

Simms's Concept of Romance

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Although recent scholarship on William Gilmore Simms has distinguished his artistic achievements from his political involvement in the cause of the antebellum South, he still remains an obscure writer in American literature. William Trent's biography (1892) gave the first full analysis of Simms's life and literary achievements, but ironically it served to question the full significance of "a close scrutiny into his motives and his lifework." After examining reluctantly the romances of the writer who identified himself as a romancer, Trent pointed out, "That the romance, in its old form at least, will play a serious part in the history of literature is open to grave doubt."¹

The romance hypothesis, explored by myth and symbol criticism and "characterized by a tangential relation to social experience," is considered nowadays to be "a radical simplification of historical and textual complexity."² There is no denying the fact that the words "romance" and "novel" were interchangeable in Simms's days. However, there is also no denying the fact that while the paradigm is a cliché, "romance" is the word that American writers in the early nineteenth century used to describe what they thought they were doing.³

Simms has held a slightly more important place in the discussions of

romance over the past few decades. Richard Chase and Sergio Perosa, to mention a couple, have claimed that he preceded Hawthorne in stating the concept of romance to a large readership. Yet Chase hesitates to reevaluate Simms's writing, and George Dekker, who examines American romances to explore the influence of Sir Walter Scott upon American literature, forms no better opinion of Simms's romances.⁴ By analyzing the opinions and definitions that Simms sets forth in *Views and Reviews*, his tales and prefaces to his historical romances in 1830s, I will argue in this paper that his concept of romance has conflicts and subtleties and is more than Chase asserts. Since in Simms's estimation Scott stands higher than Cooper, I will argue further that Simms holds a significantly different conception of romance from Cooper or Hawthorne.

Views and Reviews emphasizes "A resolute will, a bold aim, and a spirit that courageously looks within for its encouragements and standards,"⁵ which will "realize for ourselves that position of independence, in all other departments, which we have secured by arms and in politics" (VR 15). Democracy tends to diffuse tastes and intellect, rendering art and literature "feeble and inert for active purposes" (VR 26), but eventually signs of freshness and originality, coupled with rudeness and irregularity, will be discovered. Thus, Simms claims optimistically that there will be a great development in American literature. Here you can see neither criticism against fiction that Hawthorne discloses in his definitions of romance, nor any complaints about deficiency in materials for fiction that Cooper makes in *Notions of the Americans*.

Simms begins his literary criticism with the definition and function of history, and endeavors to support his own view of the potentialities of Americanism in fiction. In the early part of the nineteenth century Americans hungered for a definitive national history, that is, a delineation of

reality in which “we shall see the people, stand on the spots, be present at the scenes he [the historian] depicts.”⁶ Merely holding historical facts in high regard had begun to be attacked. Simms accepted this philosophy and maintained that history is quite different from a mere reverence for facts’ as authorities. There is no use in knowing simple fragmentary facts, since dry, sapless history tells us nothing:

Hence, it is the artist only who is the true historian. It is he who gives shape to the unhewn fact, who yields relation to the scattered fragments, --who unites the parts in coherent dependency, and endows, with life and action, the otherwise motionless automata of history. (*VR 36*)

The true historian ascends into the obscure and the infinite by pursuing through buried fragments, dissolving dust and mixing dry-bones with sense and feeling. The dull seeker after bald and isolated facts is no philosopher:

It is really of very little importance to mankind whether he is absolutely correct in all his conjectures or assertions, whether his theory be true or false, or whether he rightly determines upon the actor or the scene. . . . We care not so much for the intrinsic truth of history, as for the great moral truths, which, drawn from such sources, induce excellence in the student. (*VR 38*)

This view sounds like an idealistic philosophy of history, such as the eminent early twentieth-century Italian Idealist, Benedetto Croce claimed. Croce’s famous formula, “every true history is contemporary history” par-

allels Simms's view that art employs history so that "the past lives to the counselling and direction of the future" (*VR* 34). By speculating on the unknown the historian gathers "the true from the probable" (*VR* 35). His moral objects are not simply truths of time but truths of eternity.

How, then, does the historian choose his facts out of the past which will go a long way toward giving depth and elevation to our understanding of truth and the future? A real historian, Simms assumes, gives a "happy conjecturing, of what might have been from the imperfect skeleton of what we know" (*VR* 36), and makes "progress" into the truth, in order to "transmit, with the most happy confidence in fame, his own possessions to the future" (*VR* 36). "Exploration" into the land of "equal doubt and promise" (*VR* 43), a just curiosity, inquiry and progress into the dominions of the obscure, are rewarded with "conquest." The word "doubt" is concerned with "the blanks in history" which a historian should fill "with those details without which the known were valueless" (*VR* 42). The land of doubt does not at all lead the historian to question the impartiality and integrity of his creation. On the contrary, Simms demands that the historian arouse in readers "the holiest kinds of truth--the truths of the greatest purpose, --the purest integrity, the noblest ambition, the most god-like magnanimity" (*VR* 32). The chief value of history consists, he says,

in its proper employment, as so much raw material, in the erection of noble fabrics and lovely forms, to which the fire of genius imparts soul, and which the smile of taste informs with beauty;--and which, thus endowed and constituted, are so many temples of mind--so many shrines of purity, --where the big, blind, struggling heart of the multitude may rush, in its vacancy, and be made to feel; in its blindness, and be made to see; in its fear and find countenance; in its weakness

and be rendered strong; in the humility of its conscious baseness,
and be lifted into gradual excellence and hope! (VR 34)

Simms's idea of history most nearly resembles the whig interpretation of history with which George Bancroft, a Romantic contemporary, assured Americans of their heroic destiny and embodied the nineteenth-century faith in optimistic progressivism. It would be misplaced criticism to say that Simms's allowing imagination to supersede facts or actuality causes extensive damage to the accurate understanding of history.⁷ Simms holds that historical facts should not be distorted, and even goes so far as to say in *The Lily and the Totem* that history should not be superseded even by romance.⁸

History consists of a succession of historical events, indeed, but some of them can be reduced to a model, or a sequence which arouses in the historian such an ardor for illustrating the moral truth as Simms pursues, while others are mere incidents in light of causation. Since the law of causation rests upon a process of abstraction, it follows that any historiography involves teleological thinking which comes out of evaluation or value judgment. Simms's point is that no single historical judgment furnishes a universally accurate reorganization of historical events.

The idea of progress was widely accepted in America as an undoubted model of historical development, and like many Southern leaders Simms adhered to a faith in progress to the extent that he ignored the discrepancy between the Southern cause of slavery and progressivism. Furthermore, as Dekker says, the stadialist theory of progress, which offered a linear model of historical development from lower to higher stages of civilization, profoundly influenced the conception of historical process in the novels of Scott.⁹ Since Scott fascinated him as a writer of romances, it is quite nat-

ural that Simms became the more enthusiastic in his faith in progress.

Simms was influenced in a great degree by the whig philosophy of progress, but in *Views and Reviews* he also reveres Livy (Titus Livius) and Edward Gibbon as artists who possessed a "singular ability in the adjustment of details and groups, and in the delineation of action" (VR 42). It is very important to note Simms's reverence for these two historians, since they adopted a gloomy outlook on life. According to Livy, "what chiefly makes the study of history wholesome and profitable is this, that in history you have a record of the infinite variety of human experience plainly set out for all to see, and in that record you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warning."¹⁰ Interestingly enough, however, Livy, who saw history in moral terms, held the outlook that morality was in steady decline. Gibbon, on the other hand, combined enormous erudition with the philosophical ideals of the Enlightenment which had its Judeo-Christian teleological thinking secularized, but he had no belief in divine revelation and regarded changes brought about in history as retrogression. Thus their moral standpoints are totally different from Simms's. Simms cites them to contend that in historical writing a historian should re-enact the past in realistic tones and moral seriousness.

Simms's whig philosophy of history inevitably influences his concept of romance. The difference between history and romance, he observes, is that the former deals with the subject of dignity and grandeur, while the latter describes the great leading characteristics of society and human nature in greater details and with more delicacy. Simms discards the metaphors of warfare to clarify the privileges of the romancer, and introduces the term "neutral ground":

A certain degree of obscurity, then, must hang over the realm of the

romancer. The events of history and of time, which he employs, must be such as will admit of the full exercise of the great characteristic of genius--imagination. He must be free to conceive and to invent--to create and to endow;--without any dread of crossing the confines of ordinary truth, and of such history as may be found in undisputed records.... That twilight of time, that uncertainty of aspect and air in history, which so provokes curiosity, and so encourages doubt... -these are the periods of time, in history, which, illustrated by corresponding periods of light and darkness, afford to the poet or the artist of a nation, the proper scope for his most glorious achievements. (VR 56-60)

Simms goes on to say that America had its beginning in an age after the discovery of printing. As such, America was furnished with full details of its history which rendered its facts less questionable than those of other nations. But these "stumbling blocks" (VR 61), as he puts it, can be susceptible of choice and use in the hands of a romancer; he can make much room for the exercise of his imagination. Compared to the dramatist or poet, a romancer conforms his writings more nearly to the form and aspect of events as they really happen. This becomes a source of vast freedom and flexibility:

He may contend with the painter in the delineation of moral and natural life,--may draw the portrait, and colour the landscape, as tributary to the general *vraisemblance* which is his aim. He may view [*sic*] with the poet in the utterance of superior sentiment and glowing illustration and description; with the dramatist in his dialogue and exciting action; with the historian and philosopher, in

his detail and analysis of events and character. (VR 75)

Simms assumes the sort of poetry or romance which is didactic or merely moralistic lacks in permanence and general interest and possesses no symbolic influence upon readers. He finds the true and most valuable inspiration of the poet "in the illustration of the national history, or in the development of the national characteristics" (VR 53-54). It is easy to understand why the proclamation of optimistic progressivism and buoyant allegation of legitimacy of romance nauseated Hawthorne when he was asked to review *Views and Reviews*. Simms's statement would have been disgusting even to Hawthorne, who stated in "Sir William Phips" that "A license must be assumed in brightening the materials which time has rusted," adding that "Fancy must throw her reviving light on the faded incidents that indicate character, whence a ray will be reflected, more or less vividly, on the person to be described."¹¹

Simms goes on to enumerate the specific materials which support his conception of linear history. His optimistic attitude toward history brings to his attention "a stateliness in his [the explorer's] simplicity, a nobleness and a majesty in his firm aspect--a glory in his strength and hardihood--a brightness in his hope and a beauty in his faith...such as might well be chosen to adorn and give dignity to the choicest annals of future song" (VR 82). Although he states that "Our imperfect knowledge of the Indian, --the terror that he inspired, --the constant warfare between his race and our own--have embittered our prejudices, and made us unwilling to see any thing redeeming either in his character or intellect" (VR 139), ethnocentrism or white supremacy surrounds his view of Indians in this work. This is demonstrated when he compares Indians to the Gauls, the Goth and the Cimbri who have so little intellect that they need to be civilized. He also

discards the question of the enormity of the invasion and butchery of the Meso-American Indians by Cortés as being “not a question for us” (VR 221).

Simms makes his excuses with reason for “the somewhat too ornate character of the composition” (VR 30). The greater part of this work forms the substance of certain lectures which were delivered before the Historical Society of the State of Georgia on March 8 and March 10, 1842. As he says, history concerns the subject of dignity and grandeur, and his intention is to bring to light Emersonian literary declaration of independence in ornate expressions in order to elucidate that American history is worthy of exploration.

The last section of this work is devoted to an analysis of romance in which Simms compares the writings of Cooper with those of Sir Walter Scott. From the standpoint of my discussion the most important point is his ambivalent criticism toward these two romancers. The ambivalences surrounding this section demonstrate that what he tries to achieve in his fiction is quite different from Cooper.

Cooper’s great fault is that when conceiving a single scene he discards from his mind all serious concerns:

He seems to exercise none of his genius in the invention of his fable. There is none of that careful grouping of means to ends, and all, to the one end of the dénouement, which so remarkably distinguished the genius of Scott.... The consequence is, that his catastrophe is usually forced and unsatisfactory.... We are astonished when we see them [scenes], --we wonder and admire, --but our feet have grown weary in the search for them. (VR 260-263)

What is the harmonious achievement, then, that Simms demands the writer of romance to aim at? He concludes it comes from "the perfecting of the wondrous whole--the admirable adaptation of means to ends--the fitness of parts, --the propriety of the action--the employment of the right materials, -- and the fine architectural proportions of the fabric" (VR 265). This concept of writing parallels that of the epic romance in *The Yemassee* which finds essential "unities of plan, of purpose, and harmony of parts."¹² He seems to fasten on writing in a more fundamental and less romantic level than vraisemblance Scott emphasized. It is important to note that he censures Cooper for making the scenes rise up too abruptly for readers to be convinced. He even accuses Scott of allowing his hero to be governed by the caprices of other persons, though it goes without saying he greatly admires both as writers of romance. Cooper professes in the introduction of *The Pioneers* that it is a descriptive tale and most of the contents is literal fact. Simms, however, thinks he is too faithful to the conflicts of mythological elements to adhere to the realistic presentation of the world. Scott, who is famous for his detailed and variegated depictions of customs and ordinary life in his fiction, sees in history the struggle for power of two opposing parties. Simms adores these writers because he sees in them what is essential to historical romance, yet he feels something is forfeited and sacrificed in their style of representation.

Still Scott is an almost ideal romancer to Simms, while the method Cooper uses to transform the romance that Scott established attracts his attention. Scott is faithful to the literal depiction of the past and customs, but Cooper, Simms argues, makes description much simpler. He comments that Cooper devotes too much attention to a single object and character:

His characters are uniformly the same, his incidents are seldom

varied;--the whole change he effects in his story, consists in new combinations of the same circumstances, heightened, now and then, by auxiliary events, which are seldom of much additional importance. (VR 274)

It is the invariable secret of Cooper's success to manage the progress of one protagonist who would turn into a sailor or a forester with a highly individual character. Simms cites Milton and Byron as great examples of this type, but the want of variety in Cooper is "not because of any deficiency in the material, but, simply, because the mind of Mr. Cooper is limited in its grasp" (VR 274). The characterization which reiterates the same pattern embodies "his ideal of philosopher" (VR 269) and derives its philosophies and character from the same sources. It is clear that Simms's negative reaction to Cooper results from his hesitation in accepting Cooper's metaphysical thinking and mythological rendition.

Simms's realism aims to penetrate deeper than ever into the invisible. The narrator of "Grayling; or, Murder Will Out", a tale Poe admired, complains that story-tellers are driven to deal in only the actual by the coarseness of modern materialistic taste. Their sole goal is to prove their devoted adherence to nature and actuality, and a love of the marvellous is lamentably out of date. However, persuading himself to maintain a belief in the wonders of the invisible world, the narrator eventually gets the better of his father, to whose rationalistic reasoning he bends an ear with great patience to the end.

In "The Last Wager, or the Gamester of the Mississippi" Simms paradoxically begins:

It is not the policy of a good artist to deal much in the merely ex-

travagant. His real success, and the true secret of it, is to be found in the *naturalness* of his story, its general seemliness, and the close resemblance of its events to those which may or must take place in all instances of individuals subjected to like influences with those who figure in his narrative. The naturalness must be that of life as it is, or with life as it is shown in such picturesque situations as are probable--seemingly real--and such as harmonize equally with the laws of nature, and such as the artist has chosen for his guide. . . . Probability, unstrained, must be made apparent at every step.¹³

This quotation is a satire on "the suspicious incredulity of the cold and unobserving citizen" (*WiC* 72). The dull reader requires "as close reasoning, and deductions as logically drawn, in tale and novel, as in a case at law or in equity" (*WiC* 72). Since Simms states that "The Last Wager" tries to illustrate a story of broad extravagance, it is clear that his aim does not lie in the nice adaptation of certain ordinary occurrences in life to a natural and probable conclusion.

"The Two Camps, A Legend of the Old North State" elucidates the labor of an artist by which an ordinary event is made to assume the character of novelty. A mere brutality is too vulgar for the taste of the belles-lettres reader, but it can be made to "appear in the right place, strike at the right time, and so adapt one fact to another, as to create mystery, awaken curiosity, inspire doubt as to the result, and bring about the catastrophe, by processes which shall be equally natural and unexpected" (*WiC* 38).

In this manner Simms reveals in introductory passages of his tales his disdain for the naturalness of life as it is. We have also examined earlier in this paper how he emphasizes the importance of unities of plan and harmony of parts in *Views and Reviews* and *The Yemassee*. What is the rela-

tionship, then, between these two views of writing? Does Simms disclose opposite literary theories for the two kinds of fiction, Gothic romance and historical romance, just for the sake of convenience? The analysis of the difference between facts, history and romance that I have given, however, gives a flat contradiction to any affirmative conclusion that he does. His interest is consistently turned to the penetration into the invisible and the grasp of the possible, and consequently unities of plan and harmony of parts do not altogether involve the precise representation of actuality but more realistically truthful rendering of human experience.

As early as 1835, far earlier than Hawthorne did in *The Scarlet Letter*, Simms made a clear definition of the difference between novel and romance in the introduction of *The Yemassee*. Before turning to a closer examination of it, a few remarks should be made concerning the definitions of romance made by Simms in the 1830s.

The introduction to *The Partisan*, the first of his Revolutionary novels, substantiates at once a sober desire for history and an aim to delineate through the medium of "a glass darkened."¹⁴ We need imagination which ventures to embody the features of the past, because

History, indeed, as we style it somewhat complacently, is quite too apt to overlook the best essentials of society--such as constitute the moving impulses of men to action--in order to dilate on great events, --scenes in which men are merely massed, while a single favourite overtops all the rest, the Hero rising to the Myth, and absorbing within himself all the consideration which a more veracious and philosophical mode of writing would distribute over states and communities, and the humblest walks of life. (*Partisan* ix)

A story of events is involved here with delineating "the moving impulses of men to action," which echoes Aristotle's contention that all human happiness or misery takes the form of action and that "the purpose of living is an end which is a kind of activity, not a quality."¹⁵ Dilating on great events inescapably involves ascribing moral qualities to the masses. Such an account of the world that denies the hero a mythical status is "more veracious and philosophical." Simms goes on to say that a nation does not gain in glory and greatness unless it pursues the truth, and that he does not hesitate to depart from the absolute plan of the story to dilate upon the dangerous errors of the leading personages. Romance is useful only when it serves morals.

The introduction to *Mellichampe*, which seldom draws the attention of critics, offers an interesting comment on the relation among historical romance, historical facts and actual life. This work is less strictly historical than *The Partisan*, Simms concedes, but is "correct to the very letter of the written history."¹⁶ It shows that the ebullitions of popular justice caused the excesses of patriotism which is "but too frequently productive of a tyranny more dangerous in its exercise, and more lasting in its effects, than the despotism which it was invoked to overthrow" (*Mellichampe* 2). To defend himself from the charge that low and vulgar personages preponderate in his work, he calls our attention to the fact that a romanticist is

willing to behold in the progress of society none but its most lofty and elevated attributes. . . , will not look at the materials which make the million, but. . . picks out from their number the man who should *rule*, not the men who should *represent*. . . , requires every second person to be a demigod, or hero, at the least. . . and. . . scorns all conditions, that only excepted which is the ideal of a pure mind

and delicate imagination. (*Mellichampe* 5)

To adhere to the attributes of real life as closely as possible, Simms continues, is a far more difficult matter than producing a fairy tale, or "a tale in which none but the colors of the rose and rainbow shall predominate" (*Mellichampe* 5-6).

It is worth mentioning here that Simms first hesitates to call *Mellichampe* an historical romance because it contains nothing which has a visible effect on the progress of the American Revolution. Yet he eventually declares *Mellichampe* is "truly and legitimately such" (*Mellichampe* 2), since it is imbued with the facts supported by close examination and depiction of the features of real life. The alleged partiality to an epoch-making event which he was destined to seek among the poor materials of the past in the South is undermined and disavowed in this work by his own words. Historical romance relates not what has actually happened, but "the kinds of thing that might happen, that is, that could happen because they are, in the circumstances, either probable or necessary."¹⁷ Romance does not have to confine itself to epoch-making events to reveal aspects of the progress of the Revolution. Sectional literature can sometimes reveal essential aspects of national history.

Richard Hurdis is not a Revolutionary War romance but one of the border romances which are "more or less readable on account of their rapid movement, . . . but are marred by a slipshod style, by a repetition of incidents, and by the introduction of an unnecessary amount of the horrible and the revolting."¹⁸ Simms, however, claims the story is a genuine chronicle of the border, and that the materials are really of historical character:

Its personages were real, living men; being, doing, and suffering, as

here reported. Nothing has been "extenuate [sic]," nothing has been "set down in malice." A softer coloring might have been employed, and, more frequently, scenes of repose might have been introduced for relieving the intense and fierce aspects of the story; but these would have been out of place in a narrative so dramatic of cast, and where the action is so rapid.¹⁹

Though "the heroic, the bold and attractive" (*Hurdis* 11) are brought into prominence to excite readers, the merely loathsome is suppressed. The hero as an alterego of Simms states "not only what he himself performed, but supplies the events, even as they occur, which he yet derives from the report of others" (*Hurdis* 11). Under this plan the hero and the author become identical, but strictly within the proprieties of art.

Once these points are understood, we are in a better position to evaluate the preface to *The Yemassee* and Simms's intentions. The following is the preface that he wrote in 1835, and is only slightly different from the 1853 revision:

I HAVE entitled this story a romance, and not a novel--the reader will permit me to insist upon the distinction. . . . The question briefly is, what are the standards of the modern romance--what is the modern romance itself? The reply is instant. Modern romance is the substitute which the people of to-day offer for the ancient epic. Its standards are the same. The reader, who, reading *Ivanhoe*, keeps Fielding and Richardson beside him, will be at fault in every step of his progress. The domestic novel of those writers, confined to the felicitous narration of common and daily occurring events, is altogether a different sort of composition; and if such a reader hap-

pens to pin his faith, in a strange simplicity and singleness of spirit, to such writers alone, the works of Maturin, of Scott, of Bulwer, and the rest, are only so much incoherent nonsense. . . . Its [the modern romance's] standards are precisely those of the epic. It invests individuals with an absorbing interest. . . it requires the same unities of plan, of purpose, and harmony of parts, and it seeks for its adventures among the wild and wonderful. It does not insist upon what is known, or even what is probable. It grasps at the possible; and, placing a human agent in hitherto untried situations, it exercises its ingenuity in extricating him from them, while describing his feelings and his fortunes in their progress. The task has been well or ill done, in proportion to the degree of ingenuity and knowledge which the romancer exhibits in carrying out the details, according to such proprieties as are called for by the circumstances of the story.

(*Yemassee* v-vii)

The novel, represented by Fielding and Richardson, narrates everyday occurrences and insists on the known or the probable, whereas the romances of Maturin, Scott, and Bulwer grasp the possible. To Richardson romance meant merely "all romantic flights, improbable surprises, and irrational machinery,"²⁰ but to Scott it meant a fictitious narrative which turns on marvellous and uncommon incidents, revealing a new kind of historicism, an awareness of the historical opposition between progress and reaction. Simms, again following Aristotle, puts greater emphasis on the action which is most likely to render human experience. The possible can be achieved through action or plot by "placing a human agent in hitherto untried situations, . . . while describing his feelings and his fortunes in their progress." Whether it is a likely impossibility or unconvincing possibility,

however, depends on the degree of ingenuity in carrying out the details. Preserving various characters "from beginning to end in a perfect vraisemblance & symmetry of costume" and "liberality of portraiture" is, therefore, "the grand secret of Scott's preeminence," and should be "one of the most important requisites in modern romance."²¹

Calling for American writers to remake the epic in Scott's image was common in the early nineteenth century America, and not a few literary critics craved national epics. As McWilliams puts it, "Simms's contribution was not, as has been assumed, to originate this idea, but to be the first to state it concisely, fully, and to a large readership."²² More important to us here, however, is the negative view that McWilliams holds of the epical qualities of prose romance Simms maintains:

Simms here fastens upon the most trivial aspects of Scott's and Cooper's aesthetic, and then makes them synonymous with the epic. His many chapters of filler often cause his heroic prose romance to devolve into mere adventure, and thereby to sacrifice, not only the narrative thrust central to epic, but "unities of plan" and "harmony of parts" as well.²³

In view of what I have discussed in this paper this argument against Simms's use of romance is not to the point. Simms is critical of the aesthetics of Cooper and Scott. Cooper does not carry out the details which Simms deems most important. Furthermore McWilliams's remark that the greater part of *The Yemassee* is filled with portions that "in no way further the confrontation of the two cultures," ignores Simms's acknowledgement that American history only saw the conquest or extermination of Indian culture by white culture. As discussed earlier, Simms sometimes diverges

from the mere pursuit of the unities of plan and harmony of parts in order to adhere to the truth. The truth in *The Yemassee*, achieved through the unities of plan, purpose, and harmony of parts, is that there is no possible way to unify the two plots which represent Indians and whites.

Chase is one of myth critics who estimate romance writers' resistance to social problems very highly. He states that Simms's identification of romance with the epic reflects his love of panoramic scenery, warfare and heroism. Merely from a chronological point of view Chase gives Simms precedence over Hawthorne, but for Chase, Simms remains a noisy nationalist who stresses the value of the epic to depict the lofty spirit of a nation.²⁴ It would carry my argument too far if I insisted that what Chase criticizes is totally irrelevant, but it can safely be said that it functions only as part of the means by which Simms aims to reveal the essence of human experience.

However much space it allows for a soaring imagination, Simms's respect for history as a conglomerate of facts which justify his whig philosophy of history forces a plot which seems to acquiesce in the expansion of the white civilization. His emphasis on imagination, however, goes further than that. The way the plots thicken and unravel always reveals a pronounced awkwardness and ambivalence, since a precise rendering is Simms's goal.

The Yemassee denotes the inevitable unfolding of historical movement but readers who discern connotations are made to side with the Indians as often as they are swept away into sympathy with the whites. It is true that Harrison, who hardly does anything to check the avarice of the whites, defeats Sanutee in wisdom and tactics, and that the white civilization reveals itself as a sort of manifest destiny which dooms the Yemassees. But Simms brings the fact to our attention that the Yemassees begin the war of their own free will to sever their magnanimous and altruistic relationship with

the whites. Also the rescue of Harrison by Matiwan, who kills Occonestoga for his honor, decides the war. This framing action essential to our understanding of the story is not concordant with historical facts but wholly of Simms's imagination. Furthermore in terms of white mythology he endeavors to depict and understand the Indians. They show more democratic and more human inclinations, but eventually the myth is undermined by the merciless and all-purpose westward movement.

The insanity of Frampton, who appears in nine chapters of *The Partisan*, demonstrates the cruelty of war. Simms justifies the use of force to regain independence and freedom, making Frampton prostrate before Katherine Walton, who reminds him of his slain wife, but the seemingly convincing validity of Katherine's open defiance to the British and Tories and the idealized representation of chivalry are questioned and undermined by his mental derangement. His insanity even casts a shadow over Simms's happy description of the way his son Lance grows up into a fine young partisan.

Mellichampe focuses great attention on the dark conflict of Blonay and Humphries, coupled with that of Mellichampe and Barsfield. It represents in detail why half-breed Blonay pursues Humphries, a thorough merciless partisan, and Simms even goes so far as to let Barsfield have his say. Although Blonay is fascinated by Jane Berkeley, Mellichampe's love, and Barsfield is killed by a black who is faithful to Mellichampe, the impartial though feeble sympathy that Simms has endeavored to arouse in readers is not altogether driven away, since *Mellichampe* aims to portray the excesses of patriotism which caused a tyranny more dangerous and more lasting than the despotism which it was invoked to overthrow. In this manner the life-like representation of history that Simms pursues discloses where the question lies. The seemingly easy conclusion of the story revealing his optimism inevitably excites in readers doubt and ambivalence. The question remains un-

settled, because it is rendered in the work too graphically to be cleared up by romantic progressivism.

Notes

1 William P. Trent, *William Gilmore Simms* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892), pp. 328-332.

2 Robert Clark, "American Romance," in *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, eds. Martin Coyle et al. (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 577, 578.

3 Michael Davitt Bell, *The Development of American Romance* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), p. xii. For the interchangeability of the two words in the early nineteenth century, see Nina Baym, "Concepts of the Romance in Hawthorne's America," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 38 (1984), 426-443.

4 Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), p. 20 and Sergio Perosa, *American Theories of the Novel: 1793-1903* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 33-41. See also Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p. 245, and Mary Ann Wimsatt, *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 34-40. George Dekker, *The American Historical Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), an essential overview of the Waverley tradition in American fiction, focuses only a small amount of attention on Simms.

5 William Gilmore Simms, *Views and Reviews in American Literature, History and Fiction* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), p. 12. Hereafter cited as *VR*.

6 "Editor's Table," *Harper's Magazine* 10 (May, 1855), 835-836, quoted in Susan L. Mizruchi, *The Power of Historical Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 51-52.

7 Jon L. Wakelyn, *The Politics of a Literary Man: William Gilmore Simms* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1973), p. 116 contends that Simms held the same political bias as Bancroft and Richard Hildreth but that he was usually careless. For a discussion of Simms's literary work in light of the whig philosophy of history, see David Moltke-Hansen, "Ordered Progress: The Historical Philosophy of William Gilmore Simms," 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. 126-147.

8 See John C. Guilds, "Simms's Use of History, Theory and Practice," *Mississippi Quarterly*, XXX (Fall, 1977), 505-511, and Nicholas G. Meriwether, "Simms's *The Lily and the Totem*: 'History for the Purposes of Art,'" in *"Long Years of Neglect": The Work and Reputation of William Gilmore Simms*, pp. 76-105.

9 Dekker, p. 76 evaluates Scott's ambivalence to historical development even more highly than his faith in stadialism, but Simms also shows a great deal of sympathies for Indians. See my paper, "William Gilmore Simms and the American Indian," *The Bulletin of Aichi University of Education*, vol. 43 (1994), 15-29.

10 *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*: Macropaedia, 1980 ed.

11 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches* (New York: Library of America, 1982), p. 12.

12 William Gilmore Simms, *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), p. vi. Hereafter cited as *Yemassee*.

13 William Gilmore Simms, *The Wigwam and the Cabin* (Chicago: Donohue, Henneberry & Co., 1890), p. 71. Hereafter cited as *WiC*.

14 William Gilmore Simms, *The Partisan: A Romance of the Revolution* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1976), p. ix. Hereafter

cited as *Partisan*.

15 T.S. Dorsch, trans., *Classical Literary Criticism* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), p. 40.

16 William Gilmore Simms, *Mellichampe: A Legend of the Santee* (Chicago: Donohue, Henneberry & Co., 1890), p. 2. Hereafter cited as *Mellichampe*.

17 Dorsch, p. 43.

18 Trent, p. 88.

19 William Gilmore Simms, *Richard Hurdis* (Chicago: Donohue, Henneberry & Co., 1890), p. 10. Hereafter cited as *Hurdis*.

20 See the preface to the second volume of *Pamela*. Quoted in Dekker, p. 17.

21 Mary C. Simms Oliphant, Alfred Taylor Odell, T.C. Duncan Eaves, eds., *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms* (Columbia S.C.: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 5 vols., 1952-1956; vol. 6, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 154-155.

22 John P. McWilliams, Jr., *The American Epic: Transforming a Genre, 1770-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 144-145.

23 McWilliams, Jr., p. 151.

24 Baym, 428, points out that Chase's citation of Simms's preface creates the impression that it was written in 1835, but it is safe to argue that Simms preceded Hawthorne in stating to a large readership the difference between romance and the novel concisely and clearly.