

Visions of Order, Southern Conservatism and William Gilmore Simms's Regionalism

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Mid-nineteenth century American writers pursued the common aim of creating a national literature specific to the conditions of America. As a Southern man of letters William Gilmore Simms united himself with the group of Young America in his conviction of the need for Americanism in literature, demanding an independence from Europe and finding the source of intellectual independence in “A resolute will, a bold aim, and a spirit that courageously looks within for its encouragements and standards” (*Views* 12). “[A] native literature,” he wrote in 1840, is “essential to national patriotism — to the independence of the national mind, and to the securing of the popular liberty” (*Letters* I: 201). He declared in the January 1845 issue of *Southern and Western Magazine and Review* that the South is responsible for “the mind which fills our region” (“New Monthly” 68); since “this feeling of place — this influence of the *Genius Loci*, — is one of the strongest forces, in the mind,” he wrote in the *Magnolia* for April 1842, it “achieves, in a ten mile province, a mighty monumental work, which crowns and overlooks an entire nation. If there be not a sectional literature, there will be none national” (“Sectional Literature” 251–52). It is small wonder that he called himself “an ultra-American, a born Southron, and a resolute loco-foco” (*Letters* I: 319).

What does Simms mean when he talks about a sectional literature? The term is worth reconsidering and redefining, since it perpetually haunts critical studies of his romance. Charles S. Watson, for instance, who sees Simms's Southern stance as standing out in his “commemoration of numerous localities” (*Nationalism* 11), observes that when he wrote as a nationalist he was not “dogmatic or narrow-minded” (12). It fitted “well into the pluralism of American culture” (10), confining himself as “one part of the nation” (11). However, his literary sectionalism, Watson argues, differs greatly from the literary regionalism of such postbellum Southern writers as William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor, since he promoted the political aims of the South “assiduously through his main literary works” and “never separate [d] literature from politics” after he ended his affiliation with Young America in the middle 1840s (68).

This statement is to be questioned regarding four important points. First, despite his move from political Nationalism to Secessionism, Simms's attachment to Southern values or what Watson might call his sectionalism never wavered. He was outspoken in his political views, and often expressed them in his fiction even when he was a Unionist. No critics find it easy to corroborate the argument that Simms subordinated literature to politics after he turned from Unionism to Southern Sectionalism. As C. Hugh Holman says, Simms employed the historical romance as “a tool by which to present a picture of social conditions” (“Changing View” 501), and this faithful picture of Southern “social” conditions was given as early as *The Partisan*. To argue against the Northern attack on South Carolina's role in the Revolution, as Miriam J. Shillingsburg notes, Simms “did occasionally allow political sectionalism to creep into his fiction in the 1850's” (537), but the “most political” statements in the revised Redfield editions of *The Partisan* and *Mellichampe* were made for “artistic purposes” to give “a realistic portrayal of the Southern culture of the Revolutionary War era” (536).

Second, the South's sectionalism antedates the rise of proslavery argument and secessionism. The occupational distinction between the North and Northwest as commercial and manufacturing areas and the South as based on agriculture was strengthened by the system of slave-labor, but this difference was as old as the Union; “the final disestablishment of slavery north of the Mason and Dixon line by 1804,” Jesse T. Carpenter observes, “marks a date of minor significance in the development of Southern sectionalism” (8–9). Third, as Eugene Genovese observes, both Unionists and Secessionists in the plantation states staunchly supported slavery and criticized capitalism severely (*Tradition* 32; 111). Finally, the distinction between the nineteenth-century term “sectionalism” and the twentieth-century “regionalism” is not easy to define. For instance, Robert Penn Warren, who evaluated Hawthorne and Faulkner highly as universal regionalists, remarked: “Regionalism is a more polite expression than sectionalism of the centrifugal principle, for it doesn't carry the threat of direct political, or other, action” (143). “Regionalism,” Edward W. Soja observes, can “take on many different political and ideological forms, ranging from an acquiescent request for additional resources to an explosive attempt at secession” (164; see Dainotto 24–29). If nationalism is, as Edward Said tells us, “an act of geographical violence” which destroys “concrete geographical identity” (qtd. in Dainotto 4),

then we must admit that Watson's evaluation of Simms as "dogmatic and narrow-minded" ironically demonstrates his strong regionalism. As James E. Kibler asserts, Simms's "rootedness and localness" come from "the larger understanding that we exist fully only if fixed on a place where we know thoroughly its customs and enter reality by devotion to an understanding of family ties, hearth, and home" ("Prophetic Muse" 112).

Historically, a region was a question of primary importance to Americans. In "The Significance of the Section in American History" (1925), a classic sectionalism thesis, Frederick Jackson Turner defends the value of the section, making it a condition that there should be no "sectional arrogance and exploitation of other sections" (112). "There is a sense in which sectionalism is inevitable and desirable," because "There is and always has been... a geography of political habit — a geography of opinion, of material interests, of racial stocks, of physical fitness, of social traits, of literature, of the distribution of men of ability, even of religious denominations" (111). The United States has had "a sectionalism from the beginning," arising from "the facts of physical geography and the regional settlement of different peoples and types of society" (93). Turner stresses "the newer forms of sectionalism" (108) modified by the influence of the West, but his point is that the United States, whose "politics and... society have been shaped by sectional complexity and interplay not unlike what goes on between European nations" (115), is "a federation of sections, a union of potential nations" (105). He concludes: "We must frankly face the fact that in this vast and heterogeneous nation, this sister of all Europe, regional geography is a fundamental fact; that the American peace has been achieved by restraining sectional selfishness and assertiveness and by coming to agreements rather than to reciprocal denunciation or to blows" (112).

Of course, there has been an academic argument against the Southern type of sectionalism. Referring to Turner's prediction of "the certainty of a sectional clash of interests, not unlike those which led to Calhoun's South Carolina Exposition" (Turner 105), for instance, Howard W. Odum sets wholesome regionalism against old sectionalism. Inherent in sectionalism, he observes, is "the idea of separatism and isolation; of separate units with separate interests": The distinctions are "clear between the divisive power of self-seeking sections and the integrating power of co-ordinate regions fabricated into a united whole" (Moore and Odum 39). However, he imposes an essential prerequisite to wholesome or successful regionalism. "The premise of the new regionalism," he argues, "assumes that the United States must not, either because of its bigness and complexity or because of conflicting interests, become a federation of conflicting sections but a homogeneity of varying regions" (39). He argues that the implications and meanings of regionalism are "manifold":

From the American viewpoint, it interprets the living society of the historical nation and the quest for political, cultural, and spiritual autonomy. In the generic sense, it magnifies the meaning of the local group in relation to the whole and features the folk-regional society as basic to the growth of cultures. It emphasizes the new realism of the people as the scientific as well as symbolic basic element in modern civilization. From a more practical viewpoint, namely, that of the inventory and planning of modern society, regionalism emerges as an equally definitive economy of balance and equilibrium between conflicting forces. It goes further; it offers a medium and technique of decentralization and redistribution in an age now being characterized as moving toward over-centralization, urbanism, and totalitarianism. (3-4)

In the view of this Chapel Hill sociologist who depicted poverty, backwardness and racism in the South of the 1930s, any sign of conflict is "aberrational and potentially dangerous"; political conflict is the worst and consensus is essential (Reed and Singal xiv).

Both Turner and Odum support and highly evaluate the fundamental differences of a many-regioned nation. They would agree with William B. Hesseltine that the writers of American history should not ignore "the infinite variations of American life," and that the United States is "a congeries of regions, a conglomeration of communities, a congregation of diverse districts" (143). The former tends to more complicated sectionalism and the realization of the significance of regions, whereas the latter emphasizes "the integrating power of co-ordinate regions fabricated into a united whole." The difference of their accentuation and integration of diversity in place and culture bespeaks the essential problem of considering the culture and history of a nation. Whether we use the nineteenth-century "sectionalism," the twentieth-century "regionalism" or the postcolonial "oppositional regionalism," we must admit that culture springs from a place, and that regions have different cultures resulting from geographic, economic and political diversities (for oppositional regionalism, see Dainotto 1-33). Natural and homogeneous with "physical and cultural characteristics distinct from those of neighboring areas" (Reed and Singal 308), a region precedes the artificiality of nation or national identity.

In 1845 Simms wrote in the opening number of *Southern and Western* that it “seems not an unreasonable desire, that a literature which seeks no more than to seize upon passing events and suggestions, — to give form and pressure to the occasional moods and fancies, — which addresses itself at short intervals to our leisure, and much of the material for which must be of local provision, — should be made at home” (“New Monthly” 67). In 1856 he remarked in *The Wigwam and the Cabin* that “to be *national* in literature, one must needs to be *sectional*. No one mind can fully or fairly illustrate the characteristics of any great country; and he who shall depict *one section* faithfully, has made his proper and sufficient contribution to the great work of *national* illustration.” He proclaims there that its material is “local, sectional,” since he has “seen the life” and “lived it”; “In their delineation,” he says, “I have mostly drawn from living portraits, and, in frequent instances, from actual scenes and circumstances within the memories of men” (*Simms Reader* 339). His literary sectionalism, then, is a literary attempt to represent the culture of a place which is “the metaphor of a desire for an original and free literariness that has survived the instrumental impositions of nationalism and politics alike” (Dainotto 9).

Simms understood that “the failure of the South to possess a literature of its own” arises from “*the absolute and humiliating insensibility of the great body of her people*” to “the influences of intellectual culture, and... mental grace and refinement” (*Letters I* : 220–21). In the “Southern country,” he says, the diffusion of a taste for the fine arts is restrained by “the vulgar” who value “the useful” from humanizing and elevating mankind (221–22). It needs “fixed principles and leading and high purposes,” but “our people” have “no stern morality at the bottom of their labors, urging on their industry and making them sleepless in the prosecution of high designs” (226). Next he contrasts the Southern case with “[t]he old genius of Puritanism.” While the South was “settled chiefly by individuals, or by small bodies, in greater detail, and influenced by laws which were unhappily all furnished from abroad” (227), New England earned “fruits of a pride of character and a just consciousness of strength, diseased in consequence of too much homogeneousness, but, nevertheless, full of great and permanent national results in most of their undertakings” (226). The ancient Hebrews and the New England Puritans were “as completely the creatures of the destinies, as were the Greeks,” he argues, “with this saving difference in the case of the latter, that their Deities inspired them with confidence not dread.” The New England Pilgrim saw himself as “completely the agent and representative of the Deity, in working out a mixed moral and social result.” Like Oliver Cromwell, “a striking personification of all the good and evil, all the strength and weakness,” he predicts, “the defects which impaired its perfection, will make themselves apparent for its overthrow” (227). Thus, the want of “too much homogeneousness” and its own “laws” works to the South’s serious disadvantage, but he also suggests it could be its compensating advantage, an advantage the South holds over New England Puritanism.

Simms’s historical insight into his own section “settled chiefly by individuals, or by small bodies, in greater detail” influences his view of society and order. America was born out of the passion, he argues in *The Social Principle*, for “a well-ordered and compact social system, which had trained them to a feeling of the vast importance, in all enterprises, of mutual obligation and support, — and a religious regard to those duties, which, as they were single, and circumscribed within natural boundaries, seemed reasonable, and justified in their prosecution the fiercest valor and the firmest resolution, that ever rendered inflexible the will of man” (17). The Puritans of New England and the Cavaliers of Carolina fought for “the comfort and the security of home” (12) in the Revolutionary War. Americans sought “the repose and security of society” rather than “that elementary principle of human equality” (13). A people in the custody of the social principle, they are “thus moved only by proper provocation, — thus studious to justify themselves before the world, — thus solicitous of those concerns only which seem counselled by human reason, and enforced by natural justice” (14). The progress of civilization in America is, he contends, due to this social principle which came down from the English colonists who sought “safety, peace, home, liberty” (10). The sacred character of home distinguished the English from the Spanish and the French in their successful colonization. He goes so far as to say that the British were not “expelled from America, — they maintained themselves in America”: “The invader was a foreign despot — hostile to British liberty — and the expulsion of British arms from our soil, was one of the noblest efforts of British freedom” (16).

Rootedness symbolized by society and order is the sacred core of human progress. “The law of civilization,” Simms contends, is “a law of progress” (24). A people moved by this domestic feeling and social impulse is distinguished by “the primary qualities of social permanence, method and consideration” (14). Its business is “mutual encouragement, in a common toil, for the attainment of [highest good]” (25); it advances “by the natural and moral process of accumulation, step by step, to the possession, not only of superior fortune, but of superior refinement” (15). It is “not prone to change... slow to excess — slow to revolution — considerate of life — reserved, cautious — fond of acquisition — apt to be moral, proud, prudent and persevering” (14).

The community and the individual depend upon each other. “To account for the successes of individual mind,” Simms observes, “will go far to account for those of the community,” and “the history of a community, will, in turn, measurably illustrate the progress of its individual minds” (7). The intrinsic value of home is heightened by “the recollection, that it has constituted the inheritance of his [the individual’s] fathers, and is endowed with the numerous improvements of successive generations” (23). The first requisite to the civilization of any people is, he argues, “to make them stationary”: “Every remove, of whatever kind, is injurious to social progress; and every remove into the wilderness, lessens the hold which refinement and society have hitherto held upon the individual man” (36).

The Puritans and their “Southern neighbours” are “all the same people” in that they have lost the good common sense of keeping “a great portion of this tenacious and profound devotion to the spirit of the place” (22) and “that profound reverence for the social tie, which is at the very root of all our human obligations, and, without which, no nation ever perpetuates its conquests” (49). Through a passion for money, people in America tend to place less value on “a community in every land, to whom [home’s] virtues are particularly confided, — to whom the great body of the people turn instinctively, in the moment of distress and danger; — a class which are thus tacitly distinguished as the permanent — the principled — those who obey neither the caprices of fashion, nor the impulses of speculation, — who pray for neither poverty nor riches, — whose hearths are always smiling in plenty, and whose industry never clamors for more” (21–22). Their love for gain takes the form of “a thirst, a fever, restive in restraint and sleepless in performance,” resulting in the “wandering habit of our people” which is their deteriorating social tendency in America (40). For Simms, liberty without any veneration for the soil is “the liberty of the savage, which, insisting upon its freedom, returns only to its wallow” (23).

“Life,” Simms says in *Poetry and the Practical* (1854), tends to be “an eager pursuit after money” (72): “The instincts of man all lead to acquisition” (21). Man is “a compound of beast and angel” (70); “left to himself... [and] reduced to a purely individual search after his objects,” he is “less capable than the meanest” of animals (71). The very fact that he is “born more feeble, and less capable than any, and remains so for a longer period” than other animals is “conclusive that he is not designed to live simply by his instincts” (71). It is necessary to “humble the instincts,” he argues, “lest they grow beyond our human need, beyond our capacity to control them, and depress and devour our virtues” (21). Without “the shaping and preserving influences of civilization,” man would be “the most helpless of all the beasts that perish”; according to “the variety, the powers and the refinements of the arts of a people, are they in possession of the resources of [a highly gifted, moral and spiritual, no less than mortal nature]” (71).

As Simms observes, the Poet and the Poetical must elevate “the whole heart and nature of society, without which men degenerate, through the material direction given to their minds, and finally sink under the burdens of their own material acquisitions” (69). Human society is prone to the gratification of its instincts for “a material life of great state and grandeur” (70) and the promotion of “the vulgarly practical” affairs (69). Utilitarianism eats “all that is moral and preservative from the heart of a people, by ignoring all the higher faculties of its Genius.” The mere material life “conducts inevitably to a dead level, a social flat, in which no head dares rise above its fellow” (70).

In “The Philosophy of the Omnibus” Simms equates equalitarianism with Utilitarianism. Neither the Romans, who were “quite too individual — too selfish,” nor the Greeks, whose employments were “for the individual, for the selfish, for the ambitious,” he says, could have made the Omnibus. It is “of modern invention” which marks “a new condition of things — a new order of events — a new class of men” (153). It has “no prejudice, no partialities”; it is “levelling and democratic” (155). It indicates “an elevation in the aim of man in the general, though, perhaps, largely subtracting from all his individuality” (156). It ministers “equally to all classes,” and “as if the more fully to illustrate the republicanism of the thing, the little urchin who receives the sixpences at the door, is, without doubt, the most important personage of the company” (155). He warns that levelism, “though of great benefit to the community,” is dangerous to “the man,” because “the exceptions which make him the individual, and upon which he so much prides himself, are merged completely in the mountainous and mixing masses which surround him.” It wants “discrimination” (156). For instance, it goes forth into the halls of council, the church and the forum. There are “some things, some pursuits, some principles and performances” in the history of civilization and society “only to be approached with clean hands and barefoot, as things for love, for reverence, for worship,” but the Omnibus attempts “most desperately to grapple” them with “the irreligious and profane hands” (157). Thus it is vulgar; it “knows of no distinction, whatsoever, between any of the concerns of life; which, not content with overthrowing the artificial aristocracies of government, and an unequal system of laws, is solicitous to graduate all things, of whatever class or character, by the same narrow standard,” and is “utterly indifferent to all things, unless they come coupled with some miserable and miserly maxim, taught and treasured up carefully from boyhood, in the leaves of Poor Richard” (158).

Simms watches such change and progress with dread. The Omnibus goes onward, and its era is “the era of revolution — of that love of change which is the delirium of unaccustomed license” (159). There is “no limit to levellism when once it begins”; “the spirit which has brought it into being is one, as reckless in the pursuit of the one social, as the olden power in the desire for the other selfish, extreme” (156). It might crush all things “in its progress, burying itself, in the end, amid the ruins of its own creation” (159). To go forward boldly, he writes in “Sympathy between the Past and Future,” published in 1845 in *Grouped Thoughts and Scattered Fancies: A Collection of Sonnets*, one needs to look back on one’s past:

Would we go forward boldly, and gain heart
 For farther progress, we must pause awhile,
 And gaze upon the path, for many a mile,
 We follow’d, when we first grew bold to start; —
 That so much has been traversed, is a goad
 To fresh endeavor; and the eye grows bright,
 With expectation, as the baffled sight
 Would vainly compass all the o’er-trodden road; —
 The pathways of the future will grow clear,
 When the first fresh beginnings of the march,
 Lie bright beneath the broad and sheltering arch;
 And, re-possessed of childhood, we are near
 Heaven’s sources, — for the true humanity,
 Keeps past and future still in either eye. (53)

Individualism and democracy as Simms values them are different from the Northern versions of equalitarianism which are, in his eyes, dangerous to the individual as well as the society.

Slavery in America articulates Simms’s belief in order and human inequality. One of “the governing principles of our society” that all men are created equal, he says, must be regarded in “a limited sense”; “Our forefathers, when they declared this truth to be self-evident,” were not “in the best mood to be philosophers, however well calculated they may have been to become patriots” (60–61). This view of the Fathers of the Republic and their attitudes toward equality and human nature is not grounded on sectionalism nor on racism. As M.E. Bradford argues, the Framers were “a body of religious men, skeptical concerning human nature” and feared enthusiastic “large-scale theories of human rights... [would] threaten property and the going social order” (*Remembering* 36). Many of them warned against the “turbulence and follies of democracy,” and Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, for instance, asserted the danger of “the leveling spirit” and “the evils we experience flow from the excess of democracy” (see *Remembering* 30–37). Simms argues in this review that the work of the Fathers was limited entirely to “the claims of the citizen, *each in his place*, upon the government which he was required to sustain, for the protection, — while he obeyed its laws and performed his duties — of his life, his liberty, his pursuits, and his possessions” (61). He goes further; nothing can be “more remarkable or more delightful to the mind and eye, in the examination of the works of the Deity, than the endless varieties and the boundless inequalities of his creations” (61–62). The stars, the hills, the trees, the rivers and the seas are “lovely in their inequalities”; it is “from their very inequalities” that “their harmonies arise.” They have their names “only as they are unlike and unequal.” They are “all unequal” but each keeps “its place”; “the beauty which they possess and yield us” results from “their doing so” (62). The equality insisted upon by “the levellers,” he contends, would “result in the necessary forfeiture of names to things,” and “all barriers of present distinction” would be “broken down” (65).

A probing exploration of this fundamental philosophical division between Northern liberalism and Southern conservatism is made in Richard M. Weaver’s contrastive analysis of the Puritan mind and the Southern one. In “Two Diarists” he argues that Cotton Mather has the impulse to domineer over creation and the will to conquer, while William Byrd’s outlook derives from “an acceptance of stasis and status” (*Defense of Tradition* 747). For Mather, “things must be changed in order to effect purposes, and finally change becomes a principle which is used to vindicate itself,” whereas, for Byrd, Weaver says, “Man was neither the creator of everything nor the sole agent of his destiny” (747). A society, he argues in “The Regime of the South,” accepts “correction” or makes “the empirical changes that are required by changes in the world,” but it cannot “live exclusively on a diet of self-questioning, to say nothing of self-hate” (715).

Weaver directly addresses the very essence of the distinctions in a society in his essay “Distinction and Hierarchy.” If so-

ciety is “something which can be understood,” he argues, it must have “structure”; distinctions create society (*Ideas* 35). “The comity of peoples in groups large or small” rests upon fraternity, “a concept which long antedates [the notion of equality] in history,” because “it goes immeasurably deeper in human sentiment” (41). The ancient feeling of brotherhood calls for “respect and protection,” for brotherhood is “status in family,” and family is “by nature hierarchical”: “It demands patience with little brother, and it may sternly exact duty of big brother” (41–42). Fraternity, which creates trust and loyalty, directs attention to others. It is the basis of “an organic social order” which unites “parts that are distinct” (43).

Weaver contends that the erasing of all distinctions is infeasible. Equality before the law, for instance, has “no effect on inequalities of ability and achievement” (*Ideas* 44). Except for socialism or despotism nothing can enforce economic equality. A chance to advance in society means “to have station with reference to points above and below” (45). An election is equal to a hierarchical proceeding, because it chooses a superior among many. The importance of education especially presumes “the hierarchy of values” (49) and “some source of authority” (50). Superiority in knowledge carries “prerogative, which implies, of course, distinction and hierarchy” (50). Such a view of the nature of things gives us “metaphysical reality” that “a series of things is hierarchically ordered.” If “creation” does not express “purpose,” it is impossible to find “an authorization for purpose in our lives,” and “the assertion of purpose in a world we felt to be purposeless would be a form of sentimentality.” In contrast, the mere notion of “infinite progress” and undefined equalitarianism is destructive: “If the goal recedes forever, one point is no nearer it than the last” (51).

It is “the very nature of culture,” as Weaver argues in “The Image of Culture,” to be “exclusive” (*Visions* 12). There can be no such thing as “a democratic culture” in the sense of “one open to everybody at all times on equal terms” (12). The roots of democracy are in the truth that every individual has “an inviolable personality, a private experience, and an authentic voice” (14), but if it is “allowed to fill the entire horizon,” it produces “an envious hatred not only of all distinction but even of all difference,” making men “equal in all departments, regardless of the type of activity and vocation” (15). Society is “structured, diversified, balanced, and complex,” because a culture is “a means of uniting society by making provision for differences” (16); it has “a kind of ontological basis in social life” which expresses itself “in a common participation from different levels and through different vocations” (18).

In “Two Types of American Individualism,” a contrastive analysis of Henry David Thoreau and John Randolph of Roanoke, Weaver defines these Northern and Southern versions of individualism as anarchic individualism and social bond individualism. The former shows “a complete despite for all that civilization or the social order has painfully created” (*Essays* 102), but the latter, based upon a practically universal concession that “a man is born a member of the state which protects and nurtures him” (99), battles “unremittingly for individual rights, while recognizing that these have to be secured within the social context” (82). Liberalism or anarchic individualism operates to “destroy and conserve nothing” owing to “its incapacity for commitment, its nihilistic approach, and its almost pathological fear of settled principle” (*Defense of Tradition* 715), while, in the latter type, home and community are a social whole or “a powerful check against the sense of lostness, the restlessness, and the aimless competition” (714).

As Genovese observes, generations of Southern conservatives called equality the real “opiate of the masses,” and asserted that no two men have ever been “equal in any sense other than in their possession of moral worth in the eyes of God” (*Front* 252). They recognize “the inevitability of hierarchy and the legitimacy of firm authority in social and political relations” (252). Thus they regard individuality as “a product of, rather than prior to, society” (254). This Southern conservative notion of social order and tradition dates back to “George Mason, John Randolph of Roanoke, and one side of the problematic Thomas Jefferson” (248). Jefferson wrote William Short in 1823 that compared to New York, which was “a Cloacina of all the depravities of human nature,” in Virginia “breaches of order [are] rare, and our societies, if not refined, are rational, moral and affectionate at least” (see Shalhope 553).

Simms’s Romantic view of history and nature, projected in his Revolutionary War and Border romances and Native-American stories, rests upon this Southern conservative notion of society and order. When he wrote Philip C. Pendleton in 1840 that the literature of a nation should represent “its national character — the distinct embodiment of its moral aims; its political achievements; the taste which it loves to indulge, and the amusements which it enjoys,” he meant he would see the matter through the perspective of the “constant disruption of the bonds of society... produced by the wandering habits of its members” which “results invariably in moral loss to the whole” (*Letters* I : 207). The “instability of our own people and their wandering habits,” which is “more particularly the characteristic of the Southern people,” he argues, has “a disparaging effect upon our national character” (206). Because of the “vast temptations to cupidity, and mercenary enterprise, held out by the immense, and but partially opened, tracts of plain and prairie in the west,” they “prepare, negatively, for removal from their homesteads”

(206), and “[p]rinciples become impaired in value, and standards of judgment fluctuate, with increasing insecurity, at each additional remove” (207). His fiction realizes this Southern worldview in a graphic form.

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