Working at “Romance”

Poetics and Ideology in Novels of the Antebellum American South 1824-1854

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Great genius and the people of these states must never be demeaned to romances. As soon as histories are properly told there is no more need of romances.

Walt Whitman, preface to 1st ed. of *Leaves of Grass* (1855)

[T]here come to us from the deserts of the past certain voices which "syllable men's names"—names that seem to sound like "Paulding," "Brown," "Kennedy"—and we catch nothing further. These are ghosts, and they wrote about ghosts, and the ghosts have vanished utterly. Another of these shadowy mediums . . . is W. Gilmore Simms, of whom the best and the worst thing to be said is this—that he is nearly as good as Cooper, and deserves fame nearly as much.

John William DeForest, "The Great American Novel" (1868)

It was to this that the South owed her final defeat. It was for lack of a literature that she was left behind in the great race for outside support, and that in the supreme moment of her existence she found herself arraigned at the bar of the world without an advocate and without a defence. . . . [S]he was conquered by the pen rather than by the sword.

Thomas Nelson Page, *The Old South* (1892)

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> When we mess with romance, we take awful chances, which, of course, is exactly why we should mess with it.
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> —Jack Cady, *The American Writer* (1999)

1. Introduction: "Romance" and/as Ideology

The present study explores and problematizes the relationship between ideology and aesthetics in novels produced in the American South from 1824 to 1854. It is both a reinvestigation of southern literary history and a case study in the potentials of genre criticism for the analysis of ideological developments. On both levels, I examine prominent critical notions: firstly, that antebellum southern literature followed a clear-cut and largely predetermined course of ideological radicalization; secondly, that literary forms and conventions can be identified as natural manifestations of specific ideologemes or even as determining formats of particular ideological discourses.

Focusing on a complex of poetological and ideological notions which was—and often still is—associated with the term "romance," I set out to historicize the relationship between ideology and form. The investigation aims to show how concepts of genre are utilized for the statement of ideologies, i.e. how ideological messages are purposefully inscribed into poetological concepts. My question, then, is not what it means if a narrative *is* a "romance" but rather why certain narratives, produced under the strain of certain socio-historical conditions, ask to be *read as* "romances." Most of the investigated fictions by George Tucker, John Pendleton Kennedy, William Alexander Caruthers, William Gilmore Simms, Nathaniel Beverley Tucker and John Esten Cooke do so quite explicitly and self-consciously. Centering on the vague but crucial term "romance," these texts conduct a discourse on literary conventionality, its relation to social reality or the course of history, and its pragmatic potential of altering both.

An analysis of this discourse, its intra- and intertextual development as well as its connections to overarching American discourses and socio-economic transformations, sheds light not only on the problematic relationship between genre and ideology but also on the complex workings of southern ideologies in the context of intersectional crisis and capitalist modernization. In fact, the novels produced in the antebellum South from 1824 to 1854 can be seen as notable examples of the potentials, limitations and dangers inherent in conservative ideologies. These specimens of a doomed conservatism continue to be fascinating as testimonies of a surprising and highly significant attempt: the attempt to stay the historical dynamics of disintegration and alienation by means of an aesthetic intervention that was to be

based on the conserving power of (literary) style.

Moreover, the specific conception of the power of literature which was at the heart of nineteenth-century usages of the term "romance" has proved surprisingly persistent. Ever since Mark Twain pointed to the historical fiction of Walter Scott as a major reason for the Civil War, it has been an established tradition to emphasize the disastrous effects of “romance” on the antebellum South. In this vein, Wilbur J. Cash associated “romance” with the debilitating spell under which the “Old South” suffered. And, writing in the 1990s, Ritchie D. Watson has in effect returned to Twain’s polemical explanation of the Civil War by suggesting that it was the vehicle of "romance" in which the "Old Southwest" traveled down a "fictional road to rebellion."[1] Yet, while most analyses of southern ideologies have linked the supposedly exceptional character of the antebellum South to "romance" as a form of consciousness and literary practice, there is simultaneously a firmly established critical school, ranging from Richard Chase after the Second World War to Emily Budick in the 1990s, which uses the term “romance” for defining a specifically "American" tradition of narrative literature—a tradition from which antebellum southern literature is excluded because of its reactionary concepts of social hierarchy and its defense of slavery.[2]

I will explore the significance of this contradiction between the two governing conceptions of “romance” in American Studies. Analyzing the work of antebellum southern writers in the context of both nineteenth-century poetological discourses and twentieth-century critical traditions, the present study aims to test the validity and to explore the socio-historical motivations of old and new analogies between genre, specific forms of social organization and particular ideologies. Challenging the institutionalized dichotomies of "romance" criticism, I propose to approach antebellum southern novels as specific contributions to an overarching American discourse on "romance." This perspective will disclose unexpected lines of continuity in American ideological and intellectual history. Specifically, it will help to explain why the "Old South" has offered itself as the illusionary homeland of an aborted collective American fantasy about the socially pragmatic power of the “literary mind.”

In the following sections of the introduction I will initially examine the critical tradition of associating a specific concept of “romance” with the supposed deviation of

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1 Samuel L. Clemens, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883); facsimile rpt as vol. 9 of *The Oxford Mark Twain*, ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin (New York: Oxford UP, 1996); Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (1941; New York: Vintage, 1991); Ritchie D. Watson, *Yeoman versus Cavalier: The Old Southwest's Fictional Road to Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1993). For a discussion of the twin discourses on “romance” and the “Old South,” see below, chapter 1.1.

2 Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1957); quote: viii; Emily Budick, *Nineteenth-Century American Romance: Genre and the Construction of Democratic Culture* (New York: Twayne, 1996). See below, chapters 1.3 and

antebellum southern societies and cultures from the mainstream of “American” history. I will then summarize the general historical discourse on “romance” in order to explore the significance of the term as a keyword within debates about the pragmatic power of fictional literature. The third subchapter will focus on the concept of “romance” as an important ideologeme within the construction of a “native tradition” of American literature from which antebellum southern literature is excluded. Finally, I will look at new critical approaches to “romance” and their potential relevance for the study of “romance” fictions produced in the antebellum South.

1.1 Genre as a Format of Ideology? – “Romance” and the “Old South”

The “Old South” is one of the most interesting and significant constructs in American intellectual history. It is rooted in antebellum discourses, i.e. in auto- and heterostereotypical constructions of "the South" as a separate culture which gained ground in the intersectional conflicts before the Civil War.[3] Ever since, imaginations of antebellum southern society as it supposedly existed before the American Civil War have been among the primary referents by which a modernizing America has defined both the benefits and the costs of its modernity. Moreover, the imaginary socio-cultural landscape of the "Old South" has figured as an outstandingly important ground of contestation in battles over the social role of aesthetics.

Frequently, the “Old South” has inspired surprisingly radical answers to questions about the social role of literature and literary forms. Attempting to explain southern difference in his classic *The Mind of the South* (1941), Wilbur J. Cash was again and again drawn to “romance” as the governing quality and formative force of antebellum southern societies and cultures. Emphasizing a “southern” tendency “toward unreality, toward romanticism, and, in intimate relation with that, toward hedonism,"[4] Cash did not hesitate to relate these qualities to "the influence of the Southern physical world," which he described as "a sort of cosmic conspiracy against reality in favor of romance."[5] According to Cash, then, "romance" was the general condition of the "Southern mind," a peculiarly southern state of consciousness. At the same time, he used the term "romance" to designate a (more or less specific) literary

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[3] William R. Taylor's classic study *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (1961; Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1963) continues to be an important analysis of the imagological dissociation of "South" and "North" before the Civil War.

[4] Cash 44.

genre. Thus, he called Ellen Glasgow's *Barren Ground* (1925) "the first real novel, as opposed to romances, the South had brought forth."[6] Indeed, Cash attributed the possible rise of the South to self-recognition and to the acceptance of reality, its arrival in the twentieth century, to a change of genre: from "romance" to "novel."

Ever since the publication of *The Mind of the South*, the "remarkable and anachronistic society"[7] of the antebellum South, often viewed as a separate culture or a distinct "civilization,"[8] has seemed equally attractive as an object of study to representatives of American liberalism, such as Clement Eaton, and to protagonists of American Marxism, such as the early Eugene D. Genovese. At its best, the critical discourse on the "Old South" provided compelling insights into the interrelationships between ideologies, social institutions and aesthetic developments. At its worst, the discourse postulated the antebellum South as a monolithic entity hermetically sealed off in terms of history and mentality, a doomed inversion of the necessary course of history towards democracy and market pluralism.

Since the 1980s, the construction of Southern exceptionalisms has been repeatedly criticized in the light of shifting critical agendas and closer historical investigation. Thus, Michael O'Brien has pointed out that "the search for Southern distinctiveness" as pursued by the discourse on the "Old South" has frequently turned into "a logical nightmare."[9] However, the fascination of antebellum southern history as an antithesis to the general course of American history continues. The persistence as well as the ideological significance of the discourse is evident from more recent publications such as Genovese's post-Marxist *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (1994) or Ritchie D. Watson's *Yeoman versus Cavalier: The Old Southwest's Fictional Road to Rebellion* (1993). Of course, the ideological thrusts of the two books are as different as can be. Genovese seeks to construct a usable past for an American conservatism by arguing that "the social relations spawned by slavery" motivated "an impressive critique of modern life and American institutions," a critique that was "silenced" by the "northern

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5 Cash 46.

6 Cash 374.

7 Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Pantheon, 1965) 19.

8 Rollin G. Osterweis, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* (1949; Baton Rouge Louisiana State UP, 1971) vii; cf. Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization: 1790–1860* (New York: Harper, 1961). The perception of the antebellum South as a distinct civilization is very pronounced also in the writings of Genovese; see, e.g., *The Political Economy of Slavery* 35: "When we understand that the slave South developed neither a strange form of capitalism nor an undefinable agrarianism but a special civilization built on the relationship of master to slave, we expose the root of its conflict with the North."

9 Michael O'Brien *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988) 216.

victory in 1865" but ought to be resuscitated.[10] Watson's evaluation of southern difference, on the other hand, is completely negative. He represents the antebellum South as an almost totalitarian social system which "impressed" every single author into the service of "disseminating" its absurd and reprehensible ideology.[11]

For all their differences, however, Watson and Genovese agree with each other and with Cash in associating the difference of the South with the role attributed to and played by the literary imagination in southern history. Thus, Genovese claims that the particular quality of "southern" conservatism can be comprehended only on the basis of "an understanding of the place of poetry and myth" in southern intellectual and social history.[12] For Genovese, "poetry" and "myth" signify not particular kinds of texts so much as anti-mimetic literature in general. Stressing the regenerative social function of such texts, Genovese seeks to revive a "southern tradition" of opposing the persistent conventionality of literature to the dynamics of capitalist progress:

> The southern conservatives' insistence upon the importance of poetry to the struggle of a just society has, despite repeated misunderstandings, nothing to do with a demand for political poetry. They have turned to poetry for an aesthetic vision of an older Christian view of the flowering of the personality within a corporate structure, and they have counterposed that vision to the personalism of modern bourgeois individualist ideology.[13]

Linking this insistence on the significance of "poetry and myth" to Allen Tate's thesis that the "traditional Southern mode of discourse" has been "the rhetorical" rather than "the dialectical mode,"[14] Genovese postulates a "southern tradition" which has been aware that imaginative literature may contain higher truths than those propagated by logical reasoning, scientific investigation and "bourgeois" pragmatism. Dismissing "political poetry," he indicates that these truths usually are not in the manifest content of literary texts but are more likely to be conveyed as what he calls an "aesthetic

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[10] Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism*, The William E. Massey Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization, 1993 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994) 7–8; xi. Genovese continued his celebration of the southern conservative tradition with the publication, in the following year, of *The Southern Front: History and Politics in the Cultural War* (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1995). Cf. Wesley Allen Riddle's review essay on both publications: "Southern Conservative Universalism," *Mississippi Quarterly* 49 (1996): 819–828. Riddle's approving review involuntarily highlights the ideological pitfalls of Genovese's recent post-Marxist conservatism.

[11] R. D. Watson, *Yeoman versus Cavalier* 104: "American ideals of freedom and equality could not serve as entirely suitable paradigms for a region committed to slavery and to the plantation system. Thus the South found it necessary to fashion a credo based on the concept of the lordly planter that would justify it to the nation and to the world at large. Southern writers were consequently impressed into the service of disseminating their region's aristocratic ideology, and no author, male or female, was exempted from service."

[12] Genovese, *The Southern Tradition* 2.

[13] Genovese, *The Southern Tradition* 2.

[14] Allen Tate, "A Southern Mode of the Imagination," *Essays of Four Decades* (London: Oxford

vision." The conservatism that Genovese seeks to resuscitate is thus ultimately defined by the agenda of aestheticizing the spheres of society and politics. The "southern tradition" consists in the attempt to read the aesthetics of imaginative literature as a political program. Genovese refers primarily to the Southern Agrarians, but he does not fail to point out that the conservatism of the Agrarians was firmly rooted in the social structure of the antebellum South and that their aesthetic method was informed by the example of antebellum southern literature.[15]

Genovese's ideas about the conservative ideological potential of the literary imagination and Watson's interpretation of southern literary, social and political history intersect in a most interesting manner, for Watson actually suggests that the tragedy of the antebellum South was caused by its insistence on making imaginative literature the basis of a political and social rationale. Enlarging on the thesis of his earlier study, *The Cavalier in Virginia Fiction*,[16] Watson claims in *Yeoman versus Cavalier* that the South's increasing alienation from a rapidly modernizing world led southerners to reinvent themselves in the light of highly stereotypical "romance" fictions: "There was, therefore, a perfect sympathy between the time-transcending paradigm of the plantation romance and the implicit need of southerners to believe that their culture could escape the imperatives of modernity."[17]

Although they represent opposing critical schools and ideological objectives, Cash's *The Mind of the South*, Genovese's *The Southern Tradition* and Watson's *Yeoman versus Cavalier* can be considered different manifestations of a cohering interpretive tradition that links the supposed exceptional character of the antebellum South to the peculiar character of southern literature and both to the concept of

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UP, 1970) 583; cf. Genovese, *The Southern Tradition* 3.

[15] Genovese even argues that the tradition of southern conservatism sprang from the institution of slavery: "I argue throughout that the southern conservatives today build on an impressive critique of modern life and American institutions formulated by their forebears during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I argue, further, that the staying power of that critique resulted primarily from the social relations spawned by slavery, the end of which removed the social foundation for sustained opposition to the bourgeois hegemony" (*The Southern Tradition* 8). That Genovese assumes important continuities between antebellum southern literature and the poetry of the Agrarians is evident from the claim that "Tate's finest poems . . . draw on Roman sources in the manner of his antebellum southern predecessors" (3). Moreover, it might be pointed out that Genovese's interpretation of Agrarian poetry as enactment of an "aesthetic vision of an older Christian view of the flowering of the personality within a corporate structure" (2) strikingly resembles Fredric Jameson's association of "romance" narratives with "transitional moments" in which "an organic social order" is "in the process of penetration and subversion, reorganization and rationalization, by nascent capitalism" (*The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981] 149).

[16] R. D. Watson, *The Cavalier in Virginia Fiction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1985); see also Watson's essay "Frontier Yeoman versus Cavalier: The Dilemma of Antebellum Southern Fiction," *The Frontier Experience and the American Dream*, ed. David Mogen et al. (College Station: Texas A&M UP, 1989) 107–119.

[17] R. D. Watson, *Yeoman versus Cavalier* 83.

"romance" as a form of consciousness and literary practice. Historicizing the antebellum literary discourse on "romance" and reconstructing its ideological implications, the present thesis investigates this triadic construction and tests its potentials for shedding light on general questions concerning the social function of fiction and the relationship between genre and ideology.

1.2 "Romance" and the Pragmatic Power of Literature

What, then, is a "romance"? The question is not an easy one to answer, for the term "romance" has not only been used in all kinds of contexts, it has also created confusion wherever it has been used. As Walter Scott pointed out in his essay on the subject, "romance" was originally a linguistic term that referred to the "popular dialects of Europe," which were "founded . . . upon the Roman tongue." Even at this early stage in the word's career, however, confusion is evident: "The name of Romance was indiscriminately given to the Italian, to the Spanish, even (in one remarkable instance at least) to the English language. But it was especially applied to the compound language of France . . ."[18]

Soon, "romance" came to refer to narratives composed in the vernacular languages, which generally differed from those written in Latin by an emphasis on entertainment and a diminished claim to historicity. By the thirteenth century any kind of adventure story could be called a "romance." In other words, "romance" was an early term for "fiction"; specifically, it was the term by which fictional narratives referred to themselves in order to proclaim their fictionality. Ever since, "romance" has been used as a synonym for "fiction"—a tendency that is particularly evident in figurative usages of the word as denoting a falsehood.

At the same time, there have been more restrictive definitions of "romance" as a specific type of fictional text, i.e. as a particular literary mode or genre.[19] According to these, the term either refers to medieval fictions in prose or verse which are concerned

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[18] Walter Scott, "An Essay on Romance," *Encyclopedia Britannica: Supplement to 4th–6th Eds* (1824); *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1834) 130–131.

[19] Gillian Beer's *The Romance* (London: Methuen, 1970) is still useful as a short introduction to the general discourses on "romance" in literature and literary criticism. The most influential theorist of "romance," of course, was Northrop Frye; see *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957) and *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of the Romance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1973). Fredric Jameson has appropriated Frye's concepts for the purpose of establishing genre criticism as a mode of cultural criticism; see *The Political Unconscious* (1981), esp. the chapter "Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism," which is based on Jameson's earlier essay "Magical Narratives: Romance as

with the code of chivalry and a particular ideal of love—or it points to later works of imaginative literature which may somehow be understood as continuations or transformations of the medieval tradition. On the basis of the latter definition, an enormous variety of texts have been referred to or have referred to themselves as "romances." The list stretches from the "heroic romances" of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the modernist fiction of Joseph Conrad or the postmodernist narratives of John Barth.[20] It might include "classic" American novels by Brockden Brown, Hawthorne and Melville, usually regarded as highly artistic epistemological and moral probings, as well as twentieth-century "popular" love stories mass-produced and mass-marketed for an audience of readers who want to "leave behind daily cares and live out their secret desires and passions."[21]

Even if we should decide that the term "romance" applies to medieval narratives exclusively, we would be confronted with a variety of narratives that explodes any consistent definition of genre. As one scholar of medieval literature observed, "romances" can be "comic as well as serious, religious as well as amorous, psychological as well as objective, episodic as well as tightly organized," so that the "romance genre is by no means a unified monolithic type."[22] And once we go beyond the medieval tradition, the category of "romance" will undermine even the conventional triadic distinction between narrative, dramatic and lyric texts: Shakespeare's late plays––especially *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*—have often been described as "romances,"[23] and even the poetry of Emily Dickinson has been considered a manifestation of "the rhetoric of romance."[24]

Eventually, the elusive resonance of the term will even take us beyond literary

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Genre," *New Literary History* 7 (1975): 135–163.

[20] *Romance: A Novel* (1903), co-authored by Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, or John Barth's *Sabbatical: A Romance* (1982) are among the more obvious examples for the continuing relevance of "romance" concepts in twentieth-century fiction. Antonia S. Byatt playfully uses Hawthorne's classic definition of "romance" from the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* as a motto in her novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990). Postmodern novels by Thomas Pynchon and Donald Barthelme have been discussed as evidence of a twentieth-century "renaissance of the romance." See Fluck, "'The American Romance'" and the Changing Functions of the Imaginary."

[21] Linda K. Christian-Smith, "Romance Novels," *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin (New York: Oxford UP, 1995) 766. On the contemporary "romance" of love and passion, see esp. Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984).

[22] Morton Bloomfield; qtd in Alan M. F. Gunn, "The Polylithic Romance: With Pages of Illustrations," *Studies in Medieval, Renaissance, American Literature*, ed. Betsy Fagan Colquitt (Fort Worth: Texas Christian UP, 1971) 1.

[23] On Shakespeare's "romances," see esp. Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1965) and Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1972).

[24] Evan Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance: Dialectic and Identity in Emerson, Dickinson, Poe, and Hawthorne* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985).

texts, urging us to consider Western films and the Hollywood melodrama. One might conclude that "romance" is not a genre in the sense of a specific narrative form, but rather a designation for the tendency of some narratives to give free reign to the imagination or, as Henry James put it, to "cut the cable" that ties the "balloon of experience . . . to the earth."[25] "Romance" would then operate as an antonym to "realism." However, once again, serious difficulties arise from such a definition, since one elusive term is explained by reference to another. The problems inherent in a contradistinction of "romance" and "realism" are evident from the fact that Walter Scott has been described as both the quintessential "romancer" and the prototypical "realist."[26]

Due to such confusions and contradictions, it is tempting simply to avoid the term "romance." I want to argue, however, that the confusion surrounding the term is significant—and that it is rewarding to probe this significance. Although the word has been used in diverse contexts and with mutually contradictory intentions, usages of "romance" can generally be related to a particular resonance of the term, a vague but meaningful common ground. For all their differences, most applications of "romance"—from Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) to Winfried Fluck's essay "'The American Romance' and the Changing Functions of the Imaginary" (1996), from "romance" as the form of the American "art novel" to "romance" as distracting love fiction for a mass market—in principle share a concern with the ontological or epistemological status and with the social function of fiction. In texts ranging from the thirteenth-century *Romaunt de la Rose* to John Barth's 1982 novel *Sabbatical: A Romance*, the codeword "romance" evokes a fiction about fiction, a bold theory of imagination and representation which postulates the power of imaginative literature to correct reality and which frequently goes on to propagate the use of belles-lettres as a tool for political action.

However, if the designation of a text as "romance" implies an extraordinary claim for pragmatic power, this claim is not based on a negation of the difference between fiction and reality. On the contrary, the supposed power of "romances" depends on their self-conscious deviation from the real world in which they are produced. "Romance" fictions pretend to articulate *and to implement* a higher truth. This truth is associated with the "imagination," which is taken to mean the faculty of

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[25] Henry James, preface to the New York Edition of *The American* (1907; New York: Scribner's, 1935) xvii–xviii.

[26] The classic interpretation of Scott as a realist is in Georg Lukács, *Probleme des Realismus III: Der historische Roman* (1937; Neuwied, Luchterhand, 1965) 36–76, vol. 6 of *Werke*, ed. Peter C. Ludz; see also Harry E. Shaw, "Scott: Realism and the Other," *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999) 168–217. On Scott as a "romancer," see, e.g., Alexander Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels: With New Essays on Scott* (Princeton:

invention as opposed to reproduction, a layer of human consciousness that is removed from everyday life and provides a link to the ultimate principles of human existence, the deep structure hidden beneath the contingent phenomena of history. "Romances" claim to be concrete and consequential textual resolutions of the supposed antithesis between the "real world" and the "imagination." It is their ideological objective to counteract alienation, to reduce the contingency of history (what is commonly referred to as "change") by engineering dialectical mediations between the spheres of ideality and actuality, nature and society, past and present, desire and reason.

More or less explicitly, all usages of "romance" play on the belief that the "imagination" can transcend and transform history. In fact, the most general significance of the word "romance" is as a name for this essential human hope. At the center of the discourse is the problem of mediation and the attempt to solve this problem through the concept of form: in one way or another, all varieties of the discourse on "romance" are concerned with the possibility of imposing literary forms, which are thought to possess the archetypal stability of the original, onto experiential phenomena, particularly onto the dynamics of social reality. The present study focuses on the ways in which the concept of "romance" thus relates and (purposefully) confuses poetics and politics, aesthetics and ideology.[27]

1.3 The Theory of American Literary Exceptionalism

While it seems quite possible to consider an artefact like James Cameron's melodramatic movie *Titanic* (1997) a "romance"—and this not merely because of the love story—nobody would describe a particular movie as a "novel." Nevertheless, the contradistinction of "romance" and "novel" once used to be a commonplace in American literary criticism—and it still tends to linger in both literary and critical discourses. The dichotomy derives from the eighteenth century. In Clara Reeve's *The Progress of Romance through Times, Countries, and Manners*, which appeared in London in 1785, "romance" and "novel" are distinguished in the following manner:

> The Romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things.—The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened or is likely to happen.—The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves ; and the

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Princeton UP, 1992), esp. 1–20.

[27] The relationship between poetological and ideological discourses is the subject also of David Duff's study *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994).

> perfection of it, is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us into a persuasion . . . that all is real . . . [28]

Walter Scott perpetuated this dichotomy in his "Essay on Romance" (1824), where he described the "Romance" as "a fictitious narrative in prose or verse [,] the interest of which turns upon marvelous and uncommon incidents" and the "novel" as "a fictitious narrative, differing from the Romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society."[29]

Scott's definition suggests that "romance" fictions were somehow in opposition to the way of the modern world. This notion is still prominent in current interpretations of antebellum southern "romances" as attempts to deny the necessary course of nineteenth-century American history. In the antebellum United States, however, the term had—at least originally—a very different thrust. Here, it acquired particular significance in connection with the quest for a self-confident American literature as expression of an independent American culture. Various concepts of "romance" were at the heart of a nationalist discourse that simultaneously represented a literary campaign for the social recognition of the novelist's profession. Antebellum writers and critics invoked the idea of "(American) romance" as a powerful fiction that would be able to represent and to promote the unique character of the United States, a literary form that would agree with the form and the needs of American society.[30]

An important contribution to this campaign was *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction*, a collection of literary criticism published by the South Carolinian William Gilmore Simms in 1845. Simms heralded the American "romancer" as a combination of artist and historian, fictionist and philosopher who would discover a higher form of truth by inventing American history as a grand national past that would provide the pattern for an even grander American future.[31] Naturally, Simms planned to fill this role himself. In the preface to his highly successful novel *The Yemassee* (1835), he had specified the character of his work as "an *American* romance" in distinction to novels in the manner of Richardson and Fielding, which, interestingly, he classified as

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[28] Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance through Times, Countries, and Manners* (London, 1785); facs. rpt, 2 vols in 1 (New York: Garland, 1970) 1: 111. Other important contributions to the discourse on "romance" versus "novel" in eighteenth-century Britain are William Congreve's 1713 preface to his earlier "novel" *Incognita* and Horace Walpole's preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* (the latter distinguishing the "ancient" and the "modern romance").

[29] Scott, "Essay on Romance" 129.

[30] On antebellum cultural nationalism as a literary phenomenon, see Larzer Ziff, *Literary Democracy: The Declaration of Cultural Independence in America* (1981; Harmondsworth, Engl.: Penguin, 1982) and Benjamin T. Spencer, *The Quest for Nationality: An American Literary Campaign* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1957).

[31] William Gilmore Simms, *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction: First Series* (1845); ed. C. Hugh Holman (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1962).

"domestic novels." According to Simms, the "modern romance" was "the substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic." He actually regarded "romance" as a medium of forging Americans into an encompassing social unity.[32]

In the long run, however, Simms's definition of "romance" proved less durable as an icon of American literature and American literary studies than Nathaniel Hawthorne's appropriation and transformation of the concept, most notably in the prefaces to *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). Hawthorne viewed "romance" as a highly speculative “work of art” that was not to be concerned with “the probable and ordinary course of man's experience,” but chiefly with experimental explorations of “the truth of the human heart.”[33] This simultaneously universalizing and privatizing definition of “romance”—which will be discussed in detail below[34]—became the basis for a school in twentieth-century American Studies which dissociated Hawthorne's pronouncements from their original discursive context and read them as expressions of an "American Renaissance" in which American literature supposedly came into its own.[35] This school postulated a distinctly “American” tradition of "romance" which was thought to be essentially different from both the European novel and from "romances" in the style of antebellum southern writers.

The most momentous contribution to the "romance" theory of American literary exceptionalism was Richard Chase's *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957). Here the idea that there are two kinds of "romance" in American literary history was made explicit through the image of "two streams of romance":

> In the writings of Brockden Brown, Cooper, and Simms we have the first difficult steps in the adaptation of English romance to American conditions and needs. Following these pioneers we have had, ever since, two streams of romance in our literary history. The first . . . includes Hawthorne, Melville, James, Mark Twain, Frank Norris, Faulkner, Hemingway . . . These are writers who each in his own way have followed Hawthorne both in thinking the imagination of romance necessary and in knowing that it must not "swerve aside from the truth of the human heart."
>
> The other stream of romance, justly condemned by Mark Twain and James, is one which also descends from Scott, and includes John Esten Cooke's *Surry of*

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[32] Simms, *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina*, ed. John Caldwell Guilds, Selected Fiction of William Gilmore Simms, Arkansas Edition (Fayetteville: The U of Arkansas P, 1994) xxix–xxx (Simms's emphasis).

[33] Nathaniel Hawthorne, preface, *The House of the Seven Gables*; *Novels*, The Library of America (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1983) 351.

[34] See chapter 8.3 of the present study.

[35] The term "American Renaissance" was introduced by Francis O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford UP, 1941), but Matthiessen's study was largely independent from the specific nationalist implications which the concept gained in later studies, such as Larzer Ziff's *Literary Democracy* (1981). David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1988), offers a revision of the traditional approach to the "American Renaissance." See also Walter B. Michaels and Donald E. Pease, eds., *The American Renaissance Reconsidered* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985).

> *Eagle's Nest* (1886), Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur* (1880), Charles Major's *When Knighthood Was in Flower* (1899), and later books like *Gone With the Wind* . . . Although these works may have their points . . . , they are, historically considered, the tag-end of a European tradition that begins in the Middle Ages and has come down into our own literature without responding to the forms of imagination which the actualities of American life have inspired. Romances of this sort are sometimes defended because "they tell a good story"—as opposed to the fictions of, say, Faulkner and Melville, which allegedly don't. People who make this complaint have a real point; yet they put themselves in the position of defending books which have a fatal inner falsity.[36]

According to this account, "romance" originated in the Middle Ages and was (re)introduced into the novel by Walter Scott at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Soon after, American writers—William Gilmore Simms among them—began the work of adapting the genre to "American conditions and needs." Nathaniel Hawthorne supposedly completed this process of Americanization: his "romance" sublimated the "European traditions" in which it was rooted, so that the American "romance-novel" came to be both the continuation and the subversion of this tradition.

At the same time, the medieval European heritage seemed to have lingered on in American novels of lesser standing, chiefly in historical fiction of doubtful ideological impact. Chase suggests that this "other stream" of American "romance" was connected with the American South in particular. He indirectly refers to Mark Twain's indictment of the pernicious effects of Scott's novels on southern society and politics, and among his examples for the degenerate "romance" there are two influential southern novels on the Civil War: Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) and John Esten Cooke's *Surry of Eagle's-Nest* (first published not in 1886, as indicated by Chase, but already in 1866).

Chase constructs a literary history in which southern novelists—with the notable exception of Mark Twain[37]—lingered on in the past of a false "romance" before they eventually joined the mainstream of American art in the “Southern Renaissance” of the 1920s and 1930s.[38] Nineteenth-century southern literature, particularly the literature of the antebellum South, generally has not been considered a part of "American" literary

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[36] Chase 20.

[37] In this context, it is significant that William Dean Howells described Twain as "the most desouthernized Southerner I ever knew" ("My Mark Twain" [1910]; *Literary Friends and Acquaintance*, by Howells, ed. David F. Hiatt and Edwin H. Cady [Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968] 277).

[38] See John M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920–1960* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1963) and Richard H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930–1955* (New York: Oxford UP, 1980). The term "Southern Renaissance" condenses the notion that southern writers suddenly caught up with developments that had originated in the earlier "American Renaissance," among them the emergence of the American "romance-novel" in the Hawthornian vein.

history as defined by Chase and his followers.[39]

The manner in which Chase deals with Simms is particularly striking. He grants the Charlestonian novelist a prominent place in *The American Novel* as the pioneering American theorist of the "romance." Simms's preface to *The Yemassee* (1835), which propagates the concept of the "American romance," is quoted extensively (the citation stretching over nearly two full pages). At the same time, Chase flatly refuses to discuss Simms's literary practice: "Simms's tales of passion," he declares, "are fatally marred by the carelessness and crudity with which they are thrown together, and it was in the work of Hawthorne that for the first time the psychological possibilities of romance were realized."[40]

The focus on literary works that seem to meet particular "aesthetic" standards does not sufficiently explain so blunt an exclusion: Cooper, whose form and style are quite similar to Simms's, is granted a chapter of his own. Apparently, Simms is snubbed not because of the quality of his art but because his writings deviate from the social ideology that Chase tacitly supposes to be the overarching bracket of truly "American" literature. The leading novelist of the antebellum South, who was also an eminent protagonist of the Young America movement, is excluded since his fiction (unlike Cooper's) cannot be read into the specific tradition of liberal individualism that Chase postulates as the American tradition. This argument reiterates the confusion between ideology and aesthetics that characterized the antebellum American discourse on "romance." Chase's lack of analytical distance from historical pretexts is evident from his ahistorical treatment of Hawthorne's poetology, whose fragmentary (and ironical) poetological statements are universalized without any regard to their historical context:

> The fact is that the word "romance" begins to take on its *inevitable* meaning, for the historically minded American reader, in the writing of Hawthorne. Ever since his use of the word to describe his own fiction, it has *appropriately* signified the peculiar narrow profundity and rich interplay of lights and darks which one associates with the best American writing.[41]

The American Novel and Its Tradition represents a critical discourse which is trapped in the paradigms of the historical discourse with which it is dealing. In order to break free from such restrictions, it will be necessary to pay attention to those texts which have been marginalized as an "other stream of romance" and to reconsider the relations (or equations) between genre, ideology and culture that have been proposed by both

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[39] However, Chase does provide a discussion of George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes*, arguing that "in this novel . . . Cable transcended his usual limitations and wrote a minor masterpiece" (167).

[40] Chase 17–18.

[41] Chase 20–21; my emphases.

historical and critical discourses on "romance."

The aporia of Chase's approach is indicated by its strikingly vague use of the category of genre, which supposedly is at the center of his theory. The confusion of ideology and aesthetics results in an important contradiction: the contradiction between an essentialist and a conjectural conception of genre. On the one hand, "romance" or the "romance-novel" are regarded as distinct narrative forms; on the other, these terms are merely used to indicate vaguely defined thematic and epistemological tendencies. Indeed, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* shows a marked split between the formalist terminology of its initial hypotheses, as stated in the opening chapter, and the following practical interpretations. For what the study actually offers is a series of (admirable) close readings of individual texts according to both theme and style—and these readings tend to dissolve rather than to affirm formalist definitions of genre. Actually, Chase already introduces a caveat in his theoretical outline:

> Although some of the best works of American fiction have to be called . . . romances rather than novels, we would be pursuing a chimera if we tried, except provisionally, to isolate a literary form known as the American prose romance, as distinguished from the European or American novel. In actuality the romances of our literature, like European prose romances, are literary hybrids, unique only in their peculiar but widely differing amalgamation of novelistic and romance elements."[42]

While Chase postulates the exceptionalism of American fiction on the grounds of its essential formal difference from European fiction, he simultaneously argues that there is nothing essential about narrative forms. According to the quoted passage, "romance" cannot be defined in formal terms, but it is simultaneously postulated as the defining formal characteristic of the American novel.[43]

1.4 New Critical Approaches and Their Relevance for the Study of Antebellum Southern Literature

Chase's ambivalence does not necessarily diminish the impact of his analyses. But the contradictions apparent in *The American Novel and Its Tradition* clearly serve to deflate the essentialist concepts of "romance" as the genre of the American novel which the study encouraged. For while Chase was undecided about the quality of narrative form and generally avoided the term "genre," later scholars read him in a decidedly affirmative manner. Thus, Joel Porte declared in *The Romance in America* (1969) that

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[42] Chase 13–14.

[43] Similarly, Chase's discussion of Henry James, entitled "The Lesson of the Master" (117–137), suggests that the full possibilities of the American "romance-novel" have been

it was no longer "necessary to argue for the importance of romance as a nineteenth-century American genre" which was "sharply at variance with the broadly novelistic mainstream of English writing." Porte's study represents a radicalization of Chase's theses, a movement from ambivalence to essentialism which is also indicated by the terminological shift from Chase's term "American romance-novel" to the less heterogeneous label "American romance."[44]

Such increasingly affirmative concepts of American literary exceptionalism soon came under attack. The revisionists either challenged the assumption that most American fictions had been "romances" or they called attention to the problems involved in distinguishing "romance" and "novel" as separate literary forms.[45] In an influential article on "Concepts of the Romance in Hawthorne's America" (1984), Nina Baym attempted a final blow at the "romance" theory of American literary exceptionalism by demonstrating that the dichotomy of "romance" versus "novel" cannot be grounded on the historical usage of the terms in the antebellum United States. On the basis of an extensive analysis of antebellum review articles, she argued that the systematic distinction between "romance" and "novel" which Hawthorne had introduced in the prefaces to his novels was "idiosyncratic." According to Baym, most of Hawthorne's contemporaries did not pay attention to his terminology and used the term "romance" simply as a synonym for the term "novel."[46]

However, not all of the examples that Baym provided as evidence for her argument are convincing. Her quotations from antebellum review articles certainly prove that there was a lot of confusion and inconsistency, but they also show that the term "romance" was often invested with a special, if elusive, significance. Take the following passage from the April 1839 issue of the *New York Review*, which Baym

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achieved by the sublimation of the formal characteristics of "romance."

[44] Joel Porte, *The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and James* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1969), quotes: ix–x.

[45] See Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature* (1966; London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), esp. 7–12; Martin Green, *Re-Appraisals: Some Commonsense Readings in American Literature* (1965; New York: Norton, 1967), esp. the chapter on "Melville and the American Romance" (87–112); David H. Hirsch, *Reality and Idea in the Early American Novel* (The Hague, Neth.: Mouton, 1971), esp. the chapter on "Empiricism and the American Novel" (32–48); James W. Tuttleton, *The Novel of Manners in America* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1972); Nicolaus Mills, *American and English Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: An Antigenre Critique and Comparison* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1973); Robert Merrill, "Another Look at the American Romance," *Modern Philology* 78 (1981): 379–392. A special case is constituted by Robert Post's essay "A Theory of Genre: Romance, Realism, and Moral Reality," *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 367–390, which called for an even more rigid correlation of genre and social reality than postulated by Chase and his followers. A general critique of the "romance" theory from the viewpoint of ideology critique is offered by William Ellis, *The Theory of the American Romance: An Ideology in American Intellectual History* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989).

[46] Nina Baym, "Concepts of the Romance in Hawthorne's America," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*

quotes in her essay: "[T]he common prejudice of sober men against novels is well founded. . . . But romance may become, and often is, an impressive medium for the transmission of truth."[47] "Romance" here seems to refer to a particular quality supposedly inherent in narrative fictions of a better sort: the power to reveal and communicate a "truth" which is hard to get at by other means. In fact, Baym concedes that "[t]here were reviews and essays . . . which did make an effort to discriminate between the two terms," even though "the distinction varied from review to review and whatever it was, was often abandoned within individual reviews."[48] Such inconsistency may be a good argument against adopting "romance" as a critical category, but it does not disprove the historical significance of the term. Elusiveness and contradictoriness often are characteristic qualities of the central terms within a discourse.

While Baym, relying on a formalist understanding of genre, stressed the inconsistency of nineteenth-century usages of "romance," other critics—in particular Michael Davitt Bell, Evan Carton, Robert S. Levine and George Dekker—turned away from formalist or transhistorical definitions of genre and began to investigate the reverberations of "romance" as a central historical term. Although Bell pointed out that by the beginning of the 1980s the concept of "romance" had become both a "common place" and a matter of urgent "controversy," he decided to retain the term, if only because it was "the word that Brown, Irving, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville used to describe what they at least thought they were doing." In the antebellum United States, he suggested, "romance" was "less a genre than a set of attitudes or problems whose recurrence . . . constitutes something like a tradition—a tradition at once formal and intellectual."[49]

Carton and Levine were even more explicit in acknowledging the rhetorical character and the ideological function of the concept of “romance.” Carton viewed "romance" as a "specific and urgent kind of rhetorical performance." He showed that the term marks an epistemological strategy which explores "the divide . . . between phenomena and noumena" according to a precarious dialectic that simultaneously seeks to forestall the collapse of the two (supposed) realms and to fabricate connections between them, so that the concept both propagated and critiqued "extravagant claims to linguistic and imaginative power."[50] Building on Carton's insights, Levine studied the social and political context of such claims. He argued that in the United States "the urgency of the romancer's performative art" stemmed from an

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38 (1983/84): 426–443.

47 *New York Review* (April 1839); qtd in Baym, "Concepts of the Romance" 431.

48 Baym, "Concepts of the Romance" 433.

49 Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance: The Sacrifice of Relation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980); quotes: xi–xii; 148.

50 Evan Carton, *The Rhetoric of American Romance* (1985), quotes: 1.

urge to "re-create community" in the face of alienation and dissociation.[51]

Historicizing the concept of "romance" and calling attention to its ideological implications, these critics, all of them writing in the 1980s, deviated from Chase's universalist interpretation of "romance" as the natural form of the "American novel." However, they still tended to comply with the canon set up by the critics of Chase's generation. In George Dekker's 1987 study *The American Historical Romance*, this act of exclusion is explicit. Dekker dismissed southern novels and more popular works of fiction from consideration by deciding to concentrate “on the elite figures in the historical romance tradition," basing his selection on value judgments: "I would not argue with a reader who wished I had written about certain other books by these authors or had included a book by William Gilmore Simms or G. W. Cable or Esther Forbes or Ernest Gaines; but I would maintain that most of the books I do write about are among the best of their kind."[52] While he viewed the dichotomy of "romance" versus "novel" as a (significant) construct, Dekker still followed Chase in constructing American literary history as a process of Americanization and in equating this process with a development towards aesthetic perfection.[53] This approach implies not only an elitist approach to American culture but also an ideologically restrictive understanding of American cultural history.

Indeed, if Levine stressed that "romances" addressed "the desires, fears, risks, and abuses accompanying Americans' quest for unified community," the significance of such a quest may be even more immediately apparent in the work of, e. g., Simms, whom Levine referred to only briefly as a pro-slavery pamphletist, than in the work of Hawthorne and Melville.[54] This is not to say that Levine chose the wrong authors: "the quest for unified community"—its pathos as well as its bathos—are important themes in *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and *Benito Cereno* (1855), which he discussed in detail. But a consideration of Simms's version of this quest and of his attempt to establish a "unified community" by instituting a unified readership certainly would be illuminating. Also, the Charlestonian's precarious endeavor to exalt slavery into a symbol for such a community might be telling in comparison with Melville's (equally

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[51] Robert S. Levine, *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville*, Cambridge Studies in American Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989), quotes: 3; 5.

[52] George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1987) 4.

[53] Dekker actually suggests that some antebellum southern novelists would be noteworthy even according to evaluative principles of selection: "Scott had many disciples in early nineteenth-century America besides Cooper, but only . . . William Gilmore Simms and John Pendleton Kennedy . . . wrote fiction of enduring literary interest." Yet, "even their finest works,” supposedly “fell short of the best novels that Cooper had written” (*The American Historical Romance* 62).

[54] R. S. Levine 14; 168–169.

metaphorical) representation of slavery in *Benito Cereno*.

Similarly, Carton's reading of "romance" as a specific rhetoric of literary self-empowerment and mediation gains an additional dimension if it is applied to antebellum southern literature. The ideological meaning of the Transcendentalist discourse becomes fully apparent only in comparison to the different yet related function of "romance" that is particularly manifest in the work of southern authors. Moreover, the present study will show that William G. Simms and John E. Cooke eventually came to undertake interrogations quite similar to the "self-critical analyses"[55] found by Carton in the texts of transcendentalist authors. Indeed, it can be argued that Carton's study commences at a historical moment where my own investigation ends, that the discourse on "romance" actually brackets together social ideologies produced in the antebellum South and transcendentalist investigations of "the nature of the self." There are unexpected lines of continuity in American ideological and intellectual history, which cross the boundaries between the "two streams of romance" defined by Chase and observed by a majority of critics after him.

Since the 1990s, the critical discourse on "romance" has begun to transcend the restrictions of the traditional canon. Thus, in his comprehensive discussion of "'The American Romance' and the Changing Functions of the Imaginary" (1996) Winfried Fluck considers not only the fiction of Cooper, Hawthorne and Melville, but points to Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* as an important transformation of the American "romance" tradition. Steven Frye's study of the historiographical—or, one is tempted to say, historicopoeic—paradigmatics of "romance," *Historiography and Narrative Design in the American Romance* (2001), looks at works not only by Hawthorne and Cooper but also by William G. Simms (and Lydia Maria Child).[56] However, a comprehensive consideration of antebellum southern novels as contributions to the nineteenth-century American discourse on "romance" still remains to be realized.

Moreover, there are indications of a revival of universalist concepts of "romance." Emily Budick's *Nineteenth-Century American Romance: Genre and the Construction of Democratic Culture* (1996) offers a convincing analysis of the "self-consciousness about literary form"[57] which is characteristic of the American "romance" tradition. Yet, by attempting to define American "romance" in contradistinction to the British novel of society, the study basically repeats Chase's thesis of US (literary)

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[55] Carton 1.

[56] Steven Frye, *Historiography and Narrative Design in the American Romance: A Study of Four Authors* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001). Frye offers a highly instructive definition of "romance" as a paradigm of narrating and constructing history. This understanding of "romance" is brought to bear in detailed readings of four novels. The chapter on Simms primarily deals with *The Yemassee* as a key text in "American progressivism."

exceptionalism. A tendency towards a revival of universalist or essentialist concepts of "romance" is evident even from Fluck's essay. Although "romance" is discussed as primarily a design of (social) function, “the romance” simultaneously is viewed as the expression of an anthropological given. This perspective depends on the introduction of the concept of "the imaginary," which Fluck defines as "an agglomerate of diffuse feelings, images, associations, and visions" that "needs fiction"—specifically "romance"—"to be translated into a coherent, comprehensible, and culturally meaningful expression." Although the "imaginary . . . eludes ontological definitions," it still seems to constitute a transhistorical category. At the same time, the "imaginary" is invested with a clearly defined historical mission: according to Fluck, "romance" is the most potent manifestation of the role of fiction "as an important force of democratization in Western society."[58]

Fluck introduces the concept of the "imaginary" in order to oppose what he perceives to be the shortcomings of current approaches in literary and cultural studies. He criticizes a tendency in American Studies to emphasize the inevitable collusion of literary productions with established structures of social power. As Fluck argues, such an approach "remains locked in a quest for true oppositionalism."[59] While these misgivings may be justified, it seems doubtful whether a transhistorical absolute like the "imaginary" really offers a way for restoring dialectics to history.

Rather, it seems that the crucial ideological operation is the definition of a field of study and the (often tacit and unreflected) exclusions entailed in the process. The ongoing tendency in American Studies to either neglect antebellum southern literature and culture or to study the nineteenth-century South as an entirely different culture is a case in point. A reconsideration of antebellum southern novels in the context of American culture, specifically as a variety of the discourse on "romance," may constitute a small but significant step towards redefining an established field of study and towards restoring dialectics by widening the critical horizon. To take the texts produced by southern writers before the Civil War seriously—not as deviations *from* but as a significant variants *of* nineteenth-century American literature and culture—seems to be a feasible means of deconstructing the consensus interpretation of American history. Conceived in this way, a reconsideration of southern contributions to nineteenth-century American culture could take its place beside other revisionist approaches of longer standing, such as African-American studies (in which the analysis of southern history is also an important agenda) or the attention to nineteenth-

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[57] Budick, *Nineteenth-Century American Romance* 26.

[58] Fluck, "The American Romance” 423–424; 443. On the concept of the “imaginary,” cf. Wolfgang Iser, *Das Fiktive und das Imaginäre: Perspektiven literarischer Anthropologie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1991).

century women writers.

The attempt to view the "romances" of southern novelists as an integral part of nineteenth-century American literary and cultural history can build on the work of Americanist "romance" critics since the early 1980s, specifically their perspective on "romance" as a significant historical term connected to ideological agendas and problems which were at the heart of nineteenth-century American culture, society and politics. Moreover, such a project can draw on the work of some critics who wrote before the theory of the "American romance" hardened into a nationalist orthodoxy. Thus, Perry Miller's early formulation of the "romance" theory in "The Romance and the Novel"—presented as a conference paper in 1956 but first published only in 1967—did not exclude antebellum southern novelists as easily as Chase's *The American Novel* did. Miller saw Walter Scott's novels as an important influence on an American tradition of "romance" which included John Pendleton Kennedy, Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, William Alexander Caruthers and William Gilmore Simms, all of whom are at least mentioned in the essay.[60] Miller stressed that the novelists of the "American Renaissance" worked within an established discourse that included the work of southern novelists.

Along similar lines, the present study suggests that the antebellum South was not so radically different that it cannot be meaningfully related to American culture at large. Rather than two separate "streams of romance," the literary theories and practices of William Gilmore Simms and Nathaniel Hawthorne represent different currents within a single stream of literary and ideological history. The ways in which such currents run together and diverge are significant for an understanding not only of American literary history but also—and more importantly—of general ideological and cultural developments in American history.

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[59] Fluck, "The American Romance" 444–447.

[60] Perry Miller, "The Romance and the Novel," *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1967) 241–278.

2. “Romance” as Compromise: Walter Scott's Example

> It was Sir Walter that made every gentleman in the South a Major or a Colonel, or a General or a Judge, before the war ; and it was he, also, that made these gentlemen value these bogus decorations. For it was he that created rank and caste down there, and also reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them. Enough is laid on slavery, without fathering upon it these creations and contributions of Sir Walter. Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war. It seems a little harsh toward a dead man to say that we never should have had any war but for Sir Walter ; and yet something of a plausible argument might, perhaps, be made in support of that wild proposition. The Southerner of the American revolution owned slaves ; so did the Southerner of the Civil War : but the former resembles the latter as an Englishman resembles a Frenchman. The change of character can be traced rather more easily to Sir Walter's influence than to that of any other thing or person.
>
> —Mark Twain, Life on the Mississippi (1883)[1]

Walter Scott is an almost notorious point of departure for a study of antebellum southern fiction. Ever since Mark Twain offered the, as he himself admitted, "wild" proposition that "Sir Walter" was "in great measure responsible" for the Civil War, the cliché has persisted that antebellum southern literature, society and politics were somehow shaped by Scott's fictions. In an influential essay of 1917 H. J. Eckenrode argued that the Waverley novels "gave the South its social ideal" so that the section might be referred to as "Walter Scottland."[2] Wilbur J. Cash did not want to go quite as far, but he still thought that "Walter Scott was bodily taken over by the South and incorporated into the Southern people's vision of themselves.[3] In a similar manner, Rollin G. Osterweis pointed out that "[w]hile the rest of America read Scott with enthusiasm, the South assimilated his works into its very being."[4]

What might be called the Scott thesis of antebellum southern exceptionalism has been so tenacious that in *The American Historical Romance* (1987) George Dekker devotes a separate subchapter to the question: "Was Scott Responsible for the Civil War?"[5] And in his more recent book *Yeoman versus Cavalier* (1993) Ritchie D.

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1 Samuel L. Clemens, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883); facsimile rpt as vol. 9 of *The Oxford Mark Twain*, ed. Shelley Fisher Fishkin (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 469.

2 Hamilton J. Eckenrode, "Sir Walter Scott and the South," *North American Review* 206 (1917): 595–603; quotes: 601.

3 Cash 65.

4 Osterweis 41.

5 Dekker, "Was Scott Responsible for the American Civil War?," *The American Historical Romance* 272–281. Though Dekker emphasizes the significance of Scott for southern literature as well as for southern societies and ideologies, he answers in the negative: "Evidently the enchantments which Mark Twain attributed to the Wizard of the North had bewitched the American South thirty years or more before the Waverley novels began to appear" (275). According to this interpretation, however, the popularity of Scott in the antebellum South still appears to be symptomatic of the peculiar condition of southern societies, their being "bewitched" by the imagination.

Watson emphasizes the importance of Scott as a landmark along "the Old Southwest's fictional road to rebellion." In Scott's "colorful period pieces," suggests Watson, "the South found not only an escape from increasingly bitter sectional tensions but also an implicit justification of its own way of life."[6] As Michael O'Brien points out, such assumptions are heavily clichéd:

> We do not have the research that will accurately tell us about the reception of Scott in the Old South (and it is extraordinary that this is so, given how much Scott's name has been bandied about), but there is reason to think that antebellum Southerners read Scott better than did Rollin Osterweis . . . they found him congenial because his standpoint so matched their own situation, buckling down to modernity while shedding a tear for the old ways."[7]

This statement contradicts the traditional interpretation of antebellum southern history as a flat-out reactionary movement, a (faltering) attempt of negating the necessary course of history. Simultaneously, O'Brien's reading of Scott is opposed to Twain's. In O'Brien's view, the novelist was a sort of fake conservative, a modernizer in every field but feeling. If he was undoubtedly an important influence on southern fictions and southern ideologies, it is implied, Scott's influence was of a very different quality than assumed by Twain, Osterweis and Watson.

While the interpretation of Scott as a conservative progressive is probably accurate,[8] southern readers and writers may not have been as easily in accordance with Scott's interpretation of history as O'Brien suggests. As will be shown, the particular character of antebellum southern fiction was in reality defined by both its emulation of and its deviance from Scott's aesthetic and ideological formula. This is especially true with regard to Scott's concept of "romance." The attempt of southern writers to do for the United States and for the South what Scott seemed to have done for Great Britain and Scotland resulted in fictions that were related to as well as markedly different from the Waverley Novels. Scott's strategy of combining a sentimental relation to the past and a pragmatic approach to the present by mediating

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6 R. D. Watson, *Yeoman versus Cavalier* 70.

7 O'Brien, *Rethinking the South* (1988) 53. An early critic of the habit of constructing southern exceptionalisms as the result of the reception of Scott's fiction in the South was Jay B. Hubbell: see "Sir Walter Scott and the South," *The South in American Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1954) 188–193. The Scott thesis of southern difference has been criticized also by Andrew Hook, "The Scottish Landscape of Southern Literature," *Rewriting the South: History and Fiction*, ed. Lothar Hönnighausen and Valeria Gennaro Lerda (Tübingen: Franke, 1993) 41–53.

8 On the progressivist aspects of Scott's politics, ideology and narrative technique, see: Duncan Forbes, "The Rationalism of Sir Walter Scott," *The Cambridge Journal* 7.1 (1953): 20–35; Georg Lukács, *Der historische Roman*, esp. 36–76; Patricia Harkin, "Romance and Real History: The Historical Novel as Literary Innovation," *Scott and His Influence*, ed. J. H. Alexander and David Hewitt (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1983) 157–168; Paul Henderson Scott, "The Politics of Sir Walter Scott," *Scott and His Influence*, ed. Hewitt, 208–217; James Kerr, *Fiction against History: Scott as a Story-Teller*

"romance" and "real history" did not really work out for the South. The following discussion of Scott's concept of "romance" as an ironic strategy of mediation shows why it was actually of limited use in the historical situation in which antebellum southern writers found themselves.

Scott liked to revel in stories of the past. The account of his avid youthful reading which he provides in the 1829 "General Preface" suggests that the chapters in *Waverley* on the hero's early reading habits and practice of bookish day-dreaming have an autobiographical tendency. When he was a boy, the novelist explains, he "was plunged" into a "great ocean of reading" which he traversed "without compass or pilot," devouring everything that he could get hold of in Edinburgh's circulating library: "I believe I read almost all the romances, old plays, and epic poetry, in that formidable collection, and no doubt was unconsciously amassing materials for the task in which it has been my lot to be so much employed." At the same time, however, profound acquaintance with works of fiction resulted in a "satiety" that led the young man to shift to more factual reading: "I began, by degrees, to seek in histories, memoirs, voyages and travels, and the like, events nearly as wonderful as those which were the work of imagination, with the additional advantage that they were at least in a great measure true."[9]

These pronouncements postulate a dichotomy between story and history which they simultaneously attempt to confound. In fact, Scott's fictional and critical writings are characterized by a sophisticated strategy of simultaneously stressing and obscuring the difference between fiction and (historical) truth. According to Scott, history is a complicated discourse of texts, many of which are "romances."

This textual approach to history is clearly evident in two crucial essays that Scott contributed to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1818 and 1824: the "Essay on Chivalry" and the "Essay on Romance." Close to the beginning of the former, a footnote almost aggressively asserts the value of fictional texts for the historian: "We may here observe, once for all, that we have no hesitation in quoting the romances of Chivalry as good evidence of the laws and customs of knighthood."[10] In a similar manner, Scott points out that "the Bride of Rodomont, in the Orlando Furioso, and the valiant defiance which the knight of La Mancha hurled against the merchants of Toledo . . . were neither fictions of Ariosto nor Cervantes, but had their prototypes in real

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(Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989); Welsh, *The Hero of the Waverley Novels*.

[9] Scott, "General Preface" (1829); rpt in *Waverley*, ed. Claire Lamont (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 350.

[10] Scott, "An Essay on Chivalry," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1818); rpt. in *The Miscellaneous*

story."[11]

The term "Real story" indicates a conflation of story and history. Scott not only subverts the distinction between fictitious and factual narratives (fiction and historiography) but he also blurs the boundaries between representation and event (historiography/narrative and history). For having proposed the historicity of fiction, Scott goes on to imply the fictionality of history:

> "All those extravagant feelings, which really existed in the society of the middle ages, were magnified and exaggerated by the writers and reciters of Romance ; and these, given as resemblances of actual manners, became, in their turn, the glass by which the youth of the age dressed themselves ; while the spirit of Chivalry and of Romance thus gradually threw light upon and enhanced each other. The Romances, therefore, exhibited the same system of manners which existed in the nobles of the age. . . . So high was the national excitation in consequence of the romantic atmosphere in which they seemed to breathe, that the knights and squires of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries imitated the wildest and most extravagant emprises of the heroes of Romance . . ."[12]

"Romances" not only offer credible representations of medieval reality; they are, as it were, even antecedent to this reality. It is suggested that, in the last resort, the facts of medieval history were an external expression of and a counterpoint to what was essentially an intertextual discourse. According to such a radical belief in the textuality and the fictionality of (medieval) history, the most authentic text is not the one which comes closest to specific historical facts but the one which is nearest to a supposed prototypical text, to the original “romance”:

> The progress of Romance . . . keeps pace with that of society, which cannot long exist, even in the simplest state without exhibiting some specimens of this attractive style of composition. It is not meant by this assertion, that in early ages such narratives were invented, as in modern times, in the character of mere fictions, devised to beguile the leisure of those who have time enough to read and attend to them. On the contrary, Romance and real history have the same common origin. It is the aim of the former to maintain as long as possible the mask of veracity ; and indeed the traditional memorials of all earlier ages partake in such a varied and doubtful degree of the qualities essential to those opposite lines of composition, that they form a mixed class between them ; and may be termed either romantic histories, or historical romances, according to the proportion in which their truth is debased by fiction, or their fiction mingled with truth."[13]

If the critic goes back far enough into the past, it is suggested, the boundary between fact and fiction becomes disappears. The original "romance" is linked to a state of society before the commencement of historical time, a point in (or before) time where fact and fiction had not yet become dissociated. Conversely, history after this point of origin is viewed as a process of fictionalization: "Romance, though certainly deriving its

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Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1834) 8.

11 Scott, "Essay on Chivalry" 47.

12 Scott, "Essay on Romance" 171–172.

first original form from the pure font of History, is supplied, during the course of a few generations, with so many tributes from the Imagination, that at length the very name comes to be used to distinguish works of pure fiction."[14]

The original unity of fact and fiction, reality and imagination, history and desire is explained by the eminent position of the poet in early society:

> In a very early period of civilisation [sic], ere the division of ranks has been generally adopted, and while each tribe may yet be considered as one great family, and the nation as a union of such independent tribes, the poetical art, so nearly allied to that of oratory and persuasion, is found to ascertain to its professors a very high rank. Poets are, then, the historians and often the priests of society.[15]

What Scott describes as "a very early period of civilisation" seems to be the level of socio-genesis. This event is viewed as a dialectical process in which society and language emerge interdependently. The original unity of fact and fiction is coexistent with an original social unity, an absence of "ranks" or "classes." Scott's conception of the role of the poet at this early stage is very close to the notion of the poet as lawgiver. Poetry and “romance” have not yet been degraded to "mere amusement" but have the dignity of religion. The original “romance” is the script of sociogenesis. Representation and reality at the same time, it is a lived social text. The evolution of civilization, however, brings the stratification of society and the decline of the poet from his former eminent position. History, according to Scott, is a process of diversification, dissociation and alienation: it corrupts the prototypical text, degrading it to the status of fiction.

Thus, Scott contrasts "Romance" and "real history" not only as two "opposite lines of composition"[16] but also as different orders of reality or as consecutive phases in the development of society. These connotations emerge more clearly in the light of the well-known passage from *Waverley* in which the hero, having been separated from the withdrawing army of the Pretender, feels "entitled to say firmly, though perhaps with a sigh, that the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced."[17] Here, the Jacobite rising of 1745/46 and Edward's participation in it are interpreted as (mistaken) attempts at recreating the original "romance" in the face of "real history," efforts of returning to an earlier state of society which seems to be preserved in fictional representations. Even though the hero's infantile escapism is ridiculed, the contrast between "romance" and "real history" is not simply one between fiction and fact, between the inventions of fancy and a sober recognition of reality:

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[13] Scott, "Essay on Romance" 134.
[14] Scott, "Essay on Romance" 153–154.
[15] Scott, "Essay on Romance" 163.
[16] Scott, "Essay on Romance" 134.
[17] Scott, *Waverley* 283.

ultimately, it is a contrast between the vanishing letter of the original text and the reality of an alienated history.

How, then, does "romance" work *in* history, i.e. after the dissociation of fact and fiction and after the stratification of society? The answer is that Scott generally regards "romance" as an artifact that has the power to reestablish social coherence. Provisionally mediating fact and fiction, "romance" (as a narrative) can refer actuality back to the prototypical text, the original "romance" as an absolute History beyond history. This explains Scott's insistence on the emergence of "chivalry" from a process of life imitating art. Indeed, though he is aware of the absurdities and abominations that grew from the feudal system and the ideology of "chivalry," Scott eagerly dwells on its potential beauty.[18] Yet, while he is inclined to believe that the actual institution of "chivalry" at least sometimes lived up to its organizing idea, he points out that "chivalry" as a social practice was necessarily subject to the dissolution, decay and corruption that go along with the process of history.

In consequence, attempts to live "romance" in real life are bound to fail. Separated by a widening gap, "romance" and "real history" can be mediated only symbolically or ironically. As we get closer to the present, the original "romance" becomes less and less tangible, surviving only in corrupted transcripts of doubtful authenticity. As a substitute for the original "romance," the system of "chivalry" increasingly looses its substance and turns into a quaint and sublime fiction. As Scott observes towards the end of the "Essay on Chivalry":

> We can now only look back on [the system of chivalry] as a beautiful and fantastic piece of frostwork, which has dissolved in the beams of the sun! But though we seek in vain for the pillars, the vaults, the cornices, and the fretted ornaments of the transitory fabric, we cannot but be sensible that its dissolution has left on the soil valuable tokens of its former existence.[19]

In Scott's view, the fictions of chivalry are useful as pr(a)etexts for new fictions that provisionally contain the contingency of change by establishing a vague relation between the texts of "real history" and "romance." But the old "romances" yield "valuable tokens" only if their pastness is affirmed and they are treated as "transitory fabrics." The dangers inherent in attempts to read "romance" as "real history" or to transform "real history" according to the letter of a supposed original text are the main themes of *Waverley*. Edward's participation in the Jacobite rising really is an effort of returning Britain to the letter of an original text by reinstalling the legitimate House of Stuart and by perpetuating the clannish feudalism of the Highlands. This attempt is explained as the result of the hero's unguided youthful reading of "romances." It is

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[18] Scott, "Essay on Chivalry"; see esp. 20–21.

mistaken because it disregards the factuality and the irreversibility of history as a process that long ago opened a gap between "romance" and "real history."

The passage on Waverley's conversion from "romance" to "real history" signals a change of strategies: the hero eventually realizes that (modern) history has completely torn loose from the script of "romance," that "romance" has been reduced to the status of fiction. From now on, he will observe the difference between the two worlds. In consequence, Waverley changes sides and shifts from an affirmative to an ironic strategy. Instead of living the "romance" and trying to rewrite the history, he now lives the history and adapts the "romance." Accordingly Waverley is shown to rewrite his participation in the rising as a fiction. The conversion from "romance" to "real history" does not result in a realistic representation of history but in its purposeful fictionalization: it is based on a precarious balance between irony and nostalgia.[20]

The ending of *Waverley* is ambiguous. Something of the ethos inherent in the doomed Jacobite cause seems to have been preserved by the hero, if only in a somewhat trivializing manner. On the other hand, the conciliation achieved is possible only because the representatives of the past order have been silenced. Fergus has to be executed and Flora has to be cloistered. The success of Scott's "romance" as a strategy of accommodating the contingency of history depended on a wavering hero who is "contemplative, fanciful, and enthusiastic" like Waverley rather than "ardent, fiery, and impetuous" like Fergus.[21] In fact, Scott seems to have been aware that his story would look very different if it were told from a perspective situated on the other side of the Highland line. Antebellum southern writers, however, although they emulated the example of Scott in many respects, had a hard time deciding on which side of the Highland line they actually stood.

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[19] Scott, "Essay on Chivalry" 124.

[20] Cf. Edgar A. Dryden, "The Thematics of a Form: *Waverley* and the American Romance," *The Form of the American Romance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988) 1–29.

[21] Cf. Scott, *Waverley* 338.

3. Materiality versus Textuality: George Tucker and the Catastrophic Commencement of the Southern Novel

3.1 Tucker's Critique of "Romance" Rhetorics

The ambiguous relationship of antebellum southern fiction to Walter Scott's theory and use of "romance" is strikingly evident in the very text that has been described as "probably the first important Virginia novel"[1]: *The Valley of Shenandoah*, which the Virginian lawyer, politician, man of letters and soon-to-be professor and economist George Tucker published in 1824. As Scott's novels almost invariably are, Tucker's bewildering fiction is a story about "change": it tackles the pervasive process of transformation by which traditional societies and economies where reorganized into a more centralized and highly complex system regulated by the idea of individualism and the principle of profit. From the viewpoint of "modern days"[2] the narrator looks back at the time when the modern condition was emerging in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. In this intermediate region old and new, Tidewater civilization and backcountry spirit, planter and freeholder came into contact; here the East encountered the West and the South encountered the North, all seemingly fusing into a novel social settlement.[3] This settlement, however, is viewed very skeptically in *The Valley of Shenandoah*. The novel refuses to represent the new society as the happy conciliation of old values and new principles of social organization which Scott finally managed to conjure up in the endings of the Waverley Novels. Instead, Tucker's pioneering work in the history of southern fiction bemoans the decline of Virginia's old elite, whose serious attempts at

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1 Donald R. Noble, Jr., introduction, *A Century Hence*, by George Tucker (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1977) xvi. Possible rivals with *The Valley of Shenandoah* for the title of the "first southern novel" are John Davis's *The First Settlers of Virginia* (New York, 1806) and the anonymous *Tales of an American Landlord: Containing Sketches of Life South of the Potomac*, which appeared in the same year as *The Valley*. On early Virginia fiction, see Richard Beale Davis, "The 'Virginia Novel' before *Swallow Barn*," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 71 (1963): 278–293 and *Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia, 1790–1830* (Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1964) 298–313; Elisabeth Simmons Chamberlain, "The Virginia Historical Novel to 1835," diss., U of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979; Craig Werner, "The Old South, 1815–1840," *The History of Southern Literature*, ed. Louis D. Rubin et al. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1985) 81–91. On John Davis and *The First Settlers of Virginia*, see Hubbell, "European Writers and the South: John Davis," *The South in American Literature* 193–197, and Jan Bakker, "John Davis and the Southern Garden," *Pastoral in Antebellum Southern Romance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989) 14–23.

2 George Tucker, *The Valley of Shenandoah: Or, Memoirs of the Graysons*, 2 vols in 1, introd. Donald R. Noble, Southern Literary Classics Series (Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1970) 1: 14. This is the only modern edition; it offers a facsimile of the original edition (New York: Charles Wiley, 1824)—for unaccountable reasons, however, without Tucker's original preface. Subsequent page references will occur parenthetically in the text.

3 On the in-between-ness of the Valley of Virginia, see William W. Freehling, *Secessionists at Bay: 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990) 165, where the region is described as a "neutral zone" that divided "colliding regimes."

reform and regeneration seemed tragically doomed to failure.

In fact, it is probably hard to surpass the plot of *The Valley of Shenandoah* in its relentless insistence on total catastrophe. The novel tells the story of the Graysons, an old planter family threatened, and eventually destroyed, by economic decline. The exposition suggests a tale of regeneration and mediation, in which Edward Grayson—a reformed scion of the planter class who possesses all its splendid ethos yet none of its profligacy—is eventually united to the daughter of a rising middle-class family. However, all hopes for recovery are destroyed by an ill-fated affair between Edward's sister Louisa and his college friend James Gildon, the son of a prosperous New York merchant. While Grayson mistakes Gildon for his like, the latter is really a mixed character: bent upon appearances, he wavers between the roles of ardent lover and heartless cynic. Having managed to seduce the improvident Louisa, Gildon leaves for the fashionable world of New York City where he makes a financially desirable match. Following Gildon in order to obtain satisfaction, Grayson is killed by his former friend in self-defense. On learning of the hero's death, Louisa loses the child she is expecting from Gildon, while Edward's sister Mathilda converts to Catholicism and enters a convent. The narrative eventually turns out to be a tragedy. It proposes a "melancholy history" (2: 320) in which avarice, opportunism and foppishness thwart heroic grandeur. The effect on the reader is particularly strong as, almost up to the very end of the narrative, the catastrophe is not really predictable: despite all complications, an expectation of final conciliation is sustained, only to be mercilessly disappointed.

In spite of the unambiguously tragic ending, however, *The Valley of Shenandoah* is still very close to the formula of Scott's historical fiction. As Elisabeth Simmons Chamberlain has shown, Tucker emulated the "Author of Waverley" not only by carefully sketching the historical background of the story, but also by offering "a socio-economic 'moral' based on the lessons of history." In particular, the Virginian followed Scott in reading "the past as the prehistory of the present," in representing "history as a process" that affects "the lives of ordinary people," and in focusing on a "conflict between two different ways of life" which are shown to be "geographically determined."[4] In the American's novel, the contending cultural systems are the buzzing commercial metropolis of New York, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Virginia countryside, where decaying plantations struggle to adapt to the new commercial regime. Tucker's perspective on the crumbling social order of late eighteenth-century Virginia actually invites comparison with Scott's representation of the doomed clan

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[4] Chamberlain, "The 'Scott-Novel' Pattern in Virginia Historical Fiction," "The Virginia Historical Novel to 1835" 86–240; quotes: 184–186. The influence of Scott's concept of history on Tucker's novel is stressed also by R. D. Watson, *The Cavalier in Virginia Fiction* 78–79.

system of the Scottish Highlands.[5]

Tucker's fiction further resembles Scott's novels in that the action is based on an excursion to the periphery, undertaken by a representative of the (commercial) center. Indeed, just like the heroes of *Waverley* or *Rob Roy*, Gildon may be characterized as a wavering character torn between his urge towards "romance"—which he takes to mean radical politics and passionate love affairs—and businesslike pragmatism. Just like many of Scott's protagonists, Gildon confuses allegiances and contributes to the erosion of the old social system by falling in love with a female representative of the more traditional society.

In other respects, however, *The Valley of Shenandoah* differs markedly from the Waverley formula. The most decisive difference is that in the Virginian's novel the wavering character figures not as the protagonist but as the antagonist. Tucker's narrative shifts to the perspective of the periphery, so that the representative of the center does not function as an agent of conciliation but comes to appear as a "perfidious villain" (2: 276) and a "viper" (2: 293). He is a false player who has intruded into a traditional social system to inflict a mortal sting. The conflict between the old and the new society cannot be resolved by constructing the course of history as an essentially beneficent process of integration and the traveler's attempt at appropriating the ethos of the more traditional society comes to be viewed as an act of aggression. While exemplifying the inevitability of change and the futility of persistence in a manner reminiscent of the Waverley Novels, Tucker's narrative eventually transgresses Scott's historiographical paradigms. The violent ending of the novel may be read as a frustration of conciliation, a refusal to transfer values from the past to the modern settlement.

More unambiguously than Scott, Tucker suggests that the doomed past possessed superior social graces. The narrator does not feel completely at home in the "modern" (1: 14) world and remembers the old way of life with a distinct sense of loss:

> There are many persons now living, who remember what Williamsburg was twenty-five or thirty years ago, and who can bear testimony to the rare union of good breeding and good fellowship which that place then exhibited. Here one met with the most cultivated minds, free from either the pedantry or rust that a life of study is apt to superinduce—the greatest simplicity of character joined to the greatest polish of manners, and a style of delicate and even luxurious living, unaccompanied with that love of show and rivalry, which so often poisons social enjoyment. (2: 48).

The society of eighteenth-century Williamsburg represents an ideal synthesis of values which have since come to be dissociated. The college town seems an Arcadian place which boasted all the fruits of refined society without any signs of degeneration. Yet,

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[5] See, e.g., *Shenandoah* 2: 105 where an old planter is described as "a specimen of that

the narrator is regretfully aware “that those days are gone, never more to return!" (2: 53).

According to the novel, the decline of traditional social graces towards the ending of the eighteenth century was particularly evident in the field of love. The subjection of love to base utilitarian motives is starkly represented by Mrs. Fawkner's conduct. After the death of her first son, the beauty of her daughter "presented a new object on which her avarice and ambition, and restless, intriguing disposition could operate" so that she began "to look around for a suitable match for her. A match by which she might bring into the family an estate still larger than her own" (1: 21). If the tendency towards economic utilitarianism is already bad with Mathilda's mother in the rural seclusion of the Shenandoah Valley, it is even worse with the New York jeunesse dorée of which Gildon is a prime specimen. A letter addressed to Gildon by one of his New York friends caricatures the rationale of these people. Since Emily de Peyster's father, a businessman, has meanwhile managed to reestablish his lost fortune and since "commerce was never so profitable as at present," the writer urges Gildon to "extricate" himself from his "romantic attachment" to a "little Virginia rustic." Contrasting Gildon's love-affair with Louisa with his more profitable relation to a New York belle, who possesses not only more economic capital but also more symbolic capital in the "fashionable circles" of the city, the letter calls upon Gildon to leave aside "romance" and return to realistic business considerations (1: 182). And indeed, the news from the capital of commerce instantly causes Gildon to waver between genres: he is "again thrown back from his generous and romantic resolutions, and brought down to be a mere son of earth" (1: 183). Gildon, arguably Tucker's portrait of "modern" man, assumes and discards the role of the "romantic" like a mask.

Another aspect of the degeneration of love as described in *The Valley of Shenandoah* is the tendency to replace true sentiment by an inflated rhetoric of rapture: passion has become fashion. Gildon is such an accomplished practitioner of this rhetoric that he frequently manages to confound himself. Louisa, on the other hand, is unable to recognize Gildon's real character because her sense of authenticity has been distorted by modern "romances," which have caused her to form “exaggerated conceptions of human life,” particularly concerning the “raptures of sentimental love.” Because of the “standard” she has “created for herself of a hero of romance” Louisa rejects all acceptable suitors and feels attracted only to the more urbane and fashionable Gildon (1: 91).[6] Naturally, this sentimental rhetoric of love turns out to be spurious and trivial: a pseudo-"romance," which is in fact a sign of insincerity and

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class of old fashioned persons, (the Virginia gentlemen,) [sic] which is now nearly extinct."

[6] Louisa's friend Julia Barton is mislead in a very similar manner; cf. *Shenandoah* 2: 24–26.

alienation.

In the field of politics, too, passion has become fashion. Set towards the end of Washington's second term of presidency, the narrative stresses how the radical rhetoric imported from Revolutionary France eroded the political consensus of the post-Revolutionary United States. Early in the text, Grayson and Gildon engage in a discussion with the yeoman farmer M'Culloch in which they severely criticize Washington's policy of neutrality in Europe's Revolutionary Wars (1: 44–45). The trusty "mountaineer" (1: 42) M'Culloch is sorry to recognize that even the noble Grayson seems to have been so "thoroughly inoculated with the disease" of radical democracy that he is willing to criticize the "old general" (1: 45). In their turn, Grayson and Gildon, are shocked at current tendencies to compromise Washington's personal integrity. Grayson feels "extreme repugnance" at the denunciations of Washington's personal character by American Jacobins whom he encounters in a Fredericksburg tavern: discussing Washington's Farewell Address of 1796, the young men indulge in fierce personal accusations of the President, basing their defamations on "Godwin's political justice, then getting into vogue, and zealously propagated by a few enthusiasts" (2: 28).

The novel thus represents Jefferson's "Revolution of 1800"[7] not as a renewal of democratic principles but rather as the spurious victory of a new kind of revolutionary rhetoric which was alien to the true principles of the American Revolution and destabilized the political unity of the nation:

> It was now publicly known that General Washington, wearied and somewhat disgusted with these party feuds, and with the censure which began to be very openly cast upon some of his political measures . . . was about to return to private life . . . Mr. Jefferson had withdrawn from the cabinet . . . and, as his admirers said, had abstracted himself from active politics, and passed his time in building, in experimental agriculture, and the cultivation of letters. But he was the rallying point of opposition, and those who were in the secret knew that he was engaged in an extensive political correspondence, and that A——B——, from New York, was then on a visit to Monticello for the purpose of marshalling their hosts, and taking the field as soon as the veteran chief had sounded his retreat. (1: 147–148)[8]

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[7] Cf. Daniel Sisson, *The American Revolution of 1800* (New York: Knopf, 1974).

[8] "A—— B——," refers to Aaron Burr, who would be Jefferson's rival in the elections of 1800 and would later become his Vice President. In the light of Tucker's affiliations with the Democratic party, it may seem surprising that he depicts Jefferson as a sort of conspirator. However, Tucker's political commitments are hard to describe in terms of party lines. See Robert Collin McLean's intellectual biography *George Tucker: Moral Philosopher and Man of Letters* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1961). Apparently, Tucker's stance on economic issues increasingly estranged him from Jeffersonianism, so that he was even accused of being a Federalist in Republican disguise. While he was appointed to a professorship in Jefferson's newly founded University of Virginia, McLean suggests that he might have been selected partly because of his acceptability to Jefferson's enemies. In fact, Tucker's *Letters from Virginia*, anonymously published in 1816, contain attacks on Jefferson, and so does even his *Life of Thomas Jefferson* (1837).

In contrast to the divisive rhetoric of the Jacobins, Washington's Farewell Address is permanently present in the background of the narrative as a futile endeavor of renewing the old rhetoric of social and national unity. In this context, Robert S. Levine's interpretation of Washington's address as "an exemplary American romance" is enlightening. According to Levine, the leaving President called “on citizens to participate in his American romance,” attempting to create "a castle out of words" which would "provide a safeguard against the insidious plottings of antirepublican subversives."[9]

Tucker's novel, on the other hand, dramatizes the breakdown of the consensual basis of republican "romance" politics. It shows that already by 1800 the paradigms of change were shifting. The "romance" of the Revolutionary era, when the fate of nations seemed to be decided by the rhetorical bravado of hero figures, was being replaced by the impersonal dynamics of the economy. This perspective clearly foreshadows Tucker's subsequent career as an economist. Indeed, as soon as he had realized that his fiction was failing with the public, the would-be author accepted the chair for moral philosophy at the University of Virginia, a position which he was to hold for twenty years.[10] In his scholarly writing, he stressed the prevalence of economics over rhetoric and politics. Passionate politics, Tucker suggested, was only impeding the necessary and essentially beneficent developments that would eventually result from the natural evolution of the economy. In his 1843 study *Progress of the Unites States in Population and Wealth in Fifty Years as Exhibited by the Decennial Census* he scolded abolitionists for hampering a natural development towards free labor by provoking the resistance of the Southern slaveholders. Still, Tucker argued, "if we carry our views to a yet more distant future, we shall find causes at work whose effects on this institution [i.e. slavery] neither the miscalculating sympathies of fanaticism or philanthropy, nor their re-action on the slave owners, can avert or long delay." These causes, of course,

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[9] R. S. Levine 3–4.

[10] When he was offered the professorship, Tucker originally asked for a postponement. He accepted only after the failure of his novel had become obvious. If *The Valley of Shenandoah* had been been a success, Tucker would probably have set out on a career as a novelist (cf. McLean 26–28). Even though he gave up this idea, Tucker wrote another two novels during his time in the academy. Significantly, in both of these he tried to escape from the dilemma he had dared to face in *The Valley of Shenandoah*. Under the pseudonym of Joseph Atterley, Tucker published *A Voyage to the Moon: With Some Account of the Manners and Customs, Science and Philosophy, of the People of Morosofia and Other Lunarians* (New York: Elam Bliss, 1827), a largely unproblematic science-fiction satire on the aberrations of modern society. In 1841 he wrote "A Century Hence: Or, A Romance of 1941," which was published only in 1977 (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia). Using the device of the epistolary novel based on a highly conventional love plot, *A Century Hence* is a fictionalized treatise in political economy written from what amounts to a geopolitical perspective. For the United States the novel predicts great prosperity in the face of abiding problems. Interestingly, it is prophesied that sectional alliances will have shifted: while the new capital of the nation has moved further west, it is now the East that threatens to secede.

are economic: if there will not be any precipitate government intervention slavery is going to vanish all by itself due to the decreasing price of free labor.[11] According to Tucker, the economy had become the real motivation of development: everything else was a potentially dangerous fiction.

The economist's perspective of the social sciences, specifically of economics, pervades *The Valley of Shenandoah*, occasionally relegating the story to the background. Close to the beginning, Grayson delivers a first lengthy disquisition on the population structure in the Shenandoah Valley (1: 49-59). The way in which this digression is introduced indicates the tensions between the book's purposes as an entertaining fiction and as a socioeconomic treatise: "Since Edward's dissertation may seem very dull prosing to some of my readers," the narrative voice explains, "it is put in a separate chapter, that those who choose it, may pass it over without breaking the thread of the narrative" (1: 48). Grayson's "dissertation" leads over into a discussion with Gildon about the problem of slavery; and though it is represented as a dialogue, the passage is yet another social treatise masking as fiction (1: 60-65). In a different place, the narrator explains that a discourse on the judicial system of Virginia (1: 199-212) will be presented as a separate chapter "for the convenience" of his "fair readers." These "lovely creatures . . . hating, as they do, what is serious and dull" are invited to skip the chapter, which is explicitly intended for "those minds which, at once patient and inquisitive, are not averse to dry speculations" (1: 198). In many respects, *The Valley of Shenandoah* appears to be a fiction against fiction. Exposing the dangerous effects of false "romance," it strives to become a social tract.

The moral thrust of Tucker's social criticism is directed not only against the acquisitiveness of social climbers like Mrs. Fawkner or the greed of New York businessmen, but also against the improvidence of the traditional Virginia planter class itself. Explaining why money lenders thrive in a rural community like the Shenandoah, Valley Grayson concludes:

> Such is the course of many a landed gentlemen in the ancient dominion, and thus are her best estates constantly passing from the hands of those who have inherited them, to those whose frugality, or industry, or rapacity, furnish the means of their purchase. All this is perhaps as it should be, but the change often furnishes subjects of melancholy contemplation to those who can feel for the fallen, and with a good deal of blame on the reckless course of expense they have pursued, and contempt for their deplorable incapacity for business or labour, and their silly pride, there is mingled a lively pity for their humiliation and distress. (1: 112–113)

This seems to suggest that the novel represents an appeal to the members of the old

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[11] George Tucker, "The Future Progress of Slavery," *Progress of the Unites States in Population and Wealth in Fifty Years as Exhibited by the Decennial Census* (1843); facsimile rpt, American Classics in History and Social Science 142 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1970)

social elite of Virginia to mend their ways, that it is a careful analysis of their mistakes and an instruction for reform. Indeed, Grayson promises that he will try to save his family estate by hard labor (1: 115–116). However, the seeming didactic intention of the novel is subverted by the hero's eventual failure in spite of his superior graces and unceasing efforts. It is as if Tucker doubted the existence of a middle way between the principles of “honor” and economic rationality. "Romance," he seems to suggest, can be transferred to the nineteenth century only as a spurious fiction, while the real thing must necessarily perish under the conditions of modern life.

3.2 Realism in Defense of Slavery

According to an influential school in criticism, extending from Francis Pendleton Gaines's *The Southern Plantation* in 1925 to the studies of Ritchie Devon Watson in the present days, antebellum southern literature has usually been interpreted as a tradition of "romance" which copied the example of Scott in order to glorify the plantation order. Allegedly, this tradition culminated in the nostalgic fictions of Thomas Nelson Page and achieved its ultimate codification in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936).[12]

Viewed from such a perspective, *The Valley of Shenandoah* is bound to appear as an exception to the rule. Although the novel is rather conventional in terms of plot, characterization and sentiment, it is tempting to write down its grim devotion to the inevitability of change as a form of "realism." In 1970 Donald R. Noble characteristically described *The Valley of Shenandoah* as a promising beginning for a southern tradition

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108–118; quote: 109.

[12] Francis Pendleton Gaines, *The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and in the Accuracy of a Tradition* (1925; Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962). Gaines's Book influenced Vernon Louis Parrington's perspective on antebellum southern fiction in *Main Currents in American Thought*; see vol. 2 on *The Romantic Revolution in America, 1800–1860* (1927; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1954). Another early contribution to the discourse on "plantation fiction," the "plantation romance" or the "plantation myth" was Sterling A. Brown's *The Negro in American Fiction* (1937); rpt in *The American Negro: History and Literature* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969); see esp. Brown's chapter on "The Plantation Tradition: Proslavery Fiction" (17–30). There is indeed a genealogical relationship between a fiction like Page's "Marse Chan" (1884) and, say, Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* (1832); yet, it ought to be pointed out that, as a distinct type solely devoted to the idealization of the plantation order, "plantation fiction" or "plantation romance" emerged only in the various responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* penned by southern fictionists during the 1850s. William A. Taylor's classic study *Cavalier and Yankee* (1961; Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1963) challenged the stereotyped conceptions that earlier critics had displayed in reading antebellum southern fiction as simply a defense of the plantation order. As Taylor warned, "[a]nyone expecting to find in these novels anything resembling a consistent celebration of the plantation economy, slavery or the Tidewater aristocrat is in for a surprise" (128).

of the novel. According to Noble's interpretation, Tucker set a standard of distanced social investigation which subsequent southern writers proved unable to attain. Noble argued that Tucker was able to criticize Virginia's social institutions only because the Missouri Compromise had created a political atmosphere in which such criticisms could be tolerated. However, this ideological "breathing spell" ended with the beginning of the 1830s, when inter- and intrasectional strife was renewed in the wake of the Nat Turner revolt and the defeat of schemes for gradual emancipation in the Virginia legislature. Noble's argument deserves to be quoted in full as a significant example for the traditional perspective on antebellum southern literature:

> Having voted to retain slavery in the face of insurrection at home and increased criticism from the North, Virginians and other Southerners then took steps to protect themselves from their slaves and to eliminate incendiary criticism. On the practical level, this assumed the form of stricter enforcement of slave codes and systems of control and patrol. On the intellectual level, it took the form of censorship by public opinion. Criticism of slavery or of the class system by a Southerner became impossible. It became the duty of Southern writers to defend slavery and to glorify the Southern way of life. Simms and other writers were encouraged to turn from the novel and from their natural subject, the society around them, toward the romance, the way of Scott, and the past. They were hindered from examining an area that Tucker, an inferior craftsman, gave promise of dealing with. If we accept Hawthorne's brief definition of the novel, as set forth in the "Preface" to *The House of the Seven Gables*, as a form of composition "presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience," it may be that George Tucker's *The Valley of Shenandoah* is one of the very few *novels* to be written in the South in the nineteenth century. It is an awkward book, yet it points the way that Southern fiction might have taken had Southern writers been able to keep their intellectual freedom.[13]

Noble here makes a series of fundamental statements, not only about the history of southern literature, but also about the relations between society, politics and literature in general: (1.) he views fiction as an immediate response to political events; (2.) he equates ideologies and literary forms; and (3.) he appropriates Hawthorne's definition of "romance" in order to postulate a bipolar opposition of "novel" versus "romance" in terms of both ideology and aesthetics. Antebellum southern literary history comes to be viewed as a decline from "the novel," which is defined as a realist critique of society, towards "the romance," which is regarded as escapist or reactionary. If criticism is based on such assumptions, *The Valley of Shenandoah* actually seems to be an "awkward book." The epithet applies not only to its internal ambiguities and contradictions but also to the novel's place in southern literary history.

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[13] Donald R. Noble, introduction, *The Valley of Shenandoah*, by G. Tucker (Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1970) xxx–xxxiv. Noble's interpretation of antebellum Southern history is very close to the argument made by Clement Eaton in *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South* (1940; rev. edition: New York: Harper & Row, 1964). On the Nat Turner Rebellion and the Virginia Slavery Debate, see Freehling, 178–196, and Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619–1877* (1993; London: Penguin, 1995) 182.

However, Noble's interpretation simplifies both the ideology proposed by the narrative and the relation of this ideology to genre. Firstly, Tucker's novel cannot really be described as an indictment of the southern position on slavery; secondly, the text actually assumes the pretense of realism in order to defend the "peculiar institution." Rather than critiquing the politics of slavery, Tucker counters the categorical arguments of abolitionists by viewing the reality of the institution with ostentatious objectivity: the novel purports to present a picture of slavery as it is actually being lived, a picture in which its bright and its dark aspects seem to be balanced. Grayson's response to Gildon's imputation that slavery is inconsistent with democratic republicanism obviously represents Tucker's own opinions: "[N]othing can be more unfair than the charge of inconsistency. We, of the present generation, find domestic slavery established among us, and the evil, for I freely admit it to be an evil, both moral and political, admits of no remedy that is not worse than the disease" (1: 61). Since instant emancipation would lead to St. Domingo scenes and no viable scheme for colonization has yet been devised, Grayson argues, "we must even set [sic] down contented, and endeavour to *mitigate* a disease which admits of *no cure*" (1: 62; Tucker's emphases). Of course, this line of argument was the typical apology for slavery in the phase before the "positive good" argument emerged during the 1830s.

According to the picture drawn in *The Valley of Shenandoah*, the reality of slavery in the southern states defied abstract indictments. Still pursuing their discussion, Grayson and Gildon encounter a group of field hands doing harvest work. The "athletic negro men" obviously take pleasure in their work; moreover, they are "plentifully supplied with whiskey," which further contributes to their "good humor." Realizing the presence of their master, they greet him delightedly; and Grayson, in turn, is mindful to inquire after their well-being. The visitor from the North is astonished to see that "whatever might be the condition of other slaves, the bonds of those of Beachwood, sat lightly upon them" (1: 65–67). Afterwards he tells Grayson: "I have often heard . . . that the labour of a slave, was but half that of a freeman, yet I scarcely think that I ever saw our stoutest and most active labourers work more willingly, or with better effect, than these bondsmen of yours" (1: 67). Bondage may be a severe problem in the abstract. Yet, Tucker suggests, in actuality the bonds can become invisible.

In another scene, however, the perspective on slavery actually seems to be surprisingly critical. The description of the auction in which a majority of the Graysons' slaves have to be sold (2: 206–214) shows that Tucker actually was in a position to undertake a surprisingly distanced and critical assessment of the institution. For if he stressed that the fetters of bondage could be made invisible, he was still realist enough to recognize that such a trick was based on a "delusion":

> One not accustomed to this spectacle, is extremely shocked to see beings, of the same species with himself, set up for sale to the highest bidder, like horses or cattle ; and even to those who have been accustomed to it, it is disagreeable, from their sympathy with the humble and anxious slave. The weight of his fetters, the negro, who has been born and bred on a well regulated estate, hardly feels. His simple wants are abundantly supplied, and whatever of coercion there is on his will, it is so moderate and reasonable in itself, and, above all, he has been so habituated to it, that it appears to be all right, or rather, he does not feel it to be wrong. He is, in fact, a member of a sort of patriarchal family. But when hoisted up to public sale, where every man has a right to purchase him, and he may be the property of one whom he never saw before, or of the worst man in the community, then the delusion vanishes, and he feels the bitterness of his lot, and his utter insignificance as a member of civilized society. (2: 207)

This observation significantly deviates from the posture of a novelist like Simms, who would stress that the beneficent moral reality of the patriarchal ethos transcends all appearances. However, Tucker's ostentatious objectivity in rendering the auction scene and his readiness to admit the evil aspects of slavery still have to be regarded as an attempt to defend the institution. Thus, at the auction everything is done to buffer harmful effects for the individual slaves. Care is taken to exclude bidders of a doubtful character and to avoid splitting up families. In one instance a disrupted couple even is reunited through the auction! In every single case, the predilections of the slaves are taken into consideration (2: 210–211). Before the auction, Mrs. Grayson has carefully informed the slaves about the option of being sold to Georgia, "assuring them that although it would be an advantageous one for the estate, it should not be made if it were against their wishes" (2: 200). Although the Graysons have to sell in order to satisfy their creditors, it is apparent that they put the well-being of the slaves above monetary returns.

The auctioned slaves, in their turn, generally seem reconciled to their fate. They are actually more worried by the straits of their former mistress than by their own hardships. While it points to the moral deficiencies of slavery, the auction scene also seems an exemplification of the diligence with which good slaveholders take care of their wards: the real problem seems to be that model slaveholders like the Graysons are forced to sell. Although it points out some of the problems inherent in slavery, the ostentatious realism with which Tucker treats the institution is a defensive strategy. By pretending to consider slavery realistically—i.e., as it is actually lived—the text relativizes abstract indictments of its inherent evil. In contradiction to Noble's views and assumptions, Tucker's novel actually can be found to offer an example of realism in defense of slavery.

3.3 The Doomed Legacy of True “Romance”

Similar to Noble's analysis, Ritchie Devon Watson's more recent discussion of *The Valley of Shenandoah* represents the novel as an exceptional case in the literary history of the antebellum South, especially because of Tucker’s "willingness to include middle-class characters as a significant element in his novel."[14] Yet in spite of such qualities, Watson still thinks that Tucker contributed to the genesis of the “plantation tradition."[15] The main reason for this assessment is the hero of the novel, Edward Grayson: "It is hard to believe that a writer who was capable of a penetrating analysis of social decay and slavery could be equally capable of creating such a stiff and lifeless character. Yet Tucker seems to have been as fictionally committed to his Cavalier ideal as he was to an objective analysis of the society which produced that ideal."[16]

Simply splitting the narrative in two, separating its patterns of figuration from its supposedly “objective” analysis of antebellum southern society, this assessment betrays the limitations of an approach that aims at classifying narratives according to their ideological progressiveness. However, Watson is certainly right in calling attention to the unresolved tensions that govern Tucker's novel: the dilemma between its self-consciously old-fashioned ethical standards, on the one hand, and its grim belief in the inevitability of a change, on the other. As Watson points out, Tucker's adherence to an older system of values is expressed by Edward Grayson's characterization:

> In his temper Edward was reserved, somewhat haughty in his manners to those who were not acknowledged inferiors, (to whom he was all mildness and condescension,) and possessed of the most scrupulous and fastidious honour. In person, he was tall, thin, with gray eyes, light hair, and a long, thin, but very pleasing visage. (1: 3)

Unmistakably, Edward is marked out as an aristocrat and a slaveholder. His paternalistic relation to his "inferiors" is a constitutive part of his character. The hero’s profile is brought out against the characteristics of his adversary, with whom he is immediately contrasted:

> Gildon, without being positively short, was lower and stouter than Grayson, had a full, round face, black eyes, and hair of the same colour. (1: 4)

The moral significance of Gildon’s and Grayson’s contrasting appearances is unmistakable. Grayson is not only "haughty," he is also an individual of commanding height; Gildon, on the other hand, is "lower" in both personal appearance and moral

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[14] R. D. Watson, *The Cavalier in Virginia Fiction* 74.

[15] Watson explicitly counters Jay B. Hubbell's claim that "Tucker had no part in the building up of the romantic plantation tradition.” R. D. Watson, *The Cavalier in Virginia Fiction* 75; cf. Hubbell, *The South in American Literature* 252.

status. Grayson's slim figure may reflect moderation, while Gildon's tendency to corpulence is designed to indicate immoderate sensuality.

In fact, the two main characters in *The Valley of Shenandoah* apparently belong to different fictional realms. If we accept the traditional contradistinction of "novel" and "romance," Grayson comes out as a "romance" hero, while Gildon resembles the (anti-)heroes found in more "realistic" and psychologically more complex "novels." For an assessment of literary form the dichotomy of "romance" versus "novel" is of limited use. The point is, however, that the dichotomy is obviously part of the generic self-consciousness of *The Valley of Shenandoah*.

This is evident in Gildon's reactions to the moral superiority of his friend. Mortified by Grayson's nobility, Gildon resorts to irony, claiming that his friend "is too much in the clouds to know what concerns such a son of earth as I am. Whenever he formally sets out on a tour of knight-errantry, I shall accompany him, that I may catch some of the spirit of the mirror of modern chivalry" (1: 78). Delegating his friend to the sphere of (chivalric) "romance" and fiction, Gildon claims the actual world for his own habitat. He attempts to convert his own inferiority, his closeness to the baser aspects of existence, into a form of realism. Of course, Gildon would also aspire to the role of the hero, but, again and again, he is "thrown back from his generous and romantic resolutions, and brought down to be a mere son of earth" (1: 183). As the narrator points out in what amounts to a genre-critical meta-narrative, Gildon is "one of those mixed and imperfect characters, which though seldom found in novels, are very commonly met in real life" (1: 173). The text stages a conflict of genres—not as a conflict of representational modes, however, but as a dramatic conflict between individual characters.

The implications of this staged generic conflict are clearly ideological. Grayson and Gildon do not only belong to different genres, they also represent antagonistic cultural or social systems. This antagonism surfaces in a discussion on slavery, which is triggered by Gildon's attempt to make Grayson identify with the stereotype of the slaveholder as southern aristocrat: "There is something very fascinating now confess it," Gildon observes, "in this unlimited control, let us fiery republicans say what we will. . . . he who is proud of his own freedom, is equally gratified at controlling the freedom of others." Grayson, however, does not gratify his friend's expectations: he calls Gildon's argumentation "a very ingenious piece of sophistry," elaborates on the moral dilemma of the slaveholder, and points out that a noble character does not find any gratification in holding absolute sway over another human being. Gildon retorts with undisguised hostility by evoking the cliché of the Southerner as rhetorician (1: 60–

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[16] R. D. Watson, *The Cavalier in Virginia Fiction* 78.

61). It is implied that Gildon simply cannot accept the congruence of rhetoric and principles, appearance and actual character represented by the hero. Unable to write off Grayson's conduct as pretense, he aims his irony at the persistence with which his friend clings to an outdated mode of conduct.

As Michael Kreyling has pointed out, while "Gildon can go behind words and representations," this "intellectual maneuver is denied the hero, who works in a sphere utterly devoid of irony."[17] Indeed, the antagonism between the two characters can be understood as a battle between irony and affirmation, a conflict over the ontological status of (moral) conceptions. The antagonism between the Northerner and the Southerner is an epistemological conflict that represents a conflict between social or cultural systems. Grayson is a figure at the core of a static cultural system based on the assumption of reliable patterns of signification: in such a system, the principle of honor supposedly ensures the correspondence of appearance and true character and postulates the identity of ethical valor and social status.[18] Gildon, however, is the protagonist of a dynamic cultural system that acknowledges the ambiguity of signification: the free agency of capital and the imperative of critical investigation guarantee the adaptability of such a system to ever-changing circumstances.

The interpretation of the staged antagonism between Gildon and Grayson as an ideologically charged conflict of genres is partly analogous to Walter Benn Michael's interpretation of the collision of "romance" and "novel" in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. According to Michaels, Hawthorne opposes "romance" and "novel" as different epistemologies which represent different relations to property and, consequently, different concepts of social organization.[19] In a similar manner, *The Valley of Shenandoah* contrasts Gildon and Grayson as the representatives of different genres ("realism" versus "romance"), which are based on different epistemologies (ironic versus affirmative) and connote different social systems (a traditional society versus a capitalist society). However, while Hawthorne achieves a closure in which the principle of "romance" is provisionally reconciled with a prosaic environment, Tucker's narrative insists on the incongruity of "romance" and modern reality. Indeed, Grayson fails just because of his unwavering devotion to the "romantic" ethos of heroism and honor.

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[17] Michael Kreyling, *Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1987) 16.

[18] On the code of honor and the validation of appearances see Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996).

[19] Walter Benn Michaels, "Romance and Real Estate," *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, ed. Walter B. Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985) 156–182. The essay was originally published in *Raritan 2* (Winter 1983). It is reprinted also in Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century*, The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics 2 (Berkeley: U of

What has above been viewed as the resistance of Tucker's narrative against Scott's covert pattern of expansionist mediation and progressivist accommodation manifests itself on the generic level as an act of resistance against Scott's strategy of generic hybridization. If, as Northrop Frye has suggested, the Waverley novels "mark the absorption of realistic displacement into romance itself,"[20] Tucker's narrative suggests that the "realistic displacement" allegorically represented by Gildon cannot be (re)contained by "romance." If Frye argues that realistic fiction is “essentially parody romance,"[21] Tucker seems to insist that "romance" does not admit of a parody. In contrast to Scott's fiction, *The Valley of Shenandoah* implies that (ideological) genres cannot be mixed. Gildon must not succeed in his attempt to be both a hero of "romance" and a pragmatic. If Scott's strategy of mediation and conciliation depended on treating both "romance" and "real history" as texts, Tucker claimed the material reality of both (real) "romance" and "real history." Since he viewed neither the "romance" of Virginia's past nor the present reality of economic transformation as a text, rhetorical mediation was impossible. In consequence, *The Valley of Shenandoah* comes to be both an apotheosis and an abortion of "romance."

Watson, for whom Scott represents a standard that Tucker narrowly missed, argues that the ideological ambiguity of *The Valley of Shenandoah* may reflect “the tensions and unresolved conflicts which eventually split the nation—tensions between the commitment to status quo and the commitment to progress, between slavery and abolition, between a past- or future-oriented time perspective. Tucker never resolved these tensions in *The Valley of Shenandoah*."[22] This may be taken to suggest that only the Civil War created a historical situation that allowed for a fictional treatment of the South which emulated the ideological achievements of Scott. In fact, Scott implicitly admitted that his strategy of conciliation depended on the *fait acompli* of the Highlands’ political integration into Great Britain. In 1813, while he was working on *Waverley*, he wrote in a letter: "Seriously, I am very glad I did not live in 1745 for though as a lawyer I could not have pleaded Charles's right and as a clergyman I could not have prayed for him yet as a soldier I would I am sure against the convictions of my better reason have fought for him even to the bottom of the gallows."[23]

According to Scott, then, "romance" is hazardous as a strategy for present political action: its use as a means for achieving conciliation between the past and the

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California P, 1987) 85–112.

[20] Frye, *The Secular Scripture* 40.

[21] Frye, *The Secular Scripture*.

[22] R. D. Watson, *The Cavalier in Virginia Fiction* 79.

[23] Scott, letter to Miss Clephane, 1813; *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. H. J. G. Grierson (New York: AMS, 1971) 3: 302. In his correspondence, Scott made exceedingly economical use of commas.

present, conservatism and progressivism depends on the pastness of the past, its having become a text which may be rewritten according to the needs of the present. In fact, the idyllic plantation school of southern fiction which flourished after the Civil War is generally much closer to the ideological achievement of the Waverley Novels than antebellum southern fiction. The pre-war texts betray a feeling of living in a past that was doomed but had not yet been finally defeated. As John M. Grammer observes with reference to *The Valley of Shenandoah*, southerners began "pronouncing elegies upon their nation almost as soon as they began to believe that they had one."[24] Indeed, in *The Valley of Shenandoah* the postulate of southern difference goes along with the demonstration of its impossibility. Tucker's text seems to represent a suicidal "romance" of cultural difference; his insistence on the material reality of a "romantic" southern past results in the abortion of "romance" as a means for coming to terms with the present.

This demise of "romance" history results in a decidedly skeptical picture. At the end of the narrative, neither the traditional hero nor his wavering antagonist prevail, but inane characters that had formerly been of secondary importance. After Mathilda has withdrawn into a monastery, the bulk of the Fawkners' fortune eventually descends to James Fawkner, the offspring of the marriage between Mathilda's cousin and the daughter of a tavern keeper. As caricatures of mediocrity, both parents are targets of the narrators scorn. The narrative is a "melancholy history" (2: 320) because it ponders the possibility that change is inevitable but not necessarily beneficent. The epitaph on the Graysons' history spoken by Mr. Truehart, the trusty lawyer of the family, summarizes the feeling of anxiety and confusion which is conveyed by the novel: "Here is a family possessing every virtue and grace, fitted to enjoy happiness and comfort beyond any other I ever knew, that are overwhelmed with every species of affliction. . . . The whole world, and all it contains, is an inexplicable mystery" (2: 293).

Although *The Valley of Shenandoah* failed with the public and can only have had a very limited direct influence on subsequent southern writers, it has to be regarded as a startling expression of the anxieties with which antebellum southern novelists had to grapple. Subsequent southern "romances" can be seen as more or less provisional attempts to solve the dilemma stated in Tucker's novel. The story of antebellum southern "romance" is a story of (increasingly unsuccessful) efforts of reasserting a salvational concept of history, of (more and more desperate) reconstructions of "romance" in the face of the experience of alienation which Tucker, the political economist, had so scathingly recorded.

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[24] John M. Grammer, *Pastoral and Politics in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1996) 164.

4. The "Romance of Domestic Life": Salvational Hybridizations in John P. Kennedy's *Swallow Barn*

4.1 The "Picturesque Tourist" as an Agent of Assimilation

In light of its self-defeating ideological message and poor success with the public, George Tucker's *The Valley of Shenandoah* may well appear as a false start in southern fiction. The first novel by a southern author to achieve critical and financial success was *Swallow Barn: Or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion*, which the Baltimore lawyer, politician, businessman and author John Pendleton Kennedy published in 1832, i.e. eight years after Tucker's doomed effort. *Swallow Barn* was not only well received by the public, but it also managed to paint a more cheerful picture of southern life and its relation to a modernizing America than Tucker's gloomy fiction had done.

However, while Kennedy's novel would exert a tremendous influence on the forms, themes and ideological dispositions of subsequent southern fiction, it was an exceedingly contradictory piece of writing. Thus, William S. Osborne described the book as both "a nostalgic re-creation of a way of living being lost in an expanding America" and "a pioneer study in American realism," William A. Taylor read it as an attempt at social satire which eventually turned into the "literary origin of the plantation legend," and J. V. Ridgely pointed out that *Swallow Barn* was "*both* myth and counter-myth."[1]

It has usually been suggested that the ambiguity of *Swallow Barn* reflected the specific cultural and psychological position of its author, that the narrative reflected Kennedy's "ambivalence about what the plantation and slavery were and should be"[2] or that it expresses the "identity crisis" experienced by the successors of the founding fathers.[3] Nevertheless, *Swallow Barn* should not be reduced to an expression of Kennedy's psychocultural condition. The ideological and aesthetic heterogeneity of the narrative is not merely the (unintentional) expression of ideological crisis. Rather, it is the very strategy by which the text seeks to overcome crisis. While there may be truth in the assertion that *Swallow Barn* "puzzled its author himself,"[4] the way in which the narrative constructs an opposition of ironic and idyllic impulses, of real and ideal, past

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1 William S. Osborne, introduction, *Swallow Barn* (New York: Hafner, 1962) xix; xv; Taylor 157–167; J. V. Ridgely, *John Pendleton Kennedy* (New York: Twayne, 1966) 53.

2 Louis D. Rubin, *The Edge of the Swamp* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana States UP, 1989) 50.

3 Lothar Hönnighausen, "Political Landscapes of the Antebellum South: Friedrich Gerstäcker and John Pendleton Kennedy," *Rewriting the South: History and Fiction*, ed. Hönnighausen and Valeria Gennaro Lerda (Tübingen: Franke, 1993) 69. See also Parrington's discussion of Kennedy as a typical product of antebellum Baltimore, a "southern whig" who was torn between a "literary romanticism" and an "economic romanticism" (*Romantic Revolution* 44–54).

4 Lewis P. Simpson, *The Dispossessed Garden: Pastoral and History in Southern Literature*

and present should primarily be seen as a purposeful ideological strategy of negotiation and conciliation.

Indeed, while George Tucker had refused Scott's strategy of ironic mediation, Kennedy returned to it. Through self-conscious experimentation with conventional patterns of perception and representation, Kennedy's narrative builds a provisional bridge between the old and the new, between a backwards Virginia and a modernizing United States. If *The Valley of Shenandoah* can be read as a denial of conciliation, juxtaposing genres and insisting on their distinctiveness, *Swallow Barn* attempts mediation through a strategy of generic hybridity; if in Tucker's novel the dynamics of action lead to the death of the traditional social system, Kennedy tries to save its ethos by minimizing action to the point of painting a still life.

These differences between Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* and Tucker's *The Valley of Shenandoah* are particularly significant in light of the many similarities between the two texts. Both proceed from the same basic situation: a visitor from the North spends some time on a Virginia plantation. Though the plantation depicted in *Swallow Barn* is set in Tidewater Virginia, the two authors may in fact have been inspired by the same locality, for Kennedy modeled his fictional plantation on the estate of his relatives in the Shenandoah Valley.[5] Like *The Valley of Shenandoah*, Kennedy's fictional travel account describes the domestic affairs, political beliefs and economic habits of Virginia planters with much realistic detail. Both narratives are predominantly concerned with the phenomenon of economic and political change, which is viewed as inevitable and threatening. Furthermore, Kennedy follows Tucker in correlating the difference between the old and the new way of life to the difference between the South and the North, and in associating the more traditional society with "romance." The treatment of slavery in the two narratives is also comparable. Although they admit that the institution is highly questionable from the perspective of absolute morals, both narratives go out of their way to stress that slavery is essentially a beneficent institution, that the course of progress will eventually result in the automatic abolition of the system, and that abolitionist propaganda and political intervention will only retard this supposedly natural process.

The fundamental difference between *The Valley of Shenandoah* and *Swallow Barn* is that Kennedy makes the northern visitor the narrator. The fiction is presented as a series of letters in which the New Yorker Mark Littleton recounts his observations

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(Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1975) 50.

[5] Ridgely, *Kennedy* 20–21.

and adventures during a prolonged stay on the James River plantation of his relatives. At the suggestion of his Virginian cousin, Ned Hazard, Littleton decides to take a holiday in the South in order to correct his "unseemly prejudices against the Old Dominion."[6] The device of using the persona of an outside visitor who explains the American South to another outsider allows for a detached investigation of southern life and institutions. At the same time, the format of the epistolary travel account is a potent tool for assimilation. Littleton's letters traverse the boundary between the sections. They domesticate the political, social and moral strangeness of Virginia by confidentially relating a series of intimate encounters with the southern way of life. In his 1832 preface, Kennedy apologized for the "mirthful mood" of his narrative by explaining that "the ordinary actions of men, in their household intercourse, have naturally a humorous or comic character" (vii). Within the household, difference is experienced as amusing rather than threatening.

This emphasis on intimacy is part of an overall strategy of subjectivity. Littleton is not only more interested in the details of every-day life than in social and political abstractions, but he also indulges in the freedom of exercising his fancy. The subtitle of the narrative, "A Sojourn in the Old Dominion," indicates that the journey is a casual and self-indulgent undertaking. By describing himself in the opening letter as a "picturesque tourist" (17), the narrator defines the basic mode of representation and trick of thought applied in *Swallow Barn*. Firstly, the text draws on a paradigmatic change of perspectives and attitudes from the supposedly objective investigations of eighteenth-century "travelers" to the self-conscious subjectivism of nineteenth-century "tourists." Secondly, the subjectivism of the "tourist" is explicitly connected to the theory of the "picturesque."

This theory had evolved in eighteenth-century Europe by abstracting from the work of seventeenth-century landscape painters a system of rules for the tasteful evaluation of scenery.[7] Disciples of the "picturesque" inverted the usual relationship between art and reality by aiming to transform nature into a picture gallery. Landscape gardeners translated the imaginative sujets of painters into reality and travelers began

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[6] John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn: Or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion*, ed. and Introd. William S. Osborne, Hafner Library of Classics 22 (New York: Hafner, 1962) 14. Subsequent page references will occur parenthetically in the text. *Swallow Barn* was first published anonymously in two volumes by Carey and Lea (Philadelphia, 1832). A revised edition in one volume, containing numerous illustrations by David Strother, one of Kennedy's Virginian cousins, was published by George P. Putnam (New York, 1851). For this edition Kennedy, among other changes, reworked and extended the chapter on slavery, "The Quarter." Osborne's edition offers a facsimile of Putnam's 1853 reprint of the 1851 edition, including the illustrations. It also provides additional material from Kennedy's manuscripts.

[7] On the theory of the "picturesque" and its ideological functions, see Peter Womack, *Improvement and Romance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); esp. 61–65. On Kennedy's use of the "picturesque," see Hönnighausen, "Political Landscapes of the Antebellum South."

to equip themselves with so-called "Claude glasses," colored mirrors that distorted the landscape according to the conventions of pictorial representation. For "picturesque tourists" like Mark Littleton, holiday-making was the art of seeing what one wanted to see. A painter rather than a reporter, a sentimentalist rather than a sociologist, the "picturesque tourist" experimented with subjectively projecting conventional forms of representation and perception onto the landscape.

Washington Irving was among the chief agents of transferring the conventions of the literary "picturesque" to the United States. There is evidence that in *Swallow Barn* Kennedy sought to do for the "Old Dominion" what Irving had done for the Hudson Valley and the Catskill Mountains, which is to define the region as a "picturesque" counterpoint to ubiquitous change, a poetical rather than a political phenomenon.[8] Indeed, *Swallow Barn* was apparently conceived as an imitation and benevolent burlesque of Irving's *Bracebridge Hall* (1822).[9] Kennedy not only sent a copy of the book to Irving but he also dedicated his second novel, *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, to the famous writer. Moreover, he had initially planned to make the narrator of *Swallow Barn* a young painter similar to Irving's Geoffrey Crayon.[10] On the advice of a friend, Kennedy dropped the painter yet retained the perspective.[11]

As a "picturesque tourist," Mark Littleton transforms the natural landscape into mental paintings, a strategy which is taken to its limits in this description of a forest scenery:

> It was just such a landscape as a painter would delight to study in detail, and sketch from every point ; there was such variety of foliage, such beautiful contrasts of light and shade, such bits of foreground, and rich accessories to throw into a picture. The beech, the poplar, and the sycamore, all so different in form, and so majestical from age and size, rose in this forest from a carpet of matted grass of the liveliest verdure. There was no underwood to interrupt the view into the deep recesses of shade. An occasional straggling grape-vine swung across from tree to tree, embracing the branches of both in its huge serpent-like folds ; and, here and there, an erect, prim, and maidenish poplar was furbelowed, from the root all the way up to the limbs, with wild ivy, and in its sylvan millinery coquetted with the zephyr that seemed native to the grove. (117–118).

By rearranging the scenery according to the hierarchy of foreground and background the fake three-dimensionality of pictorial representation is translated back into the

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[8] Cf. Parrington 28, on the idea that Virginia might be the best American substitute for the European landscapes in Irving: "[T]he Virginia romantic had no need to seek the picturesque in England and Spain, as Irving had done. He had only to pick and choose from the familiar stuff lying all about him, emphasizing the agreeable, overlooking the unpleasant, fashioning his figures and action to suit the ideal of a golden age of plantation society."

[9] Osborne, introduction, *Swallow Barn* xxviii–xxxvi.

[10] Originally, the first chapter of *Swallow Barn* was entitled "Studies from Nature by a Young Artist: An Inn." The discarded manuscript is reprinted in Osborne's edition of the novel (xlvi–xlix).

[11] Ridgely, *Kennedy* 36–37.

landscape. The process of imaginary appropriation is concluded through semantic manipulations. The forest is made to rise from "a carpet of matted grass"; the grape-vine is conceptualized as a serpent living out its symbolic potential by engaging in a darkly erotic "embrace"; the poplar comes to be "furbelowed" in a "millinery" of ivy and, thus feminized, is built into a love plot with the "zephyr" who is evoked by the conventions imposed upon the setting. Natural objects are transferred into the sphere of the household and emplotted by reference to conventional story patterns. The effect is a fictionalization of the landscape, which comes to occupy an intermediary zone between the realm of the actual and the realm of pictorial or literary art. At the same time, the exuberant use of conceited associations lends a certain sportive quality to the narrative.

The ideological motivation of Kennedy's "picturesque" aesthetics and wavering tone is connected to the political crisis brought about by the reawakening of intra- and intersectional conflicts in the 1830s. While George Tucker had written his highly confrontational *The Valley of Shenandoah* in a comparatively relaxed political atmosphere, when the Missouri Compromise had once again taken slavery out of the political arena, the topic had since returned with a vengeance. In 1831, the Southampton Slave Rebellion had shaken the ideology of paternalism, violently refuting the cherished belief that slaves were generally docile and contented. While the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831/1832 had shown that in reality the South was internally divided over the issue, the controversy over slavery was increasingly being polarized along a North-South axis. This development was connected to the transfer of the centers of antislavery activity from the South to the North and to the shift of an active minority of agitators from gradualist to immediatist abolitionism. In 1831 William Lloyd Garrison had founded both his antislavery journal *The Liberator* and the New England Antislavery Society. In 1832, the year in which *Swallow Barn* appeared, he published *Thoughts on African Colonization*, arguing that the colonization of slaves was hypocritical and calling for immediate liberation within the United States. While immediatists like Garrison represented only a tiny minority, many southerners believed in the existence of a homogenous abolitionized North and launched an aggressive anti-northern defense of the peculiar institution. Publications like Thomas R. Dew's *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature* (1832) took the step from defending slavery to praising it as the basis of a distinct and superior form of society, which again helped to confirm northern misgivings.

In this context, Kennedy used the aesthetics of the "picturesque" for converting explosive social or political difference into structured aesthetic difference. Indeed, if the "picturesque" perspective transforms the landscape into a social setting where imaginary "zephyrs" commune with imaginary "maidens," the process works the other

way as well: real people and social practices can be read into the landscape as yet another part of the scenery. *Swallow Barn* places the landscape and the society of Virginia on the same plane, interpreting both as a semi-fictional text that is accessible to the subjective manipulations of the tourist.

Like the landscape, characters, customs and activities can be considered as "picturesque" especially if they lend themselves to an association with literary conventions. There is "a dash of the picturesque in the character" of Prudence Meriwether because the spinster has intentionally transformed her life along the lines of educated fancy: "[I]n her boudoir may be found exquisite sketches from her pencil, of forms of love and beauty, belted and buckled knights, old castles and pensive ladies, Madonnas and cloistered nuns,—the offspring of an artistic imagination heated with romance and devotion" (48). Bel Tracy, Ned's beloved, shows an even greater inclination than Prudence to copy "romance" in real life: "She reads descriptions of ladies of chivalry, and takes the field in imitation of them. Her head is full of these fancies, and she almost persuades herself that this is the fourteenth century" (86). Walter Scott is mentioned as the primary source of Bel's delusions (228). Her real-life imitation of the novelist's medievalist fiction goes so far that she trains a hawk as a falcon and, as we learn in a separate chapter of that title, an aged Hessian tramp as a "Last Minstrel" (374–385).

While the narrator's perspective is clearly ironical, it is equally obvious that he is charmed by the boldness with which the Virginian planter class mix literature and life. Attempting to translate mistaken notions of a heroic past into the real world, they produce a social scenery that is an ideal field for the "picturesque tourist," a scenery full of literary quotations that the visitor can identify and ironically re-encode in mock-heroic representations.

The quixotic traits of southern life and politics are most emphatically stressed in the characterization of the old planter, Frank Meriwether, whose general mood and outward appearance anticipate that quintessential southern Quixote, Porgy, whom William Gilmore Simms created shortly after the appearance of *Swallow Barn*.[12] Meriwether represents a political temperament that is displaced into the imaginary, an archaic and parochial conservatism that manifests itself in a peculiar "fondness for paradoxes" (72). His paradoxical political "philosophizing" (73) is epitomized in a disquisition on the dangerous effects of the steamboat on Virginia culture and society:

> "I don't deny that the steamboat is destined to produce valuable results—but after all, I much question . . . if we are not better without it. I declare, I think it strikes deeper at the supremacy of the states than most persons are willing to allow. This annihilation of space, sir, is not to be desired. Our protection against the evils of

[12] Porgy makes his first appearance in Simms's *The Partisan* (1835); see below, chapter 6.3.

consolidation consists in the very obstacles to our intercourse." (72–73)

Meriwether's unwitting self-parody is at its best when he quotes an acquaintance who used to claim that "the home material of Virginia was never so good as when her roads were at their worst" (73). This kind of conservatism is melancholic rather than aggressive. The message to a reader from outside the South is that the self-defeating sectionalism of Virginian planters does not really represent a threat to the Union.

Kennedy reinforces this message by suggesting that Meriwhether's cast of mind is literary and imaginative rather than political. Reading has played an important role in shaping the planter's peculiar temperament. He has "rambled with wonderful assiduity through a wilderness of romances, poems, and dissertations, which are now collected in his library, and, with their battered covers, present a lively type of an army of continentals at the close of the war, or a hospital of invalids" (33). At first sight, the books look like an army, but they really represent a sanitarium. In the planter's library, it is suggested, political radicalism is displaced into "abstruse reading" (67). Lewis P. Simpson has drawn attention to the Jeffersonian ideal of the plantation as a "dominion of the life of the literary mind" in accordance with pastoral conventions.[13] Kennedy's sketches testify to the importance of this ideal, but they also suggest that the "literary mind" fostered by the plantation order is completely politicized and absolutely inactive at the same time. The plantation library seems to be the place where the refugees from the modern world harmlessly gather in contemplation. The most extreme representative of this type of refugee is the tutor of the family, Parson Chub: "He is a good scholar, and having confined his reading entirely to the learning of the ancients, his republicanism is somewhat of the Grecian variety. He has never read any politics of later date than the time of the Emperor Constantine,—not even a newspaper" (66). This form of political radicalism is an inversion of political action: the (purely imaginary) denial of the present is the most radical political statement engaged in.

4.2 Slaves and Swamps: The Pastoral Suspension of History

Bel Tracy's attempt to set up the old Hessian tinker and tramp Hafen Block as a "Last Minstrel" is ironized as an instance of female quixotism. Harvey Riggs observes: "I don't know much about your troubadours and minnesingers : but, if there was amongst them as great a scoundrel as Hafen, your age of chivalry was an arrant cheat" (376). At the same time, however, one of the most interesting passages of *Swallow Barn*

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[13] Simpson, *The Dispossessed Garden*; quote: 23.

suggests that there actually are modern substitutes for medieval minstrels in Virginia. The passage describes the old slave Carey serenading the ladies:

> [O]ur attention was suddenly drawn to another quarter by the notes of a banjoe, played by Carey in the courtyard. He was called up to the door, and, to gratify my curiosity to hear his music, he consented to serenade the ladies under their windows. Carey is a minstrel of some repute, and, like the ancient jongeleurs, he sings the inspirations of his own muse, weaving into song the past and present annals of the family. He is considered a seer amongst the negroes on the estate, and is always heard with reverence. . . . The scene was quite picturesque. Carey was old, his head was hoary, and now borrowed an additional silver tint from the moonbeam that lighted up his figure. (101)

Again, the general effect of the passage is to stress the region's quaint provinciality, inviting the reader to join the "picturesque tourist" in his (provisional and condescendingly ironic) identification with the locals. However, the passage is of particular significance since it is slavery that is here imbued with the ideality of literary stereotypes. The comic rendition of a southern planter family listening in rapture to a slave "serenading the ladies" on the banjo is a most effective ideological trick by which the epitome of southern difference is redefined as an aesthetic phenomenon with a comic potential. The "peculiar institution" is made to appear as a quixotic social rite of reciprocal symbolic gratification mutually engaged in by the slaves and their masters.

Representing the slaves as an analogy to the rural population of non-slaveholding agricultural communities, Littleton manages to view even the slave quarter as "an exceedingly picturesque landscape" (449). The living conditions of the slaves are not depicted as the product of the system of slavery, but as the manifestation of a semi-autonomous slave culture, a culture which is primitive but still provides for the good life:

> [T]he inmates of these dwellings were furnished according to a very primitive notion of comfort. Still, however, there were little garden-patches attached to each, where cymblings, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, water-melons and cabbages flourished in unrestrained luxuriance. Add to this, that there were abundance of poultry domesticated about the premises, and it may be perceived that, whatever might be the inconveniences of shelter, there was no want of what, in all countries, would be considered a reasonable supply of luxuries. (450)

The idyllic representation of the quarter as simultaneously "primitive" and "luxuriant," with little gardens and domesticated poultry recalls the conventions of the pastoral, which are closely connected to the "picturesque" mode.[14] Indeed, Kennedy foregrounds the use of pastoral conventions by meta-narrative comments like the

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[14] On the pastoral dimension of *Swallow Barn*, cf. Jean Fagan Yellin, *The Intricate Knot* (New York: New York UP, 1972) 50, and Jan Bakker, "Time and Timelessness in Images of the Old South: Pastoral in John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* and *Horse-Shoe Robinson*," *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 26 (1981): 77. See also Bakker's discussion of *Swallow*

following: "I resume my task at this ninth chapter, which, being of a bucolical character, I have entitled 'an eclogue'" (81).

In terms of ideological function, the pastoral is a tool for suspending or for sublimating history. It produces representations of the "country," i.e. of nature and the simple life, which are intended to gratify urban sensibilities, specifically the longing for a state of perfect harmony which is situated beyond the beginning of history as a process of alienation[15] This longing for a *saeculum aureum* is very explicit in *Swallow Barn*:

> Nothing more attracted my observation than the swarms of little negroes that basked on the sunny sides of these cabins, and congregated to gaze at us as we surveyed their haunts. They were nearly all in that costume of the golden age which I have heretofore described ; and showed their slim shanks and long heels in all varieties of their grotesque natures. Their predominant love of sunshine, and their lazy, listless postures, and apparent content to be silently looking abroad, might well afford a comparison to a set of terrapins luxuriating in the genial warmth of summer, on the logs of a mill pond. (450–451)

Wearing the "costume of the golden age," the slaves are fused into the natural environment, they constitute a different species which shuns contact with modern man but which thrives in luxuriant profusion on the plantation.

The passage shows why Lewis P. Simpson described *Swallow Barn* as "an uncertain attempt at a pastoral ratification of slavery."[16] However, even though the pervasive analogies between slaves and primitive animals are fiercely racist,[17] it is

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Barn in *Pastoral in Antebellum Southern Romance* 41–49.

[15] On the pastoral mode in general, see William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935; London: Penguin, 1995), who first described the literary convention of the pastoral as an ideological "trick of thought" (25). On the pastoral in American literature and culture, see: Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage, 1950) and Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1964). On the pastoral in relation to the American South, see: Simpson, *The Dispossessed Garden*; Bakker, *Pastoral in Antebellum Southern Romance*; Grammer, *Pastoral and Politics in the Old South*.

[16] Simpson, *The Dispossessed Garden* 43;

[17] Cf. the following passage, in which the slaves are represented as wild animals who shun contact with man: "They are afraid of me, because I am a stranger, and take to their heels as soon as they see me. If I ever chance to get near enough to speak to one of them, he stares at me with a suspicious gaze ; and, after a moment, makes off at full speed, very much frightened, towards the cabins at some distance from the house" (*Swallow Barn* 308–309). Moreover, by placing the description of the slave quarter after a chapter in which Meriwether shows Littleton around the stables, the narrative establishes a perplexing connection between the two most valuable parts of the plantation "stock." It seems to be suggested that Meriwether's "Oratory" (434) upon the beauty of the cultivation and "improvement" (437) of horses also applies to the slaves. If the horses are kept "more for their nobleness of blood than for any purpose of service" (444) the same is claimed with reference to the slaves: they abide on the plantation in order to be slowly "improved" to the level of civilization. The assumption that slavery is a civilizing institution is most clearly stated in the following passage from *Swallow Barn*: "A bevy of domestics, in every stage of training, attended upon the table, presenting a lively type of the progress of civilization, or the march of intellect ; the veteran waiting man being well-contrasted with the rude half-monkey, half-boy, who seemed to have been for the first time admitted to the parlor ; whilst, between these two, were exhibited the successive degrees that mark the advance from the young savage to the

probably not their primary function to legitimize the master's absolute sway by de-humanizing the slave. Rather, Kennedy attempts to argue slavery out of politics by stressing that it is a phenomenon beyond human intervention, a part of natural history rather than of social and political history. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, Kennedy's representation of the slaves as a part of nature and natural history also has ideological functions that are quite independent from quarrels over the legitimacy of slavery. Indeed, the claim that their position in southern society allows the slaves to remain in a state of nearly perfect innocence[18] is not only a pastoral ratification of slavery but it is also a pastoral ratification of the changelessness of Virginia.[19] For if it is Kennedy's central hope that Virginia is somehow exempt from the usual laws of historical development, this proposition rests on the representation of slavery as a retarding moment in Virginian society. In the "Old Dominion," it is suggested, the slaves set the pace of history—and it is a very slow pace indeed.

In this context, it may be significant that Carey is more convincing as a "minstrel" than Hafen. The reason is that the slave is supposedly closer to the core of the southern symbolic order and to the meaning of southern history than the old Hessian. The status of the slaves as a link between southern society and a distant past is brought out also by Carey's function as a page for Meriwether. Whenever the planter attends the county court, where he "keeps the peace as if he commanded a garrison, and administers justice like a Cadi" (33), he is attended by Carey. The slave boasts an ornate coat that is so heavy that in warm weather he suffers "as much under his covering as an ancient knight of the Crusades, in his linked mail, on the sandy plains of Syria" (166). If Virginia life constantly turns into a pageant, it is supposedly the slaves who transform history into a stage and who take the lead in enacting fake feudal traditions. Of course, this is an effective ideological trick: putting down the unsettling parochial aspirations of southern slaveholders to the agency of the slaves, Kennedy distorts both the quality of southern ideologies and the violent reality of slavery.

In terms of plot structure, the pastoral urge to suspend history results in the absence of any serious action. In fact, *Swallow Barn* is close to being a still life. The only two major

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sedate and sophisticated image of the old-fashioned negro nobility" (326–327).

[18] The narrative actually implies that in the "Old Dominion" Africans are taking a permanent holiday from history: "I will not say that, in a high state of cultivation and of such self-dependence as they might possibly attain in a separate national existence, they might not become a more respectable people ; but I am quite sure they never could become a happier people than I find them here" (452–453).

[19] In fact, Simpson points in a similar direction when he argues that the pastoral design eventually turned into "the burden of the pastoral ideal" (62) because it forestalled an effective defense of slavery and the formulation of an effective political ideology.

events in the narrative are Ned Hazard's courting of Bel Tracy and the equally uneventful lawsuit about the "Old Mill." The latter shows the difficulty of economic improvements in Virginia. Long before the present of the story, Ned's grandfather dammed a small stream that constituted the border between Swallow Barn and the neighboring estate of the Tracies and built a mill. However, fed by an insufficient supply of water the mill soon had to be closed down. To gain space for the reservoir created by the damming-up of the Apple-pie, old Ned Hazard had bought ground from the neighboring Tracy family. For decades, this land has been the object of legal contentions between Isaac Tracy and the owners of Swallow Barn. Frank Meriwhether is eager to terminate the conflict, but does not know how to do so "without wounding the feelings of his neighbor" (151), for the latter cannot easily part with a case that has come to constitute an essential ritual for the old man. The narrative goes to great lengths in depicting the paradoxical situation of trying to coax Tracy into accepting a settlement in which all the disputed land is granted to him. The irony of the situation is heightened by the fact that the land is utterly worthless, for even though the Apple-pie rivulet was too small to feed the mill, it was still strong enough to carry away its damn during a storm, creating a useless expanse of marshland. The final victory of the small brook over the attempt to convert it into a source of progress is rendered as a fable on the resilience of the pastoral order: the intrusion of the “machine” into the “garden” has been repelled.[20]

The significance of the swamp image in *Swallow Barn* is highly ambiguous: in the first place, it implies a critique of southern improvidence and sloth, but it also underlines the admirable resilience of the southern order, for the swamp represents a successful denial of history. Even though Kennedy's narrator is often keenly critical of southern provincialism, his admiration for the idiosyncrasies of the Virginians, especially for their bold subversion of utilitarianism, is equally obvious. In a manner reminiscent of Wilbur J. Cash's *The Mind of the South*, Kennedy sometimes suggests that the peculiar achievement of Virginians is that they actually manage to live in a dream. If Cash asserted that the southern "tendency toward unreality, toward romanticism, and . . . toward hedonism" has been connected to the southern "physical world," which constitutes "a sort of cosmic conspiracy against reality in favor of romance,"[21] this is actually very close to Kennedy's perspective. In *Swallow Barn*, the landscape of Virginia is taken to be both the result of the inactivity of Southerners and the most important determinant of their "romantic" way of life.

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[20] Here again, the changelessness of Virginia is associated with the slaves: in their musings, Ned and the narrator conjure up the "elfish little negroes who have probably all sunk, hoary-headed, to the grave, leaving their effigies behind, as perfect as in the days when they themselves rode to mill" (144).

This is particularly evident in the description of a Fourth of July meeting that is held on board a James River ferry anchored at a "a mouldering wharf of logs" (159). In one of the most fascinating—and least ironic—descriptions of scenery in *Swallow Barn*, the narrator dwells on the "voluptuous landscape" (160) surrounding the landing where the "national anniversary" is held:

> It was a picture of that striking repose, which is peculiar to the tide-water views ; soft, indolent and clear, as if nature had retreated into this drowsy nook, and fallen asleep over her own image, as it was reflected from this beautiful mirror [i.e. the river]. The river was upwards of a mile in width, and upon its bosom were seen, for many a rood below, those alternate streaks of light and shade that are said to point out the channel, where its smooth surface was only ruffled by the frequent but lonely leap of some small fish above the water. A few shallops were hauled up on the beech, where some fishing nets were stretched upon stakes, or spread upon the fences on the bank. At the distance of two or three hundred yards from the shore there was a slim pole planted in the river, probably to mark a fishing-ground, and upon the very top of this was perched, with a whimsical air of unsociableness, a solitary swallow, apparently ruminating on the beauteous waste of waters below him ; whilst above this glittering expanse, some night-hawks skimmed, soared and darted in pursuit of the hordes of insects that bickered through the atmosphere. (160–161)

The passage is reminiscent of Mark Twain's lyric evocations of the Mississippi in *Huckleberry Finn* and in the first half of *Life on the Mississippi*. As in Twain's descriptions of the Mississippi, the observer attempts to *read* the river while being aware that its mysterious majesty, relativizing and overtowering human endeavors, cannot really be sounded. God-like, the stream is even above nature, causing nature and the dynamics of development inherent in it to "retreat" and fall asleep in the hypnotizing presence of its majesty. Jan Bakker characterizes the manner in which the view from the deck is represented as "a sort of Southern Midday Gothic, frozen in sunshine."[22] Indeed, Kennedy's description of the river scenery evokes the impression that Virginian society is approaching an entropic standstill.

In such an environment, which significantly includes an "extensive swamp" (159), civilization does not have a chance to grow vigorous. The scenery shows traces of abandoned efforts at economic activity, which are reminiscent of the dilapidated mill. Having "originally been used for . . . foreign trade," the landing is now "nothing more than the place of resort for a few river craft, used in carrying the country produce to market." The victory of nature over industry is symbolized by the ruins of what was "once the mansion of an emigrant merchant from Glasgow": a "brick house, with a part of the roof entirely gone," in which grows a "rank crop of Jamestown weed" (158–159).

The implications of the description are ambiguous. Read as an indictment, the

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[21] Cash 46.

[22] Bakker, "Time and Timelessness" 79. Cf. Bakker's discussion of the same passage in *Pastoral in Antebellum Southern Romance* 47, where the scene is characterized as "a stultifying emblem of rural stasis and isolation."

scenery epitomizes the negative effects of political provincialism: the decaying trading station is a suitable setting for a Fourth of July meeting where sectionalist sentiments are eagerly discussed, and the moored ferry is a fitting symbol for a society that is proud of doing without roads. At the same time, the passage can also be read as an apology for southern provinciality, in so far as it shows that rebellion against the sway of the river is futile. Read either way, the chapter about "The National Anniversary" suggests that Virginian society is insulated against history in a manner that is both charming and precarious.

As Leo Marx pointed out, the complicated relation between the image of the garden and the image of the swamp goes back to classical pastoral literature: Virgil's "ideal pasture has two vulnerable borders: one separates it from Rome, the other from the encroaching marshland."[23] If the pastoral aims to suspend history by establishing a precarious balance between civilization and nature, the swamp may be taken as a gloomier version of the pastoral order. The swamp emerges when the "pastoral economy" collapses and the garden is reclaimed by the wilderness. However, it is also possible to consider the swamp a radicalization of the pastoral order: luxuriantly living on its own, the swamp constitutes an archaic paradise. Thus, David C. Miller suggests that in nineteenth-century American culture there are signs for a gradual transition from resolutely negative to more positive connotations of the swamp image, which can partly be explained as a reaction to the "dominant industrial-capitalist order." Miller points out that the image of the swamp gained particular importance in representations of the American South.[24] Apparently, the western "myth of the garden" was being paralleled by a southern "myth of the swamp."

Indeed, while they are sometimes used to voice a criticism of southern improvidence, Kennedy's persistent references to Virginia's swamp landscapes[25] also articulate the specific longings described by Miller. However, while Miller points out the subversive functions acquired by the swamp image around the middle of the nineteenth century, in *Swallow Barn* it primarily serves to sublimate the potentially subversive impulse of escaping from the constraints of change. Simms's "Revolutionary romances" would soon use the swamp image for the creation of a sectionalist ethos, but Kennedy's swamp still expresses a predominantly integrationist design. In *Swallow Barn*, the southern swamp emerges as a circumscribed habitat, an endangered biotope that ought to be conserved as a holiday resort for the "picturesque tourist."

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[23] Marx 22.

[24] David C. Miller, *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989); quotes: 8–9. Rubin significantly calls his study on the literature and society of the Old South *The Edge of the Swamp*.

[25] Cf. the chapter "The Goblin Swamp" (*Swallow Barn* 248–262) for another extensive description of a swamp in *Swallow Barn*.

4.3 Generic Hybridity as Political Strategy

Kennedy's integrationist design is clearly manifest also in his ostentatious strategy of generic hybridity. In "A Word in Advance, from the Author to the Reader," written for the revised edition of 1851, Kennedy warned that *Swallow Barn* "is not a novel" (10) and then commented: "Our old friend Polonius had nearly hit it in his rigmarole of 'pastoral-comical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral'—which, saving 'the tragical,' may well make up my schedule" (11). Later in the text, the narrator tells his correspondent to be prepared for the "little romance of domestic life" which he is "about to weave out of . . . everyday occurrences" (80). The oxymoronic categorization of *Swallow Barn* as a "romance of domestic life" indicates that the narrative mixes elements from the "romance" and the domestic novel, producing a crossbreed that can be harnessed to both progressivism and conservatism. Kennedy's "romance" is open for assimilation because it has been domesticated. The hero is relegated to the household, where his culture-preserving activities turn into self-conscious antics that do not have any political significance.

In fact, it is tempting to view Ned (i.e. Edward) Hazard in *Swallow Barn* not only as a distant relative of Scott's Edward Waverley but also as a mock-heroic substitution for George Tucker's Edward Grayson in *The Valley of Shenandoah*. Mark Littleton writes to his correspondent: "A few years ago [Ned] was seized with a romantic fever which manifested itself chiefly in a conceit to visit South America, and play knight-errant in the quarrel of the Patriots. . . . [H]e came home the most disquixotted cavalier that ever hung up his shield at the end of a scurvy crusade" (52–53). The characterization is closely reminiscent of James Gildon's attempt to compromise Edward Grayson's heroism as "knight errantry"[26]—yet, in *Swallow Barn* the cynic's perspective, represented as benevolent irony, is that of the narrator.

As has been argued above, the precarious balance established by the narrative between the pragmatic ratification of change and the conservative opposition to change rests on its being a still life. In consequence, Ned Hazard's wooing of Bel Tracy is a series of non-events ironically distorted to mock-heroic dimensions. The labels provided for Ned's feats by the respective chapter titles evoke a heroic plot with which the real occurrences are comically at odds. Thus, the chapter entitled "Knight Errantry" (351–358) recounts his attempt to regain Bel's good will by catching "Fairbourne," her escaped falcon (which, of course, is really a hawk). The following chapter, "A Joust at Utterance" (359–368), shows Ned engaging in a pointless and decidedly un-genteel fistfight with a notorious troublemaker. At the end of this chapter, the narrator comments sardonically: "we regained Swallow Barn : returning like knights to a

bannered castle from a successful inroad,—flushed with heat and victory,—covered with dust and glory ; our enemies subdued and our lady's pledge redeemed" (368). And Harvey Riggs, who serves as an extension of the narrator's ironic voice, comments on Ned's embarrassing attempt at chivalry: "Fancy that you have heard of a tilting match between a bull and a cavalier, and that the bull was beaten. Romance and chivalry are souvereign varnishes for cracked crowns and bloody noses" (385).

When she learns of the fistfight, Bel is greatly disconcerted. Ned responds to her displeasure by symptoms of love-sickness, which are described in a short chapter entitled: "Signs of a Hero" (386–392). Here, the willfulness with which the "romance" plot pattern is imposed onto the scene is once again brought home. According to the narrator, Bel's learning of the quarrel was "one of those unlucky strokes of fortune to which the principal actors in romance have been subject from time immemorial. This therefore, gives me strong hopes that [Ned] is really destined to be a hero of some note before I am done with him" (386). The passage announces that the "picturesque tourist" will eventually withdraw from the scene and return from the periphery to the center, from provisional and ironic "romance" to everyday reality. Before he does so, Ned has successfully confessed his love to Bel—a somewhat embarrassing drawing-room occurrence that is recounted under the disproportionate heading "The Fate of a Hero" (420–434).

After its two uneventful strands of action (the swampland lawsuit and Ned's wooing of Bel) have been brought to a conclusion, the narrative disintegrates. First, it veers into the chapter about the slave quarter, which, in its turn, leads to an inserted story that recounts the tragic fate of the slave Abe. Here again, the particular significance attributed to the slave population as embodiment of the conventions and abstractions at the heart of the southern symbolic order becomes apparent. Too proud to serve on the plantation, Abe was put under the service of a pilot on the Chesapeake and died in the attempt of saving the crew of a shipwrecked boat during a furious storm. In volunteering for this kind of hopeless service, it is pointed out, the slave was "impelled by that love of daring which the romancers call chivalry" (482). If the old slave Carey is the nearest approximation to a medieval "minstrel," Abe is the most authentic translation of a "romance" hero into the present of the nineteenth-century. Indeed, his fate spurs the narrator to real pathos: "I say, it was a gallant sight to see such heroism shining out in an humble slave of the Old Dominion !" (483).

Such pathos, however, is possible only in connection with the vague tale about a dead slave. Otherwise, the text takes pains to show that the "Old Dominion" is not so much a (political) reality as an image that is consciously conjured up by the visitor from

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[26] Cf. G. Tucker, *The Valley of Shenandoah* 1: 183.

the North. By a twofold strategy, Kennedy finally provides a closure which contains the political implications of Littleton's "sojourn" in the South. As Walter Scott's wavering heroes have to be conducted from the "romantic" realm of the Highlands back into the British Empire, Kennedy's traveler also has to be piloted out of the "Old Dominion," recrossing the boundary that separates the realm of ambiguity from the real world. Littleton is made to do so by the sluice of the plantation library, where he withdraws during a prolonged spell of rain. Reading in the library, the narrator ceases to be a participant in the life of his Virginian relatives and undergoes a process of unlearning. Accordingly, the narrative shifts from the description of plantation life to an account of Littleton's reading experiences. He spends his time perusing an old account of the life of Captain John Smith, one of the first colonists of Virginia. Having read the story Smith's life when he was still a child, Littleton now finds a new relationship to the text:

> The narrative was no longer the mere fable that delighted my childhood ; but there I had it in its most authentic form, with the identical print, paper and binding in which the story was first given to the world by its narrator—for aught that I knew, the Captain himself—perhaps the Captain's good friend, old Sam Purchas, who had such a laudable thirst for the wonderful. This was published, too, when thousands were living to confute the author if he falsified in any point. (496)

Describing his intellectual adventures in the library, Littleton employs the tone of the professed antiquarian, mixing ironic fabulation and scholarly pedantry in the manner of Scott's narrators. The implicit theme of these passages is what Scott discussed as the conflicting claims of "romance" and "real history," i.e. the twin dichotomy of fiction versus fact and text versus history. Paradoxically, as a grown-up the narrator seems to be charmed even more thoroughly by Smith's account than when he was a child. Now, the distinction between fact and fiction come to be totally obliterated. Smith's story ceases to be a "mere fable" because Littleton is actually holding the volume in his hands. Evidently, the error—or the trick—is in the confusion of medium and message, since the material authenticity of the book is purposefully mistaken for the historicity of its content. Littleton underscores the implicit irony by stressing the uncertainty of authorship. Even the year of publication is obscure because the last number of the date given on the title-page is illegible (495).

It becomes apparent that the secularization of "romance" goes along with the mythification of history. History is mixed up with myth, in the same manner in which "romance" is mixed up with domestic fiction and the still life. While George Tucker had insisted that "romance" once had been real but was irrevocably gone, Kennedy follows Scott in suggesting that "romance" has never been quite real. If “romance” has always been a construction, however, it can apparently be continued into the "real history" of the present. Accordingly, Mark Littleton's confusion of medium and message in reading

the account of Smith's life points to a strategy of displacing politics into the literary, where it would pose a formal problem amenable to stylistic solutions. Kennedy's narrative achieves a hybridization of genres and modes that is purposefully confused with a mediation of the glaring oppositions of permanence and change, regionalism and nationalism, plantation and industrial manufacture, slavery and freedom, "South" and "North." In *Swallow Barn*, the "Old Dominion" is represented as an imaginative realm, a fictitious text, where politics might be transcended by style.

5. Tilting the Balance: The Historical Romances of John P. Kennedy and William A. Caruthers

5.1 "Romance" as Absolute History: Kennedy's *Horse-Shoe Robinson*

In *Swallow Barn*, Kennedy's designation of Virginia as the "Old Dominion," a semi-fictional realm of pastness and stasis rather than an actual political entity, indicates his attempt to suspend the course of history, opening up a space for intervention in intersectional conflicts over the issues of slavery and political or economic modernization. The appeal of such a strategy even to later analysts as well as its eventual failure are reflected in Parrington's somewhat naive assumption that the "armed clash over slavery very probably might have been averted if the spirit of the Old Dominion had prevailed."[1] Like Kennedy had done, Parrington obviously still thought of the "Old Dominion" as a place that was somehow exempt from the divisive powers of modern history.

However, there is a decisive difference between Kennedy's and Parrington's visions of what Virginia originally was like. According to the latter the true "spirit of the Old Dominion" was "Jeffersonian," by which he meant cosmopolitan, classicist and rationalist, rather than "romantic." In fact, Parrington suggested that "picturesque" and "romantic" fictions in the manner of Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* portended the decline of Virginia's better intellectual traditions:

> At the time when the romantics were beginning their work of constructing the plantation tradition the intellectual renaissance of Virginia was passing. With the fading of the French influence after 1820 came increasing isolation and a conscious sectionalism. Intellectual discipline and catholic tastes became rarer. . . . The revolutionary mood was gone, and after 1820 the stimulus to intellectual life grew weaker. English romanticism as exemplified in the work of Scott and Tom Moore was the single foreign influence that spread amongst the plantations, and the new literature accepted the cult of the picturesque romantic.[2]

As Parrington thought, war eventually became inevitable when a "Virginia Renaissance" of liberal intellectual activity was superseded by a "Renaissance of Slavery"—thus the titles of the first two sections of Parrington's analysis of the antebellum South. Significantly, these sections in *Main Currents* are linked by a chapter on "Adventures in Romance." Here, it is implied that the movement from an "old" antebellum South, in which Parrington found much that is admirable, to an intellectually more barren and ideologically more aggressive "new" antebellum South was reflected in and assisted by a formal development in southern fiction: the transition "from the

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1 Parrington 9.
2 Parrington 28–29.

essay-sketch . . . to the full-blown romance of love and adventure" which took place in the early 1830s.[3]

While Parrington's account may be biased (especially in its monolithic interpretation of southern ideological history), there actually are indications of the aesthetic and ideological shift which he saw in the literary history of the antebellum South. It seems to be manifest in the development from *Swallow Barn* to Kennedy's second major fiction, *Horse-Shoe Robinson* (1835). Thus, Jan Bakker interprets the difference between the two books as a regression from irony to idyll. While he sees *Swallow Barn* as a "modern" and thus an "inverted pastoral" with a subtle yet firm critical note, he notes that in *Horse-Shoe Robinson* Kennedy "surprisingly . . . allows his nostalgia to get the upper hand."[4] If *Swallow Barn* seems the work of a cautious progressive, Bakker reads Kennedy's second fiction as a flat-out reactionary text, concluding that "in the final analysis, Kennedy was not very progressive after all."[5]

Indeed, although there are no indications that Kennedy's political or ideological postures significantly changed between 1832 and 1835, the movement from *Swallow Barn* to *Horse-Shoe Robinson* is a likely choice if the (daunting) attempt should be made to determine where southern literature began to deviate from the mainstream of antebellum American ideologies. It has been argued above that *Swallow Barn* achieved mediation by a strategy of generic hybridization which evoked the ethos of "romance" and simultaneously attempted to curb its dynamic potentials. For this reason, the text had to be a still life: a narrative that was limited to the rendition of trivial household matters ironically distorted to mock-heroic dimensions. If a fully developed plot had been allowed to enter into the mixture, the precarious generic and ideological balance would have been likely to tilt.

It may be argued that this is exactly what happened in *Horse-Shoe Robinson*. While *Swallow Barn* is characterized by the ironic quotation of literary conventions, cautiously playing them off against each other in order to test their mediative ideological potentials, Kennedy's second fiction gives in to their affirmation. While *Swallow Barn* deals with the inconsequential domestic antics of contemporary Virginians, *Horse-Shoe Robinson* is set in 1780 and recounts the deeds of the eponymous Virginian revolutionary. Turning to the epic matter of the American Revolution, Kennedy seems to have sacrificed the domestic stasis and the careful ironic distance he had observed in his first major fiction.[6]

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3 Parrington, "Adventures in Romance," *Romantic Revolution* 39–56; quote: 39.

4 Jan Bakker, "Time and Timelessness" 77. Cf. Bakker's discussion of *Swallow Barn* and *Horse-Shoe Robinson* in *Pastoral in Antebellum Southern Romance* 40–54.

5 Bakker, "Time and Timelessness" 86.

6 Ernest E. Leisy commented on the absence of plot in *Swallow Barn*: "What Kennedy had yet to learn was the management of the sustained narrative of a full-fledged romance"

In the preface to the first edition of *Horse-Shoe Robinson* Kennedy presented this shift as to ideological purport and narrative technique with ostentatious good humor:

> As yet, only the political and documentary history of that war has been written. Its romantic or picturesque features have been left for that industrious tribe of chroniclers, of which I hold myself to be an unworthy member, and who of late, as the public is aware, set about the business in good earnest. It shall go hard with us if we do not soon bring to light every remnant of tradition that the war has left.[7]

The passage stresses the difference of historiography and fiction: after the historiographer comes the fictionist, dealing with the subject of the Revolution in a more haphazard manner.[8] Kennedy's ironic representation of the novelists as an "industrious tribe of chroniclers" who are going about the "business" of bringing something "to light" plays on the notion that fiction cannot claim the dignity of professional scholarship. As he explains, the Revolutionary War constitutes a fit subject for fiction only since it has come to be far enough removed into the haze of the past:

> An opinion has heretofore prevailed that the Revolution was too recent an affair for our story-telling craft to lay hands upon it. But this objection, ever since the fiftieth anniversary, has been nullified by common consent,—that being deemed the fair poetical limit which converts tradition into truth, and takes away all right of contradiction from a surviving actor in the scene. The pension roll is manifestly growing thinner, and the widows—married young after the peace—make a decided majority on the list. These are the second-hand retailers of the marvels of the war; and it is observed that, like wine which has descended to the heir, the events have lost none of their flavor or value by the transmission. This is all so much clear gain to our fraternity; and it is obvious, therefore, that we must thrive. (11)

Kennedy claims fictional license by setting up the novelist as a kind of picaroon scholar and by pointing out the evasiveness of historical truth. Novelists, it seems, may feel free to practice their fancy on the subject of the Revolutionary War since its historical truth, having passed through several agencies of "transmission," has become irrecoverable anyway.

(introduction, *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, by Kennedy [New York: American Book Company, 1937] xvi). If Leisy thus evaluated the development from *Swallow Barn* to *Horse-Shoe Robinson* as indication of Kennedy's increasing literary skill, Edd W. Parks was more alert to the ideological problems involved: "Wisely or unwisely, Kennedy abandoned the contemporary scene and the casually constructed novel for the historical romance" (*Ante-Bellum Southern Literary Critics* [1962; Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1978] 69).

[7] John Pendleton Kennedy, *Horse-Shoe Robinson: A Tale of the Tory Ascendancy* (1835); 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Putnam, 1852); ed. and introd. Ernest E. Leisy (New York: American Book Comp., 1937) 11. Subsequent page references will occur parenthetically in the text.

[8] Kennedy's construction of a chronological succession of historiography and fiction in the exploration of the Revolutionary War is not quite correct. Cf. Michael Kammen *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (1978; New York: Oxford UP, 1980).

However, the preface also invites a different reading that inverts the ironic subordination of fiction to historiography. Viewing the process of "transmission" as a process of degeneration by which truth comes to be distorted into fiction is only one of two possible perspectives. For as the simile of aging wine suggests, "transmission" may also be seen as a process of refinement which "converts tradition into truth." It is implied that the facts of "political history," as they are gleaned from official documents by the historian, are only so much dead matter, while the "remnants of tradition" which the fictionist "brings to light" and embellishes may constitute an active force in the present. Kennedy's argument in the preface to *Horse-Shoe Robinson* certainly is ironical; yet, in contrast to *Swallow Barn*, the irony does not disengage the fiction from reality but, conversely, serves to excuse a feat of myth-making aimed at the transformation of reality. While *Swallow Barn* was governed by the paradigm of ironic nostalgia, *Horse-Shoe Robinson* wavers between ironically disclaiming and affirmatively claiming historicity. In fact, having sportively pointed out the relativity of historical truth, at the end of the preface the persona of the author surprisingly professes to have been "scrupulous to preserve the utmost historical accuracy" (11).

In the introduction to the second edition of *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, appearing in 1852, Kennedy reinforces this ambiguous strategy by locating his source in oral history. He claims to have actually met a person called Horse-Shoe Robinson on a business trip to South Carolina in 1819. Though already in his seventies, the venerable yeoman struck the young lawyer as an impressive "woodland hero" (8), a vivid impersonation of the vigorous vitality of America's Revolutionary tradition. Allegedly, all the "leading incidents" of the novel are built on the relations of the real Robinson, and some are even given "almost in the very words of my authority" (9–10). Kennedy concludes with a telling anecdote. When the novel was first published in 1835, the author sent a copy to Robinson. After the narrative had been read to him, the old man—who would then have been close to ninety years of age—was asked for his opinion. He is said to have replied: "It is all true and right—in its right place—excepting about them women, which I disremember. That mought be true, too; but my memory is treacherous—I disremember" (10).

If the story is not strictly true, Kennedy suggests, it still represents an authorized tradition. Both the preface and the introduction to *Horse-Shoe Robinson* intimate a belief that the imaginative reconstruction of history may ultimately reveal a higher truth than factual historiography. While *Swallow Barn* showed "romance" and the "picturesque" to be constructions located in the eye of the beholder or springing from the quixotic delusions of Virginians, *Horse-Shoe Robinson* grants the "romantic or picturesque features" of the Revolutionary War their own kind of authenticity. In the former fiction, the "Old Dominion" was postulated as a surrogate "romance," a touristic

enclave established within the realm of modernity through the ironic suspension of disbelief—in *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, however, Kennedy pretends to steal a glimpse at the real thing hidden in the haze of the past.

The "romancing" of the American Revolution and the Revolutionary War practiced by Kennedy and other southern fictionists was based on the claim that these events are located beyond the beginnings of (American national) history. In consequence, the Revolution acquires a status similar to the original “romance” which Scott assumed to have been at the basis of the process of history. Kennedy's Revolution is an absolute History, a story of origins that aspires to the transcendence of myth. Bakker's remark that in *Horse-Shoe Robinson* Kennedy's "glance goes back in history and lingers there, where time is dead,"[9] seems to indicate this mythic absoluteness of Revolutionary history as represented by Kennedy. According to Scott, the Urtext of the original “romance” is irrecoverably lost. Like Scott's Waverley, however, Kennedy and other American "romancers" were tempted to sell later recreations for the original text. Instead of accommodating the past to the present, as Waverley eventually learns to do, Kennedy and his colleagues felt tempted to accommodate the present to an invented past that they declared to be a higher truth. In *Horse-Shoe Robinson* Kennedy elevates the Revolution above mere story or history and moves it to a transhistorical realm of universal significance. Transformed into "romance," the Revolution emerges as a scripture that contains the figures of American history and awaits typological exegesis by fiction: the real "romance" of the past, the reader is made to believe, contains the future.

By promising "An Adventure wherein It Is Apparent that the Actions of Real Life Are Full as Marvelous as the Inventions of Romance" (242) the title to chapter XXII of *Horse-Shoe Robinson* explicitly claims the coincidence of "romance" and reality in the realm of original history.[10] The chapter relates Robinson's astonishing feat of capturing five British soldiers with the sole assistance of a boy in his early teens and without firing as much as a single shot. Indeed, part of the "romance" of the Revolutionary War seems to be in the unlikely victory of the powerless over the powerful. The narrator lauds partisan leaders like Marion, Sumpter and Pickens for "keeping up an apparently hopeless partisan warfare, which had the promise neither of men, money, nor arms,—and yet which was so nobly sustained, amidst accumulated discomfitures, as to lead eventually to the subversion of the 'Tory ascendency' [sic] and the expulsion of the

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[9] Bakker, "Time and Timelessness" 83.
[10] Cf. the title of chapter III: "An Incident That Savors of Romance" (*Horse-Shoe Robinson* 32).

British power" (242–243).

Kennedy suggests that this act of subverting an established power structure depended on the partisans' close alliance with nature. Operating from the topoi of "romance," i.e. the recesses of forests and swamps, they were successfully maintaining a secret deep structure right underneath the infrastructure of the British army: "the high road from Blackstock's towards Ninety-six was almost as necessary for communication between Sumpter and Pickens, as between the several British garrisons" (243). Provided with such historical background information, the reader observes Robinson "cautiously urging his way into the deep forest, by the more private path into which he had entered" and evading an encounter with the enemy by hiding "under the cover of the thicket afforded him by a swamp" (243). David C. Miller's description of the symbolic function of the swamp in nineteenth-century American culture, which has been referred to in the previous chapter, can be brought to bear also on this scene: the image of Robinson taking "cover" in the "thicket" of a swamp points to the pristine originality of the American resistance against British domination.[11]

Constantly stressing the importance of the secret means of travel afforded by Robinson's close knowledge of the natural environment, the narrative suggests that the foundations of American history were laid by branching off from the mainroads of British history into a "more private path" leading through a "deep forest." The Revolution can be interpreted as a "romance" because it is a salvational renewal of history in accordance with the natural order of things. It constitutes an alternative history of which the swamp and the forest are concise symbolic expressions. Having stressed the courage needed to oppose the omnipotent "Tory ascendancy," the narrator comments on the spirit of the South Carolina partisans:

> There were heroes of this mould in South Carolina, who entered with the best spirit of chivalry into the national quarrel . . . Some few, still undiscouraged by the portents of the times, retreated into secret places, gathered their few patriot neighbors together, and contrived to keep in awe the soldier-government that now professed to sway the land. They lived on the scant aliment furnished in the woods, slept in the tangled brakes and secret places of the fen, exacted contributions from the adherents of the crown, and by rapid movements of their woodland cavalry and brave blows, accomplished more than thrice their numbers would have achieved in ordinary warfare. (129)

Due to their close collaboration with nature, the warfare of the partisans is not only a *bellum iustum*, it is also "picturesque." In other words, "romance" and the "picturesque" are related through the perception of the Revolution as a point of convergence between the natural order and human history. Fleeing from Tory soldiers who are raiding the homesteads of revolutionaries, Robinson and the heroine miraculously arrive in the

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[11] D. C. Miller, *Dark Eden*.

camp of the partisan leader Marion, who "hovered about this border more like a goblin than a champion whose footsteps might be tracked" (416).[12] Situated on an island of firm ground in the middle of a swamp, the partisan camp is characterized by "lively, picturesque beauty." Mildred exclaims upon the sight: "We have seen war in its horrors . . . and here it is in all its romance!" The "romance" of the partisans' guerilla strategies is contrasted with the "horrors" spread by the British army and the Loyalists: while the former conduct a just war in alliance with nature, the latter represent a political history that has degenerated into a flat contradiction of the natural order.

Of course, Marion conforms to the heroine's notion of a "romantic" hero: he addresses Mildred in a "gay and chivalrous tone," and when he has to break camp this happens with such speed that it "seemed almost like enchantment" (407–411). Later, the party hit upon Campbell's "woodland cavalry" of "mountaineers,"[13] the battle force of the natural order who have descended from the Alleghenies like a force of divine intervention. The encounter takes place in the middle of the night in a "deep and lonely forest." Robinson has been attracted to Campbell's resting-place by the "gigantic torch" of a pine that the soldiers have set ablaze, a scene of "picturesque beauty" (509–511). The novel ends with the account of the Battle of King's Mountain in which Campbell's "army of mountaineers" vanquishes Ferguson's army of regular soldiers and Loyalists: it is a victory of the "backwoods" over the military machinery of the British, of "romance," the "picturesque" and the natural order over profane political history.[14]

By representing Carolina partisans according to the conventions of chivalric "romance" *Horse-Shoe Robinson* follows the strategy described by Fredric Jameson as a refashioning of older narrative forms in new social and cultural contexts.[15] Moreover, the narrative self-consciously reflects this process: the quality of the Revolutionary war as a "romance" and of the partisans as "chivalric" is never taken for granted. Describing the reaction of Campbell's men to Mildred's story, the narrator remarks that "there was

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[12] The South Carolinian partisan captain Francis Marion, often referred to as the "Swamp Fox," is a historical figure. He looms large in background of Simms's fiction, who also wrote a biography of the hero.

[13] Again and again, the association of Campbell's partisans with mountains and woods is stressed in *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, e.g.: "a hastily levied band of mountaineers" (499); "this suddenly-levied mountain army" (517); "army of mountaineers" (519); "woodland cavalry" (505); "this peculiar woodland army" (529).

[14] The contrast between the partisans and a professional army is clearly brought out: "The troops . . . consisted of distinct bodies of volunteers, who had each assembled under their own leaders, without the requisition of the government, entirely independent of each other, and more resembling the promiscuous meeting of hunters than a regularly-organized military corps" (500). Only later Campbell, who is represented as a true mountaineer, is by common consent made the "chosen leader of our gallant and efficient little army" (505).

[15] Cf. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 141.

even a tincture of the romance of chivalry in the fervor with which . . . they pledged themselves to her service" (513; my emphasis). If Kennedy appropriates the medieval rhetoric of "chivalry" by substituting the "mountaineer" as a new referent, he makes sure to bring home this act of appropriation. In fact, he seems to relish the irregularity of associating Campbell's "hastily levied band of mountaineers" and "backwoodsmen" (499) with a feudal army of knights. Campbell's men, it is implied, are cavaliers not because of their social standing but primarily for the reason that, in contrast to medieval foot-soldiers, they are mounted on horseback (the literal meaning of “chevalier”, of course, is “horseman”). The narrative testifies to the incongruence of the association by pointing out the "peculiar" aspect of Campbell's troop (e.g., 529). The paradox, however, is not intended to satirize the partisans, but serves to underscore the fundamental meaning of the American Revolution as a subversion of feudalism. In the Revolution a democratized ethos of heroism was supposedly translated to the United States. The real "romance of chivalry" pertains to the partisans of the American Revolution rather than to the feudal knights of the Middle Ages.

This democratization of "romance" and "chivalry" is most clearly evident in the peculiar manner in which the narrative realizes the role of the hero. According to the decorum of conventional narrative, Mildred's lover Arthur Butler—a true gentleman and "possessor, by inheritance, of what was then called a handsome fortune" (87)—ought to be the hero. Indeed, it is obvious that the young South Carolinian consciously aspires to the valor of knighthood when he tells his beloved Mildred: "You would not have your soldier bear himself otherwise than as a true knight, who would win and wear his lady-love by good set blows when there was need for them?" Mildred, however, is aware of the constructedness of this kind of heroism: to Butler, she describes herself playfully as a "foolish, conceited, heady, prattling truant . . . that first took a silly liking to your pompous strut, and made a hero to her imagination out of a boasting ensign" (44). Actually, Butler has been promoted to the rank of major not because of any particular merits but, as Robinson reminds him, "by occasion of the wiping out of a few friends from the upper side of the adjutant's roll" (57). In spite of his pretensions to knightly prowess, the young man is not described as setting as much as a single "good set blow" and spends most of the time in British captivity.

When Robinson manages to get Butler free, the major is immediately recaptured since he unwisely makes it a point to attend the funeral of a young man killed in his liberation. Indeed, other than the wily Robinson, Butler always acts in accordance with the categorical imperative of gentlemanly honor. The British officer St. Jermyn, who later is revealed to be a villainous schemer, accuses the young Whig of an "exaggerated and delusive sense of honor" (266). Such a sense of "honor" is the hallmark of aristocracy. Butler's character is so essentially and undeniably aristocratic

that the perceptive daughter of a miller at once sees through his disguise as a commoner (146). For all his inactivity, then, Butler is still a kind of hero. However, he is less an actor than a cause of action. His primary role is as an almost messianic sufferer. Pondering the effects of his imminent execution upon Mildred he actually thinks of himself in that manner: "Heaven grant, my girl, that thy fortitude may triumph over the martyrdom of him that loves thee better than his life!" (268). Although Butler represents the values at the heart of the Whig cause, this symbolic function paradoxically condemns him to inaction.

In nineteenth-century fiction, the role of impersonating the object or the ethos of a cause was usually delegated to female characters. And indeed, Butler has many qualities that would have been thought of as feminine. In contrast to the vigorous Robinson, who never loses his confidence and mirthful mood (cf. 247), Butler is frequently despondent and tired. Thus, arriving in Innis's camp as a prisoner, he "was too weary even to be troubled with the cares of his present condition; and, without waiting, therefore . . . he flung himself upon the couch and sank into a profound and grateful sleep" (241). Robinson, on the other hand, acts as Butler's guide and mentor. In dangerous situations, it is the blacksmith who makes the prompt decisions; and when the travelers realize that they are about to run into an ambush, Butler explicitly tells his companion: "I will be ruled by you!" (187). The relationship between the two men is slightly reminiscent of that between Leatherstocking and one of his female charges, with the difference that Robinson is not afflicted by the trapper's shyness: conducting his weary major to the waiting Mildred after the Battle of King's mountain, the reader observes Robinson as "springing to the ground, he swung Butler from the horse, with scarce more effort than he would have used in handling a child" (541).

In his classic study *Cavalier and Yankee* William Taylor comments on the transformation of the concept of the hero in many so-called "plantation novels":

> In the plantation novel, however, the commoner and the genteel half-breed rather than the gentleman began to receive the most creative emphasis. The gentleman planter for writers like Kennedy—himself half Scotch-Irish—became less a cultural ideal than a touchstone against which the emerging stock could measure its historical credentials, its vitality and its promise. The result of this fictive introspection was a virtual revolution within the social world of the novel, a near overturning of the social order on the legendary plantation and the emergence of the Scotch-Irish yeoman as a chivalric hero second to none.[16]

From the very beginning of the novel, Robinson is not only the most active and attractive character, he is also the one talking, recounting the history of the war up to the commencement of the narrative and seasoning his discourse with witty turns of rhetoric. He is introduced as "an athlete whom the sculptors might have studied to

improve the Hercules" (17) and whose valor has already earned him a wide-spread reputation, so that to mention his name inspires awe in strangers (36–37). Eventually, the conventions of chivalric heroism come to be fully realized in the representation of Robinson: "[T]hen, with a jaunty air of careless mirth, springing into his saddle and receiving his trusty weapon from the young comrade of his late gallant adventure, he rode forth with as stout a heart as ever went with knight of chivalry to the field of romantic renown" (338).

The sentence is ironic in that it foregrounds the displacement of feudal rhetoric to the representation of a South Carolina backwoods blacksmith. Robinson, however, is not the target of the irony. Rather, the passage celebrates the empowerment of the common man that is inherent in his appropriation of the knight's role. Moreover, in the description of the Battle of King's Mountain, Robinson's association with medieval knighthood almost completely loses its ironic dimension. The protagonist fights so valiantly that his exploits "would not ill deserve the pen of Froissart" (536). Again, it would be mistaken to read the self-consciousness evident in Kennedy's use of "chivalric" rhetoric as a deflation of "romance" conventions. Rather, the implications are both democratic and nationalist: it is suggested that American yeomen like Robinson are truer heroes of "romance" than the knights celebrated in medieval narratives. The former are closer to nature; they are more immediately connected to the original order, the Urtext of "romance" (of which chivalric "romances" are only decadent recreations). *Horse-Shoe Robinson* attempts to revert the alienation effected by human history—what Scott had described as the "division" of the original community into "ranks"—by divesting the concept of "chivalric" and "romantic" heroism of the bias of social status.

Of course, Kennedy does not intend to abolish the stratification of American society—rather, he aims at a social regeneration that would be effected by a renewed covenant between the upper and the lower classes. The novel symbolically obliterates the dissociation of society along class lines by creating a composite hero consisting of a passive aristocrat and a potent yeoman who closely cooperate. This composite hero figure points at the heterogeneous ideological structure of the narrative. George Dekker's remark that "[m]ost of our major writers of historical romance have been cautiously progressivist in social philosophy"[17] holds true also for *Horse-Shoe Robinson*—but the qualification "cautiously" has to be carefully underlined. In fact, Kennedy's narrative aims at being conservative and progressivist at the same time: the construction of an absolute History and the composite hero are means by which the narrative seeks to mediate passivity and action, persistence and change, aristocratic

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[16] Taylor 157.
[17] Dekker 42.

and democratic ideologies.

5.2 Medievalist Progressivism: Caruthers' Paradoxical "Romances" of Chivalry

Though the second volume of William A Caruthers' novel *The Cavaliers of Virginia: Or, The Recluse of Jamestown: An Historical Romance of the Old Dominion* appeared a couple of months before *Horse-Shoe Robinson*,[18] Caruthers' fictionalization of Bacon's Rebellion in seventeenth-century Virginia reads like a further intensification of the formal and ideological affirmations evident in Kennedy's novel. This is especially true for Caruthers' emphatic use of the rhetoric of "chivalry." As the novelist's biographer Curtis Carroll Davis claimed, the "prevalence of the 'cavalier' theme in the twentieth-century Old Dominion, if it can be ascribed to the work of any one man, is to be ascribed to that of William Alexander Caruthers."[19]

However, Caruthers was an unlikely candidate for the role of a "Chronicler of the Cavaliers," as Davis called him in the title of his biography. The physician from the Shenandoah Valley had little in common with the Tidewater gentry whose ancestors he glorified in his fiction. He was the son of a merchant, born into what Davis described as "a bourgeois society, with commercial and religious emphases," he opposed slavery in principle, and he contributed to a memorial addressed to the Virginia Convention of 1829–30 which demanded democratic reform in order to curtail the supremacy of the Virginian East.[20] Indeed, while the rhetoric of "chivalry" tends to be associated with parochial southern ideologies and while R. D. Watson suggests that Caruthers' fiction "contributed to the widely held impression that the North and the South were

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[18] The second volume of *The Cavaliers of Virginia* probably appeared late in January 1835: cf. Curtis Carroll Davis, *Chronicler of the Cavaliers: A Life of the Virginia Novelist Dr. William A. Caruthers* (Richmond, VA: Dietz, 1953) 527.

[19] C. C. Davis 130.

[20] C. C. Davis 21. Caruthers' opposition to slavery is clearly expressed in numerous passages of his first novel *The Kentuckian in New York* (1834); facsimile reprint, Americans in Fiction Series, 2 vols in 1 (Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg, 1968). Thus, in the novel a young Virginian declares with reference to his impressions on a tour through North Carolina that "the poor of a slave-country are the most miserable and the most wretched of all the human family. The grades of society in this state are even farther apart than in Virginia. Here, there is one immense chasm from the rich to the abject poor. . . . You know I am no *abolitionist* in the incendiary meaning of the term ; yet I cannot deny from you and myself, that they [i.e. the slaves] are an incubus upon our prosperity. This we would boldly deny, if a Yankee uttered it in our hearing ; but to ourselves, we must e'en confess it. If I am, therefore, an abolitionist, it is not for conscience-sake, but from policy and patriotism" (1: 76–77). At the same time, Caruthers came to own a considerable number of slaves when he married the heiress of a large Georgia sea island planter. When he got into financial difficulties, the author first began to rent out his wife's slaves and eventually sold them (cf. C. C. Davis 72–74; 89).

fundamentally incompatible cultures,"[21] the author really was a nationalist rather than a secessionist.

In his first novel, *The Kentuckian in New York* (1834), Caruthers actively strove to diminish sectional prejudice. Davis may be justified in regarding *The Kentuckian* as "the earliest authentically intersectional novel" in American literature,[22] for Caruthers took pains to construct a somewhat bizarre narrative that brings together almost all the regions and character types of the United States in a gesture of mutual understanding and good will: a young Virginian traveling to South Carolina in order to woo a plantation belle exchanges letters with a friend from South Carolina who, in the company of a cherished old slave and an outspoken Kentucky drover, is meanwhile pursuing a mysterious New England beauty to New York. Simultaneously set on a South Carolina plantation and in New York City (and a variety of other places) the novel not only includes scenes from fashionable society in both localities, but also realistic descriptions of a slave quarter and a metropolitan slum. The obvious didactic objective of furthering intersectional understanding is combined with the intention of relativizing the meaning of class distinctions within American society. Thus, the eponymous Kentuckian is much more than a comical frontier buffoon. His opinions on the aberrations of fashionable life are evidently sound, and the young upper-class Carolinian eventually learns to accept him as an (almost) equal companion.

Clement Eaton described Caruthers' first book as a "novel of realistic criticism of Southern life" written before the author "turned to romanticizing the land of Dixie" in his later fiction.[23] And indeed, the differences between *The Kentuckian in New York* and *The Cavaliers of Virginia* as to plot, setting and tone are startling, particularly since the two novels were published in close succession.[24] In fact, Caruthers was conscious of the difference between his two works. In a note attached at the end of *The Kentuckian in New York*, the author announced the imminent publication of his second novel and explained:

> We confess to our kind readers who have travelled with us thus far (and to none else shall it be revealed) that we have put forth "the Kentuckian," with all his sins upon his head, with some such intention of betraying them into a smile of good-humor with us. We trust, therefore, that his adventures will be taken as nothing more than our introductory story in this our maiden effort to get into their good graces. This course was thought the more necessary by a southern aspirant as there is evidently a

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[21] R. D. Watson, *The Cavalier in Virginia Fiction* 145–146.

[22] C. C. Davis viii. John Neal's *Randolph* (1823) and George Tucker's *The Valley of Shenandoah* (1824) are earlier fictions that contain typical features of the intersectional novel.

[23] Eaton, *Freedom-of-Thought Struggle* 49.

[24] The appearance in 1834 of both *The Kentuckian* and the first volume of *The Cavaliers* makes it probable that Caruthers worked on the two novels simultaneously. C. C. Davis, however, quotes internal evidence that seems to suggest that work on the first novel was well under way as early as 1832 (440, note 24).

> current in American literature, the fountain-head of which lies north of the Potomac, and in which a southern is compelled to navigate up the stream if he jumps in too far south.
>
> These views may in some measure, perhaps, apologize for the author's having chosen such a hero, and such a location, in preference to the Cavalier Refugees of Jamestown, of his own loved native soil, around whose jovial memories such a rich store of traditionary lore, and so many manuscript relics of antiquity fast crumbling into oblivion for want of some competent adventurer, to weave them into such a shape as would at once preserve the general features of historic truth, and throw around these venerable relics the richer and more attractive hues of romance.[25]

Caruthers' announcement of his new novel is a "romance" manifesto with strong political overtones. Apologizing for what he feels to be the imperfections of his first book, the author diminishes his efforts for intersectional understanding to a mere public relations trick. According to the quoted passage, the shift from the epistolary novel of manners to the "romance" constitutes an upward movement in a hierarchy of genres. A glorious regional past, a true hero and a fully developed plot are going to be substituted for an imperfect national present, a comic hero and a juggling intersectional plot, while the (more or less) realist representation of contemporary manners is going to be replaced by idealizing historiography. Moreover, Caruthers invests this change of genres with sectionalist political implications: to write the kind of "romance" that he announces means to "jump" into the "stream" of American literature farther south.

The Cavaliers of Virginia is based on a historical topic: Bacon's Rebellion of 1676, in which the unauthorized punitive expeditions of a young planter against Native Americans eventually turned into an armed uprising against the royal government of colonial Virginia. Handling the historical sources in a very free manner, Caruthers turns the events into a psychological drama in which Nathaniel Bacon fights for both social recognition and his love for the Governor's niece. Although it does not directly deal with the American Revolution, the novel conforms to the pattern of Revolutionary "romance," for Bacon's Rebellion is interpreted as the first act of the American Revolution: "Here was sown the first germ of the American revolution. . . . Exactly one hundred years before the American revolution, there was a Virginian revolution based upon precisely similar principles" (2: 50–51). The opening sentence of *The Cavaliers of Virginia* clearly indicates that the narrative is to be read as a "romance": "The romance of history pertains to no human annals more strikingly than to the early settlement of Virginia."[26] The idea is similar to Kennedy's in *Horse-Shoe Robinson*: "romance" is a

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[25] Caruthers, *The Kentuckian* 2: 218–219 ("Addenda").

[26] William A. Caruthers, *The Cavaliers of Virginia: Or, The Recluse of Jamestown: An Historical*

past reality, particularly in the South. However, the notion of absolute history seems to be taken even further than in Kennedy's novel. If the American Revolution is an original history that contains the types of American history in general, Bacon's rebellion is the origin of that original history, it is of mythic dimensions.

That Caruthers pushes back into the sphere of myth is particularly evident in the representation of the hero. Bacon's special status is manifest upon his first appearance close to the beginning of the novel. Virginia Fairfax, his stepsister and love, is waiting for the hero outside the palisade of colonial Jamestown. She nervously scans the horizon until "a moving speck" appears "upon the distant waters" of the James. The object approaches and is revealed to be a "beautifully painted canoe" with a "curled and fantastic head," from which "a gallant and manly youth," Bacon, leaps upon the shore. The hero thus enters the novel as a portentous messenger from the West. Traversing the waters that separate civilization and wilderness in a canoe of Indian origin, he appears to straddle worlds. Apparently going back and forth between the settlements of the natives and the colony, Bacon seems to belong to both the natural order and the sphere of civilization. The hero's outfit includes a "brass hunting horn," a "short cut and thrust sword" and "a fishing rod and tackle," all emphasizing his association with the manly and primordial activities of hunting and fighting (1: 14–16).

Though a very young man, Bacon is evidently matured by "much painful thought" (1: 16). The cause of his worries is his exclusion from the social order of the colony, for although Bacon has grown up in the household of a prominent citizen and has won the love of the Governor's niece, his origins are shrouded in mystery. While the awareness of his doubtful social position is painful for the hero, it is also the cause of the particular power of his personality. In combination with his passionate character, his doubts inspire a fanciful imagination; they are the source of his genius. Bacon's peculiar position in-between the social and the natural order is reinforced through his association with another sublime character: the mysterious "Recluse" mentioned in the subtitle of the novel. This character is even more of an outcast than the hero. He lives in a huge cave beyond the boundaries of Jamestown and is eventually revealed to have been one of the judges who sentenced Charles I to death. Representing a Byronic demi-god who has been exiled from human society for the sin of making history, the "Recluse" functions as an allegorical representation of the ethos that inspired the English Revolution. He symbolically translates this ethos to the American colonies where it is purified of political radicalism and handed on to the next generation. Bacon eventually appropriates this ethos not only by conducting an

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Romance of the Old Dominion, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834–1835); facsimile rpt, Americans in Fiction Series, 2 vols in 1 (Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg, 1968) 1: 3. Subsequent

expedition against the Native Americans which simultaneously represents a rebellion against colonial authorities but also by emancipating from the "Recluse" himself, shaking off his erroneous claim of being the hero's father.[27]

In terms of ideology, the narrative comes full circle by representing Bacon's rebellion according to the rhetoric of "chivalry." The "Virginia revolution," which supposedly is the origin of the American Revolution, combines the two principles that had contended in the English Revolution: it reconciles a purified version of Roundhead Republicanism with the spirit of exiled "Cavaliers." Because of his position between all fronts, Bacon is regarded by Richard Gray as a "wavering hero in the Scott tradition."[28] Indeed, the hero stands between Roundheads and Cavaliers, civilization and wilderness, the Indian and the Anglo-Saxon "maiden"; he even makes a strange combination between a plebeian and a nobleman. However, if it is true that antebellum Southern fiction—like American fiction in general—often drew on the fictional patterns popularized by Scott, it should also be recognized that these patterns were transformed according to new ideological functions. Bacon's precarious position in between all fronts has a very different meaning than Edward Waverley's: it is the prerequisite for his role as founder of a new society that fuses old oppositions into a new vision. Bacon transforms the stigmatizing uncertainty of his origin into the source of unrestrained autonomy. A universal outcast, he is thrown back onto himself and, by a tour de force of self-empowerment, becomes a straddler of worlds and, thus, the mythic founder of America as a new world. The hero's nobility is not received but self-created; and in inventing himself, Bacon invents American society as opposed to British and Colonial society.

Having been singled out by providence to execute the decree of history, Bacon is the only person to be aware of the "stern necessity" of driving the Native Americans far away "from the haunts of the white man" (2: 68). According to the picture drawn in the narrative, Bacon's heroism is based on his willingness to cast aside moral and legal doubts: "The right of the aboriginals to the soil was indeed plain and indisputable ; yet now that the Europeans were in possession, whether by purchase or conquest, the absolute necessity of offensive warfare against them was equally plain and unquestioned in his mind" (2: 69). In his defense speech before a court martial set up by the Governor, the captive Bacon rises to a vision of manifest destiny and declares: "I confess that I have been the first to maintain the impossibility of the two species living together in peace, and to execute the primitive and opening step in this great

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page references will occur parenthetically in the text.

[27] Recluse type figures, especially hermits, also figure very prominently in chivalric tales, such as *Parzival*.

[28] Richard Gray, *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (Cambridge, Engl.:

revolution of nations" (2: 180). The past related by the narrative is an absolute History in that it contains the future: Bacon predicts that "[f]uture emigration must advance westward in a semicircular wave—like a kindred billow of the watery ocean, sweeping all obstruction before it" (2: 179–180). The process begun by Bacon in the seventeenth century, it is suggested, had not yet been completed at the time of narration.

The ideological objective of Caruthers' novel is both to affirm and to transform the social ideology contained in the convention of the "chivalric" hero of "romance." Indeed, Bacon's revolt is depicted not only as the first step towards American independence, but simultaneously as a social revolution against the hauteur of the traditional aristocracy. The arrogance of the old elite is particularly evident in Governor Berkley's[29] opposition against his niece's love to Bacon, whom he regards as "the son of no one knew whom" (1: 199). For all his faults, however, Berkley is still depicted as a true knight of extraordinary courage and noble impetuosity (cf. 2: 232–233). It is Bacon's achievement to invest the traditional "chivalric" ethos represented by the Governor with a new vision and to win many of the "Cavaliers" over to his own side (cf. 2: 172). If Berkley is represented as the "old Cavalier" (2: 173), the rebel's troop constitutes a regenerated "chivalry," one that is willing to bow to the command of "the son of no one knew whom":

> "There was a cool settled determination visible in the countenances of all, which was admirably evinced by the order and alacrity with which they obeyed the general's orders. Bacon's cause had now become personal with every man in the ranks, composed as they were principally of hardy planters and more chivalrous Cavaliers . . ." (2: 227)

Bacon's crusade against the Native Americans, which is simultaneously a revolt against the old elite, integrates the representatives of different social strata into a new society that is bracketed together by a transformed rhetoric of "chivalry."

As he saw *The Cavaliers of Virginia* through the press, Caruthers was already thinking of his next project. Like *The Kentuckian in New York*, his second novel ends with an "Addenda" in which the author announces the publication of new novel entitled "The Tramontane Order; or, the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe." However, it was to take six years until the Savannah *Magnolia* serialized Caruthers' third novel in 1841 and another four years until it was published by an obscure printer in Alabama as *The Knights of the Horse-Shoe: A Traditionary Tale of the Cocked Hat Gentry in the Old*

Cambridge UP, 1986) 58.

[29] This is how Caruthers spells the Governor's name. The historical person is usually spelled Berkeley.

Dominion (1845).[30] One reason for the delay between the original announcement of the narrative and its serialization is that the first manuscript of *Knights* was lost when Caruthers' Lexington home burned down in 1837.[31] Publication in book form was then delayed by the effects of another catastrophe that had struck in 1837: the financial Panic of that year, which had tremendous effects on the book market.

The Knights of the Golden Horse-Shoe deals with an expedition into the Valley of Virginia which Governor Alexander Spotswood undertook in the early eighteenth century (while the novel has it take place in 1714, the historical date of the expedition is 1716). Along similar lines as Bacon's Rebellion in *The Cavaliers of Virginia*, Spotswood's expedition is represented as a realization of Manifest Destiny and a foreshadowing of the American Revolution:

> Grand and enthusiastic as were the conceptions of Sir Alexander Spotswood and his young followers, they had little idea that they were then about to commence a march which would be renewed from generation to generation, until, in the course of little more than a single century, it would transcend the Rio del Norte, and which perhaps in half that time may traverse the utmost boundaries of Mexico. (161)

Though this time it is the Governor himself who takes action, Spotswood's expedition resembles Bacon's crusade against the Native Americans in being an instance of westward expansion in defiance of British authorities. Like Bacon, Spotswood has to prevail against the conservative establishment in order to realize his vision. Initially, "three fourths of the aristocracy of the land" oppose his scheme (39). Consequently, the expedition is represented as a soft social revolution, the foundational act of a new American aristocracy that emerges as European stock is transformed by confronting the wilderness and its inhabitants. The undertaking is based on the support not only of the bourgeoisie but even of the lower classes:

> With all the middle and lower ranks the Governor and his family were very popular, perhaps for the very reason, that he was now at a deadly feud with some of the largest and most influential families in the land. The time was now rapidly approaching when this very favor of the plebeian ranks stood him in great stead. The favorite scheme of his life—one for which he had perilled his office—his influence—his standing—his fortune, having been accomplished at last much through their means. (43)

Spotswood's "volunteer militia" chiefly consists of Virginia yeomen who "have come in with their homespun clothes, and with the burrs yet in their horses' tails and manes"

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[30] The edition referred to here offers a facsimile rpt of the Alabama edition: William A. Caruthers, *The Knights of the Golden Horse-Shoe: A Traditionary Tale of the Cocked Hat Gentry in the Old Dominion* (Wetumpka, AL: Charles Yancey, 1845); facsimile rpt, introd. Curtis Carroll Davis (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1970). The edition restores the adjective "Golden," which had been used in the serialization, to the title (cf. "Note on the Text" xxix). Page references will occur parenthetically in the text.

[31] Cf. C. C. Davis 198–199 and introduction, *Knights* ix.

(99). In *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, Kennedy had transformed the Scotch-Irish yeoman into a Revolutionary hero fit to be represented according to the clichés of chivalric rhetoric. Even though its social thesis is actually more pronounced, Caruthers' *The Knights of the Golden Horseshoe* does not go quite as far, but in the scout Joe Jarvis it contains a character who has many similarities to Kennedy's Robinson. Jarvis's first appearance is remarkable: clad in "homespun" clothes, the giant rides "into the midst of the gentry," mounted on a pony that is so small that the rider's feet almost touch the ground. Additionally, the frontiersman not only carries a gun that exceeds his pony in length but is also accompanied by a preposterously small dog. The reaction of the gentry is merriment, but Jarvis, who has instantly discovered the defects in the equipment of the Tidewater greenhorns, also indulges in a "sly inward chuckle" of conscious superiority. He is a monument to the unbounded "self-confidence" that is instilled into the common man by mastering the hardships of the Frontier (175–176). Frank Lee, the upper-class protagonist, instantly recognizes Jarvis's valor and accepts him as a tutor in woodcraft (see esp. 182–183).

In Caruthers' novel, the horseshoe, which had received prominence as the sobriquet of Kennedy's hero, becomes the symbolic center of the story. In part, Jarvis's confidence in his importance for the success of the expedition is due to his awareness that the unshod hooves of the Cavaliers' horses, used to the sandy soil of the Tidewater, will be a serious problem in the mountains. The scout boldly attacks social pretension by telling Lee: "Now, Squire, which is agoin' to be the best stand by, the blood in your horses' veins, or the shoes on mine's feet ?" (187). Providently, Jarvis has provided the expedition with metal for the forging of horseshoes, and when the Cavaliers eventually acknowledge the reason for the lameness of their animals a camp is set up and a smithy is improvised. Like Kennedy's Robinson, Caruthers' yeoman scout has learned the trade of a blacksmith, and at the "Horse-Shoe Encampment" (211–214) a new society is literally forged: "During the first day, most of the youngsters stood around and watched Jarvis teaching the Governor of Virginia, the art of horse-shoeing" (212). As a technical improvement of knighthood introduced by a common man, the horseshoe symbolizes a social reform that diminishes aristocratic pretensions and democratizes "chivalry." It is a means of translating the heroic ethos of knighthood from the sandy soil of Tidewater Virginia into the mountains of the West where it is renewed as an emancipatory power. The horseshoe is thus an ostentatiously paradoxical symbol that affirms both aristocratic and democratic ideologemes. The oxymoronic strategy of the text completely manifests itself when the narrator praises Virginia as "that land in which was exhibited the rarest combination of social aristocracy and public equality—where virtue, and talents, and worth alone were consecrated to reverence, through hereditary lines of descent" (86).

The Knights of the Golden Horse-Shoe differs from Caruthers' previous fiction in that the main historical character, Spotswood, is not the protagonist. This role is filled out by Frank Lee, a young "wealthy planter" who has taken part in a Jacobite uprising in Britain and returns incognito to his native Virginia. Though Lee does not have the mythical stature accorded to Bacon in the earlier novel, the similarities between the two heroes in terms of their characterization and function are still surprising. If Bacon is in danger of being reduced to a nobody because of the uncertainty of his origins, Lee masquerades as the common man for political reasons. Spotswood discovers the young man among a boatload of Scottish emigrants and hires him as a tutor for his children. Of course, like Kennedy's Butler, the young planter is unable to hide his essential nobility, so that the Governor's daughter whispers to a friend: "Our new tutor has quite as aristocratic an air as any person at the table, and more of the camp grace about him than even papa himself" (40). Eventually, however, Lee comes as close to being a complete outcast as Bacon: due to fatal circumstances he is suspected of having murdered the Governor's son, and even his magnanimous mentor comes to doubt the hero's innocence.

Frank Lee's hardships are mainly due to the machinations of his own brother. If Spotswood and Frank boast all the positive aspects of an aristocracy that is willing to do without pretensions, Henry Lee, a "haughty young aristocrat" (114), is represented as the impersonation of the negative aspects of a feudal social system. Since Caruthers propagates an ideal middle between democracy and aristocracy, however, he does not fail to point out the snares of the doctrine of radical equality either. These are illustrated by the character of John Spotswood, the Governor's own son, who is made to declare: "Oh, damn the barriers of social order. If I had my way, I would cement the whole of them with the hot fumes of wine into one great social circle of democracy—with our joy in common, our property in common ; in short, I would revolutionize your social structure : I would wipe out old things, and begin all anew again" (68). The novel shows that opinions of this kind result not only in atheism but also in alcoholism. Even more dangerously, the passionate irreverence to social customs and traditions leads to miscegenation: the beautiful Indian Wingina, whom John is unable to actually love, expects a child from the Governor's inebriate son. The "romance" of Virginian history, as propagated by Caruthers and Kennedy, was in the realization of an ideal middle position between Revolutionary radicalism and conservatism, a perfect synthesis between democratic and aristocratic ideals. In this sense, the contemplation of Virginias Revolutionary and pre-Revolutionary history seemed to provide a model for the solution of America's present problems.

5.3 A Fictional Road to Rebellion?

The beginning of the present chapter referred to Parrington's thesis that the shift of southern narrative to "full-blown romance," manifest in the development from Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* to *Horse-Shoe Robinson* and from Caruthers' *The Kentuckian in New York* to his subsequent historical novels, reflected the decline of Virginia towards narrow sectionalist views. Ritchie D. Watson, a modern disciple of Parrington, even suggests that, traveling in the vehicle of "romance," antebellum southern fiction eventually took the turn into a "fictional road to rebellion."[32] While the nationalist and (pseudo-)democratic rhetoric evident in Caruthers' historical "romances" represents a tendency in antebellum southern fiction which tends to be overlooked,[33] there are certainly arguments that seem to back such an interpretation.

First of all, there is an almost ironic connection between Caruthers' Westward imperialism and the sectionalization of American politics. For it was precisely the basis of Caruthers' imaginative solutions, expansion to the West, that would become the mainspring of intersectional conflict. Also, apotheoses of the heroic genius making history against all odds may have provided a model for the secessionist "fire eaters". It is a notorious historical fact that the ideology of "chivalry," promoted by Kennedy and Caruthers as the catalyst of social synthesis, was instrumentalized by the Confederate South. Finally, the absolute Histories provided by southern authors during the 1830s implied the sectional appropriation of American history. For if it had been Virginia that provided the blueprints for an independent American history, it followed that it should also be Virginia that would define the future course of the United States. In short: based on the confusion of typological and literal readings of history, the strategy of "romance" really may have promoted a precarious urge to realize metaphors, an urge that is often to be found at the basis of political catastrophes.

However, while it is tempting to construe an unequivocal relation between formal and thematic developments in fiction, on the one hand, and the ideological and political tendencies leading to the Civil War, on the other, such constructions run the risk of a fourfold reductionism. First of all, they tend to reduce the complexity of history

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[32] R. D. Watson, *Yeoman versus Cavalier: The Old Southwest's Fictional Road to Rebellion*.

[33] In this context, a passing reference to the treatment of antebellum southern novels in Alice Jouveau DuBreuil's curious dissertation *The Novel of Democracy in America: A Contribution to the Study of the Progress of Democratic Ideas in the American Novel* (1922/23; Folcroft, PA: The Folcroft P, 1969) may be of interest. Introducing a new genre category for novels "in which is expressed the spirit that has made possible our gradual development toward religious freedom and political, economic, and social equality of opportunity" (1), DuBreuil included Caruthers' *The Cavaliers of Virginia*, Kennedy's *Rob of the Bowl*, Simms's *The Yemassee* and *The Partisan* as well as Cooke's *The Virginia Comedians* and *Henry St. John* in her list of examples.

by assuming a straight logic of development leading to secession and the outbreak of the war. Secondly, attempts to explain secession from *a* southern culture not only overlook important social, economic and cultural differences extant between and within the various regions of the South, but also negate that the antebellum North and the antebellum South shared a common American cultural identity. Thirdly, implying that secessionist politics were the “natural” result of a secessionist culture, such approaches frequently oversimplify the relations of culture, ideology and politics. Lastly, efforts to construct an immediate connection between "romance" and secession suggest an overly deterministic conception of the social function of fiction and simplify the complicated relations between form and content. While it has to be recognized that the self-conscious affirmation of literary conventions actually had ideological implications that may be meaningfully associated with the history of the Civil War, investigating the functions of antebellum southern "romance" cannot mean assessing how fiction contributed to the outbreak of war. Rather, it means asking how fictional narratives operated in the context of a social and political situation from which war is known to have eventually emerged.

In this situation "romance" gained a particular importance and was invested with particular meanings. Specifically, writers attempted to actualize what may be referred to as the synthetic potential of "romance": the quality of dialectically structured symbolic narratives to achieve synthetic resolutions of ideological contradictions. The "romancing" of the Revolution and of other potentially symbolic events in American history thus was an attempt at conservative symbolic action: fictionists like Kennedy and Caruthers constructed an absolute History that bore obvious typological relations to the present and that would be remembered in order to restore original harmony. The fictions produced by southern authors during the 1830s certainly are ideologically precarious, but neither did secessionist ideologies find their natural expression in a form of "romance" nor did "romance" engender an automatic disposition to secessionist ideologies. Rather, the fictions produced by authors like Kennedy and Caruthers have to be regarded as (rather desperate and largely unsuccessful) efforts to bring about rhetorical solutions to oppressive problems in antebellum American society and politics. Yet, while Kennedy and Caruthers turned to fictionalizations of the American Revolution or its supposed prototypes in order to reintegrate the contemporary United States by evoking basic referents of collective identity, they wrote in a political and ideological situation in which such attempts were bound to reveal just how contested the meaning of these referents and the nature of that identity really were.

In an essay on the problematic role of the Revolutionary heritage in the antebellum United States Eric J. Sundquist argues that the tension between the reality of slavery and the American rhetoric of freedom could only be integrated by pretending

the permanence of the Revolutionary moment, by cultivating a "sense of 'continuing revolutionary time.'" However, the harmonizing potential of memorializing the Revolution was limited. The antebellum United States were faced with a constellation of problems in which references to the Revolution could be divisive. Sundquist characterizes the period from the beginning of the thirties to the Civil War as an era "in which the authority of the fathers had become the subject of anxious meditation and in which the national crisis over slavery's limits compelled a return to the fraternally divisive energies of revolution."[34]

It is in fact revealing how easily a revolutionary "romance" like *Horse-Shoe Robinson* can, in spite of Kennedy's evident Unionism, be (mis)read as a covert sectionalist statement. The sectionalist symbolic potential of the novel becomes apparent if Parrington's construction of a swing from the Jeffersonian to the Calhounite South is accepted—and indeed, the thesis does at least address superficial ideological tendencies. If the shift from the "old" to the "new" antebellum South was not only an ideological but also a geographical movement, the two journeys from Virginia to South Carolina depicted in *Horse-Shoe Robinson* might be taken for significant symbolic action. This applies particularly to the second journey, in which the heroine, who supports and incarnates the cause of liberty, leaves her placid Virginia home and travels to the South Carolina theater of war in order to rescue her lover from British captivity. Against the will of her father, who is morbidly afraid of political commitment, Mildred has married a major of the Continental Army, and by her southwards journey she both ratifies her marriage to the South Carolinian revolutionary and realizes her political convictions. Mildred's emancipation from her father, who is immobilized by a stiff traditionalism that has degenerated into crass superstition, constitutes an allegorical celebration of the vitality of the new American nation: in the spirit of the emerging Young America movement Kennedy was appealing to Americans of his day to rediscover the regenerative potentials of that vitality. In the context of contemporary political struggles, however, the allegory may have invited a different reading according to which the Virginia heroine—as personification of her home state—would finally realize her natural alliance with South Carolina, the state that had only recently probed sectional revolution in the Nullification Crisis.

"Romance" was both: a means of evading the complexities or restrictions of the political discourse and a strategy of acting within that discourse. It is the profound (but explicable) irony of the prewar historical situation that attempts to escape from the actuality of sectional and social contest into a realm of original coherence or to resolve

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[34] Eric J. Sundquist, "Slavery, Revolution, and the American Renaissance," *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, ed. Walter B. Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: Johns

actual conflicts by displacing them into such a realm, were bound to produce most divisive results. The puzzlement of readers like Ritchie D. Watson over whether writers like Kennedy and Caruthers finally were "progressives" or "reactionaries" is telling. Desperately striving to achieve a synthesis of change and persistence, the "romances" of these authors actually cut across the dichotomies set up by the progressivist interpretation of history. In the face of increasing political and social tensions, however, this attempt at the “romance” of synthesis proved increasingly precarious.

Hopkins UP, 1985); quotes: 9; 6.

6. The Sacrifice of Dialectics: William G. Simms's *The Partisan*

6.1 The Empowerment of Fiction: Simms's Concept of "Romance"

In 1842 Caruthers, aged only thirty-nine, used the startling title "Excerpts from the Portfolio of an Old Novelist" for a series of brief essays in which he sketched his opinions on literature and its relation to life. "As the civilized world departs from nature and becomes more enslaved to the conventional laws of society," Caruthers wrote, "just in the same proportion will the choicest spirits of that world become slaves to the ideal ; and this is the true reason why ours is such a novel-reading age."[1] At points, the novelist was even more emphatic, exalting the "romantic disposition" as a "passion for the Ideal" and claiming that "a great writer of Romance is communicating in spirit with a whole world of ideal personages, and rousing up, like an enchanter, the dead heroes of a thousand Romances in real life."[2] These pronouncements exceed metaphorical praise of a good novelist's lively powers of description. They claim that fiction can make the ideal factually present "in real life." It is suggested that the process of translating reality into the sphere of literary conventionality may be inverted, that the ideality of literary conventions can also be transferred into actuality.

It was in William Gilmore Simms's literary theory and fiction that such a concept of "romance" received its most emphatic codification. In the same year in which Caruthers' "Excerpts from the Portfolio of an Old Novelist" appeared, Simms delivered a series of lectures on "The Epochs and Events of American History, as Suited to the Purposes of Art in Fiction." Parts from these lectures were immediately published in the *Magnolia*. The full text was eventually incorporated in *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction*, published in 1845. These lectures, particularly the introduction on the "True Uses of History," offer the best introduction to Simms's rhetorical and pragmatic concept of "romance."[3]

The essay begins with an anecdote of the dying Robert Walpole, who is said to have refused his son's offer to read from a work of historiography by remarking: "I have long since done with fiction" (30). Simms inverts the thrust of Walpole's polemic by observing that the old statesman was right in pointing out the ubiquity of fiction. Historiography, Simms suggests, simply cannot do without fiction. If the "golden

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1 The series ran from April to June 1843: Caruthers, "Excerpts from the Portfolio of an Old Novelist," *Family Companion and Ladies' Mirror* 2 (1842): 56–57; 79–80; 173; quotes: 79.

2 Caruthers, "Excerpts from the Portfolio of an Old Novelist" 57.

3 Simms, "The Epochs and Events of American History, as Suited to the Purposes of Art in Fiction," *Views and Reviews*. The introductory section (30–55) is headed: "True Uses of Literature. Objects of Art. Its Ductility and Universality." Page references will occur parenthetically in the text.

ornaments of rhetoric and passion” are taken away, history is only a meaningless tale from which even “the most hearty lover of the truth may well recoil in disrelish or disgust" (32). While the labor of scholarly inquiry alone is usually disingenuous, it is “the genius of romance and poetry” who is able to solve the mysteries of history (40). His "perfect history" may claim truth even if it should be found to deviate from ascertained facts (40-42).

Simms is not quite consistent in equating historiography and fiction. The author of "romances" is relegated to the "dominions of the obscure and the impalpable" (43) and it is pointed out his "privileges . . . only begin where those of the historian cease" (56). However, this is not a disparagement of “romance.” Simms’s proposition might be read either as a limitation or as an affirmation of the "romancer's" freedom. Moreover, the restriction of the proper realm of (historical) “romance” is for pragmatic rather than for epistemological reasons. Claiming that "truth" is a functional rather than an ontological category, Simms regards historiography and "romance" fiction simply as different strategies of participating in the social construction of reality. The proper realms of the two disciplines are primarily defined not according to the nature of the "truth" that is to be discovered but rather according to the chances of achieving its social acceptance. In his view, both the historical novel and historiography proper are fictions designed to establish truth; but they are still different forms of fiction in that they depend on different conventions of plausibility.

Indeed, if Simms defines "romance" as a genre, he does so in contradistinction to historiography rather than to the novel. According to his definition, the legitimate realm of the "romancer" as novelist is where pure imagination can be successfully transformed into accepted fact. Simms makes it clear that the standard for the value of the productions of both the "romancer" and the historian is effect rather than correctness; both "romance" fiction and historiography are didactic forms of “art,” which employ rhetoric for "the benefit and the blessing of the races which they severally represent":

> [W]hen they have warmed our curiosity in what concerns the great family to which we belong—strengthened our faith in what are its true virtues, and what, under proper cultivation, it may become—excited our sympathies in the cause of its leading minds—filled our hearts with gentle hopes, and stimulated our souls to ardency in the grand and unceasing struggle after perfection which is the great business of the ages—then have they severally executed the holy trusts of art which have been committed to their hands. (44)

Such ideas are strongly reminiscent of Shelley's romantic idealism in the "Defence of Poetry" (written in 1821 but published only in 1840, two years before Simms originally presented his lecture). However, Simms's moral is more immediately political than Shelley's. In fact, there is a significant contradiction between Simms's uncompromising

idealism, on the one hand, and his polemical emphasis on the social and political relativity of truth, on the other. It is an epistemological contradiction that is caused by Simms's striving to define literature both as a realm of ideality that is above politics and as an efficient tool for national and sectional political action.

This ambition is evident from the "Dedicatory Epistle" that in 1853 Simms added to *Guy Rivers*, the first of his full-length novels. Here Simms relates the story of how he settled on a career as a professional fictionist when, in consequence of his opposition against Nullification as editor of the *Charleston Gazette*, he found himself "cut off from politics" and "equally cut off from law." In this situation, he explains, "[l]iterature was my only refuge, as it had been my first love, and, as I fancied, my proper vocation . . . "[4] From the beginnings of his career, Simms summoned up all his characteristic vigor in order to make his "proper vocation" into a regular and socially accepted profession. In some respect, he was hoping to preside over the field of literature in the way in which a planter presided over his plantation.[5]

It may be argued that it was this striving to transform authorship into a profession equal to, or even above, the triad of planting, politics and the law which motivated the polemical and paradoxical character of Simms's literary theory and practice. He was not content with symbolic action but wanted the writing of literature to be a higher and more immediately effective form of politics. Thus, Simms's idealism was the basis of a pragmatic aesthetics that exalted the transformative power of fiction. As used by Simms, "romance" primarily denotes not a specific form of narrative in contradistinction to the "novel" but the event-producing use of that power. As a bold fantasy of the power of literature, Simms's concept of "romance" refers to function rather than form.

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[4] Simms, "Dedicatory Epistle" (1853), *Guy Rivers: A Tale of Georgia*, rev. ed. (1885); facsimile rpt (New York: AMS, 1970) 9–10.

[5] On Simms's striving for social acceptance as a writer see esp. Rubin "The Dream of the Plantation: Simms, Hammond, Charleston," *The Edge of the Swamp* 54–102. See Faust's classic study *A Sacred Circle* for an analysis of the attempts of Simms and his compeers to organize as a clerisy of discontents, who would reform their society and force it to recognize "a social role for knowledge and for the intellectual" (17). As to Simms's continuing yearning for political office and political impact, cf. John Caldwell Guilds, *Simms: A Literary Life* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P. 1992), esp. 111–129, and Jon L. Wakelyn, *The Politics of a Literary Man: William Gilmore Simms* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1973). Wakelyn even claimed that "[p]olitics was Simms's career" rather than literature (82). A more recent study of Simms's politics is Charles S. Watson, *From Nationalism to Secessionism: The Changing Fiction of William Gilmore Simms*, Contributions in American History 151 (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1993). Like Wakelyn, Watson reads Simms's writings from a traditional historiographical perspective, concentrating on manifest content and explicit political statements rather than on the ideological implications of form and aesthetics. For an interesting treatment of Simms by a modern historian (within a comprehensive history of the South's way into secession), see Freehling 236–245.

6.2 The "Romance" of the Swamp and Its Ideological Implications

In an incisive critical essay on "Simms's Stories and Reviews," published by the *North American Review* in October 1846, the classical philologist and Harvard professor Cornelius Conway Felton attacked Simms's literary practice and aesthetic theory. Summarizing Simms's argument in "The Epochs and Events of American History," Felton claimed that the novelist was driven by an almost pathological "mania for fiction" that led to "perverting history for the purposes of art."[6] As a reading of *The Partisan* (1835)—Simms's third major fiction and the first novel in what would become a series of seven "Revolutionary romances"[7]—can show, Felton's polemic had its point, for Simms's attempt at substituting "romance" for history really did entail "perversions." Driven by the urge of investing literature not only with political significance but also with event-producing power, Simms purposefully confused fact and fiction, referent and sign, matter and representation, literal and typological readings of history. Perhaps ironically, he thus was canceling the ontological difference between actuality and ideality which was the basis for the dialectical strategy of mediation which Kennedy and Caruthers associated with "romance."

A central device for enacting these confusions in Simms's fiction was the swamp image. In *The Partisan*, the association of the American revolutionaries' guerilla warfare with the swamp—a device which had already played a role in Kennedy's *Horse-Shoe Robinson*—becomes a central ideological and narrative device. Simms's swamp is a realm where narrative deep structure surfaces, where the order of ideality comes to be materially present as a separate world within the world of the novel. Close to the beginning of the story, Robert Singleton, the "partisan" referred to in the title, is led to the swamp hideout of the guerilla troop of which he is to take command:

> The gloomy painter would have done much with the scene before us. The wild and mystic imagination would have made it one of supernatural terrors ; and fancy, fond of the melancholy twilight, would have endowed the dim shadows, lurking like so many spectres between the bold cypresses, with a ghostly character, and most unhallowed purpose. Though familiar with such abodes, Singleton, as he looked upon the strange groupings thrown along the sombre groundwork, was impressed with a lively sense of its imposing felicity. They stood upon an island in the very centre of the swamp—one of those little islands, the tribute ooze of numerous minor watercourses, hardening into solidity at last. These, beating their feeble tides upon a single point, in process of time create the barrier which is to usurp their own possessions. Here, the rank matter of the swamp, its slime and rubbish, resolving

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[6] Cornelius Conway Felton, "Simms's Stories and Reviews," *North American Review* 63 (October 1846); qtd in Bassett 83–84.

[7] Usually, *Eutaw* (1856) is taken to be the last novel of the series to appear. However, *Joscelyn: A Tale of the Revolution*, which was serialized in *The Old Guard* magazine during 1867, really has to be regarded as yet another "Revolutionary romance"—even though it hardly resembles the other novels in the series and was published as a book only in 1976 (Columbia: U of South Carolina P). This is why the number of Simms's "Revolutionary romances" is sometimes given as eight.

> themselves by a natural but rapid decomposition into one mass, yield the thick luxuriance of soil from which springs up the overgrown tree, which throws out a thousand branches, and seems to have existed as many years—in whose bulk we behold an emblem of majesty, and, in whose term of life, standing in utter defiance of the sweeping hurricane, we have an image of strength which compels our admiration, and sometimes the more elevated acknowledgement of our awe.[8]

The camp in the middle of the swamp is a sujet for the "gloomy painter": it is a dark variety of the "picturesque." If the scene might be invested with "supernatural terrors," however, this is not to say that it necessarily inspires horror. Rather, the swamp landscape bespeaks of the presence of a divine power that evokes both admiration and fear. Compelling "the more elevated acknowledgement of our awe," the swamp scenery connects the sphere of human experience to the realm of the supernatural. The swamp transcends the properties of the conventional "picturesque" not only through its intractable sublimity but also through the way in which it is alive as a dynamic ecosystem.

The image of the tree rising in its "majesty" from an island of decomposed "slime and rubbish" inspires ambivalent interpretations. On the one hand, it suggests the rootedness of human history in natural history; on the other, it indicates that the swamp contains the promise of its transformation according to human desire: very slowly, its numerous small rivulets "usurp their own possessions" and create an island that invites human habitation. Thus, the civilization represented by the partisans originates in the very heart of the natural order on an island of solidified time. The partisan camp is a pastoral mediation of the antithesis of wilderness and civilization. It is both of and above the swamp and, consequently, belongs to natural and to human history simultaneously.[9]

In the depiction of Marion's camp this peculiar version of a civilization contained within natural history is even more pronounced. Captain Singleton, Lieutenant Porgy and the other partisans have to be taken there in a boat which Marion's men propel with the aid of long canes, so that "[w]ithout dip of oar or plash of paddle, silently and still, as if endued with a life of its own, the boat swept through its natural abode" (413). Cut off from the rest of the world by expanses of water and walls of overhanging vegetation, the heart of the swamp is represented as a mystic place where everything is at peace and where even material objects like the boat seem to be animate.

This representation of the swamp corresponds to Frye's characterization of the

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[8] Simms, *The Partisan: A Romance of the Revolution* (1835); new and revised edition (1886); facs. rpt (New York: AMS, 1968) 72. Subsequent page references will occur parenthetically in the text.

[9] For a less abstract interpretation of the passage which brings out its nationalist implications see L. Moffitt Cecil, "Functional Imagery in Simms's *The Partisan*," *Studies in Medieval, Renaissance, American Literature: A Festschrift*, ed. Betsy Fagan Colquitt (Fort Worth:

"innocent world" of "romance" as an "animistic world, full of elemental spirits."[10] In *The Partisan*, the world of "romance" is defined as a separate locality within the world of the novel, a realm of undisplaced literary conventionality within the alienated political reality of the Tory ascendancy. The partisan lieutenant Porgy, Simms's most important focalizer and spokesman in *The Partisan*, uses a metaphor from the bible to describe the scene. Enumerating all the different animal species that inhabit the region, he observes that "there are no possible extremes in nature to which a swamp like this will not give shelter, and furnish something to arouse and satisfy the appetite. It is a world in itself, and, as I said before, with a figurative signification of course, it is indeed a land of milk and honey" (414). Significantly, discussing the swamp scenery Porgy seems to turn into a literary scholar. His cautious restriction that in quoting the book of Joel he is using the figurative mode actually affirms the other-worldliness of this region, its close association with the mythical world of undisplaced literature: it is "a world in itself" which belongs in a separate ontological category where the distinctions between literal and figurative meanings become blurred.

The allusions to holy scripture are pursued further. As one of the troopers complains that Porgy is not right in speaking about "a land of milk and honey" when everything around is water, one of Marion's men replies: "wait a bit, and you'll see the blessedest land you ever laid eyes on. It's the very land, as the big-bellied gentleman says, that's full of milk and honey ; for, you see, we've got a fine range, and the cattle's a plenty, and when the sun's warm you'll hear the bee trees at midday—and such a music as they'll give you! Don't be afeard now, and we'll soon come to it" (414). The partisan camp is thus announced as a promised land, a perfect pastoral setting. And, eventually, the promise is fulfilled:

> And very picturesque and imposing, indeed, was the scene that now opened upon Porgy and the rest, as they swept round the little bend in the waters of the creek, and the deeply embowered camp of the partisan lay before them. Twenty different fires, blazing in all quarters of the island, illuminated it with a splendour which no palace pomp could emulate. The thick forest walls that girdled them in were unpierced by their rays ; the woods were too impenetrably dense even for their splendours ; and, like so many huge and blazing pillars, the larger trees seemed to crowd forward into the light with a solitary stare that made solemn the entire and wonderful beauty of the scene. (415)

Marion's camp represents a city in the swamp. Like the paradise of the bible it is engirded by a wall that shelters the *locus amoenus* from the outer world. The camp suggests a prelapsarian utopia where the contradiction between humanity and nature is permanently resolved. Situated on an island within the heart of the swamp, the place

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Texas Christian UP, 1971) 155–164.

[10] Frye, *Anatomy* 153. Cf. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 113.

is a humanization of the natural environment but still escapes the danger of alienation. It is a civilization *contained* by the wilderness. Simms counters the problem of alienation by a topographical dissociation of history: the utopian character of Marion's camp is based on its being "a world apart," sealed off from overarching historical processes by the "impenetrable" foliage of the swamp, which provides an insulation against the contingency of historical developments.

The ideological implications of this utopian vision are far-reaching. It seems to imply an intense parochialism that is in contradiction to the nationalist surface theme of the novel. Indeed, it is tempting to read *The Partisan* as a sectionalist reinterpretation of the Revolution which limits the legitimate objectives of the War of Independence to the resistance against outside interference.[11] On the surface, it is the British army and its Tory allies who are represented as the invaders of the pastoral order. However, the Continental Army with its artificial hierarchies and centralist organization is obviously just as alien to the ideal civilization represented by Marion's city in the swamp. Indeed, if Kennedy's *Horse-Shoe Robinson* dwelt on the contrast between the "romance" of Marion's guerilla warfare as opposed to the "horrors" represented by the brutal military operations of the British army and Tarleton's Loyalists,[12] Simms's novel goes on to stress the differences between the partisans and the official Continental Army: "Marion was the very opposite of Gates in nearly all respects" (485). Although *The Partisan* describes a development from defeat to triumph, its ending is twisted: the narrative first relates the Battle of Camden, in which the Continental Army suffers a dramatic defeat after their commander Gates has haughtily refused the assistance of the partisans, and then closes with two splendid maneuvers in which the latter overpower a troop of Tories and finally save a Whig aristocrat from execution. While the military machinery of the Continental Army suffers defeat as a result of its inflexibility and arrogance, the partisans' triumphant operations are effected through their collaboration with the common citizenry of Dorchester, on the one hand, and nature, on the other.

The emphasis laid on the difference between the Carolina guerilla and the Continental Army in strategy, bearing, objective and success imbues the narrative's regional focalization of the Revolution with sectionalist overtones: it is implied that the

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[11] For a concise interpretation of Simms's sectionalism in relation to his Revolutionary novels, see Roger J. Bresnahan, "William Gilmore Simms's Revolutionary War: A Romantic View of Southern History," *Studies in Romanticism* 15 (1976): 573–587. Although Bresnahan believes that the novelist became a secessionist only during the 1840s, he describes the development of Simms's sectionalism as escalation of a sentiment that is evident even in his early fiction. See also Ch. S. Watson, *From Nationalism to Secessionism*, who proceeds from the—slightly paradoxical—thesis that "[i]n the first half of his career up to 1848, Simms struggled to maintain his nationalism, that is the devotion to the interests of the nation, even though the effort became increasingly difficult as his sectionalism grew stronger" (xii).

[12] Kennedy, *Horse-Shoe Robinson* 408; see the discussion of the passage in the previous chapter.

partisans are opposed not only to the tyrannical rule of Britons and Tories but also to the integration of their organic commonwealth into the new centralized political and social structure that is represented by the Continentals. The Revolution that is conducted from the swamp significantly differs from the Revolution as a whole.

As Michael Kreyling points out, "[t]he British . . . are not the only enemy; in fact, they merely stand in for the actual villain," which is history as a contingent process of change.[13] Instituting the vision of the city in the swamp as a counterforce to alienation, Simms simultaneously implies a radically conservative reinterpretation of the Revolution as regression from large-scale political history back to the pristine order of the swamp. *The Partisan* thus is a revolutionary novel also in that it propagates the dissolution of the power monopoly of a centralized government. As Roger J. Bresnahan claims, Simms eventually came to the conclusion that sectionalism was in accordance with the true principles of the Revolution and that there ought to be a "second revolution" consisting in a rebellion of the South against the North.[14]

The "extreme militancy" that Bresnahan recognizes in Simms[15] is present in *The Partisan* as an archaic ethos of violence. In the description of the triumphant rescue of Colonel Walton, for example, Singleton's valor is represented in the graphical terms of medieval "chivalric romance": "Right and left, his heavy sabre descended—a sweeping death, defying the opposing steel, and biting fatally at every stroke" until he " had ploughed his way through the living wall, with a steel and strength equally irresistible" (527–528). This ethos of violence works as a counterpoint to the peaceful spirit of the pastoral. Yet, the pastoral world of the swamp itself is represented as ambiguous. The swamp is a nourishing mother only to the partisans, who are its legitimate inhabitants and who observe the rules of the natural order. When these rules are violated by intruders, the dark underside of the swamp comes to the surface and the pastoral becomes a deadly place.

The novel offers an almost unbearably graphic description of violence in the scene that narrates the murder of Clough by the "maniac" Frampton. Desperately seeking revenge for the murder of his pregnant wife by Clough and a group of marauding Tories, Frampton has forsaken his humanity and turned into a creature of the swamp. Stealthily he enters the hut where the wounded enemy is held captive:

> Clough was in a stupor . . . and he muttered something to the intruder . . . The man replied not, but approaching closely, put his hand upon the bandagings of the wound, drawing them gently aside. The first distinct perception which the prisoner had of his situation was the agonizing sense of a new wound, as of some sharp weapon driven directly into the passage made by the old one. He writhed under the

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[13] Kreyling 40.
[14] Bresnahan 581–582; cf. 576–577.
[15] Bresnahan 581.

> instrument as it slanted deeper and deeper into his vitals ; but he had not strength to resist, and but little to cry out. . . . The knife went deeper—the whole frame of the assailant was upon it, and all motion ceased on the part of the sufferer with the single groan and distorted writhing which followed the last agony. In a moment after, the stranger had departed by the way he came ; and it was not till he had reached the thick swamp around, that the fearful laugh of the maniac . . . announced the success of his new effort at revenge. (115–116)

The scene is particularly malicious not only because Frampton acts in a way that leads his victim to take his tormentor for the long waited-for surgeon, but also because the representation suggests that the murder is a ritual repetition of the rape that Clough committed on Frampton's wife. Graphically representing the relentless way in which the natural order takes revenge on intruders, the passage reinforces a message that seems to be at the heart of the novel: the resilience of an order thought to be overcome by the forces of history.

The violent ethos of the narrative can be explained by Simms's insistence on the materiality of the ideal. If the ideal is as materially real as the fallen world of actuality, the opposition of ideality and actuality cannot be mediated. Instead, a deadly power struggle has to be waged between positive and negative forces. Such a Manichean plot, in which the powers of darkness are locked in a death-struggle (*pathos*) with the powers of light, is usually seen as the defining characteristic of "romance" narratives.[16] Kennedy's *Horse-Shoe Robinson* and the historical fiction of Caruthers utilize such a bipolar structure of values. However, these novelists try to replace the *pathos* by a process of conciliation. They stress the possibility of synthetic resolutions between the contending principles. Simms, on the other hand, implicitly formulates a *tertium non datur*. Like George Tucker had done in *The Valley of Shenandoah*, Simms again opposed the juggling mediation of "romance" and "real history." However, there is a decisive difference between the two novelists, for Simms, at least temporarily, seems to have thought that that a heroic intervention in the dynamics of progress was feasible. In *Egeria*, a book of meditations that was published in 1853, he would write: "true Conservatism is . . . the bold spirit which leaps into the car of progress, and, seizing upon the reins, directs its movements with a firm hand."[17] It is not quite clear where Simms wished to steer the "car of progress." On the surface, his dictum might be read as a plea for the conservative progressivism envisaged by Kennedy and Caruthers. Yet, there is evidence in Simms's fiction that a straight backwards course also held an attraction for the novelist.

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[16] Cf., e.g., Frye, *Secular Scripture* 53; Jameson, "Magical Narratives" 140–145.
[17] Simms, *Egeria* (1853); qtd in Bresnahan 581–82.

6.3 Rhetoric Digesting History: Porgy as Hero

In spite of the radically conservative longings evident in Simms's fiction, David Moltke-Hansen claims that the novelist was still in accordance with the "Whig philosophy of history," that he merely emphasized order as a third principle besides the ideas of progress and democracy. Arguing that Simms regarded aristocratic leadership within a democracy as "a stabilizing as well as a revolutionary force," Moltke-Hansen refers to Major Singleton as a typical protagonist of the idea of "ordered progress" according to which Simms interpreted the American Revolution as a "conservative revolution" in which change and persistence had coincided.[18] And indeed, the characetrization of Singleton seems to bear out such an interpretation:

> [H]e had his friendly word for all—some words, in every ear, of kind remark and pleasant encouragement. No person, however humble, went utterly unnoticed. . . . all in turn were sure, as the Major of Partisans went by, to hear his gentle salutation, in those frank tones which penetrated instantly to the heart, a sufficient guarantee for the sincerity of the speaker. And there was no effort in this familiar frankness, and no air of condescension. He was a man speaking to men ; and did not appear to dream of any necessity of making every word, look, and tone remind them of his authority. . . . When he addressed them, he did so with great respect, which always tutored them when they spoke to him. He always rose for this purpose, if previously he had been sitting. His was that due consideration of the man, as a man, that never permitted the same person, as an animal, to suppose that his embraces would be proper to his intercourse. Yet nobody ever thought of accusing Singleton of pride. . . . Truly, he was the man to be a leader of southern woodsmen. (355–356)

Singleton's achievements are due his mastery of a specific rhetoric which authenticates his innate aristocracy of character and, at the same time, establishes a face-to-face relationship with the common men. The passage stresses the Major's "sincerity," which is manifest in the sobriety of his rhetoric. Only at times, Singleton rises to a more emphatic style—for example, when he exhorts his men in a battle speech: "I do not call upon you to destroy men, but monsters ; not countrymen, but those who have no country—who have only known their country to rend her bowels and prey upon her vitals." Even in this instance, however, the narrator stresses that Singleton "had but few words," though these were "highly stimulating." And the effect of Singleton's exhortations still agrees with the ideal of sobriety and "sincerity": "There was no shout, no hurrah ; but the eyes were bent upon the ground, lips knit closely in solemn determination ; and Singleton saw at a glance that his men were to be relied on" (372–

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[18] David Moltke-Hansen, "Ordered Progress: The Historical Philosophy of William Gilmore Simms," *"Long Years of Neglect": The Work and Reputation of William Gilmore Simms*, ed. John Caldwell Guilds (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P. 1988) 126–147. While it seems to downsize the reactionary qualities of Simms's conservatism, Moltke-Hansen's argument has the advantage of dissociating the question of sectionalism from the question of progressivism, thus exploding the simple equation of progressivism and Unionism that biases much criticism on antebellum southern literature and politics.

373). The major's rhetoric is a precise tool, limiting itself to the utterly necessary. Its function transcends the military purpose: by lifting the common men it creates a new society that is supposed to be both aristocratic and democratic. In short, Singleton seems to support the interpretation that Simms was really a conservative progressive.

However, the major is not the only character of heroic dimensions in Simms's novel. For while Singleton is the eponymous protagonist of *The Partisan*, the reader's sympathies are more likely to be attracted by lieutenant Porgy, who is more human and more alive than the former and is frequently used as a focalizer. In a much quoted passage, Simms's first biographer William P. Trent claimed that the novelist closely identified with this character: "Simms said that Porgy was a transcript from real life, and I have it on good authority that he intended Porgy to be a reproduction of himself in certain moods."[19] While Singleton is a stereotypical representation of the ideal southern leader, the saving "bold spirit" who would leap "into the car of progress" and direct its course towards a beneficent resolution, in creating of Porgy the novelist seems to have indulged "certain moods" of his own—"moods" which were flatly contradictory to the ideal of "ordered progress." Throughout Simms's series of "Revolutionary romances," Porgy was to appear again and again, before he would eventually take center stage in *Woodcraft* (1852/54).

On the surface, Porgy's function in the first novel of the series is to allow for some comic passages within the serious story of Revolutionary history. Yet, the comedy enacted by the fat lieutenant is so attractive that it seems to appropriate (and to subvert) the action and the ethos of the novel. As Michael Kreyling observes in his study on "heroic narrative" in southern literature, Porgy "leads Simms and the genre into confusion." Originally intended as a "Falstaffian counterpoint to the chivalric Singleton and his serious page," the lieutenant "becomes a Rabelaisian subversion of the official order." Introducing Porgy Simms sails from "orthodox faith in the godlike hero Singleton" towards "heresy" and "goes over the edge of the known heroic world."[20]

Porgy's first appearance in the novel is prepared for by a sketch of his idiosyncratic character which is given by one of the partisans to Major Singleton—who is very skeptical as to the Lieutenant's merits: "You'll like him. Lord how he can talk. You'll like him, I know. He's been a rich planter in his time, but he's ate and drank and talked everything away, I reckon, but his horse, his nigger servant, and his broadsword" (98–99). This characterization of Porgy as a man who has "talked everything away" contrasts with Singleton's characterization as "a man talking to men"

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[19] William P. Trent, *William Gilmore Simms* (1892; New York: Greenwood, 1969) 109.
[20] Kreyling 47; 36.

in an interesting manner: the Major's rhetoric is pragmatically directed at other people, it is an act of organization, establishing his personality as the center of authority with minimal expenditure; conversely, Porgy's is a giving away, eventually reducing the speaker—who is literally a teller—to his central attributes: his stomach, his horse, his sword, and his slave. While Singleton's rhetoric is a tool, Porgy's is a life style:

> At a glance you saw that he was a jovial philosopher—one who enjoyed his bottle with his humors, and did not suffer the one to be soured by the other. It was clear that he loved all the good things of this life, and some possibly that we may not call good with sufficient reason. His abdomen and brains seemed to work together. He thought of eating perpetually, and, while he ate, still thought. But he was not a mere eater. He rather amused himself with a hobby when he made food his topic, as Falstaff discoursed of his own cowardice without feeling it. He was a wag, and exercised his wit with whomsoever he travelled . . . (110)

Porgy, the narrative implies, is an artist rather than a politician. Contrary to Singleton's, his eloquence is what Kenneth Burke calls "symbolic action for its own sake."[21] As a proponent of "poetry," Porgy strips language of its referential and pragmatic functions. Indulging in the play with words, he privileges form over content. If Porgy was intended as figuration of a specifically southern ethos, Simms's interpretation of that ethos is remarkably close to that offered by Cash in *The Mind of the South*. Concerning the "solidification" of the South through the conflict with "the Yankee" Cash explains: "[T]he shining sword of battle, the bread and wine—if I may be permitted to carry out the theological figure—through which men became one flesh with the Logos, was, of course, rhetoric, a rhetoric that every day became less and less a form of speech strictly and more and more a direct instrument of emotion, like music."[22]

Simms and Cash elaborate on the same ideologeme, and in doing so, both present an ultimately indissoluble mixture of critique and affirmation. Indeed, Simms's characterization of Porgy can be regarded as an early manifestation of the ideologeme which has been condensed in the image of "the southern mind" and which, in the twentieth century, would evolve into a seminal concept according to which the region was reinvented in a process that made the debunking of "myths" into the source of new mythologies.[23] In antebellum sectionalist ideologies, the concept was used to essentialize the differences between northern and southern societies as a conflict of

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[21] Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1966) 296.

[22] Cash 79.

[23] That writers like William Faulkner need not necessarily be seen as the conquerors of a southern mythology that originated in antebellum writers, and particularly in Simms, but that there is a common tradition of myth-making which may even have been more effective in the twentieth century than in the times of Simms, is intimated by Bresnahan: "To credit to Simms the South's consciousness of itself would be to disregard subsequent Southern myth-makers like Faulkner, O'Connor, and Davidson who—despite their obvious differences—have probably had more to do with the creation of a cult of the heroic South in our time than Simms in his" (587).

opposing mentalities in which southern idealism was pitted against northern materialism. Thus, in 1857 Simms explicitly contrasted the "mind of the North" to that of the South when he tried to explain his bewildering and infuriating experiences on a failed lecture tour through the North in the previous year.[24]

Lewis P. Simpson called attention to the analogies constructed in the sectionalist discourse between the supposed ethos of southern societies and the concept of "the literary mind," which he relates to Enlightenment ideas concerning the power of the intellect. Simpson argues that since the beginning of the nineteenth century social and economic modernization seemed to pose a threat to an order which based itself on the validity of the "literary mind" and suggests that southern writers strove to reassert its significance as a means of shaping the course of history.[25] In so far as the concept of the “literary mind” points to literature as a lifestyle rather than as a body of texts, Porgy may be regarded the heroic representative of this way of life. The specific kind of idealism evident in the characterization of the fat lieutenant is brought out by John Grammer's explanation for the glaring argumentative inconsistencies in the work of the pro-slavery theorist George Fitzhugh: "Fitzhugh was a careless writer, which no doubt helps to account for these internal contradictions. But it does not wholly explain them, any more than it explains the same rhetorical habit in Whitman or Emerson. In all three cases these contradictions express (and are meant to express) the superiority of conception to mere circumstance: of mind, we might say, to history."[26] Porgy's heroism also is in the persistence with which he supposes the "superiority of conception to mere circumstance" and of "mind" to "history." Moreover, Grammer's remark shows that the rhetoric idealism of Fitzhugh and Simms was not a purely southern phenomenon. Indeed, the speaker of Whitman's "Song of Myself" and Simms's Porgy have a lot in common. The famous dictum "Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes)"[27] is so close to the oratorical style and the sentiment of Porgy that, were it put into the mouth of the partisan philosopher, it probably would not strike the reader of *The Partisan*, *Woodcraft* or *The Forayers* as exceptional.

Porgy's Whitmanesque fondness for eloquence is connected to a strong partiality for food. It is primarily through his mouth that he seeks to interact with the

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[24] Simms, "Antagonisms of the Social Moral. North and South," unpublished lecture in the Charles Carroll Simms Collection of the South Carolina Library, U of SC; qtd in Miriam J. Shillingsburg, "Simms's Failed Lecture Tour of 1856: The Mind of the North," *"Long Years of Neglect"*, ed. Guilds (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1988) 188.

[25] Simpson, *The Dispossessed Garden*.

[26] Grammer 125.

[27] Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" (1855; 1881) 1324–26, *Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose*, ed. Ellman Crasnow (London: Dent, 1993) 79.

world around him.[28] However, this obsession with food does not indicate materialism but, paradoxically, spiritualism: Porgy devours materiality and digests it into thoughts and words. This, at least, is what the "epicure" claims himself. Having just caught a number of enormous terrapins, he explains to one of the partisans:

> I cannot talk to you for an hour, John Davis, my boy—not for an hour—here's food for thought in all that time. Food for thought did I say! Ay, for how much thought! I am thoughtful. The body craves food, indeed, only that the mind may think, and half our earthly cares are for this material. It is falsehood and folly to speak of eating as a mere animal necessity, the love of which is vulgarly designated an animal appetite. It is not so with me. The taste of the game is nothing to the pleasure of taking it—nothing to the pleasure of preparing it in a manner worthy of the material, and of those who are to enjoy it. I am not selfish, I share with all ; and, by the way, John Davis, I feel very much like whipping the fellow who shows no capacity to appreciate. (321)

First, Porgy suggests that he eats only to be able to think; the next step in his series of anti-utilitarian inversions of causality is to claim that the eating of the food is nothing to the hunting of the game; and finally he postulates pleasure as a duty, a well-nigh religious rite that separates the worthy from the unworthy.

The passages dealing with the capture, preparation and eating of the terrapins––and Porgy's incessant discourse on the theme—stretch over dozens of pages.[29] Indeed, the reader is made to feel that the episode dramatizes an ideological statement which is at the core of the novel. At the beginning of the episode, Davis surprises Porgy as, in the middle of the night, the latter is crouching besides "a long dark pond, which was fed by numerous sluices from the swamp," watching out for the terrapins. The yeoman, who has not yet discovered the animals, is startled by the strange behavior of his superior: "Davis could not say at first whether he lay flat upon the ground, or whether he was on his knees. To suppose him to be crawling upon all fours, would be a supposition scarcely consistent with the dignity of his office and the dimensions of his person. Yet, there was so much that was equivocal in his attitude, that all these conjectures severally ran through the head of the woodman" (315). What is stressed here is the contrast between the dignity that would be consistent with Porgy's rank as an officer and the way in which, lying on his belly in the swamp, he exposes himself to the base materiality of existence. Indeed, on realizing Davis's presence Porgy is mortified—and he tries to compensate for this mortification by overpowering his subordinate with a burst of eloquence:

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[28] On Porgy's relation to food, see Anne Kolodny, "Every Mother's Son: The Revolutionary War Romances of William Gilmore Simms," *The Lay of the Land* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1975) 115–132, who dissects the hero's psychology and discusses the "regressive aspect" of his "excessive orality" (125).

[29] The motif is introduced in the beginning of chapter 30 (315) and it is only towards the end of chapter 33 (365) that the meal is eventually finished.

> [A]s he spoke, he motioned to Davis to sink down, crouch close, and creep towards him. Davis, much bewildered, did as he was required, Porgy meanwhile, *sotto voce*, continuing to dilate after his usual fashion of eloquence—a style by the way, that was very apt to bewilder all his hearers. Davis had never studied in the schools of euphuism ; nor in any school, indeed, except that of the swamp. He fancied he knew the philosophy of the swamp as well as any other man ; and that Porgy should extract from it a source of knowledge hitherto concealed from him, was a subject of very great amazement. (316)

Porgy's behavior is highly histrionic. Obviously, the genre is comedy—yet, it is a comedy purposefully and delightfully enacted by Porgy himself. The Lieutenant transforms his mortification into an act of carnivalization, a subversion of established hierarchies, value systems and modes of knowledge. Porgy not only deviates from the behavior expected from an officer, but he makes the hunting of terrapins into a burlesque of warfare and transforms the very swamp into a "source of knowledge" or religious inspiration. Declaring that alligator terrapins are not only eatable but are in fact a heavenly delicacy, Porgy extends the transformative powers of his digestion into the heart of the swamp, down to the basest forms of animal and vegetable life. Mingling the sacred with the profane and the sublime with the ridiculous, he erodes the boundaries between civilization and nature, between animal and human spheres. In order to approach the shy terrapins without startling them, he metamorphoses into a grunting hog and, having come close, is even moved to court the ugly animals like a lover.[30] The Lieutenant's heroism is in the boldness with which he proposes and enacts the materiality of the ideal symbolic order, surmounting alienation by conflating the existential civilizational dichotomy that Burke defines as "animality" versus "symbolicity."[31] Converting matter into spirit, Porgy is able to "extract" wisdom from the swamp. In fact, he blasphemes the idea of transubstantiation by referring to the terrapins as "our quail and manna of the swamp" (317). Claiming the power to invest the material world with new and transcendent meanings,[32] he may be understood as a figuration of Simms's notion of the artist: Porgy is the protagonist of inversions of fact and representation, of real and fictional history—inversions which are at the heart of Simms's idealist ontology and aesthetics.

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[30] "'Beautiful creature, sleep on!' murmured Porgy to himself, in tones and words as tender as made the burden of his serenade, in the days of his youth, to the dark-eyed damsels upon the waters of the Ashley and the Savannah" (320). Porgy's perverse desire to metamorphose into an animal is suggested in yet another passage of the terrapin sequence, when he playfully fits the empty shell of a terrapin to his belly. To his great mortification, in this activity he is surprised by Singleton (352).

[31] Cf. Burke, "Definition of Man," *Language as Symbolic Action* 3–24; quote: 7.

[32] See Lewis P. Simpson's *Mind and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989), who claims that the strategy of converting "matter" into "mind" was an important aspect of the pro-slavery argument: "The southern intellectuals turned over the rationalistic coin of the Enlightenment ethos, and instead of continuing to secularize the spiritual, so to speak, spiritualized the secular" (31).

Clearly, one function of the terrapin episode is to offer comic relief, specifically to the interspersed Gothic scenes in which the "maniac" Frampton drowns a captive British sergeant. Yet, Simms apparently wanted to make sure that Porgy would not be mistaken for a mere caricature:

> Now, it will not do to misconceive Lieutenant Porgy. If we have said or shown anything calculated to lessen his dignity in the eyes of any of our readers, remorse must follow. Porgy might *play* the buffoon, if he pleased ; but in the mean time, let it be understood, that he was born to wealth, and had received the education of a gentleman. He had wasted his substance, perhaps, but this matter does not much concern us now. It is only important that he should not be supposed to waste himself. (358)

Porgy, then, is to be understood as a virtuoso manipulator of significations. His histrionic enactments and rhetorical maneuvers aim at an ontological revolution that would resolve the contradiction of mind and matter. It is exactly his habit of exposing himself to failure, ridicule and mortification, to the baseness of existence and the contingency of history, that is taken to constitute his particular heroism. Wasting his "substance," i.e. divesting himself of the material attributes of social standing, he is spiritually ennobled.

At the same time, the fat lieutenant follows an inverse strategy of going through the bathos of material existence to the apocalyptic realm of ideality. Thus, Porgy's corpulence, his gaining in bodily "substance," is represented as evidence of his mental growth. Furthermore, by putting on weight he translates history into concrete experience: his belly is not only a potent symbolic statement against utilitarianism but also a material bulwark against the contingency of history. In an old but extraordinarily instructive essay, Simone Vauthier claimed that Porgy's "mountainous abdomen" is to be interpreted as "incorporated time." As Vauthier put it, Simms's fiction conducts "an inquiry into the properties of time" in which "the antinomy between permanency and change" is the most central theme. It "finds a concrete existential solution when the interrelation of past, present, and future is recognized and experienced. Porgy, having literally assimilated his past and fearlessly . . . faced the future, achieves freedom of action in the present . . ."[33] He contains contingency by writing down history in his own flesh, he translates change into the material persistence of his enormous belly. Indeed, having finished his meal Porgy exclaims:

> So much is secure of life. . . . I am satisfied—I have lived today, and nothing can deprive me of the 22d June, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty. The day is completed : it should always close with the dinner hour. It is

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[33] Simone Vauthier, "Of Time and the South: The Fiction of William Gilmore Simms," *Southern Literary Journal* 5.1 (1972): 26–27; 31–32. The quotes loosely refer to *Woodcraft* rather than *The Partisan*, but Vauthier is investigating the characterization of Porgy in general and not in relation to a single novel.

> then secure—we cannot be deprived of it : it is recorded in the history of hopes realized, and of feelings properly felt. (364)

Vauthier stresses Simms's use of "romance" for the construction of a "usable past" that is achieved by relating the scattered fragments of history.[34] However, while the intention is obvious, its success seems doubtful. In fact, the characterization of Porgy, may be read as a self-consciously ironic commentary on the ideological conflicts that tore Simms. The lieutenant's peculiar strategy of literally incorporating history points at the precariousness of trying to formulate a usable past: the only strategy by which the fragmentation of history can be overcome seems to be a desperate quixotism that declares one's own navel the center of the world. Thus, *The Partisan* seems to suggest that the establishment of historical coherence must result in the sectional fragmentation of American national history. This is borne out also by the image of Marion's city in the swamp. It implies that history can be rendered meaningful only if it is restricted to a circumscribed area, that the only way of countering contingency is clinging to one's native ground. Marion's camp represents an ideal civilization because it is walled in by an impenetrable forest and a labyrinth of waterways. On a subtextual level at least, Simms's novel thus marks a transition from the "romance" of national history to the "romance" of secession. The national history constructed by Simms was really an unusable past, and especially through the attractive character of Porgy, the novel even betrays a vague consciousness of the fact.

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[34] Vauthier; esp. 6–8.

7. From "Romance" to Real Politics: Nathaniel B. Tucker's *The Partisan Leader*

7.1 A Handbook for Rebellion

Borrowing a term from C. Hugh Holman, Jan Norby Gretlund describes the year 1835 as "the first *annus mirabilis* of Southern fiction." In that year Kennedy's *Horse-Shoe Robinson* and the second volume of Caruthers' *The Cavaliers of Virginia* were published as well as Simms's *The Partisan* and *The Yemassee*, Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* and Ingraham's description of *The South-West*. As Gretlund claims, 1835 is remarkable not only for witnessing a short "first flowering of Southern writing" but also for constituting a dead point of ideological development, "a rare moment" of "internal dialogue," before the South began its "self-destructive" descent into radical sectionalism." [1] Gretlund singles out a specific novel as marker of the ending of the "*annus mirabilis*": *The Partisan Leader*, which the Virginian Nathaniel Beverley Tucker––a relative of George Tucker—published in 1836 under the pseudonym Edward William Sidney. According to Gretlund, the novel was the first clear indication in literature of a "self-destructive preoccupation" that was to take possession of the South: "From now on southern literature would be 'hag-ridden' by politics and political rhetoric."[2]

While the assumption of a general collapse of antebellum southern fiction into pure propaganda is probably not entirely correct (see below, chapters 9-11), *The Partisan Leader* certainly does confirm Tucker's reputation as "one of the earliest Southern secessionists."[3] With unrestrained enthusiasm, the narrative invents a future in which Virginia joins a "Southern Confederacy" and eventually achieves independence from the Union in a guerilla war against the Federal Army. Indeed, the novel was so significant as a foreshadowing of secession that during the Civil War it

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1 Jan Norby Gretlund, "1835: The First *Annus Mirabilis* of Southern Fiction," *Rewriting the South: History and Fiction*, ed. Lothar Hönnighausen and Valeria Gennaro Lerda (Tübingen: Francke, 1993) 121–130; quotes: 122. Cf. C. Hugh Holman, "William Gilmore Simms and the 'American Renaissance'" (1962); rpt in *The Roots of Southern Writing: Essays on the Literature of the Americana South* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1972) 76. Besides the publication of novels by southern authors, the emergence of a number of literary magazines is another indication that the first half of the thirties saw a flowering of southern literature which culminated in 1835: two periodicals, the *Southern Review* and the *Southern Literary Gazette*, had been founded already in 1828; the *Southern Literary Messenger*, probably the most significant Southern periodical, started to appear in 1834 and the *Southern Literary Journal* commenced publication in 1835.

2 Gretlund 130.

3 Hubbell 424. On Tucker's life and work, see: Arthur Wrobel, "Nathaniel Beverley Tucker," *Antebellum Writers in New York and the South*, ed. Joel Myerson (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1979) 345–347, vol. 3 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography*; Robert J. Brugger, *Beverley Tucker: Heart over Head in the Old South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978); Parrington, "Nathaniel Beverley Tucker: A Virginia Fire Eater," *Romantic Revolution* 33–38.

was reprinted in New York under the title *A Key to the Disunion Conspiracy*. This reissue was prefaced by an "Explanatory Introduction" which presented the text as evidence that the South had been plotting secession for a long time and had worked to bring about disunion and war by systematically undermining the political system.[4]

Besides the almost uncanny similarity of their titles, *The Partisan* and *The Partisan Leader* share a lot of characteristics as to their ideological sentiment and the mode of its representation: both narratives revel in the "romance" of guerilla warfare and show it as superior to the pomp and inflexibility of the regular military; both have splendid young heroes who use their aristocratic authority for achieving union with the common men; in both novels, this union is the backbone of a conservative revolution that has the immediate objective of repelling an invasion (in Tucker's novel that of the Federal Army); and both show a conflict between a degenerate civilization and an apparently sound order that is closer to nature.

At the same time, *The Partisan Leader* reads like a radicalization of *The Partisan* in that it seems to spell out the secessionist subtext of Simms's novel. If it is possible to discover in the earlier novel traces of Simms's emergent belief in the necessity of a second—i.e. a reactionary—revolution, Tucker uses fiction to provide the handbook for such a rebellion. This translation of "romance" into propaganda is achieved by a skillful manipulation of the genre of historical fiction. For *The Partisan Leader* is a futuristic tale told as history, a "historical romance of the future."[5] In fact, the radicalism of the novel is in its substitution of the future for the past even more than in its substitution of Van Buren for the British King and of the Federal Army for the British or the Tories.

As a feigned date of publication, the novel gives the year 1856, and an introductory "Dedication" (xii–xv) informs the reader of the author's intention to commemorate the contribution of the Virginian people to the struggle in which independent statehood was won. This prefatory text achieves a dual representational

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[4] The edition of *The Partisan Leader* here referred to is a facsimile rpt of the Civil War New York edition: Nathaniel Beverl[e]y Tucker [as Edward William Sydney], *The Partisan Leader: A Tale of the Future* (1836; alleged date of publication: 1856), with an additional introduction; rpt. as *The Partisan Leader: A Key to the Disunion Conspiracy: Secretly Printed in Washington (in the year 1836) by Duff Green, for Circulation in the Southern States: But afterwards Suppressed*, 2 vols. (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1861); facsimile rpt, The Muckrakers: American Novels of Muckracking, Propaganda, and Social Protest (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Gregg, 1968). Subsequent page references will occur parenthetically in the text. During the war, the novel was reprinted also in Richmond by West & Johnston, who advertised it in the *Southern Literary Messenger* as "A Novel, and an Apocalypse of the Origin and Struggles of the Southern Confederacy" (qtd in Hubbell 430). The first modern reprint of the novel, ed. and introd. Carl Bridenbaugh, appeared in the Americana Deserta series (New York, 1933).

[5] Grammer, "Nathaniel Beverley Tucker and the Historical Romance of the Future," *Pastoral and Politics in the Old South* 68–97.

trick. On the one hand, Virginia's independence is represented as an established and well-known historical fact; on the other, the rhetoric of American Republicanism is transferred to the cause of secessionism. *The Partisan Leader* can be regarded as a travesty of the genre of the Revolutionary novel, or generally of the way in which Americans memorialized the origin of their independent nationhood. By projecting the conventional paradigms and rhetoric of remembering the Revolution into the future, Tucker demonstrated how fractured the basic referents of a collective American identity had become and released the ideological forces that had been shored up in the contemplation of its fragments.

The time scheme of *The Partisan Leader* is unusually sophisticated not only on the extradiegetic level—telling the future as past—but also on the diegetic level. Considering the time when the novel was written, it is rather surprising that it should have an open beginning. Yet, at the onset of the first chapter the reader suddenly finds himself in the year 1849 and in the middle of the story. The actual exposition, which provides information on the political situation and on the former history of the principal characters, is deferred until chapters four and five. After the artistically rather effective opening, the expository matter, cast in the style of politically charged historiography, comes as a sort of let-down. It is the first indication of the novel's general tendency to subordinate the story to an obtrusive political purpose. The exposition reaches back to Jackson's Proclamation and Force Bill of 1832 and interprets these legal measures as affronts which were apt to provoke even moderate Virginians. These, it is explained, fell to supporting Martin Van Buren. The new president, however, eventually turned out an even more radical centralist than Jackson. Imperceptibly, Tucker transforms his account of recent or imminent political events into a fictional historiography of the future. He has Van Buren go for a third term of office; and when this comes to an end, the President manipulates the vote and creates a kind of dictatorship. This *coup d'état* leads to the foundation of a "Southern Confederacy," which Virginia initially does not join. When federal troops are moved into the Old Dominion, however, secessionist sentiment eventually runs high. Beginning with chapter six, the novel embarks on a detailed account of the diegetic past, and it is only with chapter thirty, far into the second volume, that the narrative eventually arrives at the time of its opening.

According to the story, the secessionist revolution eventually sets off when the military tries to interfere in the election to the state legislature of Virginia. The young Virginian Douglass Trevor, an officer of the Federal Army who has been moved to resign for personal and for political reasons, becomes the leader of a highly successful "partisan corps" (240) that operates in the region of the Blue Ridge. In an act of foul

play, however, the guerilla captain is kidnapped and incarcerated in Washington. Surprisingly, the narrative does not end with a triumphant description of Virginia's victory over the Federal Army but breaks off suddenly when the fate of the principal hero is at its nadir: he is in the hands of the tyrant Van Buren and the plans for his rescue appear to be endangered. While the reader learns that the southern revolution eventually turned out successfully, it remains a mystery how the overwhelming difficulties described in the actual narrative should have been overcome.[6]

Beverley Tucker's political faction, initially known as the Opposition Party, would latter be called the "Whigs" in allusion to the anti-monarchist rhetoric that they directed against Jackson's successor. They depicted Andrew Van Buren as an enemy of American Republicanism who had ambitions to transform into "King Andrew." This demagoguery is very pronounced in Tucker's novel, which had the immediate political purpose of influencing the outcome of the election of 1836, in which Van Buren ran against four Whig candidates. The narrator sneeringly reports that by the late forties the president's residence has come to be designated as a "palace" (132). Here Van Buren is shown to hold court as the embodiment of a culture that adores luxury and dotes on appearances:

> The place of hair was supplied by powder, which his illustrious example had again made fashionable. The revolution in public sentiment, commencing sixty years ago, had abolished all the privileges of rank and age ; which trained up the young to mock at the infirmities of their fathers, and encouraged the unwashed artificer to elbow the duke from his place of precedence ; this revolution had now completed its circle. (133–134)

In a similar manner as George Tucker in *The Valley of Shenandoah*, Beverley Tucker represents the North and the South as irreconcilable social systems. The North as a capitalist society that is set on a cult of surfaces is opposed to the South as a heroic society in which the permanence of significations is ensured through the observation of

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[6] The time and plot structure of *The Partisan Leader* are astonishingly similar to a later propaganda novel: Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908). Like Tucker's, London's narrative is told from the point of view of a future in which a revolutionary reorganization of society has finally been achieved (even though this future is far more distant in *The Iron Heel*) and looks back into a near future when the struggle for change will be waged. The novels agree also in offering a fictional introduction which establishes the enlightened perspective of a post-revolutionary future. Furthermore, both texts break off at a point when the cause of the revolution seems to be vanquished and withhold the details of its eventual success. The comparison with London's novel reveals that *The Partisan Leader* foreshadows the political and representational strategies of a new era by substituting an absolute future for the absolute history provided by Kennedy and Caruthers. Another fiction that might be compared to *The Partisan Leader* is George Tucker's *A Century Hence: Or, A Romance of 1941* (presumably written in 1841 but published only in 1977). The similarities of Beverley Tucker's novel with Edward Bellamy's utopian "romance" *Looking Backward* (1888) likewise are striking. Yet, Bellamy concentrates on the description of the new society, and not on the process of dissolving the old; furthermore, *Looking Backward* supposes that utopia would be realized by evolution and not by revolution.

social hierarchy and tradition. From this perspective, Beverley Tucker conceived secession as liberation from what he saw as a vicious circle of self-defeating revolutions inaugurated by the French Revolution. Secession would be a revolution to end the permanent revolving of modern history from monarchical absolutism to democratic radicalism and back again. With *The Partisan Leader* Beverley Tucker not only attempted to lay the ideological foundations for such a revolution. Taking the step from “romance” to real politics, the narrative is actually more than mere propaganda fiction: it seeks to provide a practical handbook for secessionist rebellion.

7.2 Coercion by Consent: Tucker’s Social Vision

In his reactionary conservatism Tucker foreshadowed George Fitzhugh, who would declare in a wartime article that the South was engaged in "a solemn protest against the doctrines of natural liberty, human equality, and the social contract." Had he lived long enough, Tucker would probably even have agreed with Fitzhugh's assertion that secession and the Civil War constituted an "attempt to roll back the Reformation in its political phases."[7] According to Tucker's novel, the modern state, which had its roots in the Reformation, is monarchic absolutism masking as egalitarian democracy, always aiming at the centralist accumulation of power. The fictional Van Buren's goal is "the union of all power in hands of the Central Government," while the states are to be reduced to "municipal corporations, exercising such powers as we choose to grant" (156).

In order to achieve their aims, the president and his adviser plan to instigate a weak secessionist rebellion in the South which would serve as a pretext for military intervention. These schemes rely on what the minister superciliously refers to as "the fantastic notions of what southern men call chivalry" (149). As in the fictions of George Tucker, Kennedy, Caruthers and Simms, the rhetoric of "chivalry" is ubiquitous in Beverley Tucker's novel. However, while Caruthers was trying to make "chivalry" the keyword of a progressive heroism that had been at the heart of the American Revolution, Beverley Tucker actually thought of "chivalry" as a medieval political and ethical concept antithetical to the modern state. The narrative stresses that the northern-dominated political establishment has come to be so corrupted as to positively despise the idea of honor. Conversely, the "chivalry" and scrupulous "standard of honor" of the southern heroes is incessantly dwelt upon. Even more than the

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[7] George Fitzhugh, "The Revolutions of 1776 and 1861 Contrasted," *Southern Literary*

president's aggressive centralist politics, the northern attack against the ethos of chivalry seems to make rebellion a legitimate cause.

If the capitalist North is characterized by ambiguity and hypocrisy, the most important mark of southern "chivalry" is the identity of being, feeling and appearance which is taken to be the ethical corollary of the unity of society, politics and economy that will come with decentralization. Thus, the protagonist Douglas Trevor and his brother Arthur are able to control but unable to hide their emotions. The hero figures in *The Partisan Leader* are literally transparent, they are constitutionally unable to disguise themselves. When he is provoked by a stranger Arthur's blood is "rushing to his face, as if it would burst through his clear skin" (20). In a way that is reminiscent of Arthur Butler in *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, the nobility of Arthur and Douglas is manifest even if they are clad in buckskin. The narrator observes of the former that "his whole air would have passed him for a gentleman, in any dress and any company, where the constituents of that character are rightly understood" (5). Similarly, Douglas "in any dress, in any company, under any circumstances . . . would have been recognized as a gentleman" (341). This transparency goes along with an aristocratic irritability that does not fail to have an effect on the creatures of the president's spoils system. When a corrupted Virginian slanders the heroine's father in her presence, the hero unleashes the full power of his superior moral indignation: "he glared upon him with an eye that instantly brought the other to his senses" so that he "stood blenching and cowering" under Douglas's "fierce glance" (85).

Of course, it is among the most important tasks of chivalric heroes to defend the women. Indeed, according to the narrative the necessity of putting up a safeguard against the corruption of the female sex is one of the primary motivations of secession. The novel links the onslaught of modern ambiguity with the blurring of gender lines and the increasing appearance of women in the public. The mysterious "Mr. B——," who pulls the strings of secession and whom Tucker may have intended as a portrait of Calhoun,[8] endorses Douglas's resolution never to make the private life of a woman an object of public debate: "I thank god that the fashion has not reached us. A woman exposed to notoriety, learns to bear and then to love it. When she gets to that she should go North ; write books ; patronize abolition societies ; or keep a boarding school. She is no longer fit to be the wife of a Virginia gentleman" (123). In another passage the narrator, having surmised that Delia might have been moved by Douglas's chivalrous conduct to give him a kiss, points out that in the South this would not have been regarded as improper behavior (130). This observation is followed by one of the

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Messenger (1863); qtd in Grammer 102.

[8] Cf. Parrington 35.

most interesting passages in the novel:

> Thank God ! the frame of our society has kept us free from the cause and its consequences. Whatever corruption there may be among us is restrained to a particular class, instead of diffusing itself by continuous contact through all grades and ranks. If it were true, as the wise, and eloquent, and pious, and benevolent, and discreet Dr. Channing had said, some fifteen years before, that below a certain line all was corrupt, it was equally true that above it all was pure. Nature had marked the line, and established there a boundary which the gangrene of the social body could never pass. (131)[9]

The division line referred to by Tucker is of course the color line. The institution of slavery purportedly constitutes a safeguard against the onslaught of modernity, since the slaves form a social stratum that monopolizes "corruption" and thus keeps the rest of society pure. Moreover, it is implied that slavery blocks the social mobility not only of the labor force but of all social strata. As the unchangeable foundation of a future southern society, the institution of slavery will guarantee the static permanence of its hierarchical organization. "Nature" (i.e. the color of one's skin) rather than intricate social or economic processes will determine the structure of the social body and the standing of an individual. This reactionary utopia is both a variant and a transgression of Kennedy's pastoral ratification of slavery in *Swallow Barn*. Propagating slavery as an effective insulation against modernization and thus as a positive good, *The Partisan Leader* offers a political radicalization of the idea that the "peculiar institution" links southern society to the past and to natural history. In addition, Tucker's weird speculations contain a very pragmatic idea: to counteract the danger of social revolution by the existence of a fourth estate that is completely set aside from the rest of society and may be effectively controlled.

For all its rhetorical flourish, however, Tucker's argument is all too paradoxical. Indeed, the narrative itself contradicts the daunting idea that slavery monopolizes social corruption by simultaneously stressing its beneficial effects on the slaves. As often in the pro-slavery argument, economic, existentialist and paternalist ratifications of the "peculiar institution" counteract one another.

The paternalist argument is most clearly expressed in the description of the slaves of Bernard Trevor, who functions in Tucker's novel as the embodiment of the southern ethos in a similar manner as Porgy in Simms's *Partisan*. Like Porgy's slave, Bernard's body servant is called Tom—and even more than the fat Lieutenant, Trevor treats his favorite “chattel” not merely as a child but really as a friend: "'Tom,' added he, in a tone of marled gentleness, 'the fire is low. No, not yourself, old man . . . not you, my

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[9] The sardonic reference is to the popular Unitarian minister and pulpit orator William Ellery Channing. In 1835—one year before *The Partisan Leader* was published and "some fifteen years before" the narrative present of 1849—Channing had published his abolitionist treatise

good old friend'" (97). Douglas is deeply impressed by the old servant's dignity. His uncle uses the occasion for a pro-slavery speech that climaxes in a dictum reminiscent of Fitzhugh's postulate that the whole working class, black and white, ought to be enslaved: "You will . . . bless God that your lot has been cast where the freedom of all, who, in the economy of Providence, are capable of freedom, is rendered practicable by the particular form in which the subordination of those who must be slaves is cast" (99). But the postulate that social stability depends on the coercive control of the labor force goes along with the assertion that slavery actually elevates the bondspeople. Recalling a passage from Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which also serves as motto to the respective chapter in Tucker's novel, Bernard explains that slaves are often characterized by a "proud humility" while the menials of the North are bound to display a "servile sulkiness" (99).[10]

"Proud humility" also seems to be the proper stance of the common men, on whose successful integration Tucker's reactionary utopia depends. Like Kennedy in *Horse-Robinson* and Simms in *The Partisan*, Tucker stresses the importance of achieving a covenant between a quasi-aristocratic ruling class and simple yet virtuous yeoman farmers. As in *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, the common men are represented as "mountaineers."[11] The mediator between them and the large planters of the Tidewater is a character named Schwartz, a cunning "mountaineer" of very low social origin. When he initially encounters the man, Arthur Trevor sees in him only "a little, old fellow, not less than sixty years of age, in whose manner and carriage there was nothing to supply the want of dignity in his diminutive form and features" (18). Shortly, however, the young aristocrat learns to appreciate Schwartz as the "sturdy mountaineer" (32) who has transformed the farmers of the Blue Ridge into a well-trained militia. At the same time, Schwartz immediately recognizes the superior authority of a young aristocrat like Douglas: He "knew . . . that there were some duties of a commander for which he was not fit ; and that there were other things to which a chief could not devote himself, for which he was better qualified than any other" (344).[12]

Negro Slavery, in which he argued that slavery robs the bondspeople of their humanity.

[10] The quote is from the famous passage in which Burke, praising the character and the appearance of Marie-Antoinette, bemoans the demise of the "age of chivalry": "But the age of chivalry is gone. —That of sophisters, oeconomists, and calculators, has succeeded ; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom" (Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Connor Cruise O'Brien [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969] 170).

[11] Cf., e.g. *The Partisan Leader* 15; 255. In the description of the battle between Federal troops and Douglas's army in chapter 38, the latter is always referred to as "the mountaineers."

[12] However, both the hypocrisy and the spuriousness of Tucker's social vision are betrayed when this ideal middleman between the simple farmers of the West and the eastern planter class, turns out to be a kind of golem, a creature of the mysterious "B——," who explains: "I

Tucker attempts to reconcile his vision of social hierarchy with the idea of democratic individualism through the concept of partisan warfare, which evokes the ideal of an organic society of small units that is both aristocratic and democratic. As the American Revolution according to Kennedy's and Simms's representations, Tucker's reactionary southern revolution relies on guerilla strategies. The image of partisan warfare, highlighted in the titles of Simms's *Partisan* and Tucker's *Partisan Leader*, hints at the peculiar qualities of the respective causes: they are conducted in close collaboration with the natural environment; their success depends less on a regular army and centralized structures of decision-making than on the relatively autonomous operations of small units; and, most importantly, these units, characterized by face-to-face relationships between the members of different social strata, are epitomies of the ideal society that is to be erected. The democratic character of partisan warfare is stressed when Schwartz informs the narrator—who has meanwhile revealed to the reader his identity as a participant in the occurrences—that "there an't no officers among us, and we only just call the Captain so for short" (343).

The common men actually seem to be elevated by recognizing the superior claims of the planter class to authority, for even the simple "mountaineer" is supposed to partake in the ennoblement of the white man that is brought about by the existence of slavery. The idea that slavery relativizes the social and political inequality among the white population is explicated in the dedication of the novel to "The People of Virginia" and especially to "that class, peculiar to a society whose institutions are based on domestic slavery ; the honest, brave, hardy, and high-spirited peasantry of Virginia" (xiv). However, there is going to be a clear geographical division between the plebeian and the patrician elements in Tucker's future Virginia: while the Tidewater is to be the dominion of an exclusive plantation economy, the yeoman farmers are to be restricted to the mountainous West of Virginia, a region not suitable for large plantations.

The cornerstones of the ideal Virginia imagined by Tucker are an aristocratic ruling class, pure women and a devoted yeomanry. The stability of this society rests on the observation of clear boundaries: the geographical boundary between the plantation regime of the Tidewater and the small farms in the mountains, the gender line, and—most importantly—the color line. The institution of slavery is at the very basis of Tucker's social system, it is conceived of as the precondition of the kind of social

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picked him up, nearly forty years ago, a little, dirty, ragged boy, without money, without friends without education" (254). On Schwartz, see Arthur Wrobel, "'Romantic Realism': Nathaniel Beverley Tucker," *American Literature* 42 (1970): 328, who refers to a letter in which Tucker explained that he modeled Schwartz after a rogue whom the judge regenerated in Missouri. This source might indicate that "B——" was intended not only as a portrait of Calhoun, but that Tucker may have been fond of imagining himself in the role of the mysterious secret agent of secession.

hierarchy envisaged in the novel: slavery is a bulwark against modernization; it is a safeguard against the corruption of women; it is the basis of the planters' pretensions to the character of feudal landlords; and it elevates not only the slave masters but also the simple farmers and even the slaves themselves. Of course, Tucker's vision betrays a basic contradiction between the paradigm of coercion and the paradigm of consent: the novel postulates a society in which the majority, i.e. women, yeoman farmers and the enslaved labor force, agree to subordinate themselves to the supreme rule of a few, a society in which everybody is not only forced to keep in his or her place but is actually happy to do so.

Tucker claims that even the slaves can be brought to identify with the system of slavery. In fact, he comes close to formulating the bold paradox of enslavement by consent. When a troop of the federal government surrounds Bernard Trevor's home in order to arrest the secessionists, "Mr. B——" assembles the "black watch" and explains to the surprised Douglas: "Aye, . . . The *sidier dhu*—the trusty body-guard of a Virginia gentleman. His own faithful slaves" (194).[13] Playing on the double signification of "black" in this context, the narrative constructs an analogy between southern slavery and Walter Scott's representation of the primitive feudalism of the Scottish Highlands: the slaves are to gather around their master much in the manner in which Scott's clansmen gather around their chief. It is stressed that "B——'s" intention in raising the "black watch"—in fact, he is even giving out fire arms to the slaves—is propagandistic even more than military: "We must show that that which our enemies, and some even of ourselves, consider as our weakness, is, in truth, our strength" (203). The slaves really manage to disarm a body of federal soldiers. Assuming that the slaves are desperately waiting to be liberated, the soldiers eagerly respond to the masquerade of Jack, who plays the role of "Sambo," speaking in a grossly overdone slave idiom. Intoxicated by the brandy that the slave has offered them, the would-be liberators suddenly "found themselves surrounded by a dusky ring, from which issued a voice, not unlike that of their friend Jack, which informed them, in good English, that they were prisoners" (221). The slaves, it turns out, have only masqueraded as slaves: the reality of slavery seems to counteract the implications of its definition.

Trying to convey a critique of abolitionist paternalism and an effective image of the slaves' alleged loyalty, the narrative thus shows African Americans as relatively autonomous human beings. Of course, such a strategy of representation might easily backfire: reality offered too much evidence that slavery was not based on the consent

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[13] In the early eighteenth century, companies employed to watch the Islands of Scotland were known as the "Black Watch" because of the dark tartan they wore. The "sidier dhu" are referred to in Scott's *Waverley* as "the independent companies that were raised to keep peace and law in the Highland" (qtd in M. F. A. Husband, *A Dictionary of the Characters in*

of the enslaved, and there was no place in the management of a plantation for any kind of autonomy besides that of the master. Moreover, the suggestion that slaves were capable of ingenious masquerading had frightful implications for the plantation order. Indeed, Tucker eventually backs down on the bold suggestion that slaves were capable not only of "good English" but also of autonomous action and cunning deceit. For having related the capture of the soldiers the narrator explains that the slaves did not act on their own, but that "B——" carefully staged the plot and supervised its execution. In reality, only one appearance has been substituted for another: in fooling the soldiers, the African Americans acted as slaves masking as autonomous human beings who mask as slaves.

This ploy strikingly reveals the paradoxical character of Tucker's reactionary ideology of coercion by consent. In the last resort, there is no essence behind the appearance of slavery and the "peculiar institution" must conform to its definition as a system of coercion which robs the bondspeople of their free will and their identity. Slavery thus necessarily precludes the essentiality on which it is taken to be founded. The peculiar institution is manifestly a social institution and thus contradicts the assumption that is at the heart of Tucker's ideology: the assumption that slavery is a natural fact that, if socially ratified, will abolish all institutions and convert southern society into a permanent alignment of essential givens (natural aristocrats, pure women and sturdy yeoman, all persistently content in their separate fields). Tucker's social philosophy was based on the mystery of the all-transcending paradoxical order of slavery by consent. One had to *believe* in it.

7.3 The Collapse of “Romance”

The reference to the "Black Watch" or "*sidier dhu*" is not the only analogy in *The Partisan Leader* to the imaginative landscape and history of the Scottish Highlands as it had been popularized by Walter Scott. The influence of Scott on the novel is obvious also in the description of Douglas's camp in the Devil's Backbone area. Boasting a waterfall and a narrow gorge that is referred to as a "glen" (295), the landscape closely agrees to the patterns according to which "the Author of Waverley" and other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers used to describe the Scottish Highlands. Beverley Tucker's absorption with the concept of "chivalry" and his emphasis on the "mountaineers" as a separate social type are as reminiscent of Walter Scott's

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the Waverley Novels [London: Routledge, 1910] 239).

narratives as the pseudo-archaic neologism "southron" (240; 261).[14] The hero's name Douglas, of course, is another connection to both Scottish tradition and Scott's fiction.[15]

Pointing out the similarities between Scott's and Tucker's fictions, Arthur Wrobel argued that Tucker "adapted the realistic formulas popularized by Sir Walter Scott."[16] On the basis of a diametrically opposed understanding of Scott, Ritchie Watson deals with *The Partisan Leader* as one of the primary examples for the "Walter Scott syndrome" in antebellum fiction.[17] Contradicting both Wrobel, who considers Tucker a thwarted follower of Scott's "realism," and Watson, who considers him a victim of Scott's "romanticism," it can be argued that the correspondences between Tucker's *Partisan Leader* and the novels of Scott only serve to underline important differences between the two authors. Indeed, it is possible to describe *The Partisan Leader* as a thorough perversion of the Scott scheme of historical fiction, in terms of both narrative technique and ideological import.

The common denominator of Scott's writings, produced in the context of Scotland's merging into an expanding British empire, is in the strategy of remembering Scotland's regional past in order to promote its national integration. Emphasizing the inevitable necessity of change and insulating the present against a consummated past, Scott managed to dissociate the ethos of regional history from its political implications and thus turned the symbols of Scotland's national and cultural independence into the hallmarks of a new British imperial mythology. He promoted the national integration of Scotland and achieved the conciliation of past and present through replacing the political history of his native region by an ostentatiously fictional "romance" with whom the nation could identify.

Carefully balancing affirmation and ironization by stressing the subjectivity of all viewpoints, Scott followed a strategy that is sometimes quite similar to Kennedy's in *Swallow Barn*. However, if there was a tendency in antebellum southern literature to use Scott's paradigms for the negotiation of section and nation, past and present—a tendency that was to result in the genre of the "Revolutionary romance"—there are good reasons why the effort was bound to fail. Scott proceeded from the *fait accompli* of a political centralization that had become irreversible in 1746 at the latest. In the United States, on the other hand, a comparable situation was given only after the Civil War. While Scott's fictions assumed the political center as a given, the novels produced

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[14] On the appropriation of the term "Southron" and other archaisms invented by Walter Scott in antebellum southern oratory and literature, see Osterweis 47.

[15] James Douglas, the dispossessed owner of Douglas Castle, is the leader of Scottish rebels in Scott's novel *Castle Dangerous* (1832), and the legendary medieval hero Douglas appears in *The Abbot* (1820).

[16] Wrobel, "'Romantic Realism'"; quote: 325.

[17] R. D. Watson, "Antebellum Southern Fiction and the Walter Scott Syndrome," *The Cavalier*

in the antebellum South were still trying to negotiate the location of that center. Certainly, this endeavor was conceived as a quest for national identity. Yet, while Scott rewrote regional history from a national perspective, the historical "romances" produced by Caruthers, Kennedy and Simms shared a tendency to rewrite national history from a regional perspective. Furthermore, while Scott continuously emphasized the difference of history, "romance" and the present (the pastness of the past) there was an increasing tendency in southern literature to construe the subjective negotiation of past and present as an objective mediation, forging an absolute history that seemed to contain the present (a past that was to persist).

Beverley Tucker's inversion of the time scheme of the historical novel, his writing about a past that is really a future, may be regarded as the logical conclusion of this movement away from the Scott pattern of fiction. The manipulation of the historical novel goes along with a virtual perversion of Scott's ideology. In fictions like *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*, Scott graphically described the conflict between the social system of the Highlands and the modern social, economic and political order as a doomed revolt against the decree of history that ends in the extermination of the old system. Beverley Tucker, however, transforms the "mountaineers" into a potent guerilla fighting against modernization and integration. As it were, he has the Highlands prevail against the invasion of the new order.

These inversions of narrative technique and ideological function result in a profound epistemological shift. While Scott tended to emphasize the fictionality of his narratives and to draw attention to the tension between "romance" and "real history," *The Partisan Leader* follows an inverse strategy of purported historicity. In fact, the narrative explicitly refuses to be classified as "romance." In the "Dedication" the narrator suspects that his commemoration of the deeds of the "high-spirited peasantry of Virginia" will be mistaken: "But the narrative, in which I have endeavored to preserve them, will, in after times, be classed among romances. Such is the fate of all men, whose deeds shame the vaunted achievements of those the world calls great" (xiv). Tucker insists that the novel must not be regarded as a "romance" but that its vision should be translated into reality. Tucker aims at direct rather than symbolic action, he trusts in the use of force rather than in the pragmatic power of literary conventionality.

Repeatedly, the narrator points out that his tale is governed by facts and not by narrative conventions; thus he declares in connection with the heroine's looks: "Were I writing a novel, I should be bound . . . to give an exact account of Delia's whole exterior." In that case, the narrator explains, he would dwell on the heroine's beauty: "But, in this true history, I am unfortunately bound down by facts, and I lament, that to

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in Virginia Fiction 103–112; on Beverley Tucker and *The Partisan Leader*: 106–109.

the best of my recollection, I shall not have occasion to speak of a single female, in the progress of my narrative, whose beauty can be made a theme of just praise" (60).

The narrator's critique of conventionality also extends to the aesthetics of the "picturesque." As he and Schwartz are climbing the Devil's Backbone, young Arthur is astonished at "the unromantic character of his matter-of-fact companion," who disdains the glorious sight. Being "of the romantic age when young men are taught to affect an enthusiasm for the beauties of nature, and to prate about . . . prospects in all the variety of the grand, the beautiful and the picturesque," Arthur wonders whether the mountaineer's indifference might be due to "the total absence of a faculty of which poets so much delight to speak" (25). This results in a discussion on the quality of views, in which Schwartz eventually prevails—partly because he is able to demonstrate that, in spite of his age, he simply has better eyes than young Arthur. Taking a second look at the scenery, the latter begins "to suspect that Schwartz's ideas of the picturesque were not so far wrong" and eventually corrects "his preconceptions by the testimony of his own senses" (28). Besides showing that a young aristocrat actually can be taught a lesson by a "sturdy mountaineer" (32), the passage obviously is a plea for "realism"—a "realism" that utterly contradicts Simms's insistence on the "truth" of "poetry" and the powers of the "imagination." Thus, Tucker's *Partisan Leader* seems to confirm and to contradict the traditional interpretation of antebellum southern literary history at the same time. For while there really are certain tendencies in antebellum southern fiction towards increasing sectionalization, these eventually led towards a form of assumed "realism" rather than towards the ideological apotheosis of "romance."

8. The Breaking Point: "Romance" and the Market Revolution

> We had no Hawthorne, no Melville, no Emily Dickinson. We had William Gilmore Simms.
>
> —Allen Tate, "The Profession of Letters in the South" (1935)[1]

> My dear Hammond. Order me the ton of guano, and I will contrive to pay you, with all other debts in due season. I have, amidst all my troubles, that confidence in myself, in my own resources—i.e. within certain limits, which never permits me to succumb. If you speak so strongly of guano, I will believe you. Something must be done here, to keep above water.
>
> —Simms, letter to James H. Hammond, 15 Dec. 1852[2]

8.1 Sectional Controversy, the Panic of 1837, and the Crisis of Southern Literature

Nathaniel Beverley Tucker's *The Partisan Leader* completed the process by which antebellum "Revolutionary romance" was transformed from a tool of ideological mediation into a catalyst of intersectional strife. The undisguised politics of Beverley Tucker's novel and its self-defeating hostility to fiction indicate the failure of the attempt to use narrative literature as a tool for mediation—of the attempt, that is, to establish the literary conventionality of "romance" as a realm where political and cultural contradictions could be negotiated at remove from the restrictions of reality and the current political discourse.

This failure was connected to an overall transformation of American political culture as the nation began to slide towards the Civil War. Since the beginning of the 1830s, intersectional conflicts had engendered a new rhetoric of indignation and indictment which used words for hardening confrontation rather than for engineering compromise.[3] The new political atmosphere was revealed in the acrimonious election campaign of 1836, when Van Buren found it exceedingly difficult to steer his way safely through the slavery debate. The situation had become so ideologically charged that it seemed necessary to impose dogmatic restrictions on the political discourse. Indeed, even the border state of Maryland, whose economy did not at all depend on slavery, imposed a penalty of ten to twenty years of imprisonment for anyone who spoke in favor of abolition. More importantly, the so-called "Gag Rule," in which Congress

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1 Allen Tate, *Essays of Four Decades* (1969; London: Oxford UP, 1970) 520.

2 Simms, *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, ed. Mary C. Oliphant et al., 6 vols (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1952–82) 3: 218.

3 Cf. Freehling, "The Gag Rule and the Politics of 'Mere' Words," *The Road to Disunion* 287–352.

decided that the flood of abolitionist petitions were to be tabled for an indefinite period, conjured up a political crisis that has been described as "the Pearl Harbor of the slavery controversy."[4]

This radicalization and dogmatization of the political discourse put a tremendous pressure on fiction. No longer was there any room for the ambiguous ideological engagements and symbolic actions that had characterized the novels of Kennedy and Caruthers. For all its ideological ballast, even Simms's *Partisan*, had not been a political novel of purpose but a self-consciously literary enterprise, engaging the real world through a process of indirection and historical construction. By 1836, however, the actual political situation counteracted displacement into the world of literature and compelled more direct political statements. Besides Beverley Tucker's anti-Burenite propaganda novel, James Kirke Paulding's pamphlet *Slavery in America* and Richard Hildreth's pioneering abolitionist novel *The Slave: Or, Memoirs of Archie Moore* also appeared in this year.

The decreasing number of fictions published by southern authors after 1835 is an exterior symptom of the crisis induced by the new ideological constraints with which southern literature was faced. Apart from Beverley Tucker's fictions *George Balcombe* and *The Partisan Leader*, the only other novel to be published by a southern author in 1836 was Simms's second "Revolutionary romance," *Mellichampe*. The following year saw the appearance of George Tucker's *Life of Thomas Jefferson*, but not a single novel by a southern author was published.[5] In fact, 1837, is the only year in Simms's entire literary career in which the prolific author did not publish a single new book, be it fiction or non-fiction; a fact that is only partly accounted for by his increased attention to domestic affairs after his second marriage.[6]

More importantly, the novels by southern writers which got published after 1835 indicate a growing uncertainty as to proper forms and themes. Thus Simms apparently felt that *Mellichampe* veered from the original plans for the multi-volume epic of the Revolution which he had projected. In an "Advertisement" prefixed to the new novel, he explained: "The story which follows is rather an episode in the progress of the 'Partisan' than a continuation of that romance . . . The two works which I projected to follow the 'Partisan,' and to complete the series, were intended to comprise events more strictly historical than those which have been employed in this 'Santee legend.'"[7] While Simms

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4 Freehling 308.

5 Robert Montgomery Bird's novel *Nick of the Woods*, published in 1837, also might be viewed as a "southern novel." However, Bird spent virtually his entire life in Philadelphia and had no personal connections to authors in the South.

6 The only book published by Simms in 1837 was a reissue of *Martin Faber* that featured a couple of short stories in addition to the old novelette (Guilds, *Simms* 360).

7 Simms, "Advertisement," *Mellichampe: A Legend of the Santee* (1836; 1885; facsimile rpt,

conceived his historical "romances" as official pronouncements and effective re-definitions of national and sectional history, in writing *Mellichampe* he had apparently found himself unable to meet these standards. This is reflected in the novel's subtitle: having called *The Partisan* "A Romance of the Revolution," Simms evasively classified his new fiction as "A Legend of the Santee."

The novelist's uneasiness is highlighted by the way in which he thought it necessary to affirm that *Mellichampe* still was "truly and legitimately" a historical "romance."[8] Yet, while he pledged himself to "romance," Simms simultaneously denounced "romanticism" in trying to defend his previous novel against a review which had indicted his portrayal of low and vulgar characters. The author of the respective review—most probably the reference is to Poe's review in the *Southern Literary Messenger*[9]—is branded a "romanticist" for espousing a literary theory that refuses to face the facts of life. Simms the "romancer" blends into Simms the "realist" when he declares emphatically: "My object usually has been to adhere, as closely as possible, to the features and the attributes of real life."[10]

Indeed, the descriptions of violence and war in *Mellichampe* are often "realistic" enough. At times, Simms's narrative even seems to foreshadow the narrative perspective and drastic images of Ambrose Bierce's Civil War fiction. This is especially true for the scene in which the heroine searches a deserted battlefield for the body of her lover:

> She could not be mistaken in the dreadful objects in her sight. The awful testimonies of the desperate fight were strewed [sic] around her. Her uplifted foot, in the very first step which she had been about to take from the bank, hung suspended over the lifeless body of one of its victims. . . . She was about to move forward in her determined task ; but when she strove to lift her foot, it seemed half-fastened to the ground. She looked down, and her shoe was covered with clotted blood. She stood in a fast-freezing puddle of what, but an hour before, had been warm life and feeling.[11]

Simms was experimenting with new narrative strategies. Discussing *Richard Hurdis* (1838), one of Simms's "Border Romances," John Caldwell Guilds claims: "Whatever the assessment of his contemporaries, Simms . . . was ahead of his time, anticipating realism and naturalism." Guilds points out Simms's use of a restricted point of view, a tendency that is evident also in the passage here quoted from *Mellichampe*.[12]

New York: AMS, 1970) 1–2.

8 Simms, "Advertisement," *Mellichampe* 2.

9 [Poe,] rev. of *The Partisan*, by Simms, *Southern Literary Messenger* 2 (1836): 117–121.

10 Simms, "Advertisement," *Mellichampe* 4–6.

11 Simms, *Mellichampe* 231.

12 Guilds, *Simms* 83–84; quote: 83. Cf. Guilds, "The 'Untrodden Path': *Richard Hurdis* and Simms's Foray into Literary Realism," *William Gilmore Simms and the American Frontier*, ed. Guilds and Caroline Collins (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1997) 47–54.

Both *Richard Hurdis* and *Pelayo*, Simms's second novel to appear in 1838, were published anonymously, which may be another indication that the author was going through a critical period of experimentation. Yet, although Simms could be innovative, *Pelayo*, set in Spain during the early Middle Ages, indicates that the author was not only experimenting with new forms of art but was also desperately groping for new themes that would prove marketable. This is also proved by *The Damsel of Darien*, a historical "romance" published in the following year and based on the adventures of the Spanish conquistador Balboa.

John Pendleton Kennedy's third novel, *Rob of the Bowl*, which was also published in 1838, suggests that the Marylander, too, was looking for new themes and new strategies for his fiction. Ridgely calls *Rob of the Bowl* "an even freer type of romance" than *Horse-Shoe Robinson*.[13] Though the new fiction pretends accuracy as to historical detail, it shows a striking tendency to disclaim actual relevance and to indulge in the explained supernatural or in the colorful portrayal of exotic characters. Kennedy underlines the intentional quaintness of the novel by calling it "A Legend" in the subtitle, just as Simms had done with *Mellichampe*. Set in 1681, the narrative attempts to recreate the tonality of early modern English by borrowing from the rhetoric of Elizabethan drama. While *Horse-Shoe Robinson* is remarkable for its swift action, *Rob of the Bowl* is so for the repose with which it paints the manners of a distant period. If the former fiction can be read as construction of an absolute History that allowed typological actualization, the new novel may be interpreted as an attempt at historicism, a withdrawal from the ideological contradictions and political constraints of the present into an insulated past. That Kennedy wished to limit political implications is evident also from the geographical setting. While *Horse-Shoe Robinson* had undertaken an excursion into the Deep South, the author now remained in his native Maryland. Moreover, *Rob* is a story not of triumphant revolution but of thwarted rebellion: it relates how the Catholic regime of Maryland's Lord Proprietor Baltimore eventually prevailed against the Protestant majority in the colony—and, quite obviously, the sympathies of the narrator are with the representatives of the old order.

With *Quodlibet*, a political satire on Jacksonian democracy published in 1840, Kennedy next tried his hand at a form that was even farther removed from "Revolutionary romance." If *Rob of the Bowl* differed from *Horse-Shoe Robinson* in its careful avoidance of current political issues, the new book did so through its undisguised politics. In spite of the deceptive repose of *Rob of the Bowl*, Kennedy, who had been elected to Congress in 1838 but had failed to keep his seat in the following year, had not become a less but rather a more political fictionist. However, the way in

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[13] Ridgely, *Kennedy* 92.

which he used imaginative writing for political purposes had changed significantly. He now resorted to satire as a medium of political confrontation. Considered alongside each other, *Rob of the Bowl* and *Quodlibet* betray a tendency to privatize "romance" while simultaneously shifting from a strategy of literary negotiation to a strategy of direct political engagement through polemical forms of writing. A similar trend in Simms's work is indicated by the simultaneous publication in 1838 of the pamphlet *Slavery in America* and the historical "romance" *Pelayo*. If the first text engaged in a highly polemical defense of slavery, the latter engineered an escape to a distant past and a distant country.

That southern fiction was going through a period of ideological crisis and formal experimentation is borne out by Edgar Allan Poe's only extended prose fiction, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, which was also published in 1838. Although Poe certainly cannot be considered a southern author in the same sense as the novelists with which the present study is primarily concerned, he actually was connected to the South in many ways. He was promoted—one might even say *discovered*—by Kennedy; and from 1835 to 1837 Poe edited the *Southern Literary Messenger*, which had been founded with the explicit intention of fostering a distinctively southern literary culture. *Gordon Pym* is a novelette of physical and spiritual adventure, which may partly have been intended as a parody or a hoax. It is so excessively sensational and, at the same time, so evasively symbolic that it seems to defy comparison with the fictions of Kennedy and Simms. Still, Leslie Fiedler argued that Poe's novelette is to be read as a complicated figuration of the anxieties engendered by slavery.[14] However, if Poe's fiction was significantly related to social and political reality, this relation was as indirect and disguised as it might possibly have been. According to Larzer Ziff, Poe's attitude was that the "American artist, preeminently isolated both from an unimaginative society and from a literary tradition, should be preeminently concerned with his own inner depths."[15] Such an individualist aesthetics negated the literary pragmatics that Kennedy, Caruthers and Simms both implied and explicated. Poe's technique of focusing on the "fragile integrity of the individual's psychic structure" rather than on the fate of the "human community" reflected "the end of the common belief that the world of art was rooted in the unchanging world of social thought."[16] As a radical expression of this intellectual development, *Gordon Pym* sheds light on the crisis of southern fiction as a crisis of the idealist pragmatics that were at the heart of Kennedy's, Caruthers' and Simms's concepts of "romance."

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[14] Leslie A. Fiedler, "The Blackness of Darkness: Edgar Allan Poe and the Development of the American Gothic," *Love and Death in the American Novel*, rev. ed. (New York: Stein and Day, 1966) 391–429.

[15] Ziff 70.

Besides the ideological and formal insecurity engendered by the tightening of intersectional conflicts, there was another—probably even more important—reason for the crisis of the kind "romance" practiced by writers like Kennedy, Caruthers and Simms. This reason can be found in the fundamental process of social, political and cultural transformation which is commonly described as the "market revolution."[17] In its critical phase, this process of transformation was accompanied and accelerated by a long-term economic depression that followed the financial panic of 1837. Propelling a fundamental restructuring of American society and culture which redefined the field of aesthetic and ideological engagement, the economic crisis had tremendous indirect consequences for American literature, which will be investigated below. At the same time, by deflating the book market the slump also had an immediate impact on the work of American novelists, for whom it became increasingly difficult to compete with inexpensive pirated editions of British novels. American fiction still got published, and it actually did so in increasing numbers, but if authors intended to make a living they had to produce short stories or serial novels for literary periodicals and weekly newspapers rather than bulky "romances."[18] When Hammond asked him to see to the publication of a text by the deceased writer and critic Henry J. Nott, Simms pointed to the dire situation in the book market:

> Do not . . . suppose that it is easy to get such a work published or that such writings are now profitable. Nott never received a dollar for his novelettes. There are very few American writers who ever get anything. Ingraham could scarcely at this time get a novel published at all—certainly he could hope to get nothing for it. The publishers are very costive—the sales are terribly diminished within the last few years. You will perceive that Irving now writes almost wholly for magazines and Cooper & myself are almost the only persons whose novels are printed—certainly, we are almost the only persons who hope to get anything for them.[19]

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[16] Ziff 71–72.

[17] On the "market revolution," see: Sean Wilentz, "Society, Politics, and the Market Revolution, 1815–1848," *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1990) 51–71; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–46* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991). Paul Nolte, "Der Durchbruch der amerikanischen Marktgesellschaft: Wirtschaft, Politik und Kultur in der frühen Republik (1790–1850)," *Historische Zeitschrift* 259 (1994): 695–716, provides an overview of the critical discourse on the "market revolution" since 1980.

[18] On the effects of the depression on American literature in general, see: Winfried Fluck, *Das kulturelle Imaginäre: Eine Funktionsgeschichte des amerikanischen Romans 1790–1900* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1997) 132–136; William Charvat, "American Romanticism and the Depression of 1837" (1937), *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800–1870*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (n. p.: Ohio State UP, 1968) 49–67, and *Literary Publishing in America: 1790–1850* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1959) 8–9. On the Panic of 1837 and southern literary history, see: Guilds, *Simms* 166; Wimsatt, "Antebellum Fiction," *History of Southern Literature*, ed. Rubin 93; Holman 24–25; 79–80.

[19] Simms, letter to James Henry Hammond, 16 Aug. 1841; *Letters* 1: 271. In another letter to Hammond, Simms complained in 1847: "Our planting interests barely pay expenses and my income from Literature which in 1835 was $6000 per annum, is scarce $1500 now, owing to the operation of cheap reprints which pay publishers & printers profits only & yield the author

Indeed, fictionists had material as well as aesthetic or ideological reasons for feeling unsure about their role in American society. Simms was hit by the crisis just when his career as professional author finally seemed to be taking off, promising to earn him national fame and a considerable income.

In 1840 Simms published *Border Beagles: A Tale of Mississippi*, which contributed to his series of "Border Romances," and in 1841 he brought out a third "Revolutionary romance," *The Kinsmen* (later revised as *The Scout*). While in the same year Caruthers was forced to publish *The Knights of the Golden Horseshoe* as a serialization, Simms was still able to publish books, as he proudly points out in the quoted letter to Hammond. Eventually, however, he also felt the effects of the depression. Between the appearance of *Beauchampe* in 1842 and that of his fourth Revolutionary novel, *Katherine Walton*, in 1851, there was a period of nine years in which he published only a single full-length novel, *Count Julian: Or, the Last Days of the Goth* (1845)—and this book is usually regarded as one of his weakest efforts.[20]

However, if it was difficult to publish extended fictions, Simms still found means to stay in business. His primary strategy was to shift to the writing of non-fiction, an occupation that he had begun with his *History of South Carolina* (1840; rev. ed. 1842) and the accompanying *Geography* (1843). Between 1844 and 1849 he published biographies of Marion, John Smith, the Chevalier Bayard and Nathanael Greene. In 1848, Simms even undertook a foray into the field of philology with a *Supplement to the Plays of William Shakespeare*, who was among the Carolinian's most cherished authors and influenced his diction as well as his methods of characterization.[21] Probably the most significant title from Simms's pen to appear during the slump was *Views and Reviews in American Literature* (1845), a two-volume collection of selected criticism that affirmed the author's role as a spokesman for cultural nationalism and the Young America movement. It is obvious, then, that Simms continued to be occupied with the formation of a national American literature, even though he contended that such a literature would have to be based on the particularities of the different sections that constituted the nation.[22] Besides *Count Julian*, the only volumes of fiction published by Simms between 1842 and 1851 were a collection of short stories, *The*

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little or nothing. To earn this $1500 I have to labor constantly, and being absent from the field, I labor at a venture, not being able to seize upon the occasion" (*Letters* 2: 385–386).

20 On the poor quality of *Count Julian*, cf. Guilds, *Simms* 167–168; 195. The novel is dedicated to Kennedy, whom Simms had met in 1840.

21 Cf. Ch. S. Watson, "Simms's Use of Shakespearean Characters," *Shakespeare and Southern Writers: A Study in Influence*, ed. Philip C. Kolin (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1985) 13–28.

22 On Simms's participation in the Young America movement and his abiding nationalism, cf. Guilds, *Simms* 183; Wimsatt, *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms: Cultural Traditions and Literary Form* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989) 141–143; Holman, "Simms and the Wider World: *Views and Reviews*," *Roots* 16–34.

Wigwam and the Cabin (1845/46), and a couple of novelettes.[23] Thus, even though he was still able to publish regularly, the economic crisis apparently forced Simms to abandon "full-blown romance" and to concentrate on other forms of writing, fictional and non-fictional.[24]

Though he continued to publish during the depression, Simms became increasingly dissatisfied both with his role as a professional author in the South and with his role as a southern author within the United States. His first biographer, William P. Trent, popularized the picture of a tragic Simms who went without all recognition in the section on whose glorification he spent his energies. This may be regarded as a myth, but it is obvious that Simms felt that his writing had earned him neither the social position nor the pecuniary gratification to which he thought himself entitled. In 1841 Simms vented his frustration in a very pronounced manner: "*We have not one native professional author from the Potomac to the Sabine, who, if he relied on the South purely for his resources, would not, in half the number of months in the year, go without his porridge*."[25] It makes for an ironic point if this outburst is set alongside Gilman Ostrander's observation that "except for a few magazine editors, Simms could be considered the only professional man of letters in the whole intellectual community of the South." The problem, then, was not so much that Simms had decided on a profession that was poorly paid in his society, but rather that he was trying to fill a position that did not even exist in that society. As Ostrander's pointed description of the situation of belles-lettres in Charleston suggests, Simms's attempt to set himself up as a professional writer in that city was bound to produce social as well as economic frustration: "The decentralized character of planter society in Virginia may have served to inhibit intellectual society, but Charleston . . . offered the paradox of an anti-intellectual society of ostentatiously learned planters and merchants."[26]

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[23] While *Count Julian* is usually dismissed as a complete aesthetic failure, *The Wigwam and the Cabin* is often regarded as a significant contribution to the emerging genre of the short story (see, e.g., Guilds, *Simms* 170–180). Poe wrote a very favorable review of *The Wigwam* in *Godey's Lady's Book* Jan. 1846; rpt. in *Literary Criticism*, vol. 6 (New York: AMS, 1965) 93–97, vol. 13 of *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison. On Simms's significance as "a pioneer in the short story," see Miriam J. Shillingsburg's review essay "Politics and Art: Toward Seeing Simms as a Whole" 140–142.

[24] On Simms's career during the depression, see Mary Ann Wimsatt, "Begging Times for Authordom," *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms* 136–155.

[25] The passage is from a public letter by Simms to P. C. Pendleton, published in the *Magnolia* Feb. 1841; rpt in *Letters* 1: 221 (the emphases are Simms's).

[26] Gilman M. Ostrander, *Republic of Letters: The American Intellectual Community, 1776–1865* (Madison, WI: Madison House Publishers, 1999) 263; 255. For a markedly different, though not diametrically opposed, picture of antebellum Charleston, see Michael O'Brien and David Moltke-Hansen, eds., *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1986), which includes an essay by John McCardell which focuses on Simms's relation to his native city: "Poetry and the Practical: William Gilmore Simms" (186–210). McCardell takes issue with Trent's representation of Simms's relation to his native city (186–188), emphasizes the bold "unconventionality" of Simms's attempt to set himself up as a

The lack of a well-developed southern market for intellectual commodities made southern readers and authors dependent on the fledgling publishing industries of New York City and Philadelphia. As a result, "literate Southerners belonged to Northern culture as literate Northerners did not belong to the culture of the slave states."[27] During the thirties many southerners became uncomfortably conscious of this condition and demands for the fostering of southern culture became louder. A southern cultural nationalism was developing beside the flourishing American cultural nationalism—and the case of Simms shows that the two movements sometimes sprang from the same sources and were championed by the same protagonists. In 1834 James E. Heath asked in his editorial for the first issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*: "Are we to be doomed forever to a kind of vassalage to our northern neighbors—a dependence for our literary food upon our brethren, whose superiority in all great points of character . . . we are no wise disposed to admit?" In a fiercely polemical tone that sets up a persistent opposition of "we" and "them," Heath argued that by monopolizing both the criticism and the marketing of American literature "the aristarchy of the north and east" reduced the South to cultural insignificance. Using the rhetoric of stubborn chivalry, Heath called southerners to arms: "we ought forthwith to buckle on our armour and assert our mental independence."[28]

A new tone was set, and even a devoted unionist like Caruthers heeded it when he advertised his upcoming novel, *The Cavaliers of Virginia*, as a distinctly southern fiction published in spite of northern prejudice.[29] The effects of the financial panic served to intensify such latent animosities since it was particularly difficult for southern authors to gain access to the constrained book market. While Bassett stresses that prior to the 1830s the concept of a separate southern literature was virtually absent, Werner points out that by 1840 "Southerners who a quarter-century before would have seen themselves as part of a nationalistic American mainstream were consciously creating and defining the characteristics that gave their region a literary identity clearly its own."[30]

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professional writer and comments: "In mid-nineteenth-century America, it mattered little where one chose thus to be unconventional; such were the prevailing sentiments against professional writers and such was the general state of American letters. Charleston, South Carolina, was no different from Boston, Massachusetts" (194). For a detailed discussion of Simms's problematic position as a professional writer with social ambitions in the context of Charleston society, see esp. Rubin, "The Dream of the Plantation: Simms, Hammond, Charleston," *The Edge of the Swamp* 54–102; cf. Rubin, "Simms, Charleston, and the Profession of Letters," *"Long Years of Neglect": The Work and Reputation of William Gilmore Simms*, ed. John Caldwell Guilds (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1988) 217–234.

27 Ostrander 249.

28 James E. Heath, "Southern Literature," *Southern Literary Messenger* 1 (August 1834); extract in Bassett, ed., *Defining Southern Literature* 49–52; quotes: 49–50.

29 Caruthers, "Addenda," *Kentuckian* 2: 218–219. See above, chapter 5.2.

30 Bassett, introduction, *Defining Southern Literature* 15; Werner 91.

Political as well as economic factors played a role in the development of the ideology of southern cultural distinctiveness. Towards the middle of the forties the issue of westward expansion again fueled the intersectional conflict over slavery. The presidential election of 1844, dominated by the controversy over the annexation of Texas, "marked the transition between the politics of Jacksonian America and those of the sectional controversy."[31] The conflict escalated when in 1846 Congress accepted the Wilmot Proviso, which ruled that slavery must be prohibited in the newly acquired territory. It revealed a situation in which an increasing number of voters in New England and the Middle Atlantic states were prepared to accept the abolitionists' view that a southern "slaveocracy" was trying to dominate the Union, while simultaneously more and more southerners identified with the fears of radical states' righters that an economically and politically powerful North was striving to obliterate not only slavery but all distinctly southern institutions. In this situation, southern dogmatics were eventually successful in their attempts to translate the increasingly clear-cut political antagonism between northern and southern states into a rhetoric of cultural antagonism.

Although southern states really did possess some significant intellectual, cultural and social traditions of their own, the propagation of a distinct (and monolithic) southern culture was a bold claim.[32] Indeed, Calhoun apparently was aware that the southern culture he was setting out to defend had yet to be constructed. In 1847 he declared: "We want above all other things, a Southern literature, from school books up to the works of the highest order."[33] It was in this devotion to the effort of manufacturing a southern literature that the interests of political machinators like Calhoun and those of a displaced professional author like Simms coincided. However, the new rhetoric of cultural distinctiveness damaged rather than promoted the expectations for professional authors in the South. For while literature produced in the South was successfully redefined as a distinctively "southern" literature, and consequently isolated, no distinct market for such a literature was created. At the same time, the existing southern market became more and more negligible for the big northern publishers for whom a new market was developing in the Midwest, a market that expanded rapidly because of the quick rise of literacy in the "new North." Thus, in 1849 the eminent Boston publisher Fields and Ticknor stopped sending review copies even to the *Southern Literary Messenger* and G. P. Putnam decided that he could ignore the opinion of his magazine's southern readers since in Ohio alone he was selling as many

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[31] Ashworth 414.

[32] On the inventedness of antebellum southern cultural distinctiveness see O'Brien, "The Lineaments of Antebellum Southern Romanticism," *Rethinking the South* 38–56; esp. 46 and 52.

copies as in the entire South.[34]

8.2 The "American Renaissance" and the Dissociation of American Culture

While southern authors were becoming uneasily aware—or paradoxically proud—of their increasing marginalization, in the North cultural nationalism eventually culminated in a flowering of self-consciously American literary art which is usually designated as the "American Renaissance." There is uniform agreement among students of American literature and culture that the South did not participate in American culture's coming into its own. In 1962, C. Hugh Holman published a seminal article about "William Gilmore Simms and the 'American Renaissance,'" which tried to explain why during the 1840s and 1850s Simms "lost the stature which he had once had as a national literary figure." According to Holman, the transition from Simms the national celebrity to Simms the sectional celebrity was connected to the economic depression of the late thirties, which he saw as a catalyst of fundamental transformations in American literature: "Seldom has an historical event marked a division between literary movements with as much precision as that interruption in the publication of novels marked a break in the course of American fiction." When Simms returned to the writing of "Revolutionary romances" with *Katherine Walton* (1851) and *The Sword and the Distaff* (1852; revised as *Woodcraft* in 1854), a new generation of writers had emerged who invented new and more adequate forms for American fiction. As Holman stressed, the ultimate reason why Simms had lost touch with the American mainstream was his devotion to a South which had isolated itself intellectually as well as politically.[35]

However, if the development of antebellum literature is assessed from a more inclusive perspective, the notion that writers like Simms were replaced by an avant-garde of more experimental authors is only a half-truth. In terms of public success and broad cultural impact, the writers traditionally considered as belonging to the "American Renaissance" were just as marginal as Simms had become. While Hawthorne and Melville were at times quite successful, the latter's readership declined steadily just as he was writing the daring fictions that are usually regarded as key texts of the "American Renaissance." And Emerson's *Nature*, which is regarded as one of the most significant statements of the period, was "addressed to a small coterie who might as

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[33] Calhoun; qtd in Rubin, *The Edge of the Swamp* 12.
[34] Ziff 171–172; cf. Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship* 303–304.
[35] Holman, "William Gilmore Simms and the 'American Renaissance'" (1962); *Roots* 75–86; quotes: 78–79; 85.

well have read the work in manuscript."[36]

Of course, the book published at the beginning of the fifties with the most tremendous impact on American culture at large was neither Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (1850), which exemplified a new kind of (historical?) "romance," nor Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), which explored new territories for imaginative literature, but Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851/52), which redefined the social functions and ideological potentials of fiction by putting conventional forms of narrative to new uses. While Stowe's best-seller was exceedingly inventive in its own way, its form probably had more in common with the fictions of Simms than with those of Hawthorne or Melville. In fact, Ostrander observes that Stowe's attack on slavery was "difficult for Southern literary men to cope with effectively" precisely because "it was cast in the accepted Southern literary form of the plantation novel."[37] As to popular success, one of the writers at mid-century who came close to Stowe was Augusta Jane Evans, a writer from Alabama who, in fact, was exceedingly devoted both to traditional narrative strategies and to southern ideologies.[38]

However, even though Holman's interpretation is damaged by a restricted canon and an evaluative practice of criticism, it still provides significant suggestions that deserve reconsideration: firstly, that the economic crisis of the late thirties and forties brought about far-reaching changes in the American literary system (which, however, are not adequately described as a transition from Simms and Cooper to Melville and Hawthorne); secondly, that these changes became manifest in new definitions of art and new relations to "romance"; and thirdly, that they furthered the displacement of traditional southern authors like Kennedy, Caruthers and Simms.

A comparison of Holman's construction of literary history with Larzer Ziff's nationalist account of American cultural history in *Literary Democracy: The Declaration of Cultural Independence in America* (1981) is revealing. While Holman perceived the depression as a dramatic incision which had dealt the death-blow to antebellum southern fiction, in Ziff's study the depression plays a very different role. Here, the year 1837 is viewed as the commencement of the United States' literary and cultural awakening: during that year Poe left Virginia for New York, Melville set out on his first sea voyage, Thoreau graduated from Harvard, Hawthorne published *Twice-Told Tales*

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[36] Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship* 3. Cf. Richard F. Teichgraeber, *Sublime Thoughts / Penny Wisdom: Situating Emerson and Thoreau in the American Market* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), esp. 171.

[37] Ostrander 285.

[38] Evans's second novel *Beulah*—published in 1859, when the author was only twenty-four years old—became a national best-seller, and *St. Elmo*, appearing immediately after the war in 1866, rivaled the sales figures of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. See Drew Gilpin Faust, "A Note on Augusta Jane Evans," *Macaria*, by Evans (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1992) x.

and Emerson delivered his "American Scholar" address.[39] The slow evolution of an American literature that had been achieved by writers such as Irving, Cooper and Bryant (Ziff does not mention Simms in this context[40]) was replaced by a literary revolution that suddenly effected America's literary and cultural independence. According to Ziff, the financial panic actually provided ideal conditions for this revolution: "The panic of 1837 silenced the shouts of national confidence and in the hush Emerson's voice was heard."[41] In a similar manner, William Charvat linked the rise of "American Romanticism" to the effects of the depression. He offered an assessment of the period which directly contradicts to Holman's claim that the economic crisis devastated the book market: "The depression lasted five years. The literary boom, on the other hand, not only continued but flourished."[42]

The contradiction between Ziff's and Charvat's accounts, on the one hand, and Holman's, on the other, can be partly reconciled if one considers that the contradictory interpretations are concerned with very different kinds of writers. Holman deals with a professional author, who depended on writing for his living; Charvat and Ziff discuss authors who were serious writers but obtained the bulk of their income elsewhere. As Ziff observes, none of the New England "Fireside Poets" and none of the "Transcendentalists" really depended on the income gained by their writing.[43] Furthermore, these authors were lucky to be located in New England, which was less severely hit by the depression than other parts of the United States, so that the income they derived from investments or extra-literary work was not seriously diminished.[44]

However, Ziff points out, if writers like Emerson did not need to make a living out of their writing, this "does not argue that they were not committed, professional writers. It signifies that in the absence of a literary marketplace that could support the American writer in comfort, many a writer succeeded in the marketplace that did exist only after establishing an economic base outside it." One might argue that Ziff's confusing syntax reflects the confusing literary system and the confusing strategy of professional artistic publicity that he is describing. What he means is, firstly, that because of the absence of a market for their productions Emerson and some of his New England colleagues decided to follow their literary vocation in complete independence both of the market and of their wider social environment; secondly, that

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[39] Ziff x; cf. xiii.

[40] Ziff offers a rather superficial discussion of Simms at the beginning of his one chapter on southern literature, "The Fool Killer: George Washington Harris and Sut Lovingood" (181–182).

[41] Ziff 17.

[42] Charvat, "American Romanticism and the Depression of 1837" (1937); rpt. in *The Profession of Authorship* 49–67; quote: 50.

[43] Ziff 56.

[44] Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship* 58.

they skillfully used the sources of income provided by the existing market in order to gain that very independence; and thirdly, that—by virtue of paradox—this strategy of artistic independence sometimes transformed their literary productions into a kind of commodity for which there eventually was a market. According to Ziff, when Emerson discovered that "there was no predetermined place for him in his society" he turned this situation into a boon and assumed "the literary powers of an outsider together with the economic hazards." Thus, Emerson used his "modest rentier's income" in order to "give his country a native equivalent of what magnificent fortunes had supplied in other lands in such splendid institutions as court and monastery: a place where thought and imagination could be exercised in relative freedom from immediate consequence, a center of intent both culturally revolutionary and politically powerless."[45]

Such a strategy was a precise inversion of Simms's. Confronted with the same problem of establishing himself as an artist in a transforming market society, the Charlestonian actually tried to use the modern market in order to gain the traditional place of the artist *within* society. Instead of postulating the dissociation of art and politics, he insisted on the immediate social and political significance of art. Of course, Simms was forced to realize that his initial commercial success did not earn him his desired place in society. Nor, assuming the role of a southern artist who spoke from the midst of a supposedly distinct southern society, was he able to keep the place that he had earned himself in the northern market. Emerson, on the other hand, seems to have been more successful. Ostentatiously freeing himself from dependence on the market, defining thinking and writing as activities that were to be pursued in heroic isolation both from the market and from society, he carved out a more consistent role for himself and eventually managed to gain access to the market on his own terms, which were those of *art* writ large. The strategy of Emerson depended upon an ideology according to which art was marketable and had to be marketed in order to support the artist but was supposedly produced not for the market but in independence of it. [46]

The new dogma of the economic and social integrity of art was an important reason for Simms's apparent difficulties in defining his place in the new literary and cultural system emerging during the forties. While the Charlestonian was a passionate critic of economic utilitarianism, he never bothered to pretend that he produced his writings in splendid isolation from the market and from society. The rapidity with which Simms dashed out one volume after another indicates his belief that art was both a vocation and a profession. Simms conceived of his writing as a dynamic process of

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[45] Ziff; quotes: 56, 262, 15.

[46] Cf. Teichgraeber, esp. x. On the role of sophisticated business strategies in the creation of a market for the sophisticated art produced by New England writers towards mid-century, see Charvat, "James T. Fields and the Beginnings of Book Promotion, 1840–1855" (1944); rpt. in

work which was interrelated with the dynamic pace of the world around him. Ironically, it was his desperate determination to keep abreast of things by which he wrote himself out of the sanctuary of American *art* as it was being defined towards the middle of the nineteenth century.

By his hectic literary activity, Simms was able to support his large family and his cumbersome plantation. In terms of total revenues, the prolific author probably did not fare worse than Emerson (including the latter's income from his extensive lecturing), let alone Thoreau. However, Simms's writing did not earn him the cultural authority (the symbolic capital) which Emerson and Thoreau were able to realize and for which the Charlestonian was so eager. At the same time, Simms clearly was not able to profit from his books in the way in which fictionists like George Lippard, Susan Warner, Fanny Fern, Maria Cummins, E. D. E. N. Southworth or Harriet Beecher Stowe profited from theirs. Simms's problem was not only that he pretended to be both a champion of a distinct southern culture and a driving force of American cultural nationalism at a time when increasing intersectional animosities made such a dual position untenable; his problem was also that he was trying to be both an artist and a popular author at a time when the transformation of the publishing system and the ideological redefinition of art implied the dissociation of these roles.

The transformation of American society and culture that had gained momentum during the depression comprised both: the definition of a realm where American *artists* could proclaim the nation's cultural independence, and—separate from this—the establishment of a sphere in which cultural commodities for a wider audience were produced. This process of dissociation had material as well as ideological dimensions. Among its material dimensions were not only the widening and the stratification of the reading public but also the technological modernization of the print industry which made large-scale production feasible in the first place.[47] Even though it should not be supposed that the antebellum era saw the emergence of a regular mass market for print matter, and especially for books, sales figures nevertheless rose dramatically.[48] While, according to one estimate, an average of 52 books had been published annually

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The Profession of Authorship 168–189.

47 The cylinder press was introduced in 1847.

48 On the development of the literary marketplace, see Teichgraeber, "'A Vast Cultural Bazaar': The Antebellum Literary Marketplace," *Sublime Thoughts / Penny Wisdom* 155–174. According to Teichgraeber, "there is as yet no comprehensive history of the development of the antebellum literary marketplace," so that William Charvat's publications—which have been referred to above—remain the "cornerstones for study of the subject" (157, note 4). Even though he registers a dramatic expansion of the book market, Teichgraeber draws on recent scholarship to point out that the tendency to view the antebellum literary marketplace

between 1830 and 1842, by 1853 the number had rocketed to 733. If there had been fewer than 125 American magazines in 1825, there were about 600 in 1860. The number of daily and weekly newspapers rose accordingly, and during the 1840s a new generation of “penny press” newspapers was being sold in increasing numbers. The market for print media was not only becoming busier, it was also becoming more nationally integrated.[49] This enlarged and unified market was able to generate a new phenomenon: the best-seller. While in 1826, *The Last of the Mohicans* had been a best-selling novel with 5,750 copies in circulation, George Lippard's *Quaker City* sold 210,000 copies between 1845 and 1851 and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, according to more daring estimates, may have sold as many as five million copies between its appearance as a book in 1852 and the beginning of the Civil War.[50]

The bestsellers of the 1850s often were the work of a new generation of female authors who used the opportunity offered by the expanding book market of making an independent living. Among them was Maria Cummins, whose novel *The Lamplighter* proved the decade's biggest public success after *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, selling 40,000 copies within the first two months and 100,000 up to the Civil War. It was the success of *The Lamplighter* which provoked Hawthorne's famous complaint about the "d—d mob of scribbling women." This invective not only betrays the envy excited among distinguished male literati by the sales figures achieved by some of their female colleagues, it also testifies to the strategy according to which writers like Hawthorne redefined their role in a restructuring literary system. Writing off the best-sellers produced by Cummins, Warner, Fern and Stowe as carelessly produced commodities dashed out by a "mob of scribbling women," Hawthorne implied that his own fiction was the result of a long process of careful reflection, only reluctantly put on the market afterwards. It is revealing that in expressing his indignation Hawthorne comes up with the word "mob." It may be assumed that in using this word, he thought not only of his rivals for the attention of the public but also of that public itself, designating it as an undistinguished crowd of hasty and sensation-hungry readers which was to be distinguished from the select audience he was addressing. When Melville discovered that in pursuing his vision he had left his readership behind, he reacted in a similar manner by declaring: "So far as I am individually concerned & independent of my pocket, it is my earnest desire to write those sort of books which are said to 'fail.'"[51] Finding themselves unable to compete with fictions that used highly conventional or

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as a mass market is misleading.

[49] Teichgraeber 158–161.

[50] Michael T. Gilmore, "The Book Marketplace I," *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliott (New York: Columbia UP, 1991) 54.

[51] Herman Melville, letter to Lemuel Shaw, 6 Oct. 1849; *The Letters of Herman Melville*, ed. Merrell R. Davis (New Haven: Yale UP, 1960) 92.

unashamedly sensational narrative strategies, authors like Hawthorne and Melville emphasized the exceptional character of their writing and defined isolation from the market as a virtue. Redefining not only the quality and the function of their writing but also their intended reader, they thus participated in the institution of a more rigidly defined aesthetic hierarchy.

That this aesthetic hierarchy was also a social hierarchy was most strikingly revealed by the Astor Place Riot of 1849, in which the different manners of performing and receiving Shakespeare's plays were used to stage the growing antagonism between elitist and populist cultural spheres. The British tragedian William Charles Macready had upset many Americans by refusing to accept that his eminently popular American rival Edwin Forrest was an *artist*. The anti-elitist and fiercely nationalist adherents of Forrest, many of them working-class "roughs," responded by disturbing Macready's opening performance of *Macbeth* in the Astor Place Opera House. If envy of his more successful rivals led Hawthorne to set himself and his art apart from a "mob" constituted not only by popular women writers but implicitly also by their avid readers, Macready's ostentatiously artistic and elitist version of Shakespeare actually evoked the physical resistance of such a "mob." Three days after the first incident, the militia, which was called in to protect the second performance of the British actor, faced more than ten thousand populist rioters. The confrontation resulted in brutal violence when the militia fired into the rioting crowd, killing twenty-two demonstrators and wounding many more.[52]

Though, generally speaking, they were devoted democrats with a nationalist bent, the writers singled out by Matthiessen as the major protagonists of the "American Renaissance" tended to side with the cultural and social elite when they found themselves faced with an uncontrollable, iconoclastic populace. Thus, Melville joined Irving and a number of leading New York citizens in signing a public document that expressed disapproval of the Astor Place rioters, and Reynolds assumes that Whitman, in spite of his self-proclaimed role as the poet of the "En-Masse," would probably also have signed if he had been asked.[53] Simms did not have much sympathy for New York "roughs," but it may be argued that in the cultural war between elitist and populist conceptions of culture a populist conservative like the Charlestonian was caught

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[52] On the Astor Place Riot, cf. Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988) 63–69; D. S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (1995; New York: Vintage, 1996) 163–165.

[53] D. S. Reynolds, *Whitman's America* 165; cf. L. W. Levine 64. Reynolds and Levine differ in their accounts of the "public document" in question: according to Levine it was an open letter addressed to Macready after the disastrous first performance in order to dissuade the actor from canceling further engagements and leaving the United States; Reynolds, on the other hand, implies that the document was signed after Macready's second performance had resulted in the massacre.

between the fronts. Indeed, Simms knew and admired Forrest, and in 1847 he had begun to work on a drama with the leading role especially tailored for the actor. The drama was designed to exalt the kind of democratic populism that Forrest seemed to embody. The tragedian, however, did not like the play: he was not in a position to acknowledge Simms's bold attempt to create an American equivalent to Shakespearean drama by combining vernacular dialogue and Elizabethan blank verse. Simms's style may have been both too uncompromisingly democratic and too consciously literary for a populist of Forrest's mold.[54]

Simms apparently lay square to evolving cultural compartmentalizations. For reasons that were ideological as well as commercial, he tried to be both an artist and a professional author, an elitist Macready and a populist Forrest. Simms's "romance" was designed to address all members of the integrated society that he continued to suppose or to postulate. Characteristically, Poe considered Simms a capable artist who was weighed down by his populist inclinations and/or vulgar limitations. Even when he sketched a favorable résumé of Simms's career, as he did in an 1846 review of *The Wigwam and the Cabin*, Poe felt obliged to censure his colleague's “bad taste” and “fondness for the purely disgusting or repulsive.”[55] Indeed, the impression of Simms conveyed by Poe's review is of a talented author inhibited by an inbred vulgarity, a "genius" from the rank and file who has not yet made up for the disadvantages of his upbringing.

In spite of its ostentatious elitism, however, Poe's assessment is not entirely inaccurate: Simms really had a peculiar predilection for the graphic description of violence. Among the most impressive as well as the most obnoxious instances of this tendency is the scene in *Mellichampe* (1836) in which the partisan Humphries entombs his persecutor Blonay alive in the trunk of a dead tree. Gingerly entitled "Humphries Trees the Half-Breed," the chapter is not only more violent but probably also more anguishing than anything ever written by Poe. Here is an example of Simms's disturbing gusto for drastic details of suffering and violence:

> The desperate Blonay thrust one hand through the crevice, in the vain hope to exclude the wedge [which would complete his entombment]. But a blow from the lightwood knot with which Humphries had provided himself as a sort of mallet, crushed the extended fingers almost into a mass, and the half-breed must have fainted from the pain, as the hand was instantly withdrawn ; and when the partisan drove in the wedge, the face of the victim had sunk below the opening, and was no

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[54] Cf. Guilds, *Simms* 198–199. Simms's drama was eventually serialized by the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1851 and published as a paperback in the same year: *Norman Maurice: Or, The Man of the People: An American Drama* (Richmond: Thompson).

[55] Poe, rev. of *The Wigwam and the Cabin* 94.

longer to be seen.[56]

Towards the end of the novel, the close-up description of the mutilation of Blonay's hand is echoed by a similar image when the faithful slave Scipio rescues his mistress's lover by killing the Tory Barsfield with "a ragged knot of the heaviest pine-wood that lay at hand": "The blow descended . . . The billet was buried in his brains. The skull lay crushed and flattened, and but a single contraction of the limbs and convulsion of the frame attested the quick transition of life to death." The image of the smashed skull recurs as Scipio tells of his deed: "I take light-wood knot, I hammer um on de head tell you sees nothing but de blood and de brain, and de white of he eye. He dead—'tis Scip mash um." A couple of sentences onwards Simms has the slave yet again focus on the fascinating spectacle: "De head mash flat like pancake."[57] The scene from *The Partisan* in which the elder Frampton murders the captive Clough or the description of Macnamara's torture at the stake in *The Yemassee* are further examples of Simms's tendency toward what David S. Reynolds has termed "the pornography of violence."[58] Indeed, even though the popular image of Simms is as the author of notoriously genteel "plantation novels" in which perfect gentlemen address impeccable ladies in an impossibly stilted manner, a bent towards the narrative strategies of sensational fiction is equally evident in the Charlestonian's work.

It is the seeming contradiction between Simms celebrating the elitist pretensions of the planter class and Simms indulging in the tonalities of backwoods humor and the violent fascinations of sensational fiction that led Parrington to interpret the Charlestonian as an author torn between the opposing impulses of "realism" and "romance."[59] In terms of biographical criticism, the image of Simms as a realist subdued by Charleston society and by his own planter pretensions may be partly correct. However, Parrington fails to realize that the novelist's vigorous "realism"—i.e., his indulgence in the clichés of popular sensational fiction—was just as conventional

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[56] Simms, "Humphries Trees the Half-Breed," *Mellichampe* 374–381; quote: 381.

[57] Simms, *Mellichampe* 423–424; 426.

[58] D. S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance*, esp. "The Sensational Press and the Rise of Subversive Literature," 169–210; quote: 191. Another example of Simms's fascination with details of physical violence is the description of the amputation of Millhouse's torn arm in *Woodcraft* (1854); see the discussion of the passage in the following chapter.

[59] Parrington, "William Gilmore Simms: Charleston Romancer," *Romantic Revolution* 119–130. For an argument that contradicts Parrington's interpretation of Simms as a thwarted realist, see Mary Ann Wimsatt, "Realism and Romance in Simms's Midcentury Fiction," *Southern Literary Journal* 12.2 (1980): 29–48. See also Caroline Collins, "Simms's Concept of Romance and His Realistic Frontier," *William Gilmore Simms and the American Frontier*, ed. Collins and Guilds (1997) 79–91, which is one of the rare analyses which seriously apply "romance" theory to the interpretation of Simms's fiction. Collins argues that it was in fact the "romance" form and his skillful manipulation of that form which enabled Simms to capture the history of the frontier in a believable and, at times, "realistic" manner.

and ideologically purposeful as his compliance with the fiction of social decorum.

The problem was not that Simms allowed his social obligation toward "romance" to subdue his inbred sense of "realism," but that he was trying to integrate codes of representation which were being differentiated by social and ideological processes of transformation.[60] By combining elitist pretensions, pseudo-aristocratic refinement and populist narrative strategies, sensational and conventional narrative modes, Simms attempted to bracket a broad American audience. In part, this may have been a (mistaken) attempt at maximizing his sales. But Simms's heterogeneous style also has an ideological significance: it pretends the existence of a readership or a cultural community which resembles the partisan community imagined in the "Revolutionary romances," a community that unites aristocrats and plebeians in a common cause. By supposing a coherent American readership that conjoins elite and common populace, Simms's "romances" were at odds with the process of cultural dissociation and social transformation which is manifest in Hawthorne's blunt dismissal of his popular female colleagues. Like the sectional controversy, the compartmentalization of American society and culture exploded the cultural framework assumed by Kennedy, Caruthers and Simms and subverted the pragmatics that they had associated with "romance."

Of course, the coherent American culture which their "romances" described as history and implied as present had never really existed: it was a postulate. The purpose of "Revolutionary romance" actually was to create the community that it both imagined and implied. However, intersectional conflicts and cultural diversification made the postulate of cohesion increasingly untenable. As a professional writer from the South who aimed at producing an American literature that would restore or create national, social and cultural coherence, Simms was not only claiming a social position that did not exist and propagating a conservative ideology that became more and more impossible: implying a reader who would bracket American society at large he was also addressing an (imaginative) audience that was being dispersed by the ideological as well as material fragmentation of American society and culture.

In the single chapter in *Literary Democracy* devoted to a southern author, Ziff observes: "[L]ike all writers, the American writer in the prewar period had to find his reader before he could find his voice and his genre. He did not need a large audience, but he had to be satisfied in his mind that there existed the kind of reader for whom he wrote." Ziff argues that George Washington Harris—whom he regards as "one of the greatest American writers of his day, albeit one who has not written more than ten consecutive pages that can be read without wincing"—was "thwarted by this necessity"

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[60] Guilds, who aims to reinstall Simms as a major American writer, laments the permanence of this differentiation (see *Simms* 341).

of successfully defining a readership. This observation is followed by a significant remark: "With far more modest literary powers but with a sure sense of a wide, middle-class audience, Stowe was encouraged to write better than she knew how to, even as Harris wrote worse than he could."[61] If this assertion is read somewhat against the grain, a similar argument may be made concerning Simms. As Ziff suggests, the primary question is not whether a writer manages to find a large number of readers by catering to the needs of a numerous and powerful class but whether he or she is able to imagine a believable and consistent implied reader. Ziff explains the fascinating but quixotic idiosyncrasies of Harris by implying that he failed to imagine such a reader. Simms also may have been "thwarted" by the awareness that the readership which his ideology implied was being replaced by another imaginary community, a community that Ziff calls the "middle class."

"Middle class" is a vague term: it does not describe an actual social class so much as a central image in a particular social ideology. The basic tenet of the ideologeme is that the ideal social position is in-between: the "middle class" belongs neither to a (depraved) populace nor to a (depraved) social and cultural elite of aristocratic pretensions. As a metaphor, the term effects a dual process of inclusion and exclusion: it constructs a social category that blurs social distinctions within and emphasizes the social and cultural difference to the social strata which are excluded from the bourgeois community. This ideology, however, is diametrically opposed to the social ideology of Simms's "Revolutionary romances." For even though the social utopia constructed by Simms is also established by a process of exclusion, this exclusion is a violent political process rather than the automatic social and cultural process supposed by liberal ideologies. Simms's utopia is an integrated society based upon the military repulsion of the British and the exclusion of the Tories. He imagines a community that suspends the meaning of class differences by emphasis on natural and static social distinctions within a closely-knit society that integrates all social classes. The ideology of the "middle class," on the other hand, does not refer to a society in which class distinctions have been abolished, but to a society in which a majority belongs to (or successfully pretends to belong to) a class in-between. Simms's ideal society, however, is created by a covenant between those social classes which are *not* the "middle class." It is a society in which aristocrats merge with the people and employ their natural charisma for transforming members of the underclass into valiant yeomen, or, conversely, in which experienced yeomen (such as Thumbscrew in *Mellichampe*) come to the aid of courageous aristocratic greenhorns.

Simms was increasingly aware that his mixture of genteel pretensions and

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[61] Ziff 185; 194.

populist narrative strategies did not appeal to the increasing number of contemporary Americans who were struggling—by hard work, social commitment and participation in particular and potentially exclusive cultural practices—to engineer their access to the imaginary community of a select majority which was the "middle class." After all, Trent's claim that Simms intended Porgy as a sort of self-portrait[62] may be significant: Porgy, who in the absence of a capable recipient is engaging in ever more autistic processes of communication, may be a fitting likeness for an author who felt alienated from the social ideals and the cultural practices of his potential readers, north *and* south.

8.3 From Simms to Hawthorne: The Privatization of "Romance"

I have argued that Simms's use of the term "romance" transcends literary genre not only by connoting a theory of art but also by evoking an ontology. Rather than merely defining a narrative genre in opposition to the "novel," Simms employs the term for postulating art as a means by which ideality and actuality can be made to interact. In terms of an ontology, "romance" signifies a palpable relation between the contingency of actuality and the conventionality of ideality; in terms of a pragmatics of art, "romance" is the artistic medium which establishes such a relation. This theory is connected with a social ideology: according to Simms's concept, "romance" is a conservative artifact which uses figuration in order to refer the dynamic contingency of human history back to "original" cohesion and "natural" hierarchy.

In the classic definition of "romance" narrative which he offered in the preface to *The Yemassee* (1835), Simms considered the effects of this ideology on his fiction.[63] It is misleading to view Simms's opposition between his own "modern Romance" and the

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[62] Trent 109.

[63] Simms, *The Yemassee*, Arkansas edition, ed. Guilds xxviii–xxx. The definition of "romance" was included in the "Advertisement" prefixed to the original edition of *The Yemassee* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835). For the "New and Revised Edition" of his works (New York: Redfield, 1853)—the so-called "Redfield edition"—Simms revised his prefaces and dedicatory letters. In the new edition of *The Yemassee*, which Guilds uses as a copy-text in the Arkansas edition, Simms enlarged the original "Advertisement" into a dedicatory letter "To Professor Samuel Henry Dickson, M. D. of South Carolina." However, the author retained those passages from the original preface which were concerned with the definition of "romance." A list of substantive changes, which is provided in the Arkansas edition (448–449), reveals that Simms's changes in these passages were not significant and consisted mostly in adaptations of tense and related matters. The only substantive change was to replace the original claim "The modern romance is a poem in every sense of the word" by a less emphatic statement: "The Romance is of loftier origin than the Novel. It approximates the poem" (Arkansas edition xxx; 449; cf. Guilds, introduction, *The Yemassee* xxii). Nina Baym clearly is wrong in claiming that Simms added the famous definition of "romance" only in the revised edition of 1853 ("Concepts of the Romance" 428).

"domestic novel" in the tradition of "Richardson and Fielding" primarily as an opposition of literary genres that differ according to specific narrative properties. Instead, it is a polemical opposition which consciously entails Simms's ideological positions: the basic criterion for distinguishing between the "romance" narrative and the "domestic" novel is social function rather than narrative form. In other words: Simms's definition of "romance" is primarily a definition of ideological intent.

It is Simms's central axiom in the preface that the "modern Romance is the substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic." This refers to the social and cultural function of the epic as a narrative that establishes social cohesion and propagates beliefs and norms which are at the center of a given culture.[64] Simms's claim that the "romance" somehow emerges from "the people of the present day" rather than being merely the invention of an individual author stresses this function as a manifestation of collective consciousness and as a narrative of national (or sectional) coherence. Simms explicitly points out that the modern "romance" narrative is not in the tradition of the "ancient epic" as a literary form but that it is a functional "substitute" for that form: "The form is changed; the matter is very much the same." The term "matter" seems to refer primarily to the ideological gist of the epic: "romance" is the application of the conventional ideologemes of the epic within a changed social and literary context. Conversely, the difference between Simms's "romance" novel and "the English novel" in the manner of Richardson and Fielding "is one of material, even more than of fabrication": it is an ideological rather than a formal difference. The modern "romance" narrative, then, is still a "novel," but it is a novel that serves a specific social mission and a specific ideology.

It might seem surprising that Simms characterizes not only Richardson's but also Fielding's fictions as "domestic" novels. For while the former really concentrated on accounts of private life, the latter opposed bourgeois ideologies of privacy. With his famous tongue-in-cheek classification of *Joseph Andrews* as a "comic epic poem in prose", Fielding even claimed an epic dimension for his fiction. Indeed, when Simms scorns the British novelists for "circumscribing the boundless horizon of art to the

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[64] On the social or cultural function of the epic, see Stella P. Revard, "Epic, History," *New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Preminger 361–371. On American transformations of the epic in prose and verse, see John P. McWilliams, Jr., *The American Epic: Transforming a Genre, 1770–1860* (Cambridge, Engl.: Cambridge UP, 1989), which includes a discussion of Simms's theory and practice (145–152). Of course, the argument that "romance" and "epic" are connected was not Simms's invention. In his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) Richard Hurd had defended "chivalric romance" against its opponents by arguing that it was basically a more modern form of Homer's epics and had a similar social functions. And Clara Reeve, in her influential pamphlet *The Progress of Romance through Times, Countries, and Manners* (1785; New York: Garland, 1970), had suggested that the "romance"—in contrast to the novel—is essentially "an Epic in prose" (1: 13).

domestic circle" he does not want to argue that they wrote "domestic novels" in the narrow formal sense of the term; instead, he indicts their failure to realize what he considers the full social and ideological potentials of fiction: to imitate the epic in establishing social and cultural cohesion by implying a coherent national audience and by transcending and reconstructing—rather than criticizing—social reality.

Through the redefinition of art and the emergence of a bipartite cultural system, the market revolution worked to undermine Simms's tenet that true art was primarily a social activity. The older paradigm of the writer as a public man who exerts his influence according to the triad of *belles lettres*, law and politics was being replaced by a variety of new roles for the author, which were organized around the central dichotomy of the writer as artist apart from society versus the writer as popular or populist social and political activist.[65] Living as a skeptic in the more or less splendid isolation of his "old manse," the modern artist seemed to face a "mob of scribbling women" who used sensational and sentimental strategies for the purpose of furthering the reform causes to which they had enthusiastically and naively devoted themselves. According to such a division of labor, there was hardly a third strategy between artistic abstraction and internalization, on the one hand, and populist polemics, on the other. There was no longer room for Simms's specific concept of art as an *immediate* social activity.

Ostrander argues that during the "period of political transition from Federal Republic to Democratic Republic" the "Republic of Letters . . . tended to distance itself from the political Republic," so that "philosopher-statesmen such as Franklin, Adams, and Jefferson" were "supplanted by professional politicians such as Van Buren and Thurlow Weed or apolitical literati such as Emerson and Poe."[66] Indeed, along with Simms's predilection for physical violence and his purported defects of style, Poe censured the Charlestonian's emphasis on broad social concerns, his striving to invest fiction with a social function comparable to that of the epic. Poe thought that Simms would do better by cultivating his evident talent for gothic fiction with a psychological turn. An 1841 review published in *Godey's Magazine* and very probably written by Poe

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[65] On the traditional association of law and *belles letters*, see Robert A. Ferguson, *Law and Letters in American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984). Ferguson's study contains a subchapter on "The Separate South" (290–297), which refers to Poe, Kennedy, Simms, Lanier, Longstreet, J. J. Hooper, and J. Baldwin as southern authors who were trained as lawyers. While "[b]y 1850 the old-style lawyer was an anachronism in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states," the "configuration continued to thrive in the South" (290–291). Ferguson's interpretation of this phenomenon is significant: "[A]t the very moment that the North was moving toward a more individual and imaginative literature, the South . . . plunged back into the civic forms of the past in search of a new image of itself and of its meaning in history" (292). See also Grammer 3–4: "[T]he South preserved, longer than other sections of the country, the antique idea of the man of letters as public man, with public responsibilities; and these responsibilities became increasingly acute as the sectional crisis intensified."

was enthusiastic about Simms's new fiction *Confession*, in which the Charlestonian had indulged his occasional knack for the psychological novella. The review suggested that Simms ought to drop the novel of national history and stick to his real talents:

> In general, Mr. Simms should be considered as one giving *indication*, rather than *proof* of high genius. . . . So far, with slight exceptions, he has buried his fine talent in his themes. He should never have written 'The Partisan,' nor 'The Yemassee,' nor his late book . . . about the first discovery of the Pacific [i.e. *The Damsel of Darien* (1839)]. His genius does not lie in the outward so much as in the inner world. 'Martin Faber' did him honor; and so do the present volumes. . . . We welcome him home to his own proper field of exertion—the field of Godwin and Brown—the field of his own rich intellect and glowing *heart*.[67]

While the majority of Simms's fictions are virtually obsessed with the structures and processes of social organization, the review implies that such themes are bound to produce an inferior kind of literature. According to Poe, works of a higher order focus on the individual consciousness, the "intellect" and the "heart," as a mirror of more universal questions. While Simms insisted on social representativeness, Poe pleaded for a pure art that would be achieved by abstraction from a particular social system; while for Simms "romance" connoted the power of the imagination to transform social and political actuality, Poe thought of it as imaginative art liberated from social functions.

Hawthorne's internalizing and privatizing redefinition of "romance" is even more instructive than Poe's radically aestheticist criticism of Simms. Sacvan Bercovitch claims that the "American Renaissance" marks the "aesthetic triumph" of the "double process" by which the United States symbolically "usurped America for itself" and by which "liberalism established its political and economic dominance." Summarily, he characterizes this process as "a major cultural shift from 'civic' to individualistic norms" in which "diversity itself" was redefined "as part of a strategy of cultural cohesion." In this interpretation *The Scarlet Letter* emerges as a central text because it is "the liberal example par excellence of art as ideological mimesis," both assisting in and reflecting on the reconstruction of American society and culture according to the norms of group pluralism.[68] It is indeed possible to view Hawthorne's classic as a new formal and ideological departure in the field of the American novel. Although he had been quite successful as a short story writer, Hawthorne had taken a long time in coming to terms with the novel: after *Fanshawe*, which he had published anonymously and without success twenty-two years earlier, *The Scarlet Letter* was only his second attempt in the

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66 Ostrander xv.

67 Poe, rev. of *Confession*, by Simms, *Graham's Magazine* Dec. 1841; qtd in Guilds, *Simms* 105–106.

68 Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Office of the Scarlet Letter* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991); quotes: xvii; xiv–xv; xxi–xxii.

more extensive form. After his failed debut as a novelist, Hawthorne had waited until he was able to claim an individual approach to the novel. Reviewing Simms's *Views and Reviews* for the *Salem Advertiser* in 1846, he had voiced his dissatisfaction with conventional historical fiction as practiced by Simms. Although Simms was "a man of vigorous and cultivated mind" as well as "a writer of well trained ability," Hawthorne argued, the Charlestonian lacked "genius": "The themes suggested by him, viewed as he views them, would produce nothing but historical novels, cast in the same worn out mould that has been in use these thirty years, and which it is time to break up and fling away."[69] In writing *The Scarlet Letter* Hawthorne then tried to "break up and fling away" Simms's "worn out mould." He did so not only by telling a new kind of story, which located the propelling power of history in the contradiction between individual and society, but also by offering a new theory: in the introductory "Custom-House" sketch, Hawthorne redefined "romance" in a manner that turns Simms's concept inside-out:

> Moonlight, in a familiar room, falling so white upon the carpet, and showing all its figures so distinctly,—making every object so minutely visible, yet so unlike a morning or noontide visibility,—is a medium the most suitable for a romance-writer to get acquainted with his elusive guests. There is the little domestic scenery of the well-known apartment; the chairs, with each its separate individuality; the centre-table, sustaining a work-basket, a volume or two, and an extinguished lamp; the sofa; the book-case; the picture on the wall;—all these details, so completely seen, are so spiritualized by the unusual light, that they seem to lose their actual substance, and become things of intellect. Nothing is too small or too trifling to undergo this change, and acquire dignity thereby. A child's shoe; the doll, seated in her little wicker carriage; the hobby-horse;—whatever, in a word, has been used or played with, during the day, is now invested with a quality of strangeness and remoteness, though still almost as vividly present as by daylight. Thus, therefore, the floor of our familiar room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and a fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other.[70]

It ought to be stressed that Hawthorne's and Simms's definitions of "romance" are definitely not worlds apart: they are closely related as opposing contributions to a polemical aesthetic debate with an always latent ideological subtext. Hawthorne's (ironic)[71] appropriation[72] and redefinition of the term "romance" realizes, in the field of artistic theory, the cultural shift from "civic" to "individualistic" norms referred to by

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[69] Hawthorne, rev. of *Views and Reviews*, by William Gilmore Simms, and of *Poems*, by Thomas Hood, *Salem Advertiser* 2 May 1846; *Miscellaneous Prose and Verse*, by Hawthorne, ed. Thomas Woodson, Claude M. Simpson and L. Neal Smith (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1994) 239, vol. 23 of *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*.

[70] Hawthorne, "The Custom House," *The Scarlet Letter* 149.

[71] On the "irony" in Hawthorne's definition of "romance," see Carton, *The Rhetoric of Romance* 158–159.

[72] Cf. Fluck, *Das kulturelle Imaginäre* 193–199, who explicitly refers to Hawthorne's definitions of "romance" as acts of appropriation ("Hawthornes Appropriation des Romans") and points out that they should not be interpreted as a discourse on narrative form but rather as a purposeful redefinition of the (social) function of the novel.

Bercovitch.[73] While Simms had expressed his conservative ideology of social cohesion by defining "romance" in opposition to the "domestic novel," Hawthorne subverts such a conception of the social function of literature by ironically domesticating "romance." According to the passage quoted, "romance" is the picturesque transformation of a "domestic scenery," a playful and purely "imaginary" spritualization of the bourgeois home that invests its thousand intimate paraphernalia with a peculiar dignity. The "romance" writer pictured by Hawthorne does not resemble Simms's bardic chronicler and prophet of national fate. Rather, he is an ordinary citizen and contented family father who gets up at night, puts on slippers and housecoat, and revisits the scene of his daily family bliss. The "romance" produced by such an author will be a private "romance." It will not open up a public space where the tribe may gather, but will turn ever more inward. By opening up interior rooms within the home, such a "romance" will accumulate new possessions, and by individualizing household objects it will add new members to the family.

Hawthorne's exaggerated emphasis on the writer's harmlessness is connected to the general intention of the "Custom-House" sketch to expose the idiocy of the author's dismissal from the Salem surveyorship by the new Whig administration. The author's strategy is to re-interpret his ousting from office as a liberation from a job that had enslaved the powers of his imagination. The point of the quoted passage is that the writer's relegation to the domestic sphere can actually be regarded as an empowerment. The ironic tone suggests that Hawthorne the private man and writer will ultimately be much more dangerous than Hawthorne the Democrat in a minor administrative position. The bourgeois family father, it is insinuated, may be a mask worn by an intricately subversive writer. At the same time, Hawthorne's irony serves to deflate Simms's exalted conception of the power of literature and the social role of the writer. In fact, the two points of Hawthorne's irony are related: he suggests that the power of the writer is not in performing but in abrogating a social function, not in his identification with society but in his alienation from it.

Hawthorne's concept of "romance" is the mirror image of Simms's also in the way in which he postulates "romance" as a "neutral territory." In his essay on "The Epochs and Events of American History, as Suited to the Purposes of Art in Fiction"—included in *Views and Reviews* and thus known to Hawthorne, who had reviewed the collection—Simms had also defined the dominion of the "romancer" as a "neutral

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[73] For an interpretation of Hawthorne's definition of "romance" as a movement of internalization and privatization in response to an increasingly constraining political discourse, see Jonathan Arac, "Romance, Romanticism and the Literary," *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995) 693–708.

ground" shaded off from practical reality by a "certain degree of obscurity."[74] But while Simms had regarded the "neutral ground" of "romance" as a realm where the artist works the miracle of converting the ideal into the actual, Hawthorne subjectivizes "romance" by stressing the conversion of "the Actual" (the real objects of his household) into "the Imaginary." According to Simms, "romance" translates an objective ideal that the artist grasps by his imagination into an external reality; according to Hawthorne, "romance" is the internalization of objective reality by the artist's imagination.

In the preface to the *House of the Seven Gables* (1851), the locus classicus of his theory of "romance," Hawthorne again characterizes the "romancer" as an unobtrusive citizen who keeps within a sphere of quasi-domestic privacy: he declares that "the Author . . . trusts not to be considered as unpardonably offending, by laying out a street that infringes upon nobody's private rights, and appropriating a lot of land which had no visible owner, and building a house, of materials long in use for constructing castles in the air."[75] Walter Benn Michaels has called attention to the manner in which Hawthorne here conceives of "romance" as "a kind of property" or as "an impalpable claim to impalpable property." Analyzing the relation of the preface to the plot of the novel, Michaels tries to show that Hawthorne's use of the terminology of private property is not a tribute to the pervasiveness of the marketplace: on the contrary, Hawthorne's postulate of "romance" as inalienable property is interpreted as his strategy of engineering an escape from the rapid fluctuations and from the instability of a United States that was being transformed by the emergence of modern capitalism. According to Michaels, "Hawthorne required the romance . . . to render property secure, not in compensation to the coldness of American life but in opposition to its terrible vitality."[76] Hawthorne's domestication of the "romance," then, appears to be a strategy that is both evasive and subversive: the "romancer" is a squatter on ownerless property rather than the proud lord of an estate that has been acquired according to the rules of the market. In fact, Hawthorne's opposition of "Romance" and "Novel" resembles Simms's in that it may be read as an ideological statement rendered in terms of an aesthetic theory. In reality, the dichotomy concerns social function (the fiction's relation to and its impact on society) rather than literary form:

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[74] Simms, "The Epochs and Events of American History," *Views and Reviews* 56.

[75] Hawthorne, preface, *House of the Seven Gables*; *Novels*, The Library of America (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1983) 352–353.

[76] Michaels, "Romance and Real Estate"; quotes: 157; 163; 168. For Scott's use of "romance" in relation to property, a similar argument is made by Alexander Welsh in *The Hero of the Waverley Novels* 63–85.

> When a writer calls his work a Romance it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former—while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart—has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation.[77]

Here "romance" is represented as a "claim" which "entitles" the author to deviate from the social reality in which he is placed, to transcend the "probable and ordinary course of man's experience" in contemporary society. The "romancer" pleads for exemption from the law and for the prerogative of setting up his own "laws": the laws of society are to be replaced by those of "art" and the spurious truth of mimesis is to be corrected by "the truth of the human heart." This definition of "romance" is potentially subversive since it implies a contradiction between the factual reality of contemporary society and a higher and more essential truth. Like Simms's "romance," then, Hawthorne's is an attempt to reconstruct society by transcending social reality according to the laws of art. But while Simms's "romance" aims to conquer public space by externalizing the ideal, Hawthorne's follows a strategy of internalization; while Simms's artist is a lawgiver who defines and redefines the parameters of the social contract, Hawthorne's is a cunning jurist who defines private spaces that are exempt from the public law.[78] Hawthorne is making a legal case for his "romance": he carefully justifies the act of transgression that he is about to commit. In fact, his withdrawal from a public sphere that has been appropriated by the market is through the radicalization of liberal individualism: his flight from capitalism takes him to the utopia of bourgeois privacy.[79]

A comparison between Simms's and Hawthorne's concepts of "romance"—or, more precisely, an analysis of the discursive transition between these two concepts—brings out the limitations of Myra Jehlen's version of the "romance" theory of American exceptionalism as presented in her influential essay "The Novel and the Middle Class in America." According to Jehlen, the "romances" of Hawthorne and Melville were "generated" by the exceptional ideological consensus at the base of nineteenth-century American culture. If critics like Georg Lukács and Quentin Anderson suggested that the novel intended to make up for "the absence of transcendent order or unifying purpose in the novelist's bourgeois culture," Jehlen argues, American "romance" was motivated

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[77] Hawthorne, preface, *The House of the Seven Gables* 351.

[78] On the quasi-legal aspects of Hawthorne's theory of "romance" as definition of a right to privacy, see: Milette Shamir, "Hawthorne's Romance and the Right to Privacy," *American Quarterly* 49 (1997): 746–779.

[79] Bercovitch's interpretation of *The Scarlet Letter* as the central manifestation of a nascent "American ideology" points in the same direction; see *The Office of the Scarlet Letter*, esp. 25.

by a "sense of order so pervasive as to seem inescapable." She claims that "[i]n Lukács' terms, middle-class America *was* an integrated society . . . like Athens and Renaissance London" and that "the disengaged, abstract concept of personal identity which characterize the romance" were "ideally suited to the maintenance of a specific society, that individualistic 'nation of men' which Emerson envisioned as America's special destiny."[80]

However, a comparison of Simms's and Hawthorne's concepts of "romance" suggests that the concept of "romance" which Jehlen sketches appropriated or replaced a different (American) concept of "romance," which was not at all "individualistic," namely the concept manifest in Simms's definition. "Romance," then, is not the literary correlative of a specific ideological organization of American culture. Rather, the material and ideological transformation of American society towards the middle of the nineteenth century was accompanied and supported by a redefinition of "romance." Both concepts of "romance," Hawthorne's as well as Simms's, *invest* literature and literary form with a particular ideological significance. They do not really deploy an essential ideological character inherent in specific literary forms, even if they claim to do so. Moreover, Simms's and Hawthorne's "romances" are not comprehensive manifestations but interested interpretations of contemporary social realities and ideological discourses. They should not be read as instances of the power of the American ideology "to co-opt alternative and oppositional forms,"[81] but as precarious attempts at such a co-optation.

At the same time, Hawthorne's redefinition of "romance" clearly reflected powerful historical forces which were adverse to Simms's vision of "romance" and his ideology. In fact, I will show in the following chapter that eventually the Charlestonian, too, came to believe that in the context of capitalist civil society "romance" could be sustained only as a private fiction. But while Hawthorne seems to have entertained the hope that, by the devotion to the "truth of the human heart," society might eventually be reconstructed in the image of "romance," Simms actually had become more skeptical. When he revised the original introduction to *The Yemassee* for the Redfield edition of 1853—significantly turning it into a dedicatory letter to the pro-slavery essayist Samuel Henry Dickson—Simms added concluding sentences of remarkable gloom: "If you read 'The Yemassee' *now*, with such changes of mood and judgment as I acknowledge in my own case, I can hardly hope that it will please you as it did twenty years ago. And yet, my friend, could we both read it as we did then! Ah! how much more grateful our faith than our knowledge! How much do we lose by our gains—how much do our

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[80] Jehlen 128–129; 133. The emphasis is Jehlen's.
[81] Jehlen 127.

acquisitions cost us!"[82] Simms seems to lament that in the context of an increasingly sectional and pluralistic United States the nationalist epic he had conceived at the beginning of his literary career ceased to work. Placed immediately after his old definition of "romance," the quoted sentences suggest the author's disillusionment with his youthful visions of literary power. Indeed, *Woodcraft* (1852/54), his portrait of the Revolutionary hero in post-Revolutionary civil society, comes close to being a mock epic, a funeral song to "romance" as Simms had originally conceived it.

[82] Simms, *The Yemassee* xxxii–xxxiii.

9. From Ethos to Pathos: William G. Simms's *Woodcraft*

9.1 The "Romance" of Partisan Life and the Bathos of Civil Society

In contrast to traditional critical notions, Simms did not go on writing the same kind of story from the beginning of his career up to his death. Holman's assumption that after the depression the author simply returned to the obsolete form of historical "romance"[1] has been challenged by more recent studies. Thus, Wimsatt divides the Simms's career as a novelist into two phases: the first from the beginnings of his literary activity to 1842, the second from 1850 until his death. In between these periods are the portentous years in which the author did not publish a major novel. Wimsatt points out that Simms's neglect of the novel form during the economic depression marks a significant shift in his narrative style. Simms had become increasingly interested in southern humor and the novel of manners, so that "he replaced the Gothic elements of his early work with satiric passages of social comedy and increasingly raucous backwoods humor."[2] Similarly, Charles S. Watson discovers a "major alteration" in Simms's novelistic form since the beginning of the 1850s, a shift away from the more affirmative strategies of "romance" and towards the ambiguity or the critical impetus of the social novel.[3]

Such changes in narrative method are evident in *Katherine Walton*, the first Revolutionary novel Simms wrote after the depression. It was serialized by *Godey's Magazine* in 1850 and published as a book the following year. The novelty of *Katherine Walton* is in the detailed description of the manners of fashionable society, especially in the city. In his 1854 introduction to the novel Simms comments on this change of setting and perspective: "While 'The Partisan,' and 'Mellichampe,' occupied ground in the interior, scenes at the head of the Ashley, and along the Santee and Wateree, 'Katherine Walton' brings us to the city ; and a large proportion of the work, and much of its interest, will be found to consist in the delineation of the social world of Charleston, during the Revolutionary period." In comments on his earlier "Revolutionary romances," Simms had always insisted on the historical "truth" of the narratives, their valid representation and faithful interpretation of the meaning of South

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1 Holman, "William Gilmore Simms and the 'American Renaissance,'" *Roots* 75–86.

2 Wimsatt, *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms*; quotes: 6–7; cf. 59–60. Wimsatt has repeatedly analyzed Simms's tendency to fuse "romance" structures with more "realistic" modes; see also: "Simms as Novelist of Manners: *Katherine Walton*," *Southern Literary Journal* 5.1 (1972): 68–88; "Realism and Romance in Simms's Midcentury Fiction," *Southern Literary Journal* 12.2 (1980): 29–48; "William Gilmore Simms," *The History of Southern Literature*, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., et al. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1985) 108–117.

3 Charles S. Watson, "The Signs of Change," *From Nationalism to Secessionism* 71–87; quote: 77.

Carolina's history. In the preface to *Katherine Walton*, however, he strikes a new key by postulating the historicity of the story as to its very details: "The matter, in fact, is mostly historical, even when merely social. The portraits are mostly of real persons. The descriptions of life, manners, customs, movements, the social aspect in general, have all been drawn from sources as unquestionable as abundant. The social reunions, in many instances, as described in the story, were real occurrences."[4]

While Simms proclaims his new interest in "social" history, i.e. in the history of the manners and customs of fashionable society, he implicitly stresses the difference between the bold construction of a usable past by uncovering the deep structure of history (the mode he usually referred to as "romance") and a detailed investigation of history's social surfaces (here identified as a historiography which is "merely social"). Of course, *Katherine Walton* is not restricted to the latter mode: the novel contrasts the fashionable, and mostly loyalist, world of Charleston with its balls, soirees and aggressive battles of wit to the forest world of the partisan militia—and while the trivialities of city life are rendered in the mode of the historical novel of manners, partisan camp life is clearly represented as a "romance." The "major alteration" evident in Simms's fiction around 1850 is not simply a transition from "romance" to social novel; rather, it consists in a new emphasis on the contrast between social realism and "romance."

The pronounced incorporation of social realism in Simms's narrative design indicates his increasing sophistication as a writer, but it also reflects his awareness of and his dismay at the profound changes in American society, politics and culture since the 1830s. The detailed description of a world outside the world of "romance" destabilizes the salvational construction of history; the representation of the city as a powerful antagonistic world with laws of its own complicates the conventional binary opposition of good and evil. Ultimately, the world of "romance" seems to be isolated within a hostile world that has broken lose from the higher order which "romance" implies and to which it appeals: "romance" has fallen into history.[5] It is revealing that Simms described *Katherine Walton* as "the most *symmetrical* & *truthful* of all my Revolutionary novels,"[6] for at the end of the novel the protagonists of "romance" only

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[4] Simms, introduction (1854), *Katherine Walton: Or, The Rebel of Dorchester* (1851), revised ed. (New York: Redfield, 1854); facsimile rpt with an introduction and explanatory notes (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1976) 3.

[5] Of course, the contrast of "romance" versus "real history" is not a novel phenomenon in Simms's fiction. What sets Simms's later novels apart from his earlier productions, however, is the degree to which the historical order is allowed to invade or dominate the "romance" narrative.

[6] Simms, letter to Abraham Hart, 27 Sept. 1851; *Letters* 6: 120. In the narrative itself, the historicity of the scenes describing the fashionable society of occupied Charleston is reinforced by several footnotes, such as: "This answer was really given to Barry. The scenes of this story, which occur in Charleston, were mostly of real occurrence, as the parties were

barely escape from destruction in the city. Indeed, one of them, the somewhat too stiffly virtuous and honorable Colonel Walton, is executed.

In spite of its deceptively comical tone, Simms's subsequent Revolutionary novel *Woodcraft* (1852/54) offers a yet more pessimistic picture: if the previous fictions in the Revolutionary series enacted the success and recognition of "romance" as a social reality, *Woodcraft* shows how the war-time "romance" of partisan communalism barely survives its confrontation with the bathos of post-Revolutionary civil society. The first version of Woodcraft appeared in 1852 as a serial in the Southern Literary Gazette and, still in the same year, was published as a book under the title The Sword and the Distaff: Or, "Fair, Fat and Forty," A Story of the South at the Close of the Revolution. The original title indicates the playful tone of the narrative, which is dependent on Simms's decision to move Porgy to center stage.[7] However, for the republication in the Redfield edition, Simms revised the text and changed the title to *Woodcraft* (1854).

For a narrative that is mainly set on the plantations of Porgy and his neighbor Mrs. Eveleigh, and here often indoors, this title may seem surprising, but it is has the function of signaling the central theme of the novel: the contrast between the war-time life of the partisans and the alienated condition of post-war civil society. Simms had previously used "Woodcraft" as a chapter title in *Katherine Walton*. Together with a chapter entitled "Camp-Fires," that on "Woodcraft" here offers the first description of the partisans' forest world as a counter-image to the alienated world of social circumstance in which the narrative has been set up to this point and whose atmosphere is indicated by chapter titles such as "Social Stabbing" and "Lessons in Manners." In the text of Simms's new novel, the term "woodcraft" first comes up in connection with Mrs. Eveleigh's trusty overseer Fordham: pursuing the outlaws who have attacked the widow and her party, he shows himself "a thorough master of woodcraft."[8] In the undertaking, the overseer is accompanied by Eveleigh's young son

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mostly real and well-known persons" (*Katherine Walton* 295). In another footnote Simms feels that it is "a proper precaution only, to assure the reader that the marriage thus described, did actually take place, under these very circumstances, and between these very parties ; the Rev. Edward Ellington officiating as above. He, himself, subsequently reported all the particulars" (329). In the Charleston scenes the plot is relegated to the background and the narrative actually dissolves into a series of historical sketches.

7 The phrase "fair, fat, and forty" in the title refers simultaneously to Porgy and to the Widow Eveleigh, who may be described as the heroine of the novel. In fact, the one occurrence of the phrase in the narrative is in a passage that refers to the widow; it is a paraphrase of Porgy's thoughts as he muses over Eveleigh's attractions (370). The phrase is set in quotation marks. Simms's source may have been Scott, although the phrase was also used by Joseph Johnson in his *Traditions and Reminiscences Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South*, published in 1851 (George F. Hayhoe, notes, *Woodcraft*, The Revolutionary War Novels of William Gilmore Simms 8 [Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, 1976] 524; 543).

8 Simms, *Woodcraft: Or, Hawks about the Dovecote: A Story of the South at the Close of the Revolution*, new and revised edition (1856); facsimile rpt (Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg, 1968) 68.

Arthur, who is eminently courageous but somewhat too impetuous, so that Fordham remarks: "I must give you a lesson in woodcraft" (73)—thus introducing chapter four, "Lessons in Woodcraft."

Evidently, "woodcraft" describes the knowledge and ethos which planter aristocrats have to acquire in order to meet Simms's conception of ideal leaders. Arthur's initiation to the natural world entails a transformation of his social standing in that he has to accept an inferior as his tutor: "He learned a new lesson in woodcraft, and his humility increased with his caution, in the growing conviction that he had a great deal yet to learn" (82). In a sense, Simms conceived of the entire Revolution in South Carolina as such "a lesson in woodcraft": in his "Revolutionary romances" he represents partisan warfare as a process of learning in which planter aristocrats and members of the lower classes are matured by exposure to hardships and welded together into a new society. "Woodcraft," then, emblematically represents Simms's notion that in the swamps of South Carolina the American Revolution resulted in a genuine social revolution. The theme of the novel is the collision of the partisan community emerging from this revolution with bourgeois civil society after the war.

The narrative opens in December 1782 when the provisional articles of peace have been signed and the British army is evacuating Charleston. However, the narrative does not describe the triumphant dawning of a new era. According to the picture drawn in the novel, the restitution of civil society was antagonistic to the heroic ethos of the Revolutionary War: as the swamp partisans disperse, the city with its spurious social practices and economic utilitarianism again takes control. The innate corruption of the new society is evident from its willingness to admit opportunistic turncoats like the businessman M'Kewn, who has amassed wealth by collaborating with the British in "appropriating" slaves owned by Whig planters and selling them for personal profit. In their machinations, M'Kewn has had a willing tool in Bostwick, a poor squatter on Porgy's estate. Many of the slaves appropriated by Bostwick for the two profiteers have come from the plantations of Porgy and his neighbor, the Widow Eveleigh. While the squatter is dismayed at the victory of the Americans, M'Kewn actually looks forward to taking a place at the top of the new American society. Peace will allow him to realize the fruits of his war-time swindles: he has invested in real estate and, among other assets, owns the mortgage on Porgy's plantation where he intends to settle down. M'Kewn is well-prepared for the new situation, for he has not only worked his way into the inner circles of British power but has also, at least ostensibly, acted as a spy for the Americans and enjoys the reputation of being a patriot.

Subsequent page references will occur parenthetically in the text.

Thus, the war profiteer M'Kewn has gained what Porgy, the true patriot and war hero, has lost. The opening chapters set the stage for Porgy's appearance by sketching the kind of society to which he will have to return from his war-time adventures. The central question posed by the narrative is whether this society will finally be able to accept its Revolutionary heritage or whether it will squander the gains of the Revolution at the very first moment. By way of synecdoche, the answer to this question is in the fate of Porgy, who embodies the ethical essence of the Revolution (cf. above, chapter 7.3.).

The character of the novel as a story of "soldier's pay" is brought out when the narrative turns from Charleston to the head of the Cooper river, where Marion is dissolving his partisan "brigade" (48). The contrast between this solemn procedure and the gay but equivocal festivities taking place in the city is reinforced by the comments of the narrator, who explains that the partisan troops of Marion, Sumter and Maham were not permitted to be present at the reoccupation of Charleston: "They had shared the usual fortune of modest merit ; had served their purpose, and had survived their uses. The work done, the game won, they had been thrown aside, as the orange sucked of its contents, with no more scruple or concern" (46). "Modest," of course, refers to the attitude of the partisans, not to the importance of their achievements, which is described as eminent.

One reason for the partisans' exclusion is their very looks: "mostly in rags" and their "rents of garment . . . closed by bandages of green moss," they appear to be "too *nude*" for the festive celebrations (46; Simms's emphasis). The very insignia of the partisans' exploits in forest and swamp mark their exclusion from the new order that they have helped to establish. However, the narrator explains, the primary reason for slighting the militia is of an even more "offensive and objectionable character" than mere disgust at their neglected appearance. It is an "unworthy fear—a dread of the power of a body of troops who were supposed to be less easily brought under the control of authority—who were known to be dissatisfied, and who, it was felt, had a just cause for discontent and dissatisfaction" (46–47). The key phrase is "the control of authority," for it indicates that the partisans corps are viewed as dangerous because they are expected to resist the reorganization and re-monopolization of power. These passages have considerable ideological implications, for they imply that a social revolution had taken place alongside the political Revolution, that the struggle for independence from Britain had brought about changes in the power structure of American society which the still dominant old colonial elites attempt to abolish. During the war, it is suggested, the partisan units evolved the model for an alternative organization of society in the form of small face-to-face communities in which the underclass was elevated through the leadership of natural aristocrats. Now, the re-

introduction of bourgeois society and the re-establishment of control by a centralized authority—both represented by the city—are destroying the utopian swamp communities.

Having been elevated by their participation in the guerilla warfare, the backwoodsmen are again relegated to powerlessness and declassed by being "separated from their leaders" (48). Those among the planter class who rose up to their social task by joining the partisans also have to fight for their social standing. They, too, have become unfit for civil society because of the very process that Simms's previous "Revolutionary romances" celebrated: the conversion of planter aristocrats into "natural" leaders of common men. The main plot of *Woodcraft* describes how Porgy, accompanied by close associates from lower social ranks—including his slave Tom—returns home to a ruined plantation which he tries to restore and make into a civilian analogy of the campfire community over which he presided during the war. In this attempt, he has to confront M'Kewn's claims to his plantation: "The lawyers were at work in the city. Documents, with great seals, were in preparation. Vile inventions, vulgarly denominated writs and declarations, were getting in readiness" (401).

The subtitle of the novel, "Hawks about the Dovecote," describes the situation from Porgy's viewpoint. This simile humorously epitomizes the basic construction of the narrative: quite against his grain, the protagonist eventually decides to reform into a domestic hero and to establish a partisan household in accordance with the rules of civil society; trying to pose as a "dove," however, Porgy finds himself surrounded by "hawks" and confronted with a civil society that seems to be a permanent state of war. In terms of genre, the result is a mixture of heroic paradigms with "bourgeois modes"—a mixture in which Porgy emerges not only as a mock-epic but also as a mock-domestic hero. If this reads as a comedy,[9] it also has decidedly tragic implications.

9.2 The Doomed Domestication of "Romance"

Porgy is aware that civil society, restoring "the law and its fearful activity" (102), will not hold a place for him and his band of partisans. At the beginning of the narrative, the captain, who evidently shares his creator's predilection for Shakespeare, assumes the role of an "Othello" who knows that his "occupation's gone" (53). Porgy's situation is similar to that in which Walter Scott's Waverley finds himself when he realizes that "the

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[9] Wimsatt stresses the comical aspects of *Woodcraft*, analyzing it as a "comedy of plantation manners" (*The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms* 156–172; esp. 166–172).

romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced."[10] Yet, Porgy is initially unwilling to submit to a transformation of genre. An opportunity for deferring post-war reality and for a last display of partisan "woodcraft" offers itself when Porgy and his party encounter the Widow Eveleigh, who has been attacked by outlaws on her way from Charleston back to her plantation. The partisans successfully disperse the bandits, and the dismissed captain even presumes to hold a military trial over a captive outlaw. In this situation Porgy uses his tried rhetoric for overpowering his own better reason and simply "resolves" (145) the continuance of the war-time order. In what amounts to a mock trial Porgy declares himself to be "both judge and jury," makes Millhouse his "sheriff" and crowns his contempt of civil law by regarding the bystanding "sons of Ethiopia" as witnesses (154). As the accused points out the illegality of such a procedure and refuses to answer any questions, he is subjected to torture by the rope––a process which, in a manner characteristic of Simms, is described in great length and detail (153–167).

However, Porgy is soon reminded that his pretenses at martial authority are untenable. When the prisoner eventually is about to speak, Bostwick, who has watched the trial from a hiding place, shoots him in the head. Porgy pursues the shot on impulse, forgetting that having sat down he has unbuttoned his trousers: "He was suddenly restored to recollection on this subject, and brought to an abrupt stand, by feeling himself fettered, with his nether garments clinging about his legs." In a most embarrassing manner, the captain is felled down: "The circumstances in which he found himself were utterly indescribable . . . He was only brought to a full consciousness of his embarrassment by nearly measuring his full length upon the ground" (169). Porgy's attempt at a militaristic carnivalization of the civil order turns against his own person; trying to prolong the "romance" of war into the times of peace, the protagonist is in danger of degenerating into a mock-epic hero. Having heretofore been able to convert his mountainous abdomen into a weapon—"descending" upon his enemies like "a human avalanche . . . crashing rending overwhelming" (127)—he now finds himself inhibited by his corpulence. Porgy's tumbling over his own trousers is paralleled by an earlier scene in which one of the outlaws brings the charging captain to the ground by shooting his horse (129). Porgy's unprecedented fall and the death of the animal seem to signify that the days of chivalry are over. It makes for another symbolic indication of Porgy's loss of authority that he will now have to ride a dead outlaw's horse. Indeed, after his second fall the captain eventually professes to accept peace: "It's well that the war is over . . . I am no longer fit for war" (169).

Moreover, the encounter with Eveleigh has considerably altered Porgy's

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[10] Scott, *Waverley* 283.

situation: he is again in the possession of the slaves whom the widow has rescued for him. With the help of their labor power the restoration of the plantation may be feasible. Indeed, the re-appearance of the slaves, for whose well-being his ideology makes him fully responsible, practically forces Porgy to try everything to save his plantation in order to give them a home. As he explains to Lance Frampton, he would actually prefer to sacrifice his property to his dignity and to go down in a blaze of glory, turning the forfeiture of his plantation into a theatrical performance that would expose the triviality of the law: "I suppose after a while I shall have to surrender ; but we'll make a d—d long fight of it, Lance ; and we'll get terms, good conditions, when we give in—go off with our sidearms, flag flying, and music playing the grand march "Hurrah for nothing!"' (112). But such a precariously glorious course is no longer possible for the hero: by Lance's cautious reasoning, by his faithful slaves and by Millhouse, who likewise claims the prerogative of serfdom (105–106), the captain is gently but resolutely forced to embark on the difficult adventure of restoring his run-down and debt-ridden plantation. Porgy's awareness that efforts to extend the war-time order will eventually reduce him to a mock hero is another motive for his decision to accept the peace-time order and to reform into a domestic hero.

The band of partisans seems to constitute a kind of domestic order anyway. Rather than a regular military unit, Porgy and his followers resemble a frontier family on the move. The narrative continuously stresses the analogies between the community of discharged soldiers and the sphere of the household, which is centered in the preparation and consumption of food and based on relationships of love and devotion. Thus, the slave Tom is introduced as a superb cook with "a genius for stews" and "a reputation . . . for his terrapin soups." His horse is "covered" with cooking utensils and the slave is "buried in his kitchen baggage," the items of which are enumerated in detail. Tom's culinary accomplishments and his "tried fidelity" have earned him a place clearly above that of a mere slave: he is included in the familial relationship between the partisans, paying close attention to the conversation and "not wanting, also, in the occasional comment—the camp-life having done much toward perfecting the republicanism of all the parties" (51). In fact, if the ex-soldiers may be taken to constitute a kind of family, Tom's role as a cook who is proud of his accomplishments and lovingly caters to the culinary predilections of his fat-bellied master approaches that of the housewife.

Corinne Dale argues that Porgy represents Simms's attempt at creating a domestic hero. In her opinion, *Woodcraft* ought to be read as "a domestic romance" that blurs genre as well as gender boundaries. She points out Porgy's ability, which is present all through the Revolutionary series, to transform "the swamp, almost miraculously, into a home" and views *Woodcraft* as the final apotheosis of his function

"as the guardian of domestic values" who establishes his plantation as "a model of social and moral order." However, as Dale acknowledges, such a domestic vision is undercut by the turbulent comedy of the novel: "the comic aspects of Porgy's domesticity conflict with the serious affirmations of Porgy's domestic gentility, giving rise to disturbing contradictions in Porgy's character." Dale attempts to reconcile these contradictions by arguing that while the novel describes a process of learning by which Porgy slowly grows into his domestic responsibilities as a true southern aristocrat, the inconsistencies of his character betray the general "problems involved in shaping a male domestic hero."[11]

While it is true that the comic qualities of *Woodcraft* often depend on Simms's ingenious play with gender stereotypes—a point that will be discussed in more detail below—,the interpretation of *Woodcraft* as a didactic novel on the education of the southern planter mistakes its polemical objective. This objective is to expose the aporia of the bourgeois concept of domesticity by pointing out the essential contradiction between bourgeois notions of privacy and the capitalist order on which they are based. Dale points out that Simms's "Revolutionary romances" are characterized by a "central conflict," acted out by Porgy, between domesticity and anti-domesticity."[12] However, this conflict does not signify that the epicure warrior is torn between two value systems. Rather, Simms's point is to define—according to his usual strategy of paradox—the specific character of partisan domesticity in opposition to the values of bourgeois domesticity. What Dale fails to acknowledge fully, is Simms's representation of partisan domesticity as an anachronistic order in opposition to capitalist civil society.

The peculiar character of the partisan family is strikingly revealed by the passage that relates the reason for Millhouse's excessive devotion to Porgy, which is due to the fact that the latter saved the sergeant's life by amputating his right arm:

> His right arm, torn into strips by a brace of bullets from a musket held within a few paces, was stricken off at his entreaty, by his captain, and the bleeding stump was thrust into hot, seething tar. . . . But for this proceeding, he must have perished. At that time there was no surgeon in Marion's brigade, and every hurt which affected the limbs of the victim was certain to end in death. Sergeant Millhouse . . . became the devoted adherent of a superior, who had the firmness to comply with the stern requisition of the patient, and himself perform the cruel operation, which the sufferer bore without a groan. (50)

The family of the former partisans was forged in war and, therefore, has a decidedly anachronistic character. It is organized according to rules and held together by an ethos which point to the *familia* constituted by a feudal lord and his household rather

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[11] Corinne Dale, "William Gilmore Simms's Porgy as a Domestic Hero," *Southern Literary Journal* 13.1 (1980): 55–71; quotes: 56; 71.

[12] Dale 57.

than towards the ethos of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century bourgeois domesticity. The feudal spirit of the partisan family and its opposition to the order of civil society is made explicit in the characterization of Lance: "Of law, he had only vague notions. So far as his experience went, civil authority had been only a name . . . He had come to stand up beside, and for, his feudal lord—such was really the sort of relation between the parties" (422).

The essence of the anachronistic domestic order over which Porgy presides is epitomized by the institution of slavery, which is represented not as a property relationship but as a reciprocal relationship of belonging. Thus, when the draining bottle of Jamaica has affirmed the community of the ex-partisans by making its usual round from Porgy to Millhouse and from there to Tom, the lieutenant is moved to declare his devotion to the leader. Exclaiming that Porgy is "a born gentleman, by thunder" he promises to "work for him . . . more hard than any nigger he ever had." Tom, the real slave, tries to outdo his superior by adding: "I cook myse'f 'fore I guine le' Maussa want for dinner"—to which Millhouse responds by announcing that he will even demean himself by helping the slave pack up his kitchen utensils: "Why not, nigger? To be sure! It's for your maussa, Tom, and I love him, boy, an I'll be his nigger, too, when it ain't *on*decend—that's to say, when there's no company" (105–106).

Millhouse's offering himself as a slave to Porgy constitutes a reinterpretation of slavery according to feudal conceptions: the disabled lieutenant asks to become Porgy's liege man, hoping that this will extend the partisan community into the times of peace. The language of love applied by Millhouse is in accordance with feudal rhetoric. When they are discussing Tom's standing as a slave and his possible fate in the context of bourgeois civil society, Porgy and Lance also make use of that language:

> "Tom is certainly a negro. Tom is certainly mine. As mine, Tom is liable for my debts, and it *may* be that some d——d fool of a creditor or sheriff may fancy that he can take Tom. But he shall have a hint in season of the danger of any such experiments upon my philosophy. I love Tom. Tom is virtually a free man. It's true, being a debtor, I can not confer freedom upon him. But let a sheriff touch him, and I'll put a bullet through his diaphragm. I will, by Jupiter! If I don't do that, Lance—if there's no escape for Tom—for they may seize him when I'm napping—after dinner, perhaps––then, I shall kill Tom, Lance ; I'll shoot *him*—him, Tom—in order to save him. The poor fellow has faithfully served a gentleman. He shall never fall into the hands of a scamp. I'll sacrifice him as a burnt-offering for my sins and his own. Tom, I'm thinking, would rather die my slave, than live a thousand years under another owner."
>
> "He *does* love you, captain."
>
> "And I love him. The old rascal, I do love him. He makes the finest stew of any cook in Carolina. He shall cook for me as long as I'm able to eat ; and when I'm not, we shall both be willing to die together." (113)

Porgy presides over an anachronistic order which is not only a system of unconditional authority but also a system of "love." According to the picture drawn in the novel, the

new regime of bourgeois civil society threatens to subvert this traditional and natural system through the imposition of private law, according to which Tom is redefined as alienable property. Through Porgy's inflated rhetoric, Simms suggests that the terminology of property is not adequate for defining slavery: it effects a conceptual reduction that undercuts the pastoral essence of the institution. The concept of property, it is implied, is antithetical to the ideal order of which slavery is a part. Thus, within the alien order of bourgeois society the kind of "love" which is the essence of slavery may be distorted into the obligation to kill the bondsman. The function of Porgy's ostentatiously paradoxical reasoning is to stress that the relation between master and slave is beyond pragmatic considerations: like the link between children and their parents it is a natural given that exists independent of legal definitions. It might even be argued that the passage alludes to the familiar cliché of the lovers who, thwarted by social circumstances, choose union in death rather than separation. This is not to suggest that the relation between Porgy and Tom carries a homoerotic subtext; rather, the implicit comparison of master and slave to a pair of lovers is meant to indicate that, like true love, their relation eludes rational or categorical definitions.

Of course, at a time when abolitionism had ceased to be the concern of a radical minority, the quoted passages represented a cunning defense of slavery. Still, they also have a more far-reaching ideological function: the paradox of slavery as defined by Simms serves to point out that human relationships transcend legal codification. Indeed, the private law is represented as the most powerful enemy of the pastoral family. When the captain asks Tom whether he has ever heard "of such an animal as a sheriff, or sheriff's deputy," the slave, reproducing the opinions of his owner, answers: "Enty I know? He's a sort of warmint! I knows 'em well! He come into de hen-house, cut chicken t'roat, drink de blood, and suck all de eggs! I know 'em, for sartain!" (183; cf. 184; 381). In spite of its comic character, the passage has serious ideological implications: it reveals how Simms used paternalism not merely as a strategy for the legitimization of slavery but as an anti-bourgeois ideology, an indictment of a civil law based on the concept of property.

Arguably, Simms—who had himself been trained as a lawyer—shared the scorn for the law that is manifest in Porgy's rebuke to M'Kewn: "You are something of a lawyer, I perceive, Mr. M'Kewn, and I claim to know nothing about law. Still, I have some hope of justice" (380).[13] On the basis of such an opposition between "law" and "justice," Porgy portrays the representatives of the law as emissaries of an antagonistic, i.e. an anti-domestic, power—and this power, embodied by Porgy's

[13] For a (different) interpretation of Simms's representation of legal affairs in *Woodcraft*, see L. Lynn Hogue, "The Presentation of Post-Revolutionary Law in *Woodcraft*: Another

creditor M'Kewn, is capitalism. The novel, then, is less the story of a warrior's coming to terms with peace or of a planter's conversion to domestic thrift. Rather, it constitutes an account of the (near) failure of Porgy's well-intentioned particular domestic ideals in the context of bourgeois civil society. *Woodcraft* is less a didactic than a polemical novel, aiming to critique capitalist civil society through the opposing image of a utopian partisan domesticity, an anti-utilitarian and communalistic inversion of bourgeois society—an inversion that is based on the paradox of slavery.

When there is no longer any way to obviate the confiscation of the plantation, the partisans send the slaves into the swamp, turn the mansion into "a fortified place" (424) and prepare for armed resistance. At this point in the novel, it has become obvious that the descent of the hero is inevitable and that, despite attempts at its domestic reformation, the days of "romance" are over. When the deputy and his posse lay siege to the plantation, Porgy plays the role of the warrior for a last time: "On a sudden, the corpulent might of Captain Porgy, like a young buffalo, might be seen emerging from the cover of his piazza. He came forward, swelling and *splurging* . . . his eyes glaring like meteors, his voice yelling a terrific slogan ; his broad-sword waving like the broad tail of a fiery comet, at the advent of an earthquake" (486). It is a mock battle: the partisans use powder but no bullets. Indeed, the burlesque is all too obvious: if the scene is sure to enlist the sympathies of the reader on behalf of the fat captain, these sympathies are based on compassion rather than admiration. The scene underlines Porgy's pathetic anachronism, his almost willful degeneration into a caricature of his own former self. While Simms had stressed in *The Partisan* that Porgy may have "wasted his substance" but "should not be supposed to waste himself,"[14] the hero now comes dangerously close to compromising his ethos. Desperately trying to save the plantation as a resort of partisan "romance," Porgy threatens to degenerate into a picaroon.

However, Simms eventually engineers a solution: going through the bathos of parody, the partisan "romance" of war blends into a saving—if obviously contrived—"romance" of the law when, just after the "scrimmage," Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, who is a war veteran as well as an influential politician, appears as a *deus ex machina* and uses his authority for saving Porgy.[15] That the following closure of the narrative is to be regarded as a wish-fulfillment-dream is indicated by the hypothetical mode in which it is introduced by the narrator: "Let us suppose the efforts of Pinckney to be successful in reconciling the conflicting parties, and persuading the sheriff to receive

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Perspective on the 'Truth' of Simms's Fiction," *Mississippi Quarterly* 31 (1977–78): 201–210.

[14] Simms, *The Partisan* 358; see above, chapter 6.3.

[15] Pinckney is a historical figure. Simms introduces him by a historiographical aside: "a man, who, but for the curse of party would have been subsequently made president of the United

the apologies of Porgy" (489). Thus saved from outright arrest, the captain's problems are eventually also solved by a series of lucky accidents: Pinckney overhears an interview between Bostwick and M'Kewn that exposes their criminal deeds during and after the war; the squatter confesses and dies of small-pox, while the schemer is put in prison and commits suicide. Finally, Porgy's plantation, with its productivity restored by the agency of Millhouse, is "made secure to its proprietor" (507), all mortgages being held by as mild a creditor as the Widow Eveleigh. At the end of the novel, the narrator summarily describes the eventual integration of Porgy's plantation into the peace-time order:

> [T]o sum up in a word, Glen-Eberley presented to the eye the condition of a well-managed household, in which the parties were all at peace with themselves and one another. The same thing might be said of the neighborhood. The genial moods prevailing in the one household radiated in all directions. Glen-Eberley became a sort of center for the parish civilization. The charm was great—a sort of salient attraction—which drew the gentry, all around, within the sphere of its genial, yet provocative influences. (508)

However, the pastoral *oikos* of the partisan community, the domestic “romance,” has been established as "a sort of center for the parish civilization" not because it epitomizes the ethos of that civilization, but just because of its "provocative" difference from the other households in the parish. Porgy's plantation is institutionalized as a domestic repository of the past, a welcome antithesis to the prevailing spirit of change: its function is to establish a sense of tradition by rooting bourgeois society in a non-bourgeois past, linking the capitalist order to an Other whose essential alterity is suppressed.

The role of Porgy's plantation within the context of post-Revolutionary society is similar to the role that *Swallow Barn* proposed for Virginia and its pastoral plantation economy within the contemporary United States.[16] As has been argued above, Kennedy's nostalgic idea of institutionalizing a compartmentalized "romance" as an antithesis to social and economic change is reminiscent of the strategies applied by Hawthorne. The precariousness of these strategies is brought out by Gillian Brown's interpretation of the concurrence of "romance" and domesticity in Hawthorne's novels. She argues that Hawthorne tried to establish a domesticated "romance" as an "institution of continuity." Constructing housekeeping as an "analogue for romance," he pretended "the persistence of aristocratic ideals and middle-class aspirations" and attempted the "representation of the present in terms of the past." Brown emphasizes the collusion of this strategy with the ethics of the market place. In *The House of the*

States" (*Woodcraft* 488).

[16] The revised edition of *Swallow Barn* appeared in 1851, only one year before *The Sword and the Distaff*.

Seven Gables, she argues, Hawthorne attempted a "romanticization of commerce," he constructed a "romance" which "consists in . . . the capacity to convert change itself into tradition."[17]

Although the ending of *Woodcraft* seems to apply related strategies, Simms's participation in the "bourgeois modes" prevalent in the 1850s is critical rather than affirmative. Indeed, the manner of *Woodcraft* might almost be termed *deconstructive*: the narrative subverts the superficial alignment of "romance" and civil society by stressing its precariousness and by foregrounding the character of the ending as a closure. The partisan household is not merged in civil society, but remains apart as an endangered enclave. Porgy's attempt to fuse with the contemporary order by marrying the Widow Eveleigh, translating financial into familial relationships, fails. Turning to the Widow Griffin, the other model housekeeper in the novel, Porgy finds her already engaged. The "sword" and the "distaff"—the "romance" of partisan life, on the one hand, and bourgeois domesticity, on the other—cannot be united. The captain's plantation remains an all-male community that is bound to go down with the death of the hero. Ultimately, the domestic mediation of "romance" and "real history" is only a fiction.

Kreyling, who claims that "Simms was the first to exploit the full figural powers of the hero to counteract history," comments on *Woodcraft*: "History has already changed the order of things too drastically for the hero to recover symmetry and stasis."[18] Indeed, the novel describes a situation in which the human history has passed a point of no return. If there had been a tendency in Simms's earlier writings—and in early nineteenth-century literature and thought generally—to postulate "romance" as an ideal deep structure, a transcendent ideality from which the course of actual history may deviate but towards which it is bound to (re)ascend, *Woodcraft* reveals the contingency of "romance": in the context of a world that admits the presence of other systems of meaning, "romance" appears as merely another manner of representation, another medium for the subjective construction of actuality. The process of inscribing "romance"—a literary mode which is supposed to be also a mode of life—into that world is inevitably governed by the laws of substitution, parody and marginalization. In the context of a bathetic bourgeois reality, "romance" can be continued only through an ironic strategy, as a theatrical counter-statement. As *Woodcraft* clearly shows, this pathetic redefinition of "romance" entails the danger of its trivialization: descending from the swamps into the bathetic order of civil society, the

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[17] Gillian Brown, "Hawthorne's Gothic Revival," *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990) 61–95; quotes: 93–94; 70; 69; 95.

[18] Kreyling 38; 50.

hero turns quixotic; boldly asserting "romance" in the face of a hostile and alienated social reality, he comes close to compromising the order of "romance" rather than transforming reality in its image. Drawing on Frye's definition of "displacement" as a process of adjustment which results from the imagination's struggle "with a world which is separate from itself,"[19] *Woodcraft* may actually be read as an allegory of the displacement of "romance." If this can be viewed as conversion to a sort of "realism,"[20] however, it is a decidedly painful process, indicating a profound frustration of desire.

9.3 Simms's "Answer" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In a letter to Hammond, Simms claimed that *Woodcraft* was "probably as good an answer to Mrs. Stowe as has been published."[21] Reading this claim as a statement of purpose, many critics have discussed Simms's novel as a defense of the southern position written in response to Stowe's indictment of slavery.[22] However, James B. Meriwether and John C. Guilds argue against such an interpretation. They stress that Simms's notorious remark was merely incidental, pointing to a welcome side-effect of the novel rather than stating its original intention. Meriwether points out that Simms's original manuscript seems to have been half-finished by September 1851, while, as a book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published only in March the following year. He thinks it unlikely that Simms read the serial version of Stowe's novel, which ran in the *National Era* in 1851-52, since the novelist fails to mention *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in any of his private or published writings prior to July 1852. Furthermore, Guilds quotes Simms's disapproval, voiced in an 1853 review of Mary H. Eastman's pro-slavery novel *Aunt Phillis' Cabin*, of the avalanche of fictions which were "designed as an answer to 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'"[23]

The argument that Simms had already finished a substantial part of the narrative before he took notice of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has to be qualified. First of all, it

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[19] Frye, *Secular Scripture* 36.

[20] Cf. Jan Bakker, "Simms on the Literary Frontier: Or, So Long Miss Ravenel and Hello Captain Porgy: *Woodcraft* Is the First 'Realistic' Novel in America," *William Gilmore Simms and the American Frontier*, ed. John C. Guilds and Caroline Collins (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1997) 64–78.

[21] Simms, letter to James H. Hammond, 15 Dec. 1852; *Letters* 3: 222–223.

[22] Cf. Ch. S. Watson, "Simms's Answer to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Criticism of the South in *Woodcraft*," *Southern Literary Journal* 9.1 (1976): 78–90; Ridgely, "*Woodcraft*: Simms's First Answer to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *American Literature* 31 (1959): 421–33; Hugh W. Hetherington, "Porgy and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Cavalier of Old South Carolina*, ed. Hetherington (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1966) 38–50.

[23] Guilds, *Simms* 208; 400, note 74. See also James B. Meriwether, "The Theme of Freedom in Simms's *Woodcraft*," *"Long Years of Neglect": The Work and Reputation of William*

is very hard to imagine that Simms, who as literary spokesman of the South and as a busy journalist took a very lively professional as well as personal interest in all literary events, simply overlooked the stir that was instantly created by Stowe's story. It seems more likely that he held back direct comments, trying to play down the tremendous impact of Stowe's attack. Secondly, it is not at all clear how the published text of *The Sword and the Distaff* relates to the manuscript that Simms boasted of having half finished in a letter of 27 September 1851.[24] Finally, Simms very thoroughly revised *The Sword and the Distaff* for republication as *Woodcraft*: according to one study, there were more than forty-one hundred changes made for the Redfield edition.[25] And there can be no doubt that by this time Simms had read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Indeed, *Woodcraft* contains at least one direct reference to Stowe's novel: when another slave addresses him as "uncle Tom," Porgy's servant retorts: "Don't you uncle me, you chucklehead!" (179).

Further evidence that Simms had taken notice of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is provided by a detailed article, published in the *Southern Quarterly Review* in 1853, on Stowe's *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The review was almost certainly penned by Simms, who was then editor of the magazine, and it included ample commentary not only on Stowe's sourcebook but also on her novel.[26] However, the article also serves to point out the validity of Guilds's second argument, for it indicates that *Woodcraft* can be considered as an "answer to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" only on very different terms than novels like *Aunt Phillis' Cabin*. While previous reviews like that by Louisa S. Cheves McCord[27] had contended with Stowe's anti-slavery novel as a sociological tract, Simms's is remarkable for postulating that it is "as a work of art that the romance of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' should be reviewed."[28] In fact, the review's attack on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is primarily by way of formal criticism: the novel is described as appropriating the "structure of the romance" for ends that do not agree with the genre's supposed

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Gilmore Simms, ed. John Caldwell Guilds (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1988) 28–31.

[24] Simms, letter to Abraham Hart, 27 Sept. 1851, *Letters* 6: 118–119. The first installment of Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin: Or, The Man That Was a Thing" in the *National Era* had appeared on June 5, 1851.

[25] Paula Dean, "Revisions in the Revolutionary War Novels of William Gilmore Simms," diss., Auburn U, 1972; qtd in Meriwether, note 11, 34. Simms's revisions included the correction of many misprints, but there where also more substantial changes.

[26] [Simms?,] rev. of *A Key to* Uncle Tom's Cabin, by Stowe, *Southern Quarterly Review* 24 (1853): 214–254. A convincing argument for Simms's authorship of the review has been made by S. P. C. Duvall, "W. G. Simms's Review of Mrs. Stowe," *American Literature* 30 (1958): 107–117. Ch. S. Watson, "Simms's Review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *American Literature* 48 (1976): 365–368, tries to prove that Simms wrote also a direct review of Stowe's novel, which appeared as an unsigned article in the July 1853 issue of *The Southern Quarterly Review*.

[27] Louisa S. Cheves McCord, rev. of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Southern Quarterly Review* 23 (1853): 81–129.

[28] [Simms,] rev. of *Key* 219.

ideological implications. Stowe is designated a "mere moralist," trying to reduce "romance" to a didactic and polemical purpose.[29] While Simms saw the basic function of "romance" in establishing national coherence by transcending social actuality, Stowe seemed to have gone into the opposite direction, abusing the mythmaking and action-provoking power of "romance" for the ends of sectional ideologies. By publishing the *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* and thus insisting on the factual rather than the transcendental truth of her fiction, Simms argued, Stowe had further violated the ideological and epistemological laws of "romance."

Simms's critical examination of Stowe's novel elucidates the polemical thrust of his own narrative. If the New Englander seemed to have appropriated "romance," redefining its ideological implications according to a compartmentalizing domestic vision, producing a hybrid narrative that she designated as "a mosaic of facts"[30] and that Simms described as a "Mosaic monster,"[31] the Charlestonian, in his turn, appropriated, critiqued and transformed the mode of domestic fiction, redefining the domestic vision from the perspective of the slaveholder. Indeed, *Woodcraft* is more than a pro-slavery novel: it should also—and, in fact, primarily—be read as Simms's answer to the domestic fiction of the fifties, especially to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which Jane Tompkins has described as "the *summa theologica* of nineteenth-century America's religion of domesticity."[32] While Simms participated in the genre's project of criticizing the market system, he simultaneously tried to expose the aporia of bourgeois domesticity as an alternative to the bourgeois market place: according to Simms, slavery—re-interpreted as a system of mutual belonging—was the only barrier against the capitalist erosion of the domestic sphere.[33]

One reason for not reading Simms's *Woodcraft* simply as a defense of the South's peculiar institution against Stowe's attack in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is that the two novels actually concur in their basic arrangements. If Simms stresses that slavery can function as a benevolent institution based, as it were, on a mutual agreement between the master and the slave, Stowe does so as well: her opening description of the Shelby plantation highlights the domestic bliss enjoyed by contented slaves who revere their

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29 [Simms,] rev. of *Key* 217.

30 Stowe, *A Key to* Uncle Tom's Cabin (1853); *Uncle Tom's Cabin and A Key to* Uncle Tom's Cabin, 2 vols, vol. 2 (New York: AMS, 1967) 255, vol. 2 of *The Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, Riverside Edition.

31 [Simms,] rev. of *Key* 229.

32 Jane Tompkins, "Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History" (1981); rpt in *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Myra Jehlen and Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 269.

33 This interpretation of *Woodcraft* contradicts Lucinda H. MacKethan's reading of the novel in "Domesticity in Dixie: The Plantation Novel and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, ed. Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997) 223–242.

owners and are respected in return. Conversely, if Stowe shows that the inhumanity of slavery lies in the fact that these happy relationships can be suddenly dissolved and the slave be converted into a good that is put on the market, this is exactly the threat that propels the highly dramatic action of Simms's novel.

The correspondences between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Woodcraft* are due to the fact that both novels appropriate the current ideology of domesticity for a subversive critique of marketplace liberalism. Specifically, Stowe and Simms agree in founding their counterimages to the bourgeois family and to the capitalist order on the concept of matriarchy. The ideological concurrence as well as the ideological difference between the two novels emerge clearly if *Woodcraft* is read in the light of Gillian Brown's interpretation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a "polemic for a regenerating domesticity" which proposes "the replacement of the market economy by a matriarchal domestic economy" that would represent "a different ethic of possession."[34] Simms's proslavery novel follows a similar strategy. Indeed, it may be claimed that Simms's pro-slavery argument is developed along the lines of Stowe's feminist critique of capitalism, that—by what amounts to a matriarchal redefinition of slavery—Simms made the peculiar institution into the emblem of an "ethic of possession" which inverts the bourgeois conception of property.[35]

This strategy involves a remarkable blurring of gender stereotypes. Porgy's androgynous character is evident from his very first description in the novel as "a stout, and somewhat plethoric gentleman ; full, and smooth, and florid of face, with indubitable signs of a passion for the good things of this life. His features are marked and decisive, with a large capacious nose, a mouth rather feminine and soft, and a chin well defined and masculine" (49). If the hero does not resemble the ideal of (male or female) beauty, he nevertheless represents an ideal middle between male and female attributes, with his "feminine and soft" mouth set in-between his "capacious nose" and his "masculine" chin. The "excessive development of his abdominal region" (49), on which the narrator focuses again and again, seems to betoken a female softness or a matronly plumpness, similar to "the ample, motherly form" of Rachel Halliday, the exemplary Quaker matron that shelters the fugitive slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[36]

According to Brown, the "matriarchal and antinomian" order of Rachel's kitchen

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[34] Gillian Brown, "Domestic Politics in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *Domestic Individualism* 13–38; quotes: 24; 30.

[35] As Walter Benn Michaels claims, Stowe feared slavery primarily "as an emblem of the market economy" and "was basically more horrified by the bourgeois elements of slavery than by the feudal ones" ("Romance and Real Estate" 175; 171). Simms follows an inverse strategy: he tries to show that slavery is essentially in opposition to capitalism since it implies a community that is based on human instead of commercial relationships.

[36] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin: Or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852; New York: Signet Classic, 1966) 154. In Stowe's novel, the feminization of the plantation aristocrat is

represents "a new form of government as well as a protest against patriarchy and its manifestations in slavery, capitalism, and democracy."[37] The partisan household over which Porgy presides in the swamps and later on his plantation likewise constitutes a subversion of governmental authority and established—ontological as well as social—hierarchies. If Brown describes Stowe's Quaker kitchen as a social order that centers on the preparation and consumption of food as a "sacramental act" of "communion" which is "reminiscent of Edenic unity,"[38] such religious overtones are even more pronounced in Simms's representation of Porgy's campfire community, both during the war and after. In *Woodcraft*, the quasi-religious connotations are most clearly manifest in the description of Porgy's sharing the last bottle of Jamaica with his comrades. Carefully diluting "the clear, but rather unmeaning complexion of the water, with the rich, red liquid" (52) of the rum and then handing the bottle on to Millhouse, the captain comes to resemble a priest celebrating the holy communion or even the Messiah himself sharing the Last Supper with his disciples.[39]

Even though the ideal of neatness, which is emphasized over and over in Stowe's description of Rachel's household, contrasts with Tom's and Porgy's more chaotic management, the "complicated and multiform" breakfast enjoyed by the Quakers "in the luxurious valleys of Indiana" might have originated in the partisan's vision, and so might have the notion that "the chicken and ham had a cheerful and joyous fizzle in the pan, as if they rather enjoyed being cooked than otherwise."[40] Describing the first sumptuous meal the partisans take at Porgy's plantation, the narrator likewise focuses on "the frying-pan, hissing with broad but tender slices of ham—which the fork of the grand cuisinier shifted from side to side, as the occasion seemed to require" (177). The "grand cuisinier," of course, is Tom—yet Porgy, too, does not only like to talk about and to enjoy food, but knows a lot about the art of cooking. In so far as the household at Glen-Eberley resembles that of Stowe's Indiana Quakers, in the partisans' mixed black and white family the function of Rachel Halliday is exercised jointly by Porgy and Tom. And even though master and slave sometimes resemble an imperious husband and his reluctant but devoted wife, the patriarchal implications of slavery are repeatedly undercut by what Dale describes as "Porgy's feminine sensibility."[41]

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evident in the character of Augustine St. Clare.

37 Brown 25.

38 Brown 25.

39 Cf. *Woodcraft*, chapter xviii (101–106). The caption reads: "The Last Drop of Jamaica from the Veteran's Bottle." The analogy to the Lord's Last Supper is reinforced when Porgy tells Millhouse: "Sergeant, there's still a drop of the Jamaica for you in the bottle. Give what you leave to Tom. There's, perhaps, a tolerable sup for you both ; but it's the last" (105).

40 Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 155–156.

41 Dale 66–69; quote: 67.

As Kolodny points out, the "real man" in *Woodcraft* is Sergeant Millhouse,[42] who sets himself up as overseer, commandeers Tom, and preaches practicality to Porgy. When Fordham pays a visit, the sergeant is eager to display "how strictly he held the reins of authority in his grasp, and with what judgment he could rebuke the want of it in his superior" (278). What Brown refers to as the conflict in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* between a market economy represented as patriarchal and a "different ethic of possession" based on the image of motherhood[43] is humorously developed in *Woodcraft* through the conflict between the primitive utilitarianism of the mock-patriarch Millhouse, on the one hand, and Porgy's "noble,“ if overly eccentric, anti-utilitarianism and altruism, on the other. Visiting the home of the squatter Bostwick, the captain is so taken with his enemy's innocent and refined daughter Dory that he gives her his last guinea to make him stockings. When Millhouse rebukes him for this act of charity, Porgy explains: "[I]n truth, I did not give the guinea for the stockings. I gave it for the child to buy her own stockings, if need be, or whatever else she needs. I gave it from my heart, Millhouse, and not from my pocket" (232).

This plea for an economy of the "heart" is reminiscent of the ethos espoused by nineteenth-century domestic sentimentalists. Indeed, Porgy rises to a height of sentimentality that is not inferior to Stowe's: "The true man," he declares, "does not live by money, nor by that which money will always buy—bread and meat. There is still better food than that for which I more hunger" (235). Porgy's habit of "wasting himself on people who hadn't nothing" is the subject of a debate with his overseer which resembles the conversations between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. The contention fills two entire chapters, the titles of which state the issue clearly: "Porgy's Notions of the Useful" (278–287) and "Millhouse on the Utilitarian Philosophy" (288–294). Porgy takes an ironical stance, obviously enjoying the absurdities he elicits from the sergeant. The latter betrays his absurd spirit of acquisitiveness by telling Porgy the story of a man who used to declare that he liked only one kind of music: "the music of my mills on the Edisto ; they keeps a grinding and a sawing night and day, and all the time they seems to be a singing in my ears—'Dollar! dollar! dollar!, oh! dollar! dollar! dollar! oh!'"—to which Millhouse comments: "and sure enough, that was what I call useful, business, mercantile music" (291).

However, if Millhouse makes for a substitute patriarch in the plantation household, it is a patriarch subdued by his inferiority to the head of the household according to both military and social rank—a patriarch, in fact, whose right arm is

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[42] Anne Kolodny, "The Unchanging Landscape: The Pastoral Impulse in Simms's Revolutionary War Romances," *Southern Literary Journal* 5.1 (1972): 60.

[43] Brown 30.

merely a stump, having been cut off by Porgy in a perverse act of charity.[44] The sergeant impersonates a spirit of practicality and a business acumen which are subdued and put to harness by the plantation order. Indeed, images of chastised patriarchy abound in *Woodcraft*. If Stowe calls shaving an "anti-patriarchal operation,"[45] Simms repeatedly stresses the "smoothness" of Porgy's cheeks (193; cf. 49). Similarly, for Lance Frampton "civil authority" is "only a name—a venerable thing, perhaps—but which men everywhere plucked by the beard, without fear, and with impunity" (422). Such images are part of a strategy of inversion, according to which Simms represents the peace-time order of bourgeois society as a state of war while he suggests that the actual war undermined established authorities and allowed for the institution of an alternative communalistic society among the partisans—a society in which gender distinctions were erased along with class differences and impersonal authorities.

Hence, the partisans' resistance to the new authority, their defense of the pastoral and matriarchal realm of the plantation as a substitute for the swamp, culminates in the symbolic shaving of the deputy sheriff, who is described as "one of the very best bull-terriers of the law" (442). It is emphasized that he "had never served in the wars, though pugnacious enough for all sorts of struggle" (443). If warfare is usually regarded as a male business and participation in the war might be expected to be represented as an affirmation of manhood, Simms's representation of swamp warfare as a process of learning in which the members of an alienated civilization are taught by mother nature effects a complication and partial inversion of conventional gender stereotypes. Thus, the deputy sheriff, who has not fought in the war, is portrayed as the epitome of male aggressiveness rather than the former soldiers.

Yet, as in *The Partisan*, it is stressed in *Woodcraft* that the maternal pastoral order can show its teeth. When the deputy tries to confiscate Porgy's estate, Millhouse takes him as a prisoner and conducts him to the fortified plantation mansion where Porgy has just been engaging in the meaningful operation of shaving: "The captain of partisans had been reaping the stubble field, the autumnal harvests of his chin, which were quite too grisly to be suffered to offend his or other eyes." As he apprehends the deputy, who takes great pride in his ample beard, Porgy cries out: "Heavens! What a monster! What a horrible looking creature! What a beard. Coppery-red ; a perfect jingle

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[44] The irony that Millhouse, the advocate of hard work, lacks his right arm is repeatedly worked out in *Woodcraft*. When the sergeant boasts that he will work for Porgy "more hard than any nigger he ever had" (105), Tom replies cunningly: "Well, Mass Sergeant, I know you hab de strengt', but it don't come so easy to de one-hand man" (105). In a sense, the mutilated arm is symbolic of the ultimate impotence and sterility of Millhouse's acquisitive worldview; this is very clear in the image of Millhouse "extending the stump of his arm . . . to the indicated quarter" as he is promising to Porgy that "these old fields will be sure to bring fine corn" (206). Still, Millhouse eventually proves that he is a highly capable overseer, able to produce an eminently good crop (cf. 402).

. . . Sergeant, we must have the fellow's beard off" (447). Significantly, it is the slave Tom who acts as barber and threatens to perform a symbolic castration by slicing off the deputy's enormous nose (449).[46]

Even Porgy's threat to kill Tom should he fall into the hands of another master may be regarded as a matriarchal rather than a patriarchal gesture. This, at least, is the case if the threat is read in the light of Brown's interpretation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, specifically her comment of Cassy's murdering one of her children in order to prevent its being sold: "The possibility for murder as well as nurture inheres in the maternal power Stowe advocates as a humane alternative to Northern money power and Southern slave power."[47] Porgy's promise to kill Tom, then, can be interpreted not only as an assertion of the master's absolute sway over the slave but, conversely, also as a ritual enactment of the familial redefinition of slavery in opposition to the concept of property. If Stowe argues that slavery compromises the integrity of the domestic sphere, Simms argues that this integrity is guarded by the defense of slavery. He suggests that the only alternative to capitalism is in the abrogation of possessive individualism and he makes slavery into the image of such an abrogation. In the institution of slavery, Simms suggests, the idea of self-ownership is mutually suspended for both master and slave. In one of the most frequently quoted passages from *Woodcraft*, it is Tom's turn to insist on the indissoluble link that connects him and his master: when Porgy, having finally been freed from his debts, wants to set Tom free, the slave retorts "*You* b'longs to *me* Tom, jes' as much as me Tom b'long to *you* ; and you nebber guine git *you* free paper from me long as you lib" (509). The narrator stresses the paradox formulated by Tom and affirms the idea of reciprocal ownership: "Thus the matter was settled, and Tom continued to the end of the chapter, the cook and proprietor of his master" (509).

Woodcraft, then, really seems to represent an "answer to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*"—or, more precisely, to current domestic fiction in general—insofar as it stresses the aporia of the ideology of bourgeois domesticity as a critique of bourgeois market society. In fact, it might be argued that Simms's novel anticipates—and ideologically deploys—Brown's critique of the ideology of domesticity as espoused by Stowe.[48] Brown shows that according to the model of possessive individualism, on which Stowe's abolitionist reformation of American domesticity is ultimately based, freedom

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[45] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 156; cf. Brown 38.

[46] The scene in which Tom shaves the deputy, turning a slave's menial service into a mock torture, is strangely reminiscent of Babo's shaving of Benito In Melville's "Benito Cereno" (1856).

[47] Brown 35.

[48] See especially Brown's chapter on "Sentimental Possessions," *Domestic Individualism* 39–60.

and individuality depend on the sentimental possession of domestic fetishes. Conversely, Simms transforms—or distorts—slavery into the emblem for an alternative social organization that is not based on the concept of property and the ideal of possessive individualism but on a concept of human relationships as relationships of reciprocal possession.

Of course, Simms produces a surrogate fetish by redefining slavery not only as a human relationship but actually as the one indissoluble and market-transcending human relationship. Postulating slavery as an alternative to capitalism, Simms—like many other pro-slavery thinkers—was suppressing the important historical role North American slavery had played in the process of establishing a capitalist world economy as well as its continuing involvement in such an economy, he refused to realize the dependence of the Southern slave system on the Northern market, and he also negated the capitalist characteristics inherent in the internal organization of this system. After all, southerners obviously and necessarily did regard slaves as an item of property and as a means of production. Southern slavery was averse to capitalism only in the sense that in the long run it hampered the industrialization of the section and thus precluded its regular evolution to industrial capitalism—even though, ironically, the cotton boom was the result of the rise of industrial capitalism elsewhere.[49] Just like Stowe's, then, Simms's alternative vision was compromised by its entanglement in the system which it sought to criticize. Since both authors were working from within an American tradition that had been instrumental in defining modern capitalism, their struggles to produce an alternative to that order were compromised from the start.

9.4 The Erosion of "Romance": Ideological Consequences

Showing that "romance" is distorted by exposure to the world of experience (and post-Revolutionary) political reality *Woodcraft* abrogates the strategic confusion of literature and politics that was at the heart of Simms's original concept of "romance." "Romance,"

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[49] For analyses of the ambiguous relationships between southern slavery and capitalism, see: Ashworth, *Commerce and Compromise*, esp. chapter I. 2. on "Free labor, slave labor, wage labor" (80–121) and part II: "Slavery versus Capitalism" (125–285); Kolchin 170–179; Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (London: Wildwood House, 1974); Eugene D. Genovese, "The American Slave Systems in World Perspective," *The World the Slaveholders Made* 1–113. An interesting point is made by Mark M. Smith in his analysis of antebellum southern time consciousness, "Old South Time in Comparative Perspective," *American Historical Review* 101 (1996): 1432–1469. According to this analysis, "the slave South was evidently one of the few rural regions in the nineteenth century world to be affected by a modern clock consciousness" (1466). This is explained by "southern slaveowners' bid for slave-based modernity" (1453).

the novel implies, is not of this world. In terms of political ideology, the implications of this acute skepticism are highly ambiguous. Richard Gray claims: "Simms's other Revolutionary Romances may well have expressed unwavering confidence in the superiority and strength of the Southern position. In *The Sword and the Distaff*, however, he permitted himself a note of uncertainty and anxiety—even of warning." Charles S. Watson, on the other hand, characterizes *Woodcraft* as a deliberate attempt to "pave the way for eventual Secession."[50] Indeed, if the novel evidently interrogated antebellum concepts of "romance," including Simms's own, this did not necessarily deflate the strategies of radical secessionism that were beginning to dominate southern politics during the 1850s. Beverley Tucker's early secessionist novel *The Partisan Leader* likewise was characterized by an ostentatious stance against the validity of literary conventions. In fact, the demise of "romance" as an idealist political strategy of conciliation based on symbolic action may even have furthered the evolution of radical political strategies. Confronted with a world that seemed to have broken loose from the deep structure of a salvational historicity, southern eccentrics like Simms were perhaps more willing to accept the apocalyptic fantasies offered by power-hungry secessionist fire eaters. The demise of objective idealism did not necessarily promote political realism; rather, it resulted in a form of constructivism which opened up space for violent strategies of manipulating social and political reality. In consequence, *Woodcraft* can be read either as a critique of southern political romanticism[51] or as a call to arms to realize its concepts against all odds.

Both *Woodcraft and Uncle Tom's Cabin* demonstrate the breakdown of an ideological paradigm that Sacvan Bercovitch refers to as a "rhetoric of compromise" which had previously "occupied the center" of American political discourses. While he interprets Hawthorne's "romance" of the *Scarlet Letter* as an attempt to achieve mediation by constructing "diversity as consensus," Bercovitch goes on to emphasize rhetorical and imagological shifts, evident after 1852, which exploded such a construction.[52] He connects these transformations to the rise of a reformed ideology of domesticity, according to which femininity was no longer defined merely as a reservoir of alternative values but also as a strategy of political action. Bercovitch quotes from an 1853 article in which Sarah Hale made it a credo to supplant the spirit of compromise by the "uncompromising spirituality" of the domestic sphere: "'Constitutions' and 'compromises,'" Hale wrote, "are the appropriate work of men," while she described

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[50] Ch. S. Watson, *From Nationalism to Secessionism* 84; Gray 55.

[51] Cf. Gray 53: "Translating simple destitution into heroic military defeat, and disguising a failure of responsibility beneath a series of flamboyant gestures, Porgy demonstrates here that very romanticism, that evasion of ordinary day-to-day realities, that got him into trouble in the first place."

[52] Bercovitch 101–102.

women as "conservators of moral power."[53]

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, this role for women is glorified through the character of Mrs. Bird, the wife of a senator who has exerted his influence to secure the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. She is introduced as "a timid, blushing little woman" with "mild blue eyes" who is intimidated even by a "moderate-sized cock-turkey"; but, it is stressed, an act of "cruelty" will "throw her into a passion" which is "more alarming and inexplicable in proportion to the general softness of her nature." When Mrs. Bird discovers that her husband has voted for the Fugitive Slave Law, she scolds him harshly and announces her intention of breaking the law as soon as she will get a chance of doing so.[54] Stowe tried to show that women's acceptance of their exclusion from public politics and of their relegation to the domestic sphere could and should be the inspiration of radical and politically significant actions based on the imperative of defending the integrity of that sphere against its corruption by slavery. The representation of Mrs. Bird and her politician husband epitomizes Stowe's argument for a politics of the heart instead of a politics of the head. Ethos would have to be replaced by pathos: the tender emotions were to challenge the categorical acceptance of transcendent institutions and the imperatives of the individual consciousness were to override the necessity of national compromise.

As compared to Simms's earlier "Revolutionary romances," *Woodcraft*—focusing on the domestic sphere and replacing the fate of the nation by the fate of a plantation—represents a similar shift from ethos to pathos. What is often discussed in narrowly political terms as the development of Simms's politics and fiction "from nationalism to secessionism" can be described in more general terms as a development from the imperative of synthesis to the acceptance of particularization, from inclusive "romance" to the exclusive polemics of sentiment.[55] In *The Partisan* and *Katherine Walton*, it is the joint function of Porgy and Singleton to represent the partisan symbiosis between ethos and pathos: while Singleton stands for the organizational aspects of the partisan revolution, Porgy embodies the pathos of the revolutionary principle itself, rooting the abstract goals of the independence movement in Carolina's native swamps. Compared to each other, Singleton and Porgy thus constitute an antithesis that supposedly finds a dialectical solution in the partisan cause. Viewed independently, however, each of the two partisans still represents a balance between the ethos and the pathos of the Revolution. In fact, the most important symbol of the Revolutionary symbiosis between the two principles is Porgy's

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[53] Sarah J. Hale, *Godey's Ladies' Magazine* (1853); qtd in Bercovitch 102.
[54] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 91–92.
[55] On Simms's increasing tendency towards polemic, see Ch. S. Watson, *From Nationalism to Secessionism* 71–87.

stomach, which embodies the partisan's ability to convert food into philosophy and to spiritualize the mark of extreme passions into a storehouse of ethics. However, when he is confronted with the bathos of civil society in *Woodcraft*, Porgy is forced to adopt a theatrical strategy that is based on the systematic unleashing of his passions. If, according to Stowe, women are to accept their relegation to the domestic sphere, Simms's partisan is eventually willing to do so as well, accepting that his wars are ended and improvising a home for his domesticated partisan community. Conversely, if violation of the principles at the heart of the domestic sphere throws Stowe's Mrs. Bird into a "passion" that is "alarming" to behold, this is exactly the way in which Porgy reacts to the intrusion of a civil society that is really a state of war.

However, if *Woodcraft* can be read as a manifestation of secessionist sentiments, it also reveals the weakness of secessionism as a political ideology. From the text, the option of secessionist revolt arises as a pathetic strategy rather than as a working ideology. Indeed, Simms's secessionism seems to have been conceived as a "lost cause" from the very beginning; it resembles Porgy's desperate "Hurrah for nothing!"' (112) in the face of overtowering adversities. As George M. Fredrickson points out, "[o]ne of the most striking facts about Confederate nationalism is that it did not survive military defeat and loss of independence." According to Fredrickson, the refusal of the Confederate government to consider fighting a guerilla war after Appomattox was partly due to the absence of a sustainable Confederate historical myth.[56] As far as literary myth-making is concerned, *Woodcraft* helps to account for this lack. At least Simms's secessionist sentiment was rooted in the breakdown of "romance" as his attempt at constructing an ideology of history. In contrast to Revolutionary partisan warfare, secessionist rebellion in the name of slavery could not really be conceived as a "romance."

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[56] George M. Fredrickson, *Why the Confederacy Did Not Fight a Guerrilla War after the Fall of Richmond*, 35th Annual Robert Fartenbaugh Lecture, Gettysburg College (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1996); quote: 22.

10. Deconstructing "Romance" / "Romancing" Contingency: John Esten Cooke's *Virginia Comedians*

10.1 *The Virginia Comedians* and the Self-Parodic Poetics of the "American Renaissance"

John Esten Cooke was born in 1830, when Simms had already published several volumes of poetry and was about to embark on his career as a novelist. The Virginian was to live until 1886, publishing profusely and earning considerable national fame after the Civil War.[1] Indeed, if Simms was the most eminent literary spokesman of the "Old South," Cooke eventually became one of the major writers of the "New South"—and the most important propagator of the "lost cause" interpretation of Confederate history.[2] As compared to Kennedy, Caruthers and Simms, he represents a new generation of Americans, for whom the conservative republicanism of the eighteenth century had become a dimly remembered tradition. In his first novel *Leatherstocking and Silk*, a historical comedy of manners that appeared in 1854, the young writer sketched the sweeping change of the Virginian West between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the 1830s, when "[s]team had revolutionized the past" and a "new age had inaugurated itself with literature for its pass word" and "science for its battle cry."[3] Cooke adopted a tone that was moderately mournful and reverent as well as cautiously playful and optimistic. Although he described the waning of a past that supposedly "was as picturesque as the present is prosaic," he pointed out that the narrative was "comedy rather than tragedy" and "sunny rather than gloomy."[4]

Cooke's second novel, *The Virginia Comedians*, appearing still in the same year as his first, applied this rather mirthful mode to the representation of Virginia's pre-Revolutionary history, specifically the Stamp Act Rebellion. As indicated by the title, the leitmotif of the novel—its thematic as well as its metaphorical core—is the world of the theater. The idea that life is but a stage links Cooke's novel to Simms's *Woodcraft*, where the theatrical dimension of Porgy's antics is frequently emphasized by chapter

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1 On Cooke's life and work, see: Mary Jo Bratton, "John Esten Cooke and His 'Confederate Lies,'" *Southern Literary Journal* 13.2 (1981): 72–91; John O. Beaty, *John Esten Cooke, Virginian* (New York: Columbia UP, 1922; facsimile rpt, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1965); Thomas E. Dasher, "John Esten Cooke," *Antebellum Writers in New York and the South*, ed. Joel Myerson (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1979) 64–71, vol. 3 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography*; Hubbell 511–521;

2 On the ideological successes achieved by the "New South" through rewriting the history of the "Old South," see Wolfgang Schivelbusch's provocative book *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003). Schivelbusch offers an interpretation of the South's psychocultural handling of defeat in comparison to France after 1871 and Germany after 1918.

3 [John Esten Cooke,] *Leatherstocking and Silk: Or, Hunter John Myers and His Times: A Story of the Valley of Virginia* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854) 244.

4 Cooke, *Leatherstocking* 7; 5.

titles such as "Coup de Theatre." Yet, while Simms used analogies to the theater in order to highlight the distortion of Revolutionary ethos to post-Revolutionary pathos, Cooke suggests that Revolutionary history itself can be interpreted as a comedy. The result is an interrogation of the relationship between "real history" and "romance" which is even more radical, though certainly less bitter, than Simms's. If the latter had acknowledged that post-Revolutionary history had broken loose from the original order of "romance," Cooke implies that there is no unalienated state, no original order beyond the erratic workings of contingency. Indeed, the "romance" of the Revolution itself is shown to have emerged from the turbulent comedy of conflicting subjective constructions of history and social reality, none of which can claim ultimate authority or authenticity.

This comedy is acted out by the narrative through a tour de force of formal hybridization. The text appropriates and confronts elements from most diverse genres, modes and discourses—such as comedy, "chivalric romance," gothic novel, pastoral, family chronicle, political oratory and the personal letter. Moreover, the narrative is interspersed with meta-fictional comments that foreground its stylistic experimentation and the diverse strands of the action are bracketed together by a discourse on the relationship of life and theater, truth and pretension, reality and representation. At the same time, *The Virginia Comedians* contrasts markedly with the feeling of despair and defeatism that ultimately emerges from Simms's deceptively comical *Woodcraft*. Indeed, the ostentatious fictionality and parodic conventionality of Cooke's narrative turns out to be a means for reintroducing a refined version of idealism: by way of irony, it postulates the immanence of transcendence in the contingent phenomena of life. Thus, while he deconstructs "romance," Cooke simultaneously "romances" contingency. If in Simms's novel the pathos resulting from the admission of contingency is a sign of despair and displacement, in Cooke's it emerges as a practical strategy of survival.

This concept and strategy of "romance" points to remarkable resemblances between the discourse of antebellum southern literature and what Carton describes as the dialectical "rhetoric of romance" deployed by (Transcendentalist) authors like Emerson and Hawthorne. According to Carton, this rhetoric sought to realize an "extravagant claim" to "linguistic and imaginative power"[5] which rested on the mediation of phenomena and noumena, reality and ideality. Yet while antebellum southern "romancers" originally followed a very similar strategy, Carton's insistence on the self-critical character of the Transcendentalist discourse sheds light on the epistemological and ideological limitations of the southern tradition. According to his

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[5] Carton 1.

interpretation Transcendentalist "romance" sought to forestall a collapse of the antithesis between reality and ideality by deploying a careful linguistic skepticism. In relation to an instance of Emerson's strategy of mediation, Carton observes: "At once to produce and believe such an image of unity and to recognize and betray its illusoriness is the feat of romance."[6] Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* manifested a similar strategy of suspension, but the further development in antebellum southern fiction was from self-reflexivity towards emphasis, from irony to affirmation, and it eventually resulted in a collapse of the dialectic that had originally been at the heart of "romance" as a strategy of mediation.

However, the interpretation of Simms's *Woodcraft* in the previous chapter already suggested that a partial inversion of this affirmative line of development becomes recognizable for the 1850s. The contradictions in the southern "romance" tradition as well as far-reaching cultural transformations in the mid-nineteenth-century United States caused Simms to undertake a skeptical re-assessment of the "extravagant claims" which he had formerly evolved. If Beverley Tucker had reduced the ideal to a political program and had declared that its realization was imminent, Simms now asserted the difference between ideality and reality, between the conventionality of the literary imagination and the world of real politics. Indeed, though Simms's work is usually dissociated from the "American Renaissance" and his historical "romances" are read as manifestations of the "worn-out mould" that Hawthorne supposedly cast away, *Woodcraft* evidences a degree of self-consciousness that is not dissimilar to the self-criticism that Carton detects in the texts of the "American Renaissance." Thus, it can be argued that antebellum southern "romance" eventually dissolved into or regained the "self-parodic poetics"[7] which—perhaps in a lower key—had been practiced by *Swallow Barn* and which Carton considers an innate characteristic of Transcendentalist "romance."

In *Woodcraft*, the interrogation of "romance" leads primarily to defeatism: though Simms turns his vision of doom into a not entirely ineffective critique of capitalist society and bourgeois ideologies, he sacrifices the function of "romance" as an effective counterpoint to alienation. *The Virginia Comedians*, however, is closer to the critical idealism of Transcendentalist "romance" as read by Carton: it is both skeptical and optimistic, a deconstruction of "romance" as well as a careful reinstitution of "romance" into the contingent phenomena of life. Indeed, the quality of Cooke's novel perfectly agrees with Carton's general characterization of Transcendentalist texts: "Central to the critical awareness of these texts . . . is their consciousness of

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6 Carton 107.
7 Carton 25.

themselves as texts, as weavings that cannot be disentangled from the contingency and obliquity of common materials and circumstances nor disencumbered of the mediate and material quality of language."[8] In the same manner, *The Virginia Comedians* persistently calls attention to its status as a text or as a fiction and foregrounds the inescapable conventionality of perception and representation. In doing so, the narrative shows a spirit of experimentation and a degree of complexity which are reminiscent of modern and postmodern fiction. The "Prologue" with which the narrative begins may be set down among the strangest openings in the history of the nineteenth-century American novel:

> The memories of men are full of old romances : but they will not speak—our skalds. King Arthur lies still wounded grievously, in the far island valley of Avilyon : Lord Odin in the misty death realm : Balder the Beautiful, sought long by great Hermoder, lives beyond Hela's portals, and will bless his people some day when he comes. But when? King Arthur ever *is to* come : Odin will one day wind his horn and clash his wild barbaric cymbals through the Nordland pines as he returns, but not in our generation : Balder will rise from sleep and shine again the white sun god on his world. But always these things will be : Arthur and the rest are meanwhile sleeping.[9]

While *Woodcraft* acts out Simms's tragicomic farewell to "romance," Cooke's "Prologue" immediately states that "romance" has become irrecoverable: it lies buried in the mist of history, its inherent promise of realization is infinitely deferred. The author of the "Prologue" seems to bemoan the state of a fallen world that is dissociated from the order of "romance" and must cease to believe in redemption. The sonorous names of the ancient gods and heroes can only vaguely evoke an atmosphere, but they cannot work a transformation. In fact, they may be merely names which no longer pertain to an actual referent.

The transition from a spiritual to an archeological relation to "romance," from literary pragmatics to literary criticism, is condensed in a highly suggestive phrase that follows immediately on the paragraph quoted: "Romance is history : the illustration may be lame but the truth is melancholy" (13). This may be read as a sophisticated pun: spelling the conventional equation between (American) history and "romance" backwards—"romance is history" instead of "American national history is romance"—the quoted sentence seems to subvert attempts at the typological actualization of an ideal historical order. However, the difference between "romance" and actuality is no longer experienced as a painful state of alienation but as a natural condition: Cooke's

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[8] Carton 108; cf. 117.

[9] John Esten Cooke, *The Virginia Comedians: Or, Old Days in the Old Dominion: Edited from the MSS. of C. Effingham* (New York: Appleton & Co., 1854); facsimile rpt, 2 vols. in 1, Americans in Fiction Series (Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg, 1968) 1: 13. The quoted paragraph is the opening of the narrative itself; it is preceded by a non-fictional preface and the interpolated table of contents. Subsequent page references will occur parenthetically in the text.

novel manifests and enacts the step from pragmatics to self-reflexivity, from desperate attempts at mediation to (ironic) meditations on its impossibility—from "romance" to romantic irony. The quoted passages are remarkable not only for their conspicuous irony but also for their ostentatious fictionality. The "Prologue" is part of the fiction, it is not an official pronouncement by the real author but was allegedly penned by the author of the historical manuscript on which the fiction pretends to be based. The discourse on "romance" has become dissociated from the author, it is taken out of the preface and transferred into the narrative. With *The Virginia Comedians* southern fiction arrives at what students of the "American Renaissance" usually regard as the natural theme of "romance": "romance" itself, in all its inescapable textuality.

The fictional author's musings on "romance" are intended to justify his narrative enterprise, which is a decidedly personal and subjective undertaking: "Thinking these thoughts I have thought it well to set down here some incidents which took place on Virginia soil, and in which an ancestor of my family had no small part." The "Prologue," then, is the introduction to the fictional author's "family romance" (1: 13–14). There is an obvious incongruity between the lofty realm of Nordic mythology or Arthurian "romance" and the more contingent "incidents" on homely "Virginia soil" in which the narrator's ancestor did not even play the leading role: it is the incongruity between the epic and the domestic, between a monumentalizing and a privatizing definition of "romance." The irony is further emphasized by the fact that the author is not even qualified for the job of the historian. He is presented—or, more precisely, he presents himself—as a dreamer rather than as a reliable chronicler: "Often in my evening reveries, assisted by the partial gloom resulting from the struggles of the darkness and the dying firelight, I endeavor, and not wholly without success, to summon from their sleep these stalwart cavaliers, and tender, graceful dames of the far past" (1: 14). The similarity of this passage to that in Hawthorne's "Custom-House"-sketch which propagates "moonlight" as the ideal "medium" for the "romance" writer is striking. Both passages suggest that "romance" is produced by the willful manipulation of a familiar scenery; both implicitly define "romance" not as the reconstruction of a higher truth but rather as a hudibrastic monumentalization of trivialities. In fact, Hawthorne's persona also stresses that his story partly involves family history since it goes back to the times when his family settled in the New World: "The figure of that first ancestor, invested by family tradition with a dim and dusky grandeur, was present to my boyish imagination, as far back as I can remember. It still haunts me, and induces a sort of home-feeling with the past . . ."[10] In a similar manner, the fictional author of "The Prologue" contemplates the portrait of his ancestor Champ Effingham. Sometimes the dim

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[10] Hawthorne, "The Custom-House," *The Scarlet Letter* 126.

firelight causes the delusion that the figure in the portrait is speaking to the chronicler, exhorting him to truthfulness—but eventually "the fire-light leaping up shows plainly that this all was but a dream, and the fine pale face is again only on canvas, the white hand rests upon its book :—my dream ends with a smile" (1: 15).[11] The story pretends neither to factual historicity nor to the representation of an abstract historical truth. It is a manipulative evocation of the past that aims at a universal reconciliation with the contingencies of existence. The author of the manuscript seeks to achieve the emotional state that Hawthorne ironically describes as "a sort of home-feeling with the past."

The "Prologue" to *The Virginia Comedians* resembles Hawthorne's semi-fictional introduction to *The Scarlet Letter* also in its function as an elusive account of the story's origin which stresses the inescapable intermixture of purported historicity and self-conscious fictionalization. As the reader eventually realizes, the "Prologue" is merely an extract from an older layer of the narrative, the voice that has spoken in the introductory pages had been neither Cooke's nor that of the actual narrator. Abruptly, the proper narrator takes over: "Now I will begin. Thus far the author of the manuscript" (1: 16). Significantly, the narrator bases his editing or re-telling of the original story on a free interpretation of the original author's "last request":

> The worthy gentleman gave us his full permission to edit [the manuscript] in such a manner as seemed to us best calculated to present incidents and personages clearly : and this has been the labor of the last two months. The sequence of events has been somewhat altered, to give more artistic point to certain pages—since art is all in all after honesty—and many moral digressions of the worthy gentleman have been omitted, as unnecessary and superfluous. Still a number of these passages have been retained—but always when they bore directly upon the narrative. (1: 16)[12]

This reads like an ironization of Simms's insistence in "The Epochs and Events of American History" on art as the supreme tool for the discovery of ultimate historical truth: in *The Virginia Comedians*, the "artistic" transformation of the supposed original chronicle evidently results in a further fictionalization of an already highly fictional account and thus heightens the distortion of truth. Moreover, the narrative is ostensibly conceived as a critique of its pretext: by retaining passages from the original version and commenting on their antiquated mannerism, it enacts a bewildering conflict of styles and ideologies. Thus, chapter XLIII of the first volume purportedly is a direct quote from the original chronicle. It offers a highly-wrought interpretation of the narrated

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[11] Similarly, in the "Custom-House," Hawthorne imagines a meeting with the ghost of Surveyor Pue (147).

[12] Hawthorne's persona also insists on the tale's origin in the authentic manuscript of Surveyor Pue and, at the same time, declares to have revised and transformed the material with

events as evidence for the presence of an "overruling Providence" (1: 239). At the beginning of the following chapter, however, such intrusions at the hand of the original narrator are ridiculed: "The words which men and women utter are far more powerful interpretations of what they think and feel than any mere comment on their thoughts and feelings by an indifferent person" (1: 240). This narratological manifesto has an equivocal effect: while it makes a claim to realist representation, it simultaneously subverts this claim by betraying the fictional character of the narrative—for if the dialogues are not in the original text, they must have been invented by the editor-narrator. By implication, the reader is warned that the narrative may be most fictional exactly in those passages that appear most palpably real.

At points, the comments on the pretext are clearly derisive, as in the following passage: "Thus far, the author of the MS., in that rhetorical and enthusiastic style which every where characterizes his works. Let us descend from the heights of apostrophe and declamation to the prose of simple narrative" (1: 82). The realist critique of "the heights of apostrophe," however, cannot present a more truthful story, but is limited to the (further) ironization of a corrupted chronicle of the past. Another sequence of statement and parodic counterstatement ridicules the overblown rhetoric of "chivalry"—the passage refers to the hero's brother Ralph Waters, who likes to assume the role of the "Chevalier" (e.g., 1: 255):

> "On the next day, he donned his most dangerous weapons, and cased himself in his most war-proof armor ; then with trumpets sounding, and banners flying, advanced to the assault." Thus does the author of the manuscript, in that practical style of which he is so fond, chronicle the fact that Captain Ralph Waters set out for Riverhead with the intention of making a matrimonial demonstration. We suspect that the "dangerous weapons and war-proof armor," were only smiles and (hair) powder, and mustaches gallantly curled : that the "trumpets sounding," were simply the soldiers habitual ditty . . . —lastly, that the "banners flying," were a pure figment of the author's imagination. (2: 248)

This contest of styles again lays stress on the textuality of history. Neither text nor pretext can be regarded as manifestations of an extra-textual truth: history is inscribed into the text only as a succession of conflicting modes of expression, none of which can claim authenticity. What Carton says with relation to the poetry of Emily Dickinson may also be applied to Cooke's novel: it "focuses attention not on language's function as a mediator but on its character as a medium."[13]

"nearly altogether as much license as if the fact had been entirely of my own invention" ("The Custom House" 146–147).

10.2 World as Theater / History as Comedy: The Literary Construction of Social Realities

The conflict between literary codes and historical reality which is the subject of the novel's metafictional discourse is also played out by the plot. If Caruthers had tried to make the rhetoric of chivalry into the idiom of Young America and manifest destiny, Cooke reveals its inadequacy for the perception and representation of social reality. According to his picture of pre-Revolutionary Virginia the notion of chivalry was hopelessly outdated already by the middle of eighteenth century. The false consciousness that is engendered by imposing literary conventions onto the real world is exemplified by Champ Effingham, who is the ancestor of the chronicle's supposed original author and plays the role of a tragic, and eventually reformed, villain. He is a scion of the aristocracy: his father owns "thousands of acres" and "hundreds of negroes" (1: 22). The young man has just returned from England, where his sensibilities have been corrupted by fashionable society. In fact, Champ has become so effeminate as to apply rouge to his cheeks.

In particular, however, he has acquired a dangerous taste for literature. An old friend who accuses Champ of talking literature "like a book" is led to exclaim: "what a wearisome thing literature is! And you altogether deteriorated!" (1: 171). Indeed, the young planter goes about transforming his life according to literary conventions. When he meets a strange young woman on horseback who seems to conform to his picture of a heroine of "romance," he muses: "May the fiend seize me, if the days of wandering knights and forlorn damsels, haunted castles and giants have not returned!" (1: 28). Afterwards, Champ assumes that the unknown beauty might have been "[s]ome wandering queen" or "a fairy" since "Virginia is the land of romance and magic" (1: 30). Although his tone is purposefully ironic, Champ is serious in his desire to make reality conform to his overblown notions. Indeed, Champ's manipulations do have a sinister quality because they are acted out against the resistance of the strange horsewoman, the actress Beatrice Hallam, who insists: "I am not a lady, sir" (1: 27). When, at the end of the first volume, Beatrice still persists in refusing the passionate attentions of the cavalier, he shifts to the role of the gothic villain, kidnaps the object of his desire and almost kills her lover. Champ is bent on realizing literary conventions—if needs be, violently.

There is a marked irony in the fact that it is exactly on the grounds of her being an actress and, as she tells him, "not of your class" (1: 70) that Beatrice rejects the role which the young aristocrat is trying to force upon her. Indeed, as Champ's pursuit of the girl becomes more and more oppressive and irrational, the two eventually seem to

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[13] Carton 88.

change roles so that Beatrice, who is weary of acting, asks herself: "Had she met with a real life actor superior to herself?" (1: 97). In order to be near Beatrice, Champ actually enters her (alleged) father's company of comedian's. Increasingly—and purposefully—he confuses life and the Shakespearean stage: toying with the idea of suicide he identifies first with Hamlet and then with Othello (1: 148). Even at the end of the story, a changed "Mr. Effingham," who has overcome his infatuation and has returned sobered from a second tour of Europe, still persists in rendering the story of his life according to literary conventions and in the terminology of the stage. He tells a friend: "You will no doubt recollect the affair which created so much agreeable comment in this neighborhood, a year or two ago :—an affair which, commencing like a comedy, came near ending a tragedy for all the actors, among whom I held, I believe, a distinguished rank" (2: 63–64). In a similar manner, he compares his stay in Europe to "the old tale, which we sometimes read in romances ; where the despairing lover who has committed some wild act which drives him from his native country, seeks distraction in travel" (2: 66). And when Champ eventually manages to recast the drama of his life and to put his first love, Clare Lee, in the role he had erroneously assigned to Beatrice—he tells Clare: "The old romances took a glory from your smile, and I understood for the first time what the 'love of ladies' meant, and how the old chevaliers willingly periled life for their idols" (2: 175). Champ's reformation does not turn him into a realist: he still emplots his life according to literary formulas. The difference between the old Champ and the new is merely between a prospective and a retrospective use of conventions, between a pragmatic and an idyllic concept of literature.

Although the narrative criticizes Champ's aggressiveness and destructiveness, it also brings out the heroism that is inherent in his determination to live out the rhetoric of "chivalry" against all odds, even turning his antiquated conventionality into a revolt against current social decorum. Thus, the narrator admires Champ's bold feat of taking the actress to the governor's ball, treating he in a manner that is "full of respectful and chivalric feeling." It is stressed that this was no affectation: "We have failed to convey a truthful impression of this gentleman's character, if the reader has not, before this time, perceived that, with all his woful [sic] faults and failings, Mr. Champ Effingham had much in his character of the bold gentleman—the ancient knight" (1: 275). The passage stresses Champ's ability of actually living the part he has chosen. Indeed, *The Virginia Comedians* is remarkable for being a novel in which characters seem to be free to pick their role and genre rather than having them immutably assigned by an implied author. Not only is the theater the leitmotif of the novel, but theatricality increasingly becomes its organizing principle: in the fictional world of the novel life is indeed a stage and (social) reality comes to appear as a complex dynamics that

evolves from the interplay of competing modes of perception, representation and self-dramatization.

The idea that reality can be successfully manipulated by histrionic strategies and fidelity to a chosen genre is evident also from the characterization of Ralph Waters, the hero's brother. He has just returned from Europe where during the Seven Years' War he served in the Prussian Army as a professional soldier. While the French held him under arrest in the Rhineland, he fell in love and married. Dying only two years later, his wife left him a considerable fortune, the origins of which remain a mystery. The son of a Virginia fisherman returns, as he himself puts it, "indifferent rich" (1: 327–328). This unbelievable story is offered without any pretense to verisimilitude—indeed, the reader gets the impression that the author ostentatiously plays with his freedom as a fabulator who may even switch to the mode of the fairy tale.

Ralph functions as a counterpart to Champ: if the young aristocrat self-consciously plays the role of the tragic cavalier, Ralph Waters takes life the easy way and, always scattering French expletives, zestfully acts the "chevalier": "I am called La Rivière—sometimes Captain La Rivière—not unfrequently the Chevalier La Rivière" (1: 255). Ralph Waters is a picaroon who has the luck of a true knight of "romance." The chapter which describes Champ's first meeting with Beatrice as "Something like an Adventure" is paralleled by a chapter that renders Ralph's encounter with his future wife Henrietta as "An Adventure" without any explicit qualifications (2: 12–15). Indeed, the story is an example of successful knight errantry. As he is "dying of ennui," the captain decides that he "must go and find somebody to quarrel with" (2: 6–7); he mounts "his beautiful steed" and sets forward, leaving it "to the intelligent animal" to choose the direction (2: 12). Ralph's mode of traveling is clearly a quest and the landscape also conforms to the typical significance-laden topography of "chivalric romance." Eventually, horse and rider arrive in a gorge through which runs "a deep stream" that is "swollen by the rain." The rider admires the "picturesque scenery" and then makes his horse swim the river (2: 13). This takes the adventurer to the banks of matrimony: on the other side he finds an uncontrollable coach rushing down a steep declivity; Ralph comes to the rescue, checks the horses and saves the lives of the travelers. These are a wealthy planter and his two daughters, one of whom will become Ralph's wife. Even though he decides to keep silent about his actual wealth and to court Henrietta as merely a former soldier and as the son of a poor fisherman, Ralph eventually manages to overcome her prejudices and those of her class-conscious father. The "romance" turns into a fairy tale and is led to its formulaic conclusion when Ralph invests his money in a splendid estate, gets Henrietta to pine for its possession––and only then tells her that he has already bought it.

If Ralph's genre is a mixture between a "chivalric romance" and a (bourgeois) fairy tale, the love affair between the "Chevalier's" page Lanky and Donsy, the daughter of a local factor, is rendered in the terms of mock pastoral. Again, the generic allusion is over-explicitly brought home by a playful chapter title: "Chapter XXVIII: In Which the History Descends to the Loves of Corydons and Phillises in Arcady" (2: 178–184). In this case, the genre is chosen by the woman and forced upon her lover, whom she commands: "You shall be my shepherd, Lanky" (2: 183). The narrative virtually revels in ironic conventionality while the theme of courtship—along with the motif of lord and retainer[14]—is (literally) declined through all social strata and age groups. Lanky manages to win Donsy's love by a deed of mock chivalry acted out in the schoolroom. When he watches Parson Tag's attempt to punish his beloved with the rod, the "country bumpkin" rushes into the room and draws his sword. Ralph, who has himself been ennobled by good luck, interrupts the ensuing fight, humiliates the class-conscious parson and honors the lovers by driving them away in a splendid new carriage. The title of the respective chapter evokes the heights of "romance" or fairy tale and ironically underlines the conventionality of the story as well as the obvious contrast between convention and subject: "Chapter XIX: In Which a Chariot and Four Horses Comes to the Rescue."

Centering on the theme of courtship and marriage, particularly across social strata, the second volume of the novel increasingly resembles a comedy. This development is made explicit by the narrator. Introducing an account of the childish love games between Champ's younger brother Will and his cousin Kate, he explains:

> Comedy goes out of its proper field when it deals with fiery passions, or grand personages or events ; but, if it cannot usurp the functions of tragedy, it has this to recommend it, that it may safely deal with every species of character, of every class and every age ; and when in this pursuit it finds a peculiarity, it may paint it and vindicate itself, however humble and apparently insignificant the personage or the trait may be. The reader must have been convinced, before this, that the second portion of our history is destined to deal with comedy more than the former portion, though that boasted a company of comedians,—and in this he has not been mistaken. (2: 94)

According to this metafictional comment, comedy is a mode of narrative which admits of the utmost license: by portraying a broad variety of characters "of every class" it transgresses not only social but also generic boundaries. In a particular way, then, comedy is a democratic format. And indeed, the unfolding comedy leads up to the description of the resistance against the Stamp Act as the first step in the American Revolution. The relevant chapter returns from the comedy of private history to the "fiery

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[14] If the country bumpkin Lanky is the retainer of captain Ralph, the little slave Jim Crow—a living stereotype conceived as a living stereotype—again plays the role of Lanky's page.

passions, or grand personages or events" of national history. It ends with the prophetic words, "murmured" by a "grimly" smiling Patrick Henry : "Good! . . . the Revolution is begun!" (2: 279). However, this is not the end of the novel: in another chapter "In Which the Author of the Ms. Omits Describing Four Weddings" (2: 280–281) the narrative immediately falls back into comedy and the stilted tone of its supposed pretext. Evidently, there is a confusion between public and private histories, "Revolutionary romance" and comedy. Private and public history, national lore and homely moral merge into each other.

Indeed, there is a tendency to subsume even the Stamp Act Riot itself under the comic mode, to interpret national history not only as the outcome of individual passions but furthermore to locate its origins within the comedy of private life. Thus, the rebellion is anticipated as a children's game: in front of the school, Champ's younger brother Will "of the Cornstalk Company of Virginia Volunteers" delivers "a splendid and stirring oration" dealing "in tremendous denunciation of the acts of Parliament and King George, in relation to the colony of Virginia" (2: 52). The rebellion is preceded by its burlesque—and when Jim Crow, a slave child who is introduced as a "grotesque little goblin" (2: 57), apes Will's speech against the Stamp Act, the narrative even presents the burlesque of the burlesque: "Well gemblem," Jim declares, "I'se oppose, myself to dis stump ac" (2: 117). Within the comedy of private life, public history can be introduced only as a shadow-play.

Moreover, the tables are eventually turned and the burlesque of real history is transformed into its motivation. Before the actual riots against the Stamp Act, the children's "Cornstalk Regiment" parades through Williamsburg; the children, among whom there are many slaves, carry a "silken banner" which boasts "in letters of golden silk the thrilling motto : NO STAMP ACT FOREVER! LIBERTY OR DEATH!!!" (2: 207). This, of course, is an allusion to Patrick Henry's alleged dictum: "Give me liberty, or give me death!" Indeed, in Cooke's novel the revolutionary is among the crowd who witness the "Grand Muster of the Cornstalk Regiment" and observes: "'tis a great sentiment, and I assure you, sir, that this banner, boyish as it seems, speaks the sentiment of the whole colony" (2: 208). Thus, history is not only anticipated in burlesque, but the burlesque is presented as the source of the real history upon which it plays. The story counters the idea of an absolute History as proposed by Kennedy, Caruthers and Simms by suggesting that everything is necessarily mediated. Though the Revolution may achieve the return to a more natural order, it works through a series of contingent processes of derivation; the ideal manifests itself not against but through alienation. "Romance," in other words, happens more or less accidentally.

According to Cooke's construction of history, the pathos of private life is not only a valid analogy to the "romance" of national history but actually its source. The hurried

description of the Stamp Act riot is introduced by another metafictional comment which reduces national history to "one or two more scenes" that have to be rendered "briefly" at the end of a chronicle of private life, to which it is both an opposition and an adjunct (2: 272). Resistance against the Stamp Act is connected to the theme of love in that it is also rendered as an affair of the passions. The "hurricane" of the riot may almost be seen as an erotic climax to the more subdued private love dealings with which the narrative is predominantly concerned. As a brilliant and passionate demagogue, a true hero of pathos, "the man in the red cloak"—who is explicitly revealed to be Patrick Henry only in the final sentence of the chapter—works as the engineer of the storm:

> [E]ach of [his] words, cold, yet fiery—calm, yet stormy, lashes the great popular commotion into huger waves, from which gleam bloodshot eyes, and over which rise threatening arms, clenched hands. The man in the red cloak moulds the common mind as he goes, with a master hand—he works it in his grasp like moistened clay : he laughs at it, and taunts it, and overwhelms it with contemptuous sarcasms, and pushes scornfully aside the menacing breasts, and stands the very impersonation of their thoughts and feelings, with a grim smile on his lips, a lurid fire in his eyes which makes him lord of them—lord of their hearts and arms. (2: 275)

Cooke's portrayal of Henry was obviously modeled on William Wirt's enormously successful *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry* (1817), which had offered a decidedly "romantic" interpretation of the American Revolution as a salutary storm of the passions, representing Henry as an "orator" of nature and as the efficient cause of America's struggle for independence. In Cooke's novel, the fictional Charles Waters even surpasses the historical Patrick Henry in his efficacy as an orator. After the death of his beloved Beatrice, Charles has returned from the mountain abode where the couple have lived a withdrawn life. As he translates his private sorrow and pain into passionate demagoguery his eyes assume "the expression of a madman's." The hero "arraigns England at the bar of eternal justice and brands her ; he lashes her with a whip of fire ; he plunges the weapon into her breast, and the blood spouts out hot and gurgling." The effect on the listeners is immediate: "The great multitude hold their breath—then roar" (2: 279).

The way in which Cooke renders the Stamp Act rebellion is reminiscent of stereotypical nineteenth-century representations of the French Revolution as a storm of the passions. Specifically, the description recalls the perspective of Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837) and its reverberations in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). In fact, Carlyle was one of Cooke's favorites. To the June 1850 issue of *The Southern Literary Messenger* the young author contributed an essay on "Thomas Carlyle and His 'Latter-Day Pamphlets,'" stressing Carlyle's "extravagance" but also praising him as "a bold, earnest, inflexible, conscientious thinker." A series of complimentary parodies from Cooke's pen, published by the *Literary World* in 1853,

included an imitation of Carlyle.[15] Furthermore, Beaty thinks that the "complex beginning" of *The Virginia Comedians* "may have been suggested to Cooke by Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*."[16] Perhaps, the influence of Carlyle on Cooke's novel goes deeper than the mannerisms of its opening: the ostentatious fictionality and conventionality of *The Virginia Comedians* as well as its urge towards parody may be related to Carlyle's strategy in *Sartor Resartus* of reintroducing meaning by way of irony, of developing a more sophisticated idealism by discovering the immanence of transcendence in the contingent phenomena of life.

The transformation of contingency into transcendence and of private emotion into political Revolution is effected by the systematic unleashing of passions. This strategy is epitomized by the hero, Charles Waters. The son of a poor fisherman is able to transcend the limitations of his existence by the passionate power of his intellect and will. Beatrice falls in love with him as he delivers a passionate indictment of Champ's ungentlemanly behavior: "His tone was so firm and proud—his eye so clear and full of disdain—his attitude so erect and noble, as he uttered these words, that the wide apartment, with its fishing-nets, and rough chairs and tables, seemed to grow brilliant and imposing—mind penetrating matter, and transforming it to its own likeness" (1: 92). Patrick Henry, Charles's tutor in revolutionary sentiment, can do the same trick when he casts away the pose of the cynic and rises to a thorough critique of social and political conditions:

> The haughtiest nobleman in the world would not have found in these words, uttered by the coarsely-clad stranger on the rude tavern porch, to a man of the people like himself, any thing to cater to his laughter or amusement ; for the man in the red cloak seemed no longer to be coarsely dressed, his pronunciation no longer appeared vicious and incorrect; the very porch of the tavern seemed to be transformed by his magical voice and look into a palace portico. (1: 191).

Playing the role of the strange "man in the red cloak," Patrick Henry provokes Charles to ever more enthusiastic pronouncements of his passionate idealism. With reference to classical Greece, the young man declares: "Every where mind overcame matter, the moral conquered the brutal" (1: 132). In this manner, Charles defends his belief in the perfectibility of humanity and the possibility of reform. Patrick Henry, however, provokes him still further: What, if the *ancien régime* will not heed the power of the better argument nor the thrust of public opinion? Charles's reaction is significant: "'Then, revolution! revolution, if that revolution waded in blood!' cried his companion, carried away by his fiery thoughts, and losing all his calmness and self-control; 'revolution, with God for our judge! history for our vindication!'" (1: 190).

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[15] Beaty 19; 23–24; 33; Cooke, "Thomas Carlyle and His 'Latter-Day Pamphlets," *The Southern Literary Messenger* (June, 1850); qtd in Beaty 24.

Cooke interprets the Stamp Act Riot, and thus the American Revolution, as the result of the fiery passions and rhetorical bravado of eccentric individuals. According to his picture, the Revolution depended on the visions of half-mad prophets: it was motivated by pathos even more than ethos. This interpretation implies a concept of "romance" which is skeptical and emphatic at the same time. Though the novel lets go of the ideal of an unalienated history and reveals the constructedness of reality, this constructivism in turn becomes the basis of an idealism that propagates the power of the heroic individual to shape the course of history. Cooke concedes that "romance" is not a natural given that may be discovered in the truth of art and restituted by symbolic action; yet nevertheless, he suggests that "romance" can by invented and realized by passionate strategies of theatricality. Taking the step from pragmatics to psychology, from the attempt of actualizing the past to its self-conscious emplotment as a myth *The Virginia Comedians* can be read as a conclusion to the tradition of antebellum southern "romance" which I have been investigating. By emphasizing the evanescence of history and by foregrounding the fictionality of "romance" Cooke's 1854 novel prepared the way for postbellum "mythologies" of the antebellum as well as the Confederate South––for the alluring "culture of defeat" popularized by "plantation romances" in the manner of Thomas Nelson Page and Margaret Mitchell.[17]

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[16] Beaty 45.
[17] Cf. Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat*.

11. Conclusion: The Breakdown of Narrativity

Simms's *Woodcraft* and Cooke's *The Virginia Comedians* reveal the erosion of the antebellum southern discourse on, and ideology of, "romance." As I have argued, its failure was due to internal contradictions in the discourse as well as to major transformations in the structure of American politics, society and culture. Because of increasing intersectional tensions, on the one hand, and fundamental economic, social and cultural transformations, on the other, the contradictions between conservative and progressive, nationalist and sectionalist, democratic and aristocratic sentiments became unbearable. The project of mediation by narrativization collapsed.

The demise of the kind of "romance" attempted by writers like Kennedy, Caruthers and Simms is evident from the numerous propaganda novels produced by southern authors in response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although they are frequently referred to as "plantation romances," novels like Caroline E. Rush's *The North and the South* (1852), John W. Page's *Uncle Robin in His Cabin* (1853)[1] or Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854) are not "romances" in the same sense as Caruthers' *The Cavaliers of Virginia* or Simms's *The Partisan*. A major difference is in the didactic character of propaganda fiction. Instead of trying to transform perceived actuality according to a supposed ideality, the pro-slavery novels of the 1850s try to convince by intrusive political argumentation and by outdoing the sensationalism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In Rush's novel, for example, a Philadelphia housewife is shown abusing her servant, who is still only a child, with the unrestrained brutality of a Simon Legree: "The lash fell on her little limbs, cutting the flesh and bringing the blood at almost every blow."[2]

In fact, though many of the novels written in response to Stowe's bestseller are studded with the paraphernalia of "romance" fiction (telling character names, stock pastoral settings, the rhetoric of chivalry), they do not claim to be "romances." On the contrary, the propagandists always insist on the realism of their representations. Thus, the second subtitle of Rush's novel is "A Tale of Real Life," and the narrator argues that Uncle Tom exists only "in the realms of fancy," while "the poor white slave, Gazella, with all her starving misery, adds to the history of her sufferings, that most charming of all attributes—'truth.'"[3] Accordingly, Stowe reinforced her claim that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* offered a strictly authentic picture of the horrors of slavery by publishing, in 1853, of *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, providing detailed sources for all the incidents and

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1 The full title of Page's novel is: *Uncle Robin in his Cabin in Virginia and Tom without One in Boston*.

2 Caroline E. Rush, *The North and the South: Or, Slavery and Its Contrasts: A Tale of Real Life* (1852; facs. rpt, New York: Negro Universities P, 1968) 170.

characters in the novel. Stowe insisted that her narrative "more, perhaps, than any other work of fiction that was ever written" represented "a collection and arrangement of real incidents,—of actions really performed, of words and expressions really uttered."[4] Obviously, the fictional dispute over slavery resulted in a contest for the most realistic representation.

In contrast to propagandists like Page, Rush or Hentz, Simms realized that Stowe could not be beaten on her own turf. In an 1853 review of Mary H. Eastman's *Aunt Phillis' Cabin* (1852), he expressed disapproval of fiction that was "designed as an answer to 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'"[5] Writing on *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the *Southern Quarterly Review*, Simms initially chose the approach of opposing Stowe on aesthetic grounds. "The attempt to establish a moral argument through the medium of fictitious narrative," Simms claimed, "is, *per se*, a vicious abuse of art and argument."[6] Still, Simms spent most of the forty pages of his review on trying to refute either the factual truth or the representativeness of Stowe's sources. This procedure may seem logical in a review of Stowe's sourcebook, but it also evidences Simms's precarious involvement in the political debate over slavery. The increasingly polemicist character of his novels and the characterization of *Woodcraft* as an "answer" to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reveal that the novelist was unable to steer clear of the pressure exerted by political issues.

Louis D. Rubin emphasizes the contradiction between Simms's political passions and his artistic intentions: "If we read the frantic, sometimes inchoate correspondence that Simms was scribbling at exorbitant length to his friends during the late 1850s and early 1860s, given over almost wholly as it is to politics, secession, and the coming of the war, we see the collapse of his literary vocation taking place right in front of our eyes."[7] To be sure, Simms's political involvement did not necessarily impair the artistic quality of his fiction. The overblown rhetoric of his correspondence only imperfectly conceals a growing political uneasiness, and in his later novels this uneasiness surfaces not only in a polemicist tendency but also in a certain emotional complexity. However, if the pressures of contemporary history, which the novelist felt so deeply, did not cause the collapse of Simms's art, they certainly led to the collapse of his concept of "romance," effectively subverting the rationale according to which he had defined his literary vocation.

In light of the fictional battle over slavery, Hawthorne's privatizing appropriation and redefinition of "romance" appears to be a ploy to preserve some "romance" by a

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3 Rush 127–128.
4 Stowe, *Key* 255.
5 Simms; qtd in Guilds, *Simms* 400, note 74.
6 [Simms,] rev. of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 216–217.

strategy of withdrawal. Carton points out that the term "romance," as Hawthorne used it in the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*, "implies not a process but a product, not an aggressive engagement with the world but a defensive disengagement from most of it."[8] Indeed, Hawthorne cancels fantastic claims for the pragmatic power of narrative literature: "When romances do really teach anything, or produce any effective operation," he warns, "it is usually through a far more subtile process than the ostensible one."[9] This negation of immediate purpose distances Hawthorne's narrative not only from the didactic commitments of contemporary sentimental fiction but also from the "romances" of his southern colleagues.

In contrast to his southern colleagues, Hawthorne was wary of emphatic references to the past. If there is a moral in *The House of the Seven Gables*, he explains in the preface, it is "that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones."[10] Here, the past is not viewed as a liberating national legacy but rather as a threatening individual burden. In *The Scarlet Letter*, his only historical novel, Hawthorne focuses not on the American Revolution but on the seventeenth century, not on national liberation but on the constraints placed upon the individual by the Puritan regime—a past that is significantly entered through a prison door. His earlier short story "My Kinsman, Major Molineaux" (1832) indirectly deals with the prehistory of the American Revolution. However, it does not view resistance against British government as an act of liberation but records an assault perpetrated by the rioting colonists upon the human dignity of an individual. Apparently, in Hawthorne's view even the origins of American national history could not be rendered as a "romance" in the sense propagated by Kennedy, Caruthers and Simms.

In the preface to his last finished novel, *The Marble Faun: Or, The Romance of Monte Beni* (1860), Hawthorne even comes close to negating the very existence of an American past: "No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land."[11] This ironical assertion, written in the teeth of the dawning Civil War, is meant to explain the author's preference for an Italian instead of an American setting. In *The Marble Faun*, the historical dimension necessary to "romance" is provided by the remains of ancient Rome, among which expatriate Americans move. Italian antiquity is substituted for an American past that Hawthorne found just as disturbing as the American present.

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7 Rubin, *The Edge of the Swamp* 100.
8 Carton 162.
9 Hawthorne, preface, *The House of the Seven Gables* 352.
10 Hawthorne, preface, *The House of the Seven Gables* 352.

In spite of the careful insulation of his "romance" against the pressures of "the real world," however, Hawthorne eventually found that "the Actual" still had the power to undermine the coherence of "the Imaginary."[12] In a letter of dedication to Franklin Pierce which introduces *Our Old Home* (1863), a series of sketches based on his experiences in England, Hawthorne explains that he originally intended to use the material for an extended work of fiction. This, however, turned out to be an "abortive project":

> The Present, the Immediate, the Actual, has proved too potent for me. It takes away not only my scanty faculty, but even my desire for imaginative composition, and leaves me sadly content to scatter a thousand peaceful fantasies upon the hurricane that is sweeping us all along with it, possibly into a Limbo where our nation and its polity may be as literally the fragments of a shattered dream as my unwritten Romance.[13]

Indeed, the Civil War apparently perplexed Hawthorne's creativity: his sustained efforts to write another "romance" merely resulted in four fragments, which the author left unfinished at the time of his death in 1864. Even Hawthorne's more restrictive concept of "romance" had finally broken down.

If Hawthorne withdrew from a public sphere infested by politics and downsized the implications of literature for the actual world, Walt Whitman took the opposite direction: he stressed the public role of the artist and stubbornly insisted on the power of literature to direct the course of history. In *Democratic Vistas* (1871), Whitman explained:

> To the ostent of the senses and eyes . . . the influences which stamp the world's history are wars, uprisings or downfalls of dynasties, changeful movement of trade, important inventions, navigations, military or civil governments, advent of powerful personalities, conquerors, etc. These of course play their part; yet, it may be, a single new thought, imagination, abstract principle, even literary style, fit for the time, put in shape by some great literatus, and projected among mankind, may duly cause changes, growths, removals, greater than the longest and bloodiest war, or the most stupendous merely political, dynastic, or commercial overturn.[14]

As Allen Grossman points out, Whitman felt that the United States lacked "an effective structure (a meter, a genre, an epistemology, a law) between the pragmatic ideal of political unity . . . and the mutually excluding legitimacies for which right and place were claimed in consciousness and the nation—Declaration and Constitution, equality and

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[11] Hawthorne, preface, *The Marble Faun*; *Novels* 854.
[12] Hawthorne uses these terms in "The Custom House," *The Scarlet Letter* 149.
[13] Hawthorne, "To a Friend," *Our Old Home: A Series of English Sketches* (1863; Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1970) 4, vol. 5 of *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. William Charvat et al.
[14] Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (1871); *Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose*, ed. Ellman Crasnow (London: Everyman, 1994) 507.

order, body and soul."[15] The way in which Whitman perceived political problems as aesthetic problems actually is reminiscent of the approach of antebellum southern "romancers." Likewise, his attempt at achieving a solution by confusing poetics and politics is closely related to the fantasy of mediation which southern novelists had cultivated under the title of "romance."

However, Whitman did not conceive of his project as a "romance." Even more emphatically than Simms, Whitman yearned for an aesthetic solution to pressing political and ideological problems, but what he had in mind was "the new esthetics of our future."[16] If the poet of democracy actually was a kind of "romancer," his poetic and political project was nevertheless conceived as an anti-"romance." Already in the preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Whitman had claimed: "Great genius and the people of these states must never be demeaned to romances. As soon as histories are properly told there is no more need of romances."[17] Still clinging to the "romantic" idea that literature was a means of transforming reality, Whitman believed that salvation was not in the restitution but in the abolition of "romance." By the beginning of the Civil War, American authors had apparently reached virtually universal agreement that "romance" was either no longer possible or no longer tolerable.

The far-reaching ideological implications of the demise of “romance” as an ideology of literary empowerment and a strategy of representation can be clarified by reference to Fredric Jameson's concept of cultural criticism as genre criticism, as proposed especially in *The Political Unconscious* (1981). “Romance” is at the center of the study, not only as an object of analysis but also as a seminal device within Jameson’s Marxist theory of representation. It is explicitly pointed out that the "association of Marxism with romance . . . does not discredit the former so much as it explains the persistence and vitality of the latter."[18] Moreover, supposing definable relations between narrative forms, social realities and the deep structure of history, Jameson's hypotheses actually resemble those which were at the heart of the "romance" discourse in antebellum southern literature and elsewhere.

The points of convergence between Jameson's theory of interpretation and the concept of "romance" as described in the present study emerge more clearly in the

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[15] Allen Grossman, "The Poetics of Union in Whitman and Lincoln: An Inquiry toward the Relationship of Art and Polity," *The American Renaissance Reconsidered*, ed. Walter B. Michaels and Donald E. Pease (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1985) 184.

[16] Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* 531.

[17] Walt Whitman, preface to the 1st ed. of *Leaves of Grass*; *Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose*, ed. Ellman Crasnow (London: Everyman, 1994) 497.

[18] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 105.

light of Hayden White's critical yet appreciative essay "Getting Out of History: Jameson's Redemption of Narrative" (originally published in 1982). White restates Jameson's argument in the following manner:

> Insofar as art and literature . . . not only instantiate the human capacity for imagining a better world but also, in the universality of the forms that they utilize for the representation of vision itself, actually provide us with models or paradigms of all creative productivity of a specifically human sort, they claim an authority different in kind from that claimed by both science and politics.[19]

White identifies this as the "authority of 'culture'" and points out that Jameson claims for narrative "a special place" amongst the various forms of cultural production. Narrative is eminent for its peculiar power "to master the dispiriting effects of the corrosive force of temporal processes."[20] Jameson's theory of interpretation, on the one hand, and antebellum southern "romance," on the other, thus seem to be based on similar premises as to the relationship of narrative and history. More specifically, Jameson's concept of the "political unconscious" closely resembles the central idea of antebellum concepts of "romance," which is the idea of an absolute History, a salvational historical deep structure which can be preserved and possibly even reinstated by the specific powers of narrative conventionality.[21] The following passage from Jameson's book brings out these resemblances:

> [T]he essential *mystery* of the cultural past . . . can be reenacted only if the human adventure is one; only thus—and not through the hobbies of antiquarianism or the projections of the modernists—can we glimpse the vital claims upon us of such long-dead issues as the seasonal alteration of the economy of a primitive tribe, the passionate disputes about the nature of the Trinity, the conflicting models of the *polis* or the universal Empire, or . . . the dusty parliamentary and journalistic polemics of the nineteenth-century nation states. These matters can recover their original urgency for us only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story; only if, in however disguised and symbolic a form, they are seen as sharing a single fundamental theme . . . ; only if they are grasped as vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot. . . . It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity.[22]

This, of course, is the defense of a *grand récit*. The plot of the story which the documents of history imply as their "political unconscious" is the Marxist vision of

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[19] White, "Getting Out of History: Jameson's Redemption of Narrative" (1982), *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1987) 142–168; quote: 144.

[20] White 144.

[21] The concept of the "imaginary" proposed by Wolfgang Iser and used as the basis of a theory of American "romance" by Winfried Fluck (see the introduction to the present study) might probably be understood as a—less overtly political—analogy to Jameson's "political unconscious."

[22] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 19–20.

history, the belief in eventual salvation through the emergence of a communist society. As White observes, Jameson's theory can be read as "a Marxist version" of Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*.[23] I would like to suggest that *The Political Unconscious* might also be viewed as a Marxist version of Caruthers' or Simms's insistence on what the latter called the "*usefulness of art* . . . as a corrective against the dangers of the *Real*" or the ability of the "poet" to furnish "the perfect history."[24] What Jameson shares with Frye and these antebellum southern novelists is an awareness of the spuriousness of what passes for the "real" in a particular historical moment. In a manner similar to Caruthers and Simms, Jameson proposes to "retell" history as a "romance." He aims to discover (or to *invent* in the double sense of the term) the relations of the scattered documents of history to a "single great collective story," a story that these documents both imply as and suppress into a "political unconscious."

White emphasizes that Jameson's theory indicates "his conviction of the narrativity of the historical process itself."[25] Such a conviction implies the pragmatic power of narrative to transform the course of history according to the forms of desire. In a somewhat playful manner, White characterizes this idea as Jameson's concept of "narratological causality":

> As I understand him, Jameson goes so far as to conceive of narrative as a mode of consciousness that renders possible a kind of action specifically historical in nature. To Althusser's list of three kinds of causality operative in history Jameson adds a fourth which might be called narratological causality. This would be a mode of causality that consists in a seizing of a past by consciousness in such a way as to make of the present a fulfillment of the former's promise rather than merely an effect of some prior . . . cause. The seizure by consciousness of a past in such a way . . . is precisely what is represented in a narrativization of a sequence of historical events so as to reveal every thing early in it as a prefiguration of a project to be realized in some future. Considered as a basis for a specific kind of human agency, narrativization sublimates necessity into a symbol of possible freedom.[26]

Probably, this passage may be read as a more elaborate description of what the present study has discussed as the attempt of antebellum southern "romances" to reinvent the American past as an absolute History that may be typologically reenacted. If the quoted passage provides a correct interpretation of Jameson, and if it really may be taken to offer a distilled expression of the agenda of antebellum historical "romance," it seems to shed light on the problems involved in both of these related concepts of narrative or narrativization. In fact, the attempt of antebellum southern

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[23] White 144.

[24] Simms, "Southern Literature," *The Magnolia* 3 (January 1841); *Defining Southern Literature*, ed. Bassett, 64; Simms, "The Epochs and Events of American History, as Suited to the Purposes of Art in Fiction," *Views and Reviews* 40.

[25] White 148. To be sure, the "narrativity" of the historical process must not be mistaken for the textuality of history itself, which Jameson explicitly negates.

[26] White 149.

novelists to seize the American past, specifically the supposed origins of American society, "in such a way as to make of the present a fulfillment of the [past's] promise" resulted in an interpretation of American history, in the articulation of a desire, which could not be brought to agree with the real obstacles offered by that present and with the real power of deviant interpretations of that past. Moreover, the attempt to deflect the revolutionary energy that this frustration unleashed by radicalizing "narratological causality" into a mode of actual political intervention eventually exploded the careful dialectic originally supposed by the concept.

In his reading of Jameson, White develops a concept that may be used to grasp such a phenomenon of narrative and ideological failure:

> In those works of literature in which narrativity is either refused or breaks down, we are met with the traces of a despair that is to be assigned . . . to the apperception of a shape of social life grown old. The breakdown of narrativity in a culture, group, or social class is a symptom of its having entered into a state of crisis. For with any weakening of narrativizing capacity, the group loses its power to locate itself in history, to come to grips with the Necessity that its past represents for it, and to imagine a creative, if only provisional, transcendence of its fate.[27]

Along similar lines, I have interpreted antebellum southern “romance” fiction as a failed attempt to locate or relocate southern societies in history and to transcend the doom caused by sweeping historical change. This doom was very graphically spelled out in the "melancholy history" George Tucker told in *The Valley of Shenandoah*. Representing the demise of cherished Revolutionary or Republican traditions towards the close of the eighteenth century, the novel indicates what White calls the "apperception of a shape of social life grown old." Tucker's text dramatizes a "state of crisis" that is evident in the decline of the old landed aristocracy under the twin pressures of capitalist modernization and moral decay. As a brutally aborted story of regeneration, a suicidal "romance" of cultural difference, *The Valley of Shenandoah* may be interpreted as an instance of a "breakdown of narrativity" occurring at the very outset of the antebellum southern literary discourse. The novel self-consciously portrays a historical situation that can no longer be contained by narrative conventionality because the relations between signifiers and signifieds have been undermined by the contingencies of capitalist transformation.

The defeatism of Tucker's novel underlines the urgency of Kennedy's, Caruthers' and Simms's endeavor to recontain the present and the future within a salvational plot of "romance." However, their attempts at narrativization were undertaken at the price of an escalating estrangement from the new ideological and institutional contexts created by the ongoing transformation of American economy,

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[27] White 148–149.

society and culture. The increasing consciousness of this disparity led to a renewed "breakdown of narrativity," manifest in Beverley Tucker's propaganda novel *The Partisan Leader*. Here, "romance" is sacrificed by pleading for military instead of symbolic action. Through the novel's pretense to realism and its ostensible hostility toward narrative conventionality, "romance" is made to turn against itself. The renewed "breakdown of narrativity" is directly evident in the confused time scheme of Beverley Tucker's novel and in its inability to actually narrate the redeeming revolution of which it purports to be the history.

During the 1840s, the economic depression and the radicalization of intersectional conflict further intensified the despair that had been betrayed in *The Partisan Leader*. Additionally, the ensuing crisis of the publishing system translated the ideological breakdown of narrativity into a material breakdown of publishing activity. In consequence, some of the southern novels published in the 1850s moved towards an ironic self-consciousness that foregrounded the disparity between narrative conventionality and social reality. Simms's *Woodcraft* and Cooke's *The Virginia Comedians* interpret history as a process of irreversible alienation. Even the American Revolution, the supposed site of original coherence and the typological model of American history as "romance," is shown to have already been contaminated by the corrosive workings of contingency: the absolute history is merged with the present and thus devaluated as a typological corrective.

I have described this demise of "romance" as a transition from affirmation to irony and from ethos to pathos. As the latter pair of terms indicates, I do not believe that the rise to the sort of awareness indicated by novels like *Woodcraft* or *The Virginia Comedians* can necessarily or exclusively be regarded as a process of recognition by which a false consciousness was abolished. Instead, the shift from affirmation to irony also marks the suppression of a utopian moment that antebellum southern ideologies contained in spite of their collusion with an oppressive social system. In supposing such a utopian moment I draw on Jameson's insistence on the dialectical character of all ideologies as systems of accommodation and structural limitation which also have to contain a "Utopian compensation."[28]

The critical discourse on the "Old South" has been dominated by a traditional mode of ideology critique which emphasizes the function of southern ideologies to legitimate slavery by distorting social and political realities. However, within the discourse there has always existed a countercurrent stressing the utopian moment in

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[28] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 42.

southern ideologies. This tendency is evident in Henry Nash Smith's remark that "the thinkers of the Old South did not carry through their repudiation of liberalism, perhaps because it constantly led them against their will towards the general position of the Utopians."[29] An even more radical version of the same idea provided the basis for Drew Gilpin Faust's argument in *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South*. As to the relationship of apologia and reformism in the thought of southern pro-slavery thinkers, she claimed: "They sought not to describe the South, but to inspire it. The only way to legitimate slavery, their arguments implicitly warned, was to transform the region into the moral utopia of their essays. The proslavery argument was thus in essence a charter for reform."[30]

Such interpretations use antebellum southern ideologies for providing a counterpoint to affirmative constructions of American history as a "natural" development towards capitalist modernization. Vernon Louis Parrington, too, cautiously engaged in such a mode of criticism:

> The new industrialism was creating a new philosophy of labor, and this philosophy the southern apologists seized upon and turned to their special ends. They accepted certain of the capitalistic premises, but they interpreted those premises in a spirit of drastic realism, deducing conclusions disconcerting to the apologists of industrialism. In defending the plantation system they attacked the factory system; in upholding black slavery they attacked wage slavery; and in this game of the pot and the kettle the exploitative root of both systems was nakedly exposed.[31]

The method of using southern histories and ideologies as a lever that may be applied to unsettle complacent consensus is particularly evident in Michael O'Brien's assertion that "the mixed record of Southern experience—its hideousness and attractiveness—is a standing reproof to the shallowness of the Whig interpretation of history."[32] The potentials as well as the dangers inherent in such an approach are displayed by the critical work of Eugene Genovese, who claimed in *The Political Economy of Slavery* (1965): "At their best, Southern ideals constituted a rejection of the crass, vulgar, inhumane elements of capitalist society." Genovese went even further than merely stressing the significance of such "ideals" as counterpoints to capitalist ideologies: though he argued that interpretations of the antebellum South as an agrarian economy were "naive," he still insisted that the rhetorical anti-capitalism of pro-slavery ideologues had roots in the actual structure of southern societies. In spite of their capitalist business practices, Genovese claimed, southern planters had essentially

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[29] Henry Nash Smith, "Minority Report: The Tradition of the Old South," *Literary History of the United States*, ed. Robert E. Spiller et al., 3rd ed., vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1963) 615.

[30] Faust, *A Sacred Circle* 121–122. In a similar manner, Ashworth notes "a curious tendency towards utopianism" in the thought of pro-slavery theorist George Fitzhugh (229; cf. 243).

[31] Parrington 95.

[32] O'Brien, *Rethinking the South* 6.

been "precapitalist, quasi-aristocratic landowners who had to adjust their economy and ways of thinking to a capitalist world market." According to Genovese, "in its spirit" southern society "represented the antithesis of capitalism, however many compromises it had to make."[33]

I do not believe that the drift of such an interpretation of southern history is completely wrong. Obviously, southern planters were tied to a contradictory mixture of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of economic and ideological production—even though the dependence of the large planters to capitalist markets and the profit-oriented management of their plantations makes them look like thwarted capitalists rather than convincing proponents of a pre- or anti-capitalist "spirit."[34] Moreover, antebellum southern societies comprised a numerous class which actually lived according to the economic rationale of a by-gone historical era. This was the large group of small farmers who owned few slaves or no slaves at all. According to a provocative article by Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, before the Civil War these people did not necessarily lead the impoverished existence associated with the stereotype of the "poor white." Rather, they are supposed by McDonald and McWhiney to have lived "lavishly self-sufficient," at least by "their own preferred standards, which required only an abundance of leisure, tobacco, liquor, and food."[35] It is highly probable that this picture of the quality of life enjoyed by poor farmers in the antebellum South is exaggerated: even Ulrich B. Phillips—who was decidedly eager to stress the positive aspects of antebellum southern history—presented a less cheerful picture.[36] However, it is certainly true that antebellum southern societies were characterized by the presence of a considerable number of semi-subsistent farmers or squatters and that this way of life was eradicated by the economic and social transformations ratified after the Civil War.

It is in denying the relation between the "leisurely life style of the Southern plain folk" and the system of slavery where McDonald and McWhiney are wrong.[37] The

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[33] Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Pantheon, 1965); quotes: 30; 19; 23.

[34] See, e.g., Mark M. Smith, "Old South Time in Comparative Perspective," esp. 1453–1468, on the attempts of southern slave-owners to emulate the efficiency of the factory system by enforcing a modern time consciousness on their plantations.

[35] Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The South from Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation," *American Historical Review* 85 (1980): 1095–1118; quote: 1106.

[36] See Ulrich B. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (1929; Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1941); esp. the chapter on "The Plain People" (339–353). Phillips does not fail to mention the diseases brought about by poor living conditions, especially the "typical anemic debility" caused by the hook-worm. He quotes from Daniel R. Hundley's *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (1860), where the victims of that parasite are described as "lank, lean, angular and bony, with . . . a natural stupidity or dullness of intellect that almost surpasses belief" (qtd in Phillips 347).

[37] Cf. McDonald and McWhiney 1107.

economic and social niches inhabited by semi-subsistence farmers certainly owed their prolonged existence to the availability of slave labor for agrarian capitalists and to the character of the slave system as an obstacle to large-scale urbanization and industrialization. If the powerless white population of the antebellum South was not systematically exploited, this was due to the presence of slaves, who could be exploited more easily and more rigorously. Although antebellum southern societies were characterized by a number of pre-capitalist or anti-capitalist dispositions, it is precarious to base the ideological critique of capitalism on the counterimage of these slave societies, as Genovese, McDonald and McWhiney, and many other scholars and writers have tended to do. The pitfalls of such an approach have become manifest in the striking metamorphosis of Genovese's Marxism into the well-nigh reactionary conservatism of his recent *The Southern Tradition*.[38]

Consequently, in stressing the utopian moment sometimes inherent in antebellum southern ideologies, and particularly in antebellum southern fiction, I do not claim the validity of certain "Southern ideals." Rather, I want to argue that the real or imagined contradictions between the societies (or social subsystems) in the North and the South of the United States, as well as the clashes of interest between their respective elites, created a discursive situation in which ultimate questions of social destiny were brought to the surface. In fact, the utopian moment of southern ideologies was a consequence of the inferior ideological and economic position of southern slave societies in the intersectional struggle. If the slave-based economy predominating in southern states was an agrarian form of capitalism, it was still a weaker and less consistent form of economic organization than the emergent industrial wage-labor economy of the North. And while even many slaveholders were never fully convinced of the morality of slavery, the system of wage labor was imbued with a highly effective ideology of liberation condensed in the slogan "free labor."[39]

Because of the weakness of the southern standpoint and of the southern economy, many southern ideologues and fictionists felt that the defense of slavery called for utopian visions of social organization which had to be more potent than the

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[38] Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism*, The William E. Massey Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization, 1993 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994) 7–8; xi. Genovese continued his celebration--and construction--of the southern conservative tradition with the publication, in the following year, of *The Southern Front: History and Politics in the Cultural War* (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1995). Cf. Wesley Allen Riddle's review essay on both publications under the suggestive title "Southern Conservative Universalism," *Mississippi Quarterly* 49 (1996): 819–828. Riddle's approving review involuntarily highlights the ideological pitfalls of the post-Marxist conservatism that Genovese has been developing in recent years.

[39] Cf. Ashworth; see esp. the introduction, which is subtitled "Class conflict and the American Civil War" (1–15); part one on the context of intersectional crisis (17–121); and part two, "Slavery versus Capitalism" (123–285). Ashworth's interpretation is based on the premise

appeal of free-labor ideologies. In addition, the pressure exerted on the southern system by the sweeping social and economic modernization of the North generated a profound anxiety—strikingly expressed in *The Valley of Shenandoah*—which could be mastered only by employing representational and interpretive strategies that promised liberation from the dispossessing powers of history. These seem to be the reasons why antebellum southern narratives occasionally transcended the ideological purpose of apology or justification and implied utopian visions that ultimately contradicted the realities of social organization both North and South.

The utopian moment of antebellum southern literature, then, is to be found less in some of the "values" endorsed by these texts than in their (failing) insistence on the possibility of a utopian narrativization of human history and their (faltering) endorsement—under the title of "romance"—of strategies for the interpretation of history which are not entirely dissimilar to those suggested by Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*. The interpretive practice of transcending the social status quo in the light of utopian visions of human history achieves quasi-allegorical figuration in Simms's protean Captain Porgy. Jameson appropriates the fourfold hermeneutic of patrician theology by claiming that a "social hermeneutic" must apply "a perspective in which the imagery of libidinal revolution and of bodily transfiguration" is seen as "a figure for the perfected community": "The unity of the body must . . . prefigure the renewed organic identity of associative or collective life."[40] The enormous belly of Simms's partisan "philosopher,"[41] which is represented as a collective artifact rather than an individual body, is the object of a similar and just as socially symbolic hermeneutic process that Porgy enacts by incessant eating and talking.

According to Jameson, the system of the four levels or senses provides a solution “for an interpretative dilemma which in a privatized world we must live far more intensely than did its Alexandrian and medieval recipients: namely that incommensurability . . . between the private and the public, the psychological and the social, the poetic and the political."[42] Porgy's culinary and oratorical activities are based on a related fantasy of mediation and collectivization—a fantasy that is likewise offered under the password of "poetry." Porgy claims to transform the animals of the swamp (Simms's synecdoche for material nature) into food for the thoughts that he liberally and ritually shares with the other partisans. Passing through the stage of individual

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that slavery was a weaker form of exploitation than wage labor (see, e.g., x).

40 Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 74.

41 Again and again, Porgy is referred to as a philosopher in Simms's "Revolutionary romances"; see, e.g., *The Partisan* 110.

appropriation by Porgy's digestive system, the matter of the swamp is finally restored to what Jameson calls the "collective dimension."[43] Moreover, Porgy explicitly views this process as a communal appropriation and meaningful transformation of history, and thus as a successful instance of what Jameson, paraphrasing Karl Marx, calls "the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity."[44]

In this context, it ought to be pointed out again that Simms's narratives bring out the contradictions between Porgy's symbolic actions of transformation and collectivization, on the one hand, and the interests of his social environment, on the other. The partisan's simultaneously libidinal and collectivist redefinition of the War of Independence is represented as a subversive act of carnivalization. On the level of plot and characterization, the difference between the ideological functions of *The Partisan* as a glorification of the southern past and as a utopian refiguration of human history is dramatized as the difference between the pragmatic rhetoric of Singleton and the symbolic rhetoric of Porgy.

If antebellum literature is viewed from a perspective that focuses on its utopian moment (as opposed to its immediate ideological purpose), the process that above has been described as a privatization of "romance" and as a transition from ethos to pathos comes to appear as a limitation of utopian possibility, as suppression of an interpretive horizon that would allow for the utopian reconfiguration of history according to a vision of collectivity. The dual significance, as liberation and deprivation, of the ideological shift that Hawthorne ironically represents—i.e., both critiques and enacts—in the preface to *The Scarlet Letter* as a bourgeois domestication of "romance" is manifest in the ideological potential as well as the ideological limitation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe's "romance of sentimental domesticity."[45] As is well known, Stowe's passionate attack on the inhumanity of slavery does not culminate in the vision of a multi-racial America, where black and white people would not only live in equality but would mix to form a true commonwealth. Even for the distant future, such a development is barred by the vision of a separate nation-state of former slaves in Liberia, where George Harris and his family as well as Topsy and Cassy choose to go. The very strategy that allows for the powerful indictment of slavery—the strategy that Michael T. Gilmore characterizes as Stowe's approach of "personalizing political issues and seeking to read them under the sign of the home"[46]—also results in the inability to envision the ultimate transcendence of the racist legacy of slavery. As soon as the former slaves have re-attained the semi-bourgeois status initially signified by Uncle Tom's cabin, they

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[42] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 31.
[43] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 31.
[44] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 19.
[45] Sundquist, "Slavery, Revolution, and the American Renaissance" 20.

have to be sent off. In contrast to the cabin, which was contained within the sphere of the plantation, George Harris's study represents an autonomous domestic sphere, the operational base of a subject who, it has to be feared, will eventually revolutionize not only the sentimental but also the political economy of the United States.[47]

The relapse in the final chapters of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1885) from a provocative representation of equal companionship between a white boy and a black man to the shocking burlesque of Jim's symbolic re-enslavement at the hands of his young friends may be viewed as another example of the striking inability in nineteenth-century American fiction to replace the ideologeme of race with a sustained vision of communality. Equality seems to work out only within the domestic sphere represented by the raft; whenever Huck and Tom go ashore, their relationship collapses and they are thrown back into the roles prescribed for them by society. Of course, by contrasting the utopian space of the raft with the distressing realities of life on shore, Twain achieves a trenchant analysis of the inescapable deformative force of social institutions and ideologies. What has puzzled many critics, however, is that the final chapters of the novel—which, significantly, were written seven years later than the beginning[48]—not only demonstrate the contradictions between the utopian vision and perceived social reality, but seem to eradicate this utopian vision itself, sacrificing it to a precarious comedy.[49]

Emory Elliott's positive evaluation of the ideological significance of the final chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* significantly rests on foregrounding the novel's character as an anti-"romance," arguing that Twain took it "upon himself to criticize and even dismantle the structure of the romantic novel, which he seems to have recognized as one of the buttresses of the *status quo*."[50] Indeed, Twain was almost fiercely opposed to "romance" novels. In *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), on which he worked simultaneously with *Huckleberry Finn*, he declared: "A curious example of the power of a single book for good or harm is shown in the effects wrought by Don Quixote and

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46 Gilmore, "The Book Marketplace I" 50.

47 Cf. James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" (1949); rpt. in *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (Boston: Hall, 1980), for a discussion of the ideological limitations of Stowe's abolitionism: "The virtuous rage of Mrs. Stowe is motivated by nothing so temporal as a concern for the relationship of men to one another—or, even, as she would have claimed, by a concern for their relationship to God—but merely by a panic of being hurled into the flames, of being caught in traffic with the devil" (94).

48 On the complicated process of composition, see Tom Quirk, *Coming to Grips with* Huckleberry Finn (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1993) 10–41.

49 See, e.g., Shelley Fisher Fishkin, "Racial Attitudes," *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia*, ed. J. R. LeMaster and James D. Wilson (New York: Garland, 1993) 611, who calls the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* "unsatisfying, burlesque, artificial" and points out "Twain's failure to resolve the moral conflicts set in motion in the first part of the book." However, Fishkin sees this failure as a result and a reflection of contemporary political developments, specifically the ending of Reconstruction, which seemed to cancel the possibility of realizing racial equality.

50 Emory Elliott, introduction, *Huckleberry Finn*, by Clemens (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) xliv.

those wrought by Ivanhoe. The first swept the world's admiration for the mediaeval chivalry-silliness out of existence ; and the other restored it."[51] It is tempting to view Twain's next novel after *Huckleberry Finn* as an endeavor to stay the ideological reversal supposedly wrought by Scott and his southern successors. With *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), Twain apparently tried to renew the achievement of Cervantes and again "sweep the mediaeval chivalry-silliness out of existence." Based on Twain's reading of Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* (printed in 1485),[52] the novel dismantles "romance" by retelling it from the point of view of a mechanic from contemporary Hartford who is sent on a time journey to King Arthur's medieval empire. The effect of the novel depends on the contrast between medieval society and the rhetoric of the narrator, who describes himself as "practical" and "nearly barren of sentiment" or "poetry."[53] This narrative technique serves to lay bare the spuriousness of "chivalresque" rhetoric and the oppressive character of medieval social institutions, including slavery.

However, such a reading does not sufficiently appreciate the complexity of *A Connecticut Yankee*. In fact, Twain seems to have admired the "romantic" diction and sentiment of Malory, which he so relentlessly ridicules in the novel. In conversation Twain purportedly praised Malory's "noble simple eloquence" which, he argued, "had not its equal until the Gettysburg Speech took its lofty place beside it."[54] Indeed, the pragmatic language of the "Yankee," which combines the diction of the marketplace with the rhetorics of progress and democratic populism, is both the medium and the object of critique in Twain's highly complex novel. While the corrosive power of this language is used to point out the shortcomings of medieval society—and, indeed, of human society in general—the ideological limitations of the narrator's boisterous pragmatism are also exposed. Ultimately, the technological and institutional revolution wrought by the "Yankee" does not lead to universal liberation but to the apocalypse of "The Battle of the Sand Belt." In this analogy to the American Civil War, the rhetorical conflict between genres—between Malory's "romance" and the rhetoric of the "Yankee," which is a genre of its own—finally turns into a physical conflict of horrific violence. The (anti-)hero employs the modern technology of warfare to eradicate the rhetoric of chivalry by eradicating the chivalry itself: "[A]rmed resistance was totally annihilated, the campaign was ended, we fifty-four were masters of England! Twenty-

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[51] Clemens, *Life on the Mississippi* 470.

[52] Twain first encountered the *Morte D'Arthur* on a reading tour together with George Washington Cable. Shortly afterwards he began working on the *Connecticut Yankee*. See Arlin Turner, *Mark Twain and George Washington Cable* (Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1960) 135–136.

[53] Clemens, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889; New York: Bantam, 1981) 4.

[54] Qtd in Scott Dalrymple, "Just War, Pure and Simple: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's*

five thousand men lay dead around us."[55]

Twain's bewildering novel both manifests and foregrounds the inability of the rhetoric of realism to sustain the utopian vision it initially promises. *A Connecticut Yankee* is the disturbing document of the process whereby the protagonist realizes that he is caught in the prison of an omnipotent yet ultimately destructive language, a language that does not admit of liberation and that is ultimately void of utopian potential. During the agonies of his death, therefore, the "Yankee" escapes to recollections of the domestic bliss he once enjoyed with Alisande la Carteloise, who had become his wife while he was staying in King Arthur's Court: "Ah, watch by me, Sandy," the dying man mutters, "stay by me every moment—*don't* let me go out of my mind again; death is nothing, let it come, but not with those dreams, not with the torture of those hideous dreams—I cannot endure *that* again."[56]

The painful failure of the Yankee shows Twain's skeptical attitude towards the rhetoric of realism as well as his futile yearning for a "romance" that seemed to have become, or always to have been, impossible. The ending of the novel suggests that a self-consciously realist world-view is likely to collapse into a "romance" of domesticity––or, which is the most radical form of such a "romance," into a vision of death as redemption from the sorrows of a fallen world (cf. Tom and Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). *A Connecticut Yankee* betrays a painful inability to envision a collective utopia. According to Jameson, such an inability is the result of a process of transformation which he calls the "bourgeois cultural revolution":

> [A]s any number of "definitions" of realism assert . . . that processing operation variously called narrative mimesis or realistic representation has as its historic function the systematic undermining and demystification, the secular "decoding," of those preexisting inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms which are its initial givens. In this sense, the novel plays a significant role in what can be called a properly bourgeois cultural revolution—that immense process of transformation whereby populations whose life habits were formed by other, now archaic, modes of production are effectively reprogrammed for life and work in the new world of market capitalism. The "objective" function of the novel is thereby also implied: to its subjective and critical, analytic, corrosive mission must now be added the task of producing as though for the first time that very life world, that very "referent"—the newly quantifiable space of extension and market equivalence, the new rhythms of measurable time, the new secular and "disenchanted" object world of the commodity system, with its post-traditional daily life and its bewilderingly empirical, "meaningless," and contingent *Umwelt*—of which this new narrative discourse will then claim to be the "realistic" reflection.[57]

If *A Connecticut Yankee* is read as a staged battle of "romance" and realist discourse,

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Court and the American Civil War," *American Literary Realism* 29 (1996) 8.

[55] Clemens, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889; New York: Bantam, 1981) 270.

[56] Clemens, *A Connecticut Yankee* 274; Clemens's emphases.

[57] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 152.

striking similarities emerge between the process dramatized in the novel and Jameson's account of the "bourgeois cultural revolution." The "Yankee" indeed is shown to undertake a "systematic undermining and demystification" of "inherited traditional narrative paradigms." Debunking Merlin's magic as well as the rhetoric of chivalry, he cancels the dominant prerequisites of "romance" and thus destroys the genre from within. This process of "decoding" clearly reprograms England's population "for life and work in the new world of market capitalism": as "the Yankee" explains, "we were working along down towards free trade."[58]

The process discussed by Jameson as the "bourgeois cultural revolution" is also described by Michael Gilmore, who argues that the "triumph of the novel" was connected to "an altered perception of the relationship between the self and the community." The idea of the common good was replaced by the paradigm of private interest, an "inversion of priorities" which "meshes with the novel's historic emphasis on the individual." According to Gilmore, the American novel, as it emerged in the context of the antebellum market revolution, represents an art form in which the "public sphere appeared increasingly remote" and which shows interest in public affairs only "by personalizing political issues and seeking to read them under the sign of the home."[59]

The generic dimension of the "bourgeois revolution," then, is the transition from the "romance" to the "novel." However, the difference between these supposed genres cannot convincingly be described as a formal difference. Rather, there is a transition from one poetological discourse to another. The designations "romance" and "novel" mark a transformation that does not necessarily pertain to narrative form, but frequently is articulated by reflections on narrative form. The "novel," in this sense, marks a changed consciousness of what narrative can or should do. Aggressive denouncements of the falsity of "romance" as well as lamentations of its impossibility, which both became commonplace in the second half of the 1850s, reflect a new consciousness engendered by fundamental economic, social and political transformations. They testify to a cultural revolution that diminished the belief not only in the (immediate) event-producing potency of narrative but also in the viability or desirability of collectivity. Analyses of the antebellum discourse of "romance," of its erosion and abolishment, illuminate the process by which this modern condition was institutionalized. However, a comprehensive understanding of this process will not be possible if southern contributions to the discourse continue to be relegated to the background.

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[58] Clemens, *A Connecticut Yankee* 196.
[59] Gilmore 50.

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