

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.

—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

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

1.4.

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

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

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

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

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

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 Polyolithic 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

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

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

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 below³⁴—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*

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 Twain³⁷—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

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

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

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

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 Antiggenre 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

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

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)

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-

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.

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 Scotland."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.

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

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

(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 enterprises 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

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:

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 loses 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

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.

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 were 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

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

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,

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. Fawcner'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

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

⁶ Louisa's friend Julia Barton is misled 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

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 United 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,

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 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. Fawcner 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

¹¹ George Tucker, "The Future Progress of Slavery," *Progress of the United 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

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.

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

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–

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 Michaels'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.

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 accompli* 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

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.

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

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

(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

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 majestic 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

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 (xli–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 grapevine 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 Meriwether'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*

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 banjo, 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 jongleurs, 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

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 alienation¹⁵ 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

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 dehumanizing 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 innocence¹⁸ 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

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 Tracys 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 Meriwether 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 dam 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.

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

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 landscapes²⁵ 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."

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 rigmorale 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 sovereign 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

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

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

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 ascendancy' [sic] and the expulsion of the

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

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

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

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

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

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 traditional 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

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

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

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's²⁹ 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"

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 Coked 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 Virginia's 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

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

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.

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

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.

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

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 splash 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

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 blesseddest 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

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

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 Simms¹⁵ 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

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.

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 characterization 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–

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"

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

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

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:

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.

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

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.

³⁴ Vauthier; esp. 6–8.