

# Teaching Hometown Literature: A Pedagogy of Place

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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.”

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. (A Kincaid's *A Small Place* showing on our site visiting Antigua for the silent, scathing views of them held by native Antiguan. I have also included films set both close to our campus (*All the Right Moves*, filmed in Johnstown) and far

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?

**R E G I O N A L I S M , B I O R E G I O N A L I S M , E C O C R I T I C I S M ,  
A N D P L A C E S T U D I E S**

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.

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

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



famous claim about Oakland—that “there is no there there”—the ecocritic Lawrence

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

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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:

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.”

**T E A C H I N G   B Y   S T A R T I N G   A T   H O M E   A N D   R E A C H I N G   F A R**

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 onn



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 W

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 class-



text." Many works normally taught in global or world literature courses would also work particularly well for hometown literature, such as Ngugi 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 connec-

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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