

# THE JUVENILE TRADITION AND THE FICTION FACTORY, PART I: WIDE-AWAKE YOUNG WRITERS

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IN THIS series of two essays, I consider the relation of the juvenile tradition to cheap, mass-produced fiction in America from the 1860s through the turn of the century.<sup>1</sup> Part One provides a survey of fiction-factory writing during that period by now-unrecognised young writers; my interest lies in recovering what juvenile writers who worked in that industry thought about it. Retrieving their work demonstrates a shift in the juvenile tradition over the nineteenth century. While it had flourished in Britain in the first part of the century by embracing established models of writing as art (stressing inspiration and genius), it shifted in America in the second half of the century to embrace writing as work (demanding productivity and skill).<sup>2</sup> Dime-industry authors—expressly articulating their own youth in this mode, and speaking as young to one another—were at the forefront of nineteenth-century literature’s well-known shift into mass market publication.

That many skilled hacks were *teenagers* changes our understandings of how the juvenile tradition evolved—but it also offers a new vantage point on the connection of youth and American literature. Youth was a central value in a new nation looking to the future to declare what America might be. Even before the dime novel, this seemingly indiscernible yoking of youth and America appeared vested in the medium of cheap print. As I’ve suggested in a previous essay on “Young America,” writers in that 1840s literary movement felt their youth allowed them to recognise the value of the mass production that new technology had underwritten, a value they thought the older generation could not see. The Young America movement hoped just that mass marketing would deliver high literature and established classics cheaply to the masses, but new technologies and distribution actually changed the type of literature available. As print historian Christopher Wilson argues, “the mass literary marketplace which emerged in American life during this era” carried with it “a fundamental reorientation which altered the way America looked at itself” (1). It demonstrated that “the market was more than a medium; it was also a crucible of a new cultural style” (2), and in so doing it recast the nation as technologically innovative, productive, and practically minded.

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Enter the dime novel. “The term dime novel was coined to describe the pocket-sized original novels ... of one hundred pages or so published by the New York firm of Beadle and Adams” in 1860 (Blackbeard 221). Cheap and portable, at first sent through the mail at the lower periodical rate, and very quickly seized for “the reading convenience of Civil War soldiers” (221), dime novels were disseminated across the nation and helped to create a mass readership, especially among the young. By the time, a decade or so later, they were reissued as shorter half-dime novels “intended to attract nickel-bearing boys,” they became “almost universally read” by youth (222, 223)—both boys *and* girls.<sup>3</sup> So many competitors “joined the ranks of Beadle imitators” that “their wares ... literally papered the nation .... Such mass merchandising played a part in the shaping of American literary taste” (Stern xv).

My two essays here are more interested in the *mode* of the fiction factory, the dime industry itself (including story papers, pulps) than in just the dime novel per se. The term “fiction factory” makes clear what stands out about that literature: its mass-produced, fabricated quality, its machine-made output, its notoriously formulaic character. That character instituted what Wilson calls a “new cultural style” and Stern a new “literary taste”—changes which also demanded a new kind of writer.<sup>4</sup> This type of author takes up work “like a wage laborer or industrial hand,” as Richard Brodhead states. “Writing in this form paid a standard amount for a standard job of work. Its insistence on pre-established formats narrowly delimited the space for authorial self-expression, in effect making a trademarked generic formula the work’s creator” (“American” 27). It was almost as if the books could write themselves; this formulaicness of dime novels *is* their message, Brodhead argues: “Their point as stories is that they replay a formula already fully known” (24). Whether stories of adventure on the frontier or of urban domestic romance, this kind of fiction was so “popular precisely because it followed a formula, because it reflected assumptions held in the culture at large” (Hamilton-Honey, “Turning” 88).

This assembly-line, convention-heavy mode of production was especially consequential to juvenile writers. It established a new American form so popular—its sub-genres so numerous, and dime publishers so many—that their industry “created a heavy demand for writing in these formats.... Dime-novel writing gave work literally to hundreds” (Brodhead, “American” 26), both male and female. Young writers looking to break into print seized the professional opportunities of this market—hundreds of teenagers “rushed to submit” when cheap markets opened mid-century (D. Cohen, preface vii). Sarah Lindey notes that boys as young as age “ten to eighteen” used their readership of dime forms to craft “themselves as writers”: through submissions to story paper columns they worked together to define themselves as determined and knowledgeable professionals (73). Sally Mitchell stresses that girls too aimed at “writing trash.” In England, Walter Besant (she recounts), “as secretary of the Authors’ Society,” was “inundated with packages from the country containing the verse and fiction of young ladies in their teens who are wishful to earn money” (109).

In America, youth lent itself to the new dime mode because juvenility was represented through a modern rhetoric that understood youth as adept and pragmatic, self-sufficient, with an eye to the future and the main chance—youth understood as “wide-awake.” *Wide-awake* meant alert, sharp-witted, noticing and vigilant, but also shrewd and savvy, handy and skillful, enterprising, full of energy, far from naïve—largely, but not only by any means, applied to promising young white, Anglo-Saxon males. My first essay (Part One) stresses the ways that youth were in the very thick of the professional transformation of authorship in American writing in the nineteenth century. But considering young people as producers (not just consumers) of dime industry texts reveals how they remain an important “part of a larger communications circuit that blurred the boundary between literary and sociopolitical activity,” as Susan Williams calls it (99). As I will consider in Part Two, the pernicious insularity of dime formulas haunts the dime novel’s afterlife in the juvenile tradition of the 1920s. Part Two considers how young writers negotiated the barriers of exceptionalism and intolerance built into the literary nationalism that connected youth to America. Dime plots, seeking “the lowest common denominator,” Merle Curti writes, “became stereotyped” in their sense of what American meant (“Dime” 761). “Conveyer[s] of popular attitudes and beliefs,” they reflected the “particularly ugly xenophobia and racism” proliferating at this time of “nativist nationalism” (C Smith 10). Nevertheless, some juvenile writers in the dime industry still offered what Christine Bold, a dime-novel scholar recovering work by Indigenous writers and writers of colour, suggests is a “record of marginalized cultures as agents” (“Review” 207)—explored in Part Two, for example, through the work of teenage Latino writer Luis Senarens (I mention him briefly in Part One).

Part Two goes on to discuss the long influence of late nineteenth-century dime writing; its afterlife extended to the renaissance of the juvenile tradition within mainstream publication in the early twentieth century. The early work of Richard Wright in the 1920s, for instance, was haunted by his dime reading. Dime formulas also shaped the work of other young writers in the twenties less known today: the nineteen-year-old African American writer Harry Liscomb or the white teenagers David Putnam and Horace Wade. This afterlife of the dime novel exemplifies a paradox constitutive for all writers, but for emerging young writers in particular, and especially for young writers of colour—how to negotiate signifying systems that offer authorial identity but also encode preconceptions and stereotypes. Ultimately, both Parts One and Two argue that youth is subject and object of a modality—cheap fiction produced in the dime industry by wide-awake young hacks: capable, hard-nosed, self-sufficient and self-aware—a modality that not only mesmerises; it alters historical understanding. Young writers as well as readers were constituted by, even as they sought to shape, an America imagined through such dime industry fantasies.

## Young America

IN “YOUNG America,” I argued that the long roots of an American discourse connecting youth and nation became manifest in the literary “Young America” movement, which was part of what Brodhead calls the “general reorganization of the industry of literary production in the 1840s” (“American” 23), a watershed moment for print, as he defines it.<sup>5</sup> Literary Young America was founded by young Americans proclaiming their own youth—Evert Duyckinck was not quite twenty when he brought together a circle in New York of other literary teenagers, who would go on to write for Duyckinck’s later periodicals. This group issued an express call to young writers to forge America’s literature: they naively believed that “the nation’s youth seemed to promise unprecedented possibilities for authentic literary expression untrammelled by convention” (L. Cohen, *Fabrication* 27). Though this shared movement of serious-minded young intellectuals (which advocated the mass delivery of serious literature) barely lasted out the forties, their promotion of America as quintessentially young continued to justify a connection of youth and literature even when that association took on other forms widely different from literary weightiness (as it would do in the cheap dime novel).

Young America capitalised on a connection between youth and Americanness already residual in literary nationalism, however. A decade before Duyckinck and his friends came together, the Harvard professor and editor of the *North American Review* Edward Everett had given a Phi Beta Kappa address in 1824 to the young men at Harvard (it propelled him to fame), in which he both anticipated Young America’s call for a national literature and issued the caution to wait—“the peculiarity of our condition and institutions will be reflected in some peculiarity of our literature; but what that shall be it is as yet too early to say” (E. Everett 489–91). Young America considered the *North American Review* to be everything it hoped its youth would replace—“torpid and respectable,” Cornelius Mathews called it, “that calm old adder slumbering upon the lawn of Harvard” (Review 197).<sup>6</sup> Yet Young America singled out Everett (old enough by the 1840s to be its members’ father) by remaking his identity to validate theirs, recasting him as a prodigy. “Mr. Everett may be ranked among our instances of an early exhibition of talent,” Jones wrote. For him, the Everett of the Phi Beta Kappa speech was worthy of note because he exemplified the juvenile genius “peculiar to American literature thus far: the early age at which our authors have attained the maturity of their powers—generally, in their first works” (W. Jones, “Edward” 223, 221).

In that speech, Everett cautioned that American literature must remain unanticipated in both content *and* form: “There is little doubt that the instrument of communication itself will receive great improvements. . . . where great interests are at stake, great concerns rapidly succeeding each other[;] . . . there language and expression will become intense, and the old processes of communication must put on a vigor and a directness, adapted to the aspect of the times” (E. Everett 491–92). Everett may have simply been prophesying that the English language would be

revitalised in America, but his vatic reference to “instruments” and “processes” of communication left open the possibility of more: that forward-looking America might also invent new technologies, new devices, new modes. The dime novel, as modern scholars define it, provides exactly that new technology of publication—Thomas Roberts, for instance, argues that Beadle and Adams innovated not new content but a new kind of “delivery system” for writing: “The dime novel manufacturing and distribution network ... requires that it be approached as a communications system” (406).

In 1864, forty years after his father’s speech, Everett’s son William reviewed “Beadle’s Dime Books”—an early notice of them that was a surprising move for that stuffy cultural guardian, that old adder *The North American Review*. He might have chosen to notice dime novels because he saw in them the new American writing delivered through such an emergent instrument of communication as his father had foretold.<sup>7</sup> According to Kermit Vanderbilt, anyway, the *Review*’s editor Charles Eliot Norton had commissioned William Everett’s essay because Norton did see the possibilities of this new delivery system, but (like Young America before him) wished that dime novel publishers would confine themselves to cheap editions of Shakespeare and other “great English authors” (Vanderbilt 91). As one of the first reviewers of Beadle, however, what William Everett made clear was that he was prompted to read this form by youth—or, rather, *a* youth: he was alerted to the phenomenon, he tells us, by a young boy he knew, who was convalescing, longing for a dime novel to pass the time. After reading over several himself to see why they speak to the young, what stands out to Everett is the form’s enormous reach: Messrs. Beadle & Co, he writes, “are wielding an instrument of immense power in education and civilization.” He raises, but leaves unsettled, the question of what such a popularly-disseminated instrument can do and what its power means: “Why these works are popular,” he writes, “is a problem quite as much for the moralist and the student of national character as for the critic” (W. Everett 308).

But even before Everett had asked this question, Beadle and Adams had adopted the rhetoric of Young American literary nationalism proleptically to provide the answer. They advertised the first novel in their Dime Series, their 1860 reprint of Ann S. Stephens’s frontier novel *Malaeska: the Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, as “American in all its features” (“Publishers” v).<sup>8</sup> Retrospective early twentieth-century critics echoed this promotion: “The aim of the original dime novel was to give, in cheap and wholesome form, a picture of American wild life” (Harvey 42). They were “popular because the era they depict was picturesque, violent, and authentically America” (A. Jones 37).

Though these books are as “intensely nationalistic” (Murphy 42) as Young America might wish, however, their formulaicness offered the very cheap and “degraded” product that Young America had hoped to deflect. Spurning James Fenimore Cooper as a false American antecedent, Duyckinck had warned: “The Romance of history is an exhausted vein of writing.” He felt “the production of a

work of this kind was soon made ... mechanical” because “romances were written to order: the annals of all nations were ransacked to furnish a plot and story; no country was spared; not even our own forest land, which must give up its buried Indians.... History and fiction were both degraded” (Duyckinck, “Mr” 90).<sup>9</sup> Though Young America tendentiously had hoped to cordon off national literature from formula, dime novels collapsed the two, raising the uncomfortable prospect that fantasies of the nation might be equally as bankrupt as the popular form that recycled them.

How young writers would negotiate the various degradations done to American writing through the treatment of “its buried Indians” is the subject of my second essay (Part Two of this series). Suffice it to say here that the form caught on because, as one Tennessee newspaper at the time called it, the dime novel was “the most convenient, as well as the cheapest volume of reading matter yet issued” (“Green” 3). After a century of second-hand British fiction (not yet protected by international copyright) had been pillaged for cheap reading, the reading public was ready to hail the convenient new dime novel as “perhaps the first uniquely American form of literature” (Gardner 283). That timely combination of ease and economy was enough to make it “a journalistic revolution that had a lasting impact upon all aspects of American cultural life” (D. Reynolds 171).

More specifically, this revolution foregrounded the centrality of youth to America. William Everett recognised that its huge popular sway rested on the kind of distinctively American subjects transfigured by youth that Young America had touted. A later *North America Review* essay saw the dime novel’s brand of wild and violent Americana as “an influential outlet for adolescent restlessness”—a restlessness both of youth itself and also of the young country’s national “undercurrents which were to merge into America’s ‘manifest destiny’” (A. Jones 39).<sup>10</sup> Manifest destiny becomes the allegedly natural trajectory of an adolescent nation outgrowing its childhood. Youth functions as the cover story for the particular “national stories” the dime novel tells (Wingo 126)—stories about appropriation, imperialism, violence, and racism<sup>11</sup>—casting them as (supposedly) normal development.

## Wide-Awake

IF AMERICAN national character seemed epitomised by youth, its distinction lay in being “wide awake” about it—in the sense through which Young American writer W. A. Jones understood Americans as “confessedly an acute and shrewd race”; in quoting Jones, Lara Cohen underscores “Americans’ reputation for hard-nosed rationality, or what Neil Harris has termed their ‘operational aesthetic’” (*Fabrication* 44).<sup>12</sup> Harris defines this aesthetic as one “that concentrated on the methods of operation, on aspects of mechanical organization and construction, on horsepower, gears, pulleys and safety valves” (407). “Wide awake” could be applied to all youth, including girls, as *Missions Made Fascinating for Wide-awake Girls* demonstrated, defining youth

particularly as “the ‘teen’ period” (Durfee i). “Wide awake” applied to young women particularly when the middle-class values of economic ascent it encoded were translated to moral terms of virtue and merit. The resolutely middle-class and evangelical 1875–93 children’s magazine *Wide Awake* adopted those moral terms in expressly catering to girls as well as boys, “children in their teens (the right kind of children)” (“Story” 195). It associated the term “Wide Awake” with “the right kind of ambition” (194).<sup>13</sup> “Let the young people have a name all to themselves,” the magazine declared (196), “something up to the times” (195); and it claimed that “to-day WIDE AWAKE is known throughout the land as just another name for the best—the very best that can be done for the young people of America by the brightest workers ... the best workers alike in literature and art” (196).<sup>14</sup> Yet note that even this orthodox publication assumed that regarding the writer as a literary *worker* constituted part of reflecting the times.

Though *Wide Awake* magazine set itself up as “right” by directly opposing cheap blood-and-thunder stories—it was four-square against “the vices of reading trash” (Chlebek 458)—the term “wide awake” was also current in the dime-industry’s lexicon. At the same time as *Wide Awake*’s founding (in the 1870s), the dime-publishing juggernaut Tousey issued a series it called *Wide-Awake Library* (Fig. 1). *Joe’s Luck, or Always Wide Awake* was a later (1909) Horatio Alger novel that similarly exemplified this way of being in the world as proper to youth. Indeed, Alger’s rags-to-riches formula, catapulting youth to money and fame, grew out of and summed up the mode of adroit and clever modern juvenility that had already defined dime stories for a generation.<sup>15</sup> Such operational aesthetics characterised the publication industry’s own public profile. One business manual of 1892 writes of “a bright, wide-awake writer ... always searching for new and improved methods” (Duryea 225n). Another observes: “‘The youth,’ says a wide-awake writer, ‘who comes to the city to make his way, and is not afraid of doing his best, whether paid for it or not, is not long out of work’” (Marden 74).

*His Last Cent* recounts fantasies of the publication industry as much as tells a story about its hero; “nearly fifteen years old” (Shackelford 2) when his father dies, Joe parleys his last cent into wealth and prosperity through selling newspapers—turning one cent into two, and two into four, until he becomes a millionaire. Because he also makes headlines by fighting off criminals, “his popularity aided him in selling his papers,” so that his earning power skyrockets (10). He appreciates that earning power, turning down a respectable job in an office because “I can do better than that selling papers” (10). After Joe recounts his sensational exploits (he is kidnapped and almost killed but stabs the criminal instead) to the merchant whose watch he has recovered, “Mr. Mallory was amazed. He had read of such things, but this was the first time in his life that he had realized the truth of their existence” (8). Not only do readers follow Joe’s sensational escapades directly but they also watch him narrate them repeatedly to appreciative audiences like this, who “made him tell over again the story of his adventures, which he did in a boyish kind of way” (10).

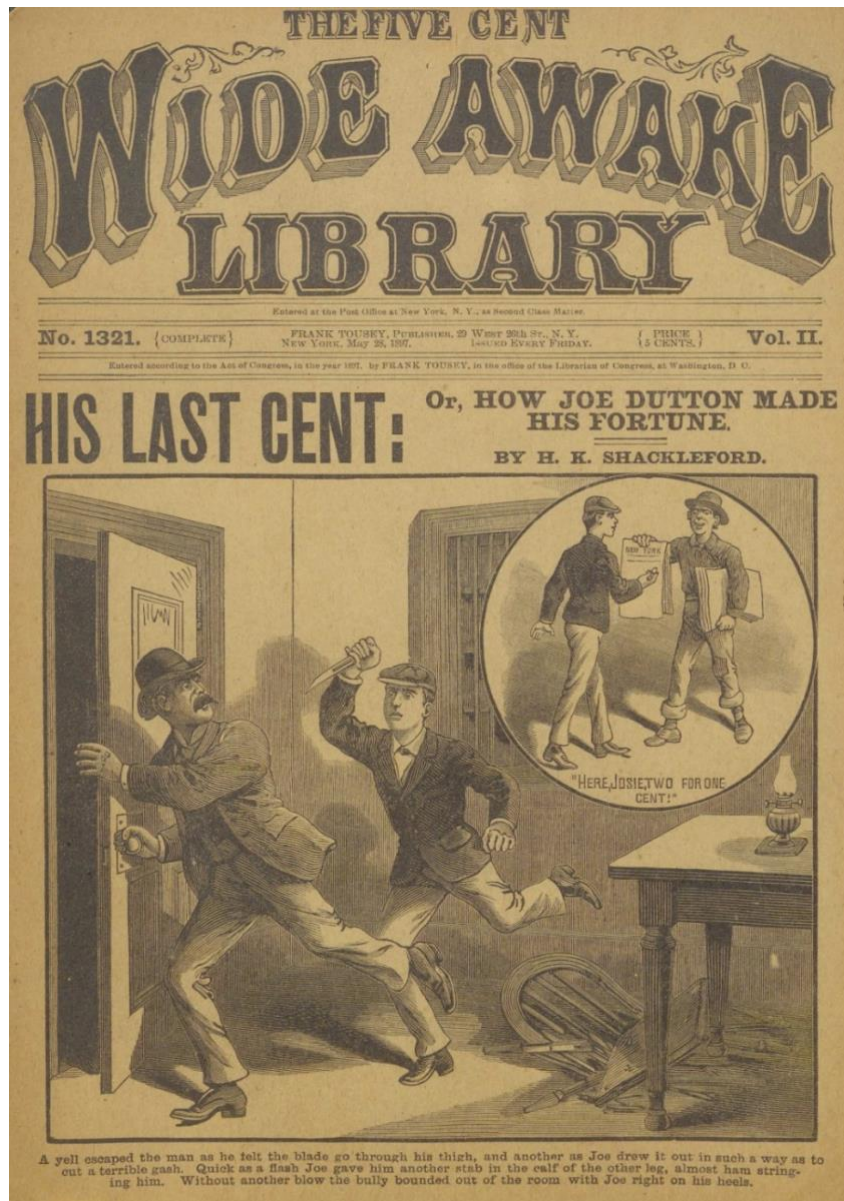


Figure 1. Cover of the Wide Awake Library, vol. 2, no. 1321, H. K. Shackelford, "His Last Cent; or, How Joe Dutton Made His Fortune," Frank Tousey, May 28, 1897. Nickels and Dimes: From the Collections of Johannsen and LeBlanc, Rare Books and Special Collections, Northern Illinois University.

*His Last Cent* shows how the formula of the dime novel points to young people as producers as well as consumers of stories (although there is no record of Shackelford publishing as a teenager himself). Christine Bold argues that such self-referentiality was a hallmark of dime novels—justifying their own kind of amazing accounts as “truth” but also paralleling their narrative practices through their heroes’



(“Voice” 30). Like Joe (who vows just to “pitch in and work like a beaver for myself” [2]), shrewd and handy youth went to work with a will as professionals in the fiction factory of the dime industry. In this “transformation in the meaning of authorship” (Streeby, “Dime” 586), the “Man of Letters” became “a Man of Business” (Williams Dean Howells’s words, qtd. in Wilson 114). More than that, for these young writers the very mode of production became their writing identity—or, as the writer Robert Carlton Brown declared: “I was a fiction factory” (Brown, “Appendix” 159, emphasis added).<sup>16</sup> Shackelford may not have written as a youngster, but Bob Brown decidedly did. Brown started out writing dime fiction as a teen, and bragged that he “averaged two hundred dollars a month” before he was twenty (154)—after which career, he went on to be an experimental modernist.

Such self-referentiality also underscored the imbrication of dime novels with what youth meant as its very mode. William Everett’s early review of dime novels did not condemn their moral influence on youth—just the opposite. It took a generation (during which the connection between youth and the dime novel came to seem more absolute) before adults like the moral crusader Anthony Comstock began to censure them for pernicious influence.<sup>17</sup> The growing moral condemnation of dime novels had nothing to do with their content, Paul Erickson argues, because their content never changed. The very “same novels were reprinted again and again” over the years (Erickson 249)—what varied was their mode of representation and, in particular, their more explicit targeting of young readers. They were repackaged over time, ultimately into different, eye-catching “colored covers as raw and bright as a new fire engine” that “stunned, then charmed a new generation of boys” (Holbrook E5), as Fig. 2 literalises.

This repackaging provided the mechanism by which the dime novels’ mode of publication specifically addressed and called together its particular social grouping, conveying “a very clear social message of who, socially, they understood themselves to be ‘for’” (Brodhead, *Cultures* 5, 6)—it concretely hailed youth as youth. “Format and distribution—what books look like and how readers get them,” Erickson agrees, “assist in both constructing and instructing an audience” (249). As their covers grew more vivid and arresting, their price dropped to a nickel, and (rather than being delivered to the home through the mail) they started being sold at newsstands outside home control—that is, their “cultural signals” changed (250): they became cheap enough and available enough for independent young consumers.<sup>18</sup>

They also became a signal of what independent and canny young people could *produce*. Young writers’ declarations of success in the dime industry confirm how dime novels provide the implicit structural and generic hailing for youthful authorship that make them a signifier of youth, their insignia, a trademark. Elizabeth Traube, discussing American youth culture of the time, states that youth adopted “outrageously expressive practices,” visual markers to indicate youthful agency and camaraderie (such as working girls wearing flamboyant clothes, clothes that rejected home values, outside the home) (Traube 140). Similarly, the dime novel instantiated

youth through the visual signal of its arresting paratext—their covers forcefully depicted young people’s agency—the cover of *His Last Cent* (Fig. 1), for instance, shows Joe Dutton not just about to go to work but directly on the attack. Such signals came to be even more eye-catching when in later years covers became garishly coloured.

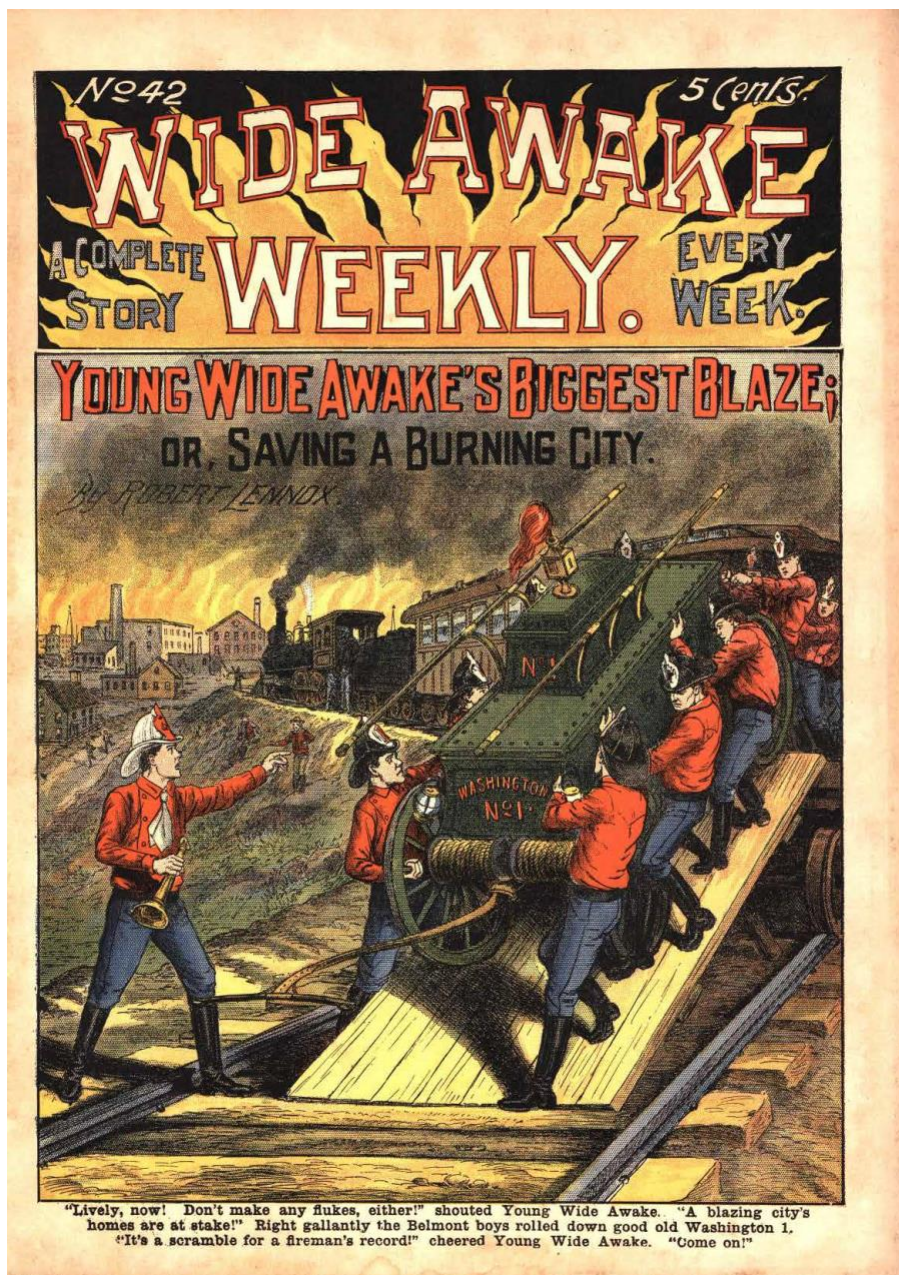


Figure 2. Cover of *Wide Awake Weekly* no. 37 [not no. 42, as shown in the image], Feb. 1, 1907, “*Young Wide Awake’s Biggest Blaze; or, Saving a Burning City,*” by Robert Lennox. University of South Florida.<sup>19</sup>

Though (starting in the 1860s) youth had always read this fiction, by the 1870s and 80s the form came to *mean* youth. Figure 2 (depicting the “juvenile fire company ... composed of boys from fifteen to eighteen”) demonstrates this shift by showing how the Wide Awake series had become personified in its young hero, Dick Halstead: “Owing to his always being alert, often scenting duty even before the call came, he was known as Young Wide Awake” (Lennox 1). Yet the status of individual names is always in question in the fiction factory. Unlike Shackelford, “Robert Lennox” could have well been a young writer since (as the dime novel collector and expert Edward T. LeBlanc writes) “this name was a stock name used by the publisher indiscriminately. Any of the Tousey staff writers could have written under this name” (LeBlanc 87n1); Tousey employed various writers who started publishing in their teens, as the early careers of Bob Brown and Luis Senarens attest. Young Wide Awake’s series makes clear that he is simply one in a brigade of young men working together, all of whom get their own stories, just as Bob Brown recounts the young staff writers at Tousey sharing the labour of spinning out copy under whatever house name required their work. Despite the anonymity of their conditions of employment, therefore, rather than dismiss their own writing as hackwork, as dispossessed literary labour, wide-awake young writers see the dime industry as constitutive, calling them into being. As hack writers, young dime novelists came to embody a mode of being, in Northrop Frye’s sense of ontology: what made possible anything that they “can do or could have done” (Frye 33). As an effect of that shift, their new kind of writing identity “challenged the very binaries of ‘literary’ and ‘popular,’ or ‘high’ and ‘low’ art” (S. Williams 90–91) to redefine what American literature could be.

## Young Writers

YOUTH, of course, was not actually the same experience for people of different circumstances. “Youth” is such a powerful signifier, Robert Latham writes, precisely because it pretends that it is the same for everyone: it seems to “objectify a common structure of feeling” (13)—but “the perceived homogeneity and mutuality of interests across divides of difference—regional, racial, and so forth—that seemed to link young people as ‘youth’ was an entirely artificial construction” (15). In offering this constructed sense of youth itself, of youth understood *as* construction, connected through performance and mode—a way of being, a kind of action (wide-awake young men, like Joe and Dick, always on the move)—the dime industry consolidated youth culture, reciprocally and tautologically calling youth together, working from an appearance of youth’s homogeneity. The mobility that dime novels depicted seemed to promise an imagined sameness that—especially in terms of equal opportunity—could never pan out. (Part Two explores how African American writers such as Harry Liscomb or Richard Wright use dime formulas ultimately to depict the bankruptnes of such proffered equal access.)

Oded Heilbronner writes that “a major sign of the existence of a unique youth or teenage culture was the marketing of goods directed towards them by well-informed manufacturers” (578). What got marketed in part was the new practical and modern understanding of the capacity of the young, a fantasy of youth that young consumers were happy to indulge and purchase in the pages of their popular reading. Such modernity stresses the new rhetoric of wide-awake youth—its art of seeming up-to-date, which went hand-in-hand with the depictions on the dime-novel covers of their heroes and heroines, arrested in dramatic action—youth as dynamic, equal to urgent and pressing circumstances, always full speed ahead. Sociologist Mark Swiencicki charts how the story papers and dime novels helped young men and women assert this youthful and ostentatious modern fashion “to express their new personas” (786; see also 790). Historian Kathy Peiss maintains that adolescents at this time included the cheap amusements they read as part of a new “mode of cultural expression” (66). This mode was one way that the dime industry, in Bold’s words, “offered readers accommodation to the speed, change, and growth of modern America” (“Popular” 291). The poet William Logan calls this a “vision of a nation filled with forward-looking go-and-get-’em types” (299) when writing about the sometime fiction-factory writer John Townsend Trowbridge. Trowbridge (first published at age sixteen) summed up this sentiment in his memoir when he wrote: “Here was life, and I was young” (89).<sup>20</sup>

The dime industry relied on an endless stream of young writers, both male and female, who were like Trowbridge feeling their youth. Daniel Cohen calculates there were “many dozens, if not hundreds” of teenagers who began writing for this demand (“Making” 99).<sup>21</sup> The cheap labour of young authors was indeed an important social determinant that helped to float the rise of popular mass media. How many young people were trying their hand at writing is revealed by the 1863 *Beadle’s Dime Letter Writer*, one of the other dime publications beyond blood-and-thunder fiction, such as songbooks and cookbooks, which rounded out Beadle’s list. In a collection of boilerplate correspondence, its chapter on “Writing for the Press: Offering Contributions to an Editor” clearly mentors *young* writers (those in danger of having “no respectable value” because “harvested too soon”): “Never tell how young you are, for, rest assured, an editor wants no other evidence of your years than the contribution itself.” Self-serving in its advice—“It is presumption in young and nameless authors to expect pay” (*Beadle’s* 64)—this advice manual makes clear the kind of contributions Beadle had frequently seen.

Considering a group of young male correspondents submitting to the 1870s Frank Tousey story-paper *The Boys of New York*, Sara Lindey outlines how the notion of writing as mass-produced, “mechanical and reproducible” (Lindey 83), encouraged these adolescents’ ambition to authorship.<sup>22</sup> Writing lay in formulas they could imitate, techniques they could master, a profession they could learn. Their very fantasy of imitation, repetition, and replication was thematised within the plots about the boy inventors in the Frank Reade Jr. dime-industry stories carried in *Boys of New*

*York* and reprinted in the *Wide Awake Library* of half-dime novels. Frank Reade Jr.'s robot-like inventions—a steam man, an electric man—replace each other in a chain of rapid obsolescence, as he too had replaced his father (once a teen in an earlier series of Edisonades).<sup>23</sup> The Frank Reade Jr. books were written by “Noname”<sup>24</sup>—Luis Senarens, who started turning out dime novels as a teenager. Nathaniel Williams calls the Noname stories “a celebration of self-determination” (“Frank” 281). “Their aesthetics were those of the boys’ subculture of” the time (Bleiler, “Luis” 666). Through his Noname pseudonym, Senarens gave a shout-out to other anonymous young dime-novel hacks who staked the possibilities of their writing selves on the conditions of modern production.<sup>25</sup> In writing about the 1870s Roberts Brothers’ No Name Series, Lara Cohen argues that the No-name pseudonym was meta-discursive about contemporary possibilities of authorship; the anonymity that for many authors (youth, women) had seemed a condition of their “participation in public literary culture, is transformed by enterprising publishers into a clever marketing device” (“Perils” 211).

These unheralded American teenagers were no-names who aspired to money and success—to a job writing for the popular genres in a new market in which they might get paid. An article treating young Upton’s Sinclair’s early dime-novel writing calls the dime novel a mode of production running at a “steam engine rate” (“Upton” H6).<sup>26</sup> Young writers understood this mode of constant production expressly in terms of themselves. Freeman Putney, Jr.<sup>27</sup>—who described himself as “a writer only of magazine stories, who has not yet risen to the height of dime novel composition (which I understand is a somewhat difficult art, granted by the muse only to a favored few)” —tied it explicitly to the “present generation” (8). Dime novels, he informs the *New York Times*, are important as the expression of the moment and the youth who inhabit it. He singles out “the quick action of the dime novel, the impatience of circumlocution, the tendency to ‘something doing’ in every paragraph” (8). Such action is evident in the novels of the *Wide-Awake Library* and *Wide-Awake Weekly* (See Figs. 1 and 2): in fact, “quick as a flash”—a phrase in the cover caption shown in Figure 1—is a characteristic dime construction (Shackelford uses it multiple times throughout Joe Dutton’s story). Young *Wide Awake*’s juvenile crew also “dash” and “dart” throughout his story, dispatching fires with great speed, an alacrity which causes even the skeptical veteran fire chief to marvel that even though the crew is young, “you’ve sure got a genius for fighting fire at railroad speed” (13). Putney argues that the dime novels’ recounting of such rapid feats “may have had a stronger influence than we realise in forming the character of the present generation of Americans. We are certainly displaying all of these tendencies in our National life and work” (8). He associates such modern action with youth—the dime novels he read “as a boy,” the young people shaped by them—reinforcing youth as an explanatory category for the press-and-go of the contemporary moment, underscoring youth’s modern capacities to meet that moment.

Connections between youth's proficiency and a modern technological world which required their know-how were not, of course, new. What changed was the packaging, the ways new technologies could blazon their interconnection so patently—starting in the 1830s and '40s with the steam-driven rotary press all the way to chromolithography at the end of the century.<sup>28</sup> By the time of the late-century dime-novel industry, with its mass-produced, replicating stories and its lurid covers, up-to-the-minute youth was a commodity that could be advertised (and advertised to) with the full armament of these tools: this new mechanical mode—"written almost automatically"—was also "painted in colours so strong and vivid there is no mistake about it," as one dime writer put it (Burgess, "Confessions" 530). Its actual "colored covers" were "gaudy and joyous to the young," another wrote (Pearson 54).<sup>29</sup> "The boy's romance of today is literal, technical, tight, efficient, and matter-of-fact. There is less blood in it, and more machinery," stated a third (Edgar 60)—consider, for instance, Young Wide Awake's fire engine which its young crew loves and names "good old Washington 1," featured so centrally throughout his story (Fig. 2). The dime novel provided the conditions of self-determination in allowing young writers to write, but also affirmed juvenile writing as an inherent function of such machineries of production, not outside or above them.

"Inspiration is only another name for industry," the dime writer William Wallace Cook said (qtd. in Scott 8). The shift in the identity of writer from inspired genius to professional practitioner went hand-in-hand with a shifting sense of literary writing as a learnable craft, open to any youth with a how-to manual. Paul Collins begins his study of the emergence of creative writing instruction in America by considering the more elite bastions for the training of youth, such as college literary societies, that provide evidence of young people's literary aspirations. Undergraduate literary magazines were records of their achievement, and widely circulated across the nation (Collins 66).<sup>30</sup> He quickly moves from such elite circles, however, to "author publication guides" directed to a wider audience (5) as a more popularly available support for young people's writing, marking the shift from ivory tower to the marketplace.<sup>31</sup> The publication of writing advice was one outcome of a rhetoric of youth like Young America's that had urged young writers to take up the pen: as John Stafford states, "Young America's awareness of the democratization that had overtaken literature also led to the prescriptive attitude: many of the new young writers who were flooding the market with volumes of their 'effusions' undoubtedly needed advice" (*Literary* 43).

Recent scholarship has begun to recover those young writers of the fiction factory through popular story papers and dime novels. Daniel Cohen has collected and analyzed the work of the young writer Mary Gibson (pen name Winifred Woodfern)—already, when she was a teenager in the 1850s, "a story-paper 'star' with a diverse mass audience of tens of thousands of readers" ("Winnie" 376), whose tales continued to appear "as dime novels throughout the 1880s, 1890s, and even into the early 1900s" ("Making" 135). For Cohen, the work of these young authors challenges



the standard division “of antebellum American popular literature into ... woman-identified ‘domestic’ or ‘sentimental’ fiction ... and male-oriented ‘adventure’ or ‘sensation’ fiction” (369).<sup>32</sup> He finds these young writers’ blithe disregard of established boundaries a direct function of their youth: starting out and eager to publish, “aspiring young authors of the period” were not restricted to “a single genre or literary voice but ... responded quickly and opportunistically to the shifting needs of editors” (380). Later dime-novelist Brown gloried in such versatility: “We didn’t know under what classification our writing fell,” he wrote. “We didn’t care. We just wrote it. To order” (“Swell” 480). “It is no small gift, this successful writing of dime novels,” an article looking back at the dime novel concludes. “More people are born to tight rope walking than to dime novel writing,” which “requires something more than mere knack,” but “if you haven’t the knack it is hopeless to try it, as they will carry you out raving after a week of effort” (Chapman D5).

Young dime-industry writers, reveling in that knack and something more, felt they could write because other young people had. Cohen describes the interactive “poetry columns of mid-nineteenth-century story papers”—in which young women writers exchanged their writing back and forth—as “sedate, slow-paced precursors to modern on-line social networking sites, in which aspiring young authors could ... communicate with each other, and craft public personae” (“Winnie” 383): he sees “the columns of antebellum story papers ... still haunted” by the records of such “dreams ... yet to be exhumed” (408). Young male writers also wrote back and forth to each other in these columns, Lindey notes, carving out authorial identities through their mutual appreciation and notice (73 and *passim*).

A first-prize story in *Boys of New York*—the “Juvenile” periodical Lindey singles out as demonstrating that such youth magazines addressed young writers as well as young readers—asserts that its schoolboy author’s inspiration came from this kind of juvenile tradition (young writers calling up other young writers in their wake): that is, he was prompted to write because of “stories by boy contributors” which were “to me the most attractive portion” of the Juveniles he read (Fig. 3). Edgar Rexford Hoadley (1859–1925) would have been about sixteen when this story was published. Active in amateur journalism (the guild of young boy printers turning out their own newspapers and journals, one departure point for this kind of wide-awake and production-minded juvenile tradition), the teen-aged Hoadley had by 1876 also set himself up as a dime writer. As Thomas Harrison recounts in his 1883 *Career and Reminiscences of an Amateur Journalist*: “At this time, sensational literature was in high favor with the amateur press,” and, Hoadley, along with other young pressmen, “were popular writers of this kind of fiction ... contributing prolifically to the press,” by churning out the familiar blood-and-thunder soft-backed “pamphlets from their pens” (141).<sup>33</sup>



Figure 3. Excerpt from Harry Hazle, Jr. [E.R. Hoadley].  
 “My First Story.” *The Boys of New York: A paper for young Americans*, vol. 1, no. 15, 29 November 1875. Digital Library@Villanova University.

“Youth ... was its own publicity” (Hentea 174), thematised in the stories it told, and also very publicly foregrounded as an advertising draw by publishers from at least the mid-century on.<sup>34</sup> In *Pierre*—Melville’s spoof of juvenile writing in Young America—the author describes how bills “every month covered the walls of the city with gigantic announcements” of Pierre’s name (339). The actual young author Ellen Louise Chandler remembers “the huge posters with which they placarded the walls, headed, ‘Read this book and see what a girl of eighteen can do’” (qtd. in D. Cohen, “Making” 123).<sup>35</sup> Firms promoted youth because it raised their editors’ professional standing, attesting to their sharpness and acumen as men who recognised talent. Nathaniel Parker Willis (brother of the widely popular author Fanny Fern), editor of the *Home Journal*, in the late 1840s had already advertised the youth of sixteen-year-old Metta Fuller, who went on to become a famous dime novelist: “Willis had a passion for thus picking up young authors who gave signs of genius, and ... pushing them before the public,” in that way giving his magazine “a distinctive reputation for the employment of brilliant literary talent” while paying nothing for it (Sikes 5).<sup>36</sup> In the 1890s, William Dean Howells still suggested that “the value of the young author” reflected on “the editor’s pride, self-interest, and sense of editorial infallibility” (“Editor’s” 418).



But young writers also touted their youth themselves to attest to their own professional savvy and success. The celebrated Fuller sisters—both recognised newspaper poets before they were fourteen, who “wrote at a time when precocity was regarded as an asset” (Sussex 144)—made the most of that initial precocity when they ultimately moved into the dime novel.<sup>37</sup> Later dime author William Wallace Cook—who “started writing when only a child” (Scott 5)—made sure in his 1912 memoir *The Fiction Factory* that readers knew that he wrote his first work “at the age of 12” ([Cook] 16) and that, at age fourteen, he won an “Award of Merit” “for excellence in literary composition” (17) from *Frank Leslie’s Boys’ and Girls’ Weekly*. The young Louisa May Alcott had won a prize from Leslie’s too, and still as an adult published her pseudonymous thrillers in his publications.

Later dime novelist Gilbert Patten, who published his first stories at age fifteen, also advertised his youth: “I was trying to write stories even before I knew how to spell some of the simplest words” (6).<sup>38</sup> Latham argues that, by the first part of the twentieth century, advertising “not only began explicitly to target youth markets but also mobilized an ideology of youth as the organizing principle and ultimate goal of mass consumption” (13). In his account, youth became the rationale for the entire system of marketing, which sold the fantasy of youth to those who were past it. The planned obsolescence of the cheap paper books in dime-industry serial publication—each book leading to a new and better one, as its heroes never stop and rarely age or, if they do, are immediately replaced by a younger version<sup>39</sup>—all exemplify this kind of degenerescent, self-engendering economy.

Such self-creations held open a fantasy of parthenogenesis, even as their paradoxes seemed to conform to a truism of modern teenage identity—the overwhelming impulse to be just like everyone else understood as the way to distinguish one’s own peculiar selfhood. The fantasy of youth playing out in these pages, Emily Hamilton-Honey argues, “gave young adults agency in a way that conventional literature for young people did not.” She quotes Deirdre Johnson, who thought the syndicate series which grew out of the dime novel were popular with young readers because in them “adolescents make their own crucial decisions” and seem the “shapers of their fate” (Hamilton-Honey, *Guardians* 773). The image of youth promulgated by the culture industry “projected adolescents as active participants in the social order ... capable of consequential behaviour” (Hendrick 253). Alcott, in *Eight Cousins* (1876), had already marked such stories as fantasies: “Now, I put it to you, boys,” says the mother, objecting to what her sons like in such books, “is it natural for lads from fifteen to eighteen to command ships, defeat pirates, outwit smugglers, and so cover themselves with glory?” (198). While this youthful swagger might be wishful, Alcott nonetheless proffered it gleefully in her own blood-and-thunder writing, as much in the narrator’s attitude as the characters.<sup>40</sup> In an 1889 editorial in *The Writer*, dime novelist Patten suggests young workers in the trade should adopt this “kind of never-say-die pluck that every young writer needs” (qtd. by R. Anderson 14). In 1895, *Munsey’s Magazine* touted its own virtues by

claiming it drew on this new “Generation of Writers”: “we are surrounding ourselves with the clever young men that mean growth, that mean a wide awake, up to date, magazine” (“Publisher’s Desk” 438).

It mattered to the juvenile tradition, and to American letters, that a wide-awake generation had grown up on dime novels—because that generation was also now turning them out. “More than one dime-novel publishing firm has made a fortune at the business of providing literature for Young America,” an essay in *The Writer* could report in 1903 (“Writing Sensational” 119). By the beginning of the twentieth century, the dime industry seemed typified by “kids just in from the prairies with their heavy office typewriters in cardboard boxes unloaded on wooden tables in shabby Manhattan furnished rooms” (Blackbeard 234).<sup>41</sup> Citing Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, and Sinclair Lewis (all of whom wrote blood-and-thunder fiction before they were twenty-one), one essay claims that the story-paper and dime-novel publishing house Street and Smith “has probably printed the early work of more successful writers than any other American firm” (A. Jones 39).<sup>42</sup>

“Dime and pulp writers were always hacks, in Walter Benjamin’s terms” (Bold claims), because Benjamin defines *hack* as a writer “who refuses as a matter of principal to improve the production apparatus” (“Voice” 29). For young writers in the fiction factory, the term “hack” was indeed a matter of principal, a badge of membership and achievement.<sup>43</sup> Rather than protest against the conditions of labour that produce them, Bold argues such writers take their creation of authorial identity *as* their story. When Lindey argues that young writers welcomed the fiction factory as a technology to develop the writing self (77), she underscores their self-regard as well as self-creation.<sup>44</sup> Bob Brown, who worked under Senarens at Tousey, recalls the “wide-awake eagerness” with which his group of young writers took New York by storm (“Swell” 482). “Give us a stint to do for our day’s bread, even 5000 words for \$15, and we were up and at it,” Brown wrote. “We made our typewriters dance” (481). Dime-novel hacks “develop a story-telling voice” about “the process of composition,” which “often constitutes the most interesting story told in the dime novels” (Bold, “Voice” 30)—an understanding of their writing as meta-discursive and self-reflexive as Senarens’s pseudonym.<sup>45</sup>

Part One of these essays has recovered those meta-reflections—it has argued that dime fiction represented not just a particular format but a distinct and modern literary mode of production with a new understanding of authorial identity: “inspiration forms a small part of the dime novel writer’s stock in trade,” *The Writer* declares. “Nearly all his stories are written to order” (“Writing Sensational” 119). This was also an understanding of the modern identity that youth felt awaited them. In his 1899 commencement speech about dime novels to his fellow young graduates of Harvard, the twenty-one-year-old Robert Peabody Bellows stressed that the dime writer knows that “no suspicion of genius can be conceived to lurk” in “his machine made weekly output” (Bellows 98). Yet such supposedly degraded works sold like crazy—already “as early as ’64 five millions of dime books had been circulated,” he

estimated (97), though “we are told that the dime novel, after flourishing for some forty years, is dying” (97).

Part Two explores how the dime novel actually persisted long past that death. Historians of popular fiction, such as Madeline Stern, note that publishers “continued to flood the country through the turn of the century with dime and nickel libraries” long after their “peak had passed” (xvi)—a persistence registered nowhere better than in the continuing evolution of the juvenile tradition in the early twentieth century. Part Two explores the dime industry’s continued afterlife in American literature by considering how the formulas of dime writing that persisted made patent the hierarchies of power within the new nation’s authorising assumptions.

To take up their authorial identities, young writers in the juvenile tradition of the early twentieth century, negotiating its inherited dime formulas, had to work within attitudes about race and imperialism that were part of American exceptionalism. For young writers restricted to the margins by the social order, using such popular formulas to break into print meant negotiating social prescriptions at odds with their very selfhoods. Part Two considers the paradoxes of such writing for young writers such as Senarens—or young African American writers such as Wright or Liscomb.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Part II will be published in *JJS* vol. 6, no. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Yet young writers had always been sharp about the demands of the market and adapted to them deftly. Though commercialised, standardised writing might seem very different from the works of the earlier young Romantics in Britain, who seem to address posterity, not the marketplace, juvenile writing had always been opportunistic, as the figure of Thomas Chatterton demonstrates. As much as he symbolised inspired genius, he also mattered to the early juvenile tradition in his status as a forger: a canny adept, who knew better than his elders and could easily put one over on them, a streetwise author who turned newspapers to his own account and died, by the age of seventeen, a Grub Street hack writing for his bread. For a discussion of Chatterton as representative of the “anxious shortcomings of the creative underclasses of the mid-eighteenth century Georgian literary economy” whose work “survives as a record of the more common, unremembered failures of Grub Street journalism and the tragic poets in the period,” see Sumner 163.

<sup>3</sup> Dime novels span a myriad of genres, and many of the critics I cite take, as shorthand for their discussion, its early frontier novels to represent the form—these appealed most, though not exclusively, to young men. The first dime novel, Ann S. Stephens’s 1860 frontier story *Malaeska: the Indian Wife of the White Hunter*, however, was actually also a sentimental love story that exemplifies the form’s cross appeal. The early male collectors and the critics first discussing this form (such as Blackbeard, Bleiler, Brodhead, Curti, Denning, Saxton, Springhall) were mostly interested in dime fiction as boys’ stories of adventure or mystery. Yet a committed group of feminist critics (including Bold, Carr, D. Cohen, Cummins, Hamilton-Honey, Masteller, Peterson, Papashvily, Sussex) have

been working to recover the women who wrote, and read, popular dime novels of sentimental domestic fiction, as well as of adventure and mystery. For a statement of the importance of this recovery work, see Carr's *American Women Dime Novels Project*. The topic of young women writers in the fiction factory deserves extended treatment, especially because Laura Jean Libbey's immensely popular love stories explicitly recount the travails of girl factory workers. Libbey's books are important not only because they appealed in record numbers to actual girl workers (as Denning and Peterson argue) but because (I think) they directly reflect on the fiction factory in which Libbey herself laboured from an early age. Throughout her career, she also consistently and explicitly foregrounded that initial precocity and reflected on her youth. While I discuss here teenage female writers such as the Fuller sisters, Mary Gibson, as well as Libbey, the discussion of the publication apparatus enabling young women writers deserves the continued comprehensive discussion begun by critics like Mitchell.

<sup>4</sup> By *mode* I mean Northrop Frye's category of how stories reflect their worlds to make meaning, the framework that shapes what is even imaginable, the formulas and conventions that make up its fabric. Mode establishes ontology; it sets the unspoken assumptions of the possible, what anyone in that world "can do or could have done" (Frye 33). When explaining Frye's understanding of "mode," Robert Denham quotes Foulke and Smith's *Anatomy of Literature*: "the most effective use we can make of the concept of mode is to think of it as representing those general historical presuppositions that modify or shape narrative patterns to the tastes of a particular period" (22).

<sup>5</sup> See my "Young America: Dime Novels and Juvenile Authorship."

<sup>6</sup> This essay is quoted in Miller (190), and ascribed by him and by Emerson's biographer Ralph Rusk, among others, to Mathews (Rusk, *Life* 323).

<sup>7</sup> Beadle and Adams did not see the review as endorsement. Vanderbilt writes they "angrily replied at once to this criticism of their dime novels and authors" (91).

<sup>8</sup> Johannsen describes the early Beadle novels as burning with a "spirit of patriotism" (1: 4). "The dime novel is an American institution," writes one twentieth-century notice (Currier 8). "They are authentic Americana," agrees another (Lutes 153), and a peculiarly American institution" writes a third (Q. Reynolds 72). The whole world "looks upon them as interesting items in the development of American culture. They are typically American.... The situations could not happen anywhere else," asserts another (Shirk 39).

More recent critics may have overlooked the youth of dime novel writers because they see the form reflecting such ingrained and disturbing nationalist ideology and worry that any connection to youth, could sanitise or idealise it. For instance, Alexander Saxton—in his *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (1990)—and Shelley Streeby have amply demonstrated that actual social divisions underly the pictures of American life encoded in dime fantasies. Streeby thinks "youth" deflects attention away from these iniquitous hierarchies, including away from gender ("Cheap" 242) so that, after half-dime novels became specifically marketed to boys, publishers disguised the gender of women who had been writing dime novels all along, or dropped women as writers altogether. But see Springhall, who regards age categories as still vital to any critique of "particular social and cultural circumstances" (*Youth, Empire* 19). He argues that ignoring youth repeats the kind of "age discrimination" which enforces "certain tastes, values, and hierarchies" so that "aesthetic distinctions became a symbolic weapon" ("Disreputable" 122).

- <sup>9</sup> In making this critique, Duyckinck might even have had a book like Stephens's *Malaeska* expressly in mind. *Malaeska* had already appeared in the periodical press twice (in 1836 and 1839) before Duyckinck's 1841 essay and before Beadle repurposed it to launch the new form.
- <sup>10</sup> Horsman argues that the idea of Manifest Destiny "revealed the extent to which" political Young America "envisioned a world dominated by the white American race" (285).
- <sup>11</sup> Wingo argues that such stories "reveal dominant American attitudes toward Indigenous peoples" (122). Henry Nash Smith is blunter: "Orville Victor said that when rival publishers entered the field the Beadle writers had to kill a few more Indians. But it went further than that.... Killing a few more Indians meant, in practice, exaggerating violence and bloodshed for their own sakes, to the point of an overt sadism" (101). Early readers recognised this inequity. The muckraking journalist Herbert Asbury wrote of dime novels: "My grandfather, himself a forty-niner, and with several years' experience among the Indians, was always violently opposed to the novels that purported to describe life among" them, which he called "packed with lies" and "unfair to the Indian" (qtd. in Pearson 237). In 1904, dime novelist George Jenks also thought that they "were designed to sell to the multitude, whose views and understanding of life were largely rudimentary.... The winning—or stealing—of the West from the aborigines was at this point being pursued with relentless ferocity" (108).
- <sup>12</sup> Harris describes in detail how P. T. Barnum exploited this aesthetic. For a discussion of Barnum's close connection to the literature of the dime industry, see Kellum. Though largely male, wide-awakeness (in terms of know-how and business acumen) actually extended to women too—as suggested by the 1893 *How: A Practical Business Guide for American Women of All Conditions and Ages, who Want to Make Money but Do Not Know How*, which suggests that women setting up cooking businesses, for instance, should turn to women's clubs and enlist "an organization of wide-awake women," to help them succeed (Taylor 34). When it came to labour in the publication industry, one of the things that especially marked Libbey, for instance, was that she was a savvy business person who knew how to run her own affairs; see Cummins.
- <sup>13</sup> This meant aspiration for "higher attainment"—"something that shall be elevating ... that shall help to make the boys and girls of America broad-minded, pure-hearted, and thoroughly wide awake," "good but not goody-goody" ("Story" 193, 194, 195).
- <sup>14</sup> The 1882 children's periodical *Forward*, similarly claimed "to be helpful, to be elevating, to lead heavenward, whilst also sprightly and wide awake to topics of present interest to young men and young women" (Overby 155). Chlebek argues that *Wide Awake's* founder, Daniel Lothrop, was a "self-starting businessperson who put moral ideals into successful practice," and who "emphatically stressed the concept of selfhood for youth" (454). The young adult writer Katherine Ellis Barrett (who had been editor of *Wide Awake* before it was taken over by its rival *St. Nicholas*) wrote a series expressly about the "Wide Awake girls," friends who met through letters to the magazine.
- <sup>15</sup> In the 1860s, the "Wide-Awakes" were also a male youth organisation associated with Lincoln. Supposedly representing young people's up-to-the minute political attitudes, it became quasi-vigilante in its adherence to them. Grinspan notes of the movement that "more than one-quarter would have been below voting age in the last presidential election," and calls them "a grand generational stirring" that heralded "the political rise of a generation. The Wide Awakes' youth ... identifies the essence of the movement" (367, 365-66). He quotes William Seward "the old men are folding their arms and going to sleep, and the young men throughout the land are Wide Awake" (366).

- <sup>16</sup> Wide-awake youth were also understood as reflecting their contemporary technological moment. By 1916, the activity book, *Something to do,—Boys!: A Book for Wide-Awake Boys*, took this reflection enough for granted that it could open with a picture it knew would entrance its audience: a description of “a great piece of machinery,” of which “each lever, shaft, and axle moves with perfect accuracy and power.” It asks its young readers, “Did you ever think that your mind is a machine that loves work?” (Foster 7).
- <sup>17</sup> Streeby suggests that a focus on young readers mistakenly plays into the contemporary “moral panic among . . . middle-class reformers” such as Anthony Comstock (Streeby, “Dime” 592), who attacked dime fiction as a kind of smoke-and-mirrors distraction from real social problems. Its modern editor points out that *Traps for the Young*—the title of Comstock’s 1883 screed against “Evil Reading”—“contained no hint of the economic catastrophes, social unrest, and industrial and agrarian protests of the period” (Bremner xiv). Instead, Comstock blames Satan himself, who (he claims) put cheap stories on newsstands for a price that children could afford in order to trap them in wickedness and crime. “Our youth are in danger; mentally and morally they are cursed by a literature that is a disgrace to the nineteenth century. The spirit of evil environs them” (Comstock 6). Springhall asserts that similar “misrepresentation” in England “preferred to target a convenient cultural scapegoat, rather than lend credence to more fundamental social and economic explanations of delinquency” (*Youth, Popular* 327).
- <sup>18</sup> I am indebted to Lesley Peterson for pointing out how news-delivery becomes thematised in and central to dime novels, both in *His Last Cent* and—see Part 2—in the very style of *The Prince of Washington Square*, which mimics newspaper headlines, but turns them wild. Just as Brown is both hack writer and Modernist, such blurring of boundaries continues the breakdown of categories between types of discourse.
- <sup>19</sup> This issue is cataloged by the University of South Florida as no. 37. The issue’s cover, however, as well as “Nickels and Dimes”, the Johannsen and LeBlanc collections in the Special Collections of Northern Illinois University, designate it as no. 42.
- <sup>20</sup> William Logan calls Trowbridge a “literary odd-job man, who turns his hand to whatever a hand can be turned”—“having started with hack work in New York, with hack work he continued” (Logan 286).
- <sup>21</sup> Daniel Cohen lists Ellen Louise Chandler (b.1835), Louis E. Cutter (b. 1835), Clara Augusta Jones (b. 1835 or 1839), and Virginia F. Townsend (b. 1836) (“Making” 100), as well as Hattie Burleigh. He refers to Helen Papashvily’s *All the Happy Endings*: she lists sixteen-year-old Mary Hawes writing in *Godey’s* as Miss Marianne Harland; another Mary Hawes, age fifteen, writing as Mrs. Mary J. Homes; Augusta Jane Evans who wrote *Inez, a Tale of the Alamo* at seventeen; and Isabella MacDonald, who published her first story in a local paper at ten (Papashvily 61).
- <sup>22</sup> There were similar venues for girls—in 1875, Beadle and Company issued a nickel weekly they titled *Girls of Today*.
- <sup>23</sup> Lindey suggests that Reade’s robots and inventors endlessly replacing each other allegorise writing in the dime-publishing system: “engaging in the mass market hinges on replication: the replication of imitative writing in order to secure the successful printing of a replicated self” (81).
- <sup>24</sup> The first “Steam Man” novel was by Edward Ellis, Beadle’s American Novel No. 45 (August 1868), *The Steam Man of the Prairies*. Harry Enton wrote four knockoffs for Tousey under the pseudonym of “Noname,” beginning with *The Steam Man of the Plains* (28 February 1876). See Evans about how these machine men replicate racism. Bleiler states that Senarens inherited the pseudonym with the series in February of 1879

- (starting with *Frank Reade Jr and His Steam Wonder*), when Senarens would not yet have turned fourteen (Bleiler, “Senarens”).
- <sup>25</sup> Randolph Cox writes of Senarens that “he may have used” Noname “more than any other writer” (237). Tousey continued to advertise Noname into the twentieth-century, identifying upcoming reprints as “by your old favorite Noname” (“Happy Days Catalog Advertisement” 8). Senarens inherited the name around the time of the No Name series of serious novels, written anonymously for Roberts Bros. publishers in 1876–87—Alcott published *A Modern Mephistopheles* in it.
- <sup>26</sup> This article is subtitled “Men Who Are Doing Things,” underscoring Frye’s sense of mode as what could be done.
- <sup>27</sup> Putney had started writing young, publishing verse while an undergraduate at Brown (see Boone 85). He was identified in *The Writer: A Monthly Magazine for Literary Workers* as “a New York businessman” with savvy and success enough to publish in higher-paying venues like *Harper’s Weekly* (“Writers” 122) by the time he wrote to the *Times* in defense of dime novels, which he found “much and long maligned” (Putney 8).
- <sup>28</sup> Jones argued in 1844 that these new media were a period of youth for the nation: “Our middle age epoch may not come for ten centuries; meanwhile we need to read much and rapidly” (“Horne’s” 61–62). For identification of Jones as author, see Stafford, “William” 290, 296.
- <sup>29</sup> Almost every early critic remarks on the visual paratext shaping the dime-novel industry—“the blood-curdling frontispieces” that “hark at you from the nearest news-stand” (Burgess, “Half Dime” para 3). After describing in depth the stationer’s display presenting such pictures, Bishop writes of dime-novel art: “It haunts one. It is a nightmare” (Bishop 387). But Maidment describes a different reaction by the teenage artist Richard Doyle; who drew “a celebratory image” of these displays, instead of “the dangerous and disruptive potential of the print shop window” that adults saw. The youth’s picture of the display window instead “has become a peaceable space” of happy schoolboys and pleasure in images (Maidment 141).
- <sup>30</sup> Collins notes that the seniors publishing *The Harvard Lyceum* in 1810—where they state that “the subject of American literature will receive our particular attention”—provide a direct “nod towards the incipient ‘Young America’ movement” (65).
- <sup>31</sup> Collins singles out an 1846 a manual by George P. Quackenbos, who “can trace his beginnings to the early dime-novel market” (71). Quackenbos entered Columbia at age thirteen, and published—at age twenty—*St. Jean’s Evening: or, Crime and Mystery*—Paul Collins calls it “a dime novel” (in his preface, Quackenbos writes: “The Author is aware that it is no recommendation to a work to be published in the *shilling* form” [5]). Quackenbos’s experience writing the “‘cheap publication’ of poison” (72) made his prompts for young writers reminiscent of dime plots: write about meeting banditti in Italy, he tells them, or having adventures in California (73). Henry James was actually one of Quackenbos’s young pupils in New York. Collins also points to Jesse Haney, who “launched Boy’s Own dime novels” (57) and published a successful writing *Guide to Authorship* (1867). Experience in “dime novels” (59) means Haney “trusts the marketplace and starkly rejects any Romantic notion of defiant genius” in his advice to young writers (60). For a similar treatment of writing considered a profession by guidebooks in Britain, addressed to young writers trying to learn their trade, see Vlitos 2021.
- <sup>32</sup> See also Sussex’s discussion of how, in “cheap exciting literature” (151), women writers traversed these boundaries in their crime and detective fiction, which focus on thrilling

- mystery instead of romance—see especially her discussion of the importance of the Fuller sisters to the dime novel form (142–63).
- <sup>33</sup> For Hoadley's participation in the 1876 National Amateur Press Association convention, see Hall. For a discussion of boy printers, see L. Cohen, "Emancipation." Harrison credits the young Hoadley as having written the 1876 *Double Dream*, but the teenaged Hoadley was much more prolific than this. According to the edition of *The Double Dream*—a dime-novel-length, fifteen-page pamphlet published by a fellow amateur—available at the American Antiquarian Society, Hoadley was also the "Author of 'Rowland Randall,' 'Benjamin Boggs,' 'Doing and daring,' 'Lionel Lancer,' 'Cheerful Charley,' 'Rover Ralph'" (Hoadley, title page). The Edward T. LeBlanc Memorial Dime Novel Bibliography at Northern Illinois University also credits him with the 1890 *Cruise of the Bianca*, published by the professional firm of Frank F. Lovell (<https://dimenovels.org/Item/20044/Show>).
- <sup>34</sup> Cohen focuses on Mary Gibson because her identity as a young writer was well-known to her audience; she made it part of her distinctive trademark through the "uninhibited, even reckless, ways in which she thrust" her own youthful persona explicitly into her writing ("Winnie" 372). Such stories of self-realisation were neatly thematised within the plots of dime novels, as Edmond Pearson (who himself started writing young for *The Harvard Advocate*) notes in his history of the form—for instance, in one tale "of a crossing sweeper in New York, who rises to fame as an author" (Pearson 29). Pearson thinks Mary Agnes Fleming is the author of this book: *Madge Wylde* (1861). Carr writes of Fleming that: "She began her writing career early, around the age of seventeen" (Carr para 1), but Johannsen finds it "impossible" that Fleming could have written *Madge Wylde* because she would have had to have started publishing around age twelve (2: 272). Lee states, however, that Fleming "began writing at the early age of thirteen" (Lee para 2). Johannsen suggests the author was possibly A. J. H. Duganne (Johannsen 2: 273)—but he too had published newspaper poems and a novel before he was twenty. Hentea points to a twentieth-century novel by a young novelist in this meta-discursive vein, Allen Clarke Maple's 1930 *Best Seller: the Story of a Young Man Who Came to New York to Write a Novel about a Young Man Who Came to New York to Write a Novel* (175).
- <sup>35</sup> Her *This, That, and the Other* was published in 1854 by Phillips, Sampson, and Co. in Boston (who carried the likes of Shakespeare and Scott). Chandler's book was reviewed widely, selling thousands, and passing into multiple editions. Her youth was consistently noted in reviews. See Whiting 29–37. Hentea points out that this practice continued into the twentieth century, and not only in North America. When Mary Panter-Downes serialised a novel in London's *Daily Mail* in 1923 at age sixteen, "the sides of London buses featured prominent advertisements emphasizing the author's age" (174).
- <sup>36</sup> Indeed, Sikes writes (just as *Beadle's Letter Writer* had advised), these "young and promising persons ... proud of seeing themselves in print, charged Mr. Willis no money for their effusions, and received their pay in the most titillating doses of flattery" (5) Sikes's essay was reprinted in the New York *Saturday Journal*, published by Beadle, so this discussion of Victor (the wife of Beadle's editor) was a marketing strategy—they stressed how young she began writing as a way to promote her. According to Johannsen, the dime novelist Sikes had himself written for some time before his work was collected at age twenty-two (2: 256).
- <sup>37</sup> Victor was first advertised as a prodigy in the 40s, as "the gifted young Poet Girl ... the 'Singing Sybil' of the *Home Journal*—and her no less talented sister Frances A. Fuller.... Few, if any female writers id [sic] our country have, in so early years, given such brilliant



- promise, or won, while yet in bright girlhood, such a wide meed of praise” (Osceola 5). Another piece placed her firmly within the canonical juvenile tradition: “It was at the early age of nine years that her taste for poetry began to betray the genius within. Moore, Scott, Byron, and Wordsworth then became her best, familiar friends.... At *thirteen* she commenced the career of authorship, which she has followed up to the present time. It is said of Bryant that, at fourteen, he made his mark in literature, and Dr. Griswold is fain to regard it as something remarkably precocious. At thirteen our subject wrote a story which yet occasionally ‘goes the round,’ from its beauty and rich glow of fancy.... At fifteen, she wrote her first lengthy work.... At seventeen Metta V. became a favorite of the *Home Journal*”; it quotes Willis, who discerns “more unquestionable marks of true genius” in Metta and her sister Frances than any others he has published though “both still in the earliest youth” and yet “undoubtedly destined to occupy a very distinguished and permanent place among the native authors of this land.” (“Metta” 86). Victor’s 1885 obituaries all mentioned how young she started; the *New York Times* pointed out her “publications ranged from the yellow covers of Beadle’s dime novels to the jealously guarded pages of *Harper’s Magazine*” (“Death” 8). After her death, mentions of her early literary prowess continued to circulate (See “Literary” 6).
- <sup>38</sup> Gardner writes, “At age fifteen, he quickly drafted two pieces and sent them off to Beadle’s. He received six dollars and was taken on as a regular contributor” (290).
- <sup>39</sup> “As part of an ongoing series, each dime novel had to say to the browser at the newsstand in its day, ‘Buy me’” (V. Anderson 120). “The title and the ‘cover situation’ are what usually sell the book” (Burgess, “Confessions” 530). “A single offensive or inept cover may drive a magazine from the newsstands and hinder the sale of other pulps in the same category for months to come” (A. Jones 37).
- <sup>40</sup> Hamilton-Honey suggests Alcott’s hypocrisy was strategic because “librarians’ endorsement of Alcott probably resulted, at least in part, from her denouncement of story papers, dime novels, and ‘bad’ series within the pages of her novels” (*Guardians* 777).
- <sup>41</sup> Of the original authors for Beadle’s first dime novel series, however, many had published as juveniles: Joseph Badger, Mary Dennison, A. J. H. Duganne, Edward Ellis, William R. Eyster, Thomas Harbaugh, Clara Augusta Jones, Ann E. Porter, Scott R. Sherwood, Frances Fuller Victor, and Metta Victor were all known to have published before they turned twenty. Other dime writers—Charlotte Brame, Ned Buntline, Francis W. Doughty, Harry Enton, Harlan P. Halsey, Laura Jean Libbey, George Lippard, Gilbert Patten, and Luis Senarens—had started that young too. Obituaries provided a vehicle for the circulation of juvenile prowess—Victor’s, Senarens’s, and Libbey’s told and retold their early authorship in notices across the nation, as if the death of any one-time prodigy encouraged the succession of the next.
- <sup>42</sup> Their writer Laura Jean Libbey became a brand in herself: her name came to mean the kind of factory-based dime-novel romance she wrote. She trademarked that name for writing and film and considered merchandising Laura Jean Libbey candy and toiletries as well (Masteller 206). Though Libbey did not actually publish until at least her mid-twenties (as Cummins recently uncovered), scholars still mistakenly refer to her as a juvenile writer because she deliberately and relentlessly constructed herself that way in every interview or notice—advancing her birth date by a good six years (Cummins 242) and repeatedly circulating stories about her discovery, supposedly at age fourteen, by the premier story paper editor, Bonner of the *Ledger* (see Rousseau 12). By so systematically

- manufacturing the persona of juvenile authorship for herself, Libby demonstrated its salability as well as its cultural consequence.
- <sup>43</sup> In his essay on “Literary Property” in Duyckinck’s *Arcturus*, G. A. Sackett explicitly asserts that demands for proper pay for work horrify the public: “What exclamations of *back* literary drudge!” greet any writer who raises the subject (111–12). Yet he argues that the writer *is* a “literary laborer” (110) bringing his productions—products of “days and nights of unceasing toil” (111)—to the marketplace.
- <sup>44</sup> Rather than the status-based humiliation that Brodhead imagines Alcott felt, D. Cohen argues that young women writers—like Alcott moving between domestic and blood-and-thunder fiction—were “more optimistic” than their contemporary elite-aspiring male authors, believing “that literary achievement can be combined with commercial success” (“Making” 120). They felt encouraged to write, not threatened, by the women bestsellers whom Hawthorne considered a damnable mob.
- <sup>45</sup> Bold quotes dime author Ned Buntline’s self-reflexive chapter titles: “The Plot Drawing to a Knot,’ . . . ‘A General Clearing Up of Mystery”” and his direct address to readers about “market-place conditions”: “I hope you feel as if you have got your money’s worth” (33). I suggested earlier that in a similar vein *His Last Cent* symbolically represents its characters as storytellers of sensational deeds.

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