

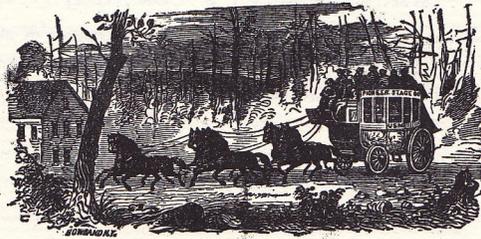
ACROSS THE CONTINENT:

A SUMMER'S JOURNEY

TO THE

ROCKY MOUNTAINS, THE MORMONS,
AND THE PACIFIC STATES,

WITH SPEAKER COLFAX.



By SAMUEL' BOWLES,

EDITOR OF THE SPRINGFIELD (MASS.) REPUBLICAN.

SPRINGFIELD, MASS. :
SAMUEL BOWLES & COMPANY,
NEW YORK :
HURD & HOUGHTON.
1865.

Exploring an Early Version of Literary Journalism: Nineteenth-century Epistolary Journalism

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Often overlooked by scholars, much of the epistolary journalism in nineteenth-century American newspapers can be considered a form of narrative literary journalism.

About to depart on a four-month journey across North America in 1865, just weeks after the end of the Civil War and four years before the completion of the transcontinental railroad, an eager traveler penned the following words:

[A]nd so, dear friends all, we sail out into this vast ocean of land. I shall think of you with every joy, and, possibly with selfish longing, with every pain. Do you think of me when the June roses open, with the dew of July mornings, with the fragrant cool of an August evening shower, when the katy-dids sing in September; and, God willing, I shall be with you again ere the maples redden in October.¹

A private letter to family or friends, it would seem. But no, instead it's a newspaper letter, written by *Springfield* (Massachusetts) *Republican* editor Samuel Bowles to his readers. This passage concluded the first of the thirty-two newspaper letters published in his paper during a remarkable trip across the continent in 1865. It doesn't sound much like a newspaper article—but, then, what is it?

Bowles was writing in what I call an epistolary journalism form—a form that assimilates traditions of journalistic writing and the discursive functionality of personal correspondence. The Bowles example reveals a text that corresponds significantly to contemporary scholars' expectations for literary

At left, facsimile title page of Samuel Bowles's Across the Continent. Reprinted by permission from personal copy of the author.

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journalism. Points of comparison include content—comprising scene construction, character development, dialogue, and solid reporting; style—comprising literary forms and language; and authorship—characterized by the subjective and mobile vocal stance of the author.

This article suggests that many of the same qualities that mark nineteenth-century newspaper letters as epistolary texts such as Bowles's *Across the Continent* also places them within a tradition of early literary journalism. This is not to say that all epistolary journalism is necessarily literary journalism. But what the Bowles example demonstrates is that the form carries the potential for compellingly rich narrative structures, grounded in fact, and representing ideas or a philosophy that exist beyond the facts of a story—in this case, the idea of a new America in the wake of the Civil War—and that is a distinctly literary journalism. Thus, as an antecedent and influence on literary journalism in the twentieth century as we have come to know it, nineteenth-century epistolary journalism, as a literary form, and Bowles's representative *Across the Continent* letters, have fair claim to a place within the study of literary journalism. I will demonstrate that claim by first examining the epistolary tradition, and then examining how content, style, and the author's role connect epistolary journalism and literary journalism.

Epistolary journalism lies at the intersection of journalism and epistolary, assimilating traditions of journalistic writing as well as the discursive functionality of personal correspondence. The form negotiates the literary space between private letters and journalistic writing in a kinetic way, drawing and retaining structures from the private letter and yet modifying them to fit the journalistic milieu; accommodating content that typifies the personal letter but which the newspaper might otherwise neglect; and oscillating between the personal voice of the author and the voice of the journalist within an epistolary text that lays claim to both. The term epistolary journalism designates letters written by journalists to be published in the newspaper. Readers could expect that the letters would convey newsworthy material but in a personal way, providing the journalist's own experiences and opinions in addition to information we typically expect in newspaper articles. In the nineteenth century, epistolary journalism often appeared in the form of travel letters, reporting information from distant locations such as Europe or remote areas of the United States. Excluded from this study and not meant to be implied by epistolary journalism are letters to the editor and novels constructed as a series of letters, commonly called epistolary fictions, which are not composed with the same expectations for content, form, and function.

My concept of epistolary journalism is tied to works of epistolary criticism, which historically have focused on private letters and epistolary fic-

tions, and which seek to uncover formulaic structures and textual functionality implicit to the letter-writing and reading processes. *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications* is William Merrill Decker's outstanding work of critical letter theory in which he theorizes letter writing in its structural sense and also examines the rhetorical and historical contextualization of the epistolary act. Decker demonstrates that the letter genre is both broadly and variously defined. He considers relevant texts to be characterized by letter-writing conventions as well as authorial idiosyncrasies that lend a significant diversity to the genre—and yet, the activity of letter-writing itself is a clearly identifiable and self-conscious activity. In other words, an individual self-consciously composes a letter, although the structure, content, and style of the finished product may be widely divergent.² But existing approaches to epistolarity are just a starting point here, since Decker and others expressly exclude public letters such as epistolary journalism from consideration despite an acknowledgement that “[w]riting of this kind often grows out of, leads to, and overlaps with private correspondence.”³ It is in this overlap that we take up epistolary journalism.

Samuel Bowles provides a case study of the form because of his approach to journalism and his motivation for this series of letters in particular. As a proponent of a newly emerging factual journalism that would ultimately be called “objective” journalism, a journalism seeking to be independent of the biases and constraints of political affiliation, Bowles nonetheless was an innovator in style and perspective. So when it came to finding a form which could adequately communicate the story he saw unfolding during his trip across the continent, he was not restricted to more traditional newspaper models then establishing themselves after the Civil War, which has often been viewed as a watershed in, or at least one important benchmark for, the evolution of “objective” style in the American journalistic experience.⁴ Like other late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century examples of literary journalism, the *Across the Continent* letters demonstrate the transformation of information into a literary text by use of narrative and rhetorical techniques generally associated with fiction. Character and scene development, an attention to concrete detail, incorporation of traditional literary forms, attention to word selection and sentence construction, the foregrounded subjectivity and involvement of the author in the story—all are present in Bowles's letters. At the same time, Bowles does not abandon the reportorial function which emphasizes information, as evidenced by extensive passages on topics such as mining, culture, and transportation. So when Bowles adopted a course of correspondence with his readers in place of more traditional reporting

models, he embraced a literary form in which he could incorporate not only the chronological events of the overland journey but also extemporaneous conversation; stories and rumor; lengthy analysis—from Bowles's point of view, of course—of politics, economics, and commerce; personal reactions to people, places, and events; and even a side-splitting joke or thinly veiled insult. Bowles's epistolary text provided a rhetorical space in which to connect his story to ideas and philosophies beyond the facts.

CONTENT

Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters abound in passages that harmonize with expectations for the content of literary journalism, particularly, as noted, through attention to scene construction, concrete details, extemporaneous dialogue, and thorough reporting. One of the ways Bowles continually inscribes an intimate presence with his readers—a rhetorical function of private correspondence—is by positioning himself as their eyes and ears in the West. To make this possible, he relates scenes and events through copious detail and vivid imagery. To adequately construct a multivalent experience for his readers—whether from a dingy tavern, in a mine shaft, or atop a mountain—Bowles incorporates multisensory concrete details and narrative action. In letter two, for instance, relating the party's passage across the Great Plains, Bowles constructs an image of the topography, the feel of the breeze and the sun, the hunger of empty stomachs, and the appearance of the sunset. These complement elements of action: scampering wildlife, constantly passing wag-
 oners and tradesmen, and, notably, a fiery, gusting, drenching storm:

First came huge, rolling, ponderous masses of cloud in the west, massing up and separating into sections in a more majestic and threatening style than our party had ever before seen in the heavens. Then followed a tornado of wind. Horses, coach and escort turned their backs to the breeze, and bending, awaited its passing. . . . Next fell the hail, pouring as swift rain, and as large and heavy as bullets. The horses quailed before its terrible pain. . . . [I]t bit like wasps, it stunned like blows. . . .⁵

Other passages illustrate similar scene construction built of concrete details. In letter twenty-five, Bowles's description of the geysers in California, for example, includes colors, textures, temperatures, smells, sounds, topography, and the resulting physiological effects of a walk in the steamy, malodorous air.⁶ In another example, found in letter twenty-seven, Bowles describes conditions in what seems to be an underground city during an unnerving excursion into the Gould and Curry mine:

Many of the chambers or streets were deserted; in others we found little coteries of miners, picking away at the hard rock, and loading up cars of the ore . . . Some of the chambers had closed in after being worked out of ore

. . . but many of the open passages were stayed or braced open still with huge frame work of timber. . . . And in many of the passages, such is the outward pressure into the vacuum, that these timbers, as big as a man's body, are bent and splintered almost in two. Great pine sticks, eighteen inches square, were thus bent like a bow, or yawned with gaping splinters; and the spaces left in some places for us to go through were in this way reduced so small that we almost had to crawl to get along.⁷

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

The weather . . . grows hot; flannels come off; . . . the close and crowded state-rooms turn out their sleepers on to the cabin floors, the decks, everywhere and anywhere that a breath of air can be wooed; . . . you have to pick your way at night about the open parts of the ship, as tender visitor to battle-field at Gettysburg. The languor of the tropics comes over you all; perspiration stands in great drops, or flows in rivulets from the body; a creamy, hazy feeling possesses the senses; working is abandoned; reading becomes an effort; card-playing ceases to lure; dreaming, dozing and scandal-talking grow to be the occupations of the ship's company, — possibly scandal-making, for the courtesans become bold and flaunt, and the weak and impudent show that they are so.⁸

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

One reason scholars of literary journalism may hesitate to include epistolary journalism in the lineage of the form, however, is the succession of subject matter within each letter. Nineteenth century newspaper letters were commonly characterized by an alternation among many of the same topical elements as personal correspondence. Such topics may include recent events and future plans of the traveler, updates on mutual friends, rich descriptions of landscape, gossip, stories, and seemingly trivial details of daily life. By alternating between various topics within the letter, scholars might argue, Bowles is aspiring to a discursive rather than a narrative mode—comprising a miscellany of topics without a unified narrative line or, for that matter, an unambiguous overarching discursive goal as one might expect of expository writing.⁹

I would suggest, however, that the range of subject matter covered by each letter and by the *Across the Continent* collection of letters as a corporate

whole does indeed support an overarching narrative of the trip and the story of a nation. In his prefatory letter to his distinguished traveling companion, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Schuyler Colfax, Bowles characterizes the book as a “story.”¹⁰ When Bowles illustrates the discomforts of the stagecoach or the prices of commodities carried by the stage lines, for example, he is not making isolated small talk; he is contributing to a narrative about the need for a transcontinental railroad. When he describes a new or prospering town, or when he discusses successes in agriculture or mining, Bowles is not making arbitrary, digressive comments; he is encouraging settlement and investment in the West. And when Bowles introduces familiar names or represents the West in terms of the East, he is actually writing a narrative of nationhood. I would also indicate that in the context of a trip across the continent, a multiplicity of themes is the only way to create a coherent and accurate depiction of the nation. Like the trip itself, the nation of 1865 comprised many people, places, cultures, foods, markets, and landscapes—all of which could be conveyed through epistolary journalism. An attempt to represent the experience through discursive isolation of topics may appear inadequate. But the letters taken together should be interpreted as portions of a larger, unified narrative, comprising the whole experience of the transcontinental trip. In fact, Bowles intentionally makes the effort to co-opt the seeming incompleteness of such isolated topics by acknowledging them as such when he states in his letter to Colfax that, despite his summer-long efforts to learn and convey an experience of the continent, “yet it were impossible adequately to represent all the strange features, all the rare capacities of this new half of our Nation.” In the “impossible,” he has summed up a significant complication of the narrative in order to bring it to a (temporary) resolution: The reader is staring into the face of the impossible to know the unknown. After thirty-two letters, Bowles acknowledges “a margin still against me,” with much more to tell than the pages would permit.¹¹ Thus, the story of a developing America is one that will have to continue in the future.

Attention to character development is another characteristic associated with fiction that can distinguish literary from traditional journalism and is facilitated by the epistolary form. Among impressions of the people he meets along the route are the fiery Mormon vigilante Porter Rockwell, the widely respected Oregon pioneer Jesse Applegate, the penurious but beloved General John C. Frémont, and the mythic Brigham Young and the other Mormon leaders. Bowles is also careful to paint complex portraits of his three traveling companions. It was standard fare of travelers to describe their companions in personal letters and a liberty journalists can take in the epis-

tology journalism form. In letter four, with attention to both his responsibilities as a journalist as well as his prerogative within the epistolary form to express subjectivity, Bowles offers his impressions of the men, beginning with Speaker Colfax:

Mr. Colfax is short, say five feet six, weighs one hundred and forty, is young, say forty-two, has brownish hair and light blue eyes, is a childless widower, drinks no intoxicating liquors, smokes *a la* General Grant, is tough as a knot . . . and is the idol of South Bend and all adjacencies. . . . He certainly makes friends more rapidly and holds them more closely than any public man I ever knew; wherever he goes, the women love him, and the men cordially respect him; and he is sure to be always a personal favorite, even a pet, with the people.¹²

Bowles describes another of the travelers, Illinois Lieutenant-Governor William Bross, primarily in terms of his relationship with his companions. Bross is “cheery in temperament, enjoying rough, outdoor life like a true, unspoiled child of Nature; . . . enthusiastic for all novel experience, we all give him our heartiest sympathy and respect and constitute him the leader of the party.” The profile is thoroughly laced with Bowles’s characteristic humor and personal observations. He calls Bross “our best foot” whom “we always put . . . foremost, whether danger, or dignity, or fun is the order of the occasion.” Because Bowles is writing in a familiar epistolary mode within the form of the newspaper letter, he relates a standing joke of the party: “Governor Bross was born in New Jersey,—and so says he never can be president, as the Constitution requires that officer to be a native of the nation.”¹³

The third member of the party, journalist Albert Richardson, was a Civil War hero and a past participant in the wild life of the Old West. Bowles describes his sophisticated habits:

[Richardson] does not chew tobacco, disdains whiskey, but drinks French brandy and Cincinnati Catawba, carries a good deal of baggage, does not know how to play poker, and shines brilliantly among the ladies. He is a young widower of less than thirty-five, of medium size, with a light complexion and sandy hair and whiskers, and is a very companionable man.¹⁴

Depictions of the party, then, come full circle to Bowles himself, but the author demurs with a rhetorical sleight-of-hand: “Looking-glasses are banished from overland baggage, and the fourth member of the party must, therefore, remain unsketched.”¹⁵

Another of the characteristics distinguishing literary from traditional mainstream journalism is an incorporation of extemporaneous and often extended dialogue.¹⁶ Although extended direct dialogue, presented within quotes, is not common in *Across the Continent*, indirect or paraphrased dia-

logue appears regularly. But it should be emphasized that the orthographic conventions of using quotation marks today were not always the same as then. An illustration in Bowles's account is a discussion between Brigham Young and Schuyler Colfax, which appears in letter eleven, integrating dialogue with Bowles's voice, or what conventionally is called indirect or paraphrased dialogue. The exchange is presented without the use of quotation marks, beginning with Young's inquiry concerning the government's intentions for the Mormons and polygamy:

The Speaker replied that he had no authority to speak for the government; but for himself, if he might be permitted to make the suggestion, he had hoped the prophets of the church would have a new revelation on the subject, which would put a stop to the practice. . . . Mr. Young responded quickly and frankly that he should readily welcome such a revelation; that polygamy was not in the original book of the Mormons; that it was not an essential practice in the church, but only a privilege and a duty, under special command of God. . . .¹⁷

Bowles incorporates additional speakers as the dialogue continues:

The discussion, thus opened, grew general and sharp, though ever good-natured. Mr. Young was asked how he got over the fact that the two sexes were about equally divided all over the world, and that, if some men had two, five, or twenty wives, others would have to go without altogether. His reply was that there was always a considerable proportion of the men who would never marry, who were old bachelors from choice. But, retorted one, are there any more of such than of women who choose to be old maids? Oh yes, said he, most ungallantly; there is not one woman in a million who will not marry if she gets a chance!¹⁸

The intent is clear, namely to convey extended, extemporaneous speech, albeit paraphrased.

Shorter passages conveying direct and extemporaneous dialogue appear occasionally throughout *Across the Continent* as part of narrative passages. "Look at your watch," stage driver Clark T. Foss told the Colfax party before a treacherous mountain descent described in letter twenty-five. Bowles continues, "When we wondered at Mr. Foss for his perilous and rapid driving down such a steep road, he said, 'Oh, there's no danger or difficulty in it,—all it needs is to keep your head cool, and the leaders out of the way.'"¹⁹ Following a discussion of the status of women in the West, appearing in letter twenty-eight, Bowles quotes a local resident: "'It is the cussedest place for women,' said an observant Yankee citizen, some two or three years from home, and not forgetful yet of mother, sister and cousin,—'a town of men and taverns and boarding-houses and billiard saloons.'"²⁰ And in letter twen-



"The Colfax Party in the Yosemite," named for U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Schuyler Colfax. Their journey in 1865 was the subject of Bowles's Across the Continent. Bowles stands in the back row, left. Colfax (who would go on to become the seventeenth U.S. vice president under Ulysses S. Grant) is seated in the middle row, third from left. The landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted appears front row, second from left. As Bowles noted: "We . . . grew steadily barbaric and dirty; laughed at dignity; and voted form and ceremony a nuisance." From the Carleton Watkins collection. Reprinted by permission of Yosemite Research Library.

ty-seven, from Austin, Nevada, where Bowles and his companions were to stay for only three days, he relates a discussion with local residents which led to a series of expeditions into the local mines: "But [three days] is nothing, said the disappointed people; you can't begin to see our mines in that time; you better have staid away. Well, come on, was the reply; show us what you can in three days, and then let us see what is left that is new and strange."²¹

Finally, there is the quality of the reporting. Even when content includes extended descriptions of scene and character, as well as complex narrative structures, the literary journalism form is grounded in solid reporting of the phenomenological world. In his introductory letter to Speaker Colfax, Bowles states his reportorial goals, that his intention in undertaking the trip was to see, study, and describe the country "to acquit ourselves more intelligently, . . . each in our duties to the public,—you in the Government, and

we as journalists.” Bowles states that he was particularly qualified for the duty because he brought interest, enthusiasm, “and the trained eyes and ears and the educated instincts of journalism.”²² *Across the Continent* bears considerable evidence of Bowles’s reportorial acumen. Extended discussions of mining, agriculture, economics, and other topics are integrated into Bowles’s narrative.²³ He provides historical background on complex or evolving topics; he seeks out developments in these and other areas which are timely and relevant; he pursues interviews from multiple sources; he thoroughly presents information, even when it conflicts with his personal opinions; and he cites sources when appropriate. Mark Kramer expects such digressions in literary journalism. He states that the author may bring related material and background information to the midst of his or her story.²⁴ It is one of the ways Bowles can adequately convey the largely unfamiliar information concerning the West, and another way story determines form in epistolary journalism. Following four unusually lengthy paragraphs on the mining industry in letter twenty-seven, for instance, Bowles abandons the reportorial voice for that of the intimate correspondent to direct his text away from the solely informational model and back to narrative. Bowles resumes the story by inscribing an image of the readers: “Do not complain, my reader, that this letter is getting dull with dry fact and statistics; consider the mass of figures and ‘disgusting details’ that I have before me, and have spared you, and be grateful.”²⁵

Bowles’s truth claim, which is a claim that invests any journalism, is both explicit and implicit, resting in his public intentions for the trip and in the use of a first-person voice that positions him as witness and the text as testimony. The letters, he writes in his introductory letter to Colfax, “serve . . . to convey true ideas of the country we passed through.”²⁶ The truth claim of his narrative rests, furthermore, on his responsibility to communicate accurately to his readers. He speaks of the “independence and integrity” he brought to the project and dispels any notion of a hidden or selfish agenda.²⁷ He also states that his obligation to speak truthfully to eastern readers was not displaced by an obligation to speak flatteringly of people in the West. They “need nothing but the Truth,—none of them asked us to tell other than the Truth.”²⁸

STYLE

A link between epistolary journalism and literary journalism can also be demonstrated in the author’s stylized freedom with language. The literary and epistolary forms liberate authors from dominant forms of journalistic writing to select and arrange words for literary effect more than for traditional journalistic conciseness, a journalistic value that developed during the Civil War.²⁹ For example, rich, compound adjectives mark a nostalgic pas-

sage in letter twenty that was written as Bowles prepared to leave Washington Territory. To compare the mild climate of the Northwest to that of New England, Bowles uses language loaded with emotive images like “our slow, hesitating, coying spring times” and “our luxuriously-advancing, tender, red and brown autumns.” Metaphorical constructions—such as “the delicately fretted architecture of the leafless trees” and “the nerve-giving tonic of the air”—reinforce the literary dimension of the passage.³⁰

Lest we think his selections accidental or convenient, Bowles comments on language in a letter to his friend Charles Allen, dated November 23, 1865, written during the process of compiling the letters for publication. Responding to Allen’s suggestions for revision to the text, Bowles reveals his attention to language:

Webster has it *transhipped* and *fullness*, and so the book. Don’t you hope to deprave us up here with your ancient spelling! “Unkempt” I used in the broader sense that is coming over it, of slouching and untidy But I can’t give up “aboundingness.” I know it is new, but it fits, and “abundance” doesn’t. . . . You see I am not learned in grammar, syntax, and prosody; my ear and my habit are my only guides.³¹

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

So we rolled rapidly through summer and winter scenes, with sky of blue and air of amber purity, and when the round moon came up out from the snowy peaks, giving indescribable richness and softness to their whiteness, we kept on and on, now up mountain sides, now along the edge of precipices several hundred feet high, down which the stumble of a horse or the error of a wheel would have plunged us; now crossing swollen streams, the water up to the coach doors, now stammering through morass and mire, plunging down and bounding up so that we passengers, instead of sleeping, were bruising heads and tangling legs and arms in enacting the tragedy of pop-corn over a hot fire and in a closed dish; and now from up among the clouds and snow, we tore down a narrow canyon at a breakneck rate, escaping a hundred over-turns and toppling on the river’s brink until the head swam with dizzy apprehensions.³²

With a single, very long, rhythmic sentence, Bowles’s text structurally reproduces the motion of the stage and its effects on the travelers, as evident in the repetition of the preposition “now,” which is repeated five times, thus establishing a rhythm taking the reader impetuously from one moment to another.

Use of literary tropes further characterizes Bowles’s *Across the Continent* letters, reflected particularly in poetry and allegory. As demonstrated in

preceding passages, a poetic sensitivity to sound and cadence emerges from Bowles's pen, particularly when commenting on the passing landscape. Spectacular scenery or dramatic manifestations of nature's power—such as the hail storm discussed earlier—are regularly conveyed through literary conventions. For example, Bowles, in letter eighteen, inscribes the beauty of the Columbia River valley through metaphor and personification:

River and rock have striven together, wrestling in close and doubtful embrace, —sometimes one gaining ascendancy, again the other, but finally the subtler and more seductive element worrying its rival out, and gaining the western sunshine, broken and scarred and foaming with hot sweat, but proudly victorious, and forcing the withdrawing arms of its opponent to hold up eternal monuments of its triumph.³³

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

The surging and sighing of the wind among the tall pines of the Sierras came like sweetest music, laden with memories of home and friends and youth. Brass bands begone, operas avaunt! . . . All human music was but sound and fury signifying nothing, before such harmonies of high nature.³⁴

And Bowles's poetry is not limited to the grandiose subject; even the alkali dust of the desert beyond the Salt Lake Valley, which Bowles characterizes in letter fourteen as "thick and constant and penetrating beyond experience and comparison," is fodder for the poetic muse: "It filled the air,—it was the air; it covered our bodies,—it penetrated them; it soared to Almighty attributes, and became omnipresent. . . ."³⁵

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

California, mature at eleven, plants a colony in 1859–60, which ripens into a new State in 1864. Nevada is the first child of California. As bachelor uncles and fond friends sometimes think children are born in order to wheedle them out of silver cups; so Nevada sprang into being under like metallic influence. And if she promised to give, rather than to get, she fails yet to keep full faith. . . .³⁶

Appearing in letter fourteen is an example of Bowles's longer narrative digressions, the story of Hank Monk, a noted stage driver who had memorably delivered Horace Greeley across rough stage roads in 1859. The story was offered as consolation to Bowles and his companions following an uncomfortable and bouncy ride, and Bowles transcribes it at length for his readers. When Greeley, in his earlier visit, suggested that the stage make better time,

the driver replied, “keep your seat Mr. Greeley, and I will get you through in time.” Bowles continues:

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

By sharing a narrative which he describes as “classic with all the drivers and all travelers on the road,” Bowles capitalizes on the flexibility of literary journalism to personally address his Eastern readers and, despite their geographical distance, engage them in the conversations of westward travelers.³⁷

AUTHOR’S ROLE

Personal, active, and subjective, the author is another principal link between epistolary journalism and literary journalism, and *Across the Continent* provides a useful case study. Bowles is present in the *Across the Continent* letters at several levels. First, because the news was generated by his personal travels, his participation in the trip was an a priori condition of the text. As a travel writer, Bowles is inherently a reporter and a participant—a quality of the literary journalism form. Norman Sims notes that travel writing and memoir, forms that were particularly popular in the nineteenth century, are “forms that traditionally allow writers more voice. Standard reporting hides the voice of the writer, but literary journalism gives that voice an opportunity to enter the story, sometimes with dramatic irony.”³⁸

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

The narrator of literary journalism has a personality, is a whole person, intimate, frank, ironic, wry, puzzled, judgmental, even self-mocking—qualities

academics and daily news reporters dutifully avoid as unprofessional and un-objective. . . . The genre's power is the strength of this voice.³⁹

I share Kramer's perspective that an oscillation of voices between informational and conversational modes operates as a discursive tool that engages the reader. Direct address contributed to a textually inscribed relationship of intimacy within which Bowles could express a "heightened and at times foregrounded subjectivity" that distinguishes literary journalism.⁴⁰ With epistolarity grounded in textual correspondence of one individual to another, direct address to the reader is an inherent part of the epistolary journalism form, and a critical link with literary journalism. One need only recall the passage at the beginning of this paper, in which Bowles addresses his readers as "dear friends all," to appreciate this.

Bowles's *Across the Continent* letters strikingly demonstrate regular fluctuation between the informal or conversational voice and the more formal, reportorial voice. The alternation of voices may take place between letters, lending each letter a distinctive flavor or perspective. It may also take place, potentially, in succession within each letter, creating for the reader a sense of discursive oscillation between voices and among subject matter. The alternation between Bowles's reportorial and conversational voices can be subtle or dramatic, and the voices, notably, can even interrupt each other. In letter four, "The Rocky Mountains and Their Gold Mines," for instance, the shift between voices is explicit. After a literary passage on the natural "panorama of perpetual beauty" surrounding Denver, presented in what I would characterize as a highly subjective informal voice, Bowles unambiguously signals a change: "Leaving nature for the material, beauty for booty, fancy for fact, I come to speak of the mineral wealth and development of this section of the Rocky Mountains." The letter then turns to an account of the mining industry and an assessment of the evolution of related settlements in what I would characterize as a distinctly more formal, reportorial voice.⁴¹ Letter twenty-three, "The Chinese: Grand Dinner with Them," also identifies a shift from an informal to a formal voice. The letter, dated August 18, 1865, begins with intimate comments that might characterize a private letter, as Bowles describes his personal condition following the dinner. But the voice is transformed abruptly to correspond with the ensuing report detailing demographic, economic, and social conditions of the Chinese in California. The transformation from informal to reportorial is apparent and abrupt: "[W]hile I am full of the subject,—shark's fins and resurrected fungus digest slowly,—let me write of this unique and important element in the population and civilization of this region. There are no fewer than sixty to eighty thousand Chinamen here. . . ." ⁴²

One of the most anticipated portions of the trip, and one that inspired significant discourse among the public, was the party's interaction with the Mormons. In addition to background information and a narrative account of his stay in Salt Lake City, Bowles also offers a subjective assessment of the experience, choosing language that clearly positions him as a subjective agent of perception. Letter eleven begins with Bowles's personal reactions to his stay in Salt Lake City. "Our visit here closes in the morning," he writes. "It has been very interesting, instructive and gratifying to us." Phrases such as "to increase my appreciation," "to evoke congratulations," "to excite wonder," and "to enlarge my respect" clearly convey the personal nature of the experience.⁴³ But other aspects of Bowles's experience with the Mormons are written in a clearly reportorial voice. Analyses of political and social implications of polygamy, for example, receive extensive treatment in this formal voice, as does the sophistication of social and agricultural structures in the Salt Lake Valley. In describing the distribution of the Mormon population in the Salt Lake Valley, for example, Bowles writes in letter nine, "[T]he Mormon settlements extend one hundred miles . . . into Idaho on the north, and perhaps two hundred miles into Arizona on the south, clinging close, through their entire length of six hundred to seven hundred miles, to a narrow belt of country hardly more than fifty miles wide."⁴⁴ And sensitive issues such as polygamy are reported in Bowles's more formal voice, as in letter eleven: "Ultimately, of course, before the influences of emigration, civilization and our democratic habits, an organization so aristocratic and autocratic as the Mormon church now is must modify its rule. . . ."⁴⁵

A significant feature of these alternating voices is the potential to convey textually-encoded inflections that may be decoded by the reader. These elements of sonance—"voiced speech" by definition—reveal moments of sarcasm or irreverence when the words alone may suggest a different message. Discussing the fauna of the Great Plains in letter two, for instance, Bowles notes the appearance of the plover, a small bird related to the sandpiper. In the midst of a typical epistolary cataloguing of the many animals encountered on the trail, Bowles's matching of lyricism and cynicism concerning this particular creature represents a tonal shift, recreated in the mind of the reader: "[W]e catch frequent glimpses of . . . the plover, paired as in Paradise, and never divorced even in this western country of easy virtue and cheap legislation."⁴⁶ In another passage brimming with lyricism and self-deprecating humor, textually-encoded sonance is enabled by an informal, conversational voice. Bowles's language is animated with inflection in the mind of the reader as he describes his anticlimactic experience passing over the great Continental Divide:

It was no more than a 'thank-ye-marm' in a New England's winter sleigh-ride, yet it separates the various and vast waters of a Continent, and marks the fountains of the two great oceans of the globe. But it was difficult to be long enthusiastic over this infinitesimal point of mud; the night was very

cold, and I was sore in unpoetical parts from unaccustomed saddles, and I got down from all my high horses, and into my corner of the stage, at the next station.⁴⁷

At times, the fluctuation of voices is so clear, and sometimes so abrupt, that the reader is sensitized to the fusing of the epistolary and journalistic forms within the text. Contrast portions of preceding passages, which bear a more formal vocality, to passages written in the informal voice, as when Bowles describes the appearance of Brigham Young in letter eight or when he assesses his own potential for becoming a Mormon in letter thirteen. In letter eight, Bowles writes, “He is a very hale and hearty looking man . . . handsome perhaps as to presence and features, but repellent in atmosphere and without magnetism. In conversation, he is cool and quiet in manner, but suggestive in expression; has strong and original ideas, but uses bad grammar. . . .”⁴⁸ In letter thirteen, he explains that Young objects to polygamy for those men who do not have the ability to keep their wives “in sweet and loving and especially obedient subjugation. So there is no chance for you and I, my dear Jones, becoming successful Mormons!”⁴⁹

*A*cross the Continent is rich, then, with examples that demonstrate how Bowles actively and subjectively enters the story—both implicitly, as a present witness and reporter, and explicitly, as a character in the narrative. As a witness and reporter, he brings the eyes and mind of an easterner to bear on scenes and events in the West. He can communicate and interpret these things in a way that is meaningful and resonant with his primarily eastern readers. Bowles doesn’t just report on the Chinese dinner; he tells us what it looked, smelled, and felt like—or *feels* like, as he attests that he is, at the time of writing, still “full of the subject.” Bowles doesn’t just talk about mining and the construction of a mine shaft; he tells us about psychological responses to fear and the physiological sensations of groping through the dark. Bowles doesn’t just report on the conditions of the road or the accommodations along the stage route; he tells us what it was like to be jostled, bumped and whipped along, and what really went bump—or squeak—in the night.

Finally, if literature does indeed stimulate informed feelings in readers and represents ideas or a philosophy that exist beyond the facts of a story, then *Across the Continent* is an example of such a literature. As suggested at the outset, the sum of these parts—including the bump and squeak in the night—reflect a text that speaks, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, compellingly and even profoundly to the American experience as it began to look beyond the death and destruction of battle to see a larger allegorical horizon, one that at the time seemed limitless and “impossible,” as Bowles suggested, to contain. Thus is revealed once more the literary claim of this one example of epistolary journalism.

CONCLUSION

When scholars go in search of a pedigree for twentieth-century literary journalism, epistolary journalism clearly presents a promising field for further study, especially its literary elements. With proclivities toward narrative content, a liberal use of literary language and tropology, and an author who is present, active, and subjective, epistolary journalism encourages the communication of news that is not just limited to who, what, where, and when, but of news that is also relevant to larger discourses. Literary and compelling, *Across the Continent*, in particular, should be considered part of the history of literary journalism for the way it draws readers' attention to social, political, and philosophical contexts of enduring relevance and interest.

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ENDNOTES

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1. Samuel Bowles, *Across the Continent: A Summer's Journey to the Rocky Mountains, the Mormons, and the Pacific States, with Speaker Colfax* (Springfield: Bowles, 1865), 9.
 2. William Merrill Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America Before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998). For additional studies of epistolary texts from a literary point of view, see Bruce Redford's *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986); Janet Gurkin Altman's *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State, 1982); Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *On the Margins of Discourse: The Relation of Literature to Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978); and two works by Linda S. Kauffman—*Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1986) and *Special Delivery: Epistolary Modes in Modern Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).
 3. Decker, 24.
 4. John William Tebbel, *The Media in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1974), 206; Edwin Emery and Michael Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretative History of the Mass Media* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice) 1978: 228.
 5. Bowles, 15–16.
 6. Bowles, 279–82.
 7. Bowles, 318.
 8. Bowles, 373–74.

9. By discursive, Hartsock refers to writing that carries many of the features of literary journalism, but which lacks a unified narrative structure. John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2000), 18, 81.

10. Bowles, v. Colfax was a journalist himself, becoming the editor of the *South Bend (Indiana) Free Press* at age 19. Colfax was vice president of the United States under Ulysses S. Grant.

11. Bowles, ix.

12. Bowles, 45–46.

13. Bowles, 46–47. Bross was an editor of the *Chicago Tribune*.

14. Bowles, 48.

15. Bowles, 49.

16. Thomas B. Connery, “A Third Way to Tell the Story: American Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Century,” *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed., Norman Sims (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 11.

17. Bowles, 111–12.

18. Bowles, 112–13.

19. Bowles, 280.

20. Bowles, 324.

21. Bowles, 316.

22. Bowles, iii–iv, v.

23. See for example 21–23 and 341–42 for the price of commodities; 36–38 for the process of removing precious metals from ore; 89–91 for a discussion of irrigation and agricultural production; 312–15 for information on the developing mining industry in California, Nevada, Idaho, and Colorado; and 348–57—all of letter thirty—for the prospects for investment in mining ventures throughout the western states. In Bowles.

24. Mark Kramer, “Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists” in *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction*, ed. Norman Sims and Mark Kramer (New York: Ballantine, 1995), 31.

25. Bowles, 315.

26. Bowles, ix.

27. Bowles, v.

28. Bowles, ix.

29. Tebbel, 206.

30. Bowles, 212.

31. Quoted in George S. Merriam, *The Life and Times of Samuel Bowles, Vol. 2* (New York: Century, 1885), 46.

32. Bowles, 81.

33. Bowles, 185–86.

34. Bowles, 165. From *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5:

SEYTON: The queen, my lord, is dead.

MACBETH: . . . Out, out, brief candle!/Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/And then is heard no more: it is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/Signifying nothing.

35. Bowles, 136.

36. Bowles, 141.

37. Bowles, 137–38.

38. Norman Sims, “The Art of Literary Journalism,” in Sims and Kramer, *Literary*

Journalism, 3. Sims suggests that travel writing is a form that has expanded the boundaries of literary journalism, and others suggest the new journalism should be more broadly interpreted to include various forms of nonfiction prose and personal memoir. Some possibilities include works of exploration such as George Catlin's *Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians* (1841) and Clarence King's *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1872), environmental works such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), and nonfiction nature writing such as Annie Dillard's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974).

39. Mark Kramer, "Breakable Rules," 28–29.

40. Hartsock, 54.

41. Bowles, 33.

42. Bowles, 238.

43. Bowles, 105.

44. Bowles, 92.

45. Bowles, 108. It was not until twenty-five years later that Bowles's prediction would come true. In 1890, a manifesto by the church's fourth president, Wilford Woodruff, prohibited members of the church from entering into polygamous unions but did not challenge those plural marriages already in existence. A second manifesto, issued in 1904, restated the church's opposition to the practice and promised excommunication for those performing or entering into plural marriages.

46. Bowles, 13.

47. Bowles, 75.

48. Bowles, 86.

49. Bowles, 125.