



James J. Connolly, Patrick Collier, Frank Felsenstein, Kenneth R. Hall, and Robert G. Hall, eds. *Print Culture Histories Beyond the Metropolis*



James J. Connolly, Patrick Collier, Frank Felsenstein, Kenneth R. Hall, and Robert G. Hall, eds. [*Print Culture Histories Beyond the Metropolis*](#). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. x, 464p., ill. ISBN 9781442650626. US \$90.00.

The 14 essays in this collection originate from a 2013 conference held at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, the city depicted in Robert and Helen Lynd's groundbreaking sociological study, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (1929). Muncie, a small city in the American "provinces," was a fitting place for a conference dedicated to investigating "modern print culture, not from the point of view of urban and imperial centres but from that of provincial locales and imperial peripheries" (5).

The book is divided into two parts: 'Circulation' and 'Place.' Part One includes essays by James Raven, Kyle Roberts, Kenneth Hall, Ronald J. and Mary Saracino Zboray, Joan Shelley Rubin, Brad Evans, and Lara Putnam. The strongest are those by the Zborays and Putnam. The Zborays pored through "5,582 Civil War-era letters and diaries," recording "every encounter with print culture reported in them" (124). They offer a fascinating analysis of how unconventional circulation methods helped forge and maintain social ties among both family members and strangers. Putnam makes an excellent case for how colonized peoples of color produced newspapers that spoke back to their colonial masters by exposing the weaknesses of imperialist ideologies of race and imagining pan-national connections with other colonial subjects.

'Place' offers essays by Robert G. Hall, Lydia Wevers, Joel D. Schrock, Lynne Tatlock, Frank Felsenstein, Julianne Lamond, and Christine Pawley. Schrock, Tatlock, and Felsenstein all use the [*What Middletown Read database*](#) - derived from Muncie Public Library circulation records from 1891-1902 - to make various arguments, respectively, about crossover adult/child reading, the reading of German novels in translation, and the degree to which the library promoted "cosmopolitanism."

The most engaging and persuasive essays in this group are Lamond's and Pawley's. Lamond employs "network theory" and "cluster analysis" to show how particular working-class readers, probably unknown to each other, borrowed similar books from the rural Lambton Mechanics' and Miners' Institute library in New South Wales and thus formed tacit connections within a small mining community. Although members of that library (like most other library users) chiefly chose to borrow works of fiction, these were not all by well-known



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British and American writers, but also by Australian authors and others whose names have been lost to history. Pawley assiduously contextualizes the diary of a rural farm woman to demonstrate how she used reading and writing to further her own ends and did not feel herself an outcast on the periphery of “real” literary culture, typically envisioned as located in distant cities.

The goal of bringing readers, writers, publishers, and editors located in non-urban areas to the forefront of print culture studies is admirable. Although they discuss locales and readers hitherto unexamined by other scholars, the essays presented here do not represent a “radical shifting” (5) of scholarly focus, as Collier and Connolly suggest in their introduction. There is a long history of studies documenting how colonial subjects not only “wrote back” but also “published back” and “read back” to their supposed colonial “masters,” and there are numerous monographs and articles that have explored the role of print in non-metropolitan cultures throughout the Anglophone world. One of the weaknesses of this book, in fact, is that its scope is confined to the Anglophone world between 1700 and 1910, with a single exception. One also wishes that the historical readers presented here were better conceptualized using reception theory, and that those essays dealing with library borrowing records had not so consistently operated under the mistaken assumption that “borrowing” is the same as “reading.” Nevertheless, the essays in this volume constitute welcome additions to the growing body of scholarship challenging long-held notions of urban print hegemony and acknowledging the importance of understanding how texts were – and are – produced, circulated, and processed beyond city limits around the world.

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