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## EAST TEXAS IN EARLY FICTION

EDWIN W. GASTON, JR.

"From the days of the first innocent sensations in Beadle's Dime Novel series, on through Zane Grey's mass productions and up to any present-day newsstand's crowded shelf of *Ace High* and *Flaming Guns* magazines," as J. Frank Dobie has shown, "the Southwest, along with all the rest of the West, has been represented in a fictional output quantitatively stupendous."<sup>1</sup> This plethora of literary activity, of course, has not necessarily been accompanied by qualitative achievement. Especially during most of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries in the Southwest, it "betrayed rather than revealed life, though not with the contemptible contempt for both audience and subject that characterizes most of Hollywood's pictures on the same times, people, and places."<sup>2</sup> But if early fiction of the Southwest, and of East Texas in particular, failed mainly to do justice to its subject, it at least provided a service by its simple acknowledgement of historic events and personages. As cases in point, one might cite eight novels published between 1819 and 1895.

Of the eight novels, four were written by Anglo-American, two by French, and one each by British and Austrian authors. Adventurers, colonists, doctors, housewives, politicians, and preachers, these writers ventured from the more civilized areas of America and abroad and after brief visits or short periods of residence in East Texas more often than not returned home to write.

These early novelists in East Texas felt that, in a sense, they were portraying history and often insisted that their works were rooted in fact. Such insistence corresponds to assertions by other early American fiction writers, who relied partly on claims of verisimilitude and partly on didacticism to overcome the conventional objection that imaginative works were "immoral." However, in East Texas, as elsewhere, early fiction stood on the periphery of actuality. And when writers did employ real events, they used them mostly to provide a loosely-constructed framework upon which to stretch the fabric of their fancies.

Some of the East Texas novelists, like their counterparts in other regions, had other reasons for the use of fact in their work. Hesper Bendbow in *More Than She Could Bear*, explains that, because knowledge of the Gachupin War is not widely held, "a larger proportion of historical matter [is] being admitted into this story than is usually embraced in works of fiction not avowedly historical."<sup>3</sup> It is more likely that authors, even when they did present facts tended to color them for their own purposes. An admission of coloring fact is that of Charles Summerfield, writing in his introduction to *The Rangers and Regulators of the Tanaha*:<sup>4</sup>

The design of the author in the humble conception and hasty preparation of the following work was to give explicitly an accurate picture of one phase in the development of the South-Western life, namely the pioneering or transition state, and inferentially to account for its existence in the peculiar social circumstances of

its actual environment. I had thought at first, to present the matter in a purely narrative form, with precise localities, names, and dates, so as to realize a veritable history, as thrilling and intensely dramatic in its events as any probable romance could be. But a little reflection soon satisfied me that such a method of treatment would be unnecessarily cruel, as many of the actors in those stormy scenes which find a place in the sequel are still living, while the others now no more, have left friends and relatives who would be pained to a profound degree by revelations of so special a character. I was compelled, therefore, by motives of humanity, to exhibit the facts in the shape of a tale or story, indulging at the same time in a few of the liberties allowed by that species of composition.

But whether avowedly factual, the early novel of East Texas does provide a kind of panorama of regional history—of event, people, and place—from Spanish colonial times to the latter part of the nineteenth century. This affiliation with history is evident in the following survey of the eight representative works and their authors.

The first East Texas novel, *L'Heroine du Texas* (1819),<sup>5</sup> was written in French with a gaucherie of style that stamps its author as a very young man, obviously an amateur, unknown even today except for the initials, "F—n M. G—n." It was unavailable in English translation until 1937. *L'Heroine* has a basis in fact. According to its author, the work resulted from the unsuccessful French attempt to establish *Champ d'Asile* (Camp Refuge), a colony founded in 1818 by Napoleonic officers and others on the Trinity River about sixty miles from Galveston. Political turmoil caused by the restoration of the Bourbons in France in the early nineteenth century had resulted in the exile of many Frenchmen. Some emigrated to the United States, where one hundred and fifty set out from Philadelphia on December 17, 1817, to found the Texas colony. The expedition had been organized by General Charles Lallemand, formerly a trusted lieutenant of the exiled Napoleon Bonaparte, but started out under the command of General Antoine Rigaud. Later, however, General Lallemand did join the colony and brought with him other settlers, increasing to about four hundred the population of the settlement. When food supplies grew short and the Spanish threatened to send troops to evict them, the settlers fled to Galveston only to be victimized by a flood. They disbanded, some going to Alexandria and others to New Orleans.

As to the factual basis of *L'Heroine*, if the author's assertion could be accepted, the novel was not intended to be a work of fiction. In the preface, the writer declares that his work is not a novel at all, but the account of a true experience. While there can be no question that he drew heavily upon real events, there can be serious doubts about the author's treatment of the materials. Obvious liberty with fact, removing the work from the realm of actuality and placing it in the category of the partly imaginative, obviates the writer's claim.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to being based on actual events, *L'Heroine* may be patterned after a supposedly true account of life in the abortive settlement—Hartmann and Millard's *Le Texas, ou Notice Historique sur le Champ d'Asile*. This work also was published in 1819 in Paris, and chronicles the



fortunes of a hero and heroine who strongly resemble Edmund and Ernestine of the novel.

*L'Heroine du Texas* is set from about 1816-18 in France, Texas, and Louisiana. Its principal characters are Edmund, a young French army officer; Ernestine Dormeuil, the Parisian girl he marries; Monsieur Dormeuil, her father; Madame Dormeuil, her mother; and Ernestine's brother (never identified by name). As the story opens, in Paris, the brother has just introduced his friend Edmund (whose last name, too, is never revealed) to his sister Ernestine. Following this meeting, the couple engages in six months of courtship that culminate in marriage. Soon husband and wife go to the United States, where in Philadelphia they join the French colonists bound for Texas. Their exact reason for taking leave of France is never quite clear, because Edmund is not linked directly with his nation's political strife. Presumably, however, he is a political exile like General Lallemand, who has organized the settlers of Champ d'Asile. The natural beauty of the site of the colony on the Trinity River and the initial nobility of the Indians residing in the vicinity enable the new arrivals to find much to admire in the Texas wilderness. Only after an Indian attack has occurred and an attack by the Spanish troops appears imminent, in fact, does their enthusiasm wane—and then only temporarily; since the novel ends with a poem celebrating the ideal existence in nature. Before the end, hero and heroine, with other surviving members of the colony, have fled to Galveston only to have the elements conspire against them. Floods produce additional hardships and cause them to flee further to New Orleans. In Louisiana, Edmund and Ernestine enjoy reunion with her parents and brother, all of whom settle down to permanent residence there.

*Mexico versus Texas* (1838)<sup>7</sup> sets the stage for a series of later East Texas novels focusing on Anglo-American conflict with the Mexicans. With other early novels it upholds the guise of fact. Like the creator of *L'Heroine du Texas*, the author fails to identify himself, indicating simply that the book is written by a "Texian." An 1842 edition, issued under the title, *Ambrosio de Letinez*, credits the work to one A. T. Myrthe; but the copyright page carries the name of Anthony Ganilh.<sup>8</sup> *Mexico versus Texas'* focus on Anglo-American and Mexican conflict is emphasized in such a later work as *Mustang Gray* (1858). *Mustang Gray* deals in a minor way with the United States-Mexican war.

*Mexico versus Texas* is set from about 1814 to 1836 in Mexico and East Texas. Its principal characters are Faring, son of a Maryland planter and the business representative in Mexico of New York interests; Maria Letinez, his Spanish wife; Count Letinez, her father; Abbate Letinez, his brother; Captain Ambrosio Letinez (Faring), Faring and Maria's son; Sophia Linton, an Anglo-American girl; Major Linton, her father; Mrs. Jordan, an Irish woman; and Flambeau, a quadroon slave. The story opens about 1814 in Phelipa on the fringe of the great desert in the state of Durango. Here Maria Letinez Faring lies dying in childbirth. She makes her Protestant husband agree to rear their son in the Roman Catholic faith. Thus, upon his wife's death, Faring leaves the child in the care of Father Fernando de Larribal, a priest at Phelipa. Maria's father, however, sends his brother, Abbate Letinez, to bring the child to Mechoacan. There the child is reared. Eighteen years elapse. During this time, the reader is told in one paragraph, Faring has paid three visits to his son and has tried repeatedly to

get the boy away from his grandfather. As the story resumes, the boy is "a tall, handsome, young man, with a pair of epaulettes, and at the head of a company of cavalry, under the command of Urrea." It is during the Texas Revolution. In pursuit of Comanche Indians, Captain Letinez and his men rescue an Anglo-American girl, Sophia Linton. The young officer takes her to Matamoros to board ship for New Orleans, but the vessel sinks, forcing the girl to turn back to San Patricio. There Letinez finds a home for her with an Irish woman, Mrs. Jordan. At Goliad, Letinez succeeds in saving the life of the girl's father, Major Linton, who has been captured with Fannin's forces. Letinez himself is captured at San Jacinto and bound out to a friendly Texas officer with a plantation "a few leagues west of the Sabine River." With the aid of the quadroon slave Flambeau, the Spaniard escapes and rejoins Urrera's forces. He is promoted to colonel and then marries Sophia Linton.

Very early in its existence, plagiarism plagued the East Texas novel. Less than twenty years after the publication of *L'Heroine du Texas* there appeared a work entitled *The Travels and Adventures of Monsieur Violet* (1843).<sup>9</sup> A product of the prolific pen of Captain Frederick Marryat, it provoked two American writers to charge the novelist with literary piracy. George Wilkins Kendall, in *Narrative of the Texas Santa Fe Expedition*, charged that Marryat "stole" some of his sketches which had been published in 1842 in the New Orleans *Picayune*. Josiah Gregg, in *Commerce of the Prairies*, likewise complained that Marryat had appropriated some of his letters that had been published in 1841-2 in the Galveston *Daily Advertiser* and the *Arkansas Intelligencer*. In spite of these charges of plagiarism, *Monsieur Violet* proves interesting as one of a limited number of connecting links between English and Texas fiction.

*Monsieur Violet* is set from about 1832-42 in Europe, in most of what is now the Western United States, and in Mexico. Its principal characters are Monsieur Violet, a young adventurer identified by name only in the title and not in the novel proper; his father; Prince Servalle, an Italian nobleman; Roche, an Irish traveling companion of Monsieur Violet; and Gabriel, a French traveling companion of Monsieur Violet. In 1833, shortly after the story opens and when Monsieur Violet is twelve, he and his father join Prince Servalle in a Utopian venture designed to civilize the Shoshone Indians in the American Pacific Northwest. A series of natural and man-induced setbacks spells doom for the colony, however, and claims the lives of Prince Servalle and Monsieur Violet's father. The demise of his sire sends Violet on the road of adventure, taking him through California, Arizona, New Mexico, Mexico, Texas, Arkansas, and Missouri. Along the way the traveler acquires two companions, Roche and Gabriel. Captured by Arapahoes, the three escape and join a party bound from Monterey to Santa Fe, near where, after a skirmish with Mexican troops, they are captured and sent to Mexico for trial as traitors. In the Sonora desert, however, the three are freed by Apaches and make their way to San Antonio. There they remain until Texas wins its independence from Mexico. After visiting Comanches, near whose tribal settlement Violet is bitten by a rattlesnake, and after escaping death in a buffalo stampede, the three travel to East Texas and Arkansas. Finally, Roche and Gabriel join a party going to trade with the Pawnees, leaving Violet to journey alone to St. Louis.

Another link between East Texas and European fiction is the Austrian



author, Karl Postl. Under the pseudonym of Charles Sealsfield, he introduces through his *The Cabin Book*<sup>10</sup> (1844) what he called the "ethnographical novel." This type employs an entire race or nation, rather than an individual, as the hero, and seeks to portray the entire round of life. Sealsfield's novel becomes one of the first to focus on the Anglo-American bent upon permanent settlement in East Texas.

*The Cabin Book* is set from 1832 forward in Texas. Its principal characters are General Edward Morse, a Texas land owner and patriot; Bob Rock, a drunkard and thief; Johnny Down, a gambler; a mulatto woman (never identified by name), Down's wife and a tavern operator; and the Alcalde, an Anglo-American colonist and political leader (also never identified by name). The story opens at a Captain Murky's dinner party in Natchez, where several speakers tell stories which constitute the entire novel. One of the speakers, General Edward Morse, explains why he went to Texas and tells of his adventures there. For \$1,000, his audience is told, Morse had purchased 10,000 acres of land from the Galveston Bay and Texian Land Company. But arriving in Texas in 1832, he found that his scrip was worthless, having been rejected by the Mexican government. Morse had remained in Texas, nevertheless, first visiting the plantation of a Mr. Neal. On a tour of the plantation, he had lost himself in the San Jacinto prairie, where he had ridden after a horse. Wandering in circles for several days, Morse had finally lost consciousness from fatigue and hunger. At this point he was rescued by one Bob Rock, who took Morse to a tavern operated by the gambler, Johnny Down, and his mulatto wife. After recovering from his ordeal, Morse had accompanied Rock on a visit to the Alcalde, before whom Rock confessed to having murdered a man. Sentenced reluctantly by the Alcalde to be hanged, Rock had revealed to his executioners that Down is "Catholic—beware!" For some unexplained reason, this revelation had resulted in the executioners' rushing off in search of Down and his wife and in a messenger's being sent with orders to "spare not horseflesh" to Stephen F. Austin. Austin, also for an unexplained reason, had "turned pale, ordered horses to be saddled, and sent for his neighbors." Down had then been caught and hanged. Meanwhile, Rock's life had been spared by the grateful Alcalde, and the two of them had gone to participate in the battle of San Jacinto. At San Jacinto, Rock had been killed, and Morse had won distinction which had caused him to be named a colonel and later a general.

Near the end of the pre-Civil War period of East Texas fiction appeared a novel that advances several interesting sociological theories. Among other things, this work, *The Rangers and Regulators of the Tanaha* (1856), by Charles Summerfield,<sup>11</sup> singles out the brutality of frontier justice as expressed in the lynch law.

*The Rangers and Regulators* is set during the first half of the nineteenth century near Shelbyville in East Texas. Its principal characters are William Bolling, an adventurer and son of an Alabama judge; Mary Miles, a young East Texas girl; Colonel Miles, her father; Captain Carlyle, a ranger or outlaw; and Lucy, Carlyle's mistress. As the story opens, William Bolling, a descendant of Pocahontas and the son of an aristocratic Southern family, goes to East Texas. There, during a storm, he rescues Mary Miles, daughter of a plantation owner. The two escape a bandit's ambush. But when they arrive at Mary's home, they are shocked at the strange recep-

tion given them by Colonel Miles, who refuses to pursue the bandits. At a ball, Colonel Miles tells Bolling that Mary is betrothed to Captain Carlyle, whose rangers or outlaws had ambushed the couple, and warns him not to interfere. On the advice of Sol Tuttle, a hunter, Bolling turns to a Major Morrow and his regulators for help in finding Caesar, his slave lost during the ambush. Caesar, however, appears before a search can be instituted. But Morrow, having been brought into the matter, announces his intention to investigate Colonel Miles' strange conduct and his connections with the outlaw leader. Meanwhile, Mary pledges her love to Bolling. Linked with slave stealing being waged by Carlyle, Colonel Miles remains silent even in the face of threats to his life made by regulator forces headed by Major Morrow. Ultimately, Colonel Miles is proven guilty of complicity in Carlyle's crimes and is drowned while fleeing arrest. His guilt is revealed by events revolving around Lucy, subject of most of the last half of the novel. She turns against Carlyle, whose attentions to Mary Miles have aroused her jealousy, and summons Sam Houston to arrest the outlaws. Lucy dies of a heart attack, Carlyle is hanged, and Mary Miles is free to marry William Bolling.

Pre-Civil War fiction in East Texas includes finally Emerson Bennett's *Viola*<sup>12</sup> (1852), which, like Summerfield's novel, deals with life in the Texas provincial period; and Jeremiah Clemens' *Mustang Gray*<sup>13</sup> (1858), which touches upon the conflict between Anglo-American and Mexican and which is based upon the life of a real person.

*Viola* is set in 1845-46 in East Texas. Its principal characters are Hal Walton, the narrator, an adventurer from Virginia; Morton Harley, a schoolmate and fellow adventurer of Walton; Viola St. Auburn, supposedly the daughter of a Frenchman but actually that of a wealthy Spaniard; Henry St. Auburn, supposedly the father of Viola; Clara Moreland, a Texas girl; and Count D'Estang, an aristocratic outlaw. The story opens with Hal Walton's leaving his home in Virginia and going to Louisville, where he is to take a steamboat south. Aboard the boat, Walton meets an old friend, Morton Harley, who acts mysteriously. Another youth, one Thomas Moreland, who is addicted to gambling, dies aboard ship, but not until he has given Walton a letter to return to his family in Texas. In New Orleans, Harley sees Viola St. Auburn, whom he loves and wishes to marry despite differences between his family and her father. With Walton, he follows the girl and her father to Galveston. There he learns that St. Auburn has sold his daughter to a French aristocrat, Count D'Estang, who owns a plantation on the Brazos. Disguised as peddlers, Harley and Walton set out to rescue Viola. En route, Walton meets Clara Moreland, a cousin of the boy who had died aboard the ship, and falls in love with her. At D'Estang ville, Harley and Walton gain the aid of Anne, D'Estang's mistress who is piqued at her lover's intention to marry Viola, in effecting the release of the kidnapped maiden. In the process, they learn that D'Estang heads a band of counterfeiters. Pursued by D'Estang, the rescuers battle their would-be captors. Henry St. Auburn, who, like his daughter, had been held captive by D'Estang, is mortally wounded in the fighting. Dying, he tells Viola that her real father is Don Juan Gomez Alverda, a wealthy Spanish aristocrat from whom he (St. Auburn) had stolen the girl when she was a baby. Harley and Viola marry. Walton prepares to win the hand of Clara Moreland.



*Mustang Gray* is set in the first half of the nineteenth century in North Carolina, Texas, and Mexico. Its principal characters are Mabry Gray, an adventurer; John Allison, his friend; Julia Allison, John's sister; Bartolo Piedras, a Mexican smuggler; Padre José, a lustful priest; and Inez Montero, a Mexican girl. Mabry Gray and his mother Mirian, widow of a man who died in the service of his country, live in North Carolina as the story opens. When the youth is sixteen, a new family settles in the neighborhood. One son is John Alison, who, of "all persons . . . would have been supposed least likely to become attached to Mabry Gray, or to win his affection in return." The two boys become inseparable, forming a friendship that would last "without change or abatement until death came to sever its links." Mrs. Gray dies of fever, and Mabry goes to live with the Allisons. He falls in love with Julia Allison, John's sister. She tells him, however, that she can love him only as a sister. Thus, Mabry leaves the country and becomes successful in business. Years pass. Meanwhile, Robert Taliafero has arrived and has sought to win Julia's hand. John Allison, suspicious of the suitor, summons Mabry. Gray checks into Taliafero's past and learns that the man has a wife and children in Baltimore. Unfortunately, Julia has already "surrendered all a woman has to give" to Taliafero. Enraged, Gray kills Taliafero in a rifle duel. He and John flee, going to Texas. But Gray knows that no "exile 'from himself can flee.'" He knows, too, that wherever "he wandered by day or by night memory would be continually calling up images to frighten repose from his breast." John takes a job in a store in San Felipe. Mabry becomes employed by Bartolo Piedras, a smuggler posing as a rancher at Corpus Christi. After fights with Indians, Gray captures a wild mustang and gets his "soubriquet" of "Mustang." On his first smuggling expedition to Monterrey, Mustang Gray eludes police as a result of a warning by Inez Montero. He gets \$5,000 for his first excursion into smuggling, and gives the money to John Allison, who goes into business for himself as a merchant. Then, Gray leaves Piedras' employ and goes to San Felipe to help the Texans in their revolution with Mexico. At San Jacinto, he saves the life of Piedras, now a Mexican army officer. After the war, Gray goes back to North Carolina only to be rejected again by Julia Allison. He thus returns to Texas and again becomes a partner of Piedras. Again, Inez Montero saves Gray's life with a warning. After an argument with Piedras, Gray recruits his own smuggling force and attacks Piedras' ranch at Monterrey. He leaves Piedras and lustful Padre José, who has tried to seduce Inez Montero, to burn to death in the house. After fighting with Mexican bandits and other adventurers, Gray forms a company of rangers known as the "Mustang Grays." The group fights during the Mexican War of 1846. After the war, Gray dies. Inez Montero, with whom he has been living, dies with him. At the end, the reader learns that Robert Taliafero, whom Gray had killed over Julia Allison, was a widower at the time that Gray thought him to be trifling with Julia's honor.

In the wake of the Civil War parts of the region were flooded by waves of didactic and sentimental fiction of a type popular throughout the entire nation. Representative is *More Than She Could Bear* by Hesper Bendbow,<sup>14</sup> who based part of his work upon the Spanish-Mexican conflict of about 1812-13 known as the Gachupin War. The Magee-Gutierrez expedition figures in this novel.



A Texas boundary dispute between the United States and Spain followed the Louisiana Purchase. On October 22, 1806, Governor Herrera and General Wilkinson agreed in conference on the latter's suggestion that, until boundary lines were settled by the two governments, the territory between the Sabine River and the Arroyo Hondo, a small bayou flowing into the Red River near Natchitoches, should be neutral ground to be occupied by neither nation. *More Than She Could Bear* is set about 1811-13 in this neutral territory, or "Neutralia" as it is called in the novel. Its principal characters are Lieutenant Augustus Magee, a United States Army officer stationed at Natchitoches; Gatewood, an Anglo-American bandit of the neutral territory; Bernardo Gutierrez, Mexican revolutionist; Isabella Delgado, daughter of a family opposing the Spanish crown; Padre Delgado, her uncle; Filly, the young girl reared by Gatewood; and John Gatley, or Carlos King, Anglo-American adventurer. As the story opens, Lieutenant Magee escorts a party of Mexican traders through the bandit-ridden Neutralia, where the party is robbed. Returning to Natchitoches, Magee takes twenty men and searches for the robbers and their leader, Gatewood. Gatewood, however, escapes their trap. Disguised, Magee then goes alone to Camp Wildwood, Gatewood's hideout, and challenges the bandit leader to a duel. But before blood can be spilled, the Mexican revolutionist Bernardo Gutierrez enlists Magee's help in the revolt against Spain. Magee and Gatewood thus reach a personal truce. Gatewood rescues the Delgado party being pursued by Spanish cavalry from Nacogdoches, Texas. Smitten with Isabella, he declines to marry his ward Filly and sends his charge to live with a Mrs. Davies, mother of one of his bandits. Padre Delgado persuades his niece Isabella to cultivate Gatewood's affection in order to get him and his men to join in the fight against Spain. She is reluctant, because she still hopes to find her lost lover, Carlos King, who has been captured by the Spanish. But she puts cause above self and responds to Gatewood's courtship. Magee, meanwhile, raises a force of about two hundred men. This group is augmented by Gatewood and his outlaws. Mrs. Davies unwittingly tells Filly that Gatewood is to marry Isabella. The girl hastens to Camp Wildwood to oppose Isabella, but instead becomes charmed by the older woman. In fact, she lives with Isabella in Gatewood's camp. Soon they discover that John Gatley, one of Gatewood's men, is really Carlos King escaped from prison. But the discovery comes only a short time prior to the men's departure for Goliad. At Goliad, Magee dies, or is murdered, after attempting to surrender to Salcedo. Gutierrez is dismissed by American officers for his complicity in the murder of the captured Salcedo. In a fight on the Medina River, the Americans suffer heavy losses. Gatley (or King) and Gatewood are reported to have been killed. Isabella and Filly, heartbroken at the news, drown themselves by weighting their bodies with gold.

The affiliation of the early novel of East Texas with regional history—event—has been evident in the foregoing survey of authors and works. Implicit, too, is the relationship between fiction and people and place—a relationship that becomes explicit under further examination.

The early novelists of East Texas did introduce an impressive number of characters into their pages. Their practice of including a multitude of persons representing numerous nationalities tends in one respect to detract from their art, since it precludes a thorough treatment of the major ones.

But it does provide a noteworthy service: that of indicating the rich variety of ethnic groups that populated the region. The novels, however, do more than serve as a mere catalogue of peoples; they represent an index to the prominence of any given group of inhabitants of the region. When a particular race was in its ascendancy economically, politically, and socially in East Texas, novelists tended to draw more generously on it for fictional figures. Conversely, when the prestige of the race declined, fiction writers often relegated its members to relatively minor roles in the novels.

The early novels thus focus primarily upon the dominant races—Indian, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo-American. The Indian receives major attention, as has been implied, in *L'Heroine du Texas* and minor notice in *Mexico versus Texas* and *Rangers and Regulators*. In *Mexico versus Texas*, the Spanish and Mexicans occupy positions of prominence, while in *Monsieur Violet*, *Viola*, *Mustang Gray*, and *More Than She Could Bear* they have somewhat less important roles. Focusing primarily upon the Anglo-American are *Cabin Book*, *Rangers and Regulators*, *Viola*, *Mustang Gray*, and *More Than She Could Bear*; and dealing less extensively with this race is *Mexico versus Texas*. The French are featured in *L'Heroine du Texas* and *Monsieur Violet*, and touched upon in *Viola*. And treated, although not extensively, are the following other races: Irish, *Mexico versus Texas* and *Monsieur Violet*; Negro, *Cabin Book*, *Rangers and Regulators*, and *Viola*; German, *Mustang Gray*; and Italian, *Monsieur Violet*.

As in the case of characterization landscape description in the early novel of East Texas plays a rather insignificant role in contrast to action. Moreover, description of the land occurs in brief comments, a phrase or a sentence, rather than in lengthy passage. Taken as a whole, however, the novels provide a reasonably accurate picture of the area.

In his *The Cabin Book*, Charles Sealsfield accurately describes the general features of the coastal plains. Of the terrain immediately north of Galveston island, for example, he correctly reports that it is "an immeasurable plain, extending for a hundred miles or more before your eyes, this plain without the least elevation or depression, overgrown with the most delicate grasses, favored by each breath of the sea breeze, rolling like waves, interrupted by nothing, no tree, hill, house, or hut." Shortly beyond this point, as Sealsfield further notes, however, changes in the landscape become pronounced.

Fifteen miles above the mouth of the Rio Brazos, we entered the first forest. Sycamores, and afterwards pecans arched themselves on both banks, over the river, and a band of deer and a flock of turkeys added to the beauty of the landscape. . . . on the coast we had found it [the soil] consisting of a light sand, covered with a very thin stratum of fertile vegetable soil, but without any indication of marsh or mire; as we proceeded upwards, the vegetable soil increased in thickness, reaching from one to four, eight, twelve, and at least fifteen feet; and at Brazoria twenty feet over the sub-soil of sand and clay. (p. 7)

Here, then, Sealsfield has observed that East Texas is plentifully and beautifully wooded. The anonymous author of *L'Heroine du Texas* similarly notes this fact. Through his hero he observes that trees "which keep their leaves nearly all the year rose majestically toward heaven."



Complementing the sylvan grandeur of East Texas, flowers of myriad color are shown to grow in abundance. The author of *L'Heroine du Texas* observes "bushes, such as the aloe, the red laurel, sunflowers" which bloom here in "great profusion of color and perfume."

Not all is placid in East Texas nature, however, as the early novelists noted. Charles Summerfield, in *Rangers and Regulators of the Tanaha*, for example, devotes much detail to a storm referred to conflictingly on page twenty of the novel as a "hurricane" and on page twenty-seven as a "tornado." Despite this discrepancy, the storm conveys amply the idea that with the beautiful exists the force of destruction.

The setting of the East Texas novel includes, in addition to nature, the locales of regional towns and villages. Brazoria, Texas, in 1832 is said by Charles Sealsfield, in *The Cabin Book*, to contain "more than thirty houses, three of which were of brick, three frame, and the remaining ones log houses, all strikingly American, as well as the streets, which were laid out in our favorite fashion, in straight lines, intersecting each other at right angles." A segment of an East Texas community—specifically, a plantation home—is described by Emerson Bennet, in *Viola*, as being,

. . . a large, angular mansion, with its porticoes, piazzas, colonades, balconies, turrets, roofs, and chimneys lifting itself above a level landscape, in the centre of a charming grove, and surrounded also by vines, and flowers, and arbours, and statues, and sparkling fountains, and winding walks, that led from sunshine to shade, and from shade into darker recesses. . . . The mansion itself stood back from the road some quarter of a mile, and could be approached, in a direct line, along a bowery footway, lined with statuary, and banked with the rarest, brightest, and sweetest flowers, whose perfume regaled the olfactory sense almost to satiety. . . . (p. 58)

Overall, then, the early novel of East Texas performs the services of portraying historical event, people, and place from 1820 to 1895. Just how well it performs this office, of course, is another matter. But perhaps a tentative appraisal can be made obliquely. In commenting on the works of Andy Adams, the Texas cowboy writer, J. Frank Dobie wrote:

It is my firm conviction that one hundred, three hundred years from now people will read Andy Adams to see what the life of those men who went up the trail from Texas was like, just as now we read the diary of Pepys to see what life in London was like following the Restoration, or as we read the *Spectator* papers to see what it was like in the Augustan Age. Those readers of other centuries will miss in Andy Adams the fine art of Addison, though they will find something of the same serenity; they will miss the complex character and debonair judgments of Pepys; but they will find the honesty and fidelity of a man who rode his horses straight without giving them the sore-back and then who traced his trail so plainly that even a tenderfoot may follow it without getting lost.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, certainly indirectly and undoubtedly only in part, Dobie has possibly pinpointed the basic worth of early East Texas fiction. Although lacking in



artistic quality, it has a physical virility emerging from simple clarity and a directness approaching honesty. Perhaps even it has a permanence that persists despite the lack of artistic and even intellectual achievement.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>J. Frank Dobie, *Guide to Life and Literature of the Southwest* (Dallas, 1952), p. 178.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>Hesper Bendbow [George W. Archer], *More Than She Could Bear: A Story of the Gachupin War in Texas, A.D. 1812-13* (Philadelphia, 1872), p. x.

<sup>4</sup>Charles Summerfield [A. W. Arrington], *The Rangers and Regulators of the Tanaha: or, Life Among the Lawless. A Tale of the Republic of Texas* (New York, 1856).

<sup>5</sup>"F—n M. G—n," *L'Heroine du Texas* (Paris, 1819). In *The Story of Champ d'Asile*, translated from the French by Donald Joseph and edited with an introduction by Fannie E. Ratchford (Dallas, 1937).

<sup>6</sup>In writing of literary works, it is customary to use the present tense even though a work may have appeared hundreds of years earlier. The reason is that the book itself continues to live after the death of its author. It said what it had to say when it was first written, and it continues to say the same thing to today's reader.

<sup>7</sup>"By a Texian" [A. T. Myrthe," or Anthony Ganilh], *Mexico versus Texas, A Descriptive Novel, Most of the characters of Which Consist of Living Persons* (Philadelphia, 1838).

<sup>8</sup>Some scholars assume that A. T. Myrthe, in whose name the novel *Ambrosio de Letinez* is copyrighted, is really Anthony Ganilh. A Frenchman by birth, Ganilh supposedly was a Catholic missionary who came to the United States early in the nineteenth century. He had become a priest about 1817, some twenty-four years following his presumed birthdate of 1793. In the United States, Ganilh served as a teacher at St. Thomas Seminary in Kentucky and at St. Anthony's at Padau, now Minneapolis. He probably went to New Orleans and Texas. In 1838 Ganilh is thought to have returned to Bardstown, Kentucky, to teach at St. Joseph's. From that point he disappears from history. It is further assumed that Ganilh did not copyright the original version of *Ambrosio* (that is, *Mexico versus Texas*), because in 1838 a person not a citizen of the United States could not be granted a copyright. (See Sister Agatha Sheehan, *Texas Prose Writings* [Dallas, 1936], p. 91, and Lennie Merle Walker, "The Beginnings of Texas Fiction," unpublished master's thesis, University of Texas, 1935, p. 35.)

<sup>9</sup>Captain [Frederick] Marryat, *The Travels and Adventures of Monsieur Violet in California, Sonora, and Western Texas* (London, 1843). Frederick Marryat, who produced more than a score of adult and juvenile novels of adventure, launched his writing career after completing twenty-four years of service as a British naval officer. His literary bent was perhaps acquired from his grandfather, Dr. Thomas Marryat, a poet of sorts. Second son of Joseph Marryat, who was a colonial agent for Granada and a member of Parliament for Sandwich, Marryat was born July 10, 1792, in London. He joined the navy in 1806. In 1811, while serving aboard the

*Aeolus*, he reached the North American shore to which he would return for a visit twenty-six years later. But the bulk of his service kept the aspiring writer far removed from the scene of *Monsieur Violet*. It took him to Burma, where in 1823 he was commander of the *Larne* during the first Burmese War; up the Bassein River, where in 1825 he led the first naval command to conduct a successful expedition there; and to many other points, which, from 1825 to 1828 and from 1828 to 1830, found him in command of the *Tees* and the *Ariadne*, respectively. By the time of his retirement in 1830, Captain Marryat had received (in 1818) the gold medal of the Royal Humane Society for saving a life at sea; had adapted to the merchantile marine Sir Home Popham's system of signaling; and had been elected (in 1819) a Fellow of the Royal Society. He also had married (in 1819) a Miss Shairp, daughter of a former British consul-general to Russia, and had become something of a caricature artist. Although Marryat had published his first novel, *Frank Mildmay*, prior to his retirement from the navy, he had not begun to write prolifically while in service as he was immediately to do. During the next eighteen years of his career, 1830-48, he produced more than twenty adult novels and a series of juveniles. From 1832-35, Marryat edited *Metropolitan Magazine*, in which he published an unfavorable review of N. P. Willis' *Pencilings by the Way*. At the time of the review's publication Willis was in England. Smarting from the article which he considered abusive, Willis challenged Marryat to a duel. But, while the two actually exchanged shots at Chatham, neither was injured. From 1837-38 Marryat visited Canada and the United States and in 1839 recorded his impressions in *A Diary in America*. This work, which gave offense to some Americans, served in part as the basis for his novel touching in part on East Texas—a work which itself contains offensive statements about this nation. Marryat died August 9, 1848, at Langham in Norfolk. (Biographical detail here and following in this paper from Edwin W. Gaston, Jr., *The Early Novel of the Southwest* [Albuquerque, 1961].)

<sup>10</sup>Seatsfield [sic] [Charles Sealsfield, or Karl Postl], *The Cabin Book; or, Sketches of Life in Texas*, translated from the German by Professor Ch. Fr. Mersch (New York, 1844). Charles Sealsfield, perhaps the foremost German-American novelist, was actually a fugitive Austrian monk named Karl Anton Postl. Because he made it a point to be very reticent about himself, however, Postl maintained his false identity until after his death, when his will revealed his real name. Such anonymity has resulted in many an unfounded statement gaining credence during the course of its progress from one essay or biography to another. One interesting side of Postl's literary anonymity, in fact, was the early spelling of his pseudonym. An error by Theodor Mundt, German literary critic, designated the writer as Seatsfield, the name carried on the title page of *The Cabin Book*; and the misspelling was perpetuated in America by such publications as *The Boston Advertiser*. Born in 1793 in Poppitz, Moravia, Postl was prepared for the priesthood. At twenty he was placed as a novice in a Prague monastery and soon was ordained a priest. But the discipline and narrowness of monastic life provoked the youth to rebellion, and, in 1822, he fled to Switzerland and then to the United States. In 1823 Postl turned up in New Orleans from where he toured the South and Southwest. From this time forward, although he lived primarily in Switzerland, he paid periodic visits to America (in 1824-25, 1826, 1827-32, 1850, and 1853-58), acquired a plantation in



Louisiana, and took United States citizenship. In this country, he served as a merchant and a journalist. Just when Postl assumed the name of Sealsfield is uncertain; but his letters to Cotta, his German publisher, are signed by this name as early as 1826. Exceedingly popular, his works were translated from the original German into English, French, and other tongues. Postl died in 1864 at his home in Solothurn, Switzerland.

<sup>11</sup>Charles Summerfield was the pseudonym of Alfred W. Arrington, an itinerant Methodist minister turned lawyer-politician and Roman Catholic. Born September 17, 1810, in Iredell County, North Carolina, Arrington was the son of H. Archibald Arrington, himself a Methodist minister. At nine he traveled with his father to Arkansas, which was to become the scene of the youth's own ministry and political career. Ten years later, after he had become a Methodist preacher, Arrington toured Arkansas, Indiana, and Missouri for five years. In 1834 he took up the study of law, and was admitted one year later to the Missouri bar. But moving to Arkansas, he built up a thriving practice, and was elected to the state legislature. After a brief residence in Texas, scene of *The Rangers and Regulators of the Tanaha*, Arrington went to New York and Boston, and, in 1857, to Chicago. There, where he spent the remainder of his life, he embraced the Roman Catholic faith and wrote poems. He died December 31, 1867.

<sup>12</sup>Emerson Bennett, *Viola; or, Adventures in the Far South-West* (Philadelphia, 1852). Born March 16, 1822, at Monson, Massachusetts, Emerson Bennett was educated at Monson Academy. At seventeen, he went to New York and launched his literary career. His first book, *The Brigand*, a "little poetical pamphlet," appeared in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*. Going west to Cincinnati in 1844 Bennett edited *Casket*, a weekly magazine, and contributed to others. In the West, too, he is believed to have traveled to Texas, where he acquired the materials for his Southwestern novels, *Viola* and its sequel *Clara Moreland* (1853). In 1847 Bennett returned to Philadelphia, married Eliza G. Daly, and lived the remainder of his life. He died May 11, 1905.

<sup>13</sup>Jeremiah Clemens, *Mustang Gray; a Romance* (Philadelphia, 1859). A United States senator, federal district attorney, and Alabama state legislator, Jeremiah Clemens was better known as a politician than as a novelist. Born December 28, 1814, in Huntsville, Alabama, he was the son of James Clemens. Following studies at LaGrange College, Clemens became one of the first students to matriculate at the newly-founded University of Alabama in 1831. From Alabama he went to Transylvania College at Lexington, Kentucky, to study law. After becoming prominent as a practicing attorney in Alabama, Clemens was appointed federal district attorney. From 1839 to 1844 he served in the Alabama legislature, leaving to come to Texas to command volunteers in the Mexican War. He returned to Alabama after the fighting and in 1849 was elected to the United States Senate. Later he edited the Memphis *Eagle and Enquirer* and, in 1862, moved to Philadelphia. At the time of his death May 21, 1865, he was again a resident of Huntsville, Alabama.

<sup>14</sup>Hesper Bendbow was the pseudonym of George Washington Archer, who combined writing with a career as a physician. Born in 1824 near Churchville, Hartford County, Maryland, Archer graduated from Bel Air Academy and studied medicine under his father, Dr. Robert H. Archer, before taking



a medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania. He went to West Texas to set up a practice, and soon joined a company of Texas Rangers. After about eighteen months of this life, however, his health failed and Archer returned to Maryland. In 1861 he joined the Confederate Army, service in which left him an invalid for life. From the War's end until his death February 16, 1907, at Churchville, he devoted himself to writing.

<sup>15</sup>J. Frank Dobie, "Andy Adams, Cowboy Chronicler," *Southwest Review*, XI (January, 1926), p. 101.