

# William Gilmore Simms and the Other American Romance in the Canon of American Literature

Masahiro NAKAMURA

*Department of Foreign Languages, Aichi University of Education, Kariya 448-8542, Japan*

## Northern Type of Realism, Trent's Biography and Simms's Romance

When William P. Trent wrote a biography of Simms, the structure and values of the American community had changed so drastically with extraordinary progress in the development of communications and transportation that realism "grew out of the bewilderment, and thrived on the simple grimness, of a generation suddenly brought face to face with the pervasive materialism of industrial capitalism" (Kazin, 15).<sup>1</sup> It was "born in protest, born in rebellion, born out of the sense of indirection which was imposed upon the new generations out of the realization that the old formal culture—the 'New England Idea'—could no longer serve" (Kazin, 31). The literary battle lines between the novel and the romance appeared in a new form as the realism/idealism controversy. Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, a Norwegian realist and professor of German at Columbia, for instance, observed in the May 1889 *North American Review* that "the great and radical change which the so-called realistic school of fiction has inaugurated" was "no longer an irresponsible play of fancy" but "acquires an historical importance in relation to the age to which it belongs" (CXLVIII, 598), since it broke with the romantic tendency to create "a series of extremely entertaining tales, which are incidentally descriptive of manners, but caricatured, extravagant, and fantastic" (CXLVIII, 599).<sup>2</sup>

At the same time it was suggested by others that art should avoid the extremes of realism and idealism. In the March 1890 *Forum* W.H. Mallock offered their intersection to seek for not only "manner and circumstances . . . as they are perceived by our own ears and eyes" but also "what lies below the surface."<sup>3</sup> A few years earlier, George Parsons Lathrop, Hawthorne's son-in-law, had referred to the import of realism in the September 1874 *Atlantic Monthly*; it supplies, he observes, "the visual distinctness which is one great charm of the stage," but the novelist must "investigate the functions of all those complicated impulses, emotions, and impressions which we experience from hour to hour, from day to day, and by which our actions and characters are continually controlled, modified, or explained." In "investigation of psychological phenomena, or insight into the mysteries of spiritual," Hawthorne's "realism" is "careful, detailed, perfectly true, and perfectly finished" (XXXIV, 321).<sup>4</sup> James T. Fields contributed toward "assuring Hawthorne's continuing presence in the cultural foreground" in the post-Civil War era, by producing eleven posthumous editions of Hawthorne's works between 1864 and 1883 (Tompkins, 29). Hawthorne's "friends and associates" kept his fiction "up-to-date" by writing about it, and "then *their* friends took over" (Tompkins, 30).

As Richard H. Brodhead observes, Hawthorne was "re-canonical on new grounds" and "elevated to the highest reaches of the literary pantheon" during a period of major shifts in literary preference and practice after the Civil War. The modernists of the 1870s coupled him with Turgenev as a model for "the new novel shorn of moral commentary" and those of the early 1880s linked him with George Eliot as "a patron of the new novel of psychological analysis and moral irresolution" (25). To sum up, the realism/idealism controversy in the age of realism was a bridge between the romance/novel distinction in the early nineteenth century and Chase's theory of romance in the mid-twentieth century.

Charles Dudley Warner, general editor of the American Men of Letters Series, who invited Trent in 1899 to write a biography of Simms as the leading man of letters in the Old South, wrote *The Gilded Age*, a satirical criticism of sentimentalism in collaboration with Mark Twain, giving a name to the 1870s and 1880s. In an essay "Two Modern Fiction" published in 1883, however, he observes that "One of the worst characteristics of modern fiction is its so-called truth to nature," and contends that "Art requires an idealization of nature" (33).

Art is "selection and idealization, with a view to impressing the mind with human, or even higher than human, sentiments and ideas" (34). Realism gives a wholly unidealized view of human society: it is "a delight in representing the worst phases of social life; an extreme analysis of persons and motives; the sacrifice of action to psychological study; the substitution of studies of character for anything like a story; a notion that it is not artistic, and that it is untrue to nature to bring any novel to a definite consummation, and especially to end it happily; and a despondent tone about society, politics, and the whole drift of modern life" (36). This kind of fiction holds that "we are in an irredeemably bad way. There is little beauty, joy, or light-heartedness in living; the spontaneity and charm of life are analyzed out of existence" (36). The main object of the novel is, as Warner argues, "to entertain," and "the best entertainment" is "that which lifts the imagination and quickens the spirit; to lighten the burdens of life by taking us for a time out of our humdrum and perhaps sordid conditions, so that we can see familiar life somewhat idealized, and probably see it all the more truly from an artistic point of view" (39).

Trent, a Virginia native, lived three decades after the Civil War in the age of realism when the canon of classic American literature was thus questioned and reconstructed. He pronounces clearly in the last chapter of the biography that Simms's romances are not worth reading "fifty years hence" (*Simms*, 328), because in the age of realism romance must "retire from the stage" (*Simms*, 329). Mentioning *The Kinsmen*, Trent says that "the bad company he had kept while writing 'Richard Hurdis' and 'Border Beagles' had not been without its effects," adding that his talking with thieves and outlaws and brothers eager to kill one another made him dwell "almost exclusively on the darker side of Carolina's revolutionary history" (*Simms*, 121). "If the friends of romance are to make any firm stand against the attacks of the realists," Trent observes, "they must make it right here, on the essentially ennobling qualities of great romances" (*Simms*, 328). The scenes in Simms's *Border Romances* are "as rough in their construction as the people described were in their manners and customs" (*Simms*, 88):

But he might have avoided, at least, introducing brutal murders not necessary to the action of the story, and he might have remembered that a good artist is not called upon to exercise his powers upon subjects not proper to his art, simply because such subjects belong to the realm of the real and the natural. He might have remembered that nobility is that quality of a romance which is essential to its permanence; and that the fact that he was describing accurately the life of a people whom he thoroughly understood would not alone preserve his work for the general reader. (*Simms*, 89)

To his own question, "Will the revolutionary and colonial romances be read, say fifty years hence?" Trent gives a prompt answer: "That the romance, in its old form at least, will play again a serious part in the history of literature is open to grave doubt" (*Simms*, 328). In *A History of American Literature, 1607-1865*, he observes about Hawthorne, "a man of noble nature and of subtle imagination" that "the sheer intellectual force of the man and the philosophical depth and scope of his artistic creations" (359) are to be "unreservedly admired," and "under any definition Hawthorne's genius must be pronounced authentic and individual" (362).

Warner and Trent had another more important similar basic understanding of American history. Before he selected Trent, Warner had impressed Trent deeply in his lecture on "Certain Diversities of American Life" at the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee; "New England," he declared, was "hospitable in its intellectual freedom, both of trial and debate, to new ideas" and "in touch with the universal movement of humanity and of human thought and speculation," but "isolation from the great historic stream of thought and agitation" produced "stagnation" in the Old South (McCardell, 179-203). Warner was also impressed with Trent, a twenty-seven-year-old native of Richmond whose philosophy was a doctrine of progress. Trent felt the necessity for historical studies in the South, but believed that "In the South there was only one thing that knit the several States together, and that was slavery"; "progress and slavery are natural enemies," he observes, and "the South had no great desire to progress except in her own way, which was really retrogression" (*Simms*, 169). He wrote in "Notes on the Outlook for Historical Studies in the South" that "I know more than one scholar, born without the Southern pale, into whose hands I would trust our history without a fear; and I cannot help smiling, to think how thoroughly the tables would be turned, if it were a Northern historian who should

first give to the world a true and complete history of the Southern people" (Stephenson, 156). Trent's *William Gilmore Simms*, then, is a co-product of a native New Englander and a Southerner who agreed, with "Professor Shaler, of Harvard, " that "If there be one fact that stands out before the student of ante-bellum Southern history, it is that the Southern people, down to 1861, were living a primitive life, a life full of survivals" (*Simms*, 31).

Trent saw the antebellum Southerners as feudal minded and the Old South as a primitive society which was "conservative, slow to change, contented with the social distinctions already existing":

Southerners lived a life which, though simple and picturesque, was nevertheless calculated to repress many of the best faculties and powers of our nature. It was a life affording few opportunities to talents that did not lie in certain beaten grooves. It was a life gaining its intellectual nourishment, just as it did its material comforts, largely from abroad,—a life that choked all thought and investigation that did not tend to conserve existing institutions and opinions, a life that rendered originality scarcely possible except under the guise of eccentricity. (*Simms*, 37)

Slavery and feudalism combined, Trent argues, to produce Southerners' incapacity to reason clearly, "arrogance, contempt for inferiors, inertia of mind and body" (*Simms*, 41), a feudal element in the Southern character, and "the planes of existence, individual as well as national" are "the forces of destiny that made the North the instrument by which the whole country, North and South, was finally saved for what we all believe will be a glorious future" (*Simms*, 287).

Trent observes Simms's romances should not have been written since "they have nothing ennobling in them" (*Simms*, 328). Scotts and Coopers, he notes, will be "preserved in the world's memory and regard," since they fill "the world's various needs" and "ennoble all who read them in the right spirit" (*Simms*, 329). Simms's best romances deal with "an eventful period, when a young people was struggling for its rights," animated by "a common patriotism," whereas they are "in many places commonplace and dull" (*Simms*, 330-31), so that "they will never be very popular, at least with older readers, but boys will continue to delight in the daring deeds of scout and partisan, and cultivated and curious persons will turn to them as faithful pictures of interesting epochs in their country's history" (*Simms*, 331). Simms, he concludes, was "more English than he thought himself": he made constant use of "the stock materials of former and contemporary romancers." Thus he was not "original," and "Any comparison with Hawthorne is of course out of the question" (*Simms*, 329). Despite "a fair measure of success" he achieved through his own energy, many of his romances as well as "his numerous essays, biographies, dramas, or even his short stories" are not worthy of special attention (*A History of American Literature*, 387-88).

### **Americanists, New Americanists, and Simms's Romance: An Overview of Twentieth-century "American" Romance**

In *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957) Richard Chase, a New Englander, distinguished the American prose romance from the European novel. He saw the contradiction of the old world and the new one in America essential to his formulation of the romance theory, just as Simms and Hawthorne had a century earlier. American romances, he says, are "adaptations of traditional novelistic procedures to new cultural conditions and new aesthetic aspirations" (14).<sup>5</sup>

Chase frames the concepts of the novel and the romance around the notion of how they view reality. The novel, he argues, presents "its great practical sanity, its powerful, engrossing composition of wide ranges of experience into a moral centrality and equability of judgment." This realistic or naturalistic art moves "through contradictions to forms of harmony, reconciliation, catharsis, and transfiguration" (2). The novel renders reality "in comprehensive detail" and delineate people "in their real complexity of temperament and motive." Character is more important than action and plot, and the primary purpose of the narrative is to enhance "our knowledge of and feeling for an important character, a group of characters, or a way of life" (12).

In contrast, the romance renders reality without providing "much intricacy of relation." The characters,

“two-dimensional types,” are shown “in ideal relation”: “abstract or symbolic.” Instead of exploring the origin of the character, the romancer envelops him “in mystery.” The romance tends to veer toward “mythic, allegorical, and symbolistic” by being “less committed to the immediate rendition of reality than the novel”(13). The “profound poetry of disorder” in romance reflects the anomalies and dilemmas of “unexampled territories of life in the New World.” The American romance is “more profound and clairvoyant than the English novel”(5). This is how Chase finds “the definitive adaptation of romance to America” in Hawthorne’s preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*. Hawthorne adapted, he argues, “the neutral territory between civilization and the wilderness” and “the borderland of the human mind where the actual and the imaginary intermingle” to “the particular demands of an American imagination” and brought “into play his considerable talent for psychology”(19).

According to Chase, pioneers of American romance like Brockden Brown, Cooper, and Simms produced two streams of romance in American literary history. A group of Hawthorne, Melville, James, Mark Twain, Frank Norris, Faulkner and Hemingway is the main stream of American fiction with “certain qualities of thought and imagination which the American fiction writer needs but which are outside the province of the novel proper.” The other one is a group of historical romance writers such as John Esten Cooke, Lew Wallace, Charles Major, Margaret Mitchell and Kenneth Roberts. “Although these works may have their points, according to the taste of the reader,” Chase states, “they are, historically considered, the tag-end of a European tradition that begins in the Middle Ages and has come down into our own literature without responding to the forms of imagination which the actualities of American life have inspired”(20-21). It is only thinly hidden that Simms should be included among these.

In “The Broken Circuit,” the first chapter of the book, Chase refers to Simms’s “Advertisement” to *The Yemassee* for his analysis of the situation of the romancer in the New World. After citing the 1835 version of Simms’s definition of romance without omission, he passes a select judgment on it:

Loosely written as it is, this statement, with its echoes of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, remains something of a classic in the history of American criticism, its general purport being one which so many of our prose fictionists have accepted. American fiction has been notable for its poetic quality, which is not the poetry of verse nor yet the domestic or naturalistic poetry of the novel but the poetry of romance. In allying romance to epic Simms was reflecting his own preoccupation with panoramic settings, battles, and heroic deeds; doubtless he had also in mind, vociferous nationalist that he was, the power of epic to mirror the soul of a people. (17)

Chase admits that Simms’s definition remains “something of a classic” and “so many of our prose fictionists” have accepted “its general purport.” He names the writings of Cooper, Melville, Twain and Faulkner as great American epics, but concludes: “On the whole, American fiction has approximated the poetry of idyl and of melodrama more often than of epic.” Simms was a “vociferous nationalist,” and involved himself in romance as epic because of “his own preoccupation with panoramic settings, battles, and heroic deeds”(17).

Chase is not unwilling to admit that Simms’s *Confession; or the Blind Heart, Beauchampe and Charlemont* are “dark studies in psychology that reflect Godwin and the Gothic tradition at the same time” and “forecast later Southern writers, such as Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren.” However, echoing Trent, he takes a high-handed attitude toward these works without any careful attention to them: Simms’s tales of passion are “fatally marred by the carelessness and crudity with which they are thrown together”(17-18). He hastens to argue that it was “in the work of Hawthorne,” who was “no less convinced than Cooper and Simms that romance, rather than the novel, was the predestined form of American narrative,” that “for the first time the psychological possibilities of romance were realized”(18). Simms’s originality was “circumscribed by his apparent belief” that “American romance would differ from earlier forms only because it had different material rather than a ‘particular mode’ of rendering this material”(19-20). In the tradition of Allen Tate’s “complexity of feeling,” Marius Bewley’s “tension,” and “the Manichaeic quality of New England Puritanism” as “the national consciousness”(5-11), Chase sees the main stream of romance in the works which delineate “the borderland of the human mind where the actual and the imaginary intermingle” rather than “the field of action” in “the

neutral territory between civilization and the wilderness" (19), and defends his hypothesis by selecting "what he believes to be the few best works by application of the thesis to them," which is "a circular argument" ("Rationale," 75).

New Americanists question the major premise of Chase's hypothesis: removing political and social contexts to argue for psychological modernity in American romance. Chase's formulation has encouraged, as a New Americanist John P. McWilliams, Jr. notes, the notion of romance writers as "prototypes of alienated modern artists concerned with the deeper psychology," and critics of the Chase school have sublimated into the ahistorical and the mythic their "fascination for all those dark, inner, asocial drives of the self" ("Rationale," 72). New Americanists, by contrast, aim to disclose "the conservative, Eurocentric hegemony of mainstream American culture and its patriarchal control of the canon of classic literary texts." Their work reflects "an irresistible trend in the academy toward the spurning of unified schemes and hierarchies of every kind."<sup>6</sup>

This "questioning of absolutes" by New Americanists has brought to light Chase's attempt to establish "a monolithic cultural mythos that implicitly reified the idea of a privileged class of ivory-tower intellectuals and narrow literary specialists" (Thompson and Link, 6). Removal of political and social contexts in Chase's formulation is closely linked by Frederick C. Crews to its indifference to and disregard for Native Americans, Black Americans, women and minorities, and by Nina Baym to a chauvinistic political consensus (Thompson and Link, 53). They rewrite the established definition of the intrinsic value of literary works in the male-and-white-dominated scholarly tradition. Baym holds that "purely literary criteria" have had "a bias in favor of things male" (14). Jane Tompkins opened up the canon to popular works and texts that are "not usually thought to conform to a definition of imaginative literature" to show that the stereotyped characters in popular writings with their sensational plots and trite expressions are "the instantly recognizable representatives of overlapping racial, sexual, national, ethnic, economic, social, political, and religious categories" (Tompkins, xvi).

The rise of New Americanism has led to an unfavorable revision of Simms's role in the novel/romance controversy in the nineteenth century. Baym, who propounds that woman's fiction was "by far the most popular literature of its time, and on the strength of that popularity, authorship in America was established as a woman's profession, and reading as a woman's avocation" (11), plays down Chase's exemplification of male writers' novel/romance controversy. The terms "novel" and "romance," she argues, were interchangeable among reviewers, and without checking Simms's 1835 version of *The Yemassee* she insists that his definition of romance was not original but only influenced by Hawthorne's 1851 preface in *The House of the Seven Gables*. Tompkins, who questions "a certain set of defects that excludes [sentimental fiction] from the ranks of the great masterpieces," encourages us to see these neglected texts "insofar as possible, as they were seen in the moment of their emergence, not as degraded attempts to pander to the prejudices of the multitude, but as providing men and women with a means of ordering the world they inhabited" (xii-xiii), but as her attention is focused on "sentimental" women writers, Simms's writings are never mentioned there. Simms's name appears under the category of neglected writers only twice in her criticism of Fred Pattee's *Century Readings for a Course in American Literature*, though she points out the selection's "geographical and chronological bias" (197).

McWilliams admits Chase's formulation of "the social novel and the otherworldly romance" ("Rationale," 71), has promoted many important strands of American critical thought, and yet contends that it allowed entrance only to the less worldly fictions of certain white male novelists; it is "tacitly exclusive" ("Rationale," 74). This is the main reason why it cannot be "successfully adapted to new critical concerns" ("Rationale," 82). By insisting upon psychological modernity, that is, employing the term "romance" to remove political and social contexts, he argues, Chase ignored "highly regarded, widely read novelists" such as Stowe, Wharton, Dreiser, Cather, and Wright, just because "novels of direct moral persuasion and/or social determinism were somehow unliterary, almost illiberal" ("Rationale," 74). Although the term is "both a diachronic term applicable to all fiction and a synchronic term referring to historical fiction" ("Rationale," 75), "romance" was "a catch-all word for fiction of any kind that seemed adventurous or thrilling" ("Rationale," 75). "Because of its links to the epic and history," he observes, "the Romance must be seen as a vital influence on the frontier novels of Cooper and Simms and the heroic histories of Parkman and Prescott" ("Rationale," 82). One conclusion which "seems wholly tenable," he contends, is to "now and finally abandon" Chase's notion of the timeless Romance ("Rationale," 82).

Supporting Baym's "claim for a mid-century definitional chaos" ("Rationale," 77), McWilliams concedes that we cannot "predict" whether the word "romance" can be "successfully adapted to new critical concerns" ("Rationale," 82). "Whether or not the term 'romance' can be plausibly applied to genres of American literature other than that of historical prose," he observes, "remains more problematic" ("Rationale," 82). Nevertheless, Hawthorne's "centrality" in the tradition of American romance is "impossible to deny"; it has "reasons beyond his indispensability to the theory of the American Romance," because "scholars and readers care for psychological subtlety, for New England historical literature, for New and Old World literary relations, and for artistic control" ("Rationale," 78). He firmly argues that Hawthorne himself steadily shifted "his idea of how the Romancer's imagination functioned" ("Rationale," 79): "The settings of the four Romances suggest," he notes, "Hawthorne's increasing removal from the historical actualities of American life, together with his growing belief that a Romance was only an artifice of the fancy anyway" ("Rationale," 80). The distinction between the novel and the romance continued to be "of importance only to Hawthorne, for whom it came to be crucial" ("Rationale," 78).

In contrast to his high appraisal of Hawthorne's romance, McWilliams sees Simms's distinction between the novel and the romance in the "Advertisement" to *The Yemassee* as "subordinate" to his contention that "the modern Romance is the substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic" ("Rationale," 79). He adds that "the generic transformation" of the verse epic into the historical prose romance is "at least as crucial to Cooper, Simms, Melville, Prescott, Parkman, and Norris as the distinction between the novel and the romance" ("Rationale," 79), but in *The American Epic* he argues that Simms's *Yemassee* is no great epic.

According to McWilliams, the Americans who won the Revolution and glorified the prospects of the emerging nation conceived the great American epic as "an eventual certainty": the forces of history were "transferring a heroic culture and its epic poet progressively westward, from Homer's Greece, to Virgil's Latium, to Milton's England, and finally to an America whose epic genius was yet to appear" (*American Epic*, 16). Yet Americans of the early Republic saw the world of Homeric poems as "a barbarous feudal chaos" and despised "the contents of the epic poems they revered" (*American Epic*, 22). They dismissed Old World barbarity of Homer and Virgil and perceived John Milton as "a principled Puritan rebelling against a tyrannical monarch, as well as the sublime singer of the word of God" (*American Epic*, 23). Thus they turned, for the possibilities of a national epic, to the Revolution and the sublimities of American nature after the fashion of Milton. The serious epic exalted "what the new nation demanded for cultural self-identification" (*American Epic*, 93), whereas the mock-epic enabled American writers to "deal with their present realistically and their past skeptically" (*American Epic*, 71).

Native Americans provided Americans with an abundance of material for epic for their heroic defiance against the march of civilization. They were, McWilliams observes, Homeric warriors living on in the American forest and Nature's noble savages as well. The first conception led Americans to shape "characterizations of the Big Serpent, Magua, Mahtoree, Sanutee, and Pontiac," while the second produced "the characterization of Yamoyden, Uncas, Hard Heart, and Oconestoga" (*American Epic*, 127). He concludes persuasively about American successful epics about Native Americans: The former Native Americans curse against the white man for outrages done to them, but the latter do not express "the epic warrior's quest for glory or renown" but "gentleness and grace," thus sacrificing themselves for white Christianity or offering the reader "an alternative that combines yet supercedes" the Native American and the white values, that is, "a promise never fulfilled" (*American Epic*, 142).

McWilliams more plainly observes in *The Columbia History of American Poetry*: despite the "seemingly imposed plots" where "a capable white man is sure to marry a genteel maiden who represents the flower of civilization, while both the noble and the diabolic savage die safely away," Cooper's Leatherstocking tales reveal "counterforces that forever unravel any claim upon manifest destiny," by directing "the reader's admiration or awe (the defining response to epic literature) . . . toward a childless and preternaturally aged hero who belongs to neither red nor white culture, and who scornfully retreats from the westering civiliziers he momentarily agrees to serve" (43). This is quite different, he argues, from Simms's story which is "cut into two independent parts." Simms's "conception of the romance epic itself" causes his heroic prose romance to "devolve into mere adventure, and thereby to sacrifice, not only the narrative thrust central to epic, but 'uni-

ties of plan' and 'harmony of parts' as well" (*American Epic*, 151).

As a matter of fact, Milton's *Paradise Lost* was the touchstone by which Simms judged contemporary epics and religious poems (Parks, 55). He contrasted the feebleness of Robert Pollok's *The Course of Time* with the "truly Epic grandeur" of Milton's and in his criticism of Robert Montgomery's *Messiah* stated that Milton is "equal to his theme" and his language is "that of an emotion so deeply aroused and enkindled as to rise above all ordinary forms of expression" (Parks, 55). Despite "Milton's superlative genius," however, he in general preferred "many-sidedness" of Homer, Shakespeare and Scott, who have "that pliancy of mood, for example, which we call mental flexibility, and which enables him to go out of himself, to forget himself, to forget his favorite thoughts and fancies, and to throw all the strength of his intellect into the *dramatis personae* that grow under his hands" (Parks, 24). The imagination of a true artist, Simms argues, never creates "a character either wholly good or bad" but a "mixt" character (Parks, 20).

Politics and myth struggle with each other in Simms's view of history in *The Yemassee*. In their polity the Yemassees are democratic and republic but doomed to be conquered by white expansionism. Myth transforms history into nature by depoliticizing the confrontation of the two cultures. The clash and reconciliation between Gabriel Harrison and his antitheses Hugh Grayson and John Matthews suppresses the cultural and more existential clash between Harrison and Sanutee. The former is a clash between the principles of class and religion, while the latter is one of history. Simms demonstrates that politics under the clothing of the progress of civilization stifles, undermines and demolishes one of the two cultures which is historically, culturally and existentially different from the other. The comic structure of the story, a world of harmony where violence and domination intrinsic to history and society are naturalized into myth, underlines the tragic one of what depicts a world based upon a different set of values. Sanutee contrasts with Cooper's version of the Native American: he never transforms himself to Chingachgook according to the author's sentimentalism, nor to Natty Bumppo, a romantic white mediator between red and white culture. He is a "Southern" Native American who possesses the natural virtues like fierce valour and generous hospitality. He disappears from the scene of America as a "Southern" Native American who refuses to be confined into the white mythology and testifies to "the many other activities and relationships that make up a society, including the socially organized forms of domination, exploitation, and power pervasive in our own society and its history" (Brenkman, vii).

McWilliams contends that Hawthorne approached the writing of New England historical fiction as "a means of uncovering, in Sacvan Bercovitch's phrase, the Puritan origins of the American self," without "exposing himself to the illogic of William Gilmore Simms's statement 'To be national in literature, one must needs be sectional.'" Hawthorne "simply assumed that New England's priority in historical influence lent it primacy in determinations of national identity" (*Hawthorne, Melville, and the American Character*, 21). However, this argument of McWilliams never removes our doubt that his critical analysis presupposes the precedence of Puritanism in the formation of American national character.

Thompson and Link are right in arguing that criticism by New Americanists is "an attempt to invent yet another academic mythos, one which, like so many of its predecessors, shows little regard for the "historical" (5). Simms's and Hawthorne's definitions of romance were "not unusual but standard in the literary magazines of the day":

As early as the 1790s, we find the distinction between old romance and new romance in terms that link British theories of modern romance from Walpole and Reeve to Scott with a line of American romance writers from Brown to Cooper, Simms, and Hawthorne. It is clear that British and American reviewers shared a common critical tradition. And, although some critics saw aspects of the gothic romance and the historical romance as New World transformations of Old World conventions, it is also clear that some of the nineteenth-century reviewers thought there were noticeable differences between British and American fictional modes.

The basic propositions regarding romance that Simms made in 1835 reflect the consensus propositions in the magazine culture at large. The modern romance was generally considered the substitute for the ancient epic; the novel rendered everyday experience of the ordinary and the probable; the romance allowed for things extraordinary and improbable; and new romance was specifically out-

lined as a blended hybrid narrative that intermingled the actual and the imaginary. These ideas had developed in England in the eighteenth century, and each was implemented in American criticism during the first third of the nineteenth century. (103-4)

Thompson and Link, who call their own outlook on romance as New Traditionalism, place a greater emphasis than ever upon the centrality of Simms in theories of American romance by approximating "a neutral ground of critical engagement" (194).

As Wimsatt observes: "Ever since literary publishing established itself in the late eighteenth century, there has been a tendency in the country, encouraged by the emergence of New York as its publishing capital, to view northern traditions as the dominant American traditions and to assign to the South before the twentieth century an inferior role in literary history. This consensus of criticism has recently come under attack, yet authors of standard studies of American Romance continue to concentrate on Cooper, Hawthorne, Melville, and Brockden Brown while treating in detail no southern writers save Poe" (262-63).

### Notes

- 1 See also Eric J. Sundquist, "Introduction: The Country of the Blue," in Eric J. Sundquist, ed., *American Realism: New Essays*, 3-24; John P. McWilliams, Jr., "The Rationale for 'The American Romance';" and G. R. Thompson and Eric Carl Link, 139-156.
- 2 See Kazin, 26-28, and Thompson and Link, 141.
- 3 See Thompson and Link, 146.
- 4 See Thompson and Link, 149.
- 5 Thompson and Link point out that "Chase's theory had itself displaced . . . the premise of the *rise* of realism and the *rise* of the novel after the Civil War [which] was traditionally accepted in academic circles" (2), and argue that Chase was "a revisionist literary and social critic skeptical of the *gemutlich* values of American culture during the Eisenhower era" (2).
- 6 Frederick Crews, "Whose American Renaissance?" *New York Review of Books* 35, no. 16 (October 27, 1988): 68-69. See Thompson and Link, 5.

### Works Cited

- Baym, Nina. *Woman's fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- Brenkman, John. *Culture and Domination*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987.
- Brodhead, Richard H. "Hawthorne among the Realists: The Case of Howells." Ed. Eric J. Sundquist, *American Realism: New Essays*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. 25-41. )
- Chase, Richard. *The American Novel and Its Tradition*. 1957; rpt. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Kazin, Alfred. *On Native Ground: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942.
- McCardell, John. "Trent's Simms: The Making of a Biography." *A Master's Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald*. Eds. William J. Cooper, Jr., Michael F. Holt, and John McCardell. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985. 179-203.



- McWilliams, John P., Jr. *Hawthorne, Melville, and the American Character: A Looking-glass Business*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- . *The American Epic: Transforming a Genre, 1770-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- . "The Epic in the Nineteenth Century." *The Columbia History of American Poetry*. Eds. Brett C. Millier and Jay Parini. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. 33-64.
- . "The Rationale for "The American Romance." Ed. Donald E. Pease, *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994. 71-82.
- Parks, Edd Winfield. *William Gilmore Simms as Literary Critic*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1961.
- Stephenson, Wendell H. "William P. Trent as a Historian of the South." *Journal of Southern History*, vol.15, no.2 (1949): 151-77.
- Thompson, G. R. and Eric Carl Link. *Neutral Ground: New Traditionalism and the American Romance Controversy*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999.
- Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Trent, William P. *A History of American Literature, 1607-1865*. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1920.
- . *William Gilmore Simms*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892.
- Warner, Charles Dudley. "Two Modern Fiction." *Documents of American Realism and Naturalism*. Ed. Donald Pizer. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998. 33-44.
- Wimsatt, Mary Ann. *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms: Cultural Traditions and Literary Form*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.

(Received August 9, 2005)