Web. A documentary about the “Negro Leagues” (before the era of Jackie Robinson) sets us up to read August Wilson’s *Fences*. While teaching Thomas Bell’s *Out of This Furnace*, I play folksongs about the coal fields and steel factories and segments of a film about the Homestead strike. Better still, when we get to the class’s hometown authors, some students are even able to play clips from their own videotaped interviews with these writers; at the very least, they bring in handouts and video displays of relevant history, photographs, and so much more. They learn a lot from putting these materials together, and we all learn a great deal from reading and seeing them. It’s a great way to connect students working on diverse, often

obscure authors that we otherwise are not reading together and would not learn about as a class.

Scholars of place studies make a key distinction between “space” and “place,” one that my students find very useful: Space is territory that has little or no meaning to a person (one thinks of wandering the United States from McDonald’s to McDonald’s in a blur of interstate highways), whereas place consists of space that a person or a group of people has invested with meaning. But place and home are not always positive. Many writers have lived far away from their home places while continuing to write about them, but there is a big difference between voluntary expatriates, such as James Joyce and Doris Lessing, and involuntary exiles, such as Salman Rushdie and Mahmoud Darwish. For some people, home is the core of their being and a place to be rooted; for others, it can become a nightmare. Homi Bhabha asks, “As the migrant and the refugee become the ‘unhomely’ inhabitants of the contemporary world, how do we rethink collective, communal concepts like homeland, the people, cultural exile [. . .]?” (271). For exiles who have been displaced from their homes, home is only an impossible and therefore painful memory. Canadian geographer Geraldine Pratt focuses on the story of Mhay, a Filipina contract worker in Vancouver: “Mhay, the Filipina domestic worker, [. . .] has a rather fragile claim to home as a domestic worker admitted into Canada on a special visa. Mhay lives a paradoxical existence of mobility and confinement with only the barest control over her own space” (Creswell 83). Pratt’s analysis informs Creswell’s explanation that “homeless” is “a term of disrespect for those who do not fit into a conception of home—who do not fit prevailing standards of housing, land tenure, family form and material comfort” (116).<sup>20</sup>

#### HOME: RETURN, ADOPTION, MIGRATION, EXILE

What *is* home? Eric Hobsbawm clarifies the German roots of the word “home”: “Home, in the literal sense *Heim*, chez moi, is essentially private. Home, in the wider sense *Heimat*, is essentially public [. . .] *Heim* belongs to me and mine and nobody else [. . .] *Heimat* is by definition collective. It cannot belong to us as individuals” (qtd. in Morley 152). Lisa Knopp digs back further into the linguistic past: “The Germanic words for home may have been derived from two Indo-European words: *kei*, which means ‘lying’ or ‘settling down,’ ‘a bed or couch,’ as well as ‘something beloved’; and *ksêmas*, which means ‘safe dwelling,’ and also the Greek *koimon*, ‘to put to sleep,’ which is the root of *koimeterion*, a ‘sleeping place’ or ‘cemetery.’ In time, the word for ‘home’ in several European languages [. . .] also came to mean a ‘village, town or collection of dwellings’”. Here we see “home” linked to “home-town,” and we can also connect it to the Appalachian “homeplace,” where dead relatives often used to be buried right on the property, as has occurred in various

other cultures around the world. As Knopp concludes, “home is both a community and a safe beloved place to lay down your living or dead body for the night or for eternity” (15). Reminding us that, in order to live fully in touch with home, we need to appreciate the ecosystem of which our home is a part, Judith Plant notes that the word “ecology” itself “comes from the Greek *oikos*, for home” (21).

Wendell Berry is the most celebrated example of a writer who found his happiness by going home, living there, rejuvenating farmlands, and writing about it. Berry brought a strongly bioregional dedication to his literary endeavors—the insights of a working farmer who left New York University in order to return to his native Port Royal not only to write about it, but to revive and tend his native lands. Berry recalls the senior professor who, invoking Thomas Wolfe, tried to talk him into staying in the English department at New York University: “‘Young man,’ he said, ‘don’t you know you can’t go home again?’” But Berry realized that “there was no reason I could not go back to it if I wanted to” (*Long-Legged* 174). For Berry, place should be no mere accident of our existence, but the ground of our being. In his essay “Poetry and Place,” he writes, concerning those of us in free societies, “How you act should be determined, and the consequences of your acts are determined, by where you are. [ . . . ] Not knowing where you are, you can lose your soul or your soil, your life or your way home” (103).

But what if we have no home, and even no hometown, to go back to? I also assign *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World*, in which Scott Russell Sanders explains that he was caught in just such a dilemma. The first places where he had lived had been buried by asphalt or flooded by dam waters. Sanders’s solution to his dilemma was to adopt a new hometown, Bloomington, Indiana, where he has taught for many years. “I am all the more committed to know and care for the place I have come to as a adult because I have lost irretrievably the childhood landscapes that gave shape to my love of the earth” (12). He emphasizes that “the work of belonging to a place is never finished” (xvi), and he feels sorry for those not living in the place where they want to be. We treat homesickness “as an ailment of childhood” and nostalgia “as an affliction of age.” But “the two Greek roots of nostalgia literally mean return pain. The pain comes not from returning home but from longing to return” (14). And Sanders offers a revision of the characterization of home by Robert Frost’s farmer as the place where “they have to take you in”: “Home is not where you have to go but where you want to go” (31). Although he lives in a neighborhood, rather than on a farm like Berry, Sanders similarly aims to devote himself to the ground beneath his feet, in the spirit of his father, who, on arriving in a new place, would often pick up a bit of dirt and smell and even taste it. Why? “Just trying to figure out where I am,” his father would say (xiii). Like Berry, Sanders has devoted himself to his place with a strongly bioregional sense of it: “When we figure our addresses, we might do better to forget zip codes and consider where the rain goes after it falls outside our windows” (62).

In Sanders's case, his rain flows into the Ohio River watershed, where I too grew up and atop which I now live. I lived in the town of Indiana, Pennsylvania for fourteen years before I really began to gain a fully bioregional sense of my place, and Abbey helped teach it to me, as I wandered out, while researching his childhood here, into areas of Indiana County that I had never seen before. I absorbed Abbey's strong sense of how this area is fully Appalachian—an identity that many western Pennsylvanians are in denial about. Then I moved a few miles out of town, into the middle of the woods. Now, I often fantasize about going home to Cincinnati, from my hilltop, by water: in the spring when the water is high, I would walk to the bottom of my long driveway carrying a big truck inner tube and proceed to float down Fulton Run into Crooked Creek and then eventually into the Allegheny River and on down the Ohio River, from the point in Pittsburgh where the Allegheny joins the Monongahela. Dams, locks, and life circumstances prevent me from living out that fantasy, but Annie Dillard's father actually did it, taking time off from his job to take his boat down the Ohio from Pittsburgh as far as Louisville, before flying back home (9–10). I recount these experiences and fantasies of my own, which encourage students to open up and share their own dreams and memories in class discussions.

For writers such as Berry and Sanders, devoting themselves to their home places—whether native or adopted—has been a matter of choice, as Sanders notes: “If I am to have a home, it can only be a place I have come to as an adult, a place I have chosen” (xiv). It's likely that Berry would not have developed such a strong sense of dedication to his home place if he had not first lived in very distant, different places, such as California and New York, and then chosen to return home. But what of the many people in this country and in the whole world who are not so privileged to be able to make such a choice because they are exiled, poor, or both? Sanders recognizes that the loss of his original home places does not compare to the losses of Native Americans, African Americans, refugees, and the poor in general (13). Nor does it compare to the plight of rootless Americans, such as migrant workers and other highly mobile people (military personnel, itinerant preachers, and others) and their children. Their “hometownlessness” is not an uncommon or even a new trend in this country: “20 to 30 percent of Americans move each year, and the average American moves fourteen times over a lifetime” (Tall 14). Yi-Fu Tuan remarks that “Americans have a sense of space rather than a sense of place,” and “Georg Lukács characterized Western society as one of ‘transcendental homelessness’” (qtd. in Lippard 23, 26). Loss of place is often literal and physical for Americans, especially in areas marked by rapid change. When I took my parents back to Delray Beach, Florida, for their fiftieth wedding anniversary, we enjoyed our stay but could find not a single structure still standing from a half-century earlier when they had spent their honeymoon there. Placelessness is also cultural. The California Council

for the Humanities found that two-thirds of its state's citizens know little or nothing about the history or culture of their local, would-be communities (Kowalewski 8). Given the high rates of mobility as Americans move through many spaces, unable to develop a rooted sense of place, we might say that many of our citizens are not bioregionally and otherwise meaningfully "placed" but are instead truly "spaced out." As Chet Raymo writes, "If we don't belong somewhere, we belong nowhere" (157).

American migrants include us, "The Rootless Professors," as Eric Zencey entitles his essay in which he urges that we should "take the trouble to include local content in [our] courses" and, like Sanders, be "willing to take root, willing to cultivate a sense of place" (19). Lucky are those of us who are able to make that transition from migration to rootedness. Some people manage to overcome and even synthesize the places of a nomadic upbringing, such as my student Heather Lowcock, who describes this experience more articulately than anyone else I've read:

I don't carry a feeling of displacement for not having a hometown. Place is significant, but hometown doesn't have to be defined by where we were born, where we began. Home also involves who we become; it is a place of connection, which can be found in many places, many homes. We all begin somewhere, but home is also about where we go. It's not that I don't belong anywhere, but that I belong in so many places. My memories are the scent of the salty wind blowing across the Pacific in Redondo Beach, California, the look of the Space Needle on a rainy Seattle day, the sound of Wrigley Field in Chicago, the friendly hellos of Kentucky tobacco farmers in their fields. When I think of those places, when I return to those places, I am home.

At the opposite extreme, for too many women, there is a home and a hometown, but they can be bad, painful places, places that become instead only spaces in which they do thankless work under the thumb of men in a living hell to be escaped if possible. Lucy Lippard points out that, while the dominant cultural clichés about home tend to be idealized—"home sweet home," "a house is not a home," "be it ever so humble, there's no place like home," "home is where the heart is"—the most contrasting clichés are revealing in terms of gender: "A woman's place is in the home" versus "a man's home is his castle" (28). The first speaks of subjugation, the second of domination, the difference between a servant and a king.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, ecofeminists criticize the ways in which men have dominated and exploited the natural world, much as they have controlled and mistreated women. Victims of child abuse often find it painful to return home as adults. To draw another example from popular film, when Jenny returns to her hometown in *Forrest Gump*, it is her former family dwelling, where her dead father abused her, not her hometown, that she never wants to see again—and so Forrest demolishes the old, abandoned shack for her.

How can we teach hometown literature to students who hate their hometowns? The student who came closest to that problem of alienation from his hometown, in my courses, was Gabriel Smith. Growing up as a liberal, vegan, punk rocker, Gabriel

felt that he did not belong in remote Kane, Pennsylvania, and he left it as soon as he could. Yet even for him, “learning there are active writers from my home area was a thrilling revelation. Others value my own hometown much more than I ever did, and it makes me want to reassess my own connections to the Allegheny National Forest and the surrounding areas.”

#### TEACHING BY STARTING AT HOME AND REACHING FAR AFIELD

My teaching of hometown literature grew out of my work with undergraduate nonmajors and then worked its way up through my courses for undergraduate majors, master’s students, and, most recently, advanced doctoral students. I began by emphasizing our region’s literature in six offerings (between 1993 and 2001) of our large, required course for nonmajors, ENGL 121, Humanities Literature.<sup>22</sup> I decided to make an impact on these students where I thought it would most affect them and stick with them: close to home. Students from outside our region learned more about where they were living during their undergraduate years. The series of authors from Pittsburgh who dominated that course included Thomas Bell, Annie Dillard, John Edgar Wideman, and August Wilson; from Wheeling, Rebecca Harding Davis; from Indiana, Edward Abbey; and from nearby Ford City, the poet Peter Oresick. Peter had begun his undergraduate studies at IUP’s branch campus at Kittanning, and came to our main campus in 1993 to read his poems to my class. I took my students on a walking tour of Indiana, reading aloud quotations from Abbey’s novel *The Fool’s Progress* as we stood in front of the places that he described. Students not only loved Abbey’s riotous writing; they learned that literature wasn’t always far from their experience, as in Shakespeare’s England four centuries earlier, but also right here, right now, just down the street from our campus, where Abbey had taken his own first college English courses in our building a half-century earlier. Oresick and Abbey made particularly strong impressions on my students—up close and personal, here at IUP, where both of these authors were once students. Pittsburgh students extended our literary and cultural experiences by bringing in photographs and reports about such areas of the city as Wideman’s Homewood. In these ways, students can literally recognize the literature that they read. At the same time, we also pay attention to how authors fictionalize and change their actual hometowns. Even Abbey’s very realistic depiction of Indiana is seen only through the ghostly lens of his protagonist Henry Lightcap; Wideman’s Homewood changes a bit in each of his books, taking on different shapes and emphases. Seeing authors’ real places allows students to appreciate even more how those places are transformed in their texts.

In the case of Wideman’s *Brothers and Keepers*—his powerful account of his brother Robbie on death row and how he got to be there while John became a celebrated author and English professor—I was able to use one of my favorite as-

signments: “Research your birthday.” I ask students to look up their birthdays in a newspaper (preferably their hometown newspaper or one close to it), see what else happened that day, and bring their favorite article to class.<sup>23</sup> They never forget what they find, because it happened on the day they were born. (The safety pin was invented on my sister’s birthday in 1949, fortuitously arriving just in time to hold up her diapers.) When I taught my first specifically hometown literature course in 2004, I realized that most of my students had been born around the time that Wideman’s book had been published twenty years earlier. I then arranged my students’ birthday articles in chronological order and reported them back to the class. We had thus worked together to assemble a new historical account of the milieu of both my students’ origins and the appearance of Wideman’s book, thus connecting students’ lives quite literally and directly to the book. Making such connections is easier to do with modern and contemporary authors, who dominate my courses also because these are my own periods of expertise, but teaching hometown literature can also work with writers from earlier periods, as evidenced by my inclusion of Rebecca Harding Davis and also by a project on Frederick Douglass by one of my students. Authors have always had hometowns, regardless of the period. It matters that Shakespeare hailed from rural Warwickshire, in contrast to his rival Ben Jonson, a lifelong Londoner. Other favorite writing prompts of mine are to describe “your most vivid childhood memory” and “your earliest memory in life.” These are always distinctive, and they also frequently connect to students’ home places.

As close to Home—the village nine miles north of Indiana around which Abbey grew up—as we had come in Humanities Literature, it was a course emphasizing regional literature, not a course devoted entirely to hometown literature, the subject that I’ve taught to English majors and graduate students since 2004. How does one begin to teach hometown literature before challenging our students to search out their own hometown authors? I started with my own hometown. Cincinnati is more of a challenge than Pittsburgh. Several notable authors passed through my hometown, with a few of them writing about it, but none of the famous ones qualify as hometown authors.<sup>24</sup> Instead, I settled on Robert Lowry (1919–94), who grew up in Cincinnati, founded a literary magazine that published William Saroyan and other notables, wrote more than a dozen novels, and, during the peak of his career in New York City, was praised by Hemingway and Thomas Mann and called the next Hemingway. Lowry authored a short story, “Layover in El Paso,” that was turned into a movie starring Sophia Loren, *That Kind of Woman*. These accomplishments and accolades all came before Lowry’s mental illness and electroshock treatments in 1952 caused him to crash and burn. Following a decade of difficulty, he returned permanently to Cincinnati in 1962 and spent most of the rest of his life living with his mother until her death in 1988, after which he eked out his last years in a seedy downtown hotel. Lately, there has been a revival of interest in Lowry,

including the publication of a Robert Lowry Journal. I decided to teach *The Big Cage* (1949), a vivid bildungsroman about the upbringing in Cincinnati of a very thinly disguised Lowry, Dick Black, and his first flight from his hometown.

It also so happens that Robert Lowry was my late mother's first cousin and that his mother regularly stayed with me at our home after school every weekday for a few years, beginning in 1961 when I was eight years old. I hasten to add, with tongue in cheek, that teachers of hometown literature need not be relatives of their hometown authors, and, seriously this time, that teaching Lowry was no act of self-indulgence or family pride for me. To the contrary, because of his psychological problems and often very bizarre behavior during all of his later years back in Cincinnati, Lowry was an embarrassment in my family. Although I vividly remember his mother's face and voice, I have no memory of meeting Lowry, but a photo of the two of them at my older brother's wedding indicates that I must have met him in passing. I never read any of his books during the first half-century of my life until I decided to begin my hometown literature course with *The Big Cage*.<sup>25</sup> I have students read the novel first, discussing it in class from the point of view of their own responses. Only then do we read and talk about Lowry's torturous biography, and only then do I share my own related family stories, reading from my late mother's journal and bringing in photographs.<sup>26</sup> *The Big Cage* takes me literally right back home in more ways than one. It reads like a home movie for me because I know Lowry's places intimately. My students enjoy it. It's not the best novel in the world, but it is also not one without redeeming qualities—or I would not teach it.

Most important, beginning my course with a text that is virtually a family confessional novel for me not only provides my students with my own hometown case study, but also encourages them to open up themselves and cast aside any embarrassment some of them may have about their own hometowns. We then move on to my adopted hometown, the place where we are sitting in our classroom. We read *Abbey* and take a field trip to his places out around Home. At the beginning of the course, while students are just getting warmed up, I am more of a performer—sharing videos, slides, and stories about both Lowry and *Abbey*. I even show them a family photo including Lowry's parents and my own family, with myself at the age of four standing sheepishly beside my mother. Once students have seen a photo of me as a little kid, they are much more ready to open up about themselves as the course goes on, when I shift my role to that of facilitator.

Students then find, research, write about, and report on their own hometown authors—sometimes with some help from me and my contacts at the Pennsylvania Center for the Book at Penn State, who not only maintain a website including a clickable literary map of the state, but also email me databases of authors listed by hometown.<sup>27</sup> I'll never forget the morning that I had an appointment with Scott from tiny Vintondale; we were both a bit nervous, thinking he might be out of luck.

We were up against the antiregionalist bias that, as Marilynne Robinson says, “supposes books won’t be written in towns you haven’t heard of before” (qtd. in Kowalewski 7). But Scott and I sat at my computer and discovered that Vintondale boasts not one, but two hometown authors. We found not only the novelist John Burgan, but also Denise Weber, a retired teacher from Indiana High School who had written a book about the abandoned “ghost towns” along the rails-to-trails Ghost Town Trail. Denise had sponsored the nearby historical marker for Malcolm Cowley at his birthplace, another of our immediate area’s claims to fame, and she had a boxful of clippings about Burgan. Soon thereafter, Scott was off happily interviewing Denise and reading her clippings as well as Burgan’s novels. Six miles further up the Ghost Town Trail from Vintondale is the town of Nanty Glo, which a long-gone reference librarian introducing my students to the library twenty years ago used to make the butt of his insensitive wisecrack: “Let me explain that again for those of you from Nanty Glo.” Today, Nanty Glo is the hub of a very active Cambria County local history project. My student from Nanty Glo and I couldn’t find an author from the town itself, but she identified strongly with some poems by Cowley, who was born just a few miles up the road. Not too far away is another old coal town, Heilwood, whose native historian Ron Kuzemchak has compiled a 66-page documentary account of the town (Huey). Such hometown history abounds. Try your local library. For the past forty years in southern Appalachia, teachers have organized their students to collect local folkways and history, as published in the large *Foxfire Book* series, which has also inspired teachers of regional literature in other areas of the country.

What if you don’t teach in the crowded East or Midwest, but in one of the more sparsely populated states of the West and fear a hopeless dearth of hometown authors? The sparsest state, Alaska—with one sole person per square mile, in contrast to Pennsylvania’s 274 and Rhode Island’s 1,003—has been a magnet for wilderness literature, boasting not only famous visitors such as Jack London, but also such notable natives as Dana Stabenow, author of detective novels set in Alaskan national parks, and Athabaskan Indian writer Velma Wallis. Wyoming and Montana, with five and six persons per square mile, respectively, have similarly attracted much writing—for example, the Wyoming anthology *In the Shadow of the Bear Lodge: Writings from the Black Hills* and works by Montana’s Native American poet and novelist James Welch. What about North Dakota, a state many people consider not the most appealing and, with six people per square mile and a dwindling population in some areas, one that has witnessed the recent closure of several towns (Simon)? In addition to popular works by Louis L’Amour and Louise Erdrich, one can read Rose Marie Brauer’s *My North Dakota Prairie Childhood* (and one can even listen to it, as I learned from an 83-page list of “North Dakota Books on Tape” posted by the North Dakota State Library). Did I do extensive research on these western states? No, a

few minutes spent searching on my laptop while writing this paragraph, without rising from my chair, produced these results, and I'm sure there's much more. Many of you teaching in these and other states already know more than I do about your region's authors.

In my intensive, five-week doctoral course in summer 2006, my students, many of them college teachers, came from all over the country. How could they possibly research and write, working mostly far away from their hometowns, about their hometown authors in such a short period of time? Yet they all did, with fascinating results.<sup>28</sup> I had emailed some helpful resources to all of these students in advance, especially the National Center for the Book homepage—which features links to all fifty states, each of them listing not only relevant authors and events, but also email addresses for more specific help.<sup>29</sup>

I have learned a great deal from my international students. Having started close to home, I had wondered if my hometown model might break down when it reached out to other countries. Instead, I learned that hometowns are taken even more seriously in other countries, at least the ones my students called home: Jordan, Taiwan, China, and Italy. Globally, attachment to hometown often becomes, as Yi-Fu Tuan put it in the title of his chapter on the subject, "Attachment to Homeland." Tuan writes, "Human groups nearly everywhere tend to regard their own homeland as the center of the world" (149). That seems truer overseas than for American bioregionalists, for example, whose particular bioregions are more essential than the concept of "the United States"—or for highly mobile Americans who have little real sense of place. Motasim Almajawa explained to us that, when people from Jordan leave their hometowns, they are considered almost traitorous unless, as Motasim did, they promise to return home, bringing back with them what they gain abroad. Wan-li Chen wrote about how the poet Wu Sheng (whose works she translated for us, as did Motasim with Darwish) "developed his sense of place from his birthplace and extended it to the nation, to construct a Taiwanese identity," partly in order to overcome the feeling of living in the large shadow of China. My Chinese and Italian students, Ning Chu and Martin Angelo, had both experienced international double identities, with two hometowns apiece: Ning moved to the United States from China when he was eleven, and Martin shuttled between Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Rome, Italy, as a child before settling back in Indiana. As Ning put it, "Even today, I have trouble figuring out where my hometown truly is. I am from two places." Martin wrote, "In Italia you don't really have this sense of 'hometownlessness.' Families tend to be centralized in one or two cities or towns and remain for generations. In the U.S., it feels much more as though a hometown can alienate its residents."<sup>30</sup>

As exiled Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish asserts (as translated by Motasim) about the home to which he cannot go, "I'm not in my village, but it is in my blood" (12). My student Brian Cope similarly concludes, "A hometown is, to borrow from

Terry Tempest Williams, one's bedrock. It is Berry's camp, Abbey's Old Lonesome Briar Patch, Williams's Salt Lake." I agree with Dan Morgan, who wrote in these pages about teaching literature, "I have come to measure success [. . .] by whether [students] make thoughtful connections to their own lives and concerns" (43). My undergraduate student Erin McNeill reports: "It is interesting to be able to know exactly what hometown authors are describing, instead of imagining a totally different area. It gives the reader and the book a sense of unity and oneness." Doctoral student Rachal Ward declares: "I will always be from Jackson County, Kentucky in my mind—even though I've lived elsewhere. That does not mean I want to make that where I live in the future."

All of my teaching builds also on reader-response pedagogy, as pioneered by Louise Rosenblatt. David Bleich's development in his work from individual student responses to the broader cultural contexts of those responses is even more in sync with teaching hometown literature. Bleich's groundbreaking essay "Reading from Inside and Outside of One's Community" proceeds as something approaching a hometown literary approach, at least in spirit. First, he explains his own cultural responses as a Jew growing up in New York—immediately connecting to Kafka's image of "a vulture [. . .] hacking at my feet" as much the same as the "deadpan metaphors of violence and death" (24) that peppered his family's speech as he grew up, rather than the abstract metaphors that he had been taught in graduate school. He then seeks to reach out to Toni Morrison's different but in some ways similar cultural experiences as an African American from Ohio, as reflected in *Beloved*. Bleich is doing some of what I want to do: to move from our own hometown experiences to those of authors from elsewhere. Bleich emphasizes that students come to us not as blank slates, but as people with complex personal experiences, so that "introduction to literature" should not merely focus on teachers introducing literature to students, but instead be a course in which "class members can recover our own best things and participate in continuous mutual introduction" (35).

What I add is a focus on students' hometowns, and my classes are student-focused through my use of strategies also employed in my other literature courses.<sup>31</sup> I have found that, rather than merely teaching the subject, actually learning hometown literature from my students—who become the real experts on their hometown authors—has been my most place-centered, student-centered, and gratifying classroom work. Students come to their projects with expertise as people who know their hometowns well; they already know more about them than we do. They have further learning to do about their hometowns and their authors, but their position is that of budding authorities, eager to add to what they know. In other words, they operate more as teacher-scholars do: we have confidence in our subjects, but we always want to know more. Students connect hometown authors to their own home places in ways that they never forget, because one never forgets one's hometown,

the place of one's upbringing, whether it was good or bad. They are also better prepared to extend this strong sense of place outward to other authors, from very different locations around the country and the world, and to theorize about that learning in ways with which we can help them. Because they have learned that place—specifically hometown—matters, students also become more likely to understand people in general, including literary authors, other locations, and their different lives, concerns, and formative home places.

## NOTES

1. See <<http://www.city-data.com/city/Vintondale-Pennsylvania.html>> for the most recent population figures on Vintondale. Throughout this essay, I quote my students with their written permission; each preferred to be identified by name. I am thankful to all of them above all others; without them, obviously, I could never have taught these courses or written this essay. I am grateful to Douglas Lanier of the University of New Hampshire, Daniel Philippon of the University of Minnesota, and Frederick Waage of East Tennessee State University (who also brought George R. Stewart to my attention) for most helpfully critiquing earlier drafts; to this journal's two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions about revising the submitted version; to John Schilb for steering me through to the essay's final, published version; to Cheryll Glotfelty and Scott Slovic, who sent me their forthcoming essays relevant to my subject; to Scott Russell Sanders, who emailed suggestions about readings that he assigns; and to colleagues on the ASLE listserv who replied to my November 2005 query about hometown literature: Pamela Banting, Cheryl Lousley, Thomas P. Lynch, Susan Rosen, James Stebbings, Lisa Sara Szabo, Rick Van Noy, and Ann Fisher-Wirth.

2. I might do better to use the Appalachian term “homeplace” instead of “hometown”—because I'm equally interested in authors' home cities and rural places—but I'll stick to the better known word “hometown.” “Homeplace” refers more specifically to one's house and property, whereas my interest runs well beyond property lines into the surrounding places and community.

3. The enclosure of “Hometown” in the title of David C. MacWilliams's short article “Using the ‘Hometown’ Novel in Composition” (2005) indicates the new and tentative use of the term. He limits himself to one literary book in his writing course, the Colorado novel *Plainsong* by Kent Haruf: “Although the town Haruf describes is from the northern part of the state, the town and rural countryside are completely recognizable to my students” (68). In her essay “Finding Home in Nevada? Teaching the Literature of Place, on Location,” Cheryll Glotfelty writes, “the gulf between reader and writer, students and texts, is bridged, since students are writers [and] the texts are about our places.” I agree with these two innovative teachers, MacWilliams and Glotfelty. My courses, however, are not limited to one home state. With a similar orientation but at the opposite end of the spectrum between specificity and breadth, Eric Ball and Alice Lai argue for emphasizing place and the local throughout our curricula rather than in just one course.

4. The poet Patrick Kavanagh not only defended, but championed the usually negative word “parochialism”: “All great civilizations are based on parochialism—Greek, Israelite, English. . . . Parochialism is fundamental” (*Collected Prose* 282–83). In much of his own best poetry, Kavanagh drew his inspiration from his own home parish in Ireland's County Monaghan, as in “Epic,” where he wonders if the local feud that is the poem's subject compares in importance to “the Munich bother” (World War I) until “Homer's ghost came whispering to my mind. / He said: I made the Iliad from such / A local row. Gods make their own importance” (*Collected Poems* 136).

5. The term “glocal” has been used in economics and other fields since about 1996. Patrick D. Murphy's *Literature of Nature: An International Sourcebook* is a good starting point for going global (or glocal), as is Scott Slovic's essay “Teaching U.S. Environmental Literature in a World Comparatist Con-

text.” Many works normally taught in global or world literature courses would also work particularly well for hometown literature, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Matigari*, Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*, Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. I am thankful to my colleague Susan Comfort for discussing global-hometown literary connections and for suggesting a number of relevant works.

6. One student in my large nonmajors course wrote a paper based on an interview with an extra in *All the Right Moves* who could say what Tom Cruise was like off camera when he was younger.

7. I had to travel to a conference in Liverpool to find the only introductory book (a British one) on theory that includes ecocriticism: Peter Barry’s *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, which incorporates a few pages toward the end on “What Ecocritics Do” (264–68). Ecocritical pedagogy is even harder to find outside the pages of *ISLE*, with rare exceptions, such as Frederick Waage’s pioneering collection on *Teaching Environmental Literature* (1985)—published by the Modern Language Association, which thus became our first major national organization to support ecocritical pedagogy—and now retitled *Teaching North American Environmental Literature* in its quite different second edition as part of the MLA’s “Approaches to Teaching” series. *PMLA* was slow to give any space to ecocriticism in the 1990s, but Ursula Heise’s recent article “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Ecocriticism” serves as an historical exposition for that journal’s sizeable readership.

8. A few examples of special issues of journals on ecocriticism can be found in *Studies in the Humanities* 15 (Dec. 1988) and 19 (Dec. 1992), *Hispanic Journal* 19 (Fall 1988), *New Literary History* 30 (Summer 1999), and *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 11.1–2 (Spring/Fall 2005). I expect there are others.

9. In “Sites and Senses of Writing in Nature” (1997), Randall Roorda argued that students (mostly from elsewhere in a New Hampshire program sponsored by the University of Michigan) could better appreciate Robert Frost and others on site, as well as write better themselves outdoors. In “Breaking Ground in Ecocomposition: Exploring Relationships between Discourse and Environment” (2002), Sidney Dobrin and Christian R. Weisser were determined to separate ecocomposition from ecocriticism: “Ecocomposition develops out of ecocriticism, yet ecocomposition is not an extension of ecocriticism” (577). This seemed ironic coming in the same issue in which Peter Elbow lamented that composition and literature are too segregated.

10. Under Murphy’s editorship, *ISLE* regularly included a pedagogical section, which faded after 1995—only to be more than compensated for by the extensive collection of syllabi on ASLE’s website at <<http://www.asle.umn.edu/pubs/collect/collect.html>>. Included there is Karla Ambruster’s interesting course on “calling America home” (<http://www.asle.umn.edu/pubs/collect/comp/Armbruster.pdf>), a writing course rather than one on hometown literature.

11. Now celebrated as a great wilderness explorer and geographer, the one-armed Civil War veteran John Wesley Powell was the first American expert to conceptualize a “region” as defined by the environmental features that set it apart from other regions. We should remember that Powell’s expedition down the Colorado River in 1869—well before Colorado, Utah, and Arizona became states—was part of an effort to map the river and help consolidate U.S. control of this region, which had been stolen from the Native American tribes inhabiting it. Only the Havasupai still maintain their land adjacent to this great river, which was stifled, beginning in 1964, by the Glen Canyon Dam.

12. James Ward Lee delivered an attack on regionalism as late as 1986, looking down his nose in his keynote address to the Conference of College Teachers of English: “In the last thirty years when English departments have gone to war over literary theory, critics and readers of regional literature have remained above the fray, so impossibly old-fashioned” (92).

13. At the 1989 WLA conference, Cheryll Glotfelty urged the adoption of the term “ecocriticism,” first used by William Rueckert in 1978 as the name of a new methodology for studying literature (although “literary ecology” had been invoked by Joseph Meecker as early as 1972). In 1991 Glotfelty campaigned for an MLA Discussion Group on Literature and Environment, but the MLA rejected it as a “limited” theme. Several years later, the MLA did accept ASLE, once it was well established and growing rapidly, as an affiliated organization. An *American Nature Writing Newsletter* appeared in 1991, the same

year that three other significant developments occurred: ASLE was formed, at a WLA conference, with Scott Slovic as its first president; Harold Fromm chaired an MLA session on “Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies”; and Glen Love led an American Literature Association symposium on nature writing. Very recently, this field has been distilled in *Greg Garrard’s book Ecocriticism and Lawrence Buell’s The Future of Environmental Criticism.*

14. As Hal Rothman notes, only with the massively attended 1970 Earth Day did “the public awake to the idea of the environment as a social issue” (125).

15. In his trenchant essay “Writer and Region,” Berry harkened back to his regionalist predecessors of a century earlier: “*Huckleberry Finn* made my boyhood imaginable to me in a way that otherwise it would not have been” (71). Twain “taught American writers to be writers by teaching them to be *regional* writers” (79). In *Bioregionalism*, Michael McGinnis nominates Gary Snyder and the activist Peter Berg as the founders of bioregionalism, which began just in time for Earth Day 1970 (15).

16. *Home!* includes Leonard Charles’s “Where You At?—A Bioregional Quiz,” which includes such earthy items as “Trace the water you drink from precipitation to tap” and “Name five native edible plants in your region and their season(s) of availability” (29). Those who can answer these and other such questions “not only know where you’re at, you know where it’s at,” but he minces no words in telling the many consumers oblivious to their natural world, “You have your head up your ass” (20).

17. The link between place studies and bioregionalism is reflected by the two pages of bioregionalists listed in Creswell’s bibliography (134–35).

18. Tuan’s global vision was updated by Doreen Massey in her 1997 paper “A Global Sense of Place,” where she argues for “a new conceptualization of place as open and hybrid—a product of interconnecting flows—of routes rather than roots. This extroverted notion of place calls into question the whole history of place as a center of meaning connected to a rooted and ‘authentic’ sense of identity forever challenged by mobility” (Creswell 13).

19. In 2003, at the ASLE national conference in Boston devoted to urban nature, I found myself in a room with a window looking out onto Storrow Drive—the same highway where I used to get clogged in traffic jams a quarter-century earlier—speaking on “The Urban and East-Coast Edward Abbey,” while cars and trucks hurtled by outside.

20. Allen Carey-Webb applies a cultural studies approach to texts from world literature in his book chapter “Teaching about Homelessness.”

21. The feminist geographer Gillian Rose notes that “communities can be stifling and homes can be and often are places of drudgery, abuse and neglect,” and argues that “humanistic geographers are working with a masculinist notion of home/place” (qtd. in Creswell 25).

22. My rethinking, at the beginning of the 1990s, of how best to teach literature to undergraduate nonmajors, was greatly enhanced by coediting (and coauthoring parts of) *Practicing Theory in Introductory College Literature Courses* (1991) with my colleague David Downing and also by exploring these new ways of teaching through workshops that I was invited to conduct at Slippery Rock University during 1993–94 as these colleagues reconsidered their teaching and curriculum.

23. I adapted this assignment from Louise Smith’s version of it (82).

24. Cincinnati is, of course, the city where Harriet Beecher Stowe learned about slavery, but she moved there only after she had married and at the age of twenty-one. She wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* mostly after she had moved to Maine, and today one can enjoy a visit to her final, most lavish home in Hartford, Connecticut, right next door to Mark Twain’s house. Nikki Giovanni moved from her native Knoxville to Cincinnati and spent a decade of her youth there but then returned in adolescence to Knoxville, has lived in many other places, and has written largely about those other places; Carol Jago argues that Giovanni’s poetry demonstrates that “wherever she traveled, Knoxville remained her true home” (9). However, as I was writing this essay, I learned that Giovanni returned to Cincinnati on October 14, 2006, for the reopening of Fountain Square and read a new poem, “I Am Cincinnati,” which not only described the city, but shocked many by attacking Republican candidates in the November election (Wilkinson and

Mrozowski). I certainly will include that poem, along with any other poem in which Giovanni touches on Cincinnati, as a handout the next time I teach hometown literature, otherwise continuing to focus on whole books. Toni Morrison set *Beloved* not far outside of Cincinnati, but she never lived there and was born and raised at the opposite end of the state, in Lorain, Ohio. Cincinnati native Michael Cunningham is the author of *The Hours*, but he left Cincinnati at an early age and never wrote about it.

25. I had read earlier only a four-page scene in *The Big Cage*, in which the protagonist's father recounts a version of a horse riding off with his sister when they were growing up in West Virginia. That sister was based on my grandmother, who lived with us during my teenage years and who often told us a quite different version of the same story (the novel has her as the instigator, whereas my grandmother always blamed her brothers for tricking her into getting onto the horse).

26. Heinz Wohler's websites (<http://www.robertlowry.de/> and <http://www.heinz-wohlers.de/>) contain a great deal of information about Lowry and many useful links, including ones to a short biography of Lowry in the University of Southern California's rare books collection (<http://www.robertlowry.de/archiv/biography.htm>), Billie Jeyes's 5 Oct. 1995 Cincinnati *Citybeat* article "Robert Lowry: An American Tragedy" (<http://www.robertlowry.de/archiv/jeyes.htm>), Lew Moores's 3 Dec. 2003 *Citybeat* cover story "Maddening Genius" (<http://www.citybeat.com/2003-12-03/cover.shtml>), and a listing of the half-dozen issues thus far of the *Robert Lowry Journal* (<http://www.heinz-wohlers.de/0000009809112436c/00000098091127b78/index.php>). See also James Reidel's recent scholarly article about Lowry.

27. The Pennsylvania Center for the Book's clickable literary map is at <http://www.pabook.libraries.psu.edu/LitMap/pamap3.html>.

28. Matt Babcock from Jerome, Idaho, wrote about not one, but three such authors in his immediate bioregion. He didn't even need to use Grace Jordan's *Idaho Reader*, a collection of no fewer than 57 Idaho authors. North Carolinian Pamela Richardson wrote about her fellow African American author Sandra Carlton-Alexander (whom she interviewed); Will Dickey, on fellow Altoona native John Pielmeier (whom he interviewed)—and so the list continues. Lake Placid, New York native Andrew Andermatt's pedagogical essay in that course, "Humor, History, and Tall Tales: Rereading the Adirondack College Student," was accepted for publication in *Voices: Journal of New York State Folklore*.

29. The National Center for the Book's front page is hosted on the Library of Congress's website: <http://www.loc.gov/loc/cfbook/stacen.html>. The Census Bureau's listing of population density by state (and even counties within each state) is at [http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/90den\\_stco.txt](http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/90den_stco.txt). North Dakota's list of North Dakota books on tapes is at <http://ndsl.lib.state.nd.us/Publications/ndbooks.pdf>. A simple way to search hometown authors is to type into the search box at <http://google.com> "born in X" author—where X (typed into the box within those quotation marks) is the name of the state and "author" is the name being searched; this tends to produce literary writers rather than movie actors, etc.

30. Ning chose to write about a group of "river poets" in his second, current hometown of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. Martin returned home to Rome by writing about the magical realist novelist Marco Lodoli.

31. Each of my students begins discussion on a chosen date, and often they bring in questions for us to answer, provoking discussion and also making sure that I talk about what students want to have addressed rather than lecture to them and merely impose my own interests. Students talk in pairs in all of my classes before we move to whole-class discussions, which are then very active because the students are warmed up with ideas to share. I believe that the ideal size of a small group is two; even with three, one student can hide, whereas with two, back-and-forth conversation occurs involving both students. Sometimes I pair students from the same regions. Or I ask each student to choose a favorite page from the day's reading; then I jot down those page numbers for display via the "doc-cam" and pair students accordingly to talk about them. Often, two students choose the same or adjacent pages. Then, after moving back into a circle, we share responses in a whole-class discussion during which I take notes on the doc-cam about what they say and intersperse my own thoughts about those and other pages. Students stay with their partners, but join a circle (or semicircle so everyone can see the doc-cam display). The doc-cam is also a great tool for allowing us to look at the same passage together; it is much better than the old "turn to page

134 in our book.” This is a very active, productive way to work our way through a text. Instead of being confronted with lecturers bombarding passive classes with their own views—further distancing themselves from their students by turning their backs on them and scrawling on the blackboard—students participate in the process of piecing together meaning, with their insights displayed for everyone to see on the doc-cam; the teacher serves simply as the note-taker and facilitator. I am obsessed with classroom geography and never cease to be amazed when I observe other classes where teachers break students into small groups but then leave them there when moving to whole-class discussions, with students continuing to sit with their backs to many of their classmates. The couple of minutes spent coaxing students into the most intimate circle possible more than pays off in the ensuing whole-class discussion. I’ve been known to almost pick up some of my undergraduates to get them into places where they can all make eye contact with each other.

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