HOWELSSIAN CHIC: 
THE LOCAL COLOR OF COSMOPOLITANISM

BY BRAD EVANS

We who are nothing but self, and have no manner of being
Save in the sense of self, still have no other delight
Like the relief that comes with the blessed oblivion freeing
Self from self in the deep sleep of some dreamless night.

—William Dean Howells, “Sphinx”

Had Sarah Orne Jewett’s country maiden from A Marsh Island (1885), Doris Owen, decided to go off with the bohemian artist Dick Dale to a life of heady, urban aestheticism, she could have hoped for no better end than to have become William Dean Howells’s Alma Leighton from A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890). The two women’s circumstances are remarkably similar, both of them familiar characters from the archives of New England regional fiction. Like Doris Owen, Alma Leighton grew up in one of those picturesque vacation destinations scattered someplace between Vermont, New Hampshire, or Maine; like Doris, her mother kept a summer boarder who happened to be a young bohemian artist who had come with the purpose of making some sketches of the local scene; and like Doris, she became romantically involved with him. The difference between them is that, rather than staying at home in rural Maine, Alma travels to New York: though, like Doris, she ultimately rejects her bohemian suitor, she does so not to remain true to her roots in the country but to become a bohemian artist herself. It is Alma’s sketch for the cover of the novel’s new illustrated magazine, Every Other Week, that sets the aesthetic framework for the novel itself. Her sketch was “chic,” “awfully chic”—and, because she knows that it’s “the nearest way to illustrating,” and thus to making it as an artist in the big city, she’s going to keep on “doing these chic things.”

“Chic” is not a word frequently attached to Howells, nor would one be prone to mistake him for a local color writer. But what Howells formulates with his deployment of Alma Leighton in A Hazard of New Fortunes is nothing less than a theory of taste that
links the American taste for the “ethnographic” aspects of local color writing with the aesthetic arts movement—*Japonisme*, simple line drawings, languid women, flowered screens, art advertising, George Du Maurier’s *Trilby*, lithography, posters, the blurring of image and text, little magazines, the French, cloying stamens, luscious pistils, and abundant cigarettes. Alma’s regionalism and her chic design are inextricably linked in the novel. She is a specimen from the local color movement that Howells and his readers would surely have recognized as a type—Jewettesque or Wilkins-Freemanesque. Her bohemian love interest, Beaton, who also hails from the locally colored rural northeast, would have known her as such from trips he had made to New Hampshire “sketching for one of the illustrated papers” (149). But she is also in circulation, moving about in Manhattan, producing covers and illustrations for the trendy new magazine, refusing to marry, making her way in the commercial mode of high aesthetics. Her Manhattan art instructor, something of a misogynist, desairs of her talent, but at the same time signals her out as an aesthete, a “case of art for art’s sake” (212).

It is no secret that Howells promoted local color fiction and local colorists—fiction with the ethnological content needed to “get the whole of American life into our fiction”—in his editorial writing. However, his deployment of Alma in conjunction with chicness opens up questions not only about the parameters of that promotion, but about an assumption held in common by two prominent lines in the contemporary critique of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century regionalism. Whether reading regionalism as an ideologically inflected geography of peoples and nations, or as an aesthetic commodity, critics have assumed that regionalism was about regions. It has been taken as a given that both the form’s ideological and market charge came from the way the fiction conceptualized and represented regional locales. However, Alma’s chic locality has very little to do with what we might normally think of as a region, a geographically isolated place defined, either positively or negatively, by its cultural homogeneity and pastoral attachment to nature. Rather, it has to do with the aesthetic charge produced by the dislocation of Alma and her sketches from the region as they were routed through the urban, internationalist space of the *fin de siècle* art market. What made Alma chic was the confluence of the local and the cosmopolitan in both her designs and her mode of living; and as such, regionalism in this account had less to do with a sense of place than with a dynamic of circulation.

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In this essay, I want to argue that regionalism gains in aesthetic and theoretical interest, both for us and Howells, to the extent that it is (and was) seen to circulate in a transnational network of distribution. Once connecting with a region meant picking up a book, once an audience became conscious of regional writing as an object of Art—or, even more crassly, as a cultural commodity—attention had already swung away from the locale described. What the character of Alma so nicely encapsulates is Howells’s sentiment of localized forms and experiences that were all circulating, available to people who were also circulating, in a newly conceived of commercial, aesthetic, and ideological relationship.

But what Howells’s development of her character might also reveal is a frequently overlooked characteristic of certain local colorists more properly defined, like Lafcadio Hearn, Alice Dunbar Nelson, or Kate Chopin. At least by this later phase of local color writing, in the 1890s and early 1900s, many people would have felt that the very idea of a discreet region being represented in writing would already have been transformed by a public taste for alterity. By then, regionalism’s relationship to a culturally and geographically homogeneous place had been recast in terms of a transnational fashion for local commodities; and, even more remarkably, local colorists had begun to deploy transnational aesthetic fashions to delimit in aesthetic terms a sense of regional places. Paradoxically, the local came to be defined by the deployment of artistic tropes that were themselves transnational in origin. And so, what Howells’s definition of the local as the chic helps us recover is the chicness of later local color writing tout court.

1. LOCALISM’S GLOBAL PURCHASE

In one of the more theoretically savvy recent assessments of regionalism, Roberto Dainotto argues that the political, epistemological, and ideological concerns about race, gender, and the nation that have preoccupied recent assessments of the form are made visible by a different kind of problem altogether: “What, or where, in fact, is this ‘region’ where aesthetics and literature survive unchanged, undivided by social conflicts, and free ‘despite political, religious, or psychological interference?’” Dainotto’s response is that the region is no place at all, but rather is a “utopia” of “ideal places . . . from which we can begin to sanitize our present.” And in this, he is very much in line with critics who have argued more particularly in the context of American regionalism that the form stood ideologically for
a nationalism out of repair, a nationalism troubled by the standardization of industrialism and the ethnic impurity of the modern city.

It is certainly true that Howells's deployment of local color can be slotted into a model that understands the desire for regionalism in terms of an antimodernist nostalgia. For example, Howells finds, in his analysis of Mary Wilkins-Freeman's local color sketches, that a "community of character abounds: the people are of one New England blood, and speak one racy tongue." To the extent that he would have known the territory of Wilkins-Freeman to be more heterogeneous than suggested by such a phrase, Howells would seemingly participate in the kind of practice that "effaced" more explosive urban and racial conflicts by "rendering social difference in terms of region, anchored and bound by separate spaces," as argued by Amy Kaplan.

But even more strikingly, and in a way much less familiar to his critics today, Howells positions the local as a highly aestheticized global commodity, one that is flung into a kind of transnational aesthetic where it trades on visual and visceral pleasures attendant to a dislocation of the self. And here, I would insist, against Dainotto and Kaplan, that even if the region of regionalism does not correspond to any territorial locale, it does not necessarily follow that the category is one simply of naïve nationalism and antimodernism.

For example, when introducing the preeminent local colorists, “Mrs. Cooke, Miss Murfree, Miss Wilkins and Miss Jewett,” as among the best short story writers, Howells immediately brings into play the French mannerist writer Alphonse Daudet and the Russian regionalist Ivan Turgenev. Howells demarcates a transnational route for American regional writers by comparing them directly to Turgenev, who had achieved his status as a novelist largely on the quality of his regionalism. He writes that it is locality—incorrectly defined, in his opinion, by its critics as “narrowness”—that distinguishes “the whole tendency of modern fiction”: “A new method was necessary in dealing with the new conditions, and the new method is world-wide, because the whole world is more or less Americanized.” That the formal characteristics of local color become the worldwide method for literary modernity is a radical departure from a conceptualization of it as an artifact of nationalist cultural citizenship. This conceptualization of the local as the global in fiction radically displaces our sense of where to locate Cooke, Murfree, Wilkins-Freeman, and Jewett—not to mention Alma Leighton.

Howells’s connection of Daudet to Turgenev and modernity in this worldwide Americanization of aesthetics has an extra purchase for his
deployment of characters like Alma in *Hazard*, because Daudet comes to have a special symbolic role in the novel as the benchmark for the *chic*. Though it goes unmentioned in *Hazard*, Daudet and Turgenev were famous acquaintances in Paris. Both were members of a very small and exclusive club of experimental realist authors meeting in Paris at the time—a group organized by Edmond de Goncourt that also included Emile Zola and Gustav Flaubert. This group can be imagined as grounding Howells’s fictionalized account of the coincidence of the local and the transnational, of Alma and *chic* aesthetics. Beaton, a bohemian artist trained in Paris, immediately recognizes the mock-up of Alma’s cover for the new magazine to be “like some of the *Tartarin* books of Daudet’s,” a reference to illustrated editions that had begun to appear in Paris in the 1880s under the influence of *Japonisme* and the aesthetic arts movement (120). The magazine’s publisher, Fulkerson, explicitly says that the process they want to use for its illustration is the same “that those French fellows gave Daudet thirty-five thousand dollars to write a novel to use with” (122). And the amiable socialite Margaret Vance confirms the pairing some hundred pages later when commenting that the new magazine is “as *chic*—that detestable little word—as those new French books” (212). Alma’s illustrations, like Daudet’s books, are poised to enter in the quickening current of the international trade in objects of art.

The issue for Howells, then, is specifically not that of getting local places defined as regional points on an American literary map, but that of understanding local color’s charge within the space of the market—a space filled with mobile and consumable cultural forms, the picturesqueness of which was itself to be consumed. And it is here that Howells can be used to extend the other line on regionalism now emerging, which locates it much more directly in the context of a modernist trade in exotic objects. Though Richard Brodhead’s emphasis on local color as a strategy for suppressing the “radically heterogeneous” falls more directly into Kaplan’s school of seeing regionalism as a form of nostalgia, he makes very clear that local color was part of metropolitan high culture. Laurie Shannon has fit Sarah Orne Jewett into the world of French art, comparing her work to that of *intimiste* painters like Edouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard. In the same vein, Bill Brown has argued that the nation is bracketed in her work, her attention to objects insisting instead on the dynamics of the global and the local. Nancy Glazener and Carrie Tirado Bramen have both pointed to Hamlin Garland’s populism to argue that
regionalism did not have a single political objective, while Stephanie Foote argues that “binaries that are assumed to constitute regional writing (rural/urban, native/stranger, simplicity/chaos, nostalgia/modernity) cannot hold up” to a more rigorous reading.\textsuperscript{13} Gavin Jones, similarly, finds that the dialect speech of local color writing was “not just a homogenous act of repression” but was very capable of evoking “a worrying sense of linguistic and social disunity.” And Chris Bongie astutely places regional writing, especially by Lafcadio Hearn, at the center of discussions about creolization and hybridity.\textsuperscript{14}

Howells’s particular use in extending this line of analysis comes from the way he grounds the local as a commodity that accumulates value when put into circulation in an internationalist art market. His deployment of Alma marks and furthers what might best be understood as an aesthetics of circulation, or the production of aesthetic value via circulation. That circulation was itself multifaceted. On the one hand, one might think of the way that American regional writing might have been traded in places like London and Paris. It was to this end that Howells promoted it in the way that he did, and there is some evidence that American regionalists did enter into the international art market. Hearn, for one, had books translated and published in France on several occasions in the early twentieth century, but was even more well received in Tokyo, where he moved in the early 1900s and where one can still find a memorial park honoring him. On the other hand, and it is here that this paper will focus its energies, one can see the circulation of iconographic images from the aesthetic arts movement in local color writing, such that the form became, in the 1890s and early 1900s, not so much about the local as about the color—not so much about regional places as about stylistic flare. In work by the likes of Hearn, Stephen Crane, and Chopin, the form itself emerged as one through which ideas about style and taste moved with particular ease. As such, the confluence of the local and chic insisted not simply on the multiplicity of local goods entering into the circuit of fashion and taste, but on the production of fashion and taste from within the rubric of locality.

\section*{II. Howellsian Chic}

The first impression Howells gives of Alma’s artwork comes in the last stages of work on a new magazine—and about a third of the way into \textit{A Hazard of New Fortunes}—when Basil March and Fulkerson are faced with the problem of deciding on the direction to take with
the cover of *Every Other Week*. The question, as the businessman Fulkerson explains it to Beaton, is whether to print the magazine with a paper cover, like the one decorating the mock-up in “ivory-white pebbled paper,” or whether it would be better off “in some sort of flexible boards, so they [the American public] can set them on the shelf and say no more about it” (120). It takes no time at all for the aesthetically cocksure Beaton to formulate his answer:

> Beaton had got done looking at the dummy, and he dropped it on the table before Fulkerson, who pushed it away, apparently to free himself from partiality. “I don’t know anything about the business side, and I can’t tell about the effect of either style on sales, but you’ll spoil the whole character of the cover if you use anything thicker than that thickish paper.” (121)

There may be a certain specimen value in the pacing and ungrammaticality of this passage—“Beaton had got done looking,” Fulkerson “pushed it away”—that could help us imagine what Kaplan has described as the conservative nature of Howells’s “construction” of reality and the kind of muscularity needed for “controlling and ordering” it. Its nonchalant and slangy tone is that of someone who can handle the hazards of modern life, who can negotiate its rhythms and emerge with his manliness intact. But coupled with this tone is an aesthetic question carried, almost by chance it would seem, in the slack reference to the magazine’s cover. What is the “character of the cover” of *Every Other Week* that, contrary to our expectations of what might signify value in a literary publication, “anything thicker than that thickish paper” would spoil? And in what way might a better perception of the taste for covers complicate our reading of the tone in which the reference is made?

These questions are of particular interest for the way they frame the market context for the reception of Howells’s own novel. Like *Every Other Week*, the fictional magazine around which the plot of *A Hazard of New Fortunes* circulates, the novel was published with a paper wrapper, relished by the critic Brander Matthews for its “decorative sobriety . . . with its sombre symbol of fate” (figure 1). The key word, here, is “decorative.” In the American 1890s, a paper wrapper was not a sign of an inexpensive or low quality publication, but rather of an experimentation with styles most recognizable as belonging to the British arts and crafts movement, the post-Impressionist Nabis in Paris, and Japanese art. Matthews insists that the paper wrapper be associated with “the originality, the elegance, the
freshness,—in a word, the art,—of the men who are making the things which encompass us roundabout.”17 More whimsically, Matthews quotes another writer to the effect that paper wrappers made fitting clothes for “summer novels”:

As certainly as the birds appear comes the crop of summer novels, fluttering down upon the stalls, in the procession through the railway trains, littering the drawing-room tables, in light paper covers, ornamented attractively in colours and fanciful designs, as welcome and grateful as the girls in muslin. . . . [I]n the summer, though the fiction be as grave and tragic as wandering love and bankruptcy, we would have it come to us lightly clad—out of stays as it were.18
It is not, admittedly, to Matthews’s evocation of the summer clothes of fiction that one might most immediately turn to elucidate A Hazard of New Fortunes, Howells’s most direct, post-Haymarket Square critique of the inequities of market speculation. What I want to point out, however, is the extent to which these summer clothes—fluttering through railway trains, circulating out of stays, and cladding Howells’s novel—should draw our attention to the aesthetic sensibility and visual iconography that articulates the novel’s realist social agenda. That sensibility is of the chic, and it is connected in particular ways to the idea of the local defined as a commodity by its movement, “fluttering,” “littering.”

The chic permeates the novel, becoming its keyword for describing what is most aesthetically cutting edge in the world of Howells’s realists. March can only smile when Fulkerson, too, mixes “American slang with the jargon of European criticism” in describing Beaton’s success with the magazine’s artwork as being “awfully chic”: “He’s caught on like mice. He’s made the thing awfully chic; it’s jimmy; there’s lots of dog about it” (174, my emphasis). Beaton has a thing for the chic. Everything he touches seems to be so, as, for example, his architectural drawings, which are said to be “very striking, very original, very chic, very everything but habitable” (104). So too is the artistic nature of the woman to whom Beaton is most attracted, Alma, who designed the cover of Every Other Week that draws such stylistic praise. Her art teacher dryly recognizes her as the most talented of his students with the acerbic comment that because she’s a woman “no amount of chic is going to help” (112). For her own part, Alma turns her teacher’s criticism to a spunky self-affirmation: “He doesn’t like my doing these chic things; but I’m going to keep it up, for I think it’s the nearest way to illustrating” (94).

There is a kind of semantic doubleness about this word chic, for while recognizable as a marker of “distinction” in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu, it clearly meant a real thing in the Manhattan literary world peopled in the novel—something with a sure referent and a sellable charm that also happened to be open in particularly loamy ways to those characters and objects with attachments to the local.19 The chic denotes not simply a matter of style and taste, but an aesthetic modality that can itself be traded and traded upon. So what is the chic?

The OED suggests that the word only entered into English slang in the 1850s: “artistic skill and dexterity; ‘style’, such as gives an air of superior excellence to a person or thing.” The first example is from 1856, but they multiply in the 1880s. Most tellingly for our purposes
is the one from an 1888 *Pall Mall*: “Her voice is sweet and her delivery artistic, but she is wanting what the French call ‘chic,’ an untranslatable word, denoting an indispensable quality.” At first glance, it would appear that the key determinant here is precisely that of locale, and specifically of France. A *Harper’s Monthly* article from 1892 confirms this sense, illustrating it with reference to “a Parisienne” in her dressing room, in which “there is no useless decoration, no excess of furniture. . . . [S]implicity itself, a mere laboratory.” But this attention to a French, or more precisely Parisian place, is somewhat illusory. The *chic* for both the British and American magazines signals not so much France itself as the dispersed network of distribution for *chic* things. The term is connected not so much to the Parisienne in her dressing room as to the tableau of the Parisienne in the magazines—magazines which become *chic*, themselves, by trading on the image.

The particular style of the Parisienne is refinement, the minimalist elegance of the line that moves in the direction of art nouveau, and yet even there it would seem to be a style that deterritorializes the object. The *Pall Mall* suggests that *chic* is an untranslatable word, but an untranslatable word is most often one without a synonym in even its own language. Its refinement—in the sense of its purification and precision—renders it irreducible, foreign even to itself. As suggested by the Parisienne in her dressing room, the *chic* is openly, even theatrically, sexualized. As a corollary, it is divorced from the domestic. It entails being at home everywhere and nowhere at once, a decoratively lived foreignness. Always in circulation, it is, moreover, easily commodified. It sells—and sells well—which is probably why in *Hazard* it typically gets translated by way of its negative, as a symptom of false consciousness, as in Margaret Vance’s half-hearted self-distancing from “that detestable little word.” Paradoxically, it is something both attractive and, because of its mass appeal, clichéd.

The *chic* is, thus, well-fitted to Alma, who renounces both the Anglo-Saxon home of her New Hampshire childhood and the possibility of domestic motherhood in order to pursue a career as a book illustrator: “I’m wedded to my art,” she tells her mother when explaining why she has turned away the romantic advances of Beaton, “and I’m not going to commit bigamy, whatever I do” (182). There is a great deal of whimsicality in Alma’s reply, but that should not divert the charge of her comment with regard to her play with the gendered expectations held for her as a young woman of rural background. As Christopher Diller has noted, Alma is cut loose from strict gender
identifications; I would add that she would not be so chic were she not to some extent androgynous. For example, when Alma first uses the word, it is to describe an illustration she had just completed of a not quite manly man, about which she notes that “as soon as his back’s turned I get to putting ladies into men’s clothes” (93). But, of course, that is exactly what she has done when making the sketch. She was the model, as she just before “got up and took a pose before the mirror, which she then transferred to her sketch”—her sketch of what turns out to be a man (93). There is a thrill for Alma—and maybe for us when we find it, unexpectedly, in Howells—in her active dislocation of herself from her body in a sketch that is chic. Indeed, what appears to be most chic about Alma’s artwork—and what is chic about the association of it with Alma herself—is that it signals her inability to be pinned down. To be chic, she must inhabit a sensibility having no home, one that is ostensibly displaced from any comfortable locale, one that has to circulate.

The most prolonged assessment of Alma’s art comes in reference to the cover she designed for the new magazine—the one compared to “those Tartarin books of Daudet’s” by both Beaton and Margaret Vance. Daudet, a French novelist of manners, published his first Tartarin book in 1872; but it, along with two others, was brought out in the late 1880s and 1890s in a series, Collection artistique Guillaume that was illustrated by artists trained in the schools of open-air painting and salon realism. American audiences would have known their work from the final installment of the Tartarin series, Port Tarascon, which was brought out with the French illustrations in Harper’s Monthly between June and November of 1890, just months after Hazard had completed its run in Harper’s Weekly. It was translated by Henry James, who in an unusual preface noted, with some thought perhaps of the social hazards described earlier by his friend Howells, that “the last moral of all is, that however many traps life may lay for us, tolerably firm ground, at any rate, is to be found in perfect art.”

The books produced in the Collection Artistique Guillaume were not expensive, but their illustrations are notable because they achieve a quality of expression that was just coming into the art form. The most important American illustrations for the decade leading up to 1885 were strikingly pastoral. Winslow Homer’s Thanksgiving in Camp, for example, compresses different parts of narrative into one frame so that, as suggested by the historian Diana Strazdes, “a single image would suggest past and future events, as well as the present” (figure 2). The image fills the entire frame; the soldiers in the
foreground seem to have struck a pose, and their placement does little to disrupt either the balance or the temporality of the composition. The Tartarin pieces, by contrast, depend much more on abstraction and quite literally break up the frame of the narrative by intruding into the text. Rather than illustrating a general mood, they tend to focus on particular scenes and points in the text that give viewers a stronger sense of action and the characters’ emotions (figure 3).

An Atlantic Monthly review of Port Tarascon notes that the French artists “speak a French dialect of pictorial art which is not merely intelligible, but penetrates the sense with a pungency of meaning which is truly exhilarating.”27 One can imagine Fulkerson wanting similar exhilaration when he describes the “kind of thing that begins at one side, or one corner, and spreads in a sort of dim religious style over the print till you can’t tell which is which” (122). One finds this especially in the illustrations by Rossi, where there is a strong emphasis on diagonal motion and an exploration of solid shapes to fill the background (figure 4). The same technique was being picked up broadly in the 1890s, as in Albert Herter’s illustration for the reissue of George Washington Cable’s collection of local color, Old Creole Days (figure 5).
Howells’s own engagement with aestheticism is signaled in his poetry for Harper’s Monthly, which the magazine paired with illustrations by the most well-known illustrator in the U.S. at that time, Howard Pyle. Though beyond Howells’s own control, Harper’s decision to use Pyle is perfectly apropos of Howells’s experimentation with both the cadences and cynicism of the aesthetics movement. “November—Impression,” published in 1891, is one of the most remarkable examples:

A weft of leafless spray  
Woven fine against the gray  
Of the autumnal day,  
And blurred along those ghostly garden tops  
Clusters of berries crimson as the drops  
That my heart bleeds when I remember  
How often, in how many a far November,  
Of childhood and my children’s childhood I was glad,
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With the wild rapture of the Fall
Thrilling from me to them, of all
The ruin now so intolerably sad.²⁹

Both the poem’s darkness and its arhythmicality identify it as an engagement with the aesthetic sensibility. The crux of the poem comes at the doubly-enjambed, heavily-stressed sixth line, “crimson as the drops / That my heart bleeds when I remember / How often.” With its transformation of crimson berries into the residue of a

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Figure 4. Rossi, illustration for Daudet’s Port-Tarascon (Paris: Collection Artistique Guillaume, 1890). Princeton University Library.

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²⁹
broken heart, the line becomes the hinge that holds the poem together thematically and (with five lines above and below it) numerically. Howells’s spry play with clusters of unstressed words in the rhymed opening, “against the gray / Of the autumnal day,” gives the poem a decidedly modern lilt. Similarly, he manipulates the rhyme pattern for dramatic effect, especially when pairing “my children’s childhood I was glad” with “now so intolerably sad” in the last four lines. Though “glad” and “sad” offer an expression of emotion unfortunately reduced from that suggested with the earlier

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imagery, they still encapsulate the series of reversals that characterize the poem as a distinctly modern exercise in style.

The aestheticist line that Howells picks up here to explore his deceptions of the early 1890s is repeated in other poems collected for publication in *Harper’s* under distinctively modern titles, “Moods” and “Monochromes.” Edwin Cady notes that “Monochromes” refers to “plastic art-work done in color, most often black-on-white”; coupled with the psychological depth of “Moods,” he argues that the poetry immediately announced its “modernist” intentions.30 Similarly, Howells engaged more explicitly internationalist stylistic experimentation in his attachment to the bilingual Franco-American poet Stuart Merrill. Howells wrote the introduction to Merrill’s collection of work by the most important French writers in the new style, *Pastels in Prose*, which came out at exactly the same time as *Hazard*. *Pastels* maps out the French aesthetic world in which the chic emerges, containing sketches by Charles Baudelaire, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Stéphane Mallarmé, Auguste Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, and, fittingly for the present discussion, Daudet. Howells, significantly, adds Turgenev to Merrill’s group, noting that his work in “this irregular species of composition” shares “qualities . . . and traits common to them all”: “beautiful reticence . . . brevity . . . simplicity; as if they felt the responsibility they were under to be even more laconic, more delicate, more refined than they might have been.”31

In this context, the most visually exciting possibility for understanding Howells’s engagement with the aesthetics movement comes with the art poster craze initiated in the U.S. by the literary monthlies in the mid 1890s. Matthews suggested the close link between picture posters and paper covers for books in an 1892 article for the *Century Illustrated*, calling the paper covers the “younger sister of the pictorial poster.”32 *Harper’s Monthly* commissioned its first poster in 1889, just as *Hazard* was reaching its conclusion in *Harper’s Weekly*, *The Century, Lippincott’s, The Chap Book*, and others did the same.33 The style of these posters was an eclectic, international mix of post-impressionist iconography (figures 6 and 7).34 One sees this influence in such things as the palette, the *Japonisme* prints on the walls, the dependence on diagonals, the characters’ costumes and postures, the immediacy of the moment that comes through with cropped figures, the use of strong outline, the excessive decorative flourishes that contrast with intense moments of flat spaces, the upward or downward perspective, the peacock feathers, and the erotically charged flowers.

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That the craze for these posters hits after the initial publication of Hazard does not detract from the correctness of aligning the chic with it. It should be kept in mind that when thinking of American illustration it is far from the only possibility. As many historians have
noted, the rapid changes in the American magazine and newspaper industry led to “the Golden Age of American Illustration.” Some surveys estimate that over 100,000 illustrations per year would have been published in the top 34 illustrated magazines alone, which does not even begin to account for the hundreds of other magazines Frank Luther Mott estimates were published during the period, or for the newspapers which were actively publishing illustrations as well.\textsuperscript{35} Most of this work would clearly not be considered \textit{chic} in the Howellsian sense; it would be more descriptive and less decorative, more realistic and less abstract. But what I want to point to here is

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the way that Hazard seems to insist on Alma doing something different from the rest of the field for Every Other Week. 36

Hazard’s engagement with this aesthetic style manifests what, from hindsight, we know to be the history of the movement without ever naming it as such. For example, Beaton comments that Fulkerson is unlikely to find the kind of illustration he wants for the magazine in the United States. “Do you expect to get such drawings in this country?” asked Beaton, after a glance at the book. “Such character—such drama? You won’t. . . . I can’t think of a man who could do it; that is, amongst those that would” (123). Though not altogether clear, what Beaton really seems to be after here is not so much verisimilitude in the illustration as the aesthetic flare tied up with this new internationalism—the sort of thing for which, prior to the 1890s, it would make sense to look to Europe. Fulkerson, whose model had indeed been a “little Spanish book,” replies, “Well, think of some woman, then” (123). Beaton thinks of Alma; and by the 1890s, a large number of newspapers and magazines had begun to do the same. Women illustrators had a significant impact on the movement in the U.S., foremost among them being Elizabeth Shippen Green, the first woman to have a regular contract illustrating for Harper’s Monthly. Not only was book illustration and cover work very much a profession open to and dependent on women artists, but they were instrumental in pushing forward the new aesthetic formalism. 37

But what this context also explains is the novel’s surprising flirtation with an aesthetic commercialization of sexuality. Creating the echo for Beaton’s comments about “character” and “drama,” Alma had earlier elicited a surprised response when showing her mother a sketch that played with sexuality:

“Go on—about the girl in the picture!” said Alma, slightly knocking her mother on the shoulder as she stood over her.
“I don’t see anything to her. What’s she doing?”
“Oh, just being made love to, I suppose.”
“She’s perfectly insipid!” (94)

What Mrs. Leighton takes to be “insipid” was sure to have been recognized by Alma as something more akin to languid sexuality, a familiar image of the feminine in aestheticism. Again, reference to one of the artists inspired by art nouveau would seem to make sense here, for what Alma and her mother describe must be something like John Sloan’s puzzle illustrations for the Philadelphia Inquirer in 1895 (figure 8). Sloan, who in typical fashion moved fluidly between
Howellsian Chic


newspaper illustration and poster art, provided an image typical for the decorative nature of its lines, the floral pattern of the woman’s chemise, the print pattern on the wall, the use of color, the strong vertical motion, and its intrusion upon the text.

This context recalls, moreover, two unexpected flirtations with nudity in Howells’s text, the first when Fulkerson talks about what to put on future covers of *Every Other Week*, and the second when the
old and provincial Mrs. Dryfoos pronounces herself offended by the illicit nature of advertising posters in department store display windows. Indeed, Fulkerson goes so far as to describe what seven years later would become two of Maxfield Parrish’s most famous magazine posters, a piece for Scribner’s and an 1897 midsummer piece for The Century Illustrated (figures 9 and 10). “Sometimes,” Fulkerson proclaims excitedly, “we’re going to have an indelicate little figure, or as much so as the law will allow. . . . Mr. Beaton here is going to supply the floating females, gracefully airing themselves against a sunset or something of that kind” (121). The style recalls most directly Gaugin’s paintings from Martinique in 1889 and Tahiti, starting in 1891 (again, aesthetically deterritorialized local color sketches). And yet, it remains difficult to gauge which comes as more of a surprise, the nudes on the cover of the notoriously prudish Century—which, remember, had not altogether given up its evangelical roots and which has always been held up in contrast to the decadent little magazines, like The Chap Book—or a character of Howells’s flirting with illicit images of floating females. The female artist and the female form; the commercial, the sexual, and the aesthetic; the local and the cosmopolitan; these references to the surprisingly forward artistic consciousness of the novel come, to say the least, as something of a surprise given what one expects from Howells. Could this be an undiscovered Howells . . . decadent, sexy, chic?

III. JAPONISME AND THE DISORDER OF THE MARKET

As suggested not only by The Century’s poster art, but by Alma’s social and professional mobility across geographic and gender borders, the aesthetic offers access to a fluid, disordered sense of the self—to movement within and across geographically and socially located types—that comes to signify something like the cosmopolitanism of the aesthetic arts movement of the 1890s. This image of guilty pleasures linked to aesthetic fluidity plays against the more doleful and conservative image of Howells, constructed most prominently by Kaplan’s reading of him as a deeply anxious man, someone who urgently “exhorts, pleads, and proclaims the need to construct a familiar reality in fiction” in order to counter his fear of “modern life.” Kaplan contrasts James’s reading of Howells as someone “animated by a love of the common, the immediate, the familiar and vulgar elements of life,” with her own feeling of Howells’s “lack of
Howellsian Chic

confidence in the existence of a common, familiar, immediate reality to which language can refer” and his discomfort with “emerging forms of mass culture.”

Though my own tendency clearly is to side with James, Kaplan’s characterization of Howells corresponds neatly with his deployment of a character who would otherwise seem to fit

Figure 9. Maxfield Parrish, poster for Scribner’s (August 1897): “an indelicate figure, or as much as the law will allow . . . floating females, gracefully airing themselves against a sunset or something of that kind” (Hazard, 121). Courtesy of Hirschl & Adler Galleries, Inc., New York City.
into the aesthetic constellation of the *chic* that I have been describing: Lindau, the novel’s only true foreigner, an unmarried, German-born, anarchist intellectual who had been hired to translate stories from the international presses for *Every Other Week*. In the climactic scene in the novel, Howells kills Lindau off, letting him fall under the baton of a policeman as he protests at a streetcar strike.
The significant role Lindau plays at the end of the novel draws into sharp focus the risk associated with the aesthetics of circulation—a risk suggested in much lighter terms at the beginning of the novel when Alma sketched herself in men’s clothing. It is a risk, staged in terms specifically applicable to the chic, between order and disorder. With Lindau, disorder has reached its limit; and yet deep sympathy remains for his plight. Despite his apparent taste in foreign literature and talent as a poetic translator, Lindau is the primary speaker of the novel’s “violent” words, an agent provocateur that Walter Benjamin reading Karl Marx has taught us to recognize as the original bohemian. In the climactic scene in the novel, Lindau puts down his literature and takes to the streets, taunting a bevy of policemen who had come to break up the streetcar strike. But not only does Lindau die: he also causes the death of the saintly Conrad Dryfoos, who had come to minister to the Christian needs of the strikers. The ideological calculus seems to tip against Lindau at this point, his version of social disorder clashing too significantly with the disorder of the aesthetic realm. March admits so much to his son when he says, in response to a question, that “Mr. Lindau died in a bad cause”:

“Why yes,” he answered; “he died in the cause of disorder; he was trying to obstruct the law. No doubt there was a wrong there, an inconsistency and an injustice that he felt keenly, but it could not be reached in his way without greater wrong.” (392, my emphasis)

And yet, there can be no mistake that March’s response to his son comes with a great deal of moral complexity. He would not have even thought of the question without prompting: “He had always been so sorry for Lindau and admired his courage and generosity so much that he had never fairly considered this question” (392). Similarly, he avoids his wife’s harsher critique of the international activist in the last pages of the novel, where she claims that the speculative capitalist, Dryfoos, “is a better man than Lindau.” March turns the comment aside with a cynical rejoinder that Dryfoos, at least, “is able to offer us a better thing in Every Other Week” (423).

In effect, what Lindau has staged in his confrontation with the police is the social equivalent of Fulkerson’s aesthetic flirtation with the limits of what “the law will allow” with regard to nudity on the covers of his magazine. Lindau crosses Howells’s line, the line at which the chic does not find its analogy in the Paris barricades of Marx’s Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon (1852). And yet he does not do so without Howells’s evident sympathy.
March's ambivalence about Lindau registers alongside his experience, throughout the novel, of dizzying moments of psychic liberation coming directly as the result of another kind of disorder—that developing out of the aesthetic realm of the chic. March spends a great deal of time in New York as a flaneur, which Howells documents with a sense for the liberation that comes with the ease of movement and observation made possible in the city. At one point, March feels deep "relief" when watching a couple at a French café in Manhattan—a young couple who must be artists because "the wife had an aesthetic dress and defined her pretty head by wearing her back hair pulled up very tight under her bonnet; the husband had dreamy eyes" (257). His sensation when looking at them is described explicitly in terms of a disordering of the self:

This immunity from acquaintance, this touch-and-go quality in their New York sojourn, this almost loss of individuality at times, after the intense identification of their Boston life, was a relief. . . . March refused to explore his conscience. . . . [H]e said he liked now and then to feel his personality in that state of solution. (257)

This fluidity that March experiences, the movement within and across social and national borders, might provocatively be aligned with fin de siècle aestheticism. It is the pleasure arising from circulation, from not being at home anywhere, from the kind of liberated sense of sexuality that permits the married and middle-class March to look at a seductive young woman.

March's disorder, however, is not social but aesthetic. The parameters of this disorder is made explicit in another of Howells's poems, "Sphinx," wherein Howells writes of the "relief that comes with the blessed oblivion freeing / Self from self in the deep sleep of some dreamless night." After the death of Lindau, Howells pulls March back, inscribing his response within a social reality that, we are lead to believe, has to do with more than just a state of mind. What remains bracketed, however, is this flirtation with another mode of achieving disorder, one that Howells deploys as if it were the product of a different aesthetic genre—not the realist novel but the poem or the colorful sketch of a young woman in a New York café.

Howells stages a similar flirtation with disorder with Beaton. Late in the novel, Beaton is contrasted to a younger and less impressive artist, Kendricks. Both men had been attracted to one of the awkward, locally-colored Dryfoos girls for her "literary effect" (343).
Unlike Beaton, though, Kendricks balks at pursuing her because doing so was incongruous in his mind with the “role of the gentleman” (344). There follows a bit of exposition that makes one question where Howells might come down on the implicit critique of Beaton’s designs:

[Kendricks] could not have penetrated to that aesthetic and moral complexity which formed the consciousness of a nature like Beaton and was chiefly a torment to itself; he could not have conceived of the wayward impulses indulged at every moment in little things, till the straight highway was traversed and well-nigh lost under their tangle. (344)

It should be unmistakable that Howells’s description of Beaton’s wayward unself-consciousness was modeled on the same aesthetic predilections pushing forward the illustration of Sloan and the flourishing of the American poster-period in the mid 1890s. With “wayward impulses indulged at every moment in little things,” one is lost in the hair, in the dress, in the dislocating “tangle” of decorative lines framing the most interesting examples of this work. Howells’s treatment of Beaton is remarkably indulgent. Though he excoriates Beaton for sexual wantonness in the last pages of the novel, Howells almost suggests that it comes with the territory of having a powerful aesthetic imagination.41

It remains the case, nonetheless, that Hazard is not “Sphinx.” Cady’s biography of Howells suggests one way of understanding the disjuncture between them. Cady notes that Howells had been approached by Harper’s in 1888 to do “a series of [local color] sketches about New York . . . one based on the social meaning of such sketches.”42 Though Howells agreed, what he gave them instead (shortly after moving, himself, to New York) was A Hazard of New Fortunes, in which local color comes in the form of March thinking about, but not producing, such sketches for Every Other Week. I would suggest that this story of Howells’s production of his most impressive social realist novel has parallels to the split between order and disorder, as portrayed by the characters of Lindau, March, and Beaton. That March never does directly produce his sketches of New York is not so much a conservative rejection of an aesthetic of circulation as it is a reflection that such an aesthetic was more easily conceived of in the deployment of other genres. It is of no small significance that Howells gave the Harper brothers not a chic local-color sketch but a novel; that the novel found its serial publication not
in the publishing house’s more decorative monthly, but in *Harper’s Weekly*, which at the time was a more politically liberal organ, publishing works by Garland and others also likely to be found in the left-leaning *Arena*; and that Howells personally picked W. A. Rogers, a staff artist at *Harper’s* and well-known political cartoonist, to do the illustrations for his stories. All of these facts may be taken as a signal of his deepening concern with social and economic inequities.

But at the same time, in other genres, in his association with writers like Merrill, and in his fascination with characters like Beaton and an aesthetics of circulation represented by Alma’s cover for *Every Other Week*, Howells indulged deeply in more unruly sensibilities. Ultimately, the *chic* affect solicited by Fulkerson for the cover of *Every Other Week* is analogous to that suggested by the cover of *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. Despite the political imagination that cannot abide the disorder of a Marxist bohemian, the aesthetic sensibility of *Hazard* is not antipathetic to the decorative stylistics of the feminine body “out of stays,” wearing what Matthews calls the “loosely fitting garments” of summer fiction. They have a sellable charm, these summer clothes with their tangled moral complexities and wayward impulses.

**IV. Chic Locality**

There is more that could be said, at this point, about Howells’s attention to the training of female art students and the international aesthetic of the *chic*—most notably that he takes up the issue directly three years later in the aptly named novel *The Coast of Bohemia* (astoundingly, his seventh major publication after *Hazard*). But let me move instead towards the question of how one might hear the concept of locality as against that of the Howellsian *chic* within the specific context of the 1890s international art complex. One of the lessons of *Hazard’s* association of the *chic* with locality is that we should be hearing in local color fiction the internationalist hum of the aesthetic arts movement. Indeed, the argument I want to make in conclusion is that what one sees in local color fiction of the 1890s is not at all the assertion of stasis and purity that one might imagine for it—a last gasp, as it were, of romantic nostalgia for a preindustrial past—but the assertion by artists, publishing houses, and perhaps even readers of a rather hip participation in the dislocating, tangled complexity of the *chic*. Indeed, by the late 1890s, the status of local color had shifted increasingly toward the aesthetic. As Charles
Dudley Warner, the successor to Howells in Harper’s “Editor’s Study” column, wrote in 1897, “We do not hear much now of ‘local color’; that has rather gone out. . . . But color is essential, and high color attracts even the uneducated taste.”

To start, let us return to the scene of the local in Hazard’s imagination of the aesthetics of circulation. The most chic characters in Hazard are also its most recognizably local. As we have seen, Alma comes to Manhattan from the country, and it might as well have been from Sarah Orne Jewett’s “country of the pointed firs.” As for Beaton, his study in Paris situates him in the world of aestheticism, but it does not make him nearly so chic as having a Syracuse stonecutter for a father, whose meager financial assistance funds Beaton’s decadence. Beaton lives in a cluttered Manhattan studio with lots of tasteful things, among them a “lay figure simpering in incomplete nakedness . . . a Japanese dress draped before it” (104), a writing desk covered with “foreign periodicals—French and English” (104), and on the mantel a “Japanese vase of bronze” (107). He moves like few other characters in the novel across the entire social spectrum—among socialites and the poor, from the Leighton’s boarding house to the Dryfoos’s mansion. He is dislocated from any one particular sense of self; he can at will take “possession of one of those other selves of which we each have several about us, . . . [becoming] the laconic, staccato, rather worldlified young artist” (110, my emphasis). There is never any doubt that he is an extremely talented and superbly chic artist, one whose lifestyle seductively beckons to characters like March. But our sense of his availability to the spirit of aestheticism cannot be disentangled from our sense of where he came from and what he is doing to his father to get it. Were he to go back to Syracuse, Beaton would be ok; but, being at home, he would never be chic.

Hazard brims over with similarly local characters, whose circulation in the city gives them a new charge as aesthetic objects. The Dryfoos girls, though not by any means cultivated themselves, are recognized by both Beaton and Kendricks as fascinating subjects for the production of chic art. In a similar vein, Alma proposes that Beaton use Miss Woodburn, a Southern belle who had moved to the metropolis with her unrepentant old-South father, the Colonel Woodburn, for a sketch. “I should think you’d want to paint Miss Woodburn,” Alma tells him. “Don’t you think her coloring is delicious?” (116). And in much the same way, the city itself becomes a stage for the transformation of the local into the aesthetic. March continually wanders the streets of New York, contemplating the
sights for the aesthetic bearing they might bring to some sketches he plans to do. To the extent that Howells does provide local color in *Hazard*, he does it in relating what March sees when riding in the elevated train, slumming in the colorful streets around Lindau’s apartment, or strolling among “the young people of that region . . . the promenaders [who] looked New Yorky” (262).

The sentiment Howells develops, of this connection between the local and aesthetic *chicness*, was shared both by his most esteemed literary interlocutors and other writers of local color with whom he has but passing acquaintance. The most literal example of *Japonisme* in the movement comes with Hearn, who moved to Japan in the early 1900s. Howells relates Hearn directly to the visual arts, calling him “an impressionist who puts on pure color, and loves to render light in its fiercest and brightest and gayest tints.” After publishing a number of marginally successful novels about Martinique, Hearn finished his writing career in an even smaller, more aesthetically refined form: he took to collecting and retelling ancient Japanese folklore. Though not so successful as Hearn in the international market, other local colorists offer examples in the same vein. The African American local colorist Alice Dunbar Nelson has been unduly trapped in a very boring mode of criticism, which takes her to have been a minor and ethnically uninflected writer, and yet her fictional recreation of the racial ambiguity of the carnival, coming out as it did in the same years as the manicheanization of race in the U.S. with *Plessy v. Ferguson*, suggests her engagement with the development of the short story as the preeminent genre for stylistic experimentation. Crane’s *Maggie* (1893), while ostensibly about the ghetto, seems even more to be about blowing apart the contrived staging of reform journalism (especially Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives*) with an exercise in pure aestheticism—“The girl, Maggie, blossomed in the mud pile.” And a plethora of art journals from the 1890s, working on the model of Aubrey Beardsley’s *The Yellow Book*, combine the forms, as in *The Echo, Moods, Two Tales*, and George Washington Cable’s *Symposium* (figure 11).

Perhaps even more to the point, though, is Chopin. No other American writer from this time period was more “out of stays” than she, and so the development of her work proves to be a remarkably useful example of the shift of local color fiction towards the chic sensibility I have been describing. Chopin was a stylist of the French school, as noted even in 1894 by William Schuyler, who remarked that she read Daudet and particularly Maupassant with pleasure. She
had translated Maupassant—publishing three translations of his stories in *St. Louis Life* in 1895—and, at least in the mind of Per Seyersted, had bettered his stylistic innovations.\(^4\) One might thus
imagine the *chic* influence on her of Maupassant; of particular interest is the way that, within her own work, one can begin to see a progression away from local color fiction’s early fascination with the ethnological dimensions of cultural association and towards its emphasis on the disordered possibilities of an art for art’s sake styistics that comes with its commodification.

Chopin published a story called “At the ’Cadian Ball” in the journal *Two Tales* in 1892 and, after completing *The Awakening* in 1898, wrote a sequel, “The Storm,” that she never tried to have published. In each, the description of the main female character, Calixta, is quite recognizable in terms of those qualities of insipid languidity that should by now be familiar. In 1892, she is “that little Spanish vixen,” whose “slender foot had never touched Cuban soil . . . but her mother’s had, and the Spanish was in her blood all the same.”

Her eyes . . . the bluest, the drowsiest, most tantalizing that ever looked into a man’s . . . her flaxen hair that kinked worse than a mulatto’s close to her head; that broad, smiling mouth and tiptilted nose, that full figure; that voice like a rich contralto song, with cadences in it that must have been taught by Satan, for there was no one else to teach her tricks on that ’Cadian prairie.”

There was no one else to teach her tricks, except, perhaps, Aubrey Beardsley, whose interest in both tantalizing sexuality and the Satanesque were suggested as influences on Chopin by her first biographer, Daniel S. Rankin (figure 12). And they were sure to be recognized as such by the men who desired Calixta, especially the aristocratic rogue, Alcée Laballière, described by one of the old ’Cadian gentlemen, “who was in the habit of reading a Paris newspaper and knew things,” as “*chic, mais chic.*”

Of particular interest for understanding local color’s movement towards aesthetics in Chopin’s writing is its movement away from a more ethnological preoccupation with race. Take, for example, her attention to Calixta’s hair, which in the first story “kinked worse than a mulatto’s.” In “The Storm,” her hair still “kinked more stubbornly than ever,” but far from any suggestion that those kinks have a racial antecedent, they are now identified as being “yellow.” The accents of race and heritage abound in “At the ’Cadian Ball”: the ball is for a race other than white; the skin color of Bobinot, the ’Cadian farmer who at the end of the story wins Calixta’s hand, is “brown”; Calixta has a distinctly Creole accent when she speaks French to the more purely bred aristocrat Clarisse; though by no means as dark as the “negro
musicians” whose riotous music warms the 'Cadian ball, Calixta’s tincture corresponds to the Caribbean. In “The Storm,” by contrast, Calixta’s skin whitens and her accent disappears. The racial markers of her desirability for Alcée are erased, and her Spanish blood is no longer reiterated as an excuse for her actions. She still has her “liquid blue eyes” and “a drowsy gleam that unconsciously betrayed a
sensuous desire,” but now she also reveals “her round, white throat and her whiter breasts.”54 Indeed, it is her whiteness that comes as a surprise to Alcée as he makes his way into her bedroom for the long-postponed coital experience: “She was a revelation in that dim, mysterious chamber; as white as the couch she lay upon.”55

Moreover, “The Storm” engages with those same markers of aesthetic stylization which had begun to displace the local in favor of chic. Perhaps nowhere can this predilection for the deployment of iconic images of the aesthetic movement be seen more clearly than when Calixta’s experience of the act of sex is described as being like “a creamy lily”: “Her firm, elastic flesh that was knowing for the first time its birthright, was like a creamy lily that the sun invites to contribute its breath and perfume to the undying life of the world.”56 To draw on just a few examples, one sees that lily on the cover of the deluxe edition of Cable’s Old Creole Days, reissued in 1896, on the cover of Beardsley’s edition of Le Morte D’Arthur (1893), and on Crane’s The Black Riders (1895). The lilies become poppies on the cover of Hearn’s collection of Japanese folktales and sketches, Kwaidan (1904), but then Hearn always seems to push the cosmopolitan aestheticism of local color to the limit. Calixta’s name itself evokes these images, “calyx” being the whorl of leaves that sheathes the flower. But in “At the ’Cadian Ball,” it had been Clarisse, the well-bred Creole woman whom Alcée eventually marries (and on whom he cheats with such harmless relish in “The Storm”) who had been described as being—somewhere between a Monet and a Van Gogh—as “[d]ainty as a lily; hardy as a sunflower.”57 In “The Storm,” the figure of the lily becomes Calixta, the most intensely dislocated character, the “Spanish vixen” of the Bayou no longer. Chopin has gone post-Impressionist: Van Gogh’s sunflowers give way to visual icons of Gustave Moreau and Gustav Klimt.

Signaling an aesthetic sensibility that is located in neither any one place nor any one self, the chic becomes a singularly effective way for locally-colored characters, like both Calixta and Alma, to inhabit modernity. But the real point is that neither they nor their work could have been recognizably chic in the aesthetic world Howells imagined without a primal connection to a locale from which they might be displaced. In her widely acclaimed work on American bohemianism Christine Stansell notes early on the prevalence of “protoethnographic” sketches in the movement: “The notion of the bohemian reflected a nineteenth-century habit of mind already attuned to discovering and observing stock ‘types’ in their particular metropolitan niches.”58
What I am arguing for here is an understanding of the extent to which bohemianism and the chic not only reflected but depended upon the notions of both “types” and “niches” such literature described. The ability to localize, and thus also to dislocate this work, produced the possibility of its circulation as an aesthetic commodity. This charge of the chic can be found in other local color writing in the 1890s, because what made local color chic was precisely the attention paid to its circulation—an attention that came when locality was deployed by practitioners of Japonisme and the aesthetic arts as a favored commodity, one to be circulated within and across the trade routes of taste.

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NOTES


3 I will elaborate these two versions of reading regionalism—neither of which is as independent from the other as is implied here—in the next section. For now, let me simply mark their places by citing the ideological critique of Amy Kaplan, “Nation, Region, and Empire,” in *Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991); and for the commodity version, Richard Brodhead, *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993).

4 Roberto Maria Dainotto, “‘All the Regions Do Smilingly Revolt’: The Literature of Place and Region,” *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1996): 489, 505.


7 Kaplan, “Nation, Region, and Empire,” 251.

8 Howells, *Criticism and Fiction* (New York: Haper and Brothers, 1891), 142.


10 Brodhead, 137.


13 Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1830–1950* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1997); Carrie Tirado Bramen, *The Uses of Variety: Modern Americanism and the Quest for National Distinctiveness* (Boston: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000). Stephanie Foote’s argument holds even though the volume as a whole is something of a disappointment for the way it brackets local color within the confines of the literary monthlies and the period 1870 to 1900, when the form has a much longer afterlife and was frequently published in newspapers, lesser magazines, and directly as books. Foote, *Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 15.


16 Brander Matthews, *Bookbindings Old and New* (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1895), 238. Tellingly, the next cover that Matthews discusses is one by Alphonse Daudet. The novel was number 661 in Harper’s Franklin Square series, novels which were published with paper covers on a monthly basis, the subscription price being $5 a year.

17 Matthews, 247.

18 The quote is from Charles Dudley Warner, in Matthews, 237.

19 With the word “distinction,” Pierre Bourdieu suggested the way that cultural goods—museum paintings, etiquette, fine food—could be appropriated and deployed for the secondary purpose of signifying class affiliation. As such, all judgements of taste were relativized. See *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1984).


23 We never really know what the cover of the first issue looks like, in part because the narrator gives two versions of it. For the mock-up, it is on “ivory-white pebbled paper . . . prettily illustrated with a watercolor design irregularly washed over the greater part of its surface, quite across the page at top and narrowing from right to left as it descended” (120). Later, we learn that the paper color was a “delicate gray tone” and the “decorative design . . . was printed in black and brick-red” (169).


29 Howells, Pebbles, 4.
30 Howells, Pebbles, 175 n. 12, xv.
32 Matthews, 248.
34 Lina Gertner Zatlin offers an extensive history of Japonisme, to which this essay is much indebted, in Beardsley, Japonisme, and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997). By 1890, Japonisme had a three decade long history in France and Britain, starting in France with Edgar Degas, Edouard Manet, Vincent Van Gogh, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, and Paul Gaugin, and carried to London largely by the American James Whistler, who had spent extensive time in Paris.
36 Here I part ways with Diller’s account of the aesthetics of Every Other Week, which, according to him, offers a “feminized visual emulation of canonical culture” (389). His own turn to Paul Cézanne’s controversial painting L’Eternel féminin at the end of his essay would seem to suggest a more radical Howellsian aesthetic formulation.
Kaplan, *Social Construction*, 21 (“exhorts”), 16 (“lack”; “emerging”). Although Kaplan’s reading of Howells’s realism as an attempted exertion of control over reality has been extremely influential, its assertion of Howells discomfort with modernity are beginning to appear exaggerated. To take but one example of relevance to this paper, Kaplan suggests that one of Howells’s “most scathing reviews” attacks popular fiction, *Ben Hur* and *Trilby*, the circus, the burlesque, cardplaying, and horseracing—entertainment for the “unthinking multitude” (17). Beyond the fact that the article she cites never mentions either *Ben Hur* or *Trilby*, that Kaplan hears those two texts in this context suggests a deeper misunderstanding of Howells’s relationship to mass culture. Though one can imagine him disliking *Ben Hur* (he does not, to my knowledge, review it), it’s less easy to imagine him disliking *Trilby*, which was written by George Du Maurier, an author whom Howells otherwise respected, about a world, the Parisian expatriate bohemians, that clearly intrigued Howells. And Howells evidently liked the circus and vaudeville. On this, see Cady’s discussion in Howells’s *Pebbles*, 178.


In another essay that reads *Hazard* for its aesthetics, Kermit Vanderbilt makes the opposite point that Howells’s excoriating treatment of Beaton concurs with Howells’s statements in his “Editor’s Study” columns against Guy de Maupassant and others of the French aesthetic school who divorced style from morality. Vanderbilt, *The Achievement of William Dean Howells: A Reinterpretation* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), 163. This reading is just wrong. Howells writes admiringly of Maupassant in the “Editor’s Study,” saying that his stories are “masterly” and “illustrative of the French sense of art in all things.” That said, he thinks that Sarah Orne Jewett is better. See his “Editor’s Study” (February 1890), in *Editor’s Study*, 238. The broader point I’m making, however, is more of a methodological one. What I’m interested in doing is marking the place where Maupassant, the French visual arts, and immorality become objects that Howells’s realism trades on—and cannot do without.


On the “little magazines,” see Larzer Ziff: “*The Chap-Book* . . . was the best as well as the first of the self-consciously avant-garde magazines of the period that soon earned the name of ‘little magazine.’” *The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation* (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), 13.


50 Daniel S. Rankin, Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories (Philadelphia, 1932); noted by Seyersted, 188.

51 Chopin, “At the ‘Cadian Ball,” 146.

52 Chopin, “The Storm: A Sequel to ‘At the ‘Cadian Ball,”’” in American Local Color Writing, 74–79, 76.

53 Chopin, “At the ‘Cadian Ball,” 142, 151.

54 Chopin, “The Storm,” 77.


56 Chopin, “The Storm,” 77, my emphasis.

57 Chopin, “At the ‘Cadian Ball,” 143.