THE SOUTHERN LOCAL COLORISTS AND THE NEW SOUTH

IDEOLOGY: A STUDY IN LITERARY TRANSITION

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Linda Kay Morris, B. A.
Denton, Texas
May, 1975

Master of Arts (History), May, 1975. 138 pp., bibliography, 124 titles.

A school of fiction known as local color emerged following the Civil War. It reached its peak of productivity during the 1880's, and faded at the turn of the century. The purpose of this study is to illuminate the Southern authors of this school, giving major emphasis to their genre in relation to their significance for Southern history. The main sources for this study come from the novels and short stories of the authors themselves. Also found valuable to this study were the numerous books, articles and criticisms of the authors by their contemporary critics.

The Southern local color school, although it did not produce any major literary figures, contained many bright minor writers. As a group they reflected and shaped much of the thinking of their age. They also provide a connecting link between pre-war romanticism and the realism of the twentieth century.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter                                   Page
I.  RECONCILIATION THEME                   1
II. NEW SOUTH AND OLD.                     18
III. THE LOCAL COLOR SCHOOL AND THE       49
     NEGRO QUESTION.
IV.  THE LOCAL COLORISTS AND OTHER FOLK   92
V.   THE SOUTHERN LOCAL COLORISTS AS       121
     TRANSITIONARY AUTHORS

BIBLIOGRAPHY                               129
CHAPTER I

RECONCILIATION THEME

With the year 1877 marking the official end of reconstruction through the elimination of southern Republican regimes, many southern writers began producing novels and short stories with reconciliatory themes. These authors began their careers during the late 1870's and continued writing strongly into the 1880's. They were, for the most part, local colorists, with an eye for scenic description and an ear for local southern dialect. To their descriptive trappings they added the reconciliation theme, a theme which embodied the concept that in order for the South to progress and develop she had to gain the tacit, if not whole-hearted, acceptance of the North. Sympathy, respect, and consideration, largely in the form of capital, were much sought after by the South as a whole. The novels of reconciliation were thus directed toward a speedy reunion through economic restoration. They offered proof to the North of the South's willingness to compromise on certain issues and also maintained that the South, although devastated by the war, could and would be a valuable asset to the
country as a whole. Their theme was primarily manifested in the garb of sentimental romantic scenarios involving beautiful southern belles and heroic Yankee captains. Very few of these writers allowed controversial subjects or political considerations to stain their romance of reconciliation.

One such romancer was Mary Edwards Bryan, a native of Tallahassee, Florida. She had begun her literary career during the 1860's, producing articles for publication in such periodicals as *Southern Field* and *Fireside* and the *Sunny South*. In 1881, she produced her second novel, entitled *Wild Work*.¹

The latter novel, although emphasizing romance and a good story, relies heavily on the reconciliation theme. After much intrigue and many twists in plot development, true love unites the handsome captain with his southern girl, Zoe Vincent. The story takes place in Louisiana following the Civil War and does include such controversial subjects as the Ku Klux Klan, the Negro question, and carpetbagger rule. The author, however, maintains her

neutral position by showing that good and evil could be perpetuated by either side. Her heroine, Zoe, was not in sympathy with those southerners who had violently murdered six Yankee office holders. At the same time a Northern radical, Witchell, is presented as a man of good character, but a man too much absorbed with his own ambitions to recognize the needs of his young bride, a man with both virtues and faults. Southerners are derided by Bryan when they evidence blind prejudices against the North. Thus by praising and casting blame on both North and South, Bryan subtly directed the reader's attention to the strong points of both sections and, via romance, projected their successful reunion.

Bryan conceived of her novel as being taken from facts but, "with an eye solely to their dramatic aspect, not distorted by Sectional prejudice and not disturbed by political side-lights." She felt that by 1880 much had changed for the better in the South. The evils of reconstruction were over, and law and order now ruled the South; "mutual sympathy and understanding open a fair prospect of


3Ibid., pp. v-vi.
union in more than name between these two sections of the Republic."⁴ James A. Patty, in his study of Bryan as a journalist in Louisiana during reconstruction, found that she was an extremely conservative Southerner on the Negro question, on reconstruction policies, etc., but that she viewed progress in the South as being tied to economic restructuring.⁵

Katherine Sherwood Bonner, another female local colorist, appeared on the literary scene during the late 1870's with the publication of a reconciliation novel entitled Like Unto Like (1878). Bonner was born in Hollywell, Mississippi, and lived in the South during the war.⁶ In 1875 she moved to the North to begin her literary career.⁷ In her first novel Bonner presents the reconciliation theme through the love of a young southern belle, Blythe Herndon, for a

⁴Ibid., pp. 409-10.
⁶Sherwood Bonner, "From '60 To '65," Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science 18(1876):500-509. Bonner states that her birthplace was Hollywell, Mississippi, not Holly Springs as other sources have indicated.
⁷Dictionary of American Biography, s. v. "Macdowell, Katherine Sherwood Bonner."
northerner, Roger Ellis. Blythe, who is presented as a neutralist in the novel, admired and was attracted to the intelligence and progressivism of Roger Ellis. Roger in turn admired Blythe for her charming southern ways. Surprisingly, unification of the two sectional lovers is ultimately denied in this novel, for Blythe could never accept nor live with Roger's practical applications of racial equalitarianism. Bonner's novel found no sympathy with slavery and her heroine reflected a fairly equalitarian racial view, and yet it seemed that neither the author nor her heroine could accept a man who kissed Negro babies on the street. In 1882 Bonner produced another reconciliation novel entitled The Valcours, and this time the two estranged sections were united. However, the two sections were not joined together by romance. The theme was, instead, subtly employed in one of the story's sub-plots. David Church, a young Republican newspaper editor, newly arrived in the South, was at first ridiculed by the area's Democrats for his Yankee ideas. By the story's end, however, David's winning personality and a spirit of compromise had made him an accepted member of his Louisiana community. He now

---

8 Sherwood Bonner's Like Unto Like (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1878), passim.
got along with members of the opposing party and the problem of politics within the newspaper was resolved by giving one half of it to the Democrats and the other half to the Republicans.9

Bonner wrote in the local color tradition, using dialect and much description of local southern scenery in her stories. She also described the southern people and their customs. In 1880, Bonner, who had shown equalitarian leanings in her novels, published "A Volcanic Interlude," a realistic story describing one aspect of southern society, miscegenation. The story received much criticism and cost her magazine several subscriptions.10 It is interesting to note that in 1883 when Bonner again dealt with the Negro in regard to aspects of southern life, she presented him as a comic rather than as a tragic figure.11

Katherine O'Flayerty Chopin accommodated the reconciliation theme as a secondary motif in her first novel At Fault (1890). Although the South's goal had been achieved

---


11 Katherine Macdowell (Bonner). Dialect Tales (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1883), passim.
by this date, Chopin's use of it points to its popularity and longevity. In *At Fault* Chopin used the intersectional marriage theme to unite the North and South. The two united sections, symbolically the lovers, are quite typically characterized. David Hosmer, owner of a mill, was presented as a middle-aged "Yankee," progressive, and yet too possessed by the puritan work ethic. His lover Therese, a Louisianian and representative of the South, was the beautiful owner of the land on which his mill was situated. She was pictured as wise, and a woman who enjoyed quiet comfort and southern ease. Through Therese, Hosmer is introduced to and is finally converted to southern ways. Hosmer in turn, taught Therese the need for and reality of change and progress.¹²

Robert D. Arner, a student of Chopin's works, interpreted the marriage of Therese and Hosmer as being the symbolic unification "of South and North, agrarianism and industrialism, pastoralism and history, tradition and innovation."¹³ His interpretation is justified; Chopin's novel was more than a stock reconciliation novel, but its frame was based on that theme.

---


Mary Noailles Murfree was primarily a local colorist who dealt with life in the southern mountains. However, she did produce one novel in the 1880's dealing with the theme of reconciliation. Murfree's *Where the Battle Was Fought* (1886) was set in her own native state, Tennessee, during reconstruction times. Murfree described with full sympathy the complete and utter devastation of her region by the war; her heroine's family lost all that they had during the battle. In the novel the author dealt sympathetically with her northerners and her southerners, uniting the two sections via the romance of the intersectional marriage plot. Marcia Vayne, daughter of a now poor aristocratic southern family, was united with her Yankee, Captain Estwicke.\(^{14}\) While Murfree gently points out some southern weakness and shows little sympathy for radical policies, she generally avoids exploration of such controversial subjects as the Klan or the Negro question, thus maintaining her theme of reconciliation. Murfree surrounds her story with the trimmings of local color; the novel employs much dialect and description of the Tennessee hill

country. Her novel, like that of Bryan, shows the South and the nation as approaching, if not already in, a new day of unification and good feeling.

Another "southern" local colorist, Maurice Thompson, who began his literary career during the 1880's local color era, offered the public another version of Murfree's reconciliation plot in *His Second Campaign* (1883). Again, the now poor daughter of past wealth and good blood lines falls in love with a young Yankee of good character.\(^{15}\) The novel, a novel which relied too heavily on the vogue of local color, paid too little attention to plot development and character delineation and too much attention to the description of the southern locale. Five years later in *Fortnight of Folly*, Thompson satirized the literary shortcomings of himself and his fellow local colorists for the above same reasons.\(^{16}\) Although not a local color novel, Thompson's history, *The Story of Louisiana* (1888), described the growing prosperity of the South and lauds her good relationship with the Union.\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\) James Maurice Thompson, *His Second Campaign* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1883), passim.

\(^{16}\) James Maurice Thompson, *A Fortnight of Folly* (New York: John B. Alden, 1888), passim.

Thomas Nelson Page, a native of Virginia and romancer of the Old South, wrote in his preface to the Plantation Edition, an eighteen-volume set containing his novels, sketches, and poems (1906-1912), that he had "never wittingly written a line which he did not hope might tend to bring about a better understanding between the North and the South, and finally lead to a more perfect Union." His writings were thus of a reconciliatory nature and reflect what he meant by "better understanding" between the two estranged sections. His short stories, such as "Marse Chan" and "Meh Lady," would lead the northern reader towards the "understanding" and the acceptance of the southern view on the war, reconstruction, on race, as well as on the South's desire for reunion. Page felt that if the "truth" were told about the nature of the South, the North and South would be reconciled. In "Marse Chan" the author tells the reader the "truth" through the mouth of an old ex-slave, Sam. He tells of the times before the war, of the well-off conditions of himself and his fellow slaves, of the goodness of southern white men and their ladies. He says that in

those days "dyar warn no trouble nor nothin." Page also states that most level-headed Southerners did not want the war, but rather joined the Confederacy out of loyalty for their individual states. Marse Chan had been such a man, a great soldier who had died not for the preservation of slavery but for his "code," a code which could be understood and admired in all sections. Page's stories usually contained glowing accounts of a past glorious southern civilization where chivalry had not died. He uses the insectional marriage theme to bring about reconciliation in "Meh Lady." Again a Negro, Billy, relates the story of his young master, Phil. The boy had been killed in the war and the story evolves around the subsequent events that befell his family and in particular his sister, "Meh Lady." Although Billy took good care of his white folks, it was a northerner who brought ultimate happiness and financial stability to the southern family. The Yankee officer married "Meh Lady" and thus the two estranged sections were reconciled. Page describes the devastation of the South and of the family, arousing much sympathy from the reader. At the close of the tale we find that out of the ruin of

---

19 Thomas Nelson Page, In Ole Virginia or Marse Chan and Other Stories (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), p. 1e, passim.
war and the marriage of enemies there had been created new life, young Phil, namesake of Meh Lady's dead brother, and young Billy, namesake of the loyal old Negro narrator.  

Theodore Gross, Page's biographer, suggests that this was a manifestation of Page's desire to have southern tradition maintained. The children of unification were to follow their southern side of the family tree.  

Joel Chandler Harris, editor and essayist for the Atlanta Constitution, incorporated the reconciliation theme into many of his local color stories. Paul H. Buck found that for Harris reconciliation was almost a "passion," for without it there could be no new South. Paul M. Gaston, in his study of the New South, pointed out that Harris would even change his southern stories in order to achieve a reconciliatory note in his work. In a story of the war published in 1877 for a southern audience, Harris' hero, Uncle Remus, shot and killed a Yankee invader in order to

---

20 Ibid., pp. 97-167.  
protect his master. However, in 1880 he adapted his story of the war to fit the theme of reconciliation. Appealing to a national audience, the plot now included only the wounding of the Yankee and added a love match between him and his Confederate nurse, a beautiful southern belle. 24 In other stories such as "Little Compton," "Aunt Fountain's Prisoner," and "Azalia," Harris reiterates the theme of reconciliation. In "Little Compton" the author states that there were good and brave men fighting on both sides, and that those men, irrespective of their political affiliations, were deserving of respect and admiration. 25 In "Aunt Fountain's Prisoner" the North and South are again united through the marriage of a Yankee captain and a southern belle. The reader is also taught that "... one may be a Yankee and a southerner too, simply by being a large-hearted, whole-souled American." 26 That the South had something she could contribute to the "new" America was illustrated in Harris' "Azalia," where two northern ladies, when exposed to the best aspects of southern life are won

24 Ibid.


26 Ibid., p. 65.
over a love of the South. 27 Another southerner learns that his new purpose in life was "... to help good people everywhere to restore the union and to heal the wounds of the war," thus the South would also aid in founding of a whole nation. 28 That Harris' avowed purpose as an editor and writer was to heal the nation's wounds and strengthen the union was further illustrated in his dedication of his magazine, The Uncle Remus Magazine, by saying that it would "hold itself against party politics and prejudices and will refuse to mistake opinions for principle or to be limited by the prolific and offensive suggestions of sectionalism." 29

Constance Fenimore Woolson's "Old Gardiston" appeared in Harper's Monthly in 1876. Her story contained the reconciliation theme achieved through the use of the inter-sectional marriage. 30 Woolson, however, could not be described as a true southern local colorist. She was born in Claremont, New Hampshire, of northern parents and was educated in New York. 31 Yet her contribution to southern

27 Ibid., p. 98.
28 Ibid., p. 160.
29 Ibid., p. 163.
31 Dictionary of American Biography, s. v. "Woolson, Constance Fenimore."
letters cannot be ignored. In dealing with Woolson's relationship with the South, one literary historian, Fred Lewis Pattee, concluded that she could logically be classed as "the first Southern writer of the new period." According to Pattee, Woolson's six year sojourn in the South enabled her to portray with great accuracy a picture of the South's pitiable devastation. It is interesting that Woolson, an objective northern observer, wrote like a southerner when describing the South and calling for reconciliation. The intersectional marriage motif was common to both sides and employed by many who were not local colorists.

Paul H. Buck found that George W. Cable, a New Orleans local colorist, used a variation of the reconciliation in his novel *The Grandissimes* (1880), a motif that was not copied by his fellow local colorists. In Cable's version "a reluctant people were held in a union not of their choice." In an address given before the literary society of the University of Mississippi in 1882, Cable explained why the

---

33 Ibid.
34 Buck, p. 223.
South lagged behind the rest of the nation in literary pursuits. It had been their ardent defense of slavery. He recommended the abandonment of all old causes, and he looked to the day when "there will be no South . . . . Let us hasten to be no longer a unique people."35 Cable's views harmonized with the South's calling for reconciliation, but they were at variance with the southern meaning of reconciliation. Very few southerners called for the day when there would be "no South." Later, Cable would be called a traitor to the southern cause, but in 1882 the southern press praised him for his reconciliation message.36

The southern local colorists' call for reconciliation denied any real past, present, or future reasons for renewed hostilities between the two regions. They would in their writings describe their region in non-prejudiced terms. As Joel Chandler Harris noted, there was a difference between a desirable continuance of "localism" and an all too persistent "sectionalism" in American letters. Localism "was the civilization and its culture; sectionalism was

36Ibid., pp. 134-35.
prejudice and politics." Local color would seek out "localism." Their common goal was achieved, often by their use of common literary devices. They employed the inter-sectional marriage motif, gained sympathy for their now devastated region, avoided controversial subjects, saw both sides as good, were optimistic about the future of the South within the union and while describing their region in romantic and non "sectional" terms, they helped to clear a path toward a viable reunion. To achieve their purpose, however, they sometimes presented conditions in the South past and present through rose-colored glasses.

---

CHAPTER II

NEW SOUTH AND OLD

The local colorists as a group looked forward to the reconciliation of the North and South, and they saw that time as rapidly approaching. Reconciliation meant a new chance for the survival of the South and possibly pointed toward a viable direction for it to pursue within the union. Throughout the 1880's spokesmen for the "new South" heralded the coming of an era of prosperity for the South; in effect a transformation of the "old" South to a "new" South. The "new South" creed as proclaimed by men such as Henry Woodfin Grady incorporated many elements. Their plan for the salvation of the South included a new economic regime, new "prestige and power," and the elimination of the Negro question. Their platform's basic elements were generally agreed upon by all southerners. However, as Paul M. Gaston found in his study of the new South creed, there came to exist a great discrepancy between what was accepted as

---

2Ibid.
actual conditions in the South and what truly existed. According to Gaston the creed was becoming a myth and the myth was being accepted as a social, political, and economic reality.

The New South local colorists spread a myth that was multi-faceted, for it embodied a romantic concept of the past through the restoration of the plantation tradition and provided accommodation for the current economic realities of industrialism, while at the same time maintaining the old Jeffersonian dream, and it generally acknowledged belief in the necessity of maintaining white supremacy in the South. Their literature was both popular and palatable to northern and southern audiences alike.

Many writers after the war returned to the antebellum South for their subject material. Save for a poorly based economic system, few southern writers found fault with the old South's way of life. After the compromise of 1877 their material began to deluge the American literary market,

---

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., pp. 199-207.
appearing in numerous editions of northern based magazines.\textsuperscript{6} The height of their literary power came between 1880 and 1900.\textsuperscript{7} These southern writers for the most part would call for reconciliation and admit defeat, but they would also glorify and mythify the South's past. Hand in hand with the literary flood of their genre seemed to go a growing distortion of actual present and past conditions in the South.

One southern romancer, Thomas Nelson Page, had stated that the "ideal champion" of the South would be the writer who possessed . . .

the sagacity to defeat whatever of evil existed in the civilization he shall chronicle, though it be gleaming with the gilding of romance; he must have the fortitude to resist all temptation to deflect by so much as a hair's breadth from the absolute and the inexorable facts.\textsuperscript{8}

Page himself had not experienced the throes of war nor had he known first hand the antebellum South of which


\textsuperscript{8}David Aaron, \textit{The Unwritten War, American Writers and the Civil War} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 288.
he wrote. And yet his picture of the South both before and after the war gradually became the accepted one in both the North and the South. Page's romantic conception of life in the South was to him a conception based on reality. However, the South that Page described was non-existent. Indeed, it had never been a reality. He would describe a garden of Eden where, although now destroyed, "ivory palaces" once stood and where "myrrh, aloes, and cassia" would breathe forever. Page, a representative of the flood of southern writers viewed his work as "truth" in fiction however distorted and romanticized that "truth" might be.

The romanticized South as presented by such local colorists as Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, and James Lane Allen, formed a composite picture of the South that would become the nation's handbook of past and present southern life. The spreading of a mythic picture began

---

9 Ibid., p. 385.

10 Osterweis, pp. 39-42.


with the reestablishment of the plantation tradition.

Dr. Francis Pendleton Gaines found in his study of the tradition that its origin could be traced as far back as 1722.\(^{13}\)

Thomas Nelson Page, "Dean of the Apologists" and fervent glorifier of the South, praised his fellow southern authors for their recently acquired seat of power in the literary market.\(^{14}\) In an article entitled "Literature in the South Since the War" (1892), he cited at least a dozen or more southern authors who had emerged to write romantic tributes to southern civilization.\(^{15}\) These writers were praised by Page for their "union" of the "realistic" with the "romantic," a quality which was attributed to their southerness.\(^{16}\) Page commended Joel Chandler Harris for his Uncle Remus creation and even found George W. Cable's exotic pictures of Louisiana praiseworthy. In fact it was only with Cable's negative stand on the Negro question and

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 18.


\(^{15}\) Thomas Nelson Page, "Literature in the South Since the War," pp. 745-753.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 755.
white supremacy that Page found fault. Most of the local colorists noted by Page such as Harris, Allen, etc., would help to expand and spread the plantation tradition. They presented their readers a picture of the old days full of moonlight and magnolias and, of course, happy darkies. Most of the writers differed only in degree in their picture of the past and some did offer a plan for the maintenance of a future South.

In a collection of short stories *In Ole Virginia; or Marse Chan and Other Stories* (1887), Thomas Nelson Page rendered his version of life in the South. As noted by his biographer Theodore L. Gross, in this one volume he "recreates a dead civilization and generates it with mythical qualities." A Negro, Sam, narrates the story of "Marse Chan." The Negro was presented by the author as a man who was an insider and who could accurately and objectively recall the facts concerning prewar and post war life on the plantation. Sam described the beautiful white pillared home, the pastoral quietude of the plantation, the happy and fair relations between master and slave, the honor, heroism, and kindness

---

17 Ibid., p. 748.

of the noble whites and actually seemed to wish that the "good ole times" could return. The plantation life as described by Page was a return to and enlargement of the plantation tradition as delineated by Francis P. Gaines in his study of the southern plantation. In later stories, Page simply embellished his earlier themes. But "... the absolute and inexorable facts ..." as Page saw them were clearly presented by Sam in "Marse Chan."

In 1898 Page published his account of the black days of reconstruction, Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction. It was to have been a factual and objective account of reconstruction purporting to be a defense of the South against Northern fictive accounts.

In Red Rock Page attempted to move from long-past antebellum days toward more recent developments in southern life. However, the once powerful plantation owner and the Negro still dominated Page's recount of post-civil war days. Like so many of his contemporary southern writers, he avoided

---


20 Gross, p. 37.

21 Ibid., p. 78.
"any real discussion of the poor whites and the yeomen who formed a dominant force in the South after the war."\textsuperscript{22} The "avoidance" was perhaps a natural oversight. The yeoman and the poor white had never played a significant role in the description of southern affairs and civilization.\textsuperscript{23}

In describing the South of reconstruction, Page pictured a defeated and prostrate people who tenaciously maintained their code of honor and held to their Southerness. He did not attempt to say in this novel that only men of the South were honorable, but rather that those who had come South to gather the spoils of war through reconstruction were not honorable northern men. Thus Page maintained a reconciliatory southern position. Page explained the existence of the Klan as purely defensive and stated that its sometimes violent methods were not approved of by southern gentlemen. In \textit{Red Rock} the Negro is shown to have been treated fairly after the war.\textsuperscript{24} In fact, his reconstruction novel was

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp. 86-7.

\textsuperscript{23} Shields McIlwaine, \textit{The Southern Poor White From Lubberland to Tobacco Read} (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939) p. 19.

primarily a reiteration of his prewar southern picture. It glorified almost all aspects of southern life; the South's peculiar institution, her pastoral scenery and her manorial architecture, her educational system, her southern hospitality and even her distinctive forms of recreation.

In Red Rock Page again describes the favorable aspects of slavery. To him it was a system which benefited all who were connected with it, the master and the slave. Mammy Krenda, house servant to a kindly southern gentleman, Dr. Cary, related an incident to her master in which she had been the victim of abuse by one of the carpetbaggers. Dr. Cary would right her grievances and offer her protection. The carpet-bagger would whip a good Negro to obtain information, an action which Mammy Krenda found in sharp contrast to the black-white relationship she was used to. She responds:

You will, will you! . . . Do you know what would happen if you did? My master would cut your heart out o' you; but I wouldn't let' you for him to do it: You ain't fitten for him to tetch. De ain' nobody ever tetch me since my mammy whipped me last; and she died when I was twelve years ole; . . .

Page further reminds his readers in Red Rock that the good slaves knowing the justice of the master-slave relationship refused to leave their masters for the freedom and benefits

\[25\] Ibid., p. 126.
offered by the North. Tarquin, another of Dr. Cary's house servants, showed his loyalty by refusing freedom and staying by his master's side. Tarquin was not alone in this heroic action as other house servants in the novel refused their freedom. In Page's stories the Negroes who are recognized as people and given prominent places are the house servants. Very seldom, if ever, does Page describe the more numerous and unidentified field hands.

Page's picture of southern architecture and the surrounding landscapes of unbelievable beauty and ease were also portrayed to confirm his earlier pictures. Mr. Welch, whose family was from the North, toured the plantation and found:

the hands working and singing in the fields, and such things as interested him. The plantation surpassed any he had yet seen. It was a little world in itself—a sort of feudal domain; the great house on its lofty hill, surrounded by gardens; the broad field stretching awry in every direction, with waving grain or green pastures in and bounded by the distant woods. . . . He pointed out the clean cabins, each surrounded by its little yard and with its garden; the laughing children and smiling mothers curtseying from their doors.  

According to Page the South's superior civilization was at least due in part to her unsurpassed educational

26 Ibid., p. 29.
system. In the South prior to the war, education had been available to all the fine old families. There were academies for men and for women, colleges and even some free schools for the southern poor white. However, Page spent little time discussing the advantage in education for the poor whites or Negroes. Their illiteracy was to be expected and accepted just as the superior intellect of the South's young men of good breeding was also accepted. Life in the South was leisurely and quite entertaining, according to Page. There were parties, ornate balls and there was even fox hunting for the young men. The Negro as well as his white counterpart was allowed to enjoy himself at Christmastime. Southern hospitality, a peculiarly southern attribute, was extended to all who would accept it in Red Rock. To Page, Red Rock, the South, had once been a "paradise," for "there were evidences that the Garden of Eden was situated not far from that spot, and certainly within the limits of the State."27 All cruelty, dishonor, greed, misery for both races, were imported from outside the southern kingdom. They were not southern in origin.28

27 Ibid., p. 47.
28 Ibid., passim.
Page's attempt at describing more recent events of southern life were unsuccessful. His *Red Rock* explained and defended the South, reiterated the glory of her traditions and people, but failed to deal realistically with reconstruction and contemporary events in southern history. It was, however, representative of nineteenth century southern thought. Page's typical southern view was later restated by Joel Chandler Harris in *Gabriel Toliver, A Story of Reconstruction* (1902).\(^{29}\) And as Theodore L. Gross pointed out, Page's work could be described as "toned down" when seen in comparison with such versions of the post war South as given by Thomas Dixon in *The Leopard's Spots*.\(^{30}\) To some extent Page realized the shortcomings of his work. He was "too near the time to be able to present the facts with true art."\(^{31}\)

\(^{29}\) Harris' *Gabriel Toliver, A Story of Reconstruction* authenticates Page's picture of the nature of the Klan, his view of the Negro as having faired well during slavery and his recommendation that the Negro question be left to the South for solution. Page was describing Virginia and Harris, Georgia, two distinctive states and yet a common southern view emerges concerning reconstruction and the South before the war.


Page did deal with one of the South's current and future problems; i.e., the Negro question. It was to him the question "on which depends the future as well as the present salvation of the nation." In his essay entitled "The Old-time Negro" and later in *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem* (1904) and in *The Old Dominion: Her Making and Her Manners* (1907), Page presented his solution to that problem. To give credence to his solution he demonstrated the natural supremacy of the white race as opposed to the natural inferiority of the Negro. The South would be saved if she would act to uplift the Negro's intellect and character through education. His prime concern, however, was that the South be granted the right to solve her problem.

The nation as a whole was experiencing a period of tremendous change and growth as it rapidly approached the turn of the century. Industrialism and its concomitant facets were dealing death blows to many long cherished American traditions. Page in the later years of his career, battled the encroachments of the twentieth century. In *Gordon Keith* (1903) and *John Marvel, Assistant* (1909),

---

32 Ibid., p. 48.

33 Information gathered from various T.N. Page readings on race.
Page attacked the vanity of wealth, the new society's lack of tradition, its pseudo-religiosity, the molding of people into machines, etc. But, as one of his contemporary critics found, his forte was not social criticism. Arthur Hobson Quinn observed that "... there are many who can paint the railroad strikes of John Marvel or the speculation of Gordon Keith; no one but a southern gentleman could have written Red Rock or Meh Lady."

James Lane Allen, a native of Kentucky, became his state's delineator of local color, publishing an abundance of popular novels and short stories dealing with Kentucky during the 1880's and 1890's. Allen, like the mainstream of his literary contemporaries, returned to Kentucky's past in search of local color and to find meaning for the present. In The Choir Invisible (1897) Allen enunciated what the past meant to him; "and so the whole past sounds to me: it is the music of the world: it is the vast choir of the ever-living dead." The past, its romance, legend,
and myth were for Allen an integral part of life. In two of Allen's short stories, "Two Gentlemen of Kentucky" and "King Solomon," Allen dealt with the kinder aspects of the war and emancipation. Incorporated in both stories is the idea that the virtuous, the gallant and the noble traits of all men of the South were brought out despite the tragedies of the new times.37 In "Two Gentlemen of Kentucky" the two gentlemen, one white and the other black, shared a now humbled existence. The old colonel continued to show his former slave affection and kindness after emancipation, and the Negro, Peter, returned his master's love with loyalty and like affection. The two were eventually buried side by side.38 One of Allen's biographers attributed his feelings toward the South to his background. He had been told stories of the old times by his elders as had Thomas Nelson Page.39

In an essay published in 1886, Allen spoke out for the necessity of romances, for he had found it to be one of the

38James Lane Allen, "Two Gentlemen of the Old School," Century Magazine 35(1888), 945-957.
"realities" of life. Thus like Page, Allen clung to legend and romance and also maintained that in the South racial harmony was a reality. One modern critic, William K. Bottorff places, Allen in the southern agrarian tradition as a precursor of John Crowe Ransom or Allen Tate. His salvation formula for the South was "to stay close to the soil, to nature," a philosophy incorporating Jeffersonian ideals. He also enunciated a doctrine of state sovereignty. Allen's regionalist flight to the past was common to his fellow southern local colorists.

While editor of Grady's Atlanta Constitution, Joel Chandler Harris had pleaded for reconciliation and had proselytized for the industrialization of the South. One literary historian, Jay Martin, found that Harris most especially after Grady's death, began incorporating a regionalist point of view in his non-journalistic writings. Martin describes the southern regionalist as a man divided by two opposing forces: the machine age versus the romance

---

40 Bottorff, p. 28.
41 Ibid., p. 31.
42 Gaston, pp. 90, 180-2.
43 Martin, p. 100.
of the edenic garden and Harris seems to fit that definition.\textsuperscript{44}

Possibly Harris was trying what many southerners have tried to do, that is, "to reconcile industrialism and the Negro with the Jeffersonian vision."\textsuperscript{45}

Harris' Uncle Remus tales recalled for the reader the happy pre-war days and his sage of Snap Bean Farm decried the turning away from old traditions, a by-product of the new industrialism. Harris' first Uncle Remus volume was published in 1880 and became extremely popular with children and adults alike.\textsuperscript{46} Harris used the kindly figure of Uncle Remus to give his readers a picture of the South's past and its present. Harris had stated his academic adherence to truth in fiction by saying:

> The great difficulty has been and is for southern writers to rid themselves of certain tendencies of romanticism which are not only preposterous in themselves but deadly in their effects upon literary art.\textsuperscript{47}


\textsuperscript{45}Davenport, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{46}Uncle Remus' popularity is evidenced in its number of copyrights and its continuing wide reading into the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{47}Joel Chandler Harris, Joel Chandler Harris Editor and Essayist Miscellaneous Literary, Political, and Social Writings, ed. Julia Collier Harris (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), p. 47.
Harris further states that romantic drivel was "... but a humiliation and a disgrace to the people whose culture it is supposed to represent." Although Harris' literary production was far superior to the material he was belittling, its romantic qualities far outnumbered its realistic ones. His presentation of the Negro, plantation life and its many components paved the way for the acceptance of the plantation tradition and the myth of racial harmony in the South. Francis Pendleton Gaines found that Harris gave his reading public a typically stereotyped picture of life in the South. For Harris the plantation was magnificent and the darkies and their masters were happy before the war. Harris' rendition of the Negro made him an authority on Negro character in the eyes of his public. His "accuracy" was upheld through the 1920's. Harris' view of the Negro was


51 Seymour Gross, pp. 5-6, cites John H. Nelson's heavy reliance on Harris' negro characterization as being indicative of the public's acceptance of stereotyping as an accurate portrayal.
kindly but extremely paternalistic. The good old days for Harris were gone but never forgotten. A solution would be found to the Negro problem through public education, time and non-interference in southern affairs.\(^{52}\)

As a southern agrarian and sage Harris spoke through his character Billy Sanders. Billy admonished the South to return to the simple life and to refrain from prejudicial acts.\(^{53}\) Also in some of his stories he dealt with people other than the landed gentry of the plantation tradition. His sketches of the Georgia crackers presented some "new" types to his readers.\(^{54}\) However, Harris did not turn to the middle class yeoman as a character type for his stories. Jay Hubbell suggests that Harris and his fellow local colorists left out the "great bulk of the white civilization" because of their absorption with romance and nostalgia.\(^{55}\) Harris could be considered a moderate in regards to the position he developed for the South.\(^{56}\) In his writing he

---

\(^{52}\) Harris, Editor and Essayist, passim.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., pp. 212-65.

\(^{54}\) McIlwaine, p. 110.


maintained a reconciliatory position toward the union; he did not denounce industrialism as an inherent evil, but rather he decried the vanity of wealth; and he did not wish to see the Negro pushed out of existence.

The motif of reconciliation had been utilized by another local colorist of minor importance after the war, Mary Edwards Bryan. James A. Patty found in his study of Bryan's political views that she was primarily motivated by typical conservative southernism. This could be seen in her view of the Negro and in her extreme defense of all things southern. Yet she, like many of her contemporary southern local colorists, recognized the South's need for industry. She admonished the South to emulate the North's industry and to "... cast off the trammels of the past, its hereditary prejudices and prepositions and adapt (ourselves) to the new order of things ..." She went on to state that industry coupled with the South's "intelligent yeomanry" would produce a happy future for the South.

Another minor local colorist, Maurice Thompson, espoused views similar to those held by Page, Allen, and Harris. He

---


58 Ibid., p. 83.

59 Ibid.
had served in the Confederate army and had been raised in the Cherokee Hill country.60 He, like his contemporaries, called for reconciliation after the war. Although much of his writing did not deal with southern regions and themes, he promoted his version of the days before the war in some of his writing concerning the "color-line." Thompson felt that slaves had been treated well before the war.61 His southern sketches were not accepted for publication in the years immediately following the war because in his opinion "they were strenuously objected to by some southern extremists as being favorable to northern prejudices, while on the other hand, many northern readers, especially in New England, castigated me severely for my sympathy with the slaveholder and the Lost Cause!"62

Thompson's sketches of life in the South were primarily humorous in tone. However, he maintained throughout his writing that the Negro was naturally inferior. His inferiority and the necessity of maintaining a "color-line" was set up by the laws of nature.63 That the Negro was enfranchised

---

61 Ibid., p. 19.
62 Ibid., p. 9.
63 Ibid., p. 15.
and then denied the vote through trickery was a "huge joke" in Thompson's opinion. 64

In a story entitled "Ben and Judas" Thompson presented a picture of race relations similar to Allen's view in "Two Gentlemen of Kentucky." He found that the black and white southerners had literally become one entity. Their fates and actions were as one, but it would be the white, because of the laws of nature, who would dictate the step of his counterpart. 65

Although the majority of the southern local colorists supported and promoted a mythic view of past and present southern life, some few did view the South in terms more or less of its actuality. Walter Hines Page, Charles Waddel Chesnut, and George W. Cable rendered views of the South that were strikingly at variance with those held by their fellow southerners.

Walter Hines Page, occupationally a journalist, published The Southerner, Being An Autobiography of Nicolas Worth in 1906. Nicolas Worth dealt with the South during the 1880's. 66

64 Ibid., p. 33.

65 Ibid., pp. 76-77.

66 The Southerner is primarily a novel of social criticism, however it does use dialect and pays close attention to detail.
Paul M. Gaston cited Page as being "the only one of the notable new South spokesmen who believed that failures outnumbered the successes of the movement."67 Page pictured the South as backward looking, prejudiced, and unsuccessful. He traced in his "autobiographical" novel his own disillusionment with the proclaimed progress of his region. By the turn of the century, Page had admitted the South's failure.68 Page's The Southerner did not deal with the good old days in the South, but rather focused on the rough times of the present. Nicolas Worth, a southerner, had returned home to North Carolina in 1883. He was a young man filled with progressive ideas and he purported to broaden the educational opportunities for all segments of the population. But Page's (Worth's) plan for the South was constantly confronted by those who saw progress as a threat to their political, economic, and social structure. Page also refuted the South's stance of existing racial harmony. In the novel Worth accomplishes little save for a college of cotton crafts for the poor white women.69 Thus,

67 Gaston, p. 198.
68 Ibid., p. 199.
Page did not promulgate the plantation tradition, the myth of racial harmony, or find solace in the promotion of industry and education, for in viewing present conditions of southern life, he found a people "mummified."

Charles Waddell Chesnutt was a Negro born in Ohio. However, he can be claimed as a southern author. His parents were North Carolinians, and he spent his youth and early manhood in the South. His love for the South was manifested through his concern for her progress and general welfare.

Charles Waddell Chesnutt began publishing his local color short stories in the late 1880's. In the early 1900's Chesnutt published two novels picturing life in the South during the 1880's. Although these later works have been classified as belonging to the muckraking tradition they do deal primarily with the realities of southern society during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

---

70 Page often described the South as a stagnant, unprogressive, or "mummified" region.


72 Ibid., p. 78.

73 Ibid.

Chesnutt's novel *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) refuted the myth of racial harmony in the South. The blacks who were destroyed in the novel were not the malcontents, the brutes, etc., of the Negro race. They were victims of extreme race hatred. The work is the tragic story of a small southern town whose population, although having a white majority, felt threatened by the seeming progress of its black minority. At first, the whites, led by a tradition-bound southerner and a "new South" demagogue, sought only to destroy the Negro's post-war gains. However, at the close of the novel, the Negroes themselves are killed.  

Chesnutt felt that white supremacy at all costs was fast becoming a reality in the "new South."

The *Colonel's Dream* is not so much interested in the Negro question per se, but it does link the Negro question with the general progress of the South. Colonel French, a member of an old and respected southern family returned home to the little southern town of Clarendon. French had left the South after the war to make his fortune in the North, and he had been quite successful. Upon returning home, he was disturbed to find the inequities of the convict

---

lease system, the total power of southern demagogues, the abuses of labor in industry, child labor, etc. French vowed to stay and help his region.\textsuperscript{76} Like Nicolas Worth, Colonel French was constantly confronted with those who felt threatened by his ideas. The major confrontations within the story, however, developed from one major source; that is, the Negro Problem. It was fast becoming unsafe for him to live in the town, and he received no help from the well-bred, traditionally paternalistic white people of the community.\textsuperscript{77} Thus, explains Chesnutt, the town of Clarendon would be left behind the rest of the nation in the twentieth century. For her lack of ability in dealing with the Negro would impede her in all phases of progress. She was choosing a reactionary path. The Colonel gave up on the South, but maintained a dream of a "new South" that would replace the old and the present one.\textsuperscript{78} Many years would pass before his dream would be even partially fulfilled. He dreamed of

\ldots a regenerated South, filled with thriving industries and thronged with a prosperous and happy people, where everyman, having enough for his needs, was willing that every other man should have the same; where law and order should prevail unquestioned, and where

\textsuperscript{76}Chesnutt, \textit{The Colonel's Dream}, passim.

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid., p. 283.

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., pp. 293-94.
everyman could enter, through the golden gate of hope, the field of opportunity; where lay the prizes of life, which all might have an equal chance to win or lose.

George Washington Cable, a native of New Orleans, published his *John March, Southerner* in 1894. Cable's work reflected many of the same attitudes about life in the South during the eighties as had those by W.H. Page, and Charles W. Chesnutt. This novel while dealing with the Negro question went further in its inclusion of other important aspects of the "new South." Cable's "new South" and the "new South" as enunciated by Grady were at odds. Cable had previously described his version in an article entitled "What Shall the Negro Do?" He said:

There is a strong line of cleavage already running through the white part of the population in every southern state. On the one side of this line the trend of conviction is toward the establishment of the common happiness and security through the uplifting of the whole people by the widest possible distribution of moral effects and wealth-producing powers. It favors for example, the expansion of the public-school system, and is strongest among men of professional callings and within sweep of the influence of colleges and universities. It antagonizes such peculiar institutions as the infamous convict-lease system, with that system's enormous political powers. It condemns corrupt elections at home or abroad. It revolts against the absolutism of political parties. In a word, it stands distinctively for the new South of American ideas, including the idea of material

---

79 Ibid., p. 280.
development, as against a new South with no ideas except that of material development for the agrandizement of the few; and the holding of the whole Negro race in the South. 80

John March had been completed several years prior to its publication date. However, it was rejected as another of Cable's polemical diatribes by the influential editor of the Century, Richard Watson Gilder. 81 It was finally accepted for serial publication in Scribner's Magazine and later published in book form by Charles Scribner. 82

In John March, Southerner Cable did not offer a concrete program of reform of the South. Instead, in this fictional work, he stated that a problem did exist in the South, and that it should be faced and a solution sought. 83 John March grew up in the small southern town of Suez in northern Georgia. On reaching manhood he was faced with the complexities and problems of life in the South. John's father had died and had left him only a legacy of land, and

80 George W. Cable, "What Shall the Negro Do?" The Forum 6(1888), 637-38.


82 Ibid., p. 122.

now it was the son's duty to make the best use of his heritage. John is duped by black and by white by northern and by southern tricksters who saw him as an easy mark. One of the stories' devious characters was Major Garnet. He posed as a Southern "gentleman," a preacher, and an educator, but at the beginning of the novel we find him whipping a free Negro without provocation, hardly an action of an educated, Christian gentleman. Cable later reveals that Garnet was a powerful land speculator and a thief, motivated by greed. The Negro, Cornelius Leggett, in turn whipped his former young master John March. Leggett was presented by Cable as having a dual nature; unscrupulous but with a sincere desire to see his race educated and given a chance. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., found that Cable's presentation of Leggett was a mark of Cable's realistic writing. Leggett was human, not to be glorified or vilified. Rubin found that Cable's realism was a source of irritation and shock to the typical post-war reader of local color fiction and that Cable's type of realism was not to be seen in the South again until the appearance of William Faulkner.

84 Ibid., passim.
85 Ibid., pp. 94-99, 135, 154.
86 Rubin, pp. 124-45.
87 Ibid., p. 131-32.
John March developed a plan of action for himself, his land, and symbolically for the South. He established a progressive Negro settlement on his inherited land. To do this, he fought many a battle with himself and with those who would have used him. He stayed in the South to work for her further advancement, wearing the proud title, John March, Southerner.  

Walter Hines Page, Charles Waddell Chesnutt, and George Washington Cable did not cater to the tastes of men such as Richard Watson Gilder who wanted only the pleasant aspects of life presented. Nor did they present life in the South as having already achieved perfection as did Grady, or Blair. Their version of southern life did not include moonlight and magnolias. They presented the darker sides of life in the South and also paid too much attention to the Negro question. Cable's persistent attention to that sore question caused him the loss of publishers and audience alike.

---

88 Cable had left his southern home in 1885 for Northampton, Connecticut.

89 Rubin, pp. 130-32. Cable's dedication to truth in fiction was seen as didacticism by Gilder.

90 Historians have noted that Gilder and other late nineteenth century editors acted as guardians of the public's morality at the expense many times of realistic writing.

Two decidedly different pictures of life in the South were presented by southern local colorists to their nineteenth century public. On the one hand Thomas Nelson Page and his like presented primarily a mythic portrait of the region while on the other hand Cable, Chesnutt, and Page attacked the mythic vision. The pronouncements of those who wrote in opposition to the myth makers went unheeded. By 1900, the mythic version had become not only popular, but fully entrenched in the minds of the national audience.

---

92 Osterweis, pp. 35-6.
93 Ibid., pp. x, 24, 29.
CHAPTER III

THE LOCAL COLOR SCHOOL AND THE NEGRO QUESTION

The Negro, slavery, and the question of race had vexed the American mind long before the outbreak of the Civil War. The war, however, eradicated the Negro's long-held societal position as slave. The post-war generation in both the North and the South was faced with a far more complex question; what new role would the Negro assume in American society as a free man? His "new" role would be largely determined by the actions of inactions of the whites, for he had been a subservient people, his freedom gained not because of a black insurrection but due rather to a Civil War between two predominantly white societies divided by a compendium of differences, one of which, and perhaps the most heavily disputed, had been the Negro question.

The fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the Constitution guaranteed to the Negro as a free man the full rights of citizenship. Ratification of these amendments by the southern states as a provision of their own readmittance back into the Union had been reluctantly met by 1870. After 1877 and during the 1880's, the two divided sections focused
their attention on the reconciliation of their sectional differences. However, the Negro question was not to be quickly or easily resolved. Professor C. Vann Woodward found that the Negro's "new" role "took shape gradually under the influence of economic and political conflicts among divided white people," conflicts which he added "were eventually resolved in part at the expense of the Negro."\(^1\) Emotional, economic, and political considerations dictated a variation in southern thinking concerning the Negro question. Southern reactionary opinion was juxtaposed to those views held by the new South spokesman, which in turn was contrasted to the radical view held by a small minority of southerners.\(^2\) The basic element of reactionary thought was a strong belief in the inherent inferiority of the Negro race. According to Paul M. Gaston, Thomas Nelson Page was the exemplar of the reactionary credo.\(^3\)

The new South advocates denounced the reactionary stance on the Negro question as unprogressive.\(^4\) They echoed the

---


\(^3\) Ibid., p. 124.

\(^4\) Ibid., pp. 124-5.
reactionary's belief in Negro inferiority, but held that repression of the Negro would not benefit the South either politically or economically. Their program would "preserve white supremacy, insure prosperity, and 'solve' the race question." To the reactionary, slavery had been a blessing to the barbarous black. To the new South men, slavery had been a cancerous sore destroying the vitals of the white race. The Radical view as held by George W. Cable abhorred slavery on moral grounds, thus differing greatly with his fellow southerners. In the name of justice and right, he called for the granting of civil rights and equal justice to the Negro as guaranteed by the constitution to all citizens. Cable's views on the race question were seen as destructive "negrophobia" by both the reactionaries and the new South promoters since they did not uphold the banner of white supremacy at all costs.

The new South's solution to the Negro problem dealt handily with the problems of freedom and equality. The new South men granted the Negro his inalienable right of suffrage in so far as the Negro adhered to the doctrine

5 Ibid., pp. 124-6.
6 Ibid., p. 126.
of white supremacy. Paul M. Gaston points out that not all new South men saw the subservient position relegated to the Negro as a permanent one. W.H. Page "promised whites would come to recognize and reward merit wherever it showed itself, in whatever skin color." Page's optimistic view of the Negro's status was not generally held by either the reactionary or new South factions. Thus the Negro's ballot which would insure him his freedom through the democratic process was nullified by restrictions placed on it in the name of white supremacy. The new South's solution to the problem of Negro equality was founded on two concepts, that of white supremacy and that of race instinct. White supremacy relegated the Negro to an inferior status because of the laws of God, and the concept of race instinct maintained that the Negro did not wish to claim his "equal" rights. The resultant concept of racial separation or segregation was formalized in 1896 in the Plessy v. Ferguson ruling.

In an essay entitled "The South As A Field for Fiction," Albion W. Tourgee noted that by 1888 American literature

---

8 Gaston, pp. 130-5.
9 Ibid., p. 132.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 149.
had embraced the romance of the South.\textsuperscript{12} Exploration of things southern had become the American literary vogue and "the African the chief romantic element."\textsuperscript{13} The Negro, as other romantic elements in southern literature, was generally assigned "stock" characteristics.\textsuperscript{14} To Tourgee, the Negro was not being dealt with as a human being, but rather as a literary "foil" to roles given the white man.\textsuperscript{15} However, the Negro was being explored, and Tourgee hoped that the Negro in all of his aspects, and not as a mere stereotype, would be fully touched on in the future.\textsuperscript{16} An article by George W. Cable, "A Simpler Southern Question" directly proceeded Tourgee's critique of current literature.\textsuperscript{17} Cable dealt with the current political and social condition of the Negro. Cable stated that the Negro question "must

\textsuperscript{12}Albion Winegar Tourgee, "The South As a Field for Fiction," \textit{The Forum} 6(1888):407.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., pp. 405-6.

\textsuperscript{14}These "stock" characteristics were defined by Francis P. Gaines as stereotyping as in the black manny with red bandana, or old colonel with white frock coat and moustache.

\textsuperscript{15}Tourgee, pp. 408-9.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., pp. 410-11.

be solved." He also refuted the much promoted idea that "in the South today he [the Negro] is happy, contented, and satisfied." He instructed the Negro to maintain his vote by voting, and he attempted to allay white fears of black supremacy. Tourgee called for an in-depth literary treatment of the Negro as a free man. Cable called for the free man to be given the rights of a man in the political arena. Tourgee and Cable offered possible literary and political alternative solutions that would have benefited the Negro. The southern Local Colorists generally refused to deal with the Negro's human aspects in their literature and likewise supported the denial of his civil and political rights in their fictive and editorial pronouncements. These local colorists writing during a period corresponding with what C. Vann Woodward designated as the decision-making years concerning the status of the Negro, roughly 1880 to 1900, reflected and in some cases predisposed the minds of the reader, both in the North and the South, towards the denouement of that question.

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p. 401.
20 Ibid., pp. 396, 397, 403.
Although C. Vann Woodward and Paul M. Gaston were able to divide southern political thought into distinctive diversions, i.e., reactionary, "New South," and radical, such division in southern authorship could be misleading. These variant ideas often flowed from the pen of a single local colorist. However, in regard to the Negro question, two distinctive classifications do emerge. The southern local colorist either regarded the Negro as inferior, possessing certain "romantic" or stereotyped characteristics and made a myth of his race, or he rejected the mythic possibilities of the Negro and dealt with him as realistically as he could. Those who promoted the Negro as an element of the southern myth very often waved the banner of white supremacy and race instinct when offering their literary solutions to the race problem, solutions that would eventually lead to a system of caste and class in America.

Waving the banner of white supremacy and stereotyping the Negro race, Thomas Nelson Page convincingly argued in his writings that the Negro and the white of the South would live in harmony again only if a strict system of caste and class were maintained. Page reflected the reactionary political view in his fiction and in his polemical essays. His major aim as a writer was "to correct popular errors
about the southern 'race' and 'the Negro problem.' "21 Page's post-war novels called for reconciliation and glorified the southern past including pre-war race relations. To Page the South's most crucial current problems was the Negro. 22 Page's pictures of the bygone days in In Ole Virginia or Marse Chan and Other Stories (1887) exemplified his belief that the Negro had been contented, happy, and extremely loyal before the war. Most of the Negroes of this volume either saved the life of a master or mistress or demonstrated love and loyalty by clinging to the memories and ways of the past. However, Page's essays and fiction dealing with the free man shattered his kindly romantic view of the Negro, replacing that view with yet another stereotype that would again define the Negro as an inferior race. Page's most recent biographer Theodore L. Gross concluded that Page's distorted view of southern problems was most apparent whenever he wrote about the Negro, "and especially of the insurgent Negro who insists upon his legal rights." 23 Page's works dealing with the Negro after


23 Ibid., p. 47.
the war no longer pictured him as "good" but rather pictured the "insurgent" black as either barbaric, superstitious, or ungrateful. Page felt that the Negro race had never "exhibited much capacity to advance," and that they were "inferior to other races."\(^2\) Page's corollary to black inferiority was Anglo-Saxon superiority.\(^2\) In his short story "The Spectre in the Cart," Page presented a picture of the Negro that defined him as superstitious, comical, and even possibly malicious.\(^2\) In his story "Bred in the Bone," appearing in 1901, Page dismissed the Negro's chances of success when challenged by white superior blood lines. Only the "horse" of good blood lines could win the race, and the Negro's defeat was preordained.\(^2\) In "Old Jabe's Marital Experiment" (1902), Page described the Negro as immoral by white standards. Such standards would not be applicable to the Negro race as long as he remained in his place of inferiority.\(^2\)

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 49.

\(^2\) Even Page admitted in his writing that oftentimes Anglo Saxons had abused their position of superiority, see T.N. Page, *John Marvel, Assistant*, on antisemitism.


Page's views on Negro inferiority buttressed his conclusions on Negro suffrage. In Red Rock, Page's version of reconstruction, he demonstrated that the Negro had not even been ready for emancipation, much less full participation in the governing of the country. At ballot time, one kindly old Negro, Uncle Gideon, was heard to say, "... I don't know who I votin' for--I jis know I votin', dat's all." In "Mam Lyddy's Recognition," Theodore Gross found that Page neatly dismissed the Negro's demands for equal rights by showing them to be born of the Negro's ignorance and planted by miscreant whites and blacks. Poor old Mam Lyddy, the family maid-servant, had succumbed to heretical teaching and had demanded "rec'nition" from her white employers. The patient white family questioned Lyddy as to what she meant by recognition only to find that she did not even know the meaning of the word. She was an innocent dupe of radical thought, parroting a foreign idea.

31 Gross, pp. 100-1.
32 Ibid.
Page's reactionary thinking is clearly demonstrated throughout his fictive works. To Page, the Negro, as a race, was inferior, barbaric, and immoral without the need of, or right to, civil or political rights. Yankee radicals had perpetrated a crime against the Negro and southern civilization when they so foolishly attempted and failed to reconstruct the South. The South could and would solve the Negro question. Page felt it to be a fact "that wherever the Negroes and the southern whites are let alone, and are not affected by outside influences, they for the most part live in harmony." To Page, slavery had been "the greatest evil that ever befell this country" because it had "kept the sections divided and finally plunged the nation into a devastating civil war." For the slave the South's peculiar institution had been a blessing as it gave him "the only semblance of civilization which the Negro race has possessed since the dawn of history." One of Page's polemical essays concerning the Negro question was written as a direct argument against Cable and his radical ideas.

34 Gross, p. 51.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., pp. 47-8.
All of Page's literary efforts regarding the Negro question ran counter to those of Cable's. They were also much more repressive in their solutions for the southern problem than those offered by Joel Chandler Harris. However, Harris', like Page, would relegate the Negro to an inferior status. Although Harris reflected diverse elements in southern thinking when viewing the whole of southern society and its direction, he maintained the "New South" position on the Negro question throughout his writings, a position having much in common with that of Thomas Nelson Page.

Harris like the majority of his fellow southerners described the old days on the southern plantation as good. To Harris the "memory of the old plantation will remain green and gracious forever."38 Along with Henry Grady, Harris condemned slavery and would have shuddered at "the bare suggestion of its reestablishment,"39 but, like Grady, he felt that the South's peculiar institution had been an economic detriment to the region. Slavery and the plantation system had not been an unpleasant memory, for during those

39 Ibid.
days before the war and reconstruction, race relations had been harmonious. Harris also believed in the doctrine of race instinct. While visiting in New England, Harris had seen a white man ridiculed by his fellow travelers for having given his seat to a Negro woman. Harris attributed the man's condemnation by northerners as being due to adherence by all men to the laws of race instinct. The man had not offered his seat to the women of his own race first, and was thus deserving of ridicule. Harris hastened to add that in the South, no woman would have been left without a seat.

Harris' views on Negroes as individuals ameliorated many of his semi-racist views. Harris, who greatly admired Booker T. Washington, saw education as a means of elevating all elements of the South's population. Unlike some of his more reactionary and sometimes disappointed new South advocates, he did not feel that "all the work that has been done in that direction has been thrown away." Apparently he did not feel that the Negro would ever become the white

---

40 Ibid., pp. 61-2, pp. 90-2.
41 Ibid., p. 170.
42 Ibid., p. 109-10.
man's equal, for he added that education for the Negro would enable him to "perform" services for his "kind."44 Unlike many southerners, Harris believed that the Negro should be judged on his individual merits. And likewise, the whole race could not be judged as criminal or barbaric because of the misdeed of individuals. Negroes like whites were distinguishable from one another physically and morally.45 Although he did not believe in blaming a whole race for the actions of a few he recognized the feelings of those whites who had suffered at the hands of black barbarity. Thus he viewed lynching as a natural reaction to heinous deeds, but spoke out against lynching as producing a poor image of the South for the rest of the nation. Aside from violating state laws, it hurt immigration into the South by picturing the region as violent.46 Julia Collier Harris labeled Harris as a "Constructive Realist." She cited several instances in his short stories where he dealt realistically and sympathetically with the problems of the freed man. To her "Free Joe" evidenced "the author's

44 Ibid., p. 156. This could also indicate a view that segregation would always exist regardless of education.
46 Ibid., p. 157.
sympathy toward those humble souls whose ignorance only heightens their tragedy . . . "47 To Julia Harris, Harris' "Where's Duncan," a story dealing with the problems of mixed blood, was his "most poignant presentation of this species of injustice."48 In "Free Joe" Harris does evoke sympathy from the reader for the pitiful freed man. However, Harris' use of realism becomes somewhat ambivalent. Free Joe never laughed or smiled, whereas the slaves were always happy. According to Harris, Joe's bad luck began when he was given his freedom, for this made him "more helpless than any slave . . . ."49 Thus, Harris enforced the plantation myth. Yet despite these romantic tendencies, he admitted to some of the darker aspects of slavery in the story. Joe's wife Lucinda was owned by a cruel and wicked master who denied Joe's seeing her. Joe died for the love of his wife. In Harris' opinion, Negroes were capable of deep feelings. Thus in one story Harris was able to present a picture of the Negro that was an admixture of romance and realism. In "Where's Duncan," which will be discussed later in detail,


48 Ibid.

Harris did decry the injustice of miscegenation; however, he did not, as did Cable or Mark Twain, blame any one sector of society. In the story of "Mingo: A Sketch of Life in Middle Georgia," Harris again presented a rather ambivalent picture of southern life. The Negro of the story is pictured in pure romantic terms which would buttress reactionary and new South solutions to the Negro problem. Mingo had been freed, but he of his own volition had remained to protect his young mistress. At one time, before emancipation, Mingo had been called "Laughing Mingo." After the war he had "the air of settled anxiety belonging to those who are tortured by an overpowering responsibility . . . ." Harris, as the narrator, commented that, "if the responsibilities of life are problems to those who have been trained to solve them, how much more formidable must they be to this poor Negro but lately lifted to his feet!" However, Harris' description of the poor whites in the story does not fit into the romantic pattern. All had not been


51 Ibid., p. 6.

52 Ibid., p. 7.

53 Ibid.
well with this sector of society and he viewed their "pent-up rage of a century" as tragic and understandable. Mingo's tragic aspects resulted from freedom and not from the darker aspects of slavery. Julia Collier Harris felt that stories such as "Mingo," "Free Joe," and "Where's Duncan" demonstrated "how modern and detached was his vision in depicting the 'Old Regime' with its mansions, slave quarters, and 'poor white' settlements."55

Albeit in Harris' views the Negro was a tragic figure, his tragic aspects were attributed to his new freedom and not to his days spent as a slave. In Gabriel Toliver, A Story of Reconstruction (1902), Harris denounced the radical northern politicians for having disturbed harmonious race relations in the South.56 To Harris their purpose had been to provoke "a new revolution in the hope that the Negroes might be prevailed upon to sack cities and towns, and destroy the white population."57 Harris, like many of the new South advocates, felt that the South had once more returned

54 Ibid., pp. 21-24.
55 Odum, p. 149.
57 Ibid.
to peaceful race relations; "matters have changed greatly
since those days [reconstruction] and all for the better."

The radical policy which had harmed race relations and caused
the Negro to question white authority had been justly over-
thrown by the better elements of southern society. Harris' liberality towards the Negro question is progressive when paralleled with the repressive ideas of the southern racist, and yet his views differed little from the mainstream of southern thinking. His type of "liberality" accepted the southern white interpretation of the laws of the land until the mid-twentieth century as they did not allow for further destruction of the status quo. By 1904, Harris felt that the Negro's lot would be improved if they followed men such as Booker T. Washington, but "agitation" and "controversy over the political or social status of the Negro" would gain him nothing except to further goad southern irritation over the matter. In this opinion Harris seems to have been the "realist."

58 Ibid., pp. 178-9, 262, 292.

59 Ibid., p. 262. Harris like Page was a friend to the negro as long as he maintained his old place. The negroes in Gabriel Toliver who were disloyal to their former masters were depicted as superstitious, immoral, and childlike, 174-186.

60 J.C. Harris, Editor and Essayist, pp. 137-8, 46-7. In 1881 Harris had defended Cable and his novel The Grandissimes in the name of literary freedom. He also called for the South to overcome her sensitiveness towards criticism.
George Washington Cable, Harris' fellow local colorist, had virtually ceased to write or protest the plight of the Negro by the turn of the century, as it was by that time a moot question. George W. Cable's reputation as a novelist had been well established by 1884. He had been favorably compared with such notable authors as Nathaniel Hawthorne and had on occasion "ranked above" Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James. However, after 1884 Cable's literary endeavors were relegated to second place in favor of his reform work. Cable's reform positions labeled him as a southern radical. In an article entitled, "George W. Cable's Beginnings As a Reformer," Arlin Turner traced Cable's so-called radicalism of the mid-1880's to its origin. According to Turner, Cable's "championing" of the Negro was a "logical" development in his career as a social reformer. During the 1870's Cable had worked and written in behalf of the destruction of the Louisiana State Lottery Company. However, his attempts on that issue

---

61 Arlin Turner, introduction to John March Southerner, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

62 Ibid., p. xv.

63 Gaston, p. 127.

64 Arlin Turner, "George W. Cable's Beginnings as a Reformer," The Journal of Southern History 17(1962):139.
had failed. He had been backed by "prominent" New Orleans citizens and by the conservative press, but public opinion against the lottery system had not been sufficiently swayed. During the early 1880's Cable actively participated in a reform movement aimed at the improvement of prisons and asylums in New Orleans, and this attempt proved successful. Cable's thoroughness in his prison investigations eventually led him to investigate the state penal system, and there he discovered the evils of the convict lease system. He found that Negro prisoners were not receiving justice by the state. According to Arlin Turner, Cable's noted biographer, these investigations led him to believe "that the Negroes were not receiving justice in the southern courts; that the discrimination which admittedly existed in schools, libraries, and other public institutions was carrying over into the administration of justice." In 1875 Cable had written a letter defending the non-segregated school policy of New Orleans. Although his first letter received publication in the newspaper and was firmly rebuked, his second

---

65 Ibid., pp. 141-46.
66 Ibid., p. 157.
67 Ibid., p. 159.
68 Ibid., p. 160.
letter in reply to that rebuttal had not even been given a hearing. Thus Cable delayed protest on the Negro question until a time when he would be allowed to speak.69

In 1882 Cable addressed the literary society at the University of Mississippi. In this address he defined some of his views on the Negro question. He found that slavery had been a "crime against heaven and humanity."70 It was the fostering of this institution that had caused the South to fall behind the rest of the nation. The present South as he saw it had not yet "joined hands with it again."71 All vestiges of a caste system in the South would have to be done away with for the region to again join the rest of the world, and that included Negro tenantry.72 This address received much praise from the southern press and very little in the way of criticism. Arlin Turner felt that this rarity could in part be attributed to the South's being "less sensitive to such criticism than it became a few years later."73

69 Ibid., p. 147.
70 Turner, George W. Cable, A Biography, p. 133.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., p. 134.
Approaching the summer of 1884 Cable stood in good stead as an accepted author and "critic" of southern society.\textsuperscript{74} But the delivery of another address, "The Freedman's Case in Equity," in September of 1884 before the American Social Science Association marked him thereafter as a radical in southern affairs.\textsuperscript{75} Abuse and rebuttal were immediate from the southern press, and the attack was resounding.\textsuperscript{76} This time Cable had directly challenged current conditions in the South. He did not attack slavery, but instead spoke out against segregation in public schools. To Cable it was unwarranted, and it would, if abandoned, not increase the likelihood of social equality.\textsuperscript{77} To Cable the stigma of racial inferiority which was being put on the Negro would, if it was not discontinued, deny him his legal rights under law.\textsuperscript{78} The South's "habit of oppression" and her dismissal of the Negro question as something that would "settle itself" could not be countenanced.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., pp. 144-55.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., pp. 155-68.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., pp. 197-98.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 196.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 195.
by a moral nation. Cable had not wanted to stir up trouble in the South, but he had wanted to "invite open discussion" on the southern problem.

One of Cable's most ardent attackers was Henry W. Grady, spokesman for the New South's moderate racial position and self-appointed spokesman for "the silent" majority of the South. Grady's reply to Cable's radicalism reiterated the South's justification for a caste system. Race instinct and segregation as solutions to the Negro problem were what would protect the Negro and hold society together, for "without it, there might be a breaking down of all lines of division and a thorough intermingling of whites and blacks." If this were allowed to happen Grady warned, "The Whites, at any cost and at any hazard, would maintain the clear integrity and dominance of the Anglo-Saxon blood."

Grady emphasized in his reply that Cable did not speak for the majority of the South, nor did he really speak for the

---

79 Ibid., p. 197.
80 Ibid., p. 194.
82 Ibid., p. 1911.
83 Ibid.
rest of the nation. Grady saw the Supreme Court's nullification of the Civil Rights Bill of 1875 as the nation's turning the Negro question over to the South for settlement, the South that knew the Negro best.  For Grady and for most of his southern contemporaries "civil" equality connoted "social" equality which, if given time, would lead to the amalgamation of the two races. Thus Grady accused Cable of promoting miscegenation.

Cable's fictive works which dealt with miscegenation did not advocate racial mixing. Instead, he admitted its existence and then attempted to describe its tragic implications. In Cable's story of "Tite Poulette" (1874) we are shown how "color" could act to thwart true love. Tite Poulette was a young and beautiful Creole whose supposed mother was a woman of "color." The girl's marriage to a young immigrant, Kristan Koppig, would have been impossible had not the "mother" denounced her child as being not her own. A similar plot was developed in Cable's "Madame

84 Ibid., pp. 1909-10.
85 Ibid., p. 1910.
86 George Washington Cable, Old Creole Days, parts one and two (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), passim.
87 Ibid.
Delphine," however, in this story the question of "color" plays a greater role. Again a white man wishes to marry the daughter of a "colored" woman. The mother, Madame Delphine, relinquished her claims of motherhood, as did the "mother" in "Tite Poulette." However, in this story of miscegenation, the "colored" woman had lied in order to procure a good marriage for her daughter. She knew that the law prohibited mixed marriages, but she felt that "Dad law is a fool!" Madame Delphine died confessing her sin before her priest. The priest, who apparently was speaking for the author, said, "Lord, lay not this sin to her charge." Her humanness had conquered the law, a law which did not take humanness into account. In this story Cable places most of the blame for the tragedy of race on society; "Blame them one part, Madame Delphine, and their fathers, mothers, and fellow citizens the other ninety-nine." To Cable the truth was "that all have a share in one another's sins." As a local colorist Cable attempted to describe the society in which he lived with as much accuracy as he

88 Ibid., p. 61.
89 Ibid., p. 81.
90 Ibid., p. 76.
91 Ibid., p. 19.
could, a society which included those of mixed blood and in which the Negro prior to the war had not always been a happy darky.  

Perhaps Cable's most important work dealing with the tragedies of race was his novel, *The Grandissimes*, which was published in book form in 1880. Although the novel was set one year after the Louisiana Purchase, to Cable the racial problems that existed then were still apparent during his lifetime. Cable believed that "... all possessing Negro blood had received the same freedom without rights which had belonged to the pariahs of 1803" who had been free men and women of color. The oldest son of the Grandissime family was the "pariah" in Cable's novel. Honoré Grandissime was a free man of color, but when his life was seen in contrast with the life of his half-brother of pure blood, his freedom lost its meaning. For Honoré Grandissime, there was no family business to inherit, no honor, no respect, and no acceptance by society. Honoré Grandissime, F.M.C., became the shadow of his brother in

---

94 Ibid., p. 90.
the novel, a brother who had been given the same name minus the F.M.C. designation. The white Honoré became aware of his brother's plight, and in Cablian fashion, tried to right the wrongs of his own society as best he could. Thus Honore went against his family and Creole society, claiming his "Ethiopian" counterpart as his true and legal brother. However, Honore's (F.M.C.) acceptance as a man of worth came too late. The story ends with his tragic death, a suicide. Cable suggested in this novel an uneasy solution to one segment of the race problem. He did not recommend amalgamation or mixing of the races, but rather he asked that the problem be faced and be equitably solved. Prior to 1884 Cable's works had been praised by his critics as charming local color sketches, and, indeed, some of them were just that. Cable's works after the 1884 declaration did become more explicit in their political and racial overtones, and the critics wondered where their writer of good fiction had gone. His fiction was now

---

95 F.M.C. stood for free man of color.
96 Cable, The Grandissimes, passim.
97 Turner, George W. Cable, A Biography, pp. 85-6, 155-6.
98 Ibid., pp. 167-8, 197.
considered didactic, polemical, and without literary merit. His works were now being judged in light of his political views.

Five of Cable's fellow local colorists also dealt with the possibly inflammable issue of miscegenation. These writers, with the possible exception of Samuel Clemens, who is included with some reservation as a local colorist, presented miscegenation as a tragic aspect of slavery but did not render personal judgment on it or present it as a problem in need of a solution.

Katherine Sherwood Bonner, who had published such reconciliation novels as *Like Unto Like* (1878) and *Dialect Tales* (1883), wrote a very different type of story for publication in *Lippincott's Magazine* in April 1880. Her story entitled "A Volcanic Interlude" was not included in her volume of collected short stories published in the 1880's because of its "unsuitability." C.L. Simpson, a compiler of local color renderings, found that her frank handling of the miscegenation theme in "A Volcanic Interlude" had led to the canceling of many magazine subscriptions.99

---

Her story was set in New Orleans sometime after the Civil War. Three young girls of good family and apparent wealth were attending an exclusive New Orleans girls school. Bonner alludes to the possibly questionable heritage of the three sisters. Their father's complexion was "excessively dark," and their mother, now dead, had brought "new vigor" to the Dufresne family. The mystery of their heritage was revealed by a meddling neighbor of their father's, and the effects were tragic. Their contented, well-adjusted life of social prominence was destroyed by the woman's revelation. Each sister had been an accident of their white father's passion. However, the youngest, Zoe, had been born of a Negro slave; and she was described by Bonner as being the true tragic figure. The others had only to live with the knowledge of the sin of their parents, but little Zoe was of mixed blood and was thus apart from her sisters. Bonner's story came very close to twentieth century realism, but was perhaps too frank for her reading public.

In 1891 a short story entitled "Where's Duncan" appeared in a collection, Balaam and His Master, by Joel Chandler

---

100 Ibid., p. 295.

101 Ibid., passim.
Harris. Harris, like Cable dealt frankly with the damning aspects of mixed blood. However, Harris, unlike Cable, offered no criticism of its social origins or implications; and he did not suggest as had Cable that society make restitution or give recognition to its victims under law. Harris' story was, as Julia Collier Harris suggested, an example of his sympathetic nature toward the Negro's problem. Duncan was a young intelligent black mulatto who had been sold down the river by his white father. Duncan, although legally a Negro, could have passed for white. However, by the time the boy had reached maturity, his father had grown to despise him and had dismissed him as his son. Upon regaining his freedom, the boy returned home seeking vengeance on all who had played a part in his demise, including its by-product, himself. After precipitating a fight between his parents, the result of which was the mortal stabbing of his father, Duncan could be seen sitting in the corner of dining room "enjoying the spectacle" as the house and its contents were being consumed by fire. Duncan, who was obviously the perpetrator of a crime under law, did not

---

102 Odum, p. 148.

receive any condemnation by the author. He was not described as malicious or barbaric, but rather was alluded to as having a good nature, a nature that had a certain quality of sadness about it. \(^{104}\)

Grace King began her career contributing to periodicals, primarily local color sketches of New Orleans life. Her works were generally apolitical in tone and content, as her main objective was to recreate an "exotic society." \(^{105}\) It is thus ironic that in at least two of her local color renderings she dismissed the romanticism of Page and chose to, in a small way, emulate the realistic studies of Cable in dealing with the Negro question. King's "The Little Convent Girl" also dealt with the miscegenation theme. As Edmund Wilson found in his study of late nineteenth century American literature, her story had a more tragic conclusion than did Cable's "Madame Delphine." \(^{106}\) In King's rendition, "the white-skinned mulatto daughter of a white father and a Negro mother--instead of marrying a white man

\(^{104}\)Ibid., p. 155, passim.


as Cable's heroine does--is driven to drown herself. 107

It was noted by Wilson that King as a southerner greatly preferred the works of Thomas Nelson Page to those of George Cable. 108

The little convent girl was described as a quiet, shy, and religious eighteen-year-old whose parents had separated when she was an infant. The father, who was now dead, had placed her for safe keeping at the convent. The girl was returning to New Orleans where she would meet her mother for the first time since babyhood. Save for her dark eyes and hair that had a tendency to curl, no one would have suspected that the little convent girl's mother would be colored. The girl unable to cope with her new identity, drowns herself, committing, incidentally, a mortal sin in the eyes of the Catholic Church where she had been sheltered. 109

In King's novel entitled Monsieur Motte (1888), the author again pursues the problems of the color line. Marcelite, a good and faithful Negress, found that for all of her good works she would maintain an inferior status in the eyes of the white world. Marcelite had secretly provided money for

107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., pp. 605-7.
109 Ibid., passim.
the education and care of her now deceased owner's child, Marie. Marie, upon finding out the identity of her benefactress, was, instead of being grateful, ashamed because she had been supported by a "nigger." Although the story concludes happily, the reader is made aware of the Negro's plight. It was that one drop of Negro blood that had relegated Marcelite to the lower rung of society and she became aware of that fact. "Gay, insouciant, impudent, she had worn her color like a travesty. Who would have suspected her."  

Kate O'Flaherty Chopin, another Louisianan, began her literary career during the late eighteen-eighties. Edmund Wilson classified Chopin with a group of writers whose work surpassed the literary output of their day, a group in which he included George Cable. Her work was different because it did not conform to the literary norms as laid down by genteel nineteenth century America. Chopin was classified as a local colorist by her contemporaries, but

\begin{footnotes}
\item[111] Ibid., p. 299.
\end{footnotes}
her interest as a writer was in the exploration of universal themes common to the human experience, such as love, hate, and human sexuality.\textsuperscript{113} Chopin's stories dealing with miscegenation were neither local-color in nature or intent nor were they meant to have political overtones. She would instead realistically explore the tragic effects of the color line on humanity. In "A Little Free Mulatto" (1892) Chopin describes the harmful effects mixed blood could have on an innocent child. A little mulatto, shunned by both the white children and the black children of her society, began to wither away. Her parents, fearing for her life, removed her to "paradise," the "L'Isle de Mulatres," where all were of mixed blood and where she could again be happy, healthy, and well-adjusted.\textsuperscript{114} In another of Chopin's stories published that same year, "Desiree's Baby," a young couple's happy marriage ends in disaster when their baby began to develop Negroid features. The husband hastily pointed the finger of racial guilt at his wife, for her ancestry was not known. The story ended in bitter irony as Desirée killed herself, and her husband, the accuser, found out that it was his own mother who had belonged "to

\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., p. 25.

\textsuperscript{114}Ibid., p. 203.
the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery."\textsuperscript{115}

The author, true to her stated intent as a writer, made no comments and passed no judgment on her real life situations. Chopin's stories were not always charming and they did not always end happily. Her later realistic exploration of the taboo topic of human sexuality cost her her literary career.\textsuperscript{116} As a local colorist she had been safe from the criticisms of genteel America.

Although Mark Twain, or Samuel Langhorne Clemens, has been generally classified as a western humorist, much of his writing does fit the southern local color pattern of the late nineteenth century. Louis D. Rubin offered proof of Twain's southerness in his study entitled \textit{The Writer in the South: Studies in a Literary Community}. According to Rubin, Twain's birthplace, border state Missouri, and his southern parentage had greatly influenced him and his literary vision.\textsuperscript{117} Another literary historian, Jane Benardete, described Twain as the "apotheosis of local color."\textsuperscript{118} His "literary voice"

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p. 245.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 30.


was always regional and his most successful novels *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* were "set in the past, gilded with nostalgia for his boyhood in Hannibal, Missouri."\(^{119}\) But Twain was different from other "southern" authors, excepting Cable, as he did not reside in the South after the war. It was Twain's physical distance from his literary community, the South, that allowed him literary objectiveness, that enabled him to "look beneath the surface, at the underlying values and attitudes of the society."\(^{120}\) It should also be noted that Twain, like the local colorists, relied heavily on regional description and dialect usage. Also, Twain as a southerner could not and did not avoid racial themes in his novels. In his writings he would probe deep into the values of a southern community and its position on race.

In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, one of Twain's lesser known works, the author explored the miscegenation theme. The plot of the story evolved around the actions of a young Negro slave girl, Roxana. Roxana had the care and keeping of two identical boys, her own son, Chambers, and her owner's son, Tom. Afraid that her son might some day be separated

\(^{119}\)Ibid.

\(^{120}\)Rubin, p. xii.
from her and be "sold down the river" into the slavery of the deep South, Roxana switched the two children in their cribs. Leslie Fielder, in his study of race in literature, noted that Twain was perceptive in his understanding of the workings of the color-line--the "color-line" in the South could easily be "crossed and recrossed by the white man's lust," it was an "imaginary" line, and what made Chambers a Negro was "custom" and "a fiction of law."121

Tom Driscoll, the black usurper, grew into manhood spoiled and unruly. The true son of Virginia stock was humble, subservient, good natured, and illiterate. Since babyhood Tom had assumed his role of master over Chambers, persecuting and abusing him; and Chambers likewise had assumed the role of Negro slave accepting Tom's abuses. The story reaches its climax when the true identity of the boys is uncovered by amateur detective Pudd'nhead Wilson. The awful truth was not learned via "race instinct" but was discovered by a common human identifier, the fingerprint, which did not lie. Tom, or rather Chambers, had committed murder in order to protect his unlawful inheritance; but because of his value as property, was not executed or imprisoned.

He was, instead, promptly "sold down the river" by his creditors, Twain, rather than merely pointing to the tragedy of mixed blood sought out its ironic implications for his southern community, where a Negro could pass for white and where a white given the inferior status of a slave could himself become one. 122

Most local colorists of the South, with the exception of Cable and Twain, did not deal in depth with the problems of race. Their dealings with the theme of miscegenation remained apolitical in tone and offered little, if any, criticism of their southern society. Regardless of their sometimes realistic handling of this extremely ticklish subject, they failed to dispel the southern white view on the race question, and this was probably not their intent. Instead, they pointed out the tragedy of race mixing, a tragedy which could easily be avoided by future southerners if they remained true to their race instinct and supported the efforts of men such as Henry Grady. A caste system strictly adhered to would prevent the tragedy of miscegenation.

Local colorists of lesser reputation such as Richard Malcolm Johnson, Ruth McEnery Stuart, James Lane Allen, and

---

Maurice Thompson reflected the racial stereotyping of Page and Harris. Johnson, a native Georgian, primarily interested in the local color aspects of the poor white, was derided by T.N. Page for having paid so little attention to the glorification of the southern past. Yet, Johnson, like Page, depicted the Negro slave of antebellum days as loyal to his master to the point of martyrdom. Johnson's short story "Moll and Virgil," which appeared in book form in 1887, depicted the slave's capacity for unquestioned loyalty. Moll and Virgil, the two slaves, worked and plotted in order to secure the release of their master Billy from prison. Billy had been falsely convicted of horse stealing. Although Billy was eventually found innocent of the crime, Moll and Virgil became martyrs for his cause. Virgil was killed trying to rescue Billy, and Moll went crazy. Moll died prior to news of Billy's release; and Johnson, in a style reminiscent of Page and Harris, concluded his story by saying, "... tears were in the eyes of her new mistress; her old master wept, as years before, at the departure of his mother." 123 Thus Johnson who did not idealize the planter society or

the "picturesque darky," did, as was pointed out by Francis Pendleton Gaines, harmonize with the general pattern.\footnote{\textit{Francis Pendleton Gaines, The Southern Plantation: A Study in the Development and Accuracy of a Tradition} (1924; reprint ed., Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1962), p. 146.}

Ruth McEnery Stuart, a native Louisianian, began her literary career as a local colorist in 1881. She was credited by one biographer as being the "first to describe the after-the-war plantation Negro in his own social environment," and for having "a genuine affectionate sympathy for the originals of her characters."\footnote{\textit{Dictionary of American Biography}, S.V. "Stuart, Ruth McEnery."} In 1893 she published a collection of her short stories entitled \textit{A Golden Wedding}. Her stories of post-war Negroes do evoke sympathy from the reader as Stuart portrays them, as loyal but comical servants. Stuart's stories did nothing new towards the delineation of the Negro as a man, but rather compounded his already stereotyped image. In \textit{A Golden Wedding} her masters were good and kind, her matrons genteel and frail, and it seemed that in the South Christmas was an everyday event.\footnote{Ruth McEnery Stuart, \textit{A Golden Wedding} (New York: Henry Mills Alden, 1893), passim.}

The reflection of the Southern racial view as enunciated by Page and ameliorated by Harris can also be seen in the
works of Maurice Thompson and James Lane Allen. Thompson's story of "Ben and Judas" and his essays on race reflected the concept of the Negro's racial inferiority and promoted the idea that the Negro had no real right or need of equality under law. Allen's stories dealing with the Negro described him as kindly and loyal. In Allen's "Two Gentlemen of Kentucky," Allen promoted the idea that the destinies of the white and black race were peculiarly entwined, that the two would walk hand in hand in contentment and prosperity, and that the white would set the step for both races.

As has been noted by C. Vann Woodward, this southern attitude towards the Negro was being rapidly adopted in American thought and in American law.\textsuperscript{127} Tourgee's plea that the Negro be given full delineation in literature went generally unheeded. Cable's plea for Negro rights under law were equally ignored. Indeed, the northern local colorists of the late nineteenth century reflected the southern view in their writings and not the traditional abolitionist views that had been the Yankee trademark before the war. Alice French, whose pen name was Octave Thanet, was born in Andover, Massachusetts, of New England parents; and yet her stories dealing with the Negro could have easily

\textsuperscript{127}C. Vann Woodward, \textit{Jim Crow}, passim.
come from the pen of a true southerner. She dismissed the myth of good old southern cooking, the fine old mansions, and the idea that prosperity reigned in the South; but she fully endorsed and accepted the southern position on the Negro problem. In her story "Half-a-Curse" which was published in the eighteen eighties, she described her Negro heroine as loyal, although superstitious and comical; a Negro willing to do anything to better the existence of her former mistress. In her novel *By Inheritance* (1910) she described, with possible allusions to her own situation, the conversion of a young radical New England woman, greatly concerned with the plight of the Negro in the South, to the southern point of view. The question put before the heroine and the reader becomes "what to do with a race we may not exterminate and we dare not assimilate." The author teaches her Yankee the cold hard facts that would shed light on the denouement of that question; that the Negro was inferior; that education for the Negro should be vocational, teaching him to be a better maid or chauffeur; that blacks with ambition were misdirected; that assimilation

128 Alice French [Thanet], *Knitters in the Sun* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1887), passim.

was not possible due to the laws of race instinct; and that the old South and the new were connected by their common pride and courage.130 Ironically, one of the most effective educators of the northern lady to the southern stand was a young Negro girl named Lilly Pearl. The story ends unhappily with the death of Lilly, with the heroine and the author describing her as "one of our own, always kind and laughing."131

Other cases of abolitionist sentiment being converted to the southern view have been well documented by Paul S. Buck in his Road to Reunion and in C. Vann Woodward's Origins of the New South. By the turn of the century the nation as a whole had come to adopt a racial policy that upheld the dominance of the white Anglo-Saxon element. The southern local colorists had helped to shape the nation's view of the negroes' status in society through his prolific literary contributions on race and the negro during the latter quarter of the century.

130 Ibid., pp. 192, 197, 322.
131 Ibid., pp. 386-87.
CHAPTER IV

THE LOCAL COLORISTS AND OTHER FOLK

In the 1870's and 1880's Americans began their repeated demand for the great American novel. They wanted an American literature encompassing the whole of America. The question thus arose as to how this tremendous task could best be accomplished.¹ One literary historian notes that "the first successful record of this cultural diversity was made in the nineteenth century by authors whose work has been denominated local color."² They sought to record the diversity of American society in pursuit of the all American novel. The Southern local colorist of the 1880's defined his region in terms of its cultural and topographical uniqueness, to preserve the South's past for posterity and to record his segment, which was a part of the whole of America.¹²


Hamlin Garland, noted nineteenth century local colorist and critic, defined desirable local color writing as having "such quality of texture and background that it could not have been written in any other place or by anyone else than a native."\(^3\) Texture would include a "complex of dialect speech, superstition, provincial lore and folkways."\(^4\) The "Background" of the work would not only encompass the geographic and topographical setting but would also involve the setting's effect on "human thought and behavior."\(^5\) Thus a southern local colorist would express himself in terms of his own southerness.

The southern local colorist, when dealing with the Civil War, Reconstruction, reconciliation, or southern economic or political considerations, wrote from a definite point of view, a view which relegated the search for and expansion of local color technique or style to a secondary position. He was more the interpreter of what he saw than a mere recorder. This is not to imply that local color at its best was meant to be mere representation of flora and

---


\(^4\) Ibid.

\(^5\) Ibid.
fauna; James Lane Allen noted that "fiction is not the proper literary form in which to furnish the reader miscellaneous information of flora, climate and other scientific features of an unknown region." Southern local colorists Cable, Harris, Page, and others would explain the war, reconstruction, the Klan, southern folkways, race relations, and southern politics according to his own philosophical bias. They would write in terms of the South's cultural and topographical uniqueness, and they would write to preserve the old South for posterity. Their southern interpretation would be conveyed in a realistic, accepted and apolitical style--local color. They were expressing Garland's conception of an honest realism or "veritism," a style which although dependent on keen observation would require interpretation on the part of the writer, an interpretation that would blend the real and the romantic. How they would interpret the "real" would vary in accordance with the author's conception of it. When the author's conception became at variance with his public's to a great extent, his work was seen as less "charming" and as unreal or polemical. Stories which exuded charm, that is dialect, setting, and

6Warfel, p. xi.

7Much of Garland's work has been labeled as didactic or propagandistic in nature.
little social interpretation were enthusiastically received.  

The local colorists as a group stayed within the bounds of good local color, tending to write more realistically and receiving less criticism for their interpretations when they described aspects of their region and its people that were not so close to the heart and emotions of the South as a whole, i.e., the Negro question, etc. These apolitical aspects included a delineation of the mountaineer, the poor white, the Creole, and the Cajun.

There the local colorist recorded a segment which was a part of the whole of America, a segment unexplored. Albion Tourgee noted that included in the new flood of southern fiction was a depiction of the poor white. "In literature as well as in politics the poor white is having the best of the southern 'renaissance.'" But Tourgee also found that the southern authors had stereotyped the poor white just as they had stereotyped the Negro. Very seldom could a reader find a novel in which the "characters have any feeling beyond a self-conscious sensibility which

---

8 This is evidenced in the public's acceptance of George Cable's works after 1884. "Charming" is often used in reviews of local color works.

seems to give them a deal of trouble without ever ripening into motive or resulting in achievement. "10 "Tourgee's criticism, though valid concerning characterization by the local colorists, does not shed light on the general intent of their renderings. They were not trying to characterize mere men, but rather were out to chronicle a subculture of their region; thus they paid little attention to in-depth analysis of their individuals.

Shields McIlwaine found that the poor whites received recognition by the local colorists during the 1880's primarily because these new types provided an addition of literary ore to be mined by them. 11 He also noted that they wrote to satisfy northern curiosity about the "new South" in its wholeness. 12 The poor white had been left out of prewar southern literature because he was an unpleasant segment of southern civilization. According to McIlwaine "the motive behind all antebellum Southern fiction of the plantation was that of glorifying the amenities and virtues of genteel country life. Such a purpose could not countenance the

10 Ibid., p. 408-409.


12 Ibid., pp. 100-104.
poor, often sordid lives on the fringe of the great estate or in the woods far back of them."\textsuperscript{13}

Southern local colorists of the 1880's dealing with "new" types included Richard Malcolm Johnston, Sherwood Bonner, George W. Cable, Mary Noailles Murfree, Joel Chandler Harris, Grace King, and Kate Chopin. Cable and Harris were the only two of the group who offered an interpretation or solution to their "segments" problems.

Richard Malcolm Johnston, a native of Georgia, published his first volume of local color tales in 1871, the \textit{Dukesborough Tales}. Johnston wrote to preserve "his memories of Powelton, Georgia, a small village in Hancock County, Georgia, near which is her birthplace."\textsuperscript{14} Johnston's sketches were of "ordinary people in situations which are awkward, humorous, and often pathetic, but never concerned with the 'great events' of high politics and war."\textsuperscript{15} Shields McIlwaine found that Johnston's writing consisted of "a type of realism with now and then a vestige of the old

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 19.


\textsuperscript{15}Ibid. F.C.S. introduction.
southern humor." Much of the "old southern humor" Johnston himself attributed to a literary escapism from the everyday trials of life. Johnston's primary concern as an author was to record the life of the South as he remembered it with his mind's eye and the aid of his imagination. He would recreate characters he had known, but would not attempt to analyze them, for this in his opinion was not the purpose of the author. He produced for pleasure and for, of course, monetary reward. His characters were rural, the middle, usually white Georgian country folk; of the Negro and the question of slavery Johnston wrote little. For Johnston, emancipation had come as a great relief for the white man, as it had removed a grave responsibility. Although Johnston used dialect to accentuate and embellish his story, he does not use nearly so much as Murfree, Harris,

16 McIlwaine, p. 228.
18 Ibid., p. 74.
19 Ibid., p. 76.
20 Ibid., pp. 74-5.
21 Ibid., p. 67.
or Cable. His style was simply to retell stories of the rural South, stories of love, humor, and irony. "The Various Languages of Billy Moon," a typical Johnston story, appeared in magazine publication in 1881. In this story Johnston described a humorous encounter between a rural lowlander, Mr. Josh Green, and a deaf mute, Billy Moon. Green, in the Dukesborough region looking for a challenge to his manly strength, met his match in Moon. He also learned that communication is independent of the spoken word, at least "spoken" in the conventional use of the word.22 Johnston recounts the action of the story, placing no judgment or critical eye on anyone of his characters for the framework of the story did not merit such. Other stories by Johnston on rural Georgia appeared in his collected volume, Mr. Absalom Billingslea and Other Georgia Folk (1887). In the preface to Mr. Absalom Billingslea, Johnston states that the purpose of the volume was to show that good character was not necessarily reflected by the character's dialect.23

Sherwood Bonner, who had published tales and novels of the war and its aftermath, has been seen by some of her critics as having achieved the most in her delineation of the Mississippi mountain folk. Bonner, not a major literary figure, published her *Dialect Tales* in 1883, the year of her death. Of the eleven stories contained in this volume, four dealt exclusively with the mountain folk, three showed the interaction of the Negro and poor white, two presented the Negro in humorous tales, and two dealt with the life of the Kansas prairie folk. In these tales Bonner uses Negro and mountain dialect, but the dialect appears secondary to her art. It is remarkable in itself for its easy readability. The four stories of mountain life include "The Case of Eliza Bleylock," "The Bran Dance at the Apple Settlement," "Lame Jerry," and "Jack and the Mountain Pink." All but one of these stories, "The Bran Dance," revolved around the mountaineers' protection of their major occupation, moonshining. In "The Case of Eliza Bleylock," a stranger comes to the mountains to seek out the stills of the area for destruction. He is led to the still by one of the girls, but poor Eliza is blamed for the heinous deed; and she dies from a case of extreme social ostracism. In this tale

---

Bonner depicts other aspects of the mountain folk; their lack of education, their reticence, the sternness of the family patriarch, the faded hopes and dreams of the older women, the isolation of their existence, and their poverty. In "Lame Jerry," a man, Jerry, is beaten and left for dead after daring to disclose the whereabouts of a still. Along with the illustrated violence of the moonshine community, Bonner discloses that Lame Jerry's daughter has lived with a man out of wedlock and she was about to give birth to a child. Seldom if ever was illicit love mentioned in local color fiction, especially in dealing with the white community. Bonner, however, does not moralize or analyze Cordy's situation for Jerry kills her lover. Cordy and her firstborn die together in loneliness and desolation, an uninterpreted casualty of mountain life. In "Jack and the Mountain Pink," Bonner discounts the myth of the beautiful mountain damsel, the "mountain pink." Jack Seldon a young man from the city retreats into the hills in search of a mountain pink. He had heard that although the older mountain women were haggard and worn, the young girls were beauties. Seldon soon discovered that "coffee" better described their complexions than did "pink." He also found the girls to have other unlovely features. "Her eyes had the melancholy of a cow's
without the ruminative expression that gives sufficient intellectuality to a cow's sad gaze. To put it tersely, they looked stupid . . . ."\textsuperscript{25} Bonner found that among the mountain pinks there was many a "Cumberland beanstalk."\textsuperscript{26} In "The Bran Dance at Apple Settlement," Bonner describes the quaint and wholesome fun of the simple people, as their youth faded so would their freedom; hopes and good fun.

Bonner's mountain stories were not remembrances of a beloved childhood or written for the preservation of a cherished southern past. Instead, she described the people, their customs and their habitats, giving major emphasis to their peculiar existence. Bonner's three stories showing the interaction of the poor white and Negro in mountain life, "The Gentlement of Sarsar," "Dr. Jex's Predicament," and "In Aunt Mely's Cabin," were apolitical sketches of life. Excepting "In Aunt Mely's Cabin," the stories described the humorous juxtaposition of the two illiterate and poor "races." Bonner's stories of the Negro in this volume, "Hieronymus Pop and the Baby," and "Aunt Anniky's Teeth," stereotype the Negro as a race of fools or clowns.


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 187.
Interestingly, the two outstanding stories of the volume, "On the Nine Mile," and "Sister Weeden's Prayer," deal with life on the prairie in Kansas. Here she is frank, realistic, and a cogent writer. In "On the Nine Mile," a young bride-to-be is humbled by a tragic accident in which she was catapulted by her horse onto a sharp plow--" and Charley and Jed wuz tryin' to lift somethin' from the knives, red with blood an' thus pointed guards clogged with mangled flesh . . . ." 27

Of the female literary lights who dealt with the life of the mountaineer, Mary Noailles Murfree was the brightest. Her stories and novels of the folk of the Great Smokies of Tennessee brought her wide acclaim in her own time and today she is still remembered for her pioneer work in that field. Edd W. Parks, literary historian and one of her biographers, concluded that although she did not "attain greatness," she "approached it; her novels are the best by far, that have yet come out of the Tennessee Mountains." 28 Mary Murfree was a well-bred southern lady who, writing under the pen name of Charles Egbert Craddock, sought to capture

27 Ibid., p. 52.

in literature the fast disappearing characteristics of a
segment of the southern region.\textsuperscript{29} She chose the illiterate
and poor mountaineer as her subject because they were the
people who interested her, different and unique to her own
experience.\textsuperscript{30} The criticism of Tourgee in 1888 that much
of the literature being offered on the poor white was
stereotyping him could also apply to Murfree's work. Of
the fifteen novels which she wrote over a period of many
years, thirteen dealt exclusively with mountain life.\textsuperscript{31}
Carl Van Doren criticized Murfree and the local color
school for their utilization of stock characters and stock
story formulae. According to Doren, the stories fell into
certain patterns:

how a stranger man comes into the mountains, loves
the flower of all the native maidens, and clashes with
the suspicions or jealousies of her neighborhood; how
two clans have been work away by a long vendetta until
only one representative of each clan remains and the two
forgive and forget among the ruins; how a band of
highlanders defend themselves against the invading
agents of a law made for the nation at large but hardly
applicable to highland circumstances; how the mountain
virtues in some way or other prove superior to the
softer virtues--vices in comparison--of the world of
planters and towns.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., pp. 90-1.
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., p. 199.
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., p. 174.
\textsuperscript{32}Carl Van Doren, The American Novel 1789-1939, 2d ed.,
This was the pattern set forth and followed by Murfree, and as such her literary efforts would seem to lack creativity or the spark of humanity. However, as Parks noted, Murfree's work was of a pioneering nature. Her first novels were fresh and unique, but as she continued to write in the same vein, her novels appeared patterned and her characters stereotyped.\textsuperscript{33} Murfree's pioneer realism lacked analysis and social criticism, a flaw due to several contributory factors; the age in which she lived, her female upbringing, and her own philosophy of the purpose of the author and literature. Her age was the "age of decorum," the genteel era, a time when one did not generally or at least openly unmask the sins and flaws of society.\textsuperscript{34} As a genteel southern lady, stories of illicit love, lust, or sordid lives would have been an anathema to her, if at all conceivable.\textsuperscript{35}

As an author, Murfree sought to accurately portray her subject, seeking detail and fact, observing and recording in a manner similar to that of Cable or Harris. For Murfree and her fiction "every old woman was alike, every girl, every stranger."\textsuperscript{36} Murfree believed in the universal

\begin{footnotes}
\item[33] Parks, p.
\item[34] Ibid., p. 194.
\item[35] Ibid., pp. 109, 195.
\item[36] Ibid., p. 199.
\end{footnotes}
humanity of man, and if this was a fault she kept company with a prestigious literary group. Albert Kirwan and Tom D. Clark, two authors of a history of the South after the war, found that even the noteworthy Mark Twain "represented a universality of human nature and human foibles," rather than broadly defining and directing his society.37

Murfree's first volume of collected short stories, In the Tennessee Mountains, appeared in 1884. One of her contemporary reviewers noted that "Mr. Craddock did not just paint pictures of her section, but rather recreated mountain life in its totality."38 This first series of stories brought her immediate fame. The tales were extremely detailed, and she paid tribute to the landscape of her section with a great deal more expository vigor than any other author of the southern local color school. The dialect of the mountaineer was also recorded in faithful exactitude. "The Star in the Valley," one of the collected stories, helps to explain Murfree's view of the mountain folk. In now formula form, two strangers, Reginald Chevis and Ned Varney venture into the mountains on a hunting expedition where they are confronted


38 The Nation, 22 May 1884.
with a "mountain beauty," Celia Shaw, and Chevis falls in love with the girl. Varney could not understand or respect the mountain people because, as the author explained, "of their narrow prejudices, their mental poverty, their idle shiftlessness, their uncouth dress, and appearance." 39

For Varney even the "patois" of the untutored people "set his teeth on edge." 40 Chevis, too, first held an incorrect view of mountain life, viewing it too ideally and romantically, his mind would be changed as he came in contact with Celia. In Celia one could grasp a true judgment of the civilization; her self-sacrifice, one of the better traits of man, would be "the basis of a common humanity." 41 A humanity in which many would suffer "unheeded." 42 Celia, who gave up her life for a neighbor for whom she held no great affection, was "like the birds that freeze on the trees, the wounded deer that leaves its cruel kind to die alone, the despairing flying fox with its pursuing train of savage dogs and

---


40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p. 155.

42 Ibid., p. 154.
men . . . "

In other stories of the volume, Murfree further delineates mountain life. In "Electioneerin' on Big Injun Mountain," the true mountaineer followed the code of the hills, whereby a man, Rufus Chadd, although not a member of the mountain community for quite some time, could regain his place if he acquiesced to its rules of fair play and benevolence; "that sympathetic heart of the multitude, so quick to respond to a noble impulse, had caught the true interpretation of last night's scene, and today all barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding were down." In "The Dancin' Party at Harrison's Cove" Murfree states that in the hills dancing was considered by some as being far more horrible than stealing or shooting a man. In other stories we learn that the mountaineer was fiercely independent, unconcerned with caste, sometimes violent, sometimes gentle, beautiful, stern and so forth.

Before writing the work that would gain her true prominence in the literary world, *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains*, Murfree returned to the mountains of Eastern Tennessee, this time actively seeking detail and subject
matter for the pursuit of her literary vein. The *Prophet*, a full-length novel, was published in 1885. It was a novel of romance with plenty of dialect and description of the region and its people, and with little if any attention paid to great social issues or questions. Murfree explored instead the religion which permeated much of mountain society, where the real question for the people was "Have you been saved?" Deep faith and superstition went hand in hand in the mountains. Mountain faith differed from the city man's faith for "in the mountains men do not regard church privilege as the opportunity of a quiet hour to meditate on secular affairs, while a gentle voice drones on antiquated themes." Superstition abounded in the hills where signs of doom or peril were not to be taken lightly.

Politics was also a topic of discussion for the mountaineer, but his political frame of reference was concerned with statesmen of decades past and of extremely local issues. The greatest common concern of the mountaineer man was the protection of his still against the

---

46 Parks, pp. 130-4.
48 Ibid., pp. 86-7.
federal agents. The story line of *The Prophet* works as a framework on which Murfree builds her recreation of mountain civilization. Briefly, it is a story of love, religious doubts, jealousy, and self-sacrifice. Rick Tyler loved Dorinda Cayce and wanted to marry her but became a fugitive from justice. Parson Kelsey, a man questioning his own faith, casts suspicion on himself in order to help Rick Tyler and is himself arrested. Dorinda begs Rick to help the man who had tried to help him, but he refuses because of his jealousy. As a result Tyler loses Dorinda and the parson sacrifices his life for another man. One reviewer of *The Prophet of the Great Smoky Mountains* found that the novel was similar to her recently published collection of short stories, *In the Tennessee Mountains*; it is a picture of manners, using the word in a large sense which includes all the complicated relations of things animate and manifate [sic], that make up the circumstance of life. It has the same strongly etched outline and the same vivid color. If the impression is anything less, it is only because the first gave the surprise of entire freshness. There is the same effect of dealing with life as a whole--with a community, a class, rather than with an individual.

In Murfree's later novels and stories she continued in the same vein, losing more and more of her original freshness. Local color alone could not sustain continued output. She

---

49 The Nation, 19 November 1885.
did not heed Walter Hines Page's suggestion that she should "paint the mountaineer as doomed by environment and lack of opportunity," for social criticism was not her forte. She felt she had honestly portrayed a segment of life, a life in common with the whole of life and yet unique. H. Aubrey Toulmin classified Murfree as a social historian, for she had helped to record "the variety and mixture of our own eccentrically assembled peoples and communities, a healthy and prosperous phase of the Southland."

Despite Murfree's gentility and perhaps because of her too close attention to detail and accurate portrayal, her work although minor met with some criticism. It did not come from the nation at large, but rather came from those whom she sought to so accurately represent. The mountain folk preferred the works of romancers such as Augusta Evans, author of St. Elmo, over the local color and sometimes too realistic work of Murfree.

---

50 Parks, p. 169.
51 Ibid., pp. 144, 170.
53 Parks, p. 197.
Joel Chandler Harris, like Richard Malcolm Johnston, wrote of a segment of middle Georgia's population, the poor white, although his reputation as a writer was fully established by his "Uncle Remus" renderings. Shields McIlwaine cites Harris as being the first of the "revival" group to deal with the poor white. In common with Murfree and other members of the southern local color school, Harris believed that an author would achieve universality if he wrote about his section, his people; he commanded authors "to set forth in fiction the things with which they are familiar." Harris' poor whites were to be pitied. Unlike Johnston who recalled with humor the escapades of the rural people, often poor and illiterate, unlike Murfree who simply described the sometimes tragic existence of the mountaineer, Harris delineated the accompanying tragedy that often befell the life of the poor white spiritually and economically. In Harris' stories of the poor white, description of the area is relegated to a secondary position in favor of the pathos of the individual. Harris described mountain life in two of his Georgia sketches, "Trouble on

54 McIlwaine, p. 111.

Lost Mountain" and "Azalia." He tells of their poverty, ignorance, their ancient political linkage with whiggery and their isolation. In "Trouble on Lost Mountain," a young girl, Babe Hightower, is killed accidentally. Although the family suffered, especially her old father who dearly loved her, although her lover would suffer and felt the loss, "the tragedy and its attendant troubles were never reported in the newspapers. The peace of the mountains remained undisturbed, its silence unbroken."\(^56\) Babe Hightower's tragedy was similar to Celia Shaw's in its silence. Two stories appear in *Mingo and Other Sketches in Black and White* describing the plight of poor white and the poor white of the mountains: "Mingo: A Sketch of Life in Middle Georgia" and "At Teague Poteets, A Sketch of the Hog Mountain Range." In "Mingo" Harris points to the conflict existent between the white upper class of the South and the poor white.\(^57\) Deely Wornum, daughter of the planter aristocracy, married a poor white named Henry Clay Bivins. The two had


\(^{57}\) Contrasts in most local color stories of mountain life usually revolved around a formula whereby a stranger from the low lands or city intrudes on the isolated mountaineer.
one daughter before they died, and their remaining families now each claimed their offspring. As Mrs. Bivins explained to a stranger how she now had the upper hand over Mrs. Wornum, having possession of the child, the stranger comments,

I cannot hope to give even a faint intimation of the remarkable dramatic fervor and earnestness of this recital, nor shall I attempt to describe the rude eloquence of attitude and expression; but they seemed to represent the real or fancied wrongs of a class and to spring from the pent-up rage of a century.58

To Harris her voice was the "voice of tragedy."59 "At Teague Poteet's" is a story of love and mountain moonshine. Harris traces the Poteet families French background and their historical revolt from society. He also states that most mountaineers were Union men when the war came and avoided conscription just as they avoided federal agents. They had no use for slavery or the slaveowning "Restercrats."60 Teague, the family patriarch, had hopes for his daughter for she was unlike her mother who had given up on life. She, in Teague's words, "hain't no dirt-eater."61 In order to

60 Ibid., pp. 48-50.
61 Ibid., p. 54.
advance his daughter Teague produces moonshine, and is one day caught by federal agents, one of whom falls in love with his daughter and takes her away from the mountains.62

George Washington Cable had gained his reputation as a great writer through his local color stories of Louisiana in which he had not only described a segment of the American population, the Creole, but had also portrayed a mini-civilization.63 His stories which would later appear in a collection of short stories Old Creole Days (1879) were first published in Scribner's in the early 1870's. These early stories dealt with aspects of the exotic Creole culture of New Orleans and were not socially or politically oriented. These stories, according to one of his reviewers, "could not fail to please the Creole readers" for they showed Creoles "of refinement, admirable and lovable in all their foibles."64 When Old Creole Days was published in 1879 Cable was praised again by his reviewers in North and South. A reviewer for the Times Democrat found that

He chooses his materials for his character sketches like the real artist and gives us the Creole, not

---

62 Ibid., passim.
63 McIlwaine, p. 124.
perhaps as the upper crust thinks Creoles to be, nor as that upper crust would like to be, but just as they are, just as you, I, and a hundred others have met them on the Rue Royale, in the Cathedral, at the French Market and in the old town. So true is the author to this idea that some of the pictures sting, and with the sting, draw forth the critic's remonstrance, which remonstrance is the true criticism of the merits of the picture...65

The reviews for *Old Creole Days* marked Cable as an author of great merit and promise. His only attackers at this point in his career were the offended Creoles about whom he wrote.66 Cable, like Murfree, preferred "true stories" above the stories he mined in early history, and like Murfree sought detail and accuracy in his representation. The earlier stories include "Madame Delicieuse" (1875) and "Tite Poulette" (1874).67 Both stories portray the conflict and possible tragedy of the quadroon in New Orleans society, but neither story explores the question of race in the depth of analysis later to be found in his *The Grandissimes*, (1880). They are, rather, primarily descriptive of life in the city, its historic landmarks and

65 Ibid., p. 86.


67 Both stories discussed in detail in chapter 3.
buildings, the moss-hung trees, the people, their customs and their quaint patois, etc. Arlin Turner, one of Cable's ablest biographers, found that the year 1875 marked Cable's assumption and definition of ideas on politics and social justice that would set him on a collision course with his contemporaries, and that was the Negro problem. By 1888 Cable had published The Grandissimes, Dr. Sevrier, The Freedman's Case in Equity and various articles concerning that great issue of the day. In 1888 he published another local color work, a collected novel, quite similar in style to Ole Creole Days, Bonaventure. Bonaventure was a compilation of three previously published stories: "Carancro," "Grande Pointe" and "Au Large." He portrayed this time a little known segment of the Louisiana population, the Cajun, avoiding the social issues that he had directly pursued since the mid-eighties. He described at length and in detail the area in which the "Cajuns" or Acadians lived and the founding of their little village, Vermilionville. His hero, an orphan Creole Bonaventure went to the Acadian village of "Grande Point" to teach school. The "Cajun," like the poor white, was isolated from the rest of society, and he suffered the ills of that isolation: poverty, and ignorance. Bonaventure attempts to teach them their history and to instill in them a freedom of the mind. From him, the children would learn:
that the day of liberty . . . had come to them; that in France their race had been peasants; in Acadia, forsaken colonists; in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, exiles alien to the land, the language and the times; in St. Domingo, penniless, sick unwelcome refugees; and for just one century in Louisiana the best of the proved Creole, held down by the triple fetter of illiteracy, poverty, and the competition of the unpaid, half-clad, swarming slave.  

For Cable, the Cajuns were the poor white of Louisiana. The Civil War for them had not been a great romantic adventure, for "many an acadian volunteer and many a poor conscript fought and fell for a cause that was really none of theirs, simple, non-slave holding peasants . . . ."  

They were a people whom few regarded as worthy of having feelings in common with the rest of humanity. When a young acadian was forcibly conscripted into the army, his parents and loved ones mourned his loss, but one of the officers replies to one who notices this action, "If the blows fell upon ourselves or our set, that would be different; but these illiterate and lowly ones--they are--you don't know--so dull and insensible." Like Harris, Cable pointed out the wrongs suffered by the poor and downtrodden but Cable unlike

---


69 Ibid., p. 9.

70 Ibid., p. 16.
his fellows offered a remedy to his plight. Salvation for
the Cajun would come in education for now "the slave was
free, the school was free, and a new wide golden future
waited only in their education in the greatest language of
the world [English]."  

Cable felt that the major opposition to their advance-
ment would come from their "hereditary dictator," the
Catholic Church. Arlin Turner found that Cable chose the
Acadians as his subject matter for local color stories
because next to the Creoles, these were the people who most
interested him, and Cable tried to present their story just
as accurately. He had traveled among them, detailing their
lives, seeking out "what was common place in the community
and yet was peculiar to them." Cable like Murfree and
Harris found that the commonality of mankind was to be
found in the unloveliest and the most unfortunate of God's
creatures. The Acadian too had feelings and traits worthy
of the human race. Bonaventure received praise from Cable's
reviewers. It was not seen as particularly didactic or

71 Ibid., p. 101.
72 Ibid.
73 Turner, pp. 235-6.
74 Cable, Bonaventure, p. 37.
75 Ibid., p. 76.
polemical but was received as "simplicity made noble and
gentleness made manly" and "a gradual evolution of character
in each individual which can hardly be called incident, but
which certainly is life."\textsuperscript{76} In 1900 when the market for
local color stories and novels of social criticism concerning
the Negro had faded Cable like Murfree turned to writing
the historical romance.

Other local colorists such as Chesnutt or Thomas Nelson
Page pursued current social problems as their subject
material. Local color, an admixture of romance and realism,
developed the American reading public's tastes for stories
truly American, written by [natives] the local colorists
as a group had recorded the diversity of American society
in pursuit of an all American literature.

\textsuperscript{76}Turner, p. 237.
Late nineteenth century America had undergone vast changes in a relatively brief period. Gertrude Stein observed that the United States was the only nation that had come into the twentieth century during the 1880's. The growth of industry, big business, and the city earmarked the last quarter of that century, and many of those changes had been brought about directly or indirectly by the Civil War. Science was waging war with religion. Romance was yielding to realism in literature. There were also advancements in medicine, technology, and transportation. The era was also marked by extreme cases of governmental corruption and political abuse. Mark Twain designated the end of the century as the Gilded Age. The period in which the southern local color school emerged was a time of crisis and change for the whole of America. Along with this national era of groping for new direction, the South herself was undergoing her own unique trauma. She had lost a war, a way of life, and her sense of direction. By the early 1880's most southerners had agreed to reconcile themselves with the United States. They did not abandon
their southern affinities but did cease to invoke the bitterness of the war. The southern author reflected aspects of the nation's upheaval, but he more significantly reflected his own world's crisis; the South as he perceived it or at least as he wished it to be. Stimulated by the impetus and ready acceptance of the writings of Bret Harte, the southern writer identified his region, its customs, locale, heritage, and his hopes for her future within the union. Harte had drawn the nation's attention to "localism" and his writing style or genre was extremely popular with the reading and publishing public.

The southern local color school was a diverse and yet connected group of writers. It incorporated a wide range of literary talent, philosophies, and personal backgrounds. As a group, however, they sought a common literary goal, and that was "truth" in fiction. Some obviously fell short of the major tenet of their school. Yet truth for the local colorist, however shaded or jaded by his own perception, was aided by his close attention to his region's peculiarities and his correspondingly meticulous recording of them in his literature. The mountaineer, the Creole, the Cajun, the hillbilly, the old-time Negro were sought out by these writers as oddities of southern life. Their stories, manners,
lives, and customs were captured as accurately as possible and were preserved for posterity.

Once these aspects of the local color genre had been fulfilled, the local colorist had to extend himself beyond regional or dialectical description. He could either interpret life in the South, dealing with her past or forecasting her future, or he could simply continue to mine the ore of surface local color as did Mary Murfree or Richard Malcolm Johnston. Those who did develop their fiction further in terms of personal interpretation predominated the school. Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, Cable, Kate Chopin, Walter Hines Page and others went beyond a desire for reconciliation or northern approval, beyond the vogue of the charm and quaintness of local color, and arrived at some interpretation of the South as they knew it. They might mythify southern tradition or actively seek to destroy or at least modify that myth. They might seek refuge in an agrarian Jeffersonian past or they might regard industrialism as the savior of the South. Their literary technique might lean backward to the romance of a Sir Walter Scott novel or push forward to the realism of a southern William Faulkner. The southern local colorist often waved and swayed to the winds of all of these possibilities. His was the age of transition and his writing
often reflected a semi-schizophrenic pattern, a division of the mind. The diversified group of Thomas Nelson Page, Harris, and Cable expressed a desire to see the writer of the South portray his region with fidelity, to be free as a writer to interpret his region as he saw it. The issue that set Cable at odds with his fellow authors was his stance on the Negro question. Neither the reactionary Page nor the moderate Harris could countenance the radicalism of Cable's verbal and written social interpretations. Many of the southern authors attributed conflicts and southern problems to the Negro question, but only a small minority would dare to suggest that the South would progress if she accepted the Negro as an equal partner in the South's destiny. The unpopularity of such a position in both the South and the North reflects the diminishing impact that question held at the turn of the century.

The unity of mind within the southern section has often been discussed concerning the Negro question, but the writer of the South experienced other problems within his literary community. James Lane Allen in the later years of his career followed Cable, Twain and Walter Hines Page to the northern literary mecca. His *The Reign of Law* attacked the South's fundamentalist religiousity, and he soon found himself
an unwelcome member of a closed community.\(^1\) Van Wyck Brooks found that New York and the east were fast becoming the free sector for literary exiles at the turn of the century. Mark Twain, at least a nominal southerner, recorded in a letter to a friend the reason why he had chosen the east as his home, "A good deal of experience of men enabled me to choose my residence wisely. I live in the freest corner of the country . . . . We never dream of such a thing as offering impertinent interference in each other's political opinions."\(^2\) Kate Chopin was blackballed from St. Louis society and her books banned from the library when she dared to explore the topic of human sexuality in *The Awakening*. Sherwood Bonner, who early in her career removed herself to the East, lost subscriptions for *Lippincott's* when she dealt in a realistic way with the aspects of sex and the Negro question. Even the mild and genteel Mary Murfree was rebuked by her editors and her southern neighbors when she described too descriptively the world of the mountaineer. All of the southern local colorists ignored the rising revolt of the yeoman farmer of the Ben Tillman variety. The southern

---


\(^2\)Ibid., p. 271.
local colorist like his fellows in other sections wrote under the auspices of the genteel tradition. Their writings dealing with the sometimes unsavory aspects of human affairs were held under close scrutiny by their editing guardians of the public's morality, men such as Richard Watson Gilder or Henry Mills Alden. Often times shaped by their own genteel background the authors edited their own works, accomplishing much the same purpose, that of lessening the realistic impact of their descriptive scenes.

Critics of this school have noted that one of its major flaws was its authors inability to explore in depth the characters about which they wrote. Robert A. Lively found, however, that the southerner's inability to go beyond stock characters or stock story formulae existed as a problem for the writer of the North as well during that time period. To say that the writer in the South was subtly repressed and perhaps forced to maintain accepted forms thus limiting his artistic ability would be a debatable stance. However, Louis D. Rubin, Jr., found in his study of the writer of the South that, although most southern writers chose to

---

remain in the South and maintained views at one with their community, those who held widely divergent views did leave. Rubin credited self-exiled writers such as Cable or Twain with a greater literary perspective due to their physical and emotional distance from their southern region.  

No one single author of this school with the exception of Mark Twain ever achieved the lasting status of a major author, but many of them were bright minor literary lights. For the most part, their art was secondary to the purpose for which they wrote. In Cable's case, it was the Negro question; in T.N. Page's, it was for the glorification and justification of the Old South. That a cause dominated the artistic merit of their literature could be said to be a tragic flaw, but for these writers it led them further into the exploration of southern themes, further than surface local color. Their search for accuracy in dialect and description of folkways further encroached on romanticism. Vernon Louis Parrington found that the nation's local color movement was a form of "primitive" realism, that it displaced romanticism and paved the way for the realism of the twentieth

---

century. In the South the local colorists, earnestly describing his region and often times delving into his region's guilts, fears, and strong points, were the region's precursors to such writers as Ellen Glasgow, Thomas Wolfe, and William Faulkner.

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Books


Page, Thomas Nelson. *In Ole Virginia or Marse Chan and Other Stories.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887.


Edited Primary Works


Articles


"Recent Novels."  The Nation 41(1885).


SECONDARY ACCOUNTS

Books


Edited Works


Articles


Brown, Sterling A. "Negro Character as Seen by White Authors." *Journal of Negro Education* 2(1933):179-203.


Ormond, John Raper. "Some Recent Products of the New School of Southern Fiction." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 3(1904).


Snyder, Henry N. "The Reconstruction of Southern Literary Thought." South Atlantic Quarterly (1902).

