If At First You Don't Secede, Try, Try Again: Southern Literature from Fenimore Cooper to Faulkner

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BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR, it has been observed, Southern writers did not have a subject, and after the war, we might add, they didn't need one. The Civil War was the greatest literary event since the war between the Greek and Trojan States, and by its sheer magnitude it seems to have stunned most American writers of major stature, North and South, into silence.[1] We do have a handful of first-rate novels about the war, but few do justice to the geopolitical complexities that were its cause. The deservedly best-known Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, was written by a man born after the war was over and concentrates on the psychological impact of battlefield encounter on a single enlisted man. Slavery, secession, and states' rights are not mentioned once. Increasingly, moreover, the best writing about the Civil War has come from historians, writers who may, like Shelby Foote, bring the sensibilities of a novelist to their craft but who are sufficiently

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1. The most detailed treatment of the subject, Robert A. Lively's *Fiction Fights the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 1957), contains a bibliography of more than five hundred titles, most of which is correctly characterized by the author as 'sub-literature.'

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humbled by the magnitude of event to bow their inventive heads before the authority of fact.

Mark Twain, to whom I shall refer again, shrewdly observed in *Life on the Mississippi* the extent to which Southerners referred to the Civil War as a momentous turning point, prefacing their anecdotes with 'since the waw; or du'n' the waw; or befo' the waw; or right aftah the waw; or 'bout two yeahs or five yeahs or ten yeahs befo' the waw or aftah the waw,' but, as his proportion of prepositions reveals, the accounts of the war itself took third place to comparisons of Southern life before and after that immense event.[2] What follows is a specimen anecdote, credited by Twain to a resident of New Orleans: 'Everything is changed since the war, for better or for worse, but you'll find people down here born grumblers, who see no change except the change for the worse. There was an old negro woman of this sort. A young New-Yorker said in her presence, "What a wonderful moon you have down here!" She sighed and said, "Ah, bless yo' heart, honey, you ought to seen dat moon befo' de waw!" '[3]

This perspective gave a vanishing point to much of the best-known Southern writing to appear after the war. Margaret Mitchell, surely the most popular novelist who has chosen the Civil War as a subject, used the actual struggle as a backdrop chiefly to a drama of social upheaval and personal suffering, rather much as Thackeray used the Napoleonic Wars in *Vanity Fair*, concentrating on the effects of the war rather than on the war itself. William Faulkner, the greatest novelist the South has produced, likewise mostly avoided the war and focused on the haunting presence of its aftermath, symbolized by those fabulous dusks of his that are inhabited by glamorous ghosts and the crumbling shapes of disastrous age.

I want to follow the lead of those fiction writers and bypass the subject of the Civil War, concentrating instead on what should be

2. *The Writings of Mark Twain*, ed. Albert Bigelow Paine, 37 vols. (New York, 1929), 10: 364.

3. Ibid., p. 365.

taken as the greatest of the themes that were involved in that conflict. I list them as secession and the concomitant ideology of states' rights and its chief political weapon, nullification. To this we can add the sectional antagonism that opposed agrarianism, which was symbolized by the plantation house and its attendant satellite, the slaves' quarters, with industrialism, in turn symbolized by the factory and its satellite, the slum. Very early on, these antagonisms found a convenient literary incarnation in the figure of the enterprising, exploitive Yankee, who first appears in Southern fiction (so far as I have been able to determine) in 1832, as an avatar of the abominable tariff, incarnated as the Devil, albeit bearing a remarkable resemblance to Daniel Webster.[4]

The meddling, swindling Yankee haunts Southern culture early and late, whether as a wandering peddler of tinware and clocks or as an agent of Reconstruction with carpetbag portfolio. And he always appears as a threat to the rural peace of the region, a remorseless apparition of opportunism and (with his rattling pans and pendulum clocks) technology.[5] The ubiquity and longevity of this basic antagonism is impressive, and it appears in the modern Southern landscape as the shopping mall, a conduit of manufactured trash perceived by many as holding a key to the continuing ruination of rural idealism, no longer figured as that physiocratic icon, a plantation house (with its greco-roman profile), but rather as a lone surviving farmhouse of cracker (vernacular) design. Surrounded by tract homes, it is a cognitive symbol, valorizing even as it signals the end to an agrarian way of life.

In terms of American letters, we may date this spectral juxtaposition of an anachronistic relic standing alone amidst the evidences of rapid change from the moment when Rip Van Winkle emerged after a twenty-year sleep to find that he had been transported from

4. *Memoirs of a Nullifier; Written by Himself. By a Native of the South* (Columbia, S.C., 1832). Lyle Wright, in *American Fiction, 1774–1850: A Contribution toward a Bibliography*, 2d ed. (San Marino, 1969), s.v. 'Thomas Cooper,' credits the book to Algernon Sidney Johnston.

5. The best if not always the most reliable presentation of the 'legendary' Yankee remains the first chapter of Constance Rourke's *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (New York, 1931), pp. 3–31.

a colonial to a republican society. Although Irving has slipped back in literary reputation to a position roughly approximate to his British equivalent, Goldsmith, any reader familiar with his works grants him considerable respect both as an innovator (he invented the short story) and as a spokesman for the more genial aspects of political reaction. That Rip Van Winkle would have a resurrection after the Civil War, both as the character immortalized on the stage by Joseph Jefferson and, once removed, as Huckleberry Finn, at a time when the United States was engaged, often violently, with a rapidly accelerating process of modernization (which we may define as a displacement of rural agrarian by urban technological life) suggests Irving's prescience. But in terms of Southern literature, his most enduring creation was 'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,' which, in its opposition of Yankee opportunism and Dutch rural stability, not only set down what we have already defined as the basic mythic antagonism of the antebellum years but provided so enduring a pattern that William Faulkner emulated it more than a century later in his comic masterpiece *The Hamlet*. There, once again, an interloping schoolmaster lusts after an opulent symbol of a fertile land and is rebuffed, to the background tantivy of horses' hooves thundering over a midnight bridge.[6]

For the present occasion, then, using Irving's story of Ichabod Crane and Faulkner's tale of the schoolteacher named Labove as chronological brackets, I wish to show that what we like to think of as Southern literature was derivative of Northern models, imitation that can only be called slavish, to the extent that the whole range of genres and types that we associate with regional writers of the South can be found as far north as northern New York State. More to the point, if it is genre that defines the particulars of a regional literature, transcending scene, then much Southern fiction was written in New England. And most important, if secession is the paramount Southern theme, then New England must be granted hegemony in that regard also.

6. I have touched upon the Irving-Faulkner connection in my essay 'Root and Branch: Washington Irving and American Humor,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 38 (1984): 415–25.

This is not to say that there is no bonafide literature of the South, which begins with the adventures of Capt. John Smith. Smith single-handedly mapped out what would become the tidewater region, and, by means of his high-handed encounters with Indians, bestowed a cavalier grace to the emerging tradition: a conglomerate image of land-sharking, animal courage, and quixotic schemes to which the Indian princess Pocahontas served as handmaiden, lending an erotic note to the tableau, a lightly clad symbol of new-world fecundity predating Irving's Katrina Van Tassel and Faulkner's Eula Varner. In the emerging iconography, the Indian Princess would be decked out in leaves of tobacco, which was never Captain Smith's favorite weed, for he preferred stable commodities to fluctuating staples. It is here that he parts company with the Southern tradition, revealing the Yankee handle to his Cavalier blade. Traveling into New England waters, Smith mapped the cape called Cod and prophesied that fish would make future settlers there rich. Captain Smith subsequently offered his services to the Pilgrims, who preferred his pint-sized counterpart, Miles Standish, as a proportionate figurehead to their diminished sense of empire. If Capt. John Smith casts an imperial shadow westward over the Southern landscape, endowing it with an expansionist élan, Capt. Miles Standish stands tall only in Duxbury, certifying the insular compass of the Pilgrim plan, associated with that industrious creature, the beaver, with his circumambient pond.

Smith moreover intended that Virginia should be first and foremost a servant to the Crown, and it was as a dependent colony that Virginia existed for the next century and a half. New England, by contrast, was founded by secessionists, then called Separatists, as testified to by those symbols sacred to her founding, the Mayflower ark and covenantal Compact, instruments of removal and consolidation. Various attempts have been made by Perry Miller and others to establish an intellectual line of continuity between the Puritans of Boston and the Transcendentalists of Concord, but the clearest route is the Separatist-secessionist succession that

has Bradford's *History* at one end and Thoreau's *Walden* at the other, with Franklin's autobiographical account of his departure for Pennsylvania placed as a waystation in the middle. As with Hooker's and all subsequent hegiras from Boston, it is a route taken by way of Newton, which passes through Hartford on its way to Philadelphia.

We have in our collective mind's eye the famous tableau of the Pilgrims signing their Compact, but to that we should add a matching iconograph showing the group of politicians who gathered in Hartford in 1812, as close a call as America ever had before 1860 to witnessing a geopolitical schizogenesis, realizing the ancient geographical error that New England was a true island, like the country for which it was named. If the politicians who gathered in Philadelphia in 1775 provided the most memorable of these icons of separation, we must remember that they were merely mounting a lintel upon a columnar process initiated and sustained by New England colonies for a century and a half. We may associate Aaron Burr's abortive plan for independent empire with Kentuckian ambitions, but Burr's hereditary roots were deep in New England's separatist soil, much as he was a scion of the most famous Jonathan of them all.

Secessionist-separatist impulses generally result in manifestos of various kinds, fiction only in the proportion of improbability they contain. So let us leave that particular theme for more viable fictive forms, most especially the novel. Now, if we define the Southern novel as a long fiction involving Southerners, then the title of premier Southern novelist must go to James Fenimore Cooper, whose first successful venture into historical romance, *The Spy* (1821), was in large part concerned with the activities of Virginians during the War for Independence. But these were Virginians (including George Washington) who had been removed to the midregions of the Hudson River Valley for the purpose, according to Cooper, of introducing the mint julep to that benighted region, signaling the birth not of the blues but of its

traditional antidote, the cocktail.[7] And it was Cooper also who, in *The Last of the Mohicans* (in which a young Virginian officer again figures), invented in 1826 a symbolic type that would haunt much subsequent fiction about the South, the tragic quadroon, giving Cora Munro a Creole ancestry that would trigger not only her fate but that of the titular Mohican, Uncas.

It was Cooper, moreover, who by celebrating sympathetically the Yorker tradition of agricultural baronies in his Littlepage trilogy and elsewhere (including *The Pioneers* and the law courts of New York) gave literary mandate to the positive depiction of plantation life. The first comic negro appeared in the pages of Cooper's fiction, as did the first meddling Yankee, the one a grinning appendage to, the other a disturbing presence in a large manorial establishment. And yet, when William Gilmore Simms adapted Cooper's art to the Southern scene, he for the most part avoided these geopolitical and racial tensions for the excitement of adventurous (i.e. chivalric) combat, though he did share with Cooper a nostalgic tear over the fate of the vanishing red man. In *Swallow Barn* (1832), Maryland's John Pendleton Kennedy established many of the elements now associated with the plantation literary tradition, but only by assiduous imitation of Washington Irving's federalist nostalgia for a lost pastoral scene. And Kennedy's historical novel *Horse-Shoe Robinson* (1835) likewise bears clear traces of lineage to Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy.* Yes, Virginia, if there is a Southern literature, it was a gift to America from the same New Yorkers who gave us Santa Claus.

Admittedly, in establishing this bond between the St. Nickelodeon or Knickerbocker tradition and the emergence of Southern literature, so-called, we must acknowledge the common British connection. If Gilmore Simms imitated Fenimore Cooper, if Ken-

7. This reference is inserted in order to call attention to a notable omission in this set of papers concerning cultural differences (and, mostly, similarities) between the North and the South; for if there has been an original Southern contribution to American culture then it is in the realm of music, creditable to the Afro- not the Anglo-American connection. The subject deserves a separate essay, perhaps another biannual sashay into the South.

nedy aped Irving, then those New Yorkers looked to models in Great Britain. Mark Twain liked to fancy that it was Sir Walter Scott who wrote the book responsible for starting the Civil War—*Ivanhoe*—but if Scott was indeed responsible for the vogue of chivalric posturing that infected the South in the antebellum years, then it was a complex disease, transmitted both directly and through Fenimore Cooper, about whom Twain had very little good to say, either. In *Life on the Mississippi*, where he several times attacks Scott's baneful influence on the South, Twain blames the British romancer for the Gothic architectural vogue in New Orleans. But then, Southern carpenters routinely copied their Gothic buildings from New England models, which were themselves inspired by the Gothic Revival in Great Britain.

Still, if we must give precedence to transatlantic influence, the transformational genius of Cooper and Irving must also be acknowledged for first giving literary license to geopolitical patterns of hostility. Without them, quite plainly, there would have been no Southern literature on the highest plane, and it was their mutual friend and literary coadjutor, James Kirke Paulding, who wrote in 1817 one of the first apologias for the Southern way of life. It was Paulding, also, who in the same book, *Letters from the South*, first put forth the outlines of what would become an episode central to Southwestern humor, the 'fight story,' a mingling of braggadoccio and physical violence that somehow got mixed up with the humorous potential of a state named Kentucky and a Tennessean named David Crockett.[8] But, here again, Cooper's priority remains unchallenged: long before Davy became a notorious public figure, the historical and literary Crocketts were prefigured by the Kentuckian bee-hunter named Paul Hover, who provides comic relief in Cooper's most ambitious geopolitical exercise, *The Prairie* (1827), which pairs off a Louisianan belle with an Army officer

8. See Joseph Arpad, 'The Fight Story: Quotation and Originality in Native American Humor,' *The Journal of the Folklore Institute* 10 (1973): 141–72.

from New York.[9] From that marriage, it might be said, much of what we call Southern literature would spring.

Prior to the Civil War, that is, it is difficult to find any Southern writing about the South by a Southerner that was not influenced by Northern modes, and much of the most memorable writing we have about the South and Southerners during that period was written by Northerners with distinctly Southern sympathies, resulting in what we can call a Copperhead literature. Still, all generalities have their defining exceptions. I shall attempt to demonstrate later on that the greatest Southern novel of the antebellum period was written by a native of Connecticut who never got south of Louisville, until she moved to Florida. But whatever else that marvelous flying fish of literature (as Henry James called it) may have been, Copperhead it most assuredly was not.

But first, let me respond to a question that should at this point be incipient if not urgent: What about Edgar Allan Poe? Yes, what about Poe? And that is my point precisely. As with so much else that we call 'Southern' during the antebellum period, Poe was born in Boston, and though he was raised in Richmond and elsewhere, including Great Britain, his regional affiliations seem nil—if we depend upon the settings of his stories and poems. Poe was never an apologist for the plantation way of life and was less a secessionist in literature than an expatriot who could not afford passage to Europe. His famous distaste for things New England such as Longfellow and Transcendentalism was for the most part the result of his affiliation (once again) with the New York literary camp.[10]

True, Poe liked to write about beautifully doomed young ladies, and his sad cadences may have influenced the most famous Southern lyricist of the antebellum period, the sweet singer of Cincin-

9. John Seelye, 'A Well-Wrought Crockett: Or, How the Fakelorists Passed through the Credibility Gap and Discovered Kentucky,' in Michael A. Lofaro, ed., *Davy Crockett: The Man, the Legend, the Legacy, 1786–1986* (Knoxville, 1985), pp. 44–45.

10. See Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale* (New York, 1956), passim.

nati, Pittsburgh-born Stephen Collins Foster. There is but a short trip through the graveyard from Annabelle Lee to Jeannie with the light-brown hair-wreath, but those cadences are closer to Tennyson in origins than to Tennessee. We would have to wait another half-century for Nashville's regional song, that sad, nasal sound of a defeated nation, beaten out upon the Appalachian mountains by the hard hammer of post-bellum adversity, a pop-article equivalent to the semiprecious artifacts inspired by the Vanderbilt muse, poems by the self-styled 'Fugitives,' genteel guerrilla holdouts for secession. About the time that busy pens were carrying on the Civil War in separate parts of Nashville, the ultimate Southern prose epic of that struggle was being birthed in Atlanta ('Lawsy, Miss Scarlett!' etc.), whose heroine is no Stephen Foster child but so famous a figure of sexual adventuring and feminine independence as to inspire countless undergraduates to spell *The Scarlet Letter* with two sets of double t's. I wish there were opportunity here to explore the roots of Mitchell's novel, which to my mind may be traced not only to that quintessential Yankee overview of the Civil War and its aftermath, J. W. DeForest's *Miss Ravenal's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867), but to the single identifiable nativist Southern literary tradition that flourished during the antebellum period, the sentimental melodrama as written by E.D.E.N. Southworth, who may be credited with inventing the first combination of crinoline and chromium steel.

But let me spare you further inquiries into long unread books in order to pursue the point, already mentioned, that the most important Southern novel, published before the Civil War obliterated the necessity, was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ironically, it was Edgar Poe who prestidigitated Stowe's masterpiece in his own single attempt at a novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838). Here, the hero's travels, which start in New England, take him ever deeper into an increasingly threatening South, a southland equated, however, with Antarctica not Alabama, yet one populated by a fierce, treacherous, bloody-minded black race, a paranoiac nightmare region inspired by Nat Turner's rebellion and current

rumors of slave insurrection. (Richard Wright a century later would pay back the debt, drawing upon and reversing the imagery in Poe's paranoiac 'The Black Cat' to give literary contextuality to his own apocalyptic novel, *Native Son.*)

But in Stowe's version of Poe's parable, the Southern savages are white, while the titular black man, Uncle Tom, is a passive, long-suffering victim of the slave system, a veritable black savior. Tom has his heroic counterpart in George Harris, a figure of fiery rebellion, an angry fugitive modeled upon Frederick Douglass instead of Jesus Christ. Still, in mapping the South chiefly as a tragic region not a heroic arena, Stowe seems to have been following the lead not of Poe but of his worst poetic nemesis, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who in his popular poem *Evangeline* (1847) had sent his sad-eyed Acadian heroine deep into Louisiana on a futile search for her lost love, a descent of the Mississippi that is associated with the breakup of families by unfeeling acts of tyranny. It is this theme that Harriet Beecher Stowe would make her own, much as she would name one of the most memorable children of our fiction after Longfellow's wandering maiden. For if we often misremember Evangeline Bellefontaine as being a blue-eyed blonde, we may thank Stowe's Eva St. Clare for the mistake.

Well, what can we say about a little girl who dies? Stowe, who borrowed the convention from Dickens's *Old Curiosity Shop*, wrung several chapters from the subject (as did Louisa May Alcott in *her* Civil War novel *Little Women*), but it is not the death of Little Eva that gives her book its tragic theme. We are given in a number of our best-known antebellum fictions a full range of tragic actions, often keyed (as in *The Last of the Mohicans*) by a racial theme, but it is in Stowe's novel that we are treated to the most agonizing of these actions, in that the dominant frame is not set in some faraway place or time—whether the frontier, Puritan Boston, or the high seas—but what was in 1850 the present moment, set in a region painfully close to home. Nor was Stowe willing to salve the famous New England conscience by assuring her readers that there was somehow a genetic difference between them and

those citizens of the United States living below the Mason-Dixon Line. If, as I have stated, most of the literature we call Southern that was written before the Civil War is of Northern origin, then *Uncle Tom's Cabin* proves the point, for not only is it an omnium gatherum of abolitionist worst-case scenarios churned out by New England presses, but most of the major white characters in the novel can trace their origins to that region, even the most brutal of them all, Simon Legree. Before setting up shop as a Southern planter, Legree was a Yankee-born sailor, whose free way with fist and whip may have been inspired by Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s Captain Thompson of the brig *Pilgrim.*[11]

In her collection of local-color stories, *Oldtown Folks* (1869), Stowe gave a much more agreeable version of Yankee character, epitomized by Sam Lawson, characterized by Stowe's neighbor Samuel L. Clemens as a 'loafing, good-natured, no-account, irreverent fisherman, hunter, boys' friend, stray-dog's friend,' which is to say that Sam is a halfway figure between Irving's Rip and Mark Twain's Huck.[12] But it was Mark Twain also who gave a much less favorable account of Yankee character, as expressed by the mulatto woman who triggers the tragic action in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894): ' "Dat overseer wuz a Yank . . . outen New Englan', en anybody down South kin tell you what dat mean. *Dey* knows how to work a nigger to death, en dey knows how to whale 'em too—whale 'em till dey backs is welted like a washboard." '[13] As we shall see, Mark Twain's 'South' is a cardinal point on Harriet Beecher Stowe's compass, and in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* it is Simon Legree who is the essential Yankee. If the book survives the contemporary issue of abolition, it is as a portrayal of man's inhumanity to man when

11. Compare, for example, Legree's initial address to his newly purchased slaves with Thompson's to his sailors on the first day out, and, more to the point, Legree's '*I'm* your church now!' to Thompson's ' "Don't call on Jesus Christ . . . he can't help you. *Call on Captain T*. . . . He's the man!" ' (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. Ann Douglas [New York, 1981], pp. 482–85; *Two Years Before the Mast*, ed. Thomas Philbrick [New York, 1981], pp. 43, 155). Cf. in Dana, also ' "I'll make you toe the mark, every soul of you, or I'll flog you all, fore and aft, from the boy, up. . . . You've got a driver over you! Yes, a *slave-driver—a negro*-driver! I'll see who'll tell me he isn't a negro slave!" ' (p. 156).

12. Mark Twain, 'The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg,' *Writings*, 23: 18.

13. Twain, *Writings*, 16: 152–53.

fueled by bigotry, putting forth a deadly combination of intolerance, indifference, and intemperance that is acted out against the mute but powerful witness of both the democratic political system and the Christian religion. Moreover, if *Uncle Tom's Cabin* survived the war it was supposed to have started, then it survives also in the shape of a book that was intended to be a sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* but that as an action is the true successor to Stowe's classic. The wood that makes up the raft that Huck and Jim call home is surely salvaged from Uncle Tom's cabin, much as Huck himself, as we have seen, is the literary son of the benevolent Yankee loafer, Sam Lawson, while his abusive fictional father, Pap, seems a close relation to Simon Legree.[14]

Stowe gave Southern literature some of its most enduring prototypes, including the enervate, fatalistic slaveholder, the long-enduring and patient black servant, the whining, petulant mistress of the Big House, the passionate, rebellious mulatto, whose equivalents can be found in the novels of Faulkner and others. But Faulkner also evinced a considerable debt to the comic genius of Mark Twain, who transformed the southwestern humor tradition of the antebellum period into the cast of multiform figures inhabiting the banks of the great river down which Huck and Jim are carried, that redneck, racist congerie inclined to recumbent postures unless inspired to mob violence, specters of lyncherdom warranted by the aftermath of Reconstruction and later worked by Faulkner and Erskine Caldwell into a fine art.

But the major line of action and reaction in Mark Twain's masterpiece is the down-river voyage central to Stowe's great book, and both journeys were written to illustrate the motto favored by the Abolitionist crusade, 'Am I Not a Man and Brother?' often accompanied by the symbolic figure of an escaping slave. It might be said that whereas in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the figure of the long-suffering black man was used to work on the sympathies of the

14. I have treated Mark Twain's 'New-Englandness' in my introduction to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York, 1985), pp. xv–xvii, and, more recently, in 'Look West, Look East,' *Virginia Quarterly Review* 63 (1987): 750–51.

reader, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* a similar figure is used to work on the sympathies of the narrator, who must be brought to share the convictions of the reader concerning the basic equality of all human beings. The difference is definitive but it is not very great and the mechanism of enlightenment is virtually identical, identified in both cases with the workings of the human heart.

We like to think of Mark Twain—if only because he encouraged the thought—as an unregenerate opponent of sentimental literature, which he caricatured in the figure of Emmeline Grangerford and her misbegotten works of art. But when, in her afterword to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe stated that her readers who wished to assist the black people of the South in their plight needed only to 'feel right' in everything they did regarding the institution of slavery, hers was a gauge of value clearly derived from the sentimental tradition, and it was one that Mark Twain adapted for his own treatment of the relationship between the races. For it is 'right' feelings that Huck depends upon again and again as he works his way toward his final decision to set aside the law and help the man who has become his friend to find his way to freedom. If Huck Finn has a 'sound heart,' as opposed to the warped conscience that is his Southern inheritance, then it is clear that that organ of right feeling, like the Colt revolver, is an implement of Hartford manufacture.

Let us at this point step back a few feet to achieve the right perspective, recognizing that the unique community established by Huck and Jim on their raft is a separatist utopia, a pairing of the pure of heart, whose compact is the letter Huck writes to Miss Watson but then tears up, vowing to go to hell before he will betray his friend. This is an act of nullification with a vengeance, turning the bigotry that took license from a twisted reading of the Constitution into a statement of brotherhood that discountenances the written word for the kind of communication transcending mere words, setting aside the laws of men for the highest legislation. I have said that the raft shared by Huck and Jim is made up of the planks from Uncle Tom's cabin, but the deeper part, the

wood that sustains the visible platform, may surely be traced back to the most famous hut in our history, built by Thoreau in the environs of Concord. Which is to say that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, generally conceived to be a great Southern novel, is a profoundly New England book, centered by a great river which Mark Twain fondly conceived as having tributaries as far east as Delaware but which, in terms of symbolic statement, has its true source in Walden Pond.

Once again, if Stowe, as Lincoln fancied, wrote the book that started the Civil War, then Mark Twain—the Lincoln, as Howells fancied him, of our literature—wrote the book that celebrated the spirit of Reconstruction as it was viewed from the North. If the novels of Cooper and the stories of Irving have a Copperhead coloration, then we can detect in a number of Mark Twain's best-known works a figured three-ply pattern associated with the kinds of baggage called 'carpet.' Yes, if to paraphrase Ernest Hemingway, modern Southern literature begins with *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, then it begins with a definable specimen of what can only be called Carpetbag literature, a Reconstructionist fiction that features at its center that dominant duo of the Reconstruction era, a white man and a black man riding together deep into Southern terrain. In his subsequent literary foray into Reconstructionist fiction, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), Mark Twain upped the ante considerably, adopting a Hartford persona in order to destroy the very flower of chivalry, that feudal institution he always associated with Sir Walter Scott and the South 'befo' the waw.' As in the Civil War itself, Twain pits Yankee technology against brave hearts enclosed in cast-iron convictions, giving Ichabod Crane the final victory in an electrified finale.

And yet Mark Twain remains a dominant figure in the hegemony of Southern letters. His mighty influence may be best defined if we compare the impress of *Huckleberry Finn* on subsequent Southern writing with that of a companion novel published at about the same time, George Washington Cable's *The Grandissimes* (1880). Cable's story is set in New Orleans during the time

of the Louisiana Purchase, but it is clearly a Reconstruction parable, which uses an urban setting against which is enacted a powerful drama of intolerance breeding violence, albeit narrated with a deadly quiet irony. The issues of intolerance and ignorance, of black and white antagonisms, are shared in common with Mark Twain's novel, but the urban setting and Cable's urbane manner established a cosmopolitan combination in all ways antithetical to the pastoral setting and rural values that characterize Mark Twain's vernacular classic and much of the subsequent literature that we call 'Southern.'

During the first half of the twentieth century, Southern writers did not much favor the urban scene, or if they did, the fate of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) served as a caveat. It would be Northern writers, following the lead of William Dean Howells, who felt more comfortable with city life, which they saw as holding the key to the American dream and its nightmare alternative. Notably, Faulkner in his fiction uses Memphis as a last resort for prostitutes and politicians, while Margaret Mitchell did her best by Atlanta by burning the city down. It is only recently that Southern writers, from Tennessee Williams to Walker Percy, have rediscovered the literary possibilities of urban and suburban life, a tendency that may be directly keyed to the emergence of the Sun Belt and the subsequent reencounter between Northern and Southern values. The Yankee peddler has been replaced by Stanley Kowalski, but Irving's basic diagram remains the same, as an idealized rural past is refuted by being violated by the spirit of the urban present, figured now not as lust for land but as literal rape.

For Walker Percy the regnant symbols of Northern incursion are motels and motion-picture production companies, but the notion of technological exploitation and spoliation remains consistent. Where Southern writers from Irving and Cooper to Mark Twain and Faulkner celebrate the perpetual victory of rural values, positing marriages of noble savages decked out in clothing from Rousseau's trousseau, writers of the 'New South' take a much more pessimistic, deterministic view, remarkably close to that

fatalistic mood we find in Cable's great novel of New Orleans. Like Cable they favor the apocalyptic not the millennial landscape, for if the millennialist ideal prevails in the South, it is in the subdivision and shopping mall, where the uniform level and linear perfection is paved over like all good intentions with asphalt provided from Hell.

Let us now return to Irving's 'Legend,' that enduring fable of regional conflict and violent resolution that provided Southern fiction with an aesthetic frame and a moral field of reference dictated by secessionists and sectional conflicts. We have already seen how Huck Finn traces his lineage by way of Sam Lawson all the way back to Rip Van Winkle. A somnabulant dreamer, who with his jug and rifle provides us with quite a different sort of hunter from that Daniel-Boone-inspired guide to westering empire, Cooper's Leatherstocking, Rip is a comic figure who draws an unerring bead all the way to Faulkner's Boon Hogganbeck, much as a tenderized Huck gives us Jody in Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *The Yearling* (1938), whose tearful coming of age is coupled with a sacrificed fawn, a device borrowed by Rawlings, along with the name of her boy hero, from John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony* (1937). This specific indebtedness is an early example of what I have elsewhere called the Hollywoodization of the modern South, the most recent equivalent to the geopolitical hegemonizing I have been describing.[15]

Again and again, that is to say, we may trace Southern literary types and formulas to Northern originals, much as the ideology of nullification and secession were derived from New England's Separatist ideals. A tourist who enjoys the picturesque environs of Savannah and Charleston regards them as types and symbols of Southern antebellum culture, with their quaint cobblestone streets and picturesque graveyards under the twisted grotesques of moss-bearded, live-oak trees and framed by the linear perfection of Georgian façades. But tourists who wander about imbibing the

15. John Seelye, 'Georgia Boys: The Redclay Satyrs of Erskine Caldwell and Harry Crews,' *Virginia Quarterly Review* 56 (1980): 612–26.

charm should remember that as the façades were often abstracted from the pages of Asher Benjamin and other architects in the North, so the cobbles came as ballast in ships from New England ports, and the gravestones recording the quietuses of so many Southern lives were quarried and carved and shipped as blanks from New England's snow-white hills.

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