

# Simms's Nihilistic View of the Revolution in *Woodcraft*

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*Woodcraft*, the most highly estimated of Simms's Revolutionary Romances, was serialized in extra issues of the *Southern Literary Gazette* in February-November, 1852, and published as a separate book in September of the same year. Owing to the political statements that Simms made in order to defend the antebellum Southern cause, and its publication that occurred by a coincidence of fate just after that of Mrs. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it has invariably been doomed to be read as a deliberate rebuttal of the latter or as a devious explanation of the Southern cause. These interpretations cannot be helped, since Simms himself said in a letter to James Henry Hammond of December 15, 1852 that it was "probably as good an answer to Mrs. Stowe as has been published,"<sup>1</sup> and in 1853 he reviewed *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, arguing against her biased descriptions. In addition, several expressions revealing his uneasiness about her work can be found in *Woodcraft*.<sup>2</sup>

Simms seemed to lack no decision in the attitude he assumed toward the vindication of the Southern society as statesman and historian. In his attack on Harriet Martineau he even imposed restrictions on freedom and human rights guaranteed by the Declaration. In his letter to John Pendleton Kennedy of April 5, 1852, he wrote, "We believe also that Negro Slavery is one of the greatest of moral goods & blessings, and that slavery in all

ages has been found the greatest and most admirable agent of Civilization" (L, III, p. 174). Porgy, the protagonist in *Woodcraft*, however, baffles our idea of Simms's unwavering faith in Southern values. He is too fat to stand up by himself, and lacks managerial talent as a planter; bewildered in choosing between two ladies, he ends up being rejected by both of them.

In the pages that follow I will argue that Simms had a unique design in adopting Porgy as a protagonist of this romance. Since Simms's involvement in politics in South Carolina which was on the way to secession cannot be questioned, it requires us to interpret it in the historical context. My arguments intend to clarify his nihilistic view of the Revolution which is embodied in the characterization of Porgy, darkening the whole work.

(1)

Simms published *The Partisan*, the first Revolutionary Romance in 1835, just after *The Yemassee*. It is not surprising that he found an inexhaustible interest in the Revolution, since it was one of the few materials that American romancers who insisted on their literary independence developed in the early part of the nineteenth century. Simms, as well as Northern writers such as Hawthorne, was aware that the Revolution could provide a background which would cast light on the future of America.

In the seven Revolutionary Romances Simms represented not only the conflicts between the British and the Marion army but also between the whigs and the tories. Simms as a historian affirmed that South Carolina had fought for freedom, but in his romances he gave a more realistic description which did not altogether advocate a romantic view of the revolution as a war for freedom and human rights. He even went so far as to

sympathize with the Tories.

Having finished writing the fifth romance, *Woodcraft*, Simms focused his attention again on the clash between the Whigs and the British in the following two romances. This highlights the fact that among the Revolutionary Romances whose primary focus was on the political aims and the conditions of the Revolutionary War, *Woodcraft* alone represented the post-war world. We can give two possible explanations for this. One of them might be that while Simms analyzed and depicted the political state of Charleston in 1780 in *Katharine Walton*, and directed his attention toward the British retreat and the subsequent circumstances of the Southern plantation, yet he held some impression after the publication of *Woodcraft* that the whole picture of the war had not been given, driving him to go back to the Revolutionary South Carolina. The other explanation is that his private concerns forced him to produce *Woodcraft* at the right time.

The former interpretation runs up against hard truths. First, *The Forayers* and *Eutaw* that follow *Woodcraft* represent the clash between the British and the militia in 1781, one of the most important periods in the history of the Southern Revolution. There is no doubt that Simms's intention was to give a minute analysis of the progress of the war chronologically. In his letter to Duyckinck of February 16, 1850, he stated clearly in his reference to *Katharine Walton* that "the progress of the action (Historical) is uniform and consistent through the whole bringing down events from the Siege & Fall of Charleston, to the virtual close of the conflict in the famous battle of Eutaw" (*L*, III, 19). We may safely say that Simms intended, when he finished *Katharine Walton*, to illustrate the Revolution in the next romance, with a special focus on the famous battle of Eutaw. This argument is also supported and reinforced by the preface of *The Forayers*, in which he clarified his endeavor "to maintain a proper historical connection

among these stories, corresponding with the several transitional periods of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina.”<sup>3</sup> *Woodcraft*, in Simms’s view, was the only romance that helped discontinue “a proper historical connection,” for he excluded it from the list of Revolutionary Romances given in the preface of *The Forayers*. It is not without substantial justification, then, to conclude that either *Woodcraft* is a romance whose design distinguishes it from his other Revolutionary War Romances, or it is a romance which he later found to be totally different from the others regardless of his intention.

Porgy often appeared in the preceding romances. In spite of Poe’s attack on his characterization, Porgy stood high in the favor of readers and Simms was quite attached to him, which fact leads us to hesitate to question why he was given an important part in *Woodcraft*. We also know that Simms exhausted his supplies of Revolutionary War series, since he had represented the happy ending of Robert Singleton and Katharine Walton.

Yet Porgy puts a Revolutionary War Romance at a disadvantage. He makes it difficult to place it in the context of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina. Granting Simms demythologized the Revolution and offered the representation of the scenery of violence and blood in the preceding Revolutionary War Romances, the heroes and heroines were allowed to act and overcome the difficulties they had faced. It makes sense, since one of Simms’s intentions was to illustrate and make public the role which Southerners had played during the Revolution. This is why Porgy was forced to play second fiddle to them. In *Woodcraft*, on the other hand, Porgy hesitates to act, and even if he acts, he cannot reap the harvest. Interestingly enough, forces unrelated to his own clear obstructions out of his way.

All these points demonstrate that Simms had a special design for com-

posing the work which rendered the postwar plantation. The question that must be asked about it, then, is what caused him to write it, preventing him from maintaining “a proper historical connection.” As I have mentioned above at the beginning of my paper, we find *Woodcraft* too fragile to counterattack Mrs. Stowe’s work. We cannot take at face value what he wrote to Hammond half a year after its publication and after his long silence; surprisingly enough, Simms made reference to *Woodcraft* only once in a letter to Abraham Hart in 1851. *Woodcraft* has met with even more prejudiced criticisms from scholars. Take, for example, the readings that there is no hero in the work; that Simms, defender of slavery, could not disregard the feelings of Northerners who read his works; and that Simms, strangely enough, created feeble Porgy.<sup>4</sup> We should seek its positive values in the characterization of Porgy, but all these criticisms are liable to lapse into discarding him as a mere accessory.

Given that *Woodcraft* is inevitably involved in the historical context of the conflict between the north and the south, the intricacies I have posed coerce us into analyzing it in the vortex of history. The Missouri Compromise passed in 1820 made Southerners conscious of the danger of the growing antislavery feeling in the North. Antislavery movements were already instituted by those inside and outside of the United States in the 1830’s, as can be seen in Simms’s criticism of Harriet Martineau’s work. However, it was European revolutions in 1848 and 1849 that incited Northerners to abolish it. It goes without saying that among these revolutions the French one was the most important. The British news media regarded it indifferently as mob-ruled violence, while Americans, with the exception of the South and some minorities, saw it in the light of the ideal American democracy put into practice.<sup>5</sup> Among them were Evert Duyckinck, one of Simms’s friends, and William Cullen Bryant, who praised the French revolutionary

government which announced the declaration of human rights. The French government came out with a new policy to abolish slavery in the French colonies, and proslavery people had deep misgivings about its outcome. Among the ardent sectional and proslavery people was Simms.

Simms's marriage with Chevilette Eliza Roach has been considered the most popular explanation of Simms's inclination to secession in the late 1840's and the early 1850's. It satisfied his long-cherished desire to belong to the planter class, leading to his abandonment of his former principles. This simplistic and misled criticism was corrected by William R. Taylor. Reading through his letters written in the period in question, we can easily see that Simms was ambivalent in his attitudes toward secession; he stuck to his position as secessionist to the last, but at the same time he knew that the Union would not let South Carolina secede as easily as Robert Barnwell Rhett claimed.<sup>6</sup> Since this paper does not allow space for referring to Simms's letters in detail, I will follow William Taylor in his discussion of Simms's falling on secessionism.<sup>7</sup>

*Cavalier and Yankee* says that in his plantation Simms had about 12,000 volumes of South Carolina-related Revolutionary materials that he had gathered over thirty years. He aimed at giving historic sites in South Carolina as wide a publicity and as great a glory as Concord, Lexington and Bunker Hill. However, two historic events very important to Simms took place in 1848. One of them was the election of Zachary Taylor as US President, and the other, the advent of the European revolutions, the French one included. He was greatly disillusioned by both these occurrences. Just before, he had seen himself as a radical reformer of society, supporting not only expansionism but also democratization, and impeaching conservatives of their old bad ways. In the 1848 Presidential election he found that the New York radicals whom he had regarded as his political

ideals supported Martin Van Buren in collusion with the Free Soil Party, and that Zachary Taylor, whom he supported believing he would be favorable to the cause of the slaveholders, took to Whiggery. Also some months after the French Revolution broke out his optimism was completely shattered. Terrified by the disastrous scenes in Paris, he came to think the restoration of order was essential for society. Taylor concludes that because of these events Simms stopped thinking of democracy in national terms and began to claim the South was radically different from other societies and it would be held in the best possible condition if left to itself.

In the light of Taylor's points mentioned above, the question can be worked out to some extent why *Woodcraft* focuses upon the recovery of the plantation after the Revolutionary War. Simms's concern was fixed on the analysis of the effects of the Revolution on the postwar world. The South Carolina conservatives, such as Rhett, associated the secession with the Revolution, thus idealizing it and considering it a clear-cut solution. Simms, by contrast, was compelled to find a connecting link among the Revolutionary War, European revolutions and secession. In this sense *Woodcraft*, begun late in 1851 and finished in August, 1852, holds a prominent place among his Revolutionary War Romances.

Taylor sees Simms involved in the politics of South Carolina which was on the way to secession, but his analysis of *Woodcraft* offers another obstacle to the understanding of its essence. Emphasizing that Porgy was born out of Simms's political apathy, he contends that "If he [Simms] found Hamlets [men who encounter hesitation and doubt whenever they are forced to contemplate a bold course of action] in every Southern closet, it was because he sensed the Hamlet too keenly within his own breast."<sup>8</sup> However, Taylor puts an exaggerated importance on the generalized conclusion that the Southerners' hasty actions come out of their irresolution,

adding that Simms suggests that the indecisive Southerner, goaded into action, may revolt.

Taylor's generalization of Porgy's character into the Southerners plays down the masochistic aspects clearly seen in Porgy as secondary characteristics; though Taylor admits that Simms combined the aristocratic refinement of Southern life and the Southern tendency to self-indulgence and indolence, he finds Porgy "at moments magnificently funny in his almost heroic ineptitude."<sup>9</sup> Taylor misreads the fact that while Simms differed in opinion from Rhett he could not see his way clear; though he published many reviews in favor of slavery and secession in the *Southern Literary Gazette*, he considered deliberately the disadvantages which would outweigh the advantages the secession might entail on South Carolina. Firsthand evidence from Simms's letters tells against Taylor's generalization. In short, one of the drawbacks to Taylor's criticism of *Woodcraft* given in the light of autobiographical aspects is the too much generalized interpretation of Simms's difficult situation. The autobiographical aspects of the work are too serious to be oversimplified by generalization. Simms had already gone through revolutions himself by writing Revolutionary War Romances. So many characters took part in the conflicts hastily because they were goaded into action. In *Woodcraft*, however, Porgy has made up his mind about a revolution; he finds it ineffectual. In the next section a minute analysis of Simms's view of a revolution presented in *Woodcraft* will be given from the above standpoint.



(2)

After serving in the militia for seven years, Porgy comes back to his dilapidated plantation. He professes himself a ruined planter, but his dissipation and profligacy is the cause of the ruin of his plantation:

Porgy had been a *fast youth*. He had never been taught the pains of acquisition. Left to himself—his own dangerous keeping—when a mere boy, he had too soon and fatally learned the pleasures of dissipation. The war found him pursued by debt and embarrassments, as unrelaxing as the furies that hunted the steps of Orestes.—He had found temporary relief from the hands of usury, and may thus be described as falling from the grasp of the Furies, into the worse keeping of the Fates. He held himself very nearly a ruined man, when the war began; and the loss of numerous negroes, carried off by the enemy, gave him no reason to doubt upon the subject. . . . The cessation of war, which stripped him of his occupation, was an event which necessarily restored the common law to its fearful activity. (pp. 101-102)

Simms describes Porgy's situation as resembling Orestes's, but their outcomes are clearly different. Orestes avenges his father to fulfill Apollo's oracle and finally succeeds in appeasing the Furies's anger through Athene's aid. In stark contrast to Orestes, Porgy endures the wrath that the Furies wreak upon him because he clings to traditions. Eventually his attack is liable to be made on his father and himself, but he fears putting the attack into practice.

Porgy thinks profligacy is the "curse of my generation" (p. 206), due

to ill-judged negligence on the part of their fathers who “either did not know how to teach it [a proper industry] to their children, or presumed on the absence of any necessity that they should learn” (p. 206). When the Revolution breaks out, Porgy has been sadly punished by the Furies for “his absurd vanities and excesses” (p. 206). Later Porgy finds that the Revolution, likened to the Fates in the above passage, has shattered the slightest hope of reforming himself; the fatal sisters do not save him from the difficulties but plunge him into the depths of despair. The end of war restores the sovereign power to the hands of the Furies, not the Eumenides (which literally means the gracious goddesses). A court of justice never protects Porgy from M’Kewn’s greed but exposes him to its “fearful activity.” The cessation of war only makes him doubt whether it was worth fighting.

Porgy regains his slaves in the early part of the work, greatly indebted to Mrs. Eveleigh’s bold action and quick wits. However, the fact remains that the Revolution has made his situation more difficult. A reading which identifies Porgy’s recovery of his slaves with Simms’s reaction against the Fugitive Slave Bill misses the point that the recovery is due to Mrs. Eveleigh’s intention and action while Porgy’s involvement is totally accidental, only dispatching reinforcements to her.<sup>10</sup>

When Porgy recovers his slaves, he feels pride at his success, stating clearly that he has to stay a captain of militia because lawlessness prevails throughout the country:

In this you have the full justification of the code of regulation; a code which is, no doubt, sometimes subject to abuse, as is the case with law itself, but which is rarely allowed to exist in practice—among people of Anglo-Norman origin—a day longer than is

absolutely essential to the common weal. (p. 146)

This reminds us of Gabriel Harrison's protest against John Matthews in the scene following the recovery of Hector in *The Yemassee*. Violence worked there, but in *Woodcraft* it never settles but worsens the situation. The sterility of using force is demonstrated by the latter part of the story. When M'Kewn, baffled in his plan to seize Porgy's plantation along with his slaves, demands of a sheriff the forcible execution of the court judgment, Porgy and his men block it, suppressing the execution by violent though comical means. When the sheriff's assistant is dispatched to them later, they again commit violence to him in the guise of pranks, driving him away in misery. Violence and force are the last resort available to Porgy; he has to take countermeasures in the style of a pseudo-revolution against the enemy who abuses the law. However, the use of force only holds his decision in suspense, diverting his attention from the reality he must accept as it is and making things go from bad to worse. Porgy himself knows this, and he hesitates to take prompt action to defend his rights. Even if he actually takes action, he turns it into a harmless farce. After the pseudo-revolution come a greater disillusionment and a persistent anxiety and melancholy.

Thus force in the Revolution (and pseudo-revolutions) begets meaningless and purposeless force and detaches itself from the ideal of the fight for justice and peace. Moreover, the Revolution provokes the destruction of the established society and the remodeling of it on a quite different line. But for the Revolution Porgy would be more easily saved from further harm, since he belongs to the governing class which would offer him help, including the sheriff who is one of his friends. The Revolution reduces by half the value of his plantation and precipitates his ruin. M'Kewn, on the

other hand, has an eye on "the affairs of polite society" (p. 32). When the British holds ascendancy over the Colonies, he gangs up with a British colonel and makes a fortune out of shipping the appropriated negroes for the West Indies. After the British army evacuates Charleston, he attends a celebration, making believe he is an unquestionable patriot. In peacetime he makes a great profit declaring himself for the observance of the law. The Revolution has offered golden opportunities to "a shrewd man of business" (p. 32) who turns anything to profit. In this manner the Revolution is nothing but "the worse keeping of the Fates."

At the same time the Revolution discloses the antebellum social problems. *Woodcraft* does not altogether disregard the primary function of a revolution, namely, to release dissension and dissonance among all the classes of society. The war finds Porgy naked of all comforts, all his hopes defeated. It is, therefore, of no small concern to Simms to depict in detail how Porgy will grope for a key, if any, to his problems.

Released from the militia, Porgy takes two people back with him to his plantation. One of them is Lance, who can be considered to be representative of Simms's positive view of the Revolution, since he has grown into an independent mind. The other is Millhouse, a strange outgrowth of the Revolution, to whom Simms urges us to pay more attention. Appointing himself as the overseer of Porgy's plantation, he openly blames Porgy for having no sense of economy. A thorough utilitarian, he judges everything from racial distinction to marriage from a utility standpoint. When Porgy's slaves come back to his plantation, Millhouse shows an interest only in the increase of their numbers. He drives away the negroes in anger when he sees them at Lance's wedding party, because he considers it does harm to their labor the next day. He goes so far as to distinguish the races economically:

Now, the sort of life you wants to lead, cappin, will do for a nigger gentleman, that ain't got nothing to lose; or for an Ingin gentleman, who's got nothing that a sheriff can put under the hammer; but for you that's got education, and has been a soldier, the thing is different. The difference between a white man and a nigger, or an Ingin, is that a white man was made to gather substance about him, and a nigger and an Ingin was made to waste it. That's the whole. The Ingin was born to clear the woods of the varmints for us; and the nigger to clean up after we've eaten. That's the philosophy. (p. 191)

Millhouse views with contempt, and as absurd nonsense, purely mental activities which bear no profit. The music he finds most agreeable is coins jingling his way, and his life's real purpose is to get a good supply of food on hand. Even if these are accomplished, he continues to seek a profit until death, piling up his wealth and extending his territory, until he assumes the positions of generalship, judicature and statesmanship which enable him to obtain good control over other people. He even uses charity to establish his control over them. It is almost needless to say that his view of women and marriage is colored by utilitarianism. He defines a woman as a being destined to be conquered and governed by a man. He says a man should show the greatest interest in the economic value she affords him, not her beauty, still less her love.

The conspicuous representation of Millhouse's utilitarianism is one of Simms's strategies with which to attack the new principles and ethics that the Revolution has brought forth. Simms goes into details to render the drama of a conflict between Porgy and Millhouse. There is a certain simi-

larity between Millhouse and M'Kewn, who takes advantage of the Revolution, though the former has lost his right arm, symbolic of violence, and functions as a fangless theorist. Nobody entertains any respect for Millhouse because he introduces out-of-place thoughts into the plantation and stands for non-Southern values that the Revolution does not allow the South to underestimate. It is no wonder that all the characters and Simms mock at him all the more because he puts on a serious expression. Mrs. Eveleigh makes mock of his philosophy calling him Miller, who was a ring-leader of the mutiny in the Pennsylvania regulars caused by their discontents with food and clothing. In this sense what he represents is Northern values, or if he represents any Southern values, they belong to Georgia, which Simms found "filled . . . with Yankee traders" (*L*, III, p. 76), or the alleged Southern set of values that the Northerners saw in slavery.

Porgy rejects Millhouse's utilitarian thinking rather flatly. He gives all the money he has with him to Dory, Bostwick's daughter, and lets idle Oakenberg and Dennison live in his plantation. Simms describes him as a typical planter, a gentleman who enjoys reading Shakespeare, Milton and Dryden and makes educated and polite conversation. He defends his cherished view against Millhouse's as follows:

Everybody seems to wish for education. I have heard you deploring, very frequently, the fact that you had no schooling. Now, schooling and education are meant for this very purpose, to give us an ear for music . . . which is not only sweet, but wise—which not only pleases but makes good; for, after all, the great secret of education is to open all the ears—which we call *senses*—of a man, so that he can drink in all the harmonies of that world of music, which we commonly call life! . . . Now, Millhouse, whatever interests a man is

valuable, though it neither works nor sings. Whatever may amuse a man is an important agent in his education. Whatever exercises the ingenuity of man, though it be a fool's brains, or a reel in a bottle, is worthy of his care and consideration. (pp. 284-286)

This passage is demonstrative of Porgy's philosophy brought into antagonism with Millhouse's. While Millhouse's appreciation of the value of things and men depends wholly upon whether they are useful, Porgy here emphasizes the importance of a life of leisure. More important than anything to Porgy is to employ his leisure wisely enough to do whatever interests him, humanitarianism included. In other words, man derives comfort from profitless actions. Porgy seems to feel comfortable with defending his point staunchly.

However, this view of Porgy's is a mere reverse of Millhouse's. Porgy is ready to fight, if impotently, against the force that M'Kewn uses, but not capable of arguing with Millhouse. Porgy's speech sounds as cynical as that of H. L. Mencken, who fervently admired the Old South as "a civilization of manifold excellences."<sup>11</sup> Porgy makes cynical and derisive remarks in the face of Millhouse, but he is not prepared enough to argue him down.

Porgy has some tincture of conservatism similar to that of Millhouse as regards his view of women. Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argue that in the Old South men were scripturally "encouraged to assume responsibility for others whom they were also obliged to govern and discipline," and that "women were encouraged to accept governance,"<sup>12</sup> but Simms is bitterly cynical toward Porgy's wish to make his wife "recognize his full superiority" (p. 374). Furthermore, the philosophy of life that he proudly announces he obtained through his personal experience of the Revolution is not capable of attacking or undermining Millhouse's logic or

sense of values:

To-day is secure. That is enough; and the philosophy which to-day has brought, will, no doubt, reconcile me to-morrow. Hear you, Lance? It is the first policy in a time of difficulty or danger, always to know the worst—never to hide the truth from yourself—never to persuade yourself that the evil is unreal, and that things are better than they really are. When you know the worst, you know exactly what is to be done, and what is to be endured. . . .

*Life itself is civil war*, and our enemies are more or less strong and numerous, according to circumstances. One of the greatest misfortunes of men, and it has been mine until this hour, consists in the greatest reluctance of the mind to contemplate and review, calmly, the difficulties which surround us—to look our dangers in the face, see how they lie, where they threaten, and how we may contend against them. (p. 109. Italics added.)

Porgy compares life to a civil war or a revolution, adding that he is ready to look his danger in the face. Asked by Lance how his philosophy can put a stop to his trouble, he pronounces with an air of importance that he has acquired a degree of knowledge through “a certain probation of folly” (p. 110), but later replies that he just has to repeat “A fig for ’em all” or “Hurrah for nothing!” after a draft of Jamaica rum and poverty and the sheriff will be driven back into the woods. Deprived of his lands and negroes, says Porgy, he is still a man. Thus he associates a civil war or a revolution with an unreal change, exactly because he knows it can never reform or even change any of the facts. Harassed by Lance, he confesses that he will never allow Tom to fall into the hands of others, revealing that he is in despair over how to contend against his difficulties. Their con-



versation gives the whole scene a certain tinge of pathetic comedy. Later in the story he announces to the sheriff that "Life, after all, is a constant warfare" (p. 435). However, he is fully and painfully aware of the utter futility of "a good fight" (p. 418), so he is forced to transform the force of arms into a farce.

Porgy is in an awkward dilemma; he cannot sympathize with the new values introduced by the Revolution, and yet finds the antebellum society tottering feebly to its collapse. Aeschylus's Athene turned to court for a reconciliatory settlement when Apollo and the Furies were determined not to yield an inch over Orestes, but Porgy finds himself deprived of any medium to reconcile the new values with the old ones. His predicament is vividly demonstrated by his hesitation in choosing between Mrs. Eveleigh and Mrs. Griffin.

Mrs. Eveleigh is a Southerner who has lived through the Revolution, or rather has sustained little damage to her plantation. She thinks herself a Whig, but taking it into consideration that her husband was a faithful loyalist, she has never involved herself in fighting against the British. These circumstances secure her plantation against the hostility of whigs and tories during the war. Many plantations around her have been devastated but she enjoys not only "the success but the charm and beauty of her plantation" (p. 335), owing to her own judicious economy and her overseer Fordham's sobriety and integrity. Her house, built in a tasteful and simple style, is "furnished with all the attractions which, in that day, distinguished the mansions of American refinement" (p. 335).

Urged by Millhouse to take advantage of Mrs. Eveleigh, Porgy focuses much attention upon her with some hesitation. Not that he is not in the least attracted by her charm; he admires "the sweet graces of her intellect; her quiet, gentle, always just and wholesome habit of thought; the pleasant

animation of her fancies; the liveliness of her conversation" (p. 370), but he cannot help objecting to "the fat" (p. 370).<sup>13</sup> Without the strenuous help of another person he cannot stand up because of "the excessive development of the abdominal region" (p. 49), which is symbolic of his ruined self-reliance. He deceives himself into associating Mrs. Eveleigh's stoutness with his own bulkiness to such an extent that he regards their marriage as an abnormal one. It is to be noted, however, that he just fears her prosperity. Her stoutness symbolizes her independent mind as well as her colossal wealth. Simms compares her with reason to "Boadicea at the head of her Britons," and "Zenobia at the moment of her greatest confidence, when she defied all the strength of Rome" (pp. 390-391). Porgy finds her self-reliance all too stunning and disgusting, because she reminds him of himself in a different way.

The bloody conflict between M'Kewn and Bostwick enables Porgy to recover Glen-Eberley and vanquish his fears and inferiority complex. Confident that he can marry her on equal terms, he calls on her to make a proposal, but naturally enough she refuses to marry him:

But, captain, I am willing to trust myself to nobody again. I have been too long my own mistress to submit to authority. I have a certain spice of independence in my temper, which would argue no security for the rule which seeks to restrain me; and you, if I am any judge of men, have a certain imperative mood which would make you very despotic, should you meet with resistance. (p. 513)

The first half of this passage represents the feelings of the mistresses who wielded power in the plantation life delineated in the nineteenth century's novels, such as *The Valley of Shenandoah* and *Swallow Barn*. The latter

half, which is a moderate explanation of the first, and Mrs. Eveleigh's keeping her neutrality in the Revolution because of her husband having been a loyalist, demonstrate that she is not so strong as to preside over the family. Yet she has planted her roots deeply in Southern soil through economic stability to the extent that she holds to the antebellum Southern way of life, keeping herself apart from the involvement in the Revolution. She never doubts her wholly Southern sense of values, so that she can say she can "lift the weapon of the man" "for the assertion of my womanly dignity" (p. 390). Her rejection of Porgy makes him only too aware that there can be no "beautiful and admirably conceived condition for human beings" (p. 512), no returning to the antebellum South.

Porgy finds another choice wanting in something very important. Whenever he is not quite satisfied with the beauty of Mrs. Eveleigh, the form of Mrs. Griffin rises vividly before his eyes. He thinks she is "a fine woman undoubtedly; good, gentle, humble, affectionate" (p. 371), but he is not altogether contented with her character. She has "no resources, no thoughts, no information" (p. 372) in his eyes. Mrs. Griffin's poverty is associated here directly with her lack of education and manners which are a product of amassing riches. The fathers of the men of fortune of his day believed that the "exercise of a proper industry" (p. 206) would establish an affluent society provided with "a beautiful and admirably-conceived condition for human beings," but their successors find affluence does not guarantee the Arcadian bliss; yet the only alternative to their survival is to cling to their forefathers' values.

Three days after he is rejected by Mrs. Eveleigh, Porgy rides over to Mrs. Griffin with the idea of marriage in his mind. While helping her reel off a pile of yarn, he sees Mrs. Eveleigh and her son coming and hastily tries to fling it away. However, he finds himself involved in the meshes in

a pitiable condition. It may be parenthetically noted here that *Woodcraft* was originally published under the title, *The Sword and the Distaff, or, "Fair, Fat and Forty."* Under the comic title lies abundant pathos. Porgy is privileged to carry a sword along but prohibited from lifting it up even against his enemy; he is compelled to fancy for the first time in his life that "spinning was a particularly picturesque performance" (p. 514). However, he ends up finding his fingers tangled in "the mischievous threads . . . as if each thread were a spirit of disorder, sent especially for his discomfort and defeat" (p. 515). He is not in the grasp of Atropos, one of the three Greek goddesses of destiny who cuts the thread of life, nor is his fate left in the hands of the merciless Furies, yet he finds that his Athene, the personification of wisdom and spinning, has only entangled him in the meshes of his allotted span.

Ten days after, he revisits Mrs. Griffin only to see a confounding spectacle in which she is clasped close in the arms of Fordham. Forced to give up "the temptation of the flesh" (p. 518), the comforting of which he makes his philosophy of life in all the romances up to *Katharine Walton*, Porgy makes a decision to remain single all his life. Along with Oakenberg, Dennison and Millhouse, a heterogeneous but yet male-sterile group, he lives on a dangling man, with a potbelly and a huge bulk on his slender legs.

Mrs. Eveleigh represents the antebellum Southern values of planters uninfluenced by the Revolution, while Mrs. Griffin stands for those of the commoners who live through it. As well as being practiced in woodcraft, Fordham plays a conspicuous part in the postwar recovery and takes away Mrs. Griffin from Porgy. Lance, who enriches experience in the Revolution, is coupled to her daughter, his future bright with the promise of growing into a man. Porgy, by contrast, feels disconcerted by the values of

planters and places himself outside of the commonalty who get the best value out of the Revolution. It is important to note that Simms ends the story with Millhouse's muttering in the ears of Dennison like this: "I see it all! He [Porgy] disowns the women bekaise he kaint help himself. The grapes is sour!" (p. 518). Why does Millhouse whisper solely to Dennison? One of Simms's possible intentions is a satire upon Dennison, who once "put fact on record" as a true "historian of the deeds which he beheld" and "sang in honour of brave spirits."<sup>14</sup> Porgy says Dennison has "frequently saved me from suicide" (p. 281). Millhouse's words satirize Dennison and Porgy with biting sarcasm, and veil Simms's agonies under masochistic nihilism. What Simms wrote to Hammond on December 15, 1852, ironically enough, testifies to his long-endured ambivalence toward the Southern cause.

(3)

It is a coincidence of singular interest that Porgy has several traits of character in common with Simms. Above all, they are much the same age, namely, they are around forty-five years old. In addition, both of them are poor managers of their plantation. Simms lamented over the Woodlands plantation too frequently mismanaged by his father-in-law Nash Roach, but he proved himself as poor a manager, supplementing his income by writing. Roach was an aristocrat and wealthy landowner of English descent, so he might well be inclined to be self-indulgent and indolent. Simms was born a commoner, which fact helped him to criticize the figure of the Southern planter. This difference of their personal histories induces us to pose a question: why "an undue indulgence of the slaves is permitted" at Woodlands. A friend of Simms's wrote that they were provided with all the

necessaries they required; some were allowed to employ their abundant leisure hours in raising vegetables and fowls, which they sold their master, and others were "dependent upon the kindness of their masters [*sic*], or more frequently upon their ingenuity at thieving" (*L*, III, p. 11n). This could be read as one of a white planter's strategies to keep his slaves out of touch with other whites or slaves from other plantations, but Bryant, an anti-slavery poet, had a feeling similar to this about Simms's plantation.

It is not too much to say that Simms maintains his ground against abolitionists from beginning to end in *Woodcraft*. He fills up his pages with descriptions and episodes that attempt to justify slavery. He makes a racist statement: "Sambo seldom troubles himself to look out for the morrow. . . . Foresight and forethought are his remarkable deficiencies. He never houses his harvest in anticipation of the storm" (p. 178). The benevolent affections which Porgy shows for the slaves whom he recovers make a sharp and decided contrast with Millhouse's utilitarian reactions. He possesses the complete confidence of Tom, though the latter staggers with a great show of alarm at the former's request that he kill himself when they should part. Their too innocent relationship, interwoven with other proslavery descriptions, irritates and sometimes outrages the modern reader, but the fact should gain attention that Simms's and Porgy's incompetence as a planter reflects their ambivalent attitude toward slaveholding.

When Simms wrote *Woodcraft*, he was so badly off that he could not reduce his debts however much he economized. Though he believed that the secession problem would disclose the nature of the conflict between the North and the South, he told Hammond that he wanted to remove to New York or Philadelphia where his income by writing would be trebled. Hammond advised him not to, doubting whether he would "find permanent appreciation elsewhere in America" (*L*, III, p. 142n). Hammond later wrote

him that "Genius & Poverty always have been boon companions & have seldom been severed without disastrous consequences" (*L*, III, p. 194n). The point that Hammond made unwittingly is that out of the embraces of the large pecuniary obligations caused by Simms's adherence to South Carolina came the "great mental uneasiness" (*L*, III, p. 194n), producing *Woodcraft*, which pushes the pecuniary matter a little further into cultural skepticism.

Simms was also deeply concerned at the pecuniary difficulties lying in the path of South Carolina. He had "long since regarded the separation as a now inevitable necessity," because the sympathies of the contradicting parties that "the Union depends wholly upon" (*L*, III, p. 8) were lost entirely. His feelings made him insist that South Carolina should secede at once. However, he knew too well that if South Carolina seceded alone it would be fraught with the gravest danger. He watched her secession with the deepest concern over the probability of her ports being blocked up by the Northern army, making her economical independence impossible. What was worse, he was sure that it was doubtful whether other Southern states would secede from the Union with South Carolina.

In an article for the July 1848 *Southern Quarterly Review* issue Simms attacked Lorenzo Sabine's study of American Loyalists by saying that "there were none of those pecuniary considerations, prompting the revolution in Carolina, which prevailed to unite the people of New England in a cause which struck directly at their common interests."<sup>15</sup> He made a clear distinction between the modern revolution in which New England had engaged and the kind of struggle characteristic of "the Anglo-Norman race,"<sup>16</sup> the latter of which he identified with a war fought for liberty and the rights of man. William Taylor comments on this as follows:

Simms's disillusionment was so extreme that he was forced to abandon the idea of insurgency in any meaningful sense. No longer did he speak hopefully of revolution in the sense of overturning an established order. His horror of reform in the North, meanwhile, led him to disparage the role of the North during the Revolution. By 1848 he had convinced himself that true patriotism during the war had existed only in the South.<sup>17</sup>

It is true that Porgy does not serve seven years in the militia from pecuniary considerations, but it is also true that he never involves himself in the war to vindicate his claim to Glen-Eberley, nor does he endeavor to retrieve an established order. He just fights through the battles satisfying his animal nature. We do not have to be told here that in his early Revolutionary War Romances Simms depicted the situational and causeless involvement of some characters in the Revolution.<sup>18</sup> Simms sensed all along that the Southern style of revolution would inevitably end up with nihilism and skepticism, because he had focused greater attention on realistic representation than on mythological or metaphysical thinking. In this sense *Woodcraft* is not only the result of his mental uneasiness but also the culmination of his many years of writing experience.

Porgy needs Millhouse in order to escape bankruptcy. However much he satirizes the latter's utilitarianism, however much he emphasizes profitless actions in the latter's face, he knows he will never be allowed to be what he is now. He cannot indulge himself in idle speculation just by wreaking his anger without reason upon his father who "either did not know how to teach it [a proper industry] to their children, or presumed on the absence of any necessity that they should learn." The Revolution brings into focus an absolute necessity of adopting creative and scientific



thinking which never identifies itself with utilitarianism but assumes a utilitarian tinge. It also makes the Northern style of revolution the less vulnerable to Simms's attack. Neither Porgy nor Simms can return to his old job, yet neither feels comfortable in the presence of Millhouse. It is no wonder, then, that Simms's later design to work on Porgy as a legislator in fiction was never accomplished. Porgy is too much involved with his own problems to represent others and too hesitant to make a law. Simms's ambivalent attitude toward revolution is the main reason why he excluded *Woodcraft* from the list of Revolutionary War Romances which went some way toward serving his pursuit of the Southern style of revolution worth rendering.

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### Notes

1 Mary C. Simms Oliphant, et. al., eds., *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1952; vol. 6, 1982), III, pp. 222-223. Hereafter cited as *L*.

2 Tom, for example, says to Pomp, "Don't you uncle me, you chucklehead!" See William Gilmore Simms, *Woodcraft* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1976), p. 179. Subsequent page references to this romance will be given in parentheses in the text.

3 William Gilmore Simms, *The Forayers* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1976), p. 3.

4 See respectively James B. Meriwether, "The Theme of Freedom

in Simms's *Woodcraft*," in John C. Guilds, ed., "*Long Years of Neglect*": *The Work and Reputation of William Gilmore Simms* (Fayetteville: The Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1988), pp. 20-36; Joseph V. Ridgely, "*Woodcraft*: Simms's First Answer to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *American Literature*, 31 (1960), 421-33; and Jean Fagan Yellin, *The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863* (New York Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 63-78. Dr. Meriwether points out in his illuminating discussion that Simms portrays the Revolution as worth fighting, that his "post-war world is seen ultimately in a positive light," and that Simms's is "significantly" different from Faulkner's and Hemingway's novels. Cecil sees Porgy as a national hero in L. Moffitt Cecil, "Simms's Porgy as National Hero," *American Literature*, 36 (1965), 475-484.

5 For the 1848 European revolutions, see Larry J. Reynolds, *European Revolutions and the American Literary Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 1-43.

6 See *L*, III, pp. 98-100, 106-108, 128, 131-133, and 193-195.

7 William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (1957; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 261-297. Charles Watson says that Simms probably misunderstood Gertrude's line in *Hamlet*: "He's fat and scant of breath." However, this reading is likely to oversimplify the characterization of Porgy that readers should focus more attention upon. More important to them is that a Falstaff figure whom Porgy represents cannot act. In addition, Simms emphasized that the lesson which Hamlet must learn was the necessity of action, but Porgy, who knows how to act, and did act, hesitates to act because he knows his action does not bring any fruits. See Charles Watson, "Simms's Use of Shakespearean Characters," in Philip C. Kolin, ed., *Shakespeare and Southern Writers: A Study in Influence* (Jackson: Univ. Press

of Mississippi, 1985), p. 22.

8 Taylor, pp. 295-296.

9 Taylor, pp. 292-293.

10 Charles Watson, "Introduction," in Charles Watson, ed., *Woodcraft* (Albany: New College and University Press, Inc., 1983), p. 26.

11 Michael O'Brien, *All Clever Men, Who Make Their Way* (Fayetteville: The Univ. of Arkansas Press, 1982), p. 8.

12 Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Religious Ideals of Southern Slave Society," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. LXX, No. 1 (Spring, 1986), 15.

13 George F. Hayhoe says in "Explanatory Notes" in *Woodcraft* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1976) that "fair, fat, and forty" is an epithet that Sir Walter Scott used in *St. Ronan's Well* and *Redgauntlet*. In his letters to James Lawson, Simms associated fatness with wealth and inertia, but fatness does not necessarily mean ugliness, as is seen from the fact that he called his daughter Mary Lawson Simms "fat and fair" (*L*, III, p. 66). Mrs. Eveleigh's stoutness does not bring up such corpulent unsightliness as Porgy embodies. Yet it is important to note that Porgy hesitates to admit they will make a good match.

14 William Gilmore Simms, *The Partisan* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1976), p. 240. Dennison does not appear in the first edition of *The Partisan*, but interestingly enough Simms identified Simms's anonymous poem "The Swamp Fox" of the 1835 edition as Dennison's in the 1854 Redfield edition. In the 1836 edition of *Mellichampe* Simms lets Ernest Mellichampe quote "a song . . . written by George Dennison, one of our partisans, a fine, high-spirited and smart fellow": "Friends are nigh! despair not, / In the tyrant's chain—/ They may fly, but fear not, / They'll return again. / "Not more true the season / Brings the buds and flowers, /

Than, through blight and treason, / Come these friends of ours”  
[*Mellichampe* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1976), p.  
350]. Parks, who calls the partisan-poet Dennison Simms’s alter-ego, says  
Simms used Robert Burns to advantage in the characterization of Dennison.  
See Edd Winfield Parks, *William Gilmore Simms As Literary Critic* (Athens:  
Univ. of Georgia Press, 1961), p. 50.

15 Taylor, p. 280.

16 Taylor, p. 280.

17 Taylor, p. 280.

18 See my paper, “Demythicizing the Revolution in Simms’s Early  
Revolutionary War Romances,” (in Japanese) *The Bulletin of Aichi Universi-  
ty of Education*, vol. XLIV (Feb. 1995), pp. 21-32.