The Dixie Plantation State: Antebellum Fiction and Global Capitalism

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THE DIXIE PLANTATION STATE:
ANTEBELLUM FICTION AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED FOR
THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
DEGREE
THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE

Katharine Aileen Burnett
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ABSTRACT

“The Dixie Plantation State: Antebellum Fiction and Global Capitalism” connects the development of literature of the U.S. South to the ideological tensions inherent in the southern plantation economy before the Civil War. Southern literary form during this time reflects an economy that was sustained by international capitalism but which imagined itself as a version of provincial feudalism. The antebellum southern economy was defined by slavery and individual plantations, which created a culture that was isolated, rural, and oppressive. However, with global trade through cotton plantations as the driving force behind regional profit, the southern economy was also shaped by a form of *laissez-faire*, liberal capitalism that emphasized individual opportunism and modernization. The texts I discuss create myths of plantation life and re-imagine southern society under the plantation economy in ways that simultaneously support and question the ideological foundations of the system. Literary representation then becomes a method of merging nineteenth-century models of capitalism and international trade with the ostensibly self-contained tendencies of the plantation and the racial oppression of the slave system.

Each chapter is organized around a different literary form or genre and incorporates a comparative study of British fiction and fiction of the U.S. South. I argue that the form of nineteenth-century southern literature developed in tandem with the expansion of transatlantic trade. Therefore, the antebellum authors I discuss in this study do not consistently separate literary value from practical business or financial concerns. In chapters that focus on the historical romance, the sketch form, social problem novels, and African-American autobiographical narratives, I highlight the interconnected nature of literary representation and economic change. Authors such as William Gilmore Simms, Joseph Glover Baldwin, George Tucker, Maria J. McIntosh, and Martin Delany drew from British novels such as Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley*, Charles Dickens’s *Sketches by Boz*, and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* to represent the South as both economically progressive and culturally traditional. In this sense, fiction allowed southern authors to engage with the quasi-feudal space of the plantation within the modern economic models of the nineteenth century, without fully rejecting or denying either.
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INTRODUCTION

The Dixie Plantation State

“Dixie’s a plantation state, and you can’t make your little patch of it prosper till our planting prospers.”

-George Washington Cable, *John March, Southerner* (1894), 229

My study of nineteenth-century southern American literature begins in the twentieth century with the publication of *I’ll Take My Stand* in 1930. The collection of essays, written by the group known as the Agrarians at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, took up the task of describing “the southern way of life” at a moment of rapid industrial change in the United States. It’s a well-worn path in southern studies to return to the book—a survey of the critical works produced by the field in the past two decades would reveal that most, particularly those featuring twentieth-century literature, touch on the collection. As Michael Kreyling points out in his now seminal *Inventing Southern Literature* (1998),

Their [the authors’] individual and collective contributions to southern intellectual and literary history have determined the currents followed for most of [the twentieth] century by demarcating before/after, neo-/post-, renaissance/other. So strong and successful has this “style” of imagining been that we seldom question its sources, rapids, submerged snags—the network of assumptions, negotiations, and local interests—that had to be navigated (or ignored) to get us to this point.

(5)
Although many scholars have interrogated the collection’s version of southern history and its representation of the southern American region, it nonetheless is still read and re-read for the impact it has had on how Americans think of the South.¹

For the authors of *I’ll Take My Stand*, the South stood against what the introduction to the collection (written by John Crowe Ransom) describes as “the American or prevailing way” of life; put another way, “the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, Agrarian *versus* Industrial” (xli). These lines from the opening paragraph of the book are the thesis for the entire collection. Throughout the rest of the essays, authors ranging from Allen Tate and Donald Davidson, to Robert Penn Warren and Andrew Lytle align the South with a regional agrarian lifestyle and a leisurely mode of existence. This trend, the authors argue, can be traced from the society of the old South before the Civil War. As Ransom depicts it in the opening essay, “Reconstructed but Unregenerate”: “There are a good many faults to be found with the old South, but hardly the fault of being intemperately addicted to work and to gross material prosperity. The South never conceded that the whole duty of man was to increase material production, or that the index to the degree of his culture was the volume of his material production” (12). The South of this imagining is a self-contained and self-sustaining community of farmers, quietly enjoying life without the pressures of modern business or industrial concerns.²


² In *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), Thomas Jefferson proposes a similar model of the South based on self-sufficient agrarianism embodied by the plantation. I will refer to Jefferson later in my studies of southern authors and their theories of political economy.
The collection was followed closely by the publication of Margaret Mitchell’s novel *Gone With the Wind* in 1936, another text that is frequently cited as a defining representation of southern American culture. In *The Real South* (2008), Scott Romine identifies the novel as a text that “conjure[s] an Old South as nostalgic compensation for present deprivations.” And though, Romine admits, it was by far not the first to do so, “no cultural text has ever done it better or more completely” (29). And for anyone who wishes to reflexively evoke “Old South” or “southern” in the minds of most Americans (or anyone else for that matter), one need simply to say, “Tara,” and immediately visions of large, isolated plantation homes with white columns and magnolias come to mind. Not the industrialized, twentieth-century Atlanta of which Mitchell was a native.3

But my epigraph taken from George Washington Cable’s 1894 Reconstruction-era novel, *John March, Southerner*, reveals another element to the characterizations of the plantation South that challenges the anti-industrial, “moonlight and magnolias” image presented in these two formative southern texts. While Cable’s character concedes that even after the Civil War, the South is, indeed, shaped by plantation culture, the use of the term “plantation state” points to the broader material and economic connections demanded for the functioning of the southern plantation economy. “State,” in this sense, implies the form of nation state that emerged in tandem with capitalist economies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his study of the development of modern nation states, Benedict Anderson writes that “[w]hat . . . made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and

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3 For more on the ubiquitous quality of *Gone With the Wind* in shaping popular conceptions of the South, see Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie* (2003).
productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity” (Imagined Communities 43). Put simply, the totalizing image of the plantation South represented in these anti-modern, pre-capitalist images would not exist but for the modern modes of capitalism that arose during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and gave shape to the South as a distinct economic and political entity. Literary representation, such as that of Cable’s novel, brings together the economic impulses of nation formation with the cultural and linguistic forces that give rise to cohesive communities.

And as Cable’s quote reveals, the symbol of the plantation as a self-contained, rural space belies the global connections that upheld the southern agrarian economy during the early nineteenth century and allowed for the existence of plantations upon which later visions of the old South are modeled. The southern plantation economy and southern society relied on the transatlantic trade in slaves and the continued presence of domestic slave labor for their basic functioning. Plantations profited from the international trade in staple crops and manufactured goods with the northern United States, Britain, and the Caribbean. As a result, before the Civil War, the region was an active and exceedingly prosperous participant in the global market economy. Historians Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer observe, “In short, the South was not an isolated, self-contained economy. It is a gross exaggeration to talk about the ante-bellum Southern states as a colonial or tributary economy, locked into dependence upon the North” (285-6).

Therefore, two accounts of the nineteenth-century South emerge: the “plantation state” of Cable’s fiction, and the isolated provincial space of Gone With the Wind and the
Agrarians. The tension between the two reveals the fraught relationship between history and memory that Kreyling identifies in his most recent book, *The South That Wasn’t There*, as being one of the consistent characteristics of southern literature and representations of southern culture up through the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The imaginative reconstruction of the old South does not coincide with its historical economic reality. And yet, the cohesiveness of the South as a distinct regional space relies on visions of antebellum southern society as isolated, provincial, and self-contained. A comparison of these three literary representations of the nineteenth-century South demonstrates that the mythic functioning of “Dixie” as a social and cultural marker becomes inherently tied to the processes of modern capitalism and the structures of political nation states.

The aim of this project is to analyze the ways in which literature, and more particularly literary form and genre, connected these two visions of the South. To this end, I focus on what I consider to be the formative moment of the American South: the antebellum period, in which the South coalesced as a distinct region with a unique cultural identity and a correspondingly unique literature, but also the moment at which the South emerged as an important element in the global economy. Drawing from critics like Anderson and Ian Watt, I argue that the concurrent emergence of a nation’s or society’s capitalist economy and the emergence of an identifiable literature or literary form is not coincidental. What I view as the intrinsic relationship between the development of the southern economy and the development of southern literature is a crucial point in my study. Rather than working against the rise of a capitalist economy,

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4 Here I refer to *The Rise of the Novel* (1957).
the authors of the antebellum South, I argue, evoked the ideology of liberal capitalism as put forth by eighteenth-century political economists when representing a region seemingly pulled in two ideological directions. For the antebellum southern authors I discuss, literary form became a way of merging the impulses of modern capitalism (namely *laissez-faire* principles and an investment in the free market) with the pre-capitalist structures that characterized southern social organization. In these antebellum representations of the region, the South was at once a dynamic member of the global economy fueled by industrialization that also upheld the social and racial oppression of slavery and a plantation system modeled after the fading aristocratic order of Europe.

Thus, “the Dixie plantation state” is at once the popular vision of a mythic and nostalgic South, but also a region directly tapped into the currents of global economic development. I will demonstrate a way to bring these two perspectives into conversation through my reading of antebellum southern literature. In doing so, I will trace the formation of a distinct southern literature that merges the seemingly contradictory representations of the South as backward and idiosyncratic, but also forward-looking and deeply in touch with international intellectual and cultural networks.

“Capitalism with its clothes off”: the Southern Plantation Economy and the Global Nineteenth Century

In analyzing the function of literary form and the role it plays in early representations of the South, my approach relies on economic history as a way to rethink the development of southern literature in the context of international literary and intellectual networks during the nineteenth century. Economic history, I argue, provides a
unique opportunity to situate the imaginative writing of the antebellum South in a context that is much broader than the regional framework in which it has normally been understood. While historians have recognized the antebellum South’s global connections, literary scholars have failed to do so, instead reading nineteenth-century southern literature as alternately anachronistic, stubbornly anti-progressive, or nostalgic.

Traditional studies such as those by Louis D. Rubin, C. Hugh Holman, and J. V. Ridgely, though important in establishing the foundation for literary criticism on the nineteenth-century South, nonetheless maintain rigid regional boundaries and default definitions of southern culture in their interpretations. Only recently have scholars such as Paul Jones and Coleman Hutchison presented readings of early southern literature that subvert the dominant proslavery stance, or that are in conversation with constructions of nationalism and international relations. As a result, not only are studies of antebellum southern literature relatively few compared to the wealth of scholarship on more popular twentieth-century southern authors (read, Faulkner, Welty, or O’Connor), but southern literature is also largely excluded from early American or nineteenth-century literary studies.

Even more important to my study, however, is the role economic history plays in understanding the development of literary form and literary representations of a particular place. To trace the development of southern literature during the antebellum period, I pull

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6 See *Unwelcome Voices* (2003) and *Apples and Ashes* (2012), respectively.
7 For example, now-standard criticism on nineteenth-century American literature such as F. O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance* (1941) barely mentions southern authors, if at all. And even more recent studies such as Tim Armstrong’s *The Logic of Slavery* (2012)—which specifically focuses on the most defining of southern institutions, slavery—instead discusses the role of slavery in works by canonical American authors like Nathaniel Hawthorne.
from multiple bases of interpretation that hold economic systems to be important, but also maintain that the influence of other historical contexts carry equal weight. In this sense, I propose that the material and economic conditions of the antebellum South created a set of distinct historical circumstances that must be considered when interpreting the art and literature produced in and about the region. However, I also incorporate biographical criticism, in which I take into account the background of individual authors and the body of their writing. And above all, I suggest that all of these considerations intersect in the form taken by the literature of the time to reveal the long-term impact the antebellum period has had on representations of southern culture. For the plantation economy defined and shaped the South up until the Civil War in a way that indelibly affected its overall social organization and culture. As W. J. Cash famously notes in *The Mind of the South* (1941),

The South, one might say, is a tree with many age rings, with its limbs and trunk bent and twisted by all the winds of the years, but with its tap root in the Old South. . . . The mind of the section, that is, is continuous with the past. And its primary form is determined not nearly so much by industry as by the purely agricultural conditions of that past. So far from being modernized, in many ways it has actually always marched away, as to this day it continues to do, from the present toward the past. (x-xi)

Not only did the plantation system tie the South to international networks of commerce and trade that shaped the nineteenth-century global economy, it also gave rise to the characteristic duality in cultural representations of the South that I have identified in my opening paragraphs. Simply put, in order to understand the South as a cultural entity that
continues to have relevance today, I return to the formative moment in which southern literature and the southern economy intersected to shape an identifiably discrete society.

The first element of the South’s economic history that delineates the inherently global and ideologically contradictory nature of southern literature is also the most defining characteristic: slavery. Foremost, the existence of slavery is what set the region apart from the rest of the nation politically and socially, especially after the beginning of the nineteenth century when it was largely abolished in northern states.8 Proslavery stances became a rallying point for white southerners in the antebellum period, especially beginning in the 1830s. In his 1983 book, *Tell About the South*, Fred Hobson writes, “The American South was forced on the defensive in the 1820s and 30s because of its peculiar institution, Negro slavery, and it has been on the defensive ever since, at least until very recently” (9). Yet, that defensiveness is equal parts a championing of the “traditional” institutions that defined the South and what C. Van Woodward dubbed the “burden” of southern history, or the inherent guilt inherited by every (white) southerner stemming from the wide-scale adoption and perpetuation of a horrific system of human bondage.9

As a marker of regional identity, slavery pulls forth both the racist ideologies that perpetuated it and the immorality inherent in a system that is, as Saidiya Hartman frames it, equal parts “shocking spectacle” and “the terror of the mundane and quotidian” (*Scenes of Subjection* 4). Slavery in the southern United States also taps into the basic functioning of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century capitalism. Paul Gilroy off-handedly calls plantation

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9 See *The Burden of Southern History* (1960).
agriculture “capitalism with its clothes off” in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), in which slavery becomes the most basic, unadulterated version of economic exploitation. And Eric Williams claims in *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) that a racialized system of slavery arose from a need for cheap labor on plantations in the Americas: “… the free laborers necessary to cultivate the staple crops of sugar, tobacco, and cotton in the New World could not have been supplied in quantities adequate to large-scale production. Slavery was necessary for this . . .” (6). A series of historians in the twentieth century have taken up Williams’s claim to discuss the capitalist nature of Atlantic slavery. In their controversial study, *Time on the Cross* (1974), Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman challenged the traditional assumption that slavery was unprofitable and economically backward. Following the idea that plantations must harness large-scale farming and labor organization in order to operate profitably, James Oakes similarly argues in *Slavery and Freedom* (1990) that slavery in the southern United States was a response to the demands for large quantities of goods required by global capitalist markets. In this way, plantations operate like factories, utilizing a system of large-scale, non-skilled labor to produce mass quantities of a particular product. Oakes comments, “Clearly the demand for slaves grew in complex relation to the rising demand for consumer goods. Just as clearly, consumer demand was itself a product of a fundamental transformation of western society” (52). African slavery, then, responded to and, in turn, reinforced an imperative to create a labor system devoted to the mass production of exportable goods. Although they also align the existence of slavery in the United States and elsewhere with capitalist modes of production and exchange, Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese are careful not to diminish the personal and individual toll of any slave system. In a direct response to
Time on the Cross, they write: “By casting the history of slavery so overwhelmingly as a matter of economics, Fogel and Engerman obscure essential realities of plantation life. Within the plantation, all fundamental economic relations became personal relations” (Fruits of Merchant Capital 132).

In this sense, slavery is at the core of my study, both in the way the system functioned in the nineteenth-century economy, but also in the impact it had on individual lives. In fact, the division set up by the Genoveses between slavery as “a matter of economics” versus “the realities of plantation life” delineates the consistent duality I posit is at the heart of representations of the South, particularly during the formative antebellum period. “The realities of plantation life” are the hierarchal communities, violence, and oppression inherent in the bondage of human beings and the everyday functioning of the social system on individual plantations. This is the “Old South” of Tara and the Agrarians. Slavery as a “matter of economics” indicates the international networks of trade and commerce that the system made possible, in other words, the broader economic networks of the plantation system as a whole. In order to represent the South, antebellum authors had to deal with these two levels and the ideological investments both entailed. Therefore, the work of southern authors would have to bring a form of modern capitalism together with social structures modeled on pre-capitalist systems.

To understand how a society—and more important, a literature—could maintain these two impulses, it is important to also understand the economic context that gave shape to such a seemingly contradictory system. Eugene Genovese points out in The Slaveholders’ Dilemma (1992) that the antebellum South was fueled by two ideological
drives: a desire for individual freedom and material progress, and the maintenance of a slave and plantation system that was seemingly aligned with older, regressive economic and social structures. This dilemma, I suggest, arises directly from the functioning of the plantation economy that formed the basis for the South’s growth during the antebellum period. In order to thrive, a plantation economy—in the United States or elsewhere—requires: 1.) a connection to outside markets for the sale of staple crops grown on farms and plantations; and 2.) large-scale, organized farming to maximize the amount of crops that can be harvested for sale. In its annual pattern of operation, a plantation in the southern United States during the early part of the nineteenth century would normally cultivate a single crop (tobacco, rice, sugar, and of course, cotton), harvest that crop, then send it to a nearby city for sale to a merchant, who would then sell that harvest with more from other plantations to another merchant, usually in the northern states or Europe. Manufacturers in the North and Europe then used those agricultural staples to produce manufactured goods, which would then be exported to a global market and sold to the urban trade centers in the South, who would then sell those goods to the plantations (Reid and Womack; Wright, Political Economy 55-62, 87-8).

These material and economic connections sustained by the plantation South indicate the global nature of the region and also draw attention to the transatlantic nature of political economy in the antebellum South. A nineteenth-century southern plantation was automatically tapped into global free markets, and those profiting from the South’s plantation system were invested in the theories of liberal capitalism that promoted such an arrangement. “Liberal capitalism” in this sense means a system that endorses the idea that social and political freedom is inherently tied to economic freedom. In turn, liberal
capitalism promotes a form of *laissez-faire* economics driven by free markets and private property, as articulated by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). According to Laurence Shore, Smith’s theories became “public grammar” by the nineteenth century, and “his book built the ideological foundation of political economy” (*Southern Capitalists* 5). Southerners frequently read and referred to eighteenth-century philosophers, not only Smith, but also Thomas Malthus, John Locke, or David Ricardo (O’Brien 877-81). In terms of the southern economy and the influence of liberal capitalist theories, the act of establishing a plantation requires that the system and those participating in it be invested in individual opportunism in an open field of competition. “‘Plantership,’” Max Edelson writes in his study of colonial South Carolina, “began as a new-world calling that stressed individual character over inherited rank as the key to acquiring land, wealth, and independence” (*Plantation Enterprise* 7-8). If a man wanted to establish his own plantation and become wealthy in the southern United States, according to this ideology, all he had to do was obtain some land and cultivate it through hard work. Once an individual capitalizes on that industry, then he may sell his crops on a free market to make a profit from his labors.

Despite typical characterizations of the antebellum South as economically backward and regionally isolated, the South’s plantation economy spurred territorial and economic growth to a massive extent. Between 1810 and 1860, the Southwest—what is now the South or Southeast—was the fastest-growing section of the country, with settlers from the east pouring into the western territories of Alabama and Mississippi, then later Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas. And in the decades leading up to the Civil War, the transatlantic cotton trade and slave property made the South one of the wealthiest areas in
the nation (North 190-8).

Yet, the large-scale farming operations demanded by such an arrangement conflicts morally and logically with the liberal capitalist philosophy. Shore observes, [W]hen proslavery leaders emphasized planters’ leisure and refinement, they extolled the qualities central to classical political economy. . . . The ‘peculiar institution,’ as Southerners called slavery, enabled planters to enjoy leisure that only Northern manufacturing/mercantile capitalists enjoyed. Ultimately, the peculiar institution supposedly received political economy’s legitimation because of the peculiar advantages it afforded capitalists in a rural society. (10)

This sort of argumentation demonstrates a “pick and choose” approach on the part of white, proslavery southerners when it came to matters of political economy. For to embrace the philosophies of liberal capitalism meant also embracing its fundamental tenets, individual freedom and free labor, which could not exist in a slaveholding society. Most white southerners at the time, whether they actually owned slaves or not, were invested in the continuance of a slavery-based economic and social system. Therefore, to abolish slavery according to the principles of individual freedom would also mean dissolving a primary source of wealth and private property, and thus undermining the system that kept slaveholders wealthy in the first place. Dubbing the phenomenon the “Adam Smith problem,” Shore writes, “Herein lay a vital point of danger to the South: the slaveholder could not be an ideal economic man. He would keep himself and his society wedded to a condition of economic and social backwardness” (8). On these terms, economic progress and modernization promoted by liberal capitalism do not always translate into the form of liberalism that facilitates universal freedom and social progress.
As Genovese puts it, “In this case the tensions, ambiguities, and quarrels [in the antebellum South] had a special root and quality that derived from a need to reconcile slavery with both freedom and progress” (*The Slaveholders’ Dilemma* 27)

The task of southern literature in representing the region during this formative moment, then, was to marry the impulses of liberal capitalism and the global free market that drove the economy with the pre-capitalist, socially regressive social organization that made that economy possible and profitable. Representations of the South written before the Civil War strove to embody the realities of plantation life that defined southern culture—including the slave system—along with the modern economic theories that championed individual freedom. As Lewis P. Simpson observes in *The Dispossessed Garden* (1975), “. . . [antebellum southern literature] involves a struggle to accommodate the pastoral mode to the antipastoral novelty of the South as expressed by the institution of African chattel slavery” (39). In negotiating a balance between two ideological stances so seemingly at variance, southern authors drew from the contemporaneous literary forms and genres that were popular in the early nineteenth-century transatlantic literary culture.

**Antebellum Literature and the New Economic Criticism**

Literary studies of the South before the Civil War have embraced one historical aspect of antebellum society while generally ignoring the other. The result is a version of the old South that adopts the image of the plantation and its attendant social and racial organization, but pushes aside the modern capitalist networks that connected the plantation to a globalized world. In many ways this interpretation echoes Thomas Jefferson’s early projections for the region in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), in
which he called for a self-sufficient, agrarian society in the South. “The political economies of Europe have established it as a principle that every state should endeavor to manufacture for itself . . . ,” he writes, “But we have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman. . . . While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff” (165-6). This early vision for the South as peculiarly agrarian and contained in the space of the plantation has shaped the way in which critics have read antebellum literature. Scholars ranging from early critics such as Jay Hubbell, Simpson, or Rubin, to more recent critics like Scott Romine, Susan Tracy or John L. Hare, largely confine their interpretations of southern literature to the historical romances popularized by writers like William Gilmore Simms or Nathaniel Beverly Tucker.10 These readings often limit southern culture to the site of the single, self-sufficient plantation of Jefferson’s imagining. And in each, southern fiction alternately presents a “pastoral,” conservative, or anti-modern version of the South and its plantation culture, despite the fact that some scholars even go so far as to recognize the more modern influences exerted on the South at the time.11

In many ways, this lopsided view of southern literature makes sense, considering that the historical framework used to interpret these texts was constructed primarily after

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10 See Hubbell, The South in American Literature, 1607-1900 (1954); Simpson, The Dispossessed Garden; Richie Devon Watson, Jr., The Cavalier in Virginia Fiction (1985); Susan Tracy, In the Master’s Eye (1995); Michael Kreyling, Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative (1987); John Grammer, Pastoral and Politics in the Old South (1996); Scott Romine, Narrative Forms of Southern Community (1999); and John L. Hare, Will the Circle Be Unbroken? (2002). Exceptions include, as always, Jones’s book, and also the essay collection edited by Susan Donaldson and Anne Goodwyn-Jones, Haunted Bodies (1997).

11 Rubin’s study, The Edge of the Swamp, highlights the investment in free market capitalism that pervaded the South, dubbing it the “plantation ideal,” or a middle-class aspiration to attain the position of gentleman planter. The issue with Rubin’s study, however, is his focus on William Gilmore Simms to the exclusion of many other authors, and further, his reversion to the regionalism that defines so many studies of the South. Without referencing the larger international networks that shaped the “plantation ideal,” Rubin’s analysis approaches the South as a self-contained entity similar to Jefferson’s vision in 1785. Relating the South to the western frontier and James Fenimore Cooper is as geographically distant as the book gets.
the Civil War, when the region was struggling economically. With this context, the
plantation is divested of its networks of international trade or the influence of European
theories of political economy on its prominent authors. Instead, we are left with the
plantation myth, the single, self-sufficient plantation standing outside of time and
governed by the structures of slavery and the remaining vestiges of a pre-capitalist social
order. According to the entry in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (2006), the
plantation myth

emphasizes the pre-capitalistic and essentially feudal characteristics of the
plantation, with specific links to an English Cavalier tradition . . . In this context,
the plantation develops primarily as a social or cultural institution rather than an
economic one. Money, then, economic self-interest, and capitalistic gain are
secondary to a primitive, premodern desire for honor, distinction, and deference.
(Pyron 139)

The plantation myth, by this definition, is the governing force of most literary criticism
aimed at antebellum fiction. These types of interpretations limit the view of the South to
the framework of a single plantation and highlight slavery or class relations as the
paradigm by which antebellum fiction can be understood.

My study applies a broader understanding of the southern plantation system that
incorporates its role in the nineteenth-century global economy as well as the intellectual
and literary influences of European authors. In this sense, I draw from economic history,
contemporaneous patterns of literary form and genre, material contexts, and in-depth
research into the biographies of southern authors in order to shift the view of southern
culture through a new interpretation of its early literature. My main goal, then, is not
merely the recuperation of understudied texts, nor is it a defense of the relative quality of the literature. Instead, my aim is to define the other side of the plantation myth, and in so doing, establish a new understanding of the South’s cultural role in national and international development.

Through my reliance on a methodology that draws from multiple bases of interpretation (historical, economic, literary, biographical), my study aligns itself with the New Economic Criticism, in which critics read literature and literary production in light of how it is informed by economic practices. A forerunner of the field, Marc Shell, showed the ways in which patterns of literary thought and language paralleled the structures of economic exchange.12 In 1999, Martha Woodmansee and Mark Osteen published the edited collection that touched off a more official version of the subfield, *The New Economic Criticism*, which contains essays on literature ranging from economic exchange in Defoe’s work, to analysis of economic language in F. Scott Fitzgerald. More recently, Mary Poovey’s *Genres of the Credit Economy* (2008) traces economic writing in nineteenth-century Britain as an emerging literary genre separate from fiction. In the past few years, more and more studies incorporating the basic concepts of the New Economic Criticism have been published.13 These studies draw from economic history, psychoanalysis, biography, and theories of genre and literary form to discuss the ways in which economics shapes and influences literary development.

My approach also takes up the effort of southern literary studies in the past decade

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to pull the South from its regional confines. As Barbara Ladd puts it in her summary of the state of the field in 2005, “The present horizon in United States southern studies is the question of how we are to reimagine the or a South or multiple Souths to take full measure of the significance of alternative memories, histories, and modes of cultural expression” (1633). In terms of economic criticism, Melanie Benson’s book *Disturbing Calculations* discusses twentieth-century southern literature in light of the South’s historical involvement in slavery, colonialism, and globalization. Similarly, the essays in the edited collection, *South to a New Place* (2002), offer new interpretations of the southern region that disrupt the assumed stability of geographic boundaries and the reflexive definition of the South that was based on the plantation myth. And the recent Global South movement aims to position the South and southern literature in transnational or transatlantic studies. The collection, *Look Away!* (2005), presents a series of essays that extend the term “South” to Latin and South America, and in turn, rethink the functioning of the South in global contexts. In their introduction to a special issue of *American Literature* in 2006, “Global Contexts, Local Literatures: The New Southern Studies,” Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer write that the aim of this shift in southern studies is “to refer to a two-way process: the dimensions of the global refer to the simultaneously to the importation of the world into the South and to the exportation of the South into the world” (679). Jennifer Rae Greeson’s book, *Our South* (2010), takes up these questions and applies them specifically to representations of the early South and its function in early U. S. nationalism.

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14 For more on the Global South, see also *Transatlantic Exchanges: the American South in Europe-Europe in the American South* (2007), edited by Richard Gray and Waldemar Zacharasiewicz.
My study builds upon this criticism to posit that antebellum southern literature—which has normally been viewed as emerging from an isolated province by literary scholars—was an integral component of international literary development during the nineteenth-century. My methodology focuses on what these authors were reading, primary documents, and the patterns of historical literary networks. In this light, Southern fiction can be read as a direct response to the popular literary forms and genres that characterized the transatlantic print public, a fact that highlights the necessarily transatlantic and comparative nature of my study. In my readings of antebellum novels and short stories, I reference British authors who form the core of the early nineteenth-century literary canon to understand how southern authors adapted literary form to represent the ideological tensions between free market capitalism and the pre-capitalist structures of the plantation that characterized the South at the time. Just as the southern economy relied on transatlantic trade networks, southern authors drew from eighteenth-century European political economists and popular British novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries whose work shaped the development of southern literature (O’Brien 742-77). In this sense, I use the broader patterns of the southern economy to read the networks of southern literary form.

If read against the transatlantic connections maintained by the antebellum southern economy, fiction of the antebellum South emerges as a literature shaped by modern economic forces and industrialization. Such a reading corresponds to the economic theories and policies championed by many prominent southern intellectuals and authors. In the prospectus for his *Commercial Review of the South and West* (1846-
the southern political economist and journalist James D. B. DeBow declares that periodical endeavors in the South up until that point had been purely literary in aim, and for the most part, short-lived and seldom read. The obvious exception, to which DeBow alludes obliquely, is the *Southern Literary Messenger*. The problem with this approach, DeBow argues, is that literature and artistic production are not the primary concerns of the southern and southwestern states. Instead, they are too bound up with “practical” matters to sustain a literary field. “Ploughshares come before philosophy,” DeBow declares (“Position” 3). For a periodical to be successful in the South, it must address the practical, or better put, economic and commercial concerns of its readers as much or more than literary or artistic matters.

DeBow’s assessment of the expectations of southern readers presents a prevailing view among southern intellectuals and authors. As Drew Gilpin Faust demonstrates in her study of intellectuals in the antebellum South, *A Sacred Circle* (1977), “Industry promised to provide a means of achieving Southern economic, and consequently, intellectual and spiritual independence” (102). To this end, industry and economic modernization could serve the ends of cultural and artistic development in the region. Although the South was invested in slavery and the seemingly archaic social order of the plantation, it was equally shaped by commercial enterprise, the growth of western territories, the shift of international markets, and a desire for modernization.

Against this backdrop, I read antebellum southern fiction as not acting against the capitalist systems of the nineteenth century, but as working with them. Not only do I read the development of particular literary forms as evolving in conjunction with important

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15 More commonly known as *DeBow’s Review.*
economic shifts and moments (the Industrial Revolution, the expansion of the United States into the West), but I read southern authors’ adoption of certain forms as a method of addressing the dueling ideologies that sustain the southern plantation system. In terms of political theory and history, the South’s reliance on the free market and individual economic mobility is at odds with its preservation of slavery and rigid social organization on the plantation. Fiction, however, presents a way of imagining another version of the South. Adapting certain literary conventions and genres enables fiction writers to represent the South in such a way that the region is both an embodiment of liberal capitalist ideologies and a bastion of pre-capitalist social mores and slavery. In the fiction of the antebellum South, the language of modern capitalism is used to justify the continued existence of pre-capitalist social and economic structures. Literary form, then, becomes a way for southerners to negotiate that ideological pull and represent a cohesive vision of the South that was anything but cohesive.

The Shape of the Project

Two major elements shape the structure of this project and its focus. The first is the emphasis on literary form, specifically fictional and novelistic form, in which each chapter corresponds to an identifiable form or genre. While the South produced a number of poets and poetical works, I limit my study to fiction in order to understand how narrative translates the impulses of the southern economy. Further, my focus on fiction situates the South in the context of general nineteenth-century literary culture. Although poetry retained an important role in nineteenth-century reading culture, the novel

16 For a quick overview of antebellum southern poetry, see O’Brien, Conjectures of Order, 706-42.
achieved increasing popularity and importance during the mid-century, including in the South (O’Brien 742-3). And with the proliferation of periodicals in the United States, short stories and serialized novels dominated the material of the nineteenth-century reading public.

The second element is a series of historical and economic moments that form the backdrop for the works I discuss. Because much of my study relies on an understanding of antebellum literature in its particular historical and economic context, these moments are critical in interpreting the effects of the economy on authors’ perception of the South, the American and transatlantic political scene, and literary trends. Events include the Industrial Revolution beginning in the late eighteenth century and lasting up through the mid-nineteenth century; Indian Removal in the United States and the resulting expansion into western territories; the Banking Panic of 1837; and the political and sectional turmoil of the 1850s, including, but not limited to, the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1850), the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), and the *Dred Scott* decision (1857).

The Banking Panic of 1837 in particular forms the crux of my interpretation of antebellum southern fiction as related to the global economy. Although most literary critics and historians cite the 1850s as the crucial decade for understanding the political and economic differences that lay at the heart of the conflicts leading to the Civil War, I argue that the 1837 panic was even more important in terms of the long-lasting social effects of the plantation economy. This is the event that led many plantation owners to reconsider the economic practices that led to the destitution of farms and mercantile firms in the South. In addition, 1837 marked an era in which the site of U.S. territorial and
economic expansion moved from the Southwest—or the South as we now know it—to the far West. That trend made the existence of slavery in the new territories and debates over its abolition that much more important. In turn, the southern social and economic systems that formed the basis for regional identity were more frequently called into question. These issues are repeatedly addressed in the fiction representing the South, in which authors attempt to define the region’s role in a global economy and an international community. Shifting the moment of sectional division and regional identity crises from the 1850s to 1837 gives us a more complete understanding of the development of regional culture and literature as part of U.S. national development and international relations.

I begin my study with the most frequently read works from the antebellum South. Chapter One, “‘The Cavalier and the Economist’: The Southern Historical Romance,” focuses on works of historical romance in the vein of Sir Walter Scott that are set on plantations in the South. Novels such as John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Horse-Shoe Robinson* (1835) and William Gilmore Simms’s *Woodcraft* (1854) use the genre to re-write southern history within the context of nineteenth-century capitalism. By setting their novels during the Revolutionary Era and featuring characters who are practical, self-sufficient frontiersmen, Simms and Kennedy write into existence a version of American history that celebrates the liberal capitalist tendencies of the plantation economy but still adheres to ideas of feudal honor and racial privilege represented by the single plantation community.

17 Alasdair Roberts’s *America’s First Great Depression: Economic Crisis and Political Disorder after the Panic of 1837* (2012) describes the effects of the bank panic on the American economy and American life.
Chapter Two, “Sketching the 1830s Cotton Boom: Charles Dickens and Southwestern Humor,” discusses the sketch form in relation to the international cotton trade, treating in particular Charles Dickens’s first book, *Sketches By Boz* (1836), Johnson Jones Hooper’s *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (1845), and Joseph Glover Baldwin’s *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1853). All three use the humorous sketch to represent the effects of cotton demand and industrialization in the United States and Britain. The sketch, this chapter argues, functions as an ideal form in which to depict rapid cultural change due to economic growth and industrialization, without wholly endorsing or wholly criticizing that change.

Chapter Three, “The Proslavery Social Problem Novel: Narratives of Reform in the Plantation South,” again highlights the transatlantic nature of the antebellum economy and examines how southern authors used the genre of the industrial reform novel established by British authors such as Elizabeth Gaskell to critique the southern economy, and particularly the slave system. George Tucker’s *The Valley of Shenandoah* (1824) and Maria McIntosh’s *The Lofty and the Lowly* (1852) both depict plantation life and slavery in a critical light by using the vocabulary of social reform employed in British novels. A survey of their nonfiction writings, such as Tucker’s works on political economy and McIntosh’s work on women’s domestic economies, reveals that while both authors are often designated as proslavery apologists, each recognized that a plantation system reliant on slave labor was not economically sustainable. In my discussion of McIntosh’s novel, I trace how her use of parallel settings (the plantation and the northern factory) mirrors that of Elizabeth Gaskell’s novel *North and South* (1854) to criticize the
inhumanity of plantation slavery and offer reforms to the system without proposing its outright abolition.

Chapter Four, “‘Money alone will carry you’: Free Labor and the Free Market in African-American Narratives,” outlines how a selection of slave narratives—including that of Henry Bibb, Frederick Douglass, James Pennington, and Harriet Jacobs—and Martin Delany’s novel, *Blake* (1859-62), depict slavery in light of labor relations and economic exchange. The most frequent analysis of nineteenth-century texts by black authors is, naturally, to read them in light of critical race theory, as in Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection* or Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*. However, in many ways this chapter takes its cue from Kenneth Warren’s recent book, *What Was African American Literature?* (2011), in thinking of African-American literature published during the nineteenth century as less about the desire to forge a positive racial identity and more as a response to economic practices. In this light, I read Delany’s novel and the slave narratives first as reflections on slavery as a structure of labor, then as a system of racial oppression. In each, the authors depict the institution of slavery as equally one of labor organization and an enforcement of racial hierarchies. Yet for both the nonfictional narratives and the novel, the figures featured in the works achieve freedom from bondage by taking advantage of their position as laborers in the plantation economy to earn their freedom, escape from the South, or forge large-scale revolt through labor organization, as in the case of Delany’s novel.

Finally, the Conclusion, “Postbellum Economic Decline and New Orleans Regionalism,” traces the lasting influence of economic models on literature to examine how fiction written in the South after the Civil War continued the paradigms produced
during the antebellum period. I use New Orleans regional writing as a case study and argue that the short fiction of George Washington Cable and Grace King, both popular authors of New Orleans-based regional fiction after the war, represented the dual nature of the plantation economy after its prominence had been replaced by western railroads and industrialization. By ending with literature written after the Civil War, my project demonstrates that the fictional reflections on the plantation economy were not of a particular or passing moment isolated to the antebellum period, but reveal the centrality of economic models to imaginative writing of the South across time periods.

And it is in this long-term trajectory of southern literature that my study finds its ultimate aim. In the same way that I take up New Orleans regional writing as a case for the continued importance of the South’s antebellum economy in its effect on cultural representations of the region, I present antebellum fiction of the South as a unique example of the way in which a dominant economic and social system can permanently shape the literature and cultural significance of a particular place. In this sense, the goal of this study is not only to place the fiction of the antebellum period in conversation with international and national literary and economic trends, but also to create a line of continuity between past representations of the South and those that continue to circulate today. Thus, the South presented in these works finds resonance in the South of the Agrarians or Gone With the Wind, in which the plantation finds multiple cultural meanings, but nonetheless forms the core of our conception of a region that remains a distinct entity in the national and international imagination.
CHAPTER ONE

The Cavalier and the Economist: The Southern Historical Romance

In 1856, William Gilmore Simms, often dubbed the “poet laureate” of the antebellum South, embarked on a lecture tour in New York state. Although Simms was a nationally known novelist, poet, and essayist, the South Carolina native was more frequently called upon to act as a general defender for the southern way of life (or plantation slavery) in the decade leading up to the Civil War. The lecture, “South Carolina in the Revolution,” was prompted by an 1856 speech given in Congress by Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts called “The Crime Against Kansas.” In it, Sumner attacked the South, and specifically the senator from South Carolina, for supporting slavery and its extension into the West. Sumner implied that the state’s present degeneration could be traced to the Revolutionary War, declaring, “Were the whole history of South Carolina blotted out of existence . . . civilization might lose — I do not say how little; but surely less than it has already gained by the example of Kansas” (qtd. in Donald, Charles Sumner 288-91). “His remarks,” Miriam Shillingsburg writes, “made that state out to be unpatriotic and un-American, not only in 1856, but at least as far back as the Revolutionary War” (183-8). It was in response to this defamation of the southern state’s history that Simms embarked on his lecture circuit aimed at setting the historical record straight.

Simms’s 1856 lecture tour reveals a moment directly before the Civil War in which southern intellectuals’ presentation of history becomes an act of self-definition. In speaking to a primarily northern audience on a topic of common American history,
Simms situates the South and southern history in the larger narrative of the United States’ development. For conservative southerners like Simms who viewed abolitionism as an attack on southern institutions, this was also a moment to defend the “traditional” structures and values represented by the South: communal social organization; a chivalric code of honor; an emphasis on family; and most importantly, the institution of slavery.

Despite their praise of the South’s supposed devotion to such qualities, many conservatives like Simms also wished for the South to maintain its viability as an economic and political power, which meant promoting the South as an active participant in the nineteenth-century global economy. Drew Gilpin Faust observes, “Industry promised to provide a means of achieving Southern economic, and consequently, intellectual and spiritual independence. Through carefully monitored social change, the men of mind hoped to preserve the old values and ethos of Southern life” (Sacred 102).

In the context of 1850s sectional tension, and as the quarrel between Simms and Sumner reveals, how history was told became a way of defining and defending a place and people.

The defense of South Carolina’s history in Simms’s lecture maintains the ideals represented by southern society (honor, communal values, tradition, slavery) and also situates the South in American economic development. He notes that as an area that engaged in active trade and did not compete with Britain in manufacturing—unlike the northern colonies—South Carolina had no economic incentive to separate from Britain. The colony participated “for more sacred and national purposes,” or for ideological reasons (527). In this representation, southerners are not motivated by commerce or economic gain, but an investment in a community, honor, and a nation. Nevertheless,
Simms is also careful to note that the South Carolina revolutionaries were not independently wealthy plantation aristocrats or merchants of the upper class. Instead, they were “[t]he native agricultural population; the native mechanics; the native lawyers and professions, mostly” (526, Simms’s emphasis). These men represent the socially mobile middle class, the artisans and laborers who contribute to economic modernization and industrialization in the South.

The lecture’s narrative of the southern colonies during the Revolutionary Era creates a lineage for the South that justifies the structures of antebellum southern society. As Simms puts it in the lecture, by denigrating South Carolina’s history, critics of the South rob the region and the nation of the “monuments by which future generations are to be taught becoming lessons & examples” (523). In the defense of the South represented by Simms’s 1856 speech, conservative southerners like Simms are able to maintain the traditional structures of southern society while also tapping into a narrative of self-sufficiency in the nineteenth-century free market economy. Through this narrative, Simms blends the ideals of self-sufficient agriculture as articulated by early southern intellectuals (and models) such as Jefferson, but adapts them to the current modes of mid-nineteenth-century capitalism. That image of the South, then, is one to be passed along to “future generations.”

Simms’s careful presentation of history was not limited to his nonfiction. The South Carolina native was also a prolific author of one of the most popular novelistic genres during the nineteenth century: the historical romance. Although historical

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18 The lecture reiterates many of the points made in Simms’s earlier histories of South Carolina, *The History of South Carolina* (1840) and *South Carolina in the Revolutionary War* (1853).
romances written by southerners during the antebellum period are typically viewed in critical circles as defenses of the traditional structures of the Old South and inferior to their northern counterparts, the novels evince the same engagement with the conflicting structures of the plantation economy through historical representation represented by Simms’s lecture. In particular, Simms’s 1854 novel, *Woodcraft; Or, Hawks About the Dovecote*, adapts the conventions of the genre to reimagine a southern historical lineage. Set after the Revolutionary War, the novel incorporates two heroes that represent the aristocratic vision of the Old South and the tenets of free market capitalism. The novel also includes the adventure plot and the traditional marriage ending of the historical romance genre, which has led many of its critics to categorize it as a fairly unoriginal plantation romance that uncritically defends the southern slave system. However, I argue that these conventions project a vision of southern society that at once defends its institutions in the climate of the 1850s, but also displays the South as a participant in nineteenth-century capitalism. In this sense, rather than upholding a standard vision of southern plantation nostalgia, *Woodcraft* is a “revision” of southern history that corresponds to the dual elements of the southern economy.

Yet, novels from the 1850s by southern conservatives like Simms differentiated themselves greatly from those of earlier decades. Before the nation had reached a sectional crisis, authors like James Fenimore Cooper were producing historical romances to cast light on American national development. Southern authors were no different. The historical romances of the 1830s such as John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Horse-Shoe Robinson; Or, A Tale of the Tory Ascendency* (1835) reveal the structures of the antebellum economy at the moment of the Revolutionary War through the use of dual
heroes and the traditional adventure and marriage plot. As another of the premier novelists of the antebellum South and a southern politician, Kennedy was conscious of the same pull between traditional southern institutions and modern capitalist systems Simms would represent in *Woodcraft*. Yet, *Horse-Shoe Robinson* has none of the imperatives of Simms’s later novel. With the ambiguous fate of his middle-class, capitalist hero, Kennedy’s rendering of southern history leaves the progress of southern capitalism and the promise of economic mobility unresolved.

This chapter presents a sampling of the southern historical romance from its initial popularity in the 1830s up through the 1850s. By doing so, I reveal the ways in which antebellum fiction writers adapted the genre of the historical romance to reframe southern history in such a way that corresponds with the complicated ideological pulls of the southern economy. I begin with a discussion of the historical romance genre and southern literary studies. In order to understand the readings and mis-readings of antebellum literature from the past century and a half, I contend that we must first examine the nature of historical narrative and the function of the historical romance. I then discuss Kennedy’s *Horse-Shoe Robinson* and argue that while it presents the dual elements of the southern economy, the novel ultimately ends with a tepid depiction of economic modernization and social mobility in a free market economy. Finally, I conclude with an extended section on William Gilmore Simms. Beginning with his novels *The Partisan* (1835) and *The Yemassee* (1835), then reading Simms’s writings on fiction and the southern economy in the 1840s and 50s, I argue that *Woodcraft* rewrites the image of the South to correspond to ideals of economic development and social mobility championed by advocates of free market capitalism. However, the novel still maintains the image of
the South as a traditional, communal society governed by a chivalric code of honor. Instead of nostalgic emblems of a fading order, we can read these southern historical romances as attempts on the part of southern intellectuals to use literary genre as a method of resolving the ideological conflict between seemingly pre-capitalist visions of the antebellum South and the drive toward relevance in the context of the mid nineteenth-century global economy.

**The Historical Romance Tradition and Southern Literary Criticism**

But for the Sir Walter disease, the character of the Southerner—or Southron, according to Sir Walter’s stanchier way of phrasing it—would be wholly modern, in place of modern and mediaeval mixed, and the South would be fully a generation further advanced than it is.

- Mark Twain, “Enchantments and Enchanters” in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), 284-5

Critics may cavil and sophisticates may yawn, but the historical romance (in one form or another) goes on forever.

- Alexander Cowie, introduction to the 1937 edition of William Gilmore Simms’s *The Yemassee*, v

Before I begin a discussion of individual novels and their negotiation of the southern economy through history, it would be helpful to outline the role that the historical romance has played in southern literary studies more generally, and how the historical romance functions as a generic method of revising the narrative of southern history. My choice to begin this study with a chapter on the historical romances of John Pendleton Kennedy and William Gilmore Simms is a pointed one. The novels of Kennedy and Simms have become the representative texts for literature of the U.S. South
before the Civil War. Though both are largely forgotten now outside of southern studies circles, during the nineteenth century and in later critical studies of the South, their novels were singularities coming out of a region that was largely thought to be devoid of a literary culture. These men were members of the representative class of southern intellectuals that aligned itself with the upper-class plantation owners, businessmen, and politicians in the South. Kennedy and especially Simms also achieved more far-reaching acclaim as authors of fiction. Up through the 1840s, William Gilmore Simms was nationally known not just as a southern author, but as one of the foremost American authors (Guilds 107).

My focus on the historical romance genre also reflects the standard critical classification of antebellum southern fiction. Critical studies of antebellum literature often mimic the famous rant by Mark Twain with their casual references to southern fiction patterning itself after the “Sir Walter Scott novel” without a more thorough examination of what that term actually entails. The effect is to cast the pall of “romanticization” over the novels’ representation of the South, rather than identifying their true generic origin in the British historical romance. “The style,” Michael Kreyling points out in *Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative* (1987), “was [viewed as] simply

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19 Edgar Allan Poe and Frederick Douglass could also be included in this list. However, both men are usually represented by literary critics as operating outside of the dominant structures of white, southern antebellum society: Poe as a Gothic, somewhat anti-establishment figure, Douglass as an abolitionist and former slave. Yet, as I argue in my final chapter, Douglass can also be read as operating in response to—and in conjunction with—dominant economic structures in his autobiographical narratives and his nonfiction. And Coleman Hutchison also reads Poe, and specifically his work with the *Southern Literary Messenger*, as upholding an early form of southern nationalist discourse (*Apples and Ashes*, Chapter 1).

and lazily borrowed from Scott with a few unimaginative changes to fit the American locale” (9). To counteract that critical trend, critics like Kreyling have made efforts in the past few decades to reach beyond that dismissive label. For example, Kreyling shifts the focus to narrative form as a way of understanding the function of the southern heroic figure, while C. Hugh Holman and Mary Ann Wimsatt more carefully examine the influence of the historical romance through their readings of Simms.\(^{21}\) In *Unwelcome Voices*, Paul C. Jones identifies several structures of antebellum historical romance using the theories of Northrop Frye and Georg Lukacs, but focuses on even more obscure authors who wrote against the status quo in the antebellum South.

The conservatism of southern authors like Kennedy and Simms and their adherence to generic conventions nonetheless present a barrier for many critics. Most view the novels as romanticized versions of southern society or simple promotions of slavery. Kreyling at one point asserts, “Southern heroic narrative . . . aims ultimately at the abolition of history and change” (*Figures* 19). Likewise, while Susan Tracy takes care to differentiate Scott’s novels from those of antebellum southerners in her thorough overview of conservative antebellum fiction, *In the Master’s Eye* (1993), the basic thesis of her book subsumes any nuanced understanding of the novels under the racist and sexist impulses of the authors.\(^{22}\) According to Tracy, “Planters are envisioned as the defenders of the traditional, aristocratic, patriarchal order from outside invasion and from the chaos of civil war caused by ambitious and criminal middle-class and poor-white men” (39).

I will not deny the attempts of conservative southern authors to promote slavery

\(^{21}\) See Holman, *Roots* and Wimsatt, *Major Fiction.*

\(^{22}\) The fact that white, male southern authors of the antebellum period were racist and adhered to a patriarchal worldview, frankly, should not come as a surprise to anyone. Yet, it comprises the majority of Tracy’s study.
and the continuance of aristocratic southern values in their novels, but I would suggest that reducing an understanding of the literature on these terms discounts the cultural work that the historical romance performed in the antebellum South. In *Rethinking the South* (1988), Michael O’Brien observes that “[i]n the South, the grievances of politics, slavery, and trade, the flux that preconditioned Romanticism, created the case for provincial self-justification” (*Rethinking* 51). And often the southern historical romances portray the South as “a provincial culture anxious to invent and legitimate itself” through their defense of slavery and plantation social organization (*Rethinking* 50).

However, the sort of categorization demonstrated by the majority of critics belies the complicated issues raised by the genre of the “historical romance.” Southern authors (and their northern counterparts) admitted Scott as an obvious influence on their work, but that influence was not as simple as following a conventional formula. As Michael Davitt Bell demonstrates in *The Development of American Romance* (1980), American authors during the nineteenth century took pains to define the term and the genre according to standards that were particular to the United States. Not only did this mean adapting the romance or romantic elements to American topics and settings, but it entailed using the term to rethink the relationship between fiction, imagination, and reality: “. . . romance in America was less a genre than a set of attitudes or problems whose recurrence in the work of some of our best fiction writers before the Civil War constitutes something like a tradition—a tradition at once formal and intellectual” (Bell 148). Novelists such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville frequently wrote on the topic of romance and used their own fiction to examine and adapt

23 And more extensively in *Conjectures of Order* (2004).
the forms popularized by Europeans authors. To borrow from Bell, “The story of British influence on American fiction is fascinating and important, but it is not the whole story. What seems even more fascinating . . . is the story of how British models were transformed, transmuted, or regenerated by American conditions” (4). Limiting a description of antebellum fiction to the “Scott novel” moniker or its desperate need to arrest change over-simplifies—and I would argue, undervalues—the history and cultural impact of southern literature.

Nor, as I hope to demonstrate, were the representations of aristocratic southern values unequivocally nostalgic or positive in the novels. Simply labeling antebellum novels as being “in the vein of Scott” relegates the work of southern authors such as Kennedy and Simms to only being the products of popular literary taste and southern conservatism. The usual story passed along by critics is that while Hawthorne and Melville evolved in their adaptations of the British romance tradition, southern authors obstinately refused to modify the formula provided by Scott.24 In her book-length study of Simms’s fiction, Mary Ann Wimsatt points out critics’ tendency to read Simms as a “failed realist,” rather than a nuanced practitioner of the romance genre (Major Fiction 8-9).25 According to these narrow interpretations, southern authors like Simms and Kennedy were then left behind to endlessly produce outmoded and uninteresting novels that touted the same conservative, proslavery party line. For example, although he devotes an entire chapter to “the historical romance of the South” in his exhaustive study, The American Historical Romance (1987), George Dekker dismisses southern antebellum

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24 See, for example, Holman, Roots.
25 She specifically references work by Vernon L. Parrington, Van Wyck Brooks, Edd Winfield Parks, and Clement Eaton. All four critics effectively shaped the tenor of Simms scholarship for the first half of the twentieth century.
fiction as “clearly inferior to that of Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville” (274). Instead, he bypasses nineteenth-century southern fiction altogether and begins his discussion of southern historical romance with what is now the “gold standard” of southern writing: William Faulkner and Allen Tate. Similarly, Tracy’s study, though an insightful overview of the antebellum novels, ends with the assertion that perhaps it is best that these novels are not read on account of the ethical and moral problems they raise for contemporary readers. This critical trend accounts for much of the neglect of nineteenth-century southern literature in literary studies and would explain why few outside of academic circles in the twenty-first century read the novels.

However, as I will elaborate later in this chapter, like Hawthorne or Melville, the southern authors of the conservative historical romances interrogated the structures of southern society and constantly reflected on the form of their writing. Though it is undeniable that Kennedy and Simms were much more conservative politically and socially than the New England authors, that did not necessarily translate into an unquestioning adoption of the literary formulas prescribed by European texts or an unwavering promotion of the southern aristocratic elite. Nor does it automatically relegate their writing to the “clearly inferior” status bestowed by Dekker. Also like their northern counterparts, southern authors of historical romances advocated for adapting the genre to American themes and molding it to fit into the climate of antebellum economics and politics. O’Brien points out that for antebellum southerners, “The attractions of Romanticism was precisely the dignity it gave to the local” (Rethinking 50-1). In turn, it follows that southerners would adapt the romance—particularly that of Scott—to their own ends, “because his standpoint so matched their own situation, buckling down to
modernity while shedding a tear for the old ways. . . [and] Southerners knew when Scott spoke to real issues, when he permitted himself nostalgia” (*Rethinking* 53-4).26 Similarly, Wimsatt observes that “Simms’s works employ the central conventions of popular fiction; they show a keen awareness of romance traditions; and they convey a statement about history through literary terms” (*Major Fiction* 38). As Wimsatt goes on to elaborate, Simms’s work consciously demonstrates that awareness. For example, in his preface to his novel *The Yemassee* (1835), Simms makes a point of describing the text as a “Romance,” not a “Novel.” Further, he declares *The Yemassee* to be “an American romance. It is so styled as much of the material could have been furnished by no other country” (6). Kennedy, too, emphasized the particular characteristics of his historical fictions as both “romantic and picturesque,” but also “American” (*Horse-Shoe Robinson*, iii, v).

Instead of characterizing the authors and their works as conservative holdovers from a previous generation, I would like to situate the genre of historical romance written in the South in the context of the region’s peculiar economy before the Civil War and the impulse to define the southern region through the reframing of history. Rather than only derivative or defensive, these novels can be read as an attempt to represent a version of southern history that accommodates the dual ideological allegiances of the antebellum plantation economy. In this light, the authors’ seeming inability to move beyond the traditional formula for historical romance is less a result of an inherent literary stodginess and more an attempt to use literature to maintain the ideological balance between

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26 In many ways, my analysis of southern historical romances takes up O’Brien’s critique of the standard scholarly attention paid to southern romances, or as he puts it, southern Romanticism. See Chapter 2, *Rethinking the South*. 

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southern society’s investment in liberal capitalism and its adherence to slavery and the pre-capitalist social organization represented by the plantation. Put another way, the “clear inferiority” of the southern historical romance is not laziness or lack of literary talent, but a generic or formal response to the demands of representing southern history and the development of antebellum southern society. When read through this lens, the question of the novels’ “quality” as literature becomes less important than understanding their function in representing the ideological impulses that shaped the region in the formative antebellum period.

The genre of the historical romance in many ways lends itself to a discussion of the interchange between economic structures and literary form by presenting a balance between the representation of history and imaginative representation.27 In her book-length outline of the historical romance, Helen Hughes describes the “dual nature” of the genre. She writes, “Historical romance, with its links with both ‘history’ and the novel, is a genre in which two systems of myth operate: the archetypal episodes of romance . . . and the presentation of history” (13). Emily M. Budick, in her 1989 study of the American romance tradition, also describes the “duality” of historical romance: “American historical romance . . . renders a double consciousness of interpretative processes. Its symbols and allegories enforce an awareness of the unknowability of material reality. Simultaneously, it presents a world that, however, defamiliarized, is still intensely recognizable” (ix). Indeed, in the 1832 preface to his historical romance of early New York, The Pioneers (1823), James Fenimore Cooper presents the novel as equal

27 For similar explorations of the romance genre and economic systems, see Ceylikkol, Romances of Free Trade or Elaine Freedgood’s essay, “Banishing Panic: Harriet Martineau and the Popularization of Political Economy” in The New Economic Criticism (1999).
parts “literal fact” and “general picture” (6). Thus, for all of the genre’s adherence to standard romance-driven patterns in terms of plot and character development, the historical romance also insists on the veracity of its presentation of the historical moment that provides the setting.28

The authors’ insistence on the romances’ historical authenticity gestures toward the increased importance of understanding the way in which history is told in the historical romance genre. The novels are not simply invented stories that happen to be set at historical moments, or romanticized versions of a historical period. They are, instead, carefully plotted versions of history. That urge is what prompted Simms’s reactionary lecture tour in 1856, which demanded a similar type of veracity. With both the lecture and the novels, how South Carolina’s (and the South’s) history is told implies present-day social and political consequences.

Therefore, I argue that in order to understand the function of the historical romance genre, it is also necessary to understand how narrative form plays a role in interpreting and conveying history. For this, I find the work of Hayden White particularly helpful. In Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (1973), White defines historical writing not as a set of immutable facts, but as “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by representing them” (2, White’s emphasis). History, then, is a narrative of the past arranged and presented by the historian, much in the same way a novel is arranged and told by an

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28 A comparison could easily be drawn between antebellum historical romances and postbellum regional or local color writing: both genres work to establish their cultural and historical authenticity, and both have a history of being similarly denigrated by critics.
author. The difference, according to White, is that the novel’s basic stories are “invented” by the author (White 6).

Perhaps more important, how the historian conveys past structures is equally as important as how the novelist relates a tale in an historical romance. To describe the process of historical writing, White differentiates between what he calls a “chronicle” and a “story.” A chronicle presents the basic facts of the past, while the story is the narrative of those facts. The task of historian, White writes, is to arrange “the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernable beginning, middle, and end” (7).

In the case of an historical romance, the chronicle is the setting and the basic outcome of the novels, which are essentially predetermined. Often the novels are set during moments of historical importance, such as wartimes and moments of rapid change within a nation or area. These settings are then grounded in what would have been basic, commonly accepted historical facts at the time the novels were published, namely, which side won a particular war, which nation conquered a particular area, which people is now extinct, or which historical figures played a role in a particular event. Those details merely provide a realistic backdrop for the fictional plots and characters of the novels.

The parameters of the chronicle then allow for the authors of historical romances to employ the imagined plot and characters to different ends. As Dekker notes, the task of the author in the historical romance is to give “dramatic expression [to] and at the same time transcend history” (45). That shift into imaginative storytelling, like the historian’s
translation of chronicle into story, implies a particular ideological message on the
author’s part. White notes that an historian’s choice of the form his or her narrative takes
automatically indicates his or her particular message:

There does, in fact, appear to be an irreducible ideological component in every
historical account of reality. . . . the very claim to have discerned some kind of
formal coherence in the historical record brings with it theories of the nature of
the historical world and of historical knowledge itself which have ideological
implications for attempts to understand ‘the present,’ however this ‘present’ is
defined. (21)

Similarly, the duality of the historical romance, with its merging of historical work and
fiction, allows for a particular kind of representation. The way in which a novel adapts
the genre of the historical romance indicates the ideological focus of the text.

Since most critics point to Walter Scott’s first novel, Waverley (1814), as the
prototypical historical romance— and it is the most frequently cited Scott novel in
southern literary studies 29 —I would like to discuss in more detail how Waverley employs
the conventions of the historical romance in order to illustrate how southern novels adapt
those conventions as a way of rewriting the story of southern history. Taking up my idea
that the historical chronicle is a framework by which the historical romance can use
fiction to arrange the story of a people or place, I would point out that Waverley is a
novel in which a specific historical moment of political upheaval is used to reveal a tale

29 However, in his critique of southern novels that I quote at the beginning of the section, Twain is
referencing Ivanhoe.
of individual development (or a quasi-Bildungsroman). What is at stake is not the outcome of a country, but the outcome of an individual life. Scott then follows the life of his titular character through the action of the 1745 Jacobite Revolution in Scotland. As with any historical romance, readers know the end: the Jacobites lost, and the English government either killed the leaders or divested them of their property and titles. Yet the focus is always on Waverley and his personal development as he moves through the patterns of what has become known as the basic romance formula. The “resolution” at the end of the novel is not the vying political or social factions of the Jacobite Revolution, but Waverley’s character. In the case of what is now considered the prototypical historical romance, the 1745 Revolution is the framework by which Scott can employ the story of history to a particular end, namely a sustained character study of an individual’s growth and development.

Other authors of historical romances employ similar techniques in terms of

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30 In *The Historical Novel* (1955), Georg Lukács makes a similar argument, yet in his Marxist interpretation the fictional emphasis is on the interactions between social and political groups, rather than the interiority of an individual. Lukacs describes the genre as a fictional mediation of radical social and historical change. In this interpretation, the historical novel depicts a moment of “great crisis” in the history of a nation, and the task of the hero is “to bring the extremes whose struggle fills the novel, whose clash expresses artistically a great crisis in society, into contact with one another. Through the plot, at whose centre stands this hero, a neutral ground is sought and found upon which the extreme, opposing social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another” (36). Similarly, Ian Duncan writes in *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel* (1992) that the Waverley novels “represent the historical formation of the modern imperial nation-state in relation to the sentimental formation of the private individual” (15). The implication with both readings is that the individual’s position in a historical moment is more symbolic, rather than the focus of the novel. For more on *Waverley as a Bildungsroman*, see Duncan; Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The “Bildungsroman” in European Culture* (1987); and Isabelle Bour, “Sensibility as Epistemology in Caleb Williams, Waverley, and Frankenstein.” SEL 45.4 (2005): 813-27.

31 These patterns are similar to those outlined by Northrop Frye in his archetypal study of the romance in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). However, I am pointedly not incorporating Frye into my discussion for the same reasons Fredric Jameson modifies Frye’s theory of romance in *Political Unconscious* (1981)—viewing romance as archetype “also amounts to the rewriting of a body of varied texts in the form of a single master narrative” (Jameson 122). As I hope my discussion of southern historical romance demonstrates, although southern authors adapted the romance genre as a mode of reframing southern history, their novels are a particular response to a particular political/social/economic moment that cannot be accounted for in an overarching myth-narrative.
framing history through imaginative writing to a specific ideological end or emphasis. Following what George Dekker calls the “Waverley-model,” James Fenimore Cooper’s American historical romances manifest the ever-present duality of the genre in tales of an emerging nation, rather than an emerging individual character. If the readers of Scott’s novel know the basic outcome (the failure of the Jacobite campaign), then the readers of Cooper’s novels know the general historical plots of Cooper’s novels, namely the settlement of American territories and the creation of the United States. The historical backdrop of each Cooper novel highlights the process of nation-building and conquest.

This emphasis on the development of a nation begins with the basic structures of the novels: in contrast to Waverley there is no single character through which the action is focalized. With novels such as The Pioneers and The Last of the Mohicans (1826), the titles are all descriptive of a place, moment, or group in history, rather than naming a single individual. The introductions to the novels, like the Scott novel that served as a template, also declare the imaginative focus of the narratives. In his introductions to the 1823 and 1832 editions of The Pioneers, Cooper repeatedly asserts that the narrative is a “general picture” or “observation” of a moment in time, while the latter introduction expands on particular points of history, historical figures or groups, and changes that have occurred since the time represented in the novel (3-4; 6-10). Likewise, the 1850 introduction to The Last of the Mohicans is almost entirely devoted to a brief history of the Mohican tribe, general characteristics of the North American Indian population, and the current state of the area depicted in the novel. In both instances, Cooper presents his novels as almost unbiased accounts of formative moments in American colonial and post-Revolutionary history—that just happen to be peopled with largely fictional characters.
Cooper’s descriptions of American Indian tribes in the prefaces to both novels reveal another ideological focus in his historical romances. Dekker points out that while Scott’s Englishmen and Jacobites present clear social and political divisions, the divisions between the groups that make up the United States’ early history in Cooper’s novels are less clear (40). In novels concerned with the growth of a new nation, the most sympathetic characters are not the authors of that nation, which has been effectively established by the time of the novels’ publication, but those being replaced by it. The most celebrated character of Cooper’s novels is Natty Bumppo, who functions as a mediating figure (in the sense that Lukacs describes it) between the white settlers and the Native American characters. Though not the focal point of the novels in the manner that Waverley is the center of Scott’s novel, Bumppo provides a moral touchstone that is doomed to extinction. The framing of each novel as “observational” and the representation of Natty Bumppo makes the ideological emphasis of Cooper’s historical romances clear. As Waverley’s focus is on the “passions” and education of individual men against the backdrop of a particular historical moment, Cooper’s novels present themselves as portraits of a young nation in development and the complications that arise from that development. Thus the duality in Cooper’s American historical romances is not the pull between romance and realism (or “prudential motives”) within an individual, but the pull between national progress and the destruction of traditional cultures.

Against the backdrop of Waverley and Cooper’s tales of national development, we can then read the southern historical romances of the antebellum period less as conservative holdovers of a generic formula—or just “bad” literature—than as a way of articulating a vision of the South that aligns itself with the ideologies of southern
conservatives in the decades before the Civil War. Kennedy and Simms, like most of the authors of southern romances, espoused the values of the plantation elite. However, they were also cognizant of the capitalist systems that sustained the southern economy, including the increased reliance on the free market in the transatlantic economy. White notes that conservative historians “are inclined to imagine historical evolution as a progressive elaboration of the institutional structure that currently prevails” (25). As the conflict between Simms and Sumner reveals, proslavery southerners like Simms understood how history connected to contemporary understandings of a place or people, and adapted their histories accordingly. In turn, as fiction written by those invested in the southern plantation system and its accompanying way of life, the role of the southern historical romance was to reconcile the capitalist impulses of the southern economy with a need for the type of social order represented by slavery and individual plantations. The result is a story of southern history that aligns with a positive vision of the then-contemporary antebellum plantation South.

Each novel constructs that history through a set of characters, specifically through the use of multiple heroes, with each embodying a different aspect of the southern economy. Namely, one hero represents the characteristics of an economic system governed by a landed, plantation elite of the aristocratic order, and the other embodies the tenets of free market capitalism. While the former is aligned with pre-Revolutionary ties to British aristocracy, and would later become the “planter aristocrat” image that dominated antebellum southern life, the latter asserts the self-sufficiency and individual opportunism that would be valued in a society guided by a free market economy and the ideals of liberal capitalism. Though the two images are apparently contradictory, they
represent the seemingly conflicted ideals that formed the basis of antebellum southern society: the plantation aristocrat who makes his living through ingenuity and international commerce.

The southern historical romances written by authors such as Kennedy or Simms create an imaginative narrative that merges these ideals in order to create a fictional lineage for antebellum southern society. Following the basic generic formula of the historical romance as presented by both Scott and Cooper, the southern romances trace their multiple heroes through various adventures and conflicts. That generic plot then serves the ideological ends of the antebellum South by demonstrating the maturation of southern society through the set of heroes and their fates. As with any romance, the novels culminate in a marriage, specifically to a lady who is a member of a wealthier or socially respected family. That marriage presents a potential merging of ideologies, in which the self-sufficient hero can work to take over the plantation system formerly governed by a titled aristocrat. Therefore, in the narrative created by antebellum southern historical romances, the plantations that dotted the southern region in the 1830s, 40s, and 50s were owned and maintained by the later generations of southerners descending from these self-made men.32

It is important to note that throughout these fictional depictions of southern life, the presence of slavery is always accepted as a constant and integral part of southern life. Though Kennedy’s *Horse-Shoe Robinson* barely addresses slavery outside of a casual depiction of stock slave characters, Simms’s *Woodcraft* posits slavery as fundamental to

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32 Wimsatt elaborates on Simms’s use of what she calls the “framing action” and “time perspective” of his novels both of which allow for a commentary on contemporary antebellum society and politics while relating a tale set during a more distant historical period (*Major Fiction* 37-40).
southern society and its economy. As with Simms’s narrative of the Revolution in 1856, the message for both is that in imagining a lineage for southerners through a story of the Revolutionary Era, slavery is automatically part of southern history. Subsequently, in the romances, racial privilege is as much a part of the maturing southern and American society as is the ideal of self-sufficiency and hard work.

The historical romance, the long-time emblem of antebellum southern fiction, therefore becomes one of the primary vehicles for authors’ negotiation and understanding of the southern economy and the seemingly conflicting social structures it perpetuated. *Horse-Shoe Robinson* and *Woodcraft* both incorporate the tenets of the romance genre to the ends of maintaining, through fiction, the basic ideological investments of southern society as put forth by the peculiar structures of the antebellum economy. However, as I will demonstrate, they did so to slightly different ends. What was an uncertain representation of tensions between conservative aristocracy and socially and economically mobile democracy in Kennedy’s 1835 novel would become an actual rewriting of southern history in Simms’s 1854 romance according to the tenets of the free market.

*“The cavalier and the economist”: John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Horse-Shoe Robinson**

Though he spent most of his life as an attorney and politician in Baltimore, and he only wrote three complete novels, John Pendleton Kennedy is best known today as the author of what most critics call “the first plantation novel.”

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33 For just a few examples of that designation, see Francis Pendleton Gaines, *The Southern Plantation* (1925); Charles H. Bohner, *John Pendleton Kennedy* (1961); Lucinda MacKethan, “Plantation Fiction,
Kennedy’s first novel. Published in 1832, it was also his most successful. Set in a rural area outside of Richmond, Virginia, the novel presents a vision of the antebellum plantation South through a series of sketches. With its realistic depiction of life on a Virginia plantation and its somewhat complicated representations of slavery and the southern plantation elite, *Swallow Barn* has become a popular text for study in southern literary circles.

Despite the critical fixation on Kennedy’s first novel, I would argue that his first historical romance, *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, is his most important novel. The novel represents the type of writing that would occupy Kennedy for most of his life. Of Kennedy’s three novels, two are historical romances, and the duality represented by the genre reveals a consistent pattern in Kennedy’s fiction and in his own life. Raised in Baltimore, but the son of a prominent Virginia plantation family (the Pendletons), Kennedy’s biography is emblematic of the antebellum South’s dual allegiances: to the commercial, industrializing forces of nineteenth-century capitalism that thrived in the flourishing port city of Baltimore, but also to the rural, aristocratically-inclined space of the Virginia elite. Throughout his life, Kennedy held his allegiance to the two-part ideology maintained by the southern plantation economy. His historical romances, and their story of southern history, reveal that tension and Kennedy’s own negotiation of the complicated social and economic structures that governed southern society.

To understand the pull between southern commerce and southern aristocracy that manifests itself throughout Kennedy’s fiction, it is also helpful to understand the political
context in which Kennedy wrote his first historical romance. Unlike *Swallow Barn*, *Horse-Shoe Robinson* and Kennedy’s later novel, *Rob of the Bowl* (1838), were both written after he became involved with the Whig political party, a shift that John L. Hare argues influenced his later fiction.\(^{34}\) The Whigs, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, presented a complicated platform that at once espoused modernization and capitalist enterprise, but distrusted complete democracies governed by the masses. Many upper-class southerners of the early antebellum period aligned themselves with the party in an effort to curtail or distance themselves from the Jacksonian Democrats. More important for Kennedy, the party formed in the decades after the War of 1812 in conjunction with the rise of what William R. Taylor has called the “New Man” of the South. In *Cavalier and Yankee* (1961), Taylor describes the “New Man” as the figure that emerged from the fading Virginia aristocracy of the Revolutionary Era.\(^{35}\) According to Taylor, the New Men were often self-made, yet supposedly possessed innate genius that enabled them to prosper socially and economically (67-72). It was an ideal that the Whig party would take up as one of its defining tenets: a man who at once tapped into the forces of liberal, free market capitalism and republican values, while also following the traditions of family-based aristocracy of the pastoral ideal.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{34}\) Hare takes that interpretation a step further to read *Horse-Shoe Robinson* as an allegory for Whig politics during the 1830s. While I do agree that Kennedy’s political views, particularly his position on economic growth and social mobility, emerge in his fiction, such a reading of Kennedy’s novel oversimplifies *Horse-Shoe Robinson*’s complicated representation of southern history. See *Will the Circle Be Unbroken: Family and Sectionalism in the Virginia Novels of Kennedy, Caruthers, and Tucker, 1830-45* (2002).

\(^{35}\) That New Man would fit into what John Grammer calls in *Pastoral and Politics in the Old South* (1996) the “pastoral republicanism” that shaped many southern intellectuals of the post-Revolutionary generation, including John Randolph and Nathaniel Beverley Tucker.

\(^{36}\) Kennedy became involved in the Whig party around the same time he composed *Horse-Shoe Robinson* in 1834-5. He would later serve as a member of the Whig party in the House of Representatives in 1838 and 1840-44 (Bohner 120-3; 143; 163-4; 172-3). In 1840, Kennedy published *Quodlibet*, a satire of Jacksonian politics, and in 1844 he published *The Defense of the Whigs*, which outlined the Whig political platform.
One of the foremost emblems of this new social order in the South was William Wirt, a politician and author whose biographies of early American founding fathers and service as the U.S. Attorney General (1817-1829) earned him the admiration of many American authors and southerners, including John Pendleton Kennedy. Kennedy and Wirt developed a friendship while the younger man was first beginning his legal career in Baltimore in the 1820s; Kennedy even dedicated *Swallow Barn* to him. In 1849, Kennedy published a biography of his mentor, *Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt*.

The singular quality of the biography is its role in using Wirt as an emblem of the move from the South governed by the inherited aristocrat to the South defined by the self-made plantation owner. Kennedy takes care to emphasize the self-made quality of the man’s life: “A narrative of the life of William Wirt will present us the career of one who, springing from an humble origin, was enabled to attain to high distinction amongst his countrymen” (*WW* 1:13). Throughout the biography, Kennedy frequently contrasts Wirt’s “humble origin” as the orphan of two Maryland laborers with the social heights he attained later in life.

Yet, in keeping with his Whig political views and the sense of communal order shared by most conservative southerners, Kennedy never uses Wirt as an example for other aspiring “New Men,” in which anyone could follow his example and achieve social and economic mobility. Wirt was, as the biography often asserts, a singular “genius.” According to this narrative, not everyone can take advantage of American social and economic systems; an individual must possess an innate quality of intelligence and

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As a Whig, Kennedy manifested some of the same ambivalence toward the new social order exhibited later by the Southwestern humorists, more of which will be discussed later in Chapter 2.
ingenuity that enables him to do so. Thus, while Americans like Wirt may attain social and economic mobility, they do so within certain constraints. This social philosophy in fact mirrors Kennedy’s Whig economic policies. As Kennedy’s biographer Charles Boehner notes, “Kennedy was irresistibly attracted to the idea of an industrial America, a self-sufficient nation doing sustenance from commerce and manufacturing” (118). The best way to ensure that success, Kennedy determined, was to limit free trade and impose tariffs on foreign commodities. Just as social and economic mobility was limited to certain men, free trade would be limited to American goods.

In this sense, Kennedy’s biography of William Wirt creates a narrative of antebellum American statesmen in the South that parallels the vision of southern history presented by William Gilmore Simms in his 1856 speech. Wirt is the self-made capitalist who nonetheless takes part in a pre-set southern community determined by intelligence and a common cause. In both cases, each author creates a myth of the southern gentleman in the vein of the landed aristocrat of “good” stock; only “good” stock comes to mean less family lineage and more the innate genius possessed by New Men like Wirt.

Further, the biography of Wirt reveals patterns in Kennedy’s writing that can be traced back to his earlier fiction, particularly Horse-Shoe Robinson. Kennedy’s historical romances illustrate the complicated relationship between the desire for progress and social mobility, paired with the fear of unregulated free market enterprise and the destruction of social and economic regulations. As with the biography of Wirt, Kennedy’s romances present a “gatekeeper” mentality in terms of social and economic prominence. In these novels, the conventions of the historical romance genre serve the ends of Kennedy’s “New Man” philosophy, in which the novels’ presentation of its
heroes becomes a method of controlling who attains power in southern society.

Another element of the earlier fiction that is picked up by the later biography is Kennedy’s reliance on archival material. The biography is notably titled “Memoirs,” and much of the text is composed of letters and reprints of important documents. Though Kennedy biographers J.V. Ridgely and Charles Bohner dub the style “dreary” and “ponderous,” the use (or overuse) of letters highlights a common trait in Kennedy’s earlier fiction. In both *Horse-Shoe Robinson* and *Rob of the Bowl*, Kennedy employs a similar technique of putting forth records and research as the sustaining structures of his narratives. In the July and August 1860 issues of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Kennedy published what comes closest to revealing his general theories on historical fiction, and particularly historical romance. “A Legend of Maryland” details a story Kennedy discovered while researching the colonial history of Maryland for *Rob of the Bowl*. What follows is an account of the ways in which historical record and imaginative writing intertwine. As with the Wirt biography, Kennedy foregrounds the archival material. He begins the essay:

> The framework of modern history is, for the most part, constructed out of the material supplied by national transactions described in official documents and contemporaneous records. Forms of government and their organic changes, the succession of those who have administered them, their legislation, wars, treaties, and the statistics demonstrating their growth or decline,—these are the elements that furnish the outlines of history. (29)

Archival materials, then, provide the basic foundation for any good (or “true”) historical narrative.
But for Kennedy, fiction, fantasy, and romance could reveal the realities of historical fact more fully to a reader than any supposedly straight-forward history, or chronicle. The next line of the essay virtually repeats the criticisms leveled at Kennedy’s biography of Wirt by later critics: “They [the official documents] are the dry timbers of a vast old edifice; they impose a dry study upon the antiquary, and are still more dry to his reader” (29). The solution, then, is romance, or at least imaginative writing:

But that which makes history the richest of philosophies and the most genial pursuit of humanity is the spirit that is breathed into it by the thoughts and feelings of former generations, interpreted in actions and incidents that disclose the passions, motives, and ambition of men, and open to us a view of the actual life of our forefathers. . . . History then becomes a world of living figures,—a theatre that presents to us a majestic drama, varied by alternate scenes of the grandest achievements and the most touching episodes of human existence. (29)

These lines reflect what Ridgely calls Kennedy’s “the truth of fiction” philosophy, in which his historical romances “represented his own view of the realities of the past which could be truthfully celebrated only through the medium of fiction” (Kennedy 104).

“A Legend of Maryland,” in this sense, articulates the same conception of historical work and the translation of chronicle into story as outlined by Hayden White in Metahistory. If Kennedy “fails to breathe life” into Wirt’s biography (as Ridgely puts it) because of his reliance on letters and archives, then the novels can be read as far more successful in their employment of story to represent early southern history. Although, as Bell points out in Development of American Romance, the climate of the early nineteenth-century intellectual and literary world was fairly hostile to romance, Kennedy
at least (and as we shall see later, Simms), seemed to recognize the potential for romance to reveal something about human experience in the midst of the “dry timbers” of historical fact.

Kennedy’s fiction distinguishes itself from simply being an embellishment of historical details in his narrative technique. Although Kennedy repeatedly insists on the primacy of historical documents in forming the core of his fiction, throughout both of his romances, the narrator consistently inserts himself into the novel as a commentator. Like the “gatekeeper” mentality that governed Kennedy’s economic and political views, this style of narration directly guides the reader through the historical records that form the basis of the tale, but also indicates the imaginative techniques used in conveying the story. For example, in Horse-Shoe Robinson, the narrator will break frequently from the main plot to elaborate or comment: “I may pause here . . . to make an observation” (1:68). Or at the beginning of a chapter, “The thread which I have now to take up and weave into this history, requires that my narrative should go back some years” (1:91). This constant narrative framing creates distance from the tale being told and limits the characterization of the figure or event described to the impressions conveyed by the narrative. Kennedy’s narrators in both Horse-Shoe Robinson and Rob of the Bowl step back to comment on everything from the presence or lack of historical archive on a particular subject, or the personality of a particular character, to his own narrative technique. The end results are novels that at once let the historical record speak for itself, but also reassert and maintain narrative control.

In doing so, Kennedy’s historical romances maintain the balance between unrestrained economic growth and fear of that growth shown in his political views.
Specifically, that balance manifests itself in the novels’ representation of the type of socially and economically mobile characters who would later come to represent the antebellum period’s “New Men.” In these representations, Kennedy’s reliance on historical record, his use of imaginative storytelling, and his strong narrative presence all converge to relay a particular story of southern history. That story presents southern society as driven by economic and social progress within the nineteenth-century free market, but still bound by ideas of tradition and an innate, usually aristocratic, southern community.

An example of this narrative control over southern history appears in Kennedy’s second historical romance (and last novel), *Rob of the Bowl: A Legend of St. Inigoe’s* (1838). At the beginning of the novel, the narrator introduces Captain Dauntrees, an officer in the Maryland military and an early settler in the province who is supposedly based on an actual historical figure. Having moved to the Maryland colony to seek his fortune, the captain still retains his military bearing and sense of military honor belonging to a gentleman. According to the narrator, his attire displays the finery of a high-ranked officer, but also incorporates the style of a colonial plantation owner. The narrator concludes: “This combination of martinet and free companion exhibited in the dress of the Captain, was a pretty intelligible index to his character, which disclosed a compound . . . of the precisian and ruffler,—the cavalier and economist” (1:28)

While Dauntrees may be representative of the early southern colonies, the narrator nonetheless takes care to insert his own view of that strange combination of “cavalier and economist”:

[Dauntrees] was worldly-wise, sagaciously provident, as an old soldier, of
whatever advantages his condition might casually supply; in words, he was, indifferently, according to the occasion, a moralist or a hot-brained reveller—sometimes affecting the courtier along with the martialist, and mixing up the saws of peaceful thrift with the patter of the campaigns. (1:29)

Although the rest of the novel displays Dauntrees’s proficiency as a cavalier and practical military man, this initial intervention on the part of the narrator frames the character as one limited in his social mobility and power in the colony. His ludicrousness and waywardness of personality prevent him from being anything more than “a hot-brained reveller.” Thus the narrative presents Dauntrees as a self-sufficient, practical man possessed of education and aspirations of economic gain, but limited by his innate lack of genius. In other words, following the pattern that runs throughout his later works, Kennedy’s historical romances allow the “cavalier and economist” figures to prosper, but not too much.  

_Horse Shoe Robinson; A Tale of the Tory Ascendency_ (1835) sets the precedent for Kennedy’s presentation of southern society and southern history that appears in _Rob of the Bowl, Memoirs of William Wirt_, and “A Legend of Maryland.” The novel takes place in the Carolina and Virginia colonies during the Revolutionary War and features two main characters, Galbraith (or “Horse-Shoe”) Robinson and Arthur Butler. Both men are officers in the American army, but while Arthur Butler is a well-educated, well-bred gentleman of South Carolina, whose family possessed extensive land holdings before the war, Robinson is a middle-class farmer on the Carolina frontier. These are the two heroes

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37 Dauntrees is also a Falstaffian, or better put, a Captain Porgy character. Porgy, who features prominently in William Gilmore Simms’s _Woodcraft_ (1852/54), also appeared in his earlier Revolutionary romance, _The Partisan_ (1835). Though there is no direct proof that Kennedy modeled Dauntrees after Simms’s character, Porgy’s popularity after the publication of the earlier novel could have had an influence.
of the novel, and their characterization becomes bound up with Kennedy’s representation of the historical moment.

As with most of Kennedy’s works, his first historical romance foregrounds the importance of historical record shaped by storytelling. Against the backdrop of the Revolutionary War, Kennedy shifts the focus to the formation of the United States’ national character and that of the southern region. This focus begins, as in *Waverley* or *The Pioneers*, with the preface to the novel, which indicates the tale’s grounding in Kennedy’s historical research: “The events narrated in the following pages, came to my knowledge in the progress of my researches into the personal history of some of the character who figure in the story” (1:3). Despite his insistence on the importance of historical record to the narrative, the preface then declares the novel’s emphasis to be on the romantic tales extrapolated from that record, “because they serve to illustrate the temper and character of the war of our revolution” (1:3). Or, to take that assertion a step further, the temper and character of a forming society.

After Kennedy has established the focus of the novel in the preface, the first chapter sets the tone for *Horse-Shoe Robinson*’s depiction of the southern region and the nation against the backdrop of social and economic change. Titled “A Topographical Discourse,” the chapter outlines the Virginia and North Carolina countryside at the time the novel takes place, then reflects on the changes that have occurred up until the time of the novel’s composition in the 1830s. After delineating the natural merits of the area both at the time of the Revolution and in the nineteenth-century, Kennedy’s narrator inserts what he dubs a brief “political reflection”:

Since that period, well-a-day! the hand of the reaper has put in his sickle upon
divided fields; crowded progenies have grown up under these paternal roof-trees; daughters have married and brought in strange names; the subsistence of one has been spread to the garner of ten; the villages have grown populous; the University has lifted up its didactic head; and every where over this abode of ancient wealth, the hum of industry is heard in the carol of the ploughman, the echo of the wagoner’s whip, the rude song of the boatman, and in the clatter of the mill. Such are the mischievous interpolations of the republication system! (1:16)

The passage blends a fond reflection on the progress of a region with the crotchets of an unapologetic traditionalist. While “the hum of industry heard in the carol of the ploughman” champions economic development, the “strange names” brought in by intermarriage and the “divided fields” tended by individual farmers rather than owners of large plantations bemoans the social disruption caused by such change.38 The novel’s frame once again embodies the “gatekeeper” mentality evident in Kennedy’s later works. That perspective gestures toward the tenets of individual, free market enterprise evoked by liberal capitalism, but nonetheless hedges away from complete democratization.

The chapter sets the tone for the novel’s representation of its two heroes. Arthur Butler is the figure of landed aristocracy inherited by birth, a gentleman cavalier who is an accomplished soldier and a well-educated landowner. Horse-Shoe Robinson is the middle-class frontiersman who demonstrates military skill and the sort of self-motivated drive that spurs social and economic mobility. However, throughout the majority of the novel, neither hero takes precedence, and the plot shifts between the two men. In this

38 The elegy for a departed moment and nostalgia for a past time brought about by a specific place also recalls Oliver Goldsmith’s poem, “The Deserted Village” (1770), which implies that Kennedy’s novel, to some extent, also draws from eighteenth-century literary models.
sense, the plot of *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, like the description of the Virginia and North Carolina countryside at the beginning of the novel, maintains the efficacy of both men as heroes in the tale of southern social development.

Taken at face value, the emphasis of the novel seems to be on the virtues represented by Robinson. The soldier is the most prominent figure in the novel, as the titular character and the main character through which most of the action is focalized. Most of the plot revolves around Butler and Robinson’s individual campaigns against the British army, and Robinson is a free agent in every sense of the word. In *Nineteenth-Century Southern Literature*, Ridgely describes Robinson as a frontier scout figure, “an exemplar of the spirit of rebellion against unfairly imposed authority” (56). As a sergeant in the American army and an inhabitant of the southern colonies who is familiar with the area, Robinson possesses the ability to move through enemy territories unscathed. The novel is peppered with scenes in which Robinson outwits and outfights British soldiers “with that acute insight which was concealed under a rude and uneducated exterior, but which was strongly marked in his actions” (1:227).

The novel also portrays Robinson as a man of practical foresight paired with a businesslike sense of organization. When making and executing decisions made either by himself or his superiors, “his thoughts ran in no other current than to obey the order, and make the most *thrifty* and careful *provisions* for its safe execution” (2:235, my emphasis). The word choice here is interesting: not only is Robinson a man of action, he is “thrifty” or *economical* in those actions. That use of the word implies a mentality that takes into consideration future profits from a certain situation, not merely a facility with a gun or in combat. Like the New Men of Wirt’s stature, or Kennedy’s later character Captain
Dauntrees, Horse-Shoe Robinson is equal parts cavalier and self-interested economist.

In contrast, the novel’s other hero, Arthur Butler, spends much of the novel in British captivity, while the rest of the characters attempt to free him. Butler is an aristocrat and cavalier in the purest sense of the word; unlike Robinson, his character is entirely motivated by a sense of honor and duty to those he loves. If Robinson is the emblem of frontier rebellion and progress, Butler represents the aristocratic, plantation-owning southern elite. As Robinson describes him, he is “Major Butler—a bold, warm gentleman—that’s been used to tender life and good fortune” (1:257). His plot mirrors that of Waverley in Scott’s novel; like Waverley, although Butler is supposedly a man of action, he is continually thwarted by his own inexperience and inability to divest himself of a romantic view of the world. For instance, at the very beginning of the novel, the two men are introduced while riding through the North Carolina countryside. Though Robinson seems preoccupied with the ride and their scouting mission, Butler is distracted by “the earnest emotions which this wild and beautiful scenery excited in his mind” (1:17). This mentality often fails him in moments of distress—Robinson evades capture, but Butler frequently fails to follow through on or comprehend the tricks of the frontier scout.

The overall plot of Horse-Shoe Robinson displays the entire spectrum of southern society during a moment of historical development. Rather than revealing Butler’s interior development in the style of Scott’s Waverley, Kennedy shifts between multiple plots and characters to give equal weight to Robinson and the other lower-class figures. Doing so, as William R. Taylor argues, allows for Kennedy to project an image of southern history that incorporates elements of the aristocratic elite (Butler) with the social
and economic progress represented by middle-class figures like Robinson. By pairing the frontier scout with the southern gentleman cavalier, Kennedy could create “an expressive amalgam of the mixed cultural ingredients” that made up antebellum southern society (Taylor 199).

The problem with this interpretation is that it does not hold for the entirety of the novel. Ultimately, despite *Horse-Shoe Robinson*’s seeming allegiance to the “New Man” represented by Robinson, the conventions of the romance plot paired with the strong presence of a narrative voice allow Kennedy to maintain the primacy of the plantation elite and its ideologies of racial and class hierarchies represented by Butler. In other words, the “gatekeeper” mentality present in *Memoirs of William Wirt* and *Rob of the Bowl* holds true for *Horse-Shoe Robinson*.

First, the presence of a large slave population is a given. There are few black characters depicted in the novel, and those that do appear are always stock slave figures associated only with the wealthiest characters in the novel. For example, later in the novel Kennedy introduces a young, pampered slave owned by Philip Lindsay, a wealthy Virginia plantation owner with British loyalties (2:99-100). Middle-class characters such as Robinson, however, are never shown as possessing slaves. The novel’s slave characters, then, like slaves during the antebellum period, become markers of wealth and privilege for the upper-class white characters.  

Secondly, and more important in terms of following the generic conventions of

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39 Contrary to the representation in *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, several critics have pointed out Kennedy’s relatively progressive position on slavery. In particular, Paul C. Jones, William Tynes Cowan, and Lucinda MacKethan describe his sympathetic (or at least more complicated) depictions of black characters in *Swallow Barn*. See *Unwelcome Voices*, *The Slave in the Swamp*, and the introduction to the 1986 edition of *Swallow Barn*, respectively.
the historical romance, the marriage ending of the novel does not sustain the primacy of Robinson as a heroic character. The novel concludes with the union between Arthur Butler, the cavalier aristocrat, and Mildred Lindsay, Philip Lindsay’s daughter. The marriage strengthens the bond between two prominent, land-owning families in the southern colonies and also establishes a lineage for the antebellum South at the time of the novel’s publication. In one of the most significant narrative interventions, Kennedy’s narrator comments on the fate of his characters in an epilogue. Mildred and Butler, he notes, “lived long enough after the revolution to see grow up around them, a prosperous and estimable family” (2:297). According to Kennedy’s version of southern history, then, the source of future generations of southerners are the aristocratic families that emerged from the Revolutionary War.

In promoting Butler’s future prosperity, and limiting Robinson’s strength to frontier or martial settings, Kennedy’s novel performs the same commentary on unrestrained growth and social mobility of a completely democratic society that is evinced in Memoirs of William Wirt, Rob of the Bowl, and the first chapter of the novel. Robinson may display proficiency in battle, but his role as a self-motivated free agent poses a threat to order in the same way that the “mischievous interpolations of the republican system” introduce a blend of positive and negative changes to the Virginia and North Carolina countryside. In yet another narrative intervention, Kennedy’s narrator comments on Robinson’s performance in battle. Though Robinson is loyal to the American cause, “he made no scruple of deserting his companions and trying his fortune

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40 In the 1852 edition of the novel, the epilogue was expanded and revised as an introduction.
on the field in such form of adventure as best suited his temper” (2:279). Here a sense of duty to a larger cause is momentarily overshadowed by the immediate benefits to Robinson himself.

Although Robinson can be the representative of future progress and social mobility for the South, the “economist” aspects of his character limit his ability to thrive in the context of Kennedy’s novel. In the novel’s epilogue, the narrator encounters Robinson in the winter of 1818 as a bachelor on a small farm in North Carolina. He is still the practical problem solver (he sets a young boy’s broken leg during the encounter), and is a successful farmer, but he is not the progenitor of future generations like Butler. Just as the narrator intervenes to curtail the social mobility of Captain Dauntrees in *Rob of the Bowl*, the epilogue both advocates for, yet limits, the possibilities open to Robinson. The result is an ambivalent depiction of socio-economic mobility within the emerging dominance of a free market economy.

Therefore in *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, we can see the ways in which Kennedy uses the historical romance genre to balance the impulses of free market, liberal capitalism with the need for a traditional southern community. Though his primary characters incline toward individual social and economic mobility, his narrative style and his adoption of generic plot conventions provide the “gatekeeper” control over who and what defines southern community through fiction. Kennedy’s first historical romance, then, provides a template for the sort of balance sought by other contemporary southern authors such as William Gilmore Simms. However, as we shall see in the next section, while Kennedy’s historical romance displays the sort of social and political ambivalence of the New Man mentality, Simms’s novels use the genre to *revise* southern history.
according to the antebellum narrative of upwardly mobile, yet still aristocratically inclined, plantation owners.

“Revising History”: William Gilmore Simms

The themes suggested by [Simms], viewed as he views them, would produce nothing but historical novels, cast in the same worn-out mould that had been in use these thirty years, and which it is time to break up and fling away.

-Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Simms’s Views and Reviews.” Salem Advertiser. 2 May 1846

My novels aim at something more than the story. I am really, though indirectly, revising history.

-William Gilmore Simms to John Reuben Thompson, 7 Feb. 1856. Letters, 3:421

In 1852, William Gilmore Simms wrote to John Pendleton Kennedy, “We differ in respect to party politics; but Whig and Dem. [Democrat] in the South are equally Conservative, & the demands of Conservatism, for Common Safety, require the Union of all our powers” (Letters 3:160). Although Simms was an avid Jacksonian Democrat throughout his life (a position that chafed against Kennedy’s Whig political positions), Simms viewed their common background as southerners as enough to unite them intellectually. Yet, Kennedy moved further away ideologically from the South during the growing sectional tension of the 1850s. Beginning in the 1830s, Kennedy either sold or freed what few slaves he owned, and when sectional tensions finally came to a head in 1860, he supported the Union (Bohner 169-71; 227-9).

Simms, in contrast, is probably best known for his conservative defenses of
slavery, the plantation system, and the South, especially toward the end of his life. The simplified trajectory of Simms’s life and writing adopted by most critics is the reverse of Kennedy; Simms has been viewed as an ardent nationalist at the beginning of his career, but a staunch southern defender closer to the Civil War. Charles S. Watson argues in *From Nationalism to Secessionism: The Changing Fiction of William Gilmore Simms* (1993) that Simms’s novels after the 1840s are almost entirely focused on a polemical defense of the South. According to this timeline, the historical romances published in the 1850s portray valorized images of South Carolina’s history in order to uphold slavery and southern traditions in the context of 1850s sectional debates.

Particularly in regard to Jacksonian democracy and the ideal of a self-sufficient, socially and economically mobile middle-class, Simms’s historical romances are consistent in their representation of the South in a way that is not recognized in the common biographical narrative of increased southern sectionalism. As Adam Tate observes, “Simms’s thought did not so much shift as it adapted to the events of the 1850s to conservative principles he had long held” (*Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals* 239). Simms’s fiction throughout his career manifests an adherence to a version of free market capitalism seemingly at odds with the proslavery, conservative southern platform.

What does seem to shift in the novels is the way in which the genre of the

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41 According to a frequently-repeated anecdote, at the 1856 Southern Convention in Savannah, Georgia, the convention members stipulated that “there be a Southern literature,” and that William Gilmore Simms “be requested to write this literature” (“Southern Literature” 207-8). Although the story is a “pithy, pretty piece of apocrypha,” as Coleman Hutchison puts it, it has become a touchstone for Simms scholars and critics of nineteenth-century southern literature as a way to understand the author’s significance in championing and defining southern culture before the Civil War (Hutchison 18). See Holman, *The Roots of Southern Writing*; Wimsatt, *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms*; and Hutchison, *Apples and Ashes*.

historical romance is used to portray a particular vision of the South.\textsuperscript{43} In this trajectory, Simms transfers the democratic impulses of his early romances to focus on the economic and social development of a self-sufficient southern region in his later works. The early historical romances reconstruct the story of southern history that projects a balance between the plantation elite and an economically mobile middle class. Like Kennedy, that balance is never resolved, and the endings of the novels maintain the social and economic hierarchies of the traditional plantation system.

Simms’s historical romances of the 1850s, in contrast, articulate a particular version of southern history, in which the novels establish a historical lineage for the antebellum South that advocates for economic change in an emerging capitalist economy. Like Simms’s 1856 defense of South Carolina during the Revolutionary War, the novels respond to the contemporary social and political climate in their depictions of history. In light of the economic fluctuations and sectional divisions of the 1830s and 1840s, particularly the effects of the Banking Panic of 1837, Simms’s later novels comment more on what the South and the nation could be, versus what was. In this sense, Simms’s 1852/54 novel, \textit{Woodcraft; Or, Hawks about the Dovecote}, “revises” the story of southern history to correspond to a vision of an aristocratic, slaveowning society, but one that also adheres to principles of democratic self-determinism and economic modernization—or a shift from a complete reliance on plantation agriculture—in the context of the free market. In these later novels, Drew Gilpin Faust observes, the post-Revolutionary society of the South embodies “the one [Simms] sought to create in the

\textsuperscript{43} For this reading, I am focusing specifically on Simms’s Revolutionary novels, not those of the frontier, such as \textit{Guy Rivers} (1834), \textit{Border Beagles} (1840), or \textit{Southward Ho!} (1854).
Old South” (Sacred 75). Or, as David Moltke-Hansen puts it, in Simms’s novels “history favors progress, or, in other words, progressives deservedly are winners” (“Ordered Progress” 131). If Simms’s 1856 lecture was a way of justifying the contemporary South through a rearticulation of its history, then the historical romances become a way of declaring an agenda for the South through literature that projects both a progressive vision of economic self-sufficiency and a defense of southern social structures and slavery sustained by the plantation.45

For this section, I have split my readings of Simms’s historical romances into two parts: a discussion of his early novels published in the 1830s, and a discussion of his later novels. This organization follows the “nationalism-to-sectionalism” pattern most critics have adopted. In doing so, I wish to highlight the moment of the late 1830s and 40s as a moment of economic change that became integral to the development of Simms’s sectional politics in the latter half of his career. I contend that Simms’s reflections on the southern economy in the context of rapid economic change are an important component in what would become a form of southern nationalism in the late 1850s.

44 Moltke-Hansen goes on to argue that this sort of historical vision manifests itself in Simms’s earlier novels as a justification for the eventual extinction of Native American tribes or the defeat of British loyalists in the Revolutionary War. Simms upholds this reading explicitly in the opening pages of The Yemassee. The epigraph to Chapter I, presumably written by Simms himself, is equal parts eulogy for vanished Native American tribes and laconic explanation for their inevitable disappearance: “A scatter’d race — a wild, unfetter’d tribe./ That in the forests dwell — that send no ships/ For commerce on the waters — rear no walls/ To shelter from the storm, or shield from strife; —/ And leave behind, in memory of their name,/ No monument . . .” (Yemassee 9). The reason for the tribe’s disappearance, in Simms’s poetic estimation, is notably their lack of modernization: they engage in no commerce and do not build cities, as any thriving civilization should do. See Moltke-Hansen, “Ordered Progress: The Historical Philosophy of William Gilmore Simms” in “Long Years of Neglect”: The Work and Reputation of William Gilmore Simms (1988).

45 In Apples and Ashes, Hutchison describes Confederate literature as “future oriented,” which he extends to include interpretations of antebellum literature (8).
“Ordered Progress” and the Early Historical Romances

One of the themes that ties together much of Simms’s early social criticism and fiction is the concept of a nation’s progress as it relates to the social and economic mobility of its middle-class citizens. Simms embraced a “gatekeeper” vision similar to that of Kennedy, or what David Moltke-Hansen has called “ordered progress.” Accordingly, Simms “treated the American South as a stage where his philosophy was being acted out” (“Ordered Progress” 126). In this conception of national growth, “progress”—or the development of a nation as economically self-sufficient and politically influential—is facilitated by talented individuals who first secure the material foundations of a nation or society (i.e. wealth and land holdings), then cultivate its artistic and intellectual development. Although Simms emphasized that only individuals with natural-born gifts of intelligence and talent could promote such development, he was a true Jacksonian Democrat in the sense that his version of social and economic change did not follow a top-down pattern. Rather, it would be generated by the common man, the middle-class laborers who worked to expand a nation’s land holdings and its economy. In an article published in the August 1834 issue of American Monthly Magazine, “The Philosophy of the Omnibus,” Simms uses the image of the omnibus—or the form of public transportation common at the time—as a symbol for the contemporary age. In part this is a positive portrayal, for the omnibus represents the potential for egalitarian change: “The Omnibus marks that period in human economy when the barriers are to be overthrown—when the gross deference to authority must be done away with—when all

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46 Around this same time, Charles Dickens was writing sketches on the London omnibus that would later be published in Sketches by Boz (1836). For more on Dickens and the sketch, see Chapter 2.
men may stand upon the same level, and look fearlessly and freely upon one another . . .” (159). However, in the same passage Simms cautions the need to temper that change: “Our prayer is, that something may be spared, in this general overthrow, to the spirit which was great and glorious in the history of the past” (159). These principles of progress balance the impulse toward an entirely democratic version of social change with the need to retain some semblance of traditional order and social structures.

Simms’s portrayal of American and southern history in the early portion of his career further reveals his policies for a measured and controlled version of American social and material progress. In an 1832 review of Frances Trollope’s *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), Simms counters Trollope’s criticism of Americans’ general lack of good manners (especially in the Southwest states) with the point that America is still in a stage of social and economic development in which the material conditions of its citizens carries more weight than good breeding and the cultivation of art. Further, he contends, Americans are “happy in the institutions, which, if they show no pampered and isolated classes, afford equal protection of the liberties of all, and strangle not their industry, and obstruct not their enterprise” (“Domestic Manners” 133). In Simms’s vision of America, each man labors in a free market for profit and without restrictions. Yet, Simms maintains the same need for order within this democratic narrative of American growth. In a review of another English novelist’s reflections on the United States, Harriet Martineau’s *Society in America* (1837), Simms cautiously delineates the difference between “democracy” and what he calls “leveling”: “Democracy is not leveling—it is, properly defined, the harmony of the moral world. . . . The definition of true liberty is, the undisturbed possession of that place in society to which our moral and intellectual merits
entitle us” (“Miss Martineau” 653). Just as “the age of the omnibus” should balance an overthrow of restrictive structures with a retention of wisdom from the past, American society—according to Simms’s representation—is created out of a balance between the structures of the free market and the intellectual hierarchies subscribed to by Whigs like Kennedy.

Likewise, Simms’s early novels follow many of the same patterns displayed by Horse-Shoe Robinson, in which the generic patterns of the historical romance reframe the limits of social mobility for certain characters through a story of southern history. Two of Simms’s most popular (or at least most studied) early novels, The Yemassee. A Romance of Carolina (1835) and The Partisan: A Tale of the Revolution (1835), present the dual heroes of Kennedy’s novel: the aristocratic gentleman planter and the middle-class frontier scout. Ridgely observes that this pair, a common trope for many antebellum historical romances, “are depicted as parts of a developing whole—the ideal southern leader” (Nineteenth-Century 56). Within the context of Simms’s writings on national development as related to social and economic mobility, the moments of the novels can be read as stages in the larger narrative of American economic development as told through a regionally-specific historical romance. “The phases of a time of errors and of wrongs,” Simms writes in the preface to The Partisan, “it has been my aim to delineate, with all the rapidity of one, who, with the mystic lantern, runs his uncouth shapes and varying shadows along the gloomy wall, startling the imagination and enkindling the curiosity” (x). It follows, then, that the main characters are figures within these “phases” of American history that, as Ridgely puts it “involv[e] the meaning of progress itself” (Nineteenth-Century 56).
The main characters in both of these early novels enact the patterns of national development in a capitalist age through their access to social mobility outlined by Simms in his essays. The aristocratic heroes of *The Yemassee* and *The Partisan* maintain the primacy of the plantation aristocracy and traditional social orders through the marriage plots that conclude the novels. As with *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, they marry the noble women of the Carolina colonies and sustain the lineage of the planter elite in the continuum of Simms’s conception of national progress.

What is significant about each of these aristocratic figures is their ability to function in a frontier setting in a way that Arthur Butler in *Horse-Shoe Robinson* does not. In his study of antebellum southern fiction, *The Edge of the Swamp* (1989), Louis D. Rubin notes the refashioning of *The Yemassee*’s aristocratic hero, Lord Craven, as a middle-class frontiersman. For much of the novel, Craven is disguised as Gabriel Harrison, a middle-class soldier; only later the novel reveals that he is the aristocratic governor of the colony. “Simms took the historical figure of an English-born royal governor,” Rubin argues, “and converted him into what is essentially a middle-class American, a frontier hero” (115). Similarly, the aristocrat in *The Partisan*, Major Robert Singleton, has lost his wealth and estate to the British soldiers, and spends the entirety of the novel living and fighting in the swamps of South Carolina.

In turn, both novels allow for their middle-class characters to attain the status of the southern aristocrat or gentleman through their contact with aristocratic figures and natural abilities, while Robinson in Kennedy’s novel is permanently relegated to middle class status. In *The Partisan*, Lance Frampton, the youngest son of a middle-class farmer, is taken on by Singleton as a protégé. Though his father and brother are uneducated
farmers with little intellectual or personal grace, Lance is frequently described as “thoughtful and acute,” and gentle of manner (2:123). Lance’s education as a gentleman becomes one of the incidental tasks for the novel’s aristocratic figures such as Singleton, or Captain Porgy—whom I will discuss in much more detail later. The character of Hugh Grayson plays a similar role in The Yemassee. Also the son of a middle-class farmer, Grayson chafes under what he views as imposed class restrictions. On the topic of farming, he remonstrates to his older brother: “It will do for you, to take the mule’s labour, who are so willing to be at the beck and call of every swaggering upstart; but I will not” (142). However, like Lance Frampton, Grayson is depicted in the novel as possessing abilities that would raise him up beyond his current social and economic position: “Hugh Grayson, with all his faults . . . was in reality a noble fellow. [He was] full of high ambition—a craving for the unknown and the vast, which spread itself vaguely and perhaps unattainably before his imagination. . .” (336). Unlike his brother, and many of the other men in the colony, Hugh possesses the ideal traits needed to succeed in a free market: ambition and drive in an open field of competition. In turn, Grayson is tutored by Lord Craven in military procedures. As representatives of a phase in national economic and social development, the middle-class characters of high intelligence and ingenuity in the novels contain the promise of future generations, namely those of the antebellum South. Yet that promise is nonetheless controlled by the plotting of the historical romance genre, just as Simms’s vision of democracy and economic

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Footnote: In fact, Lance’s father is represented as being barely human. Before the beginning of the novel’s action proper, the Framptons are raided by a group of British soldiers. Mrs. Frampton dies as a result of the attack, and Frampton is driven mad. Subsequently, all of the novel’s descriptions of the man are in animalistic terms, with him stalking the swamps and only entering the circle of the camp for food.
modernization is tempered by the presence of traditional social hierarchies.  

“Revising History” in *Woodcraft*

This view of “ordered progress” would inform Simms’s later attempts in his 1856 rebuttal to Charles Sumner to convey South Carolina history as part of a long tradition of southerners and southern culture in the trajectory of American economic and political development. Already in the 1830s, however, Simms adapts the historical romance and revises history to allow for the possibility of social and economic mobility beyond that envisioned in Kennedy’s novel. Though Simms asserts in his discussions of romance that the goal of the genre is to expand on the historical knowledge of the passions of men, he also declares romance to be a genre that “grasps at the possible” (preface to *The Yemassee* 6). Like the 1856 lecture, the later novels utilize the genre to revise history in such a way that Simms’s vision of ordered progress is adapted to advocate for economic development and industrial modernization within the context of the mid-nineteenth century free market economy.

Simms himself, as many of his biographers have pointed out, enacted the sort of economic mobility envisioned in his version of progress depicted in the early historical romances. Simms was born in Charleston, and his father was an Irish immigrant and tavern keeper who moved into the Southwest territories of Georgia and Mississippi after his wife’s death in 1808. Simms was raised by his grandmother in Charleston. Growing up, he was instilled with both a sense of respect for old Charleston society and a vision of

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48 Rubin also describes Grayson’s role as a representative middle-class figure in *The Edge of the Swamp*, but (rightly) points out that “Hugh Grayson is *not* the hero of the novel, and . . . it is Charles Craven, alias Gabriel Harrison, upon whom the author centers his attention” (120).
social mobility on the frontier represented by his father’s successful plantation in Mississippi (Guilds, *Simms* 9, 17-18). Although Simms would become a gentleman planter through his writing and his second marriage to the daughter of a wealthy Charleston family, David Donald argues that an awareness of social class followed him throughout his life: “In poverty he yearned for the place in society which his ancestors had occupied” (“Proslavery Argument” 11). Louis D. Rubin also argues that Simms’s work is shaped by what he calls “the planter ideal” and equates the middle-class Hugh Grayson in *The Yemassee* with a young Simms (*Edge* 119-20). With his successful career as an author during the late 1830s, it would seem Simms achieved the social mobility promised but never realized by the figures of Lance Frampton and Grayson in his historical romances.

The Bank Panic of 1837, as it did for many Americans, severely damaged Simms’s finances and his writing career. John C. Guilds, Simms’s biographer, writes, “The Panic of 1837, with which a gradual collapse of the national economy began, had devastated the book market by 1843” (Guilds 166). Longer two-volume novels like *The Yemassee* and *The Partisan* were out of vogue due to the rising costs of publishing and printing. Simms observes in an 1838 letter to James Lawson, “I have been mightily worried—So much so as to have written little or nothing. Indeed, for that matter, to have written, would have been fruitless enough. There is no publishing, no selling, what one writes” (*Letters* 1:132). Following the Panic and throughout the 1840s, Simms devoted more of his energy to politics and writing nonfiction—though he still managed to write a few novels.

Publishing was not the only industry affected by the depression that followed the
1837 financial collapse. Crop prices, particularly cotton, fell, and hundreds of Americans who had invested their money in the market or in agricultural ventures were left destitute. Although the Panic led to a worldwide depression, the South was hit particularly hard (Sellers 354). What had been a thriving triangular trade between Britain, the northern United States and the South up through the 1830s collapsed in the 1837 crisis, leaving many southern farmers and planters with unsold harvests and debt, or leading to the failures of numerous cotton and agricultural firms.49

Although Simms had always advocated for southern industrialization and economic development as part of his theory of progress, his writing after the Panic places greater emphasis on the need for the South to be self-sufficient within the context of free market capitalism. Most critics who subscribe to the “nationalism to sectionalism” trajectory of Simms’s career assume that shift to be an intensified allegiance to the southern cause sparked by debates over slavery. Yet slavery is a constant throughout Simms’s work, in both his nonfiction and his fiction, and a defense of slavery is an integral part in his representations of the South even before the 1840s. As early as his review of Trollope’s *Domestic Manners* in 1832, Simms was laying the foundations for a proslavery platform that would last throughout his career. And like Kennedy’s *Horse-Shoe Robinson*, the early novels represent slavery as an everyday part of southern society,

49 The Panic was the result of a combination of factors, including rampant speculation on government lands in the West and banks overissuing paper money or unbacked loans. When the Secretary of Treasury issued an order at the end of 1836 that demanded payment for land in gold or silver, banks began to restrict credit and recall their loans. The result was a dramatic contraction of the markets. For more on the Panic of 1837, see Alasdair Roberts, *America’s First Great Depression: Economic Crisis and Political Disorder After the Panic of 1837* (2012). See also Chapter 2 for more on the transatlantic cotton trade and literature, and Chapter 3 for more on the effects of the 1837 Panic on the southern economy and southern literature.
not as an anomaly.\textsuperscript{50}

In light of the concept of progress that emerges in his earlier fiction, I would argue that Simms’s writing on economic development reflects a growing awareness of the changing economic climate of mid-nineteenth-century America. The economy recovered, but southerners’ consciousness of the South’s complete dependence on global agricultural markets did not fade.\textsuperscript{51} Drew Gilpin Faust observes that beginning in the 1840s, southern intellectuals more frequently noted the need for the South to improve in its agricultural technology and methods. In turn, she writes, “The intellectual’s perception of the agricultural problem could not be separated from his dedication to regional autonomy” (Sacred 98). In the context of the increased sectional tensions of the 1840s and 50s, economic self-sufficiency equated with cultural and social self-sufficiency.

Up through the 1850s, southern conservatives frequently advocated for southern industrialization and economic development as a way to attain that self-sufficiency. In an 1841 speech to the South Carolina Agricultural Convention, Simms’s close friend and a South Carolina politician, James Henry Hammond, posits that cotton cultivation will soon be a thing of the past. As a remedy, he enumerates possible alternatives. Then he queries, “But why . . . shall we confine ourselves strictly to Agricultural pursuits, possessing, as we do, so many other resources, inviting and rewarding as amply here as elsewhere enterprise and industry?” (22). He then makes a case for southern manufacturing, noting,

\textsuperscript{50} Simms did, however, revise many of his early novels during the 1850s to incorporate more overt defenses of slavery. See Watson, Nationalism to Secessionism.

\textsuperscript{51} That consciousness emerges again on more nationalistic terms in Henry Timrod’s frequently-studied poem, “Ethnogenesis” (1861), which many scholars consider a defining literary work for the Confederacy and southern nationalism in general. See Hutchison, Introduction, Apples and Ashes.
Although it is a false principle in legislation that manufacturing should be forced upon a country by protecting duties injurious to other interests, there cannot be a doubt that where it grows up spontaneously, it is a great blessing. It makes an immense difference in the prosperity of any people, and especially of an agricultural people, whether their workshops are at home or in other countries. Not only are they free from heavy taxation in the shape of commissions, freights and tariffs, but the mechanic classes are valuable consumers of agricultural produce. They consume, too, the productions of one another. They add vastly to the nerve and sinew of the body politic. And when united in the same community with a class of industrious and enlightened agriculturalists, they mutually enrich and strengthen one another. (24)

Here Hammond directly contradicts Jefferson’s vision for Virginia in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787): “Carpenters, masons, smiths, are wanting in husbandry; but, for the general operations of manufacture, let our *workshops* remain in Europe” (166, my emphasis). Instead of limiting the South to “general operations of manufacture,” Hammond proposes the development of industry and manufacturing in the region to the ends of economic self-sufficiency. In this utopian vision of a southern economic future, Hammond presents the possibility of southern industrialization, modernization, and individual profit on the free market as merging with the tenets of the contemporary plantation-based agricultural system. In other words, he amends Jefferson’s *Notes* to the ends of the mid-nineteenth-century economy, a move from rurality and agrarianism to prosperity as an end goal. According to this vision, the South could maintain the institutions of slavery and the southern planter class while still allowing for economic
mobility and capitalist economic development.\textsuperscript{52}

Like other southern intellectuals, Simms observed that the South would need to adapt to be economically viable, but still advocated for the retention of southern institutions as represented by the plantation. In an 1850 article for the \textit{Southern Quarterly Review}, “Summer Travel in the South,” Simms makes a case for the value of southerners appreciating their home region, rather than overvaluing travel in the North or Europe. Traditionally, Simms observes, southerners have been naturally prone to cultural stagnancy:

A people wholly devoted to grazing and agriculture are necessarily wanting in large marts, which alone give the natural impulse to trade and manufactures. A people engaged in \textit{staple} culture are necessarily scattered remotely over the surface of the earth. Now, the activity of the common intellect depends chiefly upon the rough and incessant attrition of the people. Wanting in this attrition, the best minds sink into repose, that finally becomes sluggishness. (31)

As Adam Tate has observed, Simms was influenced by Adam Smith, and his reading of the effects of cities in promoting cultural development reflects that influence (Tate 172). Simms then extends his observations to a general critique of the South’s lack of economic development and general dependence on the North:

As a natural consequence, therefore, of the exclusive occupation of agriculture in

\textsuperscript{52} In what seems to contradict his position in 1841, Hammond also famously used the phrase “Cotton is King” during a speech in the Senate in 1858. This apparent reversal, I would argue, is due to the political climate of the 1850s, in which southerners more rabidly came to the defense of their established institutions, peculiar or not. However, I would also offer that Hammond in 1858 demonstrates the same negotiation of economic imperatives with southern social structures that appears in Simms’s later novels. To put it more succinctly, we can read Hammond’s famous phrase as an attempt to recognize the prominence of the cotton trade in the contemporary global economy, but doing so within a vision of the South that upholds slavery and “traditional” southern values.
the south, the profits of this culture, and the sparseness of our population, the
Southern people left it to the Northern States to supply all their wants. . . .The
Yankees furnished all our manufactures, or whatever kind, and adroitly contrived
to make it appear to us that they were really our benefactors, at the very moment
when they were sapping our substance, degrading our minds, and growing rich
upon our raw material, and by the labour of our slaves. (31)

That dependence, Simms continues, is what prevents the South from becoming self-
sufficient and developing autonomy as a region: “To secure a high rank in society, as
well as history, it is necessary that a people should do something more than provide a raw
material. It is required of them to provide the genius also, which shall work the material
up into forms and fabrics equally beautiful and valuable” (32). As with Hammond’s
earlier proposals, Simms’s observations in the article reflect a desire to adapt Jefferson’s
eighteenth-century ideals for Virginia (and by extension the South) in such a way that the
region continues to progress in line with a modernizing and industrializing economy.
Nonetheless, his exhortations to southern tourists to appreciate their home region reveal a
continued need for southern society as it is. Simms, Tate notes, “believed that two issues
provided a means of unity for the South: slavery and free trade” (241). Therefore, in
order “to secure a high rank in history,” southerners must unite economic expansion
within a capitalist system with slavery and the social structures of the contemporary
plantation system.

In turn, Simms’s literary criticism presents literature, specifically historical
romances, as working in conjunction with the impulses of economic development and
national or social progress. During the 1840s, Simms became involved with a cultural
movement called the “Young America” group, which included writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, William Cullen Bryant, and E.A. Duyckinck (who became a close friend of Simms). The group advocated for a national literature divorced from European traditions and standards.\(^{53}\) In 1845, Simms published *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History, and Fiction*, a collection of essays designed to outline the tenets of the Young American position. When the book was released, however, it was not necessarily well-received by other members of the movement. Nathaniel Hawthorne, as the passage at the beginning of this section demonstrates, found Simms’s conception of American literature and history to be outdated. In a statement that prefigures Twain’s dismissal of antebellum southern literature forty years later, Hawthorne proclaims that Simms’s definition of exemplary American fiction relies entirely on the “worn-out mould” of the historical romance (Stewart 331-2).

However, just as Simms’s increased attention to southern economic development can be situated in the context of the changing national and global economy, I posit that Simms’s continued adherence to the “worn-out” historical romance genre is his method of “revising” history—as he puts it—to represent the South and southern history as a part of that changing economic climate. Using the framework of the historical romance, to borrow again from Hayden White’s terms, Simms turns the chronicle of southern history into a story of the region’s role within the American national development.

And for Simms, the historical romance was the ideal form to accomplish such ends, for fiction’s ultimate goal was to create a story of national history. “The true and

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\(^{53}\) The movement correlates to the Young England movement, which occurred at roughly the same time. For more on Young England, particularly of its influence on southern writing, see Chapter 3.
most valuable inspiration of the poet,” Simms writes in *Views and Reviews*, “will be found either in the illustration of the national history, or in the development of national characteristics” (53-4). The first two essays in the collection, “Americanism in Literature” and “The Epochs and Events of American History,” then make a case for American literature featuring themes pulled from the American past. Not only does America have a varied history, Simms argues, but its democratic political climate facilitates imaginative creation and works of genius. Because the United States contains diversity in all respects, it also provides opportunities for individuals to distinguish themselves through their own ingenuity. In this illustration of American democracy, artistic development takes on the language of economic pursuits:

    The very inequalities of things in moral respects, in employments, in climate soil and circumstance, which we find in these severalities, is at once calculated to provoke the mind to exertion, and to endow it with originality. There is none of that even tenor of aspect, in the genius of the country, which somewhat monotonously distinguishes an empire the whole energies of which spring from *centralization*. A natural rivalry and emulation are the consequence of a form of political independence, which, in all domestic subjects, leaves us utterly free to our own pursuits. We watch the progress of our neighbour, and strive rather to surpass than to follow. There is none of that servile, blind adhesion to a superior . . . The very divergencies of our paths are favourable to the boldness, the freedom and the flights of the national intellect. (28, my emphasis)

Here Simms describes the ideal of a liberal capitalist system within a free market: individuals competing within an open arena for their own profit, which then fosters
greater economic productivity. Only here it is applied to writing historical literature that, Simms argues, is the noblest form of national fiction. Rather than a “centralized” or controlled system for literature (or the economy), we have a free market, both in artistic and economic terms.

In this sense, Simms’s conception of a nation’s artistic production fits within his reflections on national and social progress, of which the economic modernization of the South was the end result. In a later series of lectures published as Poetry and the Practical (1851/4), Simms aligns artistic production with a nation’s material progress. First, he asserts that material progress can only be accomplished if spurred on by creativity and “Imagination”: “This faculty has been your pioneer, has hewn out your way through rock and forest, has taken for you the seals from off the mysterious portals of the deep” (11-12). Once a nation is secure in terms of wealth and land, then the movement of its progress shifts to culture and art: “The work of the Imagination, which is the Genius of a race, is only begun when its material progress is supposed to be complete” (12). Following his vision of ordered progress exhibited by his early writings, yet incorporating his later views on southern economic modernization and self-sufficiency, Simms creates a lineage for imaginative works that fits into the longer trajectory of economic progress. And by extension, economic progress is a stage in a larger unfolding of national progress.

Simms’s historical romances of the 1850s, then, do not rehash the generic patterns of novels from previous decades. If the work of the poet is to outline the dimensions of a nation and national history, Simms’s later novels of the Revolutionary era present the southern nation at its inception. They take the template of the historical romance seen in
his earlier novels and those of Kennedy to enact his vision of southern development through the revision of history in fiction. Simms declares in Views and Reviews:

... it is the artist only who is the true historian. It is he who gives shape to the unhewn fact, who yields relation to the scattered fragments,—who unites the parts in a coherent dependency, and endows, with life and action, the otherwise motionless automata of history. It is by such artists that nations live. It is the soul of art . . . [that ensures] the possessions of the past, and to transmit, with the most happy confidence in fame, his own possessions to the future. (36)

The passage echoes Hayden White’s interpretation of historical work, or Kennedy’s “truth of fiction” philosophy of romance articulated in “A Legend of Maryland.” Yet, Simms takes the function of art, or historical fiction, a step further to uphold its continued importance for defining future generations. While The Yemassee and The Partisan projected visions of progress through the gradual attainment of social mobility and economic development, they are limited by their adherence to the aristocratic marriage plot. The later novels are more about “revising” history according to Simms’s vision of a future South through a modification of the generic conventions of the historical romance.

Simms’s 1854 novel, Woodcraft; Or, Hawks about the Dovecote, performs this work of historical revision as his only Revolutionary novel set after the War. Woodcraft is the novel most discussed by critics, which is partially my reason for analyzing it in the context of Simms’s discussions of the southern economy. But, as an historical romance set after the war, it is also about rebuilding a community and society, and in the process, incorporating important social values, while doing away with others. More than many of the other Revolutionary novels, Woodcraft draws from the impulse of the historical
romance to “illustrate national characteristics,” as Simms articulates it in *Views and Reviews*. In this case, the “nation” described is the South, the region which Simms and so many other conservative southerners wished to become economically self-sufficient, and eventually independent.

Published originally in 1852 as *The Sword and the Distaff; Or, Fair, Fat, and Forty*, *Woodcraft* tells the story of South Carolina at the end of the Revolutionary War through the experiences of Captain Porgy, a once-wealthy plantation owner and soldier.\(^5^4\) Porgy is first introduced in *The Partisan* as a fat “gourmand,” but the later novel reveals more nuances to his character. After the British withdraw from South Carolina, Porgy returns to his plantation, Glen-Eberley, to find it desolate and ravaged by British soldiers. Most of the slaves have been run off, the plantation house and his possessions have been stolen or destroyed, and the fields are fallow. The plantation has also been mortgaged to a Scottish businessman, McKewn.

According to this configuration, Porgy is the typical hero of the historical romance, but rather than a military foe, his enemy is a businessman, who represents the debts and financial losses he incurred during the war. Indeed, despite its frequent scenes of adventure and battle, the novel is primarily about securing property and wealth in the aftermath of war—in other words, achieving the economic and material self-sufficiency advocated by southern conservatives in the 1840s and 50s. The novel begins with a description of the state of affairs in Charleston after the war, emphasizing in particular the financial state of the Americans:

\(^{5^4}\) There are no substantial differences between the two versions of the novel, other than the title.
Peace was agreed upon; the British army was about to evacuate the city; the Americans were crowding about their outposts, eager to come in. Meanwhile commissioners from both were in the city, preparing for a peaceable restoration of prisoners, chattels, and soil. . . . The American commissioners were particularly solicitous in respect to this matter. South Carolina had already lost twenty-five thousand slaves, which British philanthropy had transferred from the rice-fields of Carolina, to the sugar estates of the West India Islands; and there were yet other thousands waiting to be similarly transported. (5-6)

From the beginning, the novel emphasizes the importance of property, specifically slaves, in the rebuilding of South Carolina after the war. The rest of the novel then revolves around the financial revitalization of the area as told through Porgy’s attempts to recover his slaves, pay the mortgage on his plantation, and begin the process of planting and harvesting.

Porgy defies the vision of the aristocratic hero that is a constant in the earlier novels. At a basic level, he presents all of the virtues of a gentleman demonstrated by figures like Robert Singleton in *The Partisan*, or Lord Craven in *The Yemassee*. He inherited his plantation as the only son of a wealthy South Carolina family; he is educated; and he possesses a sense of honor demonstrated by any good cavalier in the romantic tradition. However, he also possesses all of the failings of the southern plantation elite. Brought up in prosperity, Porgy “had never been taught the pains of acquisition. Left to himself—his own dangerous keeping—when a mere boy, he had too soon and fatally learned the pleasures of dissipation” (101). As Porgy admits of himself, “I was always one of that large class of planters who reap thistles from their planting. I
sowed wheat only to reap tares” (189). Despite the blame he places on luck, Porgy recognizes that his laziness and lack of experience in earning his own way are constant barriers to his own material security. As a result, the novel is peppered with scenes of Porgy’s follies. While Mary Ann Wimsatt interprets these comedic moments as Simms’s adaptation of the Southwest humor stories that gained popularity in the 1840s and 50s, Michael Kreyling reads Porgy as an emblem of the fading plantation order, which he claims Simms ultimately casts into history and memory (Figures 50-1).

The non-aristocratic characters are, in fact, the ones who shine and take on the role of the more practical heroes according to Woodcraft’s narrative of economic improvement. Porgy returns from the war accompanied by several of the men with whom he served; all plan to live on Glen-Eberley and help the captain rebuild his fortune. One of these is Lance Frampton from *The Partisan*, who is now a few years older and engaged to the daughter of Porgy’s neighbor, Mrs. Griffin. Lance still retains the intelligence and gentleness of nature that mark him in the earlier novel. He is also more skilled in farm management than Porgy; when the group returns to the plantation, he pitches in with the rest to rebuild the plantation, which Porgy seems incapable of doing.

The other character who seems even more adept at negotiating the uncertainties of life after wartime is Fordham, the overseer of a neighboring plantation owned by Mrs. Eveleigh, a gentlewoman of the South Carolina elite. For the most part, Fordham is virtually ignored and rarely identified by name in criticism of the novel. Yet, he is afforded a long description in the opening chapters. Although “he was evidently a

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55 For more on Simms and Southwestern humor, see Wimsatt, *Major Fiction*. See also Chapter 2 for more on Southwestern humor in the context of the southern economy.
backwoodsman, in humble life,” Fordham’s features tell of his higher intellectual qualities: “His great blue eye was expressive of much benevolence, but mixed with a decisive and earnest manliness” (23). At the moment of his introduction, Mrs. Eveleigh is in the process of recovering her property (meaning slaves), and “in this business [Fordham] was much more efficient than any of the more eminent friends of Mrs. Eveleigh could have been” (24). While Porgy, the Carolina aristocrat, is at a loss in recovering financially after the war, Fordham thrives with his practical knowledge.

Fordham’s talents are further demonstrated in an extended battle scene that occupies a large portion of the novel’s first half. After recovering her slaves, Mrs. Eveleigh travels with her young son, Arthur, and Fordham back to her plantation. On the way, the party is attacked by agents of McKewn (who had stolen her slaves in the first place). Porgy eventually comes to their rescue at the end of the skirmish, but Fordham carries on most of the fight with the bandits using “woodcraft,” or knowledge of the forest and skill at avoiding detection. The battle scene follows the patterns of Simms’s earlier romances set during the Revolution, but replaces the aristocratic figure who is adept at frontier fighting with the non-aristocratic figure who is adept at battle and at negotiating matters related to finance and property. In one scene, as the pair sneaks through the bush to kill off a bandit, Fordham instructs young Arthur Eveleigh, the budding aristocrat, in the nuances of woodcraft. The scenes reverse the dynamic of the earlier novels. Instead of the aristocrats instructing the promising middle-class figures, the frontiersman instructs the young aristocrat. Thus, Simms uses the scene of battle as a way to unite the aristocrat with practical knowledge and valorize the skills of the frontiersman.
Another non-aristocratic figure who distinguishes himself in *Woodcraft* is Sergeant Millhouse, one of Porgy’s compatriots from the war. Like Fordham, Millhouse’s talents are in battle and in practical matters, particularly in running a plantation. He and Porgy have an extended argument over the uses of “utilitarianism” midway through the novel. William R. Taylor calls the exchanges “the central debate of the novel” (*Cavalier and Yankee* 290). Throughout the dialogue, Millhouse points out—and Porgy freely admits—the captain’s complete lack of practical knowledge:

You see your ixperence is jest none at all in the way of business. You don’t know what’s useful in the world. You only know what’s pleasant, and amusing, and ridikulous, about the wisdom that makes crops grow, and drives a keen bargain, and swells the money-box, and keeps the kiver down. (290)

Millhouse’s condemnation of Porgy echoes Simms’s criticism of the South in “Summer Travel”: that the South, especially the aristocratic planter class, has neglected to cultivate its own material self-sufficiency. The result, according to Simms, is that southerners have contented themselves with cultural and economic stagnation.

The debate makes a clear case for economic self-sufficiency, but it also makes clear that such self-sufficiency should work within the confines of the social structures and racial hierarchies of the southern plantation system already in place. Frequently in the novel, and particularly when he discusses business or farming matters, Millhouse will identify himself or others as “white men” or “free white men.” For example, early in the novel Porgy expresses a desire to go shooting, and Millhouse chastises him: “. . .when a man’s wanting flesh for the pot, and meal for the hoe-cake, its not reasonable that he should be a sportsman and a gentleman. That’s a sort of extravagance that’s not
becoming to a *free white man*, when he’s under bonds to a sheriff” (191). Later, when he pleads for Porgy to adopt more practical methods in running his plantation, Millhouse remarks, “and ef there was any other sensible *white man, of business*, you might listen to him too” (289, first emphasis mine).

Not only do these passages indicate the primacy of financial concerns in the novel, they demonstrate the constant presence of a defense of slavery that characterizes all of Simms’s novels and writing. The common critical assumption is that *Woodcraft* was a response to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*—mainly based on a letter Simms wrote to James Henry Hammond after its publication (Ridgely, *William Gilmore Simms* 97). The scene frequently used to support this assertion is an interaction between Porgy and his servant, Tom, toward the end of the novel. Porgy offers to free Tom, who promptly rejects it, declaring, “Ef I doesn’t b’long to you, you b’longs to me!” (509). On this point, Lewis Simpson argues that the novel is “an effort to authenticate the historical existence of the South as a special historical case — a chosen nation” (*The Dispossessed Garden* 54). Simpson then characterizes *Woodcraft* as a “plantation pastoral” that remains “vexed” in its simultaneous defense of slavery and opposition to modernity.

However, if we read *Woodcraft* as a narrative of the economic foundations of a region through the experiences of the novel’s heroes, Millhouse’s position indicates the ways in which Simms writes racial privilege and the institution of slavery into that economic revitalization. “Free white men” have access to the opportunities for social and economic mobility as Simms presents them in the novel—not black men and women. And as with all of Simms’s novels and writing, slavery is a given. Tom is a constant presence, yet still a minor character, and none of the white characters enter into overt
debates over slavery as they would in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or other proslavery texts. The slaves on Porgy’s plantation are not even present for most of the novel; during the war they fled to the swamps and only emerge midway through the novel.

In this sense, despite *Woodcraft*’s repeated advocacy for social mobility and criticism of the plantation elite, the novel maintains the importance of the plantation aristocracy and social order. Wimsatt observes the “disdain” Porgy shows for Millhouse in all of their exchanges, which clearly demonstrates his role as a social superior that the utilitarian could never achieve (*Major Fiction* 169). Likewise, Taylor notes that Porgy “has the last word” in defense of the more gentlemanly arts to which he is privy (*Cavalier and Yankee* 291). And in a long, comedic scene, Millhouse makes a fool of himself and Porgy by presuming himself the equal with the genteel Mrs. Eveleigh and her aristocratic son.

A natural question for any reader of *Woodcraft* would be: why validate an aristocratic figure who is so obviously ridiculous in most aspects — and is repeatedly portrayed as such in the novel? I would argue that read in the context of Simms’s writings on natural literature, “ordered progress,” and his defense of South Carolina history in his 1856 northern lecture tour, the depiction of Porgy makes sense. For Simms and many other southerners at the time, justifying certain southern cultural markers was just as important as advocating for the region’s economic modernization. Although Simms pushes his depictions of southern history further than Kennedy through his non-aristocratic characters, entirely doing away with those characters would also mean a total denial of a region that was in the decline and on the defensive, economically, politically, and socially.
The final marriage plot ultimately cements Simms’s revision of history by adapting the conventions of the historical romance to achieve an image of the South that can progress according to the tenets of a free market economy, but still retain the defining social structures of the region represented by slavery and Porgy the aristocrat. As with any good historical romance, the novel ends with a marriage. However, Simms does not follow the conventions of the standard romance or his earlier novels, in which the two aristocratic characters, Porgy and Mrs. Eveleigh, would unite. Porgy does propose to the widow, but she refuses, claiming her desire to remain independent.

Instead, Simms realigns the bride and groom to “transmit,” as he puts it in *Views and Reviews*, his vision of an economically viable South to future generations. After Mrs. Eveleigh rejects his offer, Porgy then turns his attentions to Mrs. Griffin, the middle-class widow and the owner of a small but prosperous farm near Glen-Eberley. When he arrives at her home at the end of the novel, however, he discovers he is too late: “There, in the piazza, stood the fair Griffin, clasped close in the arms of the overseer, Fordham, and that audacious personage was actually engaged in tasting of her lips, as a sort of dessert after dinner” (516). Other than being told from the perspective of Porgy himself — thus accounting for the humorous description — the scene is nearly identical to the conclusions of Simms’s earlier romances, or those of Kennedy and Scott. Yet, as in the earlier battle scene, Fordham, the overseer, supplants the traditional aristocratic hero. Therefore, if the ending of *Horse-Shoe Robinson* indicates that Arthur Butler fosters future generations of southerners, the ending of *Woodcraft* revises southern history to create a lineage for the antebellum South that corresponds to economic and social mobility in a competitive free market, while still maintaining the structures of genteel
aristocracy in the form of Mrs. Eveleigh and her young son.56

The record of the novel’s publication further gestures to this revision of history through the historical romance. The first title, *The Sword and the Distaff; Or, Fair, Fat, and Forty* (figure 1) points to the novel’s theme of the South moving from wartime to peacetime, from a military to a domestic space. The title also places the emphasis on the two upper-class characters: Porgy (the sword) and Mrs. Eveleigh (the distaff). In addition, Mrs. Eveleigh is described in the novel as “fair, fat, and forty” (370). The second title, and the one by which the novel is usually known, shifts the emphasis of the middle-class characters, particularly Fordham. In the image that accompanies *Woodcraft*, the featured scene is taken from the extended battle at the beginning of the novel (figure 2).

Thus, *Woodcraft* begins with the financial and physical desolation of war, but ends with the promise of future economic growth at the hands of the novel’s non-aristocratic characters. By setting the novel after the War, Simms lays the groundwork for a revision of history that coincides with the version of the South articulated by him and his fellow southern conservatives in their nonfiction. In the end, I would argue that Simms’s continued adherence to and adaptation of the “worn-out” genre enabled him to balance those ideologies while still achieving a form of resolution. The conventions of the historical romance play out the negotiation of the tenets of free market capitalism and economic modernization against the seemingly competing adherence to a defense for slavery and social hierarchies represented by the southern plantation system. Ultimately,

56 This ending also the separate spheres within the nineteenth-century economy, with Mrs. Eveleigh representing a continued aristocracy confined to the domestic space, and the male figures accessing the realm of economic and social mobility on the free market.
Figure 1 – Title page, *The Sword and the Distaff* (1852)

Figure 2 – Illustration from *Woodcraft* (1854)

what emerges is the united vision of the South sought by southern conservatives of the 1850s that incorporated both a vision of southern economic progress and the social structures of the southern past.

In 1852, Simms wrote to Kennedy that in order to produce truly important work, an author’s time should be devoted to “writing & working wholly for yourself” (Letters 3:175). For Kennedy in his historical romances, this meant reflecting on the past and imbuing it with imaginative life. For Simms this meant that an author’s role was to use fiction and literary form to shape the history of a place and its people for future generations. In employing the historical romance to represent southern history, both writers tap into a need to navigate the complicated relationship between southern institutions and the changing social and economic world of the nineteenth century. While Kennedy’s novels open up the field to the New Men of the early nineteenth-century, Simms’s novels in many ways more successfully adapt genre to the ends of representing southern culture in response to contemporary economic development. As I will discuss in the coming chapters, this impulse to adapt economically and yet remain the same socially becomes a constant for southern authors throughout the antebellum period.
CHAPTER TWO

Sketching the 1830s Cotton Boom: Charles Dickens and Southwestern Humor

In a June 1836 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Edgar Allan Poe reviewed a new book by a then unknown British author. *Sketches by Boz*—or *Watkins Tottle and Other Sketches*, as Poe identifies it in his review—was Charles Dickens’s first major publication and features a collection of stories, impressions, and character descriptions of London life that Dickens wrote while working as a journalist in the city. In his evaluation of the book, Poe identifies a critical trend to read sketches in a collection as “detached passages, without reference to the work as a whole—or without reference to any general design” (205). *Sketches*, in contrast, collects various impressions to create what Poe dubs a “unity of effect,” in which the reader is left with a single impression of 1830s London (205). Using the metaphor of visual art to make his point, Poe writes, “To the illustration of this one end all the *groupings* and *fillings in* of the painting are rendered subservient—and when our eyes are taken from the canvass, we remember the personages of the sketch not at all as independent existences, but as essentials of the one subject we have witnessed” (206). Therefore, according to Poe, the sketches “are all exceedingly well managed, and never fail to *tell* as the author intended” (205).

In this case, the sketches in Dickens’s collection tell of a rapidly changing London during the 1830s, in which morally and ethically ambiguous characters increasingly

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57 And in a clever connection between written and visual “sketches.”
dominated British cultural life. In Poe’s review, the unlikely and unlikeable centerpiece of *Sketches* is Watkins Tottle. Rather than a stalwart, hard-working, or respectable man, Tottle lives off the credit of others and is constantly in debt. In short, Tottle is a confidence man—or swindler—who can manipulate others to earn a profit for himself. Within the context of Dickens’s *Sketches*, Tottle and other confidence men are the emblems of London life in the mid-nineteenth century, one that had evolved from a society structured around an agricultural economy to one that was urbanized, industrialized, and dependent on emerging capitalist economic structures.

Poe’s evaluation of *Sketches* reveals the ways in which the sketch form during the 1830s and 40s could serve the ends of conveying a particular impression or image of spaces undergoing change. During this time, the sketch became more commonplace and popular in conjunction with the boom in print journalism and growing urbanization on both sides of the Atlantic. In contrast to the novel, Poe argues, the sketch has the ability to create a “unity of effect” that nonetheless pulls from a varied set of subjects, themes, and characters. While the novel’s unity is assumed, the sketch collection creates that unity through its diverse and brief representations, and further, through its character tropes that represent the varied populations inhabiting a changing space. The confidence man in particular is a recurring character in sketches published between the 1830s and 50s, with morally questionable—yet ultimately entertaining—figures such as Watkins Tottle populating British and American sketch collections.

At the same time that Poe wrote his review of *Sketches*, the center of growth for the southern American region was shifting from the east coast—where Poe, Simms, Kennedy, and the *Southern Literary Messenger* were all based—to the West. As a result
of the growing demand for cotton in the North and Britain spurred by the Industrial Revolution—and motivated by the promise of plentiful land in the growing southwest territories of Georgia, Alabama Mississippi, and Arkansas—thousands of settlers poured into the South. Plantations sprang up throughout the Southwest and provided the cotton needed for the numerous mills and factories in the North and Britain. In this sense, the growing and diversifying 1830s London featured in Dickens’s *Sketches* was one node in the larger network of a transatlantic economy that connected the growing southern American region to the rest of the globe.

In turn, fiction written about the South shifted from the setting of the historical romances to sketches of the Southwest and featured confidence man figures similar to Dickens’s Watkins Tottle. The same economic downturn that led to longer novels becoming passé in the 1840s gave rise to the popularity of the sketch. Beginning in the 1820s and lasting up through the Civil War, American newspapers published humorous stories and sketches set in the expanding territories of the Southwest. Two collections of such stories, Johnson Jones Hooper’s *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs* (1845) and Joseph Glover Baldwin’s *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1853), are both set during the boom of the 1830s, when immigrants flooded into the southwestern region and individuals became wealthy through land speculation that would culminate in the 1837 bank panic. Both Hooper and Baldwin capitalized on this atmosphere to create two of the more famous “confidence men” figures of the nineteenth-century: Simon Suggs and Simon Suggs, Jr., respectively.

Just as London and the Southwest were connected by trading patterns, sketches representing these areas evince the attempt to represent spaces that were rapidly changing
due to the Industrial Revolution and transatlantic trade. The three collections of sketches I discuss in this chapter—*Sketches by Boz*, *Some Adventures of Simon Suggs*, and *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi*—all emerge from the economic moment that united the metropolis with the frontier through global trade and industrial development. The sketch form, then, with its ability to create “unity” from heterogeneity (to paraphrase Poe) presents the ideal literary form to harness spaces in economic and social flux. In this sense, I posit that the mid-nineteenth-century sketch form focused more on representing a temporal change and cultural shift than a particular location.

But rapid change also entailed a shift that upended previously stable mores and social structures, a problem that the sketch must also address. As a result, all three collections employ the confidence man trope as a way of negotiating the pull between older economic and social systems and the emerging transatlantic economy. In settings that were shaped by an increasingly dominant free market economy, the financially savvy, but untrustworthy, man was king. These figures become the central characters in all three collections. Their role in the sketches is to embody the potential for socio-economic mobility in a free market, but to also represent the potential dangers.

I argue that the sketch collections by Dickens, Hooper, and Baldwin trace the emergence of a new economic standard in the nineteenth century through the confidence man figure. I begin by outlining the general economic and social shifts that took place during the 1830s through the 1850s and discuss the concurrent rise of the sketch form in representing those changes. The confidence man, I posit, becomes a trope through which sketch authors could mediate that change. I then argue that as texts that appeared at the beginning of this era, Dickens and Hooper’s collections remain ambivalent in evaluating
the figure’s potential role in the mid-nineteenth-century economy. I conclude with a
discussion of Baldwin’s collection, which I argue presents the confidence man as an
exemplar of nineteenth-century life as shaped by the tenets of the free market. By using
the sketch form as a framework for understanding the economic patterns represented in
these three collections, we can see the growth of a new social order at the beginning of
the nineteenth century through a literary paradigm, in which older, pre-capitalist
economic structures would give way to the dominance of free market capitalism.

“A Time of Visible and Violent Transition”: The 1830s

America is much farther off from England than England from America. You in
New York read the periodicals of this country, and know every thing that is done
or written here, as if you lived within the sound of Bow-bell. The English,
however, just know of our existence, and if they get a general idea twice a year of
our progress in politics, they are comparatively well informed. Our periodical
literature is never even heard of.
- Nathaniel P. Willis, “Willis’s Impressions of
London,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, March
1835

When he wrote the above passage, Nathaniel Willis had been traveling in Britain
for several months and sending back his impressions of the English countryside, culture
and people. Willis, who would become famous in the United States and Europe for his
travel sketches, eventually lived in London briefly.58 Despite his assertions of the English
ignorance of American culture, his passage inadvertently highlights a triangle of
connection that was the foundation of the British-American transatlantic relations from

58 During the mid-nineteenth century, Willis was known for being the highest paid periodical writer in
America. On a more inglorious note, he was also brother to author Fanny Fern, who depicted him as an
egotistical dilettante in her autobiographical novel, *Ruth Hall*. For more information on Willis, see Thomas
the colonial period up through the Civil War. Beginning during the early portion of the
nineteenth century, and intensifying after the Industrial Revolution in and 1820s and 30s,
Britain, the northern United States, and the South participated in a mutually dependent
economic relationship founded primarily on the cotton trade. For as Eric Hobsbawm
remarks, “Whoever says Industrial Revolution says cotton” (40). Through the movement
of raw cotton and cotton manufactures interregionally in the United States and then
across the Atlantic, Britain and America formed a global network that not only affected
the economic structures of each region and nation, but eventually shaped the cultural
production of those spaces.

To describe this era in British history in his 1833 England and the English,
Edward Bulwer-Lytton dubs the moment “a time of visible and violent transition” (2:68).
The period from 1800 to 1840 witnessed massive industrial and economic changes,
particularly in the area of cotton manufacturing. Due to technological innovations in
weaving and cotton processing, the development of improved rail systems for transport,
and the shift from home weaving to a more efficient factory-based manufacturing system,
both Britain and the United States developed from agriculturally-based economic and
social systems to more urban, industrialized structures.59 The first “industrial cities”
developed around a concentration of cotton mills and factories in the North and Britain
(Farnie 7-10, 21). More factories meant more jobs, and increasingly those who had
formerly farmed or worked as laborers in rural areas migrated to cities for better job
opportunities. As a result, early nineteenth-century Britain and the northern United States
were marked by an increased urban population (Chapman 46).

59 For an overview of the technological innovations in the cotton industry, see Chapman 17-25.
The transatlantic cotton trade also became the major force behind the United States’ expansion into western territories, specifically the old Southwest. A higher demand for cotton required a larger portion of land on which to grow it, and the southern United States as they were (namely Maryland, Virginia, Tennessee, and the Carolinas) could not logistically meet that demand, both in terms of space and also the conditions needed to grow a large amount of cotton. The old Southwest stretching from the Carolinas to Arkansas, however, could fill that need with its varying soil composition and space on which to organize larger-scale plantations (Wright, *Political Economy* 19-22). Britain was entirely reliant on imports for the supply of raw cotton for its mills, and by the 1830s the plantations of the southern United States were its almost exclusive supplier (Chapman 36; Sellers 93).

In addition to highlighting the transatlantic triangle of the 1830s and its accompanying changes to the global economy, Willis’s sketch indicates the growing importance of the sketch form in representing these changes. He opens the article with his entrance into the city: “From the top of Shooter’s Hill we got our first view of London—an indistinct, architectural mass, extending all round in the horizon, and half enveloped in the dim and lurid smoke” (366). Here, London is not a beautiful, cultured city, but an industrial center, a hodge-podge of buildings adapted to accommodate the industrial growth indicated by the curtain of “lurid smoke.” Willis then goes on to describe views of the Tower and St. Paul’s, glorying in their magnificence (or perhaps trying to erase the ugly aspect). Still, like the smoke surrounding the increasingly industrial city, that first impression lingers. While most of the article revolves around stories of the vibrant London social life, the aristocracy, and brief physical descriptions of the city (all
carefully focused on its charms or beauties), the backdrop of that haze and “indistinct, architectural mass” that first greeted Willis’s, and the reader’s, eye is always present. Therefore, in a brief glimpse of the London landscape, Willis conveys the vying social and economic systems that constituted the changing space of Britain—and vicariously, the United States—in the form of the older aristocratic structures in which he glories and the industrialization he attempts to ignore.

“Willis’s Impressions of London” exemplifies the function of the sketch form in representing the “visible and violent transition” in the nineteenth-century the global economy. Although the sketch had achieved popularity during the eighteenth century, sketches gained prominence during the early portion of the nineteenth century in such a way that coincided with the increased urbanization of the transatlantic world, as well as the simultaneous growth of the transatlantic industrial economy (Garcha 3-4). Further, the changing dynamic of print culture and the rise/diversification of print journalism led to a greater emphasis on shorter, impressionistic pieces that would appear in newspapers and then later collected in full-length book form.

More important, however, is the nineteenth-century sketch’s role in translating those dynamic shifts. The genre of the sketch, its basic structure, lends itself to representing spaces that were constantly changing and developing. By limiting its representation to a single moment, snapshot, or impression, the sketch captures the fleeting temporal quality of a space that will not remain the same for much longer. And

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60 See, for one example, The Spectator papers published by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele between 1711 and 1712.
61 For more on the shift in print culture and its effects on cultural and social development in the transatlantic world, see Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities or Jürgen Habermas’s The Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962/1989).
when those sketches are collected into a single body, their whole or—to return again to Poe’s phrase—their “unity” assembles a representation that is at once diverse and mutable, but also cohesive. Willis’s sketch, for example, in a brief snippet of London life, melds the new urbanized setting with the last vestiges of pre-industrial London. As Amanpal Garcha observes, “literary sketches present time at once as fragmented, ever-changing, and thus best represented by static images and plotless analysis. These opposed temporalities captured the authors’ and readers’ sense of discontinuity and their desire for stable repose—a repose that the sketches often link to the very traditions modernity was in the process of destroying” (5).

But Garcha’s final point in that passage gestures to a trend in literary scholarship on the nineteenth-century sketch that I wish to contradict. Because the nineteenth-century sketch emerges from a moment of radical shifts, the typical critical approach is to read the sketches as counterpoints to those cultural changes, in which the sketches serve a reassuring function for their middle-class readers and the narrator is removed from the often dirty and bawdy scenes being described.62 Indeed, many of the sketches in Dickens’s collection and in those by Hooper and Baldwin employ a framing device in which an unnamed narrator, often of a higher class than the figures being described, enters into a situation anonymously and details the experience for the presumably middle-class reader. In reference to the Southwest humor stories in particular, Kenneth Lynn

62 For example, regarding sketches featuring urban England, critics frequently cite Walter Benjamin’s definition of a flâneur in order to identify the narrative voice. See Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism (1973). I find Benjamin’s reading of the flâneur to be unhelpful, especially in reference to sketches from the early portion of the nineteenth century. As I will demonstrate later in reference to Dickens and the Southwest humorists, the concept of the flâneur does not take into account the authors’ translation of their own experiences in London and the Southwest. See Martina Lauster, Sketches of the Nineteenth Century (2007) for more on critical misapplications of Benjamin’s study.
describes the framing as a *cordon sanitaire*: “By containing their stories within a frame, the humorists also assured their conservative readers of something they had to believe in before they could find such humor amusing, namely, that the Gentleman was as completely in control of the situation he described as he was of himself” (*Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* 64).63

However, the authors of the sketch collections were active participants in the changing economic dynamic of the 1830s in a way that contradicts the label of gentleman observer and also complicates their representations of London and the Southwest. The changes to the transatlantic economy resulting from rapid industrialization also entailed a more general ideological and material shift in British urban areas and the Southwest that implied a greater sense of socio-economic mobility in the emerging free market economy. In Britain, political and economic power was less tied to the aristocracy and the ownership of land, and fell increasingly to those who actively participated in business dealings (Walvin 66). What once was an agriculturally-based, tenant labor population in which an individual would work on the same estate his or her entire life was now an urban, physically mobile industrial and business-centered workforce (Farnie 36; Lemire 93-4; Walvin 14-15).

Likewise, those who poured into the Southwest territories to capitalize on the new demand for cotton were not always the established planters who populate the plantation romances of William Gimore Simms or John Pendleton Kennedy. As with the urban areas of Britain, the Southwest territories demonstrated a sense of physical and social

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mobility brought about by rapid economic change (Justus 34). This expansion fostered a culture in which any individual could, in theory, seize upon new opportunities for financial prosperity through land cultivation or speculation (Beidler 89). And that image of self-propelled economic gain was promoted by the opportunities emergent in the newly-settled lands. Not only were they more fertile and better suited for growing cotton, but the cost of planting and maintaining a cotton trade was much lower than in the east due to greater opportunities for transportation on the rivers and the cheapness of the land (North 125).

In turn, all three authors personally benefited from this economic and ideological shift. Dickens’s family was beset by financial difficulties throughout his childhood, and he eventually took advantage of London’s active literary marketplace to earn prosperity and fame as a journalist and later novelist. In *Charles Dickens and “Boz”: The Birth of the Industrial-Age Author* (2012), Robert Patton uses Dickens as an example—the foremost example—of the publishing industry’s evolution during the 1830s and its subsequent impact on Victorian novelists’ construction of their identities as authors. According to Patton, the Victorian era was a moment when “authorial power . . . would both fuel and stand up to capitalist material and cultural production during the heyday of British industrialism, and that would eventually extend its powers and benefits to writers around the rest of the world” (19-20). For the American authors, both Hooper and Baldwin grew up on the east coast—Hooper in North Carolina and Baldwin in Virginia—and both moved to the Southwestern territories during the land boom of the 1830s due to their own families’ financial problems. Eventually both men turned to the law to earn their living, an easy feat in the Southwest, where simply hanging out a sign and posting
an advertisement in the local paper meant one was, officially, a lawyer (Hoole 11-12, 14; Stewart i, 67). And like Dickens, both men were relatively successful; Baldwin eventually became a state Supreme Court judge in California.

Despite their participation in the new economic and social dynamics of the spaces they represent, the authors also express reservations at the changes they observe. To return again to Bulwer Lytton’s characterization of the period: the shifts manifested during the early part of the nineteenth century were both visible and violent. The violence of that change represents an upending of established social structures and conventions that had defined British and American societies. As such, the open nature of the southwestern frontier and the new urbanized Britain was not all legitimate financial gain and bred the sort of corruption represented by the confidence man character trope. In the Southwest, those not interested in running a plantation could also enter into other “fields.” The Southwest was over-populated by lawyers and land speculators seeking to profit from the abundant and cheap land available after the American Indian tribes were forced out of the region, as well as the legal disputes that arose from land claims and the chaotic nature of the still-forming legal system of the West. Further, the issuance of credit by local banks led many immigrants to take financial risks in land speculation and investment (Curti 264-5; Hammond 451-4, 468-71). In all, the nebulous nature of the social, legal and economic structures in London and the Southwest created an atmosphere that was at once highly democratic and also rife with deception and manipulation.

In this sense, the authors I discuss here were not casual and distant observers of the societies depicted in their sketches. Rather, they themselves were members of the classes featured in the sketches and as such, were equally shaped by the cultural shifts of
the 1830s and 40s, both positive and negative. Martina Lauster argues that the pre-1850 sketch writer and narrator “is not the bohemian outsider moving in the jungle of the city, but, on the contrary, one of a countless number of ordinary city dwellers who read metropolitan surfaces” (8-9). In turn, the sketches translate the experience of London—or the Southwest—in a manner that is “almost always amusingly and critically self-observing,” in which the sketch is equally about the author/narrator as it is about the people and places that make up the shifting landscapes of the 1830s (Lauster 12).

The result is that the sketches set in the 1830s evince a dual ideological allegiance that, as Garcha argues, was part of the generic formula for the nineteenth-century sketch form:

Broadly put, in these decades, sketches embodied contradictory, somewhat paradoxical, features of modern life. They accentuated the ideological value placed on newness, disconnection, and detachment—including the processes of “progress,” temporal rush, capitalistic appropriation, and market differentiation; at the same time, they emphasized the ideological value Britain placed on opposite ideas of cultural homogeneity, unity, and stasis, which helped produce the image of England as a stable, single “social body” . . . (25) Although Garcha’s focus is on British sketches, this description easily fits the space of the Southwest that was undergoing a similar and equally drastic economic and social shift. The sketch collections I discuss here harness a form that lends itself to the act of translating the shifting quality of a space undergoing massive social and economic change. However, as participants in that change, each author negotiates the pull between the possibilities represented by the emerging economic systems and a desire to retain
older social orders through the sketch form.

They do so, I posit, by incorporating the trope of the confidence man figure that emerges consistently in all three collections. In one sense, the confidence man becomes the focus of each collection and parallels the ideal of socio-economic mobility that could potentially exist in spaces structured around the free market. Through a talent for adapting to new social and economic conditions, as well operating independently of imbedded social restrictions, the confidence man upholds the values of free market capitalism within a new industrialized transatlantic economy. However, the confidence man also embodies the potential moral and ethical pitfalls that accompany the abandonment of older social mores—at least from the perspective of the nineteenth-century sketch authors. As trickster figures, they represent the hazy conception of trust in a free market and highlight the problems inherent in a system based on individual profit.

Each author’s treatment of the confidence man figure in his collection reveals an affected balance between old and new economic systems. Through humor and satire, plus the impermanent quality of the sketches themselves, Dickens, Hooper, and Baldwin can use the confidence men in their collections to both champion the economic shifts of the 1830s, while also cautioning against them. However, that humorous treatment of the figure alters as the century wears on, eventually culminating in the dominance of new economic models. From Dickens’s 1836 Sketches, to Hooper’s 1845 Some Adventures of Simon Suggs, and finally to Baldwin’s 1853 Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi, the confidence man shifts from an object of mild satire, to the figure effecting the satire. As such, the nineteenth-century sketch collection featuring spaces of rapid economic change interprets the rise of transatlantic free market capitalism through its representations of
particular moments and places affected by that change.

“Little Pictures of Life and Manners”: Charles Dickens’s *Sketches by Boz*

In his preface to the first edition of *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens asserts “[the author’s] object has been to present little pictures of life and manners as they really are” (7). And in the case of 1830s England, this was London. Dickens was an author who consistently returned to London in his fiction, and further, frequently returned to the 1820s and 30s for the temporal setting of his work. Sketches features lower or middle-class Londoners, their domestic scenes, and their working lives. Ranging from scenes depicting city streets and neighborhoods, to short character sketches of London inhabitants, Dickens’s sketches represent the varied society developing in conjunction with the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the transatlantic economy of the 1830s. In many ways, as the capital of England’s growing commercial and colonial empire, London was the embodiment of the changes occurring throughout the world.

In the same turn, Dickens’s *Sketches* draws from the particularities of London life represented in the varied sketches to comment on larger social and economic changes arising out of the increasingly commercial and international nature of England’s central city. The collection contains a diverse range of short fictional pieces, but all have in common the negotiation of new economic and social structures emerging in a rapidly

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64 Many of Dickens’s later novels are set during this time, including *Little Dorrit* (1855/7) and *Great Expectations* (1860), to name just two.

65 For more on how nineteenth-century authors capture the simultaneously global and local nature of the city through the use of the panorama and sketch forms, see Tanya Agathocleous’s *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (2011). By shifting between the two in their work, Victorian authors imagine the details of an urban space (London) and at the same time view that space “as a way to conceptualize the totality of human society in a global age” (Agathocleous 15).
urbanizing and industrializing space. In the collected manuscripts, Sketches is always organized with shorter sketches of London as the first section, and longer stories or “Tales” as the second. The sketches, then, construct the detailed space of the city and set the tone for the entire book, in which the “little pictures of life and manners” arrange to create a single image—or “unity” that Poe praised in his review—of London’s rapidly changing social and cultural life.66

Yet the sketches’ representations of the new social and economic models at play in London never make it clear whether the changes are entirely positive or negative. The balance between the minutiae of London life and the larger implications of those changes reflects the tension throughout the collection between the possibilities represented by the new social and economic order and the threat posed by that change. Throughout Sketches, Dickens moves from bleak depictions of the effects of increased urbanization and industrialization on lower-class Londoners and sketches that represent those same Londoners as morally corrupt or almost animalistic, to representing London positively as a space of social and economic mutability. For example, “A Visit to Newgate” describes the conditions of London’s debtors’ prison and reflects the sort of social commentary for which Dickens would be known in his later novels. Yet the collection also features “Seven Dials,” which details alcoholism and debauchery in a lower-class London neighborhood (figure 3). By constantly shifting between subjects and limiting his representations to brief snippets, the sketches allow Dickens to simultaneously advocate

66 The sketches and tales were originally published at varying times in London newspapers and periodicals, then collected into several editions; I will be referring to the 1839 edition, which combined all of the published sketches up until that point. For a more thorough account of the publication history and the revision process, see John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson’s Dickens at Work (1957) as well as Virgil Grillo’s Charles Dickens’ “Sketches by Boz”: End in the Beginning (1974).
Figure 3 – “Seven Dials” by George Cruikshank

for and criticize modern industrialization and urbanization, without having to present a sustained or consistent position.

The confidence man figures that populate *Sketches* deepen the both/and quality of Dickens’s representation of 1830s London life. Within a single character, Dickens can champion and critique the new economic order. The character type emerges repeatedly throughout the sketches in the form of brokers, dancing instructors, shop owners, and even beadles, all of whom frequently cheat or swindle unsuspecting Londoners who cross their paths. Yet, they are not portrayed as villains; rather, Dickens’s frequent use of an ironic or humorous tone fashions them as mock heroes, or lovable vagabonds. The confidence men of *Sketches*, then, represent the new economic landscape brought about by industrial change and the international cotton trade, as well as the moral and ethical ambiguity that comes along with a shift to increasingly capitalist economic models.

The two most prominent confidence man figures in *Sketches* are the omnibus cads and the hackney cab-drivers. The sketch “Omnibuses” appears earlier in the collection and features a new form of public transportation that operated in much the same way a public bus system functions today. Despite the innovation, however, the omnibuses are

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67 In his chapter on *Sketches* in *From Sketch to Novel*, Garcha also situates the collection in the context of contemporary economic structures and market culture. However, he seems to take for granted that the “static” nature of the sketches is equivalent to the “static” nature of the socio-economic position of the lower classes featured in the sketches. According to Garcha, the lower-class figures of the sketches are not able to participate in commercial transactions in the same way as the middle-class characters of the longer tales. Yet this sort of interpretation, as I will show, entirely discounts the autonomy exhibited by the confidence men characters of the sketches and ignores the implicit critique of middle-class society in the longer tales. See also *Dickens in the 1830s* by Kathryn Chittick for the class dimensions of the sketches versus the tales. She points out that the tales (especially those published earlier in the periodicals) “project a more elevated social scene than any [Dickens] was actually familiar with on a daily basis” (45).

68 In *The Reenchantment of Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, and Serialization* (2005), David Payne also comments on Dickens’s fascination with the cab-drivers and observes that they are affiliated with modernization and progress.
described humorously in the sketch as chaotic and irrational: passengers often embark on the wrong buss, everyone is jumbled together in the coach, and “the passengers change as often in the course of the journey as the figures in a kaleidoscope, and though not so glittering, are far more amusing” (167). Yet the omnibus cads, or conductors, are masters of the game. They control the flow of fares and the movements of the buses themselves:

His principal distinction is his *activity*. His great boast is, “that he can chuck an old gen’lm’n into the buss, shut him in, and rattle off, afore he knows where it’s a-going to”—a feat which he frequently performs, to the infinite amusement of every one but the old gentleman concerned, who, somehow or other, never can see the joke of the thing. (167-8, my emphasis)

Unlike their fares, the cads manipulate situations afforded by the new modes of transport to their own advantage, and “to the infinite amusement” of Dickens and his readers. The humorous description overlooks the questionable method by which the cad earns his living, and his “activity,” or seeming industriousness, corresponds to the values of the free market that drove the economic development of 1830s London. In this way, the space of the omnibus system takes on the trappings of the free market economy, a small microcosm of the larger international networks that connected London and Britain to the rest of the world.

The following sketch in the collection, “The Last Cab-driver, and the First Omnibus Cad,” expands on this character. Taking on a mock heroic tone, it begins with the story of “the driver of the red cab,” who (according to the sketch) was a mythic figure during the time when hackney cabs were the main mode of public transport. And like the cads described in “Omnibuses,” the driver of the red cab, though earning money by
serving the public, usually does so on his own terms:

The driver of the red cab, confident in the strength of his own moral principles, like many other philosophers, was wont to set the feelings and opinions of society at complete defiance. Generally speaking, perhaps, he would as soon carry a far safely to his destination, as he would upset him—sooner, perhaps, because in that case he not only got the money, but had the additional amusement of running a longer heat against some smart rival. But society made war on him in the shape of penalties, and he must make war upon society in his own way. This was the reasoning of the red-cab-driver. (173)

The driver of the red cab, in the sketch’s ironic way, is a defiant figure of anti-establishment, a sort of noble thief in the vein of German gothic tales or Robin Hood. So by the end of the passage, he is not merely a mock “philosopher,” but his own entity, “the red-cab-driver,” and one that defies the dictates not only of “society,” but the economic system that defines his identity. Read another way, he is an independent contractor, participating in the free market economy on his own terms.

However, in a changing economy, the red-cab-driver must give way to new modes of transportation, and the first man to capitalize on becoming the first omnibus cad supplants him. Mr. Barker, at the time an “assistant waterman” to a hackney-coach stand (or the man who tends the horses), observes the opportunities afforded by the new public transport and profits by them:

The genius of Mr. Barker at once perceived the whole extent of the injury that would be eventually inflicted on cab and coach stands, and, by consequence, on watermen also, by the progress of the system of which the first omnibus was a
part. He saw, too, the necessity of adopting some more profitable profession; and his active mind at once perceived how much might be done in the way of enticing the youthful and unwary, and shoving the old and helpless, into the wrong bus, and carrying them off, until, reduced to despair, they ransomed themselves by the payment of sixpence a-head, or, to adopt his own figurative expression in all its native beauty, “till they was rig’larly done over, and forked out the stumpy.”

(178-9, my emphasis)

Mr. Barker also acts independently to create a situation for himself by which he can earn money and employment in a space of rapid change. Again, his active industry is emphasized. Like any participant in the free market that sustained the cotton trade and promoted the growth of London and the American Southwest, both he and the red-cab-driver are able to observe economic opportunities and act on them outside the parameters of social acceptability, primarily because they are not hindered by a sense of ethics.

That lack of ethical code necessitates the sketches’ humorous or ironic tone. Though they may master the system, that mastery also entails the upending of previously stable (or supposedly stable) ethical and moral codes that (again, supposedly) characterized British society before the advent of capitalism and industrialization. The London defined by the global free market of the 1830s, in contrast, presents an ethically ambiguous space. The sketches, then, perform the work of representing rapid change in such a way that highlights that the consequences of that change are both positive and negative. As a result, neither the cad nor the red-cab-driver are heroes, they are only mock heroes. Nor do either achieve what anyone would call a “happy” and prosperous end: the red-cab-driver ends up in prison, and Mr. Barker simply works the bus.
The illustration that accompanies the sketches highlights the pull between the potential for economic mobility and the dubious nature of the morality associated with the free market that the cab-driver and cad represent (figure 4). The cab-driver, presumably the red-cab-driver, is in the foreground, sitting alone in his cab. The first omnibus cad stands in the background next to his buss with a woman inside plaintively wailing (probably wondering where she will be dropped off). Both men are dressed neatly, projecting (somewhat) an air of competence. And unlike like the rest of the illustrations in which the characters are walking, sitting, or standing in groups or in relation to other characters (see figure 3), each man is featured with the vehicle by which he earns his living, giving the presumption of both physical and economic mobility, as well as independence. Still, the illustration does not make either man trustworthy: the cab-driver’s eyes are shaded, and the cad is slouched against the buss glaring sinisterly. Once again, they are the confidence men of London’s new economic space: they actively take advantage of technological change and new economic practices, but their ability to do so is accompanied by a sense of dubious moral standards and abandonment of ethics.

These sketches stand in contrast to the longer tales, which usually feature characters who cannot quite get their feet in the door of economic mobility and manipulation. Significantly, most of the tales take place outside of the city in the extensive, higher-class suburbs of London, and the geographic change also marks a change in the characters’ relationships to new economic systems. Unlike the cads and drivers, these characters are the primarily middle-class men and women who still cling to

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69 George Cruikshank, who at the time was one of the most popular British periodical illustrators, was commissioned to produce a series of images to accompany the sketches and tales. Apparently he and Dickens collaborated well, and the illustrations are funny, detailed reflections of Dickens’s scenes (Walder, Sketches xli).
Figure 4 – “The Last Cab-Driver” by George Cruikshank

the increasingly outmoded ideas of aristocracy based on land and family connections. They also present Dickens’s comments on the burden of gentility in relation to the “world-city” of London. By holding up traditional prescripts of social mobility and acceptability, these characters at once lack the ability to act and adapt to new economic circumstances represented by the city, but are still connected to a more concrete sense of morality represented by those older orders than the cads and cab-drivers.

The tale of Watkins Tottle—the story that so fascinated Poe in his 1836 review of Sketches—exemplifies an inability to adapt to economic circumstances through the adherence to traditional, middle- or upper-class norms, but also conveys a sense of loss at the gradual passing of those norms. “Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle” is just that: a brief snippet from an otherwise unremarkable life. Tottle is entirely devoid of the activity and industry so emphasized in the sketches of the drivers and cads. At the beginning of the story he passively lives off of, and always beyond, a small annuity. Though perpetually in debt, Tottle maintains a certain lifestyle through clothes, wine, and lodgings, always hoping for a respectable way out of his financial situation:

Wrapt in profound reveries . . . fancy transformed his small parlour in Cecil-street into a neat house in the suburbs—the half-hundredweight of coals under the kitchen stairs suddenly sprang up into three tons of the best Walls-end—his small French bedstead was converted into a regular matrimonial four-poster—and on the empty chair on the opposite side of the fireplace, imagination seated a beautiful young lady with a very little independence or will of her own, and a very large independence under a will of her father’s. (495)

Never moving himself to accomplish anything in terms of profession or basic
employment, Tottle skates along on these dreams of social and financial mobility, all of which are bound up with marriage and family connections as being the only source of income.

Tottle’s dream of passive prosperity, after a fashion, presents itself in the form of Miss Lillerton, a middle-aged woman of some means. Struck with her “modesty,” another virtue prized by a more traditional social order, he constructs a romance around their seeming courtship. In the meantime, Tottle is arrested for his debts and sent to a lock-up house for debtors. Even while in the lock-up Tottle maintains his show of gentility, keeping a parlour “where rich debtors did the luxurious at the rate of a couple of guineas a day” (519). It soon becomes evident that his fascination with Miss Lillerton has as much to do with his need to be clear of debts to attain financial (and social) security as it does her “modesty.”

Tottle is released from the lock-up after a friend pays his debts, and he quickly makes his intentions known to Miss Lillerton. Believing his suit to be successful, he again “indulge[s] in the most delicious reveries of future bliss, in which the idea of ‘Five hundred pounds per annum, with an uncontrolled power of disposing of it by her last will and testament,’ was somehow or other the foremost” (531). His reveries are shattered, however, when he discovers that his “courtship” has been a huge miscommunication: Miss Lillerton is actually engaged to another man. He returns home, despondent, and a few days after her marriage, his body is found in a nearby canal.

It remains unclear whether Tottle’s suicide is the result of heartbreak or the inability to escape his financial straits. That ambiguity in itself continues the general theme that runs throughout Sketches. In the context of 1830s London, which is the greater
priority: traditional values and the morality associated with them as represented by the passing economic and social order, or the modernization and potential financial accumulation promised by an increasingly dominant free market economy? Though in many ways Tottle’s behavior throughout the story is just as morally objectionable as that of the cab-drivers and cads, that behavior is sanctioned by society as an acceptable means of attaining wealth, not the overt cheating conducted on public transport. Even a cursory glance through novels of the eighteenth or nineteenth century reveals the emphasis placed on marriage connections as financial transactions. Yet Tottle’s eventual fate questions the virtue of attaining fortune through marriage. As the tale reveals, the practice removes from the individual any option for self-sufficient industry (so valued in the free market) and limits his or her autonomy to the bluntest of choices: marriage or death. That limitation presents a dynamic that is, in fact, the opposite of a free market system. However, the pathos with which the tale reports his death, like the humor in the sketches, leaves the critique of the traditional economic system represented by the middle-class marriage plot ambiguous. Though Tottle seems doomed to failure in the space of London as the emerging “world-city,” his fate is nonetheless deeply tragic, a mourning for a passing economic order grounded in a clear moral structure that remains absent in the new economic models dominated by the cads and drivers.

In this sense, *Sketches by Boz* represents the moment of the 1830s and the impact of a changing economic system spurred on by industrialization and the international cotton trade as a tension between newer and older economic systems and the incumbent change to British society. The figures of the drivers and cads as confidence men are emblems of the changing London, a space defined by commercial exchange and free
markets. They exist in and profit by the changes occurring in technology, while also being integrated into the new image of London the center of a growing empire. The tale of Watkins Tottle, in contrast, presents the passing of traditional economic structures. Dickens uses humor and the sketch form to represent the both/and quality inherent in the shift to new economic models and in the space of the free market. While the pathos of Tottle’s death merges critique with an elegiac representation, the humor allows the confidence men to be heroic, autonomous characters, who still possess the ethical ambiguity of the new economic system. Though the collection partially mourns the passing of the older order, through the figures of the cads and drivers it also embraces the possibilities of the new, which entails an uneasy moral balance and an ill-defined (or entirely absent) ethical code.

“Whiggish Gentlemen”: The Southwest Humorists

As literature that translated the moment of the 1830s cotton boom into sketch form, Johnson Jones Hooper’s Some Adventures of Simon Suggs and Joseph Glover Baldwin’s The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi present the same use of the sketch to convey a space that was at once heterogeneous and shifting, yet also reflective of the broader shifts in the transatlantic economy. Yet the old Southwest humor sketches present the developing economy of the Southwestern frontier as less about the tension between newer and older systems than as a burgeoning area of financial possibility and social mobility. The stories’ settings in a newly-settled land changes the ways in which the authors employ the literary form of the sketch to represent the space. Rather than the characters maneuvering through a social or economic system that is changing, they are
the forerunners in creating a new system formed out of international trade and free market capitalism.

Still, the authors who wrote about the Southwest evince the same sort of ambivalence toward the economic models that made such growth possible. The old Southwest lent itself to the sort of economic opportunism seen with the cads and cab-drivers, perhaps even to the extent of enabling the characters to achieve fuller economic and social mobility. Yet that growth also opened up greater possibilities for fraud and cheating; in a territory with at most a loosely-defined legal system, there was very little to prevent anyone from taking advantage of more naive immigrants to the area, which many of the characters in Hooper and Baldwin’s stories indeed do. The paradox inherent in the expanding space of the old Southwest then leaves the primary characters of the stories in a contradictory moral position: they are at once the embodiment of the changing economic model that exists in conjunction with the extension of the frontier, and are also representations of the moral corruption that comes with a new economic order.

The term “confidence man” in some ways perfectly encapsulates the characters’ roles in the stories. The word “confidence,” like the men themselves, takes on a dual meaning in the realm of the old Southwest. Taking into account later novels like Melville’s The Confidence Man (1857), or the duke and the dauphin in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), confidence men are frequently symbols of a chaotic modern order. William E. Lenz writes, “the American confidence man embodies forces of disorder, transition, and unrest . . . [however] he relies not on supernatural powers or charms or courts, but on the fluid nature of society in the New World with its unique
opportunities of self-government, self-promotion, self-posturing, and self-creation”(1).

However, the word itself is far less sinister in definition. “Confidence” implies “trust” or “faith,” in this case faith in a system that will ultimately provide those who invest in it with far greater wealth than with what they began. Otherwise, why bother taking the risk in the first place? In this sense, the “swindles” and “seductions” of the confidence man are nothing out of the ordinary; they are simply more neatly packaged and presented by someone who knows the business, so to speak.

The ethical ambiguity that characterizes the space of the old Southwest and the confidence men of the stories is, as with Dickens’s Sketches, manifested generically. They are, after all, usually referred to as old Southwest humor stories, and that humor, as many critics have pointed out, is a method of presenting the old Southwest and its inhabitants in a palatable fashion for middle-class, “civilized” readers. In all of these interpretations, humor functions as a way of diverting readers from the morally-compromised qualities the old Southwest represented, just as the ironic and humorous tone describing the London cads and cab-drivers makes the seedy quality of their practices more amusing.

Karen Halttunen in Confidence Men and Painted Women (1982) situates the confidence man in the context of antebellum urbanization, another space of increased openness in terms of economic mobility.

In the now standard, American Humor (1931), Constance Rourke virtually dismisses the stories: “They were rough fantasies cast into the habitual large outline . . . their odd local figures were generic, the events preposterous” (70). By this description, the stories have no basis in reality and may as well be mere tall tales. Later critics have viewed the stories in a more realistic fashion, situating them more firmly in their social and historical context. However, the humor still functions as a means of distancing readers from the characters and scenes. In their introduction to the collection, Humor of the Old Southwest (1964/94), Hennig Cohen and William B. Dillingham write that the Southwest humorists were conscious of the dangers existent (physical or otherwise) in the old Southwest, and “[t]hey sought through humor to reduce this fearful spectre to less awful proportions” (xxxvi). Lenz echoes this assessment. Writing specifically of Hooper’s confidence man, Simon Suggs, he argues, “To participate imaginatively in such humorous confidence games allows the reader to envision the worst image of Americans within the safe confines of comic fiction and to discharge the anxieties this image creates through laughter at the apparent poetic justice dispensed by the confidence man in Hooper’s narrow focus on a highly exaggerated, stylized, corrupt new country” (21).
This line of thinking follows the critical assertion that many of the humorists, Hooper and Baldwin especially, were morally ambivalent about the characters and events they depicted in their fiction. The forerunner of such an argument was Kenneth Lynn and his book, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (1959). Forming what would become the defining interpretation of Southwestern humor for the next fifty years, Lynn sets forth the political affiliations of the authors as being the defining characteristic of their fiction. They were southern Whigs, who, according to his arguments, feared the growth of Jacksonian democracy in the 1820s and 30s and valued more conservative social structures represented by the southern planter class. These “Whiggish gentlemen” carried the beliefs to their fiction, using a framing technique in their narratives by which a gentleman narrator observes and interacts with the “locals,” the *cordon sanitaire* that effectively contained the uncontrolled impulses of the new economic and social system on the Southwest frontier.\(^7^2\)

But as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, dismissing the authors’ narrative stance in their writings into a single, all-encompassing political category completely ignores the much more complicated approach their sketches take to the spaces represented in their fiction, a complication represented by the confidence men characters that dominate their stories. As James H. Justus points out, while many of the authors “enjoyed their alignment with the planter class” (72-3), they did not take a morally didactic tone in their fiction towards the supposed chaos represented by the frontier. Justus goes on to systematically deconstruct Lynn’s argument, concluding, “The humor

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\(^7^2\) Walter Blair, another formative critic for Southwestern humor, also adopts the “Whiggish” mantra in his introduction to the collection *Native American Humor* (1937), and Cohen and Dillingham take up the phrase to again characterize the whole of old Southwest humor writers as “Whig gentlemen” (xx).
does not emphasize skepticism, violence, and cheerful anarchism because such subjects served the program of Whig moralists, but because the authors lived in and made their way in that kind of society. The evidence shows that they rather enjoyed it” (74). That assessment of “they rather enjoyed it” is particularly true in the case of Hooper and Baldwin, for their personal experiences with the southwestern frontier indicated that they were far more sympathetic to the changes taking place in the Southwest than the *cordon sanitaire* interpretation allows.

And while both men can be characterized as “southern Whigs,” the term itself is not as monochromatic as many critics have implied. Usually southern Whigs become synonymous in literary criticism with southern conservatives in the context of increasingly sectional politics between the 1830s and 1850s. Yet Whigs, and particularly those in the South during the mid-nineteenth century like Hooper and Baldwin, presented a strange blend of socially conservative, yet economically and politically pragmatic ideologies. Like most southern Whigs, Hooper and Baldwin both saw the need for national expansion through an investment in economic progress and modernization. For example, in 1854, Hooper argued in an editorial for the Montgomery (AL) *Daily Mail* that the state should invest in the development of railroads, stating that improved methods of transport would facilitate commerce and travel while improving communication between regions and countries (“Railroads,” 17 Nov. 1854). On these terms, Hooper and

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73 In his discussion of postbellum politics, C. Vann Woodward observes that though they were seen as allied with the planter class, antebellum southern Whigs often endorsed the very interests that led to its downfall: “They spoke for much the same type of railroad and industrial interests as did the Republicans and took a ‘practical’ view of things” (28). Similarly, and as I argue in Chapter 1, John Pendleton Kennedy—another staunch “southern Whig”—championed the “New Man” of the mid-nineteenth century, a figure shaped by the free market.
Baldwin were Whigs who were also staunch advocates of a *laissez-faire* system. In his 1855 study of early American politicians, *Party Leaders*, Baldwin writes, “The man free, and stimulated to activity, finds a thousand avenues of business and enterprise, that invite his talents. Instead of a few men thinking for all, each man is thinking for himself. From *passive* recipiency, his mind is awakened to energetic and independent action” (84, my emphasis). Baldwin’s individual does not lead a passive existence in the manner of Watkins Tottle, but adapts and uses his talents to benefit himself, and ideally, stimulate those around him. In this sense, the Whig individual is the London cab-driver of the American scene, a confidence man of the modern order.

That sense of individual freedom that led Hooper and Baldwin to embrace economic expansion and modernization as a form of national progress also drove their respective critiques of older traditions and social systems. From the perspective of both men, a society stagnates when it holds on to traditional forms of social hierarchies based on family and inheritance, in which neither social merit nor wealth is based on individual talent or effort. In their nonfiction, Hooper and Baldwin unite progress and modernization with newer economic models that followed the patterns of the free market and international commerce represented by the cotton trade. Hooper decries the American social practice of universally favoring the wealthy or well-born in a 1854 editorial called “The Morality of the Country” (21 Nov. 1854), and in *Party Leaders* Baldwin draws a

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comparison between “Conservatism” and “Progression,” identifying the former with a stultifying adherence to older norms:

- the principle of stability [versus] the principle of change; the principle which is more solicitous of keeping, than of hazarding what it has to the chance of getting more, and the principle which considers what it has as mainly valuable as capital for future acquisitions. The one principle own prudence for its parent; the other enterprise. The one looks to the past; the other to the future. . . . Progress delights in achievement; preferring the turbulence and dangers of agitation to the calm which rusts the genius, and dulls intellect, and invites despotism. (71)

Here not only does Baldwin make the case for progress, but he allies that progress with capitalism. On these terms, everything is situated as “capital,” a means of creating more, either more land holdings or more money.

Both Hooper and Baldwin expressed reservations about economic development under an emerging capitalist system, however, for while they saw the individual as the driving force of progress, individuals also had the ability to taint that progress. The freedom for individuals to exert their own talents and abilities independent of aristocratic traditions also left them open to moral corruption. Hooper expresses his doubt in an 1855 *Daily Mail* editorial in which he complains of what he calls the “cow heel aristocracy,” or a form of pretend gentility that was based only on wealth (“Cow Heel Aristocracy” 27 Nov. 1855). In his estimation, what can earn a man wealth will not necessarily earn him moral decency and respect. In a similar fashion, though Baldwin expressed a belief in the ability of individuals to adapt and flourish in new circumstances, he hoped that ability would inspire, as Adam Tate puts it, “individual responsibility, not license” (288; *Party*
Leaders 83-4). As evidenced by the speculation and fraud rampant in the old Southwest, individual responsibility could often disappear in the face of accumulating wealth.

Despite their reservations, Hooper and Baldwin were more advocates than critics of frontier expansion and the economic systems that fostered that expansion. Their brand of “Whiggery” was not of the kind to blindly adopt the cause of economic conservatism, especially for two men who took advantage of the opportunities for economic mobility afforded by the Southwest territories. As attorneys and politicians, Hooper and Baldwin participated in the space that bred the figure of the confidence man, and though perhaps only indirectly, they were part of the morally nebulous space that was the old Southwest’s legal and economic system. They were definitely not of the planter class by origin, and their political affiliations and beliefs reflect that.

In turn, neither Hooper nor Baldwin’s representations of the confidence men who dominate their sketches, nor their use of humor, can be read as a consistent whitewashing of the realities of life on the southwestern frontier. As with Dickens’s Sketches, their brand of comic sketch writing can be seen more as a technique of literary realism than generic diversion. Both Some Adventures and Flush Times represent the heterogeneity of the Southwest by using the short sketch form to shift between subjects and situations. And both authors also utilize humor to depict morally ambiguous, but situationally adept characters who deviate from older, more traditional social and economic systems.

But rather than a method of distancing readers from the subjects and settings of the stories, the humor functions as a form of realism, a way of presenting the old Southwest that does not deny the less than savory qualities. For Hooper and Baldwin this
meant presenting an image of the frontier that recognized it as a space of economic progress as well as of potential corruption. Unlike Dickens, the shifting quality of their sketches and the humorous treatment of the confidence men does not convey ambivalence over the moral and ethical implications of economic and social change. Ultimately, the both/and quality of their confidence man figures comes down on in favor of the new economic systems that spawned the growth of the Southwest.

Shiftiness: Simon Suggs

Of the two southwestern humorists discussed in this chapter, Johnson Jones Hooper was by far the most extreme in his loyalty to the southern American region. Though he wrote for and edited several Whig papers, when the sectionalism and animosity between North and South increased in the decade before the Civil War, his brand of “Whiggery” became less about national progress and more about states’ and southern rights (Hoole 147). Related to this extreme sectional loyalty, Hooper evinced a distrust of larger institutional structures, particularly the federal government, that correlates to the evils of traditional economic models presented in “Watkins Tottle.” On these terms, Hooper saw modern society as shaped by the effort of individuals and individual merit (Tate 254). Yet he also believed that individuals could not be trusted to regulate their own inclinations, an opinion which was perhaps based on his own problems with gambling and drinking: “For Hooper, a society based solely on self-interest was anarchic. Unless human nature could be contained or directed in some way, modern freedom degenerated into license” (Tate 273).

As a tenuous balance of his worldview, Hooper eventually came to espouse “wit”
as the means for distinguishing individuals. “Wit,” intellect, or simply being clever utilizes the talent of individuals without relying on their “baser” passions, hopefully bringing a certain amount of control to otherwise chaotic human nature (Tate 324). Employing his concept of wit in his sketches allows Hooper to more clearly champion for economic change by positing a philosophy that aligns with the tenets of the free market, but nonetheless recognizes the failings of the system.

The idea of individual wit as the means of surviving and thriving in the Southwest runs throughout Hooper’s first collection, *Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs*, and particularly his first fictional sketch published in the La Fayette *East Alabamian* in 1843. “Taking the Census in Alabama. By a Chicken Man of 1840” features a fictionalized version of Hooper as the “chicken man,” or federal census-taker, in Alabama. Though published before the Suggs stories, “Taking the Census” was featured in the first edition of *Some Adventures* at the end. The story follows the chicken man as he visits various homesteads and farms in rural Alabama, and the early pages are a series of humiliations for the narrator: one woman sets her dogs on him, while a man, Sol Todd, tricks him into fording the deepest part of a river as he rides between homesteads.

However, the census-taker quickly learns the tricks of the country; after the ducking in the river, he informs Sol that he lost twenty-five dollars “in hard money”

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76 With the exception of “Taking the Census” and the illustrations discussed, all citations and references to *Some Adventures* are to the 1969 edition, which is identical to the 1845 edition outside of the exceptions noted.

77 The term “chicken man” comes from the idea held by inhabitants of the newly settled states that the federal census taker would literally count the number of chickens one possessed so that he may take more money and property on behalf of the federal government. Hooper actually worked as a census-taker when he first moved to Alabama, and the story is based on his experiences.
while submerged. Convinced that he can pocket the money himself, Sol proceeds to dive into the icy river repeatedly, never knowing, as the narrator confesses, that “this, of course, was a regular old-fashioned lie, as we had not seen the amount of cash mentioned as lost in a ‘coon’s age’” (155). The chicken man eventually leaves Sol “diving for the pouch [of money] industriously” (157), and goes on to have better luck in his encounters with the residents of Tallapoosa County, Alabama. Through the experiences of the federal census-taker and his ability to adapt to frontier society, Hooper re-creates the Alabama countryside as an open space where traditional institutions can be manipulated beyond their original intent, and wit alone aids in the success of an individual. In relation to the story, Adam Tate observes, “Hooper presents the frontier as an equalizer that marked sharply the differences between those who possessed the wit and self-restraint necessary to succeed in the modern order and those who could not cope with modern freedom” (325).

Simon Suggs, however, is the centerpiece of Some Adventures. The sketches are framed as a political biography of Suggs, and like any good biographical work, the frontispiece is a portrait of the man in question (figure 5). This initial framing structure serves the same function as the mock-heroic humor of “Omnibuses” and “The Last Cab- Driver.” As the frontispiece makes clear, the subject who merits such a biography is not a bastion of clear-cut ethics and moral uprightness. In the illustration, Suggs is on his horse, in a shabby dark coat and hat, and his face is craggy and lean, almost wolfish in appearance. Indeed, in the initial sketch of the collection, which is a general overview of

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78 The illustrator for Some Adventures was F.O.C. Darley, who did many of the Southwest humor illustrations (Barnhill 47-50).
Figure 5 – “Simon Suggs” by F. O. C. Darley

Source: Johnson Jones Hooper, Some Adventures of Captain Simon Suggs, Late of the Tallapoosa Volunteers; Together with “Taking the Census,” and Other Alabama Sketches. Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1845.
the man and his character, he is described as “lithe, long, and sinewy” (7). Like the cab-driver and cad in the Cruikshank illustration for *Sketches*, Suggs is alone, and also like the autonomous figures in Dickens, he is mobile. As the later stories in the collection demonstrate, that mobility enables him to maintain his standard of living, such as it is; he escapes many of his swindles by riding off on his horse. In all, the image portrays a sort of scavenger, a man of nomadic inclinations who forages for a living: in essence, the prototypical con-man.

The initial biographical sketch highlights the ambiguity evident in the frontispiece through its humorous characterization of Suggs’s “talents.” After presenting the reader with a physical image of Suggs, the sketch then goes on to outline his character, which can be summed up by his now oft-quoted motto: “IT IS GOOD TO BE SHIFTY IN A NEW COUNTRY” (8). And if nothing else, Suggs demonstrates throughout the sketches just how well his talent for “shiftiness” has been developed in the frontier space of Alabama. The sketch elaborates:

The shifty Captain Suggs is a miracle of shrewdness. He possesses, in an eminent degree, that tact which enables man to detect the *soft spots* in his fellow, and to assimilate himself to whatever company he may fall in with. Besides he has a quick, ready wit, which has extricated him from many an unpleasant predicaments, and which makes him whenever he chooses to be so—and that is always—very companionable. In short, nature gave the Captain the precise intellectual outfit most to be desired by a man of his propensities. (8-9)

While Suggs may have a tendency to cheat his fellow man, the passage implies that this is the very talent that enables him to survive in the southwestern territories. In fact, it is a
particular skill to feel out the “soft spots in his fellow.” He is, in short, “a miracle.” But the irony that runs throughout the description, like the humorous characterization of the cads and drivers of London, or the collection’s ironic framing device as a political biography, balances the representation of Suggs as both a “miracle” of modern progress and a threat to its moral stability. Suggs is at once a figure of modernization advocated by Hooper in his political views, able to adapt and assimilate, but that modernization comes at the price of ethical ambiguity and “shiftiness.”

Whatever ambivalence may be present in the characterization of Suggs’s ethics, Hooper’s sketches nonetheless position him as an improvement on previous modes of economic and social interaction that is far less ambivalent than the conflict between social orders in Dickens’s *Sketches*. The general introduction that comprises the first sketch transitions into a story from Suggs’s childhood in which he and a young African-American boy (presumably a slave), Bill, are gambling. They are soon caught by Simon’s father, a supremely ignorant, and yet avowedly devout minister who frequently punishes Simon for his “devilish” ways. Wishing to avoid the violent thrashing his father administers to Bill, Simon convinces his father to play cards, appealing to his ego by claiming that a local neighbor can make money from gambling easily.\(^7^9\) Eager to prove himself just as smart as “Bob Smith,” Simon’s father agrees to play one hand. They bet that if Simon wins, he can take the family pony and leave; but if his father wins, Simon receives his punishment. Simon, of course, wins (by cheating), and the next story begins with him riding off from the family farm.

\(^7^9\) Several critics have observed the complicated treatment of black characters in Southwest humor. See, for example, Joanna Nichol Shields, “A Sadder Simon Suggs.” *The Journal of Southern History*. 56.4 (1990): 641-64.
Aside from further proof of Suggs’s “shiftiness” from an early age, this scene also highlights the abandonment of traditional social and economic structures in favor of the free market models that dominated the early southwestern region of the United States. At the beginning of the sketch, Simon and Bill are playing cards in the middle of a field that is being plowed by Simon’s older brother Ben. Yet it is Simon, the non-laborer, who is successful in the context of the sketches. When confronted with his card-playing, which his father calls “devilment,” Simon stoutly responds, “I’d win more money in a week than you can make in a year. There ain’t nobody round here kin make seed corn off o’ me at cards. I’m rale smart” (17). And indeed he can and is, for unlike his father or his brother, Simon has modern wit, and further, he is entirely devoid of the social pretensions that cause his father (also ironically called the “Reverend Jedediah”) to sermonize and preach a form of false morality.

The scene once again demonstrates an implicit critique of traditional structures at play in “Watkins Tottle,” but here the contrast is more explicit, for the representation of Jedediah entirely lacks pathos. The sketch reveals him to be a hypocrite: while he and Simon play at cards, Jedediah pulls out all of the “picter ones,” or so he thinks. But he still loses, for Simon knows how the swindling game is played. He uses his wit to the end of individual, capital gain, a talent which follows him throughout the stories that trace his life in the rest of the collection. Though Jedediah is just as morally corrupt as Suggs, he lacks the “wit” and intellectual capacity to adapt and participate in a free market, represented by the small-time gambling. Unlike Sketches, the collection does not mourn the loss of traditional institutions: it uses the humorous portrayal of Jedediah to present them as simply not viable in a space that expanded entirely due to international
commerce and the free market.

The next sketch further illustrates the particular economic system that governed the frontier through an anecdote of land speculation. “Simon Speculates” begins with Simon riding off on his own, then picks up the timeline of his life when he is an adult. It is set at the time Alabama grew rapidly due to the release (or outright stealing) of Native American lands and an influx of emigrants to the more unsettled areas who sought to profit from land speculation. The sketch emphasizes the peculiar nature of the Southwest’s financial sphere early on, elaborating on how a man like Suggs “without a dollar should be a land speculator.” But as the narrator explains,

> We admit that there is a seeming incongruity in the idea; but have those in whose minds speculation and capital are inseparably connected, ever heard of a process by which lands were sold, deeds executed, and all that sort of thing completely arrange, and all without once troubling the owner of the soil for an opinion even, in regard to the matter? Yet such occurrences were frequent some years since, in this country, and they illustrated one mode of speculation requiring little, if any, cash capital. (31)

While the passage represents speculation in the Southwest region as a morally dubious practice, it is nonetheless a realistic portrayal of the nature of land and capital in an area that was rapidly expanding in accordance with the demand for more land in the southern region. Just as the sketch in Dickens functions as a way to connect the particularities of place with larger, even global trends, this sketch featuring Simon Suggs uses the particular space of 1830s Alabama to comment on larger trends in the nineteenth-century American (and global) economy, whether good or bad. Suggs, in turn, becomes the
fictional emblem of the sort of character bred in this space, the perfect model of the Southwestern man. As the sketch’s narrator comments, “to buy, to sell, to make profits, without a cent in one’s pocket” as Suggs does requires “in short, genius!” (31).

In the context of rampant land speculation, Suggs’s first foray into the practice occurs almost by accident. One night, while stopping at a roadside inn, Suggs overhears two men discussing a particular tract of land that one wishes to purchase. Suggs decides to take advantage of the information he has acquired and pursues the man on the road the next morning. When they meet, Suggs gives the impression that he will put in an offer on the same tract of land; the man pays him a substantial amount of money not to do so. When the transaction is over, and both have ridden off, Suggs reflects, “Now some fellers . . . would milk the cow dry, by . . . enterin’ that land in somebody else’s name before Jones [the swindled man] gits thar! But honesty’s the best policy. Honesty’s the bright spot in any man’s character! . . . What’s a man without his integrity?” (36-7).

As this humorous exchange reveals, within a space in which land speculation, trade, and credit are all foundational to the economic system, “honesty” comes to mean something beyond merely “telling the truth” as a set of facts. Rather, the confidence man must adhere to the facts as he has presented them. For that is the basis of investment and credit: to have confidence in what is being presented as fact. Otherwise the investment and the system fail. In the story, Suggs has presented himself to Jones as intent on placing a bid; he accepted money not to do so; he does not do so; and thus further business transactions may proceed without complication. This is how the emerging economic system of the old Southwest continues to function, through a warped form of “honesty.” And while once again the humor at work in the passage recognizes the moral
complications inherent in this sort of reasoning, through Suggs it also recognizes that reasoning as the foundation of the Southwestern social and economic system.

The humorous representation of Suggs as the confidence man figure allows the sketch to celebrate a changing space that was at once open for individual opportunity, but also subject to the moral complications posed by emerging nineteenth-century capitalist systems. Although Dickens’s representation of the cab-drivers and cads may uphold their role as “active” members of the London economy, Hooper’s representation of Suggs in his various dealings throughout the Southwest is far less ambiguous in its praise. Through the “wit” and its correlation with the functioning of the free market, Hooper’s sketches present a version of the Southwest that encompasses all of its varied elements, and further, stakes a claim for what would become the overriding economic structure for nineteenth-century transatlantic economy.

A New Order: Simon Suggs, Jr.

When Joseph Glover Baldwin traveled with his family to California in 1854, the Southwest had long been settled and developed (Stewart 294-6). Plantations were established all throughout the “cotton kingdom” of Alabama and Mississippi, and cotton “constituted between 60 and 82 percent of the total value of American imports into Britain and upon which an estimated 20 percent of the British population directly or indirectly depended for its livelihood” (Crawford 458). Further, the southern region was solidifying ideologically as the nation became more embroiled in the controversy over slavery and states’ rights that eventually led to the Civil War. In the midst of all this change, California was the next space of economic opportunity. The end of the Mexican-
American War in 1848 opened up the far West to the wave of emigrants from the east, an influx that was further spurred by gold and silver discoveries. Like the old Southwest, California quickly became a space where any individual could capitalize on the fuzziness of the legal system and the natural resources abundant in the area.

Yet the “flush times” of the 1830s, despite any similarities to the far West in the 1840s, remained a unique space and time. On first moving to the far West, Baldwin wrote The Flush Times of California, a book that remained unpublished in his lifetime. In it, he observes that the nation has moved beyond a moment when the frontier space was unique in valuing individual wit that came with the free market. He begins with an observation that, “The times of 1836 in Mississippi were quiet, dull, tame, insipid, flat, stale, unprofitable—to what they are here now” (13). Taken at face value, the meaning derived from the comparison seems pretty obvious. However, as with Baldwin’s fiction, most of Flush Times in California is ironic in tone. Situated in that light, the characterization of the 1830s Southwest in relation to California is much more complicated. Take, for instance, a later passage in which Baldwin describes the nature of California society:

Society is kept together on a principle of universal distrust. Nobody has confidence in any body else. Hence no one being trusted, no one is deceived: and therefore, no one has any right to complain of being taken in. It is a great mistake to suppose that confidence keeps society together: it is the very thing that keeps men apart. Nothing so harmonizes a community as a modest and well grounded...
diffidence in each other’s integrity. (18, my emphasis).

Unlike the Simon Suggs stories, confidence no longer implies a contract between individuals or the careful presentation of facts. In turn, “wit” is no longer a singular virtue, but a trait possessed by anyone living in California, which is not a good thing. For a Whig who believed in the abilities of the individual and rested modern progress on those abilities, Baldwin’s presentation of a confidence-free society is necessarily ironic (Tate 270-2). Throughout *Flush Times of California*, Baldwin emphasizes the widespread nature of the very things that were located in individual figures in the fiction representing the Southwest.\(^81\)

By 1853, when the collection *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* was published, the traits that made the old Southwest unique economically and socially were no longer the traits of a burgeoning frontier society. Rather, the sort of self-interested, free market participation demonstrated by fictional characters like Simon Suggs had pervaded American culture to become the defining mode of economic exchange. The collection is set during the “flush times” of 1836 in Alabama and Mississippi, and the characters are not scruffy frontiersmen in the manner of Suggs. They are lawyers.\(^82\) In this sense, Americans, at least as Baldwin presents them, were confidence men. Like

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\(^81\) Similarly, in his chapter on Baldwin in *Pastoral and Politics in the Old South* (1996), John M. Grammer observes that *Party Leaders* is “a narrative of decline,” tracing the gradual dissipation of “virtue” in American culture and politics (150). Grammer also notes the seeming contradiction between the ostensible message of Baldwin’s works, a critique of the frontier and American society, and the playfulness and humor of his writing, particularly *Flush Times*. However, he never connects the two, focusing instead on the message rather than the way in which is presented.

\(^82\) Grammer also points out that Baldwin relegates the typical figures of the Southwest and Southwest humor (farmers, hunters, etc.) to the margins of his sketches and focuses instead on the legal system and questions of property ownership. Yet he also emphasizes that Baldwin saw “republican virtue” and “civilization” as “besieged” by the unethical practices of the frontier (137). As my earlier reading of Baldwin’s politics and the following discussion of his fiction reveals, I find that this reading ignores *Flush Times’s* more complicated representation of the region’s social and economic system.
Hooper and Dickens before him, Baldwin’s sketches represent this idea in both its positive and negative lights, and further, demonstrate the transition from the confidence man as an outlying figure to one who is integral to the make-up of American society. From Dickens to Hooper to Baldwin, as the temporal distance between the sketch collections’ publication and the moment of the 1830s grows, the ambivalence of the representation of the increasingly dominant free market mentality decreases.

To re-imagine a place and time in which free market capitalism increasingly took root in nineteenth-century American society, Flush Times’s various sketches use the confidence man figure to establish the basic tenets of the new economy prevalent in the Southwest. These tenets include adhering to rules of confidence and honesty that form the basis of credit (seen in “Simon Speculates”), but also moving beyond traditional institutional structures (seen in “Watkins Tottle”). The collection begins with a sketch of a character who adapts to the changing times to the extent that he actually disrupts the balance between moral ambiguity and economic progress maintained by the humor in Dickens and Hooper’s sketches.83 “Ovid Bolus, Esq.,” like Suggs, is a devious liar, yet a strangely likeable figure, a lawyer whose lies are counterbalanced by his charm. As the sketch puts it, Bolus’s lying is more in the realm of “fine arts” and elaborates, “Some men are liars from interest; not because they have no regard for truth, but because they have less regard for it than for gain.” Bolus, however, “was a natural liar, just as some horses are natural pacers” (2). Like Suggs, he is the “genius” of the Southwest, a mock hero of the free market.

83 All references to Flush Times, with the exception of the illustrations, are to the 1957 edition, which is essentially a reproduction of the first edition.
Yet Bolus’s form of lying, unlike that of Suggs, is not limited to confidence tricks or swindling for individual profit — he lies simply for the sake of lying, which undermines the confidence system that forms the basis of the southwestern economy. While the sketch adopts a mock-heroic tone, much in the same manner as “The Last Cab-Driver” or Some Adventures, the description breaks to describe one instance of Bolus’s lying that the narrator “can never forgive” (8). In need of money, as usual, Bolus convinces a friend, Ben, to sign a bill of exchange to cover a series of debts. In contrast to Bolus, Ben owns “a fine tract of land” and his name is “unfortunately good.” When Bolus, naturally, defaults on his debts, Ben is left with nothing. The lie was to the benefit of no one, not even Bolus, who does not profit by it; in essence, the sketch observes, deceiving Ben is tantamount to “crude larceny” (8).

Bolus’s penchant for unprofitable lying bares the moral problems inherent in the nineteenth-century free market system through the example of a southwestern community. The sketch makes clear that if an individual cannot practice the version of “honesty” foundational to a capitalist mode of existence, then the system falls apart. Eventually Bolus is pushed out of the area by those who treat lying as a business: “Bolus not having confined his art to political matters, sounded, at last, the depths, and explored the limits of popular credulity” (13). In a space where confidence forms the basis of a somewhat functional society, even simple gossip comes to stand for a version of credit. Using the small southwestern society to illustrate modern modes of credit, the sketch narrates Bolus’s eventual exile: “The credit system, common before as pump-water, adhering, like the elective franchise to every voter, began to take the worldly wisdom of Falstaff’s’ mercer, and ask security; and security liked something more substantial than
[Bolus’s] plausible promises” (13). Bolus’s form of lying, in other words, threatens the economic and social system upon which the Southwest is built. In the end, he leaves for the far West, which as we know from Baldwin’s later descriptions is rife with the sort of lying that permeates every aspect of society.

If Bolus is a poor example of “honesty” and the practice of confidence, then those who do not adapt to newer economic models at all are equally at fault in the sketches. Like Dickens and Hooper before him, Baldwin’s sketches and stories present an imperative to leave behind older economic and social institutions in order to embrace more modern, and, in turn, more capitalist-oriented practices. “My First Case at the Bar,” the story immediately following “Ovid Bolus,” uses a somewhat allegorical tale to illustrate the contrast between older and newer social practices in which the former come off as ridiculous and simply outdated. As the title implies, the sketch recounts the narrator’s (ostensibly Baldwin’s) first experience as an attorney in an Alabama courtroom. Unfortunately, the lawyer for the opposing side is the older and more experienced Mr. Cæsar Kasm (a tongue-in-cheek play on “sar-casm”).

The trial proceeds, and the narrator does well, that is, until it is time for the closing statements. Feeling overly confident, the narrator launches into an over-blown rhetorical style, quoting poetry and Shakespeare, and generally making an ass out of himself. Kasm tears him apart during his own closing argument, stating, “I find it difficult, gentlemen, to reply to any part of the young man’s effort, except his argument, which is the smallest part in compass, and, next to his pathos, the most amusing” (26). This practitioner of “vituperation,” though given to rhetorical manipulation himself, recognizes that to adopt the style of a high-flown orator of the old order gets one nowhere
in the Alabama courts. Poetry has no place in the Southwest; “facts” are the order of the day. To emphasize his point, Kasm produces a newspaper clipping that features a love poem the narrator had written for a lady’s album (a common practice among the upper-class in the nineteenth century), then was subsequently published. After reading a few lines that describe the narrator’s “bosom’s anguish” and the “venomous worm” piercing his heart, Kasm dryly comments, “Now, if he (Kasm) might presume to give the young gentleman advice, he would recommend Swain’s Patent Vermifuge. He had no doubt that it would effectually cure him of his malady” (31-2). Needless to say, Kasm wins the trial.

The narrator’s humiliation illustrates the move from older economic and social forms to the more modern structures that made up the Southwest. Establishing a line of thought that he would continue in Party Leaders with his contrast between “Conservativism” and “Progression,” Baldwin represents the traditions of the southern aristocracy (the gentility represented by poetry writing) as ineffectual in a space driven by modern economic networks. After the trial, the narrator moves to Natchez, Mississippi, where he begins a new law practice. Rather than putting on pretensions to “gentlemanly” manners and arts, he thereafter employs practicality, and “associated only with skinflints, brokers and married men, and discussed investments and stocks; [and] soon got into business” (33). Though there is a certain amount of irony to the narrator’s description of his new mode of conducting business, the story implies that it is nonetheless successful: “thus, by this course of things, [I] am able to write from my sugar plantation, this memorable history of the fall of genius and the rise of solemn humbug!” (33).

A later sketch in the collection, “How the Times Served the Virginians,” bolsters
the image of conservatism inherent in more traditional social modes. The sketch describes the transition from a South defined by the states along the east coast to a region that was increasingly defined by its westward expansion. Here the older, more traditional social structures are represented by Virginians and old Virginian families who move West to re-establish themselves. These are the “old guard” of the South, the First Families of Virginia (F.F.Vs) that Mark Twain would later describe, and they represent the South’s version of landed aristocracy. But just as the young lawyer’s attempts at poetry fail at the Alabama bar, these Virginians with their investment in more traditional practices are ill-suited to life in the Southwest: “Certainly the Virginia character has been less distinguished for its practical than its ornamental traits, and for its business qualities than for its speculative temper” (57). “Business” in this passage means a conservative version of business—operating on good name, slowly saving, and avoiding financial risks. None are qualities that serve to profit individuals in the southwestern states. Thus the story takes on the tone evinced more often in Dickens’s sketches: it balances a mix of nostalgia, both bemoaning the passing of the older generation and its values, while at the same time criticizing those who do not adapt to the new economic modes of the southwestern states. “How the Times” again marks the passing of the old into the new.

And the new is represented by the frontispiece of the collection, a portrait of Simon Suggs, Jr. (figure 6). Though the story featuring Suggs, Jr. is just one in the collection, his image is the masthead. Further, it is an obvious continuation of Hooper’s conceit. Suggs embodies the prototypical characters that populate all of Baldwin’s stories.

84 See Pudd’nhead Wilson (1892).
85 The illustrator for Flush Times was John McLenan (Hoffheimer 751).
Figure 6 – “Simon Suggs, Jr.” by John McLenan

in the collection: cunning lawyers who manipulate a still-forming legal and economic system to their own advantage. Yet, unlike his father, Suggs, Jr. is solidly successful and wealthy, and what’s more, he is actually integrated into the economic expansion of the Southwest territories as one of the authors of that expansion through his work as a lawyer and his speculation in newly-acquired land. As with the cab-drivers and Suggs, Sr., in the illustration Suggs, Jr. is featured alone and looks somewhat devious: his eyes are shaded and he is casually smoking a cigarette. Yet he is dressed respectably in a vest, top hat, and with a watch chain. In this sense, he is more of a “gentleman con man” in the style of Cæsar Kasm; though he has left behind the shabby exterior, he is just as much of an opportunist in that he takes advantage of the free market to his own advantage.

The sketch featuring Suggs extends this characterization of the man to American institutions as a whole, implying that swindling or cheating is not limited to the actions of single individuals, but larger organizational practices. The sketch’s frame is an exchange of letters between Suggs and a literary editor who solicits him for his biography. The conversation is obviously meant to be comical: the staid editor quotes poetry and flatters Suggs’s ego with pompous, over-blown language; Suggs replies with a somewhat literate acceptance that, despite spelling errors and the use of dialect, comes off as more practical and direct. However, when the editor mentions that Suggs would have to pay a hundred and fifty dollars to have his biography published, Suggs politely refuses.

Though it’s tempting to read the exchange as mocking Suggs himself, as Joanna Nichol Shields points out, the satire is directed more at the “shifty” quality of the literary
The editor may claim to be a purveyor of culture and history, but ultimately he is just as much of a swindler as Suggs. First, the letters from the editor are dated from the northern city of “Got-Him,” obviously a reference to “Gotham” and a play on the practice of swindling. Secondly, the editor’s tone and style reveal that of a man who is used to manipulation: his flattery, over-using (and sometimes mis-using) seemingly educated language, and the technique of slipping the subject of payment into his post-script rather than in the main body of the letter. Suggs, being a master of the con himself, immediately catches on, and points out, “your p. s. . . . seems to be the cream of your correspondents” (88).

That frame provides a backdrop to Suggs’s biography as the gentleman con man, in which the less-than-moral nature of the economic and legal exchanges are not just practiced by Suggs, but integrated into the social structure of the Southwest itself, and by extension, the national economy. Just as the literary profession in the North is revealed to have pecuniary motives, almost all of the institutions in 1830s Alabama and Mississippi are depicted in the story and rest of the collection as financially motivated or spurred by the advancement of individual interests. Thus, Baldwin’s sketches feature a shift from peripheral figures on the frontier to those who are part of the general structure of American social and economic institutions.

This move is shown through Suggs’s biography, which follows a character through life whose genius, as Baldwin proclaims, “was eminently commercial” (90). Like Hooper’s earlier collection, Baldwin’s short narrative of Suggs’s life begins with his

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childhood and follows him up through the present day. In one scene, when Suggs, Jr. is still a young man, he and his father are playing cards. At one point, Suggs, Jr. places a snuff box on the table, knowing that his father will take a pinch. Unbeknownst to Suggs, Sr., the snuff is mixed with pepper. While he sneezes, Suggs, Jr. produces a hidden jack and wins the hand.

It is a strange example of an adolescent reaching manhood, but it also demonstrates the effects over a generation of economic growth on the frontier. The “talent” of “shykeenry,” as Suggs, Sr. calls it, is being passed on, but it takes a much more socially-integrated form in his son. That transition is illustrated in the image that accompanies the sketch, “Turning the Jack” (figure 7). In the illustration father and son face off over a table on which a hand of cards has been laid out. The contrast is striking—Suggs, Sr. looks much as he did in the frontispiece to Hooper’s collection, with his scruffy clothes and lean wolf look. Suggs, Jr., on the other hand, is verging on a Tamany Hall caricature from later in the century: he still sports the top hat, vest, and chain, but his face is fuller, more well-fed than that of his father. Unlike Suggs, Sr., Suggs, Jr. has used his talent to integrate himself into more general American society in a more socially acceptable way, becoming a sanctioned confidence man like Caesar Kasm and other lawyers in the Southwest. Thus the sketch imagines a second passing of the torch: from “Reverend” Jedediah, to his son Simon Suggs, and finally Suggs, Jr.

But, as evidenced by Baldwin’s political position in his nonfiction, and the humor that dominates the sketches, this shift to an all-pervasive characterization of Americans as confidence men is not necessarily an entirely positive development. Though Baldwin advocated for national economic progress driven by westward expansion, *Flush Times of
Figure 7 – “Turning the Jack” by John McLenan

Alabama and Mississippi reveals that progress often comes at the cost of “universal distrust” described in Flush Times of California. While the scene between father and son Suggs is comic in its tale of a swindler being swindled, at a very basic level it reveals the extent to which confidence games taint even familial relationships. If all Americans participate in the free market for individual profit, how will communities and interpersonal connections remain intact?

Baldwin’s answer to this problem, in the context of his fictional sketches, seems to be incredibly cynical: in the cause of national expansion, certain morals and communal structures will inevitably disintegrate. But as with all of the sketch collections that feature the spaces developed by the 1830s international cotton trade, the use of humor mitigates the realistic representations of the inherent moral ambiguities. The rest of the short biography follows Suggs through his early years as a con man in the vein of his father, then as an attorney in Arkansas, then as a state’s attorney, and finally, as a government agent in charge of handling the land claims of Native American tribes. In each case, not only does Suggs exploit his position to benefit himself financially, he also eventually acts on behalf of the federal government, a career path that mirrors the increasing geographic growth of the United States and the growth of the American economy. Suggs’s role as an ethically-suspect agent for the federal government in matters of Native American tribal relations is summed up in the same ironically heroic tone that dominates Sketches by Boz, Some Adventures, and the rest of Flush Times: “May his shadow never gross less; and may the Indians live to get their dividends of the arrears paid to their agent [Suggs]” (103).
The sketches set in the 1830s reveal that economic models based on free market economic philosophies were gradually integrated into the very nature of transatlantic society through expansion into the southwestern territories and the development of British cotton manufacturing. The three collections, in turn, trace the growth of a new social order at the beginning of the nineteenth century, one governed by individual opportunism and a larger network of economic development, in which a particular region is always necessarily connected to a global network of trade, commerce, and modernization. Yet those who represented the moment at which the United States and Britain expanded their economies via the Southwestern territories also used their fiction to represent that change in all its particularities, including the morally questionable elements. While *Sketches by Boz*, *Some Adventures*, and *Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* all seem to advocate economic development and modernization, the ever-present confidence man figure demonstrates the moral consequences inherent in such change.

In many ways, that conflict between a desire for economic progress and the ethical complications demanded by such progress reflects the general tension present in capitalism and the southern plantation economy itself. In this sense, the old Southwest humor stories, though they do not explicitly depict the space of the plantation, nonetheless take up the issues of a plantation economy that was liberal in its economic philosophy, but nonetheless advocated for the morally and ethically regressive practices used to propagate that philosophy. Further, as the generic overlaps between the three collections reveal, the literature depicting spaces affected by the international cotton
market ultimately represents the ostensibly localized space of the old Southwest as the foundation of a larger nineteenth-century mindset. For both the southern American writers and Dickens, this was not merely a new and frightening trend, but the foundation of nineteenth-century society as a whole.
“Without being a very keen observer, I may confess that I have seen the differences you describe, but they seemed to me indicative rather of classes than countries. If there is generally a greater love of display in the Northern than in the Southern States, we must in candor confess that there is more of splendor to excite such a feeling. As to the want of ease [in the North] of which you complain, is it not the necessary result of that enterprise and industry which changes only by elevating? And is not this a sign of a healthier and happier system than that in which all is stagnant? The perfect repose sometimes seen in a landscape of a summer noon is beautiful in painting or poetry, yet some of us have felt that the beauty may be too dearly bought.”

-Maria J. McIntosh, *The Lofty and the Lowly* (1852), 1:95

In Maria J. McIntosh’s proslavery novel, *The Lofty and the Lowly; Or, the Good in All and None All-Good* (1852), a southern lady and a northern gentleman debate the relative merits and faults of their respective home regions. Each plays on general stereotypes of the areas: the South as languid, rural, and pre-industrial/pre-capitalist; the North as industrial, capitalist, and concerned with the trappings of “high society.” While the gentleman decries what he deems the pompous show and fervent self-interest of the North, the lady’s response, as we see above, is to point out the implications and consequences of such divergent attitudes toward life. If the North lacks leisure, people of the South most definitely lack the industry and drive necessary to prevent a society from becoming “stagnant,” both culturally and economically.

That McIntosh’s novel was published in 1852, in the wake of the sensation induced by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, makes this fictional conversation in which a southerner takes a critical stance toward the South highly unusual. Though *The Lofty and the Lowly*
is indisputably a novel that advocates the continuance of slavery and paints a favorable portrait of the white southern way of life, at various points the narrative pauses to present a sustained critique of the South, particularly southern economic practices and slavery, such as the one depicted in the passage above. During a time in which the country was increasingly divided along sectional lines over the issue of slavery, McIntosh’s novel purposefully crosses those lines to create a narrative that advocates southern interests, while also questioning the foundation of those ostensible interests. In this sense, the “beauty too dearly bought” is the antebellum southern society founded on a lagging plantation economy and an immoral system of human bondage.

The ability to advocate and critique southern society simultaneously makes McIntosh’s novel more reminiscent of discussions amongst southern intellectuals from earlier in the century. These authors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were inheritors of the Enlightenment thinking that drove the American Revolution and the subsequent structuring of the United States. Though most were slaveholders, they also saw the contradictions between their way of life and the principles of universal rights that upheld Revolutionary Era thinking. In turn, their adherence to the teaching of classical economists and Enlightenment philosophers like Adam Smith or Thomas Malthus led them to view the southern economy’s reliance on agriculture and lack of manufacturing as doomed to general economic and moral failure.

One such author who identified this tension was George Tucker, an economist and professor at the University of Virginia from 1825 to 1845. Though Tucker wrote numerous works of political economy that outlined the problems with American and southern economic practices, he also wrote one of the first novels featuring Virginia life,
Like McIntosh, Tucker presents a positive view of southern society, specifically at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but he also does not shy away from presenting its flaws and problems. Ultimately, though Virginia society emerges in the novel as an honorable and revered institution, *The Valley* is a bleak, realistic picture of a passing social and economic order. As in *The Lofty and the Lowly*, in Tucker’s fictional representation, Virginia’s adherence to slavery and a quasi-feudal agricultural economy will ultimately result in stagnation.

What distinguishes McIntosh’s later novel from *The Valley* is its effort to reform the southern economic and social system while still aligning itself with proslavery writing of the 1840s and 50s. As the century wore on, theorizing over sectional differences turned more and more to violent regional clashes over the existence of slavery, bound up with a defense of what many southerners saw as the southern way of life. *The Lofty and the Lowly*, as the above quote makes clear, does both and neither: it identifies the problems in southern practices while never abandoning a proslavery and ultimately pro-southern stance.

At the same time that sectionalism intensified within the nation, the transatlantic economy was shaped by the industrial and economic change that came with the increased demand for cotton and cotton manufactures. Factories proliferated, and the practices in those factories raised questions of moral culpability for the British government and upper- or middle-classes, and highlighted the responsibility they held toward the welfare of fellow human beings in the midst of economic change and technological innovation. In the decades surrounding the publication of *The Lofty and the Lowly*, British novelists condemned the factory system while also proposing through fiction ways to reform and
“fix” its problems. These “social problem novels,” as many critics have pointed out, were about imagining a different set of social relations under new economic conditions, while not completely abolishing the system itself.87

As novels whose publication date bookend the mid-nineteenth-century industrial boom, *The Valley of Shenandoah* and *The Lofty and the Lowly* trace an ideological shift over the course of several decades through their representations of the South in the transatlantic economy. Each employs different fictional conventions that correspond to the popular literary practices of the time in order to convey messages of reform to the slave system and southern economic practices. Written in the context of post-Revolutionary and eighteenth-century intellectual thought, Tucker’s novel is simply a stark portrait of a passing era in the midst of economic and social change. By using the form of the seduction novel popularized in the eighteenth century, Tucker cautions against the sort of economic practices he saw as detrimental to southern society. Ultimately, this “economic seduction novel”—as I term it—offers no “solution” to the problems presented by its depiction of Virginia society and the southern economy. *The Valley* functions more as a fictional cautionary tale, in which the downfall of the Grayson family is symbolic of the region.

*The Lofty and the Lowly*, in contrast, more closely resembles in fictional style and rhetorical techniques the British social problem novels of the 1840s and 50s. The novel depicts southern life as it was, but also what it could be, employing fictional tropes and generic conventions that mirror those of the British industrial novels to reimagine

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southern society in the context of a modernizing industrial world. In this representation, the South, though still dominated by plantation slavery, is not a pre-capitalist, feudal order, but an active participant in modern economic progress, with the potential to evolve with the rest of the world.

In this chapter, I trace the use of fiction by southern authors to critique the region’s plantation economy. I begin with Tucker and *The Valley of Shenandoah* to illustrate the moral complications raised by plantation slavery and farming during the early part of the nineteenth century. Tucker’s novel, I argue, represents an attempt to raise awareness of and check the problems resulting from racialized slavery and an economy entirely reliant on one-crop agricultural. Then, for the second half of the chapter, I situate McIntosh’s novel in the context of transatlantic literary exchange and 1850s sectional debates over slavery. When read against the popular industrial novels emerging from Britain, *The Lofty and the Lowly* imagines reform to the South’s economy and social structures in such a way that builds upon Tucker’s earlier novel, but still adheres to a proslavery stance. Reading these two novels in conjunction, I argue, highlights the ways in which the South took part in the international networks that shaped nineteenth-century literature and culture, and further, demonstrates how antebellum southern authors conceived of literature as a means of understanding and reshaping southern society as it was.

**“Present Inconvenience” vs. Long-term Prosperity**

When George Tucker died in 1861 at the age of eighty-five, he had published almost twenty books on history and political economy, and for much of his life was a
professor at the University of Virginia. His obituary published by the American Philosophical Society comments, “It is as a successful and equitable writer on great questions of politics and political economy, and of intellectual philosophy, that he will take his place” (70). And, indeed, most of the critical attention paid to Tucker in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been concerned with his thorough and statistic-driven work on American economics and economic theory.  

However, as his obituary whimsically puts it, Tucker “occasionally wooed the muse” and applied his efforts to literature. He wrote three complete novels: *The Valley of Shenandoah*, an early science fiction novel called *A Voyage to the Moon* (1827), and a novel of the future titled *A Century Hence; Or, A Romance of 1941*, which remained unpublished until 1977. Each novel presents an imagined portrait of southern and American life that reflects Tucker’s observations of American culture and economy communicated in his nonfictional works. In a strange way, all three work together, not quite as a trilogy, but close: *The Valley* looks to the past by taking place in post-Revolutionary Virginia; *Voyage* proposes a present alternate reality; and *Century* takes place in the future. All, especially *The Valley*, are cautionary tales against the current economic practices of the United States, the South in particular. As the most grounded in historical fact, *The Valley* uses realist fiction to examine the very foundations of then-

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89 *A Century Hence* was first edited and published by Donald R. Noble in 1977 through the University of Virginia Press. The project began as a dissertation at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in 1974.
contemporary Virginian society, particularly the efficacy of a plantation economy and the practice of slavery.

This attitude toward two of the defining structures in antebellum Virginia life marked Tucker as somewhat singular during his career, for though he lived up to the very eve of the Civil War, he retained many of the views circulated in post-Revolutionary and early nineteenth-century Virginia. In the wake of a revolution driven primarily by Enlightenment philosophies and liberal thought, many Virginia intellectuals viewed slavery as entirely antithetical to the doctrines of universal human rights preached during the Revolutionary period. In turn, a few predicted that the dominance of a plantation-based economy in Virginia (and by extension most of the South at the time) would hinder the region’s development both economically and in terms of a diversified population.

As decades passed, and sectional tensions deepened, the progressive vision of slavery and the southern economic system disappeared. However, Tucker and his like-minded contemporaries represent precursors to the sort of reformist position adopted by Maria J. McIntosh later in the midst of 1850s sectionalism. Both Tucker and McIntosh’s novels participate in a tradition of southern thinking that sought to gradually reform southern social and economic structures. In this sense, McIntosh is not anachronistic, but instead picking up on the earlier, Enlightenment-based attitudes held by Revolutionary-era or turn of the century white southern intellectuals like Tucker who envisioned the evolution of the United States and the southern region away from a dependence on slavery and plantation agriculture, and toward industrialization and manufacturing.

For example, Thomas Jefferson points out the moral evils represented by slavery in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787). After inserting a caveat on the inherent
inferiority of the black race, he ventures a plan for the gradual emancipation of slaves through a recolonization project in the western territories of the United States. The proposal, like many of the recolonization projects put forth throughout the antebellum period, rests on the premise that the prejudices of whites were too strong to allow for racial integration.  

In turn, Jefferson also outlines the problems with Virginia’s economy, particularly its lack of manufacturing, its reliance on foreign trade, and the deleterious effects of the then-dominant tobacco plantations. However, his calls to “throw open the doors of commerce” to free trade and for the development of self-sustaining manufactures are always paired with an assertion that “cultivators of the earth are the most virtuous and independent citizens” and an overt rejection of industrial capitalism (141). In this view, Virginia’s path to economic self-reliance and prosperity still lay in agriculture and farming, but the type of farming that would not rely on staple crops for export and deplete the soil while also being a source of food. His solution was to raise wheat.

The problem with this sort of position for a land-owning, Virginia aristocrat was the practicality of shifting from a slave-based, plantation economy to one more reliant on manufacturing and free labor. As history has revealed, Jefferson did little to counteract the evils he describes in Notes, nor did any of the other Virginia intellectuals who wrote of the moral problems with slavery act on their supposed beliefs. Emancipating one’s slaves meant also giving up property and an accustomed way of life. Therefore the default answer for Virginia politicians and more philosophical plantation owners was that

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90 In a later discussion with James Monroe on the subject, Jefferson would also propose relocating freed slaves to the West Indies (Jefferson to Monroe, 1801; Selected Writings 286-8).
immediate emancipation would be disastrous, while gradual emancipation may, possibly, be a solution—but only in the distant future. Robert McCollery wryly observes, “With regard to slavery, Virginia statesmen were in the peculiar position of repeatedly describing an evil and then proceeding to insist that nothing could be done about it” (120).

With his work on the southern economy and slavery, George Tucker fit neatly into these intellectual trends that dominated turn-of-the-century Virginia, most of which were characterized, conveniently enough, by members of his own extended family. Tucker’s cousin, St. George Tucker, was a prominent Virginia planter and politician, and like Jefferson, St. George Tucker perceived the inherent ideological and moral contradiction in owning slaves in a country supposedly founded on principles of universal freedom and human rights. In 1796, he published A Dissertation on Slavery, With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of It in the State of Virginia, which echoes many of the same arguments advanced by Jefferson in Notes (and even directly quotes from him at times).

But where Jefferson’s comments are mostly observational, St. George Tucker’s Dissertation aims to outline the origins of racialized American slavery, then provide a solution based on those origins. On these terms, Tucker explicitly takes into consideration slavery’s role in Virginia’s finances. He contends that slavery continued to exist in the United States, despite moral and ethical conflicts, because of the profit it brought to the country and the legal codes constructed to further its practice. Though he concedes that there are other factors, Tucker asserts, “The great increase of slavery in the southern, in proportion to the northern states in the union is therefore not attributable, solely, to the
effect of sentiment, but to natural causes; as well as those considerations of profit, which have, perhaps, an equal influence over the conduct of mankind in general” (15). Despite the equal weight he gives to profit, “sentiment,” and “natural causes,” Tucker continues that profit ultimately became the greatest motivator:

What else . . . could have influenced the merchants of the freest nation . . . to embark in so nefarious a traffic, as that of the human race . . .? What, but similar considerations, could prevail on the government of the same country, even in these days, to patronize a commerce so diametrically opposite to the generally received maxims of that government[?] (15-16)

In this schema, the biological differences that Jefferson presumes to be so indelible and prominent in Notes become arbitrary markers for the perpetuation of a government-sanctioned system of cheap labor in A Dissertation.91

It thus follows, in Tucker’s formulations, that if slavery is based on profit, then an emancipation project must take into account the financial implications of freeing thousands of laborers. His plan, like that of Jefferson in Notes, involves the relocation of former slaves to the western territories, but it is so gradual that the economy might adapt to it with no “danger to our agricultural interest” and not “depriving the families of those whose principal reliance is upon their slaves” (98). Also like Jefferson, St. George Tucker never acted on his plan in regards to his own slaves—it was never deemed financially feasible (or one should say, beneficial) to free them.

91 A Dissertation also outlines the creation of a racialized slave system by enumerating the laws put into place by the colonial and post-Revolutionary governments that made black men and women legally separate from white or Native American inhabitants. In this sense, the legal codes “create” the racial distinction. In many ways it is a prescient move on Tucker’s part and predates later critical race studies from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For example, see Allen, Invention of the White Race (1997) or Hartman, Scenes of Subjection (1996).
What he did work to disentangle himself from was the plantation economy that bound him and his family to the practice of slavery, and in turn, what he viewed as a regressive economic system. Unlike Jefferson, St. George Tucker saw self-sufficient Virginia agriculture as ineffectual in terms of long-term economic prosperity. After the Revolutionary era, prewar debts and flagging crop prices eroded the wealth of the former plantation elite. In turn, Tucker viewed agriculture as a gradually dying field: “Land and slaves, he realized, no longer guaranteed a family economic power and social prestige over the long term” (Hamilton 83). For the Virginia economy that was being quickly outpaced in population and wealth by the northern states and the expanding western states, manufacturing would of necessity replace the failing tobacco plantations that once sustained the landholding elite. In consequence, Tucker prepared his family for life beyond the plantation by selling off his holdings and urging his children to seek a more practical, expansive education that would fit with the changing marketplace.

George Tucker spent most of his formative years in the midst of these discussions and debates as a frequent correspondent with his cousin, as a student at William and Mary, then later as a lawyer in Virginia. In fact, one of his earliest publications is a small pamphlet on the subject of slavery, Letter to a Member of the General Assembly of Virginia on the Subject of the Late Conspiracy of the Slaves (1801). The pamphlet, inspired by the slave rebellion organized by Gabriel Prosser in 1800, reiterates what had then become the standard talking points for arguments against slavery by Virginia intellectuals: the violation of natural human rights, the hypocrisy of the United States in

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92 The full title reads: Letter to a Member of the General Assembly of Virginia, on the Subject of the Late Conspiracy of the Slaves; With a Proposal for Their Colonization. Often St. George Tucker is erroneously credited with writing the pamphlet.
continuing its practice, and a proposal for gradual emancipation through a recolonization project in the West. Tucker also shared his cousin’s view that the continued existence of slavery was largely economically motivated, calling the issue of emancipation a “present inconvenience” to slaveholders that would have long-lasting benefits to the entire region (4). In contrast to Jefferson and St. George Tucker, Tucker actually acted on his early views of slavery and freed his slaves upon his retirement from the University of Virginia before moving to Philadelphia for the remainder of his life.

That acknowledgment of the long-term effects of slavery on Virginia society and its economy is what differentiates Tucker’s argument from that of his cousin or Jefferson, and would reemerge later in the works of Maria J. McIntosh. In Letter, Tucker presents what he views as the practical consequences of slavery. First, he identifies the long-ranging effects of population growth on the development of the slave population. One of the main premises of Tucker’s pamphlet is that slaves, as human beings, cannot be kept in isolation and ignorance forever; as the slave population grows, so, too, will the opportunities for education and interaction between slave communities. He cites Prosser’s rebellion as an example of the Virginia slave community’s potential for organization and developed knowledge.

The second effect Tucker outlines is slavery’s influence on the Virginia economy and the economic practices of the slaveholding elite. Foreshadowing arguments voiced by abolitionist writers from later in the century such as Daniel Goodloe or Hinton Rowan Helper, he comments that the gradual abolition of slavery would also promote an equally gradual influx of immigrants to the region, whose population had stagnated, while for the Virginians themselves, “Idleness would no longer be the prerogative of a white skin; nor
would labor be thought unworthy of a free man” (20). And almost directly quoting from Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, he argues further that if the Virginia economy is to compete with the rest of the country, or the world, it must emancipate its slaves. For “no country can attain a great height in manufactures, in commerce, or in agriculture, where one half of the community labours unwillingly, and the other half does not labour at all” (21).

These ideas hint at the driving force behind many of Tucker’s arguments for the rest of his life, whether related to slavery or political economy more generally. As the quote above indicates, his work was heavily influenced by the economic theories of eighteenth-century philosophers like Smith who advocated for liberal capitalist practices. However, his consistent interest in the effects of population growth throughout his career stemmed from an investment in the theories of T.R, Malthus, with some reservations. Malthus posited that population growth in any given society would be checked by the depletion of natural resources, which forces the society in question to adopt new economic practices to counteract those effects.⁹³

Based on these theories, Tucker frequently predicted that slavery would be gradually phased out as the nation, and the world, developed economically. In 1820, during his short tenure as a member of Congress, he delivered a speech on the Missouri Compromise in which he argued that as more immigrants flooded into the new western states, the value of labor would decline, and slavery would cease to be profitable as the expense of keeping slaves would eventually outweigh the profit gained by their labor: “Self-interest will in time burst the bonds of slavery, and emancipation will follow along

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⁹³ James L. Huston and Tipton Snavely provide very thorough studies of Tucker’s work in relationship to Malthus in “Theory’s Failure” and *George Tucker as Political Economist*, respectively.
with tranquillity in the state” (Snively 140). Later in *The Laws of Wages, Profits, and Rent, Investigated* (1837), Tucker again alludes to the financial incentives behind the continued existence of slavery to observe:

And in this country, slaves would be worth little in the southern states on the Atlantic, if it was not for their greater value in the cotton and sugar growing states. As soon as those states are supplied with as many as can work their lands to advantage, the emancipation of slaves, occasioning but a small loss to any, and proving a positive gain to some, it will be impossible to prevent it. (49)

Here Tucker highlights the difference between the tobacco plantations of Virginia (“the Atlantic states”) and the cotton and sugar plantations of the Southwest that Gavin Wright highlights in *The Political Economy of the Cotton South* (1978). While the former tended to be smaller and require fewer slaves, the latter employed the large-scale slave labor organization that facilitated the growth of large amounts of staple crops. The implication in this passage is that had the larger plantations in the West not demanded an increased slave labor force, the reliance on slavery in the smaller plantations in the East would have gradually faded.

In his fiction, Tucker goes beyond mere theorizing to depict the gradual disappearance of slavery: in *A Century Hence*, slavery has completely ceased to exist in many parts of the world, including areas in the southern United States. With that disappearance also comes a gradual acceptance of racial equality. As one character comments in a letter to a friend, in London “they walk arm in arm with a black man as soon as a white one, and some say sooner” (74). And as I will discuss later, McIntosh
would extend this idea in *The Lofty and the Lowly* to depict the phasing out of slavery during the nineteenth century.

In this light, the consistent pattern in much of Tucker’s work—both fiction and nonfiction—is to present slavery as a by-product of capitalist economic practices, a trend that in the decades leading up to the Civil War would gradually disappear. Further, his economic work posits that slavery is a stepping stone to more profitable forms of labor organization as an area grows in population and economic development. Or, simply put, “. . . it cannot exist in the most advanced stages of society. . . . Long before that stage is reached, it is found that the labour of the slave does not repay the cost of rearing him . . .” (Tucker, *Laws* 48). Again using population growth as his main source of analysis, Tucker asserts that a more developed civilization requires advances in technology in order to meet the basic needs of its growing population. If a portion of a society’s finances is constantly funneled into the upkeep of slaves, then not only does a large section of capital not go to investments outside of slave ownership or improving agricultural methods and manufacturing, but a large sector of the labor force remains effectively inert. In his statistical comparison of economic development in the northern and southern regions of the United States, Gavin Wright observes that “slaveowners accumulated wealth in a form that had no counterpart in nonslave societies, a form that vanished when slavery was forcibly ended” (*Slavery and Economic Development* 61). Similarly, Tucker posits that though slavery can exist for a period of time while a population grows and an economy develops, it cannot be the dominant mode of labor organization indefinitely.  

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94 See also, Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1896/1933). Durkheim writes, “The division of labor varies in direct ratio with the volume and density of societies, and, if it progresses in a
Based on his work as a political economist and novelist, Tucker models a template for later work by authors such as Maria J. McIntosh, who wished to uphold aspects of southern society as it was, but also saw the problems in need of reform. As a Virginia intellectual influenced by eighteenth-century philosophies, Tucker aligned his social values with the slaveholding class; however, as an economist and statistician of population growth he perceived the problems evinced by an economy reliant on both a plantation structure and racialized slave labor for its continued existence. Tipton Snavely notes in his survey of Tucker’s economic theories, “What [made] him unhappy . . . was the failure of the South to keep pace in the development of industry and in the growth of learning . . . . He never ceased to despair at what he regarded as the wasted opportunity of Virginia and the South. While he wanted to preserve its virtues and amenities, he sought for improvement and reform in the Southern way of life. . .” (44).

Like his cousin before him, George Tucker foresaw the decreased importance of land and slaves in an economy rapidly integrating itself into systems of free trade and international commerce. In this changing financial scene, urban areas and manufacturing would become increasingly important for a sustainable economy, and further, would have long-term effects cultural effects on an area. In his 1843 work, *Progress of the United States in Population and Wealth in Fifty Years*, Tucker criticizes the overwhelmingly rural nature of the South due to its reliance on the plantation system:

> The proportion between the rural and town population of a country is an important fact in its interior economy and condition. It determines, in a great

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continuous manner in the course of social development, it is because societies become regularly denser and generally more voluminous” (262).
degree, its capacity for manufactures, the extent of its commerce, and the amount of its wealth. The growth of cities commonly marks the progress of intelligence and the arts, measures the sum of social enjoyment, and always implies increased mental activity. . . (Progress 127)

Less mental activity, Tucker argues in Letter and McIntosh later observes in The Lofty and the Lowly, was one characteristic of the southern slaveholding class. Further, that “indolence” as Tucker terms it, presented yet another impediment to economic growth in the southern states: “A course of bad crops, a recurrence of epidemic diseases, and lastly, extreme indolence, ignorance, or improvidence in the people would all conduce to the same end” (Laws 62). Thus, the South would have to adapt, both by allowing for the gradual disappearance of slavery, but also accommodating its economic practices to a system not entirely centered on agriculture. To counteract the inevitable economic decline of the region—which had already begun according to his own 1843 census analysis⁹⁵—Virginia would have to make drastic changes.

In his fiction, particularly with his first novel, The Valley of Shenandoah, Tucker was able to put these ideas into practice by representing the actual decline of the region in the form of a sentimental seduction novel. Through this form, he adapts the tropes of eighteenth-century British fiction to model the devolution of the South that he predicted in his economic writings. Just as his economic work attempted to warn southerners of an uncertain economic future, his first novel presents the potential dangers of existent southern economic practices through the tale of one representative family.

⁹⁵ See Tucker, Progress. Here Tucker points out that in contrast to the northern states, which usually averaged at least 50,000 persons or more living in towns and cities, the urban populations of most southern states barely reached 10,000 in 1840, with Virginia being the highest at 28,185 (Progress 129-31). According to Progress, Virginia fell behind every established northern state in everything but agriculture.
The Valley of Shenandoah: The Economic Seduction Novel

George Tucker wrote *The Valley of Shenandoah* directly before he accepted a professorship at the University of Virginia. For Tucker, the novel was a last-ditch attempt to save his depleted finances. Always improvident with money (a sad coincidence considering his chosen line of study), Tucker had recently lost his second wife and encountered financial difficulties with his plantation in the Virginia countryside. The novel, which is set in the same area, tells a similar story of the Graysons, a once-elite Virginia family whose economic and social decline is brought about by the numerous debts left by the head of the family, Colonel Grayson, after he passes away. As a result, some critics have interpreted the novel as a cautionary tale against financial carelessness of the sort Tucker himself practiced. Donald R. Noble points out in his introduction to the 1970 edition of the novel that much of *The Valley* is concerned with the “prodigality and disdain for business matters” that characterized the Virginia elite (xxii). On these terms, the novel falls directly in line with Tucker’s texts on political economy, in which he predicts the potential problems inherent in the South’s plantation economy.

*The Valley* is also a typical tale of seduction so common to eighteenth-century sentimental novels like Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa* (1748) or Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791/4). Against the backdrop of the family’s financial problems, the Graysons’ daughter, Louisa, begins an affair with James Gildon, the college friend of her older brother, Edward. The episode, as with so many others in earlier novels, ends disastrously: Louisa becomes pregnant and eventually dies, while Edward dies in a fight with Gildon in an attempt to defend her honor. The seduction, along with Tucker’s use of
letters between lovers and the tragic endings of all involved, are characteristics pulled straight from eighteenth-century sentimental novels. These works ostensibly present a “true story” in order to illustrate the potential dangers for overly-romantic and innocent young women who read too many novels of romance. Noble observes the generic borrowing, writing, “Tucker had read many of the eighteenth-century novels, and The Valley does display some of the conventions of the sentimental novel” (Introduction, xviii). In the same way that his nonfiction work espoused the ideas of Enlightenment thinkers, Tucker’s fiction adapts the forms of eighteenth-century fiction.

The effect of such variant forms is to split the novel into two seemingly separate tales. Throughout the narrative, The Valley shifts radically from being the straight forward realist representation of post-Revolutionary Virginia reminiscent of Tucker’s economic writings, to an almost absurdist romance plot. Those oscillations most likely explain why many critics who discuss The Valley prefer to cite only specific sections, especially those not dealing with romance. Though Noble recognizes the role of the seduction plot in his introduction, he quickly dismisses it in favor of the “realistic treatment” of plantation life (xxi), while Tipton Snavely uses passages from the novel to elucidate Tucker’s position on slavery.96 J. V. Ridgely also notes the eighteenth-century derivations, but calls the plot of the novel “a mélange of generic types currently popular in England and America, especially sentimental-domestic fiction and the tale of seduction” (36). He prefers instead to see the novel’s “value only in its freezing a moment in Virginia history before defense of slavery turned the plantation romance into a more radically self-serving document” (37). In contrast, Michael Kreyling concentrates

96 See George Tucker as Political Economist, Ch. 11.
on the romance plot of the novel in his discussion of Edward Grayson as a southern hero. Elizabeth S. Chamberlain, in her 1979 dissertation “The Virginia Historical Novel to 1835,” probably comes closest to treating the novel’s romantic plot and socio-economic observations as two parts of a whole, but she categorizes the romance as simply a derivation of Scott.

However, rather than reading the romantic plot as tangential to the realist depictions of Virginia society (or vice versa), I would like to posit that The Valley adopts the form of the eighteenth-century sentimental novel of seduction and applies it to the sort of economic and social commentary that characterizes most of Tucker’s nonfiction. In this light, the more “sentimental” aspects of the novel (Louisa’s seduction, Edward’s duel) can be reinterpreted as generic conventions of fiction that are employed to illustrate the theories of Tucker’s economic treatises. As opposed to a single story of a seduced young woman that characterized seduction novels like Charlotte Temple, Tucker presents the tale of an entire community that is brought down by its own follies and lack of financial or social foresight of the sort described in Letter. The Graysons, in this context, serve as a cautionary example for other Virginians, just as the young women led astray in the previous novels are examples for young female readers. By reading the formal

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98 In his extensive study of Tucker’s work, Robert McLean mentions money and economics as being the primary theme of The Valley. Further, he writes that “the novel . . . may be read as a parable urging the remaining ‘true old breed’ of Virginians to mend their ways, to avoid being ruined by the ironclad laws of economics, and to ‘progress’ with the rest of the nation” (88). This is precisely my read. However, McLean’s (over)use of ironic quotation marks and the word “ironclad” implies a pessimism toward the newer economic practices that neither Tucker’s novel nor his fiction demonstrate. According to McLean, then, The Valley is more of an elegy, nostalgic and mournful of the old Virginia gentry than cautionary. Yet despite his sympathy with the fading plantation elite (being, of course one of them), Tucker’s novel is more dire than wistful, especially considering it in relation to the novels of seduction. Elizabeth Chamberlain also points out this cautionary tendency and Tucker’s emphasis on the poor financial practices of the Graysons;
structures of *The Valley* against popular literary forms of the time, we can see the novel
as less fragmentated and inconsistent. Instead, the narrative draws from two seemingly
divergent written forms: an economic treatise and a sentimental novel.

The title and preface are the first indications of the novel’s debt to the eighteenth-
century sentimental genre. An important trait of most seduction novels, particularly given
their cautionary intent for young readers, was to establish the veracity of the story being
told by framing it as a documentary act. For example, the full title of Hannah W. Foster’s
1797 novel, *The Coquette*, is *The Coquette; Or, The History of Eliza Wharton*. The story
was, in fact, based on a true story of a young woman who was abandoned by her lover
and died in childbirth.99 Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* is also subtitled “A Tale of Truth.”
And in both cases, the novel ends with a description or recreation of the young woman’s
tombstone, taking pains to present “evidence” for her sad story.100

Likewise, the full title of Tucker’s novel is *The Valley of Shenandoah; Or,
Memoirs of the Graysons*. As with “history” or “truth,” “memoirs” points to the
documentary structure of the narrative. However, instead of the “memoirs” of Louisa
Grayson, the focus is on the entire family’s downfall, which is bound up with financial
crises. Thus the “tale of truth” presented by the novel is the story of the family and the
area as a whole. That impression is cemented by the novel’s preface, in which Tucker

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99 In 1788, Elizabeth Whitman, the daughter of a respectable New England family, died alone in a tavern in
Massachusetts after giving birth to a child. She had purportedly traveled to the tavern to meet her husband,
the child’s father, though the man never appeared. The story, which was printed and reprinted in local
newspapers, caused a scandal and became fodder for gossip and other novels of seduction. William Hill
Brown also adapted the story in his novel, *The Power of Sympathy: Or, The Triumph of Nature. Founded in
Truth* (1789). Brown, too, presents the novel as “factual” (Davidson vii-ix).

100 Richardson’s first novel, *Pamela* (1740), uses letters, as the subtitle proclaims, “In order to cultivate the
Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Minds of the Youth of Both Sexes.” Though Pamela is ultimately
not a seduced women, Richardson would employ the same form later in *Clarissa*. 
employs the trope of the “found manuscript” common to many eighteenth- and
nineteenth-century novels, such as Scott’s *Waverley* discussed in Chapter One.\textsuperscript{101}

According to the preface, the narrative has been pieced together from the papers and
letters of a dying man whom Tucker encountered while traveling in New York. Through
this work of editorial framing, Tucker once again presents evidence for the story, just as
*The Coquette* replicates Eliza Wharton’s tombstone at the end of the novel. Therefore, as
the preface claims, *The Valley* is both “a history of real life” and “one of those fictitious
representations by which inventive genius has occasionally . . . sought to supply to youth
the wisdom and experience of age” (v).\textsuperscript{102} As Rowson exhorted her “fair readers” to learn
from the “reality” conveyed by *Charlotte Temple*, Tucker’s preface urges his readers to
learn from the example of the Graysons.\textsuperscript{103}

By identifying the generic conventions evident in *The Valley*, we can situate the
novel in the tradition of the cautionary seduction tale, a move that highlights the tension
that runs throughout the novel between sentimental romance and the strict realism more
in line with Tucker’s nonfiction works. Frequently, the narrative will break to relate an
elaborate description of Virginia life. In these cases, the characters function as
mouthpieces for the sort of arguments and observations presented in Tucker’s economic
or sociological writings. Foremost is the frank conversation between Edward Grayson
and James Gildon on the subject of slavery. While Gildon, the son of a New York
merchant, buys into the romantic, feudal vision of slavery that would be taken up by

\textsuperscript{101} Or Gothic fiction such as Horace Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* (1764).
\textsuperscript{102} Outside of the preface, all other references to the text of *The Valley of Shenandoah* are to the 1970
dition.
\textsuperscript{103} Notably, Noble does not include the preface in his edition of the novel, and his only reference to the
“sentimental” tropes is to the romance plot. Few, if any, critics mention the preface in their discussions of
the novel. See McLean, Kreyling, Chamberlain, etc.
proslavery advocates later in the century, Grayson’s views echo those expressed by Tucker in his 1801 *Letter*: “We, of the present generation, find domestic slavery established among us, and the evil, for I freely admit it to be an evil, both moral and political, admits of no remedy that is not worse than the disease” (1:61, my emphasis).

There are several important ideas communicated in this passage. One is the continuation of Tucker’s critiques of slavery from his earlier nonfiction pamphlet. The second are the temporal cues: the “present generation” presumably means Grayson’s era, or the post-Revolutionary generation. The emphasis on “present” in the context of a narrative set in the past implies that the situation has the potential to change, which also creates an imperative for the reader. If slavery is only presently established, it could, in the future, be phased out of existence, a logic in line with Tucker’s arguments surrounding slavery throughout his career.

While never explicitly condoning the practice of slavery outside of this brief conversation, the rest of the novel does, indeed, make a case for emancipation through its stark portrayal of slavery and the attendant horrors of slave life. Though many of the Graysons’ slaves are portrayed as content, even happy, Tucker also does not hesitate to depict the horrors integral to the system, including abusive overseers, the slave auction (when the Graysons are forced to sell their plantation), and slave breeding. ¹⁰⁴ Like the “dear readers” of the seduction novels, through these conversations and the experiences of the characters on the plantations, the readers of the *The Valley* are presented with the potential dire consequences of slavery should the warnings demonstrated by the example of the Graysons go unheeded.

¹⁰⁴ See McLean 190-2.
As his catalogue of writing makes clear, slavery was but one issue with which Tucker was concerned; many of his works focus more on long-term economic change. Similarly, most of the narrative breaks in *The Valley* are descriptions of the Virginia economy, farming, and the financial mismanagement of the Virginia plantation elite. The novel itself begins with a financial crisis of the sort predicted by Tucker’s economic writings: after his father’s death, Edward and his mother learn that Col. Grayson had financed several failed land speculations and also co-signed a number of loans on behalf of his neighbors. By the novel’s opening, these problems, in addition to a steadily decreasing return on the plantations’ harvests, have left the Graysons virtually destitute. And as the novel demonstrates, their situation is by no means unusual. In yet another conversation, Edward explains the situation to Gildon, who only sees the apparent wealth of the upper-class Virginians:

“You forget . . . that you are in an agricultural and a slave-holding country, the inhabitants of which have always been remarkable for spending their incomes before they made them, and for rating them very extravagantly. As the profits of a landed estate come in but one or twice a year, the means of the proprietor are then ample, and if he is not in debt he is likely to become so, by underrating the unforeseen contingencies [weather, insect infestations, fluctuations in the market], and by getting into habits, formed when his purse was full, which cannot be changed when it is empty. Consequently, in order to continue them, he is compelled to run in debt.” (1:110-11)

Similarly, Col. Grayson lived beyond his wealth on the basis of his family’s good name and the assumption that the harvests on his two plantations would more than make up for
the loans issued—all while never taking the trouble to modify his spending and lending, or to monitor the management of his plantations. Through the extensive descriptions of the Virginia economy provided by Edward, the Graysons become representative figures of the declining plantation economy, a system entirely reliant on the labor of others, the perpetuation of credit and debt, and a single method of earning a profit. Their example presents another exhortation to the readers to consider the consequences of these economic practices and financial imprudence, in which Tucker uses the convention of the “dear reader” trope in the seduction novels to present an imagined outcome to the statistical analyses in Laws or Progress.

While the novel consistently utilizes the basic form of the cautionary seduction tale to frame the realist economic descriptions focalized through the characters, the romance plot of the novel nonetheless seems at odds with the lengthy diatribes on finance and political economy. The effect is, indeed, lopsided. However, what connects the two elements of the novel is another of Tucker’s favorite topics in his nonfiction works: the decline of the more traditional land- and slave-based plantation aristocracy of the post-Revolutionary era. Rather than being led entirely astray by the example of novels and promises of love, as with the women who populate the eighteenth-century novels, the Graysons’ downfall is precipitated by their collective refusal to abandon the more traditional social mores that characterize the older aristocracy, which is quickly fading in the face of economic change.

One element is the aforementioned tendency of all members of the plantation elite toward “indolence” (as Tucker describes it Laws of Profits and Wages) and a disregard for practical business matters. This is especially true for the young women, and that lack
of knowledge about her family’s financial affairs partially leads to Louisa’s romantic seduction. While her mother and Edward attempt to recoup the family’s estate, Louisa is left largely in the dark and to herself, which gives Gildon the opportunity to insinuate himself (*The Valley* 1:93). Those favorable circumstances are compounded by Louisa’s more general innocence as the daughter of a landed Virginia family. On the plantation, “the little country flower,” as she is often called in the novel, is a mere innocent child: “The circumstances of her education, temper, and situation at the time, peculiarly exposed her to its [Gildon’s passion] seductive influence. Treated, from her infancy, with extraordinary delicacy and tenderness, experiencing nothing but kindness and indulgence from both parents, she was all softness gentleness, timidity, and affection” (1:91). All of these traits contrast with the savvy northern daughter of a merchant for whom Gildon eventually leaves Louisa alone and pregnant.\(^{105}\) Through the basic tale of Louisa’s romantic seduction, which again follows all of the conventions derived from the eighteenth-century novels, *The Valley* presents the case for economic reform presented in his nonfiction.

Louisa is not the only Grayson affected by the family’s adherence to aristocratic values; the novel is, after all, about the fall of the entire family. Edward, despite whatever prudence he evinces in repairing the family’s estate, is also guilty of his own social prejudices and ignorance that stem from his role as the gentleman landowner, another convention of the eighteenth-century novel. To ascertain their finances, he takes stock of the family’s fortune, including the distant plantation being run by an overseer. Employing

\(^{105}\) The episode is nearly identical to the ending of *Charlotte Temple*, in which Charlotte’s seducer marries another, less naive and dependent young lady from New York, leaving Charlotte alone to die.
an overseer was common practice for the absentee owners of large or multiple estates, yet it represents another version of the “indolence” that infected most of the South’s gentry. As in any business, the longer the owner was away, the less a plantation yielded in terms of crops and the more poorly it was run. In this case, none of the Graysons had been to the plantation in months, even years, and as a result the overseer essentially runs it as his own farm: he mistreats the slaves, spends more time cultivating his own crop, and has let the maintenance of the great house fall apart. And though the overseer is clearly cheating the family of money, Edward is reluctant to believe ill of him, even when he witnesses the problems first-hand—or, perhaps, he is simply unwilling to take on the burden of running the farm himself. In either case, despite his doubts, he trusts in his father’s judgment of the manager, “a smooth, plausible, voluble man, who had got the blind side of Col. Grayson in his lifetime, and had maintained himself in the good opinion of the family ever since” (2:33).

If Louisa represents an impossible ideal of genteel female innocence, Edward represents a southern aristocrat of the old order, one quickly passing away. In *Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative*, Michael Kreyling describes him as a romantic hero pitted against the “cash nexus” represented by New York and the businessmen who populate the city (including Gildon’s father) (16-17). But Edward is less a hero than a planter bound to the impotent feudal codes that once dictated Virginia society—in fact, he might be read more as a failed romantic hero than anything else. In a modern

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106 Kreyling, despite his use of the term “cash nexus,” never explicitly connects Tucker’s novel to Thomas Carlyle’s later writings. The phrase becomes a central theme in *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle’s critique of contemporary English society. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Carlyle would become an important intellectual influence on southern proslavery thought in the 1840s and 50s.
economic world characterized by capitalist models of free trade, those codes hold little value.

Again following his narrative role as the gentleman hero of the seduction novel, Edward reverts to outmoded aristocratic codes in order to seek satisfaction for the honor of his sister and family. When Edward learns of Gildon’s treachery, he immediately travels to New York to avenge his sister’s honor. In a series of blunders, he finally challenges Gildon to a duel, and the episode not only costs the family financially, but it costs Edward his life. In challenging Gildon to a duel, he utilizes the tool held by every “man of honor” in the South to call for “public recognition of a man’s claim to power” (Wyatt-Brown 353). However, as the rest of The Valley makes clear, with the depletion of his family’s wealth and land-holdings, and his inability to move beyond the plantation system that created his former wealth, Edward Grayson is an increasingly powerless figure in turn-of-the-century America.

This episode proves to be the denouement for the entire Grayson clan, the culmination of the seduction plot set in motion by the cycles of an unsustainable plantation-based economy. The ending, true to the form of the cautionary tale, renders the Graysons victims to the economic and social practices that originally led them astray, in which the Graysons’ “seduction” at the hands of aristocratic values and poor economic practices parallels Louisa’s more literal seduction. Edward is, of course, dead; Louisa eventually dies after giving birth to a child, who also dies; and Mrs. Grayson lives alone in a small cottage, for the family has sold the plantation. The Grayson family as a whole then meets the same fate as Charlotte Temple, Clarissa, or Eliza Wharton: death, shame, or virtual extinction. However, as The Valley and the other seduction novels make clear,
their fates are more cautionary than simply tragic. The novel ends with a final injunction:

“And thus, gentle reader, you may see, in this true, but melancholy history, something of the life and manners which prevailed about twenty-five or thirty years ago, in Virginia, and especially in that part of it which is called the Valley of Shenandoah” (2:320). If Charlotte Temple is a “striking example of vice” (Charlotte Temple 132) for her female readers, the Graysons and the plantation elite who occupied the Valley are warnings for present-day readers who were wont to uphold the era as the ideal of southern society, which the decades following the publication of the novel would demonstrate.

“The Impending Crisis”: The 1850s

“Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets.”

-Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil; Or, Two Nations (1845), 65-6

But what shall we say of the South—the old South, which fought the battles of the Revolution—which gave the statesmen, the generals, and the wealth of those early times—which concentrated then the agriculture, the commerce, and, even to some extent, the manufactures of the continent, but which has lost, or is losing everything else, save that agriculture; and even this last resource growing less and less remunerative, threatens in the event to complete her beggary? How much has the South promised, and how little has she fulfilled?

-J. D. B. DeBow, “The Southern Industrial Revolution,” DeBow’s Commercial Review. (July 1850)

Commerce is king. -Thomas Carlyle

When James D. B. DeBow wrote the above lines for his southern commercial periodical, more commonly called DeBow’s Review, the southern United States had experienced years of prosperity. The imminent economic decline that Tucker predicted
for Virginia in 1824 had not occurred throughout the region: as I discussed in Chapter 2, the profitability of cotton cultivation and cotton manufactures spurred rapid territorial expansion and commercial relations between England and the South. Rather than diverting the South from an agriculturally-dominated economy, the growing prominence of mass-produced cotton manufactures pouring out of England encouraged southerners and those immigrating to the southwestern states to focus more intently on one-crop cultivation.

Yet the quotation from the British social theorist Thomas Carlyle, which also served as the perennial motto for DeBow’s journal (figure 8), reflects the general social and economic changes occurring at the time. What was in its relative infancy at the time Tucker and later Dickens were writing their first works of fiction had become the dominant way of life for the nineteenth-century economy: free trade and laissez-faire capitalism. The increasing importance of international markets and manufactures to the British and American economies brought about a social crisis that was felt by both ends of the transatlantic commercial exchange, in which upper-class intellectuals saw that a supposedly more stable way of life was quickly disappearing. In its place was Benjamin Disraeli’s “two nations” created out of the pursuit for individual wealth in the midst of growing industrialization and capitalist economic models: rich and poor, have and have nots.

This international shift also heralded a change in the ways authors approached realist fiction in Britain and the United States, in which authors more frequently turned their attention to the social and cultural consequences of rapid economic and technological change. British authors like Disraeli or Elizabeth Gaskell used their “social
Figure 8 – Front page of *DeBow’s Commercial Review of the South and West*, August 1848

Source: *DeBow’s Commercial Review of the South and West*, August 1848.
problem novels” to depict and comment upon the growing class disparity and poverty in England brought about by the factory system and industrialization. No longer solely centered on romance or representations of the past, these novels directly critiqued the contemporary English factory system, and further, proposed methods of future reform.

For the United States, social problem novels were employed to the same ends, but with an added complication: though they, too, highlighted the economic and social problems existent in the United States, the growing sectionalism over slavery demanded that the novels exercise a defense of a particular position, whether proslavery or abolitionist. Like their British counterparts, proslavery (or pro-southern) novelists like Maria J. McIntosh observed the problems with southern society highlighted by Tucker earlier in the century. Her novel, *The Lofty and the Lowly*, uses the form of the mid-century “social problem novel” and its goals of reform both to critique and defend the southern economy and slavery. Therefore, as the economy on both sides of the Atlantic changed, so, too, did authors’ attempts to represent the effects in fiction.

In the United States, the economic shift emerged as a two-sided crisis for the South: the decline of the southern agricultural economy, and the ideological threats to the established social order in the form of abolitionism. Though they were delayed, Tucker’s predictions slowly became manifest. As DeBow’s comment makes clear, the system of free trade that had formerly made the southern United States one of the wealthiest areas in the world was quickly rendering its economy and social life obsolete, while the 1837 panic that affected the literary marketplace and William Gilmore Simms’s finances left many planters throughout the South in debt (Cotterill 187-93; Sellers 354-5). By 1843, as Tucker’s analysis of the U.S. census data reveals, the more prominent southern states still
focused primarily on agriculture and mining (Progress 195-6; Sydnor 262-4). And for an economy in which manufactures were important commodities, agriculture alone would not be sufficient to support southern finances.

Further, post-1830 America was characterized by increased sectional tensions over the issue of slavery that was partially brought about by the nation’s expansion into the West. The Missouri Compromise in 1820 (which George Tucker debated) was but one of a series of events and conflicts that escalated the regional friction that eventually led to the Civil War.107 In the 1850s, these problems escalated with one conflict after another: the Compromise of 1850; the attached Fugitive Slave Act; the publication of Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852); the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854); and the Dred Scott decision (1857).108 By the end of the decade, not only was the United States divided into “two nations” under the system of free trade (rich and poor; southern agriculture and northern manufacturing), but the country had split into two distinct regional factions over the continued existence of human bondage.

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107 For more extensive discussions of the events leading up to the Civil War and the regional tensions surrounding the debates over slavery, see David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (1976); Michael A. Morrison, Slavery and the American West (1997); and William W. Freehling, The Road to Disunion Vols. 1 and 2 (1991/2007).

108 The Compromise of 1850 involved territories acquired during the Mexican-American War (1846-8). As part of its provisions, California was admitted as a free state and the rest of the territories (New Mexico and Utah) were left to determine their free or slave status by popular sovereignty. To balance the Compromise in favor of the slave states, the Fugitive Slave Act was given more legal strength, with punishment for its non-enforcement in the North (Freehling 487-510). The Kansas-Nebraska Act also left the establishment of slavery to popular sovereignty in the states, which subsequently resulted in violence between the pro- and antislavery factions (Freehling 559-65; Morrison 148-56). The Supreme Court case Dred Scott v. Sandford determined that even if a slave were transported into a free state or territory, that slave would not be freed. The decision effectively permitted slavery in all of the territories and helped to escalate the violence in the western states, leading contemporaries to dub the events in the area between 1854 and 1860, “Bleeding Kansas” (Morrison 157-60, 188-9; see also Etcheson, Bleeding Kansas [2004], particularly Chapter 5).
The reaction of upper-class white southerners was to adopt a staunch defense of slavery and the plantation system that had promoted their way of life for so long.\textsuperscript{109} For southerners like Tucker who held ambivalent positions toward their home regions, the sort of critique evinced by his nonfiction and \textit{The Valley of Shenandoah} became less frequent as the nineteenth century wore on. As their power waned, the gentlemen and intellectuals of the old order, or the southern Atlantic states, clung to the image of a prosperous plantation South of the previous generation.\textsuperscript{110} Historian David Donald has pointed out that this trend continued with later proslavery advocates. Describing them as “unhappy men who had severe personal problems relating to their place in southern society” (12), he observes:

\begin{quote}
They were defending not the social order which they knew, with flaws so glaring they had to be admitted, but an idealized paternalistic society which, as they believed, had formerly flourished in the South before it was undermined by the commercialization of urban life on the one hand and by the increasing democratization and decentralization of the frontier on the other. (16)
\end{quote}

For these men, the attacks on slavery emerged concurrently with the financial plateauing of plantation agriculture and the increased devotion of the planters’ net worth to slaves and land, which Tucker had cautioned against in his 1837 book, \textit{Laws of Wages}.

\textsuperscript{109} For a more thorough discussion of the rise of proslavery thought, see Drew Gilpin Faust, \textit{The Ideology of Slavery} (1981) and Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, \textit{The Mind of the Master Class} (2005).

\textsuperscript{110} As early as 1815, for example, John Randolph, St. George Tucker’s stepson, used his position as a Congressman to denounce “Yankee manufacturers” and “waxed nostalgic about the great Virginia planters of old whose principles, character, and wealth were largely responsible for the Old Dominion’s onetime power and greatness” (Hamilton 164).
In turn, the southern plantation society was increasingly set up in proslavery arguments to be diametrically opposed to capitalism. As the debates became more heated and divided, slavery was aligned with feudal, pre-capitalist economic models that supposedly counteracted the evils of free trade (Donald 5). Directly after the Panic of 1837, the South Carolina judge William Harper connects the conditions of those affected by the financial downturn to that of the poor in England in Memoir on Slavery (1837/8). He argues that slavery provides an antidote to the imbalance in wealth: “It is probable that the accumulation of individual wealth will never be carried to quite so great an extent in a Slave-Holding country, as in one of free labor; but a consequence will be, that there will be less inequality and less suffering” (95).

The most extreme example of this logic was put forth by George Fitzhugh, whose later tirades against the evils of free trade in Sociology for the South (1854) and Cannibals All! (1857) went hand-in-hand with his promotion of a more widespread system of slavery. According to Fitzhugh, free trade created all of the major problems in the nineteenth century, particularly the poverty resulting from widened class disparities: “It is the interest of the capitalist and the skillful to allow free laborers the least possible portion of the fruits of their labor; for all capital is created by labor, and the smaller the allowance of the free laborer, the greater the gains of his employer” (Cannibals 120). The solution, he claims, is slavery (not necessarily racialized) employed in all areas of society, including industry:

The association of labor carried out under a common head or ruler, would render labor more efficient, relieve the laborer of many of the cares of household affairs, and protect and support him in sickness and old age, besides preventing the too
great reduction of wages by redundancy of labor and free competition. Slavery attains all these results. What else will? (Sociology 59)

In this formulation, slavery cannot possibly exist in a system based on free trade, while free trade signals the decline of morality and community.

Continuing the alignment of slavery and the southern plantation economy with more feudal economic models, antislavery writers used virtually the same economic premises to argue against the institution. In these arguments, slavery and the plantation system’s inability to operate profitably within a system of free trade prevent the southern regions from advancing economically. In an argument that parallels the earlier critiques put forth by George Tucker, Daniel Goodloe focuses on the absence of manufacturing and urban centers in the South in his pamphlet, Inquiry Into the Causes Which Have Retarded the Accumulation of Wealth and Increase of Population in the Southern States (1846). He concludes, “Slavery sits like the Old Man of the Sea upon the necks of the people, paralyzing every effort at improvement” (13). Later in 1857, Hinton Rowan Helper used census statistics to prove the very same point, only emphasizing further that the presence of slavery also resulted in a higher rate of poverty for lower-class whites.

His book, The Impending Crisis, argues that not only would the conflicts over slavery divide the nation between North and South, but white southerners would also become divided along class lines as the distribution of wealth grew more and more disparate.111 Slavery, in this context, then became the catalyst for the American version of Disraeli’s “two nations.”

111 In general, Helper was less interested in the moral evils of slavery than its negative consequences for middle- and lower-class white southerners. His proposals for emancipation in The Impending Crisis, which also involved colonization in Africa, were all predicated on his extreme racism (Impending 220-1).
However, there were those who saw slavery as having the potential to be part of the capitalist system of free trade, and it is from this tradition that Maria J. McIntosh and her novels emerge. For example, though he always argued in his paper’s editorials for the continued existence of slavery as one of the cornerstones of southern society and its economy, James DeBow did not position it in opposition to the tenets of free trade. In an editorial hopefully titled, “The Southern Industrial Revolution,” he observes, “Mere production from the soil soon finds its limit and limits population” (78). He then suggests a list of new investments, from railroads and manufacturing, to increasing foreign commerce—all under the premise that both slave and free labor can be employed in each new industry (79).

Even though he argued for the modernization and increased industrialization of the southern economy according to the principles of liberal capitalism, DeBow and other southern economists drew many of their general philosophies, especially on the issue of slavery, from more conservative, aristocratically-minded British intellectuals and philosophers. The forerunner of these was Thomas Carlyle, whose famous phrase functioned as the motto for DeBow’s journal and whose articles were frequently reprinted in DeBow’s Review and other southern periodicals. Carlyle, like his fans in the southern United States, saw the industrialization of England and the growing dominance of capitalist economic practices as hints of an impending social and economic disaster, in which the needs of the individual subsumed the needs of many. He opens his book, Past

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112 Donald notes that like Helper, DeBow was one of the few proslavery advocates who addressed his arguments to the poorer whites in the South (Donald 6). See DeBow, The Interest in Slavery of the Southern Non-Slaveholder (1860).

113 In Conjectures of Order (2004), Michael O’Brien gives an extensive account of the influence of European and British philosophy on southern intellectuals, particularly Vol. 1, Book 1, Chapter 3.
and Present (1843), with a dire image of contemporary English society: “England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition” (5). As the country grows wealthier from the boom in cotton manufactures and factories, Carlyle points out that those who labor for that wealth are increasingly distanced from its benefits: “In the midst of plethoric plenty, the people perish; with gold walls, and full barns, no man feels himself safe or satisfied” (9).

Citing the historical precedent of a successful and peaceful medieval monastery, Carlyle argues that the best way to counteract the evils of England’s overabundance of wealth and increasingly individualized social structures is to adapt the communal strategies of the medieval period. In this schema, rather than each man operating for himself, naturally “talented” men (not the useless aristocracy that Carlyle claims had come to dominate English life) would influence those below them in terms of intellect and character. With these “Captains of Industry” as the proper models,

To be a noble Master, among noble Workers, will again be the first ambition with some few,—to be a rich Master only second. How the Inventive Genius of England, with the whirr of its bobbins and billy-rollers shoved somewhat into the backgrounds of the brain, will contrive and devise, not cheaper produce exclusively, but fairer distribution of the produce at its present cheapness! (266, my emphasis)

Thus the solution is a merging of the new English industrial society dictated by individualism with the older communal structures of the agricultural economy. Without entirely doing away with the advancements in wealth and technology, according to
Carlyle, English society could then remedy the “ominous condition” of the poor and working classes.

With this as his “ideal” social structure, and his general racism, it is no wonder that Carlyle’s works were frequently circulated in southern proslavery intellectual circles and publications. In what became a common form of rhetoric, proslavery authors drew parallels between the debates over industrialization in England with the conflicts over slavery in the United States. William Harper demonstrates that technique as early as 1837 in *Memoir on Slavery* by comparing the poor in England with the poor in the United States. Later, in 1850, *DeBow’s Review* reprinted Carlyle’s highly racist and highly controversial essay, “Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question” (1849), in which Carlyle uses the example of the West Indies as an argument against emancipation. DeBow praises the article in a short introduction, observing, “It is a piece of pungent satire, upon the whole body of pseudo philanthropists, who, within the last few years, have been a curse to our own country, as well as to England” (527). George Fitzhugh cites Carlyle’s essay collection on the deterioration of English society, *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), in *Cannibals All!*, and claims that his full title, *Cannibals All!; Or, Slaves Without Masters*, came from his readings of the British author (*Cannibals* 108-9). For many proslavery authors like DeBow and Fitzhugh, especially the latter who viewed capitalism and free trade as the origin point for most societal ills, England’s social

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114 The journal printed the essay under the title, “Carlyle on West Indian Emancipation” (*DeBow’s Review*, June 1850: 527-38).
115 Stowe also recreates this parallel argumentation in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with the debate over slavery between Augustine St. Clare and Miss Ophelia.
problems found their echoes in the growing economic and social disparities in the United States.\textsuperscript{116}

Aside from his influence on Americans from the southern states, Carlyle’s work influenced many of the British realist novels that came out of the industrial era. These “social problem” or “industrial novels,” were distinguished by their “focus on specific social problems raised during the process of industrialization” (Bodenheimer 4).\textsuperscript{117} In The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction (1985), Catherine Gallagher claims that the form these novels took often stems from “the traditions of industrial criticism inherited by the novelists” (33). In some cases, those inherited traditions are explicit: three of Benjamin Disraeli’s most famous novels (Conigsby [1844], Sybil [1845], and Tancred [1847]) were all written as vehicles for the Young England movement.\textsuperscript{118} Consequently, all were inspired by the intensifying social problems posed by industrialization (Sybil’s “two nations” of rich and poor), and the solution posed by the Young Englanders for a return to a feudalist social structure (all of the novels feature aristocratic heroes and the monarchy organizing the working classes).

\textsuperscript{116} For more on Carlyle’s influence on and reactions to proslavery thought and the Civil War in general, see Carlyle Society Papers, “‘At least half right’: Carlyle, Abolition, and the American Civil War” (2003-2004) and Gerald M. Straka, “The Spirit of Carlyle in the Old South” (1957).


\textsuperscript{118} Carlyle’s works indirectly spawned the Young England group, a short-lived movement embraced by a small, but powerful, group of young English gentlemen. The movement (and party) existed roughly between 1841 and 1846 and boasted members of the young aristocracy and English intelligentsia, including Benjamin Disraeli, who would later become Prime Minister in 1868, then again from 1874 to 1880 (Bradford 274-86, 304-74). Like Carlyle, the Young Englanders were disturbed by what they saw as the social anarchy caused by the increased democratization of England and the growing prevalence of industrial technologies. Also like Carlyle, these men advocated a return to quasi-feudal social structures to control these changes. For more on the Young England movement, see Richard Faber, Young England (1987).
Other influences of industrial critique are not so straight-forward in the novels, nor do they espouse the sort of reassertion of strict hierarchies advocated by Disraeli. Elizabeth Gaskell, whose *Mary Barton* (1845-7) and *North and South* (1854) became two of the better-known industrial novels, was partially inspired by her own experiences with working-class families in Manchester, but also from her readings of Carlyle. *Past and Present*, in particular, informed both of her industrial novels (Vanden Bossche lv-lvi). Frances Trollope’s *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (1839-40), one of the earliest industrial or social problem novels, also takes up ideas communicated in Carlyle’s earlier observations of English political economy and social life (Joshi 37-8). However, Trollope and Gaskell were less inspired by models of past social organization than ideas of Christian charity, what Louis Cazamian calls “Christian interventionism” (Cazamian 218-20). Both use their novels to introduce co-operation and understanding between classes, as well as general moderation in terms of social and technological change into existing models of classical economics (Bizup 56-7).¹¹⁹ Yet in spite of whatever differences the novelists used in their approaches or solutions to industrial and social critique, the common denominator is that few, if any, of the novels argue for the complete elimination of the factory system or a reversal of industrialization (Gallagher 34; Bodenheimer 172).

Like the British intellectuals and novelists who took their inspiration from the issues resulting from industrialization and free trade, American proslavery authors reacted to what they saw as an increasingly unstable way of life. Drawing again from

¹¹⁹ The terms for the sort of cooperation promoted in the novels vary depending upon the critic. Cazamian uses “interventionism”; Bodenheimer calls it “reconciliation”; and Gallagher refers to the novels’ form of “mediation.” I prefer reconciliation, simply because the term carries over to apply to the American proslavery novels, a move I will demonstrate more extensively in the next section.
British influences, Fitzhugh directly cites *Alton Locke* (1849), Charles Kingsley’s industrial novel, as a demonstration of the universality of his position against free trade (*Sociology of the South* 74-7). In turn, as their British contemporaries found outlets for social critique in fiction, proslavery advocates more frequently turned to defending slavery in novel form. Especially after the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, both northern and southern proslavery novelists used fiction to transmit the arguments evinced by authors like Fitzhugh or William Harper. Works such as *Aunt Phillis’ Cabin* (1852) by Mary H. Eastman, *Liberia* (1853) by Sarah Josepha Hale, or *The Planter’s Northern Bride* (1854) by Caroline Lee Hentz typically pit the southern plantation system and the institution of slavery against the space of free trade and competition in the North. Often featuring slaves who run away, then choose to return to slavery after experiencing poverty in free states, or depicting the lives of servants and the working classes in the North as dominated by poverty and want, these novels paint a portrait of plantation society in terms similar to those presented by the ruling aristocracy in Disraeli’s novels. In these instances, the quasi-feudal space of the plantation provides the antidote to the evils of free trade for the lower classes.

However, if the British industrial novels varied in their approaches to the problems inherent in the factory system, and proslavery advocates diverged in their attitudes toward free trade, so, too, did the proslavery novelists. Like Gaskell or Trollope, Maria McIntosh’s *The Lofty and the Lowly* approaches the question of slavery and sectional divisions from an interventionist, or “reconciliationist,” standpoint. In a climate of intensifying sectional divisions and southern economic decline, in which free trade was more aligned with northern and foreign interests, we can read *The Lofty and the
Lowly in the context of British industrial fiction rather than the reactionary proslavery or “anti-Uncle Tom” novels. Like DeBow, who envisioned the future of a unified South that incorporated more capitalist models into its economic practices, McIntosh’s fiction advocated economic reform and cooperation between regions, classes, and nations in a way that defies the standard critical and historical interpretation of proslavery fiction as anti-industrial, anti-capitalist, and anti-modern.

In this sense, drawing connections between industrial novels and proslavery fiction highlights the interconnected nature of nineteenth-century society through the networks of international commerce and free trade. Through its intellectual influences and its economy, the South was integrally connected to the North, despite whatever visions of isolated plantations emerged in contemporary and later novels. Further, using the genre of the domestic social novel also allows for the moral and spiritual problems inherent in the southern “way of life” without doing away with slavery entirely. By placing novels like McIntosh’s in line with British industrial critiques we can see how authors with southern sympathies used fiction to reimagine the South and the southern economy in such a way that it retained its distinct social structures (namely slavery and plantations), while still adapting to the nineteenth-century international economy. This reading pulls antebellum southern fiction into the center of nineteenth-century literary studies and opens up the conversation surrounding transatlantic literary networks.
The Proslavery Social Problem Novel: Maria J. McIntosh’s *The Lofty and the Lowly*

“I would rather be a man toiling, suffering—nay, failing and successless—here, than lead a dull prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call more aristocratic society down in the South . . . . One may be clogged with honey and unable to rise and fly.”

“You are mistaken . . . . You do not know anything about the South. If there is less adventure or less progress—I suppose I must not say less excitement—from the gambling spirit of trade, which seems requisite to force out these wonderful inventions, there is less suffering also. I see men here going about in the streets who look ground down by some pinching sorrow or care—who are not only sufferers but haters. Now, in the South we have our poor, but there is not that terrible expression in their countenances of a sullen sense of injustice which I see here. You do not know the South . . . .”

“And may I say you do not know the North?”

-Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1854), 81-2

By the time her proslavery novel, *The Lofty and the Lowly; Or, Good in All and All None-Good* was published in 1852, Maria J. McIntosh was well-known in both the United States and Europe as the author of popular children’s morality tales and domestic fiction. After suffering financial loss during the Bank Panic of 1837, in which her entire life’s fortune disappeared in the market crash, McIntosh turned to writing to earn her living.120 Her “Aunt Kitty’s tales” (her pseudonym at the time) proved to be immensely successful, and between 1839 and 1845 she published nine short story collections and novels mostly directed toward juvenile readers (Akili 72). All were didactic in nature, preaching to her young readers the virtues of honesty, hard work, and a Christian lifestyle; all were immensely successful. Her first novel to appear under her real name, *Two Lives; Or, To Seem and To Be* (1846), was also her first novel geared solely to

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120 The only extended biographical study of McIntosh is a unpublished dissertation written by Bashar Akili at the Loughborough University of Technology in 1990. The rest are short biographical sketches/summaries.
adults. It was a huge bestseller and went through seven editions in less than four years (Akili 76).

Though she may not have been unusual in how she came to write fiction, McIntosh was unique in her experience with the South, and more particularly, the southern plantation economy. Born on a large plantation along the Georgia coast, McIntosh was a member of a prosperous, southern aristocratic family similar to the Tuckers of Virginia. She was also an only child who grew up watching her mother run the plantation after her father’s death in 1806, when McIntosh was three. At the age of twenty, her mother died, leaving the plantation to McIntosh’s care. She ran the farm for twelve years until 1835, when, motivated by the decline in profits for plantations on the Atlantic coast, she sold the estate and moved to New York. Once there, she invested her inheritance in securities, a move that ultimately led to her destitution in 1837. She lived out the rest of her life in the North on the profits of her books (Akili 47-53, 69, 84-6).

With this first-hand experience running a large-scale plantation, owning numerous slaves, and investing in the markets, McIntosh’s perspective on the South was that of a businesswoman who understood the practicalities of a southern plantation and the larger commercial markets of which it was a part. Further, as this short synopsis of her biography reveals, McIntosh valued and practiced the sort of individual self-reliance demanded by the basic philosophies of a free market economy. That view of the South and an individual’s place in nineteenth-century society emerges in her earlier, less regionally didactic fiction. Two Lives relates the story of two girls born in the South who must move north after their father and caretaker dies. While one girl, Isabel, is independent, prudent, and evinces common sense in terms of interpersonal relationships
and money matters, her cousin, Claire, is weak-minded, dependent, and only concerned with pleasing others. Like any good morality tale, the ending reveals which is the girl to be emulated.

The book also displays themes that would be picked up in McIntosh’s later proslavery fiction. In *Domestic Novelists of the Old South* (1992), Elizabeth Moss rightly points out that McIntosh’s *The Lofty and the Lowly* is more about reconciliation between regions than an outright defense of slavery (60-2). In fact, a common trope in many of her novels is the promotion of understanding between seemingly disparate groups or individuals, a pattern that emerges clearly in *Two Lives* in the form of the morality tale. The first element of fictional reconciliation is the basic communication between regions through Claire and Isabel’s movements north and south. Though the sectional conflicts had not quite reached the fever pitch of the 1850s, the novel reiterates the characteristics normally assigned to each area of the country: the South not caring enough about money or business matters, the North caring too much for them. The novel then promotes communication and understanding between the regions by having representative characters interact and alleviate the extremes through their changes in attitude or behavior.

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121 Moss, however, goes on to call McIntosh’s, as well as other proslavery authors’, attempts at reconciliation “failures.” That sentiment, she contends, is undercut by the authors’ obvious biases for the South, as well as their continued defense of slavery. However, as this chapter reveals, I propose that reading a novel such as McIntosh’s in the context of British industrial fiction positions proslavery novels not as “successes” or “failures” in terms of realism or convincing arguments, but reveals their attempts to use fiction to create a world in which reconciliation, while still sustaining the practice of slavery, might be possible.
Yet ultimately the novel is more about an understanding of individual self-worth through economic independence and prudence. In this sense, the “reconciliation” promoted by McIntosh is between the increasingly complicated financial system of the mid-nineteenth century and average Americans, particularly women. Taking up a theme begun in Tucker’s *The Valley of Shenandoah* with the character of Louisa, the novel iterates over and over that what is needed to survive in nineteenth-century society is the independence and common sense that can only be exercised through a proper understanding of the financial system. Claire, obviously, has no sense of finances or money matters. Isabel, however, takes pains to learn about them. When her uncle, an investor in the stock market, loses the family’s fortune, she forces him to explain the situation to her, despite his protests: “Perhaps [women] would understand more about it, if men would talk more frequently to them of it. . . . Perhaps [my aunt] has not a taste for business, but I have decidedly” (216). She then takes on the responsibility for managing the family’s finances by paying her uncle’s debts with her own investments, then supporting the family by going to work herself. Claire, always the moral and pragmatic contrast, marries a French nobleman. When he dies, McIntosh takes great (and lengthy) pains to explain the laws of entailment in France, which ultimately leave Claire and her child with nothing. The novel ends with Claire dying at Isabel’s home, cared for by Isabel and her loving husband. Thus, in a style similar to that of *The Valley of Shenandoah*, McIntosh’s *Two Lives* enjoins the readers that once individuals understand the workings

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122 As critics like Mary Poovey and Elaine Freedgood have observed, Harriet Martineau’s earlier series of novellas/sketches, *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832) served a similar purpose for British readers.
of the economy, then future financial (or general societal) problems can be alleviated and even avoided.

That sense of greater understanding leading to future prosperity and alleviating social ills is ultimately what connects McIntosh’s fiction, and specifically her proslavery novel, with the contemporaneous British social problem novels. As I observed earlier in this chapter, a significant characteristic of many British industrial novels, especially those written by women, is their goal of reform through interventionism or, again, “reconciliation.” Usually, as with McIntosh’s fiction, reconciliation is effected in these novels through the interactions of characters to achieve greater enlightenment and understanding of individuals’ lives or a particular issue. In Trollope’s *Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy*, the wealthy Mary Brotherton is first made aware of the working conditions in the factories when she encounters Michael personally. He describes his family’s extreme poverty, and she realizes that her family’s fortune was attained solely by profits from the factories and the labor of children. Her interest in Michael leads her to seek out more information from a local clergyman who administers to the factory workers:

“Circumstances, Mr. Bell, have lately directed my attention to a subject which my own situation in life, as well as the neighbourhood in which I live ought to have long ago made thoroughly familiar to me—such is not the case, however; I am profoundly, and I fear shamefully ignorant respecting the large and very important class of our population employed in the factories. I am in possession of a large fortune wholly amassed from the profits obtained by my father from this species
of labour, and I cannot but feel great interest in the welfare and prosperity of the people employed in it . . .” (199)

In a long, monologue-driven chapter, Mr. Bell then explains to Mary the structure, and the evils, of the factory system. After this conversation, she sets out on a course of social improvement, adopting factory children and educating the rest of the neighborhood as to the problems of the current system.

Gaskell’s later novel, *North and South*, also promotes cross-cultural understanding through the direct contact between characters and their discussions of social problems. The novel, however, represents these discussions as less instructional and more as an ongoing debate. Through conversations such as the one cited at the beginning of this section, the varying sides of the debates over industrialization are represented through fictional characters. Margaret Hale, the daughter of a southern family who has moved to Milton, a fictionalized version of Manchester, sees only the harshness and poverty resulting from the factory system. John Thornton, the northern manufacturer, views industrialization as the ultimate triumph of individual opportunity and democracy. Through their developing relationship and their discussions, the novel reveals how the two sides can come into accord. Margaret eventually prefers the independent and busy life of the factory town, while Thornton recognizes his responsibility toward the workers in terms of improved working and living conditions. Thus, as McIntosh’s *Two Lives* promotes cross-regional connections and an understanding of the economic system through the interactions and dialogues of its characters, novels like *Michael Armstrong* and *North and South* demonstrate reform of the industrial system through greater communication and reconciliation between their representative characters.
Still, I would emphasize again that an important aspect of most British industrial novels is that the critiques are more about reform, not complete revolution of the systems in place. Despite the criticisms leveled at the factory system in *Michael Armstrong* and *North and South*, or the problems presented by the free market in *Two Lives*, the novels ultimately espouse the basic tenets of the systems as being for the general good. After enumerating the evils of the current factory system in *Michael Armstrong*, Mr. Bell nonetheless insists,

“If used aright there cannot be a doubt that this magnificent power [industrial technology] might, in all its agencies, be made the friend of man. It requires no stretch of ingenuity to conceive that it might be rendered at once a source of still increasing wealth to the capitalist, and of lightened labour to the not-impoverished operative.” (205)

Industrialization and capitalist economic models, then, have practical value.

Both also have ideological value. Thornton’s comment on the “clogged” life under aristocracy points to the benefits of liberal capitalist philosophies in terms of individual self-reliance, opportunities for social and financial mobility, and individual creativity in the schema of an ideal free market. *Two Lives* upholds these ideals in its advocacy of economic self-reliance through the structure of the morality tale and the figure of Isabel. Though Isabel experiences hardship in a free market economy, her knowledge of finance and ability to adapt to market conditions, rather than relying on others for support, ultimately renders her the model character, whose tale is resolved happily.
In contrast, British industrial novelists like Disraeli adopt what Gallagher and Bodenheimer have both identified as a more “revisionist” approach in their fictional social critiques. Revision, in this sense, implies a rewriting of history and current social modes in the fashion of William Gilmore Simms’s *Woodcraft*, rather than the promotion of understanding and cooperation between existent groups featured in reconciliation narratives. For example, though *Sybil* does not necessarily advocate for the dissolution of the manufacturing system entirely, its argument for the return to a feudal social structure within that system entirely does away with the ideas of individual opportunity and success that a free market and industrialization could potentially provide for all classes. Toward the beginning of the novel, one of the main characters delineates the problem with the abandonment of the older social systems and the resulting poverty. Like Carlyle before him, he presents the monasteries of the medieval period as emblems of what should be: “As for community . . . with the monasteries expired the only type that we ever had in England of such an intercourse. There is no community in England; there is aggregation, but aggregation under circumstances which make it rather a dissociating than a uniting principle” (64). Under a free market system and its valuing of the individual, certain classes of society are doomed to wretchedness. Only the hierarchies of feudalism and the duties entailed therein will retain community, and thus prevent social deterioration. That fundamental belief in free market individualism ultimately differentiates Disraeli’s Young England novels from those of Trollope and Gaskell.

Similarly, proslavery novels in the United States often fell into two camps: that of reconciliation between proslavery and abolitionist factions (or the South and North), and complete revision of American life according to southern nationalist principles. Elizabeth
Moss observes that often the novels written by older authors, including McIntosh and Caroline Hentz, emphasize building communication between regions in the manner I have already described in *Two Lives* and the novels of Gaskell and Trollope. Novels by younger authors such as Augusta Jane Evans and Mary Virginia Terhune, however, position the South as diametrically opposed to all things northern (or antislavery) in line with arguments like those of Fitzhugh (Moss 8). Just as Disraeli’s Young England novels imposed feudal hierarchies on the existent industrial society, so the more nationalist-minded southern authors would impose slavery and the southern plantation system on the American way of life.

Crucially, just as the British novels agreed on the need for reform without eliminating manufacturing entirely, the consensus for all proslavery novels is their basic defining characteristic: the support and continuation of slavery. *The Lofty and the Lowly* imagines a society through the generic conventions of reconciliation presented by *Two Lives*, *Michael Armstrong*, or *North and South*. McIntosh’s fictional version of southern life takes into account necessary reforms and the future developments of nineteenth-century society as a whole. Through the reconciliation plot, *The Lofty and the Lowly* identifies what McIntosh viewed as the potential benefits of slavery and a plantation economy, while still adapting both to the free market economy.

Much of this approach stems from McIntosh’s own attitudes toward slavery. For her, like Tucker before her, slavery was not a permanent institution, but a stage in the longer economic and social development of the United States and the South.\(^{123}\) The same

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\(^{123}\) McIntosh was not alone in her ambivalence toward slavery during the 1850s. Both Moss and Joy Jordan-Lake in her book, *Whitewashing Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (2005) point out that many proslavery authors would
year in which *The Lofty and the Lowly* was published, McIntosh published a small pamphlet titled, *Letter on the Address of the Women of England to Their Sisters of America in Relation to Slavery* (1853). Originally printed as a long letter/editorial in the *New York Observer*, the letter is a response to an antislavery petition that had been circulated in England (*Letter* 11). Ostensibly *Letter* is a defense of slavery against the criticism of abolitionist groups. Yet, the subject of interrogation becomes less the existence of slavery itself, than the manner in which it will eventually be phased out. Though McIntosh lists the supposedly positive points of slavery, namely its influence in spreading Christianity and in providing supposed everyday stability to slaves in the form of food, shelter, and an established community, she is also careful to detail the problems with slavery and the actions of slaveholders: “We claim not that we or our fathers have done for them all that we ought—we acknowledge that more, far more might and should have been done” (16). It is a common rhetorical tactic for many proslavery advocates of the time, to admit the faults of the system. However, McIntosh takes her (admittedly light-handed) depiction of slavery’s evils to the next step: “Every unjust accusation, every bitter and insulting word uttered against the south, in England, or in the Northern United States, has tended to harden the hearts they were seeking to soften, and to add to the prejudices which present an insuperable barrier to the attainment of their hearts’ desire and prayer; the elevation and gradual emancipation of the slave” (22). The implication of McIntosh’s *Letter* is that if left to follow its natural course, slavery would publicly support slavery, but privately had their doubts. In his political biography, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (2010), Eric Foner’s description of Lincoln’s position on slavery is uncannily similar to that of the Tuckers and Jefferson earlier in the century. According to Foner, while Lincoln believed in the inherent moral evil of slavery, he was less staunch in advocating full emancipation. Like the eighteenth-century Virginians, early on he advocated colonization in Africa and espoused a more moderate position in the debates over slavery.
eventually be phased out as an institution, a goal that was, in fact, desired by southern slaveholders. Her position is nearly identical to that of George Tucker throughout his career, only McIntosh’s view was based more on Christian charity than statistical analysis of population growth.

Further, the focus of both her nonfiction and The Lofty and the Lowly, again like Tucker’s works, is not merely on slavery, but on the plantation system that demands slave labor. According to her written observations of southern society, that system, not slavery, perpetuates the problems and stagnancy of the South. McIntosh’s only major work of nonfiction, Woman in America: Her Work and Her Reward (1850), continues the themes of her earlier juvenile fiction and Two Lives to reflect upon the position of women in contemporary American society. Yet she does so by first situating women in the history and evolution of the United States until that present moment. In this sense, her reflection on “women’s work” parallels the cycles of civilization and growth presented by Tucker via Malthus. Like her view of slavery in Letter, this long-range view of the United States implies that current social, political, and economic institutions will always change according to the needs of the people, including women. In this case, the institution that will inevitably pass away is what she calls “feudalism.” She begins a chapter titled, “Feudalism and Its Consequences,” with the typical image of a feudal society, one that is eerily similar to the idealized monasteries in Sybil: lords managing castles and large estates. These structures have long since faded away, McIntosh contends, “But the descendants of those who held those castles still claim the land that lay around them for many a mile, thus concentrating in the hands of the few the fair earth which God created for all” (43). That description outlines, without directly identifying it, the typical southern
plantation, a large swath of land concentrated in the hands of one person, or one family. McIntosh continues her attack, calling the system “diametrically opposed to the spirit of Christianity, which teaches the brotherhood of all men” (46).

More important, the form of “feudalism” McIntosh decries is opposed to the fundamental strictures of liberal capitalism that are the driving force of Two Lives and the industrial novels of Gaskell and Trollope. Within a system in which wealth and prosperity are passed through families rather than on the basis of talent, a civilization ceases to grow and advance, “for alas! strong hands and brave hearts are not always, like lands and lordships, transmissible by descent” (45). As McIntosh cautions, “There [in a feudally-based system] the distinctions are not of the various grades of talent, but of the common clay and fine porcelain, the folly of the last being more excellent than the wisdom of the first” (46).

In light of McIntosh’s attacks on “feudalism,” and the pattern of reconciliation established in her other novels, the proslavery novel, The Lofty and the Lowly, becomes more about the follies of each region than a defense of one. In turn, the novel uses the reconciliation narrative practiced by the industrial novels to imagine a reform of the plantation-based southern society without overturning the southern economy and the slave system. By the end, the novel posits the gradual phasing out of slavery and changes to the southern economy through the interchange between its characters and its continued espousal of the sort of economic self-reliance promoted in works like Two Lives or Woman in America.

The most noticeable characteristic of The Lofty and the Lowly is movement: no one character ever remains in the same place for any substantial length of time. And for a
novel that upholds and advocates for slavery and the “southern” way of life in the plantation system, only a relatively small portion of the plot takes place in the South or on a plantation. The novel, in fact, begins in the North. Much like the opening of *The Valley of Shenandoah*, the events in *The Lofty and the Lowly* are preceded by the death of a family patriarch: Mr. Montrose, the son of a wealthy family from Georgia who had moved to the North and married a northern lady, dies, leaving his wife and two children. The parallels with Tucker’s novel continue in that Montrose has also left a number of debts and a failing business.

Even the opening lines of the novel evoke movement: the first paragraphs are a letter written by Mrs. Montrose’s brother, Mr. Browne, to her brother-in-law in the South, informing him of his brother’s death and the family’s financial circumstances. Browne, a successful merchant, proposes to take in the Montroses and place the son as a clerk in his business. A conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Browne over the future of the Montrose family follows the reprint of the letter, with Mr. Browne lamenting the lack of business sense of his brother-in-law and the helplessness of his sister, all while he assumes the position of the responsible brother and businessman. Eventually, however, Mrs. Montrose decides to live with her brother-in-law’s family in the South with her two children, Alice and Charles.

Aside from exposition, the conversation between the Brownes over the fate of the Montrose family is important for the plot in that it establishes the physical and social geography of the novel from the outset. For one, the connections between the characters emulate the trading patterns and economic connections of the United States: from the southern plantations represented by the Montrose family, to the northern merchants like
Browne, as well as the international trade being conducted by both regions and the interregional travel and trade within the United States mirrored by the movement of the Montroses. Outside of physical parameters, the conversation also establishes the generally accepted social stereotypes of each region. Browne is “the model of a successful [northern] merchant. Shrewd and cautious in business . . .Close in his calculations, and a rigid economist; his expenses have always been kept far within the limit of his income” (1:8). He is also cold and businesslike to the extreme, while his wife and children are the typical wealthy northerners, superficial and materialistic. In contrast, Mr. Montrose, the southerner, was careless with money and generally lacking common sense when it came to business. And as Mr. Browne pronounces direfully, “The sins of the father are indeed visited upon the children” (1:10).

What follows is a 600-page novel composed of constant shifts and travels, both of the characters and of the nation as a whole. The novel is set during the 1820s and 30s, the time of the Industrial Revolution, the vast expansion of the western United States, the initial cotton boom in the South, and the growing industrialization in the North. As these widespread changes occur, the Montroses move to the South to live with Colonel Montrose and his family; the family as a whole travels extensively through the North; and the two Montrose sons join the Army and the Navy, then travel internationally. The movement also allows for the introduction of a northern set of characters, whose plots further extend the geographical reach of the novel. The Montrose family encounters Robert Grahame, a northern factory owner, while vacationing in the North. Grahame is a successful businessman and inventor, the paradigm of a capitalist individual. He quickly
becomes an intimate friend of the southern family, as well as the love interest for Alice Montrose.

Like the initial conversation, this extensive movement on the characters’ part establishes the parameters of the novel as much wider than simply regional, or even national, in scope. Further, the characters’ travels break down the isolationism brought about by sectional divide to highlight the integrated nature of American social and economic life. Within this vast narrative geography, slavery and industrialization are not “southern” and “northern” institutions, respectively, but part of general nineteenth-century life.

Additionally, movement within the novel also allows for the sort of cultural and regional interchange necessary to the ultimate aim of *The Lofty and the Lowly*: the reconciliation plot. As with Mary Brotherton’s interactions with the factory children in *Michael Armstrong*, or Margaret Hale’s life in Milton and her conversations with John Thornton, the characters’ travels throughout the United States and internationally reveal the inherent problems in American society and the economy as a whole. For example, the idleness and profligacy of the South is a constant theme in the novel, as I have already pointed out, but those tendencies are exacerbated when southern characters visit the North and interact with northerners.

Most of this characterization of the region comes through in the character of Donald Montrose, the son of Colonel Montrose. Donald is a male version of Claire in *Two Lives*; despite being in the Army, he has never done real work his entire life and lives off of the support of his parents. While traveling in the North with his family, he falls prey to his cousin, George Browne, who is dissolute and an inveterate gambler.
During a series of gambling sessions, Donald essentially signs over the deed to the family’s plantation in Georgia. The novel makes clear that while Browne is partially to blame for leading him astray, the loss is mainly due to Donald’s refusal to familiarize himself with money matters. When Donald signs over his debt to Browne, the narrator reflects:

To a prudent mind, it may seem strange that the mention of large interest did not serve as a counterpoise . . . But Donald was not prudent; like all the self-indulgent, he was ever prone to sacrifice the future to the present. Besides, . . . he had been taught in his Southern home, that the first characteristic of a gentleman was to prove himself untainted with a narrow, money-loving, or as they termed it, Yankee spirit; and that this was to be done, not by a wise and systematic benevolence, but by thoughtless profusion and disregard of money. To have kept a regular account of his losses and gains, would have savored of the petty shopkeeper in his opinion. (1:130)

Donald’s disregard for money and focus on the present mirrors the pattern of the average plantation owner124 described by Tucker in *The Valley of Shenandoah*, in which money is squandered on the promise of future returns on crops and the ideological investment in the plantation aristocracy. That quality makes the passage reminiscent of McIntosh’s invectives against feudalism in *Woman in America*, or the morality tale that upholds an individual’s need to understand finance in *Two Lives*.

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124 And the average British aristocrat.
In turn, Donald’s problems with money reveal the coldness and materialism of the North. After Donald signs his debt to George Browne, Browne signs it over to his father, who then demands regular payment of the exorbitant interest. The Montroses attempt to pay the debt, but because most plantations did not have a steady stream of ready cash, they turn to a money lender. Both Moss and Jordan-Lake point out that despite the attempts at regional interaction and understanding, McIntosh consistently presents northern stereotypes as far more abhorrent than the southern plantation ideal. Indeed, the Brownes’ eventually fraudulent abuse of Donald’s debt cements the early characterization of the heartless, shrewd northern merchants at the beginning of the novel. And just as the “sins” of Col. Montrose are visited upon Donald, Mr. Browne’s intense focus on accumulating wealth infects his family: “The master mind of his family, Mr. Browne had impressed his own views upon them all. These views, too, had had their legitimate effect on all, in indurating their hearts, degrading their aspirations, and presenting to them life in its most superficial aspects” (1:245). The idea of character being shaped by experience and education once again highlights an underlying belief present in all of McIntosh’s works, as well as that of the British industrial novelists. In short, a broader understanding of the world and opposing viewpoints will effect positive social change.

In line with this philosophy, northern characters also provide the models for change in southern society, in which southern characters’ encounters in the North highlight problems with the South to a positive end. This is particularly true with the novel’s representation of slavery. While traveling in the North, Alice visits Robert Grahame’s factory and the factory town. While there, she is impressed by the general
prosperity of the factory workers, including the efforts made by the Grahames to maintain good working conditions and provide education for the children. When she returns to the South, her experience with the Grahames forces her to rethink the condition of the slaves: “Mr. and Miss Grahame’s interest in their work-people . . . made me ashamed of my useless life. I tried at first to excuse myself, under the plea of different circumstances, and to persuade myself that I had none whom I could teach and influence as she did these people; but then I remembered the negroes, and how much I could teach them . . .” (1:205).

Granted, the sort of reforms Alice proposes all work within the premise that slavery will still exist as an institution—she does not return south a radical abolitionist. Yet the character’s modeling of change through experience follows the patterns of reconciliation narratives that make up the British industrial novels. As I have emphasized, the industrial novels are never about revolution; the plots of reconciliation are always enacted on a relatively small scale without undoing the entire system in question. Mary Brotherton does not abolish child labor, but adopts three factory children herself; Margaret Hale and John Thornton do not move south to run a farm, but modify Thornton’s existing factory so that the working conditions are improved.

In short, because it follows these patterns of small-scale reconciliation, McIntosh’s defense of slavery is paradoxically the very quality that connects her novel to the British industrial texts. Other critics like Elizabeth Moss and Joy Jordan-Lake have observed McIntosh’s vision of reform, but are fairly dismissive. Because the novel advocates slavery, it gets relegated to “anti-Uncle Tom” status. However, by taking a broader view of the novel and examining its formal characteristics, rather than only its ideology, we
can get a much more nuanced view of the novel itself, as well as proslavery arguments in general. Still, I would like to make it clear that reinterpreting the novel in this fashion is not intended as a “defense” of McIntosh’s views. Rather, I am more interested in how her fiction functions as a reinterpretation of the nineteenth-century international economy.

The interchange between regions, nations, and characters in the novel does gesture toward larger changes advocated by McIntosh based on the ideal principles of democratic, liberal capitalism in a global context. In the second volume, Alice and her mother move to the North to live on their own after the death of Colonel Montrose. While there, in a parallel to McIntosh’s own life, the Bank Panic of 1837 depletes the small fund of money available to them. The financial disaster forces Alice to find work to support the family. Though it is difficult, especially compared to the sheltered life she led in the South, another character observes, “she is every day acquiring that practical wisdom necessary to the successful prosecution of business” (2:154). Rather than being a blight on her character, as with Mr. Browne, Alice’s gradual understanding of simple finances and self-supporting labor become aligned with Christian values to ennable her. She defends her work to her brother Charles and declares, “I have felt since I began to try to make something, how very good our Heavenly Father was to give man work to do when he lost his happy Eden” (2:182). The subplot is a reenactment of Two Lives, in which Alice’s move to the North and away from the Montrose plantation forces her to the sort of self-reliance and economic self-sufficiency McIntosh upholds through the character of Isabel in the earlier novel.

The Lofty and the Lowly further promotes general capitalist ideals by situating individual characters in the context of the international economy. As I mentioned
previously, the scope of the novel is deliberately non-regional, an idea that is carried out by the financial interactions that form the consistent backdrop to the novel’s plot, as well as the characters’ travels. So when Robert Grahame, the northern factory owner, travels to England to sell and promote his new invention for cotton manufacturing,\(^{125}\) he is not only a representative of a successful American businessman, but an emblem of future progress for civilization as a whole:

Robert Grahame was . . . an American. His whole nature had been cast by the circumstances of his life in an American mould, and had grown rigid there. He instituted no comparisons between his own and other countries; he saw, and was willing to admit their superiority in many things, but they were, and America was to be. America was the land of hope, of promise. The matured man excels in many things the youth; but have all his attainments equalled the youth’s imaginings? America is to her children what they see she may become. (2:142)

Couched in this seemingly nationalist rhetoric is the basic principle of success and progress in a free market economy. Additionally, McIntosh takes care to frame this ideal of progress as less about one nation, class, or group triumphing over another, but rather of groups understanding and interpreting one another while always looking to the future.

Robert, as the ideal American, plays a role in the novel’s reconciliation plot on an international scale by understanding other nations and being willing to adapt himself for the long-term good.

That democratic, liberal capitalist vision of long-term economic and social progress is never more evident as when the novel represents slavery. Just as McIntosh

\(^{125}\) The exact nature of the invention is, of course, left vague in the novel.
posits the eventual and gradual phasing out of slavery as an institution in *Letter, The Lofty and the Lowly* enacts the beginnings of that process through the reconciliation plot between the northern and southern characters. The primary African-American character in the novel is “Daddy Cato,” a long-time slave on the Montrose plantation who is eventually freed after the death of Colonel Montrose. When Alice and her mother move to the North, Cato follows them, ostensibly to help out by contributing to the household income. However, rather than taking his money, Alice creates a bank account for him, and he gradually builds a small savings from his work as a free laborer in the North.

Cato’s fate in the North, though it, too, follows the pattern of self-sufficient labor in a free market, again presents a vision of reform rather than outright revolution in terms of the slave system. McIntosh represents Cato with the paternalistic benevolence espoused by most proslavery authors, in which Cato’s true love of Alice motivates his loyalty to her, and he is far too simple and inexperienced to live on his own. Cato himself claims that freedom and working for oneself is overrated, for a slave, “Ent he got he house, and he meat, and he hom’ny, and he tatars, and he fowl, and he egg, and he clothes ebery winter and ebery summer, wha’ he want wid money?” (2:101). Further, the novel reiterates the position McIntosh takes in *Letter* that interference from abolitionist groups exacerbates the problems of slavery and regional schisms.

The novel performs this regional and cultural ideological clash once again through the interaction of characters who espouse opposing viewpoints. While Alice and Cato are in the North, local abolitionist leaders see Cato traveling to and from the cottage, and assume he is a slave who has been brought north by his master. Charged by a recent meeting, the group gathers at Alice’s home to confront the slaveholder, only to find a
timid Alice and a confused and frightened Cato. The scene ends with (conveniently enough) the interference of Robert Grahame and Cato’s personal assurance of his freedom and contentment to the abolitionist group. He remarks afterwards, “You see, maussa, dem an’t so bery bad arter all, only I tink dem crazy ‘bout free. Free bery good ting, but free ent all; when you sick, free won’t make you well, free won’t gib you clo’es, nor hom’ny, let ‘lone meat. Free bery good, but free ent ebery ting” (2:175). The fictional confrontation between the abolitionists and the Montroses in the North works on several levels: not only does it present a fictional imagining of the problems that arose from the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act, but it also “proves,” in a sense, McIntosh’s idea that interference from abolitionist groups is ineffective when compared with more gradual methods of reform and understanding between the groups. Cato’s talking with the group and understanding their position, and vice versa, accomplishes more in the novel than the mob gathered about the Montrose home.

In contrast, the novel’s reconciliation narrative models a version of gradual emancipation within the existing southern economy. Toward the end of the novel, Donald Montrose, the heir to the Montrose plantation, also visits the Grahames’ factory town. He, like Alice before him, is impressed by the industry and living conditions of the workers. And also, as with Alice, it forces him to reflect on the condition of his slaves in the South:

The contemplation of all this, and the reasons which Robert Grahame alleged for it, awakened an interesting train of thought in the mind of Donald. “I too,” he said to himself, “am a Christian man. God has made me, too, a ruler over others. What have I done to advance their higher interests? Will not God require their souls of
me? Has he not in some sense committed them to me? . . . This is wrong and my conscience condemns it.” (2:297)

Upon Donald’s return to the South, he establishes what he calls a “colony” for slaves separate from the plantation, in which slave families run their own farms under his supervision and he provides a school and church for them to attend. The system is essentially a form of sharecropping, or an economy without money championed earlier by Cato, but it represents an attempt at reform of slavery without its entire abolition.

With the pattern of constant interchange and communication between the varying groups represented in the novel that mirrors those of Gaskell and Trollope, the ending follows the checklist of the industrial reconciliation narratives. In these plots, the opposing groups are brought together through marriage, as with Mary Brotherton and Edward Armstrong in *Michael Armstrong*, or Margaret Hale and John Thornton in *North and South*. In *The Lofty and the Lowly*, Alice and Robert marry, as do Donald and Mary Grahame, Robert’s sister. Thus the two opposing sides are brought together to effect further change, without entirely overturning the systems in place. Ultimately, reform of slavery and the plantation system in the South is promoted in the novel through the reconciliation plot, in which mutual understanding becomes the greater goal within the broader framework of a free market, international economy based on democratic ideals. As the novel concludes,

> And thus by the affinities of spirits devoted to the same noble ends—to the advancement of man’s happiness and of God’s glory—the North and the South, the Lofty and the Lowly, have been drawn together, and the experience of life has
taught to each and all of them, that there is good in all and that none is all-good.

(2:323)

Extending from the late eighteenth century up to the Civil War, southern intellectuals sustained a tradition of critically examining the foundations of southern society and its economy. Despite the later assertions of isolationism and proslavery defensiveness, southern leaders frequently viewed southern society in the context of general trends in the nineteenth-century. From this perspective, the South, and the southern economy in particular, often came up short. In turn, authors of imaginative writing that features the South took up these views and promoted them in their fiction. Novels like George Tucker’s *The Valley of Shenandoah* and Maria Jane McIntosh’s *The Lofty and the Lowly* respond to the larger literary trends of the era, and through those influences, take into account the South’s position in the international economy. By utilizing popular generic tropes and trends, novelists like Tucker and McIntosh engage with the debates of their time and promote an image of the South that is constantly changing and adapting.
CHAPTER FOUR

“Money alone will carry you”: Free Labor and the Free Market in African-American Narratives

The image of the subversive slave in the swamp is a common trope in representations of the antebellum South. Accounts of slave uprisings in the early nineteenth century make reference to the use of swamps to hide the revolutionaries, and antebellum slave narratives feature stories of fugitives who effect their escapes through the swamps. In her 1856 novel, *Dred; A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, Harriet Beecher Stowe presents a fictional revolutionary community in the swamps of the Carolinas that operates outside the slave system. Later novels such as George Washington Cable’s *The Grandissimes* model characters after the rebel slave in the swamp.¹²⁶ And more recently critics like William Tynes Cowan have held up the swamp revolutionary as formative in shaping discussions of antebellum southern literature and culture. In all of these imaginings, the swamp is a space in which slaves could attain a form of economic independence and self-governance, neither of which could be accessed in the plantation South.

In Martin Delany’s novel *Blake; or the Huts of America* (1859-62), escaped slave Henry Blake—also known as Henrico Blacus—travels throughout the southern United States in hopes of establishing contact with various slave communities. At one point during his circuit, he stops in the South Carolina “Dismal Swamp.” There he stays with a

settlement of slaves and former slaves who have been living undisturbed in the swamp for decades. Despite the oppression he observes in South Carolina as a whole, Blake remarks on the relative autonomy of the small community. As compatriots and heirs of former rebel leaders such as Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner, the community represents a space of rebellion in the midst of a racialized slave system in which black men and women are only identified by law and socialization as property rather than human individuals.

But in the novel, Blake does not remain in the swamp. Instead, he pursues his revolutionary agenda in various communities throughout the South. In contrast to Blake as a vibrant figure of contemporary rebellion, the figures in the swamp are aging representatives of an older order with their constant references to former rebellions and their reliance on voodoo practices. As Delany’s novel presents it, societies on the fringe do not confront, but rather avoid, the inequalities built in to the basic functioning of the southern American economy and southern society. By boldly circulating throughout the slaveholding South and organizing the far-flung slave communities, Blake represents the possibility that black Americans—enslaved or not—could directly shape the development of the southern economy, and by extension the American economy.

Blake’s act in shifting the site of slave rebellion from the liminal spaces of the swamps to the spaces central to the southern economy—namely the plantations—reflects a larger pattern in antebellum writing by black Americans to represent black labor as central to the functioning of the American economy. Slave narratives published from the 1840s up through the 1850s were the most popular form of writing by black Americans. Not only did these texts bolster the growing abolitionist movement, their popularity
coincided with the decades in which debates over free labor and labor organization became more important as a result of the growing factory system in Britain and the United States. Authors such as Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Harriet Jacobs take pains to highlight the economic systems that governed the lives and identities of slaves in the South, and further, to present black labor in the South as part of the growing pool of skilled laborers in the developing global economy. In this way, former slaves harnessed the rhetoric of free labor in the mid-nineteenth century to present black men and women as autonomous skilled laborers.

Martin Delany’s *Blake* similarly defines projects aimed at securing the rights of black Americans against the patterns of the nineteenth-century free market. Throughout his career, Delany championed the idea that if black men and women could achieve economic self-sufficiency, then social and political equality also could be achieved. In the decade leading up to the Civil War, Delany turned to plans of emigration in order to establish an independent black nation. His only novel, *Blake*, presents a fictional embodiment of these theories and his emigration project, in which a black nation-state in the Caribbean would rival the economic prominence of the antebellum South through a black-led transatlantic commercial empire.

In this chapter, I will discuss the ways in which black authors of the antebellum period used their writing to respond to questions of labor, the free market, and international commerce during the decades leading up to the Civil War. Beginning with slave narratives and their adoption of the rhetoric of free labor, then ending with a reading of Delany’s novel against his economic philosophies—which prioritize individual profit and the free market—I will trace the ways in which authors position
black Americans as central to the nineteenth-century economy. I argue that black civil rights activists intertwined the language of abolitionism and universal equality with that of modern capitalism in order to promote a vision of black American life that was independent of slavery and integral to the global economy as the nation developed into the end of the nineteenth century.

“A Person With a Price”: Slave Narratives and Free Labor

Here, then, is the origin of Negro slavery. The reason was economic, not racial; it had to do not with the color of the laborer, but the cheapness of the labor.

- Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), 20

Since Eric Williams published *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), historians of transatlantic slavery have connected the development of capitalism and industrialization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the rise of North American slavery, the growth of plantation economies in the Atlantic South, and the subsequent response of abolitionist movements in both Britain and the United States. As I discussed in my introduction, historians like Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman have evaluated slave systems as profitable in a capitalist economy, while Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese position North American slavery as an integral part of the developing capitalist order. In turn, David Brion Davis and Thomas Haskell have presented capitalism as the driving ideology behind the development of the abolitionist movement. Seldom do these studies interpret the role of slaves themselves in the plantation economy beyond

their position as chattel. Further, most slave narratives are read by critics as attempts on the former slaves’ part to “divest themselves of any connection with the slave culture” (Foster, *Witnessing Slavery* 67). In his pioneering study, *Soul by Soul* (1999), Walter Johnson outlines the economics of the antebellum slave market and its role in shaping the lives of slaves and slaveholders alike.

I wish to use the slave narratives written in the 1830s, 40s and 50s to extend the characterization of the slave in the southern economy beyond “a person with a price,” and to interpret former slaves’ depictions of their lives in the southern economy through the self-representations of their labor. With this formulation, a “person with a price” is both the horrific form of sale on the slave markets described by Johnson, and the slaves’ and former slaves’ evaluations of their central role in the southern economy as laborers. In a reading of Sojourner Truth’s 1850 autobiographical narrative, Xiomara Santamarina describes the conflicted interpretations of Truth and her narratives as a “problem of class” (*Belabored Professions* 37). Rather than adhering to the standard depiction of slave labor as inherently degrading, according to Santamarina, Truth “insisted on the value produced by the hardworking slave” (*Belabored Professions* 39). As Truth’s narrative indicates, slaves, too, represented their lives in the plantation economy in ways that were just as contradictory as the representations by the white southerners, slaveholders, and proslavery advocates. Examples such as Truth’s narrative and the absence of such discussions in histories of slavery point to the importance of understanding slavery as an economically productive system *in addition to* a racialized form of human bondage.

To discuss how slaves conceptualized their own labor in the southern economy, and perhaps more important, how they represented that labor to the rest of the world, I
will examine a set of slave narratives written between 1830 and 1860. These decades are generally considered to be the peak moment of the slave narratives’ composition and popularity, with dozens of narratives being published. I will only examine narratives written by ex-slaves themselves, not those with what William Andrews calls amanuensis-editors or ghostwriters. Like Andrews in his seminal study of the narratives, To Tell a Free Story (1986), I am interested in the rhetorical choices made by individual authors in representing their lives. Ultimately, the goal of the slave narrative was to use an individual life to represent the whole of the slave system. Whether influenced by their abolitionist editors and sponsors, the abolitionist papers in which they were published, or by their white reading public, the narratives are never without the influence of their rhetorical context. “Clearly the meaning of slave writing did not inhere exclusively in the text of a narrative alone,” John Sekora observes, “Meaning flowed into and out of a narrative in a series of acts of power” (“Black Message/White Envelope” 500). That power, Sekora argues, was usually on the part of the white abolitionist transcribing or publishing the narrative. Andrews allows more agency to the authors of slave narratives, claiming that “black autobiographers naturally realized that theirs was a rhetorical situation. . . . The writing of autobiography became an attempt to open an intercourse with the white world” (17). That rhetorical situation in fact makes the chosen content of the narratives and their representation of individual lives under the southern slave system that much more significant.

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128 For a general overview of the slave narrative genre and the number of narratives published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Marion Wilson Starling, The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History (1981). Starling’s study was originally a dissertation written in 1946; it took almost forty years for it to be published in book form.
Typically critics highlight the narratives’ emphasis on the brutalities of slavery and sentimental appeals.129 Francis Smith Foster points out that these scenes are a sentimental appeal to a reader’s sympathy, but also a method of establishing that slavery entailed a level of degradation that went beyond mere bondage: “They [the narrators] concentrated upon detailed examples of the excessive cruelty and undeserved administration of punishments. They dwelled upon the practices of flogging until backs were raw then rubbing salt or hot pepper solutions into the wounds . . .” (Witnessing 105). Every slave narrative is filled with scenes such as the one described by Harriet Jacobs in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1860), in which a slave is flogged and left bleeding in a cotton gin until the rats begin to eat his extremities (794-5), or Moses Roper’s account in his 1838 narrative of a modified cotton gin his owner used to punish Roper and the other slaves.130

Female slaves and families became particular symbols of the horrors wrought by slavery. “Within the antislavery repertoire of bodily metaphors,” Amy Stanley writes, “the predominant one was the scourged body of the bondswoman, an image that symbolized the slave’s utter debasement” (25). That image, Stanley argues, reflects the destruction wrought by slavery on both the marriage contract and the domestic space occupied by the family. The most famous example of such a moment is the scene in Narrative of the Life (1845), in which a young Frederick Douglass witnesses the brutal whipping of his Aunt Hester. Douglass describes the act in vivid detail: “. . . soon the

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129 See, for example, Christine Levecq, Slavery and Sentiment: The Politics of Feeling in Black Atlantic Antislavery Writing, 1770-1850 (2008).
130 Roper even includes a diagram of the torture device.
warm, red blood (amid heart-rending shrieks from her, and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor” (285).

Detailed descriptions of the sale of families on the slave market are an equally shocking convention in the narratives.131 “The history of the antebellum South is the history of two million slave sales,” as Johnson puts it, and the slave narratives take care to foreground that history (17). There is a reason Uncle Tom’s Cabin begins with Tom’s sale and the destruction of his family, and the narratives likewise use the dismantling of family structures—or sometimes the inherent lack of family structures—to present slavery as an institution that dehumanizes those in bondage.

The narratives also reveal an economic awareness on the part of the former slaves. As Johnson details, the market was central to the lives of antebellum southerners, and as I argue in my previous chapters, international market forces influenced the representations of the South and southern life. Likewise, the market is central in the slave narratives’ representations of individual lives. In most narratives, in addition to the conventional opening that describes the slave’s earliest memories and knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of family ties, the narrator identifies his or her owners and catalogues their properties (land and slaves). Often describing one’s family meant also describing one’s master and his property, and the narrators make a point to recognize that their masters were frequently their fathers.132

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131 They are also a feature of most antislavery writings. Though his critiques of slavery are somewhat ambivalent, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, Tucker in his novel, The Valley of Shenandoah (1824), describes the auction of a Virginia family’s slaves. See Chapter 3 for more on Tucker and Valley.
132 See Andrews, To Tell a Free Story and Foster, Witnessing Slavery for more on the specific conventions of the slave narrative.
The level of detail devoted to such descriptions highlights the narratives’ focus on the agricultural and industrial climate of the area, and also reveals the narrators’ consciousness of the economic system of which they were an integral part. After relating his early separation from his mother, Frederick Douglass describes his master, that master’s economic standing, and his property holdings in detail: “He was not considered a rich slaveholder. He owned two or three farms and about thirty slaves” (284). In his 1847 *Narrative*, William Wells Brown also lists his master’s financial portfolio: “My master owned about forty slaves, twenty-five of whom were field hands. . . . in addition to his practice as a physician, he carried on milling, merchandizing and farming. He had a large farm, the principal productions of which were tobacco and hemp” (377). For many of the narrators, outlining their owners’ property entailed tracing the sales and transactions that defined their early lives. Moses Roper begins his narrative with a dramatic tale of his birth; because Roper is the “bastard” son of his master, his mistress “went into my mother’s room with full intention to murder me with her knife and club” (9). To preserve the peace, he and his mother are sold. However, that drama devolves into a dry description of slave property division in the next paragraph when Roper is sold again at age six or seven after the death of his second master. What follows is a list of different transactions in which Roper is sold to a series of owners.

The former slaves also present a consistent knowledge of their own worth on the market. Henry Bibb’s 1849 *Narrative* chronicles his numerous attempts to escape. At the end of one of the more successful ventures, Bibb tallies up his total “cost”:

In the first place they paid eight hundred and fifty dollars for me; and when I first run away, they paid one hundred for advertising and looking after me; and now
they had to pay about forty dollars, expenses travelling to and from Cincinnati, in addition to the three hundred dollars reward; and they were not able to pay the reward without selling me. . . . And if it should be known that I had been a runaway to Canada, it would lessen the value of me at least one hundred dollars.

Outside of value on the market, slaves also “hired out” their labor, in which they would receive a portion of the profits, while their masters would “earn” the bulk. Many slaves, like Bibb, used hiring out as an opportunity to learn new trades, a system that also enabled Douglass to earn enough money to escape from Baltimore. William Wells Brown presents his life under slavery as governed by hiring out, and he is careful to reveal the extent of his earnings in the narrative. After learning that he is to be sold, he confronts his master with these facts: “. . . after you have hired me out, and received, as I once heard you say, nine hundred dollars for my services,—after receiving this large sum, will you sell me to be carried to New Orleans or some other place?” (401).

As these examples demonstrate, the slaves’ consciousness of their value in the southern antebellum market manifests itself their literary self-representations. The economic forces permeate so deep, that they are often merged with emotional and familial ties. Moses Grandy describes in 1843 that when his wife was sold from him, he begged the trader to allow him to see her one more time. Barred from actually touching her, he relates that he gave her the money in his pocket and said good-bye from a distance (Narrative 16). As Johnson observes, Grandy’s memory of his wife becomes mixed with the money in his pocket, a moment in which she is defined both by her sale from him, but
also his own monetary possessions, as he is reminded of here whenever he feels change in his pocket (Johnson 64).

The narrators’ consciousness of the centrality of the market in their lives appears in the narratives alongside the descriptions of violence, divided families, and sexual brutality. That overwhelming presence then raises the question: if the goal of the narratives was only to serve the ends of abolitionism, as scholars like Sekora and others argue, then why include moments of productive labor (as in the case of Truth’s narrative) or the details of economic exchange? I argue that there is a way of interpreting the slave narratives as a response to the broader social and economic changes that were occurring in the transatlantic world, and of which the southern economy was a part. The narratives’ awareness of economic forces expands the rhetorical situation described by Sekora and Andrews to encompass the debates over free labor and industrialization that also dominated the 1830s, 40s, and 50s.

As I discuss in previous chapters, the 1830s marked the beginnings of dramatic economic change in the Atlantic world. The rise of industrial sectors in both the North and Britain, on top of the expansion of the United States into the Southwest territories, fostered a growing economy in which the demand for staple crops fueled the growth of the southern plantation economy, which fed the development of the factory system in the North and Britain. The proliferation of plantations and the demand for slave labor in the South to meet the growing need for staple crops (mainly cotton) on the international market also brought the topic of abolition to the forefront of social and political debates in the United States and Britain. In a pattern that supports the theory that slave narratives
are intrinsically tied to the abolitionist movement, the 1830s marked the rise of their authorship and publication.

However, just as this economic shift represented the two-sided development of plantation agriculture and industrialization, the growing prominence of abolitionism emerged in tandem with more heated discussions of working conditions and rights of wage laborers, or “free laborers.”133 Although the 1830s did not witness the sort of working class organization that would emerge later in the century, this decade and the one following it represented what Kim Voss calls a “moment of class formation” in England and the United States (The Making of American Exceptionalism 5).134 In the North, mostly skilled artisans, and to a lesser extent workers in textile factories, began protesting for a ten-hour work day, rights to universal education, public relief for the poor, and fairer labor contracts (Montgomery, Citizen Worker 18, 40, 50-1). Activists on both sides of the Atlantic also joined in the cause for the working classes of United States and England. These decades saw the rise and fall of Britain’s first radical labor movement, Chartism. In the United States, European-influenced reformers and Owenites such as Frances Wright and Stephen Simpson—the leader of the Working Men’s Party in Philadelphia—advocated for reform (Dorfman 641-9). The Working Men’s Party spurred the organization of the Locofocos, or the radical labor-oriented faction of the Democratic Party that lasted up through the 1840s.135 Throughout the decades leading up to the Civil War, numerous pro-labor newspapers such as the Working Man’s Advocate (New York)

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135 See Arthur Schlesinger, The Age of Jackson (1945), Chapter 15.
or the Mechanic’s Free Press (Philadelphia) also emerged, and labor advocates circulated pamphlets such as the “Ten-Hour Circular” (1835) to outline the injustices endured by the American wage laborer and demand reforms. Although it was published in 1861, Rebecca Harding Davis’s Life in the Iron Mills is set during the 1830s, and like Elizabeth Gaskell’s fiction set in Britain in the same decade, presented an incisive critique of labor conditions in the factories and factory town of the northern United States.

The transatlantic debates over free labor and those over slavery were always connected, especially in terms of their rhetoric. In Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery (1979), Marcus Cunliffe delineates the frequent use of the metaphor of slavery and the term “wage slave” on the part of labor activists in both Britain and the United States to refer to working conditions in industrial sectors. Many activists evoked slavery as a parallel to the conditions of free laborers in their writing. Four years before she published Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy, Frances Trollope published her anti-slavery novel, Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw (1836). The book was based on her experiences traveling in the American Southwest, and the scenes on the novel’s Mississippi plantation mirror those in the British factories in the later novel. In the Chartist newspaper, the Northern Star, an article published in 1837 reads, “Black Slavery!,” and describes the beating and subsequent death of a female slave. The passage is almost identical to the beating of Aunt Hester in Douglass’s narrative and contains the same description of violence. The piece concludes, “In struggling for universal liberty, we know no distinction between black and white; while we abominate the cant of the money mongering hypocrites who affect to bewail the miseries of Colonial Slavery and labour at the same time, to make the conditions of the British freeman to be full as bad; we hope never to forget that the black
slaves are our brethren” (2 Dec. 1837). For many labor activists, slavery—either as a metaphor or through realistic descriptions—was a means of tapping into the “struggle for universal liberty” at a moment when a rapidly changing economy raised moral and ethical issues on both sides of the Atlantic.

The slave narratives themselves emerge from a context directly connected to labor movements. William Lloyd Garrison attained much of his prominence as an abolitionist in America through his connections to the antislavery movement in Britain, which successfully abolished slavery in British dominions in 1833. The British Anti-Slavery League, with which Garrison had connections, also had several Chartists as members and was generally supported by the labor movement. In 1840, Garrison attended the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention organized by Joseph Sturge, an abolitionist and Chartist. That same year in the Liberator, Garrison reprinted a letter from a Scottish Chartist, Charles M’Ewan, with his own annotations. The letter recounts a speech given by Garrison at the Convention, and is followed by an intertextual dialogue between Garrison and M’Ewan on the subject of the British working class. While Garrison chastises M’Ewan for his use of the word “slave” to describe laborers, he ultimately upholds the need for the British government to effect reforms (“The Scottish Chartists” 18 December 1840). Garrison does, however, chastise the Chartists for their habit of usurping antislavery meetings for the cause of the working class. He calls it “dastardly,” “criminal,” and simply “rude.” In a later issue he takes the same tone in reply to another letter laying out the need for labor reform, agreeing, without any real conviction or plan, that the current “system”—one presumes he means contracts or working conditions—should indeed be revised (26 March 1847).
Frederick Douglass, too, had direct connections to Chartism and British labor reform after his trip to England in 1845. During the trip, he met with several Chartist leaders and actually came out in support of the movement in a speech (McFeely 138-9, 141). When Douglass returned to America, he began his own abolitionist paper; the *North Star*, while clearly referencing the use of the star to guide escaped slaves to the North, also echoes the prominent Chartist newspaper, the *Northern Star*. And throughout the 1840s and 50s, the *North Star* printed articles by Douglass and others criticizing both the American and British labor systems (Ostrowski 500).

Garrison’s half-hearted and somewhat contentious endorsements of British labor movements reveals the fraught nature of the American abolitionist movement’s relationship with labor reform. For many antislavery activists, especially those in the United States, the arguments against slavery also served to uphold the *virtues* of the free market that was coming to define the mid-nineteenth century transatlantic economy. As historians such as David Brion Davis, John Ashworth, and Thomas Haskell point out, abolitionist movements on both sides of the Atlantic drew their philosophies of political economy from eighteenth-century writers such as Adam Smith, and, like Smith, “reflected the needs and values of the emerging capitalist order” (Davis 71). Citing American abolitionists such as Gerrit Smith and Theodore Dwight Weld, Ashworth points out that for many abolitionists, slavery presented a direct contradiction to the basic premise of capitalism and the free market: “free” labor and the autonomy of the

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individual (192). Likewise, Marcus Cunliffe observes the rallying of American abolitionists around the ideology of liberal capitalism:

The conventional wisdom of laissez-faire enterprise held that a “free” economic structure was necessarily superior to a restricted one. The slave economy could not possibly prosper—even where the apparent evidence indicated the contrary. A free industrialized economy would not only guarantee prosperity, it would put an end to the drudgery that was held to be synonymous with slavery. (29)

Such outright endorsement of “free labor” as an antidote to slavery may have been, to paraphrase Cunliffe and Ronald G. Walters, a rationalization on the part of abolitionists who did, indeed, witness the problems with the American and British labor systems. However, the repeated comparisons between slavery and the truly “free” labor in abolitionist writing reveal the movement’s fundamental investment in the liberal capitalist ideals of the free market.

Examples of such argumentation that would have provided the context for many of the more well-known slave narratives also appeared in the Liberator. In an August 1833 article, John Greenleaf Whittier presents a list of arguments against slavery, one of the more prominent being its effects on labor and the economy in the United States. Drawing from the “free labor”/slave labor dichotomy, he writes, “In the free States labor is reputable. The statesman, whose eloquence has electrified a nation, does not disdain in the intervals of the public service to handle the axe and the hoe. And the woman whose beauty, talents and accomplishments have won the admiration of all, deems it no

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137 Weld was one of the leading abolitionists in the 1830s and 40s and wrote American Slavery As It Is (1839), a testimonial to the conditions in slavery that Harriet Beecher Stowe would use as a reference when writing Uncle Tom’s Cabin.

degradation to ‘look well to her household.’ . . . But the Slave stamps with indelible ignominy the character of occupation” (“Whittier’s Reply,” 10 August 1833). In this vision of a liberal capitalist utopia, free labor empowers those who have access to it, while slavery quenches liberating impulse. More than two decades later, Garrison summarizes a speech he gave in Wilmington, Delaware, claiming that “we demonstrated, not only on the plainest principles of political economy, but by a strong array of undeniable facts, the destructive and demoralizing tendency of the slave system, and the wonderful productiveness of free labor and free institutions” (“Lecture in Wilmington, Delaware,” 12 June 1857). And in the midst of the controversy over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the paper’s poetry section printed “Song of a Kansas Emigrant,” by Almira Seymour. Between odes to the “Patriot-Pilgrims” of the West, the poem cries,

*Rights of Freemen for all!* With the hands of *free labor*

We till the free soil that a just God has given;

No chains for our children, no stripes for our neighbor—

Who enter our borders, their shackles are riven. (13 April 1855, second emphasis mine)

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139 This language is almost identical to Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations of U.S. slavery in the first volume of *Democracy in America* (1835): “There is no African who has come freely to the shore of the New World, from which it follows that all those found there in our day are slaves or freedmen. Thus the Negro transmits to all his descendants, with their existence, the external sign of his ignominy. The law can destroy servitude; but God alone can make the trace of it disappear” (327). And de Tocqueville observes the same effects: that the South has effectively abolished work for white men and women, creating a society in which “misery appeared preferable to industry” (335).
In each of these depictions, the abolitionist paper frames the conversation over slavery as being one of free labor as a virtuous good beneficial to all of society, while slavery and bondage is both a moral and an economic wrong.\textsuperscript{140}

Similarly, the relationship between the antislavery movement and the labor movement in the U.S. was antagonistic, tense at best. Eric Foner notes that “whereas labor leaders tended to see abolition as a diversion from the grievances of northern labor and slavery as simply one example of more pervasive problems in American life, abolitionists considered the labor issue as artificial or secondary” (“Abolitionism and the Labor Movement” 261). Activists who spoke out against “wage slavery” criticized abolitionists for overlooking the problems with free labor in the North, and as the earlier quote from the \textit{Northern Star} indicates, many went so far as to claim that labor conditions for the working class were “full as bad” as—or worse than—the conditions of slavery. In “The Laboring Classes” (1840), a famous essay that originally appeared in the \textit{Boston Quarterly Review}, Orestes Brownson\textsuperscript{141} declares:

\begin{quote}
In regard to labor two systems obtain; one that of slave labor, the other that of free labor. Of the two, the first is, in our judgment, except so far as the feelings are concerned, the least oppressive. . . . As to actual freedom one has just about as much as the other. The laborer at wages had all the disadvantages of freedom and none of its blessings, while the slave, if denied the blessings, is freed from the disadvantages. We are no advocates of slavery, we are as heartily opposed to it as
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{140} On the \textit{Liberator}’s relationship to the literary marketplace and commercial exchange—specifically its role in commercializing abolitionism—see Augusta Rohrbach’s article, “‘Truth Stronger and Stranger Than Fiction’: Reexamining William Lloyd Garrison’s \textit{Liberator},” \textit{American Literature} 73.4 (2001): 727-55.

\textsuperscript{141} Brownson was also affiliated with the Transcendentalist writers, and the \textit{Boston Quarterly Review}—the paper he edited—published work by Margaret Fuller, George Bancroft, and George Ripley.
any modern abolitionist can be; but we say frankly that, if there must always be a 
laboring population distinct from proprietors and employers, we regard the slave 
system as decidedly preferable to the system at wages. (10)

Despite his rather half-hearted protests to the contrary, Brownson’s denunciation of the 
current free labor system anticipates that of the proslavery southerner George Fitzhugh 
fifteen years later.\(^{142}\) Brownson notes the problems with free trade and the labor system it 
spawns, and in using the standard “slavery vs. free labor” comparison, his logic is drawn 
into an inadvertent defense of slavery.\(^{143}\) Similarly, British labor reformers utilized the 
comparison to depict slavery as the preferred state. In her analysis of the Chartist poetry 
that appeared in labor newspapers, Kelly Mays notes, “Working to show that the black 
slave’s situation is not only different from but also better than that of the British worker, 
such poems appropriate and re-work abolitionist representational strategies in order to 
generate sympathy and support for the specifically white British worker” (141). And as 
with Brownson in the United States, that reworking ultimately becomes a presentation of 
slavery in the poems as an ideal counterpart to “‘white slavery’ in ‘the land of the free’” 
(Mays 150).

If the language of labor activists emulated that of proslavery southerners like 
Fitzhugh, then often labor organizations evinced a similar form of racist logic prevalent

\(^{142}\) However, unlike Fitzhugh, Brownson advocates for the forces of free market capitalism; in suggesting 
that there perhaps will not always be a division between laborers and capitalists—or “proprietors”—he 
suggests the possibility and even probability of economic mobility within a capitalist system. This rhetoric 
was not uncommon in the discourse over free labor during the antebellum period. Jonathan Glickstein 
oberves that antebellum reformers displayed a consistent faith in the notion of an American economic 
exceptionalism, which asserted that despite apparent inequalities, the U.S. furnished enough abundant 
material opportunities in a free market so as to enable anyone to achieve social and financial mobility 
(\textit{American Exceptionalism} 4-5; 62-3).

\(^{143}\) Though in Fitzhugh’s case, the defense of slavery was not inadvertent.
in mid nineteenth-century defenses of the slave system. In the past few decades, labor historians—most notably David Roediger in *The Wages of Whiteness*—have highlighted the ways in which the nineteenth-century white working class in the United States unified around a racist ideology. This stance identified black Americans as a threat in terms of labor competition, but also as antithetical to the image of an industrial and progressive working class. “Labor republicanism inherited the idea that designing men perpetually sought to undermine liberty and to ‘enslave’ the people,” Roediger writes, “Chattel slavery stood as the ultimate expression of the denial of liberty. But republicanism also suggested that long acceptance of slavery betokened weakness, degradation and an unfitness for freedom. The Black population symbolized that degradation” (66).  

Again drawing from the “slavery vs. free labor” dichotomy drawn by abolitionists and labor reformers alike, Roediger argues that working class whites united around the correlating racial designations.

But some historians have pushed their analysis of the white working class beyond racial divisions to consider discussions of labor reform in relation to the divide between skilled versus unskilled labor that more clearly defined the movement. Kim Voss observes that in contrast to Britain or France, labor movements in the United States were dominated by skilled artisans and craft workers. This fact presents an interesting, and somewhat contradictory, trend: while craft workers were necessary to the formation of labor movements in America, they also served to exclude the less-skilled or unskilled workers from such movements. “It was not until the New Deal,” according to Voss, “that

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144 The pattern also follows for British labor reformers. Although British workers rallied around the antislavery cause in Britain, as Ray Boston puts it, once they immigrated to the United States, “there were also many among them who were much more opposed to wage slavery than they were to negro slavery, and for them the [Civil W]ar was largely irrelevant” (57).
less-skilled workers were successfully incorporated into the labor movement” (2). Citing the example of anti-Irish sentiment that ran through the ranks of the American working class in the 1830s and 40s, Jonathan Glickstein points out that the seeming racial divides have more to do with a working class abhorrence of unskilled labor. He writes, the self-definition undergone by northern white male craftsmen during the antebellum decades of incipient industrialization—during the so-called crisis of skilled labor—was shaped not merely or even primarily by skin color per se; it was shaped at least as much by confrontation with an assortment of negative reference groups of varying ethnicity, gender, and age. These latter groups were broadly linked together by their ostensible lack of a respectable economic expertise or competence. (*American Exceptionalism* 95-6)

Included in these groups, in addition to Irish immigrants, women, and children, were slaves.

In all, during the 1830s and up through the Civil War, there was a climate in the United States that devalued the labor of slaves as unskilled, and thus antithetical to the tenets of the free market that most labor advocates and abolitionists alike upheld. While abolitionists presented the slave’s access to the free market as predicated on their escape from slavery, labor activists viewed slaves and former slaves as inherently degraded, either because of racial attitudes, or because of the slaves’ distance from the free market. Thus, during the height of their popularity in the 30s, 40s, and 50s, the slave narratives were not only shaped by debates over slavery and racial politics, but also by the intersections of those debates with discussions of wage labor in a rapidly changing economic structure defined by the free market.

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In this light, we can read many slave narratives, especially those that are now seen as the canon of the genre—Douglass, Brown, Bibb, Jacobs—as narratives that present slaves and former slaves as skilled, able workers in the free market economy. Indeed, scholars have already observed the narratives’ efforts to emphasize the labor and industry of former slaves. Many associate the narratives’ depictions of the former slaves’ lives as part of the larger tradition of American exceptionalism and the American dream.

“Douglass’s work,” argues Houston A. Baker in Long Black Song (1972), “is a spiritual autobiography akin to the writings of such noted American authors such as Cotton Mather, Benjamin Franklin, and Henry Adams” (78). Andrews also labels Douglass’s Narrative an “American jeremiad,” and Valerie Smith argues that “the plot of [Douglass’s] narrative offers a profound endorsement of the fundamental American plot, the myth of the self made man” (124; Self-Discovery and Authority 27).145 Outside of Douglass’s text, scholars like David Kazanjian have identified early narratives such as those by Venture Smith and John Jea as responding to the emerging capitalist order of the eighteenth century.146 And in Slavery and Sentiment, Christine Levecq argues that the early nineteenth-century narratives of William Grimes and Charles Ball “indirectly build[] an image of African Americans as particularly apt for survival in the budding liberal, capitalist system” in the North (208).

However, I would argue that many of the narratives also harness the ideology of liberal capitalism and the free market that sustained the very system that kept them in bondage. Despite the recognition of the role played by labor and economic systems in the

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145 See also David L. Dudley, My Father’s Shadow (1991).
narratives, most of these studies subsume that presence under the impulse of the “Protestant work ethic,” in which industry, dedication, and hard work are ultimately rewarded. Further, discussions of labor in the narratives are often limited to the sections of the works in which the narrator has finally arrived in a free—or northern—state. Even Levecq, who identifies the early narratives with the emerging liberal capitalist order, describes the early narratives as participating in the “Northern work ethic” (207). While there were narratives that adopted the rhetoric of Protestant virtue, narratives such as those by Douglass, Brown, and Bibb are also positioned as a response to the characterization of slave labor as inherently degraded in comparison to free labor that circulated throughout both abolitionist and labor reform debates. These former slaves present their enslaved selves not as long-suffering and hard-working, but hard-working and self-propelled according to free market ideologies that drove both the southern plantation economy and the northern factory system.

This sort of positioning becomes clear not only in light of the contemporaneous discussions of labor, but also in the discourses surrounding the labor of black Americans in the decades following the initial publication of the narratives. In his newspapers published during the late 1840s and up through the 1850s, Douglass consistently advocated for black Americans to become skilled laborers as an eventual avenue to social and political equality. Beginning in 1853 he actively organized for an industrial and mechanics school for black men and published a series of articles supporting the need for the venture in his second paper, simply titled, Frederick Douglass’s Paper. His

147 For example, the narratives of Josiah Henson (1849), Moses Grandy, and Lunsford Lane (1842). See Andrews, Chapter 4 for more on the performance of the Protestant work ethic in slave narratives.
148 Many of the articles presenting this position in his first paper, the North Star, were written by Martin Delany.
frequently quoted editorial, “Learn Trades or Starve!” proclaims that free black Americans must learn skilled trades, for the less skilled are going to new immigrants (4 March 1853). Another article a few months later similarly prescribes: “Make Your Sons Mechanics and Farmers, Not Waiters, Porters, and Barbers” (8 April 1853).

Performing the skilled/unskilled labor divide that characterized the labor reform movement during these decades, Douglass’s articles reveal the ways in which former slaves acknowledged the ongoing discussions of free labor in a changing economic climate.

According to Santamarina, the continued posturing on the part of civil rights leaders like Douglass erased any forms of labor that did not fall into the category of “skilled,” including most labor available to working women at the time. “Skilled” in this sense means the artisanal or mechanical trades occupied by male workers, as opposed to the physical labor of the field hand or domestic servant. She writes that “ironically, in advocating on behalf of black workers consigned to menial employments, reformers at times depicted black workers as acquiescent, and even complacent, in the face of discrimination” (15). She then goes on to repeatedly cite Douglass as the perpetrator of such trends and frequently contrasts his representation of field labor and the work of slaves as methods of oppression in his Narrative with the more positive representations in Truth’s text (Santamarina 47).

149 The tone of this article reflects a general sentiment held by Douglass. Though he was sympathetic to the plight of the Irish workingmen and Chartists during his visit to Britain and Ireland in 1845, he was more critical of the Irish who were immigrating to the United States in the 1840s and 50s. According to Paul Giles, “To some extent, this hostility emerged from what the African American community in general took to be the reactionary, proslavery tendencies of Irish-American culture” (798). For more on Douglass, the Irish, and transatlanticism, see Giles, “Narrative Reversals and Power Exchanges: Frederick Douglass and British Culture.” American Literature 73.4 (2001): 779-810.
However, I would point out that rather than *devaluing* slave labor, as Santamarina argues, the narratives frame slave labor in such a way that highlights its connection to skilled labor. In this sense, the more popular narratives like those by Douglass, Bibb, Brown, and later Jacobs, can be read as products of the rhetorical situation faced by black abolitionists. The discussions of the work of slaves and black Americans in these narratives, and in the later articles by Douglass, are more the result of active efforts to make slave labor legitimate in the context of a capitalist economic system that prioritized skilled over unskilled labor. Rather than lumping all slave labor into the slave vs. free labor dichotomy that circulated in most white abolitionist writing and labor reform discussions, these narratives delineate the spectrum of labor in the southern economy in such a way that represents their subjects as active members of a free market economy in the South and the North.

To return to the example of Douglass, a significant moment in the *Narrative* reveals the dynamics between slave and free, skilled and unskilled labor in the southern economy. In a frequently cited scene from the *Narrative*, Douglass is hired out by his master in Baltimore to work in a ship-yard as an apprentice and general assistant. While there, the white shipworkers and carpenters threaten to strike, claiming that working with free black men would eventually lead to the loss of jobs for white workers (347). In the wake of this discontent, Douglass becomes a target for the white workers and is severely beaten. This scene is often read, rightly so, as an example of the sort of working-class
racism described by Roediger, and of the type Douglass himself would experience after escaping to the North.\textsuperscript{150}

However, the tendency to merge this scene with Douglass’s experiences as a free laborer belies the recognized difference between slave and free labor in the South and elides Douglass’s presentation of his actual experiences \textit{as a slave} who is laboring. At this point, Douglass is not a free laborer nor is he a \textit{skilled} laborer, and the \textit{Narrative} takes care to highlight this difference. Instead, Douglass points out that the physical violence he endures is as an \textit{unskilled} slave laborer. After describing the labor dispute, Douglass comments in the narrative: “Now, though this did not extend to me \textit{in form}, it did reach me in fact. My fellow-apprentices very soon began to feel it \textit{degrading} to them to work with me” (347, my emphasis). Although Douglass’s aim here is to present race as a central issue in the conflict, issues with labor are woven into the goals of abolitionism. With the use of the term “degrading,” Douglass’s language mirrors discussions of labor in both the abolitionist writings and those of labor reform. Slave labor, as opposed to free labor, is degrading. But more important, \textit{unskilled} slave labor is degrading when placed alongside \textit{skilled} free labor. Jonathan Glickstein observes that such violent conflicts and outbursts can be read as manifestations of “the pains that masters and journeymen proudly took to differentiate their own skilled and manly competence from more subsistent, unskilled drudge labor” (\textit{American Exceptionalism} 88). Douglass’s \textit{Narrative} participates in this sort of pattern by recognizing the divide. After this abuse, Douglass’s

\textsuperscript{150} Douglass only briefly describes northern racism in the \textit{Narrative}, but he goes into more detail in his later autobiography, \textit{My Bondage, My Freedom} (1855).
master places him in another ship-yard, where he learns the trade of calking and quickly becomes a skilled laborer and escapes from bondage.

That form of presentation allows the narratives to capitalize on the similarities between the free laborer and the slave in ways that tap into contemporaneous debates over questions of labor and subsequently draw in the abolitionist cause as part and parcel of the issues surrounding the free market and mid-nineteenth-century industrialization. In his study connecting the abolitionist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the emergence of free market capitalism, Thomas Haskell argues that market culture promoted a general change in “perception and cognitive style,” or “a change in the perception of causal connection” (111). In other words, as the market increasingly dominated the transatlantic culture of the nineteenth century, individuals that were part of that culture saw the connections between societies, countries, and locales in ways not previously perceived. The same argument applies to the slave narratives in question and their representations of slavery. Slavery in these narratives is not an issue unique to the United States, but affects the entire world connected by an increasingly expanding and industrializing global economy. Thus, the work of the formerly enslaved narrators in presenting their lives is often contradictory: the former slaves have to at once denounce slavery, but also view it as a means by which they found value in their own labor as members of the free market system.

The main method of accomplishing this sort of representation in the narratives is to use the skilled/unskilled labor divide to distinguish the narrators as autonomous individuals through their accomplishments as skilled laborers. Many scholars have observed that education is of central importance in the narratives, with the narrators
highlighting their first encounters with reading and the efforts they took to learn to read in a system that aimed to keep them in ignorance. The narrators recognize their usually self-motivated education as a turning point in their lives. Yet, the “moment of learning” in the narratives also corresponds with the narrators’ move from unskilled to skilled labor, with their literacy as part of their education as workers.

To return again to Douglass as a starting point, the 1845 Narrative pointedly enacts this learning process. Douglass describes his youth as one passed largely in ignorance, split between time on the Maryland plantation where he was born and the Baltimore house where he spent most of his childhood. While in Baltimore, he learns to read and write, and the narrative spends several paragraphs detailing the effects his reading had on his psyche. Yet, it is not until he is sent back to work on the plantations that he achieves his full “education.” The scene in which he physically battles with Mr. Covey, his master-by-hire, is the pivotal point, which Douglass acknowledges in the narrative to be “the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free” (331).

While it is easy to read this moment as simply a testament to Douglass’s “manhood” through physical and violent defiance, it also reflects the shift in Douglass’s education from that of a menial, unskilled laborer, to that of a skilled, educated worker. On Covey’s farm, Douglass performs only the physical labor necessary for running a farm: baling hay, processing cotton, caring for livestock. But after he is released from

Covey, and after the altercation, as Douglass puts it, “My tendency was upward.” Not only is the rest of the narrative characterized by his attempts to escape to the North, but those attempts become more realizable as Douglass becomes a skilled worker according to the definitions of the nineteenth-century free market. William Andrews observes that thereafter in the narrative, “the right at issue is pragmatic and economic, not abstract or romantic” (128). After a failed escape attempt from a Maryland farm, Douglass is sent back to Baltimore, which signals his entry into the field of skilled labor. In Baltimore he begins his work in the ship-yards, learns the trade of calking, and through this knowledge escapes to the North.

Similarly, in his *Narrative*, Henry Bibb aligns his education as a laborer with his education more generally. In fact, most of Bibb’s narrative is dominated by his movement through the various modes of labor and slave employment in the then Southwest. Born in Kentucky, yet hired out and sold to areas all along the Mississippi river, Bibb traverses almost all levels of the southern slave system in his narrative. At the beginning of the text, Bibb describes the trajectory of his “education”: “I confess that it was no disadvantage to be passed through the hands of so many families, as the only source of information that I had to enlighten my mind, consisted in what I could see and hear from others. . . . Among other good trades I learned the art of running away to perfection. I made a regular business of it, and never gave it up, until I had broke the bands of slavery . . .” (442, my emphasis). Bibb’s ironic use of the words “trade” and “business” to describe his attempts at running away merges questions of skilled labor with the overall development of Bibb as an enslaved individual. As he presents it in the narrative, he develops skill in escaping, a talent that is only useful in the slaveholding
South. That, coupled with Bibb’s repeated emphasis on a fundamental wrong of slavery—its robbing of the individual of his wages and possession of his labor—foregrounds the importance of free and skilled labor throughout the narrative. Bibb’s ironic presentation of his “skill” highlights his own abilities as potential skilled laborer and articulates an abolitionist position through the language of free market capitalism.

William Wells Brown’s *Narrative* also characterizes his education as tied to his increasing skill as a worker. Like Bibb, Brown marks the story of his life as a slave in terms of his various employments and masters. Also like Bibb, Brown spent most of his life as a slave along the Mississippi River and *not* employed on a plantation. In fact, he takes care to differentiate between the unskilled work done by field hands and his work in urban areas or on steamboats. As the letter from Edmund Quincy printed at the beginning of the narrative declares, Brown’s tale “presents a different phase of the infernal slave-system from that portrayed in the admirable story of Mr. Douglass, and gives us a glimpse of its hideous cruelties in other portions of its domain” (372). Although in many ways this alternative perspective adds to the work of portraying slave labor as not entirely degraded when compared with free, much of Brown’s employment as a slave was with a slave trader. In this sense, the narrative depicts Brown’s labor as a slave as educating him both in terms of learning trades, but also in exposing him to the extended horrors of slavery. Like Douglass and Bibb, he characterizes his time as a skilled worker as the moment of awakening. While still a young man, Brown was employed in a St. Louis newspaper office as an assistant and printer, and in his narrative he reflects: “I am chiefly indebted to [the editor], and to my employment in the printing office, for what

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152 Quincy was a prominent Boston abolitionist who edited the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. 
little learning I obtained while in slavery” (383). In this way, though he is less ironic than Bibb, Brown also connects his increased experience as a skilled laborer with an increased desire to escape bondage. As with Douglass’s “tendency upward” after his struggle with Covey, after his work at the printing office Brown obtains a job working on a steamboat, where he is exposed to more forms of labor and more of the violence of the slave system. These experiences culminate in his determination to escape.

Perhaps one of the best examples of a slave narrative that constructs an image of slave labor in the framework of the debates over free labor is James W. C. Pennington’s *The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, Formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, United States* (1849). Unlike most of the narratives, Pennington’s does not highlight that he is a former slave first. Rather, he is first identified by his trade, then by his chosen profession, then by his escape from slavery. And his education as a skilled laborer is presented in the narrative as beginning from childhood, “at the age of eleven” (4). Thus, his turning point does not come with the shift from unskilled to skilled labor, but at a moment where he witnesses violence that causes him to question his own alienation from his labor.153

While tending to livestock, his father is severely beaten by their master. Pennington

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153 Here I use the term “alienation” in the sense that Marx defines it in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1964). In describing alienation, Marx writes that the worker is related to the *product of his labour as to an alien object*. For on this premise it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful the alien objective world becomes which he creates over-against himself, the poorer he himself—his inner world—becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. . . .The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power of its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien. (108)

Although Pennington may define himself according to his skill as a blacksmith, in the southern slave system, that skill is never possessed by him, but by his owner. As a slave and personal property, his personal identity, or “inner world,” are not only separate from his labor, but are meaningless.
describes his family’s reaction, which is anger at the “insult” (7). He writes, “I never was a Slave after it” (7). As Pennington presents it in the narrative, the wrong done to his family that awakens a consciousness of his position as a slave is the discrepancy between the value of their labor and lives, and the manner in which they are treated by their master. Shortly thereafter, Pennington himself is beaten, and he declares that

I had always aimed to be trustworthy; and feeling a high degree of mechanical pride, I had aimed to do my work with dispatch and skill, my blacksmith’s pride and taste was one thing that had reconciled me so long to remain a slave. I sought to distinguish myself in the finer branches of the business by invention and finish . . . but after this, I found that my mechanic’s pleasure and pride were gone. I thought of nothing but the family disgrace under which we were smarting, and how to get out of it. (8-9)

Pennington presents himself here as a blacksmith and tradesman first. Although his and his father’s beating is horrific, the description does not contain the dripping blood and moans to incite reader sympathy. Instead, Pennington adopts the appeals of an independent, free laborer who takes pride in his work, but the system in which he labors is inherently unjust. For Pennington, who identifies himself first as a tradesman, his labor is his defining point of identity. When it is made clear that his labor is treated as something separate from him as an individual, and the “pleasure and pride” he associates with this identity are meaningless, Pennington can no longer remain a slave. Therefore, if the narratives by Douglass, Bibb, and Brown demonstrate the transition from unskilled to skilled labor, then Pennington’s is predicated on the existence of skilled labor in the southern slave economy in order to relate the story of his eventual escape.
Aside from the emphasis on the importance of skilled labor, the narratives highlight the diversity of slave labor in the slaveholding states in a way that undercuts the slave vs. free labor dichotomy circulating in abolitionist and labor reform debates. The lives and labor of the narrators varied depending upon where they were in the South. Likewise, their labor, like the work of free laborers, changes according to the locale. So while Douglass’s narrative displays a blend of rural farmwork and port trades that characterized the east coast, Brown and Bibb are located in the growing Southwest and the Mississippi Valley. As such, their labor fits more with the expanding large-scale plantations, land speculation, and river-based employment that forms the backdrop of the Southwest humor stories I discuss in Chapter 2. Indeed, scholars have made the connection between the narratives and trickster tales. Others, like Raymond Hedin, have described them as “road narratives,” in which Bibb and Brown’s constant movement and the episodic nature of the narratives represents an adaptation of the “picaro.”

However, Brown and Bibb’s presentation of their lives as slaves in the Southwest finds traces in the confidence man that populates the humor stories and that figure’s role as an autonomous and intelligent individual. And in many ways, their lives were shaped by the same economic forces that coincided with the rise of the humor stories. Brown and

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155 Raymond Hedin, “The American Slave Narrative: The Justification of the Picaro.” American Literature 53.4 (1982): 630-45. In another point of similarity between the slave narratives and the discourse of free labor, memoirs and autobiographies of former Chartists and working class men in Britain evince the same qualities of the “road narrative.” For example, see the autobiography of the Chartist and labor activist Allen Davenport, The Life and Literary Pursuits of Allen Davenport (1845).
Bibb in the narratives have traits of the free agents who swindle and sue their way into owning plantations and profiting from land speculation in the stories of Johnson Jones Hooper. With the former slaves, their cunning presents them as skilled, autonomous individuals and aids them in escaping slavery. Throughout his narrative, Bibb adopts the same slightly ironic tone that characterizes his reflections on his “trade” of running away, and many of his exploits involve tricking and cajoling his way to freedom. During his final escape, Bibb boards a steamboat and takes up with a group of deck passengers. He proceeds to buy them drinks, and after an hour or so, he remarks, “I was thought to be one of the most liberal and gentlemanly men on board . . . they were ready to do anything for me” (538). So when the porter comes around, Bibb’s new “friends” buy his ticket for him. A famous scene in Brown’s narrative involves a “trick” he plays on a freeman. When Brown is sentenced by a master to be whipped at a local jail, he is sent with a note to give to the jailer. Knowing the goal of the errand, Brown gives the note to a passing man, who then receives his whipping. In a similar manner to Simon Suggs, Brown exercises his education through various employments to avoid the violence of slavery. While many critics have discussed the ways in which the authors explain away their misdeeds in the narratives, these moments of “shiftiness” reveal the manner in which the authors take care to present themselves as intelligent, able men in the growing Southwest economy.

Though men portrayed their labor as slaves in the framework of the skilled/unskilled divide, for women the same portrayal during the nineteenth century would be much more difficult. Although I have referred to her narrative, thus far I have refrained from exploring Harriet Jacobs’s 1861 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. This
is due to the vastly different nature of women’s labor under slavery from that of men. For the most part, women during the nineteenth century were characterized as drudges and excluded from any forms of labor but unskilled or domestic labor. As a result, and as Glickstein and Santamarina point out, women’s labor, especially black women’s labor, was often automatically categorized with the degrading drudgery of slave labor (Santamarina 23). Female slaves were either field hands or domestic house servants. And for many enslaved women, bearing children was also a key component of their “labor” in the South. Therefore critics often read women’s narratives of slavery and work in the nineteenth century through the lens of domesticity, the home, and the disruption of the biological family.  

This is especially the case with Jacobs; critical discussions frequently overlook her presentation of skilled labor in favor of the narrative style of the text. Often cited for its frequent evocation of the sentimental and domestic traditions, Incidents is viewed as Jacobs’s attempt to bring herself to the level of her white middle-class readers who were also mothers. While Santamarina recognizes that Jacobs depicts women’s labor, she dismisses it as primarily “unpaid domestic labor” (21). In a unique take on Jacobs’s narrative, Jennifer Rae Greeson argues that it must be read as a hybrid of urban gothic fiction—to which Jacobs would have been exposed while living in New York—and the earlier slave narratives.  

Though her article discusses the role of women and sensational

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156 See, for example, Robert Reid-Pharr, Conjugal Union (1999); Johnnie M. Stover, Rhetoric and Resistance in Black Women’s Autobiography (2003); or Laura Smith, “‘Don’t Be Too Careful of Your Silks and Rags’: Domesticity and Race in 19th-Century American Literature,” Literature Compass 9.5 (2012): 343-56.

fiction, Greeson concludes that Jacobs’ use of the two genres breaks down the opposition between northern industry and southern slavery (302).

I would like to take up Greeson’s final claim and push it further to argue that in her narrative, Jacobs performs the same endorsement of skilled labor under the slave system as do the men whose slave narratives were published earlier in the century. In her study, Greeson highlights the fact that in her early descriptions of he childhood and parentage, Jacobs characterizes herself as an “artisan’s daughter” (291). Like the narratives written by Douglass, Bibb, and Brown, Jacobs begins the narrative with her parentage. Immediately, she evokes the image of the skilled laborer as a way to distinguish herself by proxy from the unskilled laborers in the slave system and “deliberately invokes terms—‘skillful,’ ‘trade,’ ‘mechanic,’ ‘freeman,’—explosively charged in the antebellum North” (Greeson 291). However, the rest of the article focuses on the image of the fallen women to merge the space of the southern plantation with the urban North.

Instead, I would posit that another skilled worker in Incidents, Jacobs’s grandmother—whom Greeson overlooks—presents another method by which Jacobs can characterize herself as aligned with the figure of the skilled free laborer in an economy from which women were largely excluded. As with her father, Jacobs takes care to represent her grandmother as a businesswoman and skilled domestic laborer: “She was much praised for her cooking; and her nice crackers became so famous in the neighborhood that many people were desirous of obtaining them. . . . The business proved profitable; and each year she laid by a little . . .” (752). Through her business, Jacobs’s grandmother eventually gains her freedom. This successful business also
supplies the wants of the young Jacobs, even when she is owned by a master: “I was indebted to her for all my comforts, spiritual or temporal. It was her labor that supplied my scanty wardrobe” (756). By repeatedly emphasizing that her grandmother’s labor provided her necessities and defined her identity, Jacobs creates in the narrative an image of a slave independent financially and emotionally from her owners. Further, the depiction of her grandmother’s productive labor in the domestic sphere gestures to a more radical reclamation of women’s labor in Jacobs’s narrative. Rather than simply focusing on the more male-centered figure of the artisan, Jacobs refashions domestic labor to claim it as skilled and autonomous. Her family, then, resembles Pennington’s family, whose skill in trade and resulting independence lead to Pennington’s eventual escape.

But Jacobs’s grandmother does not fulfill the promises of free labor in the manner offered up by abolitionist and labor reform advocates. Jacobs herself does so, but by dint of her exclusion from the sphere of free labor, she must harness other traits identified with laborers on the free market. In this case, the key characteristic is mobility, which her grandmother never achieves, but Jacobs and the other, younger members of her family do. To illustrate the importance Jacobs places on mobility (and thus escape from slavery) in the narrative, she tells the story of her uncles Phillip and Benjamin, who both escape from North Carolina to New York. However, Phillip returns to be with his mother, who then works to earn his liberty:

After a while she succeeded in buying Phillip. She paid eight hundred dollars, and came home with the precious document that secured his freedom. The happy mother and son sat together by the old hearthstone that night, telling how proud
they were of each other, and how they would prove to the world that they could take care of themselves . . . We all concluded by saying, “He that is willing to be a slave, let him be a slave.” (772-3)

Although Jacobs praises her grandmother’s bravery and hard work, the tone of this passage evinces a sense of wounded pride. Jacobs’s grandmother represents the skilled, hard-working industry of the middle-class, but her purchase of Phillip and his return to the South signals a form of immobility more characteristic of the unskilled drudgery of the slave as depicted in contemporary labor discourse. In contrast, Jacobs, her uncle Benjamin, and eventually her brother William—all of whom are “artisan’s children”—adopt the mobility needed in a free market to first achieve their freedom, then to adapt to life in the North.

Thus, the canonical slave narratives published in the decades leading up to the Civil War demonstrate a rhetorical pattern that consistently represents the lives of their authors as part of the free labor that increasingly formed the core of the mid-nineteenth century economy. By presenting themselves as skilled and mobile laborers, these authors shifted discussions of slave and free labor by black Americans to the center of debates over labor reform and economic policies in an industrializing Atlantic world. In this sense, the authors affirm the values upheld by proponents of free market capitalism, while also undercutting the racist and binary logic that pervaded the abolitionist and labor reform discourses during these decades.
“Money alone will carry you”: Martin Delany’s *Blake*

Were you not M.R. Delany, I should say that the man who wrote thus of the manners of the colored people of South Carolina had taken his place with the old planters.


When Douglass wrote the above lines, the nation was in the midst of Reconstruction, and black civil rights leaders were debating the terms on which newly emancipated black men and women in the South and freemen in the North would move forward. These conversations revolved around the very topics that occupied black abolitionists during the antebellum period, namely how former slaves would be incorporated into American society and the free labor workforce. At this point, the United States was recovering from the Civil War, and in the coming decades it would expand its western territories and would be shaped by the rise of large-scale corporations. The dominance of *laissez-faire* capitalism created the need to have social and political policies that corresponded with its tenets, and the discussions of black workers in a free labor system that were begun in the slave narratives continued to have relevance.

Martin R. Delany’s political policies and fiction similarly incorporated the need for skilled labor in the context of free market capitalism in such a way that connects to the earlier slave narratives and the work of black abolitionists like Douglass. A long-time civil rights activist and frequent collaborator with Douglass, Delany had spent the war as the first black officer in the Union army, then worked for several years with the Freedmen’s Bureau in Port Royal, South Carolina. The comparison between Delany and

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158 In *The Incorporation of America* (1982) Alan Trachtenberg details the cultural changes resulting from the rise of *laissez-faire* capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century.
the “old planters” was prompted by a letter written by Delany and published in the same issue. In his “Political Review,” Delany draws from his experiences working in South Carolina and describes what he sees as the degenerate state of the black community in the wake of Reconstruction policies. According to Delany, while some of the politicians appointed by the federal government to oversee Reconstruction were “the best and most competent men,” most were self-interested and “of the lowest grade of Northern society, negro-haters at home” (“A Political Review” 3). Delany writes, “Indeed, there were scarcely [n]one so incompetent as not to have been assigned some position of trust” (3).

The result, he argues, is that these dishonorable politicians negatively influenced the black communities whom they were supposed to lead and govern to prosperity and self-sufficiency. “This was facilitated,” he writes, “by prejudicing the ignorant against the intelligent” (3). As a result, the South Carolina black community had reverted to the evils of the southern slave society, including racial prejudice and the assumption in the post-Emancipation South that most black men and women were only fit for unskilled labor: “Still adhering to an absurdity, a relic of the degraded past, they cling to the assumption of superiority of white blood and brown complexion. And to such an extent is this carried, I am told, that old societies have been revived and revised, and absolute provisions made against the admission among them of a pure blooded black” (3). The remedy, Delany finally concludes, is for black communities to install “intelligent leaders of their own race” who will dictate the terms that will be most beneficial to their progress and articulate a vision for black society that would fit with the tenets of skilled free labor.

Upon first read, Delany’s criticisms, most of which were based on his personal experiences working in South Carolina, are not necessarily incorrect or offensive. For
anyone who is familiar with Reconstruction-era politics, the Freedmen’s Bureau and local politicians appointed in the South were notoriously corrupt, organizations were mismanaged, and all were equal parts helpful and harmful to the emancipated men and women still living in the South. But it is his tone when describing the black communities that makes Douglass’s comment more valid: Delany repeatedly describes the former slaves as “good-hearted, simple-minded, [and] uneducated” (3). This tone, coupled with Delany’s “solution” to the problem—which contains traces of the sort of logic that later motivated Du Bois’s “talented tenth” concept—presents the sort of paternalistic, condescending position many proslavery southerners took before the war. A few years later, in 1876, Delany even supported the Democratic Party in South Carolina, which was composed mainly of former Confederates. While on the campaign trail, his speeches so angered black South Carolinians, he had to avoid being shot (Adeleke 157).

This seemingly patronizing position understandably baffled fellow civil rights leaders like Douglass; before the war, Delany had been a staunch advocate for abolition and had become known for his rigorous campaigning for the establishment of a black nation state in Africa. Throughout the 1850s and up through the Civil War, Delany asserted that the United States would never adjust to having black men and women achieve full equality. He maintained that the only solution was an independent black nation in Africa whose commercial prominence would rival that of the slaveholding South. His 1852 book, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* specifically outlines the need for such a project, and directly before the Civil War, Delany traveled to Africa to raise funds for the project from British investors. His *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (1861) outlines the
trip. Based on his work during these decades, Delany appears more as a black nationalist than a proponent of class or race-based paternalism.

Delany’s only novel, *Blake; Or, the Huts of America* (1859-62) depicts a version of the project enacted in Cuba. The novel was serialized over the course of several years and between two newspapers, *The Anglo-African Magazine* and the *Weekly Anglo-African*, with a year-long break when Delany traveled to Africa.\(^{159}\) Likewise, the novel itself is patchy and contradictory. The book is divided into two distinct parts. The first part focuses on Henry Blake, a slave in Mississippi who runs away after the sale of his wife and instigates a widespread slave conspiracy to revolt against their masters. In the second half, he travels to Cuba to recover his wife and organize a black-led revolution with the ultimate goal of establishing a black nation in the Caribbean. However, the revolt itself is never realized; the last chapters were never found, so the book ends with a rallying cry for revolution: “Woe be unto those devils of whites, I say!” (313).

Critics and historians have found Delany’s switch baffling: the supposed father of black nationalism devolving into a conservative accommodationist after the Civil War. In a controversial article published in the *New York Review of Books* in 1970, Theodore Draper throws his hands up at what he sees is a paradox in Delany’s career, “the duality of all dualities.” Tunde Adeleke dismissively observes that, “The postbellum phase seems to present ideological problems and challenges to those accustomed and socialized to a one-dimensional, monohermeneutical conception of Delany, derived and built solely upon the emigration/nationalist era” (xxvi). And Nell Irvin Painter notes, “Happily for the

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\(^{159}\) *Blake* was not published in full-length book form until 1970, when it was compiled and edited by Floyd Miller. All references to the novel in this chapter are to the 1970 edition, unless otherwise noted.
reputation of Martin Delany, his misadventures after the Civil War were ignored by the black nationalists of the 1960s” (150). Painter then goes on to characterize Delany’s politics as “elitist” and aligns that elitism with Delany’s discussions of race and racial purity, particularly in his last book, *Principia of Ethnology* (1879), which is a discussion of biological racial essentialism.

However, I propose that if we take Douglass’s critique at face value, Delany’s seeming contradictions and, more important for this study, the irregular form of his novel can be understood in light of his economic policies and unwavering adherence to the tenets of free market capitalism. For on the broadest terms, to be aligned with “the old planters” could mean upholding a form of paternal racism endemic to the antebellum slave system, but it could also imply upholding the *laissez-faire* capitalism that made that plantation system possible. As I have demonstrated in previous chapters, the ideology of the slaveholding South was anything but simple and reflected the complicated rhetorical and formal maneuverings required to justify the existence of slavery and a pre-capitalist mode of existence with the desire for modernity promised by new capitalist economic structures.

Delany’s views on civil rights and political economy retain a consistency throughout his career that few critics have picked up on. Tunde Adeleke’s study of Delany, *Without Regard to Race* (2003), is predicated on unearthing this aspect of Delany’s writings and activism. Adeleke divides Delany’s life into three “integrationist” phases, and ultimately concludes that his conservatism is the binding element. Yet I would suggest that the word “conservative” is misapplied, for if anything, Delany’s views always emphasized some form of social or economic progress, particularly the latter.
Instead, I would posit that Delany espoused the basic tenets of liberal capitalism: a focus on the individual and individual profit, the need for economic self-sufficiency, and most important, a fundamental investment in the workings of the free market. Although Delany’s methods may have changed over his career, they were always tied to the idea that the free market would be the avenue to social and political equality.

Contradictions emerge in the application of such policies. In many ways, Delany’s faith in the free market is no different than George Tucker’s Malthusian theory that eventually slavery would be phased out (see Chapter 3). But just as Tucker’s theories left the state of currently enslaved men and women unaccounted for, Delany’s investment in the free market supports the progress of individual black men and women, but not necessarily entire black communities. As his letter in 1871 reveals, his policies often endorsed the uplift of “intelligent” and talented individuals at the expense of “good-hearted and ignorant” groups. And thus is the inherent contradiction in free market capitalism: opportunities for economic mobility are predicated on open access to the market, but economic mobility does not necessarily translate into political and social equality. As a result, his advocating for economic solutions to social and political inequalities causes Delany’s political policies to seem to shift or outright contradict themselves.

In the case of Blake, just as Delany’s free market policies are seemingly at odds with his goal for social and political equality for all black men and women, the form of the novel presents a mélange of various narrative forms that appear incoherent, but nonetheless manifest a consistent ideological stance. If the slave narratives can be read as rhetorical strategies that represent slaves and former slaves as agents in a economy
predicated on free labor, then Delany’s incomplete novel of black nationalism can be understood as a collage of the literary forms and genres that characterize the varying ideologies Delany’s political writings attempt to pull together. The novel’s form merges Delany’s abolitionist work in the 1840s and his advocacy for black nationalism in the 1850s with a foretelling of his policies during Reconstruction. Adopting the tropes of the slave narratives, elements of social problem novels such as Stowe’s *Dred*, and tales of transatlantic revolt derived from accounts of slave rebellions like that of Haiti or Denmark Vesey, the novel shifts through generic and formal literary conventions in the same way that Delany’s career shifts through varying political allegiances. What remains consistent, again as with Delany’s nonfiction writing, are the underlying economic impulses and championing of the free market.

Interpreting Delany’s novel and politics as components of a long-range progression fits with his own views on the development of individuals and civilizations. In the 1840s and early 1850s, Delany was associated with the freemasons, and in turn espoused their views on civilizations as evolving on a progressive continuum (Ernest, *Liberation Historiography* 116-18). In 1853 he published *The Origin and Object of Ancient Freemasonry*, which outlines the history of the organization in the United States and describes their view on the development of societies and individuals: “... the fact of [a man’s] former condition as such, or that of his parents, can have no bearing whatever on him” (58). On a very basic level, this sort of logic mirrors that of liberal capitalism, in which an individual may harness the free market to profit financially and obtain socio-economic mobility. In addition, this sort of theory places Delany in conversation with “old planters” like William Gilmore Simms, whose *Poetry and the Practical* and *Views...
and Reviews in American Literature also present a progressive interpretation of American society and literature.

Delany’s early writings in the 1840s line up with this progressive vision and participate in the conversations surrounding skilled and unskilled labor represented in the *Liberator*, Frederick Douglass’s newspapers, and the slave narratives. During the 1840s he edited the *Mystery*, a newspaper controlled by and published for black Americans. In numerous articles for the paper, Delany urges black Americans to lift themselves up economically. And in articles echoing his writings on freemasonry, he argues that the black community in the United States is on a different stage of social and political development than the rest of the country; thus it is their duty to catch up.

Toward the end of the 1840s, Delany had a brief stint co-editing Douglass’s first paper, the *North Star*. In a series of letters published in the paper between 1848 and 1849, Delany takes up the theories he advocated in the *Mystery*. The way to obtain social equality, he repeatedly writes, is to work toward economic equality and reach out beyond the jobs and trades normally reserved for black Americans, a stance taken up by the early slave narratives and Douglass’s later editorial, “Learn Trades or Starve!” In a letter published in the December 1848 issue, Delany cites the example of two black businessmen in Wilmington, Delaware, writing, “Here, instead of seeking house service, colored men, like MEN, seek for and obtain those employments generally discarded by them, and readily grasped by white men.”

In order to advance, then, black Americans must cast off social strictures and their past identities to forge their own way.

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160 The emphasis on men here to the exclusion of women reveals a characteristic of Delany’s political views with which many critics have found fault. Critics like Robert Reid-Pharr have pointed out Delany’s
Yet even these early writings reveal the contradiction between Delany’s economic prescriptions and the goal of universal civil rights for black Americans. A clear manifestation of this paradox appears in one of his articles for the *North Star*, “Political Economy” (16 March 1849). The article begins with a call for black Americans to “give their attention to Political Economy.” Delany then defines political economy with a direct reference to Adam Smith, calling it “the Science of the Wealth of Nations.” Then, in order to define “nations,” he evokes the metaphor of the family: “All well-bred, well-regulated families, have some great fixed principle as a general rule of conduct, and high incentive as the proper guidance of their children and the individual members of their household. . . . As it is with families, so it is with nations.” This reasoning matches the popular arguments for moral suasion put forth by many abolitionists during the 1830s and 40s, including Douglass. By this argument, the “great fixed principle” of the United States was individual equality, which abolitionists argued the government must uphold by abolishing slavery. This view also shares with the policies of moral suasion a general belief in the value of progress and civilization, in which “well-bred” implies the modern nations of the west and Europe that produced the philosophy of political economy, not the primitive, tribal organizations of African or Native American societies.

However, in Delany’s article, the metaphor of the family is suddenly dropped in favor of the metaphor of the business contract. Immediately after the “family as nation” paragraph, Delany muses, “When partnerships are formed, it is intended for mutual

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focus on male uplift, and argued that his treatment of women, particularly in *Blake*, reveals an undercurrent of misogyny. While I would not disagree with this assessment of the novel, I find that such a categorization of Delany’s gender politics ignores his many writings on women in the workplace, women’s rights, and women’s education. See Chapter XXII of *Condition* or “Young Women” in the *Mystery*, 21 Feb. 1844.
benefit. Each member of the firm is required to make an investment, either of capital or labor—that is, money or work.” He then continues,

We, then, as colored people—for it is to the colored people we address ourselves—may be regarded in position, taking the class for the individual, as the partner in a firm, without capital, having made no available investment, and totally unqualified to render valuable and useful service, the other members of partners in the concern bearing the whole burden of business, with us hanging upon their shoulders for daily support. This is precisely, as a general rule, our relation to each other, comparing the blacks and whites as we now exist.

The passage could easily come from a separate article: instead of pursuing the language of moral suasion in which the responsibility for equal rights is placed on the federal government—the patriarch of the “well-bred” family—Delany argues that the duty lies with black Americans themselves to effect change through economic ends. With this abrupt shift in metaphorical language, the article merges communal and familial images with the language of modern capitalism and gestures to the sort of paradoxical thinking that re-emerges throughout Delany’s career. In the context of Delany’s investment in liberal capitalism, and the urging toward individual profit and economic self-sufficiency that comes with it, the metaphor of the loving, supportive family cannot be sustained.

The 1850s marked a change in both Delany’s policies on civil rights and the general political debates throughout the nation. In previous chapters I have discussed the significance of the early 1850s in terms of shaping the debates over slavery and in molding the ways in which southern authors represented the region in fiction. With respect to the southern economy, proslavery southerners like William Gilmore Simms or
Maria J. McIntosh wrote fiction that evoked the need for industrialization and greater economic self-sufficiency advocated by politicians and political economists like James DeBow or John C. Calhoun. This economic “closing of ranks” signified the increased sectionalism of the United States over slavery, but also an increasing awareness on the part of southerners for modernization in the South.

Just as southerners began to reconsider the place of the South in the country and within the global economy, Delany reframed his position on slavery and civil rights to fit with the increasingly tense sectional conflict and the changes to the nineteenth-century economy. As a whole, the 1850s was a dismal time for race relations. Robert Levine in Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity (1997) describes the early 1850s as a period of “disillusionment” for Delany, in which the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Delany’s forced withdrawal from Harvard Medical School in 1851, and the sectional conflicts arising from the publication of Uncle Tom’s Cabin in 1852 served to undercut the ideal of a unified nation. The result was that Delany largely abandoned his advocacy for black economic elevation as articulated in his Mystery and North Star articles, and instead gradually embraced projects for black emigration over the course of the decade. Citing Condition, Levine asserts that Delany took up the ideas of black elevation through skilled labor articulated in the earlier articles and transferred them to an international context (63-4).

Condition, published the same year as Uncle Tom’s Cabin, articulates Delany’s calls for self-motivated economic elevation championed in his 1840s articles in conjunction with the increasingly militant policies of emigration and black nationalism that he has been most known for in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Levine writes
that what most characterizes the book is a “conflicted sense of possibility and disillusionment” that mirrored the state of race relations and Delany’s own negotiations of racial politics (63). In line with his earlier writings on freemasonry, Delany spends several chapters in the book outlining a history of American progress and the history of slavery in America, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which slavery and racial discrimination had been motivated by financial profit. On the nature of oppression in any given society, Delany writes, “. . .wherever the objects of oppression are the most easily distinguished by any peculiar or general characteristics, these people are the more easily oppressed, because the war of oppression is the more easily waged against them . . . .This is mere policy, nature having nothing to do with it” (18-19). This view of oppression disrupts the argument by proslavery advocates that black men and women were naturally inferior; instead, it presents slavery as a capitalist tool and racial discrimination as politically and economically motivated: “This [policy] is to ensure the greater success [of those in power], because it engenders greater prejudice, or in other words, elicits less interest on the part of the oppressing class, in their [the oppressed’s] favor” (19). This position anticipates similar arguments made later by historians such as Eric Williams, Eugene Genovese, Robert Fogel, or Stanley Engerman who have connected the development of slavery with its profitability in the emerging capitalist order of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Thus, _Condition_ posits that if man-made economic and political systems created the inequality, then they can also fix them. Delany writes, “Experience has taught us, that speculations are not enough; that the _practical_ application of principles adduced, the thing carried out, is the only true and proper course to pursue” (41). Here, Delany
articulates a fundamental belief in the free market—what he calls the practical—that drives his views on black elevation. Throughout *Condition*, he voices the same call for black men and women to learn trades, earn their own way, and move forward in the contemporary economy using methods not limited to domestic servitude or unskilled labor that were present in his newspaper publications in the 1840s.

The difference in *Condition* is Delany’s disillusionment that coincides with the contentious nature of U.S. politics during the 1850s. With that disillusionment comes a greater demand not just for black Americans to “catch up,” but to become autonomous economically and eventually as a separate nation. Building on his idea of the practical, Delany observes the current state of the American economy:

> White men are producers—we are consumers. They build houses, and we rent them. They raise produce, and we consume it. They manufacture clothes and wares, and we garnish ourselves with them. They built coaches, vessels, cars, hotels, saloons, and other vehicles and places of accommodation, and we deliberately wait until they have got them in readiness, then walk in, and contend with as much assurance for a “right,” as though the whole thing was bought by, paid for, and belonged to us. . . (44)

The solution, he argues, is greater self-sufficiency in black communities:

> Our elevation must be the result of *self-efforts*, and work of our own hands. No other human power can accomplish it. If we but determine it shall be so, it will be so. Let each one make the case his own, and *endeavor to rival his neighbor in honorable competition*. (44-5, third emphasis mine)
That last line—“endeavor to rival his neighbor in honorable competition”—depicts black Americans competing in an open field of commerce and industry with both other black men and women and also whites. As that line indicates, rather than the principle of self-motivated industry, Delany’s version of black elevation is founded on the principles of a capitalist free market.

Yet in the climate of the 1850s, Delany’s goal of social and political equality cannot be met by mere self-sufficiency of black Americans in the United States. For, as he asserts in *Condition*, “To imagine ourselves to be included in the body politic, except by express legislation, is a war with common sense, and contrary to fact. Legislation, the administration of the laws of the country, and the exercise of rights by the people, all prove to the contrary. We are politically, not of them, but aliens to the laws and political privileges of the country” (158). Without naming any specific plans, Delany declares that black Americans are then forced to leave the United States and establish a new nation, which he envisioned at this point as being in central or South America, or the Caribbean: “But we must go from our oppressors; it never can be done by staying among them” (183). And in this way, black Americans could establish their own country on terms of social equality and economic autonomy:

Go not with anxiety of political aspirations; but go with the fixed intention—as Europeans come to the United States—of cultivating the soil, entering into the mechanical operations, keeping of shops, carrying on merchandise, trading on land and water, improving property—in a word, *to become the producers of the country, instead of the consumers.* (187, my emphasis)
In this declaration of intent for emigration, Delany attempts to pull black Americans—and black men and women everywhere—further into a position of power within the global economy by exhorting them to form their own nation that will develop in the same progression as that of the United States. Just as the United States began with farms, developed manufactures, and gradually became an independent and self-sufficient economic power, so, too would the new black nation. Again, on these terms, the free market would ultimately effect social and political equality.

The form of black nationalism that has marked Delany in modern scholarship in fact fits with the then prevailing theories of political economy adopted by proslavery southerners. In Chapters 1 and 3, I discussed how the Bank Panic of 1837, coupled with the gradual decline of plantation agriculture in the 1840s and 50s, forced white southerners to reconsider their economic policies. In an article called “Summer Travel in the South” (1850), William Gilmore Simms writes,

As a natural consequence, therefore, of the exclusive occupation of agriculture in the south, the profits of this culture, and the sparseness of our population, the Southern people left it to the Northern States to supply all their wants. . . .The Yankees furnished all our manufactures, of whatever kind, and adroitly contrived to make it appear to us that they were really our benefactors, at the very moment when they were sapping our substance, degrading our minds, and growing rich upon our raw material, and by the labour of our slaves. (31)

This passage mirrors Delany’s assertion of “white men are the producers, we are the consumers” in *Condition* published just two years after Simms’s article, only, of course, the divide is between northern manufacturing and southern agriculture. Like Delany,
Simms seeks to correct this imbalance by adopting a similar rhetoric of independent nationalism and economic self-sufficiency. Simms continues,

To secure a high rank in society, as well as history, it is necessary that a people should do something more than provide a raw material. It is required of them to provide the genius also, which shall work the material up into forms and fabrics equally beautiful and valuable. (32)

Just as black men and women must harness the “practical” and elevate themselves, southerners must create their own manufacturing sector. And ultimately, this southern self-sufficiency would become southern secessionism in 1861, a shift that parallels Delany’s move from black self-elevation to black nationalism. Although one was a proslavery white southerner, and the other an activist for abolition and civil rights, in the climate of the early 1850s, both Delany and Simms evince in their writings an investment in nineteenth-century free market capitalism as a solution to a social and political inequality.161

As the 1850s wore on, Delany’s somewhat tentative endorsement of a black nation state in the Caribbean or South America turned into an all-out campaign for emigration to the west coast of Africa. And as the plans and advocacy for emigration became more definite, Delany’s adoption of capitalist policies, specifically southern capitalist policies, became more pronounced. Rather than focusing on areas to the south as potential sites for emigration due to their supposed racial commonalities with black Americans—which is the trait he cites in Condition—Delany shifts the focus to Africa

161 The correlations between Delany’s black nationalism and proslavery thought is not unlike later relationships between black national leaders and white supremacy groups in the twentieth century. In 1922, Marcus Garvey actually met with Klu Klux Klan leaders in Atlanta. See Colin Grant, Negro With a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey (2008).
due to the greater natural and geographic resources that would better foster commercial and agricultural enterprise. In a sense, this shift indicates Delany’s attempt to replicate the economic and commercial development of the United States, and particularly the Southwest, to the point of its then-present economic state. As he would pronounce in a speech given to the National Emigration Convention of the Colored People in 1854, with the new nation, “We shall then be but doing what the whites in the United States have for years been engaged in; securing unsettled lands in the territories, previous to their enhancement in value, by the force of settlement and progressive neighboring improvements” (“Political Destiny of the Colored Race” 275-6). Much like that of the early European settlers in North America, the plan articulated here presumes that the territories in Africa are uninhabited—or at least, uninhabited by a “civilized” people who would enhance the “value” of the land. Delany, then, incorporated his project into his views on the progress of civilizations in an attempt to recreate the patterns of southern capitalism. For once territories were acquired, the new nation would then develop an agricultural and industrial sector only possible in Africa. In an article published in the Weekly Anglo-African in 1862,162 “Dr. Delany on Haytian Emigration,” Delany writes,

Territorial domain and population are the essential elements of a great nationality, and no country which has these only to a very limited extent, can ever become great and powerful.

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162 The same issue featured chapters from the second part of Blake.
Haiti is a small island, with no prospect or probability of additional territory, and consequently must always have a limited population, the resources of whom must become less as they increase in numbers . . . (1 Feb. 1862)

Unlike Haiti, Africa, Delany contended, had one basic but necessary trait: land. And land would be needed to create the self-sufficient commercial empire Delany saw as being the future of a black nation state that would rival the slave-based economic power that was the United States.

Africa eventually became a space in which the recreation of capitalist development—and thereby social and political equality—could occur. As the 1861 *Official Report* based on Delany’s fundraising trip to Africa makes clear, the success of a new black nation, at least according to Delany, relied on the potential nation’s ability to usurp the cotton trade. As with his articles on black elevation or *Condition*, Delany again emphasizes the need for a self-sufficiency, only with this project the goal is to create a self-sufficient nation, not just a community: “To succeed as a state or nation, we must become self-reliant, and thereby able to create our own ways and means; and a trade created in Africa by civilized Africans, would be a national rock of everlasting ages” (356). Here again, as with his “Political Economy” article in the *North Star* or in “Political Destiny of the Colored Race,” Delany assumes the value of “civilized” peoples over non-modernized societies, in which the native Africans are presumed to be members of the latter. Indeed, much of the *Official Report* describes Africa as largely pre-industrial and economically backward. National self-reliance will be achieved, Delany argues, by capitalizing on the resources available in Africa and cultivating a modernized cotton trade in the new nation.
In addition to creating a self-sustaining economy, which Delany argues is necessary for self-governance (273), the envisioned cotton empire would use the functioning of the free market to effectively eliminate the U.S. cotton trade and thereby the need for slavery. Showing an awareness of national economic trends, Delany points out the recent decline in the southern cotton market:

In America there are several serious contingencies which must always render a supply of cotton from that quarter problematical and doubtful, and always expensive and subject to sudden, unexpected and unjust advances in prices. . . .

All, or any of these circumstances combined, render it impossible for America to compete with Africa in the growth and sale of cotton. (352)

The goal of the new nation, then, would be to use the much cheaper and abundant resources in Africa to insert itself into this foundering commercial relationship, and attain social and political equality for black men and women throughout the world by a permanent check to the slave-trade, and also by its reflex influence on American slavery—not only thus far cutting off the supply, but, also by superseding slavery in the growth and supply of those articles which comprise its great staple and source of wealth—thereby tendering slave labor unprofitable and worthless. . . (348)

Thus, Official Report picks up on the consistent thread in all of Delany’s works: that ultimately the free market is the means to promoting social and political change through economic power and influence.

Delany also viewed emigration as part of the transatlantic economic networks of which black Americans were already a part, in addition to cultural or racial connections
that connected them to the African continent. But, like the logical machinations of proslavery white southerners and his own earlier writings on political economy, Delany’s project was torn by the ideological contradictions inherent in a project predicated on the free market, but aimed at achieving civil equality for an entire group of people. Hints of this sort of contradiction emerge in the first outlines of the project in *Condition*. After describing his vision for black Americans to become more educated and more economically mobile, he nonetheless cautions, “By this, we do not wish to be understood as advocating the actual equal attainments of every individual; but we mean to say, that if these attainments be necessary for the elevation of the white man, they are necessary for the elevation of the colored man” (*Condition* 42). Following the logic of free market capitalism and its emphasis on individual wealth and attainment, while every individual has access to economic mobility not every individual will achieve political and social equality.

*Official Report* evinces a similar rhetoric, presented first through the project’s focus on cotton production and large-scale agricultural ventures. The basic functioning of a cotton plantation requires a large number of unskilled workers, and only a small number of more skilled and more educated tradesmen and managers. The implication is that many of the emigrants would be placed on plantations or farms doing essentially the same work they had performed as slaves or freemen in the United States. Despite Delany’s reiteration of the new nation’s need for skilled laborers and the goal of developing manufacturing, the organization of the project is based on the same structure of the plantation as existed in the antebellum South. For instance, when listing the benefits to establishing a cotton trade in Africa, Delany notes the abundance of cheap
labor (353). Although he claims a laborer can live better for less in Africa, this is presented only in basic economic terms; there is no indication of the quality of life for laborers in the projected scheme. Likewise, the proposed documents for the project that Delany prints as appendices indicate the imbalanced nature of the proposed economic uplift. A questionnaire that would be administered to potential emigrants lists the typical questions expected for such a venture: name, spouse, number of children, etc. But when the questions turn to work, rather than specifically asking if the emigrant knows a trade or skill, the questions ask, “Have you worked on a plantation? What did you do there?” (376). (figure 9) The implication is that most of the emigrants will be occupying the role of menial laborers, while only a few—like Delany—will hold higher, more profitable, and more prestigious jobs.

Read in light of the longer trajectory of Delany’s economic policies as they relate to his work in civil rights, Blake is a fictional template for a similar version of black American economic history and Delany’s vision for black social and political equality throughout the world. Although critics have consistently pointed out the role economics and economic language play in the novel, few read it alongside his work before and after his emigration proposals in the 1850s. John Ernest observes:

The discourse of commercial exchange . . . provides a framework for envisioning and justifying self-liberation; it indicates also a strategy for undermining the dominant economy. . . . As Blake transforms commercial discourse to speak for a moral economy, so Delany makes clear that the dominant culture’s own moral economy has been reduced to purely commercial interest. (Resistance and Reformation 122)
The subjoined paper has been issued by the African Aid Society, London, England, which I give for the benefit of those desirous of going out under its auspices, as it will be seen that the Society is determined on guarding well against aiding such persons as are objectionable to us, and likely to be detrimental to our scheme:

AFRICAN AID SOCIETY.

PAPER FOR INTENDING SETTLERS IN AFRICA.

1. Are you desirous to leave and go to the Land of your Forefathers 2. Name. 3. Age. 4. Married or Single. 5. What Children (state ages :) Boys aged years; Girls , aged years. 6. How many of these will you take with you? 7. Of what church are you a member? 8. How long have you been so? 9. Can you read and write? 10. Will you strive to spread the truths of the Gospel among the natives? 11. What work are you now doing? 12. What other work can you do well? 13. Have you worked on a plantation? 14. What did you do there? 15. Will you, in the event of the African Aid Society sending you and your family to Africa, repay to it the sum of Dollars, as part of the cost of your passage and settlement there , as soon as possible, that the same money may assist others to go there also?

"N.B.—It is expected that persons desiring to settle in Africa, under the auspices of this society, should obtain Certificates from their Minister, and if possible from their Employer, or other competent person, as to their respectability, habits, and character. These certificates should be attached to this paper."

Figure 9 – Page from Official Report (1861)

While Ernest is correct in viewing the centrality of commerce in the novel and in Delany’s discussion of civil rights, or “moral economy” as he puts it, the problem with this sort of interpretation is that it does the same sort of selective reading of Delany’s career that Adeleke points out as a fault in Delany scholarship. In Ernest’s analysis of Blake, Delany’s vision of a pan-African community undermines the dominant transatlantic economy. But Official Report makes clear that a large portion of Delany’s emigration project is to recreate the dominant economy, but to do so under the auspices of a new black nation. Rather than working against capitalist expansion in the Atlantic, Delany sought to promote such expansion in his new black nation.

Further, most literary critics focus on the second half of the novel that takes place outside of the southern United States, which is the portion that more directly corresponds to Delany’s nationalist projects, and not his work on black elevation in the 1840s or his work in the South after the Civil War. Paul Gilroy, in his interpretation of Blake in The Black Atlantic (1993), hints at the underlying paradox of Delany’s political positions: “[In the novel, t]he best way to create the new metacultural identity which the new black citizenship demands was provided by the abject condition of the slaves and ironically facilitated by the transnational structure of the slave trade itself” (28). Gilroy, like Painter and others, concludes that Delany’s position and representation of Blake in the novel has to do with a sort of bourgeois “elitism” related to Delany’s repeated preference of “civilized” peoples and societies that appears in his other black nationalist writings.

However, reading the novel as a whole against the development of Delany’s positions on civil rights allows us to see the novel’s form not as lopsided or as an isolated manifestation of black nationalism, but as shaped by his adherence to nineteenth-century
free market ideology. Not only does the novel adopt the genres and literary forms associated with Delany’s various positions on civil rights throughout his career, those forms also trace the consistent endorsement of capitalist economic theories that were at the core of his positions. In turn, through its narrative, Blake reveals the contradictions that resulted from Delany’s simultaneous support of the free market and his efforts to promote universal equality for black men and women. If writings such as “Political Economy,” Condition, and Official Report demonstrate rhetorical strategies designed to uphold individual profit and gain as well as communal uplift, then the unevenness of Blake is the result of the ideological conflicts that come from an attempt to represent those plans in fiction.

The first half of the novel that takes place in the southern United States corresponds to Delany’s early projects for black elevation. After learning that his wife, Maggie, has been sold to a Cuban planter, Blake flees the Mississippi plantation where he is held in bondage and traces a circuit through the South that creates lines of communication between various slave communities, all in the hopes of inciting a slave insurrection. As a result, much of the novel’s first section adopts the tropes of the slave narratives popular during the 1840s and 50s, beginning with the basic movement from bondage to slavery, but also depicting a scene at a slave auction, scenes on the plantation in the slave quarters, and scenes of slavery in various locales. In turn, Blake, like the earlier slave narratives, upholds the values of free labor by presenting slaves as skilled workers in a modern economy. As Jean Lee Cole points out, Delany emphasizes the

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163 See Floyd Miller’s introduction to the 1970 edition of Blake for more on the similarities between popular slave narratives and the novel (xxi-xxii).
importance of mobility in the novel, demonstrating Blake’s mobility as a direct contrast to the enforced immobility of most slaves (“Theresa and Blake” 165-6). In addition to being mobile, a necessity in the realm of “free labor,” the slaves—especially Blake—also demonstrate the ingenuity required for success in a free market. In this way, Delany uses the first part of the novel to put the tenets of the free market into effect through fiction, with Blake’s contact with various slave communities throughout the South mimicking the patterns of labor organization that were first emerging midway through the century. That parallel is only strengthened by Blake’s repeated referral to his new web of contacts in the slave communities as “the organization.”

On these terms, economic self-sufficiency, then revolution, are the only avenues to freedom and equality. According to Ernest, throughout the novel Delany “draws from the discourse and logic of the practical sphere to redefine the moral. Expenditure and profit, struggle and liberty: this is the economy in which one must operate” (Resistance 121-2). During his talks with other slaves, Blake constantly declares that, “Money alone will carry you through the White mountains or across the White river to liberty” (84). Indeed, whenever Blake or other fugitive slaves encounter barriers to their progress to freedom, they are able to buy their way through them. At one point in the novel, Blake conducts a group of fugitive slaves to Canada. On the way, they must approach several different ferrymen in order to cross various rivers. Each time, Blake presents the men with money, “at the sight of which emblem of his country’s liberty, the skiffman’s patriotism was at once awakened, and their right to pass as American freemen indisputable” (135). As in The Condition and Elevation of the Colored People, or in his emigration projects, Delany presents economic self-sufficiency as the avenue toward
freedom and equality by merging his earlier rhetoric of black elevation through economic means with the image of the semi-autonomous slave from the slave narrative.

Delany uses the image of the skilled black worker to translate his version of political economy and rewrite the most prominent antislavery rhetoric of the 1850s: the fiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe, specifically her 1856 novel, *Dred*. Like *Blake*, Stowe’s novel presents a black revolutionary figure, the titular character, who leads a group of revolutionaries in the swamps of the Carolinas. However, unlike Blake, Dred is confined to the swamps and eventually killed, with the slaves of the novel eventually finding freedom in Canada under the supervision of their former master. As several critics have pointed out, though Delany denounced *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and criticized Stowe, he nonetheless drew from her novels for his own (Gilroy 27). While *Dred* is in many ways a more revolutionary novel than her first, it reinforces many of the same racial, social and economic constructs upheld by abolitionists and free labor advocates, in which black Americans were automatically written out of the skilled labor market and would only achieve autonomy under the guidance of white abolitionists. *Blake* alters Stowe’s representation of black autonomy by placing black Americans, slave or free, at the center of the nineteenth-century global economy. In the same manner that the earlier slave narratives presented slaves as central to the system of free labor and the plantation system that sustained the American economy, Delany’s representation of black elevation in the first half of the novel presents black Americans as part of the global free market.

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164 Although, apparently, Delany never actually read Stowe’s novel, the opening epigraph of *Blake* is a poem taken directly from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. For more on Delany’s criticism of Stowe and its role in 1850s racial politics, see Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass*, Chapter 2.
A case in point is the scene mentioned at the beginning of this chapter in which Blake encounters the elder leaders of the slave community in the Dismal Swamp. Although Blake spends time with the community and heeds them as oral historians of past rebellions, he does not use the swamps or its dwellers as integral components of his overall plan. Critics have read the treatment of the Dismal Swamp in the novel as a rejection on Delany’s part of superstition or traditional African folk culture and religion. “While the maroon world is emblematic of pan-African identity formation,” Andy Doolen writes, “the Dismal Swamp demonstrates ultimately that it is sterile ground for a revolutionary politics” (160). Blake himself dismisses the swamp conjurers later in the novel as ineffectual:

All that it does, is to put money into the pockets of the pretended conjurer, give him power over others by making them afraid of him; and even old Gamby Gholar and Maudy Ghamus and the rest of the Seven Heads, with all of the High Conjurers in the Dismal Swamp, are depending more upon me to deliver them from their confinement as prisoners in the Swamp and runaway slaves, than all their combined efforts together. (136-7)

Instead of remaining in the swamps, Blake seeks to move slaves and all black men and women into the center of American society. As he repeatedly proclaims in Condition, black men and women must be “producers, not consumers.”

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165 See also Robert Carr, *Black Nationalism in the New World* (2002) for a similar reading.

166 In a different reading, Eric Sundquist argues in *To Wake the Nations* (1993) that the scene reveals the inherent potential for revolt in slave communities (193-6). However, in light of Delany’s investment in “the practical” and the character Blake’s repeated demonstrations of extreme pragmatism, I find this reading unconvincing.
But this scene also reveals the tension throughout the novel, and all of Delany’s work, between his demand for the “practical”—or operations on the free market—and a need for communal uplift. Blake’s low estimation of the Dismal Swamp leaders and his representation of himself as the sole potential leader of a future black community repeats the focus on individual attainment in *Condition*, or the repurposing of southern plantation agriculture in *Official Report*. Coming toward the end of the novel’s first section, the moment in which Blake denounces the Dismal Swamp dwellers signals a shift from the space of the United States to the space of transatlantic commercial exchange, and indicates, like Delany’s work with emigration in the 1850s, an increased emphasis on revolution as a reproduction of dominant economic patterns.

Once the novel leaves the space of the United States in the second half, the objectives of Blake’s plan for revolution become more confused. Still in search of his wife, Blake travels to Cuba as the body servant of a northern couple. He finds Maggie, frees her, and then continues his project of revolution begun in the U.S. with the ultimate goal of forming a new black nation in Cuba. This move, as Jeffory Clymer argues, “implies that the movement of slaves within America is inseparable from the forms of slavery’s international traffic” (713). By representing Delany’s plan for emigration along a continuum with his grassroots slave organization and the transatlantic traffic in slaves, “*Blake* suggests that it is impossible to make sense of America’s political structure and economy without understanding it in relation to the economic decisions and practices of other nations” (Clymer 710). In this sense, the second half of the novel parallels Delany’s emigration work in *Condition* and *Official Report*, in which the new black nation would be founded on the principles of international commerce operating in a global free market.
Toward the end of the novel, Blake’s cousin and Cuban nationalist poet, Placido, articulates the basic principles of the new black nation outlined in Delany’s emigration proposals: “The foundation of all great nationalities depends as a basis upon three elementary principles: first, territorial domain; second, population; third, staple commodities as a source of national wealth” (262). Although the efforts of the revolutionaries in the novel are mainly focused on Cuba, the vision articulated here projects a plan for a pan-African nation that includes Africa and most of the Caribbean as the potential rival to the southern cotton trade that Delany describes in *Official Report*.

But as the earlier comments on the Dismal Swamp dwellers reveal, Blake’s motivations as a “representative leader” are unclear. As with Delany’s earlier attempts to promote universal equality for black men and women through the operations of the free market, the aims of the revolution represented in the novel become contradictory. Although Blake declares repeatedly that black men and women need only to “make ourselves free, and then put what we know into practice,” that freedom is always predicated on the leadership and success of a select few (197). Just as Delany attempted to reconcile the impulse to individual profit in the free market with universal uplift in *Condition*, or proslavery southerners attempted to merge the continued existence of slavery and the plantation economy with modern capitalist structures, the novel presents

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167 The actual Placido would have been dead by the time the action of the novel takes place, but as Sundquist observes, Delany’s use of historical figures and events has the effect of creating “a fictive world in which Cuban and American slavery are yoked together in historical simultaneity” (184).
168 Delany’s emigration proposals in the 1850s evinced a similar shift from the Caribbean as the site of a new nation to Africa. As I mentioned previously, this coincided with Delany’s plans for a rival agricultural power, which necessitated the resources more readily available in Africa. But as Katy Chiles has demonstrated, that shift also complicates an understanding of Blake’s pan-African nation and the novel’s serial publication. See “Within and Without Raced Nations: Intratextuality, Martin Delany, and Blake; *Or, the Huts of America*” *American Literature* 80.2 (2008): 323-52.
169 I borrow the term “representative leader” from Levine’s study of Delany and Douglass as “representative men” in the Emersonian sense.
Blake’s revolution as both beneficial to black men and women throughout the world, but driven by the actions of elite black Cubans.\textsuperscript{170}

Critics chalk this aspect of the novel up to a sort of elitism, or an implicit support of U.S. imperialism.\textsuperscript{171} Levine proposes that one of the ways Delany attempts to bypass such critiques in the novel is “by connecting the revolutionary hero to the region through his personal history and black body” (203). As the son of a Cuban family of tobacco planters, and a black man, the novel justifies Blake’s position as a seemingly “top-down” leader for the black nation he seeks to establish. However, Levine questions, “What is it that makes Blake not simply another foreign intruder but the embodiment of Cuba?” (204). Ultimately, many critics, including myself, conclude, “Nothing.” For example, Robert Reid-Pharr argues that \textit{Blake} is essentially a black bourgeois novel that generically establishes the rule of a black elite and “comes to close in a fit of marriages” (126).

Despite critiques of the novel’s unevenness\textsuperscript{172} and the lopsided politics of Delany’s plan for a black Atlantic nation, the tendency of most scholarship is to find some sort of ideological or narrative resolution in \textit{Blake} that simply is not there. Compounding the missing end chapters that leave the narrative unfinished, the plot and politics in the existent versions of \textit{Blake} never find closure. Instead, the second half of the

\textsuperscript{170} Chiles also draws parallels between Delany’s nationalism and that of proslavery southerners, particularly southern secessionism (333). And Sundquist reads Delany’s representation of Cuban independence in \textit{Blake} against southern expansionism, in which proslavery politicians sought to annex Cuba and create a southern slave empire (\textit{To Wake the Nations} 185).

\textsuperscript{171} On Delany’s “elitism” in \textit{Blake}, see again Painter, and also Carr. For more on Delany’s imperialist policies, see Jake Mattox, “The Mayor of San Juan del Norte? Nicaragua, Martin Delany, and the ‘Cotton’ Americas.” \textit{American Literature} 81.3 (2009): 527-54; or Levine, \textit{Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass.}

novel performs a series of interrupted revolutions: secret meetings take place, members of the Cuban elite and middle-class are recruited, speakers like Placido and Blake hold forth, and black Cubans suffer violence and indignities at the hands of whites. Yet nothing is ever resolved, and no definitive steps are taken to actually promote a revolution.

A prime example is an extended scene in which Blake enlists on a slave ship traveling to Africa. His ostensible aim is to lead a mutiny once the captured African slaves are on board, thus putting a slave ship in the power of black revolutionaries and disrupting the commercial triangle of the Atlantic slave trade. Yet instead of leading the slaves to revolution, Blake sits by while they die of disease in the hold, or are thrown overboard in the manner of the famous Joseph Turner painting, “The Slave Ship.” The section ends with the slave ship returning to Cuba after a devastating storm. The slaves are then sold to members of the Cuban black upper class who emancipate them. Doolen cites the scene as an example of the way in which Delany’s novel both highlights the violence of slavery, but also instills a tradition of revolution in the Caribbean. By having the ship return and the slaves sold to black Cubans, “Delany turns the screw: slave-traders, despite their best efforts, fail to suppress the story of resistance aboard the Vulture [the slave ship]” (168). In turn, “the cargo of the Vulture . . . is an insurrectionary commodity imported into Cuba” that establishes the roots of future insurrection (170).

Yet this interpretation still leaves the question: why not simply depict a full-blown, successful mutiny, instead of deferring it? It is a puzzling—and long—episode in a book that is otherwise full of revolutionary rhetoric. The scenes on the ship make up more than ten chapters of the novel, all of which are filled with hints of revolt on the part
of the captive Africans (led by Blake) and the horrific violence of the Middle Passage (the title of several of the chapters). In this context, why not imagine a slave ship and its trade under the control of Blake and the former slaves? Instead, despite the claim of the novel’s narrator that the episode is successful for the revolutionaries (238), the exchange implicitly reinforces the existing structures of the slave system, rather than undermining them the way an outright revolution would. Therefore, as Delany’s emigration project presented a version of black communal uplift articulated through a reproduction of the southern plantation system, the interrupted narrative of revolution at once attempts to evoke the rhetoric of political equality, but ultimately replicates the patterns of the dominant nineteenth-century economic structures that sustain social and political inequality, namely the transatlantic slave trade and plantation agriculture. As Doolen inadvertently highlights, the kidnapped Africans remain “commodities imported into Cuba,” whatever their supposed insurrectionary potential.

In turn, the novel stops short of realizing its ostensible aim, Blake’s plan for a new black economic power. The ending cuts off in the middle of a meeting of the black Cuban revolutionaries, with one proclaiming, “Woe be unto those devils of whites, I say!” (313). It is left unclear whether that revolutionary potential will be fulfilled. But in light of Delany’s economic policies and their modeling on the dominant economic structures of the time, to achieve that revolution, like the episode with the slave ship, implies a conflict between the ideology of capitalism and that of general emancipation for the whole of the transnational black community depicted in the novel. The rest of the novel, in which the planning of the revolt centers around a group of elite black Cubans, indicates that Blake’s “revolution” would lead to an altered version of the capitalist
structures in place, with that elite, wealthy, landowning group at the head. The interrupted narrative of revolution presents a moment that contains the potential for the restructuring of an oppressive economic system, but instead points to the perpetuation of an economic system that sustains forms of racial and social oppression.

Thus, the position in which Delany found himself after the Civil War, namely advocating for the interests of the former slaveholding South, is not entirely out of line with his work as an abolitionist before the War. In Blake, the plans for revolution are continually interrupted or deferred; Delany similarly dropped his plans for emigration when the Civil War began and he was appointed a major in the Union army. Levine theorizes that Delany saw the potential for black uplift in the wake of the Civil War, and abandoning his nationalist projects in favor of the more “accomodationist” policies was in line with the supreme pragmatism that characterizes most of Delany’s political positions (227). Yet Delany’s work during Reconstruction, as evidenced by the quote from Douglass that began this section, continued the same tension that dominated his writing in the 1840s and 50s. Shortly after the war, Delany published a series of essays in the New South magazine (South Carolina) that outlined the current state of South Carolina and the recently emancipated slaves living in the state. In a December 1865 issue, he proposed what he called a “triple alliance” between northern capital, black labor, and southern land as the means of future economic development in the United States (“Prospects”). While the proposal may have had economic practicality, like his vision for a rival cotton enterprise in Africa, the “triple alliance” essentially recreates the plantation system on which the southern economy and slavery were sustained.
Throughout his career, Delany upheld the role of the free market in promoting the social and political interests of individuals. In this sense, he fit in with the contemporary theories of capitalism adopted by southerners and northerners alike. However, this meant being aligned with the capitalist modes that sustained the plantation economy of the southern states and the oppressive economic practices that perpetuated slavery in the first place. In Delany’s only novel, *Blake*, we can see the fictional manifestation of that ideological conflict, wherein the narrative structure serves to negotiate the balance between capitalist individualism and the common cause of racial and social equality.

In the popular slave narratives from the 1840s and 50s and *Blake*, black authors attempted to represent the central role of black Americans in the nineteenth-century global economy. For the slave narratives, this meant presenting the labor of slaves as viable embodiments of skilled labor. For Delany’s novel, this meant positing that black Americans could harness the free market and existent capitalist structures in order to obtain universal political equality and eliminate the very foundations of slavery and the transatlantic plantation system. Rather than as nameless tools of a racialized capitalism, these representations adapt the rhetoric of nineteenth-century political economy to envision and promote black Americans as autonomous and active participants in the rapidly changing global economic landscape.

Some narratives do so with greater success than others. The slave narratives use the rhetorical context of the debates over abolition to insert an assertive declaration regarding the nature of black labor in a slave economy. Delany’s novel, however, just
like his political writings, never reconciles an investment in free market capitalism with communal uplift for all black men and women. With the Civil War and the destruction of the American economy as it had existed during the antebellum period, southern authors—both black and white—would have to re-envision the South as a viable member of a new national and global economic order without the oppressive social structures that had defined the region for so long.
CONCLUSION

Postbellum Economic Decline and New Orleans Regionalism

The effect of the Civil War on the southern economy is now well-trod territory for historical studies of the nineteenth-century and popular accounts of the war: by 1865, the region was left physically and economically devastated. Farms and plantations had been burned, thousands of southerners and northerners killed, and the South was left without its primary source of wealth, the emancipated slaves and extensive trade networks through the now-decimated plantations. “The Civil War,” writes Emory Hawk, “uprooted the economic life of the South and, for nearly two decades, left it helpless in the hands of unscrupulous politicians” (Economic History of the South 425). The decades after Reconstruction were marked by the region’s gradual re-habilitation of an economic system that prior to the war had been immensely profitable.173

This moment also produced the literature that has dominated critical discussions of the antebellum South and shaped accounts of the region until today. C. Van Woodward remarks in The Origins of the New South (1951) that, “One of the most significant inventions of the New South [the common term for the postbellum era] was the ‘Old South’—a new idea in the [eighteen] eighties, and a legend of incalculable potentialities” (154-5). And much of the myth that became the “Old South” stemmed from a revival in southern literature during the 1880s and ‘90s. Here, the fiction of popular regional writers

173 For a more thorough overview of the postbellum southern economy, see Hawk, Economic History of the South (1934); Thavolia Glymph, Harold D. Woodman, Barbara Jeanne Fields, and Armstead L. Robinson, Essays on the Postbellum Southern Economy (1985); Gavin Wright, Old South, New South (1986); and Global Perspectives on Industrial Transformation in the American South (2005), eds. Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie.
of the South such as Joel Chandler Harris or Thomas Nelson Page evoke nostalgic renditions of the antebellum period that fits the pre-capitalist vision of the plantation. “The popular imagination,” Lucinda MacKethan argues,

- tasked with framing a definition of the South, easily translates the actuality into old times in the land of cotton, conjuring up a world committed in both imagery and ideology to the preservation of the simple, good life. . . . The prominence of this idea of the South, is due largely to the work of southern writers from the Reconstruction era to the present day who have nurtured in their portrayals of their region some aspect of that ancient pastoral district famed for its rural peace and simplicity. (The Dream of Arcady 3)

From this moment comes the South of the Agrarians and Gone With the Wind that I mention in my introduction, and further, the plantation myth that has characterized conceptions of the South until today.

I would like to conclude my study by presenting an alternative vision of postbellum literature, one that takes into account the economic revival that characterized the South at the end of the nineteenth century and interprets the efforts of southern writers to represent the region in such a way that responds to the economic and social shifts after the Civil War. I focus on popular literature of the 1880s and ‘90s—regional writing—and specifically narrow my analysis to one southern locale: New Orleans. As the epicenter of trade both before and after the war, New Orleans presents a special case of a southern area that was at once shaped by global economic modernization and the agrarian structures of the plantation economy. In my readings of two New Orleans regional writers, I will present a literary account of southern economic rehabilitation that
continues the ideological balance effected during the antebellum period. While one author—George Washington Cable—was an overt critic of New Orleans society and its prevalent racism, the other—Grace King—championed “traditional” southern values and white New Orleanian culture. However, both authors reveal in their realist stories featuring New Orleans a consciousness of the economic impact not only of the war, but of the plantation economy. In doing so, both use their fiction of the area to advocate for economic improvement and modernization in the South as a whole.

“Not decaying, but not advancing”: The Quandry of Postbellum Regionalism

Beginning in December 1884, New Orleans hosted the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, a large international fair during which merchants and tradesmen from all over the world could exhibit goods and technology. Though by the end of its run the endeavor lost thousands of dollars due to embezzlement and poor organization, at its start the Exposition promised to bring thousands of dollars in new businesses and tourism into a region whose trade and economy had flagged since the end of the Civil War. For many, the New Orleans Exposition, as it was more commonly called, symbolized the uniting of North and South and the erasure of regional differences through global commerce. However, others saw the more basic, practical benefits afforded by locating the exposition in New Orleans. Eugene V. Smalley, a writer for the Century magazine, declared in the June 1885 issue, “The city of New Orleans was in need of the invigorating influences of the Exposition. Its trade has been at a standstill of late. . . .The place is not decaying, but it is not advancing” (187).
At the same time that the New Orleans economy was supposedly being revived by the Exposition, fiction written about the area was reaching its peak. Regional and local color stories featuring New Orleans and its inhabitants by authors such as George Washington Cable, Grace King, Kate Chopin, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, and Lafcadio Hearn were immensely popular from the 1870s up through the 1890s. These stories, in particular George Washington Cable’s first collection, *Old Creole Days* (1879) and Grace King’s collection, *Tales of a Time and Place* (1892),\(^{174}\) tap into the impulse toward modernization evoked by the Exposition, yet are primarily set during the antebellum period or feature characters who represent the “Old South” of the plantation myth. Through their regional fiction, Cable and King depict the need for economic modernization and revitalization in New Orleans, yet do so by pulling from the culture of the antebellum period in such a way that promotes the image of New Orleans in the late nineteenth century as part of the modern American economy, but still retains the city’s distinction as a unique regional space.

To assert that regional fiction or local color stories from the late nineteenth century could somehow present a positive image of then-modern capitalist systems seems entirely counterintuitive considering the dominant themes of literary criticism on the genre. A common critical interpretation is to situate regional stories within the context of

\(^{174}\) *Tales of a Time and Place* was King’s second full-length publication. Her first was *Monsieur Motte* (1888). Though critics have referred to the book as a collection of stories (see, for example, Robert Bush’s introduction to the collection, *Grace King of New Orleans* [1973]), I consider *Monsieur Motte* to be a novel. The text is comprised of a series of vignettes, all tied together by a set of consistent characters and a continuous storyline. In contrast, the format of *Tales* is that of the standard regional story collection popular at the time: separate tales and sketches involving independent characters and plots. For more treatment of *Monsieur Motte* as a cohesive collection or novel, see Anne Goodwyn-Jones’s chapter on King in *Tomorrow is Another Day* (1981) or Helen Taylor in *Gender, Race, and Region in the Writings of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and Kate Chopin* (1989).
rising industrialization and the forming of corporations at the end of the nineteenth century, in which the rural or “ethnic” spaces in the stories counter encroaching modernity and subsequent homogenization. The image presented by regional writing, then, as Roberto M. Dainotto puts it, “is the figure of an otherness that is, essentially, otherness from, and against, history” (9). In probably the most frequently cited critical text on the subject of nineteenth-century American regionalism, *Cultures of Letters* (1993), Richard Brodhead pursues this vision of regionalism and situates it in the context of late nineteenth-century, middle-class tourism and the changing literary marketplace, in which regionalism presented a specific, constructed version of a pluralistic America. Stephanie Foote offers a similar reading of regional writing, claiming that rather than merely “depict[ing] internally homogenous regions,” regional writing helped to “construct a common past in the face of, and out of the raw material of, the increasing immigration and imperialism of the late nineteenth century” (13).

More recent discussions have sought to examine the ways in which regional writing is not simply a reaction to economic and social change, but an active participant in that change. In his 2004 book, *Cosmopolitan Vistas*, Tom Lutz focuses on the merging of aesthetics and politics to discuss the inherently “cosmopolitan” nature of late nineteenth-century writing, in which “the hallmark of local color and later regionalist writing . . . is its attention to both local and more global concerns, most often achieved through a careful balancing of different groups’ perspectives” (30). Douglas Reichert Powell adopts a similar approach in *Critical Regionalism* (2007) and discusses the ways in which regions are spaces of constant change. To define the concept, “critical regionalism,” he writes,
Recognizing that region is a social construction that can be and indeed continually is shaped by the practices of its inhabitants, and that region can be a social invention used deliberately to transform the politics and culture of the landscape, a critical regionalism works in solidarity with the historically disempowered populations of its communities to transform their local material circumstances while linking their particular struggles to larger ones. (26)

According to this definition, literary regionalism enables non-mainstream cultures and social groups to assert some form of autonomy within dominant economic and social institutions.

Similarly, Majorie Pryse argues in her article, “Literary Regionalism and Global Capital: Nineteenth-Century U.S. Women Writers” (2004) that, “Globalization in the United States begins during the post-Civil War period, when the nation-state rebuilds in part by turning regional differences into commodifiable ‘local color’ rather than recognizing regional life . . . as autonomous productions of regional consciousness” (69). Therefore, in this context, “regionalist fiction is always covertly and often overtly about economic conditions” (71). Pryse then goes on to discuss the ways in which female regionalist authors resist the dominance of global capitalism by presenting characters who undermine capitalist economic systems.

Despite the complications they raise, these analyses still presume that the engagement with larger global and economic forces is defensive, a movement against global capitalism through the representation of various regional cultures. Instead, I posit an alternative reading of regional fiction, one that frames nineteenth-century regional writing as developing in conjunction with the rise in capitalism and economic change.
other words, I argue that it is possible to understand regional writing as something that was receptive to modernization, technological change, and the rise in global capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century.

In the case of New Orleans, regional writers depicted a space whose economic prominence was destroyed by the Civil War. Many of the regional or local color stories about the city are set in the decades before the war or the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the time when New Orleans was at the peak of its commercial and industrial dominance through steamboat shipping and trade. As Carl A. Brasseaux and Keith P. Fontenot write in the first few lines of their history of Louisiana shipping, *Steamboats on Louisiana’s Bayous* (2004), “Louisiana experienced unprecedented prosperity during the antebellum period largely as a result of the introduction of steam navigation” (1). Therefore in regional fiction, commercial prosperity coincides with a flourishing Creole society and promotes the diversity of cultures that made New Orleans so unique as a place.

Although the war had an undeniable impact on the New Orleans economy, the effects of the city’s reliance on the plantation economy and slave trade hinted at economic decline even before the war. As I mention in previous chapters, the Bank Panic of 1837 and the shift of U.S. territorial expansion from the Southwest to the far West lead to the decreased profitability of plantation agriculture. Political economists such as James DeBow and George Tucker, as well as fiction authors such as William Gilmore Simms and Maria J. McIntosh, recognized the trend and advocated for industrial development in the South. These changes had a similar impact on New Orleans, which was the epicenter
of trade for the Southwest and the Caribbean, and the primary mercantile center for the trade of staple crops and slaves in the Southwest.

Advances in transportation technology exacerbated the deterioration. “Even if the Civil War had not occurred,” write Brasseaux and Fontenot, “New Orleans’s remarkable economic growth could not have been sustained indefinitely, because the nineteenth century’s second transportation revolution—the establishment of a national rail system—transformed the nation’s transportation infrastructure” (112). Railroads drew from the trade lines that before had been entirely dependent on rivers and steamboats for the transport of goods. New Orleans bore the brunt of this change; as Eugene V. Smalley observes while documenting his visit to the New Orleans Exposition in the June 1885 issue of the *Century*, “The river steamboats do not make as great a show at the levees as they did years ago, the new railroad running parallel to the Mississippi and Red rivers . . . having seriously impaired the river trade of late” (186). In a June 1882 article that formed part of a series titled “Studies in the South” in *The Atlantic Monthly*, an anonymous traveler to New Orleans (later identified as Unitarian minister and journalist Jonathan Baxter Harrison) further remarked on the grim future in store for the city:

I think that her relative importance as a metropolis, and her superiority in commerce and wealth over the other cities of the South, are likely to be less marked in the future than in the past. The city has been made and sustained chiefly by the Mississippi River, but the river itself will be of less importance henceforward. The dominion is passing to railroads in all parts of the country.

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175 My thanks to William Hardwig for supplying the name of the author.
Indeed, between 1860 and 1880, the number of steamboats from St. Louis and the Ohio River Valley docking in New Orleans ports decreased by an average of 70 percent, a trend which only continued through the end of the century. And unlike the shifts in transportation networks in other parts of the country, New Orleans’s transportation deficit was not replaced by the building of more rail lines, save one or two. Ultimately, as Brasseux and Fontenot conclude, “Due to its heavy reliance upon steamboats plying the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers and their tributaries, the Crescent City became the most significant casualty of America’s late-nineteenth-century economic metamorphosis” (112).

As a result, New Orleans after 1865 was a city in decline. Beginning in April 1862 until the end of the war, the city was occupied by Federal troops and the entirety of the Mississippi river was controlled by Union gunboats; cotton trade decreased drastically, and New Orleans was almost entirely cut off from shipping lines in the Gulf and trade along the Mississippi. According to historian Merl E. Reed, “The Civil War did more than destroy Louisiana’s existing [economic] foundation. It also destroyed the railroads and shattered New Orleans’ commercial empire” (130).

During a moment when the New Orleans economy was in desperate need of revitalization, it became the task of regional writers to depict the area as a vibrant cultural force, but one that would continue to exist in the midst of economic and social flux. In many ways, Cable and King’s stories level the same critiques at antebellum southern society as those outlined in the earlier fiction of George Tucker or Maria J. McIntosh (see Chapter 3). By taking up the antebellum period and characters based on the tropes of that era as their main features, these postbellum stories use the example of the antebellum
South and its reliance on the plantation economy to promote a diversified economic system in the postwar era that incorporates industry, manufacturing, and non-agricultural industries. Regional fiction of New Orleans, then, becomes a way of reimagining the southern economy that picks up on the ideological foundations of the antebellum era, but adapts them on terms that shift away from the pre-capitalist constructions of the plantation and slave systems.

“The long sabbath of decay”: George Washington Cable’s Old South

No one understood New Orleans’s economic and commercial position after the war better than regionalist author George Washington Cable, who grew up in the city and fought for a Louisiana regiment during the Civil War. In 1880, Cable composed a report for the United States Census Office that detailed the history of New Orleans prior to 1860. The final two sections, “Commercial Expansion—1815 to 1840” and “Positive Growth with Comparative Decline,” outline the rise of the city as an industrial and commercial center, along with its rapid descent. Like most historical accounts of antebellum New Orleans, Cable highlights the commercial boom the region experienced in the decades before the Civil War due to the introduction of steam navigation. However, unlike most histories of the city, Cable’s account notes that even at the height of its prosperity, New Orleans was already fading due to its complete reliance on a single mode of commerce to sustain both its economy and culture. He compares New Orleans’s population growth with that of Cincinnati, St. Louis, and other major river or seaport towns; their populations grew in proportion to the drastic increase in trade and commerce. These were, of course, the cities that would later become major railroad centers. In
contrast, New Orleans’s wealth from agricultural and slave trade far outpaced its population growth in such a way that a few mercantile houses were incredibly wealthy, but little industrial and manufacturing infrastructure was built to make the city self-sustaining. Cable concludes,

Thus early, while New Orleans was rejoicing yearly in an increase of population, commerce, and wealth, its comparative commercial importance was actually decreasing, and that sun of illimitable empire which had promised to shine forever upon her, was beginning to rise upon other cities and to send its rays eastward and even northward, away from and across those natural highways which had been fondly regarded as the only available outlets to the marts of the world. (Powell 142)

Like Smalley or Harrison in “Studies in the South,” Cable notes New Orleans’s inevitable decline as a result of geographic positioning and its lack of ties to more modern technologies, such as railroads, where “it was the fate, not the fault, of New Orleans, that she was not found at either end of anywhere along the course of such a line” (Powell 149).

However, Cable takes a much less fatalistic stance toward New Orleans’s position as an economic center in his history published just a few years later, The Creoles of Louisiana (1884). For Cable, the term “Creole” was often synonymous with the city of New Orleans itself, and much of the history is devoted to the growth and development of
the city rather than Louisiana or Creole culture as a whole. As with the census report, he describes the rapid economic progress, then fall:

We pause at 1860. In that year New Orleans rose to a prouder commercial exaltation than she had ever before enjoyed, and at its close began that sudden and swift descent which is not the least pathetic episode of our unfortunate civil war.

In that year, the city that a hundred and forty years before had consisted of a hundred bark and palmetto-thatched huts in a noisome swamp counted, as a fraction of its commerce comprised in its exports, imports, and domestic receipts, the value of three hundred and twenty-four million dollars. (239)

Yet in this version of the city, not only does the geographic location determine its economic development, but the structure of society and the people’s prejudices hinder it from growth. In a chapter titled, “Why Not Bigger Than London,” Cable points out that despite its immense wealth, New Orleans had essentially handicapped itself by remaining so dependent on plantation-based water trade for financial security, a system that necessitated the prevalence of slavery and led to the neglect of manufacturing and railroads (252-4). Therefore the picture Cable presents of the city before the Civil War is that of an ever-growing, over-confident giant, secure in its corrupt economic and social systems because they are so beneficial to those in power, but destined to inevitably collapse. Not only did New Orleans prosper before the war, it “exulted” in that prosperity, so when the downfall came, it was ultimately “pathetic.”

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176 The term “Creole” technically refers to those who descended from the original French and Spanish settlers in the Louisiana colonies. The term became increasingly ambiguous during the nineteenth century and came to include individuals of mixed race with Creole parentage. While many New Orleansians, including Grace King, insisted that only white descendants could be considered Creoles, Cable includes all of New Orleans society in his use of the term (Elfenbein 13-19).
Cable’s early regional stories reflect the sense of cultural loss that came with the loss of commerce and industry, along with the city’s inability to move forward. Nearly all of the stories are set during the period designated by Cable to be both the height of New Orleans’s commercial success and the beginning point of its ultimate decline. The stories themselves encompass that ambivalence; they often begin in a transitioning space that still contains the last vestiges of an earlier capitalist or colonial prominence, but one that is being changed due to outside forces.

In the case of the most frequently discussed story from the collection, “‘Tite Poulette,” that change is marked by the financial and colonial exchanges that define the area’s history. The story begins after the Louisiana Purchase with Kristian Koppig, “a rosy-faced, beardless young Dutchman,” one of the many immigrants who “swarmed from all parts of the commercial world” and moved into the Spanish quarter of the city (213). Though set during the early decades of the nineteenth-century, the story enacts an abrupt shift to a contemporary perspective of the city, a stylistic technique typical of Cable. In describing the view of a neighboring building from Koppig’s apartment window, Cable’s narrator imagines himself viewing the building in the present day (the 1870s): “All the features of the building lead me to guess that it is a remnant of the old Spanish Barracks, whose extensive structure fell by government sale into private hands a long time ago. . . . You look at it, and almost see Count O’Reilly’s artillery come bumping and trundling out, and dash around into the ancient Plaza to bang away at King St. Charles’s birthday” (213-4). The narrative of the building is marked by financial transactions that occurred before the Civil War: passing from the colonial government to private owners in much the same way that New Orleans itself passed from a Spanish or
French space to a realm of commercial opportunity for its new American “owners” after the Louisiana Purchase. Like the vision of New Orleans presented in Cable’s histories, the building is grand, but decaying.

That building, which represents both former splendor and contemporary poverty, becomes the centerpiece of a story that evinces similarly ambivalent qualities in its representation of New Orleans society. After the publication of *Old Creole Days* and his first novel, *The Grandissimes*, in 1880, Cable was criticized by other New Orleanians for his less than positive portrayals of Creole culture and his critiques of the racial discrimination still practiced in the city and throughout the southern states. While continually returning to New Orleans as a source for fiction, it was evident from his stories and later essays—“The Freedman’s Case in Equity” and “The Silent South” (both published in 1885) being the prime examples—that Cable did not agree politically with the common social practices of New Orleans society.

The basic narrative focuses on Koppig’s interactions with the inhabitants of the building, Madame John and her beautiful daughter, who is known simply as “‘Tite Poulette.” Koppig falls in love with ‘Tite Poulette, and through his observations, as well as his avid questioning of other neighbors concerning the women, he discovers that they are of mixed race. At first he despairs, for the New Orleans racial codes at the time forbade such an alliance. However, at the very end of the story Madame John miraculously reveals papers that prove ‘Tite Poulette is, in fact, the orphan of a Spanish couple.

Aside from being an explicit critique of New Orleans’s oppressive racial regulations, the story is also an examination of the economic networks that underlie those
social codes. Business and economic concerns are in the background constantly, and Madame John is conscious of that. Throughout the story, she manipulates economic structures to her own advantage, moving from the older forms espoused by old Creole society, to newer modes. While, according to the story, she was in love with Monsieur John, once he dies, she sells the house he leaves to her and uses the money to establish herself in the building described at the beginning of the story. Once it is evident that she would need to earn a living, she obtains work in a dance hall that caters to wealthy white men who wish to socialize with women of mixed race. Madame John’s actions in the story demonstrate what Marjorie Pryse points out is the defining characteristic of regional fiction, particularly fiction by or about women: labor relations, not culture or geography. According to Pryse:

[T]hroughout regionalist texts, the record of the shift from a farming to an industrial economy, the consequent attraction of gainful employment for men elsewhere, and the reliance on domestic and subsistence economies for women define regionalism as less a construct of geography in any simple sense and more a record of the social and economic changes that characterized the second half of the nineteenth century. (73)

Though Madame John’s experience may not play out the transition from an agriculturally-based economy to an industrial system, her experience with labor and financial exchange—like the depictions of slave labor I discuss in Chapter 4—gestures to the tenets of the nineteenth-century free labor system within the racially oppressive codes of New Orleans society.
Finally, though it is couched in a sentimental trope of discovered identity and romantic love, the revelation of ‘Tite Poulette’s “true” identity is another example of how the story reframes the social codes of the antebellum era in terms of modern capitalist exchange and financial transactions. Though many readers at the time, and later critics, read the story literally—that ‘Tite Poulette is actually white—I would argue that the papers are not simply a *deus ex machina* for the story, but a conscious action on Madame John’s part for the ultimate benefit of her daughter. In other words, ‘Tite Poulette is actually of mixed race, but Madame John denies this so that her daughter may marry Koppig and finally escape the social and economic system that held her in place. In an earlier scene between the mother and daughter, Madame John explicitly tells her, “If any gentleman should ever love you and ask you to marry,—not knowing, you know,—promise me you will not tell him you are not white” (223). This angers ‘Tite Poulette, and she refuses to hide her racial identity. So when Koppig finally makes his confession, rather than denying her daughter’s heritage, Madame John asserts her “true” identity with a form of irrefutable legal documentation.

Thus by the end, the women can maneuver around the older, restrictive economic and social models that have exploited and used them. By producing a legal document to prove her daughter’s “real” identity, Madame John manipulates the system of legal and commercial transactions to her advantage. At the very end of the story, the paperwork becomes the tool by which she directs the “business” of race. Though this leaves the ending that much more ambiguous (maybe ‘Tite Poulette *is* white, thus satisfying contemporary readers who wished to sustain racial divisions), the end of the story also
leaves open the possibility for all of the central characters to live together happily within the existent structure of New Orleans society.

The critique of New Orleans society in Cable’s fiction is not limited to undermining the existent structures—it also calls for a complete overhaul of the New Orleans financial and racial system. This idea emerges in the long story/novella, “Madame Delphine.” Though “Madame Delphine” was published later than Old Creole Days—it appeared in 1881—after its publication in Scribner’s Monthly, it was printed as the first story in every subsequent edition of the collection (Rubin 100). Further, Cable worked on “Madame Delphine” for several years while he wrote and compiled Old Creole Days and The Grandissimes (Rubin 75). The story reflects this parallel development, for it draws together many of the ideas that emerge in the earlier story collection on New Orleans, post-Reconstruction politics, race, and most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, economic structures. Ultimately, the story is a sort of revision of “‘Tite Poulette’; it takes up the same theme of racial inequality in the midst of economic change, but unlike the earlier story, there is no manipulation of rules or transactions that will liberate its characters. Instead, the burden is on New Orleans society as a whole to adapt and modernize.

As with most regional stories, “Madame Delphine” begins with a detailed description of the city from the perspective of a visitor to Canal Street during the 1880s, the bustling center of then contemporary New Orleans. However, the visitor or reader is quickly led away from the central portions of the city to an out-of-the-way neighborhood:

But you turn, instead, into the quiet, narrow way which a lover of Creole antiquity, in fondness for a romantic past, is still prone to call the Rue Royale.
You will pass a few restaurants, a few auction-rooms, a few furniture warehouses, and will hardly realize that you have left behind you the activity and the clatter of a city of merchants before you find yourself in a region of architectural decrepitude, where an ancient and foreign-seeming domestic life, in second stories, overhangs the ruins of a former commercial prosperity, and upon every thing has settled down a long sabbath of decay. (1-2, my emphasis)

Though the passage begins with lines and phrases that were typical of regional fiction at the time ("quiet," "antiquity," "romantic past"), that expectation of escape from a scene of bustling modernity is undercut by the remnants of capitalism and industry. While the "romantic" spaces of old New Orleans still remain on the second stories of the crumbling buildings, those buildings are literally held up and sustained by "the ruins of a former commercial prosperity." Commerce created the foundation of what is now "Creole antiquity," and now that it has been redirected elsewhere, there is nothing left but decay.

In "Madame Delphine," the ultimate downfall of the society, as Cable depicts it, is its inability to change, particularly in its attitudes towards race. The story takes place in antebellum New Orleans on the street described in the first few paragraphs, and the narrative itself revolves around the title character, Madame Delphine, and her daughter, Olive, both of whom are of mixed race, or "quadroons." Like Madame John and her "adopted" daughter, the two are devoted to one another. However, when Olive falls in love with a white man from a prominent Creole family, Captain Lemaitre, rather than producing a document to "verify" her daughter’s race, Madame Delphine fabricates a story in which Olive is not really her daughter. The lie allows Olive to marry Lemaitre without breaking the strict miscegenation laws practiced in the city. Yet, both she and
Madame Delphine suffer from the renunciation; in the end, Madame Delphine dies alone and grief-stricken over her lie and the loss of her daughter.

In the story Cable consistently condemns the racial codes through various characters, but, as in "'Tite Poulette," most explicitly through the figures of Olive and Madame Delphine. After Olive and Lemaitre announce their engagement, the couple receive threats of legal action from his family. In despair, Madame Delphine appeals to the local priest, who has served as her confidante throughout the story. She rages against the law that prevents her daughter from marrying, finally asking of the priest, "'Mais, pou’quoi yé fé cette méchanique?’—What business had they to make that contraption?,” meaning the law (61). Though in all probability the strange wording is due to Madame Delphine’s “singular patois,” the word choice is nonetheless interesting. By using the words “business” and “contraption,” Madame Delphine situates the construction of legal racial regulations and social codes in the realm of technology and manufacture. In her representation, the New Orleans or Louisiana government is in the “business” of building “contraptions” to control the lives of its black citizens. Here she questions its utilitarian (or perhaps commercial?) value; further, she proposes that it is not only illogical, but outdated. When the priest suggests that the law is designed to keep the races separate, she retorts, “[F]rom which race do that want to keep my daughter separate? She is seven parts white! The law did not stop her from being that” (62). Like a piece of antiquated technology, the racial codes have ceased to function properly (or logically) in the society using them.

Just as New Orleans did not adapt technologically or commercially to the new innovations in rail transport, the old New Orleans society and its accompanying laws, or
“contraptions,” cannot see beyond the older codes of racial division. By the end of the story, there is the hint that if contemporary New Orleans could modernize, both commercially and socially, it would become a thriving space once again, shown in the fate of Madame Delphine’s house on the decaying street. Once Madame Delphine reveals her daughter’s “true” parentage, she retreats to her home in grief, only allowing a married couple, of mixed race like herself, to live with her. After she dies, the house falls to the couple and their family: “In the course of time these two—a poor, timid, helpless pair—fell heir to the premises. Their children had it after them; but whether in those hands or these, the house had its habits and continued in them; and to this day the neighbors . . . rightly explain its close-sealed, uninhabited look by the all-sufficient statement that the inmates ‘is quadroons’” (77).

Like the second story relics of a prosperous culture that were held up by “former commercial prosperity,” the “quadroons” living in the old mansions are kept in their place by the now obsolete racial codes of antebellum New Orleans. While Madame John in “‘Tite Poulette” manipulates the regulations in order to achieve autonomy for her daughter, “Madame Delphine” does not allow its mixed-race characters the same escape. Instead, the gradual decay of Madame Delphine parallels the decay of the neighborhood around her, revealing that only through a change in lifestyle and the foundations of its way of life could New Orleans hope to find prosperity, and by extension, justice, for all of its citizens. In Cable’s version of the city, by embracing new modes of modern capitalism, commercial transport, and social change, New Orleans could again become the affluent and culturally vibrant city it was before the Civil War.
“There must come a prosperity unexcelled in history”: Grace King’s New South

By the time the New Orleans Exposition took place in 1884-5, Cable had presented a version of the city in his fiction that was in desperate need of a revitalization both economically and socially, a vision that was shared by observers of the Exposition as well as inhabitants of the city. One of these inhabitants was Grace King, a young woman who was the member of a once prominent New Orleans family that had fallen into financial difficulties since the Civil War. At the time of the Exposition, King was unknown in the American literary field. During the convention, she attended a literary seminar held by the prominent author Julia Ward Howe and presented her first nonfiction essay. It was also during this time that she met Richard Watson Gilder, the editor of the *Century*. As she later related in her memoirs, *Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters* (1932), this encounter spurred her to write her first short stories set in New Orleans (*Grace King: A Southern Destiny* 47, 57-8).¹⁷⁷ In this sense, the chronology of King’s literary career was tied to New Orleans’s economic revitalization.

It was not simply a need to defend her hometown that compelled King to write; her direct knowledge of the financial and commercial obstacles faced by New Orleans and its inhabitants in the decades after the War also played a large role. As Robert Bush writes in his introduction to *Grace King of New Orleans* (1973), King often chose to

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¹⁷⁷ In the now frequently cited account of the meeting, King describes a contentious conversation that occurred between her and Gilder. The two discussed fiction about New Orleans and in particular her objections to Cable’s representations of Creole society. According to King, Gilder retorted, “Why, if Cable is so false to you, why do not some of you write better?” (60). “The next morning I was resolved to do at least my share in our defense,” she writes in *Memories*, “... [and] I got paper and pencil, and on the writing-table in my bedroom wrote my first story” (61). Though I agree that Cable and King’s views on race, southern society, and the South differed greatly, their relationship does not appear to have been quite so antagonistic as the anecdote implies (see, for example, a letter from King to Cable dated 14 Oct. 1917 and collected in *Grace King of New Orleans*, 402).
highlight in her fiction the “cruel memories of economic struggle and humiliation” experienced by many New Orleans residents and southerners after the war (6). Indeed, King had first-hand experience with the city’s financial decline; her family began as one of the wealthiest in the city but eventually was forced to rely on support from her mother, sisters, and brothers (Bush, *Grace King: A Southern Destiny* 14-20).

Aside from personal experience, King also wrote frequently on the economic history of the area. In 1895 she published her history *New Orleans: the Place and the People*. Like Cable’s earlier *Creoles of Louisiana*, much of King’s history documents the former prosperity of the city. She notes the flourishing of the steamboat trade (259), as well as the rapid commercial development and subsequent transformation of New Orleans after the Louisiana Purchase (259-79). Her image of the city just before the Civil War is one of unlimited possibilities:

> The great financial crises of the decade [1850s] swept over the place; banks and fortunes were demolished, but only for a moment; the very stones of the street seemed to cry out wealth and prosperity, and higher and higher figures end the statistical columns,—more emigrants, more imports, more exports, more trade, more cotton, sugar, plantations, slaves; and to off-set, the more death, the more life, the city’s gayety, like the city’s gold, mounting in the flood tide over it. (290)

As with Cable’s version of the city, the antebellum New Orleans of King’s history is a bustling metropolis, virtually unstoppable in its accumulation of wealth and commercial success.

Unlike Cable, however, King presents antebellum New Orleans not as a city on the verge of imminent ruin; rather it is a city that was cut down in its prime due to outside
forces. In the history, her account of the Federal occupation of New Orleans is riddled with the injustices practiced against its citizens and Confederate sympathizers. These incidents range from women being jailed for supposed treason, to the property of absent families being sold off by Federal officials after the end of the war (*New Orleans* 300-33). Instead of the self-destructive giant of Cable’s imagining, King’s New Orleans is violently forced out of its status as one of the premier cultural and economic centers of the United States.

This sort of treatment of New Orleans characterizes most of King’s fiction as well. As a result, she is often dubbed a “Lost Cause” author or a southern apologist, in which her portrayals of Creole or antebellum southern society are tinged with a nostalgia for a long-past, yet much preferred, mode of living according to the genteel, aristocratic codes supported by slavery. As Robert Bush notes, unlike many of her fellow southern authors, for King “[t]he memory of the humiliation of Reconstruction, especially as it affected her own family, and the pride generated by the reversals of social position of the time, made her resist any temptation to feel a full sense of reunion or to embark on her career in the spirit of the New South” (*Grace King of New Orleans* 5). As a result, King was almost defiant in her “southernness,” and “she never lost the feeling that the South had first claim to her patriotism” (*Grace King of New Orleans* 5).178

Still, reading King’s stories as sketches of mourning misses the critiques integrated into the representations of her hometown. Unlike Cable, King’s stories are all set in contemporary New Orleans. In each, there is a lingering remnant of old New

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178 To name just a few of the critical references to King’s southern patriotism, see David Kirby’s *Grace King* (1980); Robert Bush’s *Grace King: A Southern Destiny*; Taylor’s *Gender, Race, and Region*; and Edmund Wilson’s brief treatment of King in *Patriotic Gore* (1962).
Orleans society that attempts to negotiate the new economic and social order during or after the war, much in the same way King’s family dealt with their impoverished state. But rather than only dwelling on the loss of the older order, King presents the need to confront new realities and subsequently adapt. Like Cable, her stories advocate change—but rather than being accusatory, she presents old New Orleans society as being in need of aid and sympathy. To put it another way, in King’s stories, New Orleans after the war is floundering in the wake of economic devastation and must adapt at the cost of losing its cultural significance in the future.

In many of the stories from Tales, that culture is replaced by something new, a mutation of the old order that adjusts to fit the new economic conditions. And despite her defiant sense of southern patriotism, King perceived a need to mold her beloved South to new modes of thinking. In one of the journals she kept during the late 1880s, King reflects on the passing of the old southern order and the future of the South. At first she records this change with sadness: “They are passing away these mistresses and slaves, passing away, and with them are passing away much of the old love & all of the traditions and customs of the Past” (To Find My Own Peace 6). However, her tone shifts in the next sentence to one of hope: “A volume of history is being finished and laid on the shelf; new events are crowding in to fill a succeeding one; whole blank pages stand thoroughly open, awaiting the chronicler” (To Find My Own Peace 6). Though King may mourn what she perceives to be a better way of life that has now “passed,” she does not try to reclaim that loss; instead, in both her journals and her fiction, she releases that past and looks to a new way of life. In this sense, while Cable’s stories serve as a catalyst for change to present-day New Orleans, King’s function more as a catharsis.
King begins *Tales* with a dismissal of the antebellum plantation romance by confronting it with the practical realities of war. “Bayou L’Ombre” depicts a plantation just outside of the city during the Civil War. The inhabitants are three sisters and their slaves, and throughout the war all live on the plantation in a relatively secluded fashion: there is no fighting, and they never encounter soldiers from either side. This isolation allows the sisters to develop a highly romanticized Confederate patriotism, all of which they draw from books and pamphlets, since their financial circumstances prevent them from ever leaving the plantation. One day, a group of Union soldiers arrive with a number of Confederate prisoners, whom they lock in the smoke-house. As the Federal officers are occupied with dinner, the girls, propelled by visions of daring escapes, release the prisoners. However, the end of the story reveals that the “Confederate” soldiers were, in fact, a troop of Federal soldiers that had been captured by the local Confederate guerillas (led, incidentally, by the girls’ cousin) who had swapped uniforms with them.

Through this surprise reversal, “Bayou” demonstrates the disappearance of a past that is no longer viable, but still enviable.179 While the girls are presented as naive, overly-romantic, and obviously impoverished by the war, their position symbolizes the idyllic image of the tranquil antebellum plantation. In turn, they represent the innocence lost to the South after the war. Yet that innocence could not possibly be maintained in the face of practical concerns, shown in the deception practiced upon them by the Confederate guerillas, including their cousin. Here, constructed notions of national or

179 “Bayou L’Ombre” also presents a complicated image of slavery and emancipation through the reactions of its black characters to the arrival of the “Yankee” soldiers. However, for the purposes of this brief analysis, I will limit my discussion to the reactions of the sisters. For a more thorough discussion of the story’s handling of racial politics, see Helen Taylor, *Gender, Race, and Region.*
familial loyalty fall aside in favor of procuring food and freedom. By beginning the collection with a story of failed antebellum romanticism during the time of war, King sets up a paradigm for the rest of the stories set in later decades: there is no room for romantic patriotism and nostalgia in the era of financial decline and overwhelming poverty that resulted from the war.

This emphasis on practical financial concerns over a misplaced adherence to older social forms and proprieties is most explicit in the next story of the collection, “Bonne Maman.” Like Cable’s stories, “Bonne Maman” begins in a place of transition, a quarter of “the city once truthfully, now conventionally, called ‘back of town’” (63). While formerly the neighborhood “had been used as an obscure corner in which to thrust domestic hearths not creditable to the respectability assumed in the front part of town,” after the war and Reconstruction, it has made gestures towards improvement:

declensions of one-storied degrees of prosperity, comparisons of industry and cleanliness, and pretensions to social precedence inherited from the architect of a century ago, or acquired, perhaps, by the thrift of a present tenant. The steps were all scrubbed red with brick, or yellow with wild camomile, which, besides gliding, lent them a pleasant aromatic fragrance. (63-4)

Here is a neighborhood that is gradually evolving from a space of decline to a space of growth and economic (and perhaps social) prosperity, a reverse of the buildings and streets that mark the beginnings of Cable’s fiction.

That is, with the exception of one house occupied by two white women and a black servant: “Bonne Maman,” her granddaughter, Claire, and their servant, Betsy. Rather than the hopeful industriousness of the surrounding homes, their house is
crumbling: “The fence of this obtruding property may have been painted in front on the other street, but to its apex it degenerated through every stage of shabbiness and neglect” (66). The decrepitude of the house reveals the inhabitants’ stasis socially and financially. Despite the former grandeur of their family, Bonne Maman and Claire have been reduced to living in the house of a former slave. While the grandmother symbolizes the older, antebellum order dictated by outdated racial and social codes, Claire is the younger generation driven by practicality in the face of hardship. So as Bonne Maman constantly laments the loss of her wealth and slaves, Claire struggles to earn enough money to support the family by any means possible without letting her grandmother know their dire financial situation. Throughout the story, the two pull at one another ideologically, leaving the house in a state of transition, unable to completely abandon the older order because of Bonne Maman, and therefore unable to progress.

The story first introduces Claire in the midst of a sewing project while her grandmother sleeps in a back room. Unbeknownst to Bonne Maman, who would undoubtedly disapprove, Claire has been taking in sewing and embroidery work from local women, both white and black, and at the opening of the story she is hastily finishing a dress for a black woman, described in unflattering terms by Betsy as “owdacious and high-minded” (76). Though this contains King’s obvious racial and class biases, Claire is not condemned as a character for deceiving her grandmother. On the contrary, she is an emblem of hard-working industry and honor. At one point during a conversation with her grandmother, Claire reflects on her education in a local convent in the manner of any well-bred New Orleans girl: “I believe the Sisters at the convent were right. I shall never have any sense—never; only strength. Ah, yes! they told me that often enough, and tried
to shame me by pointing to the good girls—the good, weak girls. Anyhow . . . goodness doesn’t stand a convent and war as well as badness” (71-2). Indeed, as with the white women in “Bayou L’Ombre,” in order to withstand a war, Claire would have to abandon any pretense of being the traditional, genteel New Orleans lady.

In the same turn, she also must abandon any lingering traces of the former antebellum gentility that remains in their home. When she finally completes the gown and brings it to her customer, the woman asks if she has any collars for sale. In her haste to earn some extra money, Claire secretly sifts through her grandmother’s old clothing and pulls out a lace collar to sell. Though Bonne Maman clings to the material emblems of her life before the war, reminiscing over her “little green work-table” and embroidery, Claire sees beyond nostalgia to the practical advantages gained by divesting herself of these reminders. This ability to look past unfounded sentiment gives her a certain nobility in the story, moreso than Bonne Maman herself or any continued devotion to a romantic southern patriotism:

Would the patriotic death of the girl’s father, would the martyrdom of her mother, would a proud disdain of law quibbles, would the renunciation of friends and the defiance of enemies alleviate her affliction then, or solace her in her youthful, unaided life-struggle, in those conditions for which ancestral glories, refinements, and luxuries but poorly equipped her? Could, in fact, their enemies have prepared an extremity of suffering beyond that to which Claire was predestined by her own grandmother? (88)

Therefore, Claire can only help herself and her family by moving beyond the past and looking to contemporary, practical concerns.
Yet it is not as if King entirely advocates new economic modes and practicality in her story; she was notoriously critical of what she saw as the “northern” business mentality. This stance becomes evident in the two other main characters of “Bonne Maman”: Betsy and Bonne Maman’s former slave, Aza. The two women present another pair of divergent ideologies; however, for obvious reasons, neither look back to the past with nostalgia. Betsy embodies the contemporary, practical spirit. Much like Claire, she does not possess the traits dictated by the antebellum social order—Bonne Maman always compares Betsy’s uncouth behavior to that of her “well-raised” Aza. However, also like Claire, Betsy is hard-working and loyal. So when Bonne Maman grows fatally ill, she finally recognizes Betsy’s worth and asks that she look after her granddaughter after her death.

Aza, in contrast, entirely embraces the new economic modes of the city. She is the one character in the story who applies practicality toward financial prosperity. Yet unlike Betsy, she does so at the cost of abandoning older affections; she seems to be motivated purely by financial gain. Aza, the story reveals, is now the proprietor of a brothel just a few doors down from where her former mistress has been living. She first appears in the story at Bonne Maman’s viewing, dressed expensively and with an air of “pampered self-consciousness.” Yet her success has deteriorated her morally and intellectually: “Pleasure seemed to have sensualized features and form into dangerous alluring harmony, and panoplied her mind against thought” (104).

Though she enters the decrepit house purely out of curiosity, Aza quickly recognizes the old woman as her former mistress. For a moment, she attempts to reclaim the relationship and affection she held for Bonne Maman, weeping over the prone body
and calling herself “her Aza.” Angered by her apparent hypocrisy, Betsy throws up her abandonment of the family, citing her new life as the path that led her away from real human affection: “Your madam! . . . You! . . . a-carrying on your devilment right out there, and your mistress a-slaving and a-starving!” (108). She continues, “The last thing before the madam there died, when your music and your devilment was going on the loudest, I told her . . . I would look after the mamzelle the same as if I were her boughten slave; and I’m going to do it” (109). Again, this scene reveals King’s position in terms of race and class, where relations between an enslaved woman and her owner could be held up as exemplary models of human affection. But in the figure of Betsy, those relations move beyond the past system of slavery and look to a new mode of relations. At this moment, Aza looks at the other woman and feels ashamed: “in Betsy’s fine, determined face, in the holy passion of her voice, in her firm, commanding eye, she recognized, not the stolen or borrowed principles of a white lady, but the innate virtue of all good women. She measured herself not with her dead mistress, but with Betsy” (109-10). The story ends with Bonne Maman’s funeral: the relatives she had shunned out of pride in her impoverished state all return, Aza sits in the corner weeping, Claire cries and marvels at her new family, and Betsy presides over it all. Once the funeral ends, presumably Claire will be taken care of by her newly discovered family, as will Betsy, while Aza simply returns to her brothel.

As with “Bayou,” the old order in “Bonne Maman” cannot be regained, but the new economic practicality can be fashioned out of the values of the old society. Though King still adheres to ideas of southern honor enough in her fiction to condemn Aza’s purely pecuniary attitude, she had enough experience with poverty to understand the
financial practicality needed to survive in post-Civil War New Orleans. Instead, she advocates a form of progress that, while it still does away with the older economic and social systems, balances a sense of what she saw as southern tradition with pragmatic action. In an entry from her journals, King writes,

I detest the North as a whole—the climate, the people, the atmosphere—the social and other customs—the very scenery loses with me, when I see the sign of human habitation there—Out of a vast region of dislike arise exceptions however—exceptions whom I love—whom critical assiduity of mine can detest aught but what is admirable—most admirable—I love the South as a whole . . . .And yet there are exceptions in it that I detest—When I think of the individuals no where are found less admirable characters—men and women . . . (To Find My Own Peace 52)

Often when critics discuss this quote, it is only to reference the first portion (“I detest the North as a whole”). Yet, the second section is in many ways more important. It reveals that while King saw immense value in southern society, traditions, and social structures, like Cable, she also saw the inherent problems. And frequently, these problems related to what King personally witnessed as a woman and as a southerner who experienced the economic hardships that came with the change in trade and commerce after the war. For King, one could still retain certain values represented by southern culture, but still act in ways that moved beyond the limitations of nostalgic regional pride.

In 1885, the year Grace King embarked on her literary career and the year that George Washington Cable was in the midst of his success as an author, New Orleans had seen both immense economic prosperity as well as devastating financial decline. Further,
the city had witnessed an economy that had shifted from one based on steamboats shipping goods through its river and sea ports from outlying plantations to one driven by industrialization, northern investors, and railroads. For the managers of and participants in the 1885 Cotton Centennial Exposition, New Orleans was primed for an economic rebirth, one that entailed a revision of the previous financial and commercial systems. In an open letter to the *Century* magazine in December 1884, right at the start of the Exposition, contributor Richard Nixon writes, “. . . in the majority of instances Southern energy has been handicapped by inferior methods and appliances. Add improved methods to her natural advantages and intense desire to develop herself, and there must come a prosperity unexcelled in history” (312).

Both King and Cable recognized the need for change in the city and reflected that need in their regional fiction set New Orleans. Despite their differences politically, for both success in the city meant a radical revision of economic and social policies of the past, as well as a new approach by inhabitants of the city. In this sense, their fiction was locked into conversations with national and global economic concerns, ones that moved beyond the restrictions of local geography and illustrated the interconnectedness of New Orleans culture with the broader economic developments occurring throughout the world at the end of the nineteenth century.

Fiction written about the South during the postbellum era may have played a large role in the creation of the plantation myth, but placing it in conversation with antebellum writing sheds light on later southern literature’s engagement with the global economy.
Although the antebellum economy as it had existed was permanently altered, the southern economy and southern society were still influenced by the impulses of liberal capitalism—shown in the attempts at economic revitalization at the end of the century—and the myth of plantation society as a pre-capitalist alternative to a perpetually modernizing world. I use the case of New Orleans regionalism to demonstrate how southern authors continued to use literary form—in this case regional short stories—to negotiate the shifts in the southern economy in order to represent the South as an active participant in modern national and international development. Still further, my hope is that through my study of early southern literary development in a particular historical context, we can trace the long-term patterns demonstrated by southern literature as a genre. In this way, my project is not limited to a study of a particular region or culture, but also illuminates how a distinct literary genre can emerge from a discrete set of historical, biographical, and economic circumstances.
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