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Buck-horned snakes and possum women: Non-white folkore, antebellum *Southern literature, and interracial cultural exchange

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BUCK-HORNED SNAKES AND POSSUM WOMEN

Non-White Folklore, Antebellum Southern Literature, and Interracial Cultural Exchange

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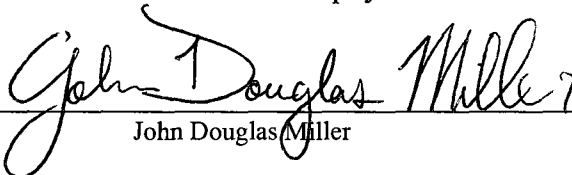
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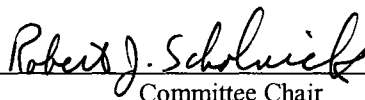
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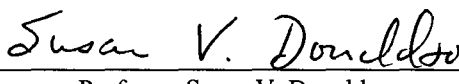
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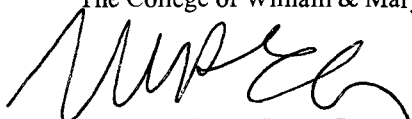
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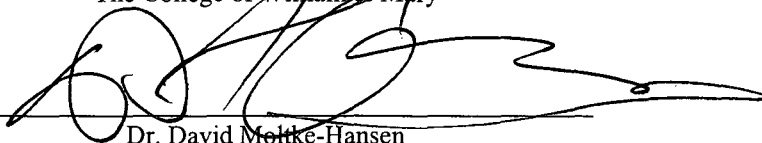
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ABSTRACT PAGE

The antebellum American South was a site of continual human mobility and social fluidity. This cultivated a pattern of cultural exchange between black, indigenous, and white Southerners, especially in the Old Southwest, making the region a cultural borderland as well as a geographical one. This environment resulted in the creolization of many aspects of life in the region. To date, the literature of the Old South has yet to be studied in this context. This project traces the diffusion of African-American and Native American culture in white-authored Southern texts.

For instance, textual evidence in Old Southwestern Humor reveals a pattern of adaptations of folklore belonging to African-Americans. In particular, Johnson Jones Hooper's *Some Adventures of Simon Suggs* (1845) reflects the presence of plots and motifs that originated in African trickster tales. Not all white Southern authors were amenable to creolization, though. Novelists like William Gilmore Simms drew from but resisted the complete integration of non-white folklore in his historical romances. Native Americans and their culture frequently appear in his *The Yemassee* (1835), for instance, but always in a separate sphere.

The differences associated with the creolization of Old Southwestern Humor and the lack thereof in Southern historical romances reflect a distinction in Southern attitudes toward westward expansion and its social implications. In particular, the degree to which these authors did or did not resist creolization reflects their opinion about patterns of antebellum emigration and the backwoods social fluidity that contributed to the phenomenon of cultural exchange. Older conservatives like Simms, for instance, perceived the Old Southwest as a threat due to its rowdiness, materialism, and permeable social class. Novels by these authors displaced this milieu into the colonial past at the historical moment at which it became stabilized. The consequent elimination of Native Americans by whites in these texts marked a symbolic victory for order and stasis.

The texts of younger emigres to the South like Hooper reflect an alternate perspective. Their embrace of the creative opportunities made possible by the social instability of the Old Southwest corresponds to their enthusiasm for the economic and social promise afforded by this recently settled region. In other words, the authors' openness to creolization mirrors a tolerance of the chaos born of mobility and a lack of structure. Suggs's antisocial exploits are adapted from African-American trickster tales whose characteristic disdain for authority and subversiveness contribute to Hooper's satire of traditional attitudes, including paternalism, which sought to limit this social flux.

These texts' competing viewpoints of the frontier allow scholars to get a sense of the diversity of social and political thought in the region—in effect, there was no monolithic Mind of the Old South. Additionally, acknowledging that these texts are a product of the multicultural environment reveals the contributions of Africans and Native Americans to Southern literature at its formative stage.

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For my grandparents, who could tell terrific stories.

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BUCK-HORNED SNAKES AND POSSUM WOMEN

Non-White Folklore, Antebellum Southern Literature, and Interracial Cultural Exchange

INTRODUCTION

In 1890, Grace B. Elmore, the then-53-year-old daughter of a South Carolina slaveholder, began writing a never-published memoir about growing up on her father's plantation. Almost every page of her manuscript is filled with memories of her family's black slaves and her interactions with them. Elmore and her brother and sister "were all the time with one or another of the servants, and most of my recollections are mixed up with them," she wrote.¹

One especially vivid memory was when the family's house servants would tell stories to her and her siblings in the parlor following afternoon tea:

The curly head of my little brother rested usually on the shoulder of Africa the houseboy, and Miniah sat between Minnie and myself. . . . then Miniah + Africa told of Bu Rabbit. . . . Africa was a graphic narator [*sic*], and never failed to interest us in the adventures of Bu Rabbit, though he depended almost entirely upon his own powers of invention for each night was different from the other, and a character I was then familiar with was "Bu Gona" the gentleman of his tales I've never heard of elsewhere. (33)

Though anecdotes like this one documenting how Afro-Southerners shared their folklore with whites are comparatively rare, historians have discovered evidence of interracial cultural exchange in other realms of Southern life, including music, foodways, and religion.² House servants like Africa and Miniah were among the agents of this influence,

¹ Box One, Folder Five, Grace B. Elmore Papers #234, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 9.

² Following the precedent of Melvin P. Ely in his *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s through the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), the term "Afro-Southerners" seems most appropriate when referring to slaves and free blacks in the South, particularly in the context of interpersonal relationships and cultural exchange since it recognizes that not only did these men and

writes Eugene Genovese, “carr[ying] Afro-American culture into the cooking, the folklore, the religion, and the sensibility of whites.” However, Genovese adds that the beneficiaries of this hybrid culture, Southern whites themselves, “have not yet ceased pretending that southern culture comes straight from Europe and the white experience in America.”³

Southern literature is one example of this unacknowledged debt. It is customarily assumed that Afro-Southern culture did not find its way into texts authored by Southern whites until Joel Chandler Harris began publishing his Uncle Remus tales in the 1880s and 1890s.⁴ But even the origin of those tales has been disputed by subsequent generations of folklorists and literary historians who stress the legacy of European antecedents in Southern folklore and literature. One such scholar is Richard Dorson, whose anthology of African-American folklore dismissed Melville Herskovits’s claim in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (1941) that African culture survived the Middle Passage.

Dorson insists that

the first declaration to make is that this body of tales does not come from Africa. It does not indeed come from any one place but from a number of dispersal points. . . . Many of the fictions, notably the animal tales, are of demonstrably

women influence European culture, but also that the African cultural heritage of black residents of the South was itself transformed by the syncretic folkways of Europeans and Native Americans. However, when referring to black folklore whose provenance is uncertain, I will use instead the more generic term “African-American.”

³ Roll, *Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 364.

⁴ For an overview of Americans’ awareness of African-American folklore, especially in the late nineteenth century, see the Introduction to Bruce Jackson, ed., *The Negro and his Folklore in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, American Folklore Society Bibliographic and Special Series 18 (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press for the American Folklore Society, 1967).

European origin. Others have entered the Negro repertoire from England, from the West Indies, from American white tradition, and from the social conditions and historical experiences of colored people in the South.⁵

Though Dorson's assertions have been rebutted by subsequent generations of folklorists, most notably William Bascom, there nonetheless remain twenty-first-century defenders of the region's alleged literary purity who are reluctant to acknowledge the likelihood of cultural exchange in this realm.⁶

Yet despite this lingering denial, evidence points to a pattern of adaptation of Afro-Southern folklore and its publication in a modified form by the Old Southwest Humorists, a group of antebellum writers who wrote short comic sketches about life in the new settlements of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Arkansas. These humorists were like other storytellers, who, as Alan Dundes points out, "are not so concerned as folklorists with the origins of the tales they tell. For a storyteller, a good tale is a good tale and deserves telling for that reason."⁷

Johnson Jones Hooper was of this mind. Hooper was a lawyer and newspaper editor who spent his adult life in La Fayette and Montgomery, Alabama, and was best

⁵ *American Negro Folktales* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Premier, 1967), 15-16.

⁶ Bascom demonstrated the existence of the trans-Atlantic connections between African and American folklore in *African Folktales in the New World*, Folkloristics (Bloomington: Indiana Univ., 1992). How those tales then found their way into the pages of white Southern authors will be discussed in these pages. For a summary of the debate between Bascom and Dorson, see Alan Dundes's introduction to *African Folktales in the New World*, xi-xv. For a general discussion on the sometimes fitful process of acknowledging black influences in Southern Literature, see Fred Hobson, "Of Canons and Culture Wars: Southern Literature at the Millennium," in *The Silencing of Emily Mullen and Other Essays* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2005), 148-49.

⁷ Introduction to Bascom, *African Folktales in the New World*, xi.

known for his humorous collection *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosa Volunteers* (1845). Its stories are typical of Old Southwestern Humor: anecdotes about practical jokes, swindles, hunting, fishing, drinking, and courtship in the Deep South, usually written in vernacular language and featuring non-elite white characters. The “Adventures” in Hooper’s collection, for example, are those of the text’s eponymous protagonist, an indigent but ingenious opportunist who believes “it is right and proper that one should live as merrily and as comfortably as possible at the expense of others.”⁸

For example, “Introduction—Simon Plays the ‘Snatch’ Game” describes the first in a series of events that enables Simon to achieve his financial independence from his parents. At the time of the story, Simon is seventeen and is still living on his family’s farm in “Middle Georgia, which was then newly settled.” Though the son of “an old ‘hardshell’ Baptist preacher,” the young Suggs “contrived to contract all the coarse vices incident to such a region,” which led him to cockfight with his mother’s chickens, race his father’s plow horses, and cheat at cards (13).

Suggs’s predilection for gambling is what gets him in trouble in “Simon Plays the ‘Snatch’ Game.” Simon and Bill, the family’s slave, are playing cards in a corner of a field instead of plowing it when Simon’s father, Jedediah, suddenly appears. Simon plays the “Snatch Game” in lieu of finishing the hand, grabbing the stakes in an ostensible effort to hide the evidence from his rapidly approaching father. When Bill complains that half of the pot is his, Simon dismisses his protest by distracting him from the theft, saying

⁸ *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, Southern Classics Series (1845; repr., Nashville: J. S. Sanders & Co., 1993), 12. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited parenthetically.

“Oh, never mind the money, Bill; the old man’s going to take the bark off both of us” (14). Thinking quickly, though, Simon “contrives” a means to escape the anticipated beating. When asked by Jedediah what he and Bill were doing, Simon lies and tells his father they were playing mumble peg. Feigning ignorance, the old preacher asks how the game is played. When Simon explains that part of it entails a player pulling a wooden peg out of the ground with his or her teeth, Jedediah demands a demonstration. The narrator explains that “the first impulse of our hero was to volunteer to gratify the curiosity of his worthy sire, but a glance at the old man’s countenance changed his ‘notion,’” and Simon instead volunteers Bill as the best player. Bill kneels down to pull the peg from the ground, and “just as the breeches and hide of the boy were stretched to the uttermost, old Mr. Suggs brought down his longest hickory, with both hands, upon the precise spot where the tension was greatest” (16).

The preacher’s calculated violence and the subterfuge with which he delivers his blow belie his vocation’s reputation for compassion. It also suggests from whom Simon inherited his propensity for deceit. Simon has a better aptitude for it—as the rest of the collection illustrates—but here he has to escape still another whipping. For after being struck, “Bill plunged forward, upsetting Simon,” who fell to the ground. The latter “was mentally complimenting himself upon the sagacity which had prevented his illustrating the game of mumble-peg for the paternal amusement,” when he realizes that his playing cards fell out of his pocket during his spill and were noticed by his father (16-17).

Consequently, at the beginning of the next sketch, “Simon Gets a ‘Soft Snap’ Out of His Daddy,” Jedediah proceeds to whip Bill, this time for gambling. Watching, Simon ruefully contemplates the justice of this brutal punishment:

It's the devil—it's hell . . . to take such a walloppin' as that. Why the old man looks like he wants to git to the holler, if he could—rot his old picter! . . . If 'twa'n't for [Simon's older brother] Ben helpin' him, I b'lieve I'd give the old dog a tussel when it comes to my turn. It couldn't make the thing no wuss, if it didn't make it no better. 'D rot it! what do boys have daddies for, any how? 'Taint for nuthin' but jist to beat 'em and work 'em. (20)

Simon recognizes that Jedediah is as mean-spirited and avaricious as himself, yet Jedediah's status as the head of the household confers upon him the right to discipline his son, including when the latter refuses to recognize that authority. This incongruity between Jedediah's character and his prerogative—not to mention the violence with which he exercises it—frustrates the younger Suggs as “each blow descended upon the bare shoulders of his sable friend [and] his own body writhed and ‘wriggled’ in involuntary sympathy” (20).

However, Simon ultimately escapes being punished. In fact, he emancipates himself from the farm's oppressive paternalism at Jedediah's expense. When it is his turn for a whipping, Simon protests that it will not alter his gambling habit. When he adds that a neighbor suggested he could make a living as a gambler in the nearby city of Augusta, Jedediah becomes indignant. Jedediah's anger is the product of a self-conscious parochialism that will not permit a preacher's son or a local rustic to claim to know more about urban life than he does, gambling included. Despite the fact that the minister has never played cards and has visited Augusta only once before, he is aggrieved by the challenge the comment poses to his authority as someone who ostensibly knows not only the world beyond the farm but also what is best for his children.

Intuiting an opportunity to escape a whipping, Simon capitalizes upon his father's misplaced ire. Correctly assuming that Jedediah will risk anything in order to maintain

his status, Simon bets his father that he can draw the same card that the latter picks from a pack. He wagers the stakes from his game with Bill against his father's pony, which he wants to use to leave the farm. The ignorant minister claims that this stock magician's trick is impossible. Nevertheless, with his authority on the line, Jedediah feels compelled to prove his son wrong, regardless even of his own denomination's prohibitions against gambling. The opportunity to cheat his son is not an insignificant incentive, either. "As he weighed the pouch of silver in his hand," Jedediah rationalizes away the bet's sinfulness as an ostensible opportunity to teach his son a lesson about obedience. The elder Suggs asks himself, "What makes betten'? The resk. [This wager is] a one-sided business, and I'll jist let him give me all his money, and that'll put all his wild sportin' notions out of his head" (25).

Thus agreeing to Simon's bet, the hypocritical preacher draws the jack of hearts and re-shuffles the deck, stacking all the face cards on the bottom in an effort to tilt the odds in his favor. His attempt to cheat is foiled when Simon, with a "suspicious working of the wrist of the hand on the cards" still draws the jack (27). He shows it to his astounded father, who claims "to be sure and sartin, Satan has power on this yeath!" (28). In spite of his accusations of black magic, Jedediah does reluctantly fulfill his end of the bet by giving Simon the family's pony, but not before seeking to exculpate himself by characterizing it as an act of paternal benevolence. He asks Simon's brother Ben "to witness the fact, that in consideration of his love and affection for his son Simon, and in order to furnish the donee with the means of leaving that portion of the state of Georgia, he bestowed upon him the . . . poney [sic]" (28).

Simon's quick wits in "Simon Plays the 'Snatch' Game" and the material rewards that they bring him in "Simon Gets a 'Soft Snap' Out of His Daddy" prefigure his adult behavior. Suggs's shrewd estimation of character and his ethical flexibility will allow him to indulge his favorite pastimes of drinking and gambling at little personal expense. These two stories also presage how the collection's other "Adventures" expose the incongruous self-interestedness of institutions such as the church and the justice system. Like Jedediah, ministers, prosecutors and other authority figures attempt to take advantage of Simon by using their status as the traditional guardians of morality and order. Just as exploitative as the elder Suggs, these institutions and their representatives are exposed as predators rather than social custodians.

Satires of hypocrisy and humorous accounts of it being remedied by the ingenuity of marginal characters are a hallmark of Old Southwestern Humor. These motifs also characterize another category of narratives in the antebellum South, Afro-Southern trickster tales. Derived from African folklore, the plots and themes of these stories are reflections of the slave experience in the American South—a life dominated by economic exploitation and the threat of violence. Consequently, this genre also promoted deception as a form of resistance, and akin to how Suggs exposes and thwarts the corrupt authority of his father, the protagonists of trickster tales manipulate their stronger opponents.

Trickster tales are common to many cultures, but correlations exist between Hooper's humor and this genre of Afro-Southern folklore that indicate a more significant relationship between the two than just coincidence. Methods used by folklorists to identify the appearance of similar folktales in different cultures indicate a genealogy for some of Hooper's stories that connect them to Africa. In other words, Simon mirrors the

behavior of the protagonists of Afro-Southern trickster tales because sketches like “Simon Plays the ‘Snatch’ Game” and “Simon Gets a ‘Soft Snap’ Out of His Daddy” also have origins in African folktales.

For instance, Simon’s lauding of Bill as the best mumble peg player in order to escape an anticipated beating from his father coincides with folk motif K842, “Dupe persuaded to take prisoner’s place in sack.”⁹ Folklorists use these alphanumerically coded motifs to “index narrative elements” for the purposes of categorizing folk tales.¹⁰ K842, for instance, is a plot motif where a trickster arranges for a substitute victim to receive a punishment in his stead. Identifying and classifying these folk motifs enables scholars to compare tales from different cultures. Dorson, for example, observes that K842 “appears in several international folktales with human characters, but has become entrenched in the American Negro animal cycle.”¹¹

For instance, in an Afro-Southern folktale collected by Dorson titled “Take My Place,” Brother Rabbit tricks a farmer’s daughter into letting him into her family’s garden to eat their greens. The farmer eventually becomes conscious of the theft and catches Brother Rabbit. He ties Rabbit to a tree limb until he can return and punish him later.

⁹ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folk-Tales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, FF Communications 109 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1932), 4: 363.

¹⁰ David S. Azzolina, introduction to *Tale Type- and Motif- Indexes: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), xxv. A motif can be “an incident, an actor, or an item,” says Stith Thompson, that contributes to the setting, characters, or theme of the tale (quoted in Dundes, editor’s preface to *Tale Type- and Motif-Indexes*, xii.).

¹¹ *American Negro Folktales*, 83.

Once the farmer leaves, Rabbit begins swinging from the limb and starts singing as if he is enjoying himself. His feigned pleasure makes Brother Bear envious, so Rabbit tells Bear that he is thirsty and invites him to be his temporary replacement: “You come up here and let me tie you up here until I can get a drink of water. I’ll be right back,” says Rabbit, who then ties Bear to the limb and disappears.¹² When the farmer returns and sees Bear there instead of Rabbit, he “took Brother Bear down and give him a good beating. Brother Rabbit done gone on home” (86).

When the same folk motif exists in different locations, scholars can begin to trace a folktale’s pattern of distribution from one culture to another as a result of storytelling among members of different cultures. K842, for instance, has a diverse geographic presence. Versions of it exist in Indonesian, Filipino, French Canadian, Native American, and New Mexican folklore. Examples of it have also been collected from African, Caribbean, and African-American sources.¹³ These scattered examples testify to the possibility of simultaneous independent traditions in the Pacific and Atlantic worlds. However, the existence of versions of this tale in African, Caribbean, and African-American folklore, and then in Hooper’s fiction, suggests a route of transmission that corresponds to the Atlantic slave trade and then to interracial cultural exchange in the American South.

Of course it is plausible that Hooper may have been exposed to non-African versions of this folk motif or even events that could have served as inspiration for “Simon

¹² *American Negro Folktales*, 85. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically.

¹³ *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 4: 363-64.

Plays the ‘Snatch’ Game.” However, the existence of African-American folktales in the Old South like “Take My Place,” whose motifs and types correspond to features of Hooper’s story, suggests the likelihood that Hooper—like Grace Elmore—heard a version of this tale from free or enslaved blacks and that he adapted and expanded upon it in order to satirize exploitative relationships among whites.

Admittedly, there are some significant differences between Afro-Southern trickster tales and the stories of Hooper’s that have African and African-American antecedents. His sketches reflect the hallmarks of literary production rather than those of oral tradition—the detailed characterization of Suggs and his father instead of allegorical animal characters, for instance, and specifics unique to an antebellum “Middle Georgia” setting rather than a more generic scenario of a rabbit stealing from a garden.

Nevertheless, outside of these variations relating to the narratives’ mode of transmission, significant similarities exist between them. Bear is punished for being a dupe, akin to Bill in “Simon Plays the ‘Snatch’ Game.” Likewise, this substitution of a victim is necessary in both instances in order to enable the protagonist to evade punishment. Yet what could be a straightforward interpretation of each trickster’s conduct as antisocial is challenged by K842’s association with what is known as “The Master Thief” tale type, an additional congruency between Hooper’s stories and “Take My Place” that points to a third and even more meaningful relationship between Old Southwestern Humor and Afro-Southern trickster tales.

In addition to K842 existing as an independent motif, folklorist Ernest Baughman links it with the folk type “The Master Thief” (Type 1525), which involves two thieves

competing against each other.¹⁴ A tale type is slightly different than a folk motif. According to Alan Dundes, the former is “a story-line distinct from other story-lines . . . [and] is a kind of abstraction which is actually manifested in multiple versions or variants.”¹⁵ In other words, it is a distinct plot archetype expressed in different variants (which can be the folk motifs like K842). For example, Type 1525’s competition of thieves corresponds to how father and son attempt to cheat each other in “Simon Gets a ‘Soft Snap.’” In the case of “Take My Place,” the farmer and Rabbit compete against one another, with the livelihood of each at stake. What is more significant is that in both stories the trickster’s behavior—not just the theft but also the manipulation of the dupe—is in response to a threat by a stronger antagonist. Thus, rather than being merely antisocial behavior, the conduct of Rabbit and Simon can be construed as a justifiable reaction necessary to defend, if not advance, their well-being.

This interpretation has a special significance with respect to paternalism, the hierarchal model of social relationships patterned on the family unit in which the mutual obligations of its members were alleged to encourage order and stability. Antebellum apologists for slavery cited paternalism in their defenses of the Peculiar Institution. They claimed that it was a healthy and natural bond between master and slave, a form of stewardship that prevented the dehumanization of the latter (*vis-à-vis* free labor in the North) and that contributed to the harmony and progress of an interracial Southern

¹⁴ Ernest W. Baughman, *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*, Indiana University Folklore Series, No. 20 (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), 354, 37.

¹⁵ Editor’s preface to *Tale Type- and Motif-Indexes*, ed. Azzolina, xii.

civilization.¹⁶ However, paternalism's familial rhetoric masked the oppressive nature of this relationship. Exposing this incongruity is a major theme of Afro-Southern trickster stories: the ruthlessness of the protagonist's stronger adversary highlights its absurdity, and the humor associated with the trickster's triumph in these situations diminishes the stronger rival's claims to authority.

Much like Simon's "own body writhed and 'wriggled' in involuntary sympathy" with Bill as the latter was whipped by Jedediah, the Old Southwestern Humorists shared the disdain of antebellum Afro-Southern storytellers for the inequality and opportunism inherent to paternalism. Historians Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese maintain that paternalism was the "dominant social relation of the Old South"; one that masters used not only to define the relationship between themselves and their slaves but also one that "deeply affected the relation between the slaveholders and the other classes of southern society" as well, including non-elite whites.¹⁷

Yet Simon's observation that fathers apparently have children for no reason "but jist to beat 'em and work 'em" suggests the frustration of some poor whites with attempts to subordinate them in this system. This is not to imply that they and slaves suffered equally in a paternalistic environment; however, both were disadvantaged by a social and

¹⁶ This relationship was emphasized in apologetics characterizing slavery as a "positive good." See, for instance, John C. Calhoun's 1837 "Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions" and James Henry Hammond's 1858 "Mudsill Speech," both reprinted in *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South*, ed. Paul Finkelman, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 54-60 and 80-88.

¹⁷ *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), 178.

political structure that favored the interests of wealthy owners of slaves and land.

Simon's unflattering representation of presumptive power and exploitive authority is characteristic of not only Hooper's stories, but also of Old Southwestern Humor as a whole. James H. Justus, for instance, has observed that there is an "absence of any sustained experience of power" in the genre that corresponds to the humorists' hostile response to any assumptions of authority based on traditional sources or arguments.¹⁸

This rejection is the final motif—in addition to plot and characterization—that the Old Southwestern Humorists adapted from Afro-Southern trickster tales, a radical one that the white authors likewise used to satirize paternalism.

Paternalism did have its literary advocates, though, and they also utilized the folk culture of non-white Southerners in narratives that depicted the benefits of this quasi-feudal model of society. Representing the perspectives of conservative Southerners who valued paternalism were the authors of historical romances, including William Gilmore Simms, John Esten Cooke, and William Alexander Caruthers. These men wrote two-volume novels rather than humorous sketches, and instead of adapting the folklore of Afro-Southerners, they drew from Native American traditions and cultural practices.

Simms's *The Cassique of Kiawah: A Colonial Romance* (1859) is typical of this pattern. Set in the Low Country of South Carolina in 1684, the novel is a tale about a reluctant privateer who saves his estranged brother from a Native American attack. Harry Calvert is at anchor near Charleston when he discovers signs of the impending assault. The home of Calvert's brother Berkeley is targeted because he recently acquired the

¹⁸ Justus, introduction to *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. M. Thomas Inge and Edward J. Piacentino (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2001), 10.

property from a Kiawah chief named Cussoboe and is endeavoring to build the seat of a model colonial society there. In contrast to the chief's resentment, Berkeley's ambition and industry evoke admiration from the neighboring frontiersmen. "He's so manful and courageous in it all," exclaims an old hunter named Gowdey. "I can't help liking him! . . . He's for taking the rough world, jest as you see it, and making it smooth for man!"¹⁹

And not just for white men, for part of Berkeley's master plan is the improvement of the indigenous peoples whom his plantation is displacing. To this end, he becomes the custodian of Iswattee, the Kiawah chief's son. Berkeley says he wishes "to see if I can not detach him gradually from the life of the woods. My purpose is ultimately a more extensive one—the gradual diversion of the tribes from barbarism to the civilizing tasks of culture" (124). The experiment fails, though, for Iswattee's health diminishes on Berkeley's emerging estate, partly—the reader is led to conclude—as a consequence of the incompatibility of the Indian with "civilized" life, but also because the youth is debilitated by conflicting loyalties to his father and to Berkeley, upon whom he is spying. (One of the novel's sensational moments is the revelation that Iswattee's father placed him with the colonist in preparation for the Kiawah attack.)

The assault is foiled with the timely intervention of Calvert, who himself ends his nomadic lifestyle at the end of the novel to become a planter. Yet he is able to save his brother's colonial enterprise only with the help of the plain white folk who are part of his crew, or who, like Gowdey, are rustic frontiersmen. In contrast to Simon Suggs, these representations of non-elite whites instinctively rally to the authority represented by

¹⁹ *The Cassique of Kiawah: A Colonial Romance* (New York: Redfield, 1859), 197. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited parenthetically.

Calvert and Berkeley. Of course, neither of these characters is a tyrant or a scoundrel like Jedediah; in fact, worried about the example he has set for his crew as a successful privateer, Calvert agonizes whether “I, in truth, under the roving commission which has seemed to me hitherto a sufficient guaranty, [have] been tutoring these miserable creatures for a life of license; for the flinging off [of] all law, social and divine [and] loosening the ties of morals” (309).

Beyond their admiration for Calvert’s and Berkeley’s decency and integrity, though, what makes the enthusiastic commitment of the novel’s non-elite characters so remarkable is their willingness to identify their own interests with the future of the colonial community, represented by the plans of Berkeley and the intervention of Calvert, and in such dramatic terms. Even though Berkeley’s pasturage and vineyards are replacing the woods that Gowdey once hunted and fished at his leisure, the yeoman claims that “work, sir, is a great sweetener of bread and meat; and to airm one’s money, makes money a more decent and respectable thing than ef I got it and gave no sweat for it” (188). In contrast to Suggs’s desire to distance himself from his father and the family farm, Simms’s poor whites appreciate the sacrifice entailed in establishing more permanent agrarian communities. Likewise, contrary to Simon’s resentment for being treated akin to his family’s slave, the non-elite whites in *The Cassique of Kiawah* defer to authority using provocative language. For example, one of the sailors, whose character is “improved by [his] love for his” captain, calls Calvert “Master” (71, 36). Gowdey also addresses Calvert in this way, leading Simms to interrupt the narrative to remark “how that word would revolt, at this day, [due to] the vanity of inferiority! Yet it conveyed then, in the mouth of that speaker, no degrading acknowledgment. It was simply the

speech of honest affection, paying tribute to noble superiority. . . . a just tribute of an honest heart to a genuine heroism” (267).

The combination of the leadership of “noble superiorit[ies]” and the sacrifice of “honest heart[s]” contains the Native American threat at the conclusion of *The Cassique of Kiawah*. In lieu of Cussoboe, the new chief, or cacique, of the region is Berkeley. The end of the novel also witnesses the reconciliation of brothers once estranged by their love for the same woman, yet Calvert decides to leave Carolina to live on his wife’s estate in Mexico. Before he departs, the former privateer offers Berkeley some advice: “Make [the South Carolina frontier] a world to itself, and *your* world. You can transport civilization to the wilderness, and so train it. . . . But you must abandon all your wild notions of philanthropy. You will never reform or refine the savage. You must subdue him. The colonial government will need to follow up this war to the extermination or utter expense of these miserable tribes” (597-98).

Calvert’s advocacy of ethnic cleansing is hard to reconcile with Simms’s own claim that his observations of Creek Indians in Alabama contributed to “an early and strong sympathy with the subject of the Red Men, in moral and literary points of view.”²⁰ Moreover, multiple scenes in *The Cassique of Kiawah* contradict Calvert’s denigration of Native American society as something akin to barbarism. Simms includes elaborate tableaux of Native American culture in the novel that contribute an exotic vibrancy to the text’s depiction of colonial frontier life.

²⁰ *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, comp. and ed. Mary C. Simms Oliphant, et al. 6 vols. (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1952-1982), 3: 101.

One of these scenes is Iswattee's ceremonial preparation for his apprenticeship with Berkeley. The narrator describes Iswattee's vision quest as "the initiation of youth for manhood," a spiritual rite where he "is expected to dream dreams, and to see visions; each of which is to have a special purport to his mind" (253). The novel details how Iswattee facilitates this divination, including choosing a location in "a region of extremest [sic] solitude"; carrying "food . . . just in sufficient quantity to preserve life"; and drinking teas made from "bitter roots, which are emetic in their propert[ies]" (257-58). After an extended period of time, "the visions follow. And these visions have a divine import, which the young man must carefully remember. They embody the mystery, and the moral, and perhaps the model, of his life" (258).²¹

Simms says this rite of passage is called "*Beni-as-ke-tau*" or "*A-boos-ke-tau*" by Southeastern Native American tribes (252). The Kiawah tribe disappeared as an independent nation early in the eighteenth century, so Simms himself had no direct link to its culture.²² However, the latter name and *The Cassique of Kiawah*'s account of the ritual correspond to a description of a similar ceremony for the training of Creek healers by Benjamin Hawkins, whose experience with Muskogee culture derived from his

²¹ Other analogous representations of Native American culture include a description of a game that Simms says is called "'*Kerakec-lakee-kee*'—'The Cheater'" (545), which corresponds to a game of chance that ethnologist Charles Hudson says is similar to the modern day shell game (*The Southeastern Indians* [Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1976], 426.).

²² Gene Waddell says the last mention of the Kiawah tribe in colonial records is in 1743 (*Indians of the South Carolina Low Country, 1562-1751* [Columbia: Southern Studies Program, Univ. of South Carolina, 1980], 6).

position as the federal Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the South from 1796 to 1816.²³ Though a lifetime resident of South Carolina, Simms did make four trips through Creek country in his teens and early twenties. However, it is more likely that he heard or read of an account of the “Boos-ke-tau” ceremony from another source rather than seeing it performed. It may have been Hawkins’s own description, which was published in 1848 by the Georgia Historical Society, of which Simms was an honorary member. A prolific reader, Simms could have also learned about similar vision quest rituals in, or heard or read folktales involving them from, Plains Indian cultures that were documented by other contemporary white authors.²⁴

The deaths of Iswattee and Cussoboe at the end of *The Cassique of Kiawah* portend the end of their culture, a fate that seems assured by Calvert’s ominous advice. Yet antebellum Native American culture did not share the destiny of the Kiawah characters, as is evident by the precedent from which Simms drew his representations of

²³ Anthropologist Bill Grantham describes this Creek ceremony in his *Creation Myths and Legends of the Creek Indians* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2002), 45-47. He also includes Hawkins’s description from *A Sketch of the Creek Country in the Years 1798 and 1799. Collections of the Georgia Historical Society*, Vol. 3 (1848; repr., New York: Kraus, 1971), 78-79. For the reliability of Hawkins’s ethnographic accounts, see Robbie Ethridge, *Creek Country: The Creek Indians and Their World* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), 7-21.

²⁴ In addition to Schoolcraft, Hudson believes Simms was familiar with scholarship on Native Americans written by Theodore Irving, Alexander Hewatt, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Beverly, Pierre de Charlevoix, Cadwallader Colden, John Heckewelder, John Lawson, James Adair, and Lewis Henry Morgan (John Caldwell Guilds and Charles Hudson, comp. and eds., *An Early and Strong Sympathy: The Indian Writings of William Gilmore Simms* [Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press for the South Caroliniana Library, 2003], xli.). For a twentieth-century version of a Sioux folktale whose subject is a vision quest, see “The Vision Quest,” in *American Indian Myths and Legends*, comp. Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 69-72.

their folklore and ceremonies. In fact, along with the Old Southwestern Humorists' adaptations of Afro-Southern folk culture, Simms's and other historical romancers' inclusion of its Native American counterpart illustrates the diversity of the cultural geography of the Old South as well as the scope of interracial cultural exchange—even second-hand—that led to the presence of non-white folklore in antebellum white-authored fiction.

Nevertheless, the deaths of the Native American characters in *The Cassique of Kiawah* and their historical equivalent, Removal, symbolize how Simms appropriated indigenous culture, especially in contrast to the humorists' borrowing of Afro-Southern folk culture. Unlike Hooper, who silently integrated non-white folklore into his sketches, Simms's adaptations of Native American folklore remain visible and separate from the novel's depictions of white society. Like Iswattee's ceremony, they occur in textual "solitude." This segregated rather than hybrid approach is a figurative manifestation of Calvert's insistence that whites and Native Americans cannot form a single harmonious community. And as the outcome of *The Cassique of Kiawah* emphasizes, the civilization of the former is destined to overcome the obstacles represented by indigenous society, whose presence signifies a hostility born of an alleged lack of development—a dilemma that frustrates their compatibility.

However, the survival and expansion of white civilization can only be ensured by a paternalistic society in which the cooperation of non-elite whites is essential. Thus, rather than incorporating a non-white folk culture whose spirit challenges paternalism, Simms's adaptations of non-white folklore depict scenes in which the power of paternalism is conveyed by its ability to eliminate that culture. Or, alternatively, the

disappearance of a vibrant indigenous culture in the novel demonstrates the potential price of insecurity and weakness if a civilization (like the Kiawah) refuses to adopt paternalism's conservative values of stability, moral progress, and a hierarchal social order.

The competing perspectives of the novelists and the humorists toward paternalism, as well as their contrary styles of adapting non-white folk culture to shape their representations of it, correspond to another historical subtext that connects these genres, one that also places them in opposition to each other. Namely, the degree to which each group of authors embraces paternalism and the extent to which each genre is a biracial textual hybrid are associated with the authors' different perspectives on antebellum emigration and settlement.

The settings of the borderlands settlements of "Middle Georgia" and colonial South Carolina function as surrogates for the historical Old Southwest. The abundance of inexpensive, affordable land there (largely as a consequence of Removal) attracted a flood of immigrants from the older states of the Atlantic seaboard shortly after the War of 1812 through the Civil War. James Miller's study of emigration in the Old South documents how this exodus spawned a vigorous "debate about movement through space" among white Southerners, a discussion that also addressed the social implications of this physical mobility. The literary contributions to this debate, especially by elite whites who chose not to emigrate to the Old Southwest, "reveal[. . .] much about the questions planters asked about their society's development in time."²⁵ These queries included

²⁵ *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South*. The American South Series (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2002), 21.

whether or not the socioeconomic instability associated with emigration to and the settlement of this new region threatened the economic prosperity, the cultural development, and the racial and social hierarchies of the antebellum South.

The degree to which this movement and flux challenged conservative ideals and rhetoric regarding governance and social relations greatly perturbed those Southerners who sought to preserve boundaries of race, class, and gender. Simms was representative of this group. He bemoaned the extension of, if not the increase in, mobility in the region and its consequences. For example, he complained in “The Social Principle” (1843) that

A wandering people is more or less a barbarous one. We see in the fate of the North American savage, that of every nomadic nation. What is true of them, is true in degree of every civilized people that adopts, in whatever degree, their habits. Every remove, of whatever kind, is injurious to social progress; and every remove into the wilderness, lessens the hold which refinement and society have hitherto held upon the individual man.²⁶

Consequently, the historical romances of Simms such as *The Cassique of Kiawah* and *The Yemassee, A Romance of Carolina* (1835), not to mention other examples of the genre such as Caruthers’s *The Knights of the Golden Horse-Shoe; A Traditional Tale of the Cocked Hat Gentry in the Old Dominion* (1845) and Cooke’s *The Last of the Foresters: or, Humors on the Border; a Story of the Old Virginia Frontier* (1856), are cautionary tales that illustrate the potential dangers of mimicking the Indians’ ostensible “wandering” habits in the frontier and ignoring the value of order and stability that paternalism lends to “social progress.” Rather than continue to “remove” in search of more profitable land or other economic opportunities, Simms preferred—like his

²⁶ *The Social Principle: The True Source of National Permanence* (1843; repr., Columbia: The Univ. of South Carolina for the Southern Studies Program, 1980), 36.

character Calvert—that Southerners stay put, or at least establish communities led by men of special character and virtue in order to make the frontier “a world to itself, and *your* world . . . [to] transport civilization to the wilderness, and so train it.” The irony, of course, is that Simms dramatized this process in his fiction using the very same culture of the “North American savage” whose destiny he wishes his fellow Southerners to avoid.

Though the humorists were also born and raised in the older seaboard states of the South, they became part of what Michael O’Brien calls a “cultural diaspora” from this region. Their removal to and adoption of the Old Southwest as home mitigated the anxiety felt by Simms and the older generation of conservatives in Virginia and the Carolinas.²⁷ As part of the South’s aspirational class, the humorists actually benefited from the socioeconomic fluidity of the Old Southwest, which offered opportunities unavailable to them in the communities that they left. Consequently, paternalism was an obstacle for Hooper and other émigrés to the Old Southwest. An emphasis on acknowledging class boundaries and the importance of social control by elites sought to deny not only the evolution of the Southern economy, but also the opportunity of the humorists to profit from it.

The prevalence of paternalism itself in the Old South has been a point of contention among twentieth-century historians of the region, particularly the degree to which this medieval social structure survived the growth of market capitalism that first fueled and then flourished with migration to the Old Southwest. As referenced above, Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese maintain that paternalism persisted, and

²⁷ Michael O’Brien, *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History* (1988; repr., Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1993), 47.

in fact, experienced a unique mutation: it “raised a regionally powerful ruling class of a new type, at once based on slave relations of production and yet deeply embedded in the world market and hostage to . . . bourgeois social relations of production.”²⁸ The two historians recognize that the authority wielded by paternalism’s elites did have limits in practice, acknowledging that “slaveholders had no more been able wholly to impose their wills upon the yeomen” than their slaves.²⁹ However, the Genoveses emphasize that the idea of paternalism still had great pull, even among those whites whom it relegated to lower social standings. The reason, they explain, is that “so long as the yeomen accepted the existing master-slave relation as either something to aspire to or something peripheral to their own lives, they were led step by step into a willing acceptance of a subordinate position in society.”³⁰

The hybrid blend of hierarchal capitalism that the Genoveses describe echoes the colonial endeavor of the character of Berkeley in *The Cassique of Kiawah* —he has one eye on the markets of Europe for his crops and wine, and one eye on the indigenous peoples over whom he assumes the role of steward. Likewise, the Genoveses’ description of non-elite whites’ willing subordination corresponds to the easy deference of the novel’s frontiersmen to Calvert’s authority. However, as the initial analysis of Hooper’s sketches suggests, there were some Southerners who resisted this hegemonic force. “Hooper made Suggs demonstrate again and again the comic futility of traditional conceptions of paternalism,” says critic Johanna Nicol Shields of *Some Adventures*, a

²⁸ *Fruits of Merchant Capital*, 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

perspective of this social relationship that was shared by other non-elite white Southerners.³¹

The Genoveses allow for exceptions in their characterization of the Old South, of course, refusing to paint the Old South as a monolithic entity, but historian James Oakes offers a more precise distinction among antebellum Southerners as well as between what they said and what actually transpired. Oakes actually argues that paternalism had little, if any chance, to ever establish itself in the Old South, largely as a consequence of its relationship with the agricultural markets and liberal philosophies of Europe. He claims that the same factors that limited paternalism in the colonial South, “the rise of the commercial market, the broad distribution of slave wealth, the diversity of the master class, and the spread of economic and political liberalism,” continued to make it an anachronistic ideology in the first half of the nineteenth century.³² Oakes explains that its logic was further weakened during the period of emigration to the Old Southwest, where the prospects for wealth and concomitant social advancement attracted thousands of Southerners like Hooper and the Old Southwestern Humorists. Paternalism contradicted their values.

However, Oakes observes that “the nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic rise in the rhetoric of paternalism,” particularly among conservatives like Simms who looked

³¹ “A Sadder Simon Suggs: Freedom and Slavery in the Humor of Johnson Jones Hooper,” in *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. Inge and Piacentino, 132.

³² *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 192.

upon this mobility as a detriment to society.³³ In other words, even as paternalism became an increasingly obsolete way of characterizing human relationships—not to mention an untenable means for organizing and exercising power over itinerant populations—the promise of order that it held out to older conservatives nostalgic for a more stable world sustained its legacy as an abstract value. Oakes's distinction that paternalism retained potency as a theory whose power was disproportionate in comparison to its practice is what spurred its advocates and opponents to debate its value in a literary realm. It is the threat of or to paternalism—its continuation or its demise—that emigration and settlement represented, rather than paternalism's actual exercise itself, that I believe the humorists and the novelists were responding to.

How non-white folklore contributed to the humorists' and the novelists' interpretations of paternalism was shaped by the same flux that these texts either affirmed or rejected. In other words, the degree to which each genre accommodated the influence of the interracial cultural exchange that flourished as a consequence of an unsettled social environment was also a reflection of the authors' attitudes about the desirability of a more fluid society.

For instance, when used in the fashion of historical romances, non-white folklore fails to challenge paternalism. Instead, the novelists manipulated non-white folklore within their historical romances to represent a homogenous, stable world characterized by the hierarchal relationships implicit in paternalism. This approach encourages the articulation of a narrowly tailored historical metanarrative and an emphasis on a unified

³³ Ibid.

society, the symptoms of which include the authorial management of the non-white voices and the historically incongruous characterization of plain white characters.

When “extraliterary” or everyday genres of language such as folklore are bracketed or mediated by authors like the novelists to the point that they are ancillary to or are part of the culture’s standard (or “official”) forms of discourse, that text, says Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin, is an example of monoglossia.³⁴ Monoglossic texts reflect a uniform reliance upon the formal languages of a culture. And rather than representing the immediacy and diversity of lived experience characterized by a range of discursive forms and the social relationships that they represent, monoglossic texts lend themselves to what Bakhtin calls “epic” qualities:

(1) a national epic past . . . the ‘absolute past’ . . . serves as the subject for the epic; (2) national tradition (not personal experience and the free thought that grows out of it) serves as the source of the epic; (3) an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality, that is, from the time in which the singer (the author and his audience) lives.³⁵

One of the other distinguishing characteristic of historical romances is this “epic distance,” a product of the rejection of independent thinking. The emphasis instead on social unity is symbolized by the romances’ focus on “national tradition”:

thanks to this epic distance, which excludes any possibility of activity and change, the epic world achieves a radical degree of completedness not only in its content but in its meaning and its values as well. The epic world is constructed in the zone of an absolute distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluating present.³⁶

³⁴ “Epic and Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Univ. of Texas Slavic Series 1 (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 33.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

This quality is represented by the historical romances' plots and settings, which are almost uniformly about momentous historical events in the colonial history of the Southeastern United States. Moreover, their resolution of dissent and instability suggests that paternalism allowed Anglo-Americans to achieve their racial and national destiny, symbolized by the successful colonization of the New World.

On the other hand, the ways in which cultural exchange contributed to the Old Southwestern Humorists' attitude toward emigration and paternalism corresponds to Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia*. In contrast to the epic distance of monoglossic texts, heteroglossic texts are defined by their engagement with "a zone of maximally close contact between the represented object and contemporary reality."³⁷ This proximity is manifested in their inclusion of extraliterary discourse, which in the case of Old Southwestern Humor includes the vernacular language of its poor white characters and the silent presence of Afro-Southern folklore.

Bakhtin values this category of texts, which he associates (ironically, in this case) with novels, because they reflect the entire scope of languages existing in a culture at a given time rather than just the elevated discourse of the elite. Moreover, he argues that the presence of multiple discourses and the social relationships that they represent lead to their interaction on an ideological level within the texts—the presence of the Other compels official culture to respond to its perspectives. This dialogic dimension of heteroglossia contributes to the satiric qualities of Old Southwestern Humor—more than

³⁷ Ibid., 31.

just being represented as vernacular forms of speech or plots, everyday genres of speech can have a transformative effect on a text's theme and tone. "Sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials," says Bakhtin, the language of non-elites "offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations," one that challenged the ruling class and its way of understanding the world.³⁸

Bakhtin's categories of genre help account for the relationship between the inclusion of non-white folklore in the texts of the novelists and the humorists and the thematic contributions of each to the antebellum debate on emigration and paternalism. Anthropological work in the field of creolization complements Bakhtinian theory by describing the process of appropriation itself and its outcome in terms of the form of the texts. Thomas Hylland Eriksen explains that creolization is the consequence of the "social encounter and mutual influence between/among two or several groups, creating an ongoing dynamic interchange of symbols and practices, eventually leading to new forms with varying degrees of stability."³⁹ The growth of scholarship in this field has led to scholars running "the serious risk of mistaking a metaphor, or, at best, [an] analogy for the 'thing itself,'" according to Stephan Palmié, and also conflating terms to describe the

³⁸ *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (1965; Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), 6.

³⁹ "Creolization in Anthropological Theory and in Mauritius," in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek, Ca.: Left Coast Press, 2007), 173.

degree to which something is or is not creolized.⁴⁰ Fortunately, Eriksen provides a series of categories to describe cultural forms and practices. Antebellum Southern historical romances correspond with what he describes as cultural pluralism. This category of heterogeneity recognizes and reflects “the relative boundedness of the constituent groups or categories that make up a society.”⁴¹ In other words, there are distinct divisions within a social body and its culture, which corresponds to the inclusion-but-segregation of Native American culture in the historical romance (itself a European form) and its representations of Anglo-American society: The indigenous presence is visible, yet it is never synthesized.

On the other hand, the sketches of Old Southwestern Humor are equivalent to what Eriksen describes as syncreticism. These texts have silently amalgamated the characterization, themes, and plots of African and African-American cultural forms with the European antecedents of the genre. In contrast to the boundaries maintained in historical romances, this cultural fusion in Old Southwestern Humor is the fully realized product of creolization. The prevalence of opportunities for interracial cultural exchange in the Old Southwest led to the evolution of a new literary form that is a product of, but nevertheless distinct, from its parent cultures.

Palmié also cautions against “substituting purely hypothetical processual models for analyses of documented process.”⁴² The first chapter of this project follows Palmié’s

⁴⁰ “Is There a Model in the Muddle? ‘Creolization’ in African Americanist History and Anthropology,” in *Creolization*, ed. Stewart, 190.

⁴¹ “Creolization in Anthropological Theory and in Mauritius,” 172.

⁴² “Is There a Model in the Muddle?” in *Creolization*, ed. Stewart, 190.

advice by documenting the historical circumstances that contributed to cultural exchange in the Old South and the evolution of its multicultural literature. Documenting the pattern of sites and factors that facilitated this transfer is also necessary because authors like Hooper left little in the way of personal papers, and none relating to their contact with Afro-Southern culture.⁴³ It would be easy to interpret this silence as evidence that white southerners behaved in ways that validated the cultural and social gulf that apologists for slavery say existed between members of the races. However, public rhetoric denigrating the mental and cultural aptitude of slaves did not necessarily guide white men and women in their interpersonal relationships with members of different races. In his study of interracial interactions between free blacks and whites in antebellum Prince Edward County, Virginia, for instance, Melvin Patrick Ely observes that “most people of both races felt their way along day by day rather than behave according to any particular ideological prescription.”⁴⁴ Consequently, in light of the void left by the humorists and novelists, examples of a pervasive pattern of interracial contact between whites, blacks, and Native Americans are substituted in order to document the likelihood that the South’s

⁴³ The lone allusion identified thus far is an oblique acknowledgment by William Tappan Thompson, the author of *Major Jones’s Courtship* (1843), *Chronicles of Pineville* (1845), and *Major Jones’s Sketches of Travel* (1848). This reference to “negro fables and legends” is discussed in the following chapter.

⁴⁴ *Israel on the Appomattox*, 337. Importantly, Ely qualifies his point by saying that although this interaction was more frequent than previous generations of historians have imagined, it did not neutralize the racial power dynamics of the region and era. It was, he says, “intimacy without equality” (Lecture, The College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Va., March 7, 2007.).

white authors would and could have developed a familiarity with the folk culture of their non-white counterparts.

Subsequent chapters will elaborate on the argument outlined above. Chapters Two and Three address the particularities of the novelists' adaptations of Native American culture and the relationship between the epic features of historical romances and paternalism, respectively. The works of Simms will receive particular attention; he is not only an anomaly in that he did document his connections to Native American culture but also because they were such a prolific motif in his work along with themes associated with emigration and the frontier.

Chapters Five and Six will detail the multicultural legacy of the Old Southwestern Humorists. The former will amplify the connections between this genre and Afro-Southern trickster tales through close readings as well as the aforementioned analytical tools of folklorists. Hooper will remain the focus of these comparisons, but the final chapter's discussion of the reasons behind Old Southwestern Humor's antagonistic stance toward paternalism and the ways creolization fueled that attitude will include his fellow humorists, including George Washington Harris and Thomas Bangs Thorpe.

One of the aims of this study is the expansion of scholars' understanding of the cultural environment that shaped the literature of the Old South. That said, because of the project's focus on creolization, it must remain selective. While the two genres of white-authored literature that are addressed in this study reflect the multicultural legacy of the region, they are not entirely representative of the region's literary tradition. Poetry, drama, and plantation and domestic novels are not analyzed here because they were less

susceptible to the influence of cultural exchange.⁴⁵ Moreover, Old Southwestern Humor and historical romances were chosen at the exclusion of these other genres of antebellum Southern literature because of the prominence of the frontier in their settings and its symbolic importance for their themes respecting mobility and instability.

For instance, the anxieties of the novelists and the indifference of humorists to emigration are apparent by how their current milieu was projected into the frontier and the backwoods settings of the novels and the sketches, respectively. The borderlands became a figurative region that acted as a backdrop for themes and plots addressing social disruptions—Simms’s Indian Wars in colonial South Carolina and the amorality of Johnson Jones Hooper’s Tallapoosa County, for instance—that in turn offered a symbolic means for the humorists and the novelists to develop competing interpretations pertaining to the notion of progress associated with the Old Southwest—in particular, defining what the experience of expansion into and beyond the region implied about or portended for the character of the antebellum South.

The other literary genres of the Old South did not share this emphasis on the frontier nor did they reflect any degree of creolization. If they did, the frontier did not appear in a political context. For instance, only occasionally did poetry address the frontier or even subjects pertaining to non-white culture. Albert Pike imitated the songs of Plains Indians and wrote about the landscape west of his adopted Arkansas; Simms as well as Alexander Beaufort Meek addressed Alabama’s Creek War of 1813; and William

⁴⁵ On the other hand, Gilbert Osofsky analyzes the narratives of former slaves and their use of Afro-Southern cultural resources in “A Note on the Usefulness of Folklore” in *Puttin’ On Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 45-48.

J. Grayson addressed the differences between the character of Europeans and Africans, but these were the exceptions among antebellum Southern poets.⁴⁶ Michael O'Brien accounts for the discrepancy by explaining that "Verse saw some objects as unsuitable . . . because poetry aimed at beauty."⁴⁷ Consequently, most of the region's poets emulated the Romanticism of earlier European writers. When the wilderness does appear in verse, for example, it is typically as "Nature" and is written about as a spiritual refuge or a source of guidance.

The questions that Old Southwestern Humor and historical novels addressed with respect to what emigration portended for the region were also absent from the drama of the Old South.⁴⁸ In fact, Southern theater was remarkable for its lack of regional distinctiveness, says James H. Dormon, Jr., including political or social issues. Instead, Southern dramatists and theatergoers shared the tastes of their counterparts in other

⁴⁶ For further discussion of Pike and Grayson, see O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2:722 and 2:736, respectively. For Meek and a discussion of Southern poetry more generally, see Rayburn S. Moore, "Antebellum Poetry," in *The History of Southern Literature*, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., et al. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1985), 123. Simms's narrative poetry about Native American history—again often romanticized accounts of major leaders or myths—is collected and discussed in Guilds and Hudson, comp. and eds., *An Early and Strong Sympathy*, 437-572.

⁴⁷ *Conjectures of Order*, 2:737.

⁴⁸ There were isolated examples of Native Americans portrayed on stage in the South. George Washington Parke Custis utilized historical Native American characters in *The Indian Prophecy* (1827) and *Pocahontas; or the Settlers of Virginia, a National Drama* (1830). As in the historical romances, indigenous characters and subjects were supporting roles in narratives of American colonization; Pocahontas' "rescue" of John Smith, for instance, in the play that bears her name, the "main purpose [of which] was to celebrate the glorious past of Virginia" (Charles S. Watson, *The History of Southern Drama* [Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky, 1997], 21).

regions of the country, preferring Shakespeare or popular melodrama. When theater did contribute to political or social debates, it was typically in response to attacks from outside the South rather than engaging in intra-regional dialogues about emigration or paternalism, for instance. Dormon points in particular to the Southern-authored responses to the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1850), explaining that "The most significant thing about them was that they appeared at all, so rare was any theatrical expression of regional animosity, or indeed, of any distinctive regional characteristics. Programming, like most other aspects of theatrical production, was nearly identical North, South, East, and West."⁴⁹

Fiction, on the other hand, "was held to be . . . peculiarly well adapted to exploring society and history," explains O'Brien.⁵⁰ Prose was more culturally and politically introspective, with writers of fiction being more responsive to each other and the region's internal debates about emigration, settlement, and social organization. O'Brien cites the Virginia poet Philip Pendleton Cooke, for instance, who acknowledged to a family member that prose "after all is the weapon for a stout-minded man; it does effective *work* in the world, and I mean to accomplish myself in its use if I can."⁵¹ However, even within the scope of antebellum Southern fiction, the categories of prose that tended to focus on the frontier and adapted non-white culture were limited. For

⁴⁹ *Theater in the Ante bellum South, 1815-1861* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1967), 280.

⁵⁰ *Conjectures of Order*, 746.

⁵¹ Philip Pendleton Cooke to John R. Cooke, July 6, 1844, John Esten Cooke Mss., Duke Univ. ; quoted in *Conjectures of Order*, 2: 742.

example, the settings of plantation novels were—by definition—restricted to the more established communities within the Southern landscape. They could offer indictments of paternalism gone awry as did John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (1832; 1851), gently chiding enervated white elites who did not carry the full weight of their social responsibility by letting the grandeur of their fiefdoms fall into disrepair. However, *Swallow Barn* and other examples of the genre such as George Tucker's *Valley of the Shenandoah, or, Memoirs of the Graysons* (1824) tended to be elegiac. O'Brien observes that "the plantation novel smiles in its regret for the past," mourning not only a bygone age but also the unrealized potential for leadership by the region's planters.⁵²

Likewise, the most commercially successful fiction writers of the region, if not the era, focused on an even more specific sphere of Southern society. In lieu of slaves, Native Americans, or male settlers, the domestic novels of Augusta Jane Evans, Caroline Lee Hentz, and Caroline Gilman "were concerned with the redemptive potential of the plantation mistress," explains Elizabeth Moss. "In the hands of the southern domestic novelists, that symbol of southern culture largely assumed responsibility for the salvation of southern civilization."⁵³ Domestic novelists did not shy from participating in the social and political debates of the era, but when they did it was to defend the South from external attacks, much like the region's theater. Moss links plantation novels to this strategy as well, arguing that "the plantation novel and the southern domestic novel were

⁵² *Conjectures of Order*, 2: 759.

⁵³ *Domestic Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of Southern Culture*, Southern Literary Studies (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 1992), 10.

two clear manifestations of male and female southern writers' need to protect their region from what they perceived as unrelenting northern aggression."⁵⁴

In contrast, Old Southwestern Humor and Southern historical romances relied upon the frontier and upon non-white culture⁵ as they addressed each other. Moreover, beyond the specific circumstances of the authors that exposed them to the folklore that shaped their texts, these two genres were susceptible to creolization⁶ in ways that permitted its expression but that the genre conventions of these other categories of literature did not allow. This susceptibility was chiefly related to their flexibility of form and special relationships to popular culture, both of which allowed them to accommodate—to varying degrees—the influence of non-white folklore. For instance, Old Southwestern Humor was a hybrid of formal and vernacular styles. It coincides with what David S. Reynolds calls the “American Subversive Style”:

an indigenous style characterized by weird juxtapositions of incongruous images and by rapid shifts in time, place, or perspective. . . . In the humor writings wild irrationalism and perversity are tempered by stylistic manipulation . . . and by an overall interest in unusual metaphors and experimental devices. The best popular humor was preliterate in a way that other popular texts were not, because it frankly confronted dark forces in human nature and in American society but sought to control them by rechanneling them into the arena of linguistic play.⁵⁵

On the other hand, historical romances were able to incorporate—albeit in their limited way—non-white folklore as a consequence of their expectations. This specific category of prose was understood to “push[. . .] credulity beyond limit so as to show the potentialities of human nature, whereas the novel plainly stuck to what was more-or-less

⁵⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁵ *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 442.

normal,” explains O’Brien.⁵⁶ Even with respect to history, there was some mutability expected. O’Brien explains that “Southern historical fiction, when most resolutely imitating Scott (or James Fenimore Cooper), shared this mixed mission, which amounted to a deliberate indecision about the boundaries of truth and fiction, verisimilitude and romance.”⁵⁷ This indecision created an opening for Southern novelists to exploit. Simms himself claimed in *The Yemassee* that the romance “invests individuals with an absorbing interest—it hurries them through crowding events, in a narrow space of time . . . it seeks for its adventures among the wild and wonderful.”⁵⁸

The degree to which these texts were creolized is a barometer of the authors’ acceptance or anxiety about what settlement and emigration meant for a multi-racial society. This debate about the social organization of Southern communities and the discussion’s relationship to the prosperity of the region reflects the scope of the region’s response to dramatic changes in demographic patterns that affected the authors’ livelihoods and the vitality of their communities. Beyond documenting a diversity of white responses to emigration, though, these texts also indirectly register the impact of emigration and paternalism on the non-white populations of the South who were most affected by the emigration to and settlement of the Old South. Consequently, reading these two groups of texts in the context of this discourse of the frontier debate reveals how Old Southwestern Humor and historical romances were responding to one another at

⁵⁶ *Conjectures of Order*, 2: 746.

⁵⁷ *Conjectures of Order*, 2: 763.

⁵⁸ *The Yemassee, A Romance of Carolina* (1853; repr., New York: Twayne Publishers, 1964), 24.

the same time they were responses to a vibrant vernacular culture. More than just a snapshot of the intellectual diversity of the Old South—from a reassertion of whiteness and traditional order to an embrace of and exploitation of instability—this debate illustrates how the region’s cultural diversity shaped the language of its expression.

This synchronicity is not a little ironic: The antebellum Southern literary debate over emigration—and by extension, the future of the white South—used the folkways and the past of those cultures most negatively affected by white settlement. No matter how much Simms claimed to empathize with Native Americans as a result of his personal contact with and research about them, it does not efface how the first peoples of the American South were violently displaced from their traditional territories. Even calling it “Removal,” says James Taylor Carson, “is to sanitize it, to banalize it, to avoid confronting it, for what [white Southerners] . . . undertook was nothing less than the complete dismemberment, the ethnic cleansing, of the society and the place they inhabited.”⁵⁹ Likewise, as James Miller observes, “for enslaved emigrants mobility brought none of the hope and continued connection that tempered the anxiety and separation experienced by free men and women.”⁶⁰ These dislocated voices, both Native American and African American, were only heard through the mediation of white authors. Without intending to, Simms and Hooper were tacitly acknowledging the history and experiences of those Southerners who were otherwise victimized by the actions and

⁵⁹ “The Obituary of Nations: Ethnic Cleansing, Memory, and the Origins of the Old South,” *Southern Cultures* 14 (Winter 2008): 10.

⁶⁰ *South by Southwest*, 122.

viewpoints of their fellow white Southerners.

CHAPTER ONE
THE CULTURAL FRONTIER OF THE SOUTH

“Slavish speech surely it is”

One of the most intimate accounts of Southern plantation life, the Civil War diary of Mary Boykin Chesnut typifies Southern slaveowners’ anxieties about the violence they felt that their slaves were capable of committing. Chesnut and her family wince at every bitter tasting sip of soup, thinking it poisoned, and they try to fathom the faces and the fidelity of their inscrutable servants, desperate to gauge their emotions and intentions. “I had never injured any of them,” she writes in 1861 after hearing of the murder of a neighbor—“a saint on this earth”—by one of the victim’s slaves. “Why should they want to hurt me?”¹

Some white slaveowners had less violent anxieties about the African-American presence in their midst. Minerva Hynes Cook of Mississippi belonged to this category of women. She mentions in her diary that one day in 1857 she “stopped for a short time at the quarters to see a few of the Servants. I do not think it is a good plan for any one who is civilized to ever have a word to say to Negroes. Their language is so horrible and vulgar and is certain if young children associate with Negroes they will be ruined.”² Fanny Kemble believed likewise. After listening to one of her slaves mispronounce

¹ *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (1905; repr., New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), 199.

² Entry for January 1857, in Minerva Hynes Cook Journal, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, quoted in Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004), 415.

“white words” on her husband’s Georgia plantation, she remarked that “the children of their [the slaves’] owners, brought up among them, acquire their negro mode of talking—slavish speech surely it is—and it is distinctly perceptible in the utterances of all Southerners, particularly of the women.”³ A Presbyterian minister echoed these women’s consternation about the linguistic influence of blacks in an 1847 article in the *Southern Presbyterian Review* and warned that “Our children catch the very dialect of our servants, and lisp all their perversions of the English tongue, long before they learn to speak it correctly.”⁴ Even visitors to the South noticed the consequence of white children spending time around slave children and adults. A British traveler in Virginia in 1736 reported that white parents were “very faulty . . . with regard to their Children, which is, that when young, they suffer them too much to prowl among the young Negroes, which insensibly causes them to imbibe their Manners and broken Speech.”⁵

Historian Mechal Sobel speculates that this phenomenon was so prevalent that many white Southerners did not even bother to mention it because, as the British actress Kemble speculated, they themselves were a product of this Africanization of standard

³ Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839*, repr. in *Principles and Privilege: Two Women’s Lives on a Georgia Plantation*, ed. by Dana D. Nelson (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995), 211.

⁴ *Southern Presbyterian Review* 1 (June 1847), 90, quoted in John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), 100

⁵ Edward Kimber, “Observations in Several Voyages and Travels in America in the Year 1736 (From *The London Magazine*, July, 1746),” *William & Mary Quarterly*, 1st series, 15 (1907), 158, quoted in Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987), 137.

English and thus did not find it out of the ordinary.⁶ When they did notice the influence, though, Southern whites also saw lurking in the corruption of English the insidious symptoms of another type of influence. A contributor to the *Southern Evangelical Messenger* warned in 1820, for instance, that slaves

are of necessity the constant attendants upon children in their early years. From them they mostly learn to talk; from them their minds receive their first impressions; and from them a *taint* is often acquired which remains through the whole of their succeeding lives. Superstition takes complete possession of a benighted mind, and hence the ready credit which is given to tales of witchcraft, or departed spirits and of supernatural appearances, with which servants terrify the young committed to their care, and impressions are made, which no after efforts of the understanding are able entirely to eradicate.⁷

In order to counteract this spread of supposedly degenerative African superstitions, the aforementioned Presbyterian author even recommended teaching slaves standard English.⁸

However, in many cases, when it came to white children absorbing these folk beliefs or folk stories along with vernacular forms of English, the horse was already out of the barn. Years after their telling, Grace Elmore remembered the impact of the stories she heard from her Gullah slaves:

Only those who in their childhood have listened to those negro tales can believe that the negro possessed the power to excite—the intense interest with which we hung upon each word, eyes fastened upon the ever changing face, and catching in every dramatic tone a realization of what was being told by Africa or Minia. Her

⁶ *The World They Made Together*, 138.

⁷ *Southern Evangelical Messenger* 2 (April 29, 1820), 32, quoted in Blassingame, 100-01.

⁸ *Ibid.*

great story was of the spirit-of-evil, personified by ‘Ole Henry Scratch,’ and she presented to our minds, as weird a picture of utter isolation as I’ve met with in literature.⁹

Like Elmore, Virginia Clay-Clopton remembered growing up in Alabama and hearing “ghastly ghost stories” from servants who warned that “evil spirits would descend on them” if she and other white children did not go to sleep when ordered.¹⁰ Likewise, Eugène A. Vail, a French visitor to Monticello, recorded in 1841 how a female slave of the Randolph family told the white children folktales that included African words and rhythms, as well as a character he labeled an “African Forest Spirit.”¹¹ Nearby, in Prince Edward County, William Branch Jr. acknowledged in verse how “Of the pert youngling quits the mother’s side / To mess with slaves, to follow as they guide . . . He learns their jargon, all their maxims learns.”¹²

Such instances were typical of the beginning of a lifelong pattern of contact with Afro-Southerners and their folklore that shaped not just the language but also the stories

⁹ Box One, Folder Five, in the Grace B. Elmore Papers #234, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 34-35.

¹⁰ *A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay of Alabama, Covering Social and Political Life in Washington and the South, 1853-66*, ed. by Ada Sterling (New York: De Capo Press, 1905), 4, quoted in Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1988), 155.

¹¹ *De la Littérature et des Hommes de Lettres des États-Unis d’Amérique* (Paris: C. Gosselin, 1841), 321-33, quoted in Sobel, *The World They Made Together*, 141-42.

¹² Poem: William Branch, Jr., quoted in Herbert Clarence Bradshaw, *History of Prince Edward County, Virginia, from Its Earliest Settlements Through Its Establishment in 1754 to Its Bicentennial Year* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1955), 277-78, quoted in Melvin P. Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s through the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 294.

of their white masters and neighbors. “Blacks and whites continued to interact all through their lives,” says Sobel of this formative influence, which was prevalent even in the eighteenth century, “But this first period of intimacy probably had a lifelong effect on whites’ values and identity.”¹³ A case in point was the humorist William Tappan Thompson, the author of *Major Jones’s Courtship* (1843), *Chronicles of Pineville* (1845), and *Major Jones’s Sketches of Travel* (1848). Like Clay-Clopton and Elmore, at some point in time in his life Thompson must have been part of an audience for tales that were told by, or that originated among, Afro-Southerners. In the December 18, 1879, issue of the Atlanta *Daily Constitution*, the newspaper’s editor, Joel Chandler Harris, requested subscribers “who may chance to remember any of the negro fables and legends so popular on the old plantation . . . to send us brief outlines of the same” (3). Thompson apparently obliged him with examples, for “Uncle Remus” thanked Thompson for his “invaluable contributions to his stock of plantation folk-lore” in the December 20 issue of the *Constitution* (3).¹⁴

But this anecdote alone—indirect and oblique as it is—may be the sole admission by any of the Humorists regarding their exposure to or knowledge of non-white folklore. Unfortunately, there are very few documents by the Humorists themselves about their work and none addressing their source material or their own biographies, including

¹³ *The World They Made Together*, 147.

¹⁴ I am indebted to Herbert P. Shippey, whose *William Tappan Thompson: A Biography and Uncollected Fictional Writings* (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of South Carolina, 1991) brought this exchange to my attention.

information about any personal relationships with non-whites.¹⁵ Their texts, on the other hand, contain evidence of such contact, with plots, characterizations, and motifs common in or unique to non-white folklore. Given the absence of archival evidence of cultural exchange, it is important first to describe the circumstances that would have enabled such contact and transmission to occur, even though white Southerners of that era (and since then) often denied the likelihood.

This cultural exchange was the consequence of a pattern of opportunities that began in childhood with white children and black nurses or house servants and extended into social, occupational, and leisure relationships in which non-slaveholding whites also participated. This series of shared spaces and experiences facilitated the exposure to and the borrowing and adaptation of African and Afro-Southern culture by Southern whites, including the folklore of the former. The humorists' appropriation of folklore from other races—even second-hand from other whites—will be thus understood as a natural, and perhaps inevitable, phenomenon through documentation of such points of contact in an interracial society characterized by a creolized culture.¹⁶

¹⁵ Augustus Baldwin Longstreet is unique in leaving behind enough letters to compile a book; see Jimmy Ray Scafidel, *The Letters of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet* (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of South Carolina, 1976). A few letters by Thompson, chiefly related to editorial matters or publishing arrangements, are scattered among archives at the of Georgia, at Georgia State College and University, and at the University of South Carolina; the same is true of Thomas Bangs Thorpe, with a handful of correspondence located in collections at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the New York Public Library, and the University of Virginia. There are some letters from Johnson Jones Hooper and his family to each other at the University of North Carolina, and records dealing with the estate and business partnership of Henry Clay Lewis are located at the University of Texas. That, unfortunately, is the extent of manuscripts by and relating to the humorists.

¹⁶ Cultural exchange occurred in both directions, of course, and Afro-Southern folklore itself was a creolized genre. Lawrence Levine speculates that for the number of slave

Likewise, relationships between Native Americans and white Southerners encouraged the propensity for cultural exchange between these two groups as well. Such contact occurred even before the first groups of Africans arrived on the continent in 1619. And like the legal restrictions defining the white/black experience of the Old South, official policies of removal as well as racism and fear did not preclude relationships of many different types between whites and Native Americans, nor did it prevent the transmission of folkways from occurring between the two groups. William Gilmore Simms in particular was fascinated with and made substantial use of Native American culture in his oeuvre. In what may be an appropriate description of all these authors' interest in non-white folklore despite official policy, John Caldwell Guilds explains Simms's embrace of Native American folklore by speculating that "when his observations came in conflict with social, moral, or religious principles, Simms gave priority to his own judgment because he recognized that no rule could in reason be absolute."¹⁷

This attitude reflects the lived experience of the Old South, a region that for too long was interpreted through either the pronouncements of its white elites or the prism of the racial segregation that followed Reconstruction. Either of these worldviews and its

tales brought from Africa, "a roughly similar percentage were tales common in both Africa and Europe . . . [and] a third group of tales were learned in the New World both through Euro-American influence and through independent creation" ("Some Go Up and Some Go Down": The Meaning of the Slave Trickster," in *The Hofstadter Aegis: A Memorial*, ed. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974], 95).

¹⁷ Guilds and Charles Hudson, comp. and eds. *An Early and Strong Sympathy: The Indian Writings of William Gilmore Simms* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press for the South Caroliniana Library, 2003), xiv.

prescribed boundaries of relationships and culture would have been unfamiliar, if not undesirable, to many Southerners before the Civil War—white, black, and indigenous. Likewise, until the advent of “New Southern Studies,” the literature of this era and this region has been interpreted through a lens that addressed themes of race, but not with substantial attention to how non-white cultures shaped the white-authored literature of the region via creolization. Susan V. Donaldson has challenged Southern scholars to alter the traditional paradigm:

We need . . . to read southern literature from the perspective of its earliest beginnings, that is, as a ‘contact zone’ . . . where different cultures confront, intersect, and interpret one another’s otherness. What this kind of ‘contact perspective’ reveals are the multi-cultural origins of a region stereotyped and classified for far too long in homogenous terms. . . . We discover instead a region that has long functioned as the nation’s imaginative borderlands, an arena of conflicting and merging cultures.¹⁸

Donaldson’s call to action resonates on multiple levels with this project. On one hand, this dissertation’s thesis challenges conventional interpretations of the white-authored literature of the Old South as a product of Eurocentric forms and white vernacular traditions—a propensity that minimizes or ignores the contributions of African and indigenous cultures. Second, Donaldson’s summons to scholars alludes to how antebellum historical romances and Old Southwestern Humor are not only outcomes of, but are also responses to, the Old South as a cultural borderland. The depictions of the frontier’s social environment in these texts are a literal consequence of, and figuratively

¹⁸ “Literature” in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Regional Cultures: The South*, ed. William R. Ferris, et al. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004), 326.

reflect upon, the interactions that occurred in the “contact zone” of the fields, woods, domestic spaces, and streets of the Old South.¹⁹

From this perspective, the South is a middle ground. This model for understanding the experience of the frontier is “defined only partly or imprecisely by geographical considerations,” explain Sylvia L. Hilton and Cornelis A. van Minnen:

The ‘middle ground’ is above all a cultural meeting-place; a place where different peoples and cultures might coexist and interact in many ways. Interaction, of course, includes every kind of relationship, from open and violent conflict to active, voluntary cooperation, and complex combined and qualified responses in between which reveal (or conceal) all sorts of simultaneous ambivalences and evolutionary processes.²⁰

One of the “evolutionary processes” that emerges from this conceptual “meeting place” is creolization, the mutual influence of distinct cultures upon each other. The mobility of culture in this middle ground would not exist were it not for a very real and equivalent demographic volatility in the Old South. The conclusion of the War of 1812 initiated a mass migration of white Americans and their African-American slaves to the future Deep South states, primarily due to the availability of affordable land for large-scale

¹⁹ Even traditional understandings of what “frontier” implies must be re-assessed. As James Taylor Carson points out, there are Eurocentric overtones attached to this historical paradigm: “Calling the land a wild frontier rather than a people’s homeland in effect denies that the pioneers were invaders and that the Choctaws and Chickasaws were humans” who had already developed sophisticated civilizations in the region (“The Obituary of Nations: Ethnic Cleansing, Memory, and the Origins of the Old South,” *Southern Cultures* 14 [Winter 2008]: 24).

²⁰ “Frontiers and Boundaries in U.S. History: An Introduction,” in *Frontiers and Boundaries in U.S. History*, ed. Cornelis A. van Minnen and Sylvia L. Hilton, European Contributions to American Studies (Amsterdam: VU Univ. Press, 2004), 17.

agriculture.²¹ This influx of immigrants accelerated following the federal government's adoption of Indian Removal as an official policy, and as a result, the population of the counties that would become Mississippi doubled from 1810 to 1820. Likewise, Alabama's population "increased more than sixteen-fold" during the same time period, according to historians Thomas D. Clark and John D. W. Guice, leading to the trend being known in its own day as "Alabama Fever."²² This human movement contributed to the fluidity of social and racial categories in the Old Southwest. Moreover, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, this emigration and social instability fueled either anxiety or approbation among the South's writers, depending on how invested they were in traditional social hierarchies. The novelists tended to fall into the former category; the humorists, the latter. Likewise, the crossing of racial and class boundaries was also portentous or promising, which contributed to the different modes of appropriation of vernacular (including non-white) culture between the genres and their competing responses to creolization.

A Picture of the Family Circle

In her introduction to the six-volume collection of her ancestor's letters, Mary Simms Oliphant concludes her description of Simms's family by emphasizing that "a picture of

²¹ James David Miller argues that these emigrants' "anxious pursuit of western lands cannot be understood apart from their desire to prosper in the cotton marts of the nation and the world" (*South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South*, The American South Series [Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press / William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, Southern Methodist Univ., 2002], 9).

²² *The Old Southwest, 1795-1830: Frontiers in Conflict* (1989; reprint, Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 164.

the Simms family circle would be incomplete indeed without mention of the negroes who lived at Woodlands,” the author’s plantation in South Carolina.²³ Oliphant writes that “Northern visitors at Woodlands . . . drew a pleasant picture of general well-being of the Negroes,” with Simms himself “color[ing] the picture with such descriptions as that of the evening when the Negroes gathered delightedly and watched through the long windows of the gallery the charades and dancing of the family and the guests.”²⁴

Oliphant’s description caters to the white fantasy of well-mannered slaves seemingly content with their lot on the periphery of white family life. Historically speaking, though, rather than being marginalized as spectators, Afro Southerners played a much more central role in antebellum plantation life. The physical proximity alone of Afro-Southerners on plantations and farms made their existence—and by extension, their culture—impossible for whites to ignore, contrary to later perceptions of the Old South such as Oliphant’s that imagined more significant boundaries between white and black lives.²⁵

The omnipresence of Afro-Southerners disturbed Fannie Kemble, who wrote that despite the “personal offensive[ness]” of slaves as a consequence of their allegedly poor personal hygiene, “this very disagreeable peculiarity does not prevent Southern women

²³ William Gilmore Simms, *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, ed. Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, and T. C. Duncan Eaves (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1952–1956), 1: cli.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ For discussion on the phenomenon of anomalous representations of the intimacy of race relations in the Old South, see Jeff Forret, introduction to *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2006), and Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox*, pp. 308, 433–43.

from hanging their infants at the breasts of negresses, nor almost every planter's wife and daughter having one or more little pet blacks sleeping like puppy-dogs in their very bedchamber, nor almost every planter from admitting one or several of his female slaves to the still closer intimacy of his bed."²⁶ Caroline Gilman concurred, but with less disdain. "I must ask indulgence of general readers for mingling so much of the peculiarities of negroes with my details," she wrote as a preface to her contributions to William Burton's *Cyclopedia of Wit and Humor* (1857). "Surrounded with them from infancy, they form a part of the landscape of a Southern woman's life; take them away, and the picture would lose half of its reality."²⁷

In fact, as historians of the Old South have demonstrated in studies of antebellum plantation life, white and black lives were inextricably interwoven.²⁸ Women like Kemble, Gilman, and their slaves, says Fox-Genovese, "shared a world of physical and emotional intimacy that is uncommon among of women of antagonistic classes and different races," but which arose due to the prescriptive social, gender, and economic norms that governed women's lives on plantations.²⁹ On one hand, in order to train domestic servants, their white mistresses assumed a significant role in raising them, says

²⁶ *Journal of a Residence*, 23.

²⁷ "Negro Domestics," in *Cyclopedia of Wit and Humor of America, Ireland, Scotland, and England*, ed. William E. Burton (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1857), 139.

²⁸ In addition to Sobel, Fox-Genovese, and Blassingame, see also Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976); and Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999).

²⁹ *Within the Plantation Household*, 35.

Fox-Genovese, “presid[ing] over a kind of primary school for servants.”³⁰ Sometimes, though, the relationship between master and slave came to be understood as something less self-interested (at least according to the whites themselves). Letitia Burwell remembered, for instance, how “my mother and grandmother were almost always talking over the wants of the negroes—what medicine should be sent, whom they should visit, [and] who needed new shoes, clothes or blankets,” which would be distributed on rounds of the quarters that Burwell herself made.³¹

At times that sense of duty even appeared to become conflated (again in the minds of the whites themselves) with obligations more characteristic of kinship than of the mutual material dependence of the master/slave relationship. For example, Sobel documents how families, including the Washingtons, understood their slaves to be foster members of their family. When one of Martha Washington’s slaves ran away, her husband’s attempts to find the woman, says Sobel, reflect the degree to which “[Martha] Washington was emotionally involved with this woman. . . . [A]lthough George was seeking her as a stepfather might a runaway stepdaughter, he was ready to treat her as property at one and the same time.”³² Likewise, on a much less illustrious level, historian Walter Johnson cites an example of what he calls this “incongruous paternalism” and notes the ironic affection that one slave trader felt toward his own slaves in an 1835 letter

³⁰ Ibid., 153.

³¹ Letitia M. Burwell, *A Girl’s Life in Virginia Before the War* (New York: F. A. Stokes Co., 1895), 7, quoted in Sobel, *The World They Made Together*, 138.

³² Sobel, *The World They Made Together*, 139.

home to his wife while on a trip selling other Afro-Southerners: “*Howdy to the Negroes,*” he wrote sunnily.³³

These relationships across racial lines on large farms and plantations began early; black children and white children often interacted as playmates rather than as masters and servants. For instance, the Virginia novelist John Esten Cooke remembered that as a boy, his and his brother’s closest companions were his father’s slaves: “Henry and myself, with our ‘tail,’ as the Scotch say, of little negroes, wandered over the domain of Glengary at our own will and pleasure.”³⁴ Sometimes the intimacy of those childhood relationships blurred important boundaries. Cooke, for instance, remembered “fighting negro Jim at the overseer’s barn.”³⁵ Likewise, James Williams, an escaped slave whose parents were born in Africa, wrote that George Larrimore, his master’s son,

was just ten days older than myself; and I was his playmate and constant associate in childhood. I used to go with him to his school, and carry his books for him as far as the door, and meet him there when the school was dismissed. We were very fond of each other, and frequently slept together. He taught me the letters of the alphabet, and I should soon have acquired a knowledge of reading, had not George’s mother discovered her son in the act of teaching me.³⁶

³³ Isaac to Harriet Jarratt, November 9, 1835, Jarratt/Puryear Papers, Records of Antebellum Southern Plantations on Microfilm From the Revolution to the Civil War, ed. Kenneth M. Stampp (Bethesda, Md.: Univ. Publications of America, 1988), quoted in Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999), 55.

³⁴ Mary Jo Jackson Bratton, “John Esten Cooke: The Young Writer and the Old South,” Ph.D. diss., The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 1969, 65.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁶ *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave, who was for Several Years a Driver on a Cotton Plantation in Alabama* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 28.

But what did Williams teach young Larrimore? In return for the rudiments of European forms of knowledge, did—as the anecdotes at the beginning of this chapter also imply—Williams and his fellow Afro-Southerners share their own cultural capital with their white counterparts? Like many white families in the South (including Simms, the son of an Irish immigrant), many slaves (like Williams, the son of Africans) were only a generation or two removed from their ancestral land and culture. Moreover, some of these voices at this time were still able to articulate the stories of their native lands. Contrary to Richard Dorson and others who claim that Afro-Southern folklore was largely a product of white influence rather than adaptations of African traditions that survived the Middle Passage, Lawrence W. Levine argues:

Perhaps at no other point in United States history is the term *Afro-American* a more accurate cultural designation than when it is applied to black Americans in the mid-nineteenth century. The essence of their thought, their world view, their culture, owed much to Africa, but it was not purely African; it was indelibly influenced by the more than two hundred years of contact with whites on American soil, but it was not the product of an abject surrender of all previous cultural standards in favor of embracing those of a white master.³⁷

Of course, the African folktales told by slaves as well as African culture in general had not remained unaltered by the time of Williams or Simms; processes of cultural exchange and creolization are reciprocal. But as Melville Herskovits, Michael Gomez, and John Thornton have demonstrated, Africanisms were preserved or renegotiated by slave and free black communities in the United States, albeit often in forms that reflected the assimilation of tribal distinctions into a more generalized

³⁷ *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 135.

identity.³⁸ Consequently, rather than listening to extemporaneous New World creations or variations on European folktales, were white southerners like Clay-Clopton and Elmore an audience to expressions—albeit mediated ones, as Levine says—of the African Diaspora?

Laboring Indiscriminately

Using census data, historian James Oakes has determined that slaveownership and thus the master/slave relationships associated with opportunities for cultural exchange were more common than some may assume. Oakes claims, “For the first half of the nineteenth century, about a third of all southern white families held slaves, and the fraction never went below a fourth before the Civil War. . . . In some of the most heavily populated slave states—South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia—between thirty-five and fifty percent of the white families held slaves in 1860.”³⁹ The magnitude of slaveownership as well as the variance between those figures, explains Oakes, is a

³⁸ Thornton writes that “Afro-Atlantic culture became more homogenous than the diverse African cultures that composed it, merging these cultures together and including European culture as well” (*Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680*, Studies in Comparative World History [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998], 206). See also Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1998); and Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, whose *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* de-emphasizes continuities from specific African traditions in favor of the creation of syncretic cultural forms in new world slave communities (1976; rev ed., Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

³⁹ *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 40. Oakes is measuring households that owned slaves during the antebellum period.

consequence of the mercurial economic fortunes of whites in the Old Southwest, seasonal requirements for labor, and the fact that most masters held no more than five slaves.⁴⁰

For many white Southerners, even owning one slave was a sign of social prestige as well as economic status. Walter Johnson describes it as “a way of coming into their own in a society that had previously excluded them.” Moreover, the very potential to become slaveholders, even on a small scale, was enough, says Johnson, to ally plain or poor whites’ political interests with those of their wealthier, slaveowning counterparts.⁴¹

However, despite the illusion or promise of white racial solidarity, the public rhetoric that drew abstract boundaries dividing whites and blacks did not necessarily preclude informal relationships between members of different races. This was the case among both slaveholders and non-slaveholding whites, the latter of whom often put their own socioeconomic interests before race loyalty, especially when there was something to be gained materially by interacting with Afro-Southerners. Jeff Forret argues that “race relations were not predetermined but rather negotiated continually by individuals acting in specific contexts. . . . Slaves and poor whites in the Old South overcame racial barriers to mingle in any number of ways that should not have occurred in a society rigidly divided by race.”⁴² In fact, Forret and other historians point out that many of the ways in which non-slaveholding whites associated with Afro-Southerners, including illicit economic transactions, sexual relationships, and leisure activities, posed a threat to

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Soul by Soul*, 80.

⁴² *Race Relations at the Margins*, 16.

slaveowners' imagined or attempted dominance of blacks and of the local economy as well as to ostensible elite white sexual mores.⁴³

But while these instances of physical proximity among blacks and plain or poor whites threatened the slaveowners' fantasies of hegemony, they also enriched the lives of non-elite whites—not only fiscally but culturally as well, since many of the likely sites and contexts of interracial contact, then as today, encouraged the sharing of anecdotes and stories, including the traditional narratives whose status and authority originated in previous generations of a particular culture. And while a story might have a special significance in the culture of the storyteller, it could be and was appreciated and adapted by listeners or readers from other cultures.⁴⁴

Like Ely and Forret, Timothy Lockley points out that non-slaveholding whites and Afro-Southerners were often neighbors in the Old South, a proximity that would easily facilitate not just personal relationships but also this type of cultural exchange. In William Tappan Thompson's hometown of Savannah, for instance, an antebellum white woman complained that the streets in one neighborhood were "always so thronged by sailors, slaves and rowdies of all grades and color [sic], that it is not safe for ladies to

⁴³ See Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 74-114; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 22; and Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 116-21.

⁴⁴ Stith Thompson cites "tradition" and the "authority of antiquity" as the two means used by storytellers to give folklore "interest and importance" (*The Folktale* [1946; repr., Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977], 5). I will also follow Thompson's very broad and inclusive categorization of folklore that includes "all forms of prose narrative, written or oral, which have come to be handed down through the years" which reflects a raconteur's disinterestedness in genre taxonomies: "[a scholar] must realize that the men and women who tell them neither know nor care about his distinctions" (4, 7).

walk there alone.”⁴⁵ Blacks and non-slaveholding whites also lived side by side in the rural spaces of the Old South. “Shunted to more marginal, unproductive, or depleted lands,” explains Forret, “poor whites had the greatest opportunities for regular contact with slaves at the ragged fringes of the plantation economy.”⁴⁶ As a result, like plantation children, the offspring of non-slaveholders could and did interact with their Afro-Southern peers, leading to friendships that sometimes lasted into adulthood. “We thought well of the poor white neighbors. . . . We colored children took them as playmates,” remembered a former slave in North Carolina.⁴⁷ In Virginia, Frederick Law Olmsted was “struck with the close cohabitation and association of black and white. . . . children . . . playing together ([and] not going to school together).”⁴⁸ That youthful familiarity could be problematic when children grew older. Forret cites the case of William Vandeford, a poor white laborer in North Carolina, who “lived for many years” with a slave belonging to a nearby farmer. One evening, the slave called Vandeford by the latter’s first name, at which another white man took offense. Refusing to allow the man to whip the slave for

⁴⁵ Emily Burke, *Pleasure and Pain: Reminiscences of Georgia in the 1840s* (1850; repr., Savannah: Beehive Press, 1991), 17, quoted in Timothy James Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia, 1750-1860* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2001), 47.

⁴⁶ *Race Relations at the Margins*, 13.

⁴⁷ George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972), Vol. 15, pt. 2, 345, quoted in Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 35.

⁴⁸ *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller’s Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. (1861; repr., New York: Random House, 1984), 31.

disrespect, Vandeford threatened the white and explained that he “and the boy had been raised together and the boy always called him by that name.”⁴⁹

If not swapped across tables, over fences and on porches, stories could be exchanged between Afro-Southerners and non-slaveowning whites on the job, for integrated workplaces were common in the Old South. The humorist Hardin E. Taliaferro worked alongside slaves in his brother’s Tennessee tanyard, for instance, and blacks and whites were also co-workers in Southern mills, fields, and on rivers.⁵⁰ The amicability between members of both races on the job surprised some observers. When James Silk Buckingham visited a cotton factory near Charlottesville, Virginia, he reported that “both spinning and weaving are carried on [here]; and whites and blacks work indiscriminately together.” When Buckingham visited another cotton factory, this one in Athens, Georgia, he observed that despite blacks and whites working side by side, “There is no difficulty among them on account of colour . . . the white girls working in the same room and at the same loom with the black girls; and boys of each colour, as well as men and women, working together without apparent repugnance or objection.”⁵¹

It was far more common, though, for whites and blacks—of both sexes—to work together as agricultural laborers. Like the humorist Henry Clay Lewis, whose family was

⁴⁹ Affidavit of Patsey Vandeford, March 26, 1834, in Governor’s Papers, Gov. David L. Swain, vol. 68, 497, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, quoted in Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 37.

⁵⁰ Introduction to *The Humor of H.E. Taliaferro*, ed. Raymond C. Craig (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1987), 10.

⁵¹ *Slave States of America* (London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1842), 2: 411, 112-13, quoted in Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 46, 49.

ruined by the Panic of 1837, poor or plain whites were frequently hired by slaveowners to supplement their enslaved workforce. The overseers were typically white, but whites would work—as Lewis said he did—as “the companion of negroes” in the fields of the South.⁵² Similarly, passing through Georgia, white traveler Emily Burke noticed these “white women and black women” laboring in fields “without distinction.”⁵³

Nor was this a practice limited to poor whites. Often yeoman farmers would hire other whites’ slaves (or pay the slaves directly) if they did not own any themselves. Abner Ginn of Nix Crossroads, South Carolina, was part of the latter group. Ginn would hire James Ruth, a neighbor’s slave, to work on his off-time over the weekends to do improvements to Ginn’s small farm.⁵⁴ And even if they did own a slave or two, it would not be uncommon for yeoman farmers or their wives or children to labor side by side with their slaves, just as Simon Suggs is supposed to be doing with Bill in the opening sketch of *Some Adventures*. Similarly, Ginn’s neighbor Ellender Horton defended her disheveled physical appearance to her community in September 1856 by explaining that “[m]e and sister worked together with the colored women in the field . . . and made the crop” because “we had no men servants.”⁵⁵

⁵² [Madison Tensas], *Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor*, ed. and with a new introduction by Edwin T. Arnold (1850; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 1997), 33.

⁵³ Burke, 77, quoted in Lockley, *Lines in the Sand*, 36.

⁵⁴ McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 62.

⁵⁵ Claim of Ellender Horton, Beaufort, SCCR, RG 217, File #8006, quoted in McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 80.

There were other occupations that brought non-slaveholding whites and blacks together. Aside from growing crops, raising beef and pork was a major, but often ignored, aspect of the Southern economy and landscape; historians Thomas Clark and John Guice estimate that “the value of Southern livestock in 1860 was twice that of the same year’s cotton crop and roughly equal to the combined value of all Southern crops.”⁵⁶ Consequently, many whites, slaveholders or not, “took advantage of the vast expanses of unimproved and unenclosed land to range large herds of swine, cattle, and sheep.”⁵⁷ In most cases the animals were permitted to graze until it was time to gather them for market. Then, or in some rare cases on a permanent basis, the antebellum equivalent of cowboys would be hired to collect and manage the free-ranging herds. Men who did this type of work represented the entire spectrum of the Old Southwest, say Clark and Guice: “Not only were mounted herdsmen of various nationalities more common in the lower Mississippi Valley than is generally acknowledged but also Indians rounded up their stock on horseback, as did black slaves.” Regarding the latter, the two historians cite the research of Peter Wood, who documented the similarities between the horsemanship and herding skills of Afro-Southerners in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century South Carolina and those of cultures in Africa’s Gambia River valley.⁵⁸ And according to accounts by one of their contemporaries, Mississippi author J. F. H. Claiborne, the experience of the

⁵⁶ *The Old Southwest*, 100. Chapter Six in particular discusses this sector of the Southern economy.

⁵⁷ McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 64.

⁵⁸ Clark and Guice, *The Old Southwest*, 105, 114. Their reference to Wood is to *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Norton, 1974).

Old Southwest's cowboys anticipated the later, romantic image of those of the Wild West, even down to campfires at night with jugs of "old corn."⁵⁹ One wonders what kind of yarns were swapped over those fires, and, given the mixed race of the cowboys, among whom they originated.

Like cattle driving, another common profession that "guaranteed intense contact among" its members in the Old South was the transportation of freight along the region's waterways by rafts or bateaus. Like the cowboys, the interracial raft crews that are described in Simms's stories such as "Ephraim Bartlett" (1852) and *Paddy McGann* (1863) were a frequent occurrence. Ely explains that "the boatmen's calling, like so many others, brought slaves, white men, and free blacks together."⁶⁰ The river, says Ely, represented freedom, both metaphorically and practically.⁶¹ Not only did serving as crew—or in many cases on Virginia's Appomattox River, becoming a captain or even owner—of one of these hand-poled boats allow Afro-Southerners (and their white shipmates) to travel beyond the horizons of their isolated communities, but the entrepreneurial nature of this business also allowed for economic independence. Here, too, in the long trips down and up river, in a trade that cultivated "the fluidity of relations

⁵⁹ "Rough Riding Down South," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (June 1862), 29-37, quoted in Clark and Guice, *The Old Southwest*, 105.

⁶⁰ Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox*, 157, 155. Ely also discusses the presence of Afro-Southerners among Farmville's carpenters (123), bricklayers (125), and wagoners (145), which was representative of how "biracial work was the norm" (157). For further discussion and examples of black tradesmen and artisans working or competing with their white counterparts, see Lockley, *Lines in the Sand*, 65-74.

⁶¹ *Israel on the Appomattox* 172.

between free people of the two races,” one wonders: what kind of stories were told to pass the time?⁶²

“How he came with those negroes”

Off the clock, blacks and whites in the Old South also shared a comparable degree of social intimacy in certain leisure activities, including drinking, gambling, and field sports. Though distinctions were drawn rhetorically between members of different races by apologists for slavery, historical records illustrate how—as in the aforementioned occupational relationships—these boundaries often disappeared or were overlooked during Southerners’ free time. For example, even the reserve that Fanny Kemble uses to describe her relationship with her husband’s slaves disappears on her frequent fishing trips with “my boy Jack,” the slave who teaches her about the wildlife surrounding her Georgia home.⁶³ Likewise, in his *Carolina Sports by Land and by Water* (1846), William Elliott’s slaves are fixtures in his anecdotes about hunting and fishing. In most sketches he admires their daring and skill, including an expedition after giant rays in which one Afro-Southerner dives into the water after one of these fish: “we have few sportsmen who would venture on the daring feat of the African ‘May.’ Had he belonged to the Saxon or Norman race, he had probably been knighted, and allowed to quarter on his shield the

⁶² Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox*, 173. See also Thomas C. Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks, and the Western Steamboat World* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁶³ *A Residence in Georgia*, 123.

horns of the devil-fish . . . As it is, his praise had almost been unsung, ‘sacro quia caret vate.’”⁶⁴

Elliott’s favorite hunting companion is his slave Robin, whom he admires as much for his quick-wittedness and glibness as for any sporting prowess. In fact, Elliott delights in recounting Robin’s tricks and repartee, which are often at his or at other whites’ expense. After one hunt, for instance, in which a white sportsman incorrectly believes that he has killed his first deer, the young man eagerly practices “*hunter’s law*” and begins painting his face with the animal’s blood. But before anybody has a chance to point out that he did not fire the mortal shot, Robin sidles up to the eager hunter and comments for all to hear that “Maussa Tickle, if you wash off dat blood dis day—you neber hav luck again so long as you hunt.” Picking up on the joke, Elliot and the other hunters agree. Consequently, the “the proud novice,” “his face glaring like an Indian chief’s in all splendor of war-paint,” greeted that night his “young and lovely wife, his face still adorned with the stains of victory”—much to her chagrin—and not until then is he told that it was another man, not he, who killed the deer.⁶⁵

Such amicable relationships in social settings were not exclusive to masters and slaves. Elliott also includes a short story titled “The Fire Hunter” in *Carolina Sports* in which a white overseer and a slave conspire together to kill a large deer secretly, but as

⁶⁴ *William Elliott’s Carolina Sports by Land and Water, including Incidents of Devil-Fishing, Wild-Cat, Deer and Bear Hunting, Etc.* (1846; repr., Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1994), 19. Elliott misquotes Horace: “Because they lack a sacred bard” (John Devoe Belton, comp., *A Literary Manual of Foreign Quotations, Ancient and Modern* [New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1891], 23).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 155-56. For anecdotes in which Robin talks his way out of unpleasant tasks at Elliott’s own expense, see pp. 157-58 and 187.

the story is a polemic decrying poaching and fire hunting, the stilted tale ends badly—the slave’s brother is mortally wounded by mistake. Not all non-elite interracial social relationships ended so morbidly. Frequently they centered around drinking and gambling, which Forret and other historians interpret as activities with symbolic connotations of egalitarianism and autonomy. The former explains that “When slaves and poor whites recognized their shared subordinate status, camaraderie rather than conflict characterized many of their social encounters.”⁶⁶

Though these pastimes, symbolic or not, were commonplace—as Simon Suggs’s and Bill’s willingness to play cards together illustrates—such interracial diversions were not condoned by the legal and moral authorities of the South. Ironically, it is often legal proceedings that indicate the extent of this pattern of behavior. In Laurens District, South Carolina, for instance, a white man named Edward Neil was called upon by a court to explain why he was gambling with “four negroes,” including a freedman; Neil responded that “this Boy Tom owes him a dollar and that was how he came with those negroes.” Likewise, two other whites in Fairfield District were indicted for gambling with two black counterparts. Even a former slave, Henry Bibb, would decry the phenomenon from a religious standpoint: “The poor and loafing class of whites, are about on a par in point of morals with the slaves in the South. . . . They associate much with the slaves; [and] are often found gambling together on the Sabbath.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 17.

⁶⁷ Laurens District, Court of Magistrates and Freeholders, Trial Papers, folder 45, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, quoted in Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 57-58; *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave*,

Authorities attached a similar stigma to interracial drinking. Officials in Johnston County, North Carolina, described in an 1857 court case a corn shucking that both blacks and whites attended. Just as much corn seemed to have been drunk as shucked, and it wasn't until "about midnight when they ceased to work."⁶⁸ More frequently, though, groggeries or groceries (purveyors of alcohol) were the sites of interracial drinking. Henrico County, Virginia, authorities arrested one man three times by 1853 for serving alcohol and having "an unlawful assemblage of negroes in his house." Three years earlier in Wayne County, North Carolina, Alvin Thornton was likewise charged with serving alcohol to groups "of persons, white and black, in the day time and the night, on work-days and Sundays, at public and private times."⁶⁹

While antebellum women were not immune to drinking or dice, the preponderance of cases brought against men and the cultural connotations of those activities in the South have led historians from Daniel Hundley to John Shelton Reed to characterize these pastimes as chiefly masculine in nature.⁷⁰ Forret speculates that

Written by Himself with an Introduction by Lucius C. Matlock (New York: privately printed, 1849), 24, quoted in Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 57.

⁶⁸ Governor's Papers, Thomas Bragg, G.P. 143, folder October 1857, North Carolina Department of History and Archives, quoted in Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 55.

⁶⁹ *Richmond Enquirer*, August 26, 1853, quoted in Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 55; and *State v. Alvin G. Thornton*, 44 N.C. 252 (1853), 240-41, quoted in Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 55.

⁷⁰ Reed's *Southern Folk, Plain and Fancy: Native White Social Types* (Lamar Memorial Lectures, No. 29 [Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1986]) takes as its starting point Hundley's *Social Relations in our Southern States* (New York: H. B. Price, 1860). Between their publication, Wilbur J. Cash made the oft-quoted description about the centrality of alcohol as part of the hedonistic "hell of a fellow" image in *The Mind of the South* (New York, Vintage Books, 1941), 52.

“perhaps poor white women simply did not engage as often in leisurely pursuits with slaves that violated the law, or were more discreet about it.”⁷¹ Some examples of culturally accepted social interactions that may have fostered social relationships among black and white women included shuckings and quilting bees. Emily Burke, the Georgia tourist and travel writer, described an example of the latter hosted by the wife of a plantation overseer at which she speculated that the chief attraction may have been the “pastry of various kinds and frosted cake.”⁷²

Another category of interracial social relationships involving women in the Old South that garners more attention—at least by historians—is sexual intimacy between members of different races. And though connecting the swapping of folk stories with pillow talk is admittedly tenuous, Joshua D. Rothman observes that “sexual connections between blacks and whites were constituent of familial and communal life in that society”—a part of life that offered opportunities for blacks and whites to meet on familiar terms and potentially exchange stories from their respective cultures.⁷³

Instances of cultural exchange may have been more likely to occur in long-term consensual partnerships between whites and blacks. The commitment inherent in this category of relationships seemed to evoke a strong reaction from some elements within the white community, thus bringing these unions to light via court records, journal

⁷¹ Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 53.

⁷² Burke, 89-90, quoted in Lockley, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 48.

⁷³ *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), 4.

entries, and newspaper accounts, more so than the sexual abuse or prostitution that were more common yet infrequently acknowledged.⁷⁴ For instance, Stephanie McCurry hypothesizes that it may not have been the unkempt attire of Ellender Horton that prompted her to defend her own reputation and that of her mother to her neighbors, but the fact she was believed to have had a longstanding affair with a mulatto man who was allegedly the father of her daughters.⁷⁵ In Charleston, Martha Bells was actually registered in census records as married to a free mulatto with whom she bore five children.⁷⁶ However, in order to escape the opprobrium attached not just to their sexual relationships, but also to their romantic feelings, some white women fled the South with their black lovers, further raising eyebrows. Susan Percy did so with a slave named John in 1857, departing Virginia, reported a Richmond newspaper, “to make their escape to a free State” in order to “hide her shame” and to attain his freedom.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ely observes that sexual relationships between black men and white women may have occurred “more often than we think,” but that when they did, or when people suspected that they did, “the white community often reacted much less repressively than it would in later eras (*Israel on the Appomattox*, 305). For a discussion of both white and black female prostitutes catering to customers across racial lines, see Lockley, *Lines in the Sand*, 51-56.

⁷⁵ McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 80. For further discussion on Southern women who flouted racial and gender norms, see Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1992); and Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997).

⁷⁶ Lockley, *Lines in the Sand*, 52.

⁷⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, November 20, 1857, quoted in Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 187.

Mixed Bloods and Mosquito Remedies

Similar patterns of interracial contact occurred between whites and Native Americans in the South as well. However, because of the frequency of these interactions or because of a comparative lack of stigma associated with them, they have been more thoroughly and frequently documented by scholars than equivalent relationships between blacks and whites in the Old South.⁷⁸ In other words, they are taken more for granted compared to the range of relationships that existed between the latter. Nevertheless, the circumstances of Native American and white contact that contributed to creolization merit review here in order to establish a reference point from which to understand the cultural material available to Southern authors.

It is important first to recognize that there were circumstances surrounding contact and cultural exchange between Native Americans and whites that were not often comparable to the same phenomena between whites and blacks. The relationships between the latter evolved out of a proximity inherent to a biracial workforce and domestic sphere. These situations certainly existed with whites and Native Americans, producing biracial Southern families, whose progeny “constituted a far larger segment of

⁷⁸ For specifics of white/Native American cultural exchange relating to locale, time, and nations, see James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001); Andrew Frank, *Creeks and Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier*, Indians of the Southeast (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 2005); Theda Perdue, “Mixed Blood” Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South, Mercer University Lamar Memorial Lectures 45 (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2002); Jack McIver Weatherford, *Native Roots: How the Indians Nourished America* (New York: Crown, 1991); and Peter C. Mancall and James H. Merrell, eds., *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers from European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500-1850* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

society than historians have previously suggested,” say Clark and Guice.⁷⁹ However, many relationships between white and indigenous peoples were associated more closely with the former’s colonization (and later, settlement) and the need to survive an alien geography occupied by sometimes-hostile nations. In the Old South, this population included “nearly 100,000 Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole” in 1795, say Clark and Guice.⁸⁰ Neal Salisbury elaborates on this difference between white and Native American interactions and white and black interactions in his observation that “Europeans adapted to the social and political environments they found, including the fluctuating ties of reciprocity and interdependence as well as rivalry. . . . They had little choice but to enter in and participate if they wished to sustain their presence.”⁸¹ In the Southeast in particular, this dependence meant that white settlers (first Spanish, then later, French, British, and American) adopted aspects of Native American culture such as dress, hunting, architecture, agricultural practices, foodways, and medicine, leading to the creolization of these practices within the region in ways that later found parallels in its white-authored literature.

The circumstances in which whites interacted with and learned from indigenous peoples varied. There were the sensational examples of captivity, when the immersion of

⁷⁹ *The Old Southwest*, 187. Perdue has fixed this gap in scholarship. For instance, she explains that “The number of mixed race children in Southern Indian societies dramatically increased throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and some of these children came to play enormously significant roles in their tribes as wealthy planters and powerful chiefs” (“*Mixed Blood*” *Indians*, 34).

⁸⁰ *The Old Southwest*, 10.

⁸¹ “The Indians’ Old World: Native Americans and the Coming of the Europeans,” in Mancall and Merrell, eds., *American Encounters*, 20.

whites in indigenous culture was a consequence of conflict.⁸² But on the other hand, there were the equally scandalous instances of whites deliberately “going native.” Theda Perdue explains that not only whites but also enslaved and free blacks “sought opportunity and freedom on the other side of the frontier” by voluntarily joining indigenous societies.⁸³ This proximity between Native American settlements and frontier communities encouraged economic relationships, too. On both an individual and a village level, Native Americans interacted with white Southerners as buyers and sellers. In his study of the eighteenth-century lower Mississippi Valley, for instance, Daniel Usner observes that Native American towns were “functioning much like colonial settlements in the regional economy.”⁸⁴ Any surplus crops or game were traded to whites for manufactured goods. The face-to-face interactions (compared to the impersonality of a large-scale market economy) encouraged relationships beyond the trade itself. Usner explains that “Indians hunting for colonial settlers formed personal bonds” in colonial Louisiana, and this region was not anomalous in this respect.⁸⁵ For example, William Byrd’s 1728 expedition to survey the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina

⁸² The most famous colonial examples of this scenario in what would become the Old South would be the captivity narratives of John Smith (*The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* [1624]), Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca (*The Narrative of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca* [1542]), and Juan Ortiz (Garcilaso de la Vega, *La Florida del Inca* [1605]). Examples of whites becoming “Indian” are discussed in the next chapter.

⁸³ “*Mixed Blood*” *Indians*, 4.

⁸⁴ *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley Before 1783* (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press for The Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1992), 168.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

includes two professional hunters from the Sapponi nation. One of them, Bearskin, is mentioned frequently throughout the text, not only for his hunting prowess but for the insights into his culture that he provided Byrd and the other colonists. Byrd reports in his journals that “In the Evening I examin’d our Indian Ned Bearskin concerning his Religion, & he very frankly gave me the following Account of it,” which included its creation myths and legends of the afterlife.⁸⁶ Though Byrd’s experience occurred a century prior to the publishing careers of the novelists and humorists examined in this study, his experience is representative of how occupational relationships between whites and First Peoples involved cultural as well as economic benefits.⁸⁷

There were other economic scenarios that brought whites and Native Americans together in the Old Southwest. To accommodate the passage of emigrants through the region, stands (inns) flourished on the major frontier byways. These were often in remote, isolated locations, where it behooved the operators to have contacts in and an understanding of the local indigenous population. Clark and Guice, for instance, report that “some of the proprietors of the stands were white men who had resided for years among the Indians and who had taken Indian wives. Others were mixed bloods.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ *Histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, ed. William K. Boyd (New York: Dover, 1967), 199.

⁸⁷ “Cumanches” served as guides and hunters for the events Thomas Bangs Thorpe describes in “Pictures of Buffalo Hunting,” for instance, a first-person account of his hunting trip to Texas, which he included in *Mysteries of the Backwoods; or, Sketches of the Southwest* (1846). Bearskin’s explanations of Indian cosmology were also available to antebellum readers thanks to the publication of Byrd’s *History* by Edmund Ruffin in 1841.

⁸⁸ *The Old Southwest*, 89.

Moreover, the inns themselves provided opportunities for members of different races and cultures to interact with and learn about each other.⁸⁹

James Axtell and other scholars have documented “how English warfare had been forced to acculturate from the earliest encounters with the Indians in the seventeenth century.”⁹⁰ Some of the “ties” that Neal Salisbury alluded to that bound Native Americans and whites were a common enemy. Native Americans were often enlisted or sometimes conscripted to join whites in campaigns against their European or indigenous foes. Even in peacetime, Usner observes that a “combination of geographical and economic conditions in Louisiana also brought soldiers and associated occupational groups—sailors and other boatmen—into close contact with peoples of different cultures.”⁹¹ Beyond practices of warfighting, the presence of Native American allies may have fostered relationships that enabled the sharing of indigenous culture with whites in camp or in garrison, including the former’s folklore.

These scenarios gave Native Americans additional economic leverage with whites in the Old Southwest. This was a footing that was not as common in black and white relationships, the exception being black market transactions or special sets of

⁸⁹ See for instance, Chapter Two’s discussion of Simms’s “Indian Sketch,” (*The Southern Literary Gazette*, November 1828) and Chapter Five’s discussion of George Washington Harris’s “Sut Lovingood at Bull’s Gap” ([Nashville] *Union and American*, Dec. 5, 1858).

⁹⁰ *Natives and Newcomers*, 325.

⁹¹ *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 220. Usner cites the use of Native American and colonial fighters in colonial campaigns against the Natchez and then the Chickasaw (220). However, some of the peacetime living conditions were so abysmal that the French soldiers would desert to Native American towns where they found life more enjoyable (240-43).

circumstances similar to the one that Ely describes between whites and an established community of free blacks in Prince Edward County. However, other categories of relationships between whites and Native Americans were comparable to the aforementioned types that existed between blacks and whites. Many whites and Native Americans worked together (alongside Africans and Afro-Southerners, too).⁹² For example, Usner has also documented how livestock management in colonial Louisiana was among the “activities [that] employed a diverse number of people and encompassed widespread intercultural interaction.”⁹³ Likewise, Native Americans’ proficiency with the light craft best suited to inland waterways and their knowledge of navigation made them

⁹² There is, of course, an important body of scholarship that addresses the relationships between Native Americans and African Americans in the Old South, including their cultural ties. See, for instance, James F. Brooks, ed. *Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2002); Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005); and Celia E. Naylor, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens*, The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008).

Afro-Southern and Native American relationships contributed to the exchange and creolization of each cultures’ folklore. Albeit beyond the scope of this study, this hybridity is important to recognize because it potentially complicates the patterns of transmission from non-white sources to the white authors, especially the humorists, who resided in a comparatively greater tri-racial world than the novelists. For instance, folklorist Stith Thompson describes the extreme perspective in his observation that the animal tales of Southeastern Native Americans tribes have “become so greatly influenced by the ‘Uncle Remus’ tales as to be at least as much negro as Indian” (Introduction to *Tales of North American Indians*, comp. Stith Thompson [1929; repr., Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000], xxii.). Subsequent folklore scholarship by William Bascom and Ernest W. Baughman has provided a clearer delineation of origins and shared tales. For an overview of the sometimes-acrimonious debate on the relationships between African-American and Native American folklore, see Alan Dundes, “African Tales Among the North American Indians,” in *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore*, rev. ed., ed. Alan Dundes (Jackson: Univ. of Mississippi, 1990), 114-25.

⁹³ *Indians, Settlers, and Slaves*, 174.

preferred boatmen in many regions of the South. In addition to hiring themselves out, they, too, shared their cultural wisdom with their white counterparts. In lower Alabama this knowledge included “how to read the currents and tides of the rivers, how to catch and cook catfish, and, equally important, how to keep unbearable mosquitoes off their bodies at night.”⁹⁴

Ultimately, these patterns of interracial contact were curtailed by the transformation of the Old Southwest in the early nineteenth century as a result of the flood of white settlers into the region. This phenomenon duplicated the same circumstances that had come close to eradicating the Native American population a century earlier in the Atlantic South. A shift from subsistence to market-oriented agriculture, the illegal seizure and sale of lands, and ultimately removal limited the scope and frequency of contact between whites and Native Americans. But even after forced migration diminished the Native American presence and lessened the chances for white exposure to indigenous culture, including its folklore, occasions to interact with and learn from Native Americans persisted. Just as Ely suggested local practice differed from official policies and rhetoric about black and white relationships, a similar flexibility could be discerned between whites and Native Americans. “Not as easily uprooted as they were controlled,” explains Usner, “the economic customs and intercultural relations fostered over the previous century would endure . . . for a long time to come.”⁹⁵ As the

⁹⁴ Ibid., 232.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 148.

subsequent chapters will illustrate, evidence of this legacy is visible in the literature of the Old South.

“Boom off for the new Canaan”

Two potential discrepancies merit explanation before an exploration of how these opportunities for cultural exchange translated into the creolization of Southern literature. The subsequent chapters will analyze how the authors of historical romances appropriated aspects of Native American culture and how the writers of sketch humor appropriated Afro-Southern culture. However, most of the aforementioned anecdotes about contact between whites and Native Americans in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century occurred in the Old Southwest, far from the seaboard cities the novelists were living in and writing from, and the majority of the instances of black and white cultural exchange cited above occurred in the Atlantic South rather than the states of the Deep South.

The shorter history of white settlement in the Old Southwest is in part responsible for the comparative prevalence of white and indigenous relationships. Because of the larger surviving population of Native Americans in the Gulf South, especially the Creek and Choctaw nations, white emigrants to these regions had more opportunities for contact with them and their culture, even after Removal. However, neither distance nor Indian policy precluded novelists living near the east coast like Simms, Cooke, and Caruthers from familiarizing themselves with their history and traditions. Simms wrote in 1859 that his sources included personal observations prior to Removal: “I have travelled, in early years, greatly in the South & South West on horseback, seeing the whole region from

Carolina to Mississippi personally, and as far back as 1825 when 2/3 was an Indian country; that I saw the red men in their own homes; could imitate them in speech.”⁹⁶

White Southern writers also compensated for their limited interpersonal contact with Native Americans in other ways, chiefly by relying on second-hand accounts and on what passed for ethnology at this time.

With respect to the incongruity of citing mid-Atlantic examples of interpersonal contact between blacks and whites as precedents for the subsequent chapters’ focus on the relationship between Old Southwestern Humor and Afro-Southern folklore, the geographic origins of the examples used here to demonstrate the extent of black and white relationships are explained by the sources cited herein: localized histories by Sobel, Ely, Forret, Lockley, and McCurry, all of whom focus on racial relationships in Virginia, the Carolinas, and coastal Georgia. And while these sources are complemented by the more wide-ranging studies of Oakes, Genovese, Fox-Genovese, and Blassingame, there is a preponderance of better-documented anecdotes from the states that had longer and more well-established judicial systems and newspapers, surviving copies of which often provide the evidence for these relationships.

However, accessibility for researchers aside, the black and white relationships that are illustrated in these texts—both histories and diaries—are not atypical of the Old South, especially its frontier from 1835 to 1861. In fact, it was these same people from the more established Southern states, both black and white, who were settling the Old Southwest together. Moreover, these Carolinians, Virginians, and Georgians carried with them their attitudes about informal interracial relationships on their journeys west. As a

⁹⁶ *Letters*, IV: 178

result, “fluidity . . . characterized territorial society” in terms of physical movement but also with respect to class and racial boundaries, according to historians Thomas Clark and John Guice.⁹⁷

This volatility was described and sometimes embodied by the authors themselves. Simms wrote in 1831, “Scarcely have [settlers to the region] squatted down in one place, and built up their little ‘improvements,’ than they hear of a new purchase, where corn grows without planting, and cotton comes up five bales to the acre, ready picked and packed—they pull up stakes and boom off for the new Canaan, until they hear of some still better, when they commence the same game.”⁹⁸ The Hooper family followed a more tempered version of this pattern of behavior. Johnson Jones Hooper’s older brother George wrote in 1833 to their eldest sibling in Wilmington, North Carolina, reporting that “Having some disposition to grow rich, I have been tempted by the glowing narrative of Louisiana settlers.” The ambitious young man compromised a year later, settling in La Fayette, Alabama, a place with “no refinement” and only “pretty good morality.”⁹⁹ Johnson Jones followed suit the next year, but only temporarily. For the next three years

⁹⁷ *The Old Southwest* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 184.

⁹⁸ *Letters*, 1: 37-38.

⁹⁹ George Hooper to deBerniere Hooper, February 3, 1833, and February 26, 1834, John deBerniere Hooper Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, quoted in Johanna Nicol Shields, introduction to *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosa Volunteers, together with “Taking the Census,” and Other Alabama Sketches* (1845; repr., Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1993), xix-xx.

he knocked about Alabama, returned east to Charleston, and then visited Texas before returning to La Fayette, “cured of the Texas Fever,” according to his brother.¹⁰⁰

As George’s comment about east Alabama suggests, the establishment of order did not always keep up with the pace of emigrants like the Hoopers. One settler wrote home that “here all society seems to participate in one common degeneracy. All seems ignoble, low, rowdy to the last extreme.”¹⁰¹ Joseph Glover Baldwin, a Virginia lawyer who himself settled in Alabama long enough to author a collection of humorous sketches entitled *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1853), described the Old Southwest as “wholly unorganized: there was no restraining public opinion: the law was well-nigh powerless—and religion scarcely was heard of except as furnishing the oaths and *technics* of profanity.”¹⁰² Absent strong central governance and beyond the influence of the church and restraint associated with community opinion, “not only did migrants freely move in and out” of the Old Southwest, observe Clark and Guice, but the region’s social hierarchy was equally permeable, “its structure . . . loose.”¹⁰³ Cultural exchange and thus creolization flourished because of the lack of well-defined boundaries between race and social class as a consequence of this flux.

¹⁰⁰ George Hooper to Archibald Hooper, April 16, 1838, Hooper Papers, quoted in Shields, introduction to *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, xxii.

¹⁰¹ [?] to Langdon Cheves Jr., December 31, 1836, Langdon Cheves Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, quoted in O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order*, 1: 352.

¹⁰² *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi: A Series of Sketches*, Library of Southern Civilization (1853; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1987), 84.

¹⁰³ *The Old Southwest*, 184.

However, my thesis about the creolization of Southern literature relies largely on circumstantial and contextual evidence, since writers like Hooper left little, if anything, in the way of a record of their own personal relationships with Afro-Southerners—particularly as regards the phenomenon of cultural exchange. But their biographies suggest that their experiences as Southerners were no different from those of their peers described above. Even though some of the Humorists may not have been slaveowners like Simms when they wrote their sketches and thus did not experience that kind of sustained relationship with Afro-Southerners, “writing was a third or fourth vocation” for some of these men, James Justus reminds us.¹⁰⁴ Thus as co-workers in tanyards, in fields, and in shops; as visitors to groceries; possibly as sexual partners; and in revivals and religious practices, the Old Southwest Humorists were undoubtedly in contact with Afro-Southerners and with their folklore on a regular basis in their biracial (and often tri-racial) communities.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Fetching the Old Southwest: Humorous Writing from Longstreet to Twain* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri, 2004), 111.

¹⁰⁵ Ely discusses the interracial membership of Prince Edward County, Virginia, churches (*Israel on the Appomattox*, 320-21), and Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, 100-01; Lockley, *Lines in the Sand*, Chap. 5; Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*, 62-68; and Christine Leigh Heyrman (*Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* [Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997], 28-76) do so more generally. And as Sobel, Blassingame, Herskovits, and Heyrman have illustrated, Southern Protestantism itself was another instance of an interracial syncretic tradition in the Old South. Sobel, for instance, writes that “in perceptions of time, in esthetics, in approaches to ecstatic religious experience and to understanding the Holy Spirit, in ideas of the afterworld and of the proper ways to honor the spirits of the dead, African influence was deep and far-reaching” (*The World They Made Together*, 3). Because Lockley points out how “Nonelite [sic] whites who sat alongside African Americans in church or at the camp meeting were most likely not the same individuals who drank and gambled with bondspeople,” and because the settings, if not the ribald flavor of Old Southwestern Humor, reflect the environment of the latter group (often directed at the former), I have

Literary Offspring

Perhaps it is a testimony to the complicated relationship of race, sex, and family in the Old South that the outcome of physical intimacy between whites and blacks and Native Americans was significant to so many whites. Chesnut herself acknowledged wryly that “our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines; and the mulattoes one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children—and every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody’s household, but those in her own she seems to think dropped from the clouds, or pretends so to think.”¹⁰⁶ Historians of the Old South have also acknowledged the importance of bi-racial Southerners. Clark and Guice assert that “large broods of mixed-blood children . . . [were] a legacy far more significant and lasting than books and roads.”¹⁰⁷

On the other hand, the antebellum literary progeny of the social intimacy between blacks and whites and Native Americans that resulted from their shared spaces, occupations, and pastimes has heretofore gone unrecognized by later literary scholars. “New Southern Studies” has begun to remedy this silence by exploring the contributions of traditionally marginalized or overlooked peoples to twentieth-century Southern literature and culture. Replacing monolithic conceptions of the South that focus less on a

refrained from a more detailed discussion of black and white relationships in religious contexts, though they existed to a comparable, if not a greater, degree as those discussed above (*Lines in the Sand*, 163).

¹⁰⁶ *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, 29. Quantitatively, Genovese estimates that about 20 percent of the Afro-American population in 1860 was biracial (*Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 414).

¹⁰⁷ *The Old Southwest*, 12.

burden of history characterized by loss with scholarly approaches that instead emphasize a hemispheric or postcolonial experience of the region has enabled authors such as Houston Baker, Jr., Jon Smith, Deborah Cohn, Riché Richardson, and James L. Peacock to acknowledge the diverse, complex, and global roots of the culture of the American South.¹⁰⁸ The subsequent chapters will apply this perspective to the texts of the antebellum period, beginning with a discussion of the product of these instances of cultural contact and exchange in the region's historical romances.

¹⁰⁸ Baker is generally acknowledged as the originator of the term—if not being the impetus for—“New Southern Studies” in *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2001). Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn have done much to “avoid modernity’s fetishization of the nation-state and the imagined community” (9) as well as “nativist assertions of community, place, the presence of the past, and so on” (5) in their collection *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2004). Richardson is Smith’s co-editor for The New Southern Studies series at the University of Georgia, whose texts include Peacock’s *Grounded Globalism: How the U.S. South Embraces the World* (2007) a wide-ranging study of the impact of global culture on Southern identity.

CHAPTER TWO

SOUTHERN NOVELISTS AND NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE

“An early and strong sympathy with the subject of the Red Men”

Though William Gilmore Simms only made three trips to the Old Southwest in his teens and early twenties, his oeuvre reflects a life-long fascination with the region's cultural geography and its imaginative applications. What he saw and heard while traveling on horseback through the wilderness of thinly settled Alabama and Mississippi to his father's plantation near Columbia, Mississippi, in 1824, 1826, and 1831 provided a lifetime's worth of inspiration for the budding author, from the exploits of the slave- and horse-stealing Murrell Gang that appeared in his novels *Richard Hurdis* (1838) and *Border Beagles* (1840), to the desultory lifestyle of white settlers that he decried in *The Social Principle* (1842) and other essays and speeches.¹ The frontier's Native American inhabitants also made a sustained impression on Simms.

An early text reflecting this enthrallment with Native American life is “Indian Sketch,” which appeared in the November 1828 issue of *The Southern Literary Gazette*. Narrated by a white traveler passing through Choctaw lands, the story is a framed anecdote describing an instance of ceremonial revenge. It begins when its unnamed narrator stops at a rustic inn in the wilderness, where he eats dinner with his host, who is of mixed race, and other Native American guests. The silence at the table impresses the

¹ For a survey of Simms's writing that stemmed from these trips, see Miriam Jones Shillingsburg, “Literary Grist: Simms's Trips to Mississippi,” *The Southern Quarterly* 41:2 (Winter 2003): 119-134.

narrator. “The half-breed has so much of the aborigine still about him,” he reports, “That he partakes of nearly the same ascetic and taciturn disposition” of the other Choctaws present (143). However, the traveler—apparently familiar with Native American character—intuits something is amiss, and after sharing his tobacco with his host and two other young Native American men, he is treated in “broken and scarcely intelligible” language to a story of a recent murder (144).

According to one of them, the local Choctaws are employed by a white planter to pick his cotton, and as a bonus earlier that afternoon, the landowner gave his workers a jug of “Fire Water.” All but one Native American, Mewanto, became drunk, and when he tried to sober up one of his friends, Oolatibbe, the latter unaccountably stabbed the former to death. Suddenly lucid, Oolatibbe “voluntarily delivered himself up to the [Choctaw’s governing] council and demanded to be led to death” (145).

The narrative returns to the present time when the storyteller informs the white traveler that “Tomorrow . . . [the murderer] will be shot.” More shocking than the crime or punishment, though, is the revelation that the perpetrator, Oolatibbe, was all this time sitting next to the narrator, unrestrained and apparently unmoved by his fate. The white traveler resolves to watch the execution, “curious to witness the final termination of this, to me, wonderful characteristic of a people, whom we have learned to despise, before we have been taught to understand” (147). Throughout the night, the condemned man “seemed to sing at times or rather muttered a few broken catches of song, monotonous and highly solemn,” and the narrator lies awake marveling at the commitment that “this ignorant savage manifested to his rude and barbarous, but really equitable laws . . .

instructing him ‘that he must not expect others to do, what he would not do himself’” (147).

The next morning brings the planned execution, which the narrator watches with morbid fascination. His attention remains focused on the stoicism of Oolatibbe, who before his death resumes singing his own elegy at the foot of his already-dug grave: “he stood as firm, proud and unbending as a Roman might be supposed to have stood, as if he disdained the addition of action to his words, the cadence, the fall, the melody and wild intonation of this high-souled savage’s voice was to me an active eloquence, which I could not misunderstand” (148). The narrator averts his eyes for the execution itself, and the story concludes with the Native Americans who carried out the sentence “slowly shoveling the earth into the grave of the murderer” (149).

The brevity of the ending may seem anti-climactic, especially compared to the details—melodramatic and sentimental as they may be—of the events leading up to Oolatibbe’s execution. Yet Simms’s youthful “Indian Sketch” is noteworthy not so much for its literary merits, as for what it illustrates about the author’s response to this cultural environment. “Indian Sketch” exemplifies Simms’s acknowledgement of a unique non-white culture in the Old South, and it represents his creative use of it in his fiction. Guilds claims that the South Carolinian “wrote more about, thought more seriously about, and almost certainly knew (and cared) more about the American Indian than any other man of letters of the nineteenth century.”² Even more than his contemporary James Fenimore

² John Caldwell Guilds and Charles Hudson, comp. and eds., *An Early and Strong Sympathy: The Indian Writings of William Gilmore Simms* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press for the South Caroliniana Library, 2003), xxix.

Cooper, Simms frequently borrowed from and romanticized Native American culture in his poetry and fiction, and his criticism reflects a fascination with their culture, history, and legends.

This familiarity is symbolized, for instance, in the way Simms positions his narrative amanuensis in “Indian Sketch” as an authority on Native American life. On one hand he scoffs at stereotypes found elsewhere in American literature, especially idealized ones: “Nothing can be more amusing to one who is at all intimate with the Indian character, than the various pictures which are given of them by the Poet and the novelist” (144).³ In contrast, the narrator emphasizes his “intimacy” and credibility by saying that he will “witness” the ceremonial execution of Oolatibbe; that he could “not misunderstand” the Native American’s feelings; and that he has to translate the story because the pidgin of the Choctaw is “scarcely intelligible” to one not familiar with it (144).

As Guilds’s claim suggests, Simms was exceptional for how eagerly and widely he sought out information on Native American culture, and the degree to which he included what he found in his writing. Simms’s ledgers and correspondence, for instance, indicate that he avidly collected anecdotes about Native American languages and customs from a variety of sources, both white and indigenous. Notebooks that Simms made in 1847 while traveling and hunting in the North Carolina mountains contain facts and

³ Simms apparently didn’t recognize his own propensity for stereotyping. There are, of course, problematic aspects to “Indian Sketch,” including its simulacraic white interpretations of Native American culture: the “taciturn” sullenness of Native Americans; the “thirsting for . . . blood” by Mewanto’s relatives; and the romantic indifference to death of Oolatibbe (143, 148). These are in addition to the denigrating and condescending Euro-centric characterizations of Native Americans as “savage.”

anecdotes he heard from white hunters about the language and habits of the “Cherokees—who, when, about 8 years ago they were to be sent beyond the Arkansas, fled to the fastness of these mountains.”⁴ Likewise, his periodical reviews and essays reveal the breadth of his reading on Native American topics. Simms eagerly noticed the scholarship of Schoolcraft, and he read or reviewed *Algic Researches, Comprising Inquiries Respecting the Mental Characteristics of North American Indians* (1839), *Oneota* (1845), and *Ethnological Researches Respecting the Red-Man of America* (1853). His sources may not have been restricted to white authors, either. For his two major non-fictional accounts of Native American history, “Thle-cath-cha. Being a few passages from Muscoghee History” (1837-1838) and “The Broken Arrow. An Authentic Passage from Unwritten American History” (1844), Simms claims that his research into the history of the Creek nation included “Sundry little particulars which [I] picked up . . . from Indian as from white authorities.”⁵

Nevertheless, Guilds and Hudson, co-editors of a volume of Simms’s work on Native American topics, report that in spite of all of the writer’s acquired knowledge of indigenous peoples, modern readers should not assume he understood completely all that he observed and read about their lives. “Despite his interest in Indian culture,” Hudson

⁴ “Personal and Literary Memorials,” Charles Carroll Simms Collection, The South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁵ “Thle-cath-cha. Being a few passages from Muscoghee History, Chapter One,” *Southern Literary Journal* 1 ns (July 1837): 394-97; repr., *Early and Strong Sympathy*, 35.

cautions, “Simms lacked the knowledge and skills to understand its complexities.”⁶

Further compromising the authenticity of his representations of Native American culture, says the ethnologist, is the fact that Simms never “gained any acceptance in a native society that would have permitted him to see the world from a native point of view. . . . He was always an outside observer.”⁷

However, seeking or valuing verisimilitude in Simms’s representations of Native American culture risks misunderstanding how and why he appropriated elements from indigenous life for his fiction. Rather than try to present facsimiles of Native American culture to his readers, Simms instead deliberately took liberties with its traditions as part of his appropriation of it, usually Anglicizing the original source or synthesizing multiple variants. These adaptations were significant enough that they usually compromised their fidelity to the original source(s). Hudson recognizes this diminished authenticity, but he also overlooks a complicated process of appropriation within the genre of historical romances in general. This assumption ignores the distinctions that Simms himself recognized between the original and his representations of it as well as the method and intent of his use of Native American culture.

Simms was, of course, no cultural anthropologist by today’s standards, and neither was he interested in authoring ethnological writing akin to that of Schoolcraft. Despite his “early and strong sympathy with the subject of the Red Men,” Simms did not include Native American culture in his texts as a means to document those people’s lives

⁶ *Early and Strong Sympathy*, xxxix. The sole example, says Hudson, is the revenge killing portrayed in “Indian Sketch.”

⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxviii

or history. His adaptations—particularly in his long fiction—contribute to narratives of the history of white settlement of the Southeastern frontier. His appropriation is typical of how the authors of antebellum Southern historical romances created a racial Other to address white anxieties about social and cultural issues arising from the settlement of the Old Southwest. This is not unusual in early American literature. Jared Gardner observes that “the meanings and metaphors contained in the notion of race often have little to do . . . with actual Indians.”⁸ Instead, these characters, and in this case, their culture, are surrogates for white American authors’ “anxieties about identity that are articulated through and transformed by the language of race.”⁹

For the antebellum Southern novelists who appropriated Native American culture and history, this incongruity reflects a social vision that they shared with an older generation of conservatives in the Atlantic South, especially regarding the perceived cost of instability in the Old Southwest, symbolized by the novels’ colonial frontier settings. Whereas the humorists incorporated Afro-Southern folklore as a means of representing the volatility within the region and to satirize paternalism’s attempts to mitigate it, novelists like Simms adapted Native American history and culture to highlight the dangers of that flux. For example, Simms featured romantic dimensions of Native American culture in these narratives because he believed their loss would be a warning of the costs associated with a failure to establish permanent communities. As a consequence,

⁸ *Master Plots: Race and the Founding of an American Literature, 1787-1845* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998), 26.

⁹ *Ibid.*

the adaptations of indigenous life in Simms's texts reflect his awareness and appreciation of Native American culture but, ironically, only in tales of its destruction.

This motif is symptomatic of what Renato Rosaldo called "imperialist nostalgia," a colonial phenomenon that occurs when "people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed."¹⁰ This dichotomy contributes to an impersonal abstraction of non-white culture in historical romances; their authors and readers can celebrate the memory of indigenous culture without having to confront the implications surrounding its disappearance. Rosaldo explains that while "imperialist nostalgia" suggests the appearance of regret, it incongruously transforms the "responsible colonial agent into innocent bystander."¹¹ By portraying Native American culture as something doomed to fail as part of the march of civilization, the historical romances did not hold whites accountable. Ironically, they helped rationalize the policies of warfare and removal that contributed to the disappearance of the culture borrowed from and mourned.

Imperialist nostalgia also contributed to a process of Othering on a dialogic level. The prescribed inclusion of voices like those represented by Native American culture and history allowed for "Authoritative discourse [to] organize around itself great masses of other types of discourse," says Mikhail Bakhtin, as part of the epic style of literature that includes historical romances. However, rather than provide an opportunity for these novels' dominant (i.e., Southern white) perspectives to respond to the challenge represented by the voices and culture of Southeastern Indians, "The authoritative

¹⁰ *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1993), 69.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

discourse itself does not merge with these. . . . It remains sharply demarcated.”¹²

Consequently, the potential for dialog is stymied by this form of appropriation.

Remaining in a separate sphere, the Native Americans’ presence in historical romances can challenge white civilization by instigating conflict, for instance, but the imperialistic logic and behavior that contributed to this friction is never meaningfully acknowledged by the narrator or by the dominant culture whose perspective the text represents.

Paradoxically, adaptations of Native American culture contribute only to narratives of the history of white settlement of the Southeastern frontier.

African American culture could perform this function in some respects, but in others it could not without raising issues that further challenged antebellum racial orthodoxy. As Toni Morrison and other scholars have illustrated, fictional representations of African American characters do have an important symbolic function in early American literature, especially for the ideological construction of race and for the defense of slavery.¹³ Likewise, as the circumstances in the previous chapter illustrate, there was no shortage of opportunities for Southern novelists to participate in the processes of cultural exchange that could also have led to their appropriation of Afro-Southern culture. However, what precluded the novelists from doing so was the limited utility of black characters and black culture for illustrating the historical interpretation of the frontier that their texts offered. On one hand, even though African-Americans contributed to the

¹² “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Univ. of Texas Slavic Series 1 (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 343.

¹³ *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992).

development of colonial America (as well as the Old Southwest), it was not a role that the novelists were eager to acknowledge. Neither were these apologists for slavery willing to recognize the existence of a culture that also suggested African-Americans were capable of developing an autonomous society, a proof of agency that undermined the demeaning logic of slavery.¹⁴ Consequently, representations of African-Americans and their culture—when they do appear in the historical romances—are stock depictions. For instance, John Owen Beaty observes that novelist John Esten Cooke “was never skillful in his delineation of the negro” and that his characters are mostly “bridle rein receivers” as part of their role as faithful retainers. Likewise, Curtis Carroll Davis claims that William Alexander Caruthers’s black characters are closer to caricatures, “introduced either for their picturesqueness or for their comedy [sic] effect.” Simms’s African-American characters are not all minstrel figures, but Mary Ann Wimsatt observes that Simms’s pattern of characterization nonetheless “stresses the ties which bind his Negroes to their owners.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Simms equated degrees of culture with the strength and stability of a society, which in his mind, equated not only a fitness for self-rule, but for imperialism as well. In “Literature and Art Among the Aborigines,” for instance, he links historical memory, the exercise of power, and aesthetics in his explanation that “The vitality of a people, their capacity to maintain themselves in recollection and to perpetuate a name through all the ordinary vicissitudes of empire, is in just proportion to their sensibilities” [*Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction, First Series* (1845; repr., Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), 128].

¹⁵ *John Esten Cooke, Virginian* (1922; repr., Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1965), 41; *Chronicle of the Cavaliers: A Life of the Virginia Novelist, Dr. William A. Caruthers* (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1953), 348; *The Comic Sense of William Gilmore Simms: A Study of the Humor in His Fiction and Drama* (Ph.D. diss., Duke Univ., 1963), 151.

An indigenous culture represented on its deathbed with the potential for sentimental adaptations had a greater value as a foil than did Afro-Southern culture, and the authors of historical romances capitalized on the original sources to provide it. But this intent compromised the extent of these novels' creolization. In spite of the transformative potential represented by interracial cultural exchange, historical romances only appropriated non-white culture to emphasize the boundaries of race and class. Consequently, these novels are not creole, which Thomas Hylland Eriksen defines as "the presence of a standardized, relatively stable cultural idiom" resulting from the mutual influence of two cultural forms.¹⁶ Instead they are literary approximations of what he describes as "cultural pluralism" in social contexts, an aggregate rather than an amalgam of influences. This conceptualization coincides with the characteristics of appropriation in these historical romances, especially the inclusion-but-segregation of non-white cultural forms and history. The presence of Native American culture in the romances is visible, yet it is never synthesized within the novels. Consequently, the historical romances retained the purity of their Eurocentric forms; outside of details contributing to the settings and plots of the novels, the texts themselves were not meaningfully influenced by the authors' appropriation of Native American culture. On a figurative level, too, the pluralized qualities of these texts allow the white characters in the novels to acknowledge but ultimately transcend this presence of the Other, similar to the phenomenon Bakhtin describes. This unilateral engagement contributes to the novels'

¹⁶ "Creolization in Anthropological Theory and in Mauritius," in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek, Ca.: Left Coast Press, 2007), 173.

singular interpretation of history as well as to the ideological dimensions inherent in this vision of the past. Namely, the use of Native American voices could articulate a conservative vision of stability for the frontier without having to respond actively to the perspectives of the Other—non-white but also non-elite—who would be victimized by it.

The antebellum South produced three major contributors to the genre of the historical romance: Simms, Cooke, and Caruthers. Their novels that feature Native American culture and history coincide with this pattern. However, thanks to Simms's longer career and more frequent use of indigenous material, there is a large group of texts to choose from to interpret the method and purpose of appropriating Native American culture in this genre. Moreover, Simms was a much more prolific critic than his peers and more frank in his discussions of how appropriation contributed aesthetically and culturally to historical romances. Consequently, he will remain the focus of analysis.

“So much raw material.”

The logic behind Simms's borrowing and adaptations of Native American culture was rooted in his theories of fiction and history. The novelist eschewed scholarly interpretations of the latter, claiming that they failed to convey what he thought was most important about the past—the character of its people and the cultural relevance of major events. Simms decried what he called “scientific” history in his 1845 essay “History for the Purposes of Art,” claiming that “We are shown the withered branches and the prostrate trunks, the blasted forms and the defaced aspects, the dry-bones of the perished

humanity; but the breath of life is gone from its nostrils.”¹⁷ In fact, Simms claimed, “We care not so much for the intrinsic truth of history” than for what it revealed about its participants and how history could inspire its readers. Consequently, the author endorsed the use of creative license when translating historical material into fiction:

Assuming that the means of [an author’s] refutation are not to be had, that he offends against no facts which are known and decisive, no reasonable probabilities or obvious inferences,—it is enough if his narrative awakens our attention, compels our thought, warms our affections, inspirits our hope, elevates our aims, and builds up in our minds a fabric of character, compounded of just principles, generous tendencies and clear, correct standards of taste and duty. (38)

Simms’s apparent dismissal of historical accuracy was not symptomatic of a cavalier disregard for the importance of history. As he explains in “History for the Purposes of Art,” he believed historical facts to be subsidiary to artistic goals:

The chief value of history consists in its proper employment for the purposes of art! [sic]—consists in its proper employment, as so much raw material, in the erection of noble fabrics and lovely forms, to which the fire of genius imparts soul, and which the smile of taste informs with beauty. . . . These are the offices of art for which she [literature] employs history, and it is these which make her not only the most lovely but the most legitimate daughter of heaven. (34)¹⁸

In fact, this mutability of history is one of the reasons Simms appreciated Native American history and culture, an affinity he acknowledges in another *Views and Reviews* essay, “Literature and Art Among the American Aborigines.” Ostensibly a review of

¹⁷ *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction, First Series*, ed. C. Hugh Holman (1845; repr., Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1962), 33.

¹⁸ Simms actually argues that the subordination of fact to interpretation makes the novelist the better chronicler of the past: “It is the artist who is the true historian. It is he who gives shape to the unheven fact, who yields relation to the scattered fragments,—who unites the parts in a coherent dependency, and endows, with life and action, the otherwise motionless automata of history. It is by such artists, indeed, that nations live” (“History for the Purposes of Art,” *Views and Reviews*, 36).

Schoolcraft's *Oneóta* and *Algic Researches*, the essay contrasts the established literature of cosmopolitan civilizations with the oral traditions of migratory people (a category in which Simms mistakenly included the indigenous population of the American South). He posits that establishing a sedentary agricultural and industrial society is responsible for the evolution of tribal folklore into civilized culture:

The Greeks had no Homer till their wanderings were over; and, with the concentration of their affections and their endowments upon a fixed abode, the American aboriginals would have looked back upon the past, gathering up, with equal curiosity and industry, its wild fragmentary traditions. These, in process of years, they would have embodied in a complete whole, and we should then have been as rigidly fettered by its details as we are now by those of Livy and Herodotus. (131)

As implied by the final sentence, Simms was not necessarily chagrined that this transformation had failed to occur. Instead, he thought authors could take advantage of the absence of a written record. Because there were “no facts which are known and decisive, no reasonable probabilities or obvious inferences,” the novelist was permitted to adapt Native American culture and history as he saw fit. Simms, as C. Hugh Holman explains, saw “in the American Indian all the materials of primitive epic art, plus a freedom from the bondage of historical record and fact, a freedom that allows the artist a full use of his imagination.”¹⁹

As a consequence of this attitude, “fidelity to the documentary record was not a priority in Simms’s historical Indian fiction,” says Hudson—an accurate estimation of the novelist’s use of tradition that recognizes the peculiarities of his historical and aesthetic

¹⁹ Introduction to *Views and Reviews*, xi.

philosophy.²⁰ But does this assessment mean that the instances of Native American culture found in Simms's texts are not authentic? Hudson believes so, but Simms's oft-reiterated conviction was that historical material was pliable. As he insisted in the Advertisement to his 1845 collection of short stories, *The Wigwam and the Cabin*, "I need not apologize for the endeavor to cast over the actual that atmosphere from the realms of the ideal, which, while it constitutes the very element of fiction, is neither inconsistent with intellectual truthfulness, nor unfriendly to the great policies of human society."²¹ In other words, Simms drew a distinction between the original and his use of it—between the desirability of the "ideal" from that of "pure truth" that Hudson does not recognize.

For example, in his 1852 review of Schoolcraft's *American Indians*, he writes that this volume's "most valuable contribution to our resources is in what may be called the Literature of the Red Man. . . . [their] fancies, myths, traditions, legends and philosophies"; in other words, Simms recognizes that Native Americans had an oeuvre of narratives unique to their culture.²² He had articulated this understanding earlier in more general terms in "Literature and Art Among the American Aborigines," where he claimed that these materials are actually a precondition to literature itself:

Art springs, slowly and painfully, from the usages of the tribes, from their sports, their toils, their religion, the egotism of the individual, or the pride of the stock,--to all of which it imparts, or seeks to impart, by little and little, the attributes of

²⁰ *Early and Strong*, xlii.

²¹ *The Wigwam and the Cabin* (1845; rep., New York: J. S. Redfield, 1856), 5.

²² "Schoolcraft's *American Indians*, and Personal Memoirs," *Southern Quarterly Review* 5 n.s. (Jan. 1852): 238-39; repr. *Early and Strong*, 121.

form, grace, colour and dignity. At first, no higher object is aimed at than simply to reconcile the struggle and impatient nature, yearning for better things, to a fate which seems unavoidable, and to a toil which needs assuasion [sic]. (128)

In fact, Simms understood that all societies possess these preconditions of “art” or literature, though he did not call these incipient materials folklore per se.²³ William J. Thomas, a British critic, had only introduced the phrase in 1846, which he used to describe the “*the Lore of the People . . . [comprising] the manners, customs, observances, superstitions, ballads, proverbs, etc.,*” from which more formal definitions have evolved.²⁴ Nevertheless, Simms’s descriptions of Native American legends and culture convey his general understanding that their traditions possessed the “common features” that folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand says “are included in most folklorists’ concepts of what comprises folklore,” namely the oral transmission of group traditions.²⁵

Compared with this understanding of how Native Americans created and communicated folklore within their own culture, Simms’s opinion on how authors of romances were licensed to adapt Native American folklore for their fiction is very

²³ In “Modern Prose Fiction” Simms says that all societies, even aboriginal ones, have a creative narrative impulse, though “if inferior in polish and variety, do not seem to have been less bold than those of the Arabians, from whom we obtain some of the loveliest fictions.” Typically folklore was initiated when “Religion soon employed the artist for her purposes,” which inspired superstitions and folktales: “This led to the machinery of superstition. Hence magic,—hence *diablerie* of all sorts,—the phantoms of imagination, the specters of ignorant dread, and those vague and shadowy influences that lurked about lonely places . . . fantastic creatures of a genius struggling constantly to pass from the oppressive chambers of the *real*, into the rare atmosphere of an *ideal* which has no incumbrances [sic]” (“Modern Prose Fiction,” *Southern Quarterly Review* XV [April 1849]: 43-44.).

²⁴ Quoted in “Folklore,” in *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Jan Harold Brunvand (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 285-86.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 286.

different, and coincides with his thoughts on the mutability of history. The two viewpoints should not be conflated while interpreting his representations of Native American culture in his work. For example, Simms himself recognized that his appropriation of Native American folklore would transform it into Anglicized versions of the original. In the dedication to his 1827 collection of poetry, *Early Lays*, for instance, Simms announces that

I have made use of one of the customs obtaining in the Creek nation, which betrays the very spirit of that pure fancy which belougs [sic], exclusively, to Nature and the Heart. I allude to their celebration of the first appearance of the Green Corn from the Earth, when all convene to rejoice in the promise of their harvest, and offer their impulsive acknowledgment for the beneficence of the Great Spirit.²⁶

The Green Corn ceremony is a well documented part of Creek culture, and Hudson suspects that Simms learned about it from Adair's *The History of the American Indians* (1775) rather than from firsthand observation.²⁷ Simms is clear about the transformation that occurs when he says that he "made use" of the ceremony in his poetry, which is typical of his adaptation of Native American culture elsewhere. In the same passage, Simms explains that "Much may be found in the traditionary relics which casual care has preserved to us."²⁸ His use of "traditionary" here suggests that he recognizes these were oral legends rooted in indigenous culture itself, albeit passed down via whites or biracial Southerners. In contrast to this "casual care," though, Simms suggests these "trophies"

²⁶ (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1827), vi. The poem, "The Green Corn Dance," is sentimentalized paean to the changing seasons with "songs" such as "Eagle from the mountain / Quickly descend; / Dove from the fountain / Hitherward bend" (27-29).

²⁷ *Early and Strong Sympathy*, xli.

²⁸ *Early Lays*, vi.

are instead “worthy to mingle with the sweetest notes of Fancy.” Simms elsewhere defined “Fancy” as “the colouring or decorative property” of literature.²⁹ As suggested by his theory of fiction that would later be outlined more concisely in “History for the Purposes of Art,” Simms makes the case in *Early Lays* that because of the “very dimness and obscurity which involves their [i.e., Native American] History” an author’s “Imagination” is “untrammelled with the restraints of reality.” This creative liberty leaves the novelist “free to spin the web of his fiction, as the vein of his mind, or the bent of his genius may direct.” Simms does not suggest that there ought to be strict fidelity to a historical record, but he makes clear from whom he appropriated the raw materials for his imaginative writing (vi).

Likewise, in an 1845 essay, “Naming of Places in the Carolinas,” he argues that the South’s geography is closely associated with the history and folklore of its indigenous peoples:

Perhaps no subject could be found more interesting to the general reader, than to inquire into the origin of those names of places with which he is most familiar. The Indian names of our country, for example, musically sounding as they are, so many of which we still retain in use . . . would, no doubt, if they could be analyzed, afford the highest satisfaction to the least curious among our people. Most of these names possess histories of their own—were coupled with the exploits and the fame of heroes, great men and lovely women. Some of them embody profound superstitions—some of them are sacred names, such as were breathed with downcast looks, hands crossed, and in subdued accents.³⁰

²⁹ *Poetry and the Practical*, ed. James Everett Kibler, Jr., The Simms Series (1854; repr., Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1996), 56.

³⁰ “Naming of Places in the Carolinas,” *Southern and Western Magazine and Review* (Dec. 1845): 367.

However, Simms was chagrined about the ignorance of Southern whites with respect to the Native American heritage of the land. The peoples' removal should not efface their legacy, he argues:

The time has gone by when the value of these names could be ascertained, and their several histories developed. Our ancestors had too little love for the Indians to give much heed to their superstitions, and the only use which they made of the Aboriginal names was to change or to corrupt them. . . . A better taste, and more expanded views of things, are beginning to make us anxious to rescue from oblivion all that we may, which relates to a very interesting, and, indeed, very remarkable people. Something may yet be preserved, and we should make a beginning, by restoring, wherever we can, to every interesting locality in our country, the Indian title which it bore. For these, not unmeaning when they were applied, we may in time discover the true signification. (367-68)

Simms is not interested in restoring the legal "title" of Native Americans to the land from which they were displaced but rather in "preserving" the cultural connection to it via their legends and the significance of local landmarks to indigenous history. Moreover, he adds that there is an additional use for this folklore beyond "restoring" original names to geographic features. Referring to a Native American named Swanannoah, who, Simms says, a source told him was banished near the place currently bearing his name in Georgia, the novelist posits that the mysterious Native American

may be amplified by the future poet or legend maker, into something ravishing. For what was he banished? Was he an orator expelled by his rival—a statesman by his competitor—a chieftain by his personal enemy—a lover by his mistress—or did he go forth, vexed by a nameless discontent, seeking peace in solitude? These inquiries may lead to moral materials which, wrought up by the skilful artist, with due regard to the exquisite beauty of the localities . . . may yet fascinate, with the charms of classic fiction, the lovers of romance and song. (372-73)

Simms's phrase "legend maker" again underscores the concept of himself and other white authors as mediums who could transform Native American history and folklore into mythology. His acknowledgement here that non-white culture can be

“wrought up” and aided by “the charms of classic fiction” articulates a more explicit description of interracial cultural exchange and appropriation characteristic of the novelists that we lack for the humorists. Identifying this phenomenon as cultural exchange does not erase the legacy of conquest and removal associated with the historical circumstances surrounding it. However, it also reveals that Simms, even as he mediated the multiethnic legacy of the South, was consciously embracing and furnishing a literature, albeit still Eurocentric, shaped by the same.

Why go “beyond usual license of fiction”?

Guilds estimates that Native American themes appear in over a hundred texts of Simms, ranging from non-fiction to poetry and prose.³¹ Of all of the genres in which Simms uses Native American folklore, though, his historical romances are the most well-developed examples of his appropriation. Moreover, Simms’s historical romances are also representative of *why* he and other Southern novelists incorporated aspects of Native American culture into their texts.

The Yemassee (1835) will serve to illustrate both points.³² Simms chose a major event in the early history of his native state as the setting for this novel, a two-year war that began in 1715 between the South Carolina colonial government and the Yamasee

³¹ *An Early and Strong Sympathy*, xxix.

³² *The Yemassee. A Romance of Carolina*, ed. John Caldwell Guilds (1835; reprint, Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1994). Guilds’s edition is a reprint of the 1853 re-issue of the novel, but I have chosen to reference this edition for its accessibility and because the textual changes Simms made to the narrative itself are nominal and are noted by Guilds.

(the preferred modern spelling), whose nation was then centered in present-day Beaufort County.³³ Though less has been written about it than about the eighteenth-century Indian wars in New England, this conflict was a major event and turning point in American colonial history. Historian Gary Nash speculates that the Yamasee and their allies came “as close to wiping out the European colonists as ever [they] came during the colonial period.”³⁴ Additionally, William Ramsey observes that the bloody conflict “spurred extensive tribal migrations and alliance realignments that changed the diplomatic and cultural landscape of the region for the remainder of the eighteenth century.”³⁵

As a result of their proximity to the coast, the Yamasee had a long relationship with European powers. They were first allied with the Spanish and then the British, in concert with whom they fought in the latter’s war against the Tuscarora in North Carolina. But by 1715, the Yamasee’s relationship with the English had soured due to trade issues resulting from the decreasing demand for animal skins, misunderstandings regarding the Anglo-American credit system, and new restrictions on the Yamasee’s trade in Native American slaves. Additionally, in the five months preceding the war, a lack of redress of these and other issues by the colonial government (due to a power

³³ In order to distinguish between the historical tribe and Simms’s literary representations of it, I will use “Yamasee” when referring to the former and “Yemassee” to the latter.

³⁴ *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (Englewood Cliffs, 2000), 123, quoted in William L. Ramsey, *The Yamasee War: A Study of Culture, Economy, and Conflict in the Colonial South*, Indians of the Southeast (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 2008), 2.

³⁵ *The Yamasee War*, 2.

struggle within the agency that regulated Indian trade) turned the former allies against each other.

Simms's novel begins a few days before the morning of April 15, 1715, the date when the historical Yamasee, together with their Muskogee allies, killed the white diplomatic legation that was sent to the Yamasee town of Pocotaligo, South Carolina, in an emergency attempt by colonial authorities to soothe Native American worries over what the latter believed to be aggressive behavior by white settlers. Though the Native Americans quickly destroyed the colonial city of Port Royal and laid siege to Charleston, militia led by Governor Charles Craven defeated the Yamasee in pitched battles later that month, including one at Salkahatchie, South Carolina. Simms's novel ends here with the death of its Native American protagonist, Sanutee, and the ostensible end of the tribe as an independent nation. Historically, though, most of the surviving Yamasee did not cease fighting until after the summer, whereupon they withdrew to Florida, where they were protected by Spanish authorities and eventually established several towns near St. Augustine. The war continued, though, for two more years as the Yamasee's Lower Creek allies fought on until they were ultimately defeated by a combined Cherokee and British effort. In spite of punitive British raids on the Yamasee's Florida towns in 1719 and 1728, the Yamasee did not actually cease to be an independent nation until 1761, and then at the hands of their former allies, the Creeks.

In keeping with his beliefs about the adaptability of history for fiction, Simms's narrative makes use of, but frequently differs from, the facts of the conflict as they have

been established by historians.³⁶ In Hudson's estimation, the novel "has but a slender factual basis."³⁷ For example, Craven is one of the novel's protagonists, but in a nod to the influence of Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) or Cooper's *The Spy: A Tale of Neutral Ground* (1821), he remains incognito for most of it, using the alias Gabriel Harrison. In contrast to his historical counterpart's being taken by surprise by the Yamasee attack, the fictional Craven/Harrison visits the frontier settlements in advance of it, gathering intelligence and preparing the colonists' defenses. He also finds time to woo the local beauty, Bess Matthews, and to fend off rivals for her affection. There was a historical precedent for Sanutee as well, but in addition to adding an extra "e" at the end of the chief's name, Simms attributes to him a host of motivations for going to war that were either historical anachronisms or that coincided with Simms's personal viewpoints on the problems inherent to two races competing for the same resources.

For example, Simms characterizes Sanutee as a reluctant warrior. The chief broodingly remembers "the ties and associations which he himself, as well as his people, had formed with the whites generally, and especially with individuals among them, at the first coming of the European settlers" (69). Though initially accommodating to them, and even assisting the English in their wars against other hostile tribes, Sanutee's "eyes were now fully opened to his error. It is in the nature of civilization to own an appetite for

³⁶ Simms's own account of the conflict in his *The History of South Carolina, from its first European Discovery to its Erection into a Republic* (1840) offers a much less sensational account for its causes. Simms explains that the Yamasee attack was "instigated by the Spaniards at St. Augustine—the hereditary enemies of the Carolinians" (2nd ed. [Charleston: S. Babcock & Co., 1842], 100-01.). This was the standard account of the conflict until the late twentieth century.

³⁷ *An Early and Strong Sympathy*, xlii.

dominion and extended sway,” says the chief, who is witnessing the unfortunate consequences of this British avarice and aggressiveness:

The evidence rose daily before his eyes in the diminution of the game—in the frequent insults to his people, unredressed by their obtrusive neighbours—and in the daily approach of some new borderer among them, whose habits were foreign, and whose capacities were obviously superior to theirs. The desire for new lands, and the facility with which the whites, in many cases, taking advantage of the weaknesses of the Indian chiefs, had been enabled to procure them, impressed Sanutee strongly with the melancholy prospect in reserve for the Yemassee. (69)

Sanutee’s characterization of this friction as an inevitable struggle between different races reflected an oft-repeated personal belief of Simms that two different races could not peacefully co-exist as equals. In Simms’s mind, says Guilds, “the motivations of the two cultures are so different that, if each is true to its beliefs and modes of conduct, only the most powerful can prevail, to the utter destruction of the other.”³⁸

In contrast to this racial ideology, eighteenth-century Native Americans waged war for other, more pragmatic grievances than the ones that the fictional Sanutee catalogs. Simms’s aforementioned *casus belli* were typical of later conflicts, not the 1715 Yamasee War. For example, “weak,” accommodating chiefs did not facilitate the aggressive acquisition of territory by whites until a century later. Likewise, Sanutee’s other complaints, including the decline of tributes and the encouragement of drunkenness among his people, are also more characteristic of nineteenth-century Native American

³⁸ *An Early and Strong Sympathy*, xxiv. This logic anticipates that of Simms’s later apologetics for slavery, especially “The Morals of Slavery” (1837). However, Louis D. Rubin, Jr., argues that in passages like these, “Simms was thinking of the Indian-white relationship of the early 1700s in terms of the slavery controversy that was beginning in the 1830s to attain such momentous proportions in American political life” (*The Edge of the Swamp: A Study in the Literature and Society of the Old South* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 1989], 109).

history. Historian Joel W. Martin documents how as late as the 1750s, South Carolina's "Indian Expenses" increased in an effort to ensure the goodwill of the leaders of nearby Native American tribes.³⁹ Furthermore, says Martin, "what amounted to a river of alcohol" poured into Native American territories was the work of unscrupulous traders in the mid-eighteenth century. Finally, Martin observes that it wasn't until about this time—four decades after the Yamasee War—that the deer population began diminishing in the Carolinas.⁴⁰

Beyond tailoring historical circumstances to suit him, Simms also modified the Yamasee's culture. Guilds argues that the novel's appeal is rooted in its believable, balanced representations of Native American characters and Simms's sympathetic portrayal of the Yamasee's doomed culture.⁴¹ For example, Simms punctuates the plot's rising action with scenes of Native American life that included vivid descriptions of alleged Yamasee culture, including its supposed folklore. In one of the domestic scenes involving Sanutee and his wife, Matiwan, Simms emphasizes the compassionate relationship between the two by including a song that Matiwan uses to soothe her angry husband. It is also an opportunity for Simms to illustrate the connectedness of Native American life to the environment by making the source of Sanutee's anger—the white colonists and the impending war—allegorical to a nature myth. The song, which Simms says is "one of those little fancies of the Indians, which may be found among nearly all

³⁹ *Sacred Revolt: The Muskogee's Struggle for a New World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 63.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 66, 67.

⁴¹ "Afterword," *The Yemassee*, 424.

the tribes from Carolina to Mexico,” is about the Mockingbird, or as Simms calls it,

“Coonee-latee”:

As the Coonee-latee looked forth from his leaf,
He saw below him a Yemassee chief,
 In his war-paint, all so grim—
Sung, boldly, then, the Coonee-latee,
I, too, will seek for mine enemy;
 And when the young moon grows dim,
I’ll slip through the leaves, nor shake them, —
I’ll come on my foes, nor wake them, —
And I’ll take off their scalps like him. (70-71)

From this grim beginning, the song evolves into a myth that describes how the

Mockingbird gained his distinctive voice—by stealing those of other birds:

But as nigher and nigher the spot he crept,
And saw that with open mouth they slept,
 The thought grew strong in his brain—
And from bird to bird with a cautious tread,
He unhook’d the tongue, out of every head,
 Then flew to his perch again; —
And thus it is, whenever he chooses,
The tongues of all the birds he uses,
 And none of them dare complain. (71)

There is no evidence that indigenous storytellers used heroic couplets, a fact for which Simms ostensibly excuses himself in a narrative aside, confessing that “the strain, playfully simple in the sweet language of the original, must necessarily lose in the more frigid verse of the translator” (70). Likewise, there is no record of this specific story in modern collections of Southeastern Native American myths, though its explanation of natural history resembles the myths that constitute the animal tale genre of indigenous folklore.

Less playful of the alleged folksongs of the Yamasee are those that are a part of the novel's scenes of their preparations for war. Simms includes their "battle-hymn," for instance:

Sangarra-me, Yemassee,
Sangarra-me—Sangarra-me—
Battle-god Manneyto,
Here's a scalp, here's a scull,
This is blood, 'tis a heart,
Scalp, scull, blood, heart,
'Tis for thee, battle-god,
'Tis to make the feast for thee,
Battle-god of Yemassee! (251)

The "hymn" precedes the sacrifice of a white man to "propitiate the Yemassee God of War—the Battle-Manneyto," and the hymn itself likewise evokes all the savagery stereotypically associated with Indians in the nineteenth century (250). This is a rare instance of Simms risking the demonization of Native Americans, but he attenuates this representation by the more frequent sentimental domestic scenes between the members of Sanutee's family.

The formality of these verses' language and meter betray them as Anglicized representations of Native American culture; moreover, the underlying exoticism of the songs' vocabulary and the religious references are designed to be more ornamental than accurate. The songs "contribut[e] nothing to our knowledge of authentic Indian culture," say Guilds and Hudson, but instead contribute to the mood of the novel's Native American scenes and underscore the vibrant singularity of the Indians' supposed culture.⁴²

⁴² *An Early and Strong Sympathy*, 449.

Simms himself confesses to these anomalies, again being very deliberate to differentiate between what I believe is his own recognition of authentic Native American folklore and the way he chose to represent it. For example, he marks the point in *The Yemassee* at which the specificity of the historical record—Craven’s campaign against the Yamasee following the latter’s initial assault—demands that he represent more faithfully the timeline and circumstances of events as they actually happened. But prior to this turning point, and because the Yamasee left behind no equivalent account of their own experiences, he explains that “where history dare not go, it is then for poetry, borrowing a wild gleam from the blear eye of tradition, to couple with her own the wings of imagination, and overleap the boundaries of the defined and certain” (402). In other words, imaginative renderings are appropriate to fill in the gaps, but Simms did not mislead himself or his readers into believing that such instances had a basis in fact.

A more detailed acknowledgment of this rationale for and method of mixed appropriation and invention is the dedication to the 1853 edition of *The Yemassee*. In this preface, Simms is more forthcoming about the liberties he took with Native Americans and what he calls “their mythology.” He defends his representations as “true to the Indian as our ancestors knew him at early periods, and as our people, in certain situations, may know him still” (xxviii). He also refers to his use of secondary materials in creating them: “For the general peculiarities of the Indians, in their undegraded condition—my authorities are numerous in all the writers who have written from their own experience.” In fact, rather than having trouble finding sources to use, he claims that “my chief difficulty, I may add, has risen rather from the discrimination necessary in picking and choosing, than from any deficiency of the material itself” (xxx).

However, Simms does admit that “what liberties I have taken with the subject, are wholly with his mythology” (xxviii).⁴³ Thus far, these admissions are in keeping with Simms’s theory of historical fiction, not to mention Hudson’s estimation of the verisimilitude of Simms’s representations of Native American folklore. Simms may have played fast and loose with some of the historical circumstances regarding the origins of the Yamasee War and their folksongs, but his creative license in introducing these modifications had some precedent somewhere else. They must have—the Yamasee effectively disappeared two generations prior to the novel’s publication. Simms acknowledges the liberties he took in the novel’s 1853 Dedication, saying that his portrayals of Yamasee religion are “based upon such facts and analogies as, I venture to think, will not discredit the proprieties of the invention” (xxviii). Here he specifically emphasizes that he did not violate standards of taste nor overstep the flexible boundaries of historical accuracy that he argued in “History for the Purposes of Art” and “Place Names in the Carolinas” that authors had the authority to do. On the other hand, and more germane to the issue of cultural exchange and appropriation, Simms’s comment also underscores his confidence in his own familiarity with examples of indigenous culture, which, though susceptible to modification, provided the basis for the romantic images of the Yamasee.

⁴³ This creative license must have been either barely distinguishable from known fact or at least within the parameters of white expectations, though, because Simms explains (one has to imagine rather smugly) that since the novel’s 1835 debut, “that portion of the story, which the reverend critics, with one exception, recognised as sober history, must be admitted to be a pure invention” (xxviii).

But what exactly were these “facts and analogies”? Hudson does recognize that the Yemassee deity Simms calls “Manneyto” is actually “based on the Algonquian concept of *manitou*, a central notion in their religious system.” Hudson explains that Manitou is “a belief in an impersonal sacred property in nature” but that there is “no justification for using ‘Manneyto’ to refer to a creator god in the Southeast, or for using ‘Opitchi-Manneyto’ to refer to his nemesis, an evil god, or war god.”⁴⁴ Hudson is correct, but there was a central God in Muskogee religious beliefs called “Hesákádum Eseeé . . . the Giver and Taker of All Life,” according to the Creek historian Martin, which coincides with the relationship of Simms’s fictional Yemassee to “Manneyto.” Likewise, though Hudson says there was no evil alter ego to the manitou, there did exist in Creek mythology a Lower World, where “there lived a second major class of sacred beings, one not taken lightly for it included the most dangerous spirit beings,” including the “Tie-Snake, a primeval dragon-like antlered monster snake” that brought death and sickness to Creeks.⁴⁵

In other words, just as Simms substituted Creek ceremonies for those of the Kiawah in his later novel *The Cassique of Kiawah*, the representations of Yamasee religion are romanticized adaptations of a *nineteenth*-century Native American culture that the novelist would be more knowledgeable of as a consequence of his reading or other research.⁴⁶ In fact, in contrast to the eighteenth-century Yamasee (of whom very

⁴⁴ *Early and Strong*, 587.

⁴⁵ *Sacred Revolt*, 24, 25.

⁴⁶ Simms may have learned about the Manitou through his reading of Schoolcraft, though in his forthcoming dissertation, Sean P. Harvey has identified numerous other antebellum

little is known even today), Simms was more familiar with the culture and history of the Upper Creeks, through whose traditional territories he had traveled during his visits to his father's plantation, and whose history he addressed in his essays "Thle-cath-cha" and "The Broken Arrow." Though modern historians and ethnologists recognize that these two essays miss important details with respect to Creek history,⁴⁷ they are, for their time, detailed narratives garnered from written and oral accounts of the events leading up to the Redstick revolt and the subsequent Creek War of 1813-14, as well as the conflicts themselves and the subsequent treaties.

Perhaps not incidentally, then, many of the historical anachronisms within *The Yemassee*, particularly Sanutee's grievances with the colonists, coincide with characteristics of the 1813 Redstick revolt. In fact, the pattern of similarities suggest that

sources on Ojibway culture (including their language and religion), some of which Simms may have also been familiar with. These include Jonathan Carver, *Travels through the Interior Parts of America* (1778); John Long, *Voyages and Travels of an Indian Interpreter and Trader* (1791); Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the River St. Lawrence* (1801); Thomas L. McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes* (1827); and Edwin James, ed., *A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner* (1830). I mention these only to emphasize the availability of sources to Simms, who may have adapted what he needed from them for inclusion in *The Yemassee*.

⁴⁷ Simms himself was not blind to the possibility of omissions and mistakes in these essays. In "Thle-cath-cha," for instance, Simms is careful to manage the expectations of the reader in terms of accuracy. He explains that "it will be understood, however, by the reader, that strict accuracy is not to be looked for in any narrative which relates to the history of our Indian tribes. Oral statements can never be so precise as written records, and depending as they must for their preservation upon the uncertain memorials of men, error becomes unavoidable even when the most conscientious principles govern the narrator. He [Simms] trusts, however, that the leading facts which he now records will be found as free from vital imperfections as it is possible for such histories to be" (*Early and Strong Sympathy*, 35).

Simms used this conflict instead of the actual Yamasee War to provide some of the “facts and analogies” for his novel.

For instance, many of the issues the novel attributes to the colonial conflict correlate with those that contributed to the Creek war: the trading away of land to whites who were aggressively expanding into the Indians’ territory; Native American leaders who appeared to accommodate white political demands; and a society in decline as a consequence of white influence.⁴⁸ Moreover, Joel Martin claims there was an important spiritual dimension to the conflict of 1813 as well, a contributing factor that Simms seems aware of since religious ceremonies are a prominent motif in his depictions of the Yemassee preparing for war. Martin argues that the Redstick leaders “acted politically in a way directly patterned after their most sacred rituals”; they expressed their grievances in religious rhetoric permeated with millenarian overtones so as to encourage a “spirit-based revolt.”⁴⁹

This religious dimension is a significant motif of *The Yemassee*. For example, whereas the colonial government’s trade mission was attacked in a preemptive strike on April 15 in the historical Yamasee War, the initial victims in Simms’s fictional account are not the British but the renegade chiefs who strike a deal with the whites. Sanutee charges that the “corrupted” Yemassee chiefs are “traitors,” much as the Redsticks

⁴⁸ Martin, *Sacred Revolt*, 116.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 132, 177. Martin cites the Yamasee War as an eighteenth-century example of “Native American peoples engaged in large-scale and dramatic movements of rebirth centered on prophetic visions of a new age” (177).

accused Creek leaders who worked closely with whites in 1812 of being collaborators.⁵⁰ Rather than being assassinated, though (their fate in the Creek revolt), the “traitors” in the novel are banished, a punishment Simms claims Native Americans believe is worse than death. However, Sanutee justifies the punishment by citing the authority of Manneyto. This rhetoric also echoes the Redstick rebellion’s character as a “response to primordial powers such as the Great Serpent and the Maker of Breath” from whose decrees “the Muskogees determined what was to be done,” according to Martin.⁵¹ Similarly, though Sanutee denounces the chiefs as collaborators, it is Manneyto who decrees the terms of their crimes and punishments. Sanutee’s co-conspirator, the prophet Enoree-Mattee, is ostensibly possessed by Manneyto. In front of the assembled tribe “he poured forth, in uncouth strains, a wild rhythmic strain, the highest effort of lyric poetry known to his people”:

Says Opitchi-Manneyto—
Wherefore are my slaves so few?
Shall the Yemassee give death—
Says Opitchi-Manneyto—
To the traitor, to the slave,
Who would sell the Yemassee—
Who would sell his father’s bones,
And behold the green corn grow
From his wife’s and mother’s breast?

Death is for the gallant chief
Says Opitchi-Manneyto—
Life is for the traitor-slave,
But a life that none may know—

⁵⁰ According to contemporary reports, “the old chiefs, friends to peace, who had taken the talks of Col. Hawkins” should be put to death (H. S. Halbert and T.H. Ball, *the Creek War of 1813 and 1814* [Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, 1895], 93, quoted in Martin, *Sacred Revolt*, 129).

⁵¹ *Sacred Revolt*, 127.

With a shame that all may see. (89, 91)

Again, though blank verse is not known to be characteristic of indigenous folksongs and the content itself does not have a recorded equivalent, the role of the spiritual world in inciting the Yamasee to war does have a specific nineteenth-century analog in later Muskogean culture. The shaman's possession by the spirit echoes the way the Redstick revolt was revealed and encouraged among Creeks: "the Maker of Breath inspired the critical shamans and disclosed to them the great revelation that the time was ripe for anticolonial revolt," explains Martin.⁵²

With Sanutee's verdict receiving divine authority in Simms's account, the first act of the rebellion begins—the elimination of the chiefs from power. Much as the Creek Revolt began with the Redstick shamans claiming that the white collaborators among the Upper Creek must be executed, Manneyto calls for similar action against the fictional Yemasee chiefs that leads to their banishment. This call to arms again echoes the Redstick revolt in two ways. First, the initial events of the Yemasee War in Simms's novel mirror the factional conflict that characterized the opening stages of what would become the Redstick War.⁵³ Second, like the removal of the renegade chiefs' tribal markings by the Yemasee mob, the executions of the Upper Creek chiefs friendly to

⁵² *Sacred Revolt*, 127-28.

⁵³ *Sacred Revolt*, 132. This is also an important distinction where Simms seems more faithful to the historical purpose of the Yamasee War. Martin speculates that until Mississippi militia attacked a party of Redsticks on July 17, 1813, in what became known as the Battle of Burnt Corn, "the rebel Muskogees were not fixed on actual war with Anglo-American armies," whereas that was the express purpose of the Yamasee and their Creek allies in 1715 (*Sacred Revolt*, 151).

whites were transformed “into a religious rite of purification” that sought to exorcise their influence, says Martin.⁵⁴ And though there are no examples of the Creek rebels exiling any members of their tribe (nor does this seem typical of their culture at large), this part of Simms’s plot coincides with the deadly leadership purge that was a prelude to the Redstick revolt and similar millenarian conflicts.⁵⁵

Other aspects of the Yemasee’s complaints and their rationale for war in *The Yemassee* also correlate with the facts of the Redstick conflict. Just as the Creeks rid themselves of all traces of European civilization, including clothes and weapons, in symbolic acts to signify “their surrender of their old colonized identity,” Martin explains,⁵⁶ the fictional Sanutee does the same by destroying beads belonging to his wife that were a gift from a white trader. Sanutee also banishes his son, an alcoholic who he says “consorts” with the British. Likewise, the significance of the Yemassee town of Pocota-ligo as a setting is its status as a “holy ground—the great feast of the green corn was there” (33). This detail corresponds with the fact that the center of major Muskogee towns served as “the ceremonial center within which were performed many of the Muskogees’ most important rituals,” including a purification rite similar to one of the most dramatic scenes in the novel (33-34).

I am not suggesting that the Yamasee War that Simms represents in his novel is a perfect equivalent to the Redstick revolt. Nevertheless, the congruencies between *The*

⁵⁴ Ibid., 129.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 182.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 142.

Yemassee and the later conflict exemplify how Simms adapted Native American culture and history for inclusion in his novels. Rather than striving for historical accuracy with his representations of eighteenth-century indigenous culture, Simms approximated it based on what he knew from his personal experiences, his reading, and his other research. This strategy of approximation included elements of religion and warfare from tribes as diverse as the Algonquin and the Creek. Simms significantly adapted these elements in order to integrate the originals into the setting of the novel, as his examples of Manitou/Manneyto and the millennial aspects of the Redstick Rebellion illustrate. Since Simms believed art trumped fidelity to historical sources, he felt he had license to romanticize what he borrowed or invented, including alleged nature myths and songs of prophecy and war.

Simms achieved several ends by appropriating Native American culture and history in this fashion. The appropriation contributed to the characterization of the fictional Yamasee, lending ostensible touches of exotic color and historical authenticity to the plot's antagonists. Sanutee in particular is no flat character; he offers a catalog of (albeit anachronistic) reasoned causes for war against Craven as well as his own people, and he is depicted by Simms as both a public and private figure. Consequently his death is conveyed by Simms as a tragic inevitability, an outcome mourned both by his wife and his adversary.

On the other hand, even though the poignancy of the final scene reflects Simms's "early and strong sympathy for the subject of the Red Men" and the fate that befell the Yamasee, the conclusion was bittersweet for the novel's antebellum readers. In spite of titling his book *The Yemassee*, Simms's narrative is not as much about that nation's

history as it is about their role in the trajectory of Anglo-Saxon civilization in North America and the cautionary tale that they represented. Only with the Yamasee acting as a believable albeit expendable foil could Simms adequately illustrate how the colonial past was analogous to the contemporary situation of the Old Southwestern frontier. The defeated nation exemplified the fate of a civilization that failed to develop into fixed agricultural communities—a destiny Simms's fictional colonists came close to sharing as a consequence of their avarice, which in 1835, seemed to the novelist a very real threat again in the context of large-scale emigration to the new states of the Gulf South. *The Yemassee's* interpretation of history explains by way of precedent the social order and restraint necessary to avoid this disaster; the novel's vivid depiction of a vibrant albeit extinct civilization as a result of Simms's exotic adaptations of Native American tradition and history illustrates not only the consequences if whites failed to do so, but the cultural price of that failure.

CHAPTER THREE

EPIC PASTS AND PATERNALISTIC FUTURES

The Native American in Anglo-American History

The critical response to William Gilmore Simms's *The Yemassee* focuses on the novel's Native American characters and scenes. John C. Guilds, for instance, observes that "it is in the depiction of the Indian and his plight where the book's greatest impact lies and where Simms's merit will be found."¹ Mary Ann Wimsatt concurs, commenting in particular on how these representations suggest Simms's awareness of the tragic loss of indigenous culture as a consequence of colonization and warfare. She identifies the paradox of how "his public confidence and hence his most traditional structures support his white characters and the future they represent for South Carolina," but the novelist's "private sympathy, which gives rise to the originality and the vitality of the Indian sequences, imbues his treatment of the Yemassee."²

Regardless of its pathos, the novel itself is an affirmation of the historical process of colonization that led to the destruction of these indigenous people and their culture. It reflects what Wimsatt says was the "public conviction" of Simms that Native Americans must succumb to Anglo-Saxon civilization, mitigated, though, by what she says was his

¹ "Afterword," *The Yemassee. A Romance of Carolina*, ed. John Caldwell Guilds (1835; reprint, Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1994), 414.

² *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms: Cultural Traditions and Literary Form*, Southern Literary Studies (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1989), 56.

private remorse that it was an unavoidable tragedy for a “gallant race.”³ The eighteenth-century Yamasee may have fascinated Simms privately, but the more important and public relevance of this group of Native Americans and their culture is how they challenged but were ultimately displaced by white expansion. Accordingly, and not a little ironically, despite being the source of the title, the Yamasee are only supporting actors in the novel, expendable antagonists in its metanarrative of the successful settlement of the American frontier by Anglo-Saxons. “If the central theme of *The Yemassee* is the Fall of the Indian,” explains Charles S. Watson, “its concomitant thesis is the Rise of the Colonist.”⁴

Anglo-Saxon settlement and expansion is a motif of Simms’s long fiction in general. Guilds explains that the novelist’s “underlying and continuing goal—in writing to please himself and his readers—was, in widest terms, to portray the development of America as a nation.”⁵ The uncertainty that surrounds the fictional frontier in the first two-thirds of *The Yemassee*, for example, is resolved by the conclusion of the novel: The safety of the colony is assured and its future is guaranteed due to the white frontier

³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴ *From Nationalism to Secessionism: The Changing Fiction of William Gilmore Simms*, Contributions in American History, no. 151 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 18.

⁵ *Simms: A Literary Life* (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1992), 342. Simms’s Border Romances, for instance, document the lawlessness and amorality of the Old Southwest in the early nineteenth century. *Guy Rivers* (1834), *Richard Hurdis* (1838), and *Border Beagles* (1840) are set in frontier Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, respectively. However, while this series reflects Simms’s simultaneous creative fascination with—yet cultural pensiveness about—the frontier, the Border Romances do not reflect Simms’s interest in and use of indigenous culture to represent either aspect of in his novels.

community's adoption of a paternalistic social order. This paternalism not only has mobilized the colonists' defense against the Yamasee but has also solved the social and political instability that contributed to the conflict. Indirectly, then, the fate of the tribe offered Simms a way to illustrate in ostensibly historically accurate terms not just the central events in the timeline of white colonization and growth, but also to justify why whites succeeded in permanently settling the region when Native American societies allegedly failed to do so.

Scholars of early American literature such as Tony Morrison, Betsy Erkkila, and Dana Nelson have demonstrated that Simms was not unusual for how his fiction provided what Jared Gardner says were "the formal structures that make the convergence of racial and national discourses imaginable."⁶ Adapting the culture and the history of the Yamasee allowed Simms to tell an oft-told story—the perseverance and success of Anglo-Saxons in settling North America—in a new but not unfamiliar way to his antebellum readers. Where Southern novelists like Simms did differ from their peers, though, is in the scope and the purpose of their appropriation of Native American culture. Native American history and culture appear in novels by Simms as well as William Alexander Caruthers and John Esten Cooke far more frequently than in texts by their Northern counterparts, James Fenimore Cooper included. Moreover, even though

⁶ *Master Plots: Race and the Founding of an American Literature, 1787-1845* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998), 9. See also Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992); Erkkila, *Mixed Bloods and Other Crosses: Rethinking American Literature from the Revolution to the Culture Wars* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); and Nelson, *The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature, 1638-1867* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992).

Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok: A Tale of Early Times* (1824), and Joseph Doddridge's *Logan: The Last of the Race of the Shikellemus* (1823) contributed to what Brian Dipe calls the motif of the "Vanishing American," these authors did not intend their representations of indigenous characters and history to be cautionary tales. Although melancholic, their novels, unlike those of Simms and his Southern peers, did not portray Native Americans as a serious threat to the Anglo-Saxon colonial enterprise. Nor did antebellum Northern novelists suggest that the fate of Native Americans was a warning of the consequences of failing to develop orderly, sedentary communities.⁷

What was defined in the previous chapter as the pluralistic qualities of the antebellum Southern historical romance's inclusion of Native American culture and history is a product of these reactionary themes in addition to the conventions of the genre itself. With regard to the former, the segregation of Native American culture in the texts figuratively coincides with how the white characters were affected by the physical presence of Native Americans in *The Yemassee* but how they ultimately overcame the threat posed by the latter. In other words, this proximity to, but transcendence of, the Other coincides with the lack of genuine interracial cultural synthesis within the text itself. Despite being the product of cultural exchange (in the sense that the novel's setting and plot are shaped by Simms's familiarity with and adaptations of indigenous culture and history), *The Yemassee* is a text where non-white folklore is compartmentalized apart from, rather than integrated with, the novel's representations of Anglo-American culture.

⁷ In addition to Gardner, see Laura L. Mielke, *Moving Encounters: Sympathy and the Indian Question in Antebellum Literature* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2008).

Moreover, the Anglo-American literary form of the historical romance is equally immune to the aesthetic influence of Native American culture. The genre of the historical romance itself was well-suited for these epic narratives about race and nationality, the latter of which contributed to what Gardner says is the troubling “early history of the American novel . . . marked by a series of attempts to revise the meaning of an ‘American race.’”⁸ For example, the propensity of historical romances for celebrating the historical legacy of the dominant culture can accommodate the inclusion of representations of Native American culture in acknowledgment of a shared historical experience. However, the ideological perspective associated with this source is marginalized as a consequence of not only its literal extermination in the conclusion but also the culture-specific narrative that the historical romance glorifies. This mode of appropriation thus subordinates instances of what in the Old South Mikhail Bakhtin would describe as the “unofficial language and unofficial thought” to the dominant discourse, which in this case is Anglo-American and conservative in particular.⁹ The proscription of this difference and consequent lack of dialogism within the historical romances’ field of discourse contributes to these texts’ monoglossia, the term Bakhtin uses to describe a single historical, authoritative voice and the official cultural perspective that it represents.

This monoglossia is symptomatic of an anxiety about what the historical frontier settings of the novels symbolized in the minds of the novelists and other seaboard

⁸*Master Plots*, 3

⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press Slavic Series 1 (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 20.

conservatives: the analogous emigration to and instability of the Old Southwest and what it portended for the nation's future. Simms believed that "Only gradually, fitfully, was society establishing the order and hierarchy necessary for true civilization," explains David Moltke-Hansen, which was "a condition that was more of a promise than a realization of Southern history to date."¹⁰ The immigration, alleged immorality, fluidity of class, economic instability, and philistinism of the Old Southwest troubled the conservatives of the older, coastal South, who, like Simms, "desired traditional societies with strong social institutions that remained open to gradual change," according to historian Adam L. Tate.¹¹ Not surprisingly, then, *The Yemassee's* representations of the accelerated, unmanaged growth leading to the chaos of the 1715 war had disquieting connotations for this group as it contemplated the corresponding situation in the Old Southwest. Simms depicts the analogous social instability of the Old Southwest by illustrating how materialistic-driven settlement of the frontier leads to potentially fatal anarchy and by suggesting how mobility and dislocation threaten the long-term sustainability of Anglo-Saxon development. He does the first by attributing the cause of the 1715 war in part to immigration practices that paralleled those occurring in the Old Southwest, and he accomplishes the second by suggesting that the fate of the Yamasee could be a precedent for the future of the Old Southwest, implying the former was doomed as a result of the tribe's ostensible inability to remain in one location and

¹⁰ "Between Plantation and Frontier: The South of William Gilmore Simms," in *William Gilmore Simms and the American Frontier*, ed. John C. Guilds and Caroline Collins (Athens: Univ. of Georgia, 1997), 14.

¹¹ *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals, 1789-1861: Liberty, Tradition, and the Good Society* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2005), 189.

develop into an agricultural society, a prerequisite step to become a more advanced and powerful civilization.¹²

The vision of order at the novel's conclusion also spoke to Southern conservatives, who, like Simms, sought to rein in the instability of the Old Southwest. Tate explains that these conservatives "appreciated the immense economic possibilities the West could offer, but feared the social dislocation southern states suffered from westward migration."¹³ This anxiety reflects yet another "central theme" in Simms's novels, according to Moltke-Hansen, "the contest between the expectations, norms, and mores of the settled, hierarchical, plantation South and the physical, psychological, and social rudeness of the frontier."¹⁴ If whites rejected discipline and authority to embrace a self-gratifying lifestyle, the Southwest would develop into an "uncivilized" culture akin to the representations of indigenous life in the novel. Ten years after the publication of *The Yemassee*, Simms again warned his readers in "Americanism in Literature" that "the temptations of our vast interior keep our society in a constant state of transition." He went on to explain that "the social disruptions occasioned by the wandering habits of the

¹² For all of Simms's interest in Native American culture, this perspective is informed by an important fact about Southeastern Native American culture that he failed to recognize or ignored. The indigenous nations he writes about or drew from were in fact sedentary, agricultural communities. The "wandering habits" he scorns and fears were only a consequence of these groups' displacement from their traditional territories by white settlers (James H. Merrell, "The Indians' New World: The Catawba Experience," in *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers from European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500-1850*, 2nd ed., ed. Peter C. Mancall and James H. Merrell (New York: Routledge, 2007), 30.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁴ "Between Plantation and Frontier," in *Simms and the American Frontier*, 12.

citizen, result invariably in moral loss to the whole. Standards of judgment fluctuate, sensibilities become blunted, principles impaired, with increasing insecurity at every additional remove.”¹⁵

Simms was not alone in believing this chain of events would cause Anglo-Saxons to follow Native Americans into oblivion. This aspect of *The Yemassee* coincides with Gardner’s aforementioned explanation that “what were not necessarily or even logically, racial fears came to be articulated in racial terms” in early American literature. Frequently, he says, the “black or Indian . . . represents the fate of the [protagonist] should his claims be unsuccessful . . . the white American thus risks becoming marked as racial other . . . marked as uncultured, unpropertied, uncivilized, unknown, and unknowable.”¹⁶ From this perspective, then, *The Yemassee* is more than a history of past heroics that included indigenous culture; the novel is also Simms’s reaction to contemporary anxieties. Like Southern historical romances by Caruthers and Cooke, it is a response to the perceived anarchy of the Old Southwest, one shaped by a non-white culture that the novelists were attracted to but whose fate they hoped to avoid. Simms, for example, may have appreciated and felt comfortable appropriating non-white culture, but he was loath to associate himself too closely with the status and fate of those from whom he borrowed.

¹⁵ “Americanism in Literature,” in *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction, First Series*, ed. C. Hugh Holman (1845; repr., Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), 10-11.

¹⁶ *Master Plots*, 4, 2.

Finally, Simms's novels in particular responded to the social instability of the Old Southwest by illustrating the benefits of a paternalistic social order; a hierarchal community whose members recognized their status within a taxonomy of race and class, as well as the responsibilities associated with that position. To discourage the self-interestedness that Simms and others believed fueled reckless emigration to the Old Southwest and the destabilizing, disorderly transgression of class and racial boundaries that characterized the new communities of the Old Southwest, the frontier vision and monoglossia of southern historical romances idealized the principles of paternalism. This was the social vision derived from traditional interpretations of the master/slave relationship, the ideal of the gentleman, and the model of the plantation. The deference and sense of mutual obligation associated with them were extended to the entire community to organize the social bonds among whites themselves. This sense of responsibility was supposed to mitigate self-interested behavior. The respect and duty associated with familial relationships, for instance, were believed to "influence[...] the behaviors of individuals when they engaged the world, thus bringing civility, reverence, and honor to the broader society," explains Tate.¹⁷ In the context of expansion, this restraint could preclude the social anarchy and the disregard for culture that the novelists perceived as unfolding in the Old Southwest—this was the threat that the writers figuratively checked by the reactionary conclusions of their novels, and that they cautioned against by illustrating the consequences of those who ignored this lesson.

¹⁷ *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals*, 197.

These novelists and an older generation of conservatives whose values the historical romances represented wanted the emigrants to the Southwest to replicate the established social order of the seaboard they left behind. They viewed it as a matter of survival that “the equality of the frontier must give way to the hierarchy of evolved society,” explains Moltke-Hansen.¹⁸ This was the contrived world, the narrowly tailored vision of a symbolic frontier, which the historical romances valorized. Southern conservatives knew “they could not return to the past,” says Tate, but they “could construct at least partially a culture devoted to conservative principles.”¹⁹ Native American culture and history had a specific place in that vision; the novelists’ appropriation of them was guided by this longing for the past and an anxiety about the present and the future.

“Alabama Fever” and the Social Principle

Though Simms delighted in the imaginative material that the Southern frontier provided for his fiction, the influence of the historical Old Southwest on many of his countrymen made the novelist anxious. The wave of immigration it inspired deeply troubled him and other Southern conservatives, as did the social disorder that accompanied the settling of the frontier. *The Yemassee* resonates with these anxieties. Even though the Old Southwest “was becoming like [the] Southeast and was no more following the universal laws of

¹⁸ “Ordered Progress: The Historical Philosophy of William Gilmore Simms,” in *Long Years of Neglect: The Work and Reputation of William Gilmore Simms*, ed. John Caldwell Guilds (Fayetteville: The Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1988), 132.

¹⁹ *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals*, 189.

history and progress in doing so than the older states of the region had,” explains historian James Miller, “The contradictory and sometimes confused efforts of the region’s analysts to understand southwestern society reflected their doubts about the subject.”²⁰

This westward movement had especially portentous implications for those, like Simms, who remained behind in the seaboard states. The departure of their neighbors seemed almost pathological. One North Carolinian complained, albeit with some hyperbole, that “The *Alabama Fever* rages here with great violence and has carried off vast numbers of our citizens. . . . I am apprehensive if it continues to spread as it has done, it will almost depopulate the country.”²¹ This alleged “depopulat[ion]” posed an array of threats, both pragmatic and symbolic. On one hand, the exodus from the seaboard states jeopardized their economic and political strength. On a national and international level, cotton production in the Deep South challenged the monopoly of planters in the Atlantic South. Virginians and Carolinians could not compete with the economies of scale that were achievable on the large affordable tracts of fertile land in the Old Southwest. Political representation shifted with trends in emigration, too, diminishing the clout of the coastal Southern states. Southern interests were increasingly represented by the newly prosperous and less moderate politicians of the Deep South.

²⁰ *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South*, The American South Series (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2002), 98.

²¹ Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 31-32, quoted in James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Vintage, 1983), 77.

Moreover, in the eyes of Southerners whom Alabama Fever left behind, some parts of the countryside assumed the character of a wasteland. A writer for the *Southern Agriculturalist* was despondent, finding it “humiliating to look over large sections of this and the neighbouring States, in the lower districts especially, and witness the frequent recurrence of dilapidation that every where presents itself.”²² Caruthers bemoans a similar fate for the Tidewater region of Virginia in his 1845 novel *The Knights of the Golden Horse-Shoe*. He complains that this “choice region . . . is daily deserted by its natives for an unknown land of frogs, and vapors, and swamps. . . . Perhaps the descendants of these very restless emigrants, now miring in the swamps of Mississippi, may return, and hunt out the faded and perishing memorials of their forefathers. . . . We say, that in less than half a century, the tide of emigration will roll backward, and the desolate shores of the Chesapeake yet blossom as the rose.”²³

Both writers’ complaints articulate what Miller says was a symbolic threat posed by emigration: the “rejection of agrarian values and a dereliction of the agriculturist’s most sacred duty to nature and community.”²⁴ Moreover, despite Caruthers’s wishful thinking, most émigrés did not return, and the communities that they started in the Southwest indeed hardly resembled the more established ones they left behind. Law and order seemed especially slow to follow settlement. However, even more troublesome for

²² “On Rural Buildings,” *Southern Agriculturalist* 8 (April 1835): 175-78, quoted in Miller, *South by Southwest*, 42.

²³ *The Knights of the Golden Horse-Shoe; A Traditionary Tale of the Cocked Hat Gentry in the Old Dominion* (1845; reprint, Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1970), 85.

²⁴ *South by Southwest*, 13.

conservatives (and the novelists) than the actual quality of life in the Old Southwest—or even the depopulation of the mid-Atlantic states—were the implications for the character, not to mention the culture, of the entire United States.

From the perspective of the seaboard, “the twin pursuits of individual liberty and national expansion seemed to undermine rather than extend the order and culture of longer-settled regions,” says Miller.²⁵ Permanence and power seemed elusive. Rather than contributing to the growth of the United States, Simms interpreted the symptoms of Alabama Fever to mean that unfettered emigration and settlement were instead responsible for Southern society’s decline.²⁶ Not only did these developments threaten to diminish the region’s economic and political strength, but even more important for Simms, the mobility and the materialism that fueled the movement of men and women weakened attachments to place, conservative values, and standards of decorum. Miller explains that the novelists and their fellow conservatives “assumed an intimate connection between the [emigrants’] progress and the progress of civilization,” a

²⁵ Ibid., 28.

²⁶ Curiously, Simms was part of the “Young America” movement, the group of American authors who not only advocated for a national literature but also for national expansion, in some cases even if it meant confrontation with Mexico and England. In fact, Simms contributed strident poems encouraging such hawkish policies of expansion in John L. O’Sullivan’s *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, the periodical in which O’Sullivan coined the term “Manifest Destiny” in an 1839 article (See Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City* [New York: Oxford Univ., 1999]; and my forthcoming article “The Business of Romanticism: Simms’s Political Poetry” in *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 42.1 [Spring 2009].). However, as Moltke-Hansen explains, Simms maintained a carefully qualified vision of national growth: “Simms’s philosophy of history revolved between two poles: progress and order. In his view, political, social, and cultural progress required political, social, and cultural stability. . . . Revolutions occurred when stability was maintained at the expense of progress or *vice versa*” (“Ordered Progress,” 128).

relationship that often disappointed them since the promise of the former failed to deliver the latter.²⁷ Consequently, rather than revel in the humor of “social disruptions” as did his contemporaries, the Old Southwestern Humorists, Simms wrote cautionary novels against these sources of instability, depicting instead the threat that the “increasing insecurity at each additional remove” posed to American civilization.²⁸

For example, Simms’s aforementioned “early and strong sympathy” for Native Americans included empathy for their historical treatment at the hands of white colonists. *The Yemassee*, for instance, acknowledges that the grievances of its Native American characters about the colonists’ behavior are justified. The narrator observes that in spite of the Yemassee chiefs’ willingness to sell their lands or make treaties with the colonists,

the whites were never so well satisfied, as when, by one subtlety or another, they contrived to overreach them. . . . The irresponsible adventurer, removed from the immediate *surveillance* of society, committed numberless petty injuries upon the property, and sometimes the person of his wandering neighbour. . . . As the whites extended their settlements, and grew confident in their increasing strength, did their encroachments go on.²⁹

Here, besides holding the colonists responsible for provocations against the Indians, the novel attributes this conduct to specific reasons associated with the contemporaneous

²⁷ *South by Southwest*, 81. Miller likewise recognizes that Simms (and Southern historian Samuel Townes) “could be as scathing as they were congratulatory about the course of southwestern development. In these moments both writers could reflect a much gloomier perspective on the Southwest, one which spoke of degeneration and decline rather than progress and prosperity” (ibid.).

²⁸ “Americanism in Literature,” 11.

²⁹ *The Yemassee. A Romance of Carolina*, ed. John Caldwell Guilds (1835; reprint, Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1994), 15.

“Alabama Fever.”³⁰ The promise of new land in the Old Southwest, for example, encouraged the influx of “irresponsible adventurers” who defied the law and whose own self-interested behavior subverted an orderly process of settlement. In the novel, this dangerous conduct flourishes because the adventurers’ mobility “removed” them from civil authorities that promote law and order, and also because there were no established communities to encourage restraint through self-policing “*surveillance*.” Paradoxically, the reverse occurs when there is a critical mass of settlers. Instead of ameliorating antisocial behavior by encouraging standards of decorum, the “exten[sion] of settlements” only exacerbates the problem. Migration begets migration, according to the narrator, and the illegal settlements and aggressions continue, part of a self-perpetuating cycle that Simms believed “the destruction of traditional society unleashed,” says Tate.³¹

Craven, the novel’s colonial governor, also acknowledges that the Native Americans’ animosity is a result of uncontrolled white emigration and the social ills to which it contributes. Moreover, the novel’s white protagonist also holds the government itself partially accountable for the problem, another connection that Simms establishes

³⁰ Wimsatt concurs, claiming that the historical process illustrated in Simms’s colonial fiction was meant to be understood in the context of the antebellum South. She argues that the themes of these texts reflect his propensity “to impose the interpretation of his own age upon the events of the past . . . whose pertinence to the present is clear” (*Major Fiction*, 38). C. Hugh Holman likewise makes a case for the equivalency of *The Yemassee*’s plot to conservative perspectives on the Old Southwest. Though the historical characters and geography differ, the theme of establishing law and order remains germane since Simms believed the “pattern of these events was to be repeated again and again in the history of the westward expanding nation.” (“Introduction to Simms,” *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina*. ed. C. Hugh Holman [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961], xviii, quoted in Wimsatt, *The Major Fiction*, 56.).

³¹ *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals*, 200.

between the novel's "historical" plot and public policy in the Old Southwest during his own era. For instance, when informed of the violence at Pocotaligo following the colonial authorities' attempt to secure more land from the Yamassee, the governor (still using the pseudonym Harrison) admits that he "feared something [like this outcome] and warned the council against this movement. But their cursed desire to possess the lands must precipitate all the dangers I have been looking for" (102). Like its antebellum historical counterpart in Washington, D.C., the fictional colonial government exercises poor judgment by enabling the avarice of the colonists who covet Native American lands. Simms was similarly frustrated by what he saw as the federal government's enabling of the destabilization of the Old Southwest through acquiring and then selling land once belonging to Southeastern tribes. In his 1841 essay "Southern Literature," for instance, Simms complained that

the unwise measures of our statesmen, by which the public lands have been thrown into the market at almost nominal prices, and long before they were necessary to the growing wants of our people, were calculated to fix this injurious habit upon them. It led to the profligate and wasteful abuse of the lands already in cultivation, and, in the end, to their subsequent abandonment. The vast temptations to cupidity, and mercenary [sic] enterprise, held out by the immense, and but partially opened, tracts of plain and prairie in the west, produced a sleepless discontent with their [i.e., the settlers'] existing condition[.]³²

Eschewing its responsibility to carefully manage the growth of the colony, the government instead fueled reckless expansion, which in the novel allegorically "precipitate[s]" an ominous war, a "curse" that almost leads to South Carolina's destruction. The narrow escape is the novel's warning of what could be expected in the Old Southwest if Simms's 1837 admonition that "land was given [to] us for cultivation;

³² "Southern Literature," *The Magnolia* (January 1841): 5.

not for speculation” went ignored and equivalent policies and behaviors were not curtailed.³³

If the acquisitiveness, mobility, and unethical behavior of the colonists did not lead directly to the premature end of the South Carolina colony, *The Yemassee* also illustrates the long-term consequences of ignoring the need for “ordered progress,” the Whiggish historical principle Moltke-Hansen says characterizes Simms’s social vision.³⁴ Simms obliquely depicts this outcome in *The Yemassee* by addressing the fate of the eponymous tribe whose “wandering habits” prevented them from developing into sedentary communities and ultimately more powerful civilizations. As mentioned earlier, this aspect of the novel corresponds with other American texts whose inclusion of doomed indigenous characters contributes to the motif that Brian W. Dippie called the “Vanishing American.” Gardner explains that this pattern “was connected in vital ways with the new pressures toward Removal and the discovery of a justification for such policy in the desire to ‘save’ the Indian from devastating contact with civilization.”³⁵

³³ “The Morals of Slavery,” in *The Pro-Slavery Argument; as Maintained by the Most Distinguished Writers of the Southern States* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Co., 1853), 261. The essay was originally published as “Miss Martineau on Slavery” in the November 1837 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*.

³⁴ “Ordered Progress,” 126.

³⁵ *Master Plots*, 96. Gardner differs from Dippie in that he believes that “the Vanishing American had less to do with historical Indians and fantasies of their preordained extinction than with a new set of anxieties about slavery and African Americans” (96). Native Americans became a surrogate to address the paradox of these issues in the early Republic. Gardner’s interpretation is sound, and his explanation of the symbolic literary use of Native Americans informs my own focus on how Southern novelists utilized indigenous culture and history to respond to anxieties about emigration and new settlement; issues certainly tied to the expansion of slavery into the Old Southwest, not to mention Removal itself, but an anxiety all of its own registered in racial terms.

However, where Simms in particular differs from this pattern is in the way his “Vanishing Americans” also represent the future of Anglo-Saxon culture if emigrants to the Old Southwest did not deviate from their own pattern of emigration and ostensibly antisocial behavior. At several points in *The Yemassee*, for example, the narrator argues that a race which fails to become “civilized” (or which does so fitfully) would ultimately disappear as a consequence of its inertia, the coup de grace delivered when it tries to coexist with another, more powerful race. This is the conclusion that Sanutee arrives at to explain the behavior of white colonists and that leads him to believe that war is the only means to halt this pattern and preserve his own nation:

It is in the nature of civilization to own an appetite for dominion and extended sway, which the world that is known will always fail to satisfy. . . . Conquest and sway are the great leading principles of her existence, and the savage must join in her train, or she rides over him relentlessly in her onward progress. (69)

His recognition is prophetic. The Yemassee “was no longer the great nation” at the novel’s conclusion, the chief’s wife being the only survivor of its war with the (allegedly) more civilized whites (413). Articulated by Sanutee, though, these claims assert themselves as somber admissions of presumably inevitable facts and not as open endorsements of the prevailing racial theories that steered antebellum policies of Removal. Likewise, later in the novel’s plot, the same conclusion is reached, even as regret is expressed for its inevitability. The Reverend Matthews, the father of the heroine who falls for Craven, asks in prayer, “Why do we thus seek to rob them of their lands? When, O Father of mercies, when shall there be but one flock of all classes and colours, all tribes and nations, of thy people?” (134). Craven, who, like Sanutee, acts as Simms’s spokesman for theories of race and civilization, responds by gravely telling his future

father-in-law that his “prayer is a just one, and the blessing desirable,” but that it is impossible since “until they shall adopt our pursuits, or we theirs, we can never form one community.” Though chagrined by the dilemma, Craven is nonetheless adamant about the reasons for the two peoples’ incompatibility: “so long as the hunting lands are abundant, the seductions of that mode of life will always baffle the approach of civilization among the Indians” (134).³⁶

Craven’s resignation was shared by many antebellum Southerners. For example, a year after the publication of *The Yemassee*, Alabama author Alexander B. Meek eulogized that “The dynasty of the Red Man is over! Slowly, and sadly the Ænigma of the western world . . . bent his footsteps to the sinking sun! . . . driven before the progress of the white man, like a storm shattered barque, before an ocean wave!”³⁷ But whereas Craven seems emotionally invested in the impending doom of the Yamasee, James Miller says Meek represented many Southerners who believed that “there was nothing personal in this process. It was strictly history. The ‘children of the forest’ were simply fulfilling

³⁶ James Taylor Carson argues that exchanges like these “read like a dress rehearsal for the expulsions [of Native Americans] that were occurring as [Simms] wrote” (“The Obituary of Nations,” 17). The views of Matthews, says Carson, reflect the uneasiness of Northern politicians such as John Quincy Adams and Congressmen Theodore Frelinghuysen and William Ellsworth with the clamor of Southern states for the removal of the Native Americans, and Craven is “an archetypal Jacksonian” by virtue of his logic for its necessity (ibid.).

³⁷ “An Oration Delivered before the Society of the Alumni of the University of Alabama, at its First Anniversary, Dec 17, 1836,” *Southern Literary Journal* 4 (April 1837): 185, quoted in Miller, *South by Southwest*, 85.

their historically ordained role, departing the scene in order that new emigrants could arrive, carrying with them the contagion of civilization.”³⁸

Implicit within this rationale is the ostensible link between sedentary populations and the evolution of civilization and its concomitant power. Tate explains that Southerners like “Simms measured the progress of the races through their public morality and their ability to create stable, civilized societies.”³⁹ This logic dictates that without stability, societies will be unable to improve themselves economically, militarily, and technically and thus will ultimately be unable to defend their interests against those civilizations who have done so. Moreover, established homes and communities are necessary for *moral* progress, which Sean R. Busick says Simms “carefully distinguished . . . from material progress.”⁴⁰ Simms elaborated on this relationship in an 1842 address at the University of Alabama, explaining that “Having security in the homestead, with that feeling of dignity which a conscious permanence of position inspires,—and a farther appreciation of the vast importance to civilization of a community, at once stationary, yet susceptible of progress . . . how naturally does man improve his condition.”⁴¹ Failing to

³⁸ *South by Southwest*, 85.

³⁹ *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals*, 228.

⁴⁰ Busick also claims that Simms “had faith in progress” but “rejected any notion of its inevitability” (*A Sober Desire for History: William Gilmore Simms as Historian* [Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2005], 4.).

⁴¹ *The Social Principle: The True Source of National Permanence* (1843; repr., Columbia: The Univ. of South Carolina for the Southern Studies Program, 1980), 18. These connections echoed both the economic and moral justification that Carson says the governors of Mississippi and Alabama offered for Removal: “With the free and easy movement of cotton, [Mississippi Governor George] Poindexter predicted that the state’s population would not only increase but would also become more prosperous, more

acknowledge the importance of this “Social Principle,” which is what Simms called this “sacred character of home . . . where the patriarchal and social virtues are yet most fondly cherished,” leads to an insidious chain of events that “baffles” the permanence and potential power of a race or nation, a prediction much like Craven’s explanation of the looming fate of the Yamasee.⁴² Simms explained the rest of the causal relationship to the Tuscaloosa undergraduates by highlighting the social costs of emigration:

In degree, all wanderers cease to be laborers. Their habits become desultory and unsettled. They obey impulses rather than laws, and toil in obedience to their humours rather than their necessities. With desultory habits, the moods of men become capricious, their resources uncertain and their principles unfixed.⁴³

Succumbing to “impulses” and lacking “principles” are characteristic of the behavior of the fictional settlers who antagonized the Yemassee, but the tribe itself is the product of a similar eschewal of settlement and the “patriarchal and social virtues” that accompany it. The conclusion of the novel realizes the final step in this process of degeneration, the elimination of a civilization weakened by its mobility. Simms elaborated on this phenomenon earlier in “The Morals of Slavery” (1837; 1852), claiming that Native Americans’

contact with the civilized must always result—as such contact has everywhere resulted—either in their subjection as inferiors, or their extermination. Their only safety will be found in their enslavement, or in their removal to a region where the hunting grounds are open and uncircumscribed. They must perish or remove,

industrious, and, in the end, more virtuous. By establishing a close relationship between land cessions, expulsion, and the settlers’ moral and economic prosperity, the two governors articulated a cogent and powerful set of conditions that required federal action” (“The Obituary of Nations,” 11).

⁴² Ibid., 11, 21.

⁴³ Ibid., 35-36.

unless they conform to the established usages of the States in which they linger, and fall into the customs of the superior people.⁴⁴

Though Simms is here specifically addressing the fate of Native Americans, he believed this deterministic theory pertained to all races.⁴⁵ According to the novelist and his peers, émigrés to the Old Southwest were mimicking the “humours” and “desultory habits” of their fictional eighteenth-century counterparts in the novel, and like the “irresponsible adventurers,” the antebellum settlers and speculators allowed their avarice—“impulses rather than laws”—for more and better land to cause grave problems that threatened the economic stability of the new Deep South states. Consequently, antebellum whites were not immune to the fate of their fictional counterparts—both colonist and Yamasee—a warning that Simms reiterated in “The Social Principle”: “A wandering people is more or less a barbarous one. We see in the fate of the North American savage, that of every nomadic nation. What is true of them, is true in degree of every civilized people that adopts, in whatever degree, their habits.”⁴⁶ Whiteness, therefore, was no guarantee of success or sustainability.

This was not a new anxiety for white Americans, even before they identified themselves as such. James Axtell observes that during the colonial period a “generalized European fear of barbarism that worried colonial planners and leaders was given specific

⁴⁴ “The Morals of Slavery,” in *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 239.

⁴⁵ Simms uses Native Americans as an analogy for the impracticality of emancipating Africans and Afro-Americans in this, his most famous pro-slavery apologetic. But he also reiterates the same logic with respect to Mexicans, for instance, in *Self-Development. An Oration Delivered before the Literary Societies of Oglethorpe University, Georgia; November 10, 1847* (Milledgeville: Thalian Society, 1847): 21-23.

⁴⁶ *The Social Principle*, 35-36.

shape and meaning by the Indian embodiment of the ‘heathenism’ that seemed so contagious to English frontiersmen and by the greater danger of Englishmen converting to an Indian way of life.”⁴⁷ It was a fear that informed Puritan anxieties about captivity at the hands of Native Americans, for instance, and was expressed in religious contexts. Axtell cites Cotton Mather’s warning to colonists living in frontier settlements that “Satan *terribly* makes a *prey* of you, and *Leads you Captive to do his Will.*”⁴⁸ Later authors expressed the stigma of “going native” in slightly less dire terms. In his accounts of his 1728 survey of the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina, William Byrd mentions a white couple who live as recluses on the shore of Currituck Inlet. Their story stimulates Byrd’s imagination, and he diverges in his narrative to describe the hermits’ way of life:

His habitation was a Bower, cover’d with Bark after the Indian Fashion, which in that mild Situation protected him pretty well from the Weather. Like the Ravens, he neither plow’d nor sow’d, but Subsisted chiefly upon Oysters, which his handmaid made a Shift to gather from the Adjacent Rocks. Sometimes, too, for Change of Dyet, he sent her to drive up the Neighbor’s Cows, to moisten their Mouths with a little Milk. But as for raiment, he depended mostly upon his Length of Beard, and She upon her Length of Hair, part of which she brought decently forward, and the rest dangled quite down to her Rump, like one of Herodotus’s East Indian Pigmies. Thus did these wretches live in a dirty State of Nature.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), 330.

⁴⁸ *A Letter to Ungospellized Plantations* (Boston, 1702), 14, quoted in *Natives and Newcomers*, 330.

⁴⁹ *Histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, ed. William K. Boyd (New York: Dover, 1967), 46.

This anecdote is part of a broader pattern in Byrd's texts where a lack of "industry" is associated with racial backsliding, expressed here in his analogies to the couple living "after the Indian Fashion" and dressed like the fabled miniature inhabitants of the Asian subcontinent. In contrast, Hector St. John Crèvecoeur was more serious toward the end of the century when he observed in *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) that "Our bad people are those who are half cultivators and half hunters, and the worst of them are those who have degenerated altogether into the hunting state. As old ploughmen and new men of the woods, as Europeans and new made Indians, they contract the vices of both."⁵⁰ The wilderness exerted a magnetic pull, and to succumb to it and forgo labor and civilization meant assuming a degraded condition of humanity whose full realization was the Native American.

Simms himself did not fear that he would "go native" or that he would become creolized as a result of his appropriation of Native American culture. There is nothing to suggest that he considered himself anything less than a member of the "Anglo-Norman" race that his fiction, and later poetry, celebrated.⁵¹ Axtell's conclusion about colonial English cultural exchange is germane to Simms and the other antebellum Southern novelists, too: "To have become truly Indian, the colonists would have had to think like

⁵⁰ *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. Warren Barton Blake (London: Everyman Edn., 1912), 55, quoted in Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 315.

⁵¹ For the history of antebellum Southern whiteness, See Ritchie Devon Watson, Jr., *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 2008); for Simms's contributions to it, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), 164-68.

Indians, to value the same things that the Indians valued, and most important, to identify themselves as Indians and their future with native society.”⁵²

This maintenance of racial boundaries also marks a significant difference between the texts of Simms and Cooper that address the clash between colonizing and indigenous civilizations. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., observes how in contrast to the character of Craven, Natty Bumppo, the idealized frontiersman and protagonist of the latter author’s Leatherstocking Series, is a liminal character between the white and Native American societies. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, for instance, Bumppo self-identifies more with the purity of character embodied by his indigenous companions than the corrupt values represented by his fellow whites. This distinction is the product of two major differences that Rubin says characterizes not just the two authors, but also the different relationships that Northern and Southern writers had with Romanticism: Cooper saw the wilderness as a place of rebirth (albeit ultimately foiled) whereas Simms saw it as a crucible for leadership but also as an enabler of avarice and as a precondition to civilization. Missing from “Simms’s version of the white man and the Indian in the forest,” says Rubin, “is the vital dimension that makes the Leatherstocking Tales . . . so deeply engaging a reenactment of the conquest of the New World wilderness: the tension between nature and society, the possibility of moral regeneration within nature.”⁵³ Instead, “Life in nature is not romanticized in *The Yemassee*. . . . The forest is the place of outlawry and

⁵² *Natives and Newcomers*, 327.

⁵³ *The Edge of the Swamp*, 108.

violence, with few ennobling qualities for those whites who put the territories behind them” in their westward movement.⁵⁴

Indeed, it was this threat—that of a future analogous to that of the Indians—that made “going native” on a civilization-wide level frightening. Simms and other conservatives who remained on the seaboard “feared that the Southwest represented the future of the South, a future in which mobility would be an intrinsic, unceasing, and disruptive feature of society,” points out Miller. These critics of migration were convinced that “far from being agents of civilized advance, the [emigrants] appeared to some to be replicating the most retrograde characteristics of the peoples they were supposed to be displacing.”⁵⁵

Moreover, the example of the Yemassee was a precedent with other ominous implications, for the ramifications of instability extended beyond mere cultural survival. This vulnerability also challenged the principles that underlay the rest of the South’s racial logic, especially its rationale for slavery. For “if the temptations of his environment

⁵⁴ Ibid., 125. Rubin’s characterization overlooks one anomalous historical novel in Simms’s oeuvre, *The Lily and the Totem, or the Huguenots in Florida* (1850), in which a French colonist does integrate himself with the Native American community, and in fact, fights against his former countrymen with his new comrades. Rubin’s characterization is also less applicable when it comes to Simms’s poetry, which more closely approximates the spirit of Northern Transcendentalists and British Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge toward the environment. James Everett Kibler, Jr., observes that Simms the poet “writes of nature and of nature’s manifold roles as teacher, source of inspiration, restorer of a tired spirit, spiritual guide, aid to reflection, nurturer, and symbol of immortality” (Introduction to *The Selected Poems of William Gilmore Simms* [Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1990], xviii). The contrast between the two genres’ approaches to the environment is due to Simms’ beliefs about the spiritually ameliorative properties of poetry and the didactic function of the novel.

⁵⁵ *South by Southwest*, 92, 93.

proved no more resistible to the white man than they supposedly did to chattel or Choctaw,” explains Miller, “Where did that leave the planters’ claims for a culture built on the exercise of measured control over oneself and others?”⁵⁶

“Prescribed Classes” and Paternalism

Though immigrants to the Old Southwest were never “seduced” by hunting as Craven suggests the Yamasee were, neither did they exercise the “measured control” that Simms believed would create stable, respectable communities. In fact, the opposite occurred as propriety diminished the farther one removed from the east coast. One Virginian described the consequences in Mississippi by declaring that “I have been . . . *candidly disgusted*—in the society of the interior of the country. I had hoped to find blackguardism and vulgarity confined here as in older states to prescribed classes of the community. But here all society seems to participate in one common degeneracy. All seems ignoble, low, rowdy to the last extreme.”⁵⁷ The fate of Sanutee and his tribe in *The Yemassee* foreshadowed the potential outcome of this mobility and amorality for white civilization in the Old Southwest. However, the novel also represents a model society that could preclude such a fate: paternalism.

Just as the cultural and physical geography of the Southwest shaped the behavior of immigrants to the region, historian James Oakes posits that similar factors accounted

⁵⁶ *South by Southwest*, 95.

⁵⁷ [?] to Langdon Cheves Jr., 31 December 1836, Langdon Cheves Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, quoted in Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1: 352.

for Simms's and his peers' suspicion of the Deep South. In contrast to the new states of Mississippi and Alabama, the region Simms was writing from was one where "the fortuitous combination of lengthy settlement, wealth, and unparalleled social stability isolated these areas from the young, speculative instability of the rest of the slaveholding South," explains Oakes.⁵⁸ The contrast informed Atlantic Southerners' perspectives on issues relating to immigration to the Old Southwest in distinctive ways. For example, says Oakes, "many slaveholders in these unusually stable regions managed to retain much of the traditional emphasis on social stratification that was inherited from the slaveholders' seventeenth-century forebears."⁵⁹ This legacy explains, for instance, the horrified reaction of travelers upon encountering a mob-like "one common degeneracy" in the Old Southwest in lieu of such sordidness being limited to the traditional "prescribed classes" where it was more or less to be expected. The fluidity of social and racial lines contaminated those who were supposed to be regulating such behavior.

Simms, a plantation owner by marriage, was like many elite whites in the older Southern states who believed that recognizing class was important, even if they didn't quite know how to define it.⁶⁰ As historian Michael O'Brien explains, "As sharply as any

⁵⁸ *The Ruling Race*, 14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁶⁰ I use "elite" and "non-elite" here to reflect the challenge of categorizing the historical antebellum Southern whites for whom Simms's characters were analogies. As O'Brien explains,

The power of [the] vision of upper and lower classes meant that the Old South had an impoverished conception of a middle class or middling classes. In the South, there were those lower than higher, higher than lower, but few who were explicitly middling. . . . [The idea of a cohesive, identifiable middle class with shared interests] was much inhibited by the porousness of the distinction between

Americans, Southerners knew that the world had its social distinctions.” However, “they were clearer about how class worked than how it might be defined, for they inhabited a world of fluidity that crowded many categories into their minds. . . . social status was most unclear, was the most profligate of confusions.”⁶¹ One of the important functions of class in Simms’s mind as it related to the Old Southwest was how it determined whether an individual was obliged to assume a position of leadership in his community or defer to such an authority. Consequently, his novels reflect a social order that Richard Gray describes as “a hierarchical system that found its summit and embodiment in what [Simms] called ‘the Southern aristocrat—the true nobleman of that region.’”⁶² Simms, a parvenu himself, was careful to acknowledge that these leaders could be born outside of the educated and wealthy elite.⁶³ His paternalistic protagonists could be “aristocrats by

rural and urban in the South, and also by the prevalence of ideas of gentility, which spoke of gentlemen and ladies, and hence bound this proto-bourgeoisie to the South’s proto-aristocracy, making them lower and higher parts of the same class. (*Conjectures of Order*, 1: 374-75)

⁶¹ *Conjectures of Order*, 1: 364.

⁶² *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1986), 47.

⁶³ Simms explained in *The Partisan*, his other 1835 novel, that

Caste and class properly pride themselves upon the habitual refinements of mind and moral, acquired in long periods of time. This constitutes their just claim to authority . . . But there is, here and there, a natural nobility in individuals, which overrides the law, and demands recognition. . . . It is the duty of an aristocracy to acknowledge all such persons, as soon as they are found, and take them lovingly into their embrace, and seek to do them honor; and there is a twofold wisdom in doing so, since we thus add to our own resources of society, and increase our influence upon mankind at large. (*The Partisan, A Tale of the Revolution* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835); qtd. in J. V. Ridgely, *Nineteenth-Century*

accomplishment, if not by birth,” explains Moltke-Hansen, but either way, they were necessary to ensure that the “public mind . . . [would] be awakened, elevated, chastened, nay goaded and scourged to its equal duties to patriotism and self,” as Simms claimed in “The Morals of Slavery.”⁶⁴

Simms’s faith in innate leadership was symptomatic of the seaboard conservatives’ commitment to paternalism. It was a mindset, Oakes explains, that “assumes an inherent inequality of men. . . . A paternalist stresses the organic unity born of each individual’s acceptance of his or her place in a stable, stratified social order.”⁶⁵ Though an ardent supporter of Jackson and, later, a self-identified “loco-foco” Democrat, Simms never completely acquiesced with that Party’s egalitarian principles, insisting upon a more Whiggish outlook with respect to class and privilege.⁶⁶ Democracy is “not levelling in character,” Simms insisted in “The Morals of Slavery.” Instead, it is “that harmony of relation in the moral world” that “not only recognized, but insisted upon inequalities,” even among whites.⁶⁷ Simms’s novels, *The Yemassee* included, valorize this paternalistic conception of the world, but never in such direct terms lest they be

Southern Literature, New Perspectives on the South [Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1980], 68.)

⁶⁴ “Ordered Progress,” 132; “The Morals of Slavery,” 256, quoted in Moltke-Hansen, “Ordered Progress,” 132.

⁶⁵ *Ruling Race*, xi

⁶⁶ For the trajectory of Simms’s political career, see Jon. L. Wakelyn, *The Politics of a Literary Man*, Contributions in American Studies 5 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973).

⁶⁷ “The Morals of Slavery,” in *The Pro-Slavery Argument*, 257, 258.

accused of an anti-republican bias. Instead, as Scott Romine has observed, representations of this pattern of community in Southern literature illustrate

the simultaneous presence of unity and division. . . . To establish itself as an organic order—that is, a natural rather than a constructed or instrumental one—the community and its representatives must therefore establish two things, the natural basis of division and the collective basis for unity. Division, then, is defined from the top down, while unity is asserted from the bottom up.⁶⁸

Romine's description suggests that communal bonds were formed by "coercion rather than consent."⁶⁹ This is the case in *The Yemassee*, where elite whites like Craven do not force their social inferiors to acknowledge their authority or conscript them into supporting the paternalistic order. The novel naturalizes this incongruity through the deferential characterization of non-elite whites and the limited agency it assigns them. In particular, the novel's yeoman characters gravitate of their own will to Craven, the tacitly recognized leader. They establish the ostensible "organic order" by willingly acknowledging their subordinate status and emphasizing the importance of it for the collective survival and success of their community.

The "true noblemen" are easy to identify in Simms's fiction, even when—as in the case of *The Yemassee*—they are in disguise. Their fitness for leadership, for instance, is reflected in their physical appearance, typically described in idealized terms.⁷⁰ When

⁶⁸ *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community*, Southern Literary Studies (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1999), 7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷⁰ O'Brien observes that using physical appearance as a metonymy for virtue and character was typical of the era. Referencing Daniel R. Hundley and his *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (1860), O'Brien explains that the book's "respect for the body, for the ancestral, marks a gulf between Hundley's time and our own. Modern sociologists and historians see social behavior as contextual. . . . Hundley, though he lovingly

introduced as the mysterious squire “Harrison” in *The Yemassee*, for instance, Craven’s authority and virtue are connoted by Simms’s description of his “rich European complexion, a light blue eye, and features moulded finely, so as to combine manliness with so much of beauty as may well comport with it. He was probably six feet in height, straight as an arrow, and remarkably well and closely set” (27).

If the narrator’s description reflects Craven’s physical attractiveness, the integrity that it represents commands the admiration of the novel’s yeomen characters. Even though they are ignorant of his identity as Governor, they still offer him their respect and loyalty. For example, the narrator mentions that, prior to the events of *The Yemassee*, there was a battle against the Spanish during which Craven volunteered to lead a militia unit whose members were “entirely ignorant of his character and his pursuits” (115). Though he skillfully leads them in combat, the stranger’s temperament was as appealing to his subordinates as his warfighting abilities: “his successful heading of them in that sudden insurrection, at a moment of great emergency, not less than the free, affable, and forward manner which characterized him, had endeared him to them generally.” In fact, says Simms, the militia “were content with this amount of their knowledge of one whom they had learned not less to love than to obey” (115).

Simms’s emphasis on the yeoman’s obedience is typical of how he sought to legitimate and even romanticize what Oakes says was supposed to be “each individual’s acceptance of his or her place”—or more accurately, self-subordination—in a

described behavior, did not usually explain society by circumstances but by physique” (O’Brien 1: 387).

paternalistic society.⁷¹ By describing the basis for the non-elite whites' relationship in emotions of "endear[ment]" and "love," Simms disguises an asymmetrical power relationship by suggesting these paternalistic bonds are instinctual rather than ideological.

Craven is even able to inspire obedience and loyalty among non-elite whites who loathe him, such as Hugh Grayson, his rival for the affection of Bess Matthews. The evolution of Grayson's character from recalcitrance to dutifulness is a subplot in the novel that not only underscores the protagonist's charisma, but also amplifies *The Yemassee's* theme of obedience and discipline.

Grayson and his brother Walter are young settlers on the frontier whose home near Pocolatigo makes them key assets in Harrison's plan to discover and then to defend against the Yamasee's attack on the colony. Walter eagerly obeys his orders, whereas Hugh remains indifferent. "I cannot like that man for many reasons," he tells his brother, "Not the least of these is, that I cannot so readily as yourself acknowledge his superiority, while, perhaps, not less than yourself, I cannot help but feel it" (42-43). Personal prejudice stands in the way of Grayson's affection for the mysterious stranger, yet he nonetheless admits the latter's compelling aura of authority. Craven's authority was "felt without being heard," as Simms would later explain in "The Social Principle."⁷² However, despite his tacit recognition of Craven's superlative qualities, Grayson later attempts to murder the disguised governor after Bess admits her preference for him. At the crucial moment of his attack, though, Grayson suddenly loosens his grip on his victim

⁷¹ *Ruling Race*, xi.

⁷² "The Social Principle," 19.

and begins to “trembl[e] before him, like a leaf half detached by the frost” (240). So emphatic is Grayson’s remorse for attacking not just his rival, but such a charismatic leader, that he invites Harrison to kill him in retribution.

However, “pity had completely taken the place of every other feeling in the bosom of Harrison,” whose sterling character is underscored by his immediate forgiveness of his assailant (241). In fact, rather than punish him, Craven appeals to Grayson’s sense of duty as a means to do his penance. He admonishes his would-be murderer by telling him that “Thou hast been rash and foolish, but I mistake not thy nature, which I hold meant for better things,” and assigns him the responsibility of evacuating colonists to the nearby blockhouse (241). When Grayson instead returns to Bess and admits his attempt on Craven’s life, her scorn only deepens his shame. She characterizes Grayson’s substitution of personal interest over deference and self-discipline in language that would resonate deeply with Simms’s white Southern readers in particular: “thou hast thy good—thy noble qualities,” she says, “wert thou not a slave” to passion (306). Humiliated by the accusation of a lack of self-mastery, Grayson “determined, from that moment, upon the overthrow of the tyranny” of jealousy that stood in the way of his duty, namely, his followership (310).

Grayson’s course of redemption in order “to be at least worthy of the love which he yet plainly felt he could never win” requires him to follow the orders of his hated rival (310). Honor and respect now require the young man—paradoxically it would seem—to acknowledge the desirability of deference. However, now he begins to “adopt energetic measures in preparing for any contest that might happen with the Indians” and “[strives] to forget the feelings of the jealous and disappointed lover, in the lately recollected duties

of the man and citizen” (310; 346). This evolution from self-interest to public disinterestedness proves crucial to the successful defense of the frontier blockhouse against the Yamasee attack. The morning after the battle, Craven tells Grayson that his contributions preserved the lives of the colonists: “But for you, the sun would have found few of us with a scalp on” (387). Furthermore, Grayson’s willingness to follow Craven’s orders is central to his redemption as a productive member of his community. “Your command, too, was excellently managed for so young a soldier,” Craven tells him publicly, restoring the prodigal yeoman’s honor and dignity among his peers (387). Yet even when being flattered, Grayson wonders from “Whence came that air of conscious superiority in the speaker—that tone of command—of a power unquestionable, and held as if born with it in his possession?” But in contrast to the bitter haughtiness that accompanied his previous thoughts about or interactions with Craven, now Grayson’s response to the “ease and loftiness” of the disguised governor is a “degree of respectful awe” that conforms to his position within the paternalistic hierarchy of Simms’s idealized frontier society (388).

Craven shortly thereafter reveals his identity to the colonists, and he places Grayson in charge of a garrison at Port Royal, confirming the latter’s redemption. But this delay of the revelation of his legal authority until the conclusion, a plot device borrowed from *Ivanhoe* and *The Spy*, enables Simms to illustrate for his antebellum readers how moral leadership alone—and not materialistic gain—can command respect

and organize a stable, organic, and mutually beneficial community.⁷³ This representation of paternalism as an ostensibly natural phenomenon with a positive outcome is associated with another polemical dimension of *The Yemassee*: its insistence on managed immigration and settlement so as to avoid moral decline and the threat of civilization's collapse. Only natural leaders with wisdom, character, and charisma could stabilize the Old Southwest in ways similar to the manner in which Craven saved eighteenth-century South Carolina in spite of the injurious, materialistic behavior of the council and irresponsible settlers. Sean Busick explains that Simms "was far more interested in the power of autonomous personal character than in impersonal forces" such as geography and climate when it came to the development of nations and races, and *The Yemassee*'s valorization of Craven's character confirms this emphasis on charisma.⁷⁴

This motif in Simms's fiction reflects the novelist's commitment to the principle that strong leaders were enough to ensure a community's prosperity and security only if their authority was acknowledged by their social inferiors—an idea flouted by the Old Southwestern Humorists and their adaptation of Afro-Southern trickster tales. But whereas the form of the periodical sketch complemented their subversive vision of social relations in the Old Southwest, Simms's choice of the historical romance as the genre to convey his message accentuated its conservative outlook on the frontier.

⁷³ Oakes explains that "The paternalist ethic implied an 'organic' unity of interests within a social order, and indeed the biological metaphor was a common rhetorical device among paternalist advocates" (*Ruling Race*, 4)

⁷⁴ *A Sober Desire for History*, 4.

Historical Romances and Moral Stewardship

Simms himself could never quite count on the same degree of respect or authority from his fellow Southerners that he accorded to the character of Craven. His patrimony—his father was a tavern keeper who later abandoned him for a new start in Mississippi—kept Simms on the margins of polite society in Charleston, no matter how well his books sold. Similarly, though a planter and slave owner in adulthood, the novelist nevertheless chafed under the fact that his property was owned and managed by his father-in-law. Moreover, Simms was elected to the state legislature by his peers in 1844 but was defeated for re-election after his first term, a rejection that wounded his already tender pride.⁷⁵ Equally painful was his life-long conviction that the South never fully appreciated his writing. “The tobacconist, or dramseller, who ministers to the most vicious appetites is held a much more practical sort of person, and is much more honored as his gains increase, than the Poet who appeals only to the affections and the sentiments,” he complained in an 1854 address, “Poetry and the Practical.”⁷⁶

Historian Drew Gilpin Faust has documented how other Southern intellectuals faced similar frustrations. Yearning for recognition in the public sphere yet denied it by their peers’ apparent indifference to the value of their artistic or scholarly contributions, Simms as well as George Frederick Holmes, James Henry Hammond, Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, and Edmund Ruffin ultimately defined the social relevance of their ambitions in terms of “moral stewardship.” As Simms wrote in “History for the Purposes of Art,” “The

⁷⁵ *Simms: A Literary Life*, 8, 262, 114, 124.

⁷⁶ *Poetry and the Practical*, ed. James Everett Kibler, Jr. The Simms Series (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1996), 17.

moral objects of the poet and the historian concern not the individual so much as the race,—are not simply truths of time, but truths of eternity” (42). Underlying this presumption, explains Faust, were these men’s belief that “only individuals of special intellectual and spiritual worth could point the human race toward truth and virtue.”⁷⁷ This conceptualization of themselves conferred a special purpose to their writing. Simms and the others believed, says Faust, that “all works of mind should be dedicated to discovering and communicating moral truth, for this was the legitimating purpose of the intellectual.”⁷⁸

Consequently, the role of moral steward validated for Simms his work as an editor, essayist, and public speaker, regardless of whether he was appreciated by Charleston’s elites, his father-in-law, or the voters of Barnwell District. This self-imposed responsibility also indirectly shaped how and why he appropriated non-white culture. On one hand, he co-opted that culture to be a part of the narrative of white settlement and growth and to provide an example of the fate that would befall Anglo-Saxon culture if it did not correct its materialistic emigration or address the lack of decorum in the Old Southwest. But the gravitas associated with such a moral obligation also determined the pluralistic nature of his appropriation. More than any other genre, the historical romance not only licensed his creative use of non-white culture but also enabled him to emphasize the polemical dimensions of history as it pertained to current circumstances.

⁷⁷ *A Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840-1860* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 54.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

The previous chapter has already addressed how Simms saw history as mutable in the context of fiction, the chief purpose of which was to edify readers. Simms, says Busick, thought “American history was full of tales of virtue just waiting to be told . . . [and] that history is philosophy teaching by example.”⁷⁹ In fact, it was the imaginative writer rather than the historian who was better equipped to convey these lessons. As Simms’s essay “Modern Prose Fiction” (1849) explains, a novelist’s expertise in developing character, tone, and theme qualifies him to

sift the causes of social progress, to estimate duly the moral of leading events, the effects of which they should produce, and the principles which they are likely to develope [sic] hereafter, whether for good or evil, upon the community no less than the individual man.⁸⁰

Moreover, a novelist was able to illustrate the “moral[s]” and “principles” of past events in a more compelling fashion than historians themselves could.

If Simms seemed overly sensitive in his defense of the novelist or overeager in his explanation of his profession’s centrality to the moral development of his society, it was with just cause. He was acutely self-conscious of his own reputation, for Southern readers viewed novels with suspicion. Michael O’Brien notes that there was “a troubling lack of legitimacy in fiction, which . . . stood suspected of lightness, triviality, immorality, and deceit, all vices which might lead young men and women astray.”⁸¹ O’Brien cites, for example, how in 1842 the Demosthenian Debating Society of Barnwell deliberated the

⁷⁹ *A Sober Desire for History*, 7.

⁸⁰ “Modern Prose Fiction,” *Southern Quarterly Review* XV (April 1849): 45.

⁸¹ *Conjectures of Order*, 2: 743.

question “Are the advantages of novel reading sufficient to warrant us, in recommending them to others?” The members ultimately decided they were not.⁸²

Simms vigorously responded to these sentiments by emphasizing the didactic and ameliorating aspects of fiction. In fact, the best writers, for whom Simms reserved the title of “artist,” could not separate polemic from entertainment. “As the great end of the artist is the approximation of all his fiction to a seeming truth, so, unavoidably, he inculcates a moral whenever he tells a story,” he argued in “Modern Prose Fiction.” “The passion for his narratives is equally true to the moral instincts of his auditory. This determines the legitimacy of his art, which has been practiced from the beginning of time, in all the nations and all the ages of the earth.”⁸³ Simms believed novels were particularly apt for improving the moral behavior of readers, so he fumed about the stigma attached to them. “Modern Prose Fiction,” for example, is an apologia for the form. In the essay he responds to the charges of the genre’s alleged ability to mislead young or susceptible minds by arguing that “Romance is, in fact, one of youth’s most legitimate restorers. It brings back all its first, glowing and most generous conceptions. . . . There is nothing in life, beheld though such a medium, which is vulgar and degrading;—all its fancies are pure and show as innocently as they are bright” (53). Simms did acknowledge the existence of hackwork but also claimed that the best examples in the genre occupied a privileged position typically reserved for ancient wisdom:

the plan of a romance, in prose, in two volumes, is not a whit less acceptable to the genius of classical art[.] . . . We do not argue in respect to abuses of the popular novel—the low purposes to which it is put, and the inferior objects which

⁸² *Conjectures of Order*, 2: 744.

⁸³ “Modern Prose Fiction,” 43.

are sometimes aimed at in its composition. All forms of art, all doctrines, all customs—the offices of religion,—the purest privileges of love and society—are thus sometimes employed for their own desecration. Our purposes is to show that the susceptibilities of this particular species of fiction, are quite as legitimate, and, indeed, much more various, than is the case with any other” (51).

Simms had made a similar case for the edifying potential of romance fourteen years earlier in his definition of the genre in the “Advertisement” to *The Yemassee*. In it he “insist[s] upon the distinction” between romances and novels, the latter of which he says are “confined to the felicitous narration of common and daily occurring events, and the grouping and delineation of characters in ordinary conditions of society” (22, 23). In contrast, the romance, *The Yemassee* included, “does not confine itself to what is known, or even what is probable. It grasps at the possible” (24). Nevertheless, Simms is again adamant that the romance, despite its emphasis on the imaginative, does balance entertainment with a didactic purpose. In a subsequent letter he emphasized that “The Yemassee, & in fact most of my works are *romances*, not novels. . . . They are imaginative, passionate, metaphysical; they deal chiefly in trying situation, bold characterization, & elevating moral.”⁸⁴

The historical romance was unique in its accommodation of history, imagination, and didacticism. Its ability to synthesize all three and link past to present contributed to Simms’s preference for it. His interest corresponds with Georg Lukács’ explanation for the genre’s appeal: “What matters . . . in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led

⁸⁴ *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms*, comp. and ed. Mary C. Simms Oliphant, et al. 6 vols. (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1952-1982), 3: 388.

men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality.”⁸⁵ In the case of *The Yemassee* and its interpretation of colonial expansion and social organization, this principle inspired the analogousness of those events and their solutions to the settlement of the Old Southwest.

Consequently, the purpose and potential of historical romances correlates with the seriousness with which Simms approached his job as an intellectual and moral steward of the South. In fact, no other genre—especially not the periodical sketches of the *Humorists*—could help him articulate his moral vision with equal vividness. Short fiction, for instance—though ironically a Simms forte—was a lesser form for these reasons. In a review that praised the novels of James Fenimore Cooper, Simms explained:

It is a tolerable easy thing to write a spirited sketch—a startling event—a hurried and passionate delineation of an action, which in itself, involves, necessarily, strife and hate, and the wilder phrenzies of the human heart and feeling. But the perfecting of the wondrous whole—the admirable adaptation of means to ends—the fitness of parts—the propriety of the action—the employment of the right materials—and the fine architectural proportions of the fabric, —these are the essentials which determine the claim of the writer to be the BUILDER!⁸⁶

He also underscored the link between restraint and propriety in “History for the Purposes of Art”: “If the historian is required to conceive readily, and to supply the motive for human action where the interests of a State, or a nation, are concerned,—a like capacity must inform the novelist, whose inquiries conduct him into the recesses of the individual heart. Both should be possessed of clear minds, calm, deliberate judgments, a lively

⁸⁵ *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1962), 42.

⁸⁶ “The Writings of James Fenimore Cooper,” *Views and Reviews*, 265.

fancy, a vigorous imagination, and a just sense of propriety and duty.”⁸⁷ Short fiction could entertain, but it could not improve its reader’s character.

This “sense of propriety and duty” separated Simms and other authors of historical romances from the humorists, most of whom the former held in light regard. It was not that Simms did not appreciate humorous writing; in fact, his post-bellum sketches “‘Bald-Head Bill Bauldy,’ and How he Went through the Flurriday Campaign!—A Legend of the Hunter’s Camp” (1865-70?) and “How Sharp Snaffles Got his Capital and Wife” (1870) are superb examples of the eccentric characterization, physical humor, and exaggerated plots typical of the Old Southwestern style of comic writing.⁸⁸ Moreover, Simms manifests a wry satire in short stories such as “Those Old Lunes! Or, Which is the Madman” from *The Wigwam and the Cabin* (1845) and “Ephraim Bartlett, The Edisto Raftsman” (1852), and he includes scenes that draw from

⁸⁷ “History for the Purposes of Art,” *Views and Reviews*, 44. It was for these reasons that Simms admired Sir Walter Scott. He explained in “The Writings of James Fenimore Cooper”: “Such were Scott’s stories. In the gradual progress of the reader, as of a traveller through a new country, the tale carried us on, step by step, from beauty to beauty, from event to event, each beauty becoming brighter and dearer, each event more exciting and interesting, until we reached the crowning event of all; completing, in a fitting manner, and with appropriate superiority, the whole continuous and marvellous [*sic*] history. There was no violence done to the reader’s judgment—his sense of propriety or of justice” (“The Writings of James Fenimore Cooper,” *Views and Reviews*, 264).

⁸⁸ John Caldwell Guilds discusses the unclear circumstances surrounding the textual history of the posthumously published “‘Bald-Head Bill Bauldy’” in his explanatory notes to the edition of the story published in *The Writings of William Gilmore Simms*, Centennial Edition, Volume V: Stories and Tales (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1974), 807-10.

the Southwestern vein of humor in novels such as *Border Beagles; A Tale of Mississippi* (1840) and *As Good as a Comedy: or, the Tennessean's Story* (1852).⁸⁹

Simms believed humor must follow certain guidelines, though, in order to be worthwhile. In particular, legitimate humor must contribute to the improvement of its readers' character, similar to the purposes of historical romances. In fact, the traditional appeal of humor made it *potentially* more effective in achieving this goal. "No more easy, natural, or grateful work, perhaps, can be commenced than such . . . for shaping the general morals" of the public wrote Simms in an unpublished essay titled "Wit and Humor of the Professions" (5).⁹⁰ Consequently, Simms valued more genteel comedy for its edifying effect. In an August 1841 letter to Philip C. Pendleton, for instance, Simms wrote that "I rely upon your . . . Carutherses, and . . . Longstreets . . . to do justice to us,

⁸⁹ One of *Border Beagles'* chief characters is an itinerant actor whose rural naïveté leads him to mistake dangerous situations for dramatic opportunities, and *As Good as a Comedy* includes comic descriptions of a gander pulling and a circus performance similar to those in Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* (1835) and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), itself a legatee of the Old Southwestern tradition.

Simms's emphasis on the propriety of humor and on a humorist's social obligation is antithetical, though, to the subversive qualities that Bakhtin attributes to laughter as well as the manifestations of it in the works of the other Old Southwestern Humorists (Longstreet and Thompson excepted, perhaps). Thus while I believe that Simms has a skilled comic hand, and again, that stories like "Sharp Snaffles" and "Bill Bauldy" are superb, Simms's humor (or at least his perspectives on it) does not represent a sustained departure from the social function he saw his long fiction performing; namely, a polemical role that (like his treatment of the irresponsible planter Porgy in his *Woodcraft or Hawks about the Dovecote* [1852]) chastised excess, irresponsibility, or vanity. Moreover, the elements of frontier humor in *Border Beagles* and *As Good as a Comedy* are tempered by these novels' valorization of a hierarchal social structure that offers discipline and provides order for their fictional societies, non-whites and non-elite whites included.

⁹⁰ Box "Ms, Printed Articles, Essays, etc.," the Charles Carroll Simms Collection, the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

while giving to, and preserving, the true moral tone in your community.”⁹¹ Simms appreciated the elegant satire of manners in novels such as Caruthers’ *The Kentuckian in New-York* (1834) and enjoyed the Augustan comedy of Longstreet, whose blithe portrayals of country rustics and urban dandies in *Georgia Scenes* (1835) led Simms emphatically to declare them “Decidedly, the best specimens of American humor which are known to us.”⁹² Simms also prized the emphasis on public figures in Joseph Glover Baldwin’s *Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1853), which he said was “Full of fun and spirit. . . . The author gives us some really brilliant sketches of prominent persons, and shows himself capable of an excellent analysis of character.”⁹³

However, the texts of other humorists did not merit the label of “serious” literature. He wrote in 1845 that he was dismayed by the fact that much of popular humor seemed gratuitous instead of morally redeeming: “We are made to laugh now by what is simply queer or ridiculous,—by the grotesque and impossible . . . and by the worst of manners shown up in the strangest of situations.”⁹⁴ Consequently, Simms’s review of

⁹¹ *Letters* 1: 265.

⁹² “The Humourous [sic] in American and British Literature,” *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction, Second Series* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), 177. Regarding Longstreet’s apology in *Georgia Scenes* for the language he uses, O’Brien says that “Longstreet’s case points a moral. The moral weight of the intellectual society, when it comes to matters of language, lay with propriety, which was a recent and hard-fought possession, like the gentlemanly status of authors” (*Conjectures of Order*, 1: 419).

⁹³ *Southern Quarterly Review* (April 1854): 555.

⁹⁴ “The Humourous [sic] in American and British Literature,” 175. Here Simms argues that humor instead ought to balance laughter and propriety for the sake of bettering the condition of society. He claims that “It is only by a proper application of the moral and social standards of the country to the condition of things you wish to scourge and

Henry Clay Lewis's *Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor* (1850) focuses on its absence of gravitas and its lack of introspectiveness. Simms described it as "one of a class to which we do not seriously incline. Our Swamp Doctor affords us sundry scenes sufficiently ludicrous. . . . Of our Swamp Doctor's humour the less we say the better. 'Purge us of that, Doctor,' will suffice; and must not be taken so much as an acknowledgement of his ability, as in the nature of an exhortation that, from this day forth, he ceases to make use of it."⁹⁵ Likewise, even though Simms appreciated the humor of *Polly Peablossom's Wedding* (1851), one of the major anthologies of Old Southwestern Humor, his review of it emphasized the collection's place in a very limited sphere of letters: the volume was a "collection of broad-grin, Southern and Western exaggeration—comicalities of the woods and wayside; such as will compel laughter if not reflection. Just the sort of volume to snatch up in railway and steamboat, and put out of sight in all other places."⁹⁶

overthrow, that you can hope to be successful in your satire" (154). Satire does not equate all forms of humor, of course, but this comment strikes me as representative of how Simms values the "proper applications" of humor for more than just evoking laughter; its true worth was for its ameliorating or uplifting potential.

⁹⁵ *Southern Quarterly Review* (July 1850): 537. Simms likewise dismissed Thompson's *Major Jones's Courtship* in the June 1843 *Magnolia*: "This is some of our Georgia humors,—a series of charcoal sketches in low life, abounding in extravagancies, which will doubtless gratify numerous readers, and persuade to broad grin and vociferous cachinnation, on the part of some, —to the heart's content of the author. . . . It has never been our lot to perceive much approximation to the actual and the true in this sort of writing. We regard it, even in its modern master, Mr. Dickens, as one great, gross caricature,—such a distortion of nature, and man, and society, —that in the language of Hamlet, treating of a kindred art, — 'I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated nature so abominably'" (399).

⁹⁶ *Southern Quarterly Review* (July 1851): 272.

Historical romances, on the other hand, were more appropriate for the parlor and study. The propriety associated with their polemical function lent them a respectability not shared by Old Southwestern Humor. Moreover, these same connotations shaped how Simms and his fellow authors of historical romances appropriated Native American culture.

Transcendental Whiteness

The conservatism of novelists such as Simms and of the historical romance genre itself contributes to a pattern of how competing voices are represented in novels like *The Yemassee*. The emphasis on tradition and didacticism encouraged these authors to include highly visible but clearly demarcated depictions of anachronistic Native American culture, whose predetermined fate contributes to the novelists' valorization of Anglo-Saxon identity and paternalistic communities. This particular inclusion of Native American traditions reflects the novelists' awareness of the Old South's cultural diversity, but it also signals their rejection of the alternative ideological perspectives represented by it in favor of a fantasy of white cultural hegemony.⁹⁷ Additionally, the conservatism of Simms and the historical romance also help explain how his anxieties

⁹⁷ Though a pattern in his historical romances, this is not to suggest that Simms everywhere Orientalizes Native American characters. Simms portrays Native Americans in their own culture (without the presence of whites) in short fiction such as "Jocassée. A Cherokee Legend" (1836) and "The Arm-Chair of the Tustenuggee. A Tradition of the Catawba" (1840), and as model and even heroic characters in short stories including "Caolya; or, the Loves of the Driver" (1841) and "The Two Camps. A Legend of the Old North State" (1843). The difference in genre—sketches versus historical romances—and the mission of the latter to relate and interpret national history rather than to entertain readers account for the differences in representation.

came to be represented in not only racial terms but also registered in the degree to which the texts themselves failed to become creolized.

To say that a historical romance like *The Yemassee* lacks multiple perspectives may seem counterintuitive. On one hand, it is a two-volume novel, the genre that Bakhtin associates with the dialogic play of authoritative and traditionally marginalized voices that he calls heteroglossia. However, it is important to remember that the theorist defined the genres of “epic” and “novel” according to a text’s inclusiveness of informal genres of language, the elevation of its subject matter, and the seriousness of its tone rather than by the generic characteristics of the text itself. For example, instead of just being long verse narratives, epics are any literary form characterized by what Bakhtin says is a “reliance on impersonal and sacrosanct tradition, on a commonly held evaluation and point of view . . . and which therefore displays a profound piety toward the subject described and toward the language used to describe it.”⁹⁸ As a result, the way Bakhtin characterizes (and privileges) the novel and its “familiarization of the world through laughter and popular speech” sounds more like the short periodical sketches of the antebellum humorists than the long texts of the region’s novelists, whose historical narratives portray as in a Bakhtinian epic, a culture “inaccessible and closed” as a consequence of their projection of current events into the past.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ “Epic and Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 16-17.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23, 27.

Interestingly, in the “Advertisement” of the first edition of *The Yemassee*, Simms actually claims that romances like it are “the substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic” (xxix). Prosody aside, Simms explains:

The modern romance is a poem in every sense of the word. It is only with those who insist upon poetry as rhyme, and rhyme as poetry, that the identity fails to be perceptible. Its standards are precisely those of the epic. It invests individuals with an absorbing interest—it hurries them through crowding events in a narrow space of time—it requires the same unities of plan, of purpose, and harmony of parts, and it seeks for its adventures among the wild and wonderful. (vi)

In subsequent editions of the novel, Simms elaborated on this explanation by pointing out that “The standards of the Romance—take such a story, for example, as the *Ivanhoe* of Scott or the *Salathiel* of Croly, —are very much those of the epic” (24).¹⁰⁰ Simms was not, of course, anticipating the theoretical paradigms of Bakhtin, but his nod to the national themes of Scott and the historical settings of Croly correlate with how the Russian theorist later emphasized how epics portray the “heroic past” of a community, similar to Scott’s account of medieval Normans and Saxons, and “a world of ‘beginnings’ and ‘peak times’ in the national history, a world of fathers and founders of families, a world of ‘firsts’ and ‘bests,’” such as Croly’s story of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish Diaspora.¹⁰¹ In fact, Simms emphasizes the historical specificity of *The Yemassee* in its “Advertisement,” highlighting the novel’s character as “an *American* romance. . . . so styled as much of the material could have been furnished by no other country. . . . The natural romance of our country has been my object, and I have not dared

¹⁰⁰ Simms is referring to Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe* (1819) and the more obscure *Salathiel: A Story of the Past, the Present, and the Future* (1828) by George Croly.

¹⁰¹ “Epic and Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 13.

beyond it” (xxx). This national emphasis underscores Simms’s use of Native American materials as necessary to achieve the historical color he desired in his account of colonial American history. But if one of the characteristics of an epic is that its subject is an important incident in its culture’s history, then the central focus of *The Yemassee* is the survival of European colonialism rather than the destruction of Native American civilization.

In addition to utilizing the “heroic past” of the 1715 Yamasee War as a source for *The Yemassee*’s setting and plot, what also makes these aspects of *The Yemassee* epic in a Bakhtinian sense is the way they function as analogies for contemporary experience. In other words, what Bakhtin said was the epic’s characteristic “transferral [sic] of a represented world into the past” is accomplished in *The Yemassee* by making the eighteenth century conflict a loose allegory for the antebellum Old Southwest.¹⁰² This projection of the present into the past (or vice-versa) has important ramifications, Bakhtin notes. It explains why historical romances like Simms’s reflect neither the immediacy of contact with the multicultural milieu that produced them—i.e, they are not creole texts—nor share the skepticism and subversiveness that are characteristic of the Old Southwestern Humorists. Simms’s representations of the Old Southwest and his anxieties about its disorder in an eighteenth-century setting “excludes any possibility of activity and change [and] the epic world achieves a radical degree of completedness not only in its content but in its meaning and its values as well.” Bakhtin says this is because an “epic world” like the setting of *The Yemassee* “is constructed in the zone of an absolute

¹⁰² “Epic and Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 13.

distanced image, beyond the sphere of possible contact with the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluating present.”¹⁰³

Though this closure would seem to preclude Simms’s ability to advocate for a change in the circumstances of emigration and settlement that so disturbed him, the finality of the *The Yemassee*’s plot and its insularity from the analogous events unfolding around him emphasize the novel’s interpretation of these events as the authoritative interpretation of them. Epics like *The Yemassee* deny the “re-thinking and re-evaluating present,” represented in this case by the diversity of experiences and opinions of the Old Southwest, including the perspectives of emigrants to the region who rejected the paternalism they had left behind and the perspectives of non-white Southerners victimized by colonization and settlement. For example, *The Yemassee*’s choice of a historical setting speaks to the issues surrounding the Old Southwest and immigration, community, and power, yet the predetermined fate of the subaltern voices in *The Yemassee*—uncooperative whites such as Hugh Grayson, not to mention the Yamasee themselves—mitigates how widely and accurately the plot reflects the diversity of opinion in the Old Southwest, especially regarding paternalism and emigration.

The epic’s lack of inclusiveness with regard to language and the ideological perspectives that discourse represents reinforces the isolation of historical romances from the diversity of voices and opinions existent in their milieu. Bakhtin characterizes the style of poetic genres like the epic (again, using the term “poetic” figuratively) as possessing “a unitary and singular language and a unitary, monologically sealed-off

¹⁰³ Ibid., 17.

utterance."¹⁰⁴ An epic may nominally incorporate the voices of others, but that inclusion is qualified by the author's "stripping all aspects of language of the intentions and accents of other people, destroying all traces of social heteroglossia and diversity of language" in favor of maintaining an official interpretation of the past.¹⁰⁵ In other words, the variety of social experiences that the language is supposed to *represent* is absent; they appear only as straw men in the epic. For instance, Sanutee's objections to colonization and Grayson's anger at Craven's assumed prerogative are expressed, but *The Yemassee's* predetermined outcome and rigidly drawn characterization mean Simms is not compelled to respond meaningfully to these alternative perspectives, nor to the groups that they historically represented. "Authoritative discourse may organize around great masses of other types of discourse," explains Bakhtin, "but the authoritative discourse itself . . . remains sharply demarcated."¹⁰⁶ Consequently, a dominant voice emerges in the text and becomes what Simon Dentith calls the "author's overarching consciousness."¹⁰⁷ In *The Yemassee*, this is the authorial presence of Simms and the conservative perspective he represents, which always remain in the background. Thus despite the semblance of multiple non-white voices, these representations of non-elite perspectives are always already subordinated to the dominant language, much in the way that Simms includes but brackets elements of Native American culture in *The Yemassee*. In other words, the

¹⁰⁴ "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 296.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 314.

¹⁰⁷ *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, Critical Readers in Theory and Practice (London: Routledge, 1995), 44.

voices in the text itself are never fully integrated, just as Craven explains that the races themselves cannot merge.

These boundaries are absent in the works of the humorists. Their unrestricted use of non-elite and non-white discourse and thus their engagement with the experiences represented by these communities make Old Southwestern Humor more akin to Bakhtin's definition of the novel than the romances of Simms. According to Bakhtin,

the novelistic plot serves to represent speaking persons and their ideological worlds. What is realized in the novel is the process of coming to know one's own language as it is perceived in someone else's language, coming to know one's own horizon within someone else's horizon. There takes place within the novel an ideological translation of another's language, and an overcoming of its otherness—an otherness that is only contingent, external, illusory.¹⁰⁸

This overcoming of Otherness is what is lacking in Simms, for in unitary language, says Bakhtin, “there is no soil to nourish the development of such discourse in the slightest meaningful or essential way.”¹⁰⁹ This is not to say that there was not a proliferation of non-official, non-white voices in the Old South in general, as the other products of antebellum cultural exchange demonstrate (Old Southwestern Humor included), but that multiplicity fails to materialize—in spite of the presence of Native American culture—in the monological environment of *The Yemassee*.

So why did Simms include Native American culture at all, or even represent the voices of non-elite whites, only to limit the ideological contributions of each by circumscribed representations of them? Again, beyond their contributions to historical setting and plots for the sake of exotic verisimilitude, the containment of Native

¹⁰⁸ “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 365.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 325.

American voices and the resolution of non-elite white perspectives support the dominant narrative and its racial ideology. Here Simms's desire to idealize paternalism is betrayed by the act itself. Critics Peter Stallybrass and Allon White observe that an author's "attempt to found an illusory unity above and beyond the carnival" of voices reveals the "act of discursive rejection."¹¹⁰ In their study of the carnivalesque in British culture, Stallybrass and White focus on its manifestations outside of festival and literary contexts, namely for the ways in which it helped constitute bourgeois identity. They argue that the hierarchal divisions of high and low culture and their corresponding class differences are never quite as distinct as authors such as Simms desired. These "cultural categories of high and low, social and aesthetic . . . are never entirely separable . . . [T]he human body, psychic forms, geographical space and the social formation are all constructed within interrelating and dependent hierarchies of high and low."¹¹¹ In fact Stallybrass and White argue that "the 'carnavalesque' mediates between a classical/classificatory body and its negations, its Others, what it excludes to create its identity as such."¹¹² For example, despite Simms's attempt to differentiate white culture from that of Native Americans, his own valuation of the former was ultimately informed by that which he marginalized. Jared Gardner says this Othering was a widespread pattern in early American literature, one which, like Cooper, Simms contributed to: "Race as a

¹¹⁰ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 124.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 26.

developing discourse helped provide the terms by which national identity came into being.”¹¹³

In particular, Simms represented the Native American way of life and the potential chaos of the frontier as problems for white Anglo-Saxon culture to overcome. The successful transcendence of each threat to conservative ideals of order and stability reifies Simms’s social vision first in racial terms and then along class lines with respect to paternalism. Yet as Stallybrass and White explain, at the same time that official culture denigrates the presence of the Other and its culture, they are “perpetually rediscovering . . . [the Other] as a radical source of transcendence. Indeed that act of rediscovery itself, in which the middle classes excitedly discover their own pleasures and desires under the sign of the Other, in the realm of the Other, is constitutive of the very formation of middleclass identity.”¹¹⁴

Gardner points to a similar trend in the context of race and early American culture. He explains that “the problem facing those who would found a national literature involved not simply cultural differences from Europe, but a complicated defensive relation to African Americans and Native Americans as well. The solution arrived at . . . [was] that an American literature comes to be defined not only by its cultural uniqueness but also by its defense of a model of racial purity.”¹¹⁵ Likewise, though Simms is not middle class in the sense that Stallybrass and White conceive of this identity, their

¹¹³ *Master Plots*, 11.

¹¹⁴ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 201.

¹¹⁵ *Master Plots*, 2.

explanation suggests at least partially why Simms eschews the grotesque, vernacular aspects of the Old Southwestern Humorists' material and why even the folk culture of the Yemassee ends with the novel. "Carnival was too disgusting for bourgeois life to endure except as sentimental spectacle," claim Stallybrass and White. "Even then its specular identifications could only be momentary, fleeting and partial—voyeuristic glimpses of a promiscuous loss of status and decorum which the bourgeoisie had had to deny as abhorrent in order to emerge as a distinct and 'proper' class."¹¹⁶ This simultaneous attraction and rejection dovetails with the aforementioned paradox of imperialist nostalgia, the regret Renato Rosaldo says colonial peoples feel for the loss they themselves were responsible for. Rather than embrace the transformative possibilities that non-white culture or even non-elite white culture represented—as did the Humorists in their integration of Afro-Southern trickster tales into their sketch humor, novelists like Simms portrayed it as something to reject yet remember in the fashioning of their own selves.

An explicit example of this process is *The Last of the Foresters* (1856) by Simms's contemporary, John Esten Cooke. Much like his mentor in South Carolina, Cooke saw himself as an historian as well as a novelist, but his mythical figures inhabited his native Virginia instead of South Carolina.¹¹⁷ "I have been trying to paint the Va. Cavaliers—their passions, humours, habits, opinions, foibles, strong points, dress, look,

¹¹⁶ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 183.

¹¹⁷ John R. Welsh, ed., "John Esten Cooke's Autobiographical Memo," University of South Carolina Department of English Bibliographical Series, No. 4 (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina, 1969), 29.

voice, and everything!” he wrote to Simms, whom he whom he addressed as “my dear Moestra [maestro].”¹¹⁸ Set in the late eighteenth-century Shenandoah Valley, *The Last of the Foresters* illustrates the transformation of the multi-cultural frontier into an Anglo-Saxon plantation society. This evolution is symbolized in the character of Verty, who is ostensibly one of the last of two Native Americans residing in the woods near Winchester, Virginia. Cooke explains in the preface that he “endeavored to place a young hunter—a child of the woods—and to show how his wild nature was impressed by the new life and advancing civilization around him.”¹¹⁹

The foil to this young Adam character is Rosebud, a “true child of the South,” and the daughter of a nearby plantation owner (11). In contrast to this feminine epitome not merely of whiteness, but of verifiable Southern whiteness, “Verty, clothed in his forest costume of fur and beads, his long, profusely-curling hair hanging upon his shoulders, and his swarthy cheeks, round, and reddened with health, presented rather the appearance of an Indian than an Anglo-Saxon—a handsome wild animal rather than a pleasant young man” (70).

The plot of the novel revolves around Verty’s assimilation into white society, a Pygmalion-like process he reluctantly agrees to only because of his affection for the white girl, whom he wants to marry. Verty is consequently put to work as a scrivener in the office of a lawyer, who also purchases him suits of “civilized” clothes to replace his

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 25.

¹¹⁹ *The Last of the Foresters: or, Humors on the Border; a Story of the Old Virginia Frontier* (1856; repr., Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Univ. Library, n.d.), vi. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

“forest costume.” Slowly the swarthiness and redness within him is minimized as “the process of his mental development” gains momentum (vi). However, though minor characters remark upon the growing fairness of Verty—a fellow scrivener tells him, for instance, that “You are a Saxon, not an Aboriginal”—what ultimately guarantees his whiteness is the sudden revelation at the novel’s conclusion that he is in fact the long-lost son of his patron, whose wife and newborn were kidnapped by Native Americans years ago (343). His racial identity vouched for, Verty and Rosebud are quickly married.

If not for its eventful plot or historical setting, then at least the emotional drama of *The Last of the Foresters’* magical conclusion marks the novel as a romance in the vein that Simms describes in the “Advertisement” to *The Yemassee*. Verty himself muses about “How singular it is that an Indian boy like me should have been brought up here. I think my life is stranger than what they call a romance” (358). Metafiction aside, though, this character’s literal transformation from a Native American to a white illustrates Stallybrass and White’s explanation for the transcendence of the Other as a means to celebrate and reify a dominant identity. While Verty’s Native American identity is romanticized in stock ways as “the Wild Huntsman, or other impersonation of the German Legends,” and his name connotes impeccable character, he is nonetheless prohibited from marrying the white heroine because of his ostensible indigenoussness. Rosebud’s aunt tells him, for instance, that the “proprieties of civilization require a mutual criterion of excellence” (204). Only when he transcends his Native American qualities can he assume the responsibility of civilizing the frontier through plantation society in ways his adopted Delaware community allegedly could not.

The corollary to this rejection or sublimation of the Other and its carnivalesque qualities in historical romances, explain White and Stallybrass, is that it “always bears the imprint of desire. These low domains, apparently expelled as ‘Other,’ return as the fair object of nostalgia, longing and fascination.”¹²⁰ The fascination of Simms with Native American culture—his “early and strong sympathy with the subject of the Red Men”—suggests this simultaneous attraction and rejection. But his sympathetic understanding of their fate could not overcome his more pressing anxieties about the future of white civilization in the Old Southwest and the concomitant advancement of Euro-American culture. Embracing the Southern intellectual imperative to be the moral conscience of the South, if not the United States, Simms’s novels emphasize a polemical approach rather than an empathic one.

“Dialogic Angles” and Resolution

Though Simms’s use of Native American history and religion in his novels reflects the multi-cultural landscape of the region and his and other white novelists’ fascination with and appropriation of the folklore of the Other, historical romances are not dialogic in the same way that the sketches of Hooper and other Old Southwestern Humorists are. In other words, novels like *The Yemassee* represent an embrace of indigenous culture and its voice, but it does not indicate a dialectical engagement with that non-white experience.

This limitation on the dialogic qualities of the voices within the text is also a product of the other consequence of *The Yemassee*’s epic distance—the tendency of the

¹²⁰ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 191.

author to adopt “the reverent point of view of a descendent” toward the past.¹²¹ Rather than question history, the deferential tone of novelists such as Simms toward it helped valorize its solutions to problems by advocating them as answers to contemporary issues.

Some critics do claim that the historical romances of Simms are heteroglossic, pointing to the diversity of their language, particularly the vernacular of the frontier characters. For example, referring to Simms’s border romance *Guy Rivers*, David Newton says, “Simms’s use of an unfamiliar foreign word is interesting because it seems to suggest the polyglossia or unfamiliar heteroglossic impulses that are always present within any language. . . . Indeed, Simms reveals that this heterogeneous confusion is not only social, but linguistic, and soon influences the different forms of social discourse that occur within the village.”¹²² Likewise, Thomas McHaney claims that in *Border Beagles* “The polyphony of Simms’s novel—the play of folk voices against the staid and genteel—can be regarded, of course, as nothing more than evidence of Simms’s close observation of local color. . . . [But] the play of voices in Simms is . . . a play of forces. *Border Beagles* is a dramatization of the heteroglossia of a society in flux where, often, an individual voice is all that a single person owns for use in the struggle to claim a piece of action in a new section of a rapidly vanishing frontier.”¹²³ But both Newton and McHaney are mistaking the presence of linguistic diversity (which also occurs in *The*

¹²¹ “Epic and Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 13.

¹²² “Voices Along the Border: Language and the Southern Frontier in *Guy Rivers: A Tale of Georgia*,” in *Simms and the American Frontier*, 123.

¹²³ “Simms’s *Border Beagles*: A Carnival of Frontier Voices,” in *Simms and the American Frontier*, 99.

Yemassee) for the dialogic qualities that characterize heteroglossia, especially its transformative possibilities. Bakhtin himself explained in “Discourse in the Novel” that “Using rhetoric, even a representation of a speaker and his discourse of the sort one finds in prose art is possible—but the rhetorical double-voicedness of such images is usually not very deep; its roots do not extend to the dialogical essence of evolving language itself; it is not structured on authentic heteroglossia but on a mere diversity of voices.”¹²⁴ Dentith interprets Bakhtin’s comment to mean that the “mere presence of linguistic diversity does not make for a polyphonic novel.” Quoting Bakhtin, Dentith emphasizes that “what matters is the *dialogic angle* at which these styles and dialects are juxtaposed or counterposed in the work.”¹²⁵ In other words, the degree to which the ideologies represented by these voices interact with one another is more important than just the textual presence of classed or raced language.

Equally important, adds Dentith, is that these voices cannot be contrived. An author can “acknowledge social and historical diversity” but must not (to be dialogic) “place it ‘either’ in socially typifying or alternatively individualizing ways” that preclude dialogism.¹²⁶ Bakhtin says that this practice of mere inclusion “may be only a stylistically secondary accompaniment to the dialogue and forms of polemic. The internal bifurcation (double-voicing) of discourse, sufficient to a single and unitary language and to a consistently monologic style, can never be a fundamental form of discourse: it is merely a

¹²⁴ “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 354.

¹²⁵ *Bakhtinian Thought*, 47.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

tempest in a teapot.”¹²⁷ This contrived inclusion of voices is characteristic of Simms’s romances whose subjects are the frontier. For example, the conclusion of *The Yemassee* (and those of his Border Romances) does not allow for nor admit any potential for competing perspectives about emigration and settlement.

Here, too, Simms scholars who claim that his texts are novels in the Bakhtinian sense overlook the fact that historical romances can only end in one way, no matter the uncertainty leading up to the conclusion. Nancy Grantham, for example, believes that “The text of [*The Yemassee*] traces the resulting confrontation of the two cultures through the voices of the Yemassee, the whites, and the author. The multi-voicing results in a dialogic treatment of the conflicting cultures and ideologies. Thus cultural collision seen in Simms’s work becomes literary cultural dialogism.”¹²⁸

Similarly, regarding Simms’s representation of the frontier, Grantham argues that

Even though there is a victorious culture within these works and, consequently, one ideology appears to overcome, subvert, or somehow assimilate the other, the subverted culture is not truly silenced in these novels. It remains in the margins of the text, unwilling to surrender its identity. . . . Even when the Yemassee are defeated, their voice . . . is not silenced, because Simms’s authorial voice does not justify the annihilation of the Yemassee people nor deny the validity of the Yemassee culture or their stand to defend it. Consequently, the Yemassee’s cultural identity lingers in the margins of the text, even after the destruction of their society.¹²⁹

Grantham accurately identifies Simms’s empathy with the fate of the Yemassee, but her interpretation overlooks the fact that Craven is nevertheless standing over the body of

¹²⁷ “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 325.

¹²⁸ “Simms’s Frontier: A Collision of Cultures,” in *Simms and the American Frontier*, 110.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

that nation's last and most powerful leader. The whites have succeeded at the expense of the Native Americans; the tribe has for all intents and purposes become a sacrificial relic of the past. It is a relic that Simms re-introduces, of course, and uses to challenge materialistic justifications for emigration to the Old Southwest. Ultimately, though, the Yamasee's fate was decided ahead of time by the historical record. The novelist might have been a vocal advocate for and master practitioner of creative license when representing history, but the very choice of the Yamasee War precluded any dialogic interpretation of the outcome; the work can only reflect the historical progress of Anglo-Saxons. The finality of *The Yemassee*'s resolution is antithetical to a key aspect of dialogism, namely that it "cannot fundamentally be dramatized or dramatically resolved" according to Bakhtin.¹³⁰ This is important, because it is one of the major distinctions between the historical romancers and the humorists; the latter, though they may have been nostalgic for a recent past that licensed the exploits of their protagonists, did not suggest that the frontier and its ethos in particular were beyond reach.

In contrast, in *The Yemassee* and other historical romances, the marginal elements of white society have either been eliminated or accommodated into a paternalistic pattern of civilization. Again, this easy resolution of perspectives snubs the critical spirit of heteroglossia, explains Dentith, who says that polyphony "does not mean a simple celebration of the other's word but a responsible engagement with it—though of course with no attempt to arrogate the final word."¹³¹ Bakhtin insisted that "The prose writer as a

¹³⁰ "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 326.

¹³¹ *Bakhtinian Thought*, 94

novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works, he does not violate these socio-ideological cultural horizons . . . that open up behind heteroglot languages—rather, he welcomes them into his work.”¹³² Though Simms welcomed the opportunity to include diverse voices, his integration of the perspectives that they represent into a narrative that espouses paternalism precludes any double-voiced discourse in the novel.¹³³ The dramatic evolution of Hugh Grayson in *The Yemassee* from prodigal to loyal underling reflects this curbing of alternative voices and visions for the South. Likewise, the elimination of more radical characters and the intentions they represent in the novel—the pirate Richard Chorley and Sanutee, for instance—also reflect Simms’s priority on closure, rather than the celebration of diversity and openness that is characteristic of heteroglossia.

Guided by their anxieties, antebellum novelists like Simms responded to change by emphasizing continuity. This social conservatism translated into their fiction. Not only did its valorization of the past contribute to the epic qualities of their vision of the South, but that historical vision made these texts impervious to creolization in spite of all the opportunities afforded by the circumstances surrounding the novelists that contributed to cultural exchange (and which did result in the creolization of Old Southwestern Humor). This outcome is one of the most ironic aspects of Simms’s novels in particular. If we are

¹³² “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 299.

¹³³ Newton approximates the Bakhtinian aspects of Simms more closely when he describes how in *Guy Rivers* “Simms continues to link the use of language to explorations of power and social status. In fact, virtually every confrontation between Guy Rivers and Ralph Colleton centers on struggles for social power that are expressed through language” (“Voices Along the Border: Language and the Southern Frontier in *Guy Rivers: A Tale of Georgia*,” in *Simms and the American Frontier*, 137).

to take seriously his claim that he possessed “an early and strong sympathy with the subject of the Red Men,” his texts failed to integrate not merely Native American culture, but Native American voices, in an empathic way that allowed for the articulation of their victimization. The evasion of responsibility through mourning, the conventions of historical romances, and the allegories between the Yamasee and the instability of the Old Southwest account for the political and colonial logic of such a dichotomy, but the final explanation for this frustrated potential is that Simms had too much at stake to do otherwise. Occupying a precarious social position already, and spurred by the impetus to defend a self-anointed position as an intellectual steward that itself was tenuous, Simms ultimately compromised his sympathy by keeping his subjects at arms’ length.

CHAPTER FOUR

WAS SIMON SUGGS BLACK?

“Known but to the few”: The Humorists and Native American Folklore

In contrast to the antebellum novelists' appropriation of Native American culture, Old Southwestern Humor uses it far less; even Native American characters infrequently appear in Old Southwestern Humor. The exception to this pattern is Thomas Bangs Thorpe, a New York native who settled in Louisiana and who primarily wrote sporting and natural history sketches. His *The Mysteries of the Backwoods; or Sketches of the Southwest* (1846) includes several stories depicting Native American culture and history, such as “Pictures of Buffalo Hunting” and “Romance of the Woods. The Wild Horses of the Western Prairies,” vivid anecdotes of Native American techniques for capturing and breaking horses that Thorpe witnessed during a hunting trip to Texas.¹

A sense of nostalgia, if not loss, characterizes the mood of the Thorpe sketches that feature Native American topics. In the Texas stories in particular the frontier is moving farther west, signified by an absence of inhabitants, both animal and human. For the buffalo in the American South, the “day of his glory is past,” claims Thorpe in “Pictures of Buffalo Hunting” (283). The same goes for the Native American who hunts

¹ “Pictures of Buffalo Hunting” and “Romance of the Woods. The Wild Horses of the Western Prairies,” David C. Estes, ed., *A New Collection of Thomas Bangs Thorpe's Sketches of the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State Univ., 1989), 283-99 and 160-65. (Hereafter cited parenthetically.) Thorpe biographer Milton Rickels traces the provenance of the stories to first-hand observations in *Thomas Bangs Thorpe: Humorist of the Old Southwest* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 1962), 64, 102.

him, and the twilight of this era casts a romantic hue over Thorpe's prose. An Indian hunter reminds him of a "bronze statue of antique art" (297) an image that was a "sadly empty cliché" even by the 1840s, says Thorpe's biographer, Milton Rickels.² The analogy between vanishing species and disappearing tribes is likewise suggested in "Romance of the Woods." A wild mustang—described in Rousseauian terms as a "noble animal [that] has roamed untrammled" (160)—is ultimately domesticated by his Indian rider. Thorpe then describes the animal's fate in language that eerily echoes white sentimentality about Native American removal and the perceived decline of indigenous culture. He writes that "The poor creature was completely conquered . . . and [a] big tear rolled down his cheeks. His spirit was completely broken. . . the saddle was removed from his back, and he walked slowly off, to be found, by a singular law of his nature, *associated with the pack horses of the tribe*, and waiting for the burthens of his master" (165). Thorpe had little in common with the novelists or their attitudes toward emigration and social order, but on an allegorical level, moments like these correspond to the imperialist nostalgia of the historical romances: their simultaneous fantasy of white cultural domination and the mourning of its consequences.³

The diminution of indigenous culture is even more apparent in *Mysteries of the Backwoods's* "Concordia Lake," where Native American civilizations, not to mention the people themselves, are relics on the verge of being forgotten. This sketch describes a remote lake near the Mississippi River, and Thorpe's survey of its flora and fauna

² *Thomas Bangs Thorpe*, 105.

³ Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Books, 1993), 69.

includes its human inhabitants, “some few renegade Indians, who make a precarious living in the barter of game” (310). He says he also occasionally encounters there “a family of the once powerful Choctaws” resting under a grape-covered oak tree, “where they dozed away the noontide heats” (311).

At the conclusion of the sketch Thorpe contrasts the contemporary enervation of these Native Americans with a legend about their more fabled past. He relates how “four generations since, . . . the ancestors of this Indian family, ‘seven hundred strong,’ fell upon the Natchez” nation nearby, and together with the French, nearly destroyed the latter tribe, “the most singular nation of all our aborigines.” The survivors, explains the narrator, “crossed the Mississippi, swept by the old oak we have described in their flight, coursed along the margin of Concordia Lake,” and prepared fortifications for a “deathly siege.” These earthen landmarks remain near Concordia Lake, but “the white man now incuriously wanders [over them], ignorant alike of their associations or purposes, and known but to the few who cherish the traditions and antiquities of our western home” (311).⁴

⁴ Thorpe wrote several more stories that convey this sense of loss in ways usually associated with the style of Simms and James Fenimore Cooper. See also Thorpe’s “Scenes on the Mississippi,” “The Disgraced Scalp Lock, or Incidents on the Western Rivers” and “A Tradition of the Natchez.” The first is an anecdote of the “melancholy exhibitions” of Indian Removal, a policy designed, says Thorpe, so the “dispirited and heart-broken” Native American “can pursue, comparatively unrestrained, his inclinations, and pluck a few more days of happiness before his sun entirely sets” (129). “Disgrace of the Scalp Lock” is a Mike Fink legend about a mortal feud between the fabled keelboatman and Proud Joe, a “superior Indian” who is missing his traditional marker of courage thanks to Fink’s marksmanship. However, Fink recognizes that he himself is as much a historical anomaly as his foe, “noticing with sorrow the desecrating hand of improvement” as he floats down the Mississippi River (173, 172). Thorpe’s “A Tradition of the Natchez” is a legend about the religious rites of the Natchez nation, and “what is remembered of them, [which] is calculated to make a deep impression upon the

The melancholic tone that pervades Thorpe's sketches of Native American culture and the somber conclusion of "Concordia Lake" suggest one explanation for why indigenous culture did not appeal to the humorists in the same way that it did to the novelists. The sense of loss that Thorpe describes may have figuratively distanced Native American culture from the humorists, helping place it beyond the pale of assimilation. Indigenous folkways were given the virtual status of historical artifacts, similar to the earthworks of the Natchez. Ironically, the perceived remoteness of Native Americans could be a product of Southern literature's contributions to, if not the psychological effectiveness of, the United States government's policy of removing indigenous peoples from the Deep South.⁵ Novels like *The Yemassee*, and even these sketches of Thorpe, contributed to this phenomenon. Brian W. Dippie's aforementioned thesis of the "Vanishing American" explains the ostensible logic of Removal, namely that "Indians

imagination, and cause regret, that some historian has not preserved a truthful history of this singular people" (318).

⁵ Thomas D. Clark and John D. W. Guice make the case that the United States government adopted the policy of Indian removal beginning with its 1817 treaty with the Cherokee at Hiwassee, Tennessee (*The Old Southwest, 1795-1830: Frontiers in Conflict* [1989; repr., Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1996], 238). With the passage of the Indian Removal Act in 1830, though, this policy was accelerated, ultimately displacing more than 100,000 Native Americans, most of them from the Southeast, west of the Mississippi during the 1830s ("Indian Removal Act," in *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Southeast*, ed. Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, The Columbia Guides to American Indian History and Culture [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2001], 178).

James H. Justus has found no evidence that the Humorists disagreed with the policy of removal in general: "The humorists were no more exempt from the general complacency about the Indian, or the tortured rationalizations of official racist policy, than most antebellum Americans, wherever they lived. . . . Their very presence in former Indian lands demanded" the necessity of Removal. (*Fetching the Old Southwest: Humorous Writing from Longstreet to Twain* [Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2004], 197.)

were doomed to ‘utter extinction’ because they belonged to ‘an inferior race of men.’”

This rationale, says Dippie, was fueled by the maudlin pathos of early American authors:

“Romantic poets, novelists, orators, and artists found the theme of a dying native race congenial, and added those sentimental touches to the concept that gave it wide appeal. . .

. Opinion was virtually unanimous: ‘That they should become extinct is inevitable.’”⁶

Removal not only physically distanced Native Americans from whites (who, as Thorpe observes, then settled their lands), but this historicization of Native Americans and their culture made the remaining inhabitants and their lore merely part of a disappearing landscape. The South’s indigenous people and their culture were “recent history” or “reference points” for the humorists, explains James Justus.⁷ In Thorpe’s sketch, the Native American legacy competes with observations of wrens and descriptions of trout fishing as part of a “few of the incidents and associations of Concordia Lake” (311).

However, compared with the eastern urban centers from which the novelists were writing, there were actually comparatively greater opportunities in the Old Southwest for the humorists to interact with Native American culture (or at least the remnants thereof), as “Concordia Lake” itself demonstrates.⁸ Moreover, even when those firsthand experiences of contact and cultural exchange were not afforded to writers, the example of

⁶ *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1982), 10-11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁸ James Taylor Carson reminds us that even though census takers in the South “failed to note the presence of any remaining Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws” in 1840, “some remained, hiding and waiting until they could safely reassert their public identities once more” (“The Obituary of Nations: Ethnic Cleansing, Memory, and the Origins of the Old South,” *Southern Cultures* 14 [Winter 2008]: 9).

Simms demonstrates that Southerners still had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the customs, spirituality, and history of the region's indigenous populations through early histories and ethnographies.

Another explanation for the dearth of Native American history and culture in Old Southwestern Humor is that outside of Thorpe, it had less value for the humorists in terms of how it could contribute to the settings, plots, and themes of their sketches. Unlike historical romances, the humorists' stories did not recreate the epic moments or depict the iconic heroes of colonial Southern history; instead, they represented contemporary settings or characters, or those from a much more recent past.⁹ Likewise, rather than document historical crises or future threats, the humorists embraced the comic aspects of emigration and new settlement. As a result, Native American culture was not needed as a historical surrogate to depict the adversarial conditions of regional expansion and development. In fact, the humorists' sketches challenged the novelists' gloomy portrayal of the frontier, especially their warnings about the threat that its social instability and emigration posed to civilization and culture. This absence of anxiety happened in part because the humorists themselves benefited from the fluidity of boundaries in the Old Southwest. Consequently, they rejected not only the novelists' jeremiad about the region, but also the paternalism that their fiction prescribed as part of the solution for the Gulf South's social, economic, and cultural instability.

⁹ Aside from Thorpe, Creek history and culture are the settings of two sketches ("Simon Speculates Again" and "The 'Tallapoosy Vollantares' Meet the Enemy") in Johnson Jones Hooper's *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, both of which will be subsequently discussed. In each case, though, the events are less than ten years removed from the collection's date of publication. (*Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosa Volunteers, together with "Taking the Census," and Other Alabama Sketches* (1845; reprint, Nashville: J. S. Sanders & Co., 1993), 69-81, 111-17.)

Instead of Native American culture, Afro-Southern culture was more useful for challenging this conservative outlook and for attacking the value of paternalism.¹⁰ The congruency between the motifs of their trickster tales and the alternative social vision that the humorists wanted to convey encouraged their use of plots, character types, and themes characteristic of black trickster tales. The humorists used these dimensions of Afro-Southern culture to describe a disorderly social environment as well as to diminish the idea of paternalism through satire.

Facilitating this appropriation was the visibility of Afro-Southern culture in the Old Southwest due to the numbers of slaves and free blacks living among whites. This proximity helped make black folklore more accessible, especially compared with the relatively smaller number of Native Americans remaining in the Old Southwest after the 1830s.¹¹ In fact, the more racially diverse character of society in the Old Southwest coupled with the social fluidity inherent in emigration and new settlement encouraged the patterns of interactions between whites and blacks that were described in the first chapter. These fueled the process of cultural exchange between members of both races, including

¹⁰ Stith Thompson distinguishes *folktales* from the broader category of *folklore* by defining the former to include “all forms of prose narrative, written or oral, which have come to be handed down through the years,” though given the prohibition on slave literacy, antebellum Afro-Southern folktales were almost exclusively exchanged by word of mouth (*The Folktale* [1946; repr., Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1977], 4.).

¹¹ There were also mundane practical factors that facilitated the comparatively greater degree and rate of creolization of Old Southwestern Humor than the historical novels. David Buisseret lists “the newcomers’ sense of self-importance” vis-à-vis the culture that was being interacted with, the familiarity of the two cultures with one another, and the relative size of each group to each other (Introduction to *Creolization in the Americas*, ed. David Buisseret and Steven G. Reinhardt [College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press for the Univ. of Texas at Arlington, 2000], 7).

the humorists, and, ultimately, the creolization of Old Southwestern Humor. The result was a genre of white-authored literature that is much more of a cultural amalgam than the novels. Like the description of biracial slaves by Simon Suggs in Johnson Jones Hooper's *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (1845), the humorists' sketches themselves were also a "breed . . . so devilishly mixed."¹²

Though there is textual evidence of Old Southwestern Humor's interracial cultural ancestry, the humorists left few, if any, records identifying their sources. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to interpret their silence as indicative of a lack of indebtedness to Afro-Southern folk culture. As recent scholarship on minstrelsy illustrates, the explicit acknowledgement of sources should not be a prerequisite in order for scholars to concede the influence of a subaltern culture upon that of a dominant group. The very nature of blackface suggests its indebtedness to non-white folk culture, but the task of identifying non-white contributions to Old Southwestern Humor is complicated by the way in which the genre *differs* from minstrelsy in its appropriation of Afro-Southern culture.¹³ Whereas

¹² *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, 142.

¹³ Historians acknowledge that although minstrelsy included aspects of African-American culture, that relationship was a primarily a racist simulacrum. Robert Toll concedes the possibility that minstrels may have "selectively adapted elements of black as well as white folk culture," but he qualifies this claim by noting that though minstrel players "claimed to be the authentic delineators of black life," they "were not authentic, even in intention. They were not ethnographers, but professional entertainers" (*Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* [New York: Oxford Univ., 1974], 42, 40). Recent scholarship also focuses on how and why these aspects of non-white culture were deliberately and persistently distorted to the point that antebellum whites accepted the results as "authentic." Eric Lott emphasizes the ideological aspects of this process, arguing that minstrelsy was "a principle site of struggle in and over the culture of black people" in which whites' attraction to non-white culture was mitigated by their transformation of it into a pejorative spectacle (*Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993], 18.).

Eric Lott argues that “cultural expropriation is the minstrel show’s central fact,” and that consequently any characteristics of black culture were “passed through an inevitable filter of racist presupposition,” the Humorists’ usage of non-white folk culture was instead motivated less by racism and more by opportunism.¹⁴ Rather than parody Afro-Southern folklore to underscore racist stereotypes, the Humorists instead integrated the folktales’ plots, themes, and characterization into their sketches to challenge stereotypes of frontier civilization.

This synthesis represents an entirely different mode of literary hybridity than the texts of the novelists and their appropriation of Native American materials. In contrast to the visible profile of Native American culture on account of the novelists’ highly romanticized adaptations and their transcendence of it, Afro-Southern tropes are quietly synthesized with European literary and vernacular traditions in Old Southwestern Humor. This cultural fusion is the fully realized product of creolization, the process Thomas Hylland Eriksen explains is the consequence of the “social encounter and mutual influence between/among two or several groups, creating an ongoing dynamic interchange of symbols and practices, eventually leading to new forms with varying degrees of stability.”¹⁵ In other words, the prevalence of opportunities for interracial cultural exchange in the Old Southwest led to the evolution of a new literary form that is a product of, but nevertheless distinct from, its parent cultures.

¹⁴ *Love and Theft*, 19, 101.

¹⁵ “Creolization in Anthropological Theory and in Mauritius,” in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek, Ca.: Left Coast Press, 2007), 173.

The syncreticism of Old Southwestern Humor signals not only an absence of resistance to creolization, but also the authors' nonchalance about the factors that contributed to it. In other words, the ultimate manifestation of interracial cultural exchange in the sketches represents the humorists' agreeability with a process whose circumstances included the suspension of cultural and social standards—the same phenomenon that the historical romances decried. These taboos included not only the embrace of non-European forms, but also a familiarity with them bred of disregarding prohibitions governing interactions between members of different races and social classes—a literal and figurative intimacy borne of the relaxed social distinctions that accompanied emigration and new settlement. Not coincidentally, these were the same historical circumstances that fostered the opportunities for members of different races to share stories with one another. In short, the Humorists appreciated a good story when they heard one, and as a result, they did not have objections to including Afro-Southern forms and themes amid a range of other, also mostly unacknowledged, sources. There was no effort at maintaining the kind of Eurocentric cultural purity that stymied a similar synthesis between Anglo and Native American culture (or that of Afro-Southerners, for that matter) in the historical romances.

This is another symptom of the difference between Old Southwestern Humor and historical romances that is not only a consequence of the humorists' acceptance of creolization, but also their indifference to the circumstances that facilitated it. The Humorists did not try to maintain boundaries between high and low culture in order to introduce or perpetuate class or ideological divisions, as Simms and others did through their methodology for including examples of Native American culture. Instead, the

syncreticism of the sketches coincides with Mikhail Bakhtin's claim that in non-epic texts "there takes place . . . an ideological translation of another's language, and an overcoming of its otherness."¹⁶ This absence of marginalization suggests not only the more liberal attitudes of white Southerners toward black culture in practice—regardless of the racist rhetoric published by Southerners in defense of slavery—but it also contributes to the critical edge of the sketches. Rather than seeking to avoid the radical perspective represented by Afro-Southern trickster tales, the humorists capitalize on it, using it to challenge the official forms and ideology of the dominant culture. Old Southwestern Humor parodies the serious forms and intent of historical novels—the intellectual and moral stewardship claimed by authors like Simms, for instance—and it also confronts their conservative response to the historical conditions of the Deep South, paternalism in particular.

One important qualification must be acknowledged regarding this creolization: It does not have to be a deliberate or conscious process. David Buisseret observes that creolization is not always "a voluntary activity . . . the adaptive pressures were omnipresent and irresistible, even if a person or a group tried to resist them."¹⁷ In spite of the contributions that Afro-Southern folklore did make to the plots, characterization, and satirical qualities of their sketches, the humorists themselves may not have been aware of

¹⁶ "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Slavic Series 1 (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 365.

¹⁷ Introduction to *Creolization in the Americas*, 7. Mary L. Galvin adds that "creolization is a process of selective adaptation in which borrowing is affected but by no means determined by" colonizers ("Decoctions for Carolinians: The Creation of a Creole Medicine Chest in Colonial South Carolina" in *Creolization in the Americas*, 64).

the fact that they were including elements of black folktales in their texts, especially if they heard these stories second-hand from whites in an already syncretic form. In other words, it is possible that the humorists heard versions of Afro-Southern folktales that did not feature black or animal characters, or settings and plots that did not involve slavery.

Nevertheless, the possibility of indirect influence does not alter the fact that Old Southwestern Humor has a racially diverse genealogy. I am less interested in confirming the exact patterns of transmission from African-American to humorist than I am in how tales from Africa directly or indirectly contributed to a genre of white-authored antebellum Southern literature that challenged the premises of paternalistic authority. The humorists did not have to recognize the source of a subversive element to exploit its utility in conveying their theme. However, as comparable studies of interracial cultural exchange in the colonial and antebellum South demonstrate, creolization was often a deliberate practice.¹⁸ James Axtell, for instance, characterizes colonial British appropriation of Native American culture as a process of “selective and piecemeal adaptations” that included diet, attire, and styles of fighting.¹⁹ Likewise, in her study of colonial pharmacology, Mary L. Galvin discusses how authorities in South Carolina went as far as to advertise and offer rewards for African and Native American botanical knowledge in order to meet the health challenges that North America presented.²⁰

¹⁸ See, for example, the case studies in Buisseret and Reinhardt, ed. *Creolization in the Americas*; and James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), chap. 14.

¹⁹ *Natives and Newcomers*, 327.

²⁰ “Decoctions for Carolinians: The Creation of a Creole Medicine Chest in Colonial South Carolina,” in *Creolization in the Americas*, 81.

Therefore, I am proceeding under the assumption that the humorists were consciously choosing to include elements of Afro-Southern folktales in a genre that critical consensus says capitalized upon the Anglo-American oral traditions of the Old South.

Even if a conclusive record of the patterns of transmission cannot be documented, this chapter's close readings and comparisons of Afro-Southern folktales and Old Southwestern Humor will nevertheless demonstrate that the former contributed to the latter. In particular, this chapter will highlight a pattern of connections between the trickster stories of slaves and the sketch humor of Johnson Jones Hooper, specifically *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (1845). Even after taking into consideration Ralph Ellison's warning that "from a proper distance all archetypes would appear to be tricksters and confidence men," textual evidence still points to major characteristics in a third of Hooper's stories that are unique to African and Afro-Southern folklore.²¹ It is circumstantial evidence, perhaps, but combined with Hooper's disdain for paternalism and the ways in which the details of his biography correspond with patterns of interracial contact in the Old South, the case for the creolization of texts such as *Some Adventures of Simon Suggs* rests upon more than inferences.

To help identify the parallels between Afro-Southern folktales (the parent culture) and Old Southwestern Humor (the creolized cultural form), a comparative analysis of their tale types and motifs will supplement the close readings in this chapter. Due to the

²¹ Ellison also cautions that "the trickster is everywhere and anywhere at one and the same time, and . . . is likely to be found on stony as well as on fertile ground" ("Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," in *Shadow and Act* [1953; reprint, New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1994], 46).

focus of this project, the same comparisons will not be made between Old Southwestern Humor and folktales collected from white sources, analyses of which have been done elsewhere.²²

Tale typing is the standard technique folklorists use to identify, classify, and determine the provenance of folktales based on their plots. However, the lack of a comprehensive index of African folktales makes this approach less than conclusive about the origins of certain tales and thus the direction of cultural exchange in the American South.²³ Regardless of the limitations inherent to tale typing African-derived folktales, one of the reasons that comparative close readings remain convincing is because these tales are so distinctive. A brief discussion of their characteristics before making the comparisons will help highlight the Afro-Southern legacy in the work of Hooper. His text will then be introduced as part of a similar overview of Old Southwestern Humor and its respective features. Galvin emphasizes the importance of understanding each of these traditions in their own right: “to analyze the relative importance of borrowing and

²² Thomas Tuggle, “Folklore in the Humorous Works of Johnson Jones Hooper,” (MA Thesis, University of Georgia, 1968), 49-51. Tuggle argues that Hooper’s use of “language, tall tales, superstition, trickster tales, and circuit tales” is derived from folklore (27). For the relationship between white regional folklore and other humorists, see also Bettich, “Hardin Edwards Taliaferro”; Paula H. Anderson-Green, “Folklore and Fiction in Nineteenth-Century North Carolina: Taliaferro’s *Fisher’s River* and Chesnut’s *The Conjure Woman*” (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State Univ., 1980); and Richard Ormonde Plater, “Narrative Folklore in the Works of George Washington Harris” (Ph.D. diss., Tulane Univ., 1969).

²³ William Bascom discusses the gaps in collecting and indexing African folklore that make such comparisons challenging in *African Folktales in the New World*, Folkloristics (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1992), 19-21. Bascom was compiling studies of American folktales with African roots when he passed away in 1981.

transfer in any aspect of the development of a creole culture, we must keep the beliefs and practices of the heritage cultures in full view in order to identify variation.”²⁴

These overviews of Afro-Southern folktales and Old Southwestern Humor will demonstrate that though both are independent genres, the white-authored texts reflect the influence of the Afro-Southern plots, characterization, and tone. At the risk of offering only a one-sided perspective of the literary genealogy of Old Southwest Humor, I will not be reviewing the influence of the genre’s other “heritage culture,” its European and Anglo-American antecedents. Whether a literary or an oral form, white culture undeniably had a formative effect. James Justus, for instance, characterizes the genre as “a museum of types including the topographical description, the almanac entry, the historical sketch of specific places, the public letter, the gentleman’s essay on outdoor sports, the turf report, the profile of local heroes and colorful characters, and the ‘Character’ itself (descended from Webster and Overbury through Addison, Irving, and Paulding).”²⁵

However, like Old Southwestern Humor’s relationship to white folklore, its connections to European literature have been well-documented elsewhere, and the time is past due for focusing on the contributions of African and African-American culture to

²⁴ “Decoctions for Carolinians,” 64.

²⁵ Introduction to *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. M. Thomas Inge and Edward J. Piacentino (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2001), 2. Kristie Hamilton also lists “the *essai*, the Theophrastian character, the eighteenth-century periodical essay, [and] the *bagatelle*” as influences on the American literary sketch (*America’s Sketchbook: The Cultural Life of a Nineteenth-Century Literary Genre* [Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1998], 15.).

Southern literature.²⁶ The silence of the Humorists themselves on the process of appropriation should not discourage scholars from re-examining Old Southwestern Humor through a multicultural lens. Those humorists who most appreciated African-American folkways would have been loath to acknowledge their indebtedness to a non-white culture that was publicly disparaged as inferior to its Eurocentric counterpart. Where silence still prevails, though, scholars must remedy its critical legacy by heeding Toni Morrison's advice to scrutinize the canon for "the 'unspeakable things unspoken'; for the ways in which the presence of Afro-Americans has shaped the choices, the language, the structure—the meaning of so much American literature."²⁷

Afro-Southern Folklore and the Trickster Tales

Shaped by the conditions and experiences of slavery, Afro-Southern folklore is what James C. Scott calls a "hidden transcript," a category of subaltern discourse "that is ordinarily excluded from the public transcript of subordinates by the exercise of power"

²⁶ It is reasonable to assume, as Justus does, that "the primary inspiration of the humorous sketches was prior writing," with folktales complementing or seasoning the humorists literary influences (*Fetching the Old Southwest*, 236). To what degree the humorists were indebted to British forms is a matter of disagreement. Justus suggests a spectrum of formal and vernacular sources; J. A. Leo Lemay identifies a "continuous series of Southern colonial writings from 1708 to the Revolution" and beyond that anticipate "the same impulses and traditions" of the humorists ("The Origins of the Humor of the Old South," in *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. Inge and Piacentino, 19.); John O. Rees explores how "precedents in English literature could shape what the Southwestern Humorists" ("Some Echoes of English Literature in Frontier Vernacular Humor," *Studies in American Humor* n.s., vol. 1, no. 3 [February 1983]: 350); and Pascal Covici claims a complete reliance on the *Spectator* tradition (*Mark Twain's Humor: The Image of the World* [Dallas, Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1962], 59).

²⁷ "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28.1 (1989): 11.

but is a consequence of the “practice of domination” itself.²⁸ African-Americans recognized the potential of slavery to chip away at their humanity by its brutal mental and physical oppression; lacking the capacity to muster sustained political or violent resistance to it, they responded by developing a vernacular oral tradition designed to preserve their sanity, heritage, and solidarity, as well as to articulate their anger, resilience, and optimism.²⁹ This constituted their folklore, which George W. Boswell and J. Russell Reaver define as “the traditional belief[s], literature, exaggeration, knowledge and skills orally constituted or transmitted” between a group’s generations or among members of the same one.³⁰

One of Afro-Southern folklore’s defining characteristics, as Scott’s explanation suggests, was its status as a separate (though not impermeable) alternative cultural sphere on the plantations and in the households of the South: a “public, if provisional, space for the autonomous cultural expression of dissent.”³¹ This boundary benefited slave communities by encouraging “an intragroup lore,” says Lawrence Levine, which

²⁸ *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1990), 27.

²⁹ Levine argues that culture was the one of the only sustainable means of resistance since “slaves found no political means to oppose slavery. But slaves were pre-political beings in a pre-political situation. Within their frame of reference there were other . . . means of escape and opposition” (*Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Thought from Slavery to Freedom* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977], 54).

³⁰ *Fundamentals of Folk Literature* (Oosterhaut, The Netherlands: Anthropological Publications, 1962), 11-12. For a more elaborate definition with an extensive list of the forms of folklore and a discussion of what constitutes “folk” itself, see Alan Dundes, “What is Folklore?” in *The Study of Folklore* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), 1-3.

³¹ *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 166.

“intensified feelings of distance from the world of the slaveholder.”³² It precluded, as John W. Blassingame has demonstrated, slaves’ complete identification with a culture that demeaned them: “The more [a slave’s] cultural forms differed from those of his master and the more they were immune from the control of whites, the more the slave gained in personal autonomy and positive self-concepts.”³³

Additionally, maintaining a distinct cultural sphere provided slave communities an opportunity and a means to communicate the knowledge and the skills needed to mitigate the effects of slavery, both physical and psychological. For several reasons, folktales emerged as the currency of this discourse.³⁴ Entertaining and informal, they attracted an audience, could be remembered easily, and thus could be re-told by almost anyone. Likewise, the anonymity of folktales (that of the storytellers as well as the characters themselves, who tended to be metonymic figures rather than specific persons)

³² “‘Some Go Up and Some Go Down’”: The Meaning of the Slave Trickster,” in *The Hofstadter Aegis: A Memorial*, ed. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 124.

³³ *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 106. In contrast, says Blassingame, independent folk traditions and practices “helped the slaves to develop a strong sense of group solidarity” (147). See also John W. Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 4-5.

³⁴ For further reading on other forms of black folklore which will not be covered in this study, see Sw. Anand Prahlad, *African-American Proverbs in Context*, Publications of the American Folklore Society (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1996); Jeffrey E. Anderson, *Conjure in African American Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2005); Yvonne P. Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2003); Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Champaign: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2003); and Rebecca J. Fraser, *Courtship and Love among the Enslaved in North Carolina* (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2007).

contributed to their universality. But the factors perhaps most responsible for folktales' popularity were their immediacy and relevance as a means of instruction. They conveyed the wisdom of folklore, with settings derived from the circumstances of bondage, and they articulated lessons about how to make one's way under the yoke of oppression. In this respect, Afro-Southern folklore did not echo the epic, romantic, or fanciful qualities of white, European folktales such as "Cinderella" or "Jack and the Beanstalk." Instead, scholars including Levine say slaves "tended to devote the structure and message of their tales to the compulsions and needs of their present situation."³⁵ The world described in the tales was a projection of the world inhabited by their storytellers, which included notions of ideal modes of behavior.

For example, the value of discretion is emphasized in a folktale that Richard Dorson collected titled "Talking Turtle."³⁶ And while the tale's plot does have a bit of a fantastic dimension, it is nonetheless firmly embedded in the slave experience. In this version, a slave is sent to fetch water from a bayou. When he complains loudly about his work, a turtle in the swamp says to him, "Black man, you talk too much" (148). Surprised, the slave runs to tell his master, who doesn't believe him. When the slave continues to insist that his master come see for himself, the master grudgingly agrees to but warns the slave he will beat him for wasting their time if the turtle doesn't speak.

³⁵ *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 90. "The slaves' plight was too serious," Levine argues, "their predicament too perilous, for them to indulge in pure fantasy and romanticism" that were characteristic of Eurocentric fairy tales (99).

³⁶ *American Negro Folktales* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Premier, 1956), 148-49. (Hereafter cited parenthetically.)

When the pair returns to the bayou, the turtle hides in his shell, and despite the slave's pleading, it does not say a word. The master then beats his slave and tells him to get back to work gathering water. Once he leaves, the turtle sticks his head back out and tells the injured slave, "Black man, didn't I tell you *y*ou talked too much?" (149).

Despite the association of the sketch's setting and characters with antebellum slavery, the tale's origins are actually distant from the American South.³⁷ Like many other Afro-Southern folktales, this story has antecedents in African folklore, illustrating how slaves utilized the oral traditions inherited as part of their cultural legacy. African folklore was a natural choice for Afro-Southerners to describe the conditions of slavery and simultaneously attempt to preserve cultural differences. They included motifs and genres adaptable to the African experience in the New World, but with rhetorical forms and a symbolic vocabulary distinct from that of slaveowners. Creolization mitigated these distinctions over time, but African folktales initially provided the foundation for an intra-group lore that reflected an experience and culture independent of the slaves' masters.

The trickster tale was particularly germane on both continents. African and African-American trickster tales typically feature an anthropomorphic animal protagonist whose cleverness allows him to outwit a traditionally stronger opponent, sometimes for the sake of survival but usually to add to his power, wealth, or prestige. The trickster's successful manipulation of the antagonist or the dupe also reveals the potential for change

³⁷ Ernest W. Baughman classifies this as Motif B210.2, "Talking animal or object refuses to talk on demand" (*Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*, Indiana University Folklore Series 20 [The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966], 82). Bascom identifies it instead as a tale type and one that "beyond dispute . . . was brought to the United States from Africa," citing twenty-four African versions of it (*African Folktales*, 17, 22).

in social organizations—the fact that customary hierarchies of power are potentially vulnerable suggests that relationships of authority are alterable. Folklorist John Roberts explains that slaves “soon realized that the basic behaviors of their African animal tricksters and the situations in which their actions unfolded objectified types of situations with which they had not only been all too familiar [with] in Africa but also continued to experience in America.” He adds that this specific genre of stories was also relevant because it “could continue to serve as . . . an expressive tradition to transmit a conception of behaviors appropriate and beneficial for protecting [slaves’] values and well-being under the conditions faced in slavery.”³⁸

For example, in another tale with African antecedents that Dorson collected titled “Who Ate Up the Butter?” a rabbit uses subterfuge to acquire food and then escapes punishment for the theft.³⁹ A frequent protagonist of Afro-Southern folklore, Brother Rabbit is working in the fields with his fellow animals—Brothers Deer, Fox, Bear, and Terrapin—on their collective crop when he feigns hearing his wife call him. At their urging he pretends to go see what she wants, but instead he goes to the animals’ house and eats part of a pound of butter that they had purchased together to share among themselves. He returns to the field and tells the animals that his wife gave birth to a son named “Quarter Gone” (68). He repeats this trick three more times, reporting that the

³⁸ *From Trickster to Badman*, 33.

³⁹ This tale corresponds to Aarne-Thompson Type 15, “The Theft of Butter (Honey) by Playing Godfather.” Their index lists numerous European versions, but Dorson mentions that May A. Klipple documents five African references for it in her index *African Folktales with Foreign Analogues* (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana Univ., 1938.) (Dorson, *American Negro Folktales*, 68n.).

other alleged newborns are named “Half Gone,” “Three Quarters Gone,” and “All Gone.” In between his trips to eat the animals’ butter, Rabbit sends his co-workers into the house to fetch water and matches. But it is not until they all break for dinner that they notice the butter has been eaten. The other animals immediately point to Brother Rabbit as the thief, but he deflects their accusations by reminding them that some of them were in the house, too. Rabbit then proposes a test to identify the culprit: they each have to leap over a fire to prove their innocence, and whoever falls in is guilty. Ultimately, Brother Bear, who, ironically, was the only animal not to go in the house, cannot jump over the flames, and Rabbit encourages the other animals to push the embers over Bear, which kills him.

Though this folktale may border on being gratuitously violent, it does illustrate a pattern of “behaviors appropriate and beneficial” to enslaved Afro-Southerners. In the guise of folk wisdom it teaches, if not encourages, theft, an activity that while taboo, was historically necessary given the privations of slavery.⁴⁰ Hidden transcripts like this tale, says Scott, “help[ed] constitute that behavior” by providing the blueprint for it.⁴¹ On the other hand, the absence of any moralizing at the tale’s conclusion about Brother Bear’s

⁴⁰ The slaveowner William Elliott wryly describes the subterfuge that slaves used on his rice plantations to compensate for food rationing in *Carolina Sports by Land and Water: Including Incidents of Devil-Fishing, Wild-Cat, Deer, and Bear Hunting, Etc.*, Southern Classics Series [1846; repr., Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina, 1994], 177-81). See also Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, pp. 121-28, for additional examples.

⁴¹ *Hidden Transcripts*, 189. Scott specifically alludes to the fact that a hidden transcript like folklore can be often be (mis)interpreted as a substitute for meaningful resistance to domination; he argues instead that tales like these serve as a strategy and precondition for patterns of indirect resistance including theft. Roberts, though, cautions against a too-literal approach to interpreting the didacticism of trickster tales, saying they did not “provide a literal guide for actions in everyday life, but rather served as an expressive mechanism for transmitting a perception of cleverness, guile, and wit as the most advantageous behavioral options” (*From Trickster to Badman*, 37).

death would seem to indicate an ambivalence toward, if not the tacit approval of, the unwarranted punishment of a dupe. For modern readers, this may be an attitude even less appealing than the endorsement of theft; though ostensibly more powerful than Rabbit, Bear is nonetheless innocent. However, according to Levine, the “characteristic spirit of these tales was one not of moral judgment but of vicarious triumph.”⁴² The elimination of a stronger rival offers the promise of power not through force, but by virtue of ingenuity.

Given the degradation, violence, and racism that slaves were exposed to or potentially exposed to, they had little incentive to celebrate in their folktales the traditional virtues of honesty and mercy—or any characters who embodied these traits—that were typically valorized in the culture and in the narratives of their white masters. For instance, Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Kenneth S. Greenberg have documented how, even though honor was considered the paramount virtue of Southern masculinity, slaves were thought by whites to be incapable of possessing honor, and thus were denied the autonomy and authority that it conferred upon white men in the Old South.⁴³ In fact, the themes and tones of Afro-Southern folktales satirize traditional values like honor through the trickster’s rejection of and success in spite of them; he is celebrated as a consequence of his wits and ruthlessness rather than his dignity or virtue, or for exposing the latter as

⁴² “Some Go Up,” 105.

⁴³ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), chap. 14; and Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996), chap. 2.

hypocrisy on the part of whites.⁴⁴ Rather than sharing the “idealized heroic values of the western world,” claims Roberts, these tales provided an alternative model—and in an alternative, non-white form of discourse—for conduct and for morality specific to the Afro-Southern community.⁴⁵

This substitute ethos contributed to the therapeutic value that Levine also believes these tales had for slaves in addition to their didactic importance. Namely, the stories mitigated the mental effects of oppression and of being denied access to normative white cultural measures of personal worth by acting as a “psychological release from the inhibitions of their society and their situation.”⁴⁶ This function also suggests the source of the tales’ humor. Herbert Spencer and, later, Sigmund Freud, hypothesized that laughter derives from the release of nervous energy, such as the tension inherent in the oppressiveness of slavery.⁴⁷ When a story addresses taboo behavior, the suppressed feelings of the audience toward that topic are called up and discharged. This “relief theory” of humor not only explains the psychological response associated with laughter, but, coupled with the tales’ didactic qualities, also accounts for the emotional benefit that

⁴⁴ William J. Hynes and William G. Doty argue that a culture’s tricksters “profane nearly every central belief, but at the same time they focus attention precisely on the nature of such beliefs” (“Introducing the Fascinating and Perplexing Trickster Figure,” in *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*, ed. Hynes and Doty [Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1993], 2).

⁴⁵ *From Trickster to Badman*, 4.

⁴⁶ Levine, “Some Go Up,” 97.

⁴⁷ For further discussion of the relief theory, see John Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany: State Univ. of New York, 1983), chap. 4.

can follow this catharsis: “From [the trickster’s] adventures [slaves] obtained relief,” explains Levine, and “from his triumphs they learned hope.”⁴⁸

“An insight into his real character”

What, then, did whites glean from these trickster tales? Though Scott says hidden discourses like Afro-Southern folklore are not “public transcripts” and Afro-Southern folktales did originate within a separate cultural sphere from that of Southern whites, these stories were certainly not hidden from the latter. As the recollections by antebellum Southerners in the first chapter demonstrate, whites did hear folktales from their slaves, black neighbors, co-workers, friends, or lovers. Attempts by Afro-Southerners to maintain cultural distance were sometimes compromised by the intimacy of interracial life in the Old South, which led to cultural exchange and the creolization of white-authored Southern literature. But how well were whites attuned to the subversive themes of black folktales? Did they, too, interpret Afro-Southern folktales in the context of resistance?⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 114. For further discussion of this psychological function of slave folklore, see Bernard Wolfe, “Uncle Remus & the Malevolent Rabbit,” in *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (1973; repr., Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1990), 535; and William J. Hynes, “Inconclusive Conclusions: Tricksters—Metaplayers and Revealers,” in *Mythical Trickster Figures*, ed Hynes and Doty, 206.

⁴⁹ Scott himself equivocates on this issue. At one point he claims that members of the dominant and subordinate classes “will be familiar with the public transcript and the hidden transcript of his or her circle, but not with the hidden transcript of the other.” Later, though, he suggests that “the excluded (and in this case, powerful) audience may grasp the seditious message in the performance [of coded aspects of the hidden transcript]

Charles Joyner speculates that whites did not. He believes that “one of the persistent delusions of the slaveholders [and] of visitors to the plantations . . . was that the trickster tales told by plantation slaves were mere entertainment.”⁵⁰ Joyner’s claim corresponds with Zora Neale Hurston’s characterization of African-American humor—even in the early twentieth century—as Janus-faced. A folklorist herself, Hurston explained that “the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, ‘Get out of here!’ We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn’t know what he is missing.”⁵¹

However, some antebellum whites were more perceptive than modern critics may give them credit for. Levine mentions the example of John Dixon Long, a Methodist minister from Maryland who astutely perceived the mask that slaves wore for whites and who understood how their folklore offered more candid assessments of their lives and their oppressors. Long wrote in 1857 that “The inevitable tendency of servitude is to make a slave a hypocrite toward the white man. If you approach him from the stand-point of authority, you will never get an insight into his real character. . . . You must catch him

but find it difficult to react because that sedition is clothed in terms that also can lay claim to a perfectly innocent construction” (*Hidden Transcripts*, 15, 158).

⁵⁰ *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community*, Blacks in the New World (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1984), 172.

⁵¹ *Of Mules and Men* (1935; repr., New York: Harper Perennial, 1990), 2-3.

at work. Listen to his songs . . . You must overhear his criticisms in the quarters.”⁵² With respect to the subversive dimension of Afro-Southern folklore in particular, historian Albert J. Raboteau cites how the ambiguity of a spiritual whose chorus included the lyrics “We’ll soon be free” and “We’ll fight for liberty” earned the enslaved singers of the hymn jail time in Georgetown, South Carolina, shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War.⁵³

Textual evidence in the humorists’ sketches suggests that these white authors not only knew the colorful characters and unique plots of Afro-Southern folktales but that they also intuited their subversive themes and tones. In fact, this was part of the folklore’s appeal in that they contributed to the sketches’ satirization of paternalism. Ironically, though, the value the humorists placed on the dissent within black folklore does not mean that these white authors were radical in their opinions about slavery. Justus observes that, “[a]lthough their world was a de facto biracial society, the humorists rarely identified slavery as an institution either to be defended or criticized” in their texts.⁵⁴ There are several plausible reasons for this paradox. The simplest explanation may be the inconsistency of human nature itself, namely the discrepancy between racism’s effect on

⁵² *Pictures of Slavery in Church and State: Including Personal Reminiscences, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, Etc., Etc.*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, privately printed, 1857), 196-98, quoted in Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 100.

⁵³ Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), 248. Similarly, decades after the War, Bernard Wolfe documents how whites who read Joel Chandler Harris’s *Uncle Remus Tales* were also bothered by what they perceived were racially subversive tones within the stories (“Uncle Remus & the Malevolent Rabbit,” 532).

⁵⁴ *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 208.

beliefs and behaviors. For example, Axtell's observations about British appropriation of Native American culture in the seventeenth century are again applicable, this time to the humorists: "Their adaptation of selected facets of native material culture did little or nothing to alter their self-identities."⁵⁵ In spite of their affinity for black culture or their personal amity toward Afro-Southerners, these authors were nonetheless susceptible on an abstract level to the South's hegemonic racism, including, for instance, the values that Wyatt-Brown and Greenberg describe. In other words, the humorists' appropriation of subversive elements from Afro-Southern folktales neither made them neither empathic toward the perspective of their enslaved sources nor likely to endorse the folktales' original subversive meanings, including their satire of the logic and the conditions of slavery.⁵⁶

Alternatively, Justus speculates that Old Southwestern Humor's silence on the issues of slavery and race may be a consequence of the fact that these topics were addressed elsewhere in Southern letters.⁵⁷ Allen Tate famously described Southern literature as "hag-ridden with politics," and much of it justified the slaveholding

⁵⁵ *Natives and Newcomers*, 327. Galvin likewise demonstrates through her study of creolized medicine that "Eurocarolinians were perfectly willing to tap the knowledge and genius of the people they considered their social and cultural inferiors" ("Decoctions for Carolinians," 84).

⁵⁶ Alternatively, Philip D. Biedler suggests that Baldwin and Hooper "sublimat[ed] racial guilt out of slavery and into contemplation of the injustice done native tribes," but the sketches about Native Americans are so few in number that Biedler's thesis cannot alone account for the absence of Afro-Southern issues and characters in Old Southwestern Humor (*First Books: The Printed Word and Cultural Formation in Early Alabama* [Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1999], 100-01; quoted in Justus, *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 206n. 23).

⁵⁷ *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 212.

position.⁵⁸ There was no shortage of pro-slavery fiction by white Southern authors, from thinly disguised apologetics such as Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854) to narratives where contented slaves were part of the fabric of Southern life, including Simms's own *Woodcraft; or, Hawks about the Dovecote* (1852). Consequently, the humorists may not have felt compelled to take up the defense of slavery in their fiction.

However, as sectional feelings over the future of slavery did become polarized, some humorists, especially those who were newspaper editors, became more publicly committed to the defense of the Peculiar Institution in their nonfiction. Augustus Baldwin Longstreet published *A Voice from the South: Comprising Letters from Georgia to Massachusetts, and to the Southern States* (1847) through his protégé William Tappan Thompson's press in Baltimore, and Hooper's and Taliaferro's editorial positions became more reactionary in the following decade. Hooper opined in the May 25, 1855, *Montgomery Daily Mail* that "The masses of abolition[ists] are moving forward to attack us. It is weakness and . . . folly to talk longer of any hope outside ourselves. . . . We must conquer a peace."⁵⁹ Hardin Taliaferro actually kept his *South Western Baptist* free from

⁵⁸ "The Profession of Letters in the South," in Tate, *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1968), 523. For discussions of pro-slavery discourse, see Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History in the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1987); and Paul Finkelman, ed. and comp., *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South*, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003).

⁵⁹ Folder 17, Box 1, William Stanley Hoole Papers, W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama. On the other hand, Adam L. Tate characterizes Hooper as "an inveterate racist" (*Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals, 1789-1861: Liberty, Tradition, and the Good Society* [Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2005], 338). He cites as an example an 1860 editorial attacking William Pennington, the newly

sectional controversy until 1859, when the tenor of his editorials began trumpeting sectionalism.⁶⁰ In 1860 he reviewed a tract titled “The South Alone, should govern the South. And African Slavery should be controlled by those who are friendly to it,” only then publicly signaling his views on slavery and its future in the South.⁶¹

However, these pro-slavery statements were responses to threats of abolitionism or Northern political aggression and were written for a local subscription-paying readership. It is important to note that the humorists’ attacks do not include any denials of the existence of black culture—one could defend slavery as well as acknowledge the creativity that it fostered. In spite of his own consistent opinion on slavery, for instance, Simms acknowledged that all races possessed “Fancy” and “Imagination.” These were the two essential elements critical to folklore and to literature (folklore’s fully mature form, according to Simms), and the novelist believed “even the African possesses them.”⁶²

elected speaker of the House of Representatives as “one of those who believe the African to be the equal of the Anglo-Saxon” (*Montgomery Daily Mail*, Feb. 3, 1860, quoted in *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals*, 338). However the context of this example must be kept in mind; racebaiting in partisan journalism on the eve of the Civil War does not necessarily imply similar attitudes about race and culture and fiction fifteen years earlier.

⁶⁰ Heinrich R. Bettich, “Hardin Edwards Taliaferro: Life, Literature, and Folklore” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1983), 101.

⁶¹ “A Significant Tract,” *South Western Baptist*, November 1, 1860, quoted in Bettich, “Hardin Edwards Taliaferro,” 103. For a more complete account of the evolution of Taliaferro’s perspectives on slavery, see Bettich, 100-110.

⁶² *Paddy McGann; or The Demon of the Stump*. Text established by James B. Meriwether and an introduction and notes by Robert Bush. The Writings of William Gilmore Simms, Centennial Edition, Vol. 3 (1863; Columbia: Univ. Press of South Carolina, 1972), 224. A contemporary of Simms, Y. S. Nathanson, shared his qualified opinion about the

The editorials cited above also should not be taken to mean that the humorists sought to articulate a racial position in their nationally published and circulated *fiction*, where, again, representations of slavery are scarce.⁶³ In fact, similar to the dearth of Native American characters in Old Southwestern Humor, there is an equivalent scarcity of African-Americans. Justus observes that “African-Americans in the Old Southwest are seldom sources of ethnic humor . . . slaves appear as part of a social matrix, another condition of the authors’ world, like climate and geography.”⁶⁴ Though there are several notable exceptions where black characters are featured as dupes (such as Bill in the opening sketch of *Some Adventures of Simon Suggs*) and even once as a potential murderer (in Henry Clay Lewis’s “A Struggle for Life” from *Odd Leaves from the Life of*

creative faculties of blacks: “the African nature is full of poetry. Inferior to the white race in reason and intellect, [African-Americans] have more imagination, more lively feelings and a more expressive manner” (“Negro Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern,” *Putnam’s Monthly*, January 1855, 72-79, quoted in Jackson, *The Negro and his Folklore in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, American Folklore Society Bibliographic and Special Series 18 [Austin: Univ. of Texas Press for the American Folklore Society, 1967], 52).

⁶³ Finally, because the humorists were writing for Northern periodicals or were published by houses with national distribution networks, they may also have been careful not to include provocative topics that would potentially alienate non-Southern readers (see Justus, *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 211, 242-43; and Norris W. Yates, *William T. Porter and the Spirit of the Times* [New York: Arno Press, 1977], 22.). In this respect, the humorists may coincide with Terence Whalen’s description of Edgar Allan Poe’s “average racism,” a market-savvy “form of racism acceptable to white readers who were otherwise divided over the issue of slavery” (“Average Racism: Poe, Slavery, and the Wages of Literary Nationalism,” in *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001], 4.).

⁶⁴ *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 208.

a *Louisiana Swamp Doctor*), most black characters in Old Southwestern Humor are little more than names or stock representations of servants or laborers.⁶⁵

Despite this lack of visibility, Afro-Southern culture did leave its imprint on Old Southwestern Humor. Thanks to the methodologies of folklorists, plot analyses and comparisons provide quantifiable evidence of the presence of black folklore in a creolized Old Southwestern Humor.

Old Southwestern Humor, Hooper, and Trickster Tales

Old Southwestern Humor was as young a genre as the region it chronicled, and therefore it was susceptible to influence by other cultural forms. In 1845 William T. Porter, the editor of the *New York Spirit of the Times*, announced in the preface of his collection *The Big Bear of Arkansas and Other Sketches, Illustrative of Characters and Incidents in the South and Southwest* that “A new vein of literature, as original as it is inexhaustible in its source, has been opened in this country within a very few years, with the most marked success.”⁶⁶ His volume anthologized popular examples of the genre, which was characterized by short comic sketches, typically about rural hunters or confidence men,

⁶⁵ The notable exception to this rule are sketches by Taliaferro featuring dialect sermons of the black preacher Charles Gentry (*The Humor of H.E. Taliaferro*, ed. Raymond C. Craig [Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee, 1987], 146-48.); and the Lewis stories “A Tight Race Considerin,” “The Curious Widow,” and “Stealing a Baby,” also from *Odd Leaves* (1850; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1997). For more on this anomalous aspect of Lewis’s humor, see Justus, *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 211-13; Edwin T. Arnold’s introduction to the modern edition of *Odd Leaves*, and Henry Rose, *Demonic Vision: Racist Fantasy and Southern Fiction* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1976).

⁶⁶ *The Big Bear of Arkansas and Other Sketches, Illustrative of Characters and Incidents in the South and Southwest* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1845), n.p.

fight, horse races, gambling, illness, immodesty, militia drills, fishing and hunting, drinking, and practical jokes.⁶⁷ Often written in vernacular, the broad, physical style of its humor had become a staple of local Southern newspapers in addition to the *Spirit of the Times*, Porter's nationally circulating sporting weekly that William E. Lenz describes as the "national clearinghouse for frontier writers."⁶⁸

Porter's collection would be reprinted four more times in the next nine years. Thanks in part to its popularity, Old Southwestern Humor is sometimes referred to as the "Big Bear" school of humor.⁶⁹ The implications of "school," though, need to be qualified in the case of this genre. The men who are usually categorized as part of it—George Washington Harris, Henry Clay Lewis, Joseph Glover Baldwin, Charles Fenton Noland, and John S. Robb in addition to Longstreet, Thompson, Thorpe, Taliaferro, and Hooper—were literary dilettantes scattered throughout the Old Southwest. Though aware of each other's work, these authors did not perceive themselves as constituting an

⁶⁷ Hennig Cohen and William B. Dillingham enumerate twenty-two common subjects in their introduction to *Humor of the Old Southwest*, 3rd ed. (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1994), xxiv.

⁶⁸ "The Function of Women in Old Southwestern Humor: Rereading Porter's *Big Bear* and *Quarter Race* Collections," in *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. M. Thomas Inge and Edward J. Piacentino (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2001), 36.

⁶⁹ The title of Porter's collection comes from one of its stories with the same name, contributed by Thomas Bangs Thorpe, which Justus characterizes as "the best-loved sketch in all the writings from the Old Southwest" (*Fetching*, 396). *Big Bear* was a success for Porter and its publishers: the first printing of 4,000 copies sold out, and the collection was reprinted again in 1846, 1850, 1851, and 1855 (Yates, *William T. Porter*, 52-53.).

intellectual or an artistic circle in the same way their contemporaries in Concord or Charleston did.⁷⁰

Instead, the Humorists were mobile men emerging from the Old South's professional class, arrivistes who were frequently lawyers moonlighting as small-town newspaper editors. The short, humorous stories they wrote using local settings and stock regional characters were often intended for their own columns or for those of their friends. Encouraged by Porter, though, the Humorists often re-submitted their stories to his *Spirit*, or he reprinted them of his own volition, in keeping with the editorial practice of the day. After a critical mass of their sketches appeared, many of the Humorists then had their collected work published by one of the Philadelphia or New York firms, with Porter again facilitating the arrangements.⁷¹ And though the Humorists' books—typically one or two titles in a given author's career, observes Clyde Wilson—would be successful enough to go through multiple editions, none of these men considered themselves professional authors or critics like their fellow Southerners Simms, Poe, or Cooke.⁷²

⁷⁰ Clyde Wilson, foreword to *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, viii-ix. Some of the Humorists knew each other personally, as in the case of Longstreet and Thompson; at least one adapted another author's character, namely Baldwin and his "Simon Suggs, Jr., Esq."; and some playfully referenced others' work in their own stories or in letters to the *Spirit* and local periodicals. For further examples of this intertextuality, see Ed Piacentino, "Recovering C.M. Haile, Antebellum Southern Humorist," *Studies in American Humor* 3, No. 16 (2007): 47-68.

⁷¹ Porter assisted Hooper, Thorpe, and Thompson in this way; his weekly magazine and his contacts may have also facilitated the publication of Lewis, Robb and others by Carey & Hart and T.B. Peterson (Norris, *William T. Porter*, 53).

⁷² Wilson, Foreword, ix. As a testimony to their popularity, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes* (1835) went through nine printings in twenty-five years; Hooper's *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* was reprinted eleven times from

Hooper's biography is representative of these writers' lives and their experiences as authors, and his work is characteristic of the genre itself.⁷³ Born in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1815, Hooper began his career in publishing at age eleven as a printer's devil for *The Cape-Fear Recorder*, a newspaper that his father, Archibald Maclaine Hooper, owned after a series of other business failures.⁷⁴ But the elder Hooper was forced to sell the paper in 1832 because of debts and took a job in the Wilmington Customs House. Feeling "keenly the sting of the family's decline" and lacking significant career prospects in the Carolinas, Johnson Jones (or "Jonc" as he was called by friends and colleagues) subsequently joined tens of thousands of other residents of the older seaboard states—including most of the future Humorists—and emigrated south and west to the new

1845 to 1856; and William Tappan Thompson's *Major Jones's Courtship* went through seventeen editions beginning in 1843 through 1855.

⁷³ This statement is not intended to imply that the texts of these authors were indistinguishable from each other. Old Southwestern Humor ranges from the genteel stories of Longstreet and Thompson to the racy yarns of Harris and Lewis; from the sermonizing tales of Taliaferro to the sporting sketches of Thorpe. However, despite these differences, the origins of these stories and their narrative characteristics are adequately represented by Hooper's texts. Moreover, each humorist, like Hooper, considered authorship to be a secondary career after their primary professions of journalism (Thorpe, Thompson, Taliaferro, and Robb) or law (Longstreet, Baldwin, and Noland), and most were émigrés to the Old Southwest (Thompson and Lewis from Ohio, Taliaferro from North Carolina, Robb from Philadelphia, Noland and Baldwin from Virginia, and Thorpe from New York).

⁷⁴ Paul Somers, *Johnson J. Hooper*, Twayne's United States Author Series 454 (Boston: Twayne, 1984), 2. It was in his father's newspaper that he had his first humorous work published, a satiric poem about a British consul who fell into the harbor while christening a ship (W. Stanley Hoole, *Alias Simon Suggs: The Life and Times of Johnson Jones Hooper* [Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama, 1952], 6-8.).

interior states and territories.⁷⁵ In 1835 Hooper settled in the small east Alabama town of La Fayette, which had been established just two years earlier.⁷⁶ The younger Hooper studied law with his brother George and passed the bar, but like many of his fellow humorists, he took a job outside of the legal field. These included a memorable appointment as “the chicken man,” or a deputy marshal, for the 1840 census. In this capacity, Hooper traveled through rural Alabama to count the alternatively picturesque and grotesque residents of Chambers County—and their fowl—that he would later humorously describe in the short story “Taking the Census.”

Hooper returned to journalism in 1842, when he was appointed editor of the *East Alabamian* in La Fayette; it would be the first of five newspapers he would edit in his lifetime in Alabama.⁷⁷ Soon after assuming the editorial chair, Hooper began publishing anecdotes and character sketches of his own creation in the *East Alabamian* to fill column inches and, as he later wrote, to “amuse a community unpretending in its tastes.”⁷⁸

“Taking the Census,” for instance, appeared in August 1843 and was reprinted by Porter

⁷⁵ Johanna Nicol Shields, “A Sadder Simon Suggs: Freedom and Slavery in the Humor of Johnson Jones Hooper,” in *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. Inge and Piacentino, 133. Shields says Hooper moved to Charleston at 18, where he was supported by relatives. It was two years later that he caught “Alabama Fever.”

⁷⁶ Nella Jean Chambers, “Early Days in East Alabama,” *The Alabama Review* 13, no. 3 (July 1960): 179-180.

⁷⁷ Aside from the *East Alabamian*, these included the *Wetumpka* [Ala.] *Whig* (September 1845 to Spring 1846), the [Montgomery] *Alabama Journal* (Summer 1846 to January 1849), the *Chambers* [County, Ala.] *Tribune* (September 1849 to 1853), and the *Montgomery Weekly Mail* (April 1854-1861).

⁷⁸ Preface to *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, np. Subsequent page numbers will be cited parenthetically from the Sanders edition.

in the *Spirit of the Times* the very next month. This exchange began a long, cordial relationship between the two editors, leading Hooper to dedicate his first book, *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, to Porter.⁷⁹

“Taking the Census” was included in this 1845 collection of short stories, but with only one other exception, the rest of the book’s tales feature the eponymous protagonist, who had made his debut in the *East Alabamian* in December 1844. Simon Suggs is one of the most memorable opportunists in Southern literature. Like his contemporaries the Afro-Southern tricksters, Suggs lives by his instincts and his own moral code. The sketches of *Some Adventures* depict him as a “miracle of shrewdness” dubiously blessed with the ability “to detect the *soft spots* in his fellow” (12). This intuition coincides with his “whole ethical system [that] lies snugly in his favourite aphorism—‘IT IS GOOD TO BE SHIFTY IN A NEW COUNTRY’” (12). Neither he nor his wandering moral compass desire further stability in newly settled Alabama. Another Suggs proverb, “mother-wit kin beat book-larnin, at *any* game!,” is symptomatic of his disdain for

⁷⁹ For the publication history of *Some Adventures*, see Hoole, *Alias Simon Suggs*, 58-59 and 174. Hooper would publish two other books during his lifetime: *The Widow Rigby’s Husband* (1851), another collection of humorous sketches, and *Dog and Gun* (1856), a manual on field sports that went through three editions. Hooper later claimed he was a victim of the success of his foray into letters. He unsuccessfully ran for multiple political offices and speculated that his perennial failure was because voters associated him with the amoral trickster that he had created. In a letter to the *Spirit*, he complained tongue-in-cheek that he was considered “‘*too d---d knowin’ about Suggs to be honest himself!*” (*Spirit of the Times*, July 28, 1849, quoted in Hoole, *Alias Simon Suggs*, 68; for other examples of Hooper’s purported embarrassment in later life at having written *Some Adventures*, see Hoole, 102-03, 105). However, it is more likely that Hooper’s affiliation with the Whig Party in a Democratic stronghold was responsible for his failed bids for office. With the secession of Alabama, though, Hooper became Secretary to the Provisional Congress of the Confederacy and later moved to Richmond with the capital, where he died in 1862 (Wilson, foreword to *Some Adventures*, xii).

traditional standards of civilization and cultural capital, examples of which the protagonist regularly reveals to be superficial or exploitative (53).

Suggs actually lacks any kind of capital, which is the premise for most of the stories' plots as well as for the collection itself. *Some Adventures* is a mock campaign biography of the perpetually impoverished Alabaman protagonist, who is of advanced age at the time of its writing and "needs an office, the emoluments of which shall be sufficient to enable him to relax his intellectual exertions" (148).⁸⁰ Who the beneficiary of this sinecure will be—Suggs or the public that he has long victimized—is left unclear. The latter certainly needs relief, for the stories that constitute the biography describe a lifetime of these amoral "exertions"; they are "convincing illustrations" of Suggs's belief "that one should live as merrily and as comfortably as possible at the expense of others" (12). For Suggs, "living comfortably" chiefly equates to possessing a ready supply of whiskey and enough money to play faro. Adverse to any occupation that may require physical labor or that may interfere with his whiling the day away at the local grocery or betting parlor, Suggs instead takes advantage of the opportunities afforded by life in a new settlement—and his gift of "a quick, ready wit"—to deftly separate dupes from their money (12).

For example, in "Simon Speculates Again," Suggs is caught up in the 1835 frenzy of land speculation in east Alabama following the Creek cession. Standing in the way of his turning a profit, though, is an inconvenient lack of cash to actually purchase a tract of

⁸⁰ For more on *Some Adventures* as a parody of this popular political genre, including how its anecdotal sequence parallels Amos Kendall's 1844 biography of Andrew Jackson, see Robert Hopkins, "Simon Suggs: A Burlesque Campaign Biography," *American Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1963): 459-463.

land promised to him (for \$200 and three blankets) by a Native American woman, the “Big Widow.” However, Suggs is not fazed by this problem. It was explained earlier in *Some Adventures* that a lack of funds does not typically preclude him from speculating. “As for those branches of the business requiring actual pecuniary outlay,” his biographer wryly explains, “he regarded them as only fit to be pursued by purse-proud clod-heads” (35). Indulging in such ventures without the prerequisite capital, on the other hand, “required judgment, discretion, ingenuity—in short, genius!” but, as the narrator illustrates, of a perverse, Suggsian kind (35).

In this case, Suggs, or as he is called by the Indians, “The Mad Bird,” has the added benefit of the Native American woman’s affections: “as she happened to take a liking to him, she preferred that he should have [the land] at that price, to selling to others who were offering her a thousand” dollars (74). The reasons behind her sentiments, however, are suspect: although Suggs “was a good friend, and had a sweet tongue . . . if she gave her land to any body else, he . . . wouldn’t give her tobacco and *sweet water* any more” (74). Despite Big Widow’s generosity and patience, though, Suggs is unable to raise the money. His lack of capital fuels the cupidity of the other speculators present who then press their own lucrative offers upon the woman. Even when Suggs proposes a partnership with the other men—“an even intrust with me in the land” in exchange for a loan of the \$200, they turn him down, eager to own outright “the Big Widow’s ‘low grounds’” (76, 75).

Furious at being stymied, Suggs extracts a promise from the Big Widow to hold off selling the land for another twenty-four hours. He swears to the other speculators he will “eat Satan raw and onsalted, ef any of you ever git a foot of that land,” and gallops

away, allegedly to pay a visit to “an old friend of mine not twenty mile from here, that’s got three or four hamper baskets-full o’ Mexicans,” or gold coins (76). The next day, as Suggs’s deadline approaches, the rival speculators “pushed and pulled the old squaw up to the shed under which the agent was ‘certifying,’” a struggle that leads to a brawl among themselves “in the enthusiasm of the moment” (79). But before the fight or the transaction can be settled, Suggs rides up and demands that they “jist give a poor man a chance to make an honest contract.” Dismounting, he staggers under “the weight of a very plethoric pair of saddle-bags” (79).

Assuming Suggs has \$200 worth of foreign gold in his bags, the rival speculators begin bickering again, but this time over the right to make Suggs the best offer for an interest in the land. His confidence is buoyed by their change in attitude, so Suggs demands that any buyer pay him \$500 outright as a commission and purchase the land with his own money. Otherwise, he warns, “I shall have to onlock these here,’ patting his saddle-bags, ‘and buy it for myself.’” The offer is quickly accepted by one of the speculators, Colonel Bryan, and the deed is certified to Suggs, who immediately transfers the claim to Bryan, “who was delighted with his bargain” (80). Bryan’s pleasure evaporates, though, when Suggs, after hearing his new partner’s sense of satisfaction with the deal, remarks that “bein’ as that’s the case . . . I’ll throw out these here *rocks and old iron*, for its *mighty* tiresome to a horse,” and he empties his saddlebag of said non-pecuniary contents (80).

The fraud and avarice represented in “Simon Speculates Again” reflects the historical circumstances surrounding the speculation in Native American lands in east Alabama; Robbie Ethridge notes that the Creek word for speculators was

ecunnaunuxulgee, or “those greedily grasping after our lands.”⁸¹ The story is also representative of Old Southwestern Humor and its characteristic motifs: a narrative framing device juxtaposing standard and vernacular English, a localized setting, the chicanery of Suggs, his colorful, exaggerated boasts, the physical humor of the fight between the speculators, and the swindling of not just the Creek woman, but the other speculators too, which adds an element of poetic justice to the dark humor about the cheating of Native Americans.⁸²

However, the general plot of “Simon Speculates Again” is representative of another culture: African. This story’s tale type coincides with what William Bascom identifies as “Trickster Seeks Endowments,” a type he says is “reported in Africa from Gambia to Zaire, with many variations in both Africa and the Americas.”⁸³ In other words, Hooper used the basic outline of an African plot for “Simon Speculates Again” that Bascom summarizes as a trickster seeking some type of skills, privileges, or rewards, but in order to receive them, the trickster must accomplish one or more tasks that require an adversary to act in a counterintuitive manner.⁸⁴ However, Hooper added additional

⁸¹ *Creek Country: The Creek Indians and their World* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003), 197. See Chaps. 10 and 11 for Creek land cessions and their subsequent removal.

⁸² Hoole says that Hooper’s public defense of the nation against speculators led to him to be called “Champion of the Creeks” (*Alias Simon Suggs*, 19).

⁸³ Bascom, *African Folktales in the New World*, 40.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 41, 42.

motifs to this plot that were more local in origin and tailored to coincide with the tropes of Old Southwestern Humor.⁸⁵

Since Hooper never traveled to Africa, it seems logical to assume that there was an intermediary source between “Simon Speculates Again” and one of the many African examples, or cognates, of this tale type that Bascom cites.⁸⁶ That source was likely some anonymous Afro-Southerner, though again Hooper may have derived his story from a tale he heard second-hand—either scenario is possible.⁸⁷ For example, Wilmington was a

⁸⁵ Usually a number accompanies the tale type; however, Bascom says that “Since there are no references [in the tale type indices] to similar tale types or motifs from Europe or India, folktales [such as “Trickster Seeks Endowments”] must have come from (and originated in) Africa” (*African Folktales in the New World*, 42). On the other hand, motifs in “Simon Speculates Again” include K1954 “Sham Rich Man” and J1172.2 “Payment with the clink of the money,” which have European and Indonesian analogues. These may represent the adaptations Hooper made to the African tale type. These and all subsequent motifs are from Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols., FF Communications 106 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1932).

⁸⁶ Dundes explains that “all of the references listed under tale type numbers are th [sic] versions of tales assumed to be *cognate*, that is, all the versions cited are presumed to be historically/genetically related” (editor’s preface to *Tale Type- and Motif- Indexes*, ed. Azzolina, xiv).

⁸⁷ On the other hand, on at least two occasions Hooper did refer to an “original of ‘Suggs,’” whom Hoole identifies as Bird H. Young, a local planter and friend of Hooper’s brother (*Alias Simon Suggs* 53, 222). Young was a well-known practical joker, and there apparently was enough of a correlation between his antics and the sketches that one of the latter offended Young, compelling Hooper to issue an apology that was reprinted as “Capt. Suggs and his Wife” in the November 29, 1845, issue of *Spirit of the Times*: “We have received a letter from the individual who is generally considered to have been the original of ‘Suggs,’ requesting us to say that no disrespect was intended to his wife, by the occasional mention of the name ‘Mrs. Suggs,’ in the [book]. . . . we doubt not that the captain has received as hard raps at home for his wild frolics, as ever caught in ‘Suggs,’ or any where else” (Folder 15, Box 1, William Stanley Hoole Papers, W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library, the University of Alabama).

racially diverse port city: Fifty-eight percent of its inhabitants were black in 1830.⁸⁸ Consequently, there were many opportunities (such as those described in the first chapter) for Hooper to meet and listen to Afro-Southern storytellers. Hooper grew up in a slaveholding family, and his apprenticeship likely brought him into contact with the black inhabitants of Wilmington outside of his household. According to worried letters from his mother, for instance, he ran with “low company” in the streets of the city.⁸⁹ East Alabama was also racially diverse and its society even less settled. The census Hooper himself helped take in 1840 listed 13,173 whites and 7,174 free and enslaved blacks in Chambers County.⁹⁰ He may have owned a slave himself as a consequence of his wife’s inheritance

Hoole does not specify which stories Hooper may have heard from or modeled on Young. Somers speculates that they might have been the ones involving faro since Young once ran afoul of the law on gambling charges (*Johnson Jones Hooper*, 6, 27). However, in his notes for his biography of Hooper, Hoole casts doubt on the evidence that Somers uses for his claims, noticing Hooper’s reticence to connect Young directly to the plots of the sketches (Folder 15, Box 1, William Stanley Hoole Papers, W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama).

Given the number of folk cognates belonging to both black and white folklore that are found in *Some Adventures*, I think it reasonable to believe that while Young was a prototype of an opportunistic libertine that Hooper used for Suggs, the sketches of *Some Adventures* are not directly related to Young’s life, but are derived in part from black and white folktales as well as other literary forms.

⁸⁸ Alan D. Watson, *Wilmington, North Carolina, to 1861* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2003), 125.

⁸⁹ Charlotte Hooper to deBerniere Hooper, August 22, 1832, John deBerniere Hooper Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, quoted in Shields, introduction to *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosa Volunteers, together with “Taking the Census,” and Other Alabama Sketches* (1845; repr., Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1993), xviii.

⁹⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States . . .* (Washington: Thomas Allen, 1841), 52-55.

after her father's death in 1849, but prior to then many members of his social circle were slaveowners, including his older brother, with whom he lived for a time.⁹¹

The precise correlation of African tale types with American analogues is not always possible as a result of the incomplete indexing of African folklore. However, the similarities that emerge from a comparative close reading of "Simon Speculates Again" and an Afro-Southern trickster tale that is also a cognate of "Trickster Seeks Endowments" strengthens the probability of a lineal connection between Hooper's sketch and the trans-Atlantic antecedent. In particular, a black folktale collected by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps suggests an intermediary similar to the Afro-Southern tale Hooper may have adapted for "Simon Speculates Again."

Hughes and Bontemps published an example of the "Trickster Seeks Endowments" tale type that they titled "Brer Rabbit and Sis Cow." Like the characters in "Simon Speculates Again," the animals of this black folktale have an uneasy relationship with one another. Though the Sis Cow "has a bag plumb full of milk" and Brer Rabbit "ain't had nothin' to drink fur a long time," he does not directly broach the subject of her sharing any of it with him: "'tain't no use askin' her fur milk 'cause las' year she done 'fused him onct, and when his ole 'oman was sick, too.'"⁹² While Brer Rabbit ponders how to get her milk from her, he notices that she is grazing under a persimmon tree whose fruit hasn't yet ripened enough to drop. Rabbit approaches Sis Cow, and after some small talk, asks her, "would you do me the favor to hit this here persimmon tree

⁹¹ Hoole, *Alias Simon Suggs*, 197n30, 193n1.

⁹² *Book of Negro Folklore* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1958), 4. Subsequent citations will be made parenthetically to this edition.

with yore head an' shake down a few of dem persimmons?" She consents, but a minor nudge with her horns does not produce the desired result. Frustrated, Sis Cow gets a running start and "hit dat tree so hard dat her horns go right into the wood so fur she can't pull 'em out" (4). Stuck, she looks to Brer Rabbit, saying, "I implores you to help me git a-loose." However, he defers, replying "I can't get you a-loose. I'm a mighty weakly man, Sis Cow. But I kin 'suage your bag, Sis Cow, and I'm goin' to do it fur you" (4-5). The tale concludes with Brer Rabbit and his wife and children, whom he went and fetched, milking Sis Cow while she is stuck, and the family later having "a big feastin" (5).

"Simon Speculates Again" obviously is a more elaborate narrative than "Brer Rabbit and Sis Cow." The amount of detail in the former produces apparent differences in regard to the thoroughness of characterization and setting, for instance. However, this sophistication is a de facto luxury afforded to literary sketches versus oral tales; human memory and the conventions of storytelling contribute to folktales being more economical in detail. But despite the comparative density of "Simon Speculates Again," the story's basic plot approximates that of "Brer Rabbit and Sis Cow." In fact, compared with the African examples Bascom lists for "Trickster Seeks Endowments," these two American tales are more similar to one another than either is to their African antecedents.

This congruency illustrates the evolution of African folktales in the Americas. For example, Bascom says that one of the features of the African cognates is that the trickster is usually seeking some skill or position of authority: "wisdom, cunning, or power."⁹³

⁹³ *African Folktales*, 40.

However, in New World variants the endowment is some material reward: a tail (in some animal stories), a bride, food, or money, the latter two being the case in the two narratives analyzed here. This difference between the African and the American versions is typical of the transformation that accompanied African folklore's arrival in the New World, says Roberts. Afro-Southern folktales—and the Old Southwestern Humor that they informed—feature secular protagonists rather than divine ones; are more anthropomorphic as a result; and are focused on personal gratification based on materialism rather than resolving communal deprivation resulting from the environment, the latter of which is characteristic of African trickster tales.⁹⁴

Acquiring a material objective without having to pay for it is the most obvious connection between “Simon Speculates Again” and “Brer Rabbit and Sis Cow.” However, this aim is typical of many trickster tales. What links these two stories together as cognates of “Trickster Seeks Endowments” yet distinguishes them from similar, non-African trickster tales is how the antagonists give the trickster what he desires in spite of explicitly wanting to do otherwise. Just as African versions of “Trickster Seeks Endowments” require their tricksters to accomplish tasks that force animals to act contrary to their will—filling a gourd full of uncooperative stinging insects, for example—Colonel Bryan gives Suggs \$500 outright when just a day earlier he had refused him a loan in exchange for an interest in the property. Likewise, Sis Cow

⁹⁴ Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman*, 34, 38, 45, 46. Roberts explains the difference as a consequence of African tricksters resolving problems brought on by the natural environment, whereas the adversity in the New World was a result of human-caused privation; i.e., chattel slavery (34).

provides Brer Rabbit with milk against her will, having denied him the same favor in the past.

Because of the unwillingness of the antagonist to accommodate the trickster, the latter must gain his “entitlements” through improvisation, indirection, and subterfuge, other plot elements these two tales share with each other each other and with their African antecedents. For instance, neither protagonist physically confronts the owner of what he desires after the initial or anticipated refusal of their request; both understand that direct demands or physical intimidation would be counterproductive. The speculators and Sis Cow are too powerful financially and/or physically to be challenged directly by the tricksters. Instead, the protagonists use their greatest—perhaps their only—asset, their wits, to trump power by inventing a ruse. Brer Rabbit, for instance, “begun thinkin’ mighty hard” before even approaching Sis Cow (4). Likewise, Suggs examines the situation from all angles before he “hit upon an expedient” and called “his rivals” together to request a loan (75).

This comparative impotence actually works to the tricksters’ favor; their foes underestimate their savvy, and this overconfidence makes the antagonists more vulnerable to being duped. The gullibility of Sis Cow, for instance, is a combination of her underrating Brer Rabbit and his cleverness and valuing too highly her own strength. In other words, Brer Rabbit intuitively and capitalizes on Sis Cow’s weakness of character—her misplaced faith in physical rather than mental prowess. Justus’s claim regarding Suggs is thus applicable to Rabbit as well: the “greed, hypocrisy, and pride of others . . .

guide his scheming” and indirectly contribute to the dupes’ own victimization.⁹⁵ The same applies to the competing speculators, whose own vulnerability is a consequence of their avarice. Their obsession with the Big Widow’s land and its resale value leads them to focus on Suggs’s pecuniary resources and overlook his resourcefulness in other respects. As a result, their immediate reaction to his reappearance with the bulging saddlebags is to assume that they contain money, despite his reputation in the community as an impoverished charlatan. In fact, Colonel Bryan’s losses are exacerbated by the bidding war the speculators get into without even seeing the gold that their singular focus leads them to assume is in the bags.

The final similarity between these two tales bears a closer resemblance to their African antecedent. At the conclusion of each story, the tricksters make a point of ensuring their stronger antagonists know that they have been duped. Brer Rabbit tells Sis Cow he will “suage your bag . . . fur you,” even going as far as to invite the rest of his family to help him do so and then to celebrate afterward (5). Similarly, Suggs empties his saddlebags in front of his victim, Colonel Bryan, after the deed is signed and transferred, causing the dupe and his fellow speculators to “vanish[. . .],” embarrassed, from the scene (80). These conclusions, codas almost, come after the protagonists obtain their material goals—the milk and the money. Consequently, Rabbit’s and Suggs’s flaunting of their success represents not just a desire for material entitlements, but also a demand for recognition of their power from the stronger entities. Akin to African trickster tales that “revolved around the strong patterns of authority so central to African cultures . . .

⁹⁵ *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 522.

manipulating the strong and reversing the normal structure of power and prestige,” Rabbit and Suggs also desire recognition for how they overturned traditional positions of authority.⁹⁶

Suggs and the tricksters of slave stories perpetually rely upon their wits. For the latter, the relentless deprivation, racism, and violence of slavery that inspired the folktales required perpetual vigilance. For Suggs, though, his “intellectual exertions” result from penury that is a consequence of his own predilection for whiskey and the faro table. In other words, he drinks and gambles money as quickly as he can trick people out of it. The narrator of *Some Adventures* affects a tone of mock ignorance about this fact, though, in the exposition of another sketch, “The Captain Attends a Camp-Meeting.” Claiming Suggs’s poverty is “alike inexplicable to him and to us,” the narrator observes with ironic disbelief that “the money which he had contrived, by various shifts to obtain, melted away and was gone for ever” only a year after his successful speculation in Creek lands (118).⁹⁷ Wrapping himself up in a disingenuous cloak of domestic piety, Suggs claims that “He could stand [the destitution] himself—didn’t care a d—n for it, no way,” but since it affected “the old woman and the children; *that* bothered him!” (118).

Their poverty becomes a crisis one morning in “The Captain Attends a Camp Meeting” when his wife tells him they are almost out of food. Suggs reacts by shouting “D—n it! *somebody* [sic] must suffer!” before leaving the house as well as leaving his

⁹⁶ Levine, “Some Go Up,” 101.

⁹⁷ In the interval, Suggs had become the Captain of the “Tallapoosy Vollantares” by exacerbating and exploiting his neighbors’ paranoia during the Creek War of 1836, a series of anecdotes explored in the next chapter.

wife, the narrator, and the reader in suspense as to who will bear that onus: himself, his family, or some other victim (118). The answer is provided by his destination, a religious revival on the banks of a nearby creek. The theatrics of the camp meeting are in full swing when Suggs arrives: a “half-dozen preachers were dispensing the word,” and “men and women rolled about on the ground, or lay sobbing or shouting in promiscuous heaps” (119). Suggs, his biographer tells us, looked on with professional admiration that bordered on envy: “He viewed the whole affair as a grand deception—a sort of ‘opposition line’ running against his own” (122). The circuit preachers (frequent targets of *Old Southwestern Humor*⁹⁸) caught his eye in particular. One was “a-figurin amongst them galls, and’s never said the fust word to nobody else,” leading Suggs to wonder why “the sperrit never moves ‘em” in the direction of less attractive women (122).

While Suggs is standing there, one of the ministers targets him as a potential convert, and the Captain is “soon surrounded by numerous well-meaning, and doubtless very pious persons, each of whom seemed bent on the application of his own particular recipe for the salvation of souls” (123-24). Suggs doesn’t respond to their entreaties to repentance at first, but then begins feigning signs of being overcome with emotion and the workings of the Holy Spirit. This is the reaction the proselytizers were looking for: “Great was the rejoicing of the brethren . . . for by this time it had come to be generally

⁹⁸ And of more genteel observers of Southern culture as well. In his review of Frances Trollope’s *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), William Gilmore Simms laments that her lurid portrayal of a camp meeting is all too accurate: “Her description of their ill effects upon society, morals and manners, in certain portions of the country, is scarcely exaggerated. The extent to which this fanaticism has prevailed, and still measurably prevails, among the ignorant, the morose, the distempered of our population, is sometimes productive of the most humiliating exhibitions, such as she describes” (“Domestic Manners of the Americans” in *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction, Second Series* [New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845], 38).

known that the ‘convicted’ old man was . . . the very ‘chief of sinners’ in all that region” (124). Suggs ostensibly has a spiritual epiphany, for he relates his conversion experience with such sincerity and passion—using, ironically, gambling metaphors—that it rivals the bombast of the ministers. In fact, Suggs proceeds with such enthusiasm to convert other “brethren” there that “he was unanimously voted to be the most efficient addition the church had made during that meeting” (130).

The next morning it is announced that Suggs intends to become a minister. Moreover, “mourning over his past iniquities, and desirous of going to work in the cause as speedily as possible, [he] would take up a collection to found a church in his own neighbourhood.” The proceeds of it would be “held in trust by brother Bela Bugg, who was the financial officer of the circuit” and one of the ministers present at the camp meeting, “until some arrangement could be made to build a suitable house” (130). Suggs begins the collection with as much earnestness as he employed to save his brethren’s souls the night before, and he soon has “a very handsome sum” collected (132). The attendees’ generosity is due in no little part to Suggs’s ability to exploit the status consciousness of the wealthier members of the neighborhood. He targets first the brethren who were the most anxious to leave before the plate came to them: “These, to exculpate themselves from any thing like poverty, contributed handsomely.” Suggs’s strategy had its intended effect—namely it “excited the pride of purse of the congregation” and led members to compete in demonstrating their largesse (131).

When the collection is over, Brother Bugg approaches Suggs for the money, telling him he is about to return home. The minister is surprised when Suggs refuses: “‘It’s got to be *prayed over*, fust!’” Suggs says, the narrator adding that “a heavenly

smile [was] illuminating his whole face.” But when the minister suggests they quickly go off to one side to do so, Suggs replies with his own, better idea: ““You see that krick swamp?’ . . . ‘I’m gwine down in *thar*, and I’d gwine to lay this money down *so*’ . . . ‘and I’m gwine to git on these here knees’ . . . ‘and I’m *n-e-v-e-r* gwine to quit the grit ontwell I feel it’s got the blessin’! And nobody aint got to be *thar* but me!’” Bugg ruefully “admired the Captain’s fervent piety,” and reluctantly departs, leaving Suggs to walk to the swamp himself, where, not incidentally, his horse awaits him (132).

Stories about camp meetings and preachers are a major subgenre of both Old Southwestern Humor and African-American folklore, typically exposing ministers’ “alleged pomposity, greed, unchastity, and hypocrisy,” says Richard Dorson.⁹⁹ And while Dorson includes examples of Afro-Southern tales in his collection that satirize preachers’ worldliness as “Simon Attends a Camp Meeting” does, there is one in particular that has a tale type with African antecedents that approximates the underlying plot of Hooper’s story and that also links it to Afro-Southern folklore. This is Tale Type 1525 again, “The Master Thief.” It is a broad category of tales about thieves, who among other things, steal from each other, as Suggs does from the ministers who are fleecing the flock, including Bugg’s attempt to swindle Suggs himself.¹⁰⁰ “The Master Thief” is also the basic plot for the Afro-Southern folktale “Playing Dead in the Road,” which—like Suggs and the hypocritical, avaricious preachers in “The Captain Attends a Camp-Meeting”—is about a trickster who steals from an antagonist who is simultaneously eying the trickster as a

⁹⁹ *American Negro Folktales*, 363.

¹⁰⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all tale types are cited from Baughman, *Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America*.

dupe.¹⁰¹ Like “Brer Rabbit and Sis Cow” and “Simon Speculates Again,” “Playing Dead in the Road” suggests a likely intermediary between “The Captain Attends a Camp-Meeting” and its African antecedents.

“Playing Dead in the Road” begins with Brother Bear stopping by Brother Rabbit’s house one hot day and asking him if he would like to go fishing. Uninterested in fishing and deterred by the heat of the day, Rabbit declines but nevertheless follows Bear from a distance and watches him catch an impressive stringer of fish. In the shade of a tree on a hill above Bear, Rabbit thinks to himself, “Phew, I sure want some of them fish” (93). He puts into motion a plan to get them. He dashes ahead of Bear on the road home, and “lay down acting like he was dead.” Coming upon him, Bear is surprised to see Rabbit there. “He retched [reached] down and felt Brother Rabbit—‘Hm, he ain’t been dead long, he’s warm and just as fat as he can be.’” Remembering his fish, though, Bear says “Aw, I don’t need him,” and continues on down the road, leaving Rabbit in the dirt rather than taking and eating him (93).

As soon as Bear gets out of sight, Rabbit jumps up, runs ahead again, and feigns death a second time. Bear reacts the same way again, and Rabbit runs ahead and plays dead a third time. This time Bear pauses longer upon seeing Rabbit in the road: “Well here’s another Rabbit—that makes three—big snowshoe rabbits’ . . . ‘Well, I’ll just lay my fish down here and go back and get the other two.’” (Dorson’s storyteller explains that “It was worthwhile now” to recover and eat the rabbits.) But as soon as Bear gets out

¹⁰¹ Dorson includes two variants of the following tale. I have chosen for its detail “Playing Dead in the Road,” which Dorson ironically collected from an African-American named J.D. Suggs, a native of Mississippi. Dorson relates Suggs’s biography on pp. 59-64.

of sight, Rabbit grabs the fish and runs home to eat them. When Bear returns empty-handed from looking for the other two rabbits and “the fish and the rabbit are gone . . . he knows Brother Rabbit had tricked him” (93).

Though the differences in the plot details and the setting of these two tales are even greater than those of “Simon Speculates Again” and “Brer Rabbit and Sis Cow,” “Simon Attends a Camp Meeting” and “Playing Dead in the Road” do include motifs common to the first two tales. Ingenuity and indirection are again the keys to obtaining money or food from an ostensibly more powerful antagonist, in part by capitalizing upon his immoral susceptibilities, either “pride of purse” or gluttony. Beyond these similarities, though, the “The Master Thief” plot shared by the latter two stories emphasizes the adversarial relationship between the trickster and the dupe.

In “Simon Attends a Camp Meeting” and “Playing Dead in the Road,” Suggs and Rabbit are particularly reluctant to obtain food by socially acceptable means. Instead, they decide to acquire it by preying upon others who are ostensibly following normative conventions of behavior: preaching and fishing. In neither Suggs’s nor Rabbit’s case do ethical considerations appear to enter the tricksters’ decision-making process as they formulate their plans. As a result, the behavior of both appears to be more predatory than merely acquisitive, as was the case in the “Trickster Seeks Endowments” pair of tales.

However, key to “The Master Thief” plot is an incongruity between appearance and reality, a difference the protagonists readily distinguish but that a reader or listener tardily recognizes: The ministers and Bear, though victims, are not dupes throughout the

story. Instead, they “are merely rivals who have been momentarily outstripped.”¹⁰² In each case, given the opportunity, the apparent victim reveals himself to be just as devious as the trickster himself, and the trickster capitalizes upon this knowledge and plans accordingly. For instance, Suggs recognizes their opportunism when he characterizes the camp meeting as “a sort of ‘opposition line’ running against his own.” The appropriately named character of Bugg, for instance, seems a disinterested—albeit amorous—pastor up until the collection is taken. Eying the bounty, he intends to leave with it, probably never to return to build the promised church. But in doing so, the “opposition line[s]” cross, and Bugg is now attempting to steal from Suggs as well as from the congregation. Similarly, Bear demonstrates his willingness to eat a neighbor with whom he appeared to be on otherwise good terms. The tale begins with his amiably inviting Rabbit to go fishing, but its conclusion portrays him preparing to devour his friend. In fact, assuming the anthropomorphic qualities of the animal characters extend this far, Bear does not even bother to mourn Rabbit or inter his corpse when he finds him apparently dead.

The outcomes of “Simon Attends a Camp Meeting” and “Playing Dead in the Road” are characteristic of African-American trickster tales. Instead of being victims, they victimize those willing to take advantage of them.¹⁰³ But apart from their superior shrewdness as Master Thieves, what also differentiates Rabbit and Suggs from their antagonists is the former two characters’ self-awareness regarding their own behavior:

¹⁰² Justus makes this point with regard to Suggs and the preachers, but I believe this point can be extended to the protagonist/antagonist relationship in the Afro-Southern folktales as well (*Fetching the Old Southwest*, 529).

¹⁰³ Levine, “Some Go Up,” 103.

each understands that he has to be “as merciless as his stronger opponent,” whose own ruthless nature is inevitably revealed as such despite initial appearances otherwise.¹⁰⁴

Pretenses of piety and cordiality aside, Bugg and Bear are as eager to exploit the perceived weakness of Suggs and Rabbit as the latter pair is to manipulate the former. Accordingly, Justus’s estimation of Suggs’s unscrupulousness in “Simon Attends a Camp Meeting” applies to Rabbit’s deceit as well: it “is a necessary ploy to raise the ante in a game that is already rigged.”¹⁰⁵

Though the plot of “Simon Attends a Camp Meeting” broadly resembles that of “Playing Dead on the Road,” the origin of the tale type of these two trickster tales is not as definitively rooted in African culture as is that of “Simon Speculates Again” and “Brer Rabbit and Sis Cow.” Instead, the thirty-two variants of “The Master Thief” tale type that forms the basis of “Simon Attends a Camp Meeting” and “Playing Dead on the Road” have European, Asian, Indian, and Spanish-American antecedents. However, the Aarne-Thompson Index does list a West Indian cognate for the tale, which the editors footnote as “Negro.”¹⁰⁶ Folklorist Elsie Clews Parsons expands on this aside in a 1917 essay in which she documents three versions of this tale type from the Bahamas that are similar to “Playing Dead on the Road.” She describes parallels between these examples and similar stories from the Cape Verde Islands and the Sudan, but nevertheless claims that “[p]lainly

¹⁰⁴ Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 107.

¹⁰⁵ Justus, *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 517.

¹⁰⁶ Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*, trans. and ed. Stith Thompson, 2nd rev., FF Communications 184 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1961), 431.

the tale is European[,] and a Portuguese variant must be inferred to be the origin,” based upon a Scottish analogue she describes and the Portuguese colonization of and slave trade in Africa. She then traces the tale’s migration west from Africa to the West Indies and then to the American South.¹⁰⁷ Her confidence notwithstanding, subsequent scholarship by Bascom and Dundes has demonstrated the fallacy of such sweeping generalizations that ignore how African culture survived the Middle Passage.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, multiple global cognates and this kind of confusion over the exact patterns of transmission are typical of many Old Southwestern Humor sketches that parallel Afro-Southern folklore.¹⁰⁹ Specific correlations are sometimes impossible to

¹⁰⁷ “The Provenience of Certain Negro Folk-Tales. I,” *Folklore* 28.4 (Dec. 31, 1917): 413.

¹⁰⁸ For historical patterns of Atlantic creolization that address the Caribbean as a “middle ground” between African and North American cultures, see Ira Berlin, “From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America,” *The William & Mary Quarterly* 3rd series, 53, no. 2 (April 1996): 251-88; and John Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20. And Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619,” *The William & Mary Quarterly* 3rd series, 55, no. 3 (July 1998): 421-34. I am indebted to Dave Brown of The College of William & Mary for pointing me to these sources.

¹⁰⁹ I chose to analyze “Simon Speculates Again” and “Simon Attends a Camp Meeting” here because they are not only representative of the shared plots and characterization between Old Southwestern Humor and Afro-Southern folktales, but as will be discussed in the next chapter, they are also indicative of how these parallels extend to tone and theme as well. However, there are other sketches within *Some Adventures of Simon Suggs* that have motifs that parallel tales collected by Dorson. These include “Daddy Biggs’ Scrape at Cockerell’s Bend” (189-201), which shares Folk Motif K1971 “Man behind statue (tree) speaks and pretends to God (spirit)” with Dorson’s “Old Boss and John at the Praying Tree” (153-54). “Simon Speculates” (30-41) resembles motif K1956, “Sham wise man,” for which Dorson lists one African and numerous Caribbean cognates, including “Coon in the Box” (126-29; 126n.).

Old Southwestern Humor’s connections to Afro-Southern folktales aren’t exclusive to Hooper, either. Taliaferro’s “The Buck-Horned Snake” (88-89) is remarkably like

identify, which ultimately limits the efficacy of comparative tale typing to irrefutably and precisely authenticate elements of non-white folklore in Old Southwestern Humor. However, identifying and comparing the different narratives' tale types and their origins do complement close readings of examples from each genre to illustrate *how* Humorists like Hooper were influenced by African and their descendents rather than solely by Eurocentric folk sources, as scholars have heretofore claimed. In other words, the types and motifs of African folklore are the figurative fingerprints of black culture on this white-authored genre. To date, only Thomas Tuggle has suggested the possible influence of non-white folktales on *Some Adventures of Captain Simons Suggs* by wondering "whether or not Hooper derived any of the Suggs episodes from [black] sources." However, even he defers answering the question, saying it "must be left open to conjecture."¹¹⁰

Tuggle's unresolved speculation is characteristic of the propensity to ignore interracial creolization as a contributing factor to the Humorists' oeuvre. The analysis above is designed to be a corrective, to uncover the "unspeakable things unspoken" by underscoring the similarities between the plots and characterization of Afro-Southern

Dorson's African-American folktale "Hunting Possum on Sunday" (266), and its predominant motif, Q223.6.2 "Person is punished for hunting on Sunday," which has mixed British and Afro-Southern roots. Likewise, Taliaferro's story "The Tape-Worm" (86-87) is a variant of B784 "Animal lives in person's stomach" echoed by Dorson's collected story "Girl Swallows Lizard" (277-78). "Indian and Bear Story" (115-18) is an adaptation of X1133.1, "Lie: man uses remarkable means of getting out of tree stump" that is also found in the slave story "Who Darket the Hole" (345-46). Again, though, these are representative examples and are by no means an exhaustive list. Further examples from Hooper and George Washington Harris will be addressed in the next chapter.

¹¹⁰ "Folklore in the Humorous Works of Johnson Jones Hooper," 43.

folktales and Old Southwestern Humor. But do they prove that Simon Suggs was black?¹¹¹ Not definitely or exclusively, but the textual evidence combined with the trans-Atlantic pattern of the tale types' origins points to a genetic makeup of the sketches that strongly suggests Suggs had a racially diverse folkloric ancestry as a consequence of his author's immersion in a multi-cultural environment.

The relationship between the integrated population of the Old South and the syncretic composition of Old Southwestern Humor is not accidental: What Bakhtin describes as polyvocality is a consequence of creolization. The black as well as white voices within sketches like Hooper's are a result of the multi-racial culture to which the humorists were exposed. On one hand, this product of cultural exchange is indicative of the humorists' attitude toward the frontier—and the emigration and new settlement that it symbolized—and its distinctiveness from the novelists. These were the conditions that actually fueled the processes of creolization, and rather than being a source of anxiety, especially for how it threatened to unravel Western culture, the multi-racial voices within the humorists' texts and their demonstration of how, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, "otherness . . . is only contingent, external, illusory" suggests that these writers did not envision difference as a threat.¹¹² Thus not only do the trickster-inspired themes of the sketches reject stasis and rigid social order, but the heterogenous structural elements of the texts themselves symbolize the humorists' nonchalance toward social and racial

¹¹¹ The title of this chapter is a play on Shelley Fisher Fishkin's groundbreaking study of interracial cultural exchange in Mark Twain titled *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993).

¹¹² Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Univ. of Texas Press Slavic Series 1 (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981), 365.

differences and the movement that occurred across these boundaries as a result of emigration to and the settlement of the Old Southwest.

The nature of the genre itself may also have something to do with the relationship between Old Southwestern Humor's polyvocality and the region's multicultural population. As will also be addressed in more detail in the next chapter, the humorists' rejection of an epic style of literature in favor of a mode of writing that reflects the characteristics that Bakhtin associates with novelistic discourse made the sketches more susceptible to creolization. In particular, Old Southwestern Humor's focus on challenging authority, its lack of pretension, its contemporaneity, and its use of vernacular discourse coincide with Bakhtin's principle of the carnivalesque, a spirit of popular subversion that encourages heteroglossia, the incorporation of other, non-official forms of language like folktales. It is heteroglossia that contributes to polyvocality and its dialogical quality in texts like *Some Adventures of Simon Suggs*. Not only in the sketches themselves and their assaults on powerful animals and religious authorities but also on a broader level: the Afro-Southern contributions to Old Southwestern Humor facilitate the genre's assault on the stewardship assumed by seaboard conservatives, represented in the historical romances and their advocacy of paternalism.

CHAPTER FIVE

A NEW LITERATURE FOR A NEW COUNTRY

Creolization and its Literary Equivalents

In contrast to the monoglossia of antebellum Southern historical romances, the polyvocal sketch humor of Johnson Jones Hooper and his peers are the product of a more liberal attitude toward heteroglossia and its cultural equivalent, creolization. The ideological distinctions between these groups of authors, especially with respect to their attitudes toward the social environment that facilitated cultural exchange, help account for these divergent responses to creolization. If the syncreticism of the humorists' texts is evidence of their acceptance of or indifference to this process, it suggests an amenability to the circumstances described in the first chapter that encouraged the transmission of ideas and idioms between members of different races—in other words, the fluid social boundaries that accompanied emigration to the Old Southwest and that created this cultural borderland. Hooper's sketches, for instance, reflect an awareness of the folklore of non-whites, but the tone, plots, and themes of his stories also reflect his enthusiasm for representing the instability of "a new country." These were the same symptoms of migration, though, that were negatively dramatized and then figuratively resolved in the historical romances of Simms and his peers—solutions that came at the expense of the Native American cultures who represented a historical precedent these novelists were anxious to avoid.

Consequently, this divergence illuminates a curious relationship between creolization and the Old Southwest that is germane to how each group of authors interpreted the frontier's symbolic relationship to progress: namely, the degree to which each genre is syncretic also corresponds to its authors' point of view on what the unruly social environment of the Old Southwest portended for the future of Southern civilization. Whereas the novelists saw this region's and its imaginative equivalent's lack of order as a harbinger of decline, the humorists were more nonchalant, if not indulgent, in their representations of the Old Southwest's frontier characteristics. In addition to indirectly benefiting from the instability's contributions to creolization (which was a by-product of a frontier's lack of social boundaries), the humorists framed the lack of infrastructure and decorum of backwoods communities as something to be relished for the excitement and economic potential that it promised. Thus, rather than condemn opportunistic behavior—or attempt figuratively to rein it in through representations of paternalistic institutions in their fiction—the humorists instead demonstrated how opportunism and “mother-wit” were intrinsic to economic success in a capitalistic market environment and not part of a formula for cultural suicide. This attitude not only represents an alternative interpretation of the frontier, different from the perspective of the seaboard conservatives; it also reflects the genre's reliance on trickster-derived protagonists, plots, and themes.

This chapter will explain how the humorists' perspectives on migration and the Old Southwest informed their representation of the frontier and how that was articulated in part through the authors' choice of and use of Afro-Southern folklore. This relationship between the trickster tales and Old Southwestern Humor was previously established by

highlighting their shared plots and characterization; here the congruencies between these narratives' tones and themes will be focused on in order to illustrate how Afro-Southern folklore helped amplify the Humorists' response to the world view represented in historical romances by Simms, Caruthers, and Cooke. For example, much in the same way trickster tales celebrated improvisation and satirized exploitative power relationships, ingenuity was frequently rewarded in Old Southwestern Humor. Moreover, protagonists from the sketch humor also exposed and diminished pretenses to power by traditional sources of authority. Finally, much as one of the social functions of Afro-Southern trickster tales was the therapeutic effect of their laughter, the sketch writers likewise eased anxieties associated with the Old Southwest with their humor. In particular, says Christopher Morris, "Nineteenth-century humorists helped readers confront the market and the social change it entailed by showing them how to laugh at an otherwise scary world."¹ It, too, served a cathartic function, and in lieu of the cautionary tales offered by the novels, the sketch humor helped acclimatize readers to the new economic and social experiences represented by the region.²

The following discussion will also explain why the humorists differed from their novel-writing counterparts in their attitudes toward this cultural milieu, especially why they interpreted its chaos as something to be enjoyed rather than as an anxiety-producing

¹ "What's so Funny? Southern Humorists and the Market Revolution," in *Southern Writers and their Worlds*, ed. Christopher Morris and Steven G. Reinhardt, The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures 29 (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press for the Univ. of Texas at Arlington, 1996), 11.

² For an overview of what is known as the relief theory of humor, see John Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany: State Univ. of New York, 1983), chap. 4.

precursor to cultural backsliding. As emigrants themselves to the Old Southwest, the humorists witnessed the growing pains accompanying “Alabama Fever” and the economic issues associated with the “Flush Times.” However, what drew them to the Deep South was the same potential that the themes of their texts celebrate in their rejection of paternalism: The frontier offered the promise of a meritocracy and an escape from the entrenched social and economic barriers that paternalism perpetuated. The humorists were like thousands of other white Southerners who subscribed to a “world view that equated upward mobility with westward migration,” says James Oakes.³ In his biographical sketch of Henry Clay, for example, the humorist Joseph Glover Baldwin described the advantages that a new country offered to ambitious young men: “A young community, unorganized and free, furnishes an open, unoccupied field for energy and intellect.”⁴ Relocation to the frontier provided opportunities for those lacking capital or familial prestige—like many of the humorists themselves, not to mention their protagonists—to be successful based on initiative and ingenuity alone.

The Frontier and “The very incarnation of tom philosophy!”

It merits remembering that the Humorists themselves were also imaginatively representing a landscape from the recent past, much as the novelists used the colonial

³ *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 68.

⁴ *Party Leaders; Sketches of Thomas Jefferson, Alex'r Hamilton, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, John Randolph, of Roanoke, Including Notices of Many Other Distinguished American Statesmen* (New York: D. Appleton, 1855), 284, quoted in John Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South*, *New Perspectives on the History of the South* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2009), 65.

frontier as a proxy scenario for interpreting contemporary issues related to westward expansion. For example, the settings of most of the sketches in *Some Adventures of Simon Suggs* involve historical events that occurred a decade prior to the collection's publication in 1845. "Simon Speculates Again," for instance, occurs in 1835, and "Simon Becomes Captain" is set "in May of the year of grace—and excessive bank issues—1836."⁵ Moreover, James H. Justus reminds us that the humorists took as much license in their representations of regional life as the authors of the historical romances did. In fact, Justus prefers the term "Old Southwestern humor" instead of the also-popular description of the genre as "frontier humor" because the former "acknowledges that most of this writing appeared after the frontier line had moved farther west."⁶ For instance, by the time Hooper published *Some Adventures of Simon Suggs*, Alabama had been a state for twenty-six years.

However, despite their creative license in representing frontier society, the humorists were not writing from the same vantage point as their counterparts in Charleston, Savannah, and Richmond. Ritchie Devon Watson, Jr., reminds us that "even into the 1830s and 1840s places like Mississippi retained a roughness of social texture

⁵ *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, Southern Classics Series (1845; repr., Nashville: J. S. Sanders & Co., 1993), 82. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

⁶ *Fetching the Old Southwest: Humorous Writing from Longstreet to Twain* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2004), 6. Justus cautions that Old Southwestern Humor could be "as artful a distortion of the way things were as a plantation romance" (15). However, my argument here is that by portraying the social landscape using motifs that were more representative of lived experience in the Gulf South, the Humorists were challenging the interpretation of the Old South offered by historical romances.

that betrayed their recent frontier origins.”⁷ These vestiges of unruliness or the more recent memory of the unsophisticated aspects of life in the interior sections of the Deep South certainly had a part in coloring the humorists’ sketches. However, and more importantly, like Simms’s, Caruthers’s, and Cooke’s strategic portrayals of the colonial frontier for ideological purposes, the humorists’ representations of a period-specific environment was also a deliberate choice they made in order to express their own interpretation of progress—especially in contrast to that of the novelists. The sketches were thus part of what James David Miller says was a region-wide debate about emigration that “reflected, and influenced, wider discussions of southern society’s character and destiny.”⁸ For instance, Hooper’s use of his adopted hometown of La Fayette is “a symbol as well as a setting,” explains Johanna Nicol Shields, part of a legacy of embryonic communities used by American writers from John Winthrop to James Fenimore Cooper to contemplate the promise of the frontier. Where Hooper differs from these authors, says Shields, is in the earthy humor of his contemplations: “In a grotesquely comic form, Suggs’s adventures in east Alabama epitomized the anxieties and hopes of Hooper’s readers about what their frontiers might hold.”⁹

⁷ *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War*, Southern Literary Studies (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 2008), 108.

⁸ *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South*, The American South Series (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press / William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies, Southern Methodist Univ., 2002), 39.

⁹ Introduction to *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, Library of Alabama Classics (1845; repr., Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1993), x, xii.

If the jovial mood of Hooper's grotesqueries—and the genre as a whole—are indicative of the author's intended interpretation, Old Southwestern Humor aimed to encourage optimism rather than pessimism. The humorists' sketches do not share the historical romances' anxiety about the threat that emigration and wilderness communities allegedly posed to civilization and national culture. In contrast to Simms's grumbling in "Americanism in Literature" that "standards of judgment fluctuate; sensibilities become blunted, [and] principles impaired, with increasing insecurity at each additional remove," John S. Robb, writing from St. Louis, gushed in the Preface to his *Streaks of Squatter Life, and Far-West Scenes* (1847), that "every step of the pioneer's progress has been marked with incidents, humorous and thrilling, which wait but the wizard spell of a bright mind and able pen to call them from misty tradition, and clothe them with speaking life."¹⁰ Even when that progress was accompanied by Simms's dreaded "disruptions," the humorists could wryly transform chaos into comedy. Baldwin, writing from Alabama, remembered it as a "halcyon period, ranging from the year of Grace, 1835, to 1837; that golden era, when shinplasters were the sole currency; when bank-bills were 'as thick as Autumn leaves in Vallambrosa,' and credit was a franchise."¹¹ Baldwin may have had his tongue firmly planted in his cheek, but instead of being the end times, the "Flush Times"

¹⁰ "Americanism in Literature," in *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History, and Fiction, First Series*, ed. C. Hugh Holman (1845; repr., Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), 10-11; *Streaks of Squatter Life, and Far-West Scenes*, ed. John Francis McDermott (1847; repr., Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1962), viii.

¹¹ *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi. A Series of Sketches*, Library of Southern Civilization (1853; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 1987), 1.

were portrayed as an age of larger-than-life historical characters who, like the humorists themselves, saw the frontier as a horizon of opportunity.

If the fondness of Old Southwestern Humor for its setting suggests that the humorists themselves did not believe the frontier posed a grave risk to the fate of the nation, the subjects of the sketches also emphasize this difference. James Justus explains that “despite their stake in civilization, the humorists were mostly satisfied in going no further than to demonstrate human foibles that were exposed to all eyes.”¹² In other words, in contrast to illustrating epic battles in colonial history, the sketches document clashes of egos in horse swaps; rather than memorializing political figures, the humorists describe mythic loafers. For instance, in lieu of representing Indian wars as apocalyptic symbols portending the end of white civilization (as Simms suggested in *The Yemassee*), Hooper uses the Creek War of 1836 as an opportunity to emphasize the propensity of Southerners—both settlers and public intellectuals—to absurdly exaggerate threats to their community.

Granted, the historical equivalent for this nineteenth-century conflict did not pose as grave a threat to the future of white settlement as had the Yemassee War, but Hooper’s caricature of the response to this isolated Creek uprising hints that Southerners themselves had difficulties in making that distinction. For instance, the narrator of “Simon Becomes Captain” remembers that “The more remote from the scenes of blood, the greater the noise” was made about the news of the Creek attacks. He also deadpans that the backwoodsmen of the type celebrated in Simms’s novels, “the yeomanry of the

¹² *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 473. This motif is also similar to how hubris, greed, and lust were caricatured in the animal tales of African Americans.

country—those to whom, as we are annually told, the nation looks with confidence in all her perils—packed up their carts and wagons, and ‘incontinently’ departed for more peaceful regions!” (82-83). Rather than attempt to allay his neighbors’ fears and to manage the situation in order to restore calm to the community, Suggs—who “was well informed as to the state of feeling of the Indians, in all the country for ten miles around, and knew there was no danger”—chooses instead to capitalize on the disorder and the settlers’ sense of vulnerability (85).

In fact, Suggs’s response is a burlesque of Craven’s behavior in *The Yemassee*. Like the fictional colonial governor, Suggs “was in his element” among the panic, yet his assuredness sprang from different sources: “Not that Suggs is particularly fond of danger,” the narrator explains, “but because he delighted in the noise and confusion, the fun and the free drinking, incident to such occasions.” For example, fortified by frequent draughts from the whiskey barrel at the neighborhood grocery to which the panicked residents have fled (compared to the flight of the Carolinians to the fortified blockhouse in Simms’s novel), Suggs deliberately inflates their nightmarish visions of bloodshed. He also suggests that a local militia be created to defend the store and the refugees. After wryly suggesting that they ought to “make some man capting that aint afeard to fight . . . some sober, stiddy feller,” he accepts his neighbors’ nomination to the position (87). Out of this irony, the narrator explains, the “Tallapoosy Vollantares” were born:

the nucleus of that renowned band of patriot soldiers, afterwards known as the “FORTY THIEVES”—a name in the highest degree inappropriate, inasmuch as the company, from the very best evidence we have been able to procure, never had upon its roll, at any time, a greater number of names than *thirty-nine!* (89)

This incongruity also foreshadows the ludicrousness of the rest of the sketch, especially Suggs's exploitation of his neighbors' paranoia. But rather than condemn this unprincipled behavior as symptomatic of the frontier's negative effect on civility and on an individual's relationship to public welfare, Hooper, like his fellow humorists, portrays this behavior as endemic to human nature. The only reasonable response to the panic is exhibited by a settler's housecat, who watches, unperturbed, the carryings-on during its evacuation on a wagon full of household valuables: "the old tom-cat sits there," remarks the narrator, "gravely and quietly, the very incarnation of tom philosophy!" (83).

Hooper's sketch mocks the opposite of this feline equanimity, the propensity for embellishing threats and then succumbing to one's own (or someone else's) fear-mongering. Though neither Hooper nor any of the other humorists went on record responding to the dire interpretation of rapid expansion and emigration expressed in texts like Simms's "The Social Principle," the satire of Simms's logic in sketches like "Simon Becomes Captain" suggests that these texts were a subtle criticism of beliefs *about* the frontier, especially by those whose perspective was distorted by distance (such as pundits residing in established seaboard states) or by change (the settlers themselves). Richard Boyd Hauck, for instance, believes that "what is going on in these yarns is not so much a matter of exaggeration as it is a recording of the ways in which normal events can be seen as exaggerated from a detached point of view, or the ways in which normal people can behave absurdly under the pressures of a strange environment."¹³

¹³ *A Cheerful Nihilism: Confidence and "The Absurd" in American Humorous Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1971), 42.

The crisis that precipitates Suggs's victimization of his neighbors, for example, is a figment of the dupes' overactive imaginations. Likewise, the only "battles" engaged in by the "Tallapoosy Vollantares" are products of the commanding officer's own machinations. When a widow slips past a sentry at night to retrieve her chewing tobacco and scares a sentinel, Suggs, "convinced that the alarm was a humbug of some sort," was nevertheless for "keeping up the farce, [since it] kept up his own importance" (93). He orders a volley fired, which kills the widow's brace of oxen and a pony. To add insult to injury, the widow later pays a fine to Suggs following a parody of a court martial in which he threatens to execute her for disobeying his curfew.

Likewise, in a subsequent sketch, "'The Tallapoosy Vollantares' Meet the Enemy," Suggs decides to visit and bet on a nearby ball game between friendly Creek towns after weeks of "subsisting comfortably upon the contributions which he almost daily levied from wagons passing with flour, bacon, and whiskey, from Wetumpka eastward" (111). However, when he discovers that some rival white spectators at the ballgame are in cahoots with the players to steal his stakes, Suggs instead develops a ruse and he himself rides off with the entire pot. He loses his own pony in the ensuing melee, though, and after the cessation of the conflict, the state legislature "thrice refused to grant him any remuneration whatsoever." The narrator concludes with the wry observation that "Truly 'republics *are* ungrateful'" to ostensibly dutiful men like Suggs (117).

Ultimately, the last laugh is on Suggs, but not before he has a good number of them himself at the literal and figurative expense of his neighbors. Consequently, what is noticeably absent from sketches like these is the polemic tone that accompanies such charlatanism in the historical romances. One explanation for this difference, as Shields

observes, is that, “armed only with mother wit, Suggs makes his victims choose their own fates.”¹⁴ In other words, Suggs’s depredations are borne either by scoundrels who attempt to cheat Suggs first or by fools like the dupes who elect him captain. In the first instance, poetic justice is served, and in the second, the credulity of the victims undermines any empathy for them. Justus concurs with this interpretation, suggesting that “even if Hooper never quite gives his blessing to this old trickster who uses his superior knowledge of *human natur* to get what he wants, he manifestly prefers Simon to those foolish enough to become his victims.”¹⁵ This indulgence toward his protagonist also leads to Hooper’s reluctance to expose Suggs to any sustained negative consequences associated with his actions. Suggs may lose the value of his pony (though he had already obtained a replacement in the melee following the ball game), but it is a comparatively inconsequential loss. In contrast to the fates of the selfish and apostate characters in novels such as *The Yemassee*, Suggs is neither killed off like Chorley nor is he reformed like the renegade yeoman Grayson. Instead, Suggs’s charlatanism is described in a mock campaign biography that wryly contextualizes it as a qualification for public office.

Nevertheless, some scholars have interpreted sketches similar to those in *Some Adventures* as the humorists’ censure of unrestrained, self-interested behavior. Kenneth S. Lynn, for instance, argues that the function of the narrative frames in the sketches reflects the value the humorists placed on order and restraint. He claims the humorists “found that the frame was a convenient way of keeping their first-person narrators

¹⁴ Introduction to *Adventures of Simon Suggs*, xxxviii.

¹⁵ *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 520.

outside and above the comic action, thereby drawing a *cordon sanitaire*, so to speak, between the morally irreproachable gentleman and the tainted life he described.”¹⁶

According to Lynn, the “Self-Controlled Gentleman” represented not only the more educated narrators of the frame but ostensibly the humorists themselves. Their desire to check the unruliness of the frontier and its Jacksonian instigators coincided with the discipline imposed by the frame itself on the fictional antics of the sketch’s “Clown” figures.

The apparent logic of this thesis is shared by scholars who interpret the humorists’ fiction from the perspective of their Whig politics. This perspective does seem reasonable since many of the humorists were newspaper editors who wrote for (and were sometimes candidates of) the Party. For example, Hooper himself was the editor of the *Wetumpka Whig* when *Some Adventures of Simon Suggs* was published, and Suggs made his first appearance in Hooper’s *East Alabamian*, the masthead of which superimposed “H. Clay of KY” over an American flag in homage to the party’s 1844 Presidential candidate.¹⁷ Thus it seems plausible, as Stephen Railton has claimed, that Old Southwestern Humor’s proletarian antics were a satiric “counterattack upon the spirit of the times, a deeply rooted motivated [sic] repudiation of the contemporary urge of democratic impulses most conveniently represented by Jacksonianism.”¹⁸ This connection between the Whigs’

¹⁶ *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1959), 64. Lynn goes on to argue that these two voices were synthesized in the work of Mark Twain, particularly *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885).

¹⁷ [La Fayette, AL] *East Alabamian*, Sept. 23, 1843.

¹⁸ *Authorship and Audience: Literary Performance in the American Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), 100, quoted in Ed Piacentino, “Contesting the

leeriness of egalitarianism and the sketches' licentious characters also informs the introduction to the standard anthology of Old Southwestern Humor by Hennig Cohen and William B. Dillingham. They argue:

Political undertones are discernible in the work of nearly all of the Old Southwestern authors. Many were staunch members of the Whig Party, and their plainly stated views occur in their sketches. But even where the political is not an obvious factor, it is a real, if slightly obscured one. The writers' amused observations on the outspoken, crude, and often illiterate democratic man reveal a persistent if sometimes only half-conscious feeling that while these ringtailed roarers had their virtues, they could not be trusted to run the country.¹⁹

On one hand, Lynn's, Railton's, and Cohen and Dillingham's interpretations do reflect important principles of the Whig Party. Historian Daniel Walker Howe (quoting Lyman Beecher) explains that "in the absence of order, the threat of a Hobbesian state of nature, where men behaved like 'famished, infuriated animals, goaded by instinct and unrestrained by protective hopes and fears' seemed very real to the Whigs."²⁰ Likewise, the aggressive self-interestedness of Hooper's protagonist seems anathema to what Howe says was a "recurring theme in Whig rhetoric": the "organic unity of society. Whereas the Jacksonians often spoke of the conflicting interests of 'producers' and 'nonproducers,'

Boundaries of Race and Gender in Old Southwestern Humor," in *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. M. Thomas Inge and Edward J. Piacentino (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2001), 52.

¹⁹ Introduction to *Humor of the Old Southwest*, eds. Hennig Cohen and William B. Dillingham. 3rd ed. (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1994), xxxix. For an interpretation of these sketches as satirizing Jackson himself, see Joseph O'Beirne Milner, "The Social, Religious, Economic, and Political Implications of the Southwest Humor of Baldwin, Longstreet, Hooper, and G. W. Harris" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 1971), 243-44.

²⁰ *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), 34.

the 'house of have' and the 'house of want,' the Whigs were usually concerned with muting social conflict."²¹

However, this purely political interpretation of Old Southwestern Humor is imperfect for the same reason that Lynn's *cordon sanitaire* thesis is less than adequate. Instead of "muting" or quarantining disruptive behavior, the humorists instead exaggerated its antisocial qualities in order to satirize anxieties about it. Sketches such as "Simon Became Captain" overstate fears about disruption to the point that they seem ludicrous, and stories like "Simon Speculates Again" show how the selfish behavior of "gentlemen" only exacerbates the anarchy that the authority and self-discipline inherent to their social status are supposed to check.²²

Likewise, the social antagonisms in *Some Adventures of Simon Suggs* and their aforementioned comic resolution in favor of the protagonist are such a predominant aspect of the collection that Hooper's imaginative vision of the frontier also fails to coincide neatly with the platform of the Whig party. Hooper may have "resisted the egalitarian ethos of nineteenth-century America," observes historian Adam L. Tate, but that did not mean that he or the other humorists "desire[d] to return to a traditional

²¹ Ibid., 21.

²² James E. Caron summarizes the flaws in the symbolic significance that Lynn attributes to the frame narrative, specifically his conceptualization of the cultural function of the genre itself as a "*cordon sanitaire*." Caron himself argues that Lynn's reduction of the texts' voices to simply upper-class and lower-class sets of attitudes is an oversimplified account of class diversity in the Old South. He interprets the humor as suggesting "one can laugh with instead of at *dēmos* (i.e. the people)" ("Backwoods Civility, or How the Ring-Tailed Roarer Became a Gentle Man for David Crockett, Charles F.M. Noland, and William Tappan Thompson," in *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. Inge and Piacentino, 162.).

aristocratic order” such as paternalism to curb the region’s indecorous behavior.²³

Instead, they looked upon the latter with amused indifference. Justus, for instance, likens Hooper’s view of the havoc wrought by Suggs and his antagonists to the outlook of the aforementioned tom cat in “Simon Becomes Captain”: “From his own superior vantage point, the narrator accepts the eruptions of human folly without undue involvement or judgment.”²⁴ Even though William Lenz labels Suggs “the American confidence man par excellence,” he concurs with Justus’s estimation of the sketches’ lack of censure. Lenz argues that the narrative’s frame device and the competition between two scoundrels such as Bugg and Suggs in “Simon Attends a Camp Meeting” actually contribute to—contra Lynn—the sketches’ moral implications remaining undefined: Hooper “allows the reader to try out each position, to evaluate each without commitment, and, at the tale’s end, to retreat to a humorous vision of the whole.”²⁵ Rather than a censorious interpretation, this circumspection encourages an amused ambiguity at odds with the certitude of Whig orthodoxy.²⁶

²³ *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals, 1789-1861: Liberty, Tradition, and the Good Society* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2005), 323.

²⁴ *Fetching the Old Southwest*, 520. Justus goes on to say that “Moral commentary, such as it is, is oblique and structural” in these sketches (520).

²⁵ *Fast Talk and Flush Times: The Confidence Man as a Literary Invention* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1985), 65, 67.

²⁶ Hooper himself drew careful distinctions about what aspects of the national party platform that he supported. In a June 24, 1853, letter to W. G. Clark, the editor of the [Mobile] *Advertiser*, Hooper explained that “backed by extensive [and] influential family connections, I was known to be a Whig in most, at least, of my affinities I did not set out [in this letter] to prove myself a ‘good’ Whig. According to the latest tests, I am not.” The test in particular he referred to was the Whig Party’s nomination of the anti-slavery candidate Winfield Scott for President in 1852, a decision for which he held “Free-

Again, this insouciance constitutes a major distinction from the historical romances and their belief in the disruptive force of human behavior when it goes unchecked by paternalism. The tone is a product of the humorists' vantage point: These authors were transplanted Easterners writing about the Old Southwest *in* the Old Southwest. These were not only emigrants themselves (which will be addressed in more detail at the end of this chapter); they were also immersed in the fluidity of the society they described in their sketches. Moreover, this proximity facilitated the influence of Afro-Southern trickster tales on the genre, including its tone. Even the attitude of sketches that lack clear antecedents to African trickster tales coincides with Lawrence Levine's aforementioned claim that "the characteristic spirit of these tales was one not of moral judgment but of vicarious triumph."²⁷ In other words, much as Afro-Southern trickster tales that were often narratives of wish-fulfillment for their enslaved audiences, sketches like those by Hooper represent a vision of the frontier where capital in the form of wits and improvisation trumps traditional sources of economic power and social prestige.

This comparison is not intended to equate the relative freedom of blacks and non-elite whites in the Old South. Nevertheless, as Joseph Milner points out, Hooper's vision

Soilers + Abolitionists" responsible. In contrast, he tells Clark that "I do entertain and cherish the sentiments of the Clay Whig Party, + I have no concealment about what I approve or condemn" (Folder 17, Box 1, William Stanley Hoole Papers, W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library, the University of Alabama.). Shields diminishes Hooper's political commitment even further, saying that his candidacy for office was inspired by his need "to pay his debts" (Introduction to *Some Adventures*, lix).

²⁷ "'Some Go Up and Some Go Down': The Meaning of the Slave Trickster," in *The Hofstadter Aegis: A Memorial*, ed. Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 105.

of the Old Southwest “reflects a view of man’s survival as determined by his own shifts and struggles” rather than by external influences—Providence, education, or as was exhibited in the historical romances, by position of birth or by acknowledging one’s position within a hierarchical social order.²⁸ Although non-elite whites were not coerced like slaves, emigration and the frontier offered them the promise for economic success and independence based on ingenuity and diligence, represented by Suggs’s “mother-wit.”²⁹ The same opportunities were denied to slaves, but the latter’s folktales provided at least some of the motifs for articulating the white experience of a common struggle against paternalism.

The relationship between the sketches’ tones, subjects, and hybridity merits exploration before analyzing the causes for the humorists’ dismissive attitude about the social costs of emigration and, in particular, their differences with the novelists on this point. For the humorists’ use of Afro-Southern folktales is connected to the authors’ embrace of the unstable social environment created by emigration and regional expansion.

The Carnavalesque in Southern Literature

The gleeful indifference to order and authority shared by Old Southwestern Humor and Afro-Southern folklore is characteristic of a subversive cultural ethos that Mikhail Bakhtin called the carnivalesque. Critics Peter Stallybrass and Allon White define this cultural and literary convention as “a populist utopian vision of the world seen from

²⁸ “The Social, Religious, Economic, and Political Implications,” 226.

²⁹ *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, 53.

below and a festive critique, through the inversion of hierarchy, of the ‘high’ culture” and the authority it represents.³⁰ As its name suggests, Bakhtin believed this phenomenon was rooted in the medieval carnival, the folk festivals of European towns and villages that were neither official holidays nor sponsored by the government or church. This distinction is important because, lacking formal sanction, these events were egalitarian in setting, participation, and spirit. They occurred in central spaces such as the village or town marketplace, for instance, included non-elite members of the village or towns, and featured popular forms of entertainment that defied standards of propriety.

Bakhtin believed that the folk sources of the carnival and their disregard for decorum encouraged humorous exaggerations of the grotesque body and its appetites to become a distinguishing characteristic of these events. He explained that a focus on the body as an expression of popular culture had two important implications for the social function of these events. On one hand, celebrating fleshiness, appetites, and excretions rather than honoring the transcendent, static qualities of reason and spirituality transformed the sites of carnival into a “boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations [that] opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture.”³¹ Carnivals became spheres of informal gaiety that mocked high culture and its conservative gravitas. Second, “Status degradation through exposure of the

³⁰ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 7.

³¹ *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), 4. Stallybrass and White explain that “In Bakhtin the ‘classical body’ denotes the inherent *form* of the high official culture and suggests that the shape and plasticity of the human body is indissociable from the shape and plasticity of discursive material and social norm in a collectivity” (*The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 21).

grotesque aspects of the body and exorbitant exaggeration of its features is an essential aspect of this [inversion].”³² Because the body “is always in process, it is always *becoming*” as it eats and defecates, grows and diminishes, replicates itself and dies; it was a symbolic foil to the inflexibility of governance and religious dogma that dominated social life during the rest of the year.³³ Coupled with the fact that the dates of these festivals were typically associated with or commemorated “moments of death and revival, of change and renewal,” the focus on the body contributed to the way that the carnival “celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchal rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.”³⁴

This periodic, temporary abeyance of authority transformed the carnival into a public opportunity for the expression of what at other times would be subversive behaviors. These included parodies of feudal ceremonies, travesties of church rituals, and the oaths and curses of Billingsgate.³⁵ Consequently, Bakhtin explained that this uninhibited space and time “offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; [carnival] built a second world and a second life outside officialdom.”³⁶ It was a space

³² Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 183.

³³ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁴ *Rabelais and His World*, 9, 10.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

and time where authority was not only suspended but could be safely inverted or satirized. According to Stallybrass and White, carnival “allowed the society involved to mediate into periodic ritual the culturally constructed ‘otherness’ of its governing categories. . . . Categories *opposite* to the ones normally enforced [were] given an actual and active staging during the festival.”³⁷ This critical assessment contributed to the most important but largely implied social function of the carnivalesque: Because of its transformative possibility—by the fact that authority, its culture, and the decorum that stemmed from it could be interrupted, inverted, and satirized—the hegemonic power of state and religious authorities was revealed as contingent. This tenuousness thus suggested the opportunity for social change and renewal, a potential shared by both Afro-Southern trickster tales and Old Southwestern Humor by virtue of their protagonists’ reversal of the asymmetrical power relationships inherent to slavery and paternalism.

The relationship between medieval carnival and nineteenth-century folklore and fiction is not coincidental. Carnival’s popular roots, disorder, and license to flout social authority were ultimately curtailed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the evolution of the bourgeois state. The comic and derisive rituals of carnivals became threats to societies that had a growing interest in preserving social divisions. Ultimately, explained Bakhtin, “the state encroached upon festive life and turned it into a parade.” What once were festivals of renewal were transformed into carefully programmed pageants and spectacles that offered the promise of the “extraecclesiastical and

³⁷ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 189.

extrapolitical aspect of the world” but that ultimately contained it.³⁸ Likewise, the popular culture that prevailed during the medieval carnivals was “stigmatized as the vulgar practices of a superstitious and crude populace,” say Stallybrass and White. The form of the carnival itself was transformed, they continue, “prettified, incorporated into commercial or civic display or regarded as a purely negative phenomenon.”³⁹ These festivals are the simulacra that we are more familiar with today, including Mardi Gras. These are orchestrated events that celebrate excessive appetites, sometimes raucously, but they are devoid of transformative possibilities, even on a symbolic level. They allow for the release of inhibitions, but they are always contained by civic and economic authorities.

However, Bakhtin did not believe that the spirit of the carnival was eradicated. Beginning in the late Middle Ages, he said a comic literature emerged “infused with the carnival spirit and [that] made wide use of carnival forms and images. It developed in the disguise of legalized carnival licentiousness and in most cases was systematically linked with such celebrations. Its laughter was both ambivalent and festive.”⁴⁰ Consequently, the structure and principles of carnival survived outside of town festivals and marketplaces. Two aspects in particular were incorporated by authors. The first was the carnival’s folk humor and its relationship to grotesque bodily imagery, which Bakhtin calls “grotesque

³⁸ *Rabelais and His World*, 33.

³⁹ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 9.

⁴⁰ *Rabelais and His World*, 13.

realism” in a literary context.⁴¹ Similar to its function in the medieval marketplace, the purpose of this comic focus on the body, its appetites, emissions, and “lower stratum,” says Bakhtin, “is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract,” and representations thereof in literature.⁴² Compared to discipline and order, explain Stallybrass and White, the carnivalesque is a “figural and symbolic resource for parodic exaggeration and inversion.”⁴³

However, in spite of the potential for antagonism spurring parody’s diminishment of its subject, Bakhtin was emphatic that the carnivalesque’s satiric debasement was not malicious. Just as “folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time,” the humor stemming from grotesque realism in carnivalesque literature is designed to “liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things.”⁴⁴ The humor of the grotesque negates affectation, but not by eliminating its sources as much as by

⁴¹ Ibid., 18.

⁴² Ibid., 23, 19. Bakhtin was referring to classical and later Enlightenment representations of the body itself, in which it “was first of all a strictly completed, finished project. Furthermore, it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies” (29). It was thus stripped of its earthy, leveling, regenerative qualities, and came to be more associated with the classical tradition it opposed and used to diminish in medieval carnivals.

⁴³ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 9.

⁴⁴ *Rabelais and His World*, 11, 34.

exposing the artifice of pretenses, by redressing its arbitrary claims of authority, and by suggesting alternatives.

This earthy parody and its transformational capabilities are motifs of Old Southwestern Humor. For instance, most of the genre's protagonists are defined by their corporeality, including Suggs himself, who literally embodies the vulgar attributes of grotesque realism. In contrast to the classical, masculine features of Craven in *The Yemassee*, Suggs's head is "thinly covered with coarse, silver-white hair" and is distinguished by "a pair of eyes with light-grey pupils and variegated whites," and a nose, "long and low, with an extremity of singular acuteness" (10-11). And as his aforementioned "adventures" suggest, this physical unattractiveness is a manifestation of Suggs's misshapen ethical disposition. Other humorists also created monstrous characters whose features, if not the behavior represented by them, are correctives to pretense. For example, the eponymous character of George Washington Harris's *Sut Lovingood's Yarns Spun by a "Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool"* (1867) is likewise defined and motivated by his body and its appetites. His name itself has sensual, if not sexual, connotations: "Sut" is a consonant away from "rut," the time in late fall when male deer are most sexually aggressive, and "Lovingood" suggests the character's amorous skills. He is likewise a grotesque, described by Harris' amanuensis as "a queer looking, long legged, short bodied, small headed, white haired, hog eyed, funny sort of a genius."⁴⁵ Such a physical

⁴⁵ "Sut Lovingood's Daddy, Acting Horse," in *Sut Lovingood's Yarns*, ed. M. Thomas Inge, The Masterworks of Literature Series (New Haven, Conn.: College and Univ. Press, 1966), 33.

specimen is not typically associated with “genius,” but like Suggs, Lovingood has a gift for disrupting the social order of his east Tennessee setting.

In addition to grotesque bodies, their appetites and excrement are also popular motifs in Old Southwestern Humor.⁴⁶ They challenge the decorum associated with the high culture and the self-discipline represented by and advocated in antebellum Southern historical romances. “No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can coexist with [these] images,” explains Bakhtin. “These images are opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity.”⁴⁷ For instance, one of Harris’s sketches, “Sut Lovingood at Bull’s Gap” (1858), portrays the rude conditions of backwoods accommodations in ways that would make the rustic characters of Simms’s novels blush. Lovingood overnights at a roadside inn, where he encounters another guest, “a big-thunderin Du[t]chman.”⁴⁸ The homeliness of Lovingood himself pales in contrast to his description of the German:

he looked like he’d been moulded in a elephant’s paunch, an his laigs in a big crooked holler log, an stuck on arterwards. His britches wer as big es a bedtick, with two meal-bags sowed tu hit fur laigs, an his head wer as round es a ball; his har—well, hit mout a been a sandy boar’s skin tuck ofen the beastez when he wer mad and had all bristils sot, an then fitted without eny combin ur cleanin tu his skull. His face looked like sum stout pusson hed busted a ripe tomato ontu hit, an seeds an innards an skin hed all stuck and dried thar. (233-34)

⁴⁶ Monstrous bodies are also a prominent motif in the humor of Henry Clay Lewis (Madison Tensas). See in particular “The Curious Widow,” “Stealing a Baby,” and “A Struggle for Life” from *Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor* (1850; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1997).

⁴⁷ *Rabelais and his World*, 3.

⁴⁸ “Sut Lovingood at Bull’s Gap,” [Nashville] *Union and American*, Dec. 5, 1858; repr. *Sut Lovingood’s Yarns*, ed. Inge, 233. Subsequent citations will be made parenthetically to this edition.

Lovingood is even more fascinated by his fellow guest's appetite. The Dutchman eats an entire boiled chicken in one giant bite along with "a big tin pan ove sourcrout what smelt sorter like a pile ove raw hides in August" (234). Likewise, the Dutchman's thirst for alcohol is magnificent. After finishing his meal, he is handed a "yeathen crock ove dish water with a teacupful ove red pepper an a pint ove tanglelaig whiskey mixed in"; the Dutchman drains the concoction in a single gulp and rubs his belly in satisfaction (234). But that gustatory pleasure turns nightmarish later that evening when the Dutchman's stomach literally explodes—"busted open for more nur a foot"—as a result of his excessive eating and his attendant indigestion. Lovingood takes it in stride, though, and precedes to doctor the foreigner's belly in a manner that is as painful as the original injury: "I jist laid him ontu his back, tuck a knife fur a needil, an a ole bridil rein fur a thread, an sowed him up adzactly like ye sows up the mouf ove a par ove saddil bags with the strap, an then tied a knot on bof ainds ove the rein" (239). The Dutchman is none the worse for wear, and his only anxiety about Lovingood's ad hoc surgery is whether "he wer bound to *leak his lager bier*" until the wound fully closed up (240).

The unrestrained appetites and outrageous behavior of this sketch would appear to validate the warnings of authors like Simms about the retrogressive condition of civilization in undeveloped regions. In fact, this sketch is the antithesis to "The Social Principle." The low company of Lovingood and the Dutchman, the latter's vulgar appetites and profanity, and the absence of civilized hospitality in the inn all would seem to confirm the value of a stable social order and its moral benefits. But rather than criticizing the Dutchman's gluttony, this disregard for decorum is celebrated by the

sketch. The comic exaggeration of the Dutchman's bodily excesses corresponds to the qualities of grotesque realism and the "positive force" that Bakhtin assigns to it.⁴⁹ The character's immigrant status and intemperance challenge the stasis and expectations of self-discipline inherent in "The Social Principle," and his overindulgence is, against "civilized" assumptions, not the death of him. Lovingood sews him up and later hears that "he hed bet a feller his trunk agin a barrel ove sourcroust that he could drink lager bier faster and longer nur a big muley cow could salted meal slop, an durnd ef he didn't win on bof pints" (240). Admiration substitutes for condemnation, and consequently, like Hooper's humor, the irreverent tone of "Sut Lovingood at Bull's Gap" indicates its tolerance for an environment that permits such hedonism. Rather than advocate restraint like the historical romances, the grotesque realism of Old Southwest Humor undermines that social vision by exposing its constraints as overwrought snobbery.

Grotesque realism also challenges the propriety associated with official culture. The low, bodily humor of "Sut Lovingood at Bull's Gap" is representative of how Old Southwest Humor exhibits a carnivalesque disdain for high culture—even the elevated formality characteristic of genteel literature is derided. For example, even though Lovingood says he "aint spected to act ur talk like human, no how," this marginalization does not dissuade him from sharing the anecdote in his own vernacular style. At the beginning of the tale he promises with dismissive relish to "tell jist what I seed, hearn and felt . . . I don't keer a durn" for how the tale is received by the audience, or whether it is believed (230).

⁴⁹ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 9.

Especially in contrast to the seriousness of official culture represented by the historical romances, the carnivalesque qualities resulting from Old Southwestern Humor's focus on the body also mock the formality of these Bakhtinian epics as contrived and ridiculous. Thomas Bangs Thorpe's "The Big Bear of Arkansas" (1843) illustrates this power of the grotesque to highlight and undermine pretense. In the sketch, which is one of the most anthologized tales of Old Southwestern Humor, a strange "man of Arkansas" precedes his entrance to a cabin of a steamboat with a "loud crowing." He then "[takes] a chair, put[s] his feet on the stove," and greets the other passengers with a hearty informality. The sketch's frame narrator observes:

Some of the company at this familiarity looked a little angry, and some astonished, but in a moment every face was wreathed in a smile. There was something about the intruder that won the heart on sight. He appeared to be a man enjoying perfect health and contentment—his eyes were as sparkling as diamonds, and good natured to simplicity.⁵⁰

As much as his undignified announcement of his presence, the recognizable "simplicity" marks the hunter as an "intruder" to the heretofore muted environment of the steamboat cabin. Here, the man's exuberance demolishes the pretensions of his fellow passengers, much like the "grotesque tends to operate as a critique of a dominant ideology which has already set the terms, designating what is high and low," explain Stallybrass and White.⁵¹ Moreover, akin to how the grotesque can "unsettle 'given' social positions and interrogate the rules of inclusion, exclusion and domination which

⁵⁰ "The Big Bear of Arkansas" in *A New Collection of Thomas Bangs Thorpe's Sketches of the Old Southwest*, ed. David C. Estes (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State Univ., 1989), 113. Subsequent citations will be made parenthetically to this edition.

⁵¹ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 43.

structured the social ensemble,” the wealthy passengers are overcome by the gaiety of the “intruder,” his plainness, and his obvious bodily health.⁵² What beforehand was an atmosphere of clubby gentility punctuated by the murmur of discussion is transformed into a room revolving around the hunter’s loud, unsophisticated, and entertaining stories about his hunting prowess and the fertility of Arkansas.

The comedy in “The Big Bear of Arkansas” is derived from its unsophisticated protagonist and the risqué incongruity of its conclusion. Like many of the genre’s “ring tailed roarers,” Jim Doggett eschews hunting for sport, which he suggests is not a true marker of masculinity. Returning on a steamboat from New Orleans, whose gentlemen think bird hunting is a test of skill, the Arkansas native tells his fellow passengers that at home “a bird any way is too trifling. I never did shoot at but one, and I’d never forgiven myself for that had it weighed less than forty pounds; I wouldn’t draw a rifle on anything less than that” (114). This combination of the hunter’s braggadocio and his embellishment of his native state’s bounty is a prelude to the story’s central anecdote, the hunt of “the d——t bar that was ever grown” (119). Even though the hunter has killed so many bears that the stories of his hunts are typically “told in two sentences—a bar is started, and he is killed,” this bear was like “hunting the devil himself,” and it escaped death in several spectacular close calls (118, 121). Doggett relates that his reputation was deflated by his failures, and he says he became the butt of his neighbors’ jokes: “It was too much, and I determined to catch that bar, go to Texas, or die” (121). The next morning Doggett ostensibly redeems himself by killing the animal. Contrary to expectations, though, he does so while going to the bathroom. He had gone “into the

⁵² Ibid.

woods near my house, taking my gun and Bowie-knife along, just *from habit*, and there sitting down also from habit, what should I see, getting over my fence, but *the bar!*" (121-22). Caught squatting, Doggett says "I raised myself, took deliberate aim, and fired." The bear staggers off, but to add anti-climax⁴ to anti-climax, Doggett says he "started after [the bear], but was tripped up by my inexpressibles, which either from habit, or the excitement of the moment, were about my heels" (122).

Thorpe's obliqueness in describing the act of defecating as well as Doggett's underwear is a token nod to the propriety that imperfectly governed the publication of the usually ribald tales of Old Southwestern Humor. Nevertheless, the incongruity of the situation—"a creation bar," according to the hunter, killed while the latter was using the bathroom—is a burlesque of the romantic legends of mythic frontiersmen like Davy Crockett and the woodcraft of literary characters such as James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo (122). Additionally, despite the homage that the "man of Arkansas" pays to his native state, the sketch's ludicrous, scatological conclusion satirizes the reverence antebellum romantics like Cooper, Simms, David Hunter Strother, and even Thorpe himself sometimes used to represent the relationship between the environment and Adamic characters.⁵³ Instead of a sentimentalized pastoral vision, "The Big Bear of Arkansas" deflates that schmaltz by virtue of the plot's reliance upon the hunter's "lower

⁵³ In addition to Cooper's Leatherstocking Trilogy, Simms's nature poetry (such as "To the Mountains" [1826] and "The Streamlet" [1829]) valorizes the relationship between man and the environment in ways that anticipate his later fiction with the same themes, notably *The Cub of the Panther; A Mountain Legend* (1869). See also Strother (Porte Crayon), *Virginia Illustrated: Containing a Visit to the Virginian Canaan* (1857) and the more nostalgic sketches by Thorpe referred to at the beginning of the previous chapter.

stratum” as a “bodily and popular corrective to individual idealistic and spiritual pretense.”⁵⁴

Finally, Old Southwestern Humor’s low, derisive laughter is symptomatic of the spirit of the carnivalesque’s satire of authority. For instance, Suggs is only held accountable for his behavior once in *Some Adventures*. The story of his arrest for gambling and his subsequent trial is the collection’s final sketch, “The Captain is Arraigned Before ‘A Jury of His Country.’” Not surprisingly, Suggs’s case is ultimately dismissed, but not before the only witness called to the stand makes a mockery of religion and the legal system’s effectiveness in regulating behavior. Suggs’s friend Wat Craddock is called by the prosecution to testify against the protagonist. The defense seeks to have Craddock disqualified since he is illiterate and therefore cannot be trusted not to perjure himself since he is not familiar with the Bible. When the prosecutor responds by countering that Craddock would have heard the Bible read during religious services, the latter demurs. “Gaping extensively as he spoke,” he explains that on Sundays he “goes a-fishin on the krick, and sometimes I plays marvels. . . . Sometimes I lays in the sun, back o’ Andy Owenses grocery” (136). The judge throws Craddock out of the courtroom for being drunk on the stand. The symbol of grotesque realism, Craddock’s irreverence and his lack of bodily control identify him as plebeian, and the consequence of his indulgence of bodily pleasures impedes the justice system by foiling its ability to impose its values and to limit activities that fall outside of the pale of official decorum.

Instances like these illustrate Justus’s claim that there is an “absence of any sustained experience of power in the humor,” as is true in the suspension of authority

⁵⁴ *Rabelais and His World*, 22.

characteristic of the carnival.⁵⁵ Like Old Southwestern Humor's other major texts, the only character who seems to exercise any semblance of power throughout *Some Adventures* is Suggs, the marginal trickster figure. It is important to recognize, though, that, like the folk humor of the carnival, Old Southwestern Humor is neither malicious nor does it advocate a permanent anarchy. In "The Captain is Arraigned Before 'A Jury of His Country,'" for instance, the court later resumes its business: Nevertheless, the district attorney is chastened by the fact that the power vested in him by the state constitution extends only so far. Likewise, the premise that Craddock "can't believe what he knows nothing about" questions not just the ostensible appeal of religion but also its alleged authority as a guarantor of truth (136). In each case, the humor does not advocate the abolition of law, social order, or religion; it merely suggests that there is an alternative to them ("a-fishin on the krick," for instance), a belief shared by the humorists that extends to their attitude toward paternalism in the Old Southwest.⁵⁶ Rather than replicating what they left behind, the humorists and their fellow émigrés saw in the newness of the frontier a potential for change that could empower them both socially and economically.

In addition to serving a social function, the second legacy of the carnival that was retained when it was transformed into literature was its linguistic features. In their discussion of the grotesque aspects of the carnivalesque, Stallybrass and White explain

⁵⁵ Introduction to Inge and Piancentino, eds., *Humor of the Old South*, 10.

⁵⁶ Milner observes that like Afro-Southern trickster figures, Suggs has a "tendency to be satisfied with fulfilling immediate and basic needs rather than aggressively striving to build [a] fortune" ("The Social, Religious, Economic, and Political Implications," 208).

that the grotesque is “formed through a process of hybridization or inmixing of binary opposites, particularly of high and low, such that there is a heterodox merging of elements usually perceived as incompatible.”⁵⁷ As with the thematic dimensions of the grotesque, this heterogenous aspect of the grotesque’s form also had its precedent in medieval carnivals. A carnival’s popular origins, egalitarian atmosphere, and suspension of propriety led to what Bakhtin said was “the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free . . . liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times.”⁵⁸ These were the new language forms that helped articulate the carnivalesque’s low, subversive humor; consequently, many were vulgar and related to the carnival’s focus on the body. These were the Billingsgate, which Stallybrass and White say included “curses, oaths, slang, humor, popular tricks and jokes, [and] scatological forms.”⁵⁹

These forms of vernacular language and humor, and their power to mitigate more official forms of discourse, extend to carnivalesque literature as well. In this context, the hybridity of the “carnival-grotesque form” enabled authors “to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their

⁵⁷ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 44. The authors interpret Bakhtin as offering two conceptualizations of the grotesque: one is “simply the opposite of the classical—it is the Other to the set of values and forms which make up the classical.” The other model is the one quoted above, which I—like Stallybrass and White—prefer as “more adequate to thinking [about] the complexity of high-low relations on the site of the fair” and its literary equivalents (44).

⁵⁸ *Rabelais and his World*, 10.

⁵⁹ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 8.

rapprochement.”⁶⁰ Since Bakhtin believed the form discourse took was contingent upon its content, he maintained that the novel was most representative of the carnivalesque and its embrace of non-official discourses.⁶¹ The carnivalesque’s allowance for the “combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement” facilitated the novel’s heteroglossia, the genre’s other distinguishing feature. Consequently, according to Simon Dentith, “the novel can be thought of as the form which most exploits the heteroglossic potential that is present in all languages. . . . But the specific social and institutional form which enables and anticipates the activity of the novel is the epochal force of carnival.”⁶² Dentith follows Bakhtin’s own centrifugal metaphor to help explain how these texts were informed less by the language of power and authority and more by the “non-official” voices of those the former subjugated: The novel “springs from active

⁶⁰ *Rabelais and his World*, 34.

⁶¹ “The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time,” explains Bakhtin, “precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making” (“Epic and Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press Slavic Series 1 [Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1981], 7). According to critic Simon Dentith, this was because Bakhtin believed the genre took “the carnival spirit into itself and thus reproduces, within its own structures and by its own practice, the characteristic inversions, parodies and discrownings of carnival proper” (*Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, Critical Studies in Theory and in Practice [New York: Routledge, 1994], 65).

⁶² *Bakhtinian Thought*, 60. I have explained the logic behind my identification of Old Southwestern humor with Bakhtin’s definition of the novel, but it is worth reiterating Michael Holquist’s point that “‘novel’ is the name that Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system” (Introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*, xxxi.). The novel is consequently an anti-genre, but by the same token, its source is the carnivalesque, says Dentith. But since the carnivalesque is the substance of something that does not really exist, it is a spirit that is potentially embodied in multiple literary forms, including sketches (*Bakhtinian Thought*, 60).

social forces which constantly pull the language away from that national centre and seek to overturn particular authorities.”⁶³ In other words, the way medieval carnivals embraced forms of Billingsgate to challenge the prerogative of the government and church is analogous to how non-epic literary genres like the novel embraced vernacular forms of language for the purpose of satirical representations of these or similar institutions.

This aspect of the carnivalesque thus accounts again for how and why the heteroglossic texts of the white humorists accommodated the voices of a marginalized population of the Old South. As was illustrated in the previous chapter, slave folklore was one of the many “extraliterary” forms of discourse—“the genres of everyday life,” explains Bakhtin—that shaped the structural as well as thematic aspects of Old Southwest Humor.⁶⁴

The volatility of life in the Old Southwest contributed the “active social forces” that took the Eurocentric genres constituting the “national centre” of Old Southwestern

⁶³ *Bakhtinian Thought*, 50.

⁶⁴ “Epic and Novel,” 33. Bakhtin also acknowledges that such influences can be camouflaged as a consequence of the process of adaptation, which also helps account for the silence surrounding the appropriation by the white authors of Afro-Southern folklore. “When such an influence is deep and productive, there is no external imitation, no simple act of reproduction, but rather a further creative development of another’s (more precisely, half-other) discourse in a new context and under new conditions” (“Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 347).

Ironically, Bakhtin also suggests that the parsing of influences may be futile. He claims, for instance, that “There takes place within the novel an ideological translation of another’s language, and an overcoming of its otherness—an otherness that is only contingent, external, illusory” (*Ibid.*, 365). Dentith explains that the novel (he uses Bakhtin’s own example of Rabelais’s writing) assimilates its sources but doesn’t necessarily acknowledge them, “drawing on and transforming the social forms that surround it, and then transmitting them forward even when those forms themselves have disappeared” (*Bakhtinian Thought*, 61).

Humor and leavened them with vernacular discourse, including the folktales of Afro-Southerners. The Humorists' embrace of the frontier milieu contributed to and parallels the openness of their fiction to the influence of Afro-Southern folklore, which in turn helped the humorists achieve their ideological goals of challenging the pretensions of traditional forms of authority in the Old South. The texts' syncretism challenges the order of the novels, much as the carnivalesque capitalized upon Billingsgate and other vernacular forms of expression in its own time. This form of "hybridization . . . produces new combinations and strange instabilities in a given semiotic system," explain Stallybrass and White. "It therefore generates the possibility of shifting *the very terms of the system itself*, by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it."⁶⁵ This is part of the "further creative development" that Bakhtin says accompanies heteroglossia and that is analogous to creolization and its outcome—a cultural form that is produced by but is different from its parent discourses.

This dynamic is particularly apparent in Old Southwestern Humor's challenge—aided by the influence of Afro-Southern folklore—of the authority assumed by paternalism. Paternalism, according to James Oakes, "assumes an inherent inequality of men: some are born to rule, others to obey."⁶⁶ He adds that "to slaveholders, every assertion of the paternalist ideology was a tacit defense of slavery," and this ostensible logic and its manifestations in slaveowners' behavior were among the aspects of slavery

⁶⁵ *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 58.

⁶⁶ *The Ruling Race*, xi.

that Afro-Southerners satirized in their folktales.⁶⁷ The previous chapter's examples illustrated Lawrence Levine's observation that "trickster tales were a prolonged and telling parody of white society," and that their plots and themes were "compellingly and realistically reflective of the irrational and amoral side of the slaves' universe," including the racist assumptions inherent in paternalism.⁶⁸

The humorists revealed the tenuousness of claims to power asserted by social and political elites just as Afro-Southern trickster tales exposed attempts to naturalize the exploitation of black Americans by paternalistic apologists for slavery. Though free, many non-elite whites, like the humorists, recognized paternalism's spuriousness as much as their enslaved counterparts did. Envisioned as a response to manage the instability that supposedly accompanied emigration, the premium that paternalism placed on deference and the limits it imposed upon social mobility were anathema to those who left its prescriptions behind when they emigrated south and west. In contrast to the value that Tate says Simms placed on such "traditional social institutions" in order to help "men to live moral lives," the humorists recognized that these paradigms, including paternalism, were an anachronistic overreaction to the evolution of backwoods communities.⁶⁹ Afro-Southern storytellers, for their own audiences, and in their own way, attacked the same paternalistic pretensions. Likewise, the humorists' sketches illustrate what Tate says was recognizable to their authors and their peers: that "in the face of modern freedom,

⁶⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁸ "'Some Go Up and Some Go Down,'" 121; Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 72.

⁶⁹ *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals*, 197.

traditional society was incompetent,” especially when it came to the social and economic flux of new territories.⁷⁰

Paternalism’s emphasis on stability, for instance, could not accommodate the movement of settlers, not only in and out of territories, but in and out of the ranks of elites according to their economic fortunes. Previous chapters have discussed how the novelists contained these scenarios through representations of hierarchical relationships that emphasized community members’ obligations to one another. An approach to mitigating change that “stressed systems of hierarchies as remedies,” such as paternalism did, was an ineffective relic that failed to account for the pace of change in the Southwest, explains Tate.⁷¹ This wishful thinking and the reactionary sentiment that it reflected were ripe for satire. Shields argues that in response to the “notion that planters should rightfully be fatherly stewards for other free white men . . . Johnson Jones Hooper thought it nonsense.”⁷²

This irreverence is apparent in the sketches that satirize power, but particularly so in the texts that incorporate Afro-Southern folklore to expose paternalism’s pretenses and expectations of deference. Through these narratives’ heteroglossia, the carnivalesque spirit of the humorists’ attack on representations or affectations of paternalism are amplified, as illustrated by the opening sketches of *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* discussed in the Introduction. Many of George Washington Harris’s sketches also

⁷⁰ Ibid., 321.

⁷¹ Ibid., 272.

⁷² “A Sadder Simon Suggs: Freedom and Slavery in the Humor of Johnson Hooper,” in *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. Inge and Piacentino, 132.

offer a carnivalesque challenge to religious authority, aided by the influence of Afro-Southern folktales. “Parson John Bullen’s Lizards,” for example, begins with a reward poster offering “AIT (\$8) DULLARS REW-ARD” for the capture of Lovingood “dead ur alive, ur ailin” and his transfer to the clergyman named in the title.⁷³ It prompts the narrator of the frame to ask Lovingood what led to his fugitive status, and the protagonist explains that it is a consequence of a prank he played on Bullen. The minister had caught Lovingood and a girl canoodling at a camp meeting, and not only did Bullen knock him into a “trance” with “a four year old hickory-stick,” the minister also told the girl’s mother after promising the daughter that he wouldn’t (52). This betrayal and the girl’s “all fired, overhanded stroppin frum her mam” leads Lovingood to plot revenge against the “durnd infunel, hiperkritikal, pot-bellied, scaley-hided, whisky-wastin, stinkin ole ground hog” of a minister (52-53).

Consequently, Lovingood attends the next meeting and sits close to Bullen’s pulpit. The seething lover explains that he “*hed* tu promis the ole tub ove soap-grease tu cum an’ hev myself converted, jis’ tu keep him frum killin me,” but he also has “seven ur eight big pot-bellied lizards” tied up in a bag that are part of his planned revenge (53, 54). Lovingood feigns piety and spiritual distress for most of Bullen’s hellfire and brimstone sermon. Eventually the Parson’s homily “commenced onto the sinners; he threaten’d ‘em orful, tried to skeer ‘em wif all the wust varmints he cud think ove, an’ arter a while he got ontu the idear ove Hell-sarpints.” At the mention of these tormentors, Lovingood recognizes his opportunity, and releases the lizards near the bottom of the parson’s pants

⁷³ “Parson John Bullen’s Lizards” in *Sut Lovingood’s Yarns*, ed. Inge, 51. Subsequent citations will be made parenthetically to this edition.

leg at a moment when the latter is too worked up to notice. "Quick es gunpowder they all tuck up his bar laig," remembers Suggs, "makin a nise like squirrels a-climbin a shell-bark hickory" (54).

The effect is instantaneous. The minister stops his sermon and the "tarifick shape ove his feeters stopp't the shoutin an' screamin" of the congregants. Bullen's shock soon evolves into a slapstick routine with ribald undercurrents:

He gin hisself sum orful open-hand slaps wif fust one han' an' then tuther, about the place whar you cut the bes' steak outen a beef. Then he'd fetch a vigrus ruff rub whar a hosses tail sprouts; then he'd stomp one foot, then tuther, then bof at onst. Then he run his han' atween his waisbun an' his shut an' reach'd way down an' roun' wif hit. (54-55)

Ignorant of what Lovingood has done, Bullen interprets his grotesque bodily discomfiture as a spiritual struggle of apocalyptic proportions. Regaining his voice, he asks the congregation to "Pray fur me brethren an' sisteren, fur I is a-rastilin wif the great inimy rite now!" (55). Rather than waiting for their prayers to be answered, though, the parson begins to strip, continuing the sketch's sexual motif. He rips his shirt off and yanks down his pants, whirling them around and then throwing them into the congregation. The latter's shock at their minister's disrobing is compounded by the surprise when his pants land, says Lovingood:

You cud a hearn the smash a quarter ove a mile! Ni ontu fifteen shorten'd biskits, a boiled chicken, wif hits laigs crossed, a big dubbil-bladed knife, a hunk ove terbacker, a cob-pipe, sum copper ore, lots ove broken glass, a cork, a sprinkil ove whisky, a squirt, an three lizzards flew permiskusly all over that meetin-groun', outen the upper aind ove them big flax britches. (55)

Now wearing only his shoes, socks, and some "eel-skin garters," Bullen remains convinced that he is still under assault by Satan (56). He attempts to flee the church in terror but is foiled in a final bit of physical humor. In his rush to depart the church, he

“loped ober the frunt ove the pulpid” and landed “on top ove, an’ rite among the mos’ pius part ove the congregashun”—its women. Mrs. Chaneyberry in particular is the unfortunate victim of Bullen’s clumsiness: “He lit a-stradil ove her long naik, a shuttin her up wif a snap, her head atwix her knees, like shuttin up a jack-knife” (56). The Parson recovers from his fall, and the last the congregation sees of the minister is his fleshy profile running into the woods: “He weighed ni ontu three hundred [pounds], hed a black stripe down his back, like ontu a ole bridil rein, an’ his belly wer ‘bout the size, an color ove a beef paunch, an ‘hit a-swingin out from side tu side” (56).

Not only is the grotesque corporeality of Bullen exposed but so is the evidence of his many bodily appetites, not to mention the hypocrisy that they document. In spite of his harangues on sinfulness, the parson seems to share Lovingood’s appetites of the flesh as the hidden food, tobacco, and alcohol reveal. Moreover, his coarse scratching and pulling at himself, his exotic garters, and his half-naked leap into the rows of women are rife with bawdy overtones. In addition to these tropes of grotesque realism, the negation of religious authority intrinsic to the carnivalesque is also reflected in the transformation of Bullen’s power following his comic exposure. Both his personal appeal and his spiritual authority apparently have been dampened by his alleged possession, for the next time he preached, he “hadn’t the fust durn’d ‘oman tu hear ‘im: *they hev seed too much ove ‘im,*” says Lovingood (57). Bullen’s rhetoric was softened, too, for “he never said Hell-sarpints onst in the hole preach,” adds his antagonist (58).

As in Hooper’s sketches, the heteroglossiac qualities of “Parson John Bullen’s Lizards” contribute to the gay relativity of the carnivalesque. Harris’s use of extraliterary discourse including Afro-Southern folklore, contributes to the sketch’s grotesque realism

and the suspension of religion's social power. For example, Bullen's mistaking of the lizards for "Hell-sarpints" is a variant of the folk motif J1781, "Objects Thought to be Devils by Fools." One of its variants is J1781.2, "Watch mistaken for the devil's eye," which Baughman cites as folk type 1319A.^{74f} Baughman cites five cognates of this type, four of which are African-American (including versions from Virginia and Kentucky), one generically labeled "south," and one from Dorson's black southern sources who had moved from Mississippi to Michigan. There are a number of versions of both this folk motif and folk type in which objects from trains to robbers to watches are mistaken by fools for the devil.⁷⁵ For example, in one account collected by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps that they call "Voices in the Graveyard," a slave named Isom is passing a graveyard at night when he notices voices coming from behind a tombstone. Hidden behind the grave marker are two slaves who have stolen a sack of sweet potatoes, and Isom hears them dividing the spoils: "Ah'll take dis un, an' yuh take dat un."⁷⁶ Mistaking them for "Gawd an' de debbil . . . down hyeah dividin' up souls," Isom runs to tell his master. The white man is incredulous and follows Isom reluctantly, promising him a whipping if he is lying. As they creep up to the graveyard, they hear the two slaves still

⁷⁴ *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America*, Indiana University Folklore Series 20 (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), 314.

⁷⁵ Interestingly, William Tappan Thompson's story "The Mysterious Box; or, How the Steam Doctor Liked to Git Blowed Up with a Infernal Machine" from *Major Jones's Courtship* (1840) is an unusual analogue to this folk type. In Thompson's version, a practitioner of alternative medicine mistakes a medicine chest for a bomb, part of "a plan of the medicals to blow up the man what they couldn't put down no other way" ([repr., Covington, Ga.: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1973], 244).

⁷⁶ *Book of Negro Folklore* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1958), 80. Subsequent citations will be made parenthetically to this edition.

parceling out the potatoes: “Yuh take dis un, an’ Ah’ll take dat un.” The eavesdroppers then run away in panic when one of the thieves, who remembers dropping two potatoes by the graveyard gate, says “Ah’ll take dese two an’ yuh take dem two over dere by de fence” (80).

The differences between “Parson John Bullen’s Lizards” and this folktale are fairly evident, and I am not claiming that Harris heard this specific cognate of “Objects Thought to be Devils by Fools.” However, the shared motif of an object mistaken for the devil in “Parson John Bullen’s Lizards” and “Voices in the Graveyard” suggests a correspondence between them, which coupled with the predominantly Afro-Southern origins of this folk type, hints that Harris might have adapted it from another version that he heard directly or second-hand.⁷⁷ For instance, the misinterpretation of the thieves for the devil and God by Isom and his master parallels Parson Bullen’s misapprehension. Likewise, the comic incongruity at the end of the folktale—the characters believing the devil is coming for them instead of two slaves coming for the sweet potatoes—echoes Bullen’s certainty that “hell sarpints” are struggling to possess his body and soul. Finally, the authority of both Bullen and the master are diminished in each story. Rather than

⁷⁷ Harris emerged from the laboring classes of whites to at least temporary prosperity, and in between these poles, was likely to have experienced the types of scenarios outlined in the first chapter that would have exposed him to Afro-Southern culture. Though he was born in 1814 in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, Harris was brought to Knoxville, Tennessee, by his half-brother and raised there. After displaying an early aptitude for mechanics, he was apprenticed to a metal smith. Harris became a captain of a steamboat at nineteen but retired to a 375-acre farm with three slaves in 1839. Foreclosure forced him back into metalsmithing and then a series of jobs that included supervising a glassworks, ownership in a sawmill, a mine surveyor, and then work for the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad (M. Thomas Inge, introduction to *Sut Lovingood: Yarns Spun by A ‘Nat’ral Born Durn’d Fool’* [1867; repr., Memphis: St. Luke’s Press, 1987], np.).

being exemplars of restraint in accordance with their social stations, both men are revealed to be naïve dupes, gullible enough in spite of their ostensible wisdom and power to be misled by their senses or their cowardice. Like the Parson, Isom's master, together with his slave, "ran home as fast as they could go" (80). Afterward, much as the Parson's propensity for hellfire and brimstone was softened, so, too, was the master's attitude toward Isom. "Voices in the Graveyard" concludes with the observation that "after this the master never doubted Isom's word about what he saw or heard" (80). Not only does the carnivalesque humor of these sketches lower the stature of these authority figures by exposing their tenuous claims to power, but Harris's story does so as a result of its heteroglossia, namely its incorporation of the Afro-Southern folk motif.

Outside of lampooning fictional representations of authority, Old Southwestern Humor by extension responded to the perspectives of the seaboard conservatives who perceived emigration to the Deep South and the instability that followed it as harbingers of cultural decline. As illustrated in this chapter's early examples from Hooper, the latter perspective includes those whose attitudes were represented by historical romances. These texts' prescription for the region was challenged by the humorists' grotesque realism and their use of extraliterary sources made available to them by the very instability that Simms and others decried. Much as Jedediah convinces himself via a perverted logic that taking his son's money is for the latter's own good, paternalism purportedly benefited the entire community because of its contribution to social stability. Though posing as stewards of the community, proponents of paternalism would benefit the most by retaining social and political authority. And as Suggs sees through his father's logic, so did the humorists understand the ambitions of the novelists.

In and of This World

The humorists' rejection of the novelists' visions of the frontier, and their use of Afro-Southern folklore to express that opinion, again reflect their alternative interpretation of what the frontier symbolized—namely, progress. And while it is, of course, risky to make generalizations about a group of writers who range from a future college president (Longstreet) to a former metal smith and steamboat captain (Harris), there is a pattern of consistencies among these authors that helps explain the differences between their relationship to the Old Southwest and its figurative equivalent (the frontier) on the one hand and that of the novelists on the other. The two chief factors are generational and geographical, which sometimes complement and sometimes overlap each other.⁷⁸ And while these elements do not necessarily account for why the humorists drew on Afro-Southern folklore in their sketches, the geographic and generational differences do document the diversity of social outlooks in the Old South and begin to explain how they were expressed in the region's literature.

As mentioned previously, one source of these distinctions is the geographic position from which the humorists were writing. Rather than describing the Old Southwest from a vantage point in the east (as Simms and Cooke and Caruthers did), the humorists had recently lived through or were still surrounded by the experiences they described in their sketches. They were familiar with the uncertainty of the region, which Oakes describes as "a way of life marked by constant struggle, spurts of progress and

⁷⁸ I am indebted to David Moltke-Hansen for suggesting these explanations.

occasional setbacks, and seemingly endless physical movement.”⁷⁹ This difference is even apparent in the texts of humorists who remained in or wrote about the seaboard areas. The humor of Taliaferro (whose *Fisher’s River* is set in North Carolina), Longstreet and Thompson (writing about Georgia), and even William Elliott (a South Carolinian) lacks the subversiveness, skepticism and even the ribaldry of their contemporaries who experienced the more recent social and economic fluctuations of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Instead, the works of Longstreet, Taliaferro, Thompson, and Elliott portray a frontier society in its twilight and are nostalgic for its disappearing rusticity.

Rather than looking backwards like the eastern humorists or bemoaning the frontier’s instability and figuratively distancing themselves from it through epic settings like those of the novelists, the humorists who pushed further west embraced the opportunism of “a new country” like that of Suggs first by emigrating toward it and then by writing about it. The adventures of Suggs are comic exaggerations of the experiences of Hooper and many other emigrants to the Old Southwest. Like their protagonists, the humorists were also “men rattling through different parts of the Mississippi Valley in pursuit of the main chance,” says Michael O’Brien.⁸⁰ Similarly, Joseph Milner characterizes their relationship to the region as a “dual vision” of the frontier: Hooper and his fellow authors were “both participants in and spectators of the flush times.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ *The Ruling Race*, 55.

⁸⁰ *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2:758.

⁸¹ “The Social, Religious, Economic, and Political Implications,” 17.

This dual vision was possible because the humorists constituted the upwardly mobile professional class of the South, who envisioned the new towns in which they settled as sites for advancement. But like characters such as Suggs, they relied upon their education or professional training (however rudimentary) rather than capital in the form of slaves or land to succeed in a world whose middle class was only just emerging. Mayfield astutely recognizes that one of the undercurrents in Henry Clay Lewis's *Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor* (1850) "is a recurring story of work, planning, and scheming, compounded with a con man's opportunism and sense of fun, all directed toward the acquisition of fame and fortune." Lewis is perhaps the only humorist who injected so much of his own biography into his collection, but as the aforementioned experiences of Taliaferro, Hooper, and Harris suggest, Lewis's life was by no means an anomaly amid the boom-and-bust cycles that marked the humorists' personal and professional histories.⁸²

Writers of romances, too, might struggle for economic success and personal happiness. Simms, for instance, strove to realize both all of his life, and even when he became a plantation owner through marriage, he was haunted by a lack of resources and social recognition. Simms also made a number of trips through the Old Southwest and the sparsely settled sections of the Carolinas. So while geographic proximity to the Deep South and an intimacy with its economic vicissitudes does have a great deal to do with

⁸² *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, 91. Mayfield also acknowledges that "Harris rose up from nothingness, worked for a living at whatever came his way, and suffered the consequences of his mistakes directly, with no family safety net to cushion the blow" (115).

the differences between the outlooks of the novelists and the humorists on how the instability of the Old Southwest should or could be interpreted, it is not a complete explanation.

The geographical distance between the groups of authors also has a temporal equivalent that helps fill these gaps. With only a couple of exceptions, the humorists belonged to a younger generation than the novelists. The median year of birth of William Alexander Caruthers (1802), Simms (1806), and John Esten Cooke (1830), the three novelists discussed in the previous chapters, is 1806. The median year of birth of the three humorists analyzed in this chapter, Harris (1814), Hooper (1815), and Thorpe (1815), is 1815, a difference of nine years.⁸³ As the American South expanded and evolved in the early nineteenth century, so, naturally, did the social and political perspectives of its inhabitants. O'Brien's intellectual history of the Old South documents how "Southern thought had undergone marked change . . . as different options were considered, accepted and rejected."⁸⁴ What is most important here is how the age difference between the novelists and the humorists helps represent a demarcation in

⁸³ I chose to use median birth year rather than the mean birth year because Cooke skews the results of my small sample of novelists. Even though he is closer in age to the humorists, his conservatism and especially his style of writing is closer to that of an earlier generation. However, when one broadens the sample to include members of what Drew Gilpin Faust calls the "Sacred Circle" of seaboard intellectuals whose perspective is represented by that of the novelists, including Nathaniel Beverley Tucker (1784), Edmund Ruffin (1794), James Henry Hammond (1807), and George Fredrick Holmes (1820), the median *and* mean birth year is 1806. Likewise, the median *and* mean birth year for the humorists also remains 1815 when that sample is comparably expanded to include the other sketch writers discussed in these pages: Hardin E. Taliaferro (1811), William Tappan Thompson (1812), Joseph Glover Baldwin (1815), and Henry Clay Lewis (1825).

⁸⁴ *Conjectures of Order*, 1:11.

interpreting social relationships among whites. Adam Tate, for instance, has charted how Southern conservatism's approach to the relationship between citizens and the government evolved in the antebellum period. Unlike previous generations of conservatives that included Simms, younger conservatives such as Hooper and Baldwin (the only two humorists whom Tate discusses) "remained suspicious of a traditional social order and did not seek consciously to defend the Western intellectual tradition," choosing instead to make "their peace with the modern world." In contrast to those born closer to the turn of the century and who "hoped to recreate a traditional southern society in the Old Southwest," Tate concludes that humorists were part of a new breed of conservative that was of the opinion that "traditional societies could not keep order because they were either not yet created in the West or [were] insufficient for the task."⁸⁵

These differences in age and locale also intersect to help explain the humorists' relationship to the evolving economy of the Old Southwest, a distinction that is also reflected in the variation between the outlooks of the sketches and the novels. Christopher Morris, for instance, says what is evident in the sketch humor is "America's transformation into a capitalistic market society."⁸⁶ The humorists' growing understanding of their relationship to a market-based economy was a product of their coming of age during this transitional time in a region where it flourished. As Morris succinctly observes, "the capitalist market did not approach Hooper and Baldwin[;] it

⁸⁵ *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals*, 354, 219, 249.

⁸⁶ "What's so Funny?," 24.

already enveloped them.”⁸⁷ Moreover, the humorists’ move westward coincided with market capitalism’s growth as new lands for cotton became available. There was an opportunity to benefit from this economic transformation, and, poised to participate in it, the humorists had no interest in returning to a social structure that viewed the self-interest associated with capitalism as a cultural sin. Joseph Glover Baldwin, for instance, explained that “an old society weaves a network of restraints and habits around a man,” hindering his chances of success.⁸⁸

As a result, says Morris, the sketches of authors such as “Hooper and Baldwin presented a completely new world in which traditional values made no sense.” As much as the fiction of Simms encouraged a return to traditional ways, the sketches of the humorists “implied that a new age had arrived and that, if it was to be managed at all, it would be done by new sorts of people operating by new standards.”⁸⁹ I would go one step further and argue that the sketches offer a blueprint of the criteria required to succeed in such an environment; characteristics that were embodied in Suggs rather than Craven, with the focus of interest shifted from the good of society to the good of oneself. David S. Reynolds, for instance, acknowledges that “Suggs is the first figure in American literature who fully manipulates Conventional values—piety, discretion, honesty, entrepreneurial shrewdness—for purely selfish ends.”⁹⁰ This characterization coincides with Mayfield’s

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁸ *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi*, 229.

⁸⁹ “What’s so Funny?,” 23.

⁹⁰ *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 454.

recognition of an emergent model of masculinity derived from capitalism rather than traditional notions of honor: “Manhood in the marketplace required shrewdness over fearlessness, cleverness over generosity, a tough rationalism over pride, self-discipline over conspicuous waste, and the occasional need to be downright deceptive rather than transparent.”⁹¹ Other than self-control, this set of criteria fits Suggs perfectly. The capitalistic market was a harbinger of modernity in the Old South, and Suggs’s adventures in speculating reflected the fact that neither hard currency or collateral was necessary in this new system. Likewise, the havoc he wrecked among his rivals reflected how, as Morris points out, “the system of national finance was truly chaotic.” Instead of loans backed by real estate or the honor of a neighbor as collateral, one needed only the worthless paper money of wildcat banks—or its equivalent, a saddle bag full of rocks—to be considered prosperous.⁹²

In fact, the personal bonds that characterized the traditional societies of the past and that were a hallmark of paternalism were largely irrelevant in the national market for cotton and manufactured goods. Morris observes that this new economic system “depersonalized business, destroying the face-to-face way of life; nevertheless, that is the way the people whom Suggs encounters want to live because that is how they continue to understand the world.”⁹³ Similarly, Shields points to how this discrepancy allows Suggs

⁹¹ *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, xviii.

⁹² “What’s so Funny?,” 16. Suggs also takes advantage of a wildcat bank in the final sketch of *Some Adventures*, “Conclusion—Autographic Letter From Suggs.”

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

to capitalize on the dupes' unwillingness to let go of a worldview that is more typical of the fantasy of the novelists rather than an acknowledgement of reality. She posits that Suggs "succeeds by virtue of his anonymity, living within the impersonal cash nexus of a capitalistic economy. And in that respect, he provoked laughter about anxieties that were well-nigh universal among the literate business classes of the Victorian world, regardless of where they lived or what their political interests."⁹⁴

In other words, in lieu of paternalism as an antidote for instability in the Old Southwest, the humorists offered laughter. Being insulated from some of the market revolution's direct effects enabled seaboard authors like Simms to contemplate these changes in conceptual ways. From a distance, observes Morris, "romantic writers North and South waxed philosophical about the human character and soul in an increasingly commercial world, and in so doing tended to abstract their literature from the context of early nineteenth-century American society." But in the Old Southwest, where this transformation had "rapidly consumed the nonmarket, semisubsistent [sic] economy and society of pioneer communities," the transition was instead "quick, jarring, and confusing."⁹⁵

Morris recognizes how this incongruity offers fertile fields for laughter, if not a need for humor's ability to relieve anxiety. Consequently, whereas "paternalistic writers tried to reconcile the ideals of social inequality, stability, and organic unity with the

⁹⁴ Introduction to *Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, xxxvii. For detailed studies on the relationship between capitalism and confidence men, see Lenz, *Fast Talk and Flush Times*; and Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1982).

⁹⁵ "What's so Funny?," 12, 13.

conflicting principles of individual enterprise and material acquisition,” as James Oakes argues, the humorists were unencumbered by this responsibility.⁹⁶ The humorists—not hostile like the paternalists to the social, cultural, and economic disruptions that followed in the wake of emigration—instead used humor to alleviate that tension. As Richard Boyd Hauck suggests in his estimation of Old Southwestern Humor, “possibly the comic turn was always there because this elicited saving laughter, a response which overcame the horror.”⁹⁷

Measures of Lived Experience

In response to claims that the humorists were proto-realists initiating a documentary tradition in Southern letters, David C. Estes argues instead that their depictions of the Old South were “part of the dynamic, self-reflexive public discourse antebellum Southerners were conducting about their culture.”⁹⁸ Comparing these sketches to the historical romances highlights this quality of Old Southwestern Humor. Just as the novels of the

⁹⁶ *The Ruling Race*, 6.

⁹⁷ *A Cheerful Nihilism*, 43. Instead of being a product of psychic and emotional relief, the humor of these tales, John Mayfield suggests, stemmed from their incongruity. In particular, he focuses on two standards of masculine behavior: one a “market-evangelical manliness” that valorized “self-discipline and shrewdness” and which challenged but could not substitute for a more established “masquerade culture” that prioritized traditional principles of honor and hospitality. Mayfield says “it is the tension between these ideals that furnished not only comic incongruity but a deep personal ambivalence about manhood in the lives of Southern men” (*Counterfeit Gentlemen*, xxvii).

⁹⁸ “Revising Southern Humor: William Tappan Thompson and the Major Jones Letters,” in *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. Inge and Piacentino, 155.

Old South articulated a specific ideological vision of the region, the humorists responded with their own representation of what the Old Southwest meant to them.

Morris is probably on safe ground when he claims that the humorists depicted the social conditions of the Old Southwest—if not of historical frontiers in general—with greater verisimilitude. The sketches “present more realistic images of the market revolution” than the other fiction of the era.⁹⁹ And while it may seem moot to argue about the relative value of accuracy given Estes’s aforementioned claim about the reflexivity of Southern literature, Old Southwestern Humor does offer a better sense of the spectrum of experience in the antebellum South, particularly regarding the consequences of emigration and of interracial life. While the historical romances capture a reactionary structure of feeling (namely an anxiety about emigration and accompanying social fluidity), the epic distance of these texts limits the accessibility the genre offers into lived experience. In many ways, these texts were already antiquated when they were published; not just in the sense that the contemporary issues that they discuss are expressed in settings of previous centuries and in a genre that was reaching its twilight, but that paternalism itself was increasingly out of touch with real life.¹⁰⁰ Oakes explains that this

⁹⁹ “What’s so Funny?,” 12. I am indebted to Morris’ own notes for sources about the economic transformation of the Old South. See, for instance, Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne dismissed the case Simms made for historical themes and modes of writing as a national literature in his review of Simms’s second volume of *Views and Reviews* (1845): “The themes suggested by him, viewed as he views them, would produce nothing but historical novels, cast in the same worn out mould that has been in use these thirty years, and which it is time to break up and fling away” (*Salem Advertiser*, May 2, 1846, quoted in C. Hugh Holman, introduction to *Views and Reviews . . . First Series*, xxxii).

mode of thinking, which was always premised on a tenuous paradox, was an even more pronounced anomaly in the early nineteenth century. If “paternalism is the ideological legacy of a feudal political system with no fully developed market economy,” then it was incompatible with a “liberalism developed alongside [a] political democracy and free-market commercialism.” But as the latter flourished in the South during the antebellum era, those who maintained a belief in paternalism found themselves, like the ideology itself, “virtually isolated in an increasingly liberal world.”¹⁰¹

Thus the historical romances failed to register certain incongruities even within their own milieu. Many elite whites recognized that they lived in a transitional time, explains O’Brien, “caught in the middle of these tensions, for their lives mirrored a pattern of instability. Almost all experienced marked social and physical movement, and even those who did not looked out on a world where rootedness seemed an aberration.”¹⁰² The fact that authors of historical romances were aware of this phenomenon but could not acknowledge it in their novels limits how representative of the antebellum mind of the South their works could be. “What they needed,” says James Miller, “was a new language and new assumptions better suited to understanding their place in that world.”¹⁰³

Furthermore, Miller astutely points out that critics like Simms did not recognize the unintended irony in their novels’ condemnation of emigration. Mobility “itself was a

¹⁰¹ *The Ruling Class*, xii.

¹⁰² *Conjectures of Order*, 1:17.

¹⁰³ *South by Southwest*, 58.

fundamental determinant of planter thought and habit; of, in other words, their identity as individuals, as households, and as a class.”¹⁰⁴ Emigration to the Deep South was necessary to perpetuate the plantation model, including the cultivation of staple cotton and the establishment of independent households for the sons of the Atlantic South. What unfolded in front of them was the continuation of their own family and personal histories. Says Miller, “people like Simms . . . made foreign by their use of language what should have appeared to them quite familiar and ultimately unthreatening.”¹⁰⁵

By contrast, the sketches of Hooper and the other humorists more intimately reflect lived experience in the multiracial antebellum South thanks to the texts’ heteroglossic and carnivalesque qualities. Like medieval carnivals and their relationship to the life of the marketplace, the novelistic discourse of Old Southwestern Humor has a more intimate relationship with the various levels of social life than the epic. By virtue of their creolization and their more contemporaneous depictions of the subject matter, the texts of the humorists better represent the zeitgeist of a region and a society in transition, both economically and socially. Without editorializing, the humorists’ “stories indicate what antebellum Southerners found so upsetting about the rapid development of a capitalistic market economy—its instability and unpredictability, the shady characters it spawned, the suspicion that it forced people to take into their encounters with other people,” explains Morris.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰⁶ “What’s so Funny?” 20.

Not only do the subject matter and tone document the instability accompanying these new experiences, but the creolized texts themselves are also a byproduct of interracial life in the Old Southwest, reflecting how antebellum Southerners experienced the region's diverse cultures and their sources. Where Bakhtin differed from his Russian formalist peers, says Dentith, is in his belief that "aesthetic activity [is] the expression of a *relationship*, not . . . the product of an isolated consciousness."¹⁰⁷ The novel in particular as Bakhtin describes it "is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply . . . reality itself in the process of its unfolding" because novelistic discourse reflects the dialogue between both official and non-official language systems.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, as Bakhtin believed and Dentith reminds us, language always has a "social nature . . . [An U]tterance only exists between people who occupy particular places in a network of social relationships."¹⁰⁹ In other words, not only are the languages of different strata of society represented by the novel's heteroglossia, but so too are the social experiences represented by those language systems and the social positions their speakers occupy. These transactions reflect the cultural exchange that led to the syncretic aspects of Old Southwestern Humor and suggest the relationships that contributed to it. Consequently, the humorous stories are serious documents, literary evidence for scholars attempting to understand interracial behavior as it was understood and practiced on a

¹⁰⁷ *Bakhtinian Thought*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ "Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, 7.

¹⁰⁹ *Bakhtinian Thought*, 39.

local, daily level—“not predetermined,” explains historian Jeff Forret, “but rather negotiated continually by individuals acting in specific contexts.”¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ., 2006), 16.

AFTERWORD

James H. Justus's *Fetching the Old Southwest* could be the first and last omnibus of scholarship on Old Southwestern Humor. As a history and cultural analysis of a genre, it has few peers, even among other literary genres. But its stature makes one of its claims—albeit a small one made in the course of another point—chilling. In his discussion of the influence of oral storytelling on Old Southwestern Humor, Justus posits that “it now seems increasingly irrelevant to ponder the questions we once asked about their sources.”¹¹¹

This project does not wish to return to the navel-gazing stuffiness of “source-and-influence methods of an earlier era,”¹¹² But on one level, this multicultural approach to antebellum Southern literature (to include its historical romances) is in fact a study in origins: with respect to the humorists, they were the roots of a legacy of humor embraced by later Southern writers. Critic Scott Romine succinctly summarizes how many Southern literary scholars understand Old Southwestern Humor as “a genre often associated with beginnings” that subsequent authors from Twain to Ellison have drawn upon.¹¹³ Likewise, historical romancers represented the region's social and racial orders

¹¹¹ *Fetching the Old Southwest: Humorous Writing from Longstreet to Twain* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri, 2004), 407. Elsewhere Justus refers in particular to a search for antecedents in order to establish a literary genealogy, a process he says elsewhere was “a kind of solemn scholarship in which . . . high seriousness always trumped joy in scholarly enterprises” (“The Company We Keep,” *Studies in American Humor* Vol. 3, No. 16 [2007]: 137.)

¹¹² Justus, “The Company We Keep,” 137.

¹¹³ “Darkness Visible: Race and Pollution in Southwestern Humor,” in *The Humor of the Old South*, ed. M. Thomas Inge and Edward J. Piacentino (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2001), 72. For the legacy of Old Southwestern Humor in later white Southern

in ways that linger and still define conventional understandings of the Old South. Simms in particular, says David Moltke-Hansen, “did as much as any single Southern writer or editor before the Civil War to make the South what it has since been: a commodity as well as a place, a creation as well as a birthright, and a global fascination as well as domestic preoccupation.”¹¹⁴ Consequently, as a study in influences, this project suggests that the multicultural legacy of Old Southwestern Humor and historical romances was also an important, albeit unrecognized, antecedent for subsequent Southern writers.

This multicultural approach also transcends a traditional focus on Southern letters that has isolated the historical region from global currents of cultural contact and transformation. Rather than following traditional parameters of Southern Studies that examine cultural development within the boundaries of the former Confederate states—or at best, within national limits or amid national cultural trends—a “New” Southern Studies perspective on the Old South and its authors positions them as part of a much broader

authors, see Kenneth Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (1959; Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing, 1976); and John D. Miller, “The Parallel Usage of Tragicomedy in Old Southwestern Humor and Eudora Welty’s *The Golden Apples*,” *The Eudora Welty Newsletter* 28 (Winter 2004): 10-19. Scholars have also documented permutations of Afro-Southern or Humorist voices in some of these same authors: Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?: Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993); Jillian Johns’s “Going Southwest: American Humor and the Rhetoric of Race in Modern African-American Fiction and Authorship” (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 2000) explores Zora Neale Hurston’s and Ralph Ellison’s relationship to the Humorists’ legacy; and Winifred Morgan’s “Signifying: The African-American Trickster and the Humor of the Old Southwest,” in *The Enduring Legacy of Old Southwest Humor*, ed. Ed Piacentino (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2006), 211-26, examines Yusef Komunyakaa and Ishmael Reed in this context.

¹¹⁴ “Between Plantation and Frontier: The South of William Gilmore Simms,” in *William Gilmore Simms and the American Frontier*, ed. John C. Guilds and Caroline Collins (Athens: Univ. of Georgia, 1997), 5.

cultural environment. The Old South was a region characterized by the migration and mixing of ideas as well as people. The history of the Irish immigrant William Simms and his son William Gilmore represents a traditional understanding of how immigrants contributed to Southern culture, but the name and the stories of Grace Elmore's favorite storyteller, Africa, reflect an equally important aspect of it, too.

This critical orientation positions Southern literature within what Paul Gilroy calls the "Black Atlantic." It extends the roots of not only Afro-Southern folklore, but also Southern Literature in general, across the Atlantic to African cultures, complementing the aforementioned and well-established European routes of influences Southern writing. Moreover, in addition to being a part of a growing body of work positioning Southern literature in an Atlantic sphere, this study also contributes to the important scholarship now being done on the relationship between the South's indigenous people and its colonizers, both black and white. As James Taylor Carson observes, "the history of the South's First Peoples has remained on the margins of the mainstream antebellum narratives of westward migration."¹¹⁵ Exploring the connections between white authors and these cultures recognizes that before there was a "South" in the nation's collective imagination, this geographic region was home to people who rather than being an obstacle to its realization helped shape it.

Despite the recent modishness of creolization among academics and the contemporary emphasis on "transnational and intercultural perspective[s]" that Gilroy and other scholars encourage, the spirit of a multicultural approach to the Old South is

¹¹⁵ "The Obituary of Nations: Ethnic Cleansing, Memory, and the Origins of the Old South," *Southern Cultures* 14 (Winter 2008): 9.

not anachronistic.¹¹⁶ As these texts studied herein demonstrate, the authors themselves were as interested in diverse sources as contemporary scholars are. Thus beyond just documenting further influences on early Southern literature, this multicultural contextualization reflects the historical reality of the region and the circumstances of its production as well. In his survey of the popular literature of antebellum America, David Reynolds suggests that “one of the main weapons wielded by the American writers against oppressive literary influence was a native idiom learned from their own popular culture. The truly indigenous American literary texts were produced mainly by those who opened sensitive ears to a large variety of popular cultural voices.”¹¹⁷ Here is the case for how the authors of the Old South not only opened their ears, but to differing degrees, also their texts to accommodate the voices, and by extension, the attitudes, of their non-white peers. Albeit mediated, we can thus recover and re-construct the patterns of life that were responsible for these works’ multicultural singularity.

¹¹⁶ *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), 15.

¹¹⁷ *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 5.

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