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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Paul Christian Jones entitled "The Subversive South: Genre-Play, Aristocratic Ideology, and Antebellum Southern Literature." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Dorothy M. Scura, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

THE SUBVERSIVE SOUTH: GENRE-PLAY, ARISTOCRATIC IDEOLOGY, AND ANTEBELLUM SOUTHERN LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Paul Christian Jones

May 1999

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

John and Sue Jones,

who have given me a life-time of support and encouragement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to this project in a variety of ways. My interest in nineteenth-century and southern literature was fostered and encouraged by a number of wonderful professors at the University of Arkansas and the University of Tennessee. I am especially indebted to John C. Guilds at Arkansas who was the first to teach me that there was indeed literature of merit being written in the South before the Civil War. I am also particularly grateful to my dissertation committee, Mary Papke and Allison Ensor of the English Department and Stephen Ash of the History Department, each of whom has contributed to this project through numerous readings, invaluable advice, and sharp editing. Certainly, my greatest appreciation goes to Dorothy Scura, my dissertation director, whose wide-ranging knowledge of southern literature has helped to shape this project. I sincerely believe that I could not have found a better professional mentor than I have in Dr. Scura; her wisdom and advice have been crucial to my success in graduate school and to the completion of this dissertation.

I am also grateful to the Graduate Office of the English Department for awarding me the Durant da Ponte American Literature Fellowship, which funded my research trip to Virginia and Washington, D. C. My family and friends have been very supportive and encouraging over the years. Specifically, my parents have provided both emotional and financial support over the course of my graduate studies. I know they are pleased to finally have their son get out of college and head into the "real world."

Finally, my greatest debt is to Jeremy Webster. Without his encouragement and understanding, his important intellectual feedback, and his competitive nature, it is very possible that I would never have reached this moment.

ABSTRACT

This study of the literature of the antebellum South attempts to challenge the accepted notion that portrays the Old South's literature as nothing more than propaganda for the aristocratic planter class, in its attempt to justify their social status and defend the institution of slavery. My study examines the reductive view of antebellum southern literature as a body of historical romances and plantation novels written by conservative, aristocratic writers. Then, I interrogate this traditional view by closely examining the work of five writers, James Heath, Frederick Douglass, Edgar Allan Poe, John Pendleton Kennedy, and E. D. E. N. Southworth, all of whom challenge the dominant ideology of the Old South in their fiction. This subversion of aristocratic values is effected by the authors' struggle against or experimentation with the popular genres of the historical romance and the plantation novel. The first chapter explores Heath's use of the historical romance to attack the aristocracy rather than to justify it. The second chapter explores slave writer Douglass's appropriation of the white genre of historical romance in his work wherein he makes a slave the hero and the slave-owners the villains. The third chapter examines Poe's complete rejection of the romance in favor of the horror genre, a move that subverts planter ideology because it openly announces the fears and anxieties that the southern aristocracy has about their slaves and women. The fourth chapter moves to Kennedy's *Swallow Barn*, usually considered the prototypical plantation novel, to illustrate that within this work is a generic struggle between romanticism and realism that calls into question many of the region's myths. The final chapter treats another writer, Southworth, who has been linked to the plantation tradition, to illustrate that within her fiction she appropriates the conventions of the pro-slavery novel in order to make a subtle abolitionist argument. Through this series of investigations into the work of antebellum southern

writers, both canonical and obscure, I illustrate that there was indeed a subversive South before the Civil War, actively trying to change its society through its fiction.

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Introduction: Ideology and Genre in the Old South

Despite the abundant historical work which has attempted to disprove the widely-accepted yet problematic image of the antebellum South as an exclusively aristocratic society, populated by chivalrous cavaliers and coquettish belles amidst pastoral splendor, the work of southern literary scholars has strongly reinforced the belief in this myth about the pre-Civil War South. In fact, if the literary histories are to be believed, most of the literature of the antebellum South was written by a little more than a half dozen white, wealthy, land-owning, and slave-owning historical romancers who imitated the model of Sir Walter Scott's historical novels in order to paint a portrait of the South that would promote a hierarchical social structure, based on class distinction and slave ownership. In other words, southern literature before the Civil War is considered by most literary studies to be little more than glorified propaganda, poorly written imitations of Scott's Waverly novels, in service to the pro-slavery, pro-aristocratic position.[1]

This depiction of antebellum southern literature has supported the "story" of southern literature that was constructed in the early twentieth century. The work of the major twentieth-century scholars of southern literature, including Allen Tate, Jay Hubbell, Louis Rubin, C. Hugh Holman, and Lewis Simpson, has subscribed to this often reductive view of antebellum literature in order to tell a larger story about southern literature as a whole. In this story, antebellum southern literature is said to have constructed a chivalrous, racist, and aristocratic legacy which postbellum writers, like Thomas Nelson Page, long for as they construct their own myth of the Lost Cause, and with which modern

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[1] Perhaps Mark Twain's famous diagnosis of the South as having "the Sir Walter disease" in *Life on the Mississippi* and his insistence that the South's admiration for Scott and the chivalric myth was one of the central causes of the Civil War can be seen as the beginning of this verdict upon southern literature. But the strong connection between Scott and the South has been continually promoted, discussed, and analyzed by scholars of southern literature, including William Dean Howells who called this affinity "Walter-Scottismo" and H. J. Eckenrode who dubbed the South "Walter Scottland." The most important study of this connection is Rollin G. Osterweis's *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South.*

writers, like William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Thomas Wolfe, struggle to come to terms. J. V. Ridgely's *Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature* (1980) can serve to represent this tendency in southern scholarship. It judges antebellum southern literature to be "usable fiction," following the form of historical romance "as recently formulated by Sir Walter Scott," which for southerners "had a special appeal, for it fostered nationalism and authenticated hierarchy" (2). Ridgely claims that antebellum writers "shunned innovation, generally wrote leaden prose, and peopled their plots with waxwork figures" as they argued "that Virginia aristocrats were the foreordained leaders in the coming destiny of America itself" (48).

Recently, both historians of the South and critics of southern literature have begun to challenge this reductive view of antebellum southern literary culture. In 1978, historian Michael O'Brien attacked what he called "odd notions current in Southern literary criticism" (405).[2] Most notably, he criticizes the "consensus" among literary critics who view "the Old South . . . as a coherent community of values" (405) and assert that "Southern community [is] not dialectical, . . . but an homogenous community of shared values" (412). He traces the source of this consensus to Allen Tate, whose work on southern literature influenced almost all of the prominent scholars of southern literature from the mid to late twentieth century. Tate's essays were central in establishing the view of the Old South as aristocratic and passionately political at the expense of aesthetic endeavors.[3] This argument portraying southern literature as second to sectional politics, and often even as a

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[2] O'Brien's essay reviews the 1970s work of the major southern scholars--Lewis Simpson, Louis Rubin, and C. Hugh Holman.

[3] Specifically, O'Brien mentions "The Profession of Letters in the South" and "A Southern Mode of Imagination." John Grammer agrees with O'Brien's argument about Tate's influence, claiming that Tate "established most of the terms by which southern literature is now understood" (14). Grammer argues that Tate's insistence upon "the Old South's cultural inferiority" was mainly intended "to clarify the superior achievement of the New" (14). Or, in other words, Tate makes the literature of the Old South the ashes from which the phoenix of the literature of the Southern Renaissance could rise. See also Susan Donaldson, who argues that the work of Tate "encodes the profession of letters in the South as white and male" (35).

mouth-piece of those politics, though certainly espoused by some nineteenth-century scholars of southern literature including Page and William Peterfield Trent, became the accepted view of the academy with Tate's support. Consequently, O'Brien concludes that "the problem of the modern Southern critic is how to evade the influence of Tate" (406). He condemns the school of criticism which is "most prone to squeezing antebellum writing into the straitjacket of Allen Tate's critical precepts" (410) and which focuses only on work which provides the picture of the South that it wants to see by, for instance, celebrating the romances of William Gilmore Simms and John Pendleton Kennedy as well as "the astonishingly incompetent novels of William Alexander Caruthers" (409) to the exclusion of much other work which would force a re-examination of the accepted views of southern literature. Essentially, O'Brien finds the scope of literary critics to be much too narrow, as they study only literature that will confirm an already established thesis and perception about the antebellum South.

Hugh Holman is among the scholars criticized, specifically for his collection of essays entitled *The Roots of Southern Writing*, in O'Brien's essay for being too closely tied to Tate's arguments. However, in his last published work, the posthumous essay "No More Monoliths, Please: Continuities in the Multi-Souths" (1981), Holman reconsiders much of his own previous work, especially his early attempts at formulating a definition of southern literature, and he seems to support O'Brien's critique, condemning reductive views of southern literary history.[4] He discourages the "conveniently simple answers" that result in "a schema in which a sentimentalized version of Scott was used defensively in the ante-bellum period, an exploitative local colorism dominated the postbellum period, and a glorious, even sacramental, agrarianism illumines the twentieth century" (xiv). Instead, he

[4] Ironically, O'Brien's *The Idea of the American South* is among the recent books that Holman finds guilty of having "too limited a view of what southern writing has been and is" (xv). Holman's inclusion of O'Brien, along with Richard Gray and Ridgely, might be mere revenge for his own appearance on O'Brien's list, but more probably he intends to point out that despite his astute observations O'Brien is still a part of the larger problem that plagues southern literary studies as a whole.

encourages broader examinations into the literature of the South and investigations into authors and works that do not appear to fit neatly into the story about the South that the New Critics like Tate first told. He urges scholars of southern literature to see "the whole many-colored multitude of southern writers" at the expense of maintaining the reductively simple outline on which southern scholars of the past so strongly insisted (xxiii).

It is discouraging to find that reviews of the recent landmark of southern literary studies, *The History of Southern Literature* (1986), indicate that much of O'Brien's and Holman's urgings may be going unheeded by the established scholars of southern literature. Both Michael Kreyling and Jim Wayne Miller pronounce this seminal work of southern literary scholarship to be "sequestered in consensus" (Kreyling, "Consensus" 85), guilty of continued exclusion or neglect of literature which does not fit easily into the previous perceptions that O'Brien and Holman denounce. Miller argues that *The History* "presents a view of the South not essentially different from that held by southerners who contributed to *I'll Take My Stand*" (87); and he claims that the fundamental flaw with the work lies in its "assumption of a homogenous South, rather than recognition of the South's diversity" (89). Despite its minimal passing references to the diversity of the South, Miller states that "the book's organization and emphases do not permit the 'many Souths' to emerge. Emphasis is on 'one South' assumed to be much the same everywhere" (90).[5]

Ironically, the latest contribution to the perpetuation of the literary myth about the antebellum South actually comes from a historian, Susan Tracy, who in her recent *In the Master's Eye: Representations of Women, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature* (1995) perhaps inadvertently supports the standard depiction of the literature. Despite the subtitle of her useful study, Tracy still falls into the trap of boiling

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[5] See Hobson for a defense of *The History*. While granting that "the greatest shortcoming of southern literary scholarship" is "its reluctance to accept black southern writers as part of the southern canon," Hobson claims that this "is not a problem with *The History of Southern Literature*: black contributors are abundant, black writers are discussed in detail, the black contribution to southern letters is certainly acknowledged" (81).

antebellum southern literature down to "the work of those Southern white males who have been credited with creating 'Southern literature,'" concentrating "on an elite group who expressed the worldview of the planter class" (1). Regardless of the skepticism that she displays about whether this writing should be considered "Southern literature" or even "literature," she still, like many of the literary scholars who have preceded her, begs time and space constraints as the reason for excluding female and African-American writers. She further argues that they deserve book-length studies of their own.[6] Despite Tracy's intentions, readers are left again with the impression that antebellum southern literature has been written by white males. Because of the texts which she makes representative of antebellum southern literature, she can confidently claim that "every line and every scene in this literature was written to assure the reader of the natural superiority of men to women, of whites to blacks and Native Americans, and of the planter class to all other classes. These novels are more valuable then as the cultural artifacts of a defeated planter class than as works of art" (5). Rather than breaking any new ground, Tracy merely repeats the view of most of the southern literary scholars in the twentieth century, telling the same story one more time.

In this study, I hope to follow the visions of O'Brien and the late Holman and broaden the scope of what is considered antebellum southern literature. I hope to revise the accepted "story" of southern literature to incorporate women and African-American writers, from the phenomenally popular E. D. E. N. Southworth to the greatest of the slave

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[6] This has been a tendency in southern scholarship for decades. For example, Jay Hubbell explains his decision not to include any African-American writers in his seminal study *The South in American Literature* by claiming that "I have not included the Negro writers, who, as it happens belong mainly to the Northern states" (xiii). The only black writers mentioned in Ridgely's *Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature* are Charles Chesnutt and William Wells Brown who share a paragraph toward the end of the book; women fare almost as badly as only six women writers receive even brief mention. More recently, the apologetic footnote is the technique of choice among scholars rather than omission without comment. This footnote from Bertram Wyatt-Brown's "Evolution of Heroes' Honor in the Southern Literary Tradition" can serve as example: "Because of the limitations of space, I have not tried to include women and black writers or to explore very fully the issues of gender and race that a long and comprehensive monograph would allow" (126).

narrators, Frederick Douglass. My study also intends to illustrate that two of the white male romancers considered in Tracy's study did not support the conservative pro-slavery agenda by rescuing from obscurity novelist James E. Heath and by re-examining "misread" work by John Pendleton Kennedy. Most importantly, the story needs to be rewritten so that southern literary scholarship can find a way gracefully and sensibly to include the most significant writer of the antebellum South, Edgar Allan Poe. Previous twentieth-century studies have always had difficulty dealing with Poe as a southern writer, often either ignoring him or dismissing him as only nominally a southerner. This seems to me to be one of the greatest disservices of twentieth-century southern literary scholarship, which has been unsuccessful in establishing an approach to antebellum literature that would accommodate the existence of a writer like Poe.

However, while revisionist in its motives, my study will in many ways remain faithful to the standard literary histories of the antebellum South. For instance, my study does not deny the primacy of the historical romance in antebellum southern literature. On the contrary, I believe that scholars have been correct in asserting its prominent influence as an established literary genre, but most did not go far enough. I see the historical romance as central even to that work which has been most ignored by southern literary critics, that work that never seemed to fit into the reductive thesis about the literature as a whole, because it did not appear to be directly influenced by the novels of Walter Scott. As support for the thesis of the South's reliance upon the historical romance genre, most scholars have considered only the novels of Simms, Kennedy, Caruthers, George Tucker, and Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, most of who forthrightly admitted the influence of Scott upon their work. However, this thesis should become even more persuasive when the genre's permeation into the larger culture is illustrated as well in the work of women writers, slave writers, politically progressive writers, and even an apparently enigmatic figure such as Poe. My study will contend that for this diverse assortment of writers the

romance remains a haunting presence with which all southern writers had to come to terms despite the form or genre in which they attempted to write, be it sentimental novels, slave narratives, or gothic short fiction.

Further, this study will not enter into the large historical debate about the aristocratic nature of the antebellum South, which began with W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South.* Cash argued that because the upper class of the Old South was too crude, unrefined, and acquisitive, and it lacked more than a generation or two of establishment, it should not truly be considered an aristocracy. He believed that a true aristocracy could only have evolved in Tidewater Virginia, New Orleans, and the coasts of Carolina and Georgia. Eugene Genovese has vigorously challenged Cash's claims, believing that they are essentially elitist and merely definitional. He grants that southern planters "were not really genteel but acquisitive, vulgar, mean, foul-mouthed, and perhaps even unwashed," but he wonders "what aristocracy ever arose from any other kind of men?" (140). Whether the planter class of antebellum southerners deserves the description of an aristocracy will continue to be debated by Genovese and other historians of the Old South, including O'Brien, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and James Oakes. My study will depend upon only the consistent use of the aristocratic ideal that permeates the literature of the period; whether such an aristocracy actually existed or if it was only a regional myth is immaterial. The persistent reference to these ideals in literary works, while perhaps not a feasible reflection of the daily lives of many of their readers, does clearly have an ideological role and political importance in the region as a whole.

Therefore, my study does not intend to deny that for the most part southern historical romance was often tied to this very conservative ideology, that of the upper class land-owners, who possessed slaves, political clout, and, understandably, an aversion to growing democracy. These were often the men who wrote southern literature; and when not the actual authors, they were most likely the primary consumers and supporters of

southern literature. This link has been well-established by a strong tradition of scholars, both literary critics and historians. As Wyatt-Brown has argued, the majority of this literature in the antebellum period had instructional rather than aesthetic aims; its goals were "to show how slaveholders should act and what they should avoid, how readers outside the South should imagine plantation life to be and how wrong the antislavery portraits were" (112). According to Wyatt-Brown, the romances acted as both a "moral and political compass," and "their scarcely subtle themes, which exhibited strong pride in slave-state ways, were most efficiently conveyed in stereotypes and artificial plots even if the formulae make for dull modern reading" (112).

Most literary scholars agree that the form of the southern romance was indeed "highly structured," wherein "little is left to chance or to individual choice" (Tracy 37). This formal similarity in most works of the genre leads to much of the negative opinion about the genre, including Wyatt-Brown's mention of "artificial plots," Ridgely's assertion that the romances "shunned innovation" and are full of "waxwork figures" (*Nineteenth-Century* 48), Holman's criticism of "the stock hero and heroine" who are "dutifully put . . . through their paces" by the writer (*Roots* 57), and Tracy's assertion that "the heroes are virtually interchangeable with each other" (215). As was previously mentioned, many critics view this formulaic nature to be a consequence of the South's devotion to imitating what George Dekker has called the "Waverly model" of Walter Scott's historical novels. Certainly Scott's work provided influential inspiration for southern authors, but contemporary scholarship has illustrated that southern romances departed from Scott's pattern in distinct ways, making them much more conservative than any of his works.

At least since Georg Lukács's *The Historical Novel*, Scott's canon has been read as a depiction of the struggle between the forces of progress and reaction, which employs actual historical conflicts between opposing forces, such as the Jacobites and Hanoverians in *Waverly* (1814) or the Normans and Saxons in *Ivanhoe* (1819), to provide a "historical

defense of progress" (Lukács 63). Scott's central figure appears in the form of "a mediocre hero, who sides passionately with neither of the warring camps in the great crisis" and manages to participate bravely in the conflict while never becoming "fanatically partisan" in his allegiances (Lukács 36-7). Hence he is able "to bring the extremes whose struggle fills the novel, whose clash expresses artistically a great crisis in society, into contact with one another" (36). Edward Waverly is one such hero; he finds himself on the side of progress, as a soldier in the army of King George, but also as a protector against change, as he joins the Highlanders in their futile attempt to reinstate the Great Pretender to the throne. One character, observing his confused loyalties, finally tells him that he is "blown about with every wind of doctrine" (*Waverly* 353). In the historical struggle, he represents "a neutral ground . . . upon which the extreme, opposing social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another" (Lukács 36). This average man, clearly not an ideologue, allows Scott to show the conflict from both sides, to display sympathy with both the forces of progress and backward-looking tradition, and to illustrate the effects of historical conflict on the everyday lives of average people.

Like Scott, southern romancers also set their narratives amidst actual historical events, most often either among frontier conflicts with Native Americans or during Revolutionary War struggles set in Virginia or the Carolinas. As Mary Ann Wimsatt notes, the southern romancer--she specifically addresses William Gilmore Simms--is "able to impose the interpretation of his age upon the events of the past and thus to convey his sense of a providential movement in history by reference to an action whose shape is completed and whose pertinence to the present is clear" (39). In other words, rather than striving for the "historical faithfulness" that Lukács finds in "the authenticity of the historical psychology of [Scott's] characters" (60), the southern romancer exploited history, the tales of southern Cavalier victories over Native American peoples and Revolutionary Tories, to

support the belief that providence had been instrumental in the current survival and prosperity of the contemporary aristocratic class.

This use of the past appears synonymous with Marx's "latent conception" of ideology, which proposes that

> at the very moment when human beings are involved in creating their own history, in undertaking unprecedented tasks, they draw back before the risks and uncertainties of such an enterprise and invoke representations which assure them of their continuity with the past. At the very moment when continuity is threatened, they *invent* a past which restores the calm. (J. Thompson 42)

Many historians characterize the South of the early 1830s as a community that perceived its continuity as threatened by, among other events, shocking evidences of slave unrest like Nat Turner's rebellion; growing division among landowners over the issue of slavery, most visible in the Virginia legislature; and the increasing opposition in the North to the institution of slavery from an ever-more vocal abolitionist movement. Thus the historical romances, which began to appear during this time from the pens of Simms, Kennedy, and Caruthers, can be easily read as such invented pasts, reassuring readers of the nobility and durability of the South and its institutions--aristocracy, slavery, and chivalry.

Because of these apparently different purposes, Scott's "mediocre" heroes appealed little to the writers of southern romance. Notably, Simms expressed his disapproval of the Scott hero in an essay on James Fenimore Cooper:

> We have no respect for heroes placed always in subordinate positions--sent hither and thither--baffled by every breath of circumstance--creatures without will, and constantly governed by the caprices of other persons. This was the enfeebling characteristic in Scott's heroes. (*Views* 262)

He concludes that "a writer of romance cannot more greatly err than when he subjects his hero to the continual influence of events" (262). Therefore, as Tracy observes, rather than heroes as realistic men at the mercy of the tide of history, southern romancers provide their audience with "the antithesis of Scott's uncommitted average man who gets trapped in transhistorical events beyond his control" (39). Their heroes instead approximate "the medieval epic hero who molds history and founds civilization" (40).

In his well-known preface to *The Yemassee*, Simms does indeed parallel the historical romances that he writes to the great epics, claiming that the romance is "the substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic" (xxix). He argues:

> The Romance is of loftier origin than the Novel. . . . The standards of the Romance . . . are very much those of the epic. It invests individuals with an absorbing interest--it hurries them rapidly through crowding and exacting 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. It does not confine itself to what is known, or even what is probable. It grasps at the possible; and, placing a human agent in hitherto untried situations, it exercises its ingenuity in extricating him from them, while describing his feelings and his fortunes in his progress. (xxx)

While Scott defines romance as "a fictitious narrative . . . which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents," he means by this merely that the romance narrative, unlike its opposite the novel, is not concerned with "the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society" (*Essays* 65). Thus his accounts of common people caught in the actual, yet extraordinary, struggles in Scottish history qualify as romance according to his definition.

Because the romancers of the South did not see their works as realistic depictions of historical conflict, the writings of Lukács are perhaps less useful in application to their romances than Northrop Frye's formulation of the romance, which characterizes its hero as "Messianic" and as "a redeemer of society" (*Anatomy* 192). He believes that in romance "everything is focussed on a conflict between hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero" (187). Frye portrays this conflict as essential to the "general dialectic structure" of romance and to the characterization of all its participants. He explains:

> Characters tend to be either for or against the quest. If they assist it they are idealized as simply gallant or pure; if they obstruct it they are caricatured as simply villainous or cowardly. Hence every typical character in romance tends to have his moral opposite confronting him, like black and white pieces in a chess game. (195)

His archetypal approach to romance views the genre as cultural mythology that serves a larger ideological, and in fact spiritual, purpose for society.

Many scholars, including Wimsatt and Tracy, have proposed that this dialectical structure is vital to the form of southern historical romance and the conservative ideology that it advances. Perhaps the most useful of this type of study is Michael Kreyling's *Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative* (1987), which argues that an understanding of the form of southern romance is necessary in order to perceive it as more than a mere "banal and outdated imitation" of Scott (10). Influenced by the work of Marxist and material culturalist scholars such as Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, and Tzvetan Todorov, Kreyling explains that

> a cultural group accepts its narrative form, and rejects others, because that form alone embodies the group's nearest image of itself as its most truthful and accessible scripture. The group defines and recreates itself in the

> repetition of its form, confirms its understanding of the nature of things in the ritual of retelling, and advances its cause against a host of enemies and aliens in the promulgation of its story. (10)

This statement echoes Todorov's assertion that "a society chooses and codifies the acts that correspond most closely to its ideology; that is why the existence of certain genres in one society, their absence in another, are revelatory of that ideology" (19). In other words, the form of a society's literature directly corresponds to that society's essential view of itself.

For Kreyling, the figure of the hero is the backbone to the form of southern romance. He is "the linchpin of a powerful social, historical, and psychological myth" (11). He usually appears as the ideal of the southern planter class; he is "upright, pacific, healthy in mind and body" (15). Because this hero represented the ideal of a wealthy, reactionary, slave-owning class, Tracy characterizes him as "a backward-looking conservative who seeks to preserve traditional society and his place in it" (40). The hero's status as cultural ideal is highlighted through the work's dialectical structure, through the comparison between opposing forces, Frye's black and white chess pieces. Kreyling asserts that a "hero's claim to superiority is often accentuated by a foil or antagonist who radiates cultural darkness against the hero's light" (14). This antagonist or villain represents the culture's "anti-ideals that, if successful, would destroy southern civilization" (Wimsatt 38). These "anti-ideals" often include "uncontrolled passion, the recklessness of selfish individualism, and the foolish delusions of misguided 'leveling impulses'" (Tracy 37).

As he delineates the formal structure of the southern romance, Kreyling proposes that "the first 'function' . . . of the narrative is the physical juxtaposition of this pair," hero and villain (14). Once this juxtaposition is adequately presented, "the first duty of the hero, then, is to prevail against his spiritual and cultural anti-type in a contest of representations, a contest not without veiled animosities and far-reaching connotations. Every heroic

gesture expresses the culture's claim to define power and reality" (15). However, unlike Scott's romances in which the opposing forces are united in the finale, the hero must "destroy or expel the enem[y]" instead of reaching "reconciliation and compromise with him" (Wimsatt 38). The hero's final victory over the villain then represents a larger cultural victory, wherein the society's ideals have withstood external attack.

However, Kreyling also argues that in southern romance the hero's "marital interest . . . becomes as important as the martial interest" (25). As significant, if not more so, as the hero's vanquishing the villain is his finding and marrying "the woman ideally suited to become the mother of heroic culture" (18). In contrast to Scott's love stories, wherein the heroes "are moderate spokesmen for one side at the historical level, while their female counterparts usually are equally moderate spokeswomen for the other side" (Wimsatt 37), and wherein their union represents the resolution of the conflict between the opposing forces, the lovers in southern historical romance usually represent a consolidated ideology. Thus, the ideal wife for the southern hero "is as close to the hero's type and kinship group as possible, . . . often taken from the circle of first cousins" (Kreyling, *Figures* 19). Like her male counterpart, she represents the ideals of southern aristocratic society and her marriage to the hero "guarantees the transmission of the hero's identity to a future generation and symbolizes the continuity of the whole culture over time" (19). By defeating the villain, who also often courts or brazenly attempts to seduce the heroine, and making her his wife, the hero ensures cultural continuity. And, therefore, as Wimsatt argues, "the southern civilization represented by the lovers has . . . overcome the obstacles confronting it" (39-40).

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye claims that "in every age the ruling social or intellectual class tends to project its ideals in some form of romance, where the virtuous heroes and beautiful heroines represent their ideals and the villains the threats to their

ascendancy" (186).[7] Dekker also makes this assertion as he explains that "chivalric romance was an aristocratic ideal or fantasy picture of the refinement of but one social class" (60). The southern romances, as delineated by scholars like Kreyling, Wimsatt, Ridgely, and Tracy, can be closely tied through their form to the conservative ideology of the southern "ruling social or intellectual class" who "sought to celebrate and defend their section and its institutions, namely slavery" (Tracy 36).[8] As Ridgely has asserted, the romancers employed this "full-scale revivification of southern history" to develop "a gratifying thesis: a noble past prefigured a glorious future" (*Nineteenth-Century* 32). In other words, they developed "a fiction which would reorder the past in the service of the present" (33). Their romance versions of southern history assured readers that their cultural ideals would and indeed should continue long into the future. Further, the use of stereotypes, especially of women and slaves, reassured the planter class that those whom the aristocrats oppressed were willingly submissive.

Most importantly, the ideology of the southern romances "pitted itself against 'progress'" (Tracy 41). This is another major departure from the romances of Scott, whose central thesis was that societies evolved, "that change is inevitable," and that "patriarchal, pre-industrial capitalist aristocratic culture" would be extinguished by "democratic, competitive, individualistic capitalism" (Tracy 38). Scott's heroes always eventually "choose the side of the 'progressive' capitalist forces" (Tracy 39). Southern romances are exactly the opposite in their resolution to this conflict; the forces of progress

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[7] As Marx claims in *The German Ideology*, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it" (64). The romance becomes a tool of such class domination, helping to make the ideas of the ruling class the ideas of the culture at large.

[8] It should be noted that these studies of the formal characteristics of southern romance are based upon the works of only a few writers. Kreyling addresses George Tucker, Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, William Caruthers, and Simms; Wimsatt's study focuses only on Simms; Ridgely studies William Wirt, the Tuckers, John Pendleton Kennedy, Caruthers, and Simms; and Tracy adds only James Heath to the previous lists.

are always repelled as tradition triumphs. Nowhere is this more evident than in Kreyling's explication of the marriage plot in these romances, specifically the necessity that the hero and heroine be close relatives: "By securing this match, the hero ensures cultural uniformity and reinforces the possibility of perfect repetition over time. Crossbreeding introduces change. Change is the motif of history. Southern heroic narrative . . . aims ultimately at the abolition of history" (19).

Central to many studies of ideology is the concept of legitimation, the idea that the function of all ideology and tools of ideology "tends finally to legitimate a system of authority" (Ricouer 17). John Thompson claims that in order for systems of domination to be established and sustained, they must be "represented as legitimate, that is, as just and worthy of support" (61). One technique crucial to this process, and perhaps most applicable to southern romance, is "the strategy of narrativization," the process in which "claims are embedded in stories which recount the past and treat the present as part of a timeless and cherished tradition" (61). He claims that these "traditions are often *invented* in order to create a sense of belonging to a community and to a history which transcends the experience of conflict, difference, and division" (61-2). He argues further that narratives are employed "both by official chroniclers and by individuals in the course of their everyday lives, which serve to justify the exercise of power by those who possess it and which serve to reconcile others to the fact that they do not" (62). According to the work of most critics, southern romances are such narratives, created and retold to legitimate the hierarchical nature of southern planter society.

Scholars have blamed this intimate connection between the form of historical romance and conservative pro-slavery ideology for, what many consider to be, the "sub-literary" quality of much of this work. Tracy claims to understand "why this literature is forgotten" (1) and hesitates even to call the work of the historical romancers literature because it does not do "justice to the complexity of the human spirit" (5). Attempting to

explain this modern reaction to the body of work, Wyatt-Brown explains that the literature of the antebellum south was "necessarily unadventurous" because "there was no cultural or social basis upon which modern concepts of literature could rest" (115). Authors felt pressure "to follow the old formulae for plot, style, and characterization" because readers "did not really wish to understand psychological tensions, ironies, and thick social complications" (115). Wyatt-Brown cannot imagine an antebellum southern author who would have had "the nerve or intuition for challenging communal tradition, making ruthless use of neighbors, relatives and well-known local incidents as the soil from which to grow individualized characters and situations" (115). Thus we are left with a merely "usable fiction" which "responded to a burgeoning political and social necessity" in its own time (Ridgely, *Nineteenth-Century* 2), but one that is "generally arduous going for the modern reader" (33).

While the work of these critics has more than sufficiently illustrated that the romances of the antebellum south "performed a real social function" (Ridgely 33) and has made a strong case that the form and conventions of the genre of historical romance were essentially tied to aristocratic ideology, a major oversight in all of these studies is that none of them takes this connection the logical step further. They do not interrogate the significance of writers who depart from or experiment with these conventions. Perhaps this is a symptom of the reductive view of antebellum literature, for to admit deviance from the conventions would be to admit that the simplistic view of antebellum literature is untrue or at least willfully incomplete. Rather than deny these deviations or ignore their existence, they should be recorded and investigated, especially to understand their relation to the dominant ideology for, as Thomas Beebee argues, "if genre is a form of ideology, then the struggle against or the deviations from genre are ideological struggles" (19).

Furthermore, Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* proposes that this recognition of deviation is the only substantial value of traditional genre criticism as

embodied by Frye and Vladmir Propp; while such criticism strives to describe the formal characteristics of certain genres, it only becomes "productive at the moment when the narrative text in one way or another *deviates* from its basic schema" (126). That is, the work of such genre criticism can be used to "register a given text's specific deviations from [the formal conventions of its genre], and thereby to raise the more dialectical and historical issue of this determinate formal difference" (126). Not surprisingly, Jameson calls for such deviations to be historicized in order to discover both the reason that they occur at specific moments in history and their social significance for writer and reader. He urges scholars to realize that "deviation could be understood as meaningful symbolic act" (127).

My study grows out of these ideas of Beebee and Jameson and applies them to the literature of the antebellum South in an exploration of the "struggles against or deviations from genre" in the work of five writers. Finding, as Jameson does, that deviance from genre is more significant than conformity to genre conventions and believing, as Beebee does, that deviations from genres that are so closely tied to dominant ideologies clearly must offer challenge to such ideologies, I propose to illustrate deviations from the genres of historical romance and plantation novel among this group and to explore the possible ideological significance of these deviations. Whether it be James Heath's use of historical romance to support progressive politics, Frederick Douglass's attempt to use the romance to relate a slave's experience, Edgar Allan Poe's complete rejection of the romance, John Pendleton Kennedy's struggle to suppress the romance genre within his narrative and his subsequent creation of the plantation novel, or E. D. E. N. Southworth's blatant appropriation of the conventions of the plantation novel for her abolitionist agenda, when southern authors strayed from or played with these established genres, they became a threat to the status quo, the hierarchy which propagated the slave and class system in the region. Through the exploration of these writers' work, I hope to illustrate that there was indeed a subversive South before the Civil War. In the process, I also hope to respond, in small

part, to Hugh Holman's call for southern literary scholars to see the "multi-Souths" rather than continue to perpetuate the reductive views advanced so forcefully by past scholars.

Chapter I

"The World Must Be Turning Upside Down": The Subversion of Southern Romance in James Heath's *Edge-Hill*

James Ewell Heath of Richmond, Virginia, is one of the forgotten writers of the antebellum South. If remembered at all, he is remembered, as in Hubbell's *The South in American Literature* and Ridgely's *Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature*, for his service as the first editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* and as a frequent advisor to Edgar Allan Poe during his editorship of the same publication.[1] More often, including in *The History of Southern Literature*, he is not cited even for this important service to southern literature and almost never is he mentioned in his role as historical romancer, the author of a two-volume Revolutionary War romance, *Edge-Hill; or the Family of the Fitzroyals* (1828). Memory of this work has been kept alive by three scholars, Richard Beale Davis who recovered the novel in his attempt to find "The 'Virginia Novel' before *Swallow Barn*"; Ritchie Watson who considered the novel briefly in his *The Cavalier in Virginia Fiction*; and Susan Tracy who recently included it in her study of southern historical romances, *In the Master's Eye*.

Like most men of letters in the antebellum South, Heath found time for literary work while maintaining a busy professional and public life, which included a thirty-year stint as Virginia's state auditor (1819-1849). He was also a founding member, recording secretary, and librarian for the Virginia Historical Society. Because he had already gained a local reputation as a literary man by publishing an early volume of poetry and the novel *Edge-Hill*, Thomas W. White, the creator of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, asked Heath to assist him in editing the periodical in 1834. Heath served in this capacity for several

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[1] For an account of Heath's tenure as editor of *Southern Literary Messenger*, see B. B. Minor, David Jackson, and Robert Jacobs.

months, writing much of the editorial material, including "Southern Literature," the first issue's opening editorial, a call for the development of a regional literature, wherein he asked whether southerners are "to be doomed forever to a kind of vassalage to our northern neighbors--a dependence for our literary food upon our brethren, whose superiority in all the great points of character,--in valor--eloquence and patriotism, we are no wise disposed to admit?" (1). Eventually professional responsibilities forced Heath to give up his unpaid work for White, but he remained involved with the journal and contributed frequently beyond his tenure as editor. Heath's last known literary effort was the three-act comedy *Whigs and Democrats, or Love of No Politics* (1839), which apparently cost him his political office when he was ousted in retaliation by Democrats in 1849. In his time, Poe held Heath in high regard, calling him "almost the only person of any literary distinction residing in the chief city of the Old Dominion" (*Complete Works*, Vol. 15, 241).

Though all of Heath's contributions to southern literature deserve further attention, a reconsideration of *Edge-Hill* is especially appropriate in this study. It is one of the earliest attempts to use Scott's and Cooper's formulas to portray events in southern history and precedes the more famous efforts by William Gilmore Simms, John Pendleton Kennedy, and William Caruthers. Susan Tracy argues that the novel's "significance lies neither in its form nor in its art, but in its liberal attitudes toward gender, race, and class relations" (65). More significant, I believe, is that these liberal attitudes are expressed in the very form that they are, the form of southern romance. This fact alone challenges much of the established view about romance in the antebellum South, as presented in my introduction, and if Heath's work is to be incorporated into further study of antebellum southern romance, it will force literary scholars to revise previous generalizations made about the use of historical romance in the South. In fact, *Edge-Hill* contradicts the arguments that the major scholars of southern literature have persistently made about the genre's specific function in antebellum southern literature and society.

In *Edge-Hill*, one of the novel's characters, when confronted with frustrated expectations and a social structure in upheaval, proclaims that "the world must be turning upside down" (II, 8). In many ways, her frustration, confusion, and disorientation parallel the response to the novel by both antebellum readers and subsequent scholars, for, indeed, *Edge-Hill* turns many notions about the southern romance upside down. When we understand genres to be, as Fredric Jameson proposes, "essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (106), we can perhaps approach an understanding of the neglect of *Edge-Hill* both at the time of its publication and in subsequent literary histories of the antebellum South.[2] While little is known about the initial reception of *Edge-Hill* in Richmond or elsewhere, by the mid-1830s it was clearly in disfavor, one critic labeling the novel "a ricketty bantling," which "if still recollected, is remembered only as an abortion" (qtd. C. Davis 191).[3] Subsequent readers and literary histories seem to concur with this diagnosis, giving Heath's work only minimal scholarly attention ever since.

The employment of romance in the novel appears to threaten the "institution" or "contract" represented by the genre and to violate an implicit agreement between writer and readers. If indeed readers of southern historical romance come to every example of that genre with certain expectations, they would understandably be disappointed and probably

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[2] Poe offers the only known explanation of the failure of Heath's book. He claims that it is "a well-written novel, which owing to the circumstances of its publication, did not meet with the reception it deserved" (*Complete Works*, Vol. 15, 241). Most likely Poe refers to the fact that Heath's novel was published by Richmond publisher T. W. White. Because of the lack of resources that southern publishers had to distribute and market their product, Hubbell explains, "Southern writers learned from sad experience that if their books were to be widely circulated and reviewed, they must be published at the North" (364). Notably, all of the major romancers published their works with New York, Boston, or Philadelphia publishers.

[3] This lack of information about immediate reception is, of course, another symptom of the novel's general neglect. However, it is known that the novel was apparently received well enough to call for two separate theatrical adaptations in Richmond theaters, one in 1829 and another in 1831. The advertisement for the first claims that the "Melodrama" *Edge-Hill* is "taken from the celebrated novel of the same title" (Shockley 111).

even reject a genre piece that failed to meet those expectations. Certainly, there is no question that *Edge-Hill*'s attempts to turn the genre upside down with formal deviations from characteristics that are standard in the majority of historical romances produced in the South may have caused an indifferent or even a hostile reaction to the work. These include the alliance of the hero with the forces of progress rather than tradition, the alteration of the marriage plot so that the chosen mate for the hero is not within his class or kinship group, and the surprisingly bold depiction of a slave hero, all in service to an interrogation of the legitimacy of the aristocratic hierarchy, the larger project of not just turning the genre upside down but the entire social structure of the antebellum South as well.

Essentially, however, *Edge-Hill* remains typical of the romances of the late 1820s and 30s, the majority of which, Ridgely argues, were unlikely to "attempt startling innovations either in plot or method of narration" (*Kennedy* 71). He explains that even at this early date, "the basic structure of the historical romance had already become as stylized as the popular Western is today" (71):

> It would, for example, place fictional characters on the fringe of a stirring action in the nation's annals; it would focus on one upper-class hero and heroine whose foreordained union would be delayed by parental interference, forced separation, or any other obstacle which the novelist could think up; it would provide for the hero a lower-class retainer who would ride with him on his adventures and help to engineer his escapes from frequent captivities. (71-2)

And *Edge-Hill* does indeed follow this simple formula, as it places the aristocratic Fitzroyal family and their circle of acquaintances amidst the 1781 Revolutionary battles fought in Virginia, ending with Cornwallis's surrender to Washington at Yorktown. The peaceful existence of the characters is upset by the struggles between Loyalists and Rebels, as important historical figures including Benedict Arnold, Lafayette, and Cornwallis find

themselves at or near the Fitzroyal estate, Edge-Hill. The family patriarch, Launcelot, is a staunch Tory and aristocrat, who cherishes his Cavalier heritage and his privileged position in society. His only son, Charles, earns his ire when he declares himself in favor of American independence and eager to fight to end the tyranny of George III in the colonies. The novel follows both the larger military conflict as well as the family conflict which evolves between father and son, who is disowned not only for his political ideology but also for his declared love for Ruth Elmore, an orphan of obscure origins and ward of the Fitzroyal family.

Though written several years before the major southern romances of the 1830s, Heath's book anticipates in many ways the work of those more famous romancers, Simms, Kennedy, and Caruthers. Like those writers, Heath is eager for the development of a literature that treats southern scenes and is written by southern authors. Even before becoming the editorial voice of the *Messenger* in 1834, Heath called for such a literature in his preface to *Edge-Hill*, where he hoped that his work might "lead others far better qualified, to essay their strength in this popular and alluring department of literature, hitherto so little cultivated south of the Potomac" (iii). While he acknowledges that southerners may "abound in able statesmen, and eloquent speakers," he laments that "in works of fancy we have few writers who have transcended the limits of a fugitive essay, or an humble duodecimo" (iii). He implicitly calls for a southern novel, specifically a southern historical romance, despite "the overshadowing names of competitors like Scott and Cooper" which had made many hesitant to attempt to write southern work following their models (iv).

Like Scott, Cooper, and the southern romancers, Heath strongly believed that writers should turn to the people and history of their own region as subject matter. As editor of the *Messenger*, he urged contributors to "confine their efforts to native subjects

. . . and to select their themes from the copious materials which every where abound in our own magnificent country" ("Editorial" 64). Robert Jacobs states that Heath's editorial policy strove for a "'domestic literature' . . . which treated native materials truthfully or at least with verisimilitude . . . for the purpose of preserving the best in native manners and morals" ("Campaign" 74-5). Behind this insistence upon native materials, Jacobs finds the intention to "put Virginia's best foot forward . . . [and] to let the nation know that in spite of her seeming intellectual torpor, Virginia's children preserved the best of the old traditions" ("Campaign" 74). Jacobs credits Heath's dedication to regional subjects as being "instrumental in inspiring localist fiction, for tales set in Virginia or West Virginia appeared with fair frequency throughout the thirty-year history of the magazine" ("Campaign" 74).

One of the native subjects that would become very popular with antebellum southern writers was the South's participation in the brave struggle against British forces during the American Revolution. Many of the romancers, including Simms, Kennedy, and John Esten Cooke, chose to recount the brave exploits of Virginians and Carolinians in these conflicts, perhaps, as Susan Tracy argues, in order to "explain how planter-class men leading all other classes of Southern white men against the tyranny of British imperialism have earned the right to govern Southern society in peacetime" (40). More likely, they intended to celebrate southerners' involvement in the nationalist struggle, "defending the South's role in the Revolutionary War" against "Northern historians [who] have failed to give due credit to the South in producing the final victory" (C. Watson 81). Heath's *Edge-Hill* employs the Revolution in the South, perhaps for the reasons described above, but more probably he uses the social conflict apparent in the Revolution along the lines of Sir Walter Scott's use of such conflicts in his Waverly novels.

According to David Fishelov, one means through which innovation, and subsequently subversion, occurs within generic "institutions" is as a product of

"traditionalist writers who claim to be more faithful to the generic rules" (88). In almost every way that Heath's work can be said to be innovative or subversive, it is because he appears to be a purist intent upon returning to the original model for historical romance, Scott. Unlike many of his fellow southern and even non-southern romancers, Heath seems devoted to following Scott in his aspiration to maintain historical accuracy in his romances.[4] He, too, peoples his romance with actual historical figures and battles, but admits his limitations as historian, apologizing in his preface "for introducing certain well known real personages into his story, without sufficient assurance that his sketches are historically accurate" (iii-iv). He does guarantee his readers that "with respect to many of the circumstances narrated, the sources of historical truth, and private tradition, have both been consulted, and the events themselves are, it is believed, disposed in chronological order" (iv). This authorial guarantee later became standard for writers of southern historical fiction, as authors "normally took great pains to authenticate the facts upon which the tales were based, either citing the appropriate historical documents or vouching for the 'truth' of the tales as a record of some kind of personal experience" (Jacobs, "Campaign" 74).

Heath's depictions of his historical personages, including Arnold, Lafayette, Cornwallis, and Tarleton, also appear to be modeled very much along the lines of Scott's use of such figures. Though clearly he does not match what Lukács calls Scott's "incomparable ability to recreate the great figures of history" (38), Heath does follow his model's practice of keeping the actual historical figures on the sidelines of the action of the novel. Like Scott, he creates fictional characters, representatives of the common people involved in the historical moment, to play the central roles in his romance because he seems

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[4] Of course, some of Heath's fellow southern romancers also strove for such historical accuracy. Certainly, none could compare to Simms, who also served as South Carolina's historian; he is the only one of the southern romancers who approaches Scott in his copious footnotes, citations, and historical background, provided to vouch for the accuracy of his historical matter. See Holman's essays on Simms in *The Roots of Southern Writing*.

to agree with Scott that "a total historical picture depends upon a rich and graded interaction between different levels of response to any major disturbance" (Lukács 44). Because of the emphasis on the average people, the "great historical figure" is left on the margins for most of the narrative, for "his place in the action is such that he can only act and express himself in situations of historical importance" (45). Despite this marginalized role, the historical figure is "able to live himself out to the full as a human being" in Scott's fiction, "to display freely all his splendid and petty human qualities" (45).

One flaw in Heath's depictions of these figures is that he succumbs to the hero-worship that Scott is almost always able to avoid. Lukács argues that Scott "does not stylize these characters, nor place them upon a Romantic pedestal," but, instead, "he portrays them as human beings with virtues and weaknesses, good and bad qualities" (45). Heath's portrayal of Lafayette clearly must be considered Romantic hero-worship. Upon first being introduced into the presence of Lafayette as he joins the republican forces, Charles Fitzroyal pays homage to "that extraordinary man who had already gathered laurels in the fields of fame, and who now came clothed with the confidence of the illustrious Washington, to roll back the tide of war and rapine which menaced the ancient dominion" (I, 184). Lafayette is described as

> a young gentleman of great rank and riches, relinquishing the luxury of the most polished court in Europe--the delights of connubial love--the charms and allurements of home and country,--to mingle in the dubious strife and imminent peril of foreign war;--devoting his person, talents,--his wealth,--his all,--to the cause of a feeble nation struggling against a proud and arrogant foe. (I, 184)

We are told that Charles is "fired with the chivalrous example" and "struck with amazement that virtue like his, which seemed almost super-human, should rise up . . . to prove that Heaven itself was on the side of freedom" (I, 184). Unlike Scott's historical figures,

Heath's Lafayette is portrayed as a nearly superhuman saint, and nothing approaching a weakness or character flaw is ever brought to the reader's attention.

If any of Heath's depictions of historical figures can be said to approximate Scott's, perhaps it is his depiction of the traitorous Benedict Arnold. Although Arnold is a negative figure in *Edge-Hill*, Heath does not depict him without sympathy. For instance, upon the arrival of the British forces at the Fitzroyal estate, Arnold is described as being "wrapped in the impervious gloom of his own meditations" and appearing "like a fallen spirit, brooding over the horrid retrospect of the past, and shrinking from the enjoyment of lighter and happier souls, as uncongenial with his nature" (I, 108). He is depicted as a man tortured by the guilt of his betrayal and having gained no respect from the British with whom he has allied himself, for "they secretly cherished an unconquerable disgust" for him (I, 110). While not comparable to Scott's complex depictions of such figures as Richard the Lionhearted, Elizabeth, Mary Stuart, and Cromwell, Heath's historical figures do maintain the marginal yet significant position that they hold in the Waverly novels. And *Edge-Hill*'s depiction of Arnold is a more complicated portrait of a historical figure than its portrayal of the French hero of the Revolution.

Heath's firm commitment to these two principles of historical fiction, accuracy and the marginalization of historical figures, and his belief that this standard should be followed by all who write romances is illustrated in his harsh review of William Caruthers's *The Cavaliers of Virginia* (1835). Although he wants to review the book positively because the author is a Virginian who makes use of Bacon's Rebellion, "one of the most interesting periods in our early colonial history" (385), he ultimately cannot praise Caruthers's effort because "the author has evidently failed to make himself acquainted with the history of the age and character of the incidents which he has chosen as the groundwork of his story" (385). Besides making errors in "his arrangement of historical events," Caruthers has made what Heath considers to be a crucial mistake in dealing with history in fiction--the use

of actual historical figures as the central hero and villain of his romance rather than as peripheral participants who enter the action only during significant moments (385). Subsequently, Heath finds Caruthers's Nathaniel Bacon to be "a poor and feeble likeness of the original," portrayed "as a kind of half frantic, inconsiderate stripling--something of a dandy--but more of a wild and reckless lover, whose thoughts were principally occupied by his 'ladye love,'--and but slightly, if at all, by the wrongs of his suffering country" (385). Likewise, Caruthers's depiction of Jamestown governor Sir William Berkeley "is the merest caricature of that brave, accomplished, but despotic vicegerent of royal power" (385). Heath argues that Berkeley, while "certainly a tyrant, was not the vulgar insensate wretch which our author has made him" and notes that the governor surely had more pressing concerns "than to be employed upon petty schemes of matrimonial alliance" (385). Caruthers's use of history only in service of literature thus offended Heath, who concludes that *Cavaliers* is "unworthy of the subject it was intended to illustrate" (385). He also suggests that many of the defects of the work could easily have been avoided if Caruthers "had looked a little into our early writers" (385).[5]

Within a month of the appearance of Heath's review in the *Messenger*, Caruthers published a defensive response to Heath's scathing evaluation of *Cavaliers* that reveals an essential misunderstanding of Heath's points. Rather than apprehending Heath's disapproval of the unnecessary centrality he gave to the figures of Bacon and Berkeley, he only understands Heath's review to suggest "a wholly impractical concept of what a romantic hero should be" (qtd. C. Davis 190). Caruthers complains:

> Did any body ever hear of such criticism as this? Was there ever a hero of Romance, from Waverly down to -----, who was not employed upon petty schemes of matrimonial alliance? How the mischief would he construct a

[5] See Taylor 211-7 for a good discussion of the vast differences between Caruthers's depiction of Bacon's Rebellion and the historical record. For instance, the actual Bacon was "in fact married," rather than "single and eligible," and instead of "liv[ing] happily ever after," he died within a year after the rebellion (212).

> novel without it? A writer who could suggest such an idea, is not only incapable of giving a judicious opinion upon a work of fiction, but he is ignorant of the very first principles upon which a plot is constructed, so as to sustain the interest of the reader. (qtd. in C. Davis 190)

Caruthers believes that Heath is suggesting that romance heroes should act differently than his Bacon does. Instead, as will be shown upon closer examination of *Edge-Hill*, Heath has no objection to a romance hero acting in the above-stated fashion; his problem is with Bacon, an actual historical figure, functioning as that hero. He believes that Bacon should be depicted in a manner which is more faithful to historical record rather than being transformed into a typical romantic hero whose primary concern is the pursuit of his beloved, when a fictional romance hero could easily have been created both to participate in the Rebellion with Bacon and to have carried out the necessary love plot.[6] Curtis Carroll Davis, Caruthers's biographer and most prominent critic, also misunderstood Heath's assertion about the disappointing use of historical personages as key figures, for even though he acknowledges that Heath's remarks are "easily the best commentary" on Caruthers's novel and that "its criticisms are on the whole accurate," he claims that the review "reveals a warped appraisal of Caruthers's handling of Bacon's character" (186). Heath's appraisal, in short, positions himself as a closer adherent to the model of Scott than Caruthers and the other major romancers would prove to be.

The most significant way in which Heath does present himself as a traditionalist more faithful to the generic conventions of romance than these other writers is his return to the central theme of the Waverly novels and "Scott's main tendency in all his novels . . . to represent and defend progress" (Lukács 53). In fact, the Revolutionary struggle depicted

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[6] It should also be noted that Caruthers misread Heath's review, for it was not Bacon whom Heath suggested should not be "employed upon petty schemes of matrimonial alliance" (though he would surely have agreed with this suggestion as well) but Governor Berkeley, whom he claimed would have more significant concerns than the prevention of his beautiful niece Virginia, whom Caruthers created, from marrying the young hero.

in *Edge-Hill* can easily be seen in the same terms with which Scott's *Waverly* is often described. For example, Edgar Dryden reads the conflict at the center of *Waverly* as essentially the struggle between an obsolete aristocratic view of the world and a new democratic approach to society. In his reading, figures such as Waverly's uncle Sir Everard, the Baron of Bradwardine, and Highlander leader Fergus Mac-Ivor are cast as backward-looking, patriarchal, and "single-mindedly devoted to the restoration of the Stuart line to the throne of England" (11). They are representative of "attitudes of an earlier generation" that "have outlived their times" and that "appear now as an anacronistic residue in the new order of things" (11). On the other hand, those figures aligned with the House of Hanover, including Colonel Talbot and, finally, even the novel's hero, are presented as alternatives to "worn-out hereditary authority" because they suggest "lines of authority and bonds of relationship based on principles other than that of direct genealogical descent" (12). The military struggle in *Waverly* becomes a vehicle for expressing a larger shift in society as a whole.

Heath's depiction of both the military conflict and the family conflict at Edge-Hill makes a quite similar argument, and his adherence to Scott's major theme becomes the source of its subversiveness. The central defender of aristocratic tradition is family patriarch Launcelot Fitzroyal, who "venerated every thing English" (I, 23) and who had "a childish prepossession for every thing ancient, and a lively aversion from all rash innovations and revolutionary projects" (I, 45). He cherishes his family heritage, especially his descent from Sir Rupert Fitzroyal, "a loyal cavalier and gentleman of wealth and family" (I, 7), who was wounded fighting for Charles II in the 1642 Battle of Edge-Hill, in remembrance of which the estate was named. Fitzroyal proudly admires "these worthies of the olden time, . . . those true cavaliers, who were firm supporters of Church and State against the levelling assaults of roundheads and puritans" (I, 48). In turn, the colonial uprising against King George III presents a threat to Fitzroyal's aristocratic world

view as he must now worry about his family's status and reputation under a democratic government. In order to reaffirm his position in society, he marries Widow Dashwood, "whose wealth, good family, and great deserts, will reflect no dishonour on our own house" (I, 51). Fitzroyal's previous wife, much more democratic and noble in spirit than he, has died less than a year before, and the marriage that begins the novel secures his uncertain aristocratic station. However, he is more concerned with the future of the Fitzroyal family, and he plans to form a "double alliance" with the Dashwoods by having his son Charles marry Widow Dashwood's daughter Cornelia, who, Fitzroyal argues, "is every thing which [Charles] could expect or desire in a wife," for "she has a clear fortune of ten thousand pounds besides future expectations" (I, 51).

The novel's hero, Charles Fitzroyal, has other plans, however, and a much different character from that of his father. He is, in fact, "the very reverse of his father, . . . uniformly kind and affable in his manners,--a staunch republican in principle," and possessing an "ardent love of liberty" (I, 23-4). Because he aligns himself with the Colonial army and claims to "owe no allegiance to King George the Third" (I, 37), his family and friends find him to be, in the words of the Scottish tutor Kilwarden, "hearkening to this syren lullaby o' independence" with little "concern for [his] ancient an' loyal house" (I, 36). Because Charles "has been treasuring up the wild theories of democracy" (I, 42) and "drinking at the fountain o' this wicked rebellion" (I, 48), his father commits to "disinherit him on the spot" (I, 49) and to dismiss him as "a low, grovelling leveller" if he enlists with the Colonial forces and refuses the intended match with Cornelia (I, 80).

Although southern romances of the Revolution, including Kennedy's *Horse-Shoe Robinson* and Simms's *The Forayers* and *Eutaw*, frequently portrayed the dispute between Tory fathers and Patriot children, with the exception of *Edge-Hill*, the novels never used this situation to challenge aristocratic values because the heroes, despite being a threat to

monarchical rule, remained ideal representatives of the southern aristocracy.[7] Indeed, in this parent-child dispute, Charles is linked with the "anti-ideals" that Susan Tracy claims were usually embodied in the villains who threaten the aristocracy in typical southern romance. Instead of expressing the "self-sacrifice to family obligations" that romance heroes often reveal, Charles can be more easily seen as representing Tracy's characteristic villain as he values passion over family loyalty, he places individual desire over aristocratic necessity, and he strongly believes in those "foolish delusions of misguided 'levelling impulses'" that were central to the republican thought of the revolution (37).

It is in this connection of the hero to the threats to the aristocracy, in his embodiment of these anti-ideals of southern society, that *Edge-Hill* becomes so unusual as a specimen of antebellum southern fiction. The hero and the novel as a whole are positioned against cherished concepts of patriarchy, family tradition, and hierarchical social structure. Perhaps there is no better illustration of this than in the creation of the Wilton family, who serve as an anti-aristocratic contrast to the Fitzroyals. Major Wilton, Launcelot Fitzroyal's opposite and brother-in-law, displays a value system sharply different from that of Charles's father. Despite his family name and position, the Major "had too much good sense to rate his own qualities by the lustre of his pedigree" (II, 17). He denies that there is any value that comes from breeding or ancestry:

> Very early in life [he] adopted the republican maxim, that as a man's ancestors ought not by their crimes or follies to obscure his own merit, so neither ought their virtues or high standing to confer distinctions to which he is not intrinsically entitled. . . . The whole system, which built up and preserved family aristocracies among mankind, . . . he had long considered a fraud on human rights. . . . No illustrious line of kindred in his opinion,

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[7] See Tracy 183 for a discussion of the depiction of the "generation gap" dividing planter families on the issue of the Revolution in southern historical romance.

> ever existed, which could not be traced to some ancient and simple origin, undistinguished from the common mass;--and there was no individual of the species, however humble, who might not become the progenitor of heroes and sages yet unborn. (II, 17-8)

This assertion about the unlimited possibilities of any individual, especially as it is applied to non-aristocratic characters and even slaves, challenges much of the established social system in the South. This reading parallels what Dryden found in Scott's *Waverly*. Indeed, like Scott's progressive characters, the novel finally argues for a system of meritocracy to replace the aristocratic ideals so revered in the region's culture despite their seeming contradiction to the basic Jeffersonian principles of the American Revolution.

Charles's denunciation of aristocracy and his advocacy of the meritocracy is apparent not only in his political allegiances and ideas but also in his choice of a desired mate. The marriage plot of *Edge-Hill* allows Heath the opportunity to reveal the anti-aristocratic argument of the novel as a whole. Charles loves and is determined to marry Ruth Elmore, the daughter of "indigent emigrants from New-England, and tenants on the Edge-Hill estate" who died when she was an infant and bequeathed her to the protection of Mrs. Fitzroyal (I, 10). Fitzroyal views his son's decision as an attack upon his family and position and cannot believe that his son would consider "a degrading connexion with a pennyless orphan, of low and plebian birth." His "pride of aristocracy, and the spirit of avarice, were instantly alarmed" at the suggestion of "the degradation of an ancient and honourable family" (I, 79). He believes that Charles's refusal to marry Cornelia Dashwood by giving "a direct preference to the portionless orphan, the offspring of vulgar parentage, was a most unpardonable indignity" and a "stain upon [his] family" (I, 88-9). As Cornelia says to Ruth in the second volume of the novel, "The world must be turning

upside down when things like you presume to think themselves on a footing with ladies of rank and fortune" (II, 8).[8]

Thus Charles's choice between these two women has wider implications, especially as it is superimposed upon the backdrop of the conclusion of the American Revolution. If he consents to marry Cornelia, he will help to perpetuate the traditional aristocratic, classist society that many of the rebels see as an extension of British rule; if he endeavors to marry Ruth, he will participate in the dismantling of that society. But the implications of his choice had an even clearer resonance for Heath's contemporary readers and could be read as a criticism of southern society in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, a marriage between two individuals of such different classes would be the very opposite of what most readers would have expected to find in both their everyday experience and the southern romances which served to represent their society's ideals, even while cloaked in the haze of the distant past. Most antebellum readers, Susan Tracy explains, considered "marriage in a patriarchal and aristocratic society" as "a family and social affair and not simply a compact between individuals. Families are paired with each other to preserve wealth and power" (181). The matrimonial plans of the elder Fitzroyal for both himself and his son reveal this drive to make a beneficial alliance with another aristocratic clan. The novel illustrates well that marriages, at least among the upper class, are more often the result of political motivation rather than affection between individuals, as is illustrated when Widow Dashwood comments to Kilwarden that her new husband is "a great match maker" after hearing his plans for Charles and Cornelia, and the Scot's only response is that "he's a politic mon, madam" (I, 77).

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[8] Perhaps the closest that any of the major romancers comes to portraying a marriage between members of such different classes is Simms's depiction of the love between Willie Sinclair and Bertha Travis in *The Forayers* and *Eutaw*. However, though Sinclair's father opposes their union, his opposition is based upon Bertha's father's belonging to the new planter class that possesses money, property, and slaves but lacks a long-established family name.

This connection between marriage and politics is at the center of the ideology of southern romance. And just as in other southern romances, "the marital interest" is indeed "as important as the martial interest" in *Edge-Hill* (Kreyling, *Figures* 25). Of course, the ideology behind the marriage plot becomes quite different under Heath's pen. In the typical conservative southern romance,

> marriage to the hero's cognate is as essential to the narrative structure as the conquest of alien forces, for it means cultural survival for those devoted to the ideal of the perfect civilization. Unless the hero makes a proper marriage, the scheme to which he gives coherence will disintegrate, succumbing to the disorderly nature of history. . . . The nearer the hero is to his mate in type and blood, the likelier a successful denial of time. (Kreyling 24)

In accordance with this ideology, a proper marriage for Charles would certainly be to Cornelia, his new step-sister, for this would allow for the "cultural survival" of the "ideal of the perfect civilization," aristocratic society. However, Heath's romance argues for the cultural survival of not class but character by advocating the attachment of Charles to the orphaned Ruth. Heath's vision of perpetuating a perfect civilization through a meritocracy involves preserving values and character traits that benefit and strengthen a culture, rather than blindly striving to preserve a family name and tradition without regard to the character of those who carry it.

Throughout the novel, Ruth's character is evoked as the main reason for Charles's love and intentions of marriage. As an advocate of meritocracy, he clearly sees her values as a more vital necessity than the Dashwood name, neighboring estate, and fortune. In one scene, Cornelia explains that she pities Ruth for being "pennyless" and "of mean extraction" (I, 66). Charles's indignant response is that "the spotless purity of Ruth Elmore would always cast in the shade such baubles as birth and fortune" (I, 66). Cornelia

is shocked to hear "such a levelling sentiment" from "the heir and descendant of the Fitzroyals" (I, 66). Ruth's spotless purity, of course, is not her only admirable trait. She also is honest, courageous, and independent. She manages to display her devotion to and strong affection for Charles when she desperately intercedes and pleads for mercy from British soldiers who plan to take him into custody as a suspect in an assassination attempt upon Benedict Arnold. Even Widow Dashwood pronounces this action praiseworthy and tells Cornelia that she has been "quite eclipsed" and chastises her for not thinking of "so charming an expedient" herself, thus passing up an opportunity for gaining such admiration (I, 129). The continual contrasts in the novel occurring as a result of the juxtaposition of Ruth and Cornelia serve as a constant reminder from Heath that true merit comes from character and not wealth or position in society.

Because romance convention dictated that characters from "obscure origin" are frequently revealed to be of noble birth, many readers might have also held out hope for such a revelation about Ruth so that she would prove "worthy" of the love of a man in Charles's social position. Heath extinguishes this fanciful desire immediately after introducing Ruth to his reader. After relating his "hope that we shall neither offend the taste, nor excite the prejudice of any by announcing her of poor and humble extraction," Heath reveals that "unlike the fate of most heroines, no subsequent discovery of high birth will be found to redeem her from the misfortune" (I, 10). This move appears unprecedented yet well calculated; if the novel is to be read as a successful challenge to the aristocracy from its very beginning, Ruth must be clearly acknowledged and accepted as a non-aristocratic heroine from the novel's start, not just as a belle dressed in pauper's clothing waiting for the proper moment of discovery. Additionally, readers must be convinced of the purity and the propriety of the love between Charles and Ruth, made well aware that the reaffirmation of the aristocratic ideal will not appear, yet still be willing to

invest themselves in the struggle for this romance even at the expense of dispensing with the traditional expectations of society.

Readers, of course, are not the only ones who must be convinced. Within the novel, the characters portrayed as outcasts from the aristocracy are as adamant about upholding the traditional hierarchy as are aristocratic characters like Fitzroyal and Cornelia. That is, those most oppressed by the system appear as some of its strongest defenders and the most insistent upon their own inferiority. Eugene Genovese explains this mentality: "All forms of class oppression have induced some kind of servility and feelings of inferiority in the oppressed; failure to induce these means failure to survive as a system of oppression" (6). Ruth, for instance, is quite satisfied with her subordinate position in society. Despite being told by Harriet Wilton that "ancient prejudices are crumbling every day" (I, 15-6), Ruth believes a marriage between Charles and herself is inappropriate because "a proud and affluent family would be humbled by such a connexion" (I, 15). She later asserts that she has "pride enough . . . to refuse an elevation by which others might think themselves degraded" (I, 131). As she explains, she is proud of her understanding of her position; displaying a lack of awareness of her status is what she would consider to be shameful. Her contentment with her place in the hierarchical structure of her society is made most explicit when she explains to Charles why his offers are but "a flattering delusion." She admits his attentions would be welcomed if she had been born his "equal, according to the distinctions of worldly policy" (I, 137). However, because she is "an humble and destitute orphan, reared and educated by the hand of charity," she refuses to "presumptuously forget [her] dependant condition; and in return for all their undeserved kindness, light up the flames of discord, and introduce bitterness and sorrow into the family" (I, 137-8). Though not a member of the upper class, even she sees her existence as a possible future wife to Charles as a dangerous threat to the social fabric of her world.

Miss Katy, the chief housekeeper at Edge-Hill, might be the best underclass spokesperson for the aristocratic viewpoint. In a kitchen conversation with the other servants, she reveals that she has always known that raising Ruth in the Fitzroyal house would prove to be a mistake, for "it was a sin and a shame, to raise up poor folks to be fine ladies." She claims that "it's a forcing of Providence to put silver spoons in the mouths of poor folks, and no good will come of it . . . [because] quality is quality" (I, 30).[9] Later she directly tells Ruth that "Providence appointed all things--the humble to walk humbly, and the rich and the proud-born to live in fine houses and spend their riches" (I, 131). One of the most difficult challenges that both Heath and his hero Charles find in their attempts to restructure society and equalize the classes is the underclass's own participation in and reinforcement of hierarchical ideology illustrated by their assumption that their inferior status is entirely appropriate, deserved, and unproblematic.

Echoing Katy's worries about Ruth's upbringing, Fitzroyal admits to having erred by allowing his wife "to educate the poor girl, as if fortune and rank had been her portion" (I, 75). Though he realizes that she must remain under his care if his reputation is to remain untainted, he does commit to making every effort to prevent her from legally becoming a member of his family by marrying Charles.[10] Heath writes that Fitzroyal regards Ruth "as the real hindrance to the consummation of his favourite scheme for aggrandizing his family" (I, 89). When it seems unlikely that he can convince Charles to marry Cornelia Dashwood in order to preserve the aristocracy, Fitzroyal legally disinherits

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[9] However, Katy's defense of the hierarchy deconstructs itself as Heath has her unknowingly contradict herself, when she explains how she recognizes quality: "I know how to value good family, and though I say it who shouldn't say it, my ancestors had as good blood in their veins every bit and grain, as runs in these Fitzroyals" (I, 30).

[10] Tracy offers a useful reading of the novel as depicting "the underside of patriarchal 'protection'" (54). Both Fitzroyal and Ruth are trapped by the paternalistic relationship; because it would stain his reputation, he cannot be rid of her until he can find an appropriate husband, and because he is legally her guardian, she is not allowed to live with or even visit the more hospitable Wilton family once conditions at Edge-Hill become for her intolerable, bordering upon imprisonment.

Charles and decides to leave Edge-Hill and the proposed marriage to Cornelia to his nephew, Albert Monteagle.

Monteagle serves as Charles's opposite in the novel, an aristocrat who privileges only birth and wealth--in other words, the son that Fitzroyal always wanted. For Heath, Monteagle illustrates well the consequences of a society that does not respect or value character over family name. In his first appearance, he stands, as Kreyling claims heroes' opposites in romance most often do, in physical contrast to the hero. While Charles has "a form manly and graceful,--a mind vigourous and acute, and habits of persevering industry as well as stainless morality" (I, 24), Monteagle, we are told, is unlike him "in almost every point of comparison" and "inferior . . . in the advantages of person" (I, 25). He is "more compact and muscular in frame" and has a "shorter stature" and "repulsive exterior;" additionally, "his hard, inflexible features, rarely relaxed into a smile" (I, 25). From his moment of introduction and Ruth's initial repulsion at his appearance, he is marked as the opposite of Charles, or in Kreyling's words, the "foil or antagonist who radiates cultural darkness against the hero's light" (*Figures*14).

The contrasts between Charles and Monteagle logically extend to their political beliefs. Monteagle is "an insufferable tory" (I, 17), "with early attachments to the English monarchy, and a total indifference to all improvement, whether moral or political in human affairs, [and also] he regarded the revolution as an impious rebellion, and scrupled not to exult in each disaster of the American arms" (I, 26). In a drawing-room discussion of the rebellion, he defends the monarchy and argues that "Holy writ commands obedience to existing powers" (I, 38). He also confidently claims that though many brand Benedict Arnold "with the epithet of traitor,---none but fools will deny him bravery" (I, 96). Not unexpectedly, Charles's father is very pleased upon hearing these political views, and "opinions so nearly congenial with those of the elder Fitzroyal, naturally won upon the latter's esteem" (I, 26).

Monteagle also displays what Fitzroyal would consider to be a more appropriate attitude toward women of the lower class. As is typical in southern historical romances, the villain and hero share an attraction for the heroine. This is indeed true of Monteagle, in whom "Ruth's playful innocence . . . inspired an ingenuous flame." But unlike Charles, his intentions are anything but honorable; instead in him "an impurer passion was awakened . . . by mistaken inferences from her birth and dependent condition" (I, 26-7). In the course of the novel, he makes a number of sexual advances toward her, clearly exploiting her powerless position and aware that there is little she could say or do which would affect him, and he would probably have succeeded in raping her if Charles had not intervened. Her position indeed proves to be a helpless one, and she has little recourse to justice. However, even when Charles and Ruth confront Fitzroyal with Monteagle's offense, it is dismissed as "the discolouring which Miss Elmore's fancy may have given to a harmless jest" (I, 83). In fact, even after explaining that he was "protect[ing] female innocence from wanton and cowardly insult," Charles actually earns more disapproval for abandoning Cornelia in order to run to Ruth's rescue than Monteagle does for groping and molesting her in the first place (I, 82).

Monteagle's misdeeds escalate in the second volume of the novel when he concocts an elaborate kidnapping of Ruth, convincing her that she is being removed to the Wilton estate and instead holding her captive at his own. He again attempts to get her to warm to his affections, to see the material benefits she will gain by submitting to him, including an opportunity to escape her status as "a destitute orphan" and "a miserable dependent" (II, 58). Finally, to get her to comply with his desire, he stages a false wedding, hoping that if she believes that they are married, she will no longer resist him. Monteagle's henchman, disguised as a reverend, is begged by Ruth not to cooperate in the scheme. She pleads with him to "befriend a wretched orphan, whom fraud and cruelty have brought to this dwelling, and whom savage force detains here against her will" (II, 60-1).

This false wedding, Monteagle's last desperate attempt to seduce Ruth without resorting to physical force, is just one of a series of weddings or attempted weddings which the novel uses to portray the struggle between aristocracy and democracy. The marriage between Fitzroyal and Widow Dashwood that begins the novel is only the first stage in the aristocracy's attempt to solidify its position in Revolutionary Age America. In an effort to assure its continuance, Fitzroyal must marry his son to aristocracy as well. When his first attempts to tie Charles to Cornelia fail because of the son's strong affections for the low-born Ruth, he must find alternate ways of guaranteeing this perpetuation of aristocracy. Both Fitzroyal and Monteagle engage in this struggle independently and on different flanks.

Monteagle's effort to assure the future prosperity of the aristocracy is illustrated in his kidnapping and deception of Ruth, which attempts to place her into an acceptable position in which she would be an oppressed dependent, or even a mistress, to an aristocrat rather than becoming his wife. If Monteagle can destroy the "spotless purity" in Ruth that Charles so admires, her threat to the Fitzroyal family can be eliminated as she will no longer be a possible wife for Charles. Because his attempts are unsuccessful, this episode serves to clarify the character of Ruth for the reader as well. Despite her belief that Monteagle is earnest in his offer of marriage and its consequential benefits, "riches,--luxury,--and rank," and "the highest elevation [she] could ever reach in this life" (II, 59), Ruth steadfastly refuses this "offer" of marriage to the extent of even pleading with the "Reverend" not to commit "this guilty profanation of a sacred ordinance" (II, 61-2). Ironically, in her desperation, she appeals to the aristocratic values that she supposes Monteagle to embrace, most specifically the paternalism upon which much of plantation culture is based, to make him reconsider. She pleads, "If you have yet one spark of manly feeling,--forbear to insult and ill-treat an unprotected female, who happens to be in your power." He, however, remains unmoved by "the complaints of injured virtue" (II, 62).

Readers can now feel confident in Ruth's motives in her affections for Charles, for if she were only striving to improve her station in the world in a quest for material gain, while falsely presenting a cloak of humility and modesty, she would probably have viewed Monteagle's offer as an equitable substitute. This kidnapping episode confirms that Ruth's feelings for Charles are based neither on his rank or fortune nor on any hope for a change in her own station but upon his character alone. And her virtue and adamant resistance are suitably rewarded with the providential arrival of Charles to rescue her before the false wedding can proceed any further.

On the other hand, Fitzroyal's plan to preserve the aristocratic character of his family takes the form of rushing to marry his "new son" Monteagle to Cornelia Dashwood and to bequeath Edge-Hill to the couple upon his death. In this move, he could ensure that Edge-Hill would remain in possession of strong aristocratic blood. Despite the disappearance of Ruth and the impending colonial conflict, "No visible alteration . . . had occurred in the father's purpose to disinherit his refractory son, and bestow his fortune of the more pliant and artful nephew, who still maintained an exterior of great devotion and respect for his uncle" (II, 160). As the proposed union between Monteagle and Cornelia is about to take place, "Fitzroyal was the only individual present, who could be said to speculate with something like satisfaction on the approaching nuptials" (II, 161). However, the completion of this transfer of Edge-Hill is also forestalled when the wedding ceremony is disrupted in almost the same fashion as the false one that had preceded it. Ludwell, Charles's friend, arrives to bring charges against Monteagle, including "the diabolical attempt to deceive and ruin a friendless orphan by a mock marriage" (II, 165). Monteagle evades this charge by explaining to Fitzroyal that Ruth's kidnapping was "an experiment designed to preserve unstained the reputation of [his] family" and to save Edge-Hill through a "feigned offer of marriage." He declares that he could never "be guilty of such folly and perfidy, as to offer real marriage to a low born pennyless foundling,--when

already pledged to beauty and intelligence, rank and fortune" (II, 169). He presents the entire episode with Ruth as an "innocent artifice . . . to see what effect a seasonable and advantageous offer might produce" (II, 170) and asserts that his primary goal was to expose her unworthiness for Charles and the Fitzroyal name. Both Fitzroyal and Cornelia are sufficiently satisfied with his answer to continue with the ceremony.

Disappointed with Monteagle's defense against the initial charges, Fitzroyal's conviction of his nephew's truthfulness, and Cornelia's continued "willingness to be led to the altar" (II, 171), Ludwell then unveils the even more damning accusation that Monteagle had "the hellish intention to assassinate his own uncle" in order to gain rightful ownership of Edge-Hill as soon he possibly could (II, 172). Once concrete evidence is produced to confirm these accusations that Monteagle did indeed plan to murder Fitzroyal, or at least manage to have him executed by the rebels as a suspected traitor, the nephew realizes that "his whole design had been penetrated, and his dark villanies ushered into light" (II, 195). Monteagle now becomes aware of "the wide, fathomless gulf, which separated him forever from the Edge-Hill family" (II, 195). This villain thus serves the novel's argument against a blind upholding of tradition and class prejudice without regard to character. While Monteagle may be a suitable heir of Edge-Hill on the basis of his family connections and wealth, his corruption reveals the worst aspects of a hierarchical system, wherein acquiring and preserving power and position are the ultimate goals and other people finally become only means or obstacles to this effort. In a merit-based system, a man like Monteagle, whose lack of character is certainly obvious to most of the residents of Edge-Hill, would receive no material rewards just because of the family to which he was born.

The ultimate exposure of Monteagle's true nature to Fitzroyal, Cornelia, and her mother leads to the novel's resolution. Fitzroyal realizes that he was gravely mistaken to favor Monteagle solely because he appeared willing and able to aspire to Fitzroyal's aristocratic ideals. After hearing Lafayette praise Charles, observing that "there are few

fathers who would not be proud of such a son" (II, 200), Fitzroyal "recalled the heroic virtues of his son--that injured son, so wantonly and harshly discarded" (II, 196). In the final chapter, a perhaps too abrupt conclusion, an ailing Fitzroyal summons Charles and Ruth to his deathbed. He acknowledges that he has lived his life as "the slave of pride,--of prejudice, and avarice" (II, 213). His last request is that Charles wed Ruth: "Make her the wife of your bosom, and cherish her as the gift of Providence. She is worthy of you. My pride and avarice were offended at her humble birth and dependence,--but thank Heaven, I have seen my error, and now bear witness to her virtues" (II, 215). This pronouncement and the subsequent marriage of Charles and Ruth symbolize the transformation of the conservative aristocratic world view, which the marriage between the Houses of Fitzroyal and Dashwood had attempted to reinforce, into a more progressive view wherein advancement and status are decided by virtue and character.

Ritchie Watson has criticized *Edge-Hill* because it "establishes and then completely turns away from a potentially important social conflict" (100). He argues that the basic plot of the novel, the conflict between father and son, provides "an ideal context for analyzing the conflict between past and present in Virginia and for suggesting the inevitable movement of history toward liberal political principles," but he believes that the novel ultimately errs by having all the problems "neatly solved by the deathbed reconciliation of father and son" (100). Watson would prefer that the novel explore the "ultimate effect of these events on the characters" and "the ironic relationship between the aristocratic life of Edge-Hill, which it lavishly describes, and the triumph of the ideals of liberty and equality, which attends victory in the War of Independence" (101). Additionally, he sharply criticizes the novel's avoidance of dealing with "the conflict between Charles Fitzroyal's libertarianism and the role of planter-aristocrat which he seems willingly to assume at the novel's conclusion" (101).

While it should be acknowledged that Charles and Ruth Fitzroyal do indeed return to live at "Edge-Hill, where young Fitzroyal was now the undisputed master . . . of the ancient family seat" (II, 222), the reader can be assured that all of the couple's struggle is not meaningless. The novel has not conceded to the aristocratic view by reinserting Charles into the typical slave-owning patriarchal position. Instead, he is presented as a new kind of master who is now the rightful heir to Edge-Hill and the South as a whole. Heath certainly does not turn *Edge-Hill* into the type of realistic exploration of the conflict between libertarianism and plantation life that Watson desires; indeed, such an exploration would have been awkwardly out of place in this novel, considering its romantic and idealistic tone, but also in any of the historical romances penned by southern writers. In its idealism, *Edge-Hill* does not imagine or yearn for an elimination of the "romantic" trappings of southern life, such as lush plantations, gallant chivalry, and elaborate feasts, but it does ask its reader to reconsider who is deserving of these luxuries. With this new master, the answer is that such rewards should be earned by character alone. By the end of the novel, those characters who have proven themselves lacking in moral character, most notably Widow Dashwood, Cornelia, and Monteagle, are exiled far from Edge-Hill and are no longer part of the plantation world. The novel's conclusion portrays a very different Edge-Hill than is seen as the novel begins.

Despite Watson's assertion that *Edge-Hill* is "a significant indicator of the movement of Virginia's writers toward simple romance and uncomplicated glorifications of their state's past" (101), Heath's romance is not as uncomplicated in its dealing with Virginia's history as Watson believes. While it certainly glorifies the deeds of certain Virginians, it does so in service of a critique of Heath's contemporaries' continued tendency to value tradition over progress and to make decisions about character and esteem solely on the basis of class. Rather than being an "uncomplicated glorification" of the past, *Edge-Hill* offers implicit criticism of Virginia's present by reminding readers of the proud

past of the Old Dominion. Specifically, it interrogates the state's and the entire South's continued avowal of aristocratic values while they seem so inconsistent with the principles of democracy espoused by the great patriots of the Revolution, including Virginians such as Washington and Jefferson and their fictional counterpart Charles Fitzroyal. *Edge-Hill* essentially pronounces this attachment to such obsolete values as reactionary and counter-productive to the work done by these great Virginia patriots.

The marriage of Ruth and Charles is not the only element of the novel that reinforces and supports this democratic thesis. In fact, the most celebrated aspect in this little-celebrated work, an aspect unmentioned by Watson, is its depiction of Charles Fitzroyal's slave, James. As early as 1928, scholars noted "the relative prominence accorded the negro body servant" in the novel (Gordon 489). Richard Beale Davis, in turn, pronounces Heath's James to be "perhaps the most sympathetic and laudatory portrait ever drawn of the faithful Negro servant" (292). And Susan Tracy emphasizes that James is "the only free black hero in all of Southern antebellum literature" (60). Undoubtedly, to contemporary readers, the character of James is the most surprising discovery in *Edge-Hill*, especially since slaves typically played only minor roles in most antebellum productions, usually relegated to the backdrop in order to provide local color or used merely to break up the dramatic action through short episodes of comic relief. As Tremaine McDowell argues, most antebellum authors give slaves "no significant position in the plot of the novel. Slaves perform their customary household and farm tasks, carry messages, and converse briefly and respectfully with their masters, but they never directly influence the action" (57). James's depiction, in the size of the role he plays, the important contributions he makes in the development of the plot, and the character he is allowed to reveal in the course of the action, is another strong reason for further examination of Heath's work and certainly another moment when it turns audience expectations upside down.

Indeed, James is a rarity in antebellum literature, whether southern or northern. He is, as Richard Beale Davis argues, "the faithful Negro retainer raised to heroic proportions" (290). Perhaps the only depiction of a slave character in early historical romances that approaches James is Caesar in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy*, but Caesar ultimately remains a comical figure, one who does not show the bravery and initiative that Heath's James displays. *Edge-Hill* boldly paints James as American hero and patriot, as significant, if not more so, to the Revolution as Charles Fitzroyal himself. Before he is ever seen in the novel, Alice, his mother, reveals James's attitude toward the British soldiers, telling Charles that "he talks right down sassy about the British" and "he talks just like a militia-man" (I, 103). After she reveals that he wishes "his young Massa would give him a gun and some lead and powder," Charles appears to approve of this sentiment, observing that "'twould be quite patriotic to shoot a few of these red coats" (I, 103).

When James finally appears on the scene, he has been recruited to serve at a formal dinner party Fitzroyal throws for the British forces. Though he is described in nothing but glowing terms as "tall, stoutly built, and of powerful muscle" (I, 109), his initial actions appear to characterize him as no more than the comical servant typical of southern fiction. He is scolded for staring at Benedict Arnold and "stammers out" a defense, claiming that he did not believe there was any harm in observing such an important man, about whom he has heard "folks say the Governor offer a bag full of gold guineas, for he's head" (I, 110). This explanation of his actions evokes a telling response in the room full of British soldiers, similar to the effect that it probably had on its contemporary audience: "The whole company, now ripe for fun, were attentive to the lad's embarrassment, and amused at his reply. . . . The major part of the officers were in fine glee, and were tickled with the black's awkward simplicity" (I, 110).

Susan Tracy argues that this scene illustrates "Heath's sensitivity to the game of black dissembling" (59). Certainly, just as the room full of British soldiers are fooled, so

is the reader who assumes that James will be the standard silly slave too often played for laughs in southern novels. However, it is soon made clear that this "awkward simplicity" that so "tickled" the officers is merely a mask that James wears in order to identify the traitor Arnold so that he can attempt to assassinate him just a few pages later by taking a shot at him with Charles's rifle. Even after James has been implicated in this attempt upon Arnold's life, the common white misperception of slaves as unintelligent and harmless leads the British soldiers to miss completely the threat that James poses, and his own revolutionary initiative and allegiances are discounted. He is incorrectly found to be but an "instrument of this wicked plot" with Charles as the instigator who will be held responsible. Arnold himself dismisses James's role and finally concludes that "the guilt of the negro fades into nothing before that of his master" (I, 121). Of course, since the novel was written in 1828, a few years before the first major slave uprising, the image of the armed slave had not yet assumed the resonance or implications that it eventually would.

James's acts of heroism do not end with the attempt on Arnold's life. Because "the government has authorised the employment of pioneers of his colour" (I, 187), he is able to enlist as a soldier in the Revolutionary forces alongside Charles, promising that "I shant flinch from nary red coat that the sun ever shined upon" (I, 157). Soon after enlisting, James saves Charles from being slaughtered by a bayonet-bearing foe (I, 202-203), provoking Charles to claim that "I owe you everything" (I, 205). In the second volume, James is the one to discover that Ruth has been imprisoned in Monteagle's mansion and single-handedly fights off a group of the villain's mastiffs by wielding "a stout club . . . with powerful vigour" and escapes the "younger and fiercer watch dogs" by running with "swiftness of foot" and "dexterity in surmounting all impediments in his path" (II, 57). Finally, he becomes a special agent of Lafayette and carries with him a pass written by the Marquis explaining that James is in his employment, "is worthy of confidence," and has "permission to pass without hindrance" (II, 81). In one amusing scene, a group of ruffians

who assume James to be a thief or a runaway completely revise their opinion of him once Lafayette's letter is read: "The lad was forthwith transformed from a suspicious night-stroller into the confidential agent of the Virginia Commander" (II, 82). Rather than being abused, James instead becomes "an object of interest, if not respect," and is offered "a gratuitous dram and supper" and "comfortable provision" for lodging "in order to make some amends for the threatened chastisement" (II, 82).

The relationship between Charles and James is certainly unusual in southern antebellum literature as well. James had been Charles's "playmate and companion" in childhood and is "now his servant by a formal gift from the elder Fitzroyal" (I, 101). However, the relationship revealed throughout the course of the novel is atypical of master-slave relationships. After the attempt on Arnold's life, Charles no longer seems to consider James to be in bondage to a master, and he asks James, "what do you propose to do with yourself?--if you go back again to Edge-Hill, your old master will have you hanged" (I, 156). The options implied in this question illustrate that Charles does not see himself as master to James; instead, the slave appears to be free to choose where he will go next. Of course, Charles is delighted to hear that James intends to follow his example and fight against the British forces. Upon meeting Lafayette, he praises James as "a bold and mischievous fellow" who "actually aimed a ball at the traitor" (I, 186). He suggests to Lafayette that he could "confer no greater favour on the lad, than to employ him in hazardous enterprises" (I, 187). It becomes apparent that James takes his work as a soldier in the forces of Lafayette very seriously, in fact so seriously that his military orders supersede even his master's. As the novel reaches its conclusion, Charles orders James to continue to watch for Monteagle, but James rejects this command, claiming "I has my orders for to-night, and shant be back again in camp with middling good luck till sunrise" (II, 182). In this interaction, the reader observes that while Charles might remain the

superior officer, he is no longer James's master, and Charles makes no attempt to coerce James to obey his own orders at the expense of the neglect of Lafayette's commands.

Though I agree with Richard Beale Davis's opinion that James ultimately "does not occupy enough space in the narrative" (290), it should be emphasized that *Edge-Hill* ends with a celebration of the bravery and heroism of the slave, stating that it would be "an act of injustice to conclude our story without some honourable mention of James, whose efficient and faithful services must have already extorted a tribute from the generous reader" (II, 223). Heath reveals that James was given "his freedom by a public legislative act," after a commendation "so flattering to the sable patriot and volunteer" was written by Lafayette in 1784 (II, 224). The novel ends by quoting this document:

> This is to certify that the bearer, by the name of James, has done essential services to me while I had the honour to command in this State. His intelligences from the enemy's camp were industriously collected, and more faithfully delivered. He perfectly acquitted himself with some important commissions I gave him, and appears to me entitled to every reward his situation can admit of. (II, 224)

This celebration of James's military service seems an especially odd note with which to end *Edge-Hill.* While the commendation minimizes the heroics performed by James during the novel and reduces them to carrying messages, the assertion of James's merit seems to reinforce solidly the theme of meritocracy that pervades the novel. In Heath's vision of the South, slaves can be heroes and can be rewarded and honored just as all heroes should be.[11]

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[11] It should be pointed out that Heath never uses his narrative to argue openly against the institution of slavery, to which he was adamantly opposed. In a *Southern Literary Messenger* editorial, he contradicts another contributor by disagreeing with the assertion that slavery has "either a moral or political benefit." He claims that he considers slavery "as a great evil, which society will sooner or later find it not only its interest to remove or mitigate, but will seek its gradual abolition or amelioration, under the influence of those high obligations imposed by an enlightened christian morality" ("Editorial Remarks," 254).

This point should have already been fairly obvious to Heath's Virginia readers because, though it is never stated in the book, he based James upon an historical figure that would have been especially familiar to Richmond readers.[12] In *The Negro in the American Revolution*, Benjamin Quarles explains that the "best known of the Negro spies was James, a slave of William Armistead of New Kent County, Virginia" (94). Lafayette used James as a spy in the British camp, where he delivered letters to other spies and observed the actions of the officers. Reportedly, James assumed the role of counter agent, convincing the British that he was working for them as well. According to Sidney Kaplan, "after the surrender at Yorktown, when Cornwallis visited Lafayette's headquarters, he was amazed to see there the black man he had believed to be *his* spy" (39). The testimonial appearing at the conclusion of *Edge-Hill* is almost identical to the one actually written by Lafayette for James. And the consequences of this commendation as reported in the novel are accurate as well. In 1786, the General Assembly of Virginia did indeed grant James his freedom, though it remains unclear whether his master Armistead was cooperative in this emancipation. Quarles explains that a law was passed in October 1786 that ordered the state treasurer to pay James's master the equivalent price that he would have commanded on the auction block. These circumstances are of course downplayed by Heath in *Edge-Hill* because they would have effectively called into question Charles's commitment to democratic beliefs; if it took a legislative act to convince James's master that a slave, who was as important, or arguably more important, in the Revolutionary struggle as he himself was, was deserving of freedom, Charles would indeed appear in the novel as a hypocrite. Thus Heath, while quietly bowing to historical accuracy by mentioning the legislative action, chooses not to develop this part of James's story, but does elaborate upon the Anniversary celebration in 1824, where the aging James, who assumed the name James

[12] See Kaplan and Kaplan 37-40 and Quarles 94-5 for an account of the actual James and a contextualization of his achievements among other African-Americans' participation in Revolutionary conflicts.

Lafayette, was reunited with his former commander upon his return to Richmond. Surely, the story of this meeting must have been crucial to the inspiration of Heath's decision to write *Edge-Hill* four years later.

This character's basis in historical fact certainly gives Heath more freedom in his depiction of black heroics. Because James's brave actions had already been commended by both Lafayette and the Virginia State Legislature, his reader could not really deny or disbelieve the deeds recorded in Heath's work. Of course, there is no known historical record of many of the actions committed by James in *Edge-Hill*, which appear to be purely fictional, including his attempt on Arnold's life, his intervention to save Charles, and the important role he plays in rescuing Ruth from the hands of Monteagle. Heath used the historical record of James's bravery to justify an exaggerated portrait of the actual James, in which the slave was shown to be among the bravest heroes of the late Revolutionary struggles in Virginia and without whom neither Charles would be alive to assume control of Edge-Hill at novel's end nor would Ruth be in any condition to become his wife. As the novel quickly shifts in its final pages from a focus upon the typically romantic set-piece of Charles and Ruth's wedding to the emphasis upon the heroism of James, it serves to remind readers that this happy ending was a consequence of James's valiant service. This focus upon James remains consistent with the thesis of Heath's work and the emphasis that virtue and character should be rewarded in society; for a slave, this reward would be emancipation.

The world presented in *Edge-Hill* is, indeed, as Cornelia Dashwood claims, a world that is "turning upside down" (II, 8). This inversion, first of all, involves the negation of most of the values that would soon become attached to the genre of romance as it was practiced in the South. While it is clearly a romance cut from the same cloth as the work of Simms, Kennedy, and Caruthers, Heath's work cannot be considered to uphold the same conservative values that are typically linked to the works of those writers.

Instead, Heath uses the bright moments in his state's history to argue against the elitist class prejudices which he continued to see in the Virginia of 1828 and which he believed weakened rather than reinforced the social fabric of the South. Indeed, Robert Jacobs finds this perspective as well in Heath's writings for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, claiming that "it is evident from his editorial comments that Heath was a representative of the middle class morality that was beginning to supplant the aristocratic attitude in Virginia" ("Poe" 39). *Edge-Hill* is thus an early espousal of these middle class views that sought to replace the obsolete aristocracy. In the fictional Charles and Ruth and the historical James, Heath represents "the liberal promise of the revolutionary new nation: social mobility for virtuous common folk and freedom for slaves" (Tracy 54).

The romance "turns upside down," then, the expectations of its audience, especially those readers of the following decade who became familiar with the romance in its role as conveyor of aristocratic ideals and therefore can understand *Edge-Hill* only as "an abortion" in comparison. Heath's purist effort employs the form of Scott, Cooper, and the later southern romancers but also returns to the use of the genre as a defense of progressive movements. Unlike those of other romancers, his aristocratic hero does not have to quest for a suitably aristocratic wife. Instead, Charles can find nobility of character in a woman like Ruth Elmore, whose honesty, purity, and devotion mark her as a worthy mate despite her lack of name and fortune. His romance also does not end with the values of the tradition being reinforced. While Heath does indeed invoke a tradition, that of the progressive and liberal values voiced by the War for American Independence, he also challenges another tradition of his day, the one embraced by the southern romancers to follow him, as he argues for a classless society wherein merit is rewarded over blood. His romance acknowledges the heroism of those who are usually not allowed to act as heroes in typical southern romances. Heath allows both the underclass female and the oppressed slave to shine in his narrative, strongly opposing the view that only white, planter class,

aristocratic males can display heroism. This move is very important, for it paves the way for future female writers and black writers to tell their own stories, peopled with the women and slave heroes for which romance seldom allows room.

Finally, a careful reading of Heath's novel may also lead to the literary history of southern literature being "turned upside down." As scholarship continues to acknowledge and consider the existence of a book such as *Edge-Hill* and doubtless other forgotten progressive southern romances yet to be discovered, these histories will probably have to be revised. Heath's novel and others like it should cause scholars to begin to see that there was indeed a body of literature, though perhaps not well-received by either readers or subsequent scholars, that challenged the conservative establishment. And, in fact, some of these works actually did come in the form of romance, that genre most often associated with the pro-slavery, planter ideology. By admitting this complication, scholars can finally leave behind the simple story that is persistently told about antebellum southern literature as a whole.

Chapter II

Copying What the Master Had Written: Frederick Douglass and the Romance of the Heroic Slave

The dilemma of the African-American writer in the antebellum South is epitomized in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), as Frederick Douglass recounts his struggles to learn how to write while a slave in the Baltimore home of Hugh and Sophia Auld. Though he had been forbidden to read or even glance at a book or newspaper, he still managed to teach himself secretly both to read and write while his owners were out of the house: "When left thus, I used to spend the time in writing in the spaces left in Master Thomas's copy-book, copying what he had written. I continued to do this until I could write a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas. Thus, after a long, tedious effort for years, I finally succeeded in learning how to write" (53-4). While Douglass's quest for writing instruction also led him to such avenues as signs in the shipyards and cooperative children in the streets, his white master's discarded textbook becomes, as Teresa Goddu and Craig Smith have proposed, "his most important copy-book" (827). This vital source provides the model for Douglass's own writing, which he employs until he is satisfied that the product of his hand is "very similar" to that of his master. In other words, "by copying he learns to imitate the white hand" (Goddu and Smith 827).

Goddu and Smith's discussion of Douglass's acquisition of writing skills provides a useful lens through which to view the writings of Douglass and his fellow African-American writers in the antebellum South because, as Stephen Butterfield argues in *Black Autobiography in America*, "when he came to set his story down on paper, the slave narrator had little choice but to adapt the literary forms and traditions of white American culture" (47). The work of the major scholars of slave writings--Henry Louis Gates,

Houston Baker, Frances Smith Foster, William Andrews, James Olney, and Robert Stepto--generally concurs with Butterfield's finding, and the debate over which literary forms and traditions of white culture served as the sources or models for early African-American writing has become a central concern of the scholarship, especially that on the slave narrative. While much of the focus of these influence studies has been on "the secular and spiritual autobiographical narratives that marked English and European literature during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries," Baker explains that the influences upon the narratives are probably far more diverse and wide-reaching, for

> as readers and, thus, as sharers in the universe of popular nineteenth-century literary discourse, the narrators would have found available to them the techniques and traditions of plantation novels, sentimental romances, sermons, reprinted lectures on self-improvement, rhymed moralizing verse, biographical accounts of the lives of great men, Sunday-school moral tales, frontier travel accounts, Old Southwest humorous sketches such as those of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, and other forms that constituted the mass reading of the day. (13-14)

More recently, Rafia Zafar's *We Wear the Mask: African Americans Write American Literature, 1760-1870* has convincingly read early African-American writing as part of those American literary genres traditionally associated only with white writers, ranging from neoclassical poetry and Franklinian tales of success to captivity narratives and sentimental novels.

Despite the many studies of generic influences upon slave writing, very little has been written about the influence of the historical romance, that "chief vehicle" of southern literature, upon the writings of slave narrators (Ridgely *Nineteenth-Century* 2). If antebellum African-American writers were indeed "sharers in the universe of popular nineteenth-century literary discourse," it would be inexplicable if the Waverly novels of Sir

Walter Scott were not as much a part of the sphere of popular influence upon their writing as works by figures such as Rowlandson, Pope, or Franklin might be. However, because so little is known about Douglass's early reading, other than his notable possession of *The Columbian Orator*, it is difficult to trace the literary influences upon his early work. While it may be possible that Douglass had secretly read Scott's work while still a slave or at least gained a second-hand knowledge of Scott's plots and characters from others, his first specific mention of the romancer appears in the 1845 narrative as he recounts his friend and benefactor Nathan Johnson's suggestion that Frederick take Douglass for a surname, after Scott's Douglas, the hero of *The Lady of the Lake* (1810).[1] While it remains unclear whether Douglass himself had actually read Scott's work by 1838 when he assumed this name, its suggestion by Johnson, a free black man living in New Bedford, Massachusetts, illustrates that African-Americans were reading Scott and were enthusiastic enough about his work to use it as a source for possible names. If he had not done so already, this significant use of Scott by Douglass, which linked Scott's hero with his own identity, would have given Douglass more than sufficient incentive to seek out and read the romancer's work, if only to discover more about his namesake.[2] Eventually, Douglass would list Scott as one of his favorite writers of fiction and single out *Ivanhoe* as his

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[1] William McFeely, Douglass's biographer, characterizes Douglass's taking of his final name: "Frederick, without looking to see what Douglas was up to in the poem, or how the name was spelled, liked its sound. With astonishing casualness, he gave himself the name" (78).

[2] Douglass certainly became familiar with Scott's work by the 1840s when he spent 1846-1847 touring Scotland, where he visited Edinburgh's monument to Scott during the summer of 1846 (Foner 183). While on this trip, he wrote the following to William Lloyd Garrison: "If I should meet you now, amid the free hills of old Scotland, where the ancient 'black Douglass' once met his foes, I presume I might summon the sufficient fortitude to look you full in the face; and were you to attempt to make a slave of me, it is possible you might find me almost as disagreeable a subject, as was the Douglass to whom I have just referred" (Foner 133). In his revised narrative, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), he comments further upon Johnson's suggestion of the name Douglass: "He had been reading 'Lady of the Lake,' and was pleased to regard me as suitable person to wear this, one of Scotland's many famous names. Considering the noble hospitality and manly character of Nathan Johnson, I have felt that he, better than I, illustrated the virtues of the great Scottish chief" (343). Both of these references imply a familiarity with Scott's poem and the nature of the character Douglas that the 1845 narrative does not express.

favorite among Scott's romances.[3] Like any other antebellum American, Douglass was certainly exposed to the great influence that Scott's work exerted upon writers, readers, and popular culture, and though there is little record of Douglass's reading during his early years of freedom, it is probable that he would also have been aware of the work of some of those American devotees of Scott--James Fenimore Cooper, William Gilmore Simms, William Caruthers, and John Pendleton Kennedy.

The Heroic Slave as Southern Historical Romance

Ultimately, the most convincing evidence of the historical romance's influence upon Douglass's work is the fact that his single piece of fiction, *The Heroic Slave*, a novella published in the abolitionist anthology *Autographs for Freedom* (1853), belongs to the genre. Or, as William Andrews explains, it is "a historical novel pared down to the basic plot of the slave narrative, the quest for freedom" ("Novelization" 27). In fact, this work is the earliest known effort by an African-American writer in the genre of historical romance.[4] Even more specifically, it can also be considered the first work written by an African-American writer in that southern subgenre of the romance, the Virginia Novel. *The Heroic Slave* certainly shares common features with the southern romance as defined by Richard Beale Davis, who explains that a Virginia novel is "a work set either amid the great scenes and events in the state's political and martial history or largely within the confines of a Virginia ante-bellum plantation" (278). The label has been applied to literature in both

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[3] This information appeared in an 1892 newspaper interview: "Who are my favorite authors? Among poets, Shakespeare, Byron, Burns, Bryant, Whittier, and Longfellow; among prose writers, Hugo, especially 'Les Miserables' and 'The Toilers of the Sea;' the works of Sir Walter Scott, especially 'Ivanhoe;' Charlotte Bronte and Alexander Dumas, especially 'The Muskateer' and 'The Count of Monte Cristo'" (*Papers* Vol. 5, 499).

[4] Andrews explains that the first known fiction by African-Americans appeared in 1853; besides Douglass's novella, William Wells Brown's *Clotel: Or, the President's Daughter* also appeared that year. However, because all of its characters are fictional, despite the fact that its heroine is rumored to be the child of Thomas Jefferson and his slave, it should probably not be considered historical romance ("Novelization" 24).

veins: works forming a "branch of the American historical novel, largely derived from Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper" (278), that "celebrated various dramatic and significant moments in state history which was also national history" (279), as well as works that cannot properly be considered historical romances because they lack depictions of historical figures or events but which offer a romanticized and idealized vision of life "upon a great slave-operated estate" (278). Throughout much of the nineteenth century (and even into the first half of the twentieth century), this category could classify much of the fiction produced in the South.

In some sense, it is not surprising that Douglass would choose the historical romance or its southern version, the Virginia novel, to relate the tale of a slave hero. In antebellum culture, the genre would have been the most obvious forum to present heroic acts to a broad audience. However, to read *The Heroic Slave* as part of the tradition of the Virginia novel necessarily involves enlarging the conventions of the genre as it is formally defined. Like many of the Virginia novels, including the work of Heath, Caruthers, and Kennedy, Douglass's novella occupies both veins of Davis's generic description. That is, it both depicts an actual historical event in Virginian, and therefore American, history and portrays life on a Virginia slave-holding plantation. However, it does neither of these tasks in accepted fashion. The historical event it uses as its basis is an 1841 slave uprising aboard the *Creole*, a ship transporting slaves from Richmond to New Orleans.[5] The material itself is a stark departure for most writers of southern romances, who usually strove to lionize the white slave-owning males of plantation culture and ignored acts of bravery by slaves and certainly any signs of dissatisfaction they might express toward their oppression. In the world depicted by southern historical romances of the antebellum period, slave uprisings did not exist nor were they a possibility. Thus, the second vein of

[5] For more information on the actual historical event, its consequences, and contemporary response, see Jones and Sale.

the genre is also adapted, for the depiction of plantation life presented in *The Heroic Slave* is neither romanticized nor idealized; most significantly, in no way is it used to validate or justify the institution of slavery.

Studying *The Heroic Slave* as an attempt by a black writer to employ the traditionally white genre of historical romance, or the Virginia novel, offers a better position from which to understand the complicated relationship between "master genres" and black efforts to write within those genres than even the slave narratives may provide because, unlike those narratives, it is a conscious imitation of a white form. This chapter will argue that by assuming the role of romancer, Douglass subverts the work of traditional southern romance simply because he is a black writer and relates black experience. In his effort to take "for himself the gaps in the master's text" (Goddu and Smith 827), he has created a subversive fiction that speaks what had previously remained unspoken in white southern historical romances. It admits the possibility of slave heroism; in doing so, it casts those that support the slave system of the South as villains opposed to this hero's quest and makes apparent the inherent contradiction between the institution of slavery and supposedly revered American traditions.

Despite its subversive nature, the opening lines of *The Heroic Slave* do not depart from the typical paeans to Virginia that are one of the trademarks of this fiction. Douglass begins thus:

> The State of Virginia is famous in American annals for the multitudinous array of her statesmen. History has not been sparing in recording their names, or in blazoning their deeds. Her high position in this respect, has given her an enviable distinction among her sister States. With Virginia for his birth-place, even a man of ordinary parts, on account of the general partiality for her sons, easily rises to eminent stations. Men, not great enough to attract special attention in their native States, have, like a certain

> distinguished citizen in the State of New York, sighed and repined that they were not born in Virginia. (132)

He continues by cataloging the great sons of Virginia--Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and George Washington. Compare Douglass's lines to quite similar praise in John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* (1832), that most famous of Virginia novels:

> When the Revolution broke out, [Virginia] was among the first of its champions, ardent in the assertion of the principles upon which it turned, and brave in support of them. Since that period, her annals have been singularly brilliant with the fame of orators and statesmen. Four Presidents have been given to the Union from her nursery. The first, the brightest figure of history; the others also master-spirits, worthy to be ranked amongst the greatest of their day. In the light of these men, and of their gallant contemporaries, she has found a glory to stimulate her ambition, and to minister to her pride. It is not wonderful that in these circumstances she should deem herself a predominant star in the Union. (70-1)

Douglass's text appears to echo intentionally this vein of state pride that is connected with the Virginia tradition, solidly placing both his novella and its hero into the tradition of southern romance.[6]

Although, like Heath's *Edge-Hill* written twenty-five years before and long-forgotten by 1853, Douglass's novella employs the conventions of the genre of the southern historical romance, it does not share its ideological goals. Both of these works use this form so aligned with a conservative, pro-slavery agenda to challenge openly that agenda. In contrast to previous novels in the tradition, Douglass's work offers a new image of slaves, who had been consistently characterized as loyal retainers or comic

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[6] This paean to Virginia becomes a requisite component of the subgenre even for those writers who are not Virginians, including Douglass and Kennedy, both of whom were born in or near Baltimore and neither of whom ever established residence in the state of Virginia.

sidekicks. In order to justify slavery, authors such as Kennedy propagated the image of slaves as "a contented race" thriving within slavery (469). *The Heroic Slave*, like Heath's depiction of James Lafayette's exploits, challenges this myth by focusing upon the brave deeds and strong commitments of an actual Virginia slave hero. Like James, Douglass's hero, Madison Washington, is a slave figure who had displayed heroic qualities in a well-known and popularly documented event. However, because of Douglass's desire to tell the story of a heroic slave, he centers his entire work on the heroism of this historical figure, the leader of the slave revolt on the *Creole*, instead of relegating him to a relatively minor role in his tale as Heath does in accordance with the conventions established by Scott. While the exploits of Heath's James are safely buried beneath the less impressive but more developed accounts of his white compatriots, Douglass presents the brave acts of Washington as the sole focus of his novella.[7]

Despite this deviation from the Waverly model, the placement of his historical figure at the center of the action of his romance, Douglass did strive for a level of historical accuracy in *The Heroic Slave*. But implicit in this commitment to history is the argument that writing a romance about a historical black hero is a much different endeavor from writing romances about white figures. After his obligatory celebration of Virginia, Douglass explains that some of the state's greatest figures, including his subject Madison Washington, have been relegated to "undeserved obscurity" (132). Rather than being memorialized in the chronicles of the state or nation, they are given "no higher place in the records of that grand old Commonwealth than is held by a horse or an ox," and thus their deeds live "now only in the chattel records" of Virginia (132). Therefore, the dilemma for "the pen of genius" (132), who attempts to craft a romance about the bravery of Madison

[7] For Douglass, it was also important that his hero be fighting for his own liberty rather than struggling for the liberty of the white population of the colonies, as the slave heroes of the Revolutionary War, including James Lafayette, did. In an 1857 speech, he proclaimed that "Madison Washington who struck down his oppressor on the deck of the *Creole*, is more worthy to be remembered than the colored man who shot Pitcaren at Bunker Hill" (*Papers* Vol. 3, 206).

Washington, becomes not how to remain faithful to an abundance of historical records but how to weave a fiction from the little that is known about Washington through these chattel records, popular press accounts of his actions aboard the *Creole*, and Senate documents, that can still be considered an authentic and reliable narrative of his deeds. Douglass finally concedes that "glimpses of this great character are all that can now be presented" because the historical basis of *The Heroic Slave* can only be mere "marks, traces, possibles, and probabilities" (132).

The dilemma of how to tell their own stories and depict themselves has always been present for black writers in the South. This is especially the case when writing of black heroics while confined to forms that appear appropriate only to celebrations of white heroism. Since black writers did rely heavily upon the traditional genres of white writers, they are also faced with those genres' formal and ideological limitations. Significant among the limitations of the southern historical romance is its traditional denial of space for depictions of black heroes. As Kreyling explains, "a place for the black southern writer in the narrative tradition of southern heroic is difficult to imagine" because typically "the southern hero either acts or embodies the enslavement of the black" (*Figures* 185). That is, white heroics are often defined in terms of black dependency and cowardice. Black writers constantly face the fact that writing in the established genres, especially romance, is "a ritual reserved for the white male (infrequently for the white female) and denied to them" (186). He claims that black writers had very little room "for overthrowing the white heroic hegemony" because "they had been denied the tools of writing: a voice, an audience, a vocabulary, a narrative" (186).

While Douglass works under the handicap that Kreyling describes, he has by 1853 developed a voice in his narrative and speeches, gained an attentive audience of northern abolitionists, assumed the abolitionist vocabulary, and in writing *The Heroic Slave*, he appropriates the narrative of his former oppressors, southern slave owners. Despite the

difficulty of portraying slave heroes in a world and genre that ignored the existence of such figures, Douglass managed to create a Madison Washington who can surprisingly, yet successfully, function as a romance hero in the mold of white heroes regardless of his race. Because little is known that would contradict his depiction, Douglass can cast Washington as a vigorous and handsome young hero, who from this description is not so very different from the brave, virile men featured in the work of Kennedy and Caruthers. He is described thus:

> Madison is of manly form. Tall, symmetrical, round, and strong. In his movements he seemed to combine, with the strength of the lion, a lion's elasticity. His torn sleeves disclosed arms like polished iron. His face was "black, but comely." His eye, lit with emotion, kept guard under a brow as dark and as glossy as the raven's wing. His whole appearance betokened Herculean strength; yet there was nothing savage or forbidding in his aspect. A child might play in his arms, or dance on his shoulders. . . . He was just the man you would choose when hardships were to be endured, or danger to be encountered,--intelligent and brave. (134)

Like that of Heath's James, this attractive portrait of Washington as a strong, noble figure intentionally contradicts the depictions of black males in southern antebellum literature by white authors who, Susan Tracy argues, had "convinced themselves that black men were by nature docile, trusting, and naturally dependent like women and children" and that they had "failed a critical test of masculinity" because they "had arrived on their shores to be bought and sold away from their families" (155). She claims that southern slave owners and those writers who advocated their position had a vested interest in perceiving black males in the South as effeminate, the unmanly Other to planter class heroes. Douglass, in turn, asserts a concept of a heroic slave, which many of his readers would have found oxymoronic.

In his useful study of *The Heroic Slave*, Richard Yarborough explores "the representational strategies" Douglass employs to make the figure of Washington more palatable to a white readership (172). Most significantly, Yarborough finds that Douglass's description of Washington emphasizes his "attractive physical appearance" by centering upon characteristics that conform to "conventional Anglo-American conceptions of ideal masculinity" (173). Prior to publishing this novella, Douglass had never shied away from referring to Washington's racial features. For instance, in his speech of April 1849, entitled "Slavery, the Slumbering Volcano," he describes Washington as "a black man, with woolly head, high cheek bones, protruding lips, distended nostril, and retreating forehead" (*Papers* Vol. 2, 155). Yarborough justly finds the Washington portrayed in *The Heroic Slave* to be a troubling reinforcement of "one of the fundamental assertions of the racist, proslavery position: that the appearance of most blacks signified inferiority" (174). However, for a racist white readership, the changes Douglass makes in Washington as fictional hero do allow him to pass more acceptably as the standard hero of romance, even while remaining "dark," "glossy," and "black."

Additionally, Yarborough briefly notes how Douglass's description lifts Washington to "superhuman stature" through allusions to Hercules and the Old Testament (172). Through this connection, Douglass aligns himself with southern romancers whose heroes approximate those of epics and supernatural narratives, rather than the wavering, mediocre heroes of Scott's novels. Washington meets Frye's characterization of the romance hero as "analogous to mythical Messiah or deliverer" (206) who promises to effect great change in his society. As Michael Kreyling explains, the romance hero as cultural savior must first be recognized and affirmed as a leader by his community, who then become "a social group organized . . . by their recognition" (*Figures* 14). Once this recognition and subsequent community solidification occur, the hero can become a force for societal preservation. Washington assumes this position within his community, one

made up of fellow slaves being shipped as merchandise to New Orleans. Among these men, Douglass tells us, "Madison, by that mesmeric power which is the invariable accompaniment of genius, had already won the confidence of the gang, and was a sort of general-in-chief among them" (153). He stands to be a hero that, like Susan Tracy claims most heroes of southern romance do, follows the model of the "medieval epic hero who molds history and founds civilization" (40). As we shall soon see, his influence extends beyond his own race, as he gains white followers and promises to become a national figure.

Apart from his masculine, heroic appearance, Washington displays further standard traits of a romance hero. He is a great leader, whom even Tom Grant, the first mate aboard the *Creole*, must acknowledge as "a superior man; one who had he been a white man, I would have followed willingly and gladly in any honorable enterprise. Our difference of color was the only ground for difference of action" (163). His leadership abilities, which keep the violence aboard the *Creole* from escalating beyond two casualties and which carefully guide the captured vessel into the free port of Nassau, appear even to sway someone like Grant, who must be convinced of the innate inferiority in the slaves to justify his participation in the institution. Additionally, Washington is also presented as committing great acts of bravery prior to his first appearance in the novella. Before he even convinces himself that slavery is an enemy against which he must fight, he reminds himself of his past deeds and asks himself, "When that young man struggled with the waves *for life*, and others stood back appalled in helpless horror, did I not plunge in, forgetful of life, to save his? The raging bull from whom all others fled, pale with fright, did I not keep at bay with a single pitchfork?" (133). Throughout the novella, Washington is presented as a

manly, bold, and charismatic leader who rightly earns the distinction of "heroic chief and deliverer" that is given him in the work's final sentence (163).[8]

Like his white heroic counterparts, Washington faithfully upholds the codes of chivalry. Like most romances, *The Heroic Slave* does, indeed, involve a romantic plot, focusing upon the relationship between Washington and his wife Susan, through which Douglass further reinforces his slave hero's connection to the ideology of southern romance heroes. As representatives of paternalistic values, romance heroes must sacrifice selfish individual desires to the needs and protection of the family and community. Douglass's novella, Maggie Sale argues, "offers a notion of patriarchal connection to family and community that modifies any individualistic valorization of personal freedom" ("Critique" 704). Indeed, Washington defers his initial escape attempt because "the thought of leaving [his] poor wife and two little children caused [him] indescribable anguish," but he eventually convinces himself "that once free, [he] could, possibly, devise ways and means to gain their freedom also" (139). Once in Canada, he suffers intense guilt over having left Susan behind and becomes "resolved to hazard [his] own liberty, to gain that of [his] wife" (154). Valuing his obligations to his family over his own personal liberty, he courageously returns to Virginia. Tragically, however, during the attempt to

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[8] Certainly, Douglass's work also intends to dispel the myth of black male cowardice, often advanced by defenders of slavery as evidence of black inferiority. In his argument with Jack Williams, who claims that the incident on the *Creole* "was the result of ignorance of the real character of *darkies* in general" (157), Tom Grant becomes the spokesman for a sociological argument that cowardice in slaves is encouraged by the institution, not inherent to the black race. First, he denies "that the negro is, naturally, a coward" (158). Then, he proposes that their environment fosters behavior that can be interpreted as cowardice and that therefore

> it is one thing to manage a company of slaves on a Virginia plantation, and quite another thing to quell an insurrection on the lonely billows of the Atlantic, where every breeze speaks of courage and liberty. For the negro to act cowardly on shore, may be to act wisely; and I've some doubts whether *you*, Mr. Williams, would find it very convenient were you a slave in Algiers, to raise your hand against the bayonets of a whole government. (158)

As an example, he explains that the white crew of the *Creole* quickly became cowards themselves once the roles of crew and cargo were reversed, and "the terror-stricken sailors were clinging, like so many frightened monkeys . . . [to] the rigging" (162). Douglass even employs the imagery of animals, specifically primates, so often applied to black slaves to imply a subhuman status, to illustrate that whites themselves could quickly assume the characteristics they associate with slaves if situations were different.

sneak his wife off the plantation, they are discovered and pursued; Susan is shot and killed, and Madison is captured and condemned to be sold in New Orleans.[9] This heroic commitment to his obligations to family is in accordance with the expectations for southern romance heroes. However, it stands in contrast to what many white readers would have expected of men in slavery and, moreover, to the many slave narratives that portray "the strongest and most resourceful of black men in individual escapes to the North" (Sale, "Critique" 704).

Most significantly, Madison Washington passes as a southern romance hero in the tradition to which he becomes attached and because of the cultural values he embraces. Frank Meriwether, the plantation patriarch of *Swallow Barn*, used the lack of slaves' participation in the Revolution as evidence of their contentment with their status because they were so "passive to the pressure of a yoke which the philosophy of this age affects to consider as the most intolerable of burthens" (465). Douglass contradicts this assertion by attaching his heroic slave to this "philosophy of the age" as it was espoused by revered Virginia heroes and patriots, explaining that Washington was "a man who loved liberty as well as did Patrick Henry,--who deserved it as much as Thomas Jefferson,--and who fought for it with a valor as high, an arm as strong, and against odds as great, as he who led all the armies of the American colonies through the great war for freedom and independence" (132). He forces his readers to consider the efforts of a slave to escape slavery in terms of the struggles of the founding fathers to throw off the shackles of British tyranny. Consequently, Madison Washington becomes a figure, like all other great

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[9] The depiction of the love plot in *The Heroic Slave* is particularly interesting. Popular press accounts of Washington's story supposed that his wife may have been among those slaves being shipped to New Orleans on the *Creole* and that a threat to her safety or an attempt to ensure her freedom may have prompted Washington's initiation of the slave uprising aboard the ship (Andrews, "Novelization" 28). Douglass's killing of Susan well before the uprising effectively deemphasizes the romantic plot. Even though Washington's wife has been killed, Douglass argues that there is still much to fight for; romance heroes' struggles are cultural and communal struggles rather than personal ones. Though his wife is lost, Washington can still fulfill his heroic role by leading his community to freedom.

historical figures of early American national history including the more famous Washington, who fights for liberty above all else. The first scene depicting Washington finds him in misery in the woods near the plantation of his master, mourning his enslaved state, and paraphrasing Patrick Henry's famous words as he claims "*Liberty* I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it" (133). By making such a connection, Douglass attempts to achieve what Rafia Zafar has found to be the goal of "literary masking, the use of literary genres and styles familiar to whites" by black writers. That is, he attempts to gain "access to an audience that had not previously believed the Negro had any rights worth respecting" (Zafar 10). Through this process, black writers begin to assert their own identities as Americans, rather than as merely the imported African property of Americans.

During the last decade, however, the most heated debate in the scholarship on *The Heroic Slave* has concerned the implications of Douglass's basing his depiction of Washington's struggle upon the tradition of the founding fathers. William Andrews and Richard Yarborough have been the strongest critics of this problematic strategy. Andrews argues that Douglass made an error in failing to note that "the norm by which he measures his liberty-seeking hero is three slaveholders, . . . all of whom deprived hundreds of their right to enjoy liberty," and finally concludes that Douglass bought into "the authorizing mythology of an oppressive culture" (*To Tell* 187). Echoing Andrews, Yarborough finds Douglass's "celebration of black heroism [to be] subverted from the outset by the racist, sexist and elitist assumptions upon which the Anglo-American male ideal was constructed and that so thoroughly permeated the patriarchal structure of slavery" (182). Neither of these critics proposes that Douglass was conscious of these implications; instead, they characterize them as the consequences of his appropriation of a tainted rhetoric. Ultimately, Yarborough expresses doubt about whether "the tools of the master can ever be used to achieve the complete liberation of the slave" (183).

Maggie Sale has most strongly contested the assertions of these earlier critics and defended Douglass's rhetoric in the novella. Rather than viewing Douglass's use of Revolutionary language as the reinforcement of an oppressive ideology, Sale claims that Washington's appropriation of "the legacy of the founders to authorize slave rebellion was deeply disruptive" because "Douglass successfully changed the meaning of the Revolution . . . by refashioning it to suit the agenda of the event he (re)presents, an agenda which the founders would certainly not have supported" ("To Make" 55). Unlike the critics before her, Sale does not see "the language of the Revolution as yet another entrapment" for Douglass because he "does not accede or submit to the founder's ideology; instead, he redefines that language for his own ideological purposes" (56). According to her reading of *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass's strategy was an ingenious revision of the founders' rhetoric to suit his own political goals.

My argument is positioned between these two readings of Douglass's text and is consistent with Eric Sundquist's claim that "the notion that the language of the Revolution was but a new form of totalizing imprisonment, a thorough mockery of freedom, is a view that would have been anathema to Douglass" (121). That is, I am not proposing, as Sale does, that Douglass was entirely aware of the disruptive effect his appropriation of the language of the founding fathers would have. Instead, I believe his aim was merely to portray African-American slaves as genuine heirs to that tradition of liberty, to claim what he believed to be every American's legacy despite the color of his skin. I am also unconvinced that Douglass detected any irony in the fact that these representatives of liberty whom he cites were all slaveholders. If he did find a contradiction in the legacy of the founding fathers, it was that those people who deprived slaves of their liberty also praised the figures of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry as heroes for fighting against threats to their own freedom. By reclaiming this legacy as the right of slaves as well, Douglass was intent upon getting his white readership to realize this

contradiction and see that to uphold American tradition meant ridding the United States of slavery. Thus, Douglass is engaged in the same "strategy of narrativization" in which white southern romancers are involved; he appeals to a tradition "in order to create a sense of belonging to a community and to a history which transcends the experience of conflict, difference, and division" (Thompson 61-2). While the southern romancers used this technique to legitimate aristocratic authority, Douglass does so in order to subvert this authority.

Of course, the challenge faced by such an approach is that an unbelieving readership must be convinced that slavery is a similar oppression to that experienced by the white American colonists, that the slaves desire liberty, and that they could and would benefit from freedom. In essence, Douglass must make his audience realize that American values, laws, and government have now become a threat to liberty rather than its protector. Washington expresses such a view after his initial escape from slavery and upon his arrival in Canada, where he claims that he is "nestle[d] in the mane of the British lion, protected by the mighty paw from the talons and the beak of the American eagle" (147).

More importantly than Washington's viewing America as a threat to liberty, Douglass's white characters experience similar revelations in the novella. First, the Ohioan Listwell becomes an ardent abolitionist after being confronted with the horrors of slavery when accidentally happening upon Washington in the forest, and is immediately "resolved to atone for [his] past indifference to this ill-starred race, by making such exertions as [he will] be able to do, for the speedy emancipation of every slave in the land" (135). Even more convincing than making an abolitionist out of a northerner is the similar transformation of a southerner deeply involved in the commercial aspects of the slave trade. This Douglass provides in the last section of his novella as first mate Grant recounts the events of the uprising and defends himself against hostile critics. He eventually resolves "never to set foot on the deck of a slave ship, either as officer, or common sailor again . . .

[because] this whole slave-trading business is a disgrace and scandal to Old Virginia" (159). This drastic change is a result of witnessing Washington's bravery and hearing his moving justification of the uprising:

> You may call me a *black murderer.* I am not a murderer. God is my witness that LIBERTY, not *malice*, is the motive for this night's work. I have done no more to those dead men yonder, than they would have done to me in like circumstances. We have struck for our freedom, and if a true man's heart be in you, you will honor us for the deed. We have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, *so were they.* (161)

His assertion that a "true man" would have honored the rebellious slaves could easily have been changed to a "true American" because Grant's conversion from slave trader to abolitionist is the result of his understanding that slaves are fighting for "LIBERTY," the same struggle in which all of the great American heroes of the past were engaged. Grant confirms that only Washington's race or slave status had previously obscured this understanding: "It was not that his principles were wrong in the abstract; for they are the principles of 1776. But I could not bring myself to recognize their application to one whom I deemed my inferior" (163). The institution of slavery and the myths created about blacks to justify it are ironically revealed as the cause of southern violation of the region's cherished traditions. Douglass argues that once readers get beyond these misconceptions, they will see that the central struggle fought by the slaves is the same one that is so celebrated when fought by white patriots, which he further asserts by placing his slave hero directly in the line of those men as Grant claims "it seemed as if the souls of both the great dead (whose names he bore) had entered him" (161).

The question of why Douglass would fashion his slave hero as a southern romance hero rather than as a hero more faithful to Scott's formula is an important one.

Undoubtedly, like white southern romancers, Douglass found the wavering Scott heroes, such as Edward Waverly and Francis Osbaldistone, to be less suited to his purposes than the more aggressive, charismatic, and committed men represented by Simms's Robert Singleton, Caruthers's Nathaniel Bacon, and Kennedy's Arthur Butler. Despite these characters' alliance with tradition over progress, they embodied masculine virtues that Douglass wanted to display in his slave hero, while the mediocrity and lack of commitment of Scott's characters would have reinforced many white preconceptions about African-American males. Instead, by appropriating the southern white model of heroics, Douglass entered the conflict, William Andrews describes, "in which black and white texts have competed for the right to define the discursive space in which 'the Negro' would be signified" ("Inter(racial)textuality" 302). In Virginia novels, slaves were consistently characterized as "obsequious in attitude toward this ruling group, cheerful in acceptance of a humble lot, unambitious, ignorant, superstitious, [and] fantastically funny" (Gaines 3). Apart from the rare exception that Heath's *Edge-Hill* represents, southern novels of the period necessarily propagated this popular image of slaves in order to justify slavery to both themselves as southerners and the rest of the world. As Andrews explains, "The Negro of antebellum southern myth and propaganda is and must always be a constant, constitutionally averse and impervious to change, for the sake of himself, his white folks, and the southern ideal of civilization" (305). The simple act of placing a slave into a romance as hero offered a strong challenge to this myth about the race. Also, Madison Washington illustrated that the ideal that white aristocratic males had set up to distinguish themselves from females, blacks, and lower class males could be realized by men in slavery as well, or, as Robert Stepto explains, "that statesmen and slaves may share the same name and be heroes and Virginians alike" (362).

As in all Virginia novels, the image of the state becomes a central concern in *The Heroic Slave*. While published originally for abolitionist readers, Douglass's use of the

standard Virginia novel opening expressing the traditional view of Virginia as the birthplace of great men and bastion of liberty reveals an appeal to a possible future southern readership. However, his invocation of the heroes of the revolution appears to serve much the same purpose as Heath's revolutionary tale in its intention to illustrate that the present pales in comparison to the noble intentions of the past. No longer a friend to liberty, Virginia is portrayed as "an enemy's land" to this man "who sought both [his] life and [his] liberty" and who felt "robbed by society of all [his] just rights" (142). Douglass manipulates the state pride aroused at the beginning of his work in order to deromanticize Virginia and present it as the corrupt cornerstone of a misguided, oppressive nation.

As a Virginia novel with a different goal, *The Heroic Slave* shifts its focus to the parts of plantation society usually neglected by works that intend only to glorify southern planter society. There is no elaborate description of a plantation house here; instead, we are given descriptions of the nearby woods, where Washington goes to express privately his rage over his enslavement and where he eventually spends five years in hiding, before fleeing to the North. More significantly, the type of description usually bestowed upon the house at the center of a Virginia novel is here given to "a somewhat ancient and famous public tavern, quite notorious in its better days, as being the grand resort for most of the leading gamblers, horse-racers, cock-fighters, and slave-traders from all the country round about," but which, "like everything else peculiar to Virginia, lost much of its ancient consequence and splendor." He continues the description of the building where Listwell is shocked to discover Washington back in chains in terms reminiscent of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher," claiming that "the gloomy mantle of ruin is, already, outspread to envelop it, and its remains, even but now remind one of a human skull, after the flesh has mingled with the earth" (147).

In Guy Cardwell's study of the image of the plantation house in southern literature, he explains that antebellum novelists used "the house in a plantation setting as a metaphor

for those aspects of the South that they wished to praise" (15). The image became a "constant as a sign of status and as a representation of values," and "the overall tendency on the part of proslavery writers was toward the idealization of the plantation house" (18). Douglass's decision to avoid completely the plantation house in *The Heroic Slave* and instead to focus on a more representative architectural symbol, the slave tavern, intentionally ignored in other antebellum southern fiction, is a powerful revision of the Virginia tradition. Yet, as other writers do in their descriptions of the plantation house, Douglass still connects this building to Virginia's proud past. It was "once as good a house as any in Virginy," its stables had "given shelter to hundreds of the noblest steeds of 'the Old Dominion,'" and the loafers surrounding the tavern know "all the great names of Virginia . . . by heart" (148). The building's centrality to the work reflects slavery's status in Virginia. Upon arriving at the tavern, Listwell hears of "the greatest sale of niggers at Richmond to-morrow that has taken place there in a long time" and is told that "almost all other business in Virginia is dropped to engage" in slave commerce (149). Despite his abhorrence of the institution, Listwell assumes the role of a slaveowner shopping for merchandise because he is convinced "that a buyer of men and women stood the best chance of being respected" in Virginia and would have the most access to the captured hero (151). The Virginia Douglass portrays is placed upon a firm foundation of slavery, while still "boasting of its liberty, independence, and high civilization" (152).

In contrast to most Virginia novels, Douglass's work finally argues for progress, for the end to slavery. However, it argues for this progress by evoking a tradition. In Walter Scott's romances, tradition always stands as an obsolete obstacle to progress; in southern romances, tradition proves to be the only defense against the threat of progress. Douglass's novella, like *Edge-Hill*, finds a way to bridge the two. He asks his reader to reconsider the tradition, that love of liberty canonized by the founding fathers to prove that in order to uphold this tradition, progress must be made because a nation built on the ideas

of liberty and freedom cannot seriously cherish those values while withholding those rights from a significant portion of its population. By having his white characters, including slaver trader Grant, endorse slave rebellion as honorable, as precedented by the action of past patriots, and as ultimately American, Douglass proposes that in the name of tradition, slavery must be abolished.

After Listwell sees Washington for the final time, at the slave sale in Richmond, he heads home, "gladly shaking off from his feet the dust of Old Virginia" (156). Unlike his abolitionist figure, Douglass revels in this dust, the traditions of the Old Dominion, including the conventions of southern historical romance that make his work so effective. While acknowledging that the traditions of the South, including aristocracy and slavery, stood in the way of progress, he boldly employs one of the tools most often used to reinforce those traditions in order to argue for their abolishment. By illustrating how the southern romance can be appropriated for subversive purposes, Douglass effectively dismantles the genre as a tool of oppression. His work illustrates well the implications of black appropriation of a white genre. Under Douglass's pen, the southern historical romance becomes a weapon against the aristocracy, a conscious threat to the ruling class rather than a platform for its views as it is typically used.

Douglass as Romance Hero

Critics, including Robert Stepto and Eric Sundquist, have argued that Douglass found much to identify with in the figure of Madison Washington and that he was "attracted to Washington's story because it in some measure revises his *own* story" (Stepto 359). Stepto lists several parallels between the lives of the two men, noting that "both Washington and Douglass began their escape attempts in 1835, and both gained public attention as free men in the fall of 1841" (359). He then explains how Douglass may have found himself deficient in comparison to his slave hero: "While Douglass caulked ships in

Baltimore (including, perhaps, a slaver or two such as the *Creole*), Washington led black slaves in a ship's revolt. Similarly, while Douglass escaped from slavery wearing a sailor's suit, Washington was, in both a literal and figurative sense, a truer and more heroic sailor" (359). Stepto implies here that Douglass perceived himself to be a less heroic figure than Washington, or at least that his own heroism suffers in comparison to one who was willing to sacrifice his own freedom to lead his people out slavery.[10]

However, it would be a mistake to claim that Douglass did not see himself as much of a hero as was Madison Washington. He clearly equates himself with Washington in *The Heroic Slave* when he notes that his is the "pen of genius" capable of chronicling Washington's tale (132) and later uses similar terminology to explain Washington's charisma, attributing it to "that mesmeric power which is the invariable accompaniment of genius" (153). The term "genius" that Douglass employs to describe both himself and his hero was one that, Michael Kreyling explains, was often used interchangeably with the word "hero" in antebellum writing (*Figures* 32). And, according to Kreyling, it was not rare for a romancer to link himself favorably to his hero. He specifically addresses Simms, who conceived of the romancer as "the spirit of his people, making his folk conscious of their corporate identity, fighting people's battles with literature as Green and Marion fought with saber and rifle" (32). In Simms's view, "the hero figure is also the autobiographical extension of the author; only the man of letters can create genius because only he shares heroic stature." In other words, "writing about the hero is the result of heroic traits in the writer himself" (32). This elaboration of the relationship between author and hero is similar to the one Douglass perceives between himself and Madison Washington. Like Simms's romancer, Douglass is the "spirit of his people," creating an awareness of a

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[10] However, this contrast could easily be made to favor Douglass. For instance, while Washington quickly faded from the public eye after gaining his freedom, Douglass spent the rest of his life fighting to end slavery and to make conditions better for his race in America. Arguably, Douglass affected many more lives than Washington ever did.

"corporate identity" and fighting the same battles in literature that Washington does as he breaks from his fetters and raises his hand against the crew of the *Creole*.

Douglass's heroic self-conception predates the writing of *The Heroic Slave*, beginning at least with his decision to take his name from a romance hero, an act, which, in addition to displaying a familiarity with Scott's work, becomes the first step in his self-fashioning project. As George Shepperson explains, Douglass "seems to have found some peculiar fascination and destiny" in his chosen name (307). Subsequent scholars have attempted to establish exactly what his name meant to Douglass. Peter Walker has proposed that Douglass identified with Scott's character "in his unflinching fortitude in adversities brought about by the wrongful loss of his patrimony" and claims that Douglass "internalized" the hero, who despite "the loss of his honors and wealth, . . . never is embittered or vindictive" (256). Because in the end of *The Lady of the Lake* the hero's patrimony is restored to him, Walker implies that by assuming this name, Douglass hoped for a similar resolution to his own story. More recently, Lucinda MacKethan has argued that Douglass accepted his friend's suggestion of the name, "finding a compliment in its reference to such a manly hero" ("Fugitive Slave" 67). Finally, David Leverenz echoes both Walker and MacKethan in his claim that Douglass desired to take his name from "a manly text" and was attracted by Scott's character being "a paragon of unflinching fortitude in adversity" ("Self-Refashioning" 362).

Despite this connection between the romance hero and Douglass's self-image, little effort has been made to determine what effect this association may have had on Douglass's efforts to write his own story. Specifically, if the only way to relate tales of heroes was indeed the romance, then Douglass's life-writing, the tale of his own heroism, would appear to be influenced necessarily by that genre. In a sense, Douglass, by taking up the name of Scott's hero, cast himself as a romance hero both in life and his texts. And a close reading can indeed reveal romance elements even in his earliest autobiography, *Narrative*

of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (1845), most strongly in the characterization of himself as hero, paralleling the figures of historical romance, and in his characterization of the other figures in his narrative, most obviously the "villains" of his personal romance, those who oppose his quest for freedom.

Popular approaches to Douglass's self-portrait in the narrative often relate it either to Benjamin Franklin's model of the self-made man or to the figure of the trickster, the picaro of the picaresque tradition.[11] Certainly, both of these figures are influential in Douglass's depiction of himself in his narrative, but because, as Jean Fagan Yellin has argued, the narrative is "less an American success story than a hero tale" (163), an examination of Douglass's self-depiction in terms of the romance hero in the tradition of Scott, more specifically a Scott hero transformed by an antebellum writer in the American South, is in order. Not only would such an examination be useful in contextualizing slave writing into the larger literary culture of the antebellum South, but also, like *The Heroic Slave*, it would illustrate how a black writer could appropriate the white construct of the romance hero to serve his own purposes.

Douglass's self-portrait in the *Narrative* is remarkably similar to the southern romance hero who, as Susan Tracy describes, "is always morally and intellectually superior to the men he leads," "dominate[s] the action of the novel," and "emerge[s] as the ideal of human perfection" (40). More specifically, Douglass portrays himself as "the Messianic hero" and "redeemer of society" that Northrop Frye sees as central to the characterization of a hero of romance (192). Certainly, Douglass uses Christian imagery in his self-portrait, most obviously in his depiction of his battle with "nigger-breaker" Covey. During the struggle, Douglass appears as a crucified Christ, "covered with blood . . . from the crown of my head to my feet," "hair . . . all clotted with dust and blood," and "legs and

[11] For a reading of Douglass as self-made man, see Rafia Zafar. For readings of Douglass as picaro, see Henry Louis Gates and Charles Nichols.

feet . . . torn in sundry places with briers and thorns" (*Narrative* 66). Life after the battle he calls "a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom" (69), characterizing himself as a triumphant risen Christ. As he is moved to the Freeland farm, he depicts himself as a savior to his people, the other slaves on the plantation. He "succeeded in creating in them a strong desire to learn how to read" and devoted his "Sundays to teaching these my loved fellow-slaves" (73). He explains that he took such risks to teach this group of slaves, numbering up to forty, "because it was the delight of my soul to be doing something that looked like bettering the condition of my race" (74). After educating them, he begins to plan a mass exodus, writing forged passes and planning the escape route. He is the "head of the whole affair," and, as he notes, "the responsibility of success or failure lay heavily upon me" (77). Despite the failure of this group attempt, Douglass later successfully makes the journey to freedom. Yet, like Madison Washington, who could not enjoy his freedom while others were enslaved, Douglass becomes a speaker for the abolitionist cause, addressing white audiences, "a severe cross" that he is willing to bear in order to plead "the cause of my brethren" (92-3). He himself finds an alternative way to gain Washington's status as "heroic chief and deliverer" of his people.

In the *Narrative*, Douglass thus displays "the attributes of divinity" that Frye claims "will cling to the hero" of the romance (187). These attributes appear not only in the implicit connection of himself to Christ but also in the assertions that providence has directed each step of his life. From his earliest recollection, he claims to have known that "slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace" and attributes the "good spirit" of God for giving him the faith and hope that "remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom" (47). When he is sent from the Lloyd plantation to Baltimore as a child, he considers it "as a special interposition of divine Providence in my favor" (47). Later, he claims that "a kind Providence" allowed him to remain in Baltimore even after he is threatened with plantation life following the death of his original owner

(91). Like other romance heroes, he is guided by higher powers, often divine, through the steps of his quest.

Most importantly, it is his emphasis upon his duty to his community that places the Douglass of the 1845 narrative closer to a romance hero than to a self-made man or picaro. He embodies the priority upon communal obligations that is a central characteristic of southern romance heroes. Kreyling explains that this emphasis upon community differentiates southern romance heroes from the heroes of northern romancers such as Cooper. He argues that the Cooper hero "leaves something to be desired in his ties to a larger human group and to its culture," encompasses "no strong social element," and "seldom indulges in social contact" (*Figures* 33). He claims that Cooper's figures, unlike southern heroes, "do not forge a corporate 'we' through love or mutual identification" and are "not interested in the long-range project of establishing a civilization capable of surviving the ordeal of history" (34-5). This "communal ethos," a requisite of southern romance heroes, has been noticed by scholars of Douglass's work, especially when compared to works by such New England writers as Henry David Thoreau (W. Nichols 146). Douglass's emphasis upon community is most evident in his intensive planning of the escape from the Freeland farm. He explains his ties to his fellow slaves: "We were linked and interlinked with each other. I loved them with a love stronger than any thing I have experienced since. . . . We never undertook to do any thing, of any importance, without a mutual consultation. We never moved separately. We were one. . . . I bent myself to devising ways and means for our escape" (74-5). Like southern romance heroes, his actions are motivated not out of individual desires but are done on behalf of his community. Even at the end of the narrative, after he himself has attained freedom, he continues to fight for the concerns of his community, "the cause of my brethren" (93).

The southern romance hero is, as well, "a backward-looking conservative who seeks to preserve traditional society" (Tracy 40), and Douglass establishes the same

connection between American tradition and himself as slave hero as the one between Madison Washington and the founding fathers in *The Heroic Slave*. That is, he again compares the struggles of a slave for freedom to the acts of the Revolutionaries, by placing these in the context of Patrick Henry's battle for liberty. As a result of this comparison, he concludes that the slaves' bravery is greater: "We did more than Patrick Henry, when he resolved upon liberty or death. With us it was a doubtful liberty at most, and almost certain death if we failed" (76). Thus, as in his accounts of Washington's heroism, he ties his own to the struggle of a favorite patriot, a man capable of serving as the hero of any southern romance, yet within this comparison he emphasizes that his battles were much riskier than Henry's in the Revolution, for the chances of success appeared even less possible.

In addition to his depiction of himself, Douglass also follows romance characterization in the other figures who occupy the narrative. In both Douglass's narrative and traditional romance, "everything is focussed on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero" (Frye 187). Consequently, "characters tend to be either for or against the quest," and "every typical character tends to have his moral opposite confronting him like black and white pieces in a chess game" (195). Such dialectical opposition between the hero and those opposed to his quest is very apparent in the narrative. For example, about Hugh Auld, the master who is adamant that Douglass not be educated, he writes: "What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought" (48). In this description, Hugh Auld stands as an obvious "moral opposite" to Douglass, but other characters can be seen to fulfill this function in other ways.

As Frye further explains, those figures who are positioned against the hero's quest, those opposing chess pieces, become "analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world"

and "take on demonic mythical qualities" (187). Douglass's association of his adversaries with demonic qualities occurs throughout his narrative, most notably in the drastic transformation of Sophia Auld and in Douglass's climactic physical battle with Edward Covey. Sophia, the wife of Hugh Auld, appears initially as an angelic figure, "entirely unlike any other white woman I had ever seen;" Douglass "was utterly astonished at her goodness," "heavenly smiles," and "kind heart" (47). With little subtlety, Douglass then announces that this "angelic face gave place to that of a demon" (48). The gentle nature of Sophia vanishes as she is entrusted with the responsibility of preventing Douglass from becoming literate. In her determination to keep him away from books and newspapers, "the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness" (50). Because she places herself in opposition to his quest, Douglass naturally demonizes her in his narrative. However, he does explain that the source of the evil is not inherent to her but lies in the institution of slavery, which "soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities" (50). He thus pronounces her as much a victim of slavery as himself, concluding that "slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me" (50).

An even stronger example of the technique of demonizing those figures who are positioned against his quest appears in his relation of his experience with Covey, the infamous "nigger-breaker," to whom Douglass is sent to "to be broken" (60). As Douglass takes on the role of Christ in their interchange, Covey is linked to Satan himself. Initially, we are told that slaves have nicknamed him "the snake" because he "would sometimes crawl on his hands and knees to avoid detection" and surprise the slaves when they are supposed to be working (62). The equation of Covey with the Devil becomes more obvious later when we are told that "Mr. Covey's *forte* consisted in his power to deceive. His life was devoted to planning and perpetrating the grossest deceptions. . . . He seemed to think himself equal to deceiving the Almighty himself" (63). Douglass's victory over Covey comes in a battle that lasts "nearly two hours" and in which Douglass "caus[ed]

blood to run where I touched him with the ends of my fingers" (68). He views this physical victory as a spiritual triumph, the end of "the hell of slavery" (34) which he entered as a child, and a "glorious resurrection" to "the heaven of freedom" (69). By winning in his struggle with Covey, Douglass has conquered "the demonic powers" often linked to the villains of romance.

As seen in this brief description of characterization, the concept of binary opposition that is essential to the structure of southern historical romance also appears crucial to Douglass's narrative. In fact, Henry Louis Gates has argued that these binary oppositions are the central structural device of the 1845 narrative. As illustration, Gates formulates a lengthy list of these oppositions, including aristocratic/base, civilized/barbaric, enterprise/sloth, rational/irrational, chivalry/cowardice, pure/cursed, and human/beastly (88-9). He argues that the narrative exposes the fact that this code of signifiers, created and perpetuated by the southern aristocracy and their literature, "stands in defiance of the natural *and* moral order" (89). Furthermore, he argues that Douglass's use of these binaries illustrates "how the slaveowner's world negates and even perverts those very values on which it is built" (89). Gates then proposes that Douglass's ultimate purpose is "to destroy that symbolic code that created the false oppositions themselves" by showing that "the oppositions, all along, were only arbitrary, not fixed" (89).

Douglass's interrogation of these binaries can be seen even in the romance characterization of his narrative, as he illustrates that both heroism and villainy are also arbitrary distinctions, determined exclusively by one's perspective. In his view of the events of his life, as has been discussed, he presents himself as Christlike and those who stand in his way as demonic. However, his own narrative reveals this as a purely subjective view of the related events, for he too is associated with hellish traits in the course of the book. Mrs. Freeland, after discerning that he masterminded the escape plot, demonizes him: "*You devil! You yellow devil!* it was you that put it into the heads of

Henry and John to run away. But for you, you long-legged mulatto devil! Henry nor John would never have thought of such a thing" (78). For a slave-owner, the rebellious slave is the devil (one, ironically, who would never appear in romances by whites). Douglass does not allow that position to stand either, for on the very next page of his narrative, a group of slave traders are described as "fiends from perdition" who "never looked more like their father, the devil" (79). Douglass understands that these labels are not significant in and of themselves because one label can just as easily be replaced with another, a charge he makes clear in his appendix, which attacks Christians who support slavery, a group he describes as "devils dressed in angels' robes, and hell presenting the semblance of paradise" (94).

The central difference between Douglass's use of the romance and that of a writer like James Heath is Douglass's selection of slave-owners as villains. While certainly subversive, Heath's *Edge-Hill* was in many ways a traditional Revolutionary War romance by a white southern romancer, featuring a troop of British soldiers and colonists loyal to the throne as the enemies of the hero and heroine. In the end, Heath's criticism was for those holding on to an outdated code of aristocracy that contradicted the tenets of the new nation, rather than slavery and its evils. Because Heath's critique of slavery was only implied, his heroic slave James fought primarily for the liberty of the white American colonists; his own freedom came about only as a by-product of the struggle, but was not its goal. In Douglass's work, of course, the aim is much different. As slaves become heroes fighting for their own liberty, like those American patriots decades earlier, slavery becomes the central obstacle to that goal. Thus, those figures aligned with slavery, whether slaveowners, slave traders, or vocal defenders of the institution, become the natural enemies of the slave hero and are consequently portrayed as villains in any romance of his deeds. Notably, though, these figures, slave-owning plantation dwellers who believed themselves to be upholding tradition, are usually the object of great praise in southern romance. By placing the hero's quest in his terms, making slaves the brave upholders of

American tradition, Douglass holds up a very different mirror to the slave-owning aristocracy of the South, revealing a reflection unlike any seen in previous romance.

Although the power of determining which figures appeared as heroes or villains became Douglass's right as he employed the southern romance to relate a slave's heroism, because that story was his life story, he faced additional challenges. His portraits of actual living figures and depictions of some events had to be adapted or fictionalized to conform to the conventions of romance. He seems to imply as much in his famous 1848 letter to his old master, Thomas Auld:

> I intend to make use of you as a weapon with which to assail the system of slavery--as a means of concentrating public attention on the system, and deepening the horror of trafficking in the souls and bodies of men. I shall make use of you as a means of exposing the character of the American church and clergy--and as a means of bringing this guilty nation, including yourself, to repentance. In doing this, I entertain no malice toward you personally. (*Bondage* 428)

The "use" that Douglass makes of the image of Auld, and not the man himself, is in adapting him into a villain in his depiction of the romance of his own history. His biographer William McFeely points out that, as evidenced by the many horrific deeds that Douglass falsely attributes to Thomas Auld in the narrative and the letter, the slave narrator "was not above altering details to make his story better" (159).[12] Because a realistic depiction of Auld might not have been as effective in serving his agenda, Douglass "had to create a monster" out of his former owner (McFeely 160). As William Andrews explains,

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[12] Among the charges that Douglass makes in the *Narrative* or the letter that McFeely considers false are those of separating slave families; of beating Douglass and having him dragged fifteen miles to be sold at a market (McFeely claims that instead Auld prevented him from being lynched and refused to sell him); and of mistreating Douglass's grandmother (according to McFeely, Auld neither owned nor apparently knew Douglass's grandmother). McFeely attributes the false charges to Douglass's conflation of all of slavery's ills into one figure (158-160).

"though Douglass knew that Auld was not the villain the *Narrative* made him out to be, the antislavery author chose the propagandistic advantage--and no doubt savored the personal ironies--of finally putting the slaveholder Auld to *his* service." Andrews concludes that Douglass's self-portrait also benefited from this characterization of Auld: "In the process of reinventing Thomas Auld as consummate slaveholding antagonist, Douglass augmented his personal image as heroic defender of his people" (*Oxford* 101).

Douglass's personal appropriation of the historical romance in *The Heroic Slave* and many of its conventions of characterization in the *Narrative* reveals much about the nature of black use of white genres and the subversion that occurred when a black writer simply picked up a pen and wrote in the dominant mode. While Douglass's work may indeed be a copy of white hands and perhaps "very similar" to that of the master, it cannot be said to be the same. By using the romance, previously employed to justify slavery and assert the dominance of racial hierarchy, Douglass turns the form against his oppressors; instead of the hero as a representative of aristocratic interests, here he is a genuine threat to those interests. This does not mean that Douglass's subversion was entirely intentional. Like any other narrator, he had only his culture's means of storytelling and would have unconsciously turned to romance to cast himself or other slaves as heroes. But rather than being merely "black messages" in "white envelopes" as John Sekora describes slave writing (482), in this case the black message transforms the white envelope, the genre of historical romance itself. Similarly, when Douglass took his name from *The Lady of the Lake*, it too was transformed in a way that was more obvious to his antebellum contemporaries than it is to modern readers, unfamiliar with the major characters of Scott. Though it is unclear whether he did so intentionally or entirely unconsciously, Douglass, from his initial assumption of the name, altered Scott's spelling of Douglas, adding a final "s," following the way "prominent black families in Baltimore and Philadelphia spelled it" (McFeely 78). Thus, his chosen name, while perhaps being very similar to that of a white

romance hero, still speaks his race and challenges the ideology of slavery, just as his texts do.

Chapter III

Monsters in the Old South: Edgar Allan Poe, Horror Fiction, and Aristocratic Anxiety about Slaves and Women

The previous chapters of this study have explored the implications of progressive white and black writers who were opposed to the southern aristocracy and yet were writing in the genre of the historical romance, that vital tool of conservative ideology in the Old South. In the cases of both James Heath and Frederick Douglass, my study illustrated the effects of this subversive use of genre upon the prevalent and oppressive ideology as well as upon the genre of southern historical romance itself. This chapter changes course and focuses upon Edgar Allan Poe, a writer who is very supportive of southern aristocratic values, and examines the implications of his decision to shun the romance as a form and his attempt to popularize new forms, including gothic horror fiction. As Poe departed from the southern historical romance, a genre that fostered an idyllic vision of the South, which was, in turn, used by the aristocracy to present a positive image of itself to the world, he abandoned a safe, controllable form and embraced a genre over which the aristocracy would have little check. In this chapter, I hope to prove two points about Poe's decision. First, Poe attempted with this new fiction consistently to reinforce the dominant ideology of the aristocracy of the Old South--especially its attitudes about slavery and women--in a fashion that was startling to and not well received by his contemporaries. Second, despite Poe's intentions, the form he employed directly threatened the southern aristocracy because it relied upon the exposure and exploitation of the very fears of the aristocracy that the genre of historical romance had never voiced or acknowledged. That is, the anxieties of the aristocracy that were rendered silent or invisible in romance had to be heard or seen in Poe's work if it was to be in any way effective as horror fiction. Essentially, unlike in previous chapters, which illustrated the effect of a writer's ideology upon a genre, my

argument here is that the form a conservative writer chose to employ could effectively subvert the ideology with which he aligned himself.

Although Edgar Allan Poe has always been the most famous and widely read of the writers of the Old South, skepticism about whether he is deserving of the label of southern writer has been widespread. For many readers, the gothic gloom of "The Raven" or "The Fall of the House of Usher" is hard to reconcile with the charming portrayals of plantation life common in antebellum southern writing. Thus, critics find Poe's claim to southernness somewhat tentative, arguing that he was "Southern only by courtesy" (Wendell 487) or dismissing him, as W. J. Cash does, as "only half a Southerner" (93). Some studies of southern literature, while devoting significant space to Poe, claim that he should more rightly be considered an author "without a country" because "no poet, no fiction writer, has less claim to the title [of southern writer] than he" (Moses 276).[1] This reluctance to deem Poe southern is explained by G. R. Thompson, who notes that "rarely does he employ Southern locales or character types; he does not embroil himself in the issue of slavery; he does not address matters of Southern autonomy and separatism; he does not confront Southern with Northern personages; he does not cast Southern leaders as knights in quest of glory" (277). Fundamentally, Thompson questions Poe's southernness because his works are "virtually devoid of regionalist sentiment" (268). The ideology traditionally associated with the Old South, that of aristocratic planters, is not readily apparent in the nightmare visions of mad narrators, crumbling mansions, undead women, and murderous apes that are the mainstay of Poe's canon.

However, a large body of scholarship, especially that of the last decade, has illustrated Poe's affinity to the prevailing beliefs of his region. Current studies of Poe no longer focus merely on proving or disproving Poe's southernness. Instead, recent work

[1] Even some literary histories and reference books written in the last decade persist in casting doubts upon Poe's southernness, arguing that he "was not a true Southerner" (Snodgrass 241) and that he is "a writer whose 'Southerness' is suspect" (G. Thompson 264).

has begun a new phase of Poe studies, reading his work, despite its apparent difference from the more typical literature by antebellum southerners, as clearly the product of a writer from the South. These critics have, in other words, called for a revision of traditional readings of Poe's canon that divorced him from his antebellum southern context. For example, Joan Dayan encourages "a rereading of Poe that depends absolutely on what has so often been cut out of his work: the institution of slavery [and] Poe's troubled sense of himself as a southern aristocrat" ("Amorous" 241). This rereading of Poe's work, contextualizing him in terms of his antebellum social and political climate, has certainly begun, with a flood of new studies to examine Poe as Dayan has suggested.[2]

Poe's biography, while not typical of most southern writers, certainly reveals his immersion in southern environs. While Poe was indeed born in Boston, he was taken in, at the age of two, by the Virginia family of John Allan, a wealthy merchant, following the death of his traveling-actor parents. In antebellum Richmond, young Poe lived as any well-off southern boy, being waited upon by the Allans' slaves, having access to a strong education, developing a chivalric idealization of women, and growing into the image of the young cavalier that denoted status in the Virginia of his day. The Allan family was by no means aristocratic, but, as Michael Allen explains, Poe was "growing up in a South that was extending an aristocratic code from the original Virginia gentry to the whole region to consolidate it against Northern pretensions" (133). And the five years that the Allan family, including Edgar, spent in England, from 1815 to 1820, might also have reinforced the family's aristocratic notions. Certainly, Poe continued playing the young southern gentleman at the University of Virginia, where he studied in 1826 until the debts accumulating from his extravagant lifestyle and excessive gambling forced Allan to bring

[2] Within the last decade, the critical work rereading Poe's canon in terms of his southern origins and values has been overwhelming. Many of these readings have focused upon *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*; see for examples Rowe, Bradfield, D. Nelson, Worley, Goddu, and Gardner. Others like Hovey, Dayan, and Livingston have focused on Poe's verse. And Gray, Rubin, and Leverenz have emphasized his tales as a reflection of his southernness.

him home. He also spent time in Charleston and Baltimore, always around slavery, and he probably even sold a slave for his aunt and future mother-in-law, Maria Clemm, in 1829 (John Miller 52-3). By the 1830s, Poe had devoted himself full time to his writing, and in 1835 he became the editor of the single most important periodical in the antebellum South, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, where he led a campaign to promote southern letters and a southern literary establishment.

Poe's views of the South and its institutions, primarily slavery, are, fortunately, recorded in his letters and reviews. For instance, his self-identification as a southerner is clearly stated in an 1841 letter: "I am a Virginian--at least I call myself one, for I have resided all my life, until the last few years, in Richmond" (*Letters* I, 170). As a Virginian, he adopted much of the ideology of the region's upper class, especially the belief in white supremacy and the hierarchy of races. He expressed this at an early age when in 1827 he wrote an outraged letter to his foster father Allan, who "suffer[ed] me to be subjected to the whims & caprices, not only of your white family, but the complete authority of the blacks--these grievances I could not submit to; and I am gone" (*Letters* I, 8). His numerous book reviews reveal more evidently his strong racism and support of slavery. Even without relying upon the controversial Paulding-Drayton review, the authorship of which cannot positively be attributed to Poe, a consistent pro-slavery, pro-southern stance is exhibited in many of Poe's signed reviews.[3] These include a review of Robert Bird's novel, *Sheppard*

[3] The review essay critiquing James Kirke Paulding's *Slavery in the United States* and William Drayton's *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists* appeared in the April 1836 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Alternately attributed to Poe and Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, the review has been used often by scholars attempting to characterize Poe as a supporter of slavery, including Ernest Marchand, Bernard Rosenthal, John Carlos Rowe, Joan Dayan, and Dana Nelson, but such attribution has been refuted loudly and often by others, including William Hull, G. R. Thompson, and J. V. Ridgely. Because the lengthy essay which defends slavery and lambasts abolitionists cannot be positively attributed to Poe, it will not be used here as evidence of Poe's position on the issue. However, even if Poe is eventually proven not to be the author, the review still provides a vivid example of the pro-slavery rhetoric published by the *Messenger* under Poe's editorship and espoused by Poe's acquaintances, highlighting the milieu amidst which Poe composed some of his greatest works. The best discussion of the evidence supporting Poe's authorship of the review can be found in Rosenthal's article. A more objective assessment of the entire controversy is given by Hutchisson 303-6.

Lee, wherein Poe celebrates the "character of Nigger Tom" and "some very excellent chapters upon abolition and the exciting effects of incendiary pamphlets and pictures, among our slaves in the South. This part of the narrative closes with a spirited picture of a negro insurrection, and with the hanging of Nigger Tom" (*Essays* 399).[4] The frequent appearance of such pro-slavery and anti-abolitionist sentiment throughout Poe's reviews makes it, as Bernard Rosenthal has claimed, "hard to believe that any serious scholar could still doubt that Poe supported the institution of slavery" (29).

Some scholars have asserted that Poe's connection to the southern aristocracy was merely a pose, one of many that he assumed in his professional and private life, for, as Allen Tate has famously stated, while Poe may have been "a gentleman and a Southerner, he was not quite, perhaps, a Southern gentleman" (41). By this, Tate means that Poe's claims to aristocratic status were tenuous if not non-existent. However, many scholars, including W. J. Cash in his important *The Mind of the South* (1941), have made the same claims about the entire antebellum South, portraying it as a culture intent upon creating an aristocratic image of itself, rewriting its past and merely acting a role. If this view of the South is correct, then, as Richard Gray has proposed, "Poe was perhaps never more of a Southerner than when he was imitating one: applying himself assiduously to the role of Virginia dandy, even when much of the historical evidence was against him" (186). And his desperate commitment to prove to his region and himself that he was truly a southern gentleman might have even increased his attachment to upper class ideology. Regardless of

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[4] Bernard Rosenthal points out Poe's signed reviews in the *Messenger* of J. H. Ingraham's *The South-West* (January 1836), Anne MacVicar Grant's *Memoirs of an American Lady* (July 1836), Robert Montgomery Bird's *Sheppard Lee: Written by Himself* (September 1836), and Thomas Dew's *Address* (November 1836), each of which celebrates the favorable depictions of slavery and the criticism of the abolitionist movement in the work under consideration. Rosenthal also refers to an unpublished review of John L. Carey's *Domestic Slavery* (1838) as illustrative of Poe's support of slavery. While the pro-slavery element of these reviews might be explained as Poe's appeal to a particular readership, pointing out aspects of works that would be of special interest to southern, slave-owning aristocrats, this cannot explain why Poe continued to take such a position in the 1840s in reviews of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and James Russell Lowell, published in northern periodicals.

the merit of his claims to aristocratic status, he might have deeply internalized the core beliefs of the aristocracy as a way to convince both himself and others that his status as a southern aristocrat was genuine.

Whether he justly deserves certain labels is immaterial, then, to the fact that he consciously constructed himself as a writer and a citizen in the mold of a southern aristocrat. He did this by publicly identifying himself as a southerner, by serving a term as the editor of the major literary magazine promoting southern literature, and by eventually portraying himself as a southern warrior, fighting the New England establishment to make a place for southern literature. Writing of himself in a review of "The Raven" that he anonymously placed in *The Broadway Journal*, Poe claimed that "the whole literary South and West are doing anxious battle in his [Poe's] person against the old time-honored tyrant of the North" (*Essays* 1100).[5] Indeed, a central facet of the public image he constructed for himself was his attachment to the South, allowing him to cast himself as an outsider, an embattled southern writer neglected by the New England establishment.

However, there were serious economic obstacles that prevented Poe from easily assuming the mantle of gentleman southern writer. Unlike his fellow southern writers, Poe had no source of income other than his writing.[6] Thus, the ordinary course of writing historical romance was not really viable for him. Indeed, the reason that Poe never worked on a romance of the South is neither, as some have suggested, an inability to produce a romance, though critics have constantly asserted that Poe's longer works like *The Narrative*

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[5] For a detailed account of the feud with Longfellow wherein Poe depicted himself as a southern writer challenging the New England literary machine, see Hovey. Poe attacked the poet as a representative of "the Longfellow junto," the "small coterie of abolitionists, transcendentalists and fanatics in general" that prevented southern writers from making literary careers (*Essays* 760). But besides seeing Longfellow as an obstacle to literary success, Poe also saw the poet as a political threat to the region, especially in his "Poems on Slavery," which Poe considered "a shameless medley of the grossest misrepresentation . . . intended for the especial use of those negrophilic old ladies of the north, who form so large a part of Mr. Longfellow's friends" (763).

[6] See Hubbell 539-40 for a comparison of Poe's circumstances to those of other contemporary southern writers.

of Arthur Gordon Pym suffer in comparison to his shorter works, nor an aesthetic principle, which Poe consistently claimed he was upholding by writing shorter works. Instead, even though Poe was well-versed in the tradition of historical romance, its conventions and reader expectations, and probably could have written a successful romance, Poe could never have survived financially if he had produced only one lengthy book per year. Since writing long romances demanded so much time and was not very profitable, Poe became the first southern writer to abandon this respected form, never attempting to write a book similar to those of Simms or Caruthers, as he sought an alternative that could lead to frequent and adequate financial rewards; and so he discovered magazine writing. The new forms that he employed could certainly be used to express the sentiments of region, but they also offered new problems as transmitters of upper class ideology.

Importantly, Poe's rejection of the romance should not be completely seen as aesthetic as he would have his reader believe. As a reviewer of over a thousand books for several major literary magazines in the 1830s and 40s, Poe was perhaps overly aware of the popular novels being produced by his contemporaries, both northern and southern. Though Poe was famous for being a caustic critic, condemning works based upon the most minute detail of faulty punctuation or insincere dedication, many of the southern historical romances of his day received relatively unscathing, if not completely favorable, reviews from him. Among these, he praised John Pendleton Kennedy's *Horse-Shoe Robinson* (1835), William Gilmore Simms's *The Damsel of Darien* (1839), and, most notably, Nathaniel Beverly Tucker's *George Balcombe* (1836), which he considered "upon the whole, as *the best* American novel" (*Essays* 978). If Poe's situation had been different, he would probably have tried his hand at writing a southern romance merely because of the status that such a work denoted. However, necessity led Poe away from the path of historical romance and toward shorter magazine forms.

To make a career in magazine literature and still wear the cloak of gentleman writer involved justifying his choice as an artistically valid and proper one despite his actual reasons. He did so by arguing, in such pieces as his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales* and "The Philosophy of Composition," that shorter forms, the tale and lyric poetry, were "unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent" (*Essays* 571). His primary justification for privileging short forms was their preservation of the "unity of effect or impression," which he considered to be "of the greatest importance" and without which "the soul [of the reader] is never moved" (571). He faulted the novel for its length, claiming that "this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed in one sitting," for "worldly interests intervening during the pauses of perusal, modify, annul, or counteract, in a greater or lesser degree, the impressions of the book" (571-2). Thus, he concludes that the suitable length for works of fiction should be such that "requir[es] from a half-hour to one to two hours in its perusal" (572). Of course, this is the length of typical magazine fiction, making the genre within which Poe most often chose to work the most suitable form for great art. As Andrew Levy has observed, "Poe's celebration of short forms was part of an effort to enhance the status of the magazine as a site of high-culture discourse by enhancing the status of its most visible and exclusive contents" (15). In other words, "it was not by accident that [Poe's] theory of fiction set an aesthetic for a magazine literature" (Parks 56).

In his emphasis upon the emotional impact a work has upon its reader, Poe's objections to the novel, specifically the historical romance, did not end with its length. He also questioned the mixture of fact and fiction, which he considered ruinous to an author's attempt to affect his or her audience. In his review of Simms's *The Partisan*, Poe argues that

> the interweaving of fact with fiction is at all times hazardous, and presupposes on the part of general readers that degree of intimate

> acquaintance with fact which should never be presupposed. In the present instance, the author has failed, so we think, in confining either his truth or his fable within its legitimate, individual domain. Nor do we at all wonder at his failure in performing what no novelist has hitherto performed. (*Essays* 894)

He goes on to suggest that Simms might have been better off writing "a work of a character *purely* historical" rather than attempting historical fiction (893). Poe cautions all novelists to avoid the use of history as a basis for their fictional works, claiming that "there is a radical error . . . in the usual mode of constructing a story . . . [in which] either history affords a thesis--or one is suggested by an incident of the day" (*Essays* 13). He further advises authors, "if wise," not to fashion their "thoughts to accommodate . . . incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out," to invent and combine "such incidents" that will best serve "in establishing this preconceived effect" (*Essays* 572). This emphasis upon tailoring one's narrative to the actual events of a historical struggle at the expense of aesthetic concerns is a major flaw of the romance in Poe's view; by taking such a public stand, he set himself in opposition to the genre most favored by his southern contemporaries.

His rejection of the romance was especially problematic in light of the fact that, as Levy and Allen both point out, "the core of Poe's ideal audience was a Southern elite which would share and support his tastes" (Allen 193). As he envisioned his future magazine projects, he wrote: "What I need for my work in its commencement . . . is *caste*. I need the countenance of those who stand well, not less in the social than in the literary world" (*Letters* I, 154). For this social backing, Poe depended upon "the Southern planters (whom he considered to be a disenfranchised group within a Northern-dominated literary world)" to "form a financial base for his magazine" (Levy 16). Believing that "among the innumerable plantations in our vast Southern & Western Countries were a host of well-

educated men, singularly devoid of prejudice, who would gladly lend their influence to a really vigorous journal" (*Letters* I, 268), he aimed the prospecti for his proposed magazines toward fostering southern support and enthusiasm. Both the projected "Penn Magazine," and its successor, the "Stylus," were "intended to appeal mainly to a Southern audience" (Allen 193). As he explained to his Georgia relative William Poe, "it is upon the South that I chiefly rely for aid in the undertaking, and I have every hope that it will not fail me in my need" (*Letters* I, 141). If he could gain the support of the social elite, he believed the interest of the middle class would naturally follow, making his magazine a great success. As he explained in his essay "The Philosophy of Furniture," because there was really "no aristocracy of blood" in America, we "fashioned for ourselves an aristocracy of dollars" (*Tales* 382). Magazine success built solidly upon southern backing would allow Poe to gain, what he considered to be, a much deserved entrance into this "aristocracy of dollars." To achieve this success, he had to convince his southern aristocratic readers of the value of the type of work he proposed to support and encourage, as well as its benefit for the region.

However, since Poe was essentially everything a southern writer in the antebellum era should never be--"an urban, not a rural, type; a professional, not an amateur writer; an artist, not a glorifier of the plantation tradition" (Hubbell 542), Poe's justification of his craft, especially to his southern readers, had little resonance as it was based not upon moral or political terms which most would respect but merely upon the aesthetic grounds that only the short forms could achieve a real effect or influence upon readers. Through the use of shorter forms, he emphatically asserted, authors could truly realize their intent because "during the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control" (*Essays* 572). While he claimed that the aim of poetry should be the production of the effect of beauty, he believed that other effects, notably "terror, or passion, or horror" could only be produced

by the short story (573).[7] Longer forms lead to distraction, disinterest, and marred effects. According to Poe's aesthetic system, only the short form could be productive of these desired strong emotional reactions; only short forms could have any real effect or influence upon their readers. The rest of this chapter will be primarily concerned with Poe's attempts to elicit the response of horror in his target audience, the southern aristocracy.[8] Thus, I will explore the ideologically implications of Poe's turning to horror fiction and tailoring it to the aristocracy of the antebellum South, a culture that typically used its popular forms to conceal social "horrors" and promote a cultural ideal.

Ideology of Horror

Traditionally, the horror genre has focused upon a plot that introduces a "monster," some threatening and often repulsive abnormality, into the setting of the ordinary world with the authorial intention of creating fear in its audience. In other words, the horror of the audience is theoretically provoked by "the existence of a being that emerges to disrupt the personal and social relationships of the status quo" and "violates the norms and values of the society it attacks" (Magistrale 4). This disruptive being can appear in any number of forms, but it is essential that its very presence seems obviously unnatural, against the

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[7] Poe makes a distinction between horror and terror in the Hawthorne review but does not elaborate upon the difference. Many scholars of the horror/terror genre(s) have attempted to delineate the distinction between the two effects, yet there has been very little consistency among their arguments. Noël Carroll makes the distinction based upon the nature of the "monster," arguing that terror's monsters "are all too human" while horror's are supernatural or otherworldly (15). James Twitchell claims that "terror is external and short-lived; horror is more internal and long-lasting. Terror will pass . . . , but horror will never pass" (16). Rictor Norton argues that "terror is a psychological reaction which exists when the terror-inspiring object is still at some distance from oneself and there is the possibility of fleeing from it; horror is an aesthetic experience which exists when the terror-inspiring object is in very close proximity to oneself and there is no possibility of escaping it" (35). While each of these arguments has certain merit, there is clearly no agreement on the basis for differentiating the two emotional responses. Essentially, both terror and horror rely upon exploiting the audience's anxieties and fears to create the proper response. In this chapter, I will usually use the term horror to refer to Poe's work, incorportating elements from each of the above distinctions between horror and terror.

[8] This is not to say that this group was Poe's only intended audience. Poe, of course, meant for his work to be read nationally as well as internationally, but the appeal to the upper class of the South must be addressed since the specific appeal to southern readers was always a crucial element in Poe's plan for success.

"natural" order of society, to both readers and characters, and that it functions centrally "as a foil to the cultural order" (Carroll 199). Since the appearance of this figure necessarily must evoke fear from the audience, it is imperative for the author to base this fearsome figure upon the genuine concerns and worries of the intended audience. In any effective specimen of horror, "the monster both embodies and manifests the fears and anxieties of its age" (Magistrale 4).

Noël Carroll also points out that the monstrous nature of this being, its threat to society, is its "impurity." By this, he means that in the monster's nature is "a conflict between two or more standing cultural categories" (43). Thus, many monsters come in the form of "fusion figures" that "transgress categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and so on" (43). Ultimately, the fusion figure is "a composite that unites attributes held to be categorically distinct and/or at odds in the cultural scheme of things in *unambiguously* one, spatio-temporally discrete entity" (43). As Isabel Pinedo observes, the threat in this figure's existence is in its "dissolving binary differences." She claims that the monster "disrupts social order by dissolving the basis of its signifying system, its network of differences" (21). In horror fiction addressed to a southern aristocracy, a world firmly based on clear distinctions between binaries, authors would create monsters that violate the region's and the upper class's signifying system, based upon the hierarchical distinctions between aristocratic/base, civilized/barbaric, chivalric/cowardly, master/slave, human/beast, male/female, self/other, tradition/progress, and agrarianism/industrialism, among countless others. An effective monster in horror fiction tailored to the antebellum South must threaten some of these binaries that are held to be the natural order of society, either by dissolving the distinction between them or by overturning the established hierarchy accepted by the region.

Most critics agree that the typical horror plot is ultimately reactionary, "in the service of the status quo" and "invariably an agent of the established order" (Carroll 196).

Most obviously, "the genre's insistence that the monster be destroyed" is "an essentially conservative reaction" (Magistrale 5). Horror narratives introduce the abnormality, the embodiment of cultural anxieties, "into the normal world for the express purpose of expunging it" so that "the normal is reinstated and, therefore, affirmed" (Carroll 199). "The destruction of the monster is imperative" because "it is only when the monster is truly dead and subject to decay that it ceases to threaten the social order" (Pinedo 22). As the cultural threat is removed with the death or banishment of the monstrous being, "the audience is now secure in the knowledge that while its value system may have been severely challenged, the status quo--the 'norm' of its society--has been reaffirmed" (Magistrale 5).

In many ways, this conservative agenda of the horror genre is not so different from that of the historical romance, which also introduces a villainous threat to the social norm only so that it can be overcome by the ideals of the society represented in its hero and heroine. Similar to the conservative core of southern romance, the horror genre can also be read as "essentially xenophobic: monsters, given their inherently hostile attitude toward humanity, represent a predatory Other, and mobilize, in a way that interactively reinforces, negative imagery of those political/social entities which threaten the established social order at the level of nation, class, race, or gender" (Carroll 196). In both genres, any presence that challenges the established system is demonized, transformed into a fiend, and subsequently defeated by culturally-sanctioned values and actions. However, it is important to see how the two genres function differently. The genres' difference is mirrored by the contrast between villains and monsters. According to Michael Kreyling, the romance villain is a representative of an "outside group that the hero and his people identify as the enemy" (*Figures* 15). Thus, the threat is always external and rational, rather than internal and inexplicable as it often may be in horror. Also, the villain merely threatens to wed or seduce the heroine, transforming her into an unsuitable mate for the

hero and effectively signaling a change in southern culture. In contrast, the monster threatens to kill and grotesquely mutilate the heroine (in those cases where she herself is not the monster) among many others, representing a terrifying destruction of southern ideals. Finally, in romance, there is never really any doubt about the survival of social order or about the success of the hero; the action is merely a formality, a fixed contest in which the hero's qualities are celebrated while the villain's are condemned. While the same might also be essentially true of the horror genre, the comfort level is not at all similar because the genre must evoke horror from its reader and this can only happen if there is some fear that the monster might indeed triumph.

In the genre's differences from the historical romance, one can begin to see the subversive element in Poe's decision to write southern horror. Despite its conservative agenda, horror is also acknowledged to be "a force that subverts and challenges hegemonic culture by revealing its secret urges and anxieties" (Magistrale 5). This revelation is especially threatening to a culture, like the antebellum South, that relied upon leaving its fears and concerns unspoken and unacknowledged. But the success of Poe's fiction as genre pieces depends upon his utilization of these anxieties, his exploitation of the region's concerns about industrialization and capitalism, about the forces of democracy which could abolish the aristocratic hierarchy, and about white women's status in the culture, as well as "that greatest of all southern fears," what Richard Gray has described as "the fear that the slaves would one day rise and destroy a people who (all rationalizations and comforting stereotypes notwithstanding) had exploited, victimized, and oppressed them" (193).

When Poe began to craft horror fiction that would elicit a strong response from his southern aristocratic readers, he accordingly plumbed these anxieties of his culture, many of which would also have been his own as a self-identified southerner, and used them as the raw material from which to shape the monsters that inhabit his work. The remainder of this chapter will explore two forms that Poe's southern monsters take, those based

essentially on fears about rebellious slaves taking the place of their masters and those based on women who refuse to be consigned to their socially determined roles. Poe's treatment of each of these monsters reveals not only a strong attempt to reinforce the dominant ideology's views on the roles of slaves and women but also, ironically, a subversion of that ideology caused by his handling of the horror genre.

The Slave as Monster

Though some critics have continually asserted that Poe was an apolitical writer who had little to say in his work about slavery, there are actually a number of slaves in his stories, and most of them are indistinguishable from the stereotypes of blacks abundant in southern romances. For instance, in "The Gold-Bug" (1843), a significant role is given to "an old negro, called Jupiter, who had been manumitted . . . , but could be induced, neither by threats nor by promises, to abandon what he considered his right of attendance upon the foot-steps of his young 'Massa Will'" (*Tales* 561). This comic black figure, laughing, misspeaking, ignorant, reaffirms the basic southern conception of slaves as inferior and servile, convinced, even when their masters think otherwise, that their rightful place is as slaves. Similarly, in "The Man Who Was Used Up" (1839), Pompey, the black valet of Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith, is continuously berated by his master as a "dog," "nigger," "scamp," and "black rascal" (315-6), even while it is only his cooperation that allows Smith literally to be assembled into a man who meets his society's expectations for aristocratic gentlemen. In response to Smith's abuse, Pompey only "grumbl[es] out an apology" (316). He, like other Poe slaves in "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (1838) and "The Journal of Julius Rodham" (1840), fulfills his social role faithfully, content with his degraded status and quietly obeisant to his belittling master.

Notably, none of these typical slaves appears in Poe's works of horror, which abandon images of happy and enduring slaves for much more violent depictions. The

earliest appearance of a slave, or at least an African, in his horror fiction occurs in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), wherein the black cook who leads the mutiny aboard the *Grampus* is "a perfect demon," committing the "most horrible butchery," as he stands "with an axe, striking each victim on the head as he was forced over the side of the vessel by the other mutineers" (*Tales* 1042-3). Later in the narrative as the survivors arrive on the island of Tsalal, they are confronted by natives who are completely black (even to their teeth). When it becomes apparent that the Tsalalians intend to kill Pym and his companions, the white men must struggle to escape from the grasp of the "savages." Upon leaving the island, Pym pronounces the natives "to be the most wicked, hypocritical, vindictive, bloodthirsty, and altogether fiendish race of men upon the face of the globe." Even more ominously, he states, "It is clear we should have had no mercy had we fallen into their hands" (1174). Notably, none of these monstrous figures is designated as an African-American slave. Poe thus carefully distances the images in *Pym* from literal representations of slaves and, instead, crafts monsters that will appeal to more general southern anxieties about the innate nature of the African race or about darkness as a threat to whiteness. In his later fiction, Poe continued this strategy, creating monstrous figures who cannot be labeled actual representations of slaves but who are nevertheless marked with signs that would lead them to be read as slaves by southern readers of Poe's day. Essentially, each of these figures, a dark Other to the narrative voice, is either owned by a master or is in some other way completely under the authority of a keeper or overseer, yet makes the unnatural and thus monstrous attempt to change this status, retaliating against the master and in the process shattering the natural order.

The first of these slave figures, and one of the most discussed of Poe's monsters, appears in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) in the form of the murderous, armed orangutan who slaughters Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter Camille; only the ratiocinative ability of Auguste Dupin is able to expose the nature of this horrific threat.

The exotic beast is the "exclusive possession" of a French sailor who brought it from Borneo and attempted to keep the animal in his Paris residence until he was able to sell it (*Tales* 428). His plans are altered when he returns home one day to find the creature loose from its closet and occupying the sailor's "own bed-room" (428). Even more startling, the "possessor of the beast" (426) finds his property standing before the mirror, lathered up with "razor in hand, . . . attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet" (428-9). The sailor is instantly terrified at discovering "so dangerous a weapon in the possession of an animal so ferocious, and so well able to use it" (429), but his efforts at whipping it into submission succeed only in driving the animal through the window and into the streets of Paris. Eventually, the sailor tracks it to the L'Espanaye residence where he witnesses the animal's attack upon the women; it assaults the mother with the razor and "with one determined sweep of its muscular arm it nearly severed her head with its body" (430). Then, "gnashing his teeth, and flashing fire from its eyes, it flew upon the body of the girl, and imbedded its fearful talons in her throat, retaining its grasp until she expired" (430). The rebellious possession becomes a fiend whose wrath is vented upon the bodies of white women.

The planters of the South were unlikely to have been seriously frightened by the thought of primates wandering the streets of southern cities such as Richmond, Charleston, or New Orleans. But, they would have been threatened by the thought of their own living possessions, their slaves, deciding to assume the place of their masters, arming themselves, and slaughtering white women. In the decade after Nat Turner's Rebellion, this thought would surely terrify Poe's readers in the South.[9] In her essay "Romance and Race," Joan Dayan has established the racist connection that many antebellum readers

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[9] Leonard Cassuto explains that Poe's inspiration for the story was probably based on actual events which Poe read in "separate Philadelphia newspaper accounts of a Negro murderer and an escaped orangutan" (160).

would have made between the orangutan and Africans. She quotes Edward Long's *History of Jamaica* (1774), in which Long asserts that the assumption that "the oran-outang and some races of black men are very nearly allied, is, I think, more than probable" and then goes on to claim that an orangutan is "a human being . . . of an inferior species" that has "in form a much nearer resemblance to the Negroe race, than the latter bear to white men" (103).[10] Thus, for most of Poe's readers, the image of a murderous orangutan might instantly have conjured up the related image of a rebellious slave, especially in the shadow of recent slave uprisings aboard the *Amistad* (1839) and the *Creole* (1841).[11]

Though discussed more often as detective fiction, the tale also functions as horror. Indeed, unlike another Dupin story, "The Purloined Letter," horror is an essential element in this tale's effect. As in all horror, this one introduces a menace to society, which disrupts the status quo and threatens cultural order. Lack of order, logic, and reason is the overwhelming impression in the descriptions of the chamber where the murders take place. Twice we are told about its "wildest disorder" (405) and the "wild disorder of the room" (414). The disorder carries over even into the police investigation and bothers Dupin, who complains that "there is no method in [the investigators'] proceedings" (411); but he also asserts that there may be no normal explanation for the deeds. All the evidence, the unidentifiable voice heard in the chamber, the physical acts that are "something absolutely irreconcilable with our common notions of human action" (422), and the bloody consequences, "a *grotesquerie* in horror absolutely alien from humanity" (423), leads him

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[10] Many southerners made this connection between blacks and primates and frequently referred to African Americans as apes or monkeys. See the frequent examples in Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* where the white characters refer to the various slaves as a "little ape-faced negro" (107), "monkeys" (138), "untamed monkeys" (308), "the strange baboon" (309), and "half-monkey, half-boy" (327). See the next chapter of this dissertation for a discussion of the racism of Kennedy's text.

[11] Notably, both the *Amistad* and the *Creole* uprisings occurred on ships transporting slaves. Poe seems to evoke these incidents directly by relating the orangutan's resistance to his captor aboard the ship to France: "After great trouble, occasioned by the intractable ferocity of [the sailor's] captive during the home voyage, he at length succeeded in lodging it safely in his own residence in Paris" (428). But Poe realizes that the true fear about black insurrection is not about this type of incident which occurs safely at sea but those on land where the white population is most vulnerable.

to understand that no concept consistent with established ideas of order will lead to the crime's solution.

Many scholars have pointed out the racial element underlying this story.[12] Nancy Harrowitz, for example, has argued that because Poe wanted to avoid referring "directly to a race crisis, he instead displaces this tension from species to species, rather than from race to race," and uses the orangutan "as a vehicle of displacement for the stereotype of the oversexualized Other" (192-3). There is definitely some connection being made by Poe between the orangutan and non-white races, especially when Dupin, trying to find explanations for the "fiendish jabberings of the brute" (431), proposes that "it might have been the voice of an Asiatic--of an African" (416). However, the investigations into this issue, while usefully highlighting the orangutan's representation of a racial Other, have not explored this status in terms of Poe's southernness and his background in slavery. For example, Poe repeatedly emphasizes that a "possession" (426-8), "property" (427), is committing these heinous acts. Thus, this figure represents for Poe and his readers a violation of a southern social order, wherein the owned rises against the owner. The master/slave binary is overturned as the slave no longer acts according to the cultural standards that dictate that he or she should passively and quietly submit to servility. Further, in his discussion of the witnesses' contradictory reports of the ape's voice, Dupin reminds the narrator that some of them represented its sound as "quiet and *unequal*" (416, Poe's emphasis). This description would also seem to be a telling statement of the social expectations for southern slaves, which the orangutan violates as his shrieks become harsh, shrill, and fiendish--a disturbance to order.

To induce horror effectively, Poe must base his monster upon the real fears of his audience. Harry Levin has proposed that the anxiety central to this tale is "the fear of exposing a mother or a sister to the suspected brutality of a darker race" (141). Exploiting

[12] For examples, see Levin, Rubin, Dayan, and Harrowitz.

this fear, Poe depicts the consequences of slave uprising in terms of the violation of the white female body, which in the nineteenth-century South stood as the symbol of the culture's purity, and threats to this purity or any attempt at defilement often led to white retaliation, notably the many lynchings of free black men in the postbellum era done supposedly in the name of protecting white women. However, Poe's voicing of this anxiety in the antebellum era also presented a view of slaves that is contradictory to proslavery propaganda, which characterized slaves as "dependent upon the white race . . . for guidance and direction even to the procurement of his most indispensable necessaries" and as having "the helplessness of a child" (Kennedy 453). The subversiveness of Poe's tale lies in its revelation that though southerners hoped slaves would assume the role described by Kennedy, beneath this desire is a strong fear that slaves might not cooperate accede to this image and might instead rise up to fight against their masters. In its conclusion, though, the tale does reaffirm the status quo, restoring the order that Dupin and Poe's readers crave, by caging the monster. The beast is "subsequently caught" by its owner and returned to its "natural" state of captivity as it is sold to the Paris zoo (431). Despite this return to normalcy, I would argue that the tale is not finally very reassuring, as it gives readers no encouragement that this occurrence will not happen again. The fear is not eased, for as long as "savage" beings are brought into civilization as property, there is no guarantee that they will not take up weapons, attempt to assume the role of their owners, and enact violence upon the bodies of southern women.

This anxiety about slaves stepping into the role of master is crucial to another horror tale, "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether" (1845).[13] As in any specimen of the genre, our own reactions here are linked to that of the characters, specifically the

[13] The best readings of this tale can be found in Levin 121-2, Drabeck, and Rubin 163-7, but all of these find the story primarily comic, with Drabeck and Rubin arguing that the object of satire is the abolitionist movement. Drabeck briefly mentions the tale's horror aspects (179), and Joan Dayan has raised the question of the genre of this "supposedly 'humorous' story" ("Romance" 103).

narrator who is traveling through "the extreme Southern provinces of France" (699) and who decides to visit a renowned insane asylum to observe its noted "soothing system" in practice. After being introduced to the superintendent Monsieur Maillard, he receives a tour of the grand surroundings and dines elegantly with a gathered group of Maillard's family, friends, and employees. However, the narrator soon begins to notice the oddity of his hosts, as they do not quite meet his or the reader's expectations for upper class ladies and gentlemen. He initially excuses this incongruity to his unfamiliarity with the customs of the region, as he "remembered having been informed . . . that the southern provincialists were a peculiarly eccentric people, with a vast number of antiquated notions" (704), and he is told by Maillard that "we are not very prudish, to be sure, here in the South--[we] do pretty much as we please--enjoy life, and all that sort of thing" (711). As the evening gets more bizarre, the narrator is horrified by his realization that he has spent the entire night socializing with the inmates themselves, who in an act of revolution have assumed the place of their masters: "The lunatics themselves . . . had usurped the offices of the keepers" (713).

Just as in "Rue Morgue," this reversal of the "natural" order of things would have appeared as a violation of the social norm to Poe's southern readers. In fact, the narrator himself expresses extreme disbelief when told that "one fine morning the keepers found themselves pinioned hand and foot, and thrown into the cells, where they were attended, as if *they* were the lunatics, by the lunatics themselves" (713). His immediate reaction to this horrific report is that "I never heard of anything so absurd in my life!" (713). Despite its abnormality, the story introduces the possibility of such a revolution and plays upon the South's anxieties about "what would happen if the slaves tired of slavery and dispossessed their masters" (Levin 122). Although most defenses of slavery argued for the slaves' contentment and prosperity, the constant fear that this was not the truth but merely a

justification must have been common, especially in a region where, in many areas, the slave population outnumbered the whites.

Poe's use of this anxiety can be read on several levels. First, it reveals that many whites believed that slaves were not always readable texts to their masters. Many owners must have wondered about the true thoughts of slaves hidden beneath the smiling and jocular mask. Similarly, Maillard explains to the narrator that while his patients may be "soothed . . . for a time," they are "very apt to become obstreperous." He claims, in language that probably mirrors that of many slave owners, that a lunatic's "cunning, too, is proverbial, and great" and "if he has a project in view, he conceals his design with a marvellous wisdom." Using his own experience as an example, he explains that the asylum's patients "behaved remarkably well--especially so--any one of sense might have known that some devilish scheme was brewing from that particular fact, that the fellows behaved so *remarkably* well" (713). Second, even if an owner can be convinced of his slaves' resignation to their status, he must remain aware that there are other forces, such as northern abolitionists, constantly attempting to incite them into rebellion. The asylum's patients, Maillard explains, were "often aroused to a dangerous frenzy by injudicious persons who called to inspect the house" (701). Or the threat might come from within, where they could be stirred to action by a leader among them, "a lunatic--who, by some means, had taken it into his head that he had invented a better system of government than any ever heard of before" and who "persuaded the rest of the patients to join him in a conspiracy for the overthrow of the reigning powers" (713). Like the keepers in this asylum, owners of slaves must be continually on their guard for any such expression of discontent, which could be the seeds for a larger revolution.

Additionally, southerners had to wonder whether the institution of slavery itself, in its current incarnation, might foster or encourage a rebellion. In the tale, the prevailing system, the "soothing system" upon which "the institution of Monsieur Maillard was

managed," seems directly responsible for the uprising among the patients in that it did not account for the likelihood of such an act and so did not take adequate preventive measures. As the narrator explains, the basis for the system was "that all punishments were avoided--that even confinement was seldom resorted to--that the patients, while secretly watched, were left much apparent liberty, and that most of them were permitted to roam about the house and grounds" (700). Because the patients were allowed so much freedom, being "permitted the privilege of roaming to and fro at will" (701), they became susceptible to the ideas of revolution. While this description would not match most twentieth-century readers' concept of slavery, it probably was very consistent with southerners' view of the institution as benevolent and paternal yet vulnerable to a variety of threats. Poe proposes here that the institution of slavery as practiced by most southern slave owners might have become too lax to discourage or to dispel a concerted effort of a group of slaves.

However, despite the success of the inmates' insurrection in which "the keepers and kept were soon made to exchange places" (714), the transformation of the kept into masters was not believably achieved. From the beginning of the story, the narrator notices idiosyncrasies in the inhabitants' behavior that mark them as mere actors rather than actual aristocrats. More exactly, he discovers that qualities usually in binary opposition have been conflated into single beings, creating an unnatural and monstrous blending of man/beast, civilized/primitive, and master/slave. This becomes apparent first in the women, who "were, apparently, people of rank--certainly of high breeding" as evidenced by their "habiliments," but some of them are "by no means accoutred in what a Parisian would consider good taste" as they are "bedecked with a profusion of jewelry" and "wore their bosoms and arms shamefully bare" (703-4). One woman, "Mam'selle Salsafette," barely able to keep her clothes on, begins undressing at the table, and only the objections of her dining companions stop her "from putting herself upon a par with the Medicean Venus" (709). There is the sense as the narrator (as well as the reader) slowly comes to a

realization of what he has stumbled upon that more is involved in being the master than just wearing the clothes, dropping the stock phrases, or aping the movements of the upper class. The narrator continues to notice animalistic, or subhuman, traits emerging from beneath the company's mannered facade. One woman reveals her inhuman, "excessively long" tongue (710), while others, supposedly amusing their guest with anecdotes about eccentric patients that actually are confessions about their own mania, reveal self-identities that are linked to animals ranging from a donkey (705-6) and a frog (707) to "a chicken-cock" (709). Even more revelatory might be their dining habits as they gorge themselves on a huge variety of meats such as veal, rabbit, and ham: "the profusion was absolutely barbaric" and "there were meats enough to have feasted the Anakim" (704). The narrator soon sickens of watching this feast.

Central to the entire episode of watching the patients relish their freedom is the idea that "liberty [is] hazardous" to those who are not prepared for it (713). The question of how emancipated African-Americans would deal with freedom was often discussed in defenses of slavery, as southerners "reflected upon the consequences of committing two or three millions of persons, born and bred in a state so completely dependent as that of slavery--so unfurnished, so unintellectual, so utterly helpless, . . . to all the responsibilities, cares and labors of a state of freedom" (Kennedy 456). These defenders argued that emancipation would be "a cruel desertion" of the slaves, who would be condemned "to progressive debasement, penury, oppression, and finally to extermination" (456). The central claim of the pro-slavery argument here is that, like children without parents, slaves would not be able to conduct themselves without the guidance of their masters. Poe, in turn, depicts the behavior of the freed inmates as lacking any sense of limitation or moderation and as a constant indulgence in excess. We are told that as soon as the lunatics had their liberty, they "made free with the family wardrobe and jewels." More tellingly, they also raided the "cellars of the chateau . . . well stocked with wine." Because

"these madmen are just the devils that know how to drink it, they lived well" (714). Despite the inmates' satisfaction, the implication is clearly that such excess can only lead to disorder. And Poe illustrates this well in the dinner at which the narrator is the eyewitness. Indeed, the party soon dissolves into chaos as

> they chatted--they jested--they laughed--they perpetrated a thousand absurdities--the fiddles shrieked--the drums row-de-dowed--the trombones bellowed like so many brazen bulls of Phalaris--and the whole scene, growing gradually worse and worse, as the wines gained ascendancy, became at length a sort of Pandemonium. (712)

This pandemonium is Poe's vision of the inevitable result of the sudden liberty of those who have been without it and are incapable of functioning without the order of a paternalistic system.

The other inevitable consequence in Poe's tale of the rise of the oppressed is, of course, the subjugation of the oppressor--here, the asylum's guards and doctors, who awoke one day to find themselves caged. As William Gilmore Simms argued in an 1837 essay published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, many southerners believed that slavery had a necessary role in civilization but that all races were certainly not meant to play the role of master. He claims that civilization "conquers only to improve, while the savage conquers only to destroy." Accordingly, he concludes, civilization's "is the only legitimate conquest, and every other is but tyranny" (*Morals* 263). The destructive tendencies of the "savage's" conquest as well as the tyranny it imposes are both illustrated as Poe depicts the reign of the inmates as masters. The keepers are treated brutally; after having been "suddenly overpowered, [they] were first tarred, then carefully feathered, then shut up in underground cells," being allowed for nourishment only "some bread and abundance of water," which "was pumped on them daily" (716). When the keepers finally escape from their confinement, breaking into the dinner and terrifying the narrator, they appear to his

sight as "a perfect army of what I took to be Chimpanzees, Ourang-Outangs, or big black baboons of the Cape of Good Hope" (716). Enslavement has transformed the masters into the same beastlike creatures that are usually associated with slaves.

In this tale, then, Poe reaffirms aristocratic ideology about slavery. By presenting the abnormality, the slaves becoming the masters, he illustrates that slaves cannot successfully serve as masters or even live prosperously in freedom. He also restores the status quo upon the keepers' climactic reclamation of power and recapture of the patients. However, he offers some implicit criticism of the current system of slavery, which in his view allows slaves too much freedom and leaves masters vulnerable to such uprisings. Maillard, the inventor of the soothing system, reveals himself to have been a patient of the hospital, having gone mad a few years prior, and as the leader of the insurrection. As the head of the institution again under the inmates' control, he no longer subscribes to the soothing system, knowing of its dangers, and instead practices a system "of very rigorous severity" developed by "the learned Doctor Tarr" and "the celebrated Professor Fether" (711-2). Later, upon the restoration of the old order, the narrator notes that the soothing system "has been resumed at the *chateau*" but "with important modifications" (716). The narrator does not specify the nature of these modifications but seems to imply that the previous system might have been improved by its incorporating some of the harshness of the Tarr and Fether system, which the narrator calls "a very capital one of its kind" for it was "simple--neat--and gave no trouble at all--not the least" (716). Unlike the ending of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," which seemed to offer southern readers no hope of squelching slave uprisings, this tale's conclusion encourages reform in the institution of slavery which might effectively deter future rebellions, a reform based on increased brutalization and vigilance.

One of Poe's final short stories, "Hop-Frog" (1849), also features the figure of the monstrous slave. The title character, a jester for a tyrannical king, is more explicitly

connected to African-American slaves than are the orangutan or the lunatics in the previous pieces. Hop-Frog comes "from some barbarous region . . . that no person ever heard of," where he and another servant, Trippetta, "had been forcibly carried off from their respective homes in adjoining provinces, and sent as presents to the king" (902). The name, Hop-Frog, is not his birth name, "but it was conferred upon him, by general consent of the [king's] seven ministers" (902). Additionally, the jester is connected to popular images of slaves in his physical description; he is described as a dwarf, having deformed legs and "prodigious[ly] muscular" arms as "compensation for deficiency in the lower limbs" (902).[14] He is also said to resemble "a small monkey, [more] than a frog" (902) and to have "the agility of a monkey" (907).

Despite Hop-Frog's role as slave figure, he is initially presented as very sympathetic. Not only is he a dwarf, crippled, and deformed, but he also endures constant abuse from the king, who is described as a "tyrant" and "monster" (902). Hop-Frog is expected to perform "at a moment's notice" (899), is forced to drink huge portions of wine despite the fact that "it excited the poor cripple to madness," and must even wear a broad smile as he amuses the king despite the fact that he is unable to celebrate his own birthday and must wipe away a secret tear as he thinks of his "absent friends" (902). Other than in slave narratives, this level of sympathy for a slave character at the expense of his master's character is almost unprecedented in antebellum southern literature. But Poe does not stop with Hop-Frog; he also depicts the treatment of the female slave Trippetta, who "on

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[14] Alan Rose points out that in nineteenth-century literature "black and red men may reveal fangs like vampires, or be dwarfed with disproportionately long arms" (10). He points as an example to John Trowbridge's 1863 novel, *Cudjo's Cave*, which features a black man with a body "like a frog's," with "immensely long arms" and "short bow legs" (11). For an example in Poe, see Pompey in "How to Write a Blackwood Article," who is described as

> three feet in height . . . and about seventy, or perhaps eighty, years of age. He had bow-legs and was corpulent. His mouth should not be called small, nor his ears short. His teeth, however, were like pearl, and his large full eyes were deliciously white. Nature had endowed him with no neck, and had placed his ankles (as is usual with that race) in the middle of the upper portion of the feet. (*Tales* 289)

account of her grace and exquisite beauty (although a dwarf,) was universally admired and petted" (900). This brief mention of the admiration and petting that Trippetta endures is the closest that Poe ever comes to relating the experiences of a female slave, her subjection to her master's desires, and the difficulty of avoiding his advances. Notwithstanding her favored position, she is not exempted from her master's anger; after being upset by Hop-Frog's reluctance to drink, the king "pushed her violently from him, and threw the contents of the brimming goblet in her face" (902).

This creation of sympathy for Hop-Frog is a careful move on Poe's part in order to get the audience to attach themselves to the figure whose monstrous nature will be revealed by the end of the tale. Even as the pathetic elements of Hop-Frog's character--his handicap, his uncelebrated birthday, his tears--push the reader to pity and identify with the slave, the narrator also subtly warns the readers from the beginning that their sympathies are better placed with the king, by referring to him as "*Our* king" (899, Poe's emphasis). Thus, Poe wants his readers to make this unwise alliance in order to horrify them further when the true nature of this pitiable figure is revealed. The portrait of Hop-Frog as vicious monster is slowly developed, beginning with the appearance of "a low, but harsh and protracted *grating* sound which seemed to come at once from every corner of the room." The king believes the sound is produced by "the gritting of this vagabond's teeth," but when the dwarf laughingly displays his "large, powerful, and very repulsive teeth," the king becomes convinced otherwise (903). At the end of the story, when Hop-Frog has successfully enacted his revenge on the king and his ministers, "the low, harsh, *grating* sound" recurs and is revealed to come indeed from the "fang-like teeth of the dwarf, who ground them and gnashed them as he foamed at the mouth, and glared, with an expression of maniacal rage" (907). Finally, as in the other two stories, the figure of the vengeful slave is transformed into monster, one that Poe's fiction asserts has no place in the natural order of society.

The consequences of Hop-Frog's mastery over his own master are truly horrific. But, in many ways, it is the king who abdicates his position of authority to his servant. This process begins as the king urges Hop-Frog to help him plan the evening's masquerade, to decide upon the group's choice of costume, and to devise a suitable prank for the event's entertainment. Hop-Frog proposes that the men portray "Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs" (904), and the drunken courtiers and king let the dwarf cover them with tar and flax and chain them together "after the fashion adopted, at the present day, by those who capture Chimpanzees, or other larger apes, in Borneo" (905). As the spectacle proceeds according to plan, the eight men run into the ball at the stroke of midnight and scare the gathered revelers. The king has even given authority over the keys to the hall to Hop-Frog, and so the dwarf locks everyone inside. He then begins to display true brutality, as he chains the eight men to a lowered chandelier and raises them into mid-air. Finally, as the audience below and the helpless victims begin to realize the true nature of this "joke," Hop-Frog lights the flax-covered men on fire, and "in less than half a minute the whole eight ourang-outangs were blazing fiercely" (907). While the watching multitude stands horrified, Hop-Frog effects an escape for himself and Trippetta, leaving the assembled masqueraders locked in the chamber staring as "the eight corpses swung in their chains, a fetid, blackened, hideous, and indistinguishable mass" (908).

Of primary importance in this episode is the mastery that Hop-Frog assumes. It is the violation of cultural order that makes Hop-Frog a monster, as he assumes the superior position and reverses the roles of master and slave. As he makes all the plans for the masquerade and takes control of the keys, he makes beasts of his "superiors." Even as the chandelier rises into the air carrying the enchained men, Hop-Frog rides atop it, placing himself in a position above the king and his men. After witnessing the dreadful deeds of Hop-Frog once he becomes the master, despite the sympathetic early depiction, few readers would wish to see such a creature have power over others. His actions reinforce Simms's

argument that "savages" conquer only to destroy. In contrast to the gruesome murders of eight men, the torment that Hop-Frog endures at the hands of the king now seems to pale in comparison.

This tale seems especially effective as horror. The monster appears before the readers' eyes and only disrupts the natural order of society when he takes it upon himself to punish his loathsome master. The sympathy readers have for Hop-Frog and the reversal that comes at the finale of the story guarantee, as Bruce K. Martin has written, that "Hop-Frog's final deeds will horrify the reader" (290). I think Poe's tale also cautioned its original readers about having too much sympathy for slaves' depictions of their enslavement, which were being distributed widely by abolitionists in the form of published slave narratives, for to empower the slave at the expense of the master would leave the South at the mercy of the vengeance of the slaves' rage. The story offers a challenge to the abolitionist movement's rhetoric of pathos, which often cataloged the suffering of individual slaves, by showing that this pitiable slave could turn into a bloodthirsty murderer who would kill his owners at the first opportunity. Thus, "Hop-Frog" reaffirms the status quo by arguing that slavery, despite some masters' abusive behavior, is preferable to giving slaves freedom and the means for revenge.

Strikingly, unlike "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether," this tale does not end with the restored captivity of the monstrous slave figure. Instead, here Hop-Frog makes a grand escape; after wreaking "his fiery revenge" (908), the rebellious slave disappears through the sky-light and runs off with Trippetta who is stationed on the roof. The story's final line states that "neither was seen again" (908). This subversive conclusion refuses to restore order by destroying or punishing its monster. Shockingly for southern readers, here the slave gains freedom and the master is punished with death. The only way that this may have been seen as a restoration of order is if Poe at this late date may have become convinced of the merits of

recolonization, of returning freed slaves to Africa. This might account for his assertion that the two slaves "effected their escape to their own country" (908), but there is no evidence that Poe subscribed to such a philosophy. Thus, Hop-Frog stands as the most subversive, and least reassuring, of this set of stories.

One final point about this trio of slave tales is that Poe always purposely kept each of these narratives from becoming a direct depiction of the southern horror about slave rebellion. By characterizing these incidents as the rampage of a wild beast, the uprising of French lunatics, or the revenge of an enraged and abused court jester, Poe is able to exploit the essential fear held by many southerners without ever politicizing his work or making it topical. However, in his effort to elicit horror, he appealed to his readers' basic anxieties about the delicate master/slave relationship, which depended on slave acquiescence to an inferior status. In these tales, Poe tapped into a deep fear that slaves would only be cooperative for so long, and once they felt empowered to attack their masters, horrific consequences would result. His work, then, while essentially conservative, becomes subversive because it must also admit to and even magnify the grave doubts that slave owners had about their slaves' contentment, their own safety, and the system's feasibility.

Woman as Monster

The potential for slave uprising was not, of course, the only source of the anxiety for aristocratic men of the South. The threats posed to the ideal of southern civilization by the forces of democracy, technology, and capitalism also found their way into the monsters of Poe's fiction. But, the most fearsome menaces, as that of the slave population illustrates, were probably those growing from within the society. In this section, I will briefly explore the aristocratic male anxiety about the role of women, which Poe exploited and employed in fashioning a large number of his monsters. Poe was a man of his time and region in his views of women; as Ernest Marchand has argued, "in all matters touching

women, sex, marriage, 'morals,' no more conventional-minded man than Poe ever lived" (35). Among the conventional expectations of women in the antebellum South, as Anne Firor Scott illustrates in *The Southern Lady*, were for "women, along with children and slaves, . . . to recognize their proper and subordinate place and to be obedient to the head of the family. Any tendency on the part of any members of the system to assert themselves against the master threatened the whole" (17). Because women's cooperation, like that of the slaves, was so absolutely necessary for the southern system to work as it was intended, many aristocratic men were naturally insecure about "their self-proclaimed position of lord and master of the whole patriarchy" and possessed well-hidden fears about the stability of their status that "lay beneath the surface of the flowery praise of woman and the insistence that God had made her the way men wanted her to be" (A. Scott 18). Just as he did with southern white fears of slave uprising, Poe made use of the anxiety "that women would break out of the God-given and natural mode of behavior" as a source for some of his best known stories (A. Scott 20).

Indeed, much of Poe's early work is based upon this male anxiety, including "Berenice" (1835), "Morella" (1835), "Ligeia" (1838), and, most notably, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839). Many critics have noted that all of the women in these tales are in the process of dying, if not already dead. Certainly, many of Poe's stories, including these as well as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "Eleonora," "The Oval Portrait," "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," "The Black Cat," and "The Oblong Box," depend upon the presence of dead or murdered women. This should not be surprising, considering Poe's often quoted assertion that "the death . . . of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (*Essays* 19). As Joan Dayan and Richard Gray have argued, there were many similarities between images of dead women and the southern ideal of womanhood. Dayan, for instance, equates "the ideal of the lady as elegant, white, and delicate" to the status of the "living dead" ("Amorous" 240). And Gray notes that a figure

like Lady Madeline Usher was "more like a spirit or a statue than a woman, with pale skin, large eyes, and dressed in white" (194). Because the South "identif[ied] the sanctity of their society with the purity of white womanhood," the images of women in literature and cultural mythology were of goddesses upon pedestals, "ethereal, female figure[s], set apart, hardly belonging to the earth" (Gray 194). These idealized depictions were almost completely divorced from the realities of actual women's lives, bodies, and experiences. Essentially, as Leland Person has written, "For Poe [and other southern aristocratic males], the best woman may very well have been a dead woman" (40). And, in truth, only a dead woman could possibly have lived up to the expectations of the southern ideal.

This contradiction is illustrated well in Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1842), a work in which the narrator finds his way to a chateau full of "very spirited modern paintings" (*Tales* 481). One of these, a "portrait of a young girl just ripening into womanhood," particularly affects the narrator (482). Upon first seeing it, he says he "glanced at the painting hurriedly, and then closed my eyes" (482). Though he is initially unable to account for this reaction, he later surmises that the cause might "have been that my fancy . . . had mistaken the head for that of a living person" (482). Indeed, he blames the oval portrait's "*life-likeliness* of expression" for "first startling" and then "appall[ing] me" (482). As he reads "the vague and quaint words" of a volume that discusses the work of this artist, he learns the story of the young woman, "a maiden of rarest beauty" and the painter's bride (483). Though it was "a terrible thing for this lady to hear the painter speak of his desire to pourtray" her, she was "humble and obedient" and "sat meekly for many weeks" for the portrait (483). However, as the artist transformed his wife into art, she slowly began to fade away; the hours "withered the health and the spirits of the bride," who "grew daily more dispirited and weak" (483). Regardless of her own condition, she consented to her husband's will and "smiled on and still on uncomplainingly" (483). Eventually, the idealized portrait becomes more appealing to the painter than the actual woman herself, and

he "turned his eyes from the canvas rarely, even to regard the countenance of his wife" (483). Ultimately, the idealization fulfills the artist's expectations, and he proclaims that "this is indeed *Life* itself" (484). When he finally turns to consider his bride, he finds that "*she was dead*" (484). Here, Poe presents the expectations for white southern women; everything real about them as women was to be suppressed or eliminated as they conformed to aristocratic men's ideal of what white women should be.

The woman in "The Oval Portrait" is not portrayed as monstrous by Poe because, though she has some hesitations, she complies with social expectations and accepts the murder of herself as she is reduced to treasured object. The central conflict in Poe's horror fiction about women becomes this struggle between life and death. Because dead women measure up to social expectations and reinforce the status quo, the men in Poe's work, as in "The Oval Portrait," revel in their female lovers' deaths and often push them prematurely into their graves. As long as the women are alive, as long as they refuse to play the role of the dead, they are a threat to social order and therefore potential monsters. It is this monstrous undead female, the woman who will not accept her social position, that much of Poe's fiction centers upon and attempts to banish in order to restore social order. Each of Poe's tales about women dramatizes the male attempt to fit women into the southern ideal and the horror that accompanies finding women uncooperative with this effort.

In his first story for the *Southern Literary Messenger*, "Berenice" (1835), Poe establishes the essential format for his stories of monstrous women. The aristocratic narrator, Egaeus, celebrates his cousin and, later, wife's vibrance. Berenice is described as "agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy" and as possessing "gorgeous yet fantastic beauty" (*Tales* 226). However, the narrator is soon confronted with the fact that this is not a permanent state when she is struck with an illness that brings "startling changes . . . in the *physical* frame of Berenice" and results "in the singular and most appalling distortion of her personal identity" (229). From this point on, the narrator chooses to see his love "not

as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream--not as a being of the earth, earthy, but as the abstraction of such a being" (229). Because he prefers the idealization to the real woman, he "now shuddered in her presence" (229).

Oddly, Egaeus maintains his ideal and ignores the reality of his lover by developing a strange fixation on what he considers to be her one perfect characteristic, her teeth, which had "not a speck on their surface--not a shade on their enamel--not an indenture in their edges" (230). Berenice's teeth become his sole obsession, and he sees them "here, there, and every where, . . . visibly and palpably before me" (230). He comes to believe he must have the teeth for "their possession could alone ever restore me to peace" (231). When it is announced that "Berenice was--no more" (231), he seems hardly bothered at all. However, on the night of her burial, of which he has no memory, he awakens surprised to find himself dirty and his clothes in disarray. Further, he is sitting before "thirty-two small, white and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor" (233). A servant soon fills in the blanks for him, explaining that Egaeus had been found above "a violated grave" and "a disfigured body enshrouded" (232). The shock of the tale comes not only in the fact that Egaeus defiled the grave of his love, but also in the revelation that Berenice was not a corpse but "still breathing, still palpitating, *still alive!*" (232). It is made clear that the narrator was not at Berenice's grave to rescue her from premature burial; instead, he had gone there to take final possession of the teeth he so coveted. His hand, "indented with the impress of human nails," provides evidence that Berenice was not a passive victim but offered a challenge to this violence (233). Although Egaeus finally possesses the ideal, Berenice's white, unblemished teeth, the horror comes, obviously, in the realization that the real woman remains and has been actively resistant to his efforts to place her into her grave, that the real woman must die if Egaeus is to attain his ideal.

This formula is enacted again in "The Fall of the House of Usher," a work in which the men undoubtedly force Madeline Usher into a premature burial. Both the narrator and Roderick Usher are terrified and perhaps even unmanned by Madeline's existence as a living woman. Upon his arrival at the Usher estate, the narrator finds Roderick, the master of house, "a bounden slave" to "an anomalous species of terror" and "FEAR" because of his sister, Madeline (*Tales* 322). At his first sight of Madeline walking around the mansion, the narrator himself is struck with similar terror, as he regards "her with an utter astonishment not unmingled with dread," though he finds "it impossible to account for such feelings" (323). He even characterizes himself as "oppressed," as his "eyes followed her retreating steps" (323). This is a great departure from the love and affection expressed by other narrators for the already dead women in "Eleanora," "Morella," and "Ligeia." Indeed, Madeline's living proves to be the greatest horror for the narrator of this tale. Subsequently, the two men try to ignore or even erase her existence: "for several days ensuing, her name was unmentioned by either Usher or myself" (324). Instead, they retreat into the world of art, of oval portraits: "we painted and read together; or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar" (324). In this world, full of ideal women, actual women like Usher's sister can be easily forgotten or safely ignored. The two men stay in the world of books until Usher makes the pronouncement that "Madeline was no more" (328).

Even as the two men entomb Madeline, the narrator remains disturbed by any signs of life that her corpse exhibits. For instance, "the faint blush upon the bosom" and "the suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip" of Madeline appall him (329). The horror produced before she was buried gets ever worse as Roderick Usher grows aware that his sister is not dead at all but has been put "*living in the tomb*" (334). As the hypersensitive Usher detects each movement of his sister's re-entrance into his life, he grows progressively more horrified and is rendered momentarily helpless. He senses each step,

cringing at "her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin," "the rending of her coffin," "the grating of the iron hinges of her prison," "her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault" and "her footstep on the stair" (334-5). But again, the very fact that she lives, "that heavy and horrible beating of her heart," evokes the greatest fear (335). As Madeline enters the room, "there was blood upon her white robes" (335). The shock of such a stain on her pristine burial clothes wonderfully illustrates the threat that the real woman of blood poses to the ideal woman of the white robes and of art. Poe's final images thus reveal the horrific fear of the white aristocratic male that the flesh and blood woman will always prevent their ideal from being fulfilled.

In this emergence from death, Madeline and all of Poe's women become truly monstrous. As Leland Person has explained the endings of these tales, "a dead woman (a 'dead' image of woman) is rejuvenated, returning to life before a dazzled male imagination with such force that she all but destroys the male character" (25). Certainly, Madeline's reappearance proves fatal to Roderick, as she "fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and . . . bore him to the floor a corpse" (335). In addition, the sight proves enough to repulse the narrator, who "from that chamber, and from that mansion, . . . fled aghast" (335). Most importantly, her appearance effectively razes the entire mansion, which crumbles and sinks into the nearby tarn. In Poe's view, women's rejection of their socially determined role can have only apocalyptic consequences.

In recent years, a movement among feminist scholars has sought to revise and rehabilitate Poe's reputation, arguing that, essentially, his work advances a feminist agenda.[15] Debra Johanyak, for instance, argues that Poe uses Madeline, Ligeia, and the others to "represent all the silenced, repressed, frustrated and domestically imprisoned women who were largely ignored or misused by fathers, husbands, and brothers" (69). In

[15] This work includes that of Debra Johanyak, Cynthia Jordan, and Joan Dayan, specifically in her essay entitled "Poe's Women: A Feminist Poe?" See Michael Williams and Paula Kot for useful summaries of this phase of Poe studies.

the climaxes of each of the stories, these critics find a compelling argument for women's "power and endurance in the most unexpected places" because "the destruction or death of Poe's women is never final" (Dayan, "Poe's Women" 11). Consequently, they claim that Poe, in the conclusion of these tales, powerfully celebrates women's final triumph over the restraints imposed upon them in their male-dominated culture.

I might agree with this reading if the portrayals of women in Poe's work were not so monstrous. The feminist revision of Poe's work ignores the fact that these creations are objects of horror for Poe, his narrators, and, presumably, his audience. The shrieks with which the narrator of "Berenice" greets the news that his now toothless lover was found alive in her grave or with which the "Ligeia" narrator discovers that Ligeia has returned in the body of his young wife Rowena are meant to mirror (or stir) the audience's own terror in response to the possibility of such returns. Leland Person argues that "Poe forces his male protagonists, against their will, to sit passively in the presence of powerful women, who force themselves upon their imaginations" (47), and surely he also wanted to place his audience in a position similar to that of these men. Thus, Poe's intention here is not social commentary about the status of women in antebellum America, but, as he described in the Hawthorne review, the production of a powerful effect upon his readers. In these tales, he wants to strike his readers with horror by confronting them with the resurgence of these potent, resistant women in the form of the monstrous undead, the female made monstrous.

However, as feminist scholars have pointed out, there does appear to be a subversive element to this work. As Michael Williams writes, these "narratives stop at the point when the woman threatens to usurp control over [the men]" (36); that is, the narratives do not end with the death or punishment of these women but leave them as a menace to their world. With the exception of "Usher," which goes beyond the actual arrival of the female monster and depicts the consequential destruction of the entire Usher world including Madeline, Williams is absolutely correct in asserting that Poe leaves these

women as a dangerous threat. In his avoidance of resolution in these tales, Poe actually approximates the postmodern horror genre in which "either the monster triumphs or the outcome is uncertain" (Pinedo 31). In doing so, he does demonize women's resistance to their social roles, but he also offers no final reassurance to his aristocratic male readers that this is a threat that can easily be quelled. Perhaps because this anxiety was deeply part of his own psychological makeup, he could offer no solution to the dilemma. Unlike the stories of slave rebellion wherein he proposed returning the slaves "to their own country" (907) or making the soothing system more harsh and disciplinary, in the stories of monstrous females, Poe is without such answers and, to the horror of his readers, appears to relinquish the world to these women.

Southern Reaction to Poe's Horror

Despite Poe's targeting of a southern readership, his work never became very popular in the South during his lifetime. While his criticism was enjoyed by many and his poetry, especially "The Raven," received positive general notice, his fiction never really caught on, most likely because of the genre in which it was written. That is, the little existing record of responses by southerners to Poe's fiction reveals a strong reservation about literature centering upon supernatural and horrific subjects. Even the publications where Poe placed his work criticized this tendency and publicly acknowledged their own hesitations about the material. For example, in the *Southern Literary Messenger* editorial comments wherein James Heath introduced "Berenice," he explains that "we think that there is too much German horror in his subject," and, introducing "Morella," he writes that "we cannot but lament that [Poe] has drunk so deep at some enchanted fountain, which seems to blend in his fancy the shadows of the tomb with the clouds and sunshine of life"

(qtd. in I. Walker 80).[16] Similarly, an anonymous reviewer for the *Richmond Compiler* writes in 1836 that "Mr. Poe is too fond of the wild--unnatural and horrible! Why will he not permit his fine genius to soar into purer, brighter, and happier regions? Why will he not disenthral himself from the spells of German enchantment and supernatural imagery?" (qtd. in I. Walker 87). Finally, in an 1850 *Messenger* article, written as an overview of Poe's career following his death, John Moncure Daniel criticizes Poe's creations as "too goblin-like, too entirely unnatural" (qtd. in I. Walker 374). In general, these comments probably characterize the typical southern response to Poe's work, dismissing it as too dark, horrific, and unnatural to satisfy current tastes.

Regardless of the distaste these readers expressed for Poe's work, there is some evidence that his fiction did have the desired effect on this audience. Heath privately encouraged Poe in September 1839 to write in other genres for he "never could experience pleasure in reading tales of horror and mystery however much the narrative should be dignified by genius" because he did not "perceive their tendency to improve the heart," but he does ultimately admit that the stories "leave a painful and melancholy impression on my mind" (qtd. in I. Walker 110). Soon after this he publicly echoed these sentiments in comments upon "The Fall of the House of Usher" published in the October 1839 *Messenger*: "It is written with great power, but leaves on the mind a painful and horrible impression, without any redeeming admonition of the heart" (qtd. in I. Walker 111). Notably, "the painful and horrible impression" which Poe so strove to produce is one of Heath's objections to the work. Fortunately, not all southerners rejected the effect of Poe's fiction; Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, for example, praises Poe's "extraordinary faculty" to "fright us with the mystery which defies further scrutiny" (qtd. in I. Walker 117-8), and

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[16] Of course, Heath and *Messenger* proprietor Thomas White continued to publish Poe's work frequently, so one must wonder how much of this outrage was merely a precaution to avert any personal criticism to which they might have been subjected. There must have been some positive response from their readers to justify publishing more of Poe's work.

Philip Pendleton Cooke, a southern poet, explains that he enjoyed "Morella," where "the resemblance . . . of the living child to the dead mother, becom[es] gradually fearful, until the haunting eyes gleam out a terrible identity" (qtd. in I. Walker 273). While a few appreciated Poe's efforts, then, most readers in the South appeared disinterested in the genre of horror, regardless of, or perhaps because of, the effect that it could produce in its exploitation of southern aristocratic anxieties.

Though most studies of southern literature mention Poe, very few of them list horror fiction as a genre practiced in the antebellum South. And, with the exception of Poe, almost none of the region's major figures ever attempted to use the form.[17] The cause of the lukewarm reception of Poe's horror fiction, despite its appearance in major publications and the support of the major literary figures of the region, can, perhaps, be best addressed by those who have theorized about the connection between genres and ideology, for as Tzvetan Todorov has argued, "a society chooses and codifies the acts that most closely correspond to its ideology" (19). In addition, "a cultural group accepts its narrative form, and rejects others, because that form alone embodies the group's nearest image of itself as its most truthful and accessible scripture" (Kreyling, *Figures* 10). Perhaps, the horror genre never became popular, codified, accepted, or officially sanctioned in the Old South precisely because it contradicted southern ideology or challenged the region's self-image as propagated by aristocratic white males in a way that historical romance did not. Horror, or at least Poe's brand of horror, violated the aristocratic self-image by departing from the security of the romance which provided "no unexpected conclusions" and never confronted readers with an "unpredictable society" (Tracy 215). The romance reinforced the slave owners' vision of their world wherein

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[17] Simms was the only major figure other than Poe to work in the genre. Poe was particularly encouraging of his efforts, praising his 1845 story "Grayling; or 'Murder Will Out'" as an "admirable tale, nobly conceived and skilfully carried into execution--the best ghost story ever written by an American" (*Essays* 905).

"blacks and whites live harmoniously on the plantation under the beneficent patriarchal guidance of the white master" (Tracy 60) and where black men specifically were "satisfied with their condition and need not be respected as 'men'" (Tracy 147). On the other hand, Poe's horror stories exposed the illusory nature of this harmony and revealed that all black men might not be so readily resigned to their enslavement. Additionally, while romance depicted white women's idealization as moral and right, Poe's stories show that some women might find the pedestal a stifling and oppressive location and so refuse to play the part. Though he was indeed a conservative supporter of slavery and the southern aristocracy, Poe's choice of the horror genre threatened, then, these very institutions by consistently revealing the dark underside of the romantic plantation ideal and the proslavery argument, ultimately exposing the fictive nature of these "truths" cherished by and so necessary for the South's upper class.

Chapter IV

Resisting Romance: Genre Struggle and the Dialogic Narrative of John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn*

John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (1832, revised edition 1851) is perhaps the single work of fiction most closely associated with the antebellum South. Its depiction of the leisurely summer days enjoyed by the aristocratic inhabitants of the Virginia estate Swallow Barn has been both lauded as a realistic depiction of southern life and vilified as the foundation for all subsequent fictional portrayals of the plantation South, including those by Thomas Nelson Page, Thomas Dixon, and Margaret Mitchell, that romanticized the region and the institution of slavery. That such disparate views of Kennedy's work can be held even today is most likely attributable to the ideological conflict that prominently takes place within the book, as the work ultimately refuses to commit itself to any single view of the South and, instead, struggles with several, including one that is a sympathetic and romantic perception and one that is ironic and critical. My argument in this chapter is that this ideological conflict is closely tied to the work's genre. Certainly, no other text of the antebellum South more clearly illustrates Thomas Beebee's assertion that "the struggle against or deviations from genre are ideological struggles" (19) than does *Swallow Barn*. That is, Kennedy's text embodies all of the major struggles of the Old South within its narrative; these struggles, between change and progress, romanticized history and realistic depictions of the present, naive nostalgia and astute pragmatism, aristocratic agrarianism and burgeoning industrialism, slavery and abolition, all are conducted through the generic struggle that provides the overriding structure of the work. By creating a self-examining text that overtly struggles against the lure of romance in favor of the critical eye of realism, Kennedy

has shaped a literary text that offers a subversive threat to aristocratic ideology by entertaining the possibility that the South's ideals are little more than tempting fictions.

Traditionally, Kennedy's work has been considered a romantic rendering of southern life; some critics have gone so far as to mischaracterize it completely as "a Southern imitation of Scott adapted to a Virginia setting" (Osterweis 45). However, while it definitely cannot be considered an historical romance in the vein of Scott, as it lacks any depiction of historical conflicts or figures, it can justly be charged with romanticizing southern plantation life. In fact, Francis Gaines's seminal study of the southern plantation in literature, while acknowledging that romantic depictions of plantations had appeared decades before *Swallow Barn*, claims that Kennedy's work is "the first appearance of the plantation solely for its own picturesque qualities," where "the setting, the types, and the customs become everything" (22). Gaines also claims that "Kennedy's significance lies in the fact that he fixed the attitude toward plantation material" for later southern writers by casting "the glamour of romantic coloring over all" (22). Because Kennedy depicted "plantation life at its best," he "gave matter and method for a literary tradition" (23). Thus, *Swallow Barn* has been labeled by many as "the prototype" of "the southern plantation tradition, . . . a long stream of novels . . . that increasingly romanticized their materials until they all but lost their anchorages in reality and became . . . a pastoral and feudal mythology" (Bohner 73).

Because it has been given this dubious distinction of "the flagship novel of the plantation genre" (Cassuto 140), *Swallow Barn* has also been marked by the negative connotations that are associated with that genre, especially its stereotypical depictions of African American characters and its frequent defense of slavery. For instance, Edward Foster has dismissed Kennedy's work as "clear-cut propaganda, a clear misrepresentation--or, to use the kinder word, idealization--of Southern life" (150). In particular, Foster singles out Kennedy's "sketches of happily subservient slaves" as "at best shallow, more

often crude, and always morally offensive" (151). As early as the nineteenth century, the novel was considered to be pro-slavery propaganda by even some of its southern readers, who viewed it as a useful response to increasingly virulent abolitionist rhetoric following the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Upon hearing of the 1851 edition of the novel, William Gilmore Simms wrote to Kennedy that *Swallow Barn*'s "genial & natural pictures of Virginia Life . . . are in fact the most conclusive answers to the abolitionists" (Simms, *Letters* 122). Of course, Simms believed that Kennedy's portrait was a very accurate one, a verdict that has been repeated in the twentieth century by scholars such as Jay Hubbell, who claims that the work "remains the best picture of Virginia Life in the early nineteenth century" (492).

Both ways of reading *Swallow Barn*, as propaganda and as an accurate portrait of the South, are too reductive and ignore the work's complexity. Those critics who have examined Kennedy's text more closely have almost universally commented upon the work's failure to commit to one position. As J. V. Ridgely has argued, "neither [Kennedy] nor his fictional mouthpiece, Mark Littleton, could maintain a consistent stance" (*Kennedy* 53). Certainly, the work should not be considered an accurate representation of the region when, despite its constant criticisms of romantic views of the contemporary South, it often strays into idealistic and glorified depictions of the society it portrays. Then again, it cannot simply be dismissed as a romanticization either, for it almost always escapes from this tendency by quickly returning to episodes of harsh and ironic criticism of this "aristocratic" society and its pretensions. In the course of the narrative, Kennedy, through his narrator, "manages merrily both to revere and to ridicule almost all of the Old South's icons" (MacKethan, Introduction xi). William Taylor has described Kennedy's literary method as "a form of emotional Indian giving" in which he "presented his readers with a flattering image of 'feudal' Virginia and then withdrew it smilingly" (185). As a result of this constantly shifting tone and apparent intention, readers have been able to label it a

romanticized view of the South only by ignoring the sharp criticisms it makes of southern society. Other critics, though more rare, have ignored the sympathetic portions of the work and viewed it as a vicious attack upon an anachronistic society.[1] Ultimately, Kennedy's narrative lends itself to these divergent readings and becomes a version of a Rorschach test because, as Lucinda MacKethan has observed, "readers have continued to find whatever they look for in *Swallow Barn*" (Introduction xii).

Much of the ambivalence in the work towards its subject could possibly be explained as the consequence of the nature of Kennedy's ties to the South and the southern slave-owning aristocracy. Like that of Frederick Douglass and Edgar Allan Poe, Kennedy's "southernness" has been debated. While his mother, Nancy Pendleton, came from a western Virginia family, whom Kennedy would visit frequently during his childhood and even into adulthood, he spent most of his adult life as a citizen of Baltimore. Like many of his contemporaries who considered literary efforts as a noble diversion rather than as a career, Kennedy made his living in law and politics; he held elected positions in the Maryland legislature and the U. S. Congress before finally being appointed Secretary of the Navy by President Millard Fillmore. Aside from brief visits to his Virginia family, Kennedy never lived on a slave-owning southern plantation, but his affection for the charms of the southern existence was strong. He, like his character Frank Meriwether, did believe that slavery was morally wrong, but he could not conceive of any easy means of abolishing the institution without promoting societal chaos.[2] When the sectional conflicts

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[1] These readings also began as early as the book's initial publication, when a *New England Magazine* review observed that the author's purpose was to "'show up' the Virginians" by exposing them as "humorously conceited, pompous, ignorant, and dogmatic" (qtd. in Bohner 88). The reviewer concludes that the author has "succeeded admirably in showing them in a ridiculous light. . . . The gentlemen of Swallow Barn are the most ordinary, trifling, useless generation the world ever saw" (88).

[2] Kennedy's own connection to slavery is minimal but significant as it reveals his complicated relationship to the institution. In 1830, he was given a young slave by his father and had the intentions "to send him to school and let him free when he became of age." However, because he claimed that the young man proved himself to be "a liar, thief, and rascal," Kennedy eventually sent him to Virginia to be sold (qtd. in Bohner 169). Thus, while believing slavery was wrong and not wanting to be personally tainted by its evils, he still participated in the system and perpetuated its existence.

between the North and South came to a head in the 1860s, Kennedy condemned southern secession and supported the Union, resulting in his own rejection by many of his Virginia connections. Thus, as Alexander Cowie has stated, although Kennedy is "generally regarded as a Southern writer," he "answers to that description but poorly" (258). That is, "he was not a Southerner in the sense that . . . Simms was" (258).

Kennedy's marginalized status as "a man who was and was not a southerner" gave him a unique perspective from which to view the lives of antebellum southern aristocrats (MacKethan, Introduction xi). While he might not be "sufficiently detached from Virginia to see it objectively" (Bohner 75), we can at least agree that "he was both an insider and an outsider on the Virginia plantation," a position that allows him and his narrator, a New Yorker visiting his southern relations, to become "both an emic and an etic observer" (Egan 63). This divided view leads to what J. V. Ridgely has called the book's "double focus" (*Kennedy* 36). Kennedy's depiction is not so attached to the South, its customs, and its institutions that it blindly supports and defends them without acknowledging serious problems, but neither is it so detached from regional affiliation that it successfully manages to maintain a harsh lens on the southern culture and its people. In the process of moving from romanticizing southern aristocratic ideology to criticizing it, the book's self-conscious and oft-announced genre struggle becomes essential to Kennedy's goals. By claiming to attempt to avoid the genre of romance, a form closely aligned with the southern aristocracy, the narrative offers a challenge to the values that the romance represents and even questions the propriety of its application to and utility for antebellum southern society.

The Genre of *Swallow Barn*

Since its original publication in 1832, questions about the genre of *Swallow Barn* have been continuously raised. Even among its original readers, this issue was a central concern. For example, William Wirt, to whom the work was initially dedicated, classified

it as "a *sort* of novel, . . . a *non descript* sort of novel--[with] very little incident--& a great deal of what is called sketches of characters" (qtd. in Taylor 179). A New York reviewer lamented that it was "neither a novel, nor a romance, nor a history," but noted that "it smacks somewhat of all three" (qtd. in Ridgely, *Kennedy* 43). In the twentieth century, scholars have continued to explore the difficulty of classifying the text generically. William Taylor has placed it "somewhere between a sketchbook and a novel" (181). Alexander Cowie calls it "rather less a novel than a series of descriptive essays, character sketches, digressory episodes, and miscellaneous wisdom" (259-60). And most recently, Lucinda MacKethan has concluded that the text "has resisted categorization," describing it as "a novel that is not a novel, an unromantic romance" (Introduction xi).

Certainly, the confusion about *Swallow Barn*'s generic classification is intentional, the product of the work's own efforts to reject any generic label. Kennedy, through his narrator Mark Littleton, avoids any consistent commitment to a regular form; thus this work becomes not a novel, nor a romance, nor a sketchbook. Both the actual author Kennedy and the fictional author Littleton present the work as the product of a struggle between genres and authorial intentions. In his 1832 preface signed only with the name Mark Littleton, Kennedy admits to having "had great difficulty to prevent myself from writing a novel" (xxxvii). Because of the perhaps irresistible urge to present the events of his narrative in an ordered, romantic plot, *Swallow Barn*, "in spite of himself, has ended in a vein altogether different from that in which it set out. There is a rivulet of story wandering through a broad meadow of episode." In other words, he characterizes his work as "a book of episodes, with an occasional digression into the plot." In his 1851 preface, Kennedy boldly proclaims, "I wish it to be noted that *Swallow Barn* is not a novel" (10). While he acknowledges that "the narrative does run into some by-paths of personal adventure," he maintains that "it has still preserved its desultory, sketchy character to the last" (11). Therefore, he pronounces the work "utterly unartistic in plot and structure" as it

"variously and interchangeablely partak[es] of the complexion of a book of travels, a diary, a collection of letters, a drama, and a history." Kennedy also argues here that Shakespeare's Polonius has "nearly hit it in his rigmarole of 'pastoral-comical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral'--which, saving 'the tragical,' may well make up my schedule" (11).

This intentionally unstable generic position is frequently addressed as well within the narrative of *Swallow Barn* itself as Mark Littleton comments to his intended reader, Zachary Huddlestone of New York, that his account wavers from one genre to another despite his best intentions. For the first eight chapters of the text that proposes to be a record of his visit to his Virginia cousins, Littleton is consistent in his aim to provide Huddlestone with a "series of sketches" and "a set of pictures from still life" (80), but as chapter nine begins, he announces his resignation to the fact that the book may become a "little romance of domestic life" woven "out of my every-day occurrences" (80). He seems here to relinquish firm authorial control over the written text, claiming that he does not know "what my romance will come to," whether it will "naturally develop . . . through the regular stages of a story and a plot" or if it will "run off into nothing" (80). These remarks preface his first installment of *Swallow Barn*'s romantic plot, the humorous courtship between Littleton's cousin Ned Hazard and his beloved Bel Tracy, the daughter of the owner of Swallow Barn's neighboring plantation, and signal the abandonment of the work's initial object of being a mere sketchbook of Virginia life. These references mark, then, the first major shift of genre in the text, the first conflict in the generic struggle that the reader has been prepared for and expecting since the author's preface.

After almost 300 pages of primarily plot-driven material pertaining not only to Ned and Bel's romance but also to a legal dispute between Swallow Barn's patriarch Frank Meriwether and Bel's father Isaac Tracy, Littleton again addresses Huddlestone, whom he assumes has "become deeply interested in the progress of Ned Hazard's love affairs"

(374). Littleton declares that he himself is greatly surprised that "Ned has grown to be a hero in my story; and that I, who originally began to write only a few desultory sketches of the Old Dominion, have unawares, and without any premeditated purpose, absolutely fallen into a regular jog-trot, novel-like narrative,--at least, for several consecutive chapters" (374). He here surrenders to this progression, claiming that "I owe [it] to posterity to go on and supply such matters of fact as may tend to the elucidation and final clearing up of the present involved and uncertain posture into which I have brought my principal actors" (374). In this statement, he gives up the pose of recorder or documentarian and instead acknowledges himself as a storyteller, responsible for the creation of these characters and incidents. Acknowledging this newly recognized role, he accepts "the weight of this obligation" and now feels, as the weaver of this plot, that it is his responsibility to find "the best means of compassing my end" (374). In this section there is also a lack of certainty about Littleton's audience; he still addresses his "dear Zack" but also refers to his "clear-sighted readers." At this point, all parties--author, narrator, presumed reader, and actual reader--become fully involved in the work's generic struggle; that is, the reader as well as the narrator is faced with the question of whether this text is intended to be a travel journal, recording the acts of real people and meant for a single reader, or whether it is a novel full of romantic characters that is meant for a large readership.

In chapter 44, Littleton announces that he has "followed Ned's love-affair into a convenient resting place" or, as he claims, acknowledging that he still holds some narrative control, to a place "where I am willing, at least for the present, to leave it" (435). He admits that "little did I dream, when I came to the Old Dominion and undertook to write down the simple scenes that are acted in a gentleman's hall, I should, in scarce a month gone by, find myself tangled in a web of intricate love-plots which should so overmatch my slender powers!" (436). He hopes that "no future event, during my sojourn at Swallow Barn, shall impose upon me the duty of tracing out the sequel of this tortuous and

difficult history" (436). He believes that he has fulfilled his responsibilities, "through the labyrinth of my story; and now, right gladly, escape to other matters more german[e] to my hand" (436). With this proclamation, he resigns the role of novelist and returns to his original intention of providing sketches of plantation life. The final chapters include one of his most infamous, "The Quarter," a sketch of life in the slave quarters that features Meriwether's defense of slavery, as well as another about a slave hero, Abe, and an extended biography of Captain John Smith. Remaining faithful in this last portion of the book to its initial purpose, Littleton revisits the romantic plot of *Swallow Barn* only in a very brief postscript that explains that "Hazard and Bel were joined in the bands of holy wedlock" some months after Littleton has returned to New York (504).

The above description of the broad shifts in genre in *Swallow Barn* and the narrator's comments about these shifts is necessary to illustrate that Kennedy's text can and should be discussed in terms that Thomas Beebee has used to examine *Moby Dick*. Like Melville's work, *Swallow Barn* is one that "evade[s] generic classification, [while] it also discusses and theorizes its own generic instability" (Beebee 19). Beebee concludes that Melville's text "depends for its meaning not on its genre, but upon its generic instability" (26). This generic instability, the "ability to confound our generic expectations" (9), confronts readers with the choice about "what exactly to do with the [text] or how to read it" (12). As is the case in Melville's text, *Swallow Barn*'s generic instability, which is revealed in Kennedy's and Littleton's repeated comments about the text within the text itself, is crucial to its argument and thus to any full reading of the text.

This instability is also closely related to the subversive threat that Kennedy's work presents to southern aristocratic ideology. Through Littleton's struggle to maintain control over his own text, initially intended to be an accurate portrait of the South, Kennedy makes the argument that depictions of the South are inevitably pulled toward romanticization. This irresistible attraction toward romance is, in Beebee's phrase, "what the text tells us

about itself" (19). The repeated analogy of the painter which Littleton uses to describe his own work within the text echoes this message as well. Early in the text, he claims to be presenting readers with "a set of pictures from still life, . . . a little gallery of landscapes and portraits" (80). The implied goal here is documentarian, the presentation of a realistic record of life and culture in the South. But later in the book, Kennedy returns to this image of the recorder as painter to suggest that verisimilitude might not be possible. Though he admits that his "design in this work has been simply to paint in true colors the scenes of domestic life as I have found them in Virginia," he asserts that these "true colors" are indeed only subjective truths (228). He acknowledges, for instance, that these truths appear as he has seen them and claims that he has recorded only "whatever has interested me," finally even admitting that "I sketch with a careless hand" (228). No account of any subject can be completely accurate, Littleton seems to argue, as it will inevitably depend upon the artist's personal views and interests and be influenced by the artist's own limitations. In all of the "authorial" commentary that Littleton makes throughout the text of *Swallow Barn*, in all of his confessions about the work's generic instability, he implies, sometimes in frustration and sometimes with relative resignation, that the subject of the South lends itself too well to romance and that even he, a New Yorker, a northerner, a Yankee, is not immune to the temptation to romanticize southern plantation life. But, the converse to this seemingly harmless admission is the more dangerous assertion that these romances of the South are a way to deny the truth of the region, a reality that is so unspeakable that the artificiality of romance is a more palatable substitute for all involved, storyteller and listener, author and reader, and that as long as the romance is perpetuated, no actual problems or issues can be addressed or remedied.

Swallow Barn as Dialogic Narrative

Ken Egan has recently called *Swallow Barn* "a double-voiced, dialogic account of the Southern plantation" and encouraged its readers to "allow the text to speak in multiple voices, for this is indeed a highly dialogized narrative" (62-3). Though he does not develop these observations beyond these brief statements, Egan has usefully directed readers of *Swallow Barn* toward the theory of the novel developed in Mikhail Bakhtin's *Dialogic Imagination* and to a model for examining Kennedy's text that can take into account its awkwardly ambivalent nature and reveal it to be much more than simple propaganda.

In Bakhtin's discussion of the novel's development out of the epic and romance, he claims that the central defining characteristic of the form is the quality of dialogism, the presence of more than one voice, ideology, or system of belief, constantly in dialogue and debate with each other throughout the course of the text. This dialogue results in the novel's reader being faced with a multitude of voices and arguments ("heteroglossia"), rather than being presented with the single, coherent position ("monoglossia") around which the epic is centered. Bakhtin describes this principle as it appears in most novels:

> One point of view opposed to another, one evaluation opposed to another, one accent opposed to another. . . . This interaction, this dialogic tension between two languages and two beliefs systems, permits authorial intentions to be realized in such a way that we can acutely sense their presence at every point in the work. The author is not to be found in the language of the narrator, not in the normal literary language to which the story opposes itself . . . --but rather, the author utilizes now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly to either of them; he makes use of this verbal give-and-take, this dialogue of languages at

> every point in his work, in order that he himself might remain as it were neutral with regard to language, a third party in a quarrel between two people. (314)

This discussion of the dialogism inherent to the novel form aptly describes the essential structure of Kennedy's work and justifies, despite both Kennedy's own and his narrator's hesitancy to do so, labeling *Swallow Barn* a novel, while most other fiction of the antebellum South--especially the historical fiction of William Caruthers and Simms--should be more properly considered romances, based upon the monoglossia of the epic.

One of the most notable means by which Kennedy integrates dialogism into *Swallow Barn* lies in his allowing at least two voices to emerge through the single voice of his outsider-narrator, Littleton. His narration presents the reader with a view that moves from objective criticism to complete sympathy with what he observes and vice versa. For instance, Littleton can move from criticizing the static and stagnant nature of the Old South, complaining that "her laws and habits . . . have a certain fixedness, which even reject many of the valuable improvements of the day," to being seduced by the region's charms, declaring Virginia "a predominant star in the Union" (71). Often Littleton's double voice can be detected within a single sentence or statement. For instance, Littleton seems to have grown to identify strongly with the southern aristocracy and to have appropriated its values in his dramatic announcement of his own desired future:

> Ever since I have been at Swallow Barn, I have entertained a very philosophical longing for the calm and dignified retirement of the woods. I begin to grow moderate in my desires; that is, I only want a thousand acres of good land, an old manor-house, on a pleasant site, a hundred negroes, a large library, a host of friends, and a reserve of a few thousands a year in the stocks,--in case of bad crops,--and, finally, a house full of pretty,

> intelligent, and docile children, with some few et ceteras not worth mentioning. (311)

However, even as Littleton affirms the plantation ideal for southern men, the role of landowner, master of slaves, possessor of wealth and learning, and father of a brood of attractive children, the dialogic nature of the text can be detected. In his belief that he is "moderate" in his desire to have merely the items on this astonishing wish list and his closing assertion that he "doubt[s] not, after this, I shall be considered a man of few wants," Littleton presents an element of criticism, apparently implying both the impossibility of attaining such goals and perhaps the irrationality of these goals as an ideal.

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin explains that "one of the most basic and fundamental forms for incorporating and organizing heteroglossia in the novel [is] 'incorporated genres'" (320). He theorizes that the novel inherently depends for its composition upon various genres, including short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, the confession, the diary, the travel note, the biography, and the personal letter. A catalogue of the genres incorporated into Kennedy's novel would include those listed above as well as the sketch, the romance, legal discourse, court records, tall tales, comic farce, heroic tales, and historical account. With each of these genres, Bakhtin argues, "as they enter the novel, [they] bring into it their own languages and therefore stratify the linguistic unity of the novel and further intensify its speech diversity" (321). In *Swallow Barn*, the most significant "incorporated genre" is the romance, which constantly interrupts the realistic narrative, threatening to take over the work completely. The romance attempts to dictate the actions of reality, limits what Littleton feels he can include in his narrative, and forces a structure and a plot upon that which should be without structure or plot. The contest between the genres of the romance and the novel thus provides the basis for much of the dialogic effect of the text.

A site where this genre struggle becomes very clear is in the figure of the hero, whom both Bakhtin and Georg Lukács place as central to the distinction between epic/romance and the novel. As Lukács explains in his explication of the Walter Scott hero, the transition from epics to novels is tied to the focus upon a new hero, a man who is "decent," "average," "mediocre," and not "fanatically partisan" (36-7). The "hero" of *Swallow Barn*, Ned Hazard, is much more closely aligned with this average man at the center of Scott's work than the typical hero of southern historical romance. Yet, the text, the narrator, and the other characters constantly measure him by romance standards, and he himself is disappointed when he cannot compare to the heroes of epic and romantic fiction.

As has been previously illustrated in my introduction and earlier chapters, southern romancers chose to shun the novelistic hero of Scott's work and closely modeled their heroes after those of the epic. Bakhtin's characterization of the hero of epic parallels many scholars' descriptions of southern romance heroes:

> [H]e is a fully finished and completed being. This has been accomplished on a lofty heroic level, but what is complete is also something hopelessly ready-made; he is all there, from beginning to end he coincides with himself, he is absolutely equal to himself. He is, furthermore, completely externalized. There is not the slightest gap between his authentic essence and its external manifestation. All his potential, all his possibilities are realized utterly in his external social position, in the whole of his fate and even in his external appearance; outside of this predetermined fate and predetermined position there is nothing. (34)

Typically, as Susan Tracy has illustrated, southern romance heroes populating the work of Simms and Caruthers are "ideal types who are never fraught with guilt or doubt about their social responsibilities or moral choices," and they "never struggle as individuals with

questions of good and evil, or confront a chaotic and unpredictable society" (215). Instead, these figures necessarily become rather one-dimensional and static:

> An embodiment of ideal masculinity, he stands for loyalty to family and country, respect for age and women, care for one's subordinates, generosity to one's friends and neighbors, honesty in business and politics, courage in combat, and personal integrity matched by an overwhelming sense of honor that leads him to defend any real or imagined insult to himself, his family, or his country. (215)

Because of their function as societal icons, the heroes of southern romance have been justifiably criticized for being "virtually interchangeable with each other" (215). It is this figure, the South's version of "the pre-packaged and unchanging" epic hero (Bakhtin 10), to which Kennedy in his "hero" Ned Hazard has provided a surprisingly refreshing alternative. And as Ned Hazard falls short of the role of romance hero in almost every conceivable fashion, Kennedy is able to call into question the ideals to which the brave cavalier of romance is attached.

In Chapter Five, the introductory character sketch of Ned Hazard, Littleton illustrates Hazard's life-long aspirations to romantic heroism. The narrator provides Hazard's history from his schoolboy days, during which his knowledge of "chivalrous lore . . . was a matter of college renown" (61). He was, for instance, obsessed with "the states of the dark ages, . . . those feudal times, when barons fought for lady love" (61). Despite being the school's source of answers to "abstruse questions of the duello," he is eventually expelled from the school for fighting, for answering "the defiance of a gentleman of honor, to 'a joust at utterance.'" (61). After leaving school, "he was seized with a romantic fever" and journeys to South America in order to "play knight-errant in the quarrel of the Patriots" (52). As was the case in his cavalier days at school, he soon returns from this endeavor "well bitten with fleas" and "came to the sober conclusion that he was the most egregious

fool that had ever set out in quest of a wild goose" (53); he "came home the most disquixotted cavalier that ever hung up his shield at the end of a scurvy crusade" (53). In this introduction, we are also told that he is no better suited to matters of love than war. He misses a scheduled elopement with a belle, because he "fell into a revel, and then into a row, and then into a deep sleep" (60). Despite all of these suggestions that he may not meet his romantic ideal, Littleton informs us that, even at the mature age of thirty-three, Ned's "mind is still a fairy land, inhabited by pleasant and conceited images, winged charmers, laughing phantoms, and mellow spectres of frolick" (62).

In the love plot of *Swallow Barn*, in which Ned courts a romantic maiden, he does not come any closer to becoming a romance hero. In fact, as Littleton relates these events that he witnesses during his visit, Ned repeatedly continues to fall short of his culture's ideals. His first scene with Bel Tracy depicts him bellowing an absurd and loud song, based upon couplets about his love, and becoming desperately apologetic when she surprises him and believes that he is attempting to humiliate her. In his most heroic action, Ned engages in a fist fight with a group of ruffians who have criticized Bel's father, Isaac. Yet, he realizes that even here he will not measure up to the ideal:

> The idea that I had gone into a vulgar ring of clowns, and soiled my hands in a rough-and-tumble struggle with a strolling bully. Now if I had encountered an unknown ruffian in the woods, with sword and lance, on horseback, and had had my weapon shivered in my hand, and then been trussed upon a pole ten feet long,--Gad, I believe she would be thrown into transports!--that would be romance for her; it would be a glorious feat of arms. . . . But to be pommeled black and blue, with that plebian instrument a fist--pugh!--she will turn up her nose at it with a magnificent disdain. (370)

Despite his apparent knowledge that he, a mere mortal man, can never meet romantic expectations, Ned continues to strive to do so and to fail miserably. The text constantly mocks his efforts (even as it continues to force him to strive for the ideal) by naming chapters in which he falls short of the ideal according to romance traditions, such as "Knight Errantry" and "A Joust at Utterance," and dubbing him "the Knight of the Hawk" (373).[3]

Bel's role in this struggle between romance and novel is important. Despite the fact that the heroine has never been central to theories of fictional forms, in the southern romance it is crucial that she be a flawless representative of her culture's ideals, especially if she is to be married to the romantic hero as the work's resolution. Kennedy does indeed connect Bel Tracy to the ideals of the antebellum South but apparently only as a means of exposing the absurdity of measuring actual people and events against romantic and artificial standards. Bel is constant in her attachment to romantic ideals; that is, whenever Ned might be tempted to reject the ideals altogether, he is reminded that Bel is the prize that he will be awarded if only he can achieve the unachievable. Further, before a reader even encounters Bel in the text, other characters have explained that "she reads descriptions of ladies of chivalry, and takes the field in imitation of them. Her head is full of these fancies, and she almost persuades herself that this is the fourteenth century" (86). Because of this cultural ideal, she repeatedly rejects Ned's attentions, since "she has a vein of romance in her composition which engenders some fastidious notions touching propriety of manners, and gives her . . . a predilection for that solemn foppery which women sometimes imagine to be refinement,--and of which Ned has not the slightest infusion" (109). These tendencies lead her to favor Singleton Swansdown, the pretentious gentleman-poet who

[3] Littleton's own attachment to romance, despite his many protestations, should not be minimized. He, like Bel and Ned himself, wants Ned to succeed in the role of romance hero. In a chapter entitled "Signs of a Hero," he admits to possessing "strong hopes that [Ned] is really destined to be a hero of some note before I am done with him" (386). However, even here, Littleton implies that his role as author of romance will be what makes Ned such a hero; essentially, his wish is that the fiction can shape the reality of Ned.

visits Swallow Barn, causing all the women to swoon and Bel to exclaim that "he is so like the hero of a novel" (110). Her cousin chastises her for discouraging Ned in his pursuit of her hand merely because he "has not yet killed seven dragons in your service" (234). Her romantic notions prevent her, however, from seeing Ned as a potential suitor; instead, she sees him as coarse, unpolished, uncultured, and crude, a man more likely to make a joke at her expense than recite poetry to her. Because she cannot reconcile the reality of Ned with her romantic ideals, she risks missing a suitable mate, but her mistake also has larger repercussions in the plantation community. The match of Ned and Bel will ensure the harmony of the aristocratic lifestyle, according to "Mammy Diana, . . . a true sibyl, [who] has uttered the prophecy, . . .'That the landmarks shall never be stable until Swallow Barn shall wed The Brakes'" (91). Thus, by having his young lovers become victims of their own romantic notions and almost sabotaging the inevitable romance conclusion, Kennedy presents these fancies as a threat not only to their own happiness but also to that of the future of the plantation South.

Kennedy's depiction of Ned and Bel's relationship is only one example of how the text introduces dialogism into its narrative. Its use of Bel's "fancies" and the artifices of romance do act to give voice to the culture's ideals and contribute to the aristocratic and chivalric self-image of the region's planter class. However, the generic conflict that is produced as a novelistic hero proves unsuited to romance conventions, or in fact as any character or incident recorded in Littleton's account fails to measure up to the notions that the society has of itself, serves to call into question the appropriateness of such ideals and the purpose for which they are perpetuated. Similarly, this conflict between romance and reality emerges in his depiction of the plantation estate itself, his characterization of the plantation patriarch, and the absurd dispute that threatens to divide the neighboring estates. While each of these aspects is played up for comic effects, as the actuality pales against the ideal, in order to illustrate the foolishness of the culture, Kennedy also reveals that this

tendency does indeed have a serious, darker side as a tool of the class and race system of the antebellum South. Most importantly, *Swallow Barn* illustrates that the romantic nature of the South is a vital element in the perpetuation of the cruel and oppressive institution that is southern slavery.

Swallow Barn's Dialogue on Slavery

The one aspect of *Swallow Barn* that has received the most attention is its treatment of the institution of slavery. With its reputation as the prototype of all plantation novels, Kennedy's work has become the target of critics who view his depictions of African-American slaves as racist, demeaning, and offensive. An example of such sentiment is Jean Fagan Yellin's finding that "Kennedy consistently reveals a racist, proslavery bias which envisions the black as the happy inferior and chattel slavery as beneficent" (60). Even when scholars acknowledge that *Swallow Barn* is a more complicated text than others have given it credit for being, they still often fail to see how his treatment of slavery fits into this larger satire. Yellin, for instance, recognizes "the satirical tone Kennedy uses in describing much of Virginia life," but she is also convinced that "he does not handle the Southern 'peculiar institution' ironically" (53). And Alan Rose, while noting the "uneasy irony" and "ambivalence" of Kennedy's view of the South, claims that "in regard to the Negro, however, Kennedy's irony is less apparent" and that "in the sensitive area of racial description, the narrative point of view often seems stabilized in . . . the pattern of stereotyped black racial expression" (57). In opposition to these and other similar opinions, it is my argument that even the institution of slavery is treated with the double-focus with which Kennedy views the larger South, that within this text, which is often dismissed as pro-slavery propaganda, a serious dialogue takes place that calls into question many of the southern assertions about the black race and the slave system of the Old South.

The common opinion of *Swallow Barn* as racist and pro-slavery is easy to understand. The most anthologized and thus most well-known chapter of the novel, "The Quarter," contains not only a depiction of slave quarters wherein the inhabitants are "undeviatingly happy" but also "a proslavery diatribe" in Meriwether's justification of slavery to his northern kinsman Littleton (Yellin 54).[4] The first section of this chapter features Littleton's romanticized impressions of the southern slave system. The narrator acknowledges that he "came here a stranger . . . to the negro character, . . . and somewhat disposed, indeed, from prepossessions, to look upon them as severely dealt with, and expecting to have my sympathies excited towards them as objects of commiseration" (452). He then claims that "the reality which I have witnessed" has brought him "a most agreeable surprise" (452). This "reality" that Littleton surveys is a scene of a "picturesque landscape" of hovels, of "swarms of little negroes that basked on the sunny sides of these cabins" like "a set of terrapins," and of Meriwether as "a kind and considerate master" who frequently visits his slaves "to add to their comforts or relieve their wants" (449-51). Based upon this evidence, Littleton proclaims that Meriwether's slaves "never could become a happier people" (453). At this point, Littleton seems firmly convinced of the pro-slavery defense's arguments that slaves were well-treated and content in their servitude.

Littleton, though, goes beyond this stereotypical view to make larger, more philosophical statements about the institution. For instance, he claims that

> No tribe of people have ever passed from barbarism to civilization whose middle stage of progress has been more secure from harm, more genial to

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[4] Typically, if an anthology includes Kennedy, it will excerpt Chapter 46: "The Quarter." For example, *The Literary South* (Louisiana State UP, 1979) anthologizes only this chapter; *Southern Writing, 1585-1920* (Odyssey P, 1970) includes it alongside the novel's first chapter; *The Literature of the South* (Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1968) includes it among three chapters from the novel; and *The Harper American Literature* (Harper Collins, 1994) contains six chapters from *Swallow Barn,* including "The Quarter." Surprisingly, Norton's recent anthology *The Literature of the American South* (1998) excludes "The Quarter" in favor of two other chapters of *Swallow Barn.* A justification of this exclusion is not given, but perhaps it is an attempt to remedy the reductive view of Kennedy's text that occurs when the chapter is read out of its context.

> their character, or better supplied with mild and beneficent guardianship, adapted to the actual state of their intellectual feebleness, than the negroes of Swallow Barn. (453)

His theory is based on the assumption that the slave is "essentially parasitical in his nature, dependent upon the white race . . . for guidance and direction even to the procurement of his most indispensable necessaries," and as having "the helplessness of a child" (453). Because of this dependence, Littleton compares the black race to a vine which "grows upward" because "nature has supplied the sturdy tree as a support" (454). Thus, he concludes that slavery is an institution beneficial to slaves and, consequently, that the abolition of slavery, "that most cruel of all projects," would leave the entire black populace helpless (454).

Many of Littleton's "objective" and "unbiased" views are echoed in a speech given by Frank Meriwether in which the master of Swallow Barn laments the growing abolitionist movement. While he straightforwardly admits that slavery "is theoretically and morally wrong" (455), Meriwether can see no alternative to the institution when he considers "the consequences of committing two or three millions of persons, born and bred in a state so completely dependent as that of slavery--so unfurnished, so unintellectual, so utterly helpless, . . . to all the responsibilities, cares and labors of a state of freedom" (456). He claims that such an emancipation of the slave population "would be but a nominal freedom" and in actuality "a cruel desertion of our trust--inevitably leading [the freed slaves] to progressive debasement, penury, oppression, and finally to extermination" (456). He believes the end of slavery should come gradually, and in the meantime owners "owe it to justice and humanity to treat these people with the most considerate kindness" (456). The result of this beneficent paternalism, he claims, is "the natural contentment of the slave himself," making the slave populace "more free from sorrow and want than that of almost any other class of men occupying the same field of labor" (459). In his

justification of slavery, Meriwether casts slave-owners as servants to the slaves, as paternal caretakers of a childlike people who have no chance of survival on their own.

When this chapter is taken out of the context of the entire novel as it very frequently is, it would be easy to argue that Littleton's and Meriwether's positions reflect the arguments of the novel itself. However, just as every position asserted in *Swallow Barn* is contradicted and challenged, much of the rest of the novel calls the arguments of this pro-slavery defense into serious question. Meriwether's position is justly included as a realistic representation of how southerners made the brutal and demeaning slave system acceptable to themselves. By viewing the institution as beneficial, necessary, and ultimately kind, they could reassure themselves that they were not the monsters depicted in abolitionist literature and, even further, that it was actually those fighting to abolish slavery that would be doing the most harm to the African-American race. Yet, it is also important to examine this pro-slavery statement in relation to other orations given by Meriwether throughout the course of the novel. From the novel's beginning, the patriarch is presented ironically, as a pompous blowhard who loves to listen to himself give speeches. Littleton tells us that "the solitary elevation of a country gentleman, well to do in the world, begets some magnificent notions" (35). Meriwether has succumbed to these notions of his own superiority; he gets into the "habit of making long speeches" and becomes "impatient of contradiction" and "very touchy on the point of honor." While Littleton admits that on the plantation Meriwether's opinions "import absolute verity," he acknowledges that "they are not so current outside of his jurisdiction" (35). Knowing that others will disagree with some of Meriwether's eccentric opinions makes the plantation master "over-argumentative" (36). From the very first example of Meriwether's opinions, a tirade against progress and technology wherein he questions whether America would not have been better off without the invention of the steamboat, Littleton views his kinsman's positions with some skepticism. Meriwether pronounces that the "annihilation of space [caused by the

steamboat] . . . is not to be desired" because the "protection against the evils of consolidation consists in the very obstacles to our intercourse" (72-3). He asserts that "the home material of Virginia was never so good as when her roads were at their worst" (73). Meriwether continues this isolationist "harangue, to which none of the company replied one word, for fear we might get into a dispute" (73). Littleton explains that all the inhabitants of Swallow Barn "seem to understand the advantage of silence when Meriwether is inclined to expatiatory" (73). Thus, we are told that the patriarch's opinions are not necessarily those of the novel but merely the unchallenged expression of the beliefs of the privileged white male in the southern aristocracy, beliefs that no other inhabitant of the plantation, even its northern visitor, feels comfortable in openly contradicting.

Given this ironic point of view that Littleton maintains in reference to Meriwether's proclamations, a reader might possibly dismiss Meriwether's defense of slavery as just another of his eccentric and old-fashioned opinions. However, Littleton's commitment to his own newly-formed views, modeled after Meriwether's, appears strong, and it is his position that I think is most important. Kennedy uses the view of a northerner, who comes to Virginia with established, mildly abolitionist prejudices about slavery, again to make a point about the portrayal of the South. In his "Introductory Epistle" to Huddlestone, Littleton explains that Ned Hazard has accused him of having "fallen into some unseemly prejudices against the Old Dominion" (14), yet over the course of the novel, he tempers these presumably abolitionist views and by the end has completely adopted the views of slavery espoused by Meriwether in "The Quarter." His conversion to this position is gradual and begins with his observation of the slaves' attitudes toward their servitude: he believes that the slaves he sees on the streets of Richmond are "over-contented" (19) and those he encounters at Swallow Barn "are not only contented, but happy under [Meriwether's] dominion" (36). His perception of the slaves soon shifts from seeing them as human beings enjoying the support of a beneficent institution to regarding them as not

human at all. His description of the slaves at Swallow Barn becomes typical of antebellum proslavery rhetoric as it "insists on inhumanity and grotesqueness" in its characterization of the black inhabitants of the plantation (Yellin 56). Within the course of the novel, Littleton uses a variety of labels to assert the inhumanity of these figures. He first uses primate images to dehumanize the slaves he encounters: "these monkeys" (138), "untamed monkeys" (308), "the strange baboon" (309), "the rude half-monkey, half-boy" (327), and "monkey caricaturists" (446). He also relies upon supernatural and evil images, calling the slave boy, Beelzebub, a "goblin page" (118) and referring to others in the narrative as "elvish little negroes" (144), "sundry wide-mouthed negroes, children and grown, who were clustered into a dusky group . . . like some of Old Nick's brood" (265), and "this grotesque imp" (309). Each of these references is evidence of Littleton's growing involvement in and sympathy toward the southern strategy of dehumanizing the slaves as means of justification of the slave system, for as long as slaves were not human, or, if human, inferior, the system could be honorably defended.

The point in the novel at which Littleton seems most strongly indicted in the sins of the slave system occurs when he explains that the "herd of little negroes about the estate" could afford the white inhabitants "a new diversion" (308). He explains that he and Ned, in need of amusement, rounded up the "horde of . . . untamed monkeys" and "ordered this crew to prepare for a foot-race," proposing "a reward of a piece of money to the winner" (308-9). They excite the slave children, dressed only in long shirts, with the prospect of this prize, and watch them, running among the plantation dogs, humiliate themselves in hopes of success. When the children run, they expose "their bare, black, and meager shanks, to the scandal of all beholders" (309). The race is finally too close to decide, so Ned just throws the money in the midst of the desperate children and makes them scramble for it. In observation of this scene, Littleton can only comment that "young negroes" are "a strange pack of antic and careless animals" that "furnish the liveliest picture that is to be

found in nature, of that race of swart fairies which, in the old time, were supposed to play their pranks in the forest at moonlight" (309-10). Here again, he relies upon a combination of animalistic description with the supernatural to assert the slaves' lack of humanity. He has no qualms about the way these children are being treated as pets: Ned encourages "the negroes in the gambols," and Rip, the youngest Meriwether, marches the young blacks into "a kind of local militia" and "entertains us with a review" (310). Instead, this episode supposedly extolling the charms of southern life concludes with the narrator's sudden announcement of his desires for "a thousand acres of land, an old manor-house, . . . [and] a hundred negroes" (311). At this point in the narrative, this northerner seems to have been completely converted to the racist, oppressive viewpoint of the southern aristocracy.

By recording Littleton's own conversion from sharp-eyed observer to southern romantic, Kennedy illustrates how antebellum southerners themselves viewed slaves as less than human and slavery as a kind institution in order to maintain their idyllic and self-serving vision of the region. Further, he displays the southern tendency to romanticize even the most brutal aspects of its culture. In the process of this critique, Kennedy thus demonstrates that the romance was a useful tool for propagating slavery. One episode in which Kennedy explicitly connects the romance to slavery occurs when he describes Bel Tracy and her hawk, Fairbourne. The young lady had been inspired "with an especial ardor" by "the picturesque association of falconry with the stories of an age that Walter Scott has rendered so bewitching to the fancy of meditative maidens" (228). Taken with this romantic notion, she has trained her own hawk and bedecked him in "leather bewets, that button around his legs," each with a silver bell, and "a silver ring . . . fitted to one leg," engraved with his name and the legend "I live in my lady's grace" (229). As Leonard Cassuto has pointed out, in the young plantation dwellers' discussion about Fairbourne, "all words and actions surrounding the hawk carry suggestive double meaning" (141). Certainly, the characters' discussion of the bird's nature and its attitudes toward its mistress

and freedom parallels much of the rhetoric of slavery and abolition. Bel's cousin, Harvey, tells her that her "light flax is not so strong as a wild bird's love of freedom" because "these are creatures that prefer the open world to your hand, strange as it may seem" (230). She responds to the assertion that her pet might prefer its liberty to her care by claiming that he "is a gallant bird," who "loves to hear me call him" and is "loth . . . to leave my hand" (230). Like many masters, she cannot conceive of her property valuing its freedom over servitude, and thus she is astonished when, once in flight, he will not heed her calls and return to his perch. She is told that she has "overrate[d her] authority" (232), but she, believing herself a benevolent and caring mistress, asserts that "nothing that I have tended so kindly would desert me" (233). Harvey explains that the bird "belongs to an ungrateful tribe, and is not worth reclaiming" (233). However, he does not quit with this racial commentary; instead, he forecasts Fairbourne's unlikely success as a free creature: "I should not be surprised if, in three day's time, he should be whipped out of all good society in the woods, and be fain to come back to his perch, . . . torn-down and bedraggled" (233). In this episode, a reader can see traditional arguments concerning slavery rehearsed in regards to a pet hawk. In addition, though, these common beliefs of southerners, that slaves enjoy their servitude and would be unwilling to leave their masters' "kindness" if given the opportunity, are shown to be serious misperceptions.

The romance, Kennedy here argues, because of its very subject matter, reinforces notions of class hierarchy and encourages "lords" and "ladies" (that is, white men and women of the slave-owning class) to see their "inferiors" as contented with the social structure and willingly subservient in exchange for the master's kind treatment. Certainly, Bel's romantic notions about her inferiors extend beyond her pet hawk and include the poor white character Hafen Blok, whom she attempts to transform into her personal minstrel by decking him in "a dress which you would have laughed to see," an outfit "from the exact description of the minstrel's dress, as detailed by Laneham, in his account of the

entertainment of Queen Elizabeth" (377). Kennedy's indictment of romance continues as Fairbourne's fate is resolved in a later chapter wherein Ned Hazard again attempts to act as a romance hero with the re-enslavement of Bel's hawk as his romantic, chivalric object. Littleton defends the events of this chapter using romance precedents: "it will occur to [a reader], if he be read in romance, that it was not so unusual an exploit to regain a stray hawk as he might at first imagine" (355). By implication, this deed would seem to be more likely in historical romance than in real life. However, at this point in Littleton's realistic record of plantation life, Ned appears to achieve heroic status because he easily recaptures the escaped hawk. Yet, even at this point, when a romance would celebrate this achievement, the narrative focuses upon the hawk and expresses regret that the brave creature is being returned to servitude; enslaved again, Fairbourne's "whole aspect was that of a forlorn, silly, and wayward minion, wearing the badge of slavery instead of that of the wild and gallant freebooter of the air so conspicuously expressed in the character of his tribe" (358). While Cassuto has argued that this passage merely reinforces the novel's defense of slavery, claiming that Fairbourne fails to succeed in freedom, I believe that this passage directly contradicts the assertions made by Meriwether and Littleton, for here the argument appears to be that "the badge of slavery" is inappropriate for the "character of his tribe" and that the consequence of forcing a noble and gallant creature into such servitude is degradation, leaving him "silly" and "forlorn." In the sentence that concludes the entire hawk episode, Kennedy reinforces the romance's role in slavery in his characterization of the men coming back to Swallow Barn with Fairbourne as "returning like knights to a bannered castle from successful inroad,--flushed with heat and victory,--covered with dust and glory; our enemies subdued and our lady's pledge redeemed" (368). Implicit in so much of this episode is the assertion that in order for the romance of the South to be propagated, a strict hierarchy must be maintained in which social inferiors gladly accept their status so that their superiors can feel ennobled.

Not all of the opposition to the pro-slavery voice of *Swallow Barn* is as subtle as Kennedy's use of the Fairbourne episode. In the course of the novel, Kennedy introduces three very strong slave characters who directly challenge the depiction of slaves presented in "The Quarter," as they are neither unintelligent nor contented in slavery. The first of these slave figures appears in the "Introductory Epistle" as Littleton is escorted to Swallow Barn by Scipio, "an old free negro," who entertains the white man with tales of Virginia's past. Littleton is very impressed with the carriage and manner of this former slave, but he does not pay enough heed to Scipio's closing remarks: "People think old Scipio a fool, because he's got sense" (22). This acknowledgment that slaves might play dumb and happy for whites is a startling announcement with which to open a novel condemned for its portrait of supposedly unintelligent and contented slaves. While Scipio's confession of role-playing is, as Lucinda MacKethan has noted, similar to "the sentiment that produced Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poem 'We Wear the Mask'" (Introduction xxv), I believe it is also central to the novel's entire argument about southern views of slavery. Littleton is given this crucial knowledge, even though Scipio "laughed till the tears came into his eyes" (22), by the very first slave he meets, yet he ignores this information as he elects to adopt a view of slaves as simple, dependent, happy, and well-treated so that he will not have to condemn a culture that he personally finds so charming. In essence, Swallow Barn's charms can be justified only if this southern view of the black race is accepted as accurate and to uphold this view it may be necessary to privilege myth over reality.

The second figure who strongly challenges much of Littleton's thinking about slaves is Carey, the slave who runs Meriwether's stables. In his case, the relationship between master and slave is not the strict paternalism that the white men assert in the later chapter; instead here Carey and Meriwether "hold grave and momentous consultations upon the affairs of the stable, in such a sagacious strain of equal debate, that it would puzzle a spectator to tell which was the leading member in the council" (36). Littleton appears

uncertain how to characterize this relatively equitable exchange and dismisses the slave's behavior as singularly inappropriate pretensions. He claims, for instance, that Carey "thinks he knows a great deal more upon the subject than his master" and that "their frequent intercourse has begot a familiarity in the old negro which is almost fatal to Meriwether's supremacy" (37). Littleton sees this relationship as dangerous because the slave "feels himself authorized to maintain his positions according to the freest parliamentary form, and sometimes with a violence of asseveration that compels his master to abandon his ground, purely out of faint-heartedness" (37). In such situations, we are told, Meriwether usually defers to Carey's view but not without again asserting the slave's subhuman status, by telling him to "tie up your tongue, you old mastiff" (37). This episode alone seems sufficient to call into question the assertions of slaves' lack of intelligence, for here a slave logically reasons with his master and even wins the argument. In a later episode, Carey again exhibits his wisdom. Ned has asked him to perform, to "give us 'Sugar in a Gourd' or 'Jim Crow' . . . referring to two popular dances well known in this region, and for the execution of which Carey has some reputation" (102). Instead, again showing his independence, Carey sings a "doggerel ballad" about Hazard's courtship with Bel Tracy because he feels that "he must instruct his young master" and he proceeds to advise him about women. Upon hearing this song, Harvey Riggs pronounces Carey to be "a true seer" (103). In both of these episodes, Carey assumes the mentally superior position and becomes an advisor to his white masters, his actions providing a startling contrast to those of the incapable and dependent slaves presented in "The Quarter."

However, the strongest challenge to Meriwether's and Littleton's position on slavery is the story of Abe, a slave who exhibits great bravery in a time of crisis. The lengthy tale, Littleton's relation of a story that Meriwether tells him, is one of the most

discussed aspects of Kennedy's novel in recent criticism.[5] It is all the more surprising because it appears in the very chapter that follows "The Quarter," providing a strong contradiction of the patriarch's assertions about slaves, the type of challenge that none of the characters dares make, but which the sheer juxtaposition of episodes in Littleton's "sketchbook" makes clear. The first assertion that this tale contradicts is that slavery is beneficial for slaves, that they grow strong because of being supported by the "superior" white race. Abe provides an example of a man who does not prosper within plantation slavery. He has "an expression of courage in his eye that answered to the complexion of his mind: he was noted for his spirit, and his occasional bursts of passion" (466). However, these strong character traits do not serve him well on the slave-owning estate where Meriwether has him trained to be a blacksmith. Because he bore great "resentment at the authority that was exercised over him" (471), Abe soon finds himself resisting the system, taking up the "habit of associating with the most profligate menials belonging to the extensive community of Swallow Barn, and the neighboring estates," an association which "had corrupted his character, and, at the time of life he had now reached, had rendered him offensive to the whole plantation" (467). Eventually, Meriwether tells Littleton that Abe had hardened "into the most irreclaimable of culprits," who

> molested the peace of the neighborhood by continual broils; was frequently detected in acts of depredation upon the adjoining farms; and had once brought himself into extreme jeopardy by joining a band of out-lying negroes, who had secured themselves, for some weeks, in the fastnesses of the low-country swamps, from whence they annoyed the vicinity by nocturnal incursions of the most lawless character. (467-8)

[5] For a good survey of the critical discussion of Abe, see Simpson 49-51, Yellin 58-9, Rose 60-2, MacKethan's Introduction xxvi-xxvii, Grimwood 240-1, Andrews "Inter(racial)textuality" 307-12, Tracy 146-7, and Egan 69-70.

Abe's evolution from charming young man to local terrorist forces Meriwether to decide that the slave "was obliged in consequence to be removed altogether from the estate, and consigned to another sphere of action" (468). The fact that Meriwether relates this tale which so contradicts his previous presentation of slavery to his northern visitor seems shocking for, as William Andrews has claimed, the message here "seems almost heretical" in its suggestion "that every black did not have a place in the plantation order" (309).

Meriwether's solution to Abe's misbehavior, because he cannot "bear the idea of disposing of any of his negroes," is not to sell the slave but to put him "in the charge of one of the pilots of the Chesapeake, to whom, it was supposed, he might become a valuable acquisition" (467-8). Meriwether believes that Abe's "active, intelligent and intrepid character" will make him "well suited to the perilous nature of that service" (468). Certainly, Abe does thrive in his new duties: "His imagination was awakened by the attractions of this field of adventure; by the free roving of the sailor; and by the tumultuous and spirit-stirring roar of the ocean" (471). As a result of this stimulation, the degrading effects of his enslavement seem to be reversed in his new situation; "his person grew erect, his limbs expanded to their natural motion, and he once more walked with the light step and buoyant feelings of his young and wayward nature" (471). Meriwether's description of this now transformed Abe diverges from his depiction of the Swallow Barn slaves as feeble children. Abe "had grown into a sturdy manhood, invigorated by the hardy discipline of his calling. The fearless qualities of his mind, no less than the activity and strength of his body, had been greatly developed to the advantage of his character . . . [and] had operated favorably upon his morals" (474). He has successfully proven his capabilities in a career in which he works alongside white men and is "looked upon by his employers as a valuable seaman" (475). These facts alone seem sufficient evidence to question seriously Meriwether's claims that the black race cannot function or thrive without the rigid structure of the slave system.

Further, in his role of sailor, Abe goes far beyond merely functioning as a capable employee and achieves a great act of heroism. During a terrible storm, "an inward-bound brig" is "struck upon the shoal of the middle ground" of the mouth of the Chesapeake, leaving all aboard "in great danger" (476). Only Abe, among all the gathered sailors on the shore, volunteers to venture into the storm to attempt a rescue of any survivors. He assembles a crew, "three or four sailors--all negroes," to accompany him (477). The white sailors who watch his preparations are awed by his bravery and claim that "if any man along the Chesapeake . . . can handle a pilot-boat in such weather--Abe can" (479). Pride is given as one of Abe's central motivations, the "secret pleasure that he learned that several seamen of established reputation had declined to undertake the venture" (481). We are then told that Abe and his crew were never seen again and were presumed to be lost to the sea.

After hearing the facts of Abe's tale, Littleton celebrates the slave as a hero. He compares "this act of an humble and unknown negro" to "the many similar passages in the lives of heroes whose names have been preserved fresh in the verdure of history, and who have won their immortality upon less noble feats than this" (482). Using language very similar to that Frederick Douglass would later use in *The Heroic Slave*, he claims that "History is a step-mother," who "gives the bauble fame to her own children, with such favoritism as she lists, overlooking many a goodly portion of the family of her husband Time." He soon falls into romantic rhetoric to describe their deed, claiming that "it was a gallant thing, . . . worthy of a better chronicler than I, to see this leader and his little band--children of a despised stock--swayed by a noble emulation to relieve the distressed; and . . . impelled by that love of daring which the romancers call chivalry" (482). Littleton's rhapsody here is fascinating because he admits, almost parenthetically, that blacks are despised rather than loved and cherished, as most pro-slavery defenses claim. However, Abe's heroics are here also forced into the romance plot, as if this culture can only imagine one type of hero, that of romance, whose single motivation for all his actions is chivalry.

Yet even here the text introduces another voice to challenge Littleton's romantic notions, for as he proclaims that "it was a gallant sight to see such heroism shining out in an humble slave of the Old Dominion" (483), the narrative provides evidence that no such chivalric heroism was being enacted, nor any deed that the southern aristocracy would sanction as heroic. When it is revealed that Abe and his crew were never heard from again, we are told that most consider it certain that they were killed in the storm; however, the narrator also informs us, in a passage that no critic of the novel has addressed, that others have suggested that "there was even a chance, that they . . . had escaped into the middle of the Atlantic" (484-5). This idea is not expanded upon as Littleton continues his celebration of the slaves' bravery. Instead, the narrator ignores the very real possibility that the entire gesture had been nothing more than an opportunistic escape attempt on the part of Abe and his all black crew, thus allowing Littleton to maintain his romantic view of the episode.

In general, Abe's tale has fostered nothing but puzzlement on the part of *Swallow Barn*'s critics. For example, Jean Fagan Yellin observes that "it is strange that in the first important book to celebrate the antebellum South, the closest approximation to a true hero is a rebellious slave" (59). In recent years, scholars have attempted to move beyond Yellin's puzzled response in order to explain why the tale is placed where it is in the text and how it might logically fit into the work's overall purpose. Some, including Michael Grimwood and William Andrews, do not believe that the episode is as subversive as I have argued, claiming instead that it merely reinforces the ideology of "The Quarter."[6]

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[6] It is interesting that the readings that find Abe's story to be ideologically conservative see it as a direct response to Nat Turner's Rebellion of 1831. Andrews in "Inter(racial)textuality in Nineteenth-Century Southern Narrative," for instance, explains that "what Kennedy did with Abe was to accept the premise that a Negro could be converted from social conformism to militant antisocial activism, only to assert its opposite, that a Negro could be reformed to take exactly the reverse of Turner's path" (309). While he sees Kennedy's use of Abe as the author's proposed solution to the problem posed by slaves like Turner, Andrews also claims that

> transforming Negro subversion into Negro heroism was something of a rhetorical risk for a Southerner writing at the height of the Turner hysteria, but there was political compensation for this act of southern literary accommodation. Admitting the Negro as hero into southern *literary* narrative was one way of displacing the black man as subversive from southern *historical* narrative. (310)

Grimwood, for instance, argues that "the renegade slave [is] . . . transformed into a black saint" because he "sacrificed himself attempting to save white lives" (240). Thus, he concludes that Abe's heroism is "an act of total submission, not of rebellion" (240-1). Similarly, Andrews argues that Littleton's romanticization of Abe's acts is an attempt to ignore and erase real reasons for slaves' heroic action, "subsuming their action under a white Western literary category that further helps to naturalize these black sailors into Negroes whom whites could comfortably understand and romanticize" and explaining it "according to the prevailing southern norms" (310).[7] In the end, Andrews finds this strategy to be a way of displacing the actual threats black rebels might pose to whites and consigning "the Negro as hero to the realm of romance and classical myth" ("Inter(racial)textuality" 310). Additionally, Lucinda MacKethan observes that this slave hero gains his freedom "but only through the act of choosing to die for one of his master's cherished ideals" (Introduction xxvii). Of course, MacKethan does not acknowledge that Abe's intentions remain unclear; all readers of this episode are given is Littleton's relation of Meriwether's interpretation of Abe's action. The white characters struggle to find a means of explaining his heroism in terms that will not challenge their own perceptions of blacks and the slave system. Accordingly, they choose to see him as a slave who risked his own safety to save members of the "superior" race, just as many slaves did in the Revolutionary War romances of the South and just as, we are told, Abe's own father, Luke did. Indeed, Captain Hazard, Meriwether's father-in-law, "took great pleasure in acknowledging his indebtedness, on one occasion, for his escape from imminent peril, to

[7] It is also notable that, like Douglass's depiction of Madison Washington, Kennedy/Littleton uses other strategies to make Abe a more acceptable romance hero. These include, most notably, the description of Abe's appearance, which marks him as white rather than of African descent: "He had nothing of the flat nose and broad lip of his tribe" (466).

the address and gallantry of an humble retainer,--a faithful negro, by the name of Luke" (464).[8]

A reading of *Swallow Barn*'s Abe episode that diverges from this consensus appears in Lewis Simpson's *The Dispossessed Garden.* He claims that unlike the other slaves on Meriwether's plantation Abe was "a bad actor" (49), incapable of playing the role of the happy slave. Simpson reads then Abe's heroic actions as less subservient and assimilationist than do other critics, reminding us that his fierce pride "to prove that he is braver than the white sailors" is a significant motive (50). He also goes so far as to claim that the effort is "a suicidal act" because the mission could gain "nothing but the death of himself and his crew of blacks, which would appear to be what they wanted" (50). While Simpson's reading, like those of all the others, insists on the death of Abe and his crew, it at least suggests they had other motives, notably an escape from slavery through suicide, that Littleton does not entertain. Simpson agrees that it is significant that Littleton interprets the incidents of Abe's story as "an example of a slave who is in a perfect relationship with his masters" and "gives his life in their service" (51). While he admits that Kennedy's

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[8] As I argued in Chapter One, in my discussion of James Heath's treatment of the heroic slave James Lafayette, slaves in southern historical romances of the Revolutionary War frequently fought loyally for their master's cause, the liberty of white colonists in American, but never for their own freedom. Littleton presents the fact that many slaves fought in the Revolutionary War as "the best answer that can be made to all the exaggerated opinions of the misery of the domestic slavery of this region" (464-5). He claims that

> in the stormiest period of the history of the United States, and when the whole disposable force of the country was engrossed in the conduct of a fearful conflict, the slaves of Virginia were not only passive to the pressure of a yoke which the philosophy of this age affects to consider as the most intolerable of burthens, but they also, in a multitude of instances, were found in the ranks, by the sides of their masters, sharing with them the most formidable dangers, and manifesting their attachment by heroic gallantry" (465).

To reinforce the belief that slaves did not fight for their own freedom but out of loyalty to their own master, romances including William Gilmore Simms's *The Yemassee* and *Woodcraft* often depicted a grateful master offering the slave his freedom only to have the offer rejected by the slave who understands the benefits that slavery affords him. In *The Yemassee*, the slave Hector, upon his master's offer to emancipate him, exclaims "I d---n to h---l, maussa, ef I guine to be free!" (397). And in *Woodcraft*, Tom replies to his master's offer of freedom by telling him, "No! No! maussa, . . . I kain't t'ink ob letting you off dis way. Ef *I* doesn't b'long to *you*, *you* b'longs to *me*! You hab for keep dis nigger long as he lib" (509). While Heath's *Edge-Hill* was an exception to this rule, Kennedy's novel is not. Here, the slave Luke rejects the offered freedom because he "desired no greater liberty than he then enjoyed, and would not entertain the idea of any possible separation from the family" (465).

reasons for including the episode are "not altogether apparent," he ultimately concludes that "the episode belongs to the pattern of ambivalence that comprises the inner structure of a work that puzzled its author himself" (49-50).

So again, we are returned to the dialogic nature of *Swallow Barn*. Doubtless, the placement of the Abe episode was intended to provide a necessary contrast to "The Quarter" that would call into question the assertions made by Meriwether and Littleton about the black race. I also think the placement was intended to address the culture's ideas about its heroes, for Abe's story is sandwiched between tales of two white heroes. A chapter entitled "The Fate of a Hero, " which resolves the story of Ned Hazard and his pursuit of Bel Tracy's hand, is placed a few chapters before the one concerning Abe. The humorous resolution to the quest of this hero, whose most accomplished deeds are retrieving his beloved's hawk and getting into a fist fight, stands in stark comparison to Abe's heroic attempt to save human lives, even if those lives were his own and those of his crew.

This contrast is made even clearer as the Abe chapter is followed by a long biographical essay about Captain John Smith.[9] From the beginning of the novel, this hero of Virginia's past has held a special romantic appeal for Littleton, which he first reveals when his initial journey takes him past the site of Jamestown: "You would have laughed to see into what a state of lady-like rapture I had worked myself, in my eagerness to get a peep at Jamestown, with all my effervescence of romance kindled up by the renown of the unmatchable Smith" (16-7). Despite the fact that the site is composed only of ruins, "the buttress of an old steeple, a barren fallow, some melancholy heifers, a blasted pine, and, on its top, a desolate hawk's nest," Littleton declares it, in yet another assertion that romance can be a substitute for reality, "a splendid field for the fancy" and wonders "with how many things might this little spot be filled" (17). In his concluding comments about

[9] Because of its length and questionable relevance, the bulk of this biography was omitted from the second edition of *Swallow Barn*, but its frame in which Littleton reads the volume on Smith in Meriwether's library and compares his heroism to the current state of Virginia is retained.

Smith, which essentially bring his survey of Virginia culture to a close, Littleton paints him as a true romance hero, "moulded in the richest fashion of ancient chivalry" (497) and possessing "many of the points of a true knight" (498). As Littleton replaces the volume about Smith onto the library shelf, he claims to have "a renewed admiration of the sturdy and courteous cavalier who is so pre-eminently entitled to be styled the True Knight of the Old Dominion," and he argues that Smith approaches "nearer to the invention of a fiction than that of any other real personage in history" (500). Whether it was Kennedy's intention or not, the placement of Abe's hero tale right before Smith's, both of which follow Ned Hazard's "hero" tale, raises two major points, that contemporary Virginia might be devoid of men and incidents that can be compared to Smith's legacy, and, more importantly, if any bravery is to match that of Smith, then it might be, as Yellin claimed, that of a heroic slave, "the closest approximation to a true hero" in the entire narrative (59).

In her introduction to the LSU edition of *Swallow Barn*, Lucinda MacKethan contends that "the strategy behind this arrangement," even if "decided upon unconsciously for the most part, lifts Swallow Barn out of the tradition of plantation novel cemented by Thomas Nelson Page and places it at the beginning of a list of southern works that . . . probe the roots of the South's complex inheritance" (xxvii). I certainly agree with MacKethan, but the complexity of the work goes far beyond the mere insertion of Abe's tale between "The Quarter" and Smith's biography. *Swallow Barn* does present the pro-slavery view of the South and the slave system, as it clearly should according to its intentions to paint a true portrait of the region, but it also illustrates the aspects of the southern perspective that are obvious misrepresentations. Additionally, the temptation or necessity of maintaining such romantic and aristocratic notions, which are also racist, sexist, and elitist, in order to justify a society one finds so appealing is strongly displayed in Littleton's own struggle to understand this process of misrepresentation and to attempt to resist it during his summer visit to the pastoral climate of Swallow Barn.

The South as Story

Yet another means by which Bakhtin claims that heteroglossia enters into a novel is through "images of speaking persons" (332). He argues that every speaking person who enters a novel is an ideologue who brings with his or her speech a distinct ideology, another voice to the dialogue that is essential to the novel. Kennedy peoples *Swallow Barn* with a number of speaking persons, from upper class landowners, lawyers, politicians, and poets to the more marginalized figures of poor whites, slaves, and children. The speaking persons in Kennedy's work should more appropriately be called storytellers, for much of the text is made up of stories told by the various people on and around the plantation and recorded by Littleton. Ned is the first storyteller that we come across in Littleton's account; he tells the plantation children "stories with the embellishment of a deep tone of voice that makes them quake in their shoes" (52). But others also take their turns at weaving tales, including Frank Meriwether, Parson Chub, Toll Hedges, and Hafen Blok, each shaping the content and often the actual words of the text. The most cited of *Swallow Barn*'s storytellers is Harvey Riggs, Bel's cousin and the source for the bulk of Littleton's knowledge of the happenings at the Brakes. Littleton himself reveals that he is "largely indebted to Harvey Riggs for the faithful report of such matters as fell out at the Brakes when I was not there myself to note them down" (374). Harvey's contribution to the text of *Swallow Barn* spans the length of several chapters, and without his tales the romantic plot of the novel would be strictly one-sided, chronicling only Ned's perspective.

Because Littleton relies so much upon others' tales and perceptions, he often has to qualify the authenticity of what he records. For instance, prefacing his account of the plotting of a prank played on Swansdown by Prudence Meriwether, Frank's sister, he admits his knowledge is "authentic as far as Harvey Riggs is a credible witness" (297). Only two pages earlier, he has confessed that "Harvey is somewhat dramatic in his nature, and therefore apt to put words into the mouths of his actors, which, if the matter were ever

investigated, it might be discovered they never spoke" (295). Nevertheless, he concludes that if Harvey's "story be not positive fact . . . it is at least founded on a real event" (295). Storytellers often have their credibility questioned within the text. For instance, several listeners are unsure of the reliability of Hafen Blok's tale, leading the youngest Meriwether, Rip, to announce, "For my share, I don't believe it" (294). And Littleton himself accuses Harvey of misrepresenting his account of events, keeping even the narrator from knowing the truth about his narrative (316).

It is not only the credibility of these witnesses that keeps readers from an accurate view of incidents on Swallow Barn but the ability of Littleton as a recorder is also an important factor. As he has admitted elsewhere, Littleton's recountings cannot always be trusted because of the "careless hand" with which he "sketches" (228). With this knowledge of his own limitations, he sometimes allows the characters to speak for themselves or at least strives to be as faithful to their voices as he can. This is the case with Ned Hazard's relation of his history, about which Littleton claims, "I have endeavored to preserve [Ned's] own narrative, because I think it more graphic than mine would be" (55). However, at other times, he takes over the narrative, as in Hafen Blok's tale, to which he admits to making "some rhetorical embellishments" (264). Thus, for a major portion of the text of *Swallow Barn*, a reader is at the mercy of storytellers but also of Littleton's relation of these speakers. This is surely an uncertain position, a fact highlighted by Blok's admission that his tale might only "be partly true" (294).

The most important point about the storytelling in the narrative is the value placed upon stories and the rituals of relating them by this culture. The value comes not just from the reinforcement of community that comes with the experience, as is seen when Hafen Blok, "the most authentic of gossips," spins a tale about Mike Brown's struggle with the devil in the chapter entitled "Story-Telling" and holds a crowd of plantation listeners spell-bound, producing "hysterical, cowardly laughs, and uttered ejaculations of disbelief in

Hafen's stories that showed the most implicit faith" (265). More important than building community, the ritual of storytelling is useful in transmitting the region's mythology from one generation to the next, or controlling the way that regional identity is perceived. Thus, Ned's "amusing journal" of his adventures in South America has been "bound in calf, and holds a conspicuous place in the library at Swallow Barn," right alongside the biography of John Smith (53). Likewise, Harvey makes sure that he gives Littleton "a droll history of the festivities at The Brakes" on the occasion of Ned and Bel's wedding, the culmination of the romance plot and a forecast of the continuation of the plantation culture (504). Notably, Meriwether, a slave-owner, relates Abe's story to Littleton rather than allowing Abe's mother to do so. Littleton classifies her recitation of her son's story as "drivelling dotage," "incoherent expressions," and "unmeaning effusions" and defers to Meriwether, who "gave me the particulars of old Lucy's pathetic history," thereby controlling Littleton's perception of the incident (463). In *Swallow Barn*, stories are valuable; they are a cultural commodity that, not surprisingly, the white males--Hazard, Meriwether, Riggs, and Littleton--manage to control for the majority of the text.

Kennedy's novel concludes with Littleton's acknowledgement that he, too, is a storyteller. Upon his return to New York, Littleton admits that he has "become famous, at least with my mother and sisters, for my long stories and rapturous commendations of Swallow Barn, and my peremptory way of telling how things are done in the Old Dominion" (503). Here, Kennedy reveals his narrator's discovery of the power of stories, especially as a means of constructing regional identity. Littleton's praise of the South is "rapturous" and his view is "peremptory;" that is, he has become a disseminator of the myth of the Sunny South that he, like Meriwether, will not allow to be questioned or disputed. Despite the fact that his narrative in *Swallow Barn*, which is essentially his story of the South, features incidents and characters that challenge this view, he quite confidently and emphatically asserts his verdict of the region in the final sentence of the book, claiming

that "the Old Dominion contains some very happy persons within its bosom" (506). However, I do not believe that this portrayal of Littleton as southern romancer makes the book a piece of propaganda. Instead, Kennedy in this work examines how the South as a story has been constructed by one it has seduced. Because Kennedy's narrator now understands the value of the romance of the South, Littleton intentionally ignores any aspects of the region that would contradict his story. As he constructs the South for his listeners, he can omit his knowledge of the institution of slavery, the intelligent slaves who suffer as property, the plantation citizens who fall miserably short of the romantic ideal, the crumbling buildings, the stagnant culture and failing economy. This storyteller who began with the noble intentions of telling the truth about the South has finally lost his genre struggle and become a romancer, concerned only with convincing his mother and sister that the citizens of the South are indeed "very happy persons."

Chapter V:

The Plantation Revisioned: E. D. E. N. Southworth's Abolitionist Project

E. D. E. N. Southworth was arguably the most popular writer to emerge from the antebellum South. Southworth--her initials represent her birthname Emma Dorothea Eliza Nevitte--wrote tremendously popular tales, often about women scorned and deserted by men but who are able to rise up and triumph over the obstacles in their paths. The American masses caught on to Southworth almost immediately upon the publication of her first stories, devouring every one of her subsequent works. She eventually became what Frank Luther Mott calls in *Golden Multitudes: The Story of the Best Sellers in the United States* "the most popular authoress in the annals of American publishing" (136). Over the course of a forty-year writing career that spanned the late 1840s to the late 1880s, her output numbered at least fifty novels, most of which were first serialized in periodicals such as the *National Era*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and the *New York Ledger* before being published in book form. Like many of the sentimental novelists who were her contemporaries, that so-called "damned mob of scribbling women," Southworth employed her wildly popular plots of love and intrigue to address issues of large import in her culture, ranging from the position of women in society and the law to political corruption and alcoholism. Before the Civil War, no issue seemed to concern her as much as the abolition of slavery and many of her early novels presented both explicit and implicit arguments urging the dismantlement of the slave system. However, as time has gone by, the political elements of Southworth's fiction have been forgotten or overlooked as her work has suffered the neglect that popular writers have almost always received in literary histories. Ironically, when Southworth's work is mentioned at all in the literary histories of the twentieth century, it is often as an example of plantation fiction, that genre of novels developed by the antebellum South as a defense of slavery--an institution that Southworth

abhorred. This chapter will attempt to account for this discrepancy in Southworth's strongly held anti-slavery views and her reputation in the twentieth century as an apologist for the institution. Specifically, I will argue that this discrepancy is caused by Southworth's own experimentation with genre, her attempt to shape a fiction that, by incorporating aspects of plantation fiction and omitting overt attacks upon slavery, might possibly be palatable to southern slave-holding readers while still maintaining an abolitionist argument. This chapter will argue that in some cases, most notably in her best-known work *The Hidden Hand*, Southworth may have been too successful in her attempts, creating work that can today be read as abolitionist only with difficulty. However, I believe that once this work is read in the context of Southworth's larger abolitionist project, it can be shown to be consistent with Southworth's openly anti-slavery fiction despite any similarities it may share with plantation fiction.

Southworth and the Plantation Novel

The publication of the revised edition of John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* in 1851 signaled a change in the dominant mode of fiction produced by southern writers in the antebellum period. As southern fiction became more concerned with responding to specific charges made by abolitionist novels like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851-2), the tales of the glories of the southern past featured in historical romance seemed less important than depictions of the southern present. Recountings of southern heroics in Jamestown or the Revolutionary War were perceived as less useful than contemporary images of southern plantation life that directly countered the charges of the decadence and cruelty of the white slave-owning class and of the brutal treatment and horrid living conditions of the slaves. Despite the multitude of contradictory voices rising out of Kennedy's text, many readers focused only on the portions that could be read as a charming account of life in the antebellum South. And thus was born the genre that would

dominate southern literature for the remainder of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, the plantation novel with its romantic view of the region--"elegant mansions, handsome and delicate gentlemen and ladies, slaves who were childlike and loyal, cabins in the 'quarters' that rang with songs and laughter" (MacKethan, "Plantation" 209). Like antebellum historical romances, these novels were a usable fiction, but one that directly addressed the South's critics at that time.

During the early 1850s, the South suffered a barrage of attacks from abolitionist politicians, reformers, ministers, and writers. The romantic plantation novel appeared to many to be the perfect response to these fiery abolitionist attacks, especially as these in themselves were packaged in the form of sentimental novels like Stowe's.[1] To the publication of Stowe's novel and its imitators, southern writers responded with a similar flood of sentimental novels answering the charges made in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[2] Two central elements of Kennedy's work that were appropriated by dozens of southern plantation novelists were "its image of the planter's house as social and moral center of order for the culture as a whole [and] its portrayal of the planter himself as a generous, unmaterialistic gentleman whose paternalistic relation to his slaves constituted an honorable, inescapable obligation" (MacKethan, "Plantation" 210). The most prolific of these plantation novelists were women, such as Caroline Lee Hentz, Mary Jane Holmes,

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[1] Stowe's novel is the most well-known of these sentimental novels attacking slavery, but there were certainly dozens, if not hundreds, of similar novels published in the early 1850s. Other titles include Emily Pierson's *Jamie Parker the Fugitive* (1851), Sophia Little's *Thrice through the Furnace* (1852); Phebe Hansford's *Lucretia, the Quakeress* (1853); Colburn Adams's *Our World* (1855); Mary Langdon's *Ida May* (1855); Stowe's *Dred* (1856); "J. B."'s *Wolfesden* (1856); Mayne Reid's *The Quadroon* (1856); J. T. Trowbridge's *Neighbor Jackwood* (1857); and Van Buren Denslow's *Owned and Disowned* (1857).

[2] As is the case with anti-slavery sentimental novels, there were also dozens, if not hundreds, of pro-slavery plantation novels following the appearance of the revised edition of Kennedy's novel and the publication of Stowe's work. Titles include W. L. G. Smith's *Life at the South, or 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' as It Is* (1852); Mary Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* (1852); Caroline Rush's *The North and the South; or Slavery, and its Contrasts* (1852); J. Thorton Randolph's *Cabin and Parlor, or, Slaves and Masters* (1852); Robert Criswell's *Uncle Tom's Cabin Contrasted with Buckingham Hall* (1852); John Page's *Uncle Robin* (1853); Sarah Josepha Hale's *Liberia* (1853); T. B. Thorpe's *The Master's House* (1854); Caroline Lee Hentz's *The Northern Planter's Bride* (1854); Lawrence Neville's *Edith Allen* (1856); Joseph Holt Ingraham's *The Sunny South* (1860). See Tandy, Hilldrup, Gaines, J. Nelson, and Moss, for an examination of many of these texts.

Maria McIntosh, Eliza Ann Dupuy, Virginia Terhune, Mary Eastman, and Augusta Evans Wilson, all of whose works depicted a vision of the South "as an ordered, harmonious society governed by the aristocratic code of noblesse oblige"; these novelists, according to Elizabeth Moss, "countered charges of southern depravity leveled by antislavery advocates, arguing that the peculiar institution was but part of a larger system of reciprocal relationships that made southern society the moral superior of the individualistic North" (2).

Southworth began her writing career amidst this climate of dueling novels, wherein works of fiction were being deployed as crucial weapons in the battle over the issue of slavery. Southworth was born and raised in Washington, D. C., where she turned to writing after being abandoned with two small children by her husband and finding it difficult to support her young family on her teacher's salary. Once committed to writing, Southworth quickly made a place for herself in the market of polemical fiction. However, it is not on the side that one might suspect: though she was raised in a slave-owning household and was strong in her identification as a southerner, she placed her earliest pieces of fiction in Washington, D. C.'s abolitionist periodical, the *National Era*, in the late 1840s.[3] This anti-slavery periodical, which would later introduce Stowe's novel to the world in 1851, published Southworth's own abolitionist fiction, including serials such as *Retribution* in 1849 and *Mark Sutherland* in 1853, with great fanfare. Strongly anti-slavery in their portrayals of the horrors of the institution, these works earned Southworth the attention and friendship of prominent abolitionist writers, including Stowe and John Greenleaf Whittier.

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[3] Despite almost universal consideration of Southworth as southern, her "southernness" has been called into question, just as that of the other writers included in my study was. Most notably, Elizabeth Moss excludes Southworth from consideration in *Domestic Novelists of the Old South*, listing her, instead, among the "more colorful northerners"--Stowe, Fanny Fern, Catharine Sedgwick, and Susan Warner--who have stolen the critical spotlight from the "southern propagandists" (12). Moss does not explain her criteria for this judgment, but it is apparent that she defines "southern" ideologically rather than geographically; that is, because Southworth is not an upholder of the ideology of the Old South, she does not earn the label "southern."

In her lifetime, Southworth's abolitionist sympathies were certainly well-known and often announced to the world. In an unpublished account of her friendship with Whittier, she explains that her early work put her "out of favor with my friends and neighbors on account of my writing for an abolition paper" (3). But because she believed that "the abolition of slavery would be gradually and peacefully effected by 'moral suasions'" (3), she felt her participation was necessary, especially in the capital city of Washington, which she characterized as "the hotbed of slavery" and "the headquarters of the slave holding power" (1). That this commitment was more than her own perception can be seen in a letter written by her friend Stowe to introduce Southworth to Lady Byron, wherein Stowe calls her

> almost the only instance I know of a really original creative southern author . . . [and] a thoroughly southern woman tho a strong anti slavery one . . . [whose] novels contain pictures of that strange mediaeval exceptional sort of life which exists at the south, which were it not for exaggeration and overdrawings would have made her immortal. (qtd. in Wagenknecht 154)

Apparently, southern readers agreed with Stowe's observations about Southworth's exaggerations about the South, but they saw these exaggerations as a dangerous attack upon their region. In one particularly defensive review, the *Southern Literary Messenger* encourages Southworth "to abandon at once . . . the description of what she conceives to be Virginia Society," claiming "that balder, more exaggerated, more utterly *truthless* representations of the outer or inner life of Virginians, were never thrust upon a bamboozled community." This review, which is specifically about Southworth's novel *The Mother-in-Law* but which addresses her body of work in general, concludes "we do protest with all strength against the works of Mrs. Southworth being received beyond the borders of Virginia, as truthful delineations in any one particular of life and society in this

state" (390). Thus, her political purposes were clear to herself, her acquaintances, and her readers in the 1850s.[4]

Despite her activism during her lifetime, Southworth's position on slavery has undergone substantial revision in literary histories appearing in the early twentieth century. John Nelson, for example, because of the "hilariously happy" slaves that he finds populating her works (29), places Southworth's fiction directly in the tradition of the pro-slavery plantation novel and goes even further by labeling the entire tradition as "the school of Mrs. Southworth," by which he means "fiction showing the conventional old planter, irritable and aristocratic, the capriciously bewitching heroine, his daughter, . . . the faithful Cato, the domineering mammy, [and] the capering pickaninnies" (30).[5] Certain critics in the decades following Nelson echoed his verdict. Mott, for instance, notes Southworth's depiction of slaves "happy and satisfied with their lot" and asserts that her abolitionist circle of friends was unsuccessful in making "an antislavery novelist out of Mrs. Southworth" (138). Helen Papashvily claims that the novelist "rather tolerated slavery in practice with her pictures of happy field hands and domineering mammies full of 'comic talk'" (136). The revision of Southworth's politics has gone so far that John Adams has proposed that even her explicitly anti-slavery *National Era* publications "were not abolitionist" but were included in the periodical merely because "it was [the editor] Bailey's

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[4] Certainly, Southworth's commitment to abolitionist and pro-Union causes is as clearly delineated in her life as in her early publications, especially in the years approaching the Civil War. Boyle records the author's pro-Union activities during the Civil War, including nailing a Union flag over her front gate, turning her home into a reserve hospital, and offering food and shelter to Union soldiers on their journey home (15). Her personal correspondence abounds with descriptions of her disdain for slavery, the difficulties of being an abolitionist in the south, and her growing dissatisfaction with secession and the war. Furthermore, she is credited with providing the inspiration for Whittier's "Barbara Freitchie," the tale of an anti-secessionist southern woman, and in her final works, two unpublished novels, she claimed to "paint as true a picture of . . . the awful institution" of slavery as she could (Mason 71). These biographical facts alone seem sufficient to discount Frank Mott's dismissive and sexist claims that Southworth "was incapable of passionate devotion to an idea" (138).

[5] This tendency continues into much later scholarship; for instance, Arthur Silverblatt, in his unpublished 1980 dissertation, places Southworth in a direct line from John Pendleton Kennedy as one of the creators of the southern plantation myth, depicting images of beautiful plantations, kind masters, and contented slaves, and reinforcing hierarchical notions of men's superiority over women and that of whites over blacks.

policy to provide 'original sketches and tales for home reading' along with political agitation" (59).

Subsequent scholars of Southworth have taken varying approaches to reconcile the author's known abolitionist politics with the critical consensus developed in the twentieth century.[6] In her study, Boyle offers what readers today might consider a damning defense of Southworth's depictions of slavery as she argues that the novelist attempted to reveal "the unfavorable as well as the favorable aspects of slavery" (77).[7] In the introduction to her recent edition of *The Hidden Hand*, Joanne Dobson admits that many of Southworth's slaves including "the obsequious manservant Wool and the superstitious maidservant Pitapat . . . are pure, unredeemed cultural schlock" that "are stereotyped in ways offensive to modern readers" (xxiv). She quite correctly attributes Southworth's portrayals of black figures to "the limiting prejudices of her era," but notes that the novelist frequently overcame these prejudices with her "redeemed stereotypes," slave characters who escape caricature, such as Minny in *Retribution* (xxiv). Finally, Nina Baym in *Woman's Fiction* ignores the multitude of stereotyped slaves in Southworth's fiction, pronouncing the works "strikingly free from stereotype: [the slaves] are strong-minded, self-respecting, highly verbal, intelligent, versatile people; not rebellious, craven, childlike, or shaped according to pro- or antislavery sentiments; they are beings in every way the equal of the whites" (117). In my view, none of these critics has yet managed successfully to link the problematic

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[6] While serious study of Southworth has grown in recent years, her abolitionist agenda and attitudes towards slavery have gone for the most part unexamined. The most developed study of Southworth's depictions of slavery, Boyle's regrettable chapter on the subject, concludes that the author "chose a middle ground in regard to the slavery question so as not to antagonize her public. Doubtless, some of her novels were anti-slavery, yet she appeased her Southern readers in others dealing with the favorable aspects" (145). Later, Papashvily and, more recently, Baym and Dobson have briefly, though not extensively, addressed the question of her depiction of the slave system. Finally, though it focuses only on *Retribution*, Bakker's article is the most useful exploration of Southworth's use of her fiction as abolitionist argument.

[7] In defense of Boyle's claim here, Southworth did admit that "even in the Slave States" there could appear "a good master, . . . beloved by his slaves as he was by his family." But rather than seeing "dark and fair sides" to slavery, she asserts that "there could be no fair side to so black an institution" for "the very best and most tender and considerate master with the most faithful and devoted servants was no apology for the hideous moral monstrosity of the slave system" ("Reminiscences" 4).

depictions of slaves and the seemingly benevolent views of the slave system that appear in some of Southworth's fiction to her overriding abolitionist intent.

My argument in this chapter is that the dilemma that faces Southworth's readers is caused by the author's genre play, her appropriation of some of the conventions of the plantation novel--the stuffy patriarch, the spirited belle, the beautiful estate, and smiling slaves--to challenge the slave system rather than to defend it. That is, with her intention to reach a large audience, she increasingly adapts her fiction with the intention of producing an appealing, yet still abolitionist, fiction that could be read by a southern audience with little objection. However, the product of this effort, works like *The Hidden Hand*, strike readers today as more similar to pro-slavery plantation fiction of the 1850s than to abolitionist works like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Despite the apparent similarities between *The Hidden Hand* and plantation novels, I believe that when read in context with her earlier novels, novels like *The Hidden Hand* can be seen to be consistent with the aims of her larger abolitionist project. To support this claim, my chapter will first examine her most obvious anti-slavery novels, *Retribution* and *India*, in order to establish the basic elements of Southworth's abolitionist narrative. Then, *The Hidden Hand* will be reexamined in light of these narratives to illustrate that though this novel does share many surface characteristics with plantation fiction, there still exists an essential continuity in Southworth's abolitionist aims, which she has merely obscured in order to influence an even greater audience. The emphasis upon harsh treatment of the slaves, the mainstay of abolitionist fiction, is progressively muted in favor of subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, explorations of the damaging effects of slavery upon the slave owners themselves, all suffering under the system that was intended to benefit them. Finally, my chapter will turn to Southworth's lengthiest treatment of the question of slavery, the 1860 novella *The Presentiment*, to demonstrate that, contrary to some critics' assertions, Southworth was indeed still very passionate about the question of slavery and abolition in the years leading

up to the Civil War. In this novella, the tale of a heroic male slave, Southworth offers her most complete commentary on the brutality and injustice of the slave system upon the slaves themselves.

Southworth's Abolitionist Narrative: *Retribution* (1849) and *India* (1855)

In *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins argues that "the sentimental novelists elaborated a myth that gave women the central position of power and authority in the culture" (125). This central positioning of women occurs in abolitionist novels such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, wherein women--Mrs. Shelby, Mrs. Bird, and Rachel Halliday--hold the power to transform the world, to "chang[e] their society through the integration of 'feminine' values into larger society," most notably by ridding the world of slavery (Moss 14). Ironically, women maintain this position of power in the plantation novel as well. In these pro-slavery narratives, woman's power comes not in effecting change but in preventing it and in maintaining the status quo. In her study of the gender politics beneath the plantation myth, Lucinda MacKethan explains that, beginning with Kennedy's Lucretia Meriwether, plantation novelists have locked "the southern white woman in a domesticated bower and throw[n] away the key" ("Domesticity" 229). She argues that this becomes necessary when southern novelists recognize woman's power and realize that if southern women become activists like the women in Stowe's work, southern plantation women could "radically reform" the patriarchy "in a way that would make Kennedy's slavery-dependent domestic idyll impossible" (230-1). Thus, women in plantation novels, even the majority of those written by southern women themselves, are consistently shown to reinforce "the general stability of southern society"; their narratives, actions, and behaviors are all concerned with "achieving and sustaining the social and political equilibrium . . . [of] the South's existing structure" (Moss 14).

Southworth's novels prove no exception to this focus on women's role in society; as she shifts her focus to the women involved in the southern institution of slavery, she illustrates both the power that women possess to abolish slavery but also the great responsibility women have had for its perpetuation. As she does this, she also explores the devastating consequences of women's complicity in slavery. Southworth uses this approach in an attempt to reach a readership of both northern and southern women, to many of whom, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese writes, "slavery, with all its abuses, constituted the fabric of their beloved country--the warp and woof of their social position, their personal relations, [and] their very identities" (334). These women would perhaps be more influenced by illustrations of the negative effects of slavery upon themselves and their families than by images of its effects upon their slaves.[8]

The narrative of each of Southworth's novels is shaped by this emphasis upon the relationship between slavery and slave-owning women in the South. The formula is established in her very first novel, *Retribution: or The Vale of Shadows* (1849), a work which tells the story of Hester Grey, a Virginia orphan, who comes under the guardianship of abolitionist farmers, General Dent and his son, who have emancipated all of their slaves and hired "colored laborers" (39), only to find themselves guardians to "an infant heiress with three hundred negroes, and a large landed estate" (41). Because Hester cannot legally manumit her slaves until she reaches the age of twenty-one, her guardians incrementally enact their experimental reforms on her plantation, transforming it from an estate, "much

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[8] Of course, presenting slavery's harm to slave owners was not an appeal that originated with Southworth. As early as the 1780s, Thomas Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia* proposed that there would be "an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us" because the "whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism of the one part, and degrading submissions on the other" (288). The cyclical nature of slavery as children's behavior and beliefs followed their parents' examples was his primary concern and reason enough to question slavery, even "if a parent could find no motive either in his philanthropy or his self-love" (288). Slavery's consequences upon children were not unknown even among slave-owning women. One southern wife wrote to her husband, pleading to move her children from the South, because "to bring up boys on a plantation makes them tyrannical as well as lazy, and girls too" (qtd. in Fox-Genovese 365).

like all other farms in this part of the country; ill-managed enough . . . [with] barns out of repair, fences staggering, . . . troops of half-naked negro children lurking in squalid quarters, . . . [and] gangs of slave laborers loitering in the fields," into a productive plantation. The gradual plan changed the "land and people . . . by giving the latter a fair but fixed percentage, . . . mak[ing] it their interest to cultivate the soil in the best manner," (42) and "inspired [them] with a *hope*" of eventually buying their own freedom (43).

Hester, the first of many in Southworth's parade of suffering slave owners, marries Dent's son Ernest following the General's death early in the novel. As a wife and plantation mistress, Hester abhors the slave system and intends to free her slaves as soon as she is legally able. Appearing to understand the extreme burdens of her slaves, she acknowledges that "the lightest of [their] griefs would have struck [her] down into [her] grave" (95). Her sympathetic nature enables her to grow very close to Minny, a quadroon whom Ernest has bought in order to save "her from the hands of a southern slave dealer, and from the shame of an exposure and sale in some southern mart, and from the horrors of a fate worse than slavery, and which her extreme personal beauty would seem to invite" (77-8). Hester encourages Minny to relate her tragic story, a rare account in Southworth's fiction of a slave's experiences. Born in Cuba, Minny is the daughter of a white slave owner and his favorite slave. Though the owner always treated her as a daughter, until even she forgot that she was also a slave, he never legally freed her, but "deferred it from day to day--from week to week--from month to month" (101). When her father/owner died, she lost all standing and freedom that she had previously enjoyed, for legally she was still a slave. Minny mourns the fact that "if he had even manumitted me (for I was slave as well as child,) he would have saved me and others much sorrow" (101). Consequently, Minny was separated from her husband and child and sold into slavery in the United States. This mistake of Minny's father is one that Hester also makes, though because she is bound by laws preventing manumission, she does not share his culpability.

Southworth lays little blame on Hester. Instead, this legal complication reinforces the unexpected difficulties of escaping slavery, often regardless of an owner's intent or desires. After the birth of her daughter, Hester never recovers and suffers a lingering death in the middle of the novel. Although she leaves a will clearly stating her intention to free her slaves, it is eventually rendered invalid. Despite her wishes, her husband Ernest, not as committed to abolition as was his father, decides to keep the slaves, who believe that it was Hester who has betrayed them; "broke[n] her promise; and, instead of setting them free, has left them all, with their children, and their children's children, forever and hopelessly enslaved" (208). Hester's story serves as a valuable lesson for women who may find the slave system corrupt but trust their husbands to handle the problem according to their best moral judgment.

However, the central character throughout the novel, Hester's childhood friend, Juliette Summers, provides the groundwork for the figure that will become the center of the author's anti-slavery project. She belongs to a type from which many of Southworth's female characters will be molded, an orphaned child of a foreign mother, left to be raised by wealthy slave-owning guardians. In this case, Juliette, originally named Guilletta Nozzalina, is born to an Italian mother, soon orphaned, renamed, and reared by benefactors. Considered a beauty and much brighter than her friend, yet left without a similar fortune, Juliette exploits her connection to Hester, gaining an introduction into society, enchanting Ernest, and eventually marrying him after Hester's death. A different kind of slave-owning wife than Hester, she feels no compulsion to free her slaves and obviously views her new role as a step toward the restoration of her previous position, which she as "the last of the noble house of Nozzalina" feels she deserves (220). However, like many southern wives, she soon finds herself jealous of any attention her husband pays to the female slaves in the house, especially Minny, a favorite of both Ernest and his young daughter. Her solution to the problem is the "cruel order" to send Minny

"to the quarters of the field negroes--with a note to the overseer, directing him to set her to work" (244). The marital dispute that follows ultimately leads to Juliette's attempted shooting of her husband and begins her gradual transformation from beauty to fiend: "lashing herself to fury," she takes on the appearance of "a tragic actress in the part of Medea" (248). In Southworth's view, this transformation is the inevitable consequence of a woman's willing participation in the slave system.

Although Kathryn Seidel portrays Juliette's vanity as the source of her corruption (122), Southworth indicates that a childhood involvement in slavery contributes largely to her thirst for power. Early in the novel, a school mistress relates Juliette's history to young Hester, revealing that the Nozzalinas were involved in "the horrible massacre of St. Domingo," in which many, including Juliette's father and siblings, "perished by the hands of the insurgents" (27). Not until the end of the novel does Southworth reveal the significant effect that this trauma has had on Juliette. In the penultimate chapter, Juliette has left Ernest and returned to Europe to reclaim her social position. There she relates to an admirer her earliest memories, what Jan Bakker calls "the first narration of an actual slave revolt . . . in antebellum Southern romance" (11). Juliette recalls the following:

> A burning homestead, smoke, flames, falling roofs, glowing beams, and blazing rafters hurled through the air before the furious blast, and hundreds of dark demons leaping, capering, and exulting in frantic orgies through the scene. These were the sights. The reverberations of the thunder--the roaring of the sea--the noise of the cataracts--the howls and shrieks of the wind--the groans of the wounded and dying--the screams of women and children, and the triumphant shouts of the blacks. These were the sounds. (277)

Rather than discouraging her from participation in slavery, Juliette acknowledges that "the scene lives before me now, not as a retrospect, but as a vision--not as a memory, but as a

prophecy" (277). She considers it an omen of her future. And in some way, she is correct; spurred by the recollection of her "early, horrible initiation into all," her loss of the position of power over the slaves, she has made it her quest to regain that status over the "dark demons" (277). By marrying Hester's husband, she regains her role as slave owner, unconcerned with or perhaps unconscious of the harmful effects of the system upon the slaves or the masters. Most importantly, she is blinded to the toll the system takes on herself as she is transformed into a monstrous being, depicted at the novel's end as "savagely-beautiful" like a "fabled Gorgon" (285). In her portrait of the southern beauty, Southworth asserts that "never were demoniac malignity and perfect beauty so terribly blended in human features" as they were in the figure of Juliette Summers (285).

The novel's title, *Retribution*, holds the key to Southworth's message about the dangers of slavery to the slaveholders. The novel opens with a moralistic passage arguing that "*in*tangible crimes," though unpunishable by law, carry "in themselves the seeds of their own most bitter punishment--the punishment being nothing apart from or opposed to the sin, but simply the evil principle itself, in its final stage of development" (19). Though this message applies to Ernest's and Juliette's betrayal of Hester and the lifelong misery that this "sin" produces, Bakker also finds retribution in the apocalyptic vision of the slave revolt, "a raw and physical terror that provides a startling twist of meaning for . . . Southworth's title" (11). However, the moral retribution for the institution of slavery can most certainly come in forms other than slave uprisings. Southworth depicts much of this retribution in the degradation and decline involved for all participants in slavery. Like other "sins," the enslavement of one race by another brings great retribution, especially if one struggles desperately to retain the privileged and dominant position. As she becomes exclusively concerned with maintaining and gaining further power, Juliette loses any positive qualities and even becomes unable to enjoy the wealth and luxury of her status.

Southworth does portray one character who successfully avoids slavery's retribution. Therefore, "neither Hester nor Juliette," as Amy Hudock perceptively argues, "serves as a positive role model for Southworth's readers" ("No Mere Mercenary" 80-1). Hester represents one type of southern woman, that set against slavery yet too passive to reform the system; Juliette is another who may also hate slavery but enjoys the status it gives her and will do anything to retain it, regardless of the cost. Instead, Hudock proposes that as a role model readers should look to Julie, Hester's daughter, "the image of the strong woman Southworth sees as able to rejuvenate and redeem corrupt humankind" (80). Unlike her predecessors, she successfully frees her slaves, sells her home and property, and journeys to the West with her elderly father, Ernest. In contrast to Hester and Juliette, whose actions sustain the system, Julie "is the woman of the future" (81).

Four years and eight novels later, Southworth wrote a more fiercely abolitionist work, *Mark Sutherland* (1853), which was published in novel form in 1855 under the title *India, or The Pearl of Pearl River.* Though the novel's advertisement claims that Southworth's "fictions . . . faithfully delineate life and manners, without entering on vexed social, religious, or political issues" (17), *India* relates the story of young northern-educated Mississippian Mark Sutherland, who returns home with the intention "to free every negro on [his] plantation, and at [his] own expense to send every one, who is willing to go, to Liberia" (107). His family is outraged by this plan; his widowed mother worries that his plan "will reduce [her] to beggary" (78), and his cousin India, to whom he is engaged, believes he has caught a fever after being "bit by a raging reformer, and gone rabid" (63). Her father becomes convinced that his nephew is "an unprincipled man, and a mad reformer" and even warns a family friend that he will "pervert your children, steal the heart of your niece, . . . and incite your servants to revolt" (228). Because of his abolitionist convictions, Sutherland is disowned by his family, losing the hand of his beloved. This family discord caused by disparate views on slavery broadens the treatment

of slavery's harms to the owners and leads Sutherland to believe that slave owners are the "only one set of persons in the civilized world who are more unhappy than the negroes" (251).

By renaming the novel, Southworth spotlights Mark's fianceé, India, a character who, though absent from large portions of the novel, continues the author's focus upon slavery's consequence for southern women. India, "the Pearl of Pearl River," is another of the type that Southworth established with Juliette in *Retribution*; she is the daughter of a Mississippi plantation owner and "a beautiful, passionate Havanienne" (32). After her exotic mother dies in childbirth, India is raised by her doting father as "queen . . . over father and lover, friends, relatives, and servants" (48). Initially toasted as a "goddess" (25), India is soon transformed to embody the problematic nature of slave-owning women, losing all charm as she becomes an adamant defender of the slave system in a heated debate with her progressive fiancé. Although Boyle argues that the debate between the lovers functions "to give a representation of the whole people by setting forth the best arguments for and against slavery as they existed at the time" (83), India, as the mouthpiece for slavery, quickly finds her defense of the system "not [her fiancé's] equal in logic" (*India* 124). Predictably, she initially proposes that "the existence of the system of slavery. . . [is] the manifest will and ordination of Divine Providence," but she soon turns to the system's benefit to the owners (122). As Sutherland repeatedly counters her arguments, India, "baffled and disappointed in her failure," makes the debate personal, claiming that he prefers "the fancied welfare of these miserable negroes to [her] comfort and happiness" (124). Her final outburst reveals the selfishness that is the basis for many defenses of slavery:

> Know, that I like the position that I occupy, the power that I wield; our plantation is as large as a German or Italian principality; . . . We have more power than its prince. And I was born to this power; I am accustomed to it;

> I like it. Heaven crowned me with it; and do you think that I will discrown my brow to become---what? A drudging peasant? NEVER! And now, hear my oath. . . . [W]e separate, never to meet again until you have recovered manhood and . . . abandon[ed] this mad project. (131)

Thus ends their engagement as Mark realizes that there is little admirable about her, exclaiming, "I no longer worship you. Alas! there is nothing in you to worship or even to approve beyond your enchanting beauty" (138). As the novel continues, India physically wanes rapidly; "her glorious beauty was *withering, wilting*," while she attempts to hold on to the power she so treasures (246). Eventually, Sutherland "scarcely recognised her" in her plantation world where "everything is going to ruin" (330-1).

Another cousin, plain and meek Rosalie, eventually becomes Sutherland's bride, though he had given her little notice before India broke off their engagement. Readers might be tempted to see Rosalie as a parallel to *Retribution*'s Hester; however, she is more rightly compared to Hester's daughter, Julie. An active rather than a passive figure, she becomes "the guiding star of [Sutherland's] life," urging him to continue his reforms and to pursue a political career to achieve even greater good (210). Comprehending the morality of his actions, she consents to accompany him as his wife in his new life in the West, shunning material comfort and enduring "hardships from which the most robust shrink; hardships from which the strong and beautiful India shrank" (240). Together they begin a small frontier newspaper named *The True Freeman*, reflecting the status that comes as owners free themselves from the shackles of slavery. Through Rosalie's brave sacrifice and inevitable death, Southworth illustrates that the difficult adaptation necessary for southern women to survive in a world without slavery must be made in order for all of the citizens of the South truly to be free.

Though slavery's harm to southern women is integral to this novel, the brutality enacted upon the slaves themselves is largely de-emphasized in *India*, and none of its slave

characters receives significant development. Instead, readers may notice, as Sutherland's northern friend Lauderdale does, that the Sutherland slaves "are probably the best accommodated of any in the state" (97). The only episode in the novel closely comparable to the lengthy chapter in *Retribution* on Minny's history comes as Sutherland visits the plantation of the newly-married India and witnesses her husband Ashley harassing her female slave, Oriole. On "familiar" terms with her, Ashley torments her by "calling her to his side, drawing her towards him, pinching her cheek and pulling her ears with maudlin freedom; while the poor girl, blushing with shame and confusion, and weeping with grief and terror, sought in vain to escape" (317). Sutherland believes that only his presence prevents the encounter from escalating to an actual rape. Apparently, Oriole often finds herself the center of such power games. At one point, Ashley decides to sell her at auction, but in a typical action, Ashley stops her sale mere moments before the bidding is done. As a result, the once beautiful Oriole becomes a "poor, hunted, trembling deer," so scarred that she "cannot even trust a friend" (329).

The emphasis upon the owner's soul as the moral focus of the novel is reinforced in a drawing-room conversation on the Sutherland estate. As a gathered group of family and friends discusses a passage from Pope, paradoxically stating that God "binding nature fast in fate,/Left free the human will" (51), a debate results over whether mankind truly can have free will under God's providence. An aging uncle provides the final word as he argues that we must navigate between the two and "within that limit we have still room enough to save or to lose our souls" (57). Therefore, those born into slave ownership, though perhaps having been taught that slavery is the design of God, are not blameless for the ills of the system, and, by consciously choosing to remain within the system, they bear the guilt of the entire institution.

Sutherland confronts India with this dilemma as the novel closes. Though "naught remained of her glorious beauty," she is moved by her former lover's words of the guilt

she bears in perpetuating slavery (330). He predicts that after death she "will see those whom you have left on earth, doomed, with their children and their children's children, to a bondage, from which you no longer have the power and the privilege to free them" (364). Eventually convinced, she agrees to free her slaves, exercising what Sutherland calls the "godlike power, to be able to confer the blessing of liberty and education upon hundreds of beings and their descendants to numberless generations" (80). Subsequently, India and Mark, both left widowed, are married and establish an estate in the West; her original beauty, now free from the taint of slavery, is slowly restored until she is again "as beautiful but no longer as proud as Juno, Queen of Goddesses" (401).

From these two works, the central elements of Southworth's abolitionist narrative can be gleaned. A young southern woman finds herself holding the power over a grand slave-owning plantation. As she ages, she begins to realize the huge toll the power that she wields has taken on her; she suffers morally and spiritually, but Southworth, appealing to a young female audience and possibly their male admirers, presents the greatest cost to be a physical one. That is, Southworth's repeated claim in her abolitionist narrative is that slave ownership and physical beauty are mutually exclusive. Faced with this dilemma, Southworth's slave-owning women must decide what is more valuable to them--the power and status that they possess or their own souls and visages. Thus, Mark Sutherland urges a "very weak and miserable" India to "*Be* poor! *let* all go but peace of mind" (365-6). In both works, as soon as the decision to give up slave-holding has been made, the characters leave the South to establish a life in the West. According to Nina Baym, this move westward is necessary because "the democratic ideal for [Southworth] means equality for men and women, and she places her democratic hopes in the West. On the frontier the corrupt South will be replaced by a society that permits an equal participation in all the affairs of the commonwealth" (*Woman's Fiction* 123). While I agree with Baym's point here, I do not think she places enough emphasis on other elements of "the corrupt South"

that would also be discarded as Southworth's characters establish a new life on the frontier. Most notably, I would include the institution of slavery as part of the corruption that must be left behind to enable the characters to thrive.

An Abolitionist Plantation Novel: *The Hidden Hand* (1859)

The strong abolitionist agenda of these novels stands in sharp contrast to what readers find in *The Hidden Hand, or Capitola the Madcap*, Southworth's most popular serial. This work was first introduced in the *New York Ledger* in 1859 and was then reserialized twice in subsequent decades before the *Ledger*'s editor Robert Bonner finally consented to having it published in novel form in 1888. In addition to its popular appeal, critical consensus in the twentieth century has judged the novel as the author's best; Hudock finds it "certainly Southworth's most enduring novel" ("Heroism" 10), Dobson notes that it reveals "Southworth . . . at her satiric best" (xii), and Alfred Habegger, too hastily, proclaims it "Southworth's only good novel" (201). More importantly, scholars detect a distinct difference between *The Hidden Hand* and previous efforts. For instance, labeling it "the least moralizing of any of Southworth's stories" (137), Boyle characterizes it as an example of the author's presentation of "negro plantation life under its propitious conditions" (147). This lack of obvious abolitionist statement leads Boyle and other critics to link it to the pro-slavery plantation novel, with which it seems to share surface similarities--romances between belles and gentlemen, slaves who are seemingly content with their position, and benevolent masters, who find their slaves' stereotypical ignorance charming and childlike and reward their loyalties with gifts. In this vein, Silverblatt reads the novel as a strict reinforcement of plantation values and summarizes the basic movement of the plot as a "young heiress testing and defining her rights and privileges in Southern society" (124). Despite some recent attempts to revise this reading of *The Hidden Hand*, there still exists reluctance about labelling this novel as an anti-slavery work similar to her

past works. For instance, in a recent paper, Christopher Looby dismissed contemporary "attempts to find redemptive racial politics in [*The Hidden Hand*]" as "implausible" (11).

Even those critics, including Nina Baym and myself, who insist upon this "implausible" reading of Southworth's book, must admit "that to a present-day reader *The Hidden Hand* does not read like an anti-slavery book" (Baym, Introduction xviii). One of the most obvious explanations for the seemingly apolitical nature of this novel might be that it was serialized in a very different sort of publication from those that published her earlier works. The *New York Ledger* was a very popular story magazine with which Southworth in 1857 made an exclusive agreement that lasted to the end of her writing career in the 1880s.[9] Unlike the *National Era*, the *Ledger* had "an editorial policy of studied neutrality on the question of slavery and sectional division" because the editor "Bonner wouldn't let his paper be a party paper or a sectional paper" as he "wanted it to circulate and sell both North and South, among anti-slavery and pro-slavery readers" (Looby 7). With *The Hidden Hand*, Bonner seemed to have found the perfect publishable material, a work which offended no one, was apparently devoid of political opinion or sectional bias, and could be consumed by the masses.

Southworth's critics would suggest that in search for wide popularity she chose to abandon all political agenda to create a product that would sell. To the contrary, my argument here is that Southworth's commitment to her abolitionist project remains undiminished in *The Hidden Hand*, though she adapted her techniques to appeal to the wider audience that Bonner sought. Conscious of ever-growing southern criticism that recognized sentimental fiction as a frequent tool of the abolitionist movement, Southworth successfully designed a popular fiction that subtly made the same key points as did her previous novels and in the process, as Lynette Carpenter argues, "challenge[d] . . . orderly

[9] The long professional relationship between Southworth and *Ledger* editor Robert Bonner is described in detail and analyzed thoroughly in Chapter Three, "The Place of Gender in Business: The Career of E. D. E. N. Southworth," of Coultrap-McQuin's *Doing Literary Business*.

divisions of the world into opposites" such as white/black and master/slave (17). Astute readers will still find a slave system that is harmful to both the slaves and their masters and southern women who share both the blame for slavery's sins and the responsibility for bringing the institution to an end. Specifically, its popular protagonist, Capitola LeNoir, faces the same moral dilemma that Juliette and India in the earlier novels do, the same dilemma that Southworth believed all women in the South faced. And, further, Southworth confronts her reader with a much more complicated view of the South, interrogating both the construction of race and its role in the power dynamics of the master/slave relationship.

From its very beginning, readers should be alert that this is not a typical plantation novel. The setting of *The Hidden Hand* is far from the Edenic paradise established by Kennedy as the model for descriptions of southern plantations. Instead, readers are confronted with a gothic plantation, likened more to the House of Usher than to Swallow Barn. From its initial description, the pastoral estate is clearly associated with images of darkness, evil, and turmoil by the "ill-omened names" of its surroundings; Hurricane Hall is "surrounded on three sides by a range of steep, gray rocks . . . called, from its horseshoe form, the Devil's Hoof" and "on the fourth side . . . [by] the wild mountain stream known as the Devil's Run" (7). On her first night in the mansion, the heroine Capitola is taken to her chamber, a remote room oddly equipped with a mysterious trap door in the floor. Answering Capitola's inevitable question, the white housekeeper reveals that "nothing but a great, black, deep vacuity, without bottom or sides" lies beneath the door (73). The mansion, she relates, was built above this "bottomless abyss," and the door was often used as "a trap for Indians;" thus, "if there is a bottom to that abyss, that bottom is strewn with human bones" (73-4). From the beginning, this casual mention of the pit of human remains beneath the magnificent mansion's "old moldering foundation" serves as a warning, both to the reader and Capitola, that Hurricane Hall's past splendor

has been built upon the death and suffering of human beings, both slaughtered Indians and abused slaves (78).[10]

The plantation patriarch whom readers encounter in *The Hidden Hand* is also a far cry from Kennedy's Meriwether, the model for the benevolent master in the plantation genre. Another of Southworth's miserable slave owners, Major Warfield possesses a "violent temper and domineering habits," and earns his nickname "Old Hurricane" from his often explosive treatment of his slaves (8). In this first chapter, readers witness a typical interaction between Warfield and his servant Wool, who is berated by the bitter old man as a "fool," "scoundrel," "rascal," and "villain." Though the scene reveals some kind treatment to the slaves, including his permitting them to go "to a banjo break-down" for Halloween (8), Warfield's "capricious" nature is soon apparent, his kindness is forgotten, and the "Hurricane" side of his personality emerges as he threatens to "throw a bootjack at [Wool's] wooden head" (12). Though this cruel master is constantly depicted humorously, violent outbursts continue throughout the novel; at one point, the master hurls "a bronze statuette" at Wool, who manages to run "out in time to escape a blow that might have put a period to his mortal career" (266). Predictably, the owner's actions against the slaves are not always physical; for instance, upon returning from a trip, he "stormed forth upon the plantation to blow up . . . his idle negroes, who had loitered or frolicked away all the days of their master's absence" (78). When very angry, he, like India's husband, threatens to sell the slaves and once has Wool "sobbing aloud" after being given "a written order to find

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[10] Carpenter avoids direct labeling of this "pit" as a symbol for slavery, when she comments as follows: "Cap compares herself to the black slave Pitapat, . . . because both CaPITola and PITapat have 'pits' in them, and uses this fortuitous circumstance to urge their examination of the pit beneath the trapdoor, but the comparison may again suggest that they are connected by slavery" (28). More recently, Katharine Ings has argued that "the pit also connotes the 'hold' of the ships that made the Middle Passage from Africa to America, transporting slaves. Little Pitapat's name and race recalls the horrors of being packed into the ship's pit" (146). While Ings proposes this reading among a number of other possible interpretations of this mysterious pit, I believe that reading it as a symbol of slavery is vital in order to appreciate the novel's condemnation of Capitola as participant in the slave system and the subsequent redemption she achieves in the novel's climax.

a master" (125). Though they may not be physically beaten or sexually abused, Warfield's slaves cannot possibly be characterized as "hilariously happy" (J. Nelson 29).

Warfield's young ward, Capitola, who has been called "the long-lost twin sister of Huckleberry Finn," is universally adored by Southworth's critics and readers, who admire her rebelliousness, sharp wit, and resistance to the antebellum South's gender conventions (Habegger 201). However, most scholars, especially those who have read only *The Hidden Hand*, fail to see that the character does merit serious critique from Southworth and faces the same dilemma as do all women coming of age in the shadow of slavery. Cast in the mold of Juliette and India, Capitola is the daughter of Eugene LeNoir, the owner of Hurricane Hall's neighboring estate, and his beautiful French wife. In an attempt to secure the estate for himself, Eugene's villainous brother, Gabriel, kills him and imprisons his wife but is unable to prevent her from giving birth to a legal heir and hiding the daughter away for her own protection. The child Capitola grows up in New York City, believing herself an orphan and disguising herself as a boy in order to earn wages. When Warfield learns of his enemy LeNoir's crime, he recovers "the orphan," identifying her by the hidden hand, the hand-shaped birthmark on her left palm, and considers her his ward until she can be proven the rightful heir of Hidden Hollow.

Consistent with Southworth's abolitionist project, Capitola shares the characteristic flaws of the slave-owning woman displayed in Juliette and India. Upon her introduction to the plantation world, she enjoys "the great change in her fortunes" including "the spacious and comfortable mansion of which she found herself the little mistress; . . . the abundance, regularity, and respectability of her new life; the leisure, the privacy, [and] the attendance of the servants" (108). Capitola's challenge, as she settles in among this newly-obtained grandeur, is to avoid being so blinded by her surroundings that she ignores the human beings enslaved for her benefit. Early signs in the novel indicate that she is failing this test; for example, on her first night at Hurricane Hall she meets her waiting-maid Pitapat and

though pitying "the poor little darkey" (76), she is content to enjoy "her tall tester bedstead" (72) while "little Pitapat sleep[s] on a pallet" (77). Because Cap is accustomed to sleeping on the streets herself, some reluctance in assuming a dominant position and condemning another to sleep on the floor would seem expected. Instead, she adjusts to her new position without open qualms about the system's inequity. Though she has neither the power nor the position to free Warfield's slaves, readers are aware, unlike Capitola herself, that because she is the rightful heir and future mistress of "the landed estate, . . . the Hidden House, and all the negroes, stock, furniture and other personal property," she will soon be faced with this decision about her own slaves (176). An eerie encounter between Capitola and "Harriet, the Seeress of Hidden Hollow" offers an indication of how she may handle this responsibility. The Seeress envisions Cap's hand "stained with blood," predicting that "this little hand of yours--this dainty woman's hand--will be--red with blood" (271-2). As Cap flees, attempting to ignore the cryptic messages, the witch yells after her that she is "foredoomed to crime . . . doomed! doomed! doomed!" (273). By dismissing these warnings, Capitola initially shows no promise of making what Southworth considers the correct choices about the fate of her future slaves.

Though present-day readers, and perhaps many of Southworth's nineteenth-century readers, long for Capitola to denounce slavery and its evils, the heroine's redemption is not an obvious or easy one. In fact, Cap voices almost no opposition to slavery at all and clearly gains many material benefits from it. However, like Hester, she feels sympathy for the slaves' burdens, especially in their service to the volatile Warfield, and she becomes particularly fond of Pitapat. She also displays some awareness of the restrictions that slavery holds for the masters, viewing the estate as a "mad-house" in which the "servants who come at my call are the keepers" (109). Additionally, Dobson points out that Capitola is very aware of racial stereotypes and subverts them on several occasions as she mocks her guardian's fear of "runaway negroes" (xxv). However, I believe that Southworth

provides the greatest promise of Capitola's redemption in yet another way; her evolving attitudes toward slavery, as well as her future actions as a slave owner, are reflected in her final dealings with Black Donald, whom Gabriel LeNoir has hired to assassinate his niece but who instead becomes infatuated with her.

In Southworth's characterizations of Capitola and Black Donald, neither figure comfortably resides on one or the other side of what current criticism calls the "color line," illustrating the concept that race "has never been a stable idea or a fixed concept" (D. Nelson viii). For example, though the mercenary is himself considered racially "white," he often crosses the color line into "black." At least twice in the novel he is "disguised as a negro" (209), and in his initial appearance with his band of men, their faces are covered with black crape, which Carpenter argues aids them in "masquerading as black men" (25). These disguises, his nickname, and his long and black curly hair contribute to his status as a figurative slave in the last scenes of the novel. Notably, however, Capitola shares similar ambiguities. Her name is also "Black," an adaptation of LeNoir given to her by Warfield; she has a long black mane of curly locks; and, further, she even begins the novel being born to a "black" mother (for Black Donald has wrapped the mother's face, neck, and hands in the same crape that he and his men wear) and being sold into slavery with her mulatto nurse, "Granny" Grewell, by Black Donald himself. Southworth's creation of these two figures shows an early conception of the constructed nature of race. Both of these characters are made up of signs that could inscribe them either as "black" or as "white," displaying the "dynamic quality" of race and acting as a reminder that "the idea of 'race' had to be invented, described, promulgated, and legislated by those who would benefit as a group from the concept" (D. Nelson viii-ix).[11]

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[11] For the most comprehensive reading of Capitola's "blackness," see Ings's article, which claims that Southworth casts her heroine as black as "a foil to those [values] associated with the 'whiteness' of other sentimental heroines: piety, obedience, and passivity. Resemanticizing Capitola's moral whiteness as blackness thus allows Southworth to explore possibilities of situation or character that would never have been appropriate for [Susan Warner's] Ellen Montgomery or [Stowe's] Eva St. Clare" (148).

In the antebellum South, the inscription of race is intricately tied to status in the slave system; "black" almost always means "slave," and "white" consequently means "not slave" and often "master." Therefore, as Ruth Frankenberg argues in *White Women, Race Matters*, "the social construction of whiteness" becomes "a site of dominance" (6). This power struggle through race construction is illustrated in the final confrontation between Capitola and Black Donald as Southworth depicts two individuals who can assert power and identity only by defining their own "whiteness" in terms of the "blackness" of the other. That is, only by casting their opposite as "black," and consequently "slave," can either of them exercise authority. As Black Donald has Capitola trapped in her chamber, he initiates this process, this struggle for dominance, by characterizing her as both black and slave, describing her predicament as being "like the caged starling," a black bird, that "can't--get--out!" (388). Her captivity here, during which she is "entirely in the power of Black Donald," reenacts the previous enslavement she suffered as an infant at his hands (384). She thus begins this episode being figuratively returned to slavery.

Though Black Donald is all too eager to participate in this struggle, offering no hesitation about making Capitola "black," she initially resists any attempt to reverse their positions, refusing to cast him as slave and telling him, "I will not call you *Black* Donald" (389). However, her reluctance soon fades, a result of her new awareness of her capability of casting him into the pit below her chamber, of symbolically condemning him to slavery. Once she maneuvers him over the fortunately placed trap door, she quickly returns to addressing him by the epithet "Black" and now can truly claim, "I know my position" (390). Her holding this power to condemn another to slavery because of his "blackness" reinforces her own "whiteness." Indeed, as soon as he steps over the trap door, Capitola "turned very pale, but not with fear, though Black Donald thought she did" (388). She becomes "paler than a corpse" as she places her foot on the spring-bolt that will open the door (392), and upon witnessing her growing whiteness, he even offers to kiss her to "put

life into those marble cheeks" (393). It is at this moment of his acknowledgment of her whiteness--thus her power over him--that Capitola is able to fling Black Donald into "the awful void" (393). His own power, his whiteness, vanishes as a consequence of Capitola's action; his "white and panic-stricken face . . . disappeared, and then a square, black opening was all that remained" (393). This interaction seems only to verify the seeress's predictions of Capitola's bloody hands as she now seems quite prepared to accept the gruesome responsibilities of becoming a plantation owner.

However, Southworth soon begins to redeem her heroine because, unlike the other slave owners in her novels, Capitola almost immediately becomes convinced that her action is a "dreadful deed" (393). As Black Donald, still living, is dragged up from beneath the trap door, Capitola learns that it covers only an ancient cellar and not a bottomless pit as the housekeeper had previously reported. This clarification makes possible a new view of slavery for Capitola; it does not have to be the perpetual, inescapable, and unmanageably monolithic it first appears. And contrary to tradition, neither her race nor her wealth dictates that she must participate in this system.

Almost immediately, thereafter, she rejects this power to enslave others as she swears "never to occupy this room again" because "its associations are too full of horrors" (398). Rather than delight in Donald's captivity, she realizes for the first time that her acts sometimes have dire consequences, and she becomes determined to rectify the situation she has created. Even the revelation that she is "the sole heiress of the Hidden House estate and all its enormous wealth" (473) and her subsequent engagement to her beloved Herbert do not distract her from her new course because she cannot "bear the music, and the dancing, and the rejoicing, when [she] know[s] that a fellow creature is in such a strait" (481). We are told that Black Donald's imprisonment and impending execution is the "one cloud upon the happiness of Capitola" (476). Coincidentally, Black Donald's execution is scheduled for the same day as Capitola's wedding, implying a connection between (slave-

owner) Capitola's happiness and (enslaved) Donald's suffering. Unexpectedly, as the book draws to a close, she postpones her wedding in order to free Black Donald from imprisonment and a certain death. In the final chapter, readers find a changed Capitola taking possession of her estate, a Capitola who does "not care for wealth or power" (473), and who by taking charge of Hidden House with her new husband and long-lost mother transforms the estate "into a dwelling of light and beauty" (485).

Because Capitola's handling of her slaves and her attitudes about the institution are never explicitly described in the novel, her future seems uncertain. However, I believe that Capitola's decision has been made by the novel's end, though Southworth carefully avoids overt abolitionist statements as she fashions an anti-slavery fiction that would be palatable to all audiences. If Capitola had not renounced slavery, the novel's finale would be very different indeed because happiness and slave-ownership have been shown to be incompatible in Southworth's fiction, and no slave-holding estate would ever be described in her work as "a dwelling of light and beauty." As Nina Baym reminds us, Southworth's "'best' white characters always free their slaves" (*Woman's Fiction* 117); certainly, Capitola's new awareness that while "fellow creature[s] [are] in such a strait" she herself cannot enjoy the more pleasurable aspects of her status signals a growing discomfort with the dynamics of the slave system that characters such as Juliette never experience. While not an obvious abolitionist act, her emancipation of Black Donald, a "black" man imprisoned by her own actions, indicates a new development in Southworth's heroines. Though Capitola is always an active force, unlike other Southworth females, her previous acts never rectify situations for which she is responsible or benefit those she has harmed. The unprecedented act of setting Black Donald free "to commence a better life" places Capitola on the path of characters from previous novels who have also considered the damage their actions have had upon their consciences and, more significantly, upon others (484).

Additionally, Capitola's language in her final exchange with Black Donald reveals much about her transformation. As she visits him the night before his scheduled execution to equip him with the money and means to make his escape, she very consciously avoids calling him "Black," instead addressing him for the first time by his full name, Donald Bayne. Upon leaving him, however, she again reverts to referring to him as Black Donald, but this should not be seen as a negation of Capitola's redemption. Rather, it signals an important change in Capitola, for no longer does "black" automatically mean "slave" for her. Though this use of language may appear to be a small step, it is a necessary one in Southworth's vision of the changes required in the views of southern women in order to transform the slave system.

Besides lacking any overt condemnation of slavery and any openly abolitionist figures, *The Hidden Hand* also differs from Southworth's previous fiction as it does not depict her characters leaving the South to make their future in the West. Instead, Cap's friends and family "all enjoy a fair amount of human felicity" by remaining in the South (485). Thus, the diagnosis of the South's condition here does not seem to be as dire as that presented in *Retribution* or *India*. In *The Hidden Hand*, the region is not beyond repair and does not have to be abandoned as the only hope for happiness. Because this novel does not reject the South but, instead, subtly suggests that the region can be transformed, it has opened itself, like *Swallow Barn*'s closing assertion of the "very happy persons" in the South, to accusations of being pro-South and pro-slavery. Both novels refuse to condemn the region or to address the ills of slavery directly. Quite probably, these are the reasons that both works have been included in many readers' lists of plantation novels.

Despite this perception, *The Hidden Hand* is certainly consistent with Jane Tompkins's view of the sentimental novel "as a political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory, that . . . attempts to mold the values of its time" (126). Southworth herself believed that as a popular novelist she had "a hundred-fold larger

audience than the most celebrated preacher, and therefore a tremendous responsibility" (qtd. in Hudock "Heroism" 6). This responsibility included raising the consciousness of her female readers, including both those southern women discontented with the system yet unwilling to actively change it and those enjoying the benefits of the system with only very slight grumbles over slavery's inconveniences. To these women, Southworth reveals that, like Capitola's hands, their own hands are as stained with blood as those of the most abusive slave owner or tyrannical slave driver. Their hidden hands, their own unutilized and unrealized power, are more than capable of ending slavery and its evils, including the harm done to their own souls and those of their children. In her fiction, then, Southworth continuously maintains the anti-slavery agenda which Stowe attributed to her, arguing that southern women do have, whether they acknowledge it or not, the same godlike power that Julie practices, that Sutherland reveals in India's possession, and that Capitola discovers in her kind act to Black Donald. In Southworth's work, as Joanne Dobson writes, "it is the abuse of power she deplores, particularly as it deprives others of the exercise of free will" (xxiii). One such abuse of power is the choice not to use the power for the benefit of others. Above all else, the fiction of Southworth is a call for women to use this unrealized power to end the institution of slavery forever.

Southworth's Heroic Slave: *The Presentiment* (1860)

To those readers doubtful of Southworth's commitment to abolition, like Frank Mott, who claims Southworth's interest in abolitionist fiction ended because she "thought there was no money in anti-slavery literature" (138), or Christopher Looby, who believes she abandoned whatever political agenda she may have held in order "to maintain her mass audience" (9), Southworth's novella *The Presentiment* serves as the best response. This work was published the year following *The Hidden Hand* in *The Haunted Homestead*, a collection of five novellas, supposedly all based upon "facts, 'stranger than fiction'" (25).

The Presentiment depicts the story of a slave, Valentine, and his life-long relationship with his master Oswald. Running over one hundred and twenty pages, the novella is Southworth's longest treatment of the issue of slavery and a clear answer to those who believe she had given up her abolitionist aims before the late 1850s.

Set on the plantation of Red Hill, "one of the largest cotton plantations in the South" (113), the novella returns to the familiar material of plantation fiction. Red Hill is owned by a plantation novel's typical slave-holding patriarch, Colonel Waring, who is so "benevolent [that] . . . no appeal to his heart was ever slighted"; he would often "go deeper into debt for his negroes' winter clothing" (114). The master's wife, Madame Waring, is, in turn, the typical southern lady, sickly and removed from the daily affairs of the plantation. Finally, the slaves of Red Hill are well-treated by their owners, who in some ways consider them as part of their family. Phaedra, a female slave, is the "real head" of the family (114): "She is mistress of the house--absolutely to all intents and purposes, mistress of the house. All the money for domestic expenses passes through her hands; she carries the keys, governs the maids, and arranges every thing to suit herself" (125). After the death of Mrs. Waring, she even acts as a surrogate mother to Oswald, and "in her eyes he was the young master, the heir apparent, the Crown Prince" (116). Her own son, Valentine, grows up as the constant playmate and companion of the white child, and the two "behaved in all respects toward each other as peers" (117). Oswald's schoolmates tease him by calling the two "foster-brothers" and "the Siamese twins" (121).

This teasing suggestion of the boys' brotherhood approaches a revelation of an unspoken secret about the Waring family and their slaves. The two boys might indeed be actual brothers as is suggested by Valentine's having "clear, light-blue, Saxon eyes" similar to Oswald's "lively blue eyes" (116). More revealing, however, is Phaedra's confession to her son following the death of Colonel Waring. She describes her situation with the Warings as "the old Bible story of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar acted over again on this

plantation" (130). After Waring's wife's death, Phaedra apparently lived as his mistress. Of course, she was astonished when he later returned from a business trip to New Orleans with a new wife. After fainting upon seeing the woman and causing great upset, Phaedra was scolded by Waring, who "asked [her] not to be a fool, and asked [her] what [she] had expected" (131). He chastised her for "spoil[ing] his domestic peace," and, "from that day to this, [she] was only [her] master's faithful servant, and no more" (132). Valentine puts an end to his mother's recounting of this terrible time, pleading with her to stop and telling her, "I shall go mad, if you tell me more" (132). Southworth here depicts the complicated connections produced by relationships between masters and their slaves. The result here is that Valentine is not valued as an actual family member but only as property, first of his white father and later of his sibling Oswald.

For the most part, Valentine's servitude does not involve the brutal treatment or the harsh labor typical of slave life in the South. As a child and young man, his duty is to be a playmate and companion to Oswald. In the course of this duty, Valentine manages to obtain an education by getting Oswald to share his lessons with him at night. When Oswald is sent off to the University of Virginia, Valentine accompanies him as his valet. After college, Oswald makes his grand tour of Europe with Valentine at his side, exposing the slave to great culture, art, music, and literature. This treatment makes Valentine often forget his status as property, and he frequently addresses his master Oswald as an equal, speaking his mind, losing his temper when things do not go his way, and engaging his master in heated arguments. This behavior from his servant worries Oswald greatly, but he admits that "it is my fault; I have treated that boy like a brother until he is so spoiled as to be quite above his condition" (169).

Even as a young child, Valentine was known for his frank speech toward whites. He shocks one white lady by telling her that she has hurt his feelings, a charge that she cannot understand coming from "the spoiled and petted boy" (116). But, as he explains,

"You all treat me like a little poodle dog, or like a monkey; for you feed me, and you dress me up, and pet me, and laugh at me, and by and by you will drive me out" (117). When he grows to manhood, he realizes these outbursts will no longer be tolerated and he struggles to control them. However, he often fails at this attempt. At one point, tired of driving Oswald night after night to one "wine and card party" after another, Valentine urges his drunken master to retire for the evening. When Oswald accuses him of being "a spoiled negro" and suggests having him "tied up and whipt for such language" in order to "bring [him] to a sense of [his] condition" (142), Valentine, also drunk, "grew frenzied, dashed his clenched fist with all his strength into his master's face, and sprang from the buggy, leaving him to his fate" (143). Fortunately for the slave, Oswald is not seriously injured and is, further, too intoxicated to remember the cause of "the buggy accident" the next day.

One privilege that Valentine is given that most slaves could not claim is the permission to marry, in this case not another slave but Fannie, a free black woman. As Southworth explains, it is "a mad marriage, . . . where the bride had no dower, and the bridegroom not even the ownership of his own limbs to work for their support" (157). When he is told by another slave that the marriage is a "very foolish piece of business," he asserts that "people who love each other have a sort of propensity to get married" (183). But the fact that Oswald consents to this unusual marriage only leads to further problems for Valentine. Oswald has no respect for the union of Valentine and Fannie. He forces the slave to leave for long periods of time to accompany him on his travels, causing him not to see his wife and their baby Coralie for months at a time. When they are at Red Hill, the master begrudges the time that the slave wants to spend with his wife--especially the nights Valentine spends away from the plantation--and the fact that he works at the store where Fannie works for extra money. When told he must quit this outside job, Valentine asserts that "it was in over-hours--in my own time" (170). To this statement, Oswald replies,

"Your own time! Pray, sir, what time is *that*? I have yet to learn, that you *have* any time of your own!" (170).

The conflict between slave and master comes to a head when a plague breaks out in the nearby city where Fannie and Coralie live, and Oswald forbids Valentine to go to the city to take care of his infected wife out of fear that Valentine will bring the illness back to Red Hill. Oswald resists all appeals to permit Valentine to go to his family. He first dismisses his own wife's request to allow the slave to make the trip; then he rejects a final request from Valentine himself by erupting:

> What the devil is Fannie or her brat to me? If they are suffering, it is her own fault; she had no business to marry a slave, whom she could never expect to help her. And if their sufferings afflict you, it serves you right; it is a just punishment for your cursed folly in marrying a free woman, with no master to look after her or her children. (189)

Despite his master's objection, Valentine attempts to sneak into the city anyway, but he is caught and brought back by the authorities. Angered at Valentine's disregard of his orders, Oswald hits the slave "with a sudden, sharp blow with his cane across the face" (198). He follows this strike with "several other severe blows." In response to this beating, Valentine fights back, "seiz[ing] a heavy oaken stool, and, aiming one fatal blow with all his force, strikes his master in the face. . . Oswald Waring fell, never to rise again!" (198). The dehumanizing institution has thus brought death to the master and forced the slave to become a murderer after his very understandable request is unjustly denied and violence is wreaked upon him.

In the novella, Southworth attempts to demonstrate that catastrophic violence is not the inevitable consequence of this encounter. Instead, she illustrates that this incident could have been avoided at several points. First of all, Colonel Waring, presumably Valentine's father, could have freed his son from slavery. Before his death, he had "promised

faithfully" to Phaedra that he would set Valentine free in his will and "leave [him] money to take [him] to France, or to some other foreign country" (128), but his will revealed that he either lied to her or had forgotten this promise. Second, upon Valentine's wedding, Phaedra hopes that Oswald will recompense for his father's oversight and "make Valley a present of his free papers, for a wedding gift" (156). The suggestion only amuses Oswald, who responds, "Am I Don Quixote the younger, that I should be guilty of such a piece of extravagant generosity?" (157). But even though if Valentine were not given his freedom, Southworth suggests that other factors could have prevented the violent ending to this relationship. For instance, Oswald could have respected Valentine's marriage to Fannie and understood that any man, regardless of his race, would want to be at his wife's side when she was sick and suffering. When Oswald's wife presents this fact to him, he dismisses it by telling her that she is making a "mistake in endowing these creatures with the same acuteness of feelings that [whites] possess; there is a difference" (186). Because this master cannot view his slave--his own brother--as a human being with human emotions and a connection to his loved ones, he cannot understand Valentine's desperation and frustration with Oswald's prohibition against him traveling to the city. The strength of his view of slaves as inhuman property thus makes the violent clash between master and slave difficult to avoid.

Valentine's story is not the only tale of brutality against slaves presented in this novella. When Valentine attempts to make his way into the city, he encounters Governor, a slave from a neighboring plantation. Upon hearing of Fannie's illness, Governor declares that "*I wish how it wur my 'ooman as had de yaller feber*" (181). Valentine soon learns that the "new overseer is tampering with [Governor's] wife's fidelity," by giving Milly, his wife, who is "berry *putty*, mos' *white*," gifts, inviting her to his cabin, and sending her husband to the farthest field to work so that he can get her alone (182). One night "a young negro" comes and whispers "something in his ear," and Governor "all on fire with rage and

jealousy" ran to the overseer Moriarty's cabin (225). A moment later, "the overseer lay dead, slain by the hand of the injured husband" (225). With this episode, Southworth makes a strong statement about the specific hazards for women in slavery, a statement she has only suggested previously with the characters of Phaedra and *India*'s Oriole. Here she explicitly asks "how many virtuous women were there, on that or any other plantation? Why, virtue was not taught them--was not expected of them; and if they were born with the instinct, it was soon lost among a class, where licentiousness was the rule, and integrity the exception" (224). By including this incident, Southworth presents the sexual exploitation that slave women suffered in the antebellum South, an exploitation that Harriet Jacobs had already exposed in her slave narrative and that Mary Chestnut would later bemoan in her Civil War diary.

As the novella concludes, both Valentine and Governor are arrested and taken before the court. In the relation of this process, Southworth explores the status that slaves have in the justice system. At first, it seems that Valentine receives a fair trial; we are told that "when his case was fully investigated, it was obvious to all minds, that . . . Valentine struck only in self-defense--only after his own blood had been drawn, and he had once been felled to the floor" (227). However, despite the fact that "he was well and ably defended," the verdict that is rendered is "Willful Murder" (227). Governor's trial ends similarly; although "he was ably defended by the counsel," the "jury, without leaving their seats, brought in their verdict of 'Guilty'" (228). Both slaves are sentenced to death for killing their white abusers. Governor cannot believe that he will be executed, for "he knew that, *living*, he himself was worth at least twelve or fifteen hundred dollars, for he had more than once heard himself so appraised; and that, *dead*, he was worth just so much less than nothing as the cost of his burial would be" (231). Thus, he concludes that "he was far too valuable to be executed" (231). Unfortunately, he is mistaken, and the authorities intend to use the double execution as a public example, encouraging masters "to give their

slaves a holiday . . . to attend the execution" (236). As the tearful crowd watches the execution, the message that the authorities hope to convey is that slaves should passively accept any treatment that is bestowed upon them by their masters, even in cases of physical or sexual abuse. By contrast, the message that Southworth conveys by depicting this tragic tale, which she asserts is "strictly true" (241), is that the slave system was not a noble institution intended to help an "inferior" race of man, as southern defenses of the institution claimed. Instead, it encouraged the basest form of degradation; because it encouraged whites to perceive the slaves as less than human, it allowed them to commit brutal crimes upon them without the slightest twinge of conscience. Again, she comes back to her central appeal by focusing on the toll slavery takes on the master, specifically in its depiction of Oswald's monstrous treatment of his own half-brother.

I end this chapter with this discussion of *The Presentiment* because it strongly confirms that Southworth's crusade against slavery continued in her fiction well after many critics have claimed it ended. By finally writing a work that focused exclusively on the sufferings of a slave, Southworth in 1860 published the type of fiction that readers usually expected from an abolitionist writer. However, she published this adamantly abolitionist work in a readable package by including it in the middle of a collection of ghost stories. Certainly, some readers would have been shocked to come across this tale about slavery in the midst of a collection of horror tales, but this placement seems consistent with Southworth's strategy throughout her career. Though she strongly believed in and pursued the cause of abolition, she strove to find a way to present her arguments to a wide audience that included slave-owning southerners. By dressing her abolitionist message in acceptable attire, including the trappings of the plantation novel, she was able to disseminate her anti-slavery views to the masses. However, Southworth's genre-play seems to me to be ultimately unsuccessful. Certainly, she constructed fiction that could be read by a mass audience, but unless these readers digest many of Southworth's novels, it is unlikely that

they would glean any abolitionist message from *The Hidden Hand.* While Southworth should be commended for her attempt to fashion a subversive plantation novel, the effort seems ultimately to have harmed her reputation in the twentieth century (for many readers, if a book *looks* like a pro-slavery plantation novel, it *must be* a pro-slavery plantation novel). However, by examining this sampling of Southworth's work, readers can see that even among plantation novels, the genre that is often considered most ideologically connected to the antebellum South and slavery, there were works being written by southerners that attempted to subvert the dominant ideology and to reveal that the charming fictions of southern plantation life did not come close to revealing the truth about the South.

Conclusion: Recovering the Subversive South

The view of the literature of the Old South that portrays it as the exclusive domain of aristocratic white male authors writing awkward and tedious southern versions of the novels of Sir Walter Scott in an attempt to defend slavery and justify their own social status has been embraced by scholars since early in the twentieth century and has even made appearances in recent studies of antebellum southern literature, including J. V. Ridgely's *Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature* (1980) and Susan Tracy's *In the Master's Eye* (1995). While historians have long ago debunked the enduring myth of the aristocratic South, literary scholars have, until recently, been satisfied with this portrayal of the antebellum South. The recent interrogation of this standard depiction of the Old South's literary culture has been part of a larger movement, conducted by such scholars as Michael Kreyling, Susan Donaldson, Michael O'Brien, and John Grammer, that has begun to examine how the field of southern literature has been defined since its institutionalization by the Agrarian New Critics. These scholars see the traditional view of antebellum literature as a construction, the direct product of the New Critics' conservative agenda. Some, like Kreyling, O'Brien, and Donaldson, claim that the New Critics projected an image of antebellum literature that would illustrate a continuity in the values--aristocracy, patriarchy, and agrarianism--that they themselves promoted and believed to be the core of southern literature. Others, like Grammer, have proposed that the Agrarians painted the antebellum South as a cultural wasteland only so that the achievements of the Southern Literary Renaissance, a movement in which they were at the center, would shine more brightly by contrast. Regardless of the reasons behind its invention, all of these scholars agree that the Agrarian's version of nineteenth-century southern literature became standard as it was accepted by the succeeding generation of scholars and reproduced in its anthologies and literary histories. Consequently, the challenge for present and future scholars of southern

literature is to get beyond this "invented" literary history of the region, to begin to revise the accepted story, and to recover a vision of the South as a diverse region.

Of course, this call for revision has been alive since the 1970s, as critics, including Anne Goodwyn Jones, William Andrews, Lucinda MacKethan, Eric Sundquist, Minrose Gwin, Elizabeth Harrison, Mabs Segrest, and Barbara Ladd among others, have moved beyond the traditional view and attempted to incorporate more female and African-American writers into the established canon of southern literature. Nowhere is this revisionist project more eloquently elaborated than in C. Hugh Holman's last major essay, "No More Monoliths, Please: Continuities in the Multi-Souths." In this piece, he admits his own participation in reproducing a rather limited definition of southern literature but calls for the field of southern literary studies to change its course. He acknowledges that it is "a common human tendency to seek the controlling unity, the essential principle, the shaping archetype in everything we study" (xiii), but he claims that southern literary scholars found this unity "by omitting a little that cannot be made to fit, selecting from the rest rather carefully, and . . . fitting what we select to our narrow beds, [to] arrive at conveniently simple answers to the question of what southern literature is all about" (xiv). He argues that the price to be paid for continuing to repeat the established "clichés about southern writing" will be the "misunderstanding of our subject matter" (xv). To rectify these transgressions of the past, he urges present and future scholars of southern literature to approach the literature "with a deep respect for its richness and variety, its almost endless number of forms and impulses" in order to reveal "the whole many-colored multitude of southern writers" (xxiii).

In specific regard to the literature of the previous century, Holman encourages scholars, "as [they] look at the writers of both the antebellum and the postbellum periods of the nineteenth century, to set aside [their] presuppositions and [their] efforts to demonstrate an inclusive unity in southern writing" (xvii). It is with this guiding principle that I have

written this study of the literature of the antebellum South. In each of my chapters, I have attempted to call into question the received story about antebellum literature--that story that reduces the Old South's literature to its historical romances and narrows this limited view even further by claiming that all of the region's romances were poor imitations of Sir Walter Scott's work used to defend slavery, agrarianism, and natural aristocracy. In this reductive view, there is no acknowledgement that writers might struggle against these values or that they might even use romances to engage in this struggle.

The first two chapters of this study challenge the simplistic view of the period's historical romances, which claims that these romanticized depictions of the historical events of the South's past were exclusively conservative and ultimately only interested in maintaining the status quo of the region--the dominance of the slave-owning, aristocratic planter class. The interrogation of this assumption begins with the examination of the mistaken claim that southern historical romances mindlessly imitated the Waverly novels of Sir Walter Scott. While Scott's romances argued for inevitable progress and overturning tradition, the conservative southern romances presented a world wherein tradition could successfully hold off the progress threatening agrarian ways. In my first chapter, I focused upon James Heath's early romance *Edge-Hill*, a work that is faithful to Scott's form and message, as it argues for the abandonment of the southern aristocratic ideal in favor of a system of meritocracy as a means of strengthening the character and culture of the region. The second chapter also explores a work that challenges common assumptions about antebellum historical romances by examining a black writer's attempt to write a romance of southern history. Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* employs all the familiar conventions of the southern historical romance but turns the genre on its head by drafting as its requisite hero, fighting for a cherished tradition, a rebellious slave, striving for the liberty that is the foundation of Virginia culture. Consequently, the slave-owning aristocrats become the villains--those standing against tradition--in Douglass's piece.

These works, one by a politically progressive writer and the other by a former slave, challenge the generalizations about historical romance that assert that the genre could be used only as a mouthpiece of the oppressive planter class.

The work of Edgar Allan Poe has always proved difficult for southern literary historians. He is undoubtedly the most important writer to come out of the antebellum South, yet his otherworldly fiction is so different from the historical romances written by his contemporaries that he would seem to have no connection to slavery and regional politics. However, scholars like Kreyling have pointed out out that this apolitical Poe has also been an invention of twentieth-century critics, both those American literature scholars looking for a southern writer who does not appear to be an apologist for slavery and the Agrarian New Critics who constructed a Poe to serve as a model for their own work which claims to privilege formalist aesthetics above political concerns. My third chapter examines the generic choices Poe made, apparently out of financial necessity, that have made this reputation possible. By choosing to write horror fiction instead of historical romances--a genre now tainted by its connection to conservative politics, Poe developed different concerns from those of many of his contemporaries. Successful horror fiction depends upon the exploitation of fear and anxiety, that of both the writer and the reader. Thus, in Poe's work, he publicly exposed some of the central anxieties that the southern aristocracy had about their society--specifically, about whether slaves and women would accept their inferior status in the system and the consequences if they chose not to submit passively to their oppression. Because Poe's work in the horror genre revealed, through its use of murderous apes, vengeful dwarfs, and undead women, what had been unspoken in conservative historical romances, his work becomes a subversive threat to the aristocracy that did not want its attitudes toward slaves and women called into question.

The plantation novel--fiction featuring charming depictions of lavish plantations and happy slaves as an attempt to answer abolitionist claims--was the other fictional genre to

dominate the antebellum South. My last two chapters examine writers who struggle with or deviate from this genre. In my fourth chapter, I examine the work that has become synonymous with the genre, *Swallow Barn* by John Pendleton Kennedy. Within Kennedy's work, there is a conscious generic struggle in which romance competes with realism. The work refuses to remain a charming tribute to southern life because it constantly inserts the stark reality of the region--most notably the brutality--in order to contest the idyllic version that Kennedy's narrator is content to present. In my fifth chapter, I examine the work of E. D. E. N. Southworth; written in the heyday of the plantation novel, her fiction is obviously aware of the conventions of the genre, yet it consistently argues for an anti-slavery agenda. To illustrate Southworth's genre play, I examine *The Hidden Hand*, a work many readers consider to be a plantation novel, to reveal that beneath its conventional surface is an abolitionist argument consistent with that evident in her more openly anti-slavery works. In these two chapters, I illustrate that, like the historical romance, even the plantation novel, the genre most often identified with the defense of slavery in the nineteenth-century South, could be used to mount a challenge to the dominant discourse in the region.

In his final essay, C. Hugh Holman implores the southern literary scholars who will follow him not to search for a unifying vision of one South or "the South" at the expense of seeing the "Multi-Souths," a region diverse in its views and its writings. In my study, I have attempted to contribute to this recovery of a pluralistic South. Admittedly, there may have been an antebellum South that thought of itself as an aristocratic nation-state, that believed in a natural hierarchy of race, class, and gender, that confidently supported the institution of slavery in the belief that it was a moral system, and that upheld the agrarian ideal as the key to the region's future. While my study grants that this South, which matches many scholars' vision of the region, did exist, it also strives to illustrate that this was not the only South; if there was a conservative and aristocratic South, there was

also a South that called into question these conservative assumptions, that sought to reform the elitist and sexist foundations of the upper class, and that fought in its fiction to abolish the horrific institution of slavery, which it found contradictory to all that was America. This subversive South is evident in the works that I have examined in this dissertation, the fiction of Heath, Douglass, Poe, Kennedy, and Southworth, but can probably also be seen in works in other southern literary genres as well--poetry, southwestern humor, sermons and speeches, historical biographies. This study is only a small contribution to the process of revision of the image of the antebellum South from that of a region mired in consensus to a more accurate portrait of the region as vital and diverse, full of debate and difference of opinion. Contrary to established literary histories, there were indeed subversive writers in the antebellum South who attempted to use their work to confront the many injustices of their society and to change their world.

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Vita

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