

# Arguing Slavery's Narrative: Southern Regionalists, Ex-slave Autobiographers, and the Contested Literary Representations of the Peculiar Institution, 1824–1849

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**Abstract.** In the twenty-five years before 1850, southern writers of regional literature and ex-slave autobiographers constructed a narrative of United States slavery that was mutually contradictory and yet mutually influential. That process involved a dynamic hybridization of genres in which authors contested meanings of slavery, arriving at opposing conclusions. They nevertheless focussed on family and the South's distinctive culture. This article explores the dialectic of that argument and contends that white regionalists created a plantation-paternalist romance to which African American ex-slaves responded with depictions of slavery's cruelty and immorality. However, by the 1840s, ex-slaves had domesticated their narratives in part to sell their works in a literary marketplace in which their adversaries' sentimental fiction sold well. Scholars have not examined white southern literature and ex-slave autobiography in comparative context, and this article shows how both labored to construct a peculiar institution in readers' imagination. Southern regionalists supplied the elements of a pro-slavery argument and ex-slave autobiographers infused their narratives with abolitionist rhetoric at a time in which stories Americans told about themselves became increasingly important in the national political crisis over slavery extension and fugitive slaves. It was on that discursive ground that the debates of the 1850s were carried forth.

## INTRODUCTION

United States slavery became a peculiar institution in readers' imagination in part because its supporters and opponents cast it in terms that were mutually contradictory and yet mutually influential. In the twenty-five years before 1850, white fiction writers who imagined the American South for a national and international readership participated in the construction of a narrative of United States slavery that explained it as the lynchpin of an organic and hierarchically ordered society. Southern authors of local color and regional

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distinctiveness contended that slaveholders' sentiment for the people they held as slaves framed bondage and the social order that developed around it. In doing so they imagined the South as a distinctive region and supplied to politicians and others the essentials of a pro-slavery argument. White southern authors' imagined slave culture of the South became so tenacious that slavery's critics, especially ex-slave autobiographers, by the 1840s were responding by attacking American slavery on the discursive ground of their adversaries' choosing. That dialectic and the dynamic hybridization of genres it involved were essential parts of a narrative working within and through the culture and politics of the early American republic, a narrative that ultimately influenced identities Americans would fight and die to defend or destroy.<sup>1</sup>

Commercially successful and widely influential, ex-slave autobiographies persistently disputed the core component of the prevailing white southern narrative, namely that African-descended slaves labored under the protection of a class of European-descended owners in a stable, hierarchical, and fundamentally benevolent social milieu. Former slaves argued that slavery was chaotic, violent, and reprehensible. Emphasis on spiritual growth of bondspeople and the violence of slavery in autobiographies of the 1820s and 1830s gave way in the 1840s to romantic characterizations of male fugitives and an increasingly sociopolitical argument against slavery, incorporating scenes of family separation and the domestic slave trade. Each step in the process involved political awareness and shrewd calculations in a literary marketplace. The majority of authors who created and contested slavery's narrative during the years surveyed were male, and their outlooks and limitations reflect a relentlessly masculine discourse. But in the 1830s and 1840s white female authors began to reshape the genre of anti-slavery fiction that would revolutionize slavery's narrative in the 1850s, leading to responses among formerly enslaved women, among others. Anti-slavery appeals were in turn by mid-century influencing the development of a full-throated and deeply sentimental pro-slavery narrative. As depictions of the slave trade became ever more prominent in ex-slaves' autobiographies, they became scarcer in pro-slavery fiction. Both struggled to maintain authenticity as the political stakes and commercial success of their representations rose.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ronald J. Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); William J. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity: Material and Cultural Life* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), chapter 1; John Brooke, "Cultures of Nationalism, Movements of Reform, and the Composite-Federal Polity: From Revolutionary Settlement to Antebellum Crisis," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 39, 1 (2009), 1–33; Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> Frances Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-bellum Slave Narratives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); Augusta Rohrbach, *Truth Stranger than*

## THE PLANTATION ROMANCE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

By the 1820s, southern regionalists had begun to invent a narrative of slavery that contained a core of paternalist ideas. They took part in a literature that was examining the early republic's incipiently forming national character and discovering – and emphasizing – differences between southerners and northerners.<sup>3</sup> Partially obscuring the burgeoning slave market and forced migration that supplied workers to the cotton kingdom, southern regionalists' imagined world of early nineteenth-century slavery featured human dramas of masters and slaves, representing African Americans' experience of slavery in psychological categories as dependents.<sup>4</sup> The white "antebellum literary mind" concentrated on "preserving a pastoral vision of chattel slavery that resisted insertion in a historical sequence or plot."<sup>5</sup> The resulting portrait was widely influential and even shaped historians' understandings of American slavery into the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> To contemporary readers, white southern novelists and fiction writers supplied a stock set of characters and a social drama of the plantation that formed a narrative counterargument to charges, most recently made by visiting Europeans, that American slavery was barbaric and immoral.<sup>7</sup>

Southern regionalists took part in constructing a narrative that emphasized and inflated slavery's domestic character and ignored or distorted its personal and social violence. They did not simply make it up out of whole cloth, however. Reproduction and childrearing among enslaved families was a peculiar feature of North American slavery, in contrast to nearly everywhere else in the Americas. In law and custom, slavery was an inheritance for the

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*Fiction: Race, Realism, and the U.S. Literary Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), chapter 2; Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolitionism," in Shirley Samuels, ed., *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in 19th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92–114.

<sup>3</sup> William Robert Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957); Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1962), chapter 12.

<sup>4</sup> Don Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Scott Romnie, *The Narrative Forms of the Southern Community* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 66–67.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1918).

<sup>7</sup> Morris Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America, from the Coast of Virginia to the Territory of Illinois* (London: Severn and Redington, 1818); Zachary Macaulay, *Negro Slavery, or a View of Some of the More Prominent Features of That State of Society, as It Exists in the United States of America and the Colonies of the West Indies, Especially in Jamaica* (London: Richard Taylor, 1823); Jesse Torrey, *American Slave Trade* (London: J. M. Cobbett, 1822).

children of enslaved women. Creators of the plantation romance seized upon that fact but reversed the gender and racial emphasis, infusing it with a paternalist plot celebrating an extended plantation family. Yet, historically, dispossession of kin was its tragic corollary: the African American family was the one social success that slaveholders broke apart for profit, selling or hiring out those of working age and retaining grandparents and substitute caregivers to raise the large proportion of the enslaved who were orphaned children. The domestic slave trade was one of the most sustained devaluations of kinship ties in modern history. Against the grain of that historical process, pioneers of southern regional literature and local color depicted African Americans as contented residents of sleepy plantations, at home in the bosom of their extended (black and white) family, often in the background of white culture.<sup>8</sup>

In building a politically indispensable apology for slavery, intentionally or not, southern writers who imagined their region for readers refigured its history into a drama that upheld the social order of white privilege and black servitude. George Tucker confronted slavery and even included a scene of the domestic slave trade in *The Valley of Shenandoah, or, Memories of the Graysons* (1824). Representing a Virginia slave auction within his romantic novel, Tucker acquits slaveholders of greedy motives, contending that sales were aberrations in the normal course of slave life. Humans were auctioned “like horses or cattle; and even to those who have been accustomed to it, it is disagreeable, from their sympathy with the humbled and anxious slave.”<sup>9</sup> To the right-thinking southerner, Tucker instructed, the transaction had a salutary social meaning. The slave “who has been born and bred on a well-regulated estate,” he explained, “hardly feels” his or her chains. The domestic character of slavery, in his telling, salved any wounds inflicted by agents of the market. In the normal course of events, the slave’s “simple wants are abundantly supplied.” As for “whatever of coercion there is on his will,” Tucker argued, “it is so moderate and reasonable in itself, and, above all, he has been so habituated to it, that it appears to be all right, or rather he does not feel it to be wrong.” Moreover, each slave was “a member of a sort of patriarchal family: but when hoisted up to public sale, where every man has a right to

<sup>8</sup> James W. C. Pennington, *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* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1849), iv–v; Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), chapter 4; Damian Alan Pargas, *The Quarters and the Fields: Slave Families in the Non-Cotton South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> George Tucker, *The Valley of Shenandoah, or, Memories of the Graysons*, Volume III (New York: C. Wiley, 1824), 127.

purchase him, and he may be the property of one whom he never saw before, or of the worst man in the community, then the delusion vanishes.” Only through sale would the slave perceive “the bitterness of his lot,” and long for the plantation.<sup>10</sup> The slave trade temporarily disrupted paternalism, according to Tucker, but the ultimate agency for that disruption lay with disobedient and ungrateful slaves. Tucker did not explore those issues in detail, and within the novel his focus was on how whites were affected by slavery.<sup>11</sup>

Ex-slave autobiographers disputed such contentions, but in the 1820s and early 1830s their work did not coalesce into a counternarrative that posed serious challenges to the plantation romance and its emerging paternalist script. William Grimes, born enslaved in Virginia near where Tucker set *The Valley of Shenandoah*, was sold and traded between ten owners in several states from Maryland to Georgia. Grimes's *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave, Written by Himself* (1825) cast southern plantations as a “rural chamber of horrors,” according to William L. Andrews, “a nightmare world presided over by near-demonic whites as capricious as they were sadistic.” Spare in detail and lacking the abolitionist rhetoric that would come to characterize the genre, Grimes was one of the first Americans to publish his narrative in order to raise money to buy himself from an owner who caught up with him after his escape. Grimes's autobiography had little lasting effect on the genre and did not seriously disrupt the discursive world of the plantation that Tucker and other southern regionalists were busy constructing.<sup>12</sup> Delaware native Solomon Bayley in many respects pioneered the genre of ex-slave autobiography. His *A Narrative of Some Remarkable Incidents in the Life of Solomon Bayley* (1825) included scenes of his family kidnapped and sold into slavery, his own sale and hairsbreadth escape, and the public auction of his son Spence.<sup>13</sup> The central drama of Bayley's *Narrative* was his escape from slave-traders and reunification with his family, which reads as “a spiritual test” rather than as “a sociopolitical

<sup>10</sup> Tucker, 127–28.

<sup>11</sup> Romnie, 67; Robert Colin McLean, *George Tucker: Moral Philosopher and Man of Letters* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1961), chapter 11; Ritchie Devon Watson, *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup> William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 78; Yuval Taylor, “Grimes, William,” in Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham, eds., *The African American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 653–54.

<sup>13</sup> Solomon Bayley, *A Narrative of Some Remarkable Incidents in the Life of Solomon Bayley, Formerly a Slave in the State of Delaware, North America; Written by Himself, and Published for His Benefit; to Which Are Prefixed, a Few Remarks by Robert Hurnard* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1825), 2, 18.

act.”<sup>14</sup> Other early ex-slave autobiographers such as Richard Allen similarly cast their lives in terms of spiritual struggles, in terms of both individual belief and ecclesiastical life, which legitimized African American religious experience and destiny.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile the plantation narrative became more robust.

Imagining a sleepy corner of Virginia for his audiences, John Pendleton Kennedy was instrumental in articulating an ideology of slaveholding paternalism and disembedding the resulting narrative from the social turbulence amidst which it was published. *Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (1832, 1851) struggles with “how to represent the organic bond between master and slave, that relationship upon which rests the organic social order of the plantation community.”<sup>16</sup> Told through the reflections of a northern visitor, the author explores slave life, including a tour through a backward and disorganized “Quarter,” where enslaved people live in bucolic repose.<sup>17</sup> He and Tucker were the only southern novelists to confront slave family separations, but slave life as Kennedy imagined it was nearly free of the slave market and the destruction it did to families like Grimes’s and Bayley’s.<sup>18</sup> A native of Baltimore, then containing the largest slave market in the upper South, Kennedy acknowledges family separations but blames slaves for any disruption in the social order. Abe was a young enslaved man whose “occasional bursts of passion,” and a “habit of associating with the most profligate menials” in the neighborhood “had corrupted his character, and . . . had rendered him offensive to the whole plantation.” Abe’s owner “could never bear the idea of disposing of any of his negroes,” and sent him to sea instead.<sup>19</sup> As in Tucker’s imagined Virginia, slaves’ ingratitude or disobedience made them agents of their own removal from the plantation family, which ensured its moral integrity. Within Kennedy’s novel, both enslaved and free African Americans fashioned their self-consciousness in relation to whites and were satisfied with and even proud of their place within an organic neo-feudal order of the “old school” of plantation organization.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Peter T. Dalleo, “‘Persecuted but not forsaken; cut down, but not destroyed’: Solomon and Thamar Bayley, Delawarean Emigrants to Liberia,” *Delaware History*, 31, 3 (2006), 137–78; Andrews, 66.

<sup>15</sup> Andrews, 64–70.

<sup>16</sup> Romnie, 67.

<sup>17</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, or A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1832), Volume II, 223–231, available at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/kennedyswallowbarn2/kennedyswallowbarn2.html>, accessed 1 June 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Robert H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 54; John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn; or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion*, ed. Lucinda H. MacKethan (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1986), xi–xxix. <sup>19</sup> Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*, Volume II, 239–40.

<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*, Volume I, 12, 253.

In that register, slavery was a local institution lacking important economic or political ramifications. Slavery benefits those like Jupiter, king of the Quarter, for whom freedom would mean a tumble from his humble throne.<sup>21</sup> Kennedy's portrait represents other examples of the genre, even as it evaded the realities of the social context in which it was constructed. Waves of panic erupted south of where *Swallow Barn* was set in the 1830s, including reaction to circulation of David Walker's incendiary *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of the United States of America* in 1829 and 1830. "The tenor of all my letters now shows that every thing goes on smoothly on the James River," Kennedy contends in the conclusion to *Swallow Barn*, "and that the Old Dominion contains some very happy persons within its bosom."<sup>22</sup> Within the world of the novel, it could hardly be otherwise. In the actual counties south of the James River, in the aftermath of the 1831 Nat Turner rebellion, whites panicked and terrorized local African Americans. Reprisals included torture, summary executions, and beheadings of suspected black insurgents, with victims' severed heads stuck on poles along main roads.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, the domestic slave trade was accelerating, swelling roads with coffles of chained African Americans.<sup>24</sup> Obscuring that process, *Swallow Barn* sold well and attracted the praise of critics.<sup>25</sup> Kennedy's two succeeding novels, *Horse-Shoe Robinson: A Tale of the Tory Ascendancy* (1835), set in the revolutionary Carolinas, and *Rob of the Bowl: A Legend of St. Inigoe's* (1838), set in late seventeenth-century Maryland, incorporate melodramatic and gothic elements but largely avoid the social issues of slavery.<sup>26</sup>

Elsewhere in the South, humorists and local-color writers who sought to portray exotic manners and customs imagined a South for their audiences in which enslaved people featured as props in the dramas of whites. Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's *Georgia Scenes, Characters, Incidents &c. in the First Half Century of the Republic* (1835) details the intricacies of white Georgia folk culture but largely ignores blacks in a state that was over 42 percent enslaved by 1830.<sup>27</sup> It was the first southern novel to depart from a plantation

<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*, Volume II, chapter 18.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>23</sup> David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828–1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 139–42.

<sup>24</sup> Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), Appendix A.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel S. Burt, ed., *The Chronology of American Literature: America's Literary Achievements from the Colonial Era to Modern Times* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 149.

<sup>26</sup> John L. Hare, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken? Family and Sectionalism in the Novels of Kennedy, Caruthers, and Tucker, 1830–1845* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, *Georgia Scenes, Characters, Incidents &c. in the First Half Century of the Republic* (Augusta, Ga.: S. R. Sentinel Office, 1835); *idem*, *A Voice from the South Comprising Letters from Georgia to Massachusetts, and to the Southern States*

narrative.<sup>28</sup> Virginian William Alexander Caruthers nodded to the paternalist script in his anonymously published *The Kentuckian in New York, or The Adventures of Three Southerners* (1834), which emphasized family as the key to southern distinctiveness.<sup>29</sup> Of course, as John L. Hare contends, “Kennedy, Caruthers, and Tucker may not have considered [slavery] the most pressing problem of their day,” but the narrative they were instrumental in generating was becoming the fulcrum of a growing national crisis.<sup>30</sup>

The year *Georgia Scenes* was published in its entirety the American Anti-Slavery Society set ablaze political tensions over slavery with its Post Office campaign. Abolitionists sent over a million pieces of mail between 1835 and 1837.<sup>31</sup> That was partly the result of new technologies, including steam power, to print and distribute literature. A growing reading public voraciously consumed cheaper printed publications, whether anti-slavery, religious, or otherwise, and the expanding marketplace raised the stakes on slavery’s contested narrative.<sup>32</sup> In response to the postal campaign of 1835, a Charleston, South Carolina mob stole bags of abolitionist mail and burned the contents. President Andrew Jackson contemplated producing an official list of recipients of abolitionist tracts. When it came to the issue of how to respond to abolitionist petitions, Congress censored itself. South Carolina’s leading national politicians introduced the “gag rule,” whereby any petitions touching slavery would be indefinitely tabled without debate.<sup>33</sup>

White southerners refused to gag themselves, and abolitionist literature featuring ex-slave testimony provoked a ferocious reaction. South Carolinian William Drayton authored *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of Northern Abolitionists* (1836), an encyclopedic pro-slavery polemic. Drayton argued that abolitionists “publish statements of the

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(Baltimore: Samuel E. Smith, 1847); Historical Census Browser. Retrieved 10 April 2009, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

<sup>28</sup> David Rachels, ed., *Augustus Baldwin Longstreet’s Georgia Scenes Completed: A Scholarly Text* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), lx; Burt, 155.

<sup>29</sup> William Alexander Caruthers, *The Kentuckian in New York, or The Adventures of Three Southerners*, 2 Vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834).

<sup>30</sup> Hare, 1.

<sup>31</sup> James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), chapter 3.

<sup>32</sup> John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), chapter 2; Kyle R. Walker, “‘As Fire Shut up in My Bones’: Ebenezer Robinson, Don Carlos Smith, and the 1840 Edition of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Mormon History*, 36, 1 (2010), 1–40; Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), chapters 6–7.

<sup>33</sup> William W. Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, Volume I, *Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), chapter 17.



condition of the slaves in the South, made up, either of utter falsehoods, or artful exaggerations, and calculated to excite the deepest sympathy in their behalf." He reserved special invective for firsthand accounts of slavery. "Particular narratives," he argued, "embodying fictitious cases of unnatural oppression, are extensively circulated; and poetical and pictorial representations are added to complete the sinister appeal."<sup>34</sup> Perhaps he had in mind Maria Weston Chapman's pioneering *Songs of the Free and Hymns of Christian Freedom* (1836) or the woodcuts that decorated penny papers such as the *Slave's Friend*. Not just new genres but new media were igniting disagreements and creative responses. As the domestic slave trade surged toward its apex and ex-slave authors began to publish an increasingly abolitionist-toned indictment of slavery to a growing readership, Drayton and his allies exercised their literary ingenuity.<sup>35</sup>

Responding to the challenges Drayton outlined, white southern writers developed a more highly articulated paternalist narrative, female authors included. Caroline Howard Gilman dramatized slaveholding women's experiences in the South and in particular her adopted home of Charleston. Gilman's *Recollections of a Southern Matron* (1838) features characterizations of faithful, happy slaves, who are emotionally tied to their white mistresses and masters.<sup>36</sup> Among the more memorable scenes is the funeral of Jacques, an elderly slave who died "breathing a prayer for his master's family," in what may well be described as an artful rebuke to abolitionist and Charleston native Angelina Grimké's *An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* (1836). Taking on subsequent domestic female anti-slavery characterizations, Gilman magnified the character of Jacques and what he represented in her 1852 revision, *Recollections of a New England Bride and of a Southern Matron*.<sup>37</sup>

Similar characterizations of slavery were featured with increasing prominence in political disagreements over slavery, and southern authors incubated pro-slavery arguments. Nathaniel Beverly Tucker imagined a Southern Confederacy in his 1836 novel *The Partisan Leader; A Tale of the Future*, in

<sup>34</sup> William Drayton, *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of Northern Abolitionists* (Philadelphia: H. Manly, 1836), 179.

<sup>35</sup> Maria Weston Chapman, *Songs of the Free and Hymns of Christian Freedom* (Boston: I. Knapp, 1836); *Proceedings of the New-England Anti-Slavery Convention: Held in Boston, on the 27th, 28th, and 29th of May, 1834* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1834), 33; Drayton, 188.

<sup>36</sup> Caroline Howard Gilman, *Reflections of a Southern Matron* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838); Janice Joan Thompson, "Caroline Howard Gilman: Her Mind and Art," PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1975; Jan Bakker, "Twists of Sentiment in Antebellum Southern Romance," *Southern Literary Journal*, 26, 1 (Fall 1993), 3–15.

<sup>37</sup> Gilman, chapter 11; *idem*, *Recollections of a New England Bride and of a Southern Matron* (New York: G. B. Putnam & Co., 1852), chapter 1.

which the domestic character of southern slavery distinguished it from the society of the North. Tucker celebrated “the staunch loyalty and heart-felt devotion of the slave to his master,” which he imagined was a cornerstone of the newly independent southern nation. “We must show that that which our enemies, and some even of ourselves, consider as our weakness, is, in truth, our strength,” Tucker pleaded in his response to the chaos that he contended was threatening the South and which he paralleled in his drama of a southern family.<sup>38</sup>

By the late 1830s, politicians were creating a cultural pro-slavery argument drawn from the idiom mastered by white southern authors, eliding the distinction between social commentary and fiction. In the *Southern Literary Messenger*, Abel Parker Upshur constructed a political pro-slavery argument out of the elements of the plantation romance. “In no part of the world has the laboring class been more distinguished for contentment, cheerfulness, and even gaiety,” he argued in 1839, than in the American South. Contrary to fellow Virginian Thomas R. Dew’s moral ambivalence concerning slavery earlier in the decade, Upshur concluded, “we should cherish this institution, not as a necessary evil which we cannot shake off, but as a great positive good, to be carefully protected and preserved.”<sup>39</sup>

Literary contests over American youth’s understandings of slavery flared at the same time.<sup>40</sup> By the time of the Post Office campaign, southern writers were already imbuing youngsters with a version of the plantation-paternalist narrative, led by Gilman’s *Rose-Bud, or Youth’s Gazette* and *Southern Rose Bud* (1832–1839).<sup>41</sup> Stories and reports (not limited to juvenile fiction) accented differences between North and South and emphasized the domestic character of chattel slavery. Abolitionists responded in kind. Among the many articles sent – and burned – in the American Anti-Slavery Society’s Post Office campaign were homiletic tracts like the *Slave’s Friend*, an illustrated serial edited by Lewis Tappan and aimed at a juvenile readership. Articles included

<sup>38</sup> Nathaniel Beverly Tucker, *The Partisan Leader: A Novel, and an Apocalypse of the Origin and Struggles of the Southern Confederacy*, ed. Thomas A. Ware (Richmond: West and Johnson, 1862; first published 1836), 112; *idem*, *The Partisan Leader: A Tale of the Future* (Washington, DC: D. Green, 1836); Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, chapter 1; Hare, chapter 7.

<sup>39</sup> Abel P. Upshur, “Domestic Slavery,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, 5 (1839), 686–87; Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 21–77.

<sup>40</sup> Jan Bakker, “Caroline Gilman and the Issue of Slavery in the Rose Magazines, 1832–1839,” *Southern Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the South*, 24, 3 (1985), 273–83.

<sup>41</sup> Gale L. Kenny, “Mastering Childhood: Paternalism, Slavery, and the Southern Domestic in Caroline Howard Gilman’s Antebellum Children Literature,” *Southern Quarterly*, 44, 1 (2006), 65–87.

dialogues in which slave-traders feature as stock characters who steal enslaved children from their parents.<sup>42</sup>

As the contest over young readers' allegiances intensified, northern female authors increasingly influenced the contests over slavery's narrative. White female authors assumed a pivotal part in crafting a response to southern authors. Lydia Maria Child, founder and editor of the bimonthly *Juvenile Miscellany*, published "An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans," in 1833. Although the essay preceded a drop-off in subscriptions and editorial changes, the *Juvenile Miscellany* featured prominent female writers such as Hannah Gould, whose "The Prisoners Set Free" (1831) was a thinly veiled abolitionist morality tale. Other prominent contributors to the *Juvenile Miscellany* included Sarah Josepha Hale, who would publish the popular colonization novels *Northward; or Life North and South* (1852) and *Liberia; or, Mr. Peyton's Experiment* (1853).<sup>43</sup> In 1834, Child edited *The Oasis*, a collection of abolitionist essays, many by other female anti-slavery activists, and published *The Evils of Slavery, and the Cure of Slavery* (1836), an abolitionist response to the ideas of Drayton and others, which argued for immediate abolition.<sup>44</sup>

Female authors pioneered anti-slavery fiction that appropriated African American voices and used the domestic sentimentality on display in the plantation romance to argue against slavery. Maria Weston Chapman

<sup>42</sup> *The Slave's Friend*, 8 (1836), 16; *The Slave's Friend*, 10 (1836), 8; *The Slave's Friend*, 11 (1836). Drayton, complained about abolitionists' targeting youth (181); contests over young people's understandings of slavery had been under way for decades in a more subtle register. Caleb Bingham's *Columbian Orator*, which had enjoyed a score of printings over at least 20 years from the 1790s to 1810s, included anti-slavery dialogues, including one in which a slave persuades his owner to manumit him. That dialogue and the power of language it represents contributed to shaping the evolving political consciousness of a young Frederick Douglass, who bought a copy in 1830 while the twelve year-old was enslaved in Baltimore. Caleb Bingham, *The Columbian Orator: Containing a Variety of Original and Selected Pieces; Together with Rules Calculated to Improve Youth and Others in the Ornamental and Useful Art of Eloquence* (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1797).

<sup>43</sup> Hale had advocated the colonization of African Americans since at least her first novel, *Northwood, A Tale of New England*, 2 vols. (Boston: Bowles & Dearborn, 1827). In the 1850s her novels proposed to send African Americans to Africa. Sarah Josepha Hale, *Northward; or Life North and South: Showing the True Character of Both* (New York: H. Long & Brother, 1852); *idem*, *Liberia; or, Mr. Peyton's Experiment* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853); Lesley Ginsberg, "Slavery and the Gothic Horror of Poe's 'The Black Cat,'" in Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy, eds., *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1998), 107–9; Lorenzo Dow Turner, "The Second Period of Militant Abolitionism," *Journal of Negro History*, 14, 4 (Oct. 1929), 440–75.

<sup>44</sup> Lydia Maria Child, ed., *The Oasis* (Boston: Benjamin C. Bacon, 1834); *idem*, *The Evils of Slavery, and the Cure of Slavery* (Newburyport: Charles Whipple, 1836); Ruth K. Macdonald, "The Juvenile Miscellany: For the Instruction and Amusement of Youth," in R. Gordon Kelly, ed., *Children's Periodicals of the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 258–62.

published one of the earliest anti-slavery novellas, *Pinda: A True Tale* (1840), which uses the separation of the title character from her husband, Abraham, in a call to support the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. It was a generic breakthrough that used American geography and conflicts between enslaved people and slaveholders to expose slavery's moral questions in a sentimental idiom, more so than Richard Hildreth's more popular fictionalized ex-slave autobiography *The Slave: or, Memoirs of Archy Moore* (1836), which one sympathetic contemporary reviewer called "a constant violation of probability." *Pinda* rehearsed a national anti-slavery dialogue in which the family ties of articulate enslaved African Americans hung in the balance of whites' moral deliberations. That literary strategy would refigure slavery's narrative when it received its full expression in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly* (1852).<sup>45</sup>

Although droves of slaves being marched to market were found in fewer and fewer places in southern fiction, coffles of the enslaved appeared seemingly everywhere to travelers in the antebellum South.<sup>46</sup> Riding through Virginia in 1816, James K. Paulding encountered an uncovered horse cart "in which five or six half-naked black children were tumbled like pigs together," sleeping in the hot sun. "Behind the cart marched three black women, with head, neck, and breasts uncovered, and without shoes or stockings." Three men followed, "bareheaded, and chained together with an ox-chain." Driving them was "a white man on horseback, carrying his pistols in his belt, and who, as we passed him, had the impudence to look us in the face without blushing." The New Yorker discovered that the trader "had bought these miserable beings in Maryland, and was marching them in this manner to one of the more southern states."<sup>47</sup> Initially shocked by slavery, Paulding nevertheless participated in articulating a racial ideology that was at the heart of an emerging narrative of southern slaveholding.

<sup>45</sup> Maria Weston Chapman, *Pinda: A True Tale* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1840); Richard Hildreth, *The Slave: or Memoirs of Archy Moore*, 2 Vols. (Boston: John H. Eastburn, 1836); *Christian Examiner and General Review*, 28, 3rd Series, 10, 1 (March, 1840), 129 (quote); Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Company, 1852).

<sup>46</sup> Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), chapter 7; Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, chapter 6; Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 62–63; 87–89; Ethan Allen Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States* (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836); Frederick Law Olmstead, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States with Remarks on their Economy* (New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856); James Redpath, *The Roving Editor, or Talks with Slaves in the Southern States* (New York: A. B. Burdick, 1859).

<sup>47</sup> James K. Paulding, *Letters from the South*, cited in Charles Elliott and Benjamin Franklin Tefft, *Sinfulness of American Slavery: Proved from Its Evil Sources; Its Injustice; Its Wrongs; Its Contrariety to Many Scriptural Commands, Prohibitions, and Principles, and to the Christian Spirit; and from Its Evil Effects* (Ohio: Swormstedt & Power, 1851), 57.

Paulding recovered from such scenes and went on to construct a white supremacist vision of United States history in his novel *Koningsmarke, the Long Finne, A Story of the New World* (1823).<sup>48</sup> In his best-selling romance, *Westward Ho!* (1832), Paulding pressed ahead with his nationalist project, featuring conquest of Indians ("red men") in that novel of Virginians migrating to Kentucky. Each white pioneer, Paulding contends, "carries with him his destiny, which is to civilize the world, and rule it afterwards."<sup>49</sup> Having left slavery largely out of his novels, Paulding published an apology for slaveholding in *Slavery in the United States* (1836), in which he argued (through a correspondent) that "it does not happen, in one case out of a thousand, that the master willingly sells an honest, faithful slave." Honor was the bulwark against such market-driven motives. "The man doing so would be looked upon as a sordid, inhuman wretch," he explains, "and be shunned by his neighbours and countrymen of respectable standing." Slave-traders became scapegoats for a market slaveholders could not resist.<sup>50</sup> Paulding and other adherents of the increasingly pro-slavery narrative construed slaveholding in unrelentingly masculine terms, bound up with honor and manliness. Concealing the systemic nature of the slave market and hence slavery, Paulding's slave market disappeared when the coffle left the plantation. (To avoid embarrassment, he omitted the above reflection on the slave trade from his collected works published in the 1830s.)<sup>51</sup>

## SOUTHERN MASCULINITY IN BLACK AND WHITE

Responding to such characterizations, African American authors deemphasized spiritual autobiography and, like William Grimes, focussed on violence done to black bodies and enslaved families. In the 1830s, ex-slave autobiographers incorporated an emerging body of abolitionist rhetoric into their narratives, refashioning it in the process. Like southern writers, they put families at the forefront but stressed disruption and the violence slavery did to

<sup>48</sup> Larry J. Reynolds, *James Kirke Paulding* (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1984), chapter 8; Lorman Ratner, *James Kirke Paulding: The Last Republican* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992); Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), chapter 3; James Kirke Paulding, *Koningsmarke, the Long Finne, A Story of the New World* (New York: C. Wiley, 1823), revised as *Koningsmarke, or Old Times in the New World, Two Vols.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836); *idem*, *Slavery in the United States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836).

<sup>49</sup> James Kirke Paulding, *Westward Ho!*, Volume I (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832), 94.

<sup>50</sup> Paulding, *Slavery in the United States*, 218.

<sup>51</sup> James Silk Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, Volume II (London and Paris: Fisher, Son & Co., 1842), 44–45.

them.<sup>52</sup> Incubating the genre of realism, they cast the slave trade as a sociopolitical process, which supplied laborers to the cotton kingdom by stealing loved ones from their relatives. African American authors replaced the authority of the slaveholder with that of the slave, arguing that the domestic slave trade destroyed enslaved people's domesticity and made a mockery of planter-paternalists' claims. Andrews argues that Charles Ball, Moses Roper, and James Williams's autobiographies "represent the beginnings of the classic fugitive slave narrator genre in the United States."<sup>53</sup> Ball was sold to a slave-trader and separated from his family in Maryland, and force-marched to South Carolina wearing an iron collar. Resold along with newly arrived Africans, he was put to work on a Georgia cotton plantation until he escaped back to Maryland. After Ball was reunited with his wife and children, fighting against the British in the War of 1812 and becoming established as a small farmer outside Baltimore, his Georgia owner returned after over two decades and kidnapped him, marching him back to slavery in Georgia. (Ball's second wife and their children were also kidnapped and sold into slavery.) Ball's narrative, published by white editor Isaac Fischer, went through six editions between 1836 and 1859.<sup>54</sup> Roper was sold from his family in North Carolina and carried farther south by a succession of owners, memorable for their cruelty. Roper's narrative went through ten American and British editions and was even translated into Celtic; an 1848 edition claimed that 36,000 copies had been sold.<sup>55</sup> Williams portrayed the Richmond slave market and narrated scenes of family separation and toil in Alabama. All discussed their experiences with unromantic frankness and sketched scenes of violence incommensurable with the narrative of plantation slavery emerging in southern fiction.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Sarah N. Roth, "How a Slave Was Made a Man': Negotiating Black Violence and Masculinity in Antebellum Slave Narratives," *Slavery & Abolition*, 28, 2 (2007), 255–75; Edward E. Baptist, "'Stol' An' Fetched Here': Enslaved Migration: Ex-slave Narratives, and Vernacular History," in Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp, eds., *New Studies in the History of American Slavery* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 243–74.

<sup>53</sup> Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 62; Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave under Various Masters, and Was One Year in the Navy with Commodore Barney, during the Late War* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1837), 36; James Williams, *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave, Who Was for Several Years a Driver on a Cotton Plantation in Alabama* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838).

<sup>54</sup> Donald A. Petesch, *A Spy in the Enemy's Country: The Emergence of Modern Black Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 6.

<sup>55</sup> Foster, *Witnessing Slavery*, 22; William L. Andrews, ed., *The North Carolina Roots of African American Literature: An Anthology* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 13.

<sup>56</sup> Ball; Moses Roper, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery* (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Gunn, 1838); Kristina Bobo, "Moses Roper," in Andrews,

Former slaves bore the burden of establishing their own bona fides as witnesses of slavery, but race was not yet an overriding category of authorship. The marketplace's "fluidity . . . suggests that the literary strategy that made the slave narratives popular was only just becoming an identity – one that would become inextricably tied to race."<sup>57</sup> Yet authenticity became an issue for African American autobiographers and their editors, which illustrates the difficulties many African American authors faced when selling themselves to a predominantly white readership. Outraged at Williams's assault on the paternalist narrative, skeptical southern whites investigated his claims, which led to charges that his autobiography was "an outright fraud."<sup>58</sup> His amanuensis, John Greenleaf Whittier, had indeed helped to create "a work of fiction," albeit one assaulted because its author was African American and arguing against a narrative that carried great political importance. Never a slave, Williams was "a writer savvy enough to realize that this genre was the one with the most currency, especially for a black man."<sup>59</sup> The literary marketplace was making room for black authors as self-made-men, a far cry from self-effacing spiritual autobiographers. Ball's authenticity was called into question as well, and the controversy surrounding his authorship persisted into the twentieth century. Although southerners disputed the claims of few autobiographies edited by abolitionists, a cloud of suspicion was difficult to dissipate.<sup>60</sup>

By the end of the 1830s, Americans were arguing about slavery more vociferously than before, and southern regionalists went about reinvigorating a romantic planter-paternalist narrative and self-consciously disputing African

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*The North Carolina Roots of African American Literature*, 89–94; Ian Fredrick Finseth, introduction to Roper, *A Narrative*, in William L. Andrews, ed., *North Carolina Slave Narratives: The Lives of Moses Roper, Lunsford Lane, Moses Grandy & Thomas H. Jones* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 23–33; Williams, *Narrative of James Williams*.

<sup>57</sup> Rohrbach, *Truth Stranger than Fiction*, 49.

<sup>58</sup> John W. Blassingame, "Using the Testimony of Ex-slaves: Approaches and Problems," *Journal of Southern History*, 41, 4 (Nov. 1975), 476–78.

<sup>59</sup> Rohrbach, 35.

<sup>60</sup> Blassingame, 477; J. D. McCord, "Life of a Negro Slave," *Southern Quarterly Review*, 23 (1853), 206–27; Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, with an introduction by John David Smith, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007; first published 1930), 219; John W. Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), xxiii–xxvi; John Sekora, "Black Message/White Envelope: Genre, Authenticity, and Authority in the Antebellum Slave Narrative," *Callaloo*, 32 (1987), 482–515; Andrews, *To Tell A Free Story*, 62–3; Marion Wilson Starling, *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History*, 2nd edn (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1988), 106–7, 226–32.

American testimony concerning slavery.<sup>61</sup> A pioneer of the local-color movement and the South's leading antebellum writer, William Gilmore Simms imagined many corners of the South for his audience, and his influential writings profoundly influenced how Americans and Britons understood the South.<sup>62</sup> As thematically versatile as he was stylistically effective, Simms cemented the social mythology of slavery as a fundamentally benign, plantation-centered institution, in which sales, family separations, and forced relocation were peripheral or anomalous in a world ordered according to organic social relations.<sup>63</sup>

In Simms's writings, enslaved people were contented with their condition. His tableaux were wholly at odds with portraits of South Carolina and Georgia narrated by Ball, Grimes, and other African American writers. In the world of slavery Simms imagined for his readers, African American characters even argue for their own enslavement. In *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina* (1835), South Carolina planter Gabriel Harrison discusses the freedom he planned as a reward to Hector, a slave who saved his life. Harrison offered Hector his freedom and resources enough to live comfortably on his own. Hector refuses, saying, "De ting aint right; and enty I know wha' kind of ting freedom is wid black man?" Simms summarizes: the "negro was positive, and his master, deeply affected with this evidence of his attachment, turned away in silence."<sup>64</sup> The book sold 2,500 copies in its first edition (in three days) and two more editions were published the same year. Simms would re-create the scene in *Woodcraft* (1854), shrewdly using black voices to apologize (in a plantation patois) for slavery.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Jan Bakker, *Pastoral in Antebellum Southern Romance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

<sup>62</sup> David Moltke-Hansen, "Southern Literary Horizons in Young America: Imaginative Development of a Regional Geography," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 42, 1 (2009), 1–31; Michael T. Gilmore, *The War on Words: Slavery, Race, and Free Speech in American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 15–42.

<sup>63</sup> Anthony Dyer Hoefler, "'The Slaves that They Are' and the Slaves They Might Become: Bondage and Liberty in William Gilmore Simms's *The Yemassee*," *MELUS*, 34, 3 (2009), 115–32; Vincent King, "'Foolish Talk 'bout Freedom': Simms's Vision of America in *The Yemassee*," *Studies in the Novel*, 35, 2 (2003), 139–48. For an opposing argument, see Laura Ganus Perkins, "An Unsung Literary Legacy: William Gilmore Simms's African American Characters," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 42, 1 (2009), 83–95.

<sup>64</sup> William Gilmore Simms, *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina. By the Author of "Guy Rivers," "Martin Faber," &c. In Two Volumes*, Volume I (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844), 225, available at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/simms1/simms.html>, accessed: 1 June 2010.

<sup>65</sup> William Gilmore Simms, *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina*, Volume I, 2nd edn (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835); Michael Davitt Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation: Selected Essays on American Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 123–24; Masahiro Nakamura, *Visions of Order in William Gilmore Simms: Southern Conservatism and the Other American Romance* (Columbia: University of



Like African American anti-slavery writers, white southern writers did not write with one accord, and Simms defended slavery more energetically than even sympathetic fellow novelists. In *The Partisan* (1835), South Carolinian Simms locked literary horns with Marylander Kennedy. In what was perhaps his most popular novel, Simms's ambitious retelling of the master narrative of American history featured a more aggressive nationalism than his upper South counterpart, whose *Horse-Shoe Robinson* was published the same year. In a literary complement to emerging political differences within the South, Simms imagined a South Carolina aristocracy of planters as the American Revolution's true legatees. Kennedy, meanwhile, casts the Revolutionary period as one of social turbulence in which the title character's heroism was an exception and even patriots were susceptible to corruption.<sup>66</sup>

As a "spokesman for the South" and editor of three South Carolina literary magazines between 1842 and 1854, Simms was perhaps the most influential southern writer of his era as well as one of the main architects of pro-slavery ideology.<sup>67</sup> "There is no propriety in the application of the name of the slave to the servile of the south," he wrote in an article reviewing Harriet Martineau's *Society in America* in 1837 (in a telling preview of his argument with Stowe fifteen years later). The slave, he contended, was

under no despotic power. There are laws which protect him, *in his place*, as inflexible as those which his proprietor is required to obey, *in his place*. Providence has placed him in our hands, for his good, and has paid us from his labor for our guardianship.

His overriding concern was for the "honorable" slaveholder, who needed to be defended from misguided foreign critics of slavery and the writings of former slaves.<sup>68</sup>

As he labored to create a southern mythology clothed in historical romance and deeply imbued with the aggressive masculinity that was coming to characterize southern manhood, Simms deftly evaded conceding anything to his anti-slavery adversaries. The domestic slave trade peaked between the publication of *The Partisan* and his anonymously published *Richard Hurdis: A Tale of Alabama* (1838). Yet there is not a whiff of hesitation in his characterizations of slaveholders as patriots and pillars of the American political order. In *Richard Hurdis*, as in his other "border romances," including

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South Carolina Press, 2009), chapter 1; Renée Dye, "Narrating Social Theory: William Gilmore Simms's *Woodcraft*," *Studies in the Novel*, 35, 2 (2003), 190–208.

<sup>66</sup> Charles H. Brichford, "That National Story: Conflicting Versions and Conflicting Visions of the Revolution in Kennedy's 'Horse-Shoe Robinson' and Simms's 'The Partisan,'" *Southern Literary Journal*, 21, 1 (1988), 64–85.

<sup>67</sup> Simms, *The Yemassee* (1844), Volume I; John Caldwell Guilds, *Simms: A Literary Life* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992), 63, 130–61; Nakamura, chapter 2.

<sup>68</sup> William Gilmore Simms, "Miss Martineau on Slavery," *Southern Literary Messenger*, 3 (1837), 651, 657, original italics.

*Guy Rivers* (1834), *Border Beagles* (1840), *Charlemont* (1842), and *Beauchamps* (1842), he accentuates cultural differences within the South by representing an inexorably masculine character of the cotton frontier – as distinct from genteel South Carolina – which was formative in the project of expanding the South and slavery.<sup>69</sup> *Richard Hurdis* includes scenes of a criminal slave-stealing conspiracy that violently distorts the slave market, rendering it an absurdity. In explaining the “Mystic Brotherhood” of outlaws, character Ben Pickett gives an account of the fraternity’s practice of stealing slaves. “We get the negroes to run away from their owner,” he explains, “then sell them to others, get them to run away again, and, in this way we probably sell the same negro half a dozen times.” When “we apprehend detection,” Pickett avers, “we tumble the negro into a river, and thus rid ourselves of a possession that has paid good interest already, and which it might not be any longer safe to keep.”<sup>70</sup> Like the paternalist script, that portrait contained a grain of truth. Simms dramatized the actions of a legendary ring of slave-stealers led by John A. Murrell called the Mystic Clan, operating in Mississippi in the mid-1830s.<sup>71</sup> The social mythology of slave-stealing was powerful enough for Simms to claim that “the general portraiture” of *Richard Hurdis* was “not only a truthful one,” but that “the materials are really of a historical character.”<sup>72</sup> Implicitly, plantation slavery was a corrective to such dastardly and deadly entrepreneurship. Simms kept good company in illustrating the grotesque and absurd when it came to African American life.

Edgar Allen Poe contributed to the emerging pro-slavery narrative by articulating an earnest – if not fully articulated – defense of a plantation-paternalist vision and caricaturing African Americans as dimwitted low comic characters. Poe had firsthand knowledge of slavery and the slave trade from living in Richmond before and after his brief enrollment at the University of Virginia.<sup>73</sup> Discursively, Poe predicated black affection on white ownership

<sup>69</sup> Elmo Howell, “The Concept of Character in Simms’s Border Romances,” *Mississippi Quarterly*, 22, 4 (1969), 303–12; Kevin Collins, “An Earlier Frontier Thesis: Simms as an Intellectual Precursor to Frederick Jackson Turner,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 42, 1 (2009), 33–58; William Gilmore Simms, *Richard Hurdis, or The Avenger of Blood. A Tale of Alabama*, 2 Vols. (Philadelphia: E. L. Carey & A. Hart, 1838).

<sup>70</sup> William Gilmore Simms, *Richard Hurdis: A Tale of Alabama* (New York: Redfield, 1855), 220.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Ruys Smith, “‘Dead Men Tell No Tales’: Outlaw John A. Murrell on the Antebellum Stage,” *European Journal of American Culture*, 28, 3 (2009), 263–76; Dianne C. Luce, “John A. Murrell and the Imaginations of Simms and Faulkner,” in John Caldwell Guilds and Caroline Lukacs, eds., *William Gilmore Simms and the American Frontier* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 237–57.

<sup>72</sup> Guilds, *Simms*, 83; Grimsted, *American Mobbing*, 11, 17–18; 149–52; 154–56.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Gray, *Southern Aberrations: Writers of the American South and the Problems of Regionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), chapter 1.

and laid out his views in a review of Paulding's *Slavery in the United States* and Drayton's *The South Vindicated*.<sup>74</sup> Paternalistic master–slave sentiments, Poe argued in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, “belong to the class of feelings ‘by which the heart is made better,’” because they “grow by the habitual use of the word ‘my,’ used in the language of affectionate appropriation . . . he who is taught to call the little negro ‘his,’ in this sense and *because he loves him*, shall love him *because he is his*.”<sup>75</sup> Such heavy-handed pro-slavery rhetoric was a literary way of flattering ideological friends and sponsors like Simms, Kennedy, Paulding, and Drayton. Poe's African American characters appear as moral children, as in *The Gold-Bug* (1843), a large portion of which is imagined dialogue between a South Carolina slave, Jupiter, and his owner. (Poe had been stationed at Fort Moultrie, on Sullivan's Island, South Carolina, where he set that story.) Tasked with dropping a gold bug through the left eye of a skull nailed high in a tree, Jupiter fails, not knowing right from left: “Twas dis eye, massa – de lef eye – jis as you tell me,’ and here it was his right eye that the negro indicated.” Because of such “stupidity,” Poe argues, African American voices could hardly be trusted.<sup>76</sup> Crude racial bigotry is perhaps most tellingly on display in Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838). In his path-breaking detective story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” there are hints of the scientific racism of the American School of Ethnography.<sup>77</sup>

## ROMANCE OF THE FUGITIVE

In such a contest of ideas, African American autobiographers defied such characterizations by turning slaves' guile and defiance into manly virtues. Deemphasizing violence and domesticating their life stories, male ex-slave autobiographers such as Frederick Douglass appeared as the heroes of their own narratives, a strategy that valiantly met incipiently pro-slavery fiction

<sup>74</sup> Bernard Rosenthal, “Poe, Slavery, and the *Southern Literary Messenger*,” *Poe Studies*, 7, 2 (1974), 29–38.

<sup>75</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, “Review,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, 2, 5 (1836), 338, original italics.

<sup>76</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *The Gold-Bug* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1894), 60, 120; Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 207, 421–22.

<sup>77</sup> Takayuki Tatsumi, “Literacy, Literality, Literature: The Rise of Cultural Aristocracy in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue,’” *Journal of American & Canadian Studies*, 12 (1994), 1–23; Joan Dayan, “Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies, and Slaves,” *American Literature*, 66, 2 (1994), 239–73; Rudoff Shaindy, “Written in Stone: Slavery and Authority in the Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,” *ATQ*, 14, 1 (2000), 61–82; Lindon Barrett, “Presence of Mind: Detection and Racialization in ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue,’” in Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissburg, eds., *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 157–76.

writers on their own ground and seriously challenged a picture of slavery in which plantations were schoolhouses of bondage. The narrative structure that African American autobiographers explored in the 1830s matured in the 1840s into what has been termed the “heroic fugitive school of male slave narrators.”<sup>78</sup> They argued that slaveholding paternalism was hollow pretense. “Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month,” Douglass argued in a searing indictment of plantation tableaux, “its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off.” Such separations, he contended, were done “to hinder the development of the child’s affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result.”<sup>79</sup> Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845) exemplifies the strategy of constructing its author’s freedom in terms of psychological and existential turning points in a masculine register. Former slave authors represented themselves as exemplary agents of their own freedom, and they strove to excite audiences with scenes of pathos and heroism culminating in flights from captivity. The market responded favorably to them as a result.<sup>80</sup>

By the mid-1840s, the romance of the plantation competed with the romance of the fugitive, and both shared an orientation toward master–slave relationships and contests that turn on the axis of individual freedom. There were political and economic contexts as well, much of which romantic literature obscured. After the Panic of 1837 and subsequent hard times, the interstate slave trade declined at about the same time that arguments over fugitive slaves sparked political controversies. Beginning in the late 1830s, many slave narrators recruited British and Irish sponsors and captured a broad readership abroad, often debuting in Britain or Ireland before being read in the United States. That process drew the ire of white southern critics who indicted the motives of ex-slaves by contending, for instance, that “the success of Douglass” in attracting sponsors from Britain “has bred a general desire among the fugitive slaves at the North, to try their hands at diminishing the plethora of John Bull’s purse.”<sup>81</sup> By the mid-1840s, Americans were arguing

<sup>78</sup> Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 155.

<sup>79</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 2.

<sup>80</sup> Roth, “How a Slave Was Made a Man”; James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton, “Violence, Protest, and Identity: Black Manhood in Antebellum America,” in Darlene Clark Hine and Ernestine Jenkins, eds., *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men’s History and Masculinity*, Volume I (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 382–98; Dwight McBride, *Impossible Witnesses: Truth, Abolition, and Slave Testimony* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

<sup>81</sup> Joseph Bodziock, “The Weight of Sambo’s Woes,” *Journal of American Culture*, 12, 4 (1989), 89–97; “Experiments in Credulity,” *Mississippi Free Trader* 16 Jun. 1847, 2 (quote).

over slavery with increasing acrimony, and its social character was an essential component of that debate. The annexation of the slaveholding republic of Texas in 1845 was a Pandora's box of political disunion and US War against Mexico in 1846–47 resulted in a huge land cession in 1848, which exacerbated sectional tensions over slavery's expansion.<sup>82</sup> Southern politicians, brimming with the kind of bravado on display in Simms's novels, voiced an increasingly strident defense of slavery and openly discussed disunion based on a belief in irreconcilable social differences.<sup>83</sup>

Against an increasingly unbending ideological commitment to a vision of slavery as benevolent and framed by organic social relations, ex-slave autobiographers hardened the edge of their assessments of slavery in the late 1840s. Henry Bibb, James W. C. Pennington, and William Wells Brown participated in shaping a narrative of the heroic slave beyond the centrality of the narrator, emphasizing family separations. Pennington the preacher argued that “the being of slavery, its soul and body, lives and moves in the chattel principle, the property principle, the bill of sale principle; the cart-whip, starvation, and nakedness, are its inevitable consequences to a greater or less extent, warring with the dispositions of men.” He focusses on the disruption of family life.<sup>84</sup>

The dramatic landscape of Brown's narrative is coextensive with the interstate slave trade and serves as a warning that the westward expansion of slavery accelerated enforced separations. The domestication of slavery in *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave. Written by Himself* (1847) was a consequence of the domestic slave trade. Brown's break with slavery was geographical rather than existential.<sup>85</sup> He excludes the possibility that slavery was framed by organic bonds of duty or affection between masters and slaves. Incorporating realistic elements that tend to diminish his heroism, Brown includes scenes of his own deceptions, which underscore the desperation of the enslaved laboring under the violence of a toweringly immoral institution. Brown was among the first African American “authors-as-celebrity,” selling between eight thousand and ten thousand copies in the first two years.<sup>86</sup>

By the end of the 1840s, ex-slave narrators accented precisely the kind of family separation that was unimaginable in plantation romances and the highly elaborated political speech to which they gave rise. Henry Bibb elaborated on

<sup>82</sup> Michael F. Holt, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), chapter 1.

<sup>83</sup> Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, Volume I, chapters 26–27.

<sup>84</sup> Pennington, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, iv–v; Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 143, 155.

<sup>85</sup> Stephen Lucasi, “William Wells Brown's *Narrative* & Traveling Subjectivity,” *African American Review*, 41, 3 (2007), 521–39.

<sup>86</sup> Rohrbach, *Truth Stranger than Fiction*, 33 (quote); Foster, *Witnessing Slavery*, 148; Andrews, 144–150; Burt, *Chronology of American Literature*, 183.

themes such as forced separation of husbands and wives, brutality, and slaveholder licentiousness in *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* (1849). After being separated from his mother and other family members at a young age, Bibb narrates his repeated sales, including away from his wife Malinda and child, to whom he returned after escaping to Canada, only to be sold again after attempting to liberate his family. Bibb's autobiography highlights involuntary mobility over a broad geographic landscape, including the many escape attempts that resulted in his sale to "Indian Territory" and a series of owners before his final break from slavery.<sup>87</sup>

Josiah Henson published *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (1849), in which he exposed the ugly key to domesticating United States slavery. For the crime of protecting Henson's mother from the advances of a white overseer, his father was beaten and disfigured. Henson wrote that "my father became a different man" following the incident, "and was so morose, disobedient, and intractable," that the owner took him to Alabama, "and neither my mother nor I . . . ever heard of him again."<sup>88</sup> Henson's book moved readers and sold copies. The first edition sold two thousand copies, and six thousand copies sold in three years (a best seller, especially when compared to Henry David Thoreau, whose *Week on the Concord and Merrimack River* (1849) sold just 219 copies in four years). Henson outsold Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne into the 1850s.<sup>89</sup>

With Charles B. Stearns acting as his amanuensis, promoter, and publisher, Henry "Box" Brown attacked an essential component of the planter-paternalist script. "The slave's wife is his," Virginia native Brown contended, "only at the will of her master, who may violate her chastity with impunity." The contention that the black and white family of romantic fiction was actually the product of rape and sexual abuse seriously threatened the narrative of an extended multiracial family founded upon mutual sentiment. *Narrative of Henry Box Brown* (1849) details the story of Brown's struggles to keep his family together only to see his best efforts fail and his family destroyed in the space of a day.<sup>90</sup> Stearns was the editor, amanuensis, and publicist of

<sup>87</sup> Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, Written by Himself* (New York, 1849), 49, 55, 144, *passim*, available at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/bibb.html>, accessed 20 July 2009; Andrews, 151–65; Bodzioc.

<sup>88</sup> Josiah Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (Boston: Arthur D. Phelps, 1849), 1–2; Jan Marsh, "From Slave Cabin to Windsor Castle: Josiah Henson and 'Uncle Tom' in Britain," *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 16 (2002), 37–50.

<sup>89</sup> Rohrbach, 37; Foster, 22–23.

<sup>90</sup> Henry "Box" Brown and Charles Stearns, *Narrative of Henry Box Brown, Who Escaped from Slavery, Enclosed in a Box 3 Feet Long and 2 Wide. Written from a Statement of Facts Made by*

other works with substantially similar themes, including the *Autobiography of H. C. Wright* (1849) and the narrative of Virginia native Henry Watson, who escaped from Mississippi and whose narrative is a catalogue of horrors of sales of his family and himself.<sup>91</sup>

## CONCLUSION: SLAVERY'S NARRATIVE AT MID-CENTURY

By 1849 the political stakes had risen considerably over the contested narrative of American slavery. The narrative of the romantic fugitive had real consequences. The political nation was coming apart at the seams over the heroism of fugitives in the mold of Frederick Douglass, Henry Bibb, or Josiah Henson. The "unheroic" elements of William Wells Brown and other ex-slave autobiographers underscored the desperate circumstances they were forced to confront.<sup>92</sup> They, along with so many fellow autobiographers, were in large measure responsible for intensifying debates over the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, without which many in the slave South threatened disunion. Such appeals to heavy-handed federal authority to regulate slavery belied regionalists' characterizations of an organically ordered society framing a domestic institution of slavery. By the late 1840s, ex-slave autobiographies were arguing that there was no principle but profit and the families that would-be paternalists celebrated in their literature were precisely the social institution slaveholders broke up in the slave market. They would intensify that criticism in the 1850s, joined by female ex-slave autobiographers such as Sojourner Truth. Although Truth was a native New Yorker, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* includes an intensely personal account the severing of ties between mother and child through the illegal sale of her son Peter to Alabama and the violence and abuse both suffered at the hands of slaveholders. Family disruption pervades Truth's spiritual autobiography as it would other biographies and autobiographies of female ex-slaves in the 1850s and beyond.<sup>93</sup>

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*Himself: With Remarks upon the Remedy for Slavery.* By Charles Stearns (Boston: Brown and Stearns, 1849), 23.

<sup>91</sup> *Liberator*, 2 March 1849, 35; James Olney, "I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," *Callaloo*, 20 (1984), 46–73; Merle E. Curti, "Non-resistance in New England," *New England Quarterly*, 2, 1 (1929), 34–57.

<sup>92</sup> Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 8, *passim*.

<sup>93</sup> Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth a Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828*, ed. Olive Gilbert (Boston: the author, 1850); Isaac Williams, *Aunt Sally; or, The Cross the Way of Freedom. A Narrative of the Slave-Life and Purchase of the Mother of Rev. Isaac Williams of Detroit, Michigan* (Cincinnati: American Reform Book and Tract Society, 1858); Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, ed. Lydia Maria Child (Boston: the author, 1861).

As romantic characterizations of the plantation developed in the writings of Simms and others, they were being infused with robust southern nationalism and increasingly saccharine characterizations of slaves' sentimental social attachments. In that dynamic hybridization of genres even pro-slavery writers could "usurp" African American voices.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, moral ambiguity disappeared along with scenes of the domestic slave trade. Writers such as Kennedy and Simms imagined to their readers a South – and regional variations within it – in which slavery as an organic cultural institution had slipped the moorings of the advancing commercial republic in which it was situated.<sup>95</sup> In contributing to that narrative, they popularized a version of contemporary events that became an essential component of a national narrative of southern identity and character, even a proto-national one underpinning secessionism.

The narrative of slavery so fiercely contested at mid-century was the one Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* shocked and refigured. Female anti-slavery writers, including Stowe and Emily Catharine Pierson, would articulate abundant examples of slavery's damage to families and the domestic costs of slaveholders' decisions, and they also developed a generic hybrid of sentimental fiction that incorporated African American voices.<sup>96</sup> Contests among anti-slavery writers intensified in the wake of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as ex-slave autobiographers (including some who were Stowe's character models) struggled to rescue an abolitionist narrative – and the authority of African American witnesses – from the sentimentality that had enveloped it and the pro-slavery uses to which such racially infused melodrama was put by anti-Tom authors. Some of the most effective literary theorizers of a pro-slavery South were also female, including Gilman, Mary Henderson Eastman, and Caroline Lee Hentz.<sup>97</sup> In the late 1850s, African American authors including William Wells Brown, Martin Delany, Frank J. Webb, and Harriet E. Wilson wrote novels to wrest control of slavery's narrative from both anti-slavery and pro-slavery white

<sup>94</sup> Russ Castronovo, "Incidents in the Life of a White Woman: Economies of Race and Gender in the Antebellum Nation," *American Literary History*, 10, 2 (Summer 1998), 240.

<sup>95</sup> Larson, *The Market Revolution*, chapter 2.

<sup>96</sup> Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Emily Catharine Pierson, *Jamie Parker: The Fugitive* (Hartford: Brockett, Fuller and Co., 1851); *idem*, *Cousin Frank's Household; Or, Scenes in the Old Dominion, by Pocahontas* (Boston: Upham, Ford and Olmstead, 1853); Michael E. Price, "Stories with a Moral: Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, William Tappan Thompson, and other Literary Defenders of Plantation Society in Antebellum Georgia," *Atlanta History: A Journal of Georgia & The South*, 39, 2 (1995), 23–45; Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

<sup>97</sup> Mary Henderson Eastman, *Aunt Phillis's Cabin; or, Southern Life As It Is* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co, 1852); Caroline Lee Hentz, *The Planter's Northern Bride*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1854); Susan K. Harris, *19th-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), chapter 1.



fiction writers, accelerating the dynamic process of refashioning genres representing slavery's narrative.<sup>98</sup>

Nowhere else in the Atlantic world was slavery so imaginatively refracted through the published writings of slaveholders, their sympathizers, abolitionists, or ex-slaves as in the United States of the early nineteenth century. Of all the slave regimes in the nineteenth century Atlantic, only there did its defenders issue apologies framed in sentimental terms and ex-slaves respond with such ingenuity. American slavery permeated nearly all aspects of life in the South and "shaped everything it touched."<sup>99</sup> It did so at a time in which stories Americans told about themselves assumed a central importance in the creation and maintenance of political and social identities mediated by print and contributed to the impending national crisis of the 1850s.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> William Wells Brown, *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States*. By William Wells Brown, *A Fugitive Slave, Author of "Three Years in Europe."* *With a Sketch of the Author's Life* (London: Partridge & Oakey, 1853); Martin Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America*, ed. Floyd J. Miller (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970; first published 1859–62); Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig, or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black: In a Two-Story White House, North, Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There* (Boston: George C. Rand & Avery, 1859); Frank Webb, *The Garies and Their Friends* (London: G. Routledge & Co., 1857).

<sup>99</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859–1863* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 3 (quote); David F. Ericson, *The Debate over Slavery: Antislavery and Proslavery Liberalism in Antebellum America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), chapter 2; David Ryden, *West Indian Slavery and British Abolition, 1783–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chapter 8; Srividhya Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759–1815* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), chapter 4.

<sup>100</sup> Gilmore, *The War on Words*, 1–196.