THE WAR AGAINST WEARINESS:
IMAGINATIVE ENERGIES IN SOUTHERN AMERICAN NOVELS
(1864-1918)

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ABSTRACT

ADRIAN GREENE: The War against Weariness: Imaginative Energies in Southern American Novels (1864-1918) (Under the direction of Philip Gura)

Prior to the American Civil War, white southern novelists had exhorted their countrymen to “open your eyes to the danger” of the North’s encroaching ideals and not to be caught “sleeping on your posts.” After the war, new southern novelists, like George Washington Cable, Frances Watkins Harper, Sutton E. Griggs, and Charles Chesnutt, worked instead to awaken their region to the injustice of its treatment of African Americans. Each author came to realize, however, that white readers, North and South, had grown tired of novels about race. Consequently, these writers rejected their genre and turned to nonfiction to reinvigorate social reform. To goad genteel southern readers to see the race problem as a crisis demanding immediate action rather than merely an aesthetic diversion, Cable, Harper, Griggs, and Chesnutt wrote speeches, autobiographies, sermons, and nonfiction books that argued that white churches should behave as their African-American counterparts had, as sites for interracial communion. These authors, that is, sought to reform southern white society by reforming – still in words but no longer in novels – southern white churches. More specifically, these novelists focused on Social Christianity, based on the biblical principles of love and justice, to transform society, as evidenced by Cable’s African-American Sunday School classroom, minister-novelist Griggs’ National Baptist Convention, and Chesnutt’s African Methodist Episcopal church community’s work in education, urban missions, and settlement houses.
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INTRODUCTION

IMAGINATIVE ENERGIES IN SOUTHERN AMERICAN NOVELS

Far from energizing nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century southern American novelists, writing fiction about race wearied them. This weariness was born of an inability to answer in literature deceptively simple questions: How should southern whites treat African Americans, and how should southern African Americans treat whites? For George Washington Cable, Ellen Glasgow, Frances Watkins Harper, and Sutton E. Griggs, these questions were ones for which fiction ultimately proved inadequate. In striking ways not yet examined by American-literature scholars, these and other southern social-problem novelists rejected their genre, believing it to lead to daydreams rather than tangible social change. Consequently, they turned to nonfiction as a more likely means of effecting progress. To goad genteel southern readers to see the race problem as a crisis demanding immediate action rather than merely an aesthetic diversion, Cable, Glasgow, Harper, and Griggs wrote speeches, autobiographies, sermons, and nonfiction books that argued that white churches should behave as their African-American counterparts had, as sites for interracial communion. These authors, that is, sought to reform southern white society by reforming—still in words but no longer in novels—southern white churches. Cable, for instance, abandoned fiction when his 1880 novel *The Grandissimes* garnered more attention for its quaint descriptions of Creoles than for its trenchant commentary on the Louisiana caste system. When later dismantling the convict-lease system (which effectively returned
southern African-American convicts to slavery), he thus employed platform speeches, delivered in both white and black churches.

Chapter One of this work documents the state of southern literature immediately prior to such reform efforts by examining Augusta Jane Evans’ antebellum domestic novels, which largely avoided the topic of race in order to argue against the encroaching northern ideals of materialism, feminism, and individualism. Nevertheless, the work of having to produce in her novels an identity opposed to those ideals – a southern identity of self-sufficiency – proved impossible. As she inadvertently reveals through her protagonist, Irene Huntingdon, the South could not sustain its economy without embracing northern manufacturing; otherwise, both the soil and its people would be exhausted.

Chapter Two explores the years following Rutherford B. Hayes’ election, when the post-Reconstruction weariness of Cable and Glasgow at fighting southern and northern audiences’ disinterest in the race questions – the questions of how whites should treat African Americans and African Americans, whites, queries motivated by the war and Reconstruction – was manifest in the formulaic quality of their historical romances. This fiction often unified disempowered white southern characters to achieve an altered aristocratic paradigm, usually through the deus ex machina of a marriage between a poor white southerner and a wealthy one. After producing a number of such hackneyed plots, Cable abandoned them for platform speeches, editorials, and sermons on civic equality, while Glasgow speculated at literary conferences about fiction’s relevance to the real world, thereby leading to her most incisive commentary on the race problem, her autobiography.

In Chapter Three, I show how, unlike these social-problem authors, for a time racial-uplift novelists Frances Watkins Harper and Sutton E. Griggs invigorated their imaginative
energies with their novels – Iola Leroy and Imperium in Imperio, respectively – turning in these works to their church communities to approach the South’s race questions. These writers imagined churches as communal spaces where African Americans could vent pent-up frustrations while resisting mono-cultural and nationalistic forms of identity politics. Hence, where Evans wrote around the topic of race, and Cable and Glasgow assumed its stability while trying to ameliorate its political consequences, Harper and Griggs sought to redefine it. Against white southern preachers like George D. Armstrong who had used Christianity to defend slavery, they worked to free African Americans from a theology defined by the “Other,” incorporating them instead into a more broadly defined religious mainstream. In this way, Harper and Griggs sought full spiritual and civic citizenship for African Americans.

Chapter Four reveals, however, that misinterpretation and undervaluing of his novels caused Griggs to turn once and for all to writing political tracts, where he could make his messages and motivations clearest. In 1910, Griggs collected all of his political writings and published them as Wisdom’s Call, creating by far his most successful publication, to the extent that it was revised and expanded the following year; he also, within months of that work, published Beyond the End: The Sequel to Wisdom’s Call (Coleman 24). As Chapter Four illuminates as well, Griggs, like many other post-Reconstruction writers, likely and paradoxically followed the pattern established by the white-supremacist minister Thomas F. Dixon, Jr., who represented the fulcrum between the southern novelist’s turn from fiction to nonfiction. Based on changes in Southern Baptist preaching styles, Dixon shaped his novels to be direct addresses rather than strictly fiction, adopting the new sermonic method of trading emotionalism for prosaic delivery and explicitly telling his white readers that they would have a place in the bourgeois world of the New South. The tone therefore was much
more optimistic, and more expressly conveyed, than in prior southern novels. Importantly, more than anything genuinely religious, Dixon emulated this new approach for its rejuvenation of white southern rhetoric.

As my conclusion shows, to combat this revivification of white-supremacist expression, racial-uplift novelists (as well as the social-problem novelist Cable) turned to other forms, and, to these authors, nonfiction proved the most effective at realizing social change. In their letters and resulting nonfiction works, forward-thinking writers initially concentrated on abolitionists’ focus on civil equality; this approach, though, was exhausted by the 1890s, as Social Christians became disappointed by and wearied at the experiment of racial pluralism. Such weariness set the stage for the revivification of Social Christianity programs, organizations – namely African-American church communities like Griggs’ National Baptist Convention and Harper’s African Methodist Episcopal church community – which focused on education, urban missions, and settlement houses as strong foundations for the renewal of Social Christianity. The revivified movement focused on nonviolence, biracial cooperation, and the establishment of organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League of the early twentieth century (Luker 3-20). Hence, more than any fiction, the zealous civil-rights advocate Cable, for instance, was re-inspired to Social Christianity by his correspondence with Washington and the African-American author Charles Chesnutt, and finally by his witnessing the work of African-American Sunday School classes in his adopted hometown of Northampton, Massachusetts (Turner 273).

To gain a better appreciation of the causes of these authors’ initial imaginative weariness, I study their novels, as well as their letters, diaries, and manuscripts, to understand
how they chose to represent the South in works they intended to reach the widest audience possible. My focus then is less on political and scientific contexts than personal ones: How did the novelists represent southern weariness through protagonists, who served as their spokespeople, and what is their source for revivification? For my studies, I have chosen those southern American novelists who were the bestselling, with at least one bestseller, and most prolific from 1864 to 1918. (In the case of Harper and Griggs, “bestselling” is a somewhat relative term since none of these novels necessarily topped a bestsellers’ list at the turn of the twentieth century; nevertheless, Harper’s novel went into three printings, and Griggs’ novels sold well among African Americans) (Moses 172). The year 1864’s significance lies in its being the publication year of the most-read Confederate novel, Augusta Jane Evans’ *Macaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice*. My other bookend, 1918, is the publication year of Cable’s last attempt at social-problem-novel writing, *Lovers of Louisiana*.

The novelists whom I have selected, novelists who spent all or most of their lives in the “Dixie” (Old Confederacy) states (with the exception of Harper, born and raised in Maryland, a border state), are deeply concerned with weariness caused by the question of how southern whites and African Americans should behave toward one another. They address this interest in their bestselling novels, so I choose to read those works even though many have been supplanted in the nineteenth-century, southern-American canon by more modest-selling novels by the same writers. I am additionally intrigued by what principles these novelists establish or relinquish when succumbing to editorial, and mostly northern editorial, pressures.

Therefore, I concentrate primarily on novelists writing during post-Reconstruction, as this was the period in which southern didactic literature, an extension of the southern
domestic novel practiced and regionalized by Evans, and extended and revised in historical romances by Cable and Glasgow, reached its peak in popularity. As Frances Smith Foster notes at length, when many racial-uplift and social-problem novelists began their careers, after a paucity of literary publications during the Reconstruction era (when writers and publishing presses recuperated and adjusted from the war, especially in the South), literacy rates in America grew to their highest levels, publishing expanded by great leaps, and time for reading was “available as never before.” But Foster quotes Roy Harvey Pearce about the reading practices of the time, “Readers in the mid-nineteenth century were by and large […] ‘literate but not literary, thinking but not thoughtful, caught up in the exhilarating busyness of day-to-day life.’” Late nineteenth-century American readers thus believed literature’s goal to be that of education, “to record, argue, or exhort, to point out the lessons in their everyday experiences, to be a weapon with which to defend good, expose hypocrisy, and abolish evil” (Foster 27-28).

Foster continues, “In another time and place,” social-problem and racial-uplift novelists “might have chosen to brood and reflect patiently over [their] literary efforts, carefully choosing [their] words, perfecting [their] meters, perhaps even writing thoughtful prefaces to explain and justify [their] critical theory,” but the literary tastes of the time “dictated that the writer must first of all feel and say what is ‘right.’” As Frances Watkins Harper believed, literature’s purpose “is to cultivate the intellect, enlighten the understanding, give scope to the imagination, and refine the sensibilities”; however, she warns, “these are all secondary, all ‘idle tales’ unless infused with religious truths” (Foster 28-30).
This belief in the need for religious truths in literature animated the work of not only Harper, Griggs, and Cable, but also those authors whose moral lessons were about rejecting equal rights for African Americans, such as Dixon, who, along with those whose worldviews were antithetical to his, believed, “‘Everything must convey its ‘lesson,’ and is indeed set forth for the sake of its lesson.’” These authors felt the need to write not because they felt they had “‘something of [their] own to say, but because [they had] something right to feel and say.’” Consequently, as Foster prompts, in considering these writers’ works, “it is vital to recognize the literary tradition to which [they] wanted to belong, the expectations and limitations that [they] sought, and the subtle ways in which [they] modified and corrected [their] popular images and attitudes” (Foster 28-30). Often couching the idea of reform in the language of weariness or revivification, their protagonists invariably serve as their mouthpieces, making a biographical approach to their works most effective. Each novelist’s protagonist speaks for her/him but still at a remove within a fictionalized world, from which, these writers ardently believed, audiences would be more receptive to the ideas espoused.

Social-problem and racial-uplift novelists then centered their works around three basic tenets: African Americans were deserving of all rights bestowed upon white Americans; any denial of these rights “violated inalienable human rights”; racial discrimination, “therefore, trespassed the laws of God and country.” Although these works initially sold well in the circles of former northern abolitionists, as race relations reached their nadir in the 1890s, “literary fashion had changed.” Not only had most northern publishers, like The Century Magazine’s Richard Watson Gilder, “tired” of the social-problem and racial-uplift genres, considering them no longer saleable (as most readers, North and South, had also tired of reading didactic literature about the race questions), but
appreciation for didactic novels in general had faded. W.E.B. Du Bois said about Harper in his eulogy, “‘She was not a great singer, but she had some sense of song; she was not a great writer, but she wrote much worth reading. She was, above all, sincere.’” Much the same could be, and was, said of the later fiction of Cable, Griggs, and Chesnutt (Foster 31, 33, 25).

I have chosen then to focus solely on novels because these writers turned to the genre originally believing it to be the most effective at “[weaving] fact and fiction to awaken ‘in the hearts of our country men a stronger sense of justice and a more Christlike humanity’ and to ‘inspire the children’ to ‘embrace every opportunity, develop every faculty, and use every power God has given them to rise in the scale of character and condition.’” But above all, these writers dedicated themselves “to the creation of an ideal practical literature, one that would influence the largest number for the greatest good.” Harper declared, “The writer must ‘grasp the pen and wield it as a power for good,’” not “‘fritter’” it “‘away in nonsense, or […] in trifling pursuits.’” Like Cable and Griggs then, she “used the vehicle of popular literature,” even as that literature changed, “claiming it, developing it, and presenting it as a testimony to African-American participation in the American dream,” revivifying her imaginative energies as did her contemporaries by writing “more exclusively” for “the black literary audience” and the forward-thinking Christian one. In this way, through nonfiction, these writers developed practical organizations for social progress, no longer feeling the need to compromise in order to reach wider audiences who had ignored or dismissed outright the notion of reform (Foster 34-35).

What then were these wearying “burdens of southern history” at first “too great to overcome” even by social-problem and racial-uplift novelists? (Wakelyn 1329). They are related to race. Southern novelists, white and African American, felt that, if they continued to
write about equal racial relations, they would be ostracized by their reading publics. As a result, for a time, they abandoned or bowdlerized the topic in fiction.

Prior to the South’s loss, white southern novelists like Evans had exhorted southerners to “open your eyes to the danger” of the North’s encroaching ideals and not to be caught “sleeping on your posts” in advance of the war.¹ After the war, new southern novelists, like Cable, Glasgow, Harper, and Griggs, worked to “revitalize” the South (Evans 274, 275, Moss 220, Griggs 118). Still, eventually even these writers felt worn down financially, socially, and/or politically, in part by lingering concerns with writing fiction about race. Initially, Cable, Glasgow, Harper, and Griggs’ ethos was “to awaken [their] native region to the injustice and error of its treatment” of its African-American citizens, but each novelist came to realize that white readers, North and South, had grown imaginatively “tired of the race issue, and did not wish further agitation” (Rubin 243, 210-211).

Undoubtedly, race played a profound role as “the burden of southern history” for these novelists. It acted as a straitjacket. The novelists could not move too far into social-problem-novel writing for fear of reprisal; they also could not move too far into realism, either for lack of skill or for fear of the complexities of ignoring long-held southern archetypes and stereotypes.

Then how should a nineteenth-century southern novelist combat this lack of imaginative energy, when that imaginative energy would require more of her/him politically, socially, and financially? How should she/he do so, especially if her/his community believes

¹In 1863 and 1864 letters, Augusta Jane Evans worries about the “vis inertiae” of the Confederate government. She repeatedly calls for “the most vigorous exertions, the most herculean energy, which a brave people ever manifested” (SWL 83, Augusta Jane Evans, letter to J.L.M. Curry, University of Alabama Hoole Collections, Box 1563, Folder 1).
as does Caroline Lee Hentz’s protagonist, the planter Russell Moreland? When asked by a northern abolitionist, “Do you justify slavery?” Moreland responds,

Were you to ask me if I justified the slave trade, – that traffic forced upon us, by that very British government which now taunts and upbraids us with such bitterness and rancour for the institution whose cornerstone itself has laid, – I would answer No! but if you mean the involuntary slavery which surrounds me and my brethren of the South, I reply, I can justify it; we had no more to do with its existence than our own. We are not responsible for it, though we are for the duties it involves, the heaviest perhaps ever imposed on man. (Hentz 82)

Moreland will not shackle himself to – what he considers to be – another time in the name of atonement. He contends that, because he cannot control the past that was “forced upon” him and which left him with the “involuntary” present, he cannot invest himself too imaginatively in that past. He must simply work within its flows. He must accept what “seems the present destiny” and make it, unlike the past, “comfortable and enjoyable” for his slaves (Hentz 82-83).

Before beginning my investigation, let me for a moment grant the fictional planter his premise. Moreland believes white southerners are in a double bind. Some blithely interiorize regional narratives and the forgetting of a brutal and violent past. Others, in the name of humanism, lock themselves into the “reality” of history so completely that they remain there, exhausted. The rest, those who do not fall into either group, refuse to interiorize the regional narrative but do not know how to acknowledge appropriately the violence of their region’s past. As Glasgow suggests in her novel, The Deliverance, white southerners are neither devoid of self-consciousness – not attached to a wheel of fate, as her white southern protagonist believes – nor are they total self-consciousness, like God (Glasgow 218). They

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2Hentz writes in her 1852 novel Marcus Warland, “We do not enter into the bold design of going back to the time when our forefathers forfeited their claim to humanity, and purchased human blood […] We speak of the children of those forefathers, who have received the inheritance as a part of their patrimony, and on whom the evil is entailed as a birthright” (18).
are in-between, and this is why they weary. Again, the question is how to refresh their imaginative energies and whether this process is an individual or a cultural one.
Augusta Jane Evans was a hard worker, especially for the Confederacy. She cancelled her engagement in 1860 on first learning that her fiancé, New York news-writer James Reed Spaulding, sympathized with abolitionists. She wrote in an 1860 letter to her aunt regarding the impending broken engagement, “Auntie, do you not think I have a right to feel hurt when I know [it has been] said, “Augusta is going to marry a […] Black Republican […] Oh Auntie! do you wonder that I feel this very keenly” (SWL 23). Following this act of Confederate loyalty, Evans continued to dedicate herself to Confederate causes. She published anonymous newspaper articles in Confederate papers, raised funds for a Mobile, Alabama, Confederate hospital, wrote renowned Confederate leaders, including Robert E. Lee, on southern policies, and acted as a Confederate nurse (Faust x). Evans knew what it meant to channel one’s energies toward a goal.

During the American Civil War, Evans thrived in the relative boundlessness of duty afforded by the conflict. Though a vocal and public supporter of slavery, she bemoaned wealthy southern women’s inordinate leisure as one of “the ill effects of slavery on Southern women” (Roberts x). In 1863, the Confederate congressman J.L.M. Curry consented “to give a lecture on the question ‘Is the character of Southern women prejudicially affected by slavery?’” He sought Evans’ thoughts (Riepma 142-143). Evans replied that slavery “made women ‘enervated, lethargic, incapable of enduring fatigue’” (quoted in Riepma 143). She
strongly felt the need to “channel her energy,” and other white southern women’s energies, into what she believed were productive causes (Moss 220). These causes were namely to ward off northern influence. This influence, in Evans’ mind, took the forms of feminism, materialism, and individualism (220).

In channeling her energies to combat these northern ideals, Evans often ignored the northern ideal of abolitionism. This fact does not seem strange as Evans clearly felt that the slave institution, whether physically or imaginatively, wearied white southern women. She writes,

In tropical climes (where slavery flourishes) women are generally more richly endowed than in colder latitudes; their imagination more vivid and glowing, their susceptibility to emotions or impressions of beauty, or sublimity, infinitely keener; and nature seems to stamp them devotees at the shrine of Aesthetics; noble, perfect instruments for the advancement of Art. But the sacred mission is not fulfilled; they fold their listless fingers, and failing in requisite energy, become the victims of chronic inertia. (Augusta Jane Evans, letter to J.L.M. Curry, University of Alabama Hoole Collections, Box 1563, Folder 1)

Here, Evans all but admits that the duties, or more accurately lack of duties, required by the slave institution of white southern women wearies these women’s imaginations. Perhaps for fear of reprisal, she cannot bring herself to condemn the system more explicitly. Her brief reference to the institution in parentheses is telling. Accordingly, Evans writes around the topic. The topic is too complex, too fraught, and thus too wearying for novelist and reader to be dealt with in fiction in depth. Evans shunts the topic to the side so that it does not continue to siphon her imaginative ambition. She writes in the conditional tense, “If our existence as a Republic depends upon the perpetuity of the institution of slavery, then, it seems to me, that the aim of our legislators should be to render us par excellence an agricultural people” (M 367). Having accepted this flawed hypotaxical thinking, she then labors to imaginatively construct the perception of southern identity desired by the planter class. But in the course of
those duties, she and other white southern women leave the plantation behind to attempt to participate in the public sphere.

Appropriately, with her 1864 bestselling, pro-Confederacy novel, *Macaria; or, Altars of Sacrifice*, Evans writes a novel that is a panegyric to the Protestant work ethic. In the novel, her white female protagonists, Irene and Electra, feel a constant need to produce, whether the product is charity, war supplies, art, or new Christians. They do so in the name of defining the white South’s reputation. As a result, Irene and Electra’s categories of identity become produced by their labor. In this case, to fight the stigma of languor, the two women work exhaustively. And by largely omitting references to slavery, Evans endorses the idea that the institution drains women of their imaginative energies. Other work, like tending to soldiers, commissioning Confederate paintings, or secreting Confederate messages across enemy lines, temporarily invigorates Evans’ characters; however, even in a novel, this exhaustive work does not lead to white southern women’s assimilation into the public sphere. Rather, because it does not lead to their integration, this work wearies them, as evidenced by Evans’ letters and fiction.³

*Macaria* is a novel that earned Evans “a small fortune in royalties” even in the North. In fact, Evans’ pro-Confederacy novel found a northern publisher, J.C. Derby, with Evans sending the work to Derby by a blockade-runner via Cuba (Hutchison 63-64, Derby 392-395). But a competing northern editor, Michael Doolady, pirated copies and sold them without giving Evans the royalties. The practice was allowable because the novel initially had been printed in the unlawful Confederacy. After the war, Derby convinced Doolady to

³Though far from publically declared, one of Evans’ primary concerns with the Civil War was with the “inequities” “that forced the poor to fight the plantation owners’ war” (Roberts x). *Macaria* expresses this sensitivity to classism by focusing on protagonists from different classes.
allow Evans her royalties, which surprised her. She had not expected them but needed them (Sexton xxxii, Faust xvii-xviii). Derby did, though, require Evans to remove some of her more colorful Confederate language, for instance the line, “[I]f there be not a long and awful retribution for that Cain-cursed race of New England, there is neither justice nor truth in high heaven” (Faust xxviii, Evans 390).

As evidenced by this line and northern editors’ removal of it, Evans’ agenda in *Macaria* is as follows: to combat the depressive effects of a rapidly changing nation on the white wealthy southern male. As witnessed by Evans’ characterization of her male protagonist, Russell Aubrey, hypos, or a deep melancholia, causes white southern men not to be men. In 1864, white southern men were being regulated by depression, resentment, and military action in a losing war. As a result, Evans attempts in her novel to find redemption for the white southern male. She does so by fictionally replicating a political “coup,” in which the white southern male is politically re-empowered through his disempowerment, i.e. Russell’s reluctance to fight in the war only to be “redeemed” by Irene’s convincing him to commit this sacrifice. In this way, Evans presents a counter-narrative of white uplift to the real political narrative of a downward turn in white masculinity.

Thus, in the novel, Evans produces subaltern groups, namely white women and poor whites, who appear willing instruments in the construction of the wealthy, white, southern

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4 I note that, “despite its attacks on the Yankee character, *Macaria* – published in Richmond on brown wrapping paper because of the paucity of supplies – sold so well in the North that Federal officials felt it had to be burned” (Jones 59). In fact, after the war, “Evans received a considerable sum of Yankee money for her Confederate novel,” “a small fortune in royalties” (Jones 59, Moss 11).

5 Actually, Irene saves Russell’s heart literally by giving him an ambrotype case that he wears in his inner jacket pocket. The ambrotype prevents a bullet from piercing his heart (Evans 339-340). The material artifact of *Macaria* in their jacket pockets apparently served the same purpose for several real-life Confederate soldiers. It literally protected their hearts from bullets or bayonets (Moss 183).
male identity. This strategy (also accomplished using a large number of complex allusions, perhaps as a way of emphasizing her own labor) achieves her goal: to produce categories of identity by labor relations. However, as evidenced by her few halting references to slavery, Evans does not have the imaginative energy to recognize that the labor itself is where the South’s moral violations occur. Irene’s minister, Harvey Young, tells her to “‘always abound in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain’” (Evans 234, quoted in Evans 234). Nonetheless, Irene’s labor is in vain, for what she sees as necessary for the South’s identity is not. The identity does not exist. Only the desire for it exists. This epistemology leaves Irene and other southerners in an endless circuit that furthers their exhaustion.

At the heart of the novel, Evans writes of her protagonist, Irene Huntingdon, “The elasticity of spirits, the buoyancy of youth had given place to a species of stoical mute apathy; a mental and moral paralysis was stealing over her” (Evans 232). The wealthy daughter of a planter, Irene seeks to avoid this moral paralysis. At one point, she says, “Breaking the spell of inertia that bound me, I have, in part, my reward” (317). For Irene, the way to ward off paralysis is through boundless work. As Evans introduces her tireless protagonist to her southern readers, Evans also exhorts these readers to “shake off the inertia that clings to you tenaciously as Sinbad’s burden, and go to work earnestly and bravely” (13). This direct address to the reader, borrowed from rhetorical nonfiction, is one of numerous examples where Evans more directly goads her reader to proactive behavior.

Her argument, however, will eventually become circuitous. Evans wants to promote the agricultural South’s exhausted economy by having that economy work even harder. Evans writes in an 1860 letter to her friend Rachel Lyons that “work; work is the only
medicine” (Augusta Jane Evans, letter to Rachel Lyons, University of Alabama Hoole Collections, Box 1563, Folder 3). Ever present in the novel is the threat of soil exhaustion, the weakening of soil caused by the lack of crop rotation and sufficient fertilizer (Daniel 81). Irene openly admits this threat toward the novel’s end: “Unless our planters everywhere become good agricultural chemists, and by a moderate outlay renew their lands every year, the planting interest will gradually drift westward, in pursuit of fresh fertile fields” (Evans 366). Despite this imminent challenge, Evans, through Irene, wants to maintain the southern agricultural economy as it is because this economy is based upon a familiar, patriarchal, family-labor system (366).

Southern historian Pete R. Daniel writes in *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* that southern American agriculture did eventually deteriorate in the late nineteenth century “because of ‘land exhaustion’” (FERA report qtd. in Daniel 81). Daniel continues that this decline occurred “‘partly [because of] tradition […] like the planting of cotton.’” However, it also occurred because of “‘a dull, unplanning, dilatory sort of lethargy [in southern farmers] somewhat akin to the unkept, exhausted, barren aspects of the country itself’” (FERA report qtd. in Daniel 81). Daniel concludes, “While a few exceptional farmers built up their land and rotated crops, most primarily grew cotton, moved often, and ruined the land” (81). Instead of providing “some cover crop for his fallow land,” the new southern farmer, because of his “dull, unplanning, dilatory sort of lethargy,” “evaded that responsibility.” Thus, he contributed to a vicious cycle of both farmer and land’s exhaustion (81). Accordingly, Booker T. Washington writes in a letter to George Washington Cable, “So you see that the 2 parties, farmer and merchant, who have the most contact with the land, have no interest in it except to get all they can out
of it. The result of all this is seen in the ‘general run down’ condition of 4/5 of the farms’
(Booker T. Washington, letter to George W. Cable, Tulane University Louisiana Research
Collection, Box 75, Folder 4). Prophetically, Evans sees this future. However, she only offers
“working harder” (belatedly employing crop rotation and the proper fertilizers rather than “to
engage in manufactures of various kinds”) as a solution (366).

Historian Avery Odelle Craven observes, though, that, in the nineteenth-century
South, “The blame for so wide-spread destruction cannot be placed upon any inherent
careless, shiftless, or easy-going character so often ascribed to the men of the Old South”
(163). “The causes lay deeper,” Craven writes (163). Craven’s larger point is that, despite
beliefs about its uniqueness, southern soil exhaustion occurred not because of slave labor’s
loss, a fear voiced by white men in Macaria (Evans 366). Rather, it resulted from “the
burdens of [abnormally high] production,” a “typical frontier practice,” which “characterized
all frontiers” (Craven 163). Evans wants to organize her readers’ thoughts about the South’s
identity as self-sufficient. However, as Craven argues, soil exhaustion is “but a normal
chapter in the story of the farmer and his lands wherever he may be in time and place” (163).
As Craven acknowledges, this common truth “robs the story of any features that belong to
the South alone as a section and rising out of its peculiar institutions and characteristics”
(163). This universality is a possibility that, as of Macaria’s publication, Evans does not
consider.

However, even though Evans attempts to celebrate white southerners’ labor, her
language cannot help but reveal the toll that it has taken.6 Irene’s beloved, the much poorer
Russell Aubrey, has tirelessly worked in the public sphere advocating for secession. He talks

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6 Evans herself worked as a Confederate nurse. Indeed, she wrote Macaria “at the bedsides of the soldiers” at
the hospital she helped to establish (Jones 59).
of how he has “toiled and struggled” against those southerners opposing secession. He has “suffered in silence” “in a world that sometimes stung [his] fiery heart almost to madness” “in a cold and joyless life” (Evans 323). Irene too talks of struggling “with all the energy of [her] character” (324). Both contemplate “the past years of trial,” having to be “nerved to endurance,” and their “life-long sorrow” (324-325). In these moments, Irene and Russell often specifically refer to the crucible of having to deny their love for one another in order to fulfill their Confederate responsibilities. However, the language is always writ larger, with discussions of “Duty” (with a capital “D”), though “inflexible and involving great pain,” proving “not therefore less imperative” (325).  

Irene and Russell sacrifice personal happiness to the Duty of delivering something greater, the sense of southern identity. 

Irene especially presses on in her work for the Confederacy. When Irene tells Russell to be patient, after her confessing her love for him but before he leaves for war, Russell responds, “I am but human” (325). Irene replies, “Rise above the human […] I look down on the lonely, silent vista of my coming years, whose niches are filled, not with joy, but quiet resignation – and I see beyond the calm shores of Rest, where, if faithful here, you and I may clasp hands forever!” (326). In the language of labor, Irene points to the Christian reward:

Perhaps unsurprisingly, in a novel that sometimes mourns the losses required of its characters, Evans cites Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s 1849 *In Memoriam* at least twice (Evans 72, 154, 216, 252, 254, 275, 320). As *In Memoriam* works to elevate its subject – Tennyson’s deceased friend, Alfred Henry Hallam – to a divine-like status, so too does *Macaria* work to elevate its protagonist, Irene, as an avatar-like figure. As well, both *In Memoriam* and *Macaria* wrestle with art versus science. At first, science is something perhaps to be viewed negatively, something which disturbs one’s traditional manner of thinking. However, later, both works meld art and science. They attempt to see both as conveyors of God’s truth. In addition, where Tennyson fears forgetting his love for Hallam – mourning the loss of his mourning – *Macaria* mourns that others might not mourn the loss of the South’s traditional virtues (Evans 299). Finally, in *In Memoriam*, grief becomes Tennyson’s love. In *Macaria*, sacrifice becomes Irene’s love. Tennyson wants to become the best griever he can so that he may best honor his friend. Similarly, *Macaria*’s protagonists want to become the best sacrificers they can so that they may best honor the South. Both works address the difficulty of sustaining this level of commitment.
retirement in the next world, in which she and Russell at last will rest from their weariness, imaginative and physical. Evans expresses this same longing for rest when she writes in an 1860 letter to Rachel Lyons, “It seems to me that this is the unsolved problem […] to remember constantly, that this is but a probationary state; that Earth is thereby a vast vineyard in which the Father has laid out work for all of us – What matter if there are dark corners, where the sunshine rarely falls – He overlooks his laborers; and knows all the vast field before them – . Oh dear Rachel! may you and I hold up rich purple clusters, as the fruit of our toil, when the Gathering Time rolls around – ” (SWL 11-12). Until then, Irene reminds Russell, they should not complain about their labors: “I want neither your usefulness in life nor mine impaired by continual weak repining […] If I can patiently bear a great sea of silence between us henceforth, you certainly should be stronger” (326, 328). In her devotion to “usefulness,” even at the expense of her love for Russell, and indeed even at the sacrifice of his life, Irene brings to mind the mythical Greek figure for whom the novel is named.

As classical-mythology scholars Stephen L. Harris and Gloria Platzner write,

In Euripides’ *Heracleidae* (the children of Heracles), both Heracles’ mother and his children are endangered once the hero is no longer able to protect them, because Heracles’ old nemesis Eurystheus […] seeks their death. When Eurystheus leads his army to Athens, where Heracles’ family has taken refuge, an oracle predicts that the only way to save the city from destruction is to sacrifice a virgin to Persephone. In the play, Macaria, Heracles’ daughter, bravely volunteers to die, willing to sacrifice herself in order to save the city and her brothers. For this, she is praised as a truly heroic woman, a worthy daughter of her father. (350)

Irene tells the story to Russell when he leaves her for war, but she adds,

Ah, Russell! that were an easy task, in comparison with the offering I am called upon to make. I can not, like Macaria, by self-immolation, redeem my country; from that great privilege I am debarred; but I yield up more than she ever possessed. I give my all on earth – my father and yourself – to our beloved and suffering country. My God! accept the sacrifice, and crown the South a sovereign, independent nation! Gladly, unshrinkingly, would I meet a death so sublime; but to survive the loss of those dearer far than my life, to live and endure such desolation – oh! my lot, and that of
So Evans foregrounds a Greek myth of a woman’s sacrificing herself for the patriarchal state and her brothers. In much the same way, Irene wants to sacrifice herself for the Confederacy. This theme is one that Evans will echo with myriad allusions to Greek and Roman myths. Alongside these myths, she will include direct addresses, which often explain for the reader her intentions with these allusions.

Fittingly then, *Macaria*’s other title is *Altars of Sacrifice*. In the above passage, we see the theme made most clear. Irene would gladly sacrifice herself like Macaria in order to ward off northern evil and cleanse the South from northern encroachment. Indeed, Evans writes on *Macaria*’s title page, “‘We have all to be laid upon an altar; we have all, as it were, to be subjected to the action of fire’” (quoted in Kelley 270). Here, Evans illuminates that, instead of a Greek tragedy serving as a cathartic stand-in for sacrifice, white southern men and women are making actual sacrifices, bodily sacrifices, in this ritualistic, cleansing, and wearying attempt to ward off encroaching ideals. Additionally, as Harris and Platzner write, the *Macaria* myth’s “message is clear: heroes are brave if they fight their enemies; heroines are brave if they sacrifice themselves. It is, in fact, typically women who are sacrificed in [Greek] myths” (350).

Evans proves willing to align her characters with this tradition, save that, in her world, women may not make the literal, martial sacrifice. Instead, Irene persuades her father and Russell to go to war. Mr. Huntingdon and Russell die “glorious” deaths in the public sphere while Irene continues to work feverishly in the domestic one. She still desires to sacrifice herself in order to take revenge on the North. She would rather die than to live in a world where the North was not struck down. Self-abnegation and sacrifice seem far better
than not being able to destroy the forces that she, and other white women characters, feel plague the region. Irene will deliver her body for the cause, but it will be a working body unlike the mythic Macaria. It will be a body that has meaning because it labors. This philosophy recurs throughout *Macaria*. However, resentment at this labor also continues.

To ensure that their universe is governed by fairness, the novel’s characters, namely white southern women and poor white men, sacrifice themselves. Like the *Aeneid’s* Palinarus, referenced twice in the novel, they offer up themselves to save their compatriots (Evans 274, 353, Harris and Platzner 897). Russell suggests that, by sacrificing himself on the battlefield of Malvern Hill, he has “endeavored to crush the vindictive feelings of my heart; and I have conscientiously tried to do my duty to my fellow-creatures, to my command, and my country” (Evans 403). Russell even declares, “[N]one can claim a nobler, prouder death than mine – that the name of Aubrey is once more glorified – rebaptised with my blood upon the battle-field” (403). However, even having made this sacrifice, Russell still focuses on his resentment about his family name, a family long associated with the humiliation of poverty. Thus, the cycle of wearying resentment continues, unabated by sacrificial offerings.

To this point, Evans has Irene’s best friend (and Russell’s cousin), Electra Aubrey, paint a portrait of the Greek prophetess, Cassandra, as an emblem of powerful

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8Electra compares the North to the monstrous Midgard-Serpent from early medieval Norse cosmology (Evans 368). The Midgard-Serpent was an “evil force” that lived in the sea separating Midgard, a space “inhabited by gods and men,” from Utgard, a space “inhabited by giants and other sorts of non-humans and non-gods” (Hastrup 26-27). In her comparison, Electra aligns the South with Midgard, the land of gods and men, against the chaotic forces outside Midgard, against which the Midgard gods battled. Thus, we witness *Macaria’s* protagonists’ desire to feel that their universe is governed by fair play and divine justice.
In Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, Cassandra foresees the continuing cycle of revenge to emanate from Agamemnon’s death. This cycle of revenge originates from the curse of the House of Atreus, Agamemnon’s father. Atreus’ brother had an affair with Atreus’ wife.

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9Popularly, Electra’s name is probably most associated with *The Oresteia*, Aeschylus’ trilogy of plays, which includes *Agamemnon*. In the play following *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, Orestes, son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, plots to kill his mother, who killed his father. Electra is Orestes’ sister. The setting for the play is ten years after Agamemnon’s murder. Electra has been at home all of those years. Clytemnestra does not fear Electra’s avenging her father’s death because that duty traditionally belongs to the son. However, Electra does not side with Clytemnestra. In fact, Electra hates Clytemnestra for murdering Agamemnon. Thus, here, as with the Cassandra painting, we see Evans interestingly foregrounding a Greek myth, which features a woman’s siding with a man over a woman. I should note that Agamemnon killed Electra’s sister, Iphigenia, as a sacrifice to the gods. Nevertheless, Electra still sides with her dead father over her mother (Harris and Platzner 608-620).

In *The Libation Bearers*, Electra and Orestes are reunited upon Orestes’ return. At first, Electra does not recognize Orestes. However, by a lock of his hair and a footprint, she is convinced that it is he. Here in the play, there is a profound moment of joy. The siblings begin a lyric passage, entering into song together. At last, the children can finally honor their father’s grave. Agamemnon is now seen as a divine power, and Orestes and Electra try to tap into that power. Orestes, with Electra, plots to kill Clytemnestra and her lover, Aegisthus. Electra tells Orestes about their mother’s dream of a snake’s biting Clytemnestra while she was suckling it. Orestes interprets that he is the snake. However, he does not interpret the cycle of revenge, that a snake will doubtless come after him too (608-620).

Consequently, we can see the import of Electra’s name in the novel, firstly that of filial devotion to her cousin Russell. As well, invoking Electra’s name evokes the theme of endless resentment. Evans acknowledges this resentment with her characters’ personal anger. However, she does not acknowledge it when it comes to white southern women’s larger resentments about the North. Finally, *The Libation Bearers* is the least personalized of the three plays of *The Oresteia*. It is more interested in political and ethical ideas. Electra is there to shift the mood in a different direction for a while. In the same way, *Macaria* is interested in political ideas, but it does not want its female characters to become too involved in the public sphere, understanding that arena not to be a woman’s place.

10Evans clearly means for Irene to allude to Eirene, the Greek goddess of peace. In fact, within her portrait *Modern Macaria*, Electra depicts two figures, Independence and Peace, Electra and Irene respectively. Eirene was one of three daughters born to Zeus and Themis. Her sisters were Dike, the goddess of justice, and Eunomia, the goddess of order. As Evans is deeply interested in peace (in terms of freedom from northern demagogism), justice, and order, it is entirely appropriate for her to make this allusion to the Horae, the name given to the collective sisters. As well, the allusion is appropriate since the Horae were considered the “[g]uardians of natural law” and Irene possesses an interest in the natural sciences as understood through a Christian worldview. Finally, as goddesses of justice, order, and peace, Dike, Eunomia, and Eirene “regulated […] the smooth functioning of the cosmos” (Harris and Platzner 1079). Evans presents Irene as someone who at first has trouble seeing the smooth functioning of God’s design for the cosmos. However, eventually, through her work and her meetings with her minister, she comes to realize it (1079).
Because of this insult, Atreus killed his brother’s children and duplicitously fed his brother’s children to him. One of his brother’s children, Aegisthus, escaped however. Later, with Agamemnon’s wife, Clytemnestra, Aegisthus killed Agamemnon. Of course, the story does not end there, as it is a story about an endless cycle of revenge.

Irene believes in similar curses. When her cousin dies in a riding accident, she exclaims, “Ah! the curse of our house has fallen upon you” (Evans 249). Evans adds, “[T]he very atmosphere seemed filled with the curse which brooded inexorably over the ancient house” (250). Because of her long, self-taught education in Greek mythology, Evans is well aware of resentment’s potential to cycle endlessly, even and especially in white southern culture. Both Irene and Electra’s families are, in a complex subplot, “cursed” with feelings of envy and bitterness toward each other because of Irene’s wealthy father’s unrequited desire for Electra’s much poorer aunt.

Additionally and ironically, in Agamemnon, Cassandra, though enslaved by Agamemnon, her city toppled and her family killed by him, empathizes with Agamemnon rather than his wife. The fact that Electra paints Cassandra instead of Antigone (a choice with which she wrestles) says much about the novel’s ultimate desire to foreground a woman who aligns with patriarchal interests (Cassandra) rather than a woman who battles the patriarchal state because it is the right thing to do (Antigone) (Evans 205-206).

11While writing about Aeschylus’ The Oresteia, I should note that Evans does allude to the third play in the trilogy, The Eumenides. Evans writes of the internecine disagreements in the South about how to respond to Lincoln’s election: “It would seem that, for a time at least, party animosities would have been crushed; but, like the Eumenides of Orestes, they merely slept for a moment, starting up wolfish and implacable as ever” (Evans 299).

Invoking The Eumenides serves several functions here. First, The Eumenides comments on Athenian democracy, by taking a difficult case – a matricide to avenge one’s father’s murder – to evaluate the Athenian judicial system. At the beginning of The Eumenides, there is a conflict between the traditional way of justice, represented by the Furies, “goddesses of blood vengeance,” and an innovative style of justice, represented by
representative of that devotion to the patriarchal southern cause, including its resentments, no matter how wearying that loyalty might be.\(^\text{13}\)

Consequently, time and again in *Macaria*, the line from Matthew 9:37 is repeated: “The laborers are few” (quoted in Evans 108). Though this phrase has many meanings in the novel’s context – winning souls for Christ, doing good works, and, for Evans, inspiring white southern women to work harder to define the South’s identity – Evans never notes that none of her characters is indeed a physical laborer. The reasons for this omission appear threefold: (1.) Evans must prioritize imaginative energies over physical expenditures because

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Apollo (Harris and Platzner 1077). Apollo absolves Orestes of his blood guilt, whereas the Furies say that the only way to clean blood is with more blood. Therefore, Orestes must die.

In the South’s internecine disagreements, we witness the same difficulties: How does the South respond to a difficult case? In presenting this conflict and alluding to *The Eumenides*, Evans presents the South as Athens, the best hope for democracy and justice, a region where, in Evans’ eyes, argument, reason, and persuasion carry the day. We recall that, in the midst of these disagreements, “Russell was indefatigable in his labors for prompt, immediate state action […] It was now that his researches in the dusty regions of statistics came admirably into play, as he built up his arguments on solid foundations of indisputable calculation” (Evans 300).

With *Macaria*, her first post-secession novel, Evans hopes to establish a foundation myth for the South, as Aeschylus does for Athens with *The Eumenides*. Evans presents the South as the last, best site for real democratic justice (Harris and Platzner 621-642).

\(^{12}\) However, I note that, despite Evans’ eventual retreat into traditionalism, several of her contemporary reviewers criticized Irene as being too progressive, anomalous, and unreal. As well, I note that, in an innovative move, Evans does not have her heroines marry in the end. In fact, the hero dies. Instead, her heroines devote themselves to celibacy for the South’s cause. Finally, one cannot overemphasize Evans’ progressive delineations of Irene. Irene is a rational woman with a keen intellect who is interested in science. Irene even writes articles for scientific journals under a different name. This depiction is quite different from many traditional descriptions of nineteenth-century southern American women (Faust xxiv-xxv, Moss 217, Papashvily 162, Riepma 62-64, 70, 104).

\(^{13}\) Evans also references eighteenth-century Irish philosopher Edmund Burke’s work “Reflections on the French Revolution” (Evans 220). In this work and “On the Death of Marie Antoinette,” Burke laments the failure in France of the sublime to protect the beautiful. Evans also worries about this potential failure of the sublime (in Evans’ worldview, the Christian God) in the South. She expresses concern that her divinely protected South might not be as protected as she would like.
the imaginative sphere is her special province, as noted in her afore-cited letter to J.L.M. Curry, (2.) Evans, in the same letter, clearly feels at least some qualms about the peculiar institution but has no alternative to offer and, as a southern woman, may not do so anyway, and (3.) these two reasons leave Evans no choice but to write around the topic of slavery rather than to address it directly.

Seemingly, the presence and voices of slaves only become necessary as Evans begins to write about the war, which does not take place until well into the 469-page novel. When Irene returns from New York, Evans writes, “[Irene] was more anxious to see [Dr. Arnold] than anybody […] except old Nellie, her nurse” (157). Then, we at last hear from Nellie. She tells Irene that Irene’s mother “found out what Huntingdon temper was” and calls Mrs. Huntingdon a “poor blessed saint!” (166). In this instance, the slave has a plot function to serve. That function is to warn the heroine of a white planter’s mercurial temperament. However, in this case, Irene merely smiles “at the superstitious turn [Nellie’s] thoughts had taken, then dismissing the subject, [Irene] fell asleep” (167). Nellie’s insight, though accurate, is discounted. We hear from Nellie again a few pages later. Nevertheless, we only hear her briefly scolding Irene for staying out late (“You scare me nearly to death”) and her tending to Irene’s hair (“Sit down, and let me comb it out”) (191). Here, once more, Irene responds to Nellie, “That will do, aunt Nellie” (192).

In other instances, slaves (for instance, Andrew, Mr. Huntingdon’s groom) serve only to inform Irene of the location and/or status of other characters (197-198, 230, 254, 277, 283, 342, 398, 399, 400). Irene rarely notes the actual work these slaves do: the mind-numbing, repetitive work of picking cotton while under intense observation, treated like parts to a
factory. She does not even do so when admitting to her minister, Harvey Young, that, as a
woman, she is cut off from the “sphere of labor” (234).

Even Irene’s affection for her slaves is designed only to emphasize her angelic nature.
When Mr. Huntingdon leaves for war, he asks Irene with whom she will stay. Irene says that
she will stay at home. Mr. Huntingdon exclaims, “What! with nobody but the servants?”
(302). Irene replies, “They will take better care of me than anybody else. Nellie, and Andrew,
and John are the only guardians I want in your absence. They have watched over me all my
life, and they will do it in the end” (302). William, the cook, who accompanies Mr.
Huntingdon to the front, cries at leaving Irene. He says simply upon leaving, “Good-by, Miss
Irene. May the Lord protect you all till we come back!” (305). When Irene tells William that
she looks to him “to take care of father” and to let her know if anything happens to Mr.
Huntingdon, William responds, “I will, Miss Irene. I promise you I will take good care of
master, and telegraph you if he is hurt” (306). He wrings her hand as he leaves (306). When
Nellie attempts to comfort the “sorrow-stricken, tearless [Irene],” Nellie says, “Try to come
and take a nap” (306). Irene replies, “No – I can’t sleep. Go in, Nellie, and leave me to
myself” (306). Again, the servant only serves to emphasize the mistress’ noble trait, in this
case, stoicism.

When it comes to referring to actual laborers in the field, we hear but two mentions.
Before she leaves for her work as a nurse, Irene states that she is going “to consult with the
overseer about several changes which I desire made concerning the negroes” (364).
However, this reference is likely designed to show wealthy white southern women’s
newfound wartime involvement with slave management. Later, Irene consults a new
overseer. However, again this reference is probably intended to illustrate how new, broader,
southern conscription laws were affecting the planter class, leaving many plantations without overseers. Even when Evans writes in the closing pages that God is still “calling for laborers,” she does not note the physical laborer’s function in the South (414).

In these examples, slaves, like white women’s labor, are designed only to organize our thoughts about the South, as a place of mutual goodwill between master and slave. Evans presents the abovementioned moments for this reason and to feed into the myth of the southern identity of self-sufficiency. We recall Irene’s flawed – flawed because believing the South can exist without the assistance of northern manufacturing – hypotaxical thinking: “If our existence as a Republic depends upon the perpetuity of the institution of slavery, then, it seems to me, that the aim of our legislators should be to render us par excellence an agricultural people” (Evans 367). To keep this conceptual organization alive, Evans must provide slaves in her narrative. The South’s existence is believed to depend on something. Therefore, the South must produce that something. As a southern writer, Evans must present fictional white women producing ideas-as-commodities as much as she must show African Americans as commodities. For Evans, it is not enough to have slavery. She must produce it, though not overmuch, as, again, the novel’s mentions of slaves and slavery are few.

Earlier in the novel, when Irene’s crisis about her idleness culminates in a crisis of faith, Irene says, “I thought once that God created every human being for some particular work – some special mission. That, in order that the vast social machinery of the world might move harmoniously, each had his or her allotted duties, in accordance with the great fundamental law of economy – ‘division of labor’” (Evans 234). Irene then laments, “Like many other, youthful theories, I have been compelled to part with this, also” (234).
Irene’s minister, the youthful but dour Harvey Young, who ultimately comes ardently to embrace the Confederate cause, directs Irene, “Rather hold fast to it, for the precious truth it is. Do you not find, on reflection, that the disarrangement, the confusion in the same social mill proves that some of the human cogs are broken, or out of place, or not rendering their part?” (234). In other words, Harvey suggests, the “social mill” should leave no room for play, for “disarrangement.” It only allows for categories of identity produced by labor relations, created by each person “rendering [her/his] part.” Otherwise, Harvey suggests, “confusion” will occur in the “mill,” a lack of identity, a loss of the “special mission,” “the allotted duty.” Harvey identifies the South with division of labor, with each skilled member producing to her/his utmost, according to her/his special skills. Slaves must produce the agricultural harvest; white wealthy southern women, the moral. Still, this moral influence of white southern women, though deemed important by white southern men, did not extend to writing histories of the Confederacy. In fact, Evans planned to write an elaborate history of the Confederate struggle for audiences outside of the South, evidence of her cosmopolitan ambition documented by Coleman Hutchison and Melissa Homestead (Hutchison 63-73, Homestead 665-670). However, once she learned that Alexander Stephens had already started, she felt her ambitions “strangled” by a man, a hand which “waved [her] to humbler paths of labor” (SWL 144-145).

So once more Irene is called to produce something, to produce a category of southern identity through Christian labor. Part of this labor is to deliver a female body suffering for the cause. Electra says, “Irene, the women of the South must exercise an important influence in

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14As William Gilmore Simms writes twenty-two years earlier in his 1842 novel *Beauchampe: or, the Kentucky Tragedy*: “If we pause too long for rest – if we too much dream – we wake to find some other person in possession of our conquests” (45).
determining our national destiny; and because I felt this so fully, I hurried home [from abroad] to share the perils, and privations, and trials of my countrywomen” (Evans 363). Irene agrees that she too “could not die in a better cause” (376). Irene therefore delivers her body, which is consistently described as pale, bloodless, and like marble, “betoken[ing] weariness” (374). Her trials continually seem to drain the lifeblood from her. However, she presses on because of a desire for an identity that lives in her (and white southern men’s) mind. Irene believes that she must endlessly produce in order to justify herself as a southerner. Hence, she relentlessly works and indefatigably suffers toward this end. She continues with this boundless activity, working exhaustively but never assimilating into the broader public sphere. She works, in modern parlance, like a corporate tool.

Finding purpose through work is a theme that *St. Elmo*, another of Evans’ wildly bestselling works (published two years later, 1866), offers too. The story is of a Tennessee country girl, who is orphaned early in life. She, Edna Earl, is adopted by her grandfather only to see him die while she is still young. This turn of events results in Edna’s desire to leave home for Georgia factory work. However, a train accident strands her and makes her the

15 At its publication in 1866, *St. Elmo* sold more than a million copies – at a time when the national population was only thirty-six million (Kelley 25-26). Appropriately, it secured a number of lucrative publishing contracts for its author (25-26). As well, it was a healthy contributor to the nearly $100,000 Evans received by 1884 for her fiction (25-26). Nineteenth-century American parents even named their children “Elmo,” a sacrificial oblation if ever there were (Freibert and White 86). In the early twentieth century, plays and silent films based on the novel appeared (86). Scholar Helen Papashvily writes, “*St. Elmo* won [Augusta Jane Evans] an audience that places it securely among the ten most popular novels ever published in the United States” (156). Evans’ editor G.W. Carleton saw a Parsee boy in India reading a London edition of the novel: “[H]ere – here!” he exclaimed, “miles and miles up the jungles of interior India” (quoted in Hubbell 612). And all of this is not to mention the cigars, steamboats, and towns (thirteen) named after the bestseller (Kelley 27, Derby 397). Jay Hubbell adds that *St. Elmo* “went through twenty editions in a short time,” and Rebecca Grant Sexton concludes that *St. Elmo* “sold more copies than any other novel of the nineteenth century except *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” (Hubbell 614, Sexton xxi). Evans herself declared that *St. Elmo* was “‘the best thing I have ever written’” (quoted in Riepma 109).
ward of a Georgia plantation mistress and her acerbic son, St. Elmo. During her time with the family, Edna takes it upon herself to begin a career, at first anonymously in writing. She works while being wooed by the dissipated St. Elmo and rejecting his advances.

Edna’s writing work begins in earnest once she has established “a crystallized and consecrated purpose” for it: expanding women’s powers in the domestic sphere to redeem the white southern male (Evans 86). Primarily, the novel is about Edna’s finding, or rediscovering, the purpose for the eponymous male protagonist’s, St. Elmo’s, life. In this way, the novel’s wearying work is to create a teleology for the white southern male during a period, the publication’s context, the 1860s, when white masculinity appears to be fading.

16 Striking is that the first text from which Edna’s tutor has Edna read is Oliver Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village” (Evans 55). While not wanting to make a direct comparison between the South and Ireland (as biographer Mary Forrest shares, Evans displayed a strong anti-Catholic streak in Inez: A Tale of the Alamo), like Goldsmith in the famous Irish poem, Evans does desire to rediscover some part of her home that she feels might be lost: something natural and untainted by politics (Forrest 330). However, like Goldsmith, Evans seemingly worries about being unable to rediscover that place.

Also as in the Goldsmith poem, Evans expects to “return” to her home as a homecoming heroine and to reclaim the land she believes to be hers. But at times, as in “The Deserted Village,” Evans has trouble recognizing the land and longs to make it more recognizable. Goldsmith writes, “I see the rural virtues leave the land” (Goldsmith line 498). This possibility for the South is one about which Evans, via Edna, continually frets in St. Elmo. Like Goldsmith, Evans sees the sublime (or, in her worldview, the Protestant Christian God) as that which protects the beautiful (or the South). And, again like Goldsmith, Evans must make sense of why, in the case of her region’s loss, the sublime appears to have failed (Goldsmith ll. 78, 351, 349).

17 St. Elmo is rife with allusions to Old Testament etiologies. With reference to St. Elmo and his best friend, Murray, the novel offers numerous allusions to Cain and Abel, the story of whom is the etiology for murder. As well, the slave who nursed St. Elmo is named Hagar, and St. Elmo is referred to as an “Ishmael” (Evans 59). This allusion speaks to the etiologies of Christianity and Islam, the story of Isaac and Ishmael. I should also note that, if St. Elmo is Ishmael, having been nursed by Hagar, and if Edna is the daughter that Mrs. Murray always wanted, then it follows that Edna is the novel’s “Isaac,” the conveyor of a new Christian vision. In this way, we see Edna once more as a visionary.

Lastly, there are many references to Eden, the biblical site for the most well-known etiology, the story of humankind’s sinful nature. St. Elmo’s home, Le Bocage, is constructed as an Edenic site, and Edna’s name is a playful anagram of “Eden.” With these etiological allusions, we should not be surprised at Evans’ suggestion that white southern women’s work should be about establishing stories, purposes, for their male counterparts’
Accordingly, *St. Elmo’s* prime objective is to get white southern women working toward that end. When Edna is told by a doctor to rest, Evans expounds, “To tell the girl to ‘rest’ was a mockery” (283). Indeed, Edna feels “her sole hope of peace of mind, her only rest, was in earnest and unceasing labor” (283). She is driven by purpose, the *dii involuti* of duty, to “do some good for her race” (284). Evans suggests that doing this work, defining white southern identity, will lead to peace. Edna will have fulfilled her biblical duty to act as her brother’s keeper and be rewarded with rest in the next world, “peace after much strife and great weariness” (341).

This lesson is one of the major ones for St. Elmo, “the utter hopelessness of peace for heart and soul save only through that religion” (347). Edna, of course, also knows the peace that comes from doing God’s work. She recalls God’s message, “‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you’” (353). Evans posits that assiduous Christian work will lead one to a teleological vision, “‘That all the jarring notes of life / Seem blending in a psalm, / And all the angels of its strife / Slow rounding into calm’” (Whittier quoted in Evans 358). She implies that such work, if done properly, causes one to possess “renewed energy” and a “mind invigorated” (358).

But as in *Macaria*, both protagonists are wearied. Both cases are attributed to physical causes. St. Elmo suffers from syncope and Edna from hypertrophy. Hypertrophy is the excessive growth of an organ or other body part. Afflicting Edna with this suffering is Evans’ warning that, as a woman, Edna has developed too much too quickly. With this wearying physical ailment, Evans reins in Edna’s personal ambitions, as Evans will later have done to her. Perhaps reluctantly, Evans reminds Edna that her ambitions should be lives. Their work should be about helping these men toward those purposes, as long as that feminine assistance is “graceful, refined, cultivated [and] Christian” (Evans 359).
relegated to the domestic sphere. They should not grow beyond those constraints. St. Elmo, on the other hand, suffers from syncope, a heart failure which causes one to faint.

Evans distresses her protagonists with gendered ailments but applies each to the opposite gender. By doing so, she indicates the trajectories toward which white southern men and women are turned if those directions are not corrected. Edna’s suffers from excessive growth; St. Elmo’s suffers from a heart ailment, the gendered province of women and one which causes him to swoon. These ailments are Evans’ corrective to the downward turn in white masculinity (Evans 146). Shortly after each protagonist suffers from her/his respective illness, each begins to work back toward traditional gender roles. Each reinvigorates the other and the social system of which each is a part. Figuratively, the illnesses are punishments for each character’s focusing on the wrong purpose. St. Elmo overly focuses on his sinful past. Edna overly fixates on her “disavowing guardianship” of St. Elmo (Evans 215). She ignores her responsibility to him. She forgets her duty to redeem him. In the moment when each is able to free her/himself from fixation on the wrong purpose, each goes about her/his work more productively. Each is better able to keep the right purpose in mind.

It remains disturbing though when St. Elmo and Edna finally wed and St. Elmo announces to Edna, “To-day I snap the fetters of your literary bondage. There shall be no more books written! No more study, no more toil, no more anxiety, no more heart-aches! [...] You belong solely to me now, and I shall take care of the life you have nearly destroyed in your inordinate ambition” (Evans 365). This declaration, the last of St. Elmo’s soliloquies, is difficult. It positions St. Elmo as Edna’s presumed liberator and occupier as well as the judge who best gauges her ambition. Indeed, at the wedding altar, Edna faints. Mary Kelley views this event as Evans’ proof that, at last, Edna has given over to her heart (192). Of course, it
also represents Edna’s forfeiting her imaginative energies. In a case of life imitating art, after marrying the Confederate colonel Lorenzo Madison Wilson in 1868, Evans herself produced far fewer novels (Moss 174). Having written four novels in thirteen years, following marriage, Evans wrote only three in the next twenty-four years (174). This, despite Evans’ earlier claim in an 1860 letter, “I have thought much of all this, and my deliberate conviction is, that while literary women as a class, are not as happy, as women who have Husbands and Children to engage their attention and monopolize their affections; yet in the faithful employment of their talents, they experience a deep peace and satisfaction, and are crowned with a glory such as marriage never gave” (Augusta Jane Evans, letter to Rachel Lyons, University of Alabama Hoole Collections, Box 1563, Folder 3).

In fact, Evans did not stop writing following the war. She simply took to different forms of expression, a change hinted at in *St. Elmo*. Although *St. Elmo* is set in the pre-war South, and although it only mentions the coming conflict in oblique ways, the novel does refer to the war in a manner that reminds us of its publication’s context. When commenting on St. Elmo’s home, which seems more Grecian than American, Evans includes a barbed phrase about the “soi-disant [the “so-called”] ‘republican’ America” (Evans 48). In addition to this brief commentary on the North’s presumed misunderstanding of the world “republican,” Evans includes the following. Edna believed “that the intelligent, refined, modest Christian women of the United States were […] the sole agents who could successfully arrest the tide of demoralization breaking over the land” (300-301). Here, Evans quips, albeit subtly, about the North’s depriving the country of one-half of its moral influence by politicizing its women. Finally, when Edna attains some peace after losing a loved one in the North to illness, we learn, “Only one cause of disquiet now remained. The political storm
of 1861 alarmed her, and she determined that if the threatened secession of the South took place, she would immediately remove to Charleston or New Orleans, link her destiny with the cause which she felt was so just, so holy, and render faithful allegiance to the section she loved so well” (360, 357).

With the last two quotes, we see Evans’ largest purpose with *St. Elmo*: to encourage white southern women to “render faithful allegiance” to white southern men and to give Christian purpose to these men’s sacrifices now that the “political storm” has passed (360). As Sarah Gardner writes, just as colonial New Englanders interpreted their jeremiad, Evans seemingly understood the Confederacy’s defeat as a signal that God had chosen these people for this crucible. Loss did not signify that the South had been immoral; instead, it solidified white southerners’ belief about themselves as God’s chosen people (120). Following the war, Evans tirelessly worked to memorialize the dead. Only a year after the war ended, she had established a subscription drive to commission a monument to those divinely chosen warriors of what she had already termed the “Lost Cause” (Moss 220).

Therefore, we may perhaps read Evans’ inclusion of St. Elmo’s final speech as a valediction to one form of expression, fiction writing. It does not mark the end of Evans’ continued desire to realize her imaginative ambitions. Fiction writing simply did not realize those imaginative ambitions as fully as Evans had hoped. The complexities and, to her, seeming futility of addressing the race questions in fiction wearied her, and she looked to achieve her imaginative ambitions in more invigorating and effective ways. We remember that Evans writes that, in the South, “where slavery flourishes,” “[women’s] imagination [is] more vivid and glowing, their susceptibility to emotions or impressions of beauty, or sublimity, infinitely keener; and nature seems to stamp them devotees at the shrine of
Aesthetics; noble, perfect instruments for the advancement of Art. But the sacred mission is not fulfilled; they fold their listless fingers, and failing in requisite energy, become the victims of chronic inertia” (Augusta Jane Evans, letter to J.L.M. Curry, University of Alabama Hoole Collections, Box 1563, Folder 1). For these reasons, Evans cajoles herself and her friend, Rachel Lyons, to “write – Do” (Augusta Jane Evans, letter to Rachel Lyons, University of Alabama Hoole Collections, Box 1563, Folder 3).

Evans turned her energies toward what southerners called “the religion of the Lost Cause.” With monument drives, she memorialized the southern fallen, hoping that this endeavor would realize her imaginative ambitions more effectively than fiction. We may then also read St. Elmo as the tentative, inchoate beginning of this memorializing. It is the beginning of encouraging white southern women to honor the South’s patriarchal morality, so called into question by the war, and to commemorate the southern system as a part of “God’s law of order” (338). She writes, “I shall spend my life in building an historic mausoleum which will ever hold the sacred ashes of the darling dead” (quoted in Moss 174). She found renewed energy in this quest. This energy was channeled from writing fiction around the wearying topic of slavery toward the more energizing and immediately gratifying task of inscribing white southern patriarchal identity on lasting monuments.

To conclude, I turn to St. Elmo’s beginning. Here, Evans tells us that Edna sings Habakkuk’s words like the Hebrew chant of Deborah and fully as triumphant (5). Deborah was a biblical prophetess who listened and responded to the Israelites’ questions and concerns. One of her major roles in the Old Testament is to hear the Israelites’ complaint that they are at the mercy of a cruel Canaanite army commander. This is a consequence for their having done “what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (HCSB Judges 4:1-5). After hearing of
this twenty-year suffering, Deborah, according to the commandment of God, seeks a man, Barak. Barak is to take a position at Mount Tabor, along with ten thousand others, with the promise that the Lord will deliver the commander into Barak’s hands (HCSB Judges 4:6-8). But Barak will not go without Deborah by his side. He declares to his prophetess, “If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go” (HCSB Judges 4:8). Deborah agrees to accompany Barak. She tells him that what she has foreseen will occur. The Lord will sell the enemy commander, Sisera, into the hands of a woman (HCSB Judges 4:9). And everything happens the way that Deborah says it will. The Lord throws Sisera and his chariots into a panic. Sisera tries to escape. He flees to the tent of a friendly king. The king’s wife, Jael, greets Sisera. She shows him hospitality. She covers him with a rug. She fetches him milk. Then, she drives a tent peg into his head (HCSB Judges 4:15-22, Boling 375). In this way, everything that Deborah spoke came to pass: a woman – not Deborah but another woman, Jael – takes Sisera’s life into her hands (Boling 375).

With her allusion in St. Elmo to Deborah and a later sustained reference to Huldah, the other powerful female biblical prophet, Evans suggests that Edna is also prophetic. She is someone who will provide a clear teleological vision for white southern men. This vision is one in which white southern women will aid their men, as Jael did Barak. They will do so with foresight, intelligence, and a “dash” of irony (HCSB 2 Kings 22, 2 Chronicles 34, Boling 375). I note again Barak’s provisional agreement to Deborah’s unqualified directive: “If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go” (Boling 375, HCSB Judges 4:8).18 So Deborah goes with him. Much of what happens next cannot be explained. How exactly is the panic created that sends the evil commander, Sisera, fleeing for

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18Finally, given my interest in weariness, I should highlight that Sisera is killed because “he was lying fast asleep from weariness” (HCSB Judges 4:21).
his life? (Boling 375). Why does Jael, the wife of a king friendly with Sisera, take it into her head to kill him? (375-376). Why does Sisera fall asleep so easily? (376). How does Jael know first to show him hospitality? (375-376). The only explanations given are that “the Lord created the panic,” and “Providentially,” Jael “remained loyal to the cause of the Lord” (375-376).

These religious explanations – these etiological coups, which seek to re-empower the white wealthy male after disempowering him – are the ones which Evans pursues in her novels with her wearied but inexorable female protagonists. In this way, Evans hopes to show white southern women’s renewed imaginative vigor. She hopes to do so by avoiding all signs of weakness and presenting a clear teleological vision of the Lord’s new work. This vision explains a seemingly inexplicable ground-swell that, as Deborah says, shook the land and its people (HCSB Judges 5:4).
Chapter Two

The War Against Weariness:
Southern Historical Romancers (1883-1904)

Augusta Jane Evans largely wrote southern domestic novels like *Macaria* and *St. Elmo*. As we have seen, these novels defined the southern domestic sphere as ordered, harmonious, and governed by the white southern planter. They also presented a domestic defense of the region against the northern ideals of materialism, individualism, feminism, and abolitionism as well as a romanticized iteration of southern history that spoke to tens of thousands of readers North and South. However, before her success with southern domestic novels, Evans experimented with the historical romance. She did so in her early, 1850 publication, *Inez: A Tale of the Alamo*.

C. Hugh Holman nicely summarizes the formula and evolution of the southern historical romance. The historical romance is the genre made famous by the Scottish novelist, Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), whom Louisiana author George Washington Cable (1844-1925) sought to emulate with his post-Reconstruction short-story collection, *Strong Hearts* (1893-1899), and his bestselling southern novel, *The Cavalier* (1901). This resurgence of American interest in historical romances fifty years after the height of their popularity speaks to a national desire following the American Civil War. While Evans, after *Inez*, wearily labored to write around the topic of slavery, post-Reconstruction historical romancers looked to the past as a space to ignore, and rest from, the subject.
In Holman’s words, Sir Walter Scott brought us the first true historical novels. He wrote accurate portrayals of history, usually involving class contentions, but added in a love story, often involving young aristocratic protagonists. Scott set his story during a historic event and even used historical personages. He would then revolve the plot around imaginary characters whose lives were entangled in the conflict. In doing so, Holman writes, Scott developed a formula for fiction. By paying close attention to details, he conveyed a sense of authenticity even while writing a novel. Evans borrowed from Scott’s formula in writing her historical romance. She allowed minor characters to relate the details that would be typical of the time and focused the main plot line on young aristocrats in love. Still, Evans had trouble working within the context of Scott’s formula. Her novel’s setting, the Battle of the Alamo and the Mexican-American War, made it difficult for her to convey the nuances of the conflict between ethnic groups and social classes. In other words, the exaggerated plot lines in Scott’s novels did not work as well for the story that Evans wanted to tell (448-449).

In his politics, George Washington Cable greatly differed from Evans. He advocated for African Americans’ civil rights; however, he had not always been a champion of civic equality. Indeed, Cable had fought for the Confederacy during the war. Two decades after the war ended, his views changed. This shift in worldview resulted from Cable’s newspaper reporting on the southern convict-lease system. The system leased out inmates, overwhelmingly African Americans, for hard labor. In Cable’s eyes, the system was another kind of slavery. Cable began fighting for the rights of former slaves. His mission became to represent through his writings the “silent South,” those who believed as he but did not speak out for fear of retaliation.
Because of his pro-civil-rights stance, including his 1883 polemical novel *Dr. Sevier*, and the opposition it aroused, Cable felt forced to leave his home of New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1884 for Northampton, Massachusetts (Ware 71). He had been fighting the battle for civil rights on his own. He had published lectures and articles which had garnered little support. He had not understood how deeply the ideas of segregation were ingrained in white southern culture. Sarah E. Gardner quotes Daniel Aaron, “If Cable spoke for the ‘silent South,’ then surely the ‘silent contingent must have held their tongues after the public outcry provoked by Cable’s published lectures and articles’” (109-110).

Perhaps due to this venomous southern response, Cable’s 1901 *The Cavalier*, developed from the short stories of *Strong Hearts* (1893-1899), is similar to Evans’ variation on Scott’s historical-romance formula. Like Evans’ novel, Cable’s *The Cavalier*, set during the American Civil War in Mississippi, uses a historical framework, trying to build a cohesive plot through a clichéd story of hindered young lovers. One is aristocratic and one is not, though their eventual romantic union ultimately elevates the lower-class protagonist to higher economic status. In following this clichéd plot, Cable, like his predecessor, is betrayed into “an oversimplification about the nature of the civil struggle which he was portraying” and “exaggerated the extremes of the social system portrayed” (Holman 448, 449). In doing so, he reveals for the first time imaginative weariness in his southern writing, even in the postbellum southern American novel.

John Cleman argues that *The Cavalier* is representative of a profound change in Cable’s literary thinking. Cleman writes, “In *The Cavalier* more than in any other story Cable wrote, the emphasis on entertainment seems to dominate completely” (167). Cleman continues that the “purity of the emphasis on entertainment in *The Cavalier*” resulted from
“Cable’s need to make money”; his “finances were never wholly secure, and by the end of the century he had neither the energy nor the appeal to continue to support himself as a platform reader” (167-168). Cleman concludes, “To some extent all of Cable’s books show evidence of his attempts to adjust to his readers’ expectations and not offend them, but in *The Cavalier* the effort is more extreme and results in an emphasis on dramatic action, nearly devoid of either serious issues or textural background” (168). As Cleman notes, at least one contemporary reviewer noted that the novel’s “success may have less to do with its artistry than that it caught a wave of popular interest in romantic Civil War novels at the turn of the century” (168). Cable biographer Louis Rubin adds, in response to Cable’s feeling that he had “done a beautiful thing” in writing *The Cavalier*, “Was he now so fully and completely a figure of the genteel establishment that he could mistake vague, romantic inspirational characterization for anything involving real moral significance? Or was he so involved in the problems of pure literary craft when he made the remark that he was, for the moment, oblivious of all except questions of narrative technique?” (247-248).

Despite these scholars’ contentions to the contrary, there is more complexity and subversion to *The Cavalier* than one might appreciate on first reading. It is true that Cable is far from overt in his criticisms of the Confederacy and that he appears to laud its “‘pluck, resource, gayety in hardship and pain, simple and unquestioning self-surrender’” (quoted in Turner 129). Nevertheless, one must remember that the novel is told from the point-of-view of a naïve and young Confederate cavalryman. Therefore, accordingly with the narrator’s perspective, the novel’s Confederate officers are fittingly “‘highly idealized’” and at times “quite unbelievable” (quoted in Turner 128, Rubin 247). The failure to take into consideration point-of-view, coupled with overlooking the novel’s themes of duplicity,
would naturally lead a reader to an under-appreciation and dismissal of the novel as it is presented. Additionally, The Cavalier’s divorce in style from Cable’s earlier works, with a far greater emphasis on romance, plot, and art for art’s sake, would logically lead readers to reject it out of hand as an anomaly. There is power to the romance, however, as experienced in the novels of Cable’s favorite writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne. These features make it effective at showing, rather than simply telling about, the energies required to discern optimistic America’s gothic undercurrents. For these reasons, we should revisit The Cavalier as a novel that works to entertain while covertly enlightening the reader.

In Cable’s romance, the narrator-protagonist, nineteen-year-old (though, because of his slight stature, appearing sixteen) Richard “Dick” Smith, often goes for days without sleep. He is anxious to prove himself to his lieutenant, the war hero Ned Ferry, and the woman with whom Smith is smitten, Charlotte Oliver, a war correspondent. Charlotte dissemblingly works against the Union by smuggling across battle lines secrets housed in dolls. When Smith does sleep, he experiences strange dreams about succumbing to exhaustion in battle. Consequently, his not sleeping serves two purposes: to avoid those irrational patterns that come to his unconscious mind; and to prove his endurance to his beloved. However, the anxiety of tirelessly working toward these aims builds on itself. Smith battles to keep it at bay, but regularly these anxieties come back as figurative ghosts to haunt him. The behavior causes a vicious cycle in which Smith despairingly struggles to order his world, when, as The Cavalier makes clear time and again, some experiences cannot be ordered.

As an example of his attempt to order his irreducibly complex world, at the midpoint in the novel, Smith-as-narrator comments on what he sees as Charlotte Oliver’s primary
character flaw: imaginative weariness. While conjecturing about her time away from him, he writes,

[She looked] in upon herself [and the reasons for her actions]. There she saw a most unaccountable tendency for her judgment – after some long overstrain – momentarily, but all at once, to swoon, collapse, turn upside down like a boy’s kite and dart to earth; an impulse – while fancying she was playing the supremely courageous or generous or clever part – suddenly to surrender the key of the situation, the vital point in whatever she might be striving for. (Cable 212)

Of course, it is appropriate that Smith, so concerned with his own falling asleep, should also worry himself about what he sees as Charlotte’s imaginative weariness. Smith claims that Charlotte, “after some long overstrain,” “swoons” and “collapses,” “surrendering the key of the situation, the vital point,” when under duress. Smith writes this passage as if from Charlotte’s perspective. However, surely it comes from his. Ironically, Charlotte often boasts more consistent energy than any of the soldiers, especially Smith. As well, in a later scene, when Smith again sees Charlotte as imaginatively “swooning” “after some long overstrain,” she in fact makes a courageous decision. It is simply one that Smith does not understand: her initial refusal to marry Smith’s idol, the Confederate lieutenant, Ned Ferry.

Despite his compulsive attempts to order his world, in the end, Smith’s story falls apart like his psyche. He witnesses a hideously violent act, which has nothing to do with the larger, ascendant purposes that he associated with the war. Instead, this act has only to do with the burgeoning romance between Charlotte Oliver and Ned Ferry. This act of violence, committed in Ferry’s honor by Smith and a cabal of Confederate officers, eliminates the obstacle – shooting, and setting on fire, a Union guerilla, Charlotte’s husband – who has, throughout the novel, prevented Charlotte from marrying Ferry. Smith narrates Charlotte’s husband’s imminent demise, noting that he, a Union jayhawker, has a loyal slave:
The bound man sat like a statue. The slave girl went upon her knees and began to pray for her master, – with whom she had remained after every other servant on the place had run off to the Federals, – supplicating with a piteous fervor that drew tears down [a Confederate soldier’s] cheeks. “Humph!” said [Colonel Dismukes], still smiling […] “she’d better be thanking God for her freedom, for that’s what we’re going to give her to-night; we’re going to take her and [Charlotte’s father-in-law] to the outposts and turn ‘em loose, and if either of ‘em ever shows up inside our lines after to-night, we’ll hang ‘em. (Cable 303)

Here, we have reached the ultimate moment of wearying confusion. Charlotte’s husband, a jayhawker fighting for the Union, has a slave who will not leave him, for what motive or psychological/physical abuse we do not know. All we know is that her cries bring tears to a Confederate soldier’s eyes. At the same time, out of vengeance, Smith’s Confederate colonel, who is fighting a war to protect slavery, frees a slave.

Following this event, Smith, like the reader, is left only with language. We have had an experience, but we have missed the meaning. Like Smith, we are left in the horrifying realm of anti-revelation, where the deeper we have delved, the less we have known. In his narrative, Smith-as-narrator has looked to the past in order to interpret it. However, ultimately he cannot. Smith wanted to believe that the war was about something larger, something ascendant. But, in the penultimate analysis, he concedes that the war is principally a contest between battling, independent egos. Dejected, Smith admits, “[H]ow much closer I watched the trend of things that belonged only to this small story [of Charlotte, Ferry, and Charlotte’s husband] than I did that great theatre of a whole world’s fortunes, whose arches spread and resounded from the city of Washington to the city of Mexico” (Cable 291). All that is clear is that Smith is on the verge of something deeper, weird, marvelous, and heart-breaking but which appears to have no meaning.

Following this violent act, Smith encounters Charlotte. It is the day of her wedding to Ned Ferry. Charlotte at first appears to want to know where Smith has been. Then, she says,
“No [...] you couldn’t look so happy if there were the least thing wrong, could you?” (Cable 307-308). Even Charlotte’s “fathoming eyes” – the eyes that Smith has described time and again as having an “inward-outward ken,” the ability to see beyond people’s surfaces – are no longer able to envision what has occurred to secure her matrimonial bliss (308, 233). Now, like everyone else in the novel, Charlotte sees simply what she wants to see: the world as it is presented to her. Smith replies, “There’s a-many a thing wrong, but not one for which this wedding need wait another minute” (308). In Manuscript B of *The Cavalier* held at Tulane University, Cable initially writes this line, “There is not the least wrong, for which there is the smallest reason for this wedding to wait another minute” (Cable Ms. B Tulane Archives 358). In contrast, the revised line in the published novel reads much more darkly. Charlotte concludes, “God bless you, Richard! [...] and now you may go tell Ned I am coming” (308).

Had the novel ended with this scene, critics over the years might have viewed it more positively than they have. The novel would have concluded on the right note of irony. The cavalryman Smith, who wanted the war to be about something greater, instead has served merely as a conduit to removing an obstacle to a couple’s marriage. If the novel had ended this way, the conclusion would have resonated with its gothic themes: the imaginative energy required to see beyond the world as it is given and the need for rest so as not to yield to this weariness. In addition, Charlotte’s last line – “God bless you, Richard!” – which at any other time would have meant so much to Smith, would have sounded hollow as a concluding sentence (Cable 308). We might imagine that Smith does not feel blessed, having been part of so hideous a violence for so small a cause. Lastly, the final image of Charlotte (“her fathoming eyes filled while her smile brightened”) and of Smith (finally “meeting
[Charlotte’s eyes] squarely”) would have been poignant, in that finally Charlotte, like Smith, because of “some long overstrain,” no longer wants to see beyond the surface of events (308). She no longer wants to know what had to be done in order for her to achieve her private happiness.

Alas, the novel does not end this way. Smith concludes by writing, “Oh, Ned Ferry, my long-loved partner, as dear a leader still as ever you were in the days of bloody death, life’s choicest gifts be yours, and be hers whose sons and daughters are yours, and the eldest and tallest of whom is the one you and she have named Richard” (Cable 311). One cannot help but wince at such a conclusion, so cloying, and wonder about Cable’s intent. After so many a gothic undercurrent, to end the novel in this traditional, sentimental fashion seems antithetical, indeed seems to erase all that came before it.

So, like the conclusion of *St. Elmo* thirty-five years prior, we again have a novel that ends with an explicit, and un-ironic, affirmation of a woman’s influence’s serving only for a man’s redemption, in this case Smith’s. This conclusion is a shame because, for much of the novel, and even coming from a callow soldier’s perspective, Charlotte’s purpose largely concerns her own redemption via the general softening of white male violence (Cable 177). Charlotte believes that women have the capacity to assuage this violence, even well outside the domestic sphere. Intermittently in the novel, she poses difficult questions about the forms of white male violence and even harbors, albeit quietly, some questions about the war (177). Cable seemingly believes that women have this capability, if not to denounce fully patriarchal violence then at least to establish a more tempered version of patriarchal control.

*The Cavalier*, however, does not give us that conclusion. Instead, it creates for us another poor white southern female protagonist, who, purposefully or not, ultimately does
not see the world beyond the one presented to her. It provides us with an implicit endorsement of white southern women and poor whites’ laboring for a vision of the South as self-sufficient. Because of her belief that she is humanized by her labor, Charlotte continues this work. She toils for that category of identity which she believes to be produced by her labor relations. She continues her Confederate spy efforts, no longer recognizing that it is in her work where moral violations occur. In a fascinating plot development, Charlotte must reveal to inquisitive officers her jayhawker husband’s crimes. Additionally, she must reveal to them how she learned of her husband’s identity as a jayhawker. Charlotte received proof from her husband’s young slave. However, as Charlotte acknowledges, it is “evidence which our [southern] laws ignore” because the testimony comes from an African American (Cable 208). Ideally, Charlotte would want to rely on her slave’s testimony to free Charlotte from her husband. Charlotte cannot because the slave belongs to an institution for which Charlotte fights, another indication of the war’s wearying confusion. Cable, though much more enlightened than his southern white contemporaries, ultimately and perplexingly brushes past this acknowledgment to affirm unquestioningly the need to produce southern identity.

Why does Cable appear to fall back on this white southern patriarchal script, even after having fled to Massachusetts to escape it? The story of how The Cavalier came to be is an intriguing one, helpfully brought to light by Elaine Ware’s essay “George W. Cable’s The Cavalier, an American Best Seller and Theatrical Attraction.” Ware informs us that, in response to critics’ arguments that Cable had bowdlerized his earlier, more complex stories in exchange for a traditional American Civil War romance, Cable rejoined, “‘I’m too slow a story teller to do that sort of thing successfully…From first to last ‘The Cavalier’ was in the egg about nine years before I succeeded in hatching it, and I sitting on it (rather fitfully) all
that time” (quoted in Ware 70). As Ware explains, over the years 1893-1898, Cable began writing *The Cavalier* as a series of character sketches, each succeeding one to be longer than the previous. However, all of the sketches were narrated by the same Richard Smith, who had also featured prominently in the first sketch that Cable had written, which became too long to remain a short story. Cable’s response, after years of work and including three of the sketches in an anthology, *Strong Hearts*, was to make that first sketch into a novel (Ware 70-71).

Here, Ware writes, Cable began to listen intently to the advice of his northern editor, Edward L. Burlingame, editor for Charles Scribner. Burlingame looked over an early manuscript of *The Cavalier* and wrote that it was “in danger of being a little over-burdened with the psychology of the hero” (quoted in Ware 71). Burlingame continued that, if in the remainder of *The Cavalier*, “there should be a larger portion of the boy’s inner life, and the action should materially diminish.” “the extent of [the novel’s] success would be seriously diminished” (quoted in Ware 71). Heeding Burlingame’s advice to advance the novel’s action and keep the reader interested, Cable returned from Northampton to Gallatin, Mississippi, where he had joined his Confederate company in October of 1863, to recall more vividly the events of his wartime experience. While back in the South, Cable also toured other sites he had frequented as a member of Wirt Adams’ cavalry (Ware 71).

Ware further tells us that Cable’s long-gestating work paid off in the end. Scribner’s Sons printed 10,000 copies initially, then 5,000 more, then 10,000 more, before finally writing to Cable in December of 1901 to inform him that 100,000 copies of the novel had been published. Subsequent editions of the book were published in 1902, 1903, 1906, 1908, 1923, and 1935. Indeed, at Cable’s prompting, the novel became a play. Cable’s novel turned
into a literary success in the North, where northerners enjoyed Cable’s delineations of the Old South, and even garnered notable sales in his erstwhile home, Louisiana, which, as noted, had soured on Cable’s civil-rights advocacy after Cable’s controversial *Dr. Sevier* (1883). With *The Cavalier*, Cable won back those southern readers with what they saw as “charming portraits of Confederate heroes and heroines” (Ware 73, 76).

Cable had heeded the advice of Richard Watson Gilder, editor of New York’s *The Century Magazine*. Gilder’s advice to embrace the historical-romance genre, counsel reinforced by Cable’s later editor, Scribner’s Burlingame, resulted in dramatic changes to *The Cavalier* manuscript. Ware writes, “Cable seriously considered Burlingame’s warning about too much character development. Many of the expositions of the thoughts of Smith, the narrator, which appeared in Ms. A, the first draft, and Ms. B, the second draft, were deleted by Cable by the time the novel was printed in his attempt to follow Burlingame’s advice.” Ware offers a deleted passage – one of Smith’s “wanting to impress a young woman” and dreaming of “himself and his horse in a parade, celebrating the Confederacy’s crowning victory over the Union” – as evidence of “Cable’s diminished emphasis on the psychology of Smith.” Ware comments, “Obviously, Cable was illustrating Smith’s romantic naivete and mild bravado. But, in the first printing of the novel the passage has been deleted, and in its place is [one] sentence: ‘Only after a good seven miles did my meditations begin to reveal any bitter in the sweet.’” Ware concludes, “[T]he word ‘meditations’ does not reveal the romantic nature of Smith as did the parade passage in the manuscripts. Cable’s acquiescence to Burlingame’s instructions seems apparent here and throughout a comparison of the manuscripts with the printed novel” (Ware 71-72).
In fact, in two other passages in Manuscript A of *The Cavalier*, I find this same initial emphasis on Smith’s psychology, only for it to be “diminished” in later versions. In the earlier manuscript, Cable writes that Ned Ferry tells Smith, “[N]o man can attain his own very best spiritual breadth and height otherwise than through the exercise of the highest talents in his possession which the conditions will permit him justly to use” (Cable Ms. A Tulane Archives 26, Box 98, Folder 1). Cable then continues, “Take for instance a man of letter writing ability; [Ferry] even believed that if such a man would just firmly require of himself that his sentiments, purposes and behavior should always conform to the truest, highest tenets of literary art that he could lay hold of, he would sooner or later arrive at a life potentially, though maybe not superficially or very self-consciously, religious” (Cable Ms. A Tulane Archives 26, Box 98, Folder 1).

These passages, even if they are of Smith’s citing Ferry, also reveal the romantic nature of Smith about which Ware writes. Like Ware’s example, these passages too are deleted from the novel’s published version. Ironically, these passages most relate to Cable’s dilemma at the time. Cable’s late-nineteenth-century “conditions” did not “permit” him “the exercise of the highest talents in his possession.” Instead, Cable, the new and homesick Massachusetts, experienced imaginative weariness as he tried to conquer negative southern cultural conditioning even while trying not to be a southern turncoat (Cleman 150).

Cable left behind the social-problem novel, almost leaving it behind for good with *John March, Southerner*, to embrace the historical romance. To be sure, the social-problem novel caused Cable many pains. It attracted waves of criticism from his beloved South and caused him to move his family to Northampton. This decision to flee from New Orleans is one about which Cable may have had regrets (Cleman 151). The uncertainty is suggested by
Cable’s character, John March, who adamantly refuses to leave the South despite social difficulties (151). Perhaps for these reasons, Cable left behind the southern social-problem novel to write what people wanted to read (Cleman 148, 154). As one contemporary reviewer of *The Cavalier* wrote, the author “‘appears to have yielded to the pressure of a fashion, and not to the urgency of an inward voice bidding him write’” (quoted in Rubin 248). Still, as Rubin notes, Cable’s high sales figures must have appeared to him an endorsement of his editors’ advice: that he should bury any gothic undercurrents in his literature and expend his imaginative energies on delineating optimistic America (Rubin 248). Arlin Turner adds, “Whether he was aware of the forces pushing him toward a new type of fiction, he realized it was a new type for him, and he had evolved a theoretical justification for it” (319). In the 1880s, Cable had declared that literature’s purpose was to identify truth and better society. In contrast, in a correspondence with Waitman Barbe on April 7, 1900, Cable revealed his new take on literature as he described a novel’s function: “‘A novel’s most obvious aim – the aim which should never for a moment be evidently directed by any other purpose – should be to entertain, not to inform’” (Ware 74).

These later changes to Cable’s novel-writing ethos are startling for anyone who primarily knows Cable for his social-problem novels and civil-rights championing. In fact, Rubin feels that those who judge Cable’s legacy by his later novels are being “too harsh”: “Surely,” Rubin writes, “the fifteen-year battle that [Cable] had waged for Negro rights, at great personal sacrifice, in which he had been willing to leave the place of his birth and the scene of his art rather than remain silent, should suffice to safeguard him from any charges of being prone to sacrifice integrity for personal advantage.” “What is involved, rather,” Rubin adds, “is defeat. Here was a brave and passionate man who had wanted to do two things: to
awaken his native region to the injustice and error of its treatment of its Negro citizens, and to write the very best fiction of which he was capable. On both accounts he had reached the point of despair.”

Cable had discovered that he was laboring under a false idea. He came to the conclusion that “the silent South” did not exist. People were not waiting to take a stand. Instead, many white southerners truly did believe the African-American race to be inferior. This conviction was their justification to deny civil rights and enforce segregation. Cable found that many northerners also did not care about helping the African-American community. His life’s work had been to help people to recognize their racism, and he found that they were content with it. Consequently, readers grew tired of Cable’s fictional depictions of Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction life in the South. They wanted more sentimental stories that did not reveal how racism deeply affected the African-American community (Rubin 243-244). Edmund Wilson writes in Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War, “Nobody North or South wanted by that time to be shown the realities […] Animosities must be forgotten; the old issues must be put to sleep with the chloroform of magazine prose” (613). The Gilders and Burlingames needed say no more. As a social-problem novelist, Cable was finished (Rubin 243-244). “Thus,” Rubin concludes, “Cable’s reaction in the years that followed the end of the civil rights campaign and the failure of John March, Southerner might better be viewed […] as a kind of numbed acquiescence in the face of defeat, an expression of emotional exhaustion” (245).

Emotional exhaustion. Does this conclusion to Cable’s life mirror The Cavalier’s conclusion, Charlotte Oliver’s “surrendering the key to the situation, the vital point”? (Cable 212). And does our sadness at Cable’s defeat reflect our disappointment with Charlotte’s
failed imaginative ambitions? If so, and if that is the case even with a courageous, zealous writer like Cable, then what are other white southern writers – less zealous civil-rights advocates – to do to combat being wearied by the race questions? Ellen Glasgow (1873-1945) attempts to answer this query with her 1904 historical romance, *The Deliverance*, set during a time when imaginative ambition did seem unrealizable, the post-Reconstruction South.

*The Deliverance* was very popular in its time, both with audiences and critics, selling over 100,000 copies in its first year of publication and becoming that year’s second-best seller in the nation (Thiébaux 61, Godbold 70). However, unlike the most popular white-authored southern novels written before the war, *The Deliverance* does not depict a South in which its citizens are comfortable in their skins. As well, in contrast against those novels written during the war, *The Deliverance* does not delineate characters tirelessly working for what they deem a noble cause. Quite the contrary, *The Deliverance* describes the South after Reconstruction, 1878 to 1890, a region in which the most powerful southerners have been brought low by war, “the overthrow of the slaveholding gentry,” as Glasgow notes (4). It is a time in which these southerners must work physically for a living and in which they must make sense of their now-altered lives. For only the second time in a southern novel that we have studied, the first being *The Cavalier*, white southern protagonists are wearied not merely imaginatively but physically as well.¹⁹ The sibling protagonists, Christopher and Cynthia Blake, planters now disempowered by the war, experience “exhausted rage,” “self-pity,” and bodily “weariness” (155). Christopher works with “stiffened limbs,” planting tobacco on his small acreage of land, and he finds this work “particularly trying” (165). It is a

¹⁹Often in his correspondence, William Gilmore Simms complains of his energy expenditures for his plantation when he would prefer to be expending energy writing (Simms vol. 2 154, 165; vol. 3 388).
marked change from the 1854 The Planter's Northern Bride, in which the South is a place of contentment, the 1864 Macaria, in which the protagonists indefatigably work for the Confederacy, and the 1866 St. Elmo, in which the protagonist channels her energies toward defining the South in a new way. Both sources of weariness, imaginative exertion and physical toil, unearth a reservoir of resentment in The Deliverance’s protagonists. The characters feel wearied by both their situation and their anger, and it is difficult to see how they will get out from under either.

Having lost their land fifteen years ago in the unruly financial markets following the war, the previously prodigal Blake family deeply resent their current, impoverished condition. “How fit for any life in the world but this!” Cynthia Blake exclaims in the opening pages (51). “Well, it’s a muck of a world,” Christopher Blake concedes (51). Even more so, the Blakes resent the lower-class farmer, Bill Fletcher, who put them in this situation by duplicitously buying their land, held by the Blakes for over 200 years. As prodigal as the Blakes were with their money, Bill Fletcher was sinister. As a speculator, he made his money off of the South’s loss. Likely, he also stole money from the Blakes, claiming that their financial records were lost in a Yankee fire. Thus, Fletcher was able to buy the Blakes’ land, when they could no longer afford the payments. As Fletcher’s lawyer says, “[T]he events happened when the State was in the throes of reconstruction, when each man was busy rebuilding his own fortunes, and when tragedies occurred without notice and were hushed up without remark” (39-42, 84-85, 409).

It is this giving over to his life as it is that Christopher Blake resents the most. When Christopher witnesses a similar weariness in his sister, Glasgow writes,

He turned at this from the window through which he had been gazing and fixed upon her a perplexed and moody stare. The wistful patience in her face, like the look he
had seen in the eyes of overworked farm animals, aroused in him a desire to prod her into actual revolt – into any decisive rebellion against fate. To accept life upon its own terms seemed to him, at the instant, pure cowardliness – the enforced submission of a weakened will; and he questioned almost angrily if the hereditary instincts were alive in her also? Did she, too, have her secret battles and her silent capitulations? Or was her pious resignation, after all, only a new form of the old Blake malady – of that fatal apathy which seized them, like disease, when events demanded strenuous endeavour? Could the saintly fortitude he had once so envied be, when all was said, merely the outward expression of the inertia he himself had felt – of the impulse to drift with the tide, let it carry one where it would? (223-224)

Cynthia’s weariness angers Christopher because it reminds him of his own. Christopher does not want to be like an “overworked farm animal,” does not want to “submit” to “fate,” and does not want to “accept life upon its own terms.” He does not want to “capitulate” to “apathy” and “inertia,” and he does not wish to “drift with the tide, let it carry him where it would.”

Glasgow does not pretend that giving up such resentments is easy. In addition to the psychic toll that time has taken on Christopher, she reminds us of the physical energies that Christopher must expend each day. After a day’s work, Christopher “was very tired, and his muscles ached from the strain of heavy labour” (302). This tiredness is not to be discounted or ignored, as this labor wearies Christopher physically and imaginatively: “To attempt alone the cutting of his crop, small as it was, seemed, with his stiffened limbs, a particularly trying task, and for a moment he stood gazing wearily across the field” (165). Additionally, Christopher’s work is work from which he cannot escape. “The smell and stain of [tobacco] are well soaked in,” he at one point declares (182). He adds, when talking to Cynthia, “Good Lord! After a day’s work like mine you can hardly expect me to dance a hornpipe. Since sunrise I’ve done a turn at fall ploughing, felled and chopped a tree, mended the pasture fence, brought the water for the washing, tied up some tobacco leaves, and looked after the cattle and the horses […] Oh, I’m tired, Cynthia – dog-tired, that’s the matter” (222-223).
In a novel about the salutary nature of overcoming resentment regarding changing definitions of race and class, Glasgow nonetheless allows us to sympathize with her resentful protagonist. She does so by reminding us of how difficult it can be to affirm one’s life as it is, especially if fatigue has caused one to lose one’s rationality. The resentment that Christopher feels, springing from his routine mental and physical expenditures, exacerbates his weariness. When Christopher considers his life as it is, “A massive fatigue oppressed him, and his hands and feet had become like leaden weights. There was a heaviness, too, about his head, and his eyeballs burned as if he had looked too long at a bright light. At the moment he felt like a man who, being bound upon a wheel, is whirled so rapidly around that he is dazed by the continuous revolutions” (217-218).

Glasgow’s foregrounding of Christopher’s resentments might appear contradictory. Seemingly, her hope for white southerners is that they give up their resentments about their fates, yet her hero is a repository of resentments: resentments about Bill Fletcher, about the Blakes’ working-class life – “as if I were no better than a slave,” Christopher says – and about the Blakes themselves (308). In this way, Glasgow is unlike many of her white, southern, female predecessors. Their authorial theories sometimes seem not related to their lives, and they at times come across as disembodied creatures. Glasgow’s existential philosophies assert that thought is inextricably related to everyday experience.

So what Glasgow offers for Christopher is an ethical ideal. She offers Maria Fletcher, Bill Fletcher’s granddaughter. Maria’s touch lets Christopher know that “all the desires” he has known have not been “swallowed up in a single hatred” (Glasgow 156). Her touch lets him know that “in spite of everything” he “loved her” (157-158). Glasgow writes, “At the moment it seemed to him that his whole life was shattered into pieces by the event of a single
instant. Something stronger than himself had shaken the foundations of his nature, and he was not the man that he had been before. He was like one born blind, who, when his eyes are opened, is ignorant that the light which dazzles him is merely the shining of the sun” (348).

“It was more than [love],” Christopher says, when Maria tells him a story that parallels theirs. “It was a great deliverance” (394).

But Maria’s touch does more than simply change the way that Christopher views his world. It changes the way that he behaves in it. When Maria, with her touch, brings Christopher back to his body, he starts to act in a manner characterized by empathetic suffering rather than narcissistic suffering. Christopher begins to realize that his pain is not the most profound in the cosmos. He recognizes that, if he suffers, others must be suffering too.

When the general-store owner, Tom Spade, informs Christopher that Christopher’s former slave, Uncle Isam (whom we meet at the novel’s beginning), has suffered four children dying of smallpox and has more children and his wife down with the disease, Christopher’s initial reaction is “Uncle Isam! […] Why, I haven’t laid eyes upon the man for years” (445). Even when Tom Spade informs Christopher, “But he’s sent you a message by a boy […] He was to tell Marse Christopher that [Uncle Isam’s family] had nothing to eat for two whole days an’ his children were unburied,” Christopher merely laughs and says, “So he used to belong to us, did he? […] Well, what is to be done?” (445). Then Christopher experiences a change of perspective. He concedes, “I’ll trouble you to lend me your overalls, Tom […] Put what medicines you have in the cart; I’ll take them over to the old fool” (446). Christopher has just come from his time with Maria, and their time together has seemingly had a valuable effect. Having been consumed by his wearying resentments for over twenty
years, at last Christopher has had these emotions tempered. As a result, his weariness has transformed from a mechanism for self-destruction to one of self-restraint. For a time, he does not allow himself to remain fixated on his revenge against his history.

Glasgow’s biographer, Susan Goodman, writes of the ethos of the novel’s conclusion: “Glasgow’s vision of Reconstruction – a period she considered worse than the war itself – dismisses popular stereotypes of the rape of the South. Instead she redefines the very concept of ‘reconstruction’ by ignoring its political and emphasizing its spiritual dimension.” Goodman expounds, “Looking back on this period in her life and on her novel, Glasgow thought that she may have overemphasized the importance of romantic love and its ability to triumph over revenge. She wondered whether any love […] ‘could have conquered the triumphant hatred in Christopher’s heart and mind.’” “At the time, however,” in Glasgow’s personal life, Goodman appends, “love did seem to offer a partial deliverance from past hatreds” (91, 92).

Nevertheless, because of Glasgow’s later skepticism, and because of the realities of the novel’s setting, scholars have tended to focus less on Christopher and Maria’s romantic love and more on their class consciousness. Goodman writes, Maria and Christopher “forge a New South based on an alliance between the aristocracy [represented by Maria] and the rising middle class [represented by Christopher]” (91). Marcelle Thiébaux and Frederick P.W. McDowell also posit The Deliverance as primarily about class concerns. Thiébaux and McDowell write that the novel’s conclusion is representative of “‘the reconciliation of all southern whites under the banner of a modified aristocratic ideal,’” as Maria inherits her grandfather’s fortune upon his death and promises to restore Blake Hall to its original owners (Raper qtd. in McDowell 90, Thiébaux 60, 61). E. Stanly Godbold, Jr. adds, “Glasgow,
determined that her lovers should be reconciled and live happily ever afterwards, looked to the future for the solution of the South’s problems [...] as she deliberately attempted to prove, perhaps especially to herself, that traditional class consciousness should be inconsequential in love affairs” (68, 64). In order to write this conclusion, Glasgow had to ignore her usual preoccupations, which were southerners’ “‘native impulse[s] nurtured by tradition and legend’” (quoted in Richards 84). Instead, she writes, “Faith and doubt are mere empty forms until we pour out the heart’s blood that vivifies them” (Glasgow 453). Thus, as Sarah E. Gardner illuminates, “Instead of a symbolic reunification” between North and South, Glasgow “depicted a reinvigorated South, represented by the young southern couple” (91). Still, as Gardner also notes, Glasgow likely felt the need to include this contrived reinvigoration for her publishers and readers, who “‘weary’ of the novel’s ‘decayed southern gentility’” (157). “You must write historical romances if you wish to be popular,” Glasgow’s editor told her (Glasgow CM 29).

So, is it only his knowledge that he will ultimately regain his class status that causes Christopher finally to condescend to and assist Uncle Isam’s family? Does Christopher’s philanthropy thus lack edge? Is it merely a philanthropy buffet, on which he may indulge because he will have plenty remaining in the end? And, in this interpretation, do race interests still manage to overcome class ones, preventing poor whites, like Christopher, from joining economic forces with African Americans, like Uncle Isam, and improving their lots? Glasgow returned often, even within The Deliverance, to the image of the “wheel of life,” Fate. Oftentimes, Glasgow presents it as a socialized fate in the form of institutionalized racism and sexism (Goodman 90, 92). Whether a patronage of re-empowered whites toward African Americans was realistic, as Glasgow imagined, she could not be sure at the time of
her writing (90). However, as her later comments about the novel make clear, she ultimately felt that such an imagining was not realizable (91).

But, here again, maybe we are being too harsh. As Arlin Turner writes about Cable, “[O]n the supposition that a moral precept once stated is efficacious far beyond the range of the speaker’s voice, his has been an important contribution to the subsequent progress toward his goals” (40). I posit that the question then becomes whether we indeed believe this supposition. Or do we believe that imaginative energies inevitably become worn down to a striving after individualistic gain, as, in the harshest assessments of Cable, is posited about his later life?

These questions about far-reaching energies versus wearied resignations seem especially important for an author whose primary setting for her novels was “a Richmond still lethargic from defeat in war but already responding to energies let loose by an expanding industrialism” (McDowell 12). Additionally, these questions are important for a woman who felt conflict between “her ancestry to aristocratic Tidewater colonists from England [her mother]” and “Scotch-Irish settlers in the Great Valley of Virginia [her father]” (12). The tension between these class types occurs in so many historical romances that perhaps it could only express itself as a psychic unrest in Glasgow’s works (13). More likely, this psychic unrest in the novel resulted from the 1893 death of her mother, Anne, whom Ellen so dearly loved but whose memory haunted her (13).

Though Ellen believed her mother “the essence of kindness in everything else,” Anne’s nervous insomnia led her to outré behavior (13). At nights, she inexplicably kept her two youngest daughters, including Ellen, in her room to agonize with her (13). The cause of this insomnia, by Ellen’s account, was Ellen’s father’s affair with the family’s African-
American maid. Goodman notes, “The exact nature of Anne’s illness remains unknown, though Glasgow told her friends that her mother had found her father ‘sleeping with one of the colored maids.’ ‘That’s why she couldn’t keep a maid,’ one explained, ‘he did it all the time’” (19-20). The validity of this claim has not been established, but this motif reverberates throughout Glasgow’s oeuvre: the struggle with imaginative weariness and the contest not to succumb (13, Goodman 19-20). Goodman writes of Anne Glasgow, “Sometime after Ellen Glasgow’s tenth birthday, her mother changed in the space of a single night – or so it seemed to her daughter – from an engaging, inquisitive woman into a chronic invalid […] Night after night, she paced in anguish, driven back and forth by a thought or a vision from which she tried in vain to escape. Her youngest daughters, awake in the adjoining room, listened, powerless to help. They partly blamed themselves for their mother’s illness” (19). Goodman concludes that Ellen “felt that her brother Frank, just three years older than herself, alone of Anne’s children had never failed her. ‘In the environment in which we lived,’ [Ellen’s sister] Rebe wrote on the anniversary of their mother’s birthday, ‘it was hard to physically show love and affection – but if I only had!’” (19). McDowell notes, from Ellen’s “profound sense of the deprivation in her mother’s life undoubtedly derived her preoccupation in the novels with the theme of unappreciated goodness,” including the unappreciated goodness of the “despoiled aristocrats” (13, 72). In fact, in her earlier, 1902 novel, The Battle-Ground, Glasgow describes the protagonist’s plantation-mistress mother as follows: “She moved with a slow step, as if her white limbs were a burden, and her head, with its smoothly parted bright brown hair, bent like a lily that has begun to fade” (25). Glasgow concludes about this matriarch, “Of all the souls on the great plantation, the mistress alone had never rested from her labours” (25).
Glasgow lost her mother when Ellen was only twenty years old. As Goodman writes, for Glasgow, following this event, “The days seemed to bleed into one another without leaving any telltale marks.” At a hotel in Switzerland, Glasgow went outside and reclined on the lawn. She thought, “‘If only I could lose myself in nothing or everything!’” She tried to do so. Imaginatively, she attempted to make herself “‘part of the grass and the wind and the spirit that moved round them, and in them.’” She strove to achieve “‘Divine consciousness’” through “‘extinguishing [her] innermost core of identity.’” Her efforts proved unsuccessful. Goodman writes, “Exhausted, she felt herself sinking deeper and deeper into the earth” (Goodman 99, Glasgow quoted in Goodman 99). When Glasgow surrendered in this way, a moment of clarity came to her. She felt as if she had accessed something unique to the evening light, air, wind, and grass, that she had become, to use Ralph Waldo Emerson’s words, “‘part and parcel of God.’” She could not identify what was happening to her: “‘Spirit? Matter? Imagination?’” All she knew was that she had, albeit briefly, freed herself from ego. Goodman writes, “She felt an ecstasy born of agony, the absolution, as she described it, of forgetfulness. The vision sustained her.” In fact, as Goodman notes, it appears that Glasgow “experienced something akin to the religious fervor that inspired eighteenth-century Calvinists, such as Jonathan Edwards during the Great Awakening, as well as contemporaries like William James, who explored similar ineffable moments.” Goodman concludes that Glasgow awoke “not so much from grief” but from a “moral lethargy” (Goodman 100, Glasgow quoted in Goodman 100).

A year later, Glasgow wrote a friend to tell of her inspiration for a character’s similar awakening: “I know it all, for a year ago I passed through exactly the same awakening of myself, though from different causes. Mine was not physical, but spiritual – mental – what
you will! I was so dead that I couldn’t feel even when I was hurt because of some curious emotional anaesthesia, and, like you, I had to fight – fight, a sleepless battle night and day, not for my reason but for my very soul. Then at the end of a year – at Bremerbad last summer I came out triumphant, and for three whole months it was as if I walked on light, not air” (Ellen Glasgow, letter to Mary Johnston, Accession 3588, Box 2, University of Virginia Special Collections). However, Glasgow writes in her posthumously published 1954 autobiography, *The Woman Within*, “This passed with everything else” (Ellen Glasgow manuscript, Accession 5060, Box 24, University of Virginia Special Collections, 167-168). She writes, “Emotionally, I [became again] exhausted and empty […] From my sad childhood, I had worn the protective coloring of gaiety, and this successful effort at dissimulation had consumed my small store of strength. Frequently, for days, I would find myself unstrung, quivering with sensitiveness, and vaguely exasperated with people or circumstances” (178). She concludes, “I was ill, crushed, despairing, broken in everything but in that sardonic spirit which mocked incessantly: ‘I will not be defeated! I will not look defeated!’” (180).

For Glasgow, home became more depressive. Her oldest sister, Cary, experienced poor health, either from breast or uterine cancer, and depression from her mother’s death and husband’s suicide. Cary’s physical and mental health, in turn, dispirited Glasgow. Cary had acted as Glasgow’s guide through the world. Now, Glasgow had to navigate her own way through her existence. In addition, she had to care for her family. By all accounts, Glasgow “did not accept the role gracefully […] she had neither the temperament nor the desire to serve,” and she complained to Rebe of how this caretaking “wearied” her (Goodman 105).
Glasgow dealt with Cary’s sickness in much the same way that she had her mother’s. Like Christopher Blake, Glasgow experienced a narcissistic suffering, in which she felt that her suffering was the most profound in the cosmos, rather than an imaginative, empathetic suffering, in which she might realize that, if she suffers, others must be suffering too. Glasgow asked of herself, “Why was I, with my frail body and damaged nerves – why was I, alone, called upon to endure the unendurable?” (Ellen Glasgow manuscript, Accession 5060, Box 24, University of Virginia Special Collections, 193-194). She writes, “I could not read any longer. I could not work. I could do nothing but sit there, alone, and let misery wash over me” (193-194).

At last, she concluded, this could not last. She writes, “In the autumn my mind awakened from sleep, and, strangely enough, I found that my imagination was more active than ever […] wherever I was, whether in the actual world or in the old world of imagination, I was driven, consciously or unconsciously, by my old antagonist, a past from which I was running away” (195). She recognized, “What I failed to consider was my own inexhaustible vitality. Whether I desired it or not, life, in its constant renewal, would flow again in my mind and heart” (222). As Glasgow meditated daily on Cary’s tragic past, she saw how that past symbolized a family history of erroneous beliefs and their resulting actions; in other words, if Glasgow discovered, upon Cary’s death, a self-reliance she had not realized, she found as well a new fictional outlet: the novel of manners (Goodman 126). When novels of manners realize their potential, she learned, “they do not record superficial behavior, but examine the codes that govern people’s lives. And like most codes or philosophies, they surrender to other manners and ideas in the making” (126). Perhaps then we may read Glasgow’s compromised conclusion to *The Deliverance*, and even Cable’s to *The Cavalier,*
as representative of personal codes being surrendered, from imaginative weariness, to other manners and ideas in the making. As Goodman writes, “Glasgow had learned (as Henry James noted) that what we call experience is our apprehension and our measure of what happens to us as social creatures” (126). Glasgow’s apprehensions about expressing sympathy for those who were disempowered certainly lessened after her mother’s and sister’s deaths. Still, though she loved to be seen as a cultural rebel and represented this rebelliousness to varying degrees in her novels, she never truly embraced the tired, the poor, or the huddled masses yearning to breathe free (87). Indeed, Glasgow guarded the doors to her home and inner life as vigorously as Christopher Blake did his resentments (87).

At the time of *The Deliverance*’s writing, Glasgow was especially focused on the Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita. Though she was not Hindu, she found, for a time at least, revivification in her study of the text (Goodman 92). In the Bhagavad Gita, also known as the Gita, the Lord Krishna becomes manifest and acts as a warrior’s charioteer (Cunningham et al., 31). Thus, in that text, we witness the Lord Krishna as immanent, as present and abiding in the universe (Cunningham et al., 31). Even as Krishna “transcends the world of ordinary experience,” “he fills it and manifests himself through it” (Cunningham et al., 31-32). Consequently, the Gita may also be interpreted as an effort to resolve religious and moral concerns (Cunningham, et al. 139). In the case of caste (the institutionalization of labor relations needed for social life), the Gita may be read as a reinterpretation of the ideal of renunciation, the rejection of caste, in terms of detachment (Cunningham et al., 139, 138). Indeed, the Gita suggests that one may “fulfill the duty set by birth into a caste” but may do “so with the understanding that [caste, believed to be the result of *karma*] is not the ultimate reality. Thus a person cultivates a spirit of detachment” (Cunningham et al, 139). According
to this understanding of the Gita, we understand *karma yoga* to mean that “one who performs his duty in a spirit of detachment is doing right, that is, practicing a form of discipline which leads to salvation.” In other words, “Right action yields good consequences” for an individual’s soul. Indeed, the Gita counsels that “one best does one’s duty by referring all things to God in a form of devotion called *bhakti* – or love” (Cunningham, et al., 162).

At the time of *The Deliverance*’s conception, Glasgow was in love with a married man, a concern that would only lead to a dishonorable reputation for Glasgow’s family and stand in stark contrast against her brother’s marriage, which would have made the most aristocratic of southern families proud (Godbold 61-62). Accordingly, the Gita is the text to which Glasgow continually returned in her meditations about class. Of course, we have witnessed scriptural allusions throughout Evans’ and Cable’s writings, primarily biblical extracts. Glasgow’s focus on the Gita, and the transcendence of class concerns, attempts to allow for the development of new metaphors, metaphors that “reconcile religious and moral concern” (Cunningham et al, 139). Nevertheless, even these metaphors respond only to class, which, as made clear by *The Deliverance*’s conclusion, is believed to be subjective. These new metaphors do not respond to race, which is fallaciously presented by all of the novels studied thus far to be objective. In this way, Glasgow dismantles white class hierarchies but leaves racial hierarchies firmly in place.

In her integral essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” scholar Hortense Spillers encourages that we must vigorously flip the traditional cultural syntax and disrupt it if we are to disrupt cultural memory (65-80). This proposal further depends on our understanding of philosopher Saidiya Hartman’s argument: The body is often discursively produced, but it can also be shaped through vital, competing discourses. If we
accept this knowledge, then we must recognize that weariness can be transmitted through dominant discourses, fictions, which create, in Hartman’s terms, “imaginary subjects” and deny humanity (81). For Hartman, resistance is constituted as an aggressive counter-discourse. Resistance is a literature of witnessing and testifying that allows for healing. The crux of Hartman’s argument is that “to write the body is to make the body right” (Henderson). Alongside Cable and Glasgow’s valiant, if ultimately vexed, endeavors to do so for the poor white southerner, we must examine the rewriting/righting of the African-American body in nineteenth-century southern racial-uplift novels to test this critical theory.
CHAPTER THREE

THE WORLD THAT IS WITH US: RACIAL-UPLIFT NOVELS
AND WITHSTANDING WEARINESS (1892-1899)

Rather than succumbing to fiction-writing weariness, racial-uplift novelists Frances Watkins Harper and Sutton E. Griggs posit sophisticated means related to their African-American church communities for approaching the South’s race questions. In their novels, the authors imagine churches as communal spaces where African Americans can vent pent-up frustrations while resisting mono-cultural and nationalistic forms of identity politics. Hence, where Evans writes around the topic of race, and Cable and Glasgow assume its stability while trying to ameliorate its political consequences, Harper and Griggs energetically seek to redefine it. Against white southern preachers like George D. Armstrong who used Christianity to defend slavery, Harper and Griggs work to free African Americans from a theology defined by the “Other,” incorporating them instead into a more broadly defined religious mainstream. In this way, in their respective novels, *Iola Leroy* and *Imperium in Imperio*, Harper and Griggs seek full spiritual and civic citizenship for African Americans. Even in the face of bestselling, post-Reconstruction, white southern writers’ ultimate refusal to admit their culture as wearied, a stance consistent with most of their antebellum predecessors, Harper and Griggs are optimistic about the direction of history; an invigorating sense of millennial progress pervades these works, a feeling that, after forty years in Sinai, justice will be done.
Indeed, when it comes to confronting the very real memories of one’s past and not seeking to escape them for a more restful world, the most striking character in a nineteenth-century, racial-uplift novel is Frances Watkins Harper’s Lieutenant Robert Johnson. A protagonist in Harper’s novel, the 1892 *Iola Leroy*, Robert is a southern mulatto slave. Robert eventually escapes to fight for the Union army only to discover more racism in the North. But he is not an idealist in the Platonic sense.

For nineteenth-century American slaves, the corollary to Platonic idealism was the white, southern, patriarchal conception of the Christian afterlife. Slaveholders imposed this idea to inculcate passivity and obedience. In order to encourage slaves merely to endure this world and wait for the next, slaveholders presumed an ideal world where the bad events did not happen. Former slave Harriet Jacobs writes of such a practice in her account: “His [the minister’s] text was, ‘Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ’” (75). This notion reinforced ideas about the master-slave relationship. It offered the promise or peril of the afterlife as an incentive to follow rules.\(^{20}\) Fixating on white southern males’ traditional characterizations of the afterlife would mean to subscribe, at least nominally, to the conventional white southern church’s view: Both slaves and white women were “servants of a higher master, Christ” and, by extension, servants of “God’s overseers,” white southern men (Sensbach 157).\(^{21}\)

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\(^{20}\) Historian Jon F. Sensbach writes about “a church culture that exalted female spirituality and rigorously protected – even policed – white and black women’s persons and sexuality” (154). Such an oppressive use of the church led to “[b]lack and white Christians test[ing] the meaning of spiritual and worldly freedom in their relationships to each other and to the larger slave society” (155).

\(^{21}\) However, in one scene in Harper’s *Iola Leroy*, Harper turns the schema on its head. A white southern minister convinced of a planter’s mistreatment of his slaves confronts the planter. The minister says, “You seem
Still, we might ask, given the terrifying world that Harper’s Lieutenant Robert Johnson inhabited and inhabits, why does he not retreat into idealism’s repose? Of the many characters in nineteenth-century American literature, Robert has reasons to concoct a worldview in which the material world is horrific and corrupt. He would be granted profound understanding for believing that this world is death. If Robert developed a liebestod, a love of death, his doing so would be viewed not only as understandable but as deeply human, but he does not. To Robert, moving away from everything that has happened to him is fruitless. As his niece, the eponymous Iola Leroy, says, “We did not place the bounds of our habitation. And I believe we are to be fixtures in this country” (Harper 189).

It is not that Robert wants to revel in this world. The novel ends with the lines, “There is light beyond the darkness / Joy beyond the present pain […] Though the morning seems to linger / O’er the hill-tops far away” (Harper 215). Robert worked as a slave in North Carolina. His mother was sold away from him, even though Robert’s plantation mistress liked him. Realizing that no favor could protect him from being separated from his family, Robert seeks to escape this woman who chose not to recognize his family connections. However, not only is Robert torn from his mother; he is separated from his sister as well. Lastly, he witnesses the suffering of other slaves, Aunt Linda, Uncle Daniel, and Aunt Kizzie, and ultimately realizes that, for a time, his nieces and nephew served as part of this institution’s perpetuation: they passed as white on their Mississippi father’s plantation. This life and what it has shown Robert saddens him, yet he is not an idealist (123).

to me like a man standing in a stream where the blood of Jesus can reach you, but you are standing between it and your slaves. How will you answer that in the Day of Judgment?” (104). The planter replies, “For God’s sake don’t speak of the Day of Judgment in connection with slavery” (104).
Instead, Robert and his niece, Iola, believe that presents of invigoration can be received through their imaginative apparatuses. Harper frequently omits her characters’ physical descriptions. This omission makes the reader more cognizant of the speakers’ voices. The rhetorical move puts focus not on characters’ appearances, often the sites of whites’ dehumanizing rhetoric, but on their minds. By not dwelling on characters’ appearances much beyond their skin colors, Harper communicates the shared, reductive discrimination against her characters: the labels that they assume from the dominant culture are experientially grounded; their identities are responses to the discrimination that they experience. However, by quickly moving away from these physical descriptions, Harper seeks to direct attention to her characters’ imaginations and those voices which express their vital, inward states.

Recently, a number of scholars have written on *Iola Leroy*, a novel that, as scholar Hollis Robbins writes, “received broad notice, sold well, and went into a third printing in 1895” (xxiii). Of these latest scholars, many have written about Robert and Iola in productive ways. One of the first among these is Melba Joyce Boyd in her chapter, “A Novel by a Black Nazarene.” Boyd makes astute observations especially about Robert, paying intense attention to Robert’s relationship with his community and the reader. Boyd writes,

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22 Iola’s friend, Dr. Latimer, will later say, “[I]t seems to be almost impossible for a white man to put himself completely in our place. No man can feel the iron which enters another man’s soul” (Harper 199).

23 Iola’s mulatto brother, Harry, experiences this discrimination both ways. White southerners, knowing his lineage, prevent him from riding in the white train car. African-American southerners prevent him from riding in their car because Harry appears white. His betrothed, Miss Delany, says, “I tell Mr. Leroy that when he returns he must put a label on himself, saying, ‘I am a colored man,’ to prevent annoyance” (Harper 186).

24 Robert’s friend, the former slave Aunt Linda, says to Robert about her definition of freedom, “Wen freedom com’d I jist lit out ob Miss Johnson’s kitchen soon as I could. I wanted ter re’lize I war free, an’ I couldn’t, tell I got out er de sight and soun’ ob ole Miss” (Harper 118).
The black dialect spoken by most of the characters is monitored and balanced by the standard English spoken by Robert. Likewise, Robert’s literacy supplies the community with unfamiliar terms and dispels Confederate propaganda. Robert facilitates the reader in much the same way he facilitates the other slaves. He provides details that clarify and broaden perspective. (175)

Acknowledging this function of Robert is integral to understanding him as a character. Because of this argument and a number of others that Boyd makes, I want to add to her assertions.

My expounding primarily relates to Boyd’s view of Robert and Iola as “Moses figures” (178). Robert and Iola are not only biblical archetypes but indeed are new kinds of preachers, ones who serve as mediums for redemptive words, plural and lowercase, not only the redemptive Word. In this way, Robert and Iola do not simply recite Scripture; they allow new, energizing metaphors to come to them. Understanding Robert and Iola not only as biblical archetypes enables us to see them less as mythic figures than as human ones to whom we should look as models for cultural mourning. (Indeed, this reading is in keeping with Harper’s move from concentrating on the afterlife, as evinced in her 1856 poem “The Burial of Moses,” to African Americans’ realities, as in the 1869 poem “Moses: A Story of the Nile”) (Foster 36, Barrett 119). Roberta Rubenstein introduces the term “cultural mourning,” which builds on Freud’s notion that mourning, as opposed to melancholia, is a revitalizing process that ultimately replaces a lost “object” with a new one on which to cathect (Rubenstein 148). For Robert and Iola, these new “objects” on which to cathect are their imaginations.

So Robert is not only a “Moses figure.” He is also a wise man, who, despite everything that has happened to him, does not want separation from his community. What Robert desires instead are humility and intimacy. Robert does not profess to be a religious
believer, yet he attests to the sense of community that religion can inspire. “I believe in the real, genuine religion,” he says. “I ain’t got much myself, but I respect them that have” (37). In the chapter titled “A Revelation,” Robert sings a hymn at a church meeting that inspires “a dear old mother” to testify to her “trials,” her “ups an’ downs” (137). Here, again, Robert does not merely serve as a prophet figure but someone who, by exhorting his community to reclaim their voices as their property, allows that community to become once again utterly human:

They had come to break bread with each other, relate their experiences, and tell of their hopes of heaven. In that meeting were remnants of broken families – mothers who had been separated from their children before the war, husbands who had not met their wives for years. After the bread had been distributed and the handshaking was nearly over, Robert raised a hymn which Iola had sung for him when he was recovering from his wounds, and Iola, with clear, sweet tones, caught up the words and joined him in the strain. (137)

In the clearing’s church, “a neat, commodious, frame building, with a blue ceiling, white walls within and without, and large windows,” Robert encourages the conventions of ritual but only to break down those conventions. He urges the former slaves to pray.25 Then, he collapses this convention by testifying and literally recreating a community by discovering his mother in the congregation (137-139). Robert and the community engage in ritual, and the breaking down of ritual, because they know that white cultural conventions are generally designed to keep out grace, or what Robert calls “mercies” (138).26 For the community,

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25When the “dear old mother” testifies, Harper writes that the community responds as follows: “Some of her hearers moaned, others rocked to and fro, as thoughts of similar scenes in their own lives arose before them” (138).

26Author Toni Morrison writes of grace in many of her works but especially in *Paradise*, where she writes about the “amazing shapes and substances” that grace assumes (Morrison 160). In other words, Morrison conceives of grace as something that can be experienced physically in this world but not solely as a result of
these ritualized, then de-ritualized, moments are the biggest moments of grace in their lives. Reconnecting with their voices by calling and responding, testifying, and revealing their hearts, the community is reminded of the rejuvenating presents of grace offered by their voices, presents of grace formerly denied by white cultural conventions.

Because of these unassuming and real actions taken by Robert, I want to guard against branding him as only a prophetic, biblical presence. Indeed, interpreting Robert as too much of a mythic presence might lead to an unhelpful categorization of him as a superhuman figure. Rather, I choose to interpret Robert not as a mythic being but as a human being productively working through his resentments about his past. Though it is true that, in his Union army service, Robert “becomes a commander of the colored troops, which further extends his Moses role in the deliverance,” I emphasize that Robert does not subscribe to traditional religious schemas – that is to say, white, patriarchal schemas – of Platonic idealism (Boyd 178). “I never did take much stock in white folks’ religion,” Robert declares in the novel’s opening pages (Harper 37). Later, when a white Union captain talks of planters’ use of “real and invisible chains, the coercion of force, and the terror of the unseen world” to inculcate obedience in slaves, Robert replies,

When I was a boy I used to hear the old folks tell what would happen to bad people in another world; about the devil pouring hot lead down people’s throats and stirring them up with a pitch-fork; and I used to get so scared that I would be afraid to go to bed at night. I don’t suppose the Indians ever heard of such things, or, if they had, I never heard of them being willing to give away all their lands on earth, and quietly wait for a home in heaven. (103)

human beings’ doings. *Iola Leroy*’s closing lines are “Blessed themselves, they [Robert, Iola, and their families] are a blessing to others” (Harper 214).

Robert’s fellow slave Tom Anderson adds, “I think wen some of dem preachers brings de Bible ‘round an’ tells us ‘bout mindin’ our marsters and not stealin’ dere tings, dat dey preach to please de white folks”’ (Harper 18).
When the captain asks, “But, surely, Robert, you do not think religion has degraded the negro?” Robert answers, “Oh, I wouldn’t say that. But a man is in a tight fix when he takes his part, like [slave-rebellion leaders] Nat Turner or Denmark Veasy, and is made to fear that he will be hanged in this world and be burned in the next” (103). Accordingly, Robert does not merely appropriate tried-and-true Scripture. To the contrary, often, he speaks from a place sited in his real-world experience.

*Iola Leroy*’s “voices” thus suggests that language is a bodily function, born from one’s unique experience. Though language can create artifice, it is one’s most genuine response to the world. Robert’s standard-English-speaking voice is a sign of his partial, cultural assimilation. However, the novel also suggests that, by affirming cultural openness, Robert denies epistemic privilege to stultifying ethnic and racial hierarchies. Nevertheless, scholar James Christmann illuminates the competition between the novel’s two sets of voices:

As dialect and standard speakers talk to one another, as the voices and the classes they represent are given and are denied space and authority in a text whose purpose is to reconfigure Reconstruction, competing visions of a race future come into focus. On the one hand, Harper envisions a future that offers an important role for the subaltern, whose culture and courage she admired; and on the other hand, she expresses some concern that the largely rural, uneducated, dialect-speaking subaltern blacks might “drag down” the race in the new century. (Christmann 6)

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28 The same Union captain later makes a comment unintentionally praising white southern idealism. The captain says about Robert’s friend Aunt Kizzy’s Christian faith: “That was faith, a patient waiting for death to redress the wrongs of life” (Harper 37).

29 In *Witnessing*, feminist critic Kelly Oliver writes how “addressability” is a necessary condition for subjectivity, that subjectivity is relational. However, one can have a relationship with oneself, as Oliver makes clear. The voices in one’s head can provide a productive or destructive relationship with oneself: “The inner witness is the necessary condition for the structure of addressability and response-ability inherent in subjectivity [...] On the one hand, if the inner witness is an incorporation of dialogic relations with others, of external witnesses, then its ability to create an enabling and empowering subject position is determined by the sociohistorical context of the dialogic relation with others” (87).
Despite this claim, a surfeit of moments occur throughout the novel when these voices are communal rather than competitive. These moments are most significantly seen in the call-and-response format of the rural church meeting. In this meeting, the church – and the voices that comprise the church, both standard-English-speaking (Robert and Iola) and dialect-speaking – becomes the primary builder of community, a community connector, and a source of communal nourishment. The church becomes a place where African Americans, whether standard-English-speaking or dialect-speaking, may vent wearying, pent-up frustrations through testimony, song, and call and response, a dialogue between the preacher and her/his congregation.

In this context, the church moves beyond a strictly spiritual and ecclesiastical characterization. By presenting the church in this way, as a creative yoking of disparate voices, Harper portrays African-American church communities as open to others but not as assimilated. Indeed, a long tradition exists in African-American Protestantism of seeing African-American churches as the most universal of sites; this characteristic, of course, stood in stark contrast to white churches, which were segregationist (Maffly-Kipp 105). Therefore, Harper argues, the white church should exist as the African-American church does. For Harper, this openness translates as mutual acceptance within the community, intergroup and interpersonal living, and shared power within the community (210-211).

Robert especially wants to work against the anti-intellectualism being propagated firstly by white preachers but mimicked by some African-American preachers as well. “When our people say there is a trick behind it [anti-intellectualist preachers],” Robert says. “I only wish they could see the

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30 Iola’s mulatto brother, Harry, asks an African-American schoolteacher, Miss Lucille Delany, to marry him, but Lucille worries what Harry’s mother will think: “[C]omplexional prejudices are not confined to white people,” she says (Harper 212). Harry replies, “My mother is too noble to indulge in such sentiments” (212).
trick before it – the trick of worse than wasting their money, and of keeping themselves and families poorer and more ignorant than there is any need for them to be” (123).

As stated, Robert does not take to escapist theology. Instead, he is a dialectical thinker, one who seeks invigorating truth in polarities. Robert and Iola therefore become part of the late-nineteenth-century, African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church community. The A.M.E. community was one for which Harper wrote and taught. Her fiction and poems were serialized in the A.M.E. church publication, *The Christian Recorder*, and she taught at Union Seminary in Ohio (Foster 9-12). The A.M.E. church community believed in applying the biblical principles of love and justice to the transformation of the social order. It had as its goals: to proclaim the desire for true equality, to educate other community members about true equality (not doing so, in the church’s eyes, resulted in segregation), to be a catalyst for the needy, and to reconcile and build up the African-American community (Hudson & Corrigan 222-223). Robert might initially not like the emotional extravagance of his African-American church community, but he comes to appreciate it. In the rural church meeting, he tries “controlling his feelings as best he could,” but his voice becomes “still fuller of pathos” (Harper 138, 139). It is true that Robert has trouble understanding those, like the older slave Uncle Daniel, who restrict religion to the private sphere, relegating it to the apolitical (23). In contrast, Robert sees the link between Christianity and social justice. In Harper’s eyes, he possesses a more enlightened, reasoned approach to Christianity, one dealing with the dual concerns of salvation in the next world and liberation in this one. As a result, he and Iola want to operate as trained church leaders, who rediscover the emotionalism of the black church community and who see its importance in creating a New South. Robert and Iola see the church as serving a Messianic role, saving their people from intellectual persecution by
resurrecting enlightened freedom through a social-justice theology (Hudson & Corrigan 223). In this way, Harper advocates what she sees as the potential ethos of her African-American church community, practicing cultural openness but not assimilation. In the novel, she includes a rural church meeting and a conversazione, an assembly of an intellectual character. By doing so, Harper presents a regulative ideal for the church. It should serve not as a site of wearying competition but as a locus of shared power within the African-American community, with trained leaders who advocate a social-justice message.

In this way, Harper directly addresses a growing concern within a number of African-American church communities during her time. As William E. Montgomery writes, “The generation of educated blacks who had grown up since the Civil War refused to accept the old preachers, whom they regarded as superstitious and backward, as leaders.” These church detractors “were not irreligious,” Montgomery emphasizes. They were simply wearied by the “emotionalism, ignorance, and occasional moral lapses of the churches’ old leaders.” Instead, these critics “wanted preachers who would address contemporary social problems as well as the hereafter.” Journalist and civil-rights leader Ida B. Wells, one of a rising generation of African Americans energized to improve the state of the race, especially “condemned the black ministry’s failure to provide ‘practical talks’ and guidance.” Consequently, Harper, in imaginative ways, looks to yoke these potential factions. Further, she hopes to assuage the discord stirred by Wells’ and Booker T. Washington’s vocal criticisms of many late-nineteenth-century African-American church communities

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31In his 1902 novel, Unfettered, African-American novelist and minister, Sutton E. Griggs, writes of one African-American church’s emotionalism as follows: “The tumultuous scene which accompanied and followed this highly dramatic peroration [of the sermon] beggars description. Women screamed and shouted and fainted, while men wept like babes and clambered from seat to seat wild with emotion. Such was the character of the religious preparation that the Negroes had for the grave responsibilities of life in the city” (Griggs 36).
(Montgomery 308-309). Harper does so by employing what she characterizes as the traditional African-American church’s emotionalism toward creating and strengthening a New South with the aid of trained church leaders.

Where Robert acts on derived authority, authority originating from the appropriation of authoritative knowledge, Iola seemingly operates from charismatic authority, authority which comes from a special experience with God (Weber iv-xx). More than Robert, Iola taps into the old-school religiosity of what Harper characterizes as the traditional African-American church community. Iola has an understanding that, to lead people, one must understand their spirituality. More than Robert, Iola sees that education and theology will not support her completely. Therefore, she must call on the Holy Spirit, which the conversazione’s pastors see her as invoking during her climactic speech (Harper 194-195).

Iola knows that the slave preacher was a symbol of hope for her/his people (Raboteau 218). Therefore, Iola believes that the “new” preacher must offer this same symbol of invigoration. Additionally, she/he must articulate the pain predicament of her/his people. Iola does all of the above when comparing her community’s experience to that of Christ:

And is there […] a path which we have trodden in this country, unless it be the path of sin, in which Jesus Christ has not put His feet and left it luminous with the light of His steps? Has the negro been poor and homeless? The birds of the air had nests and the foxes had holes, but the Son of man had not where to lay His head. Has our name been a synonym for contempt? “He shall be called a Nazarene.” Have we been despised and trodden under foot? Christ was despised and rejected of men. Have we been ignorant and unlearned? It was said of Jesus Christ, “How knoweth this man letters, never having learned?” Have we been beaten and bruised in the prison-house of bondage? “They took Jesus and scourged Him.” Have we been slaughtered, our bones scattered at the graves’ mouth? He was spit upon by the mob, smitten and mocked by the rabble, and died as died Rome’s meanest criminal slave. (194-195)

During this speech, Iola embodies the union of the sacred and the secular. She talks about the physical bodies of her fellow ex-slaves while also conjuring Christ’s spiritual journey.
Interestingly, in focusing on bodily suffering, Harper, by way of her protagonist, deviates from the African Methodist Episcopal church’s preaching tradition. As Laurie Maffly-Kipp explains, bodily suffering was the “prevailing theme of the black Baptist collective story” (100). Nevertheless, Iola’s sermon centers on this traditionally Baptist persecution narrative. Additionally, where “black Methodists [usually] posited the church ‘exodus’ as the reassertion of black masculine authority, Baptist narrators highlighted the sufferings of Jesus and the history of Christian martyrdom, likening early black Baptists – and the church as a whole – to other humble and oppressed figures who had endured persecution for the faith” (100). It is important to note Harper’s deviation from the African Methodist Episcopal church narrative. Harper uses this Baptist trope to portray enslavement and more recent suffering as having meaning (101). She does so by situating it in a larger context, supplying it with a more profound truth (101). Doing so also removes the focus on black masculine authority, allowing Iola her voice. Finally, and perhaps most significantly to her message, Harper’s use of the trope of martyrdom reverses racial hierarchies (101). She accomplishes this end by evaluating torture as a victory not only of Christian community but also of African Americans over the peculiar institution that bound them (101). In this way, Harper has Iola Leroy not only preach the Gospel but energetically fight for social justice as well. Therefore, she, perhaps even more so than Robert, operates as Harper’s model for the new church leader: a church that features a derived authority, represented by Iola’s authoritative knowledge derived from her northern education, as well as a charismatic authority, represented by Iola’s emotionalism during and after her speech (Weber iv-xx, Harper 194-195).
As Montgomery writes, “Women seldom challenged male ministers for positions in the pulpit, but if they accepted their auxiliary status without too much complaint they were not timid about expressing their opinions about how the preachers led the churches.” African-American women, especially the well-known platform speaker Harper, “knew full well that the churches – and the preachers – depended heavily on them and the money they raised for support, and that dependence gave them considerable leverage in influencing church policy.” A large number of these informed women “believed that uneducated preachers with their pie-in-the-sky sermons were doing very little to help their people.” These women therefore “complained about preachers who were not keen on social service” (304). Evelyn Higginbotham expounds on this history. She notes that African-American women within A.M.E. and National Baptist Convention communities embraced their outspokenness. They did so because they had developed a theology in which women knew they had powerful influence over men and were thus stronger, not weaker, than men. With their outspokenness, these women advocated for the biblical authority of women’s church work, condemned African-American women’s oppression within their church communities, and believed that, through their influence, racism could be eliminated and American culture rejuvenated (Higginbotham 1-19).

Harper certainly felt this way. While teaching at a run-down school in Little York, Pennsylvania, in the mid-nineteenth century, she became depressed and wrote to a friend, “‘What would you do if you were in my place? Would you give up and go back and work at your trade (dress-making)?...The condition of our people, the wants of our children, and the welfare of our race demand the aid of every helping hand, the God-speed of every Christian heart.’” Instead of succumbing to her imaginative weariness, Harper channeled her energies
into writing. She completed an essay on education while also beginning a short book. These nonfiction publications gave rise to her work as a platform speaker to African-American and abolitionist communities. Harper’s talks were powerful addresses that garnered her and, most importantly, her cause attention (Foster 9-10, Harper quoted in Foster 9-10). Harper thus declared, “‘I pledged myself to the Anti-Slavery cause. It may be that God Himself has written upon both my heart and brain a commission to use time, talent and energy in the cause of freedom’” (Harper quoted in Brown 99). She did so through her intellectually and emotionally goading words.

This imaginative blending of authorities, derived and charismatic, does not speak to a “competition” but to the African-American church leader’s need to address a myriad of concerns within the African-American community, not only about heaven but also about the practical realities of everyday life. This new African-American leader must make the Word relevant to ex-slaves’ lives. Iola does so by focusing on the Calvary event, which dealt with Christ’s suffering through no fault of his own but also the redemptive nature of that suffering (Harper 194-195). For Harper, preaching should raise and shape public consciousness and encourage people to act responsibly (Brown 99). Both in the rural church meeting and the conversazione, Iola does so. She does so in a way that still evokes call and response, the dialogue representing shared power, but she does so also in a way that embodies the union of the sacred and the secular. She represents the challenge to social evils and the acuity not just to the African-American church but to the African-American communal body at large.

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32Iola says to her mother, “Mother, are these people Christians who made these laws which are robbing us of our inheritance and reducing us to slavery? If this is Christianity I hate and despite it.” Iola’s mother responds, “My dear child, I have not learned my Christianity from them. I have learned it at the foot of the cross” (Harper 82).
To speak even more directly to Christmann’s point, however, Robert and Iola’s more assimilated voices should not be viewed as part of a schema in which the African-American dialect is privileged or demeaned. What becomes clear from *Iola Leroy* is as follows. In their attempts to deny their racism, southern whites have reinvented racism with a different façade, by convincing subaltern groups that the only way to achieve humanization is through labor.³³ We witness this characterization when Uncle Daniel explains to Robert his reasons for not fleeing his master for the nearby Union army. “I promised Marse Robert I would stay, an’ I mus’ be as good as my word,” Uncle Daniel explains (Harper 23). In this conceptualization, Uncle Daniel believes that his category of identity is produced by his labor relations. His continuing to attend to the planter, Master Robert (not to be confused with Lieutenant Robert Johnson), and his family will confirm Uncle Daniel’s humanity.³⁴ Robert, on the other hand, though more assimilated than Uncle Daniel, vigorously denies epistemic privilege to ethnic and racial hierarchies by that very openness. Through his cultural openness, Robert does not shackle himself to a time that no longer exists. As one character says of Robert, “He knew that the South needed the surrender of the best brain and heart of the country to build, above the wastes of war, more stately temples of thought and action” (179). Accordingly, Robert recognizes the white man’s façade for what it is: racism masked as labor relations. In this way, Harper makes her point clear: By encouraging African Americans to reject cultural

³³When Robert’s white Union captain claims that Robert’s ex-slave friend Tom was grateful for his life, Robert replies, “Captain, what had we to be grateful for? For ages of poverty, ignorance, and slavery? I think if anybody should be grateful, it is the people who have enslaved us and lived off our labor for generations” (Harper 40). Later, the same captain concedes, in reflecting on white Americans’ treatment of slaves, “[I]n dealing with the negro we wanted his labor” (103).

³⁴As one of Iola’s white companions says to her about African Americans, “[T]hey must learn to struggle, labor, and achieve,” once more tying African-American identities to labor relations (Harper 89).
openness, the resistance to mono-cultural and nationalistic forms of identity politics, whites give epistemic privilege to wearying ethnic and racial hierarchies (Michaels 138-139).

Here, Harper echoes the philosophies set forth by the African Methodist Episcopal bishop, Benjamin Tucker Tanner, editor of the church’s *Christian Recorder*, in which Harper published her work. Maffly-Kipp writes, “Tanner objected vigorously to the racist ‘crime’ of white Methodists, who had ‘locked, bolted, and barred’ the doors of schools and conferences to the church’s African-American members. But he, too, located the AME Church within a spiritually pure religious line from the Mayflower migrants to Roger Williams that superseded racial constructs, a line squarely rooted in the American Protestant tradition of ‘justifiable’ religious separatism” (91). Maffly-Kipp concludes, “The primary aim of the AME Church, in Tanner’s view, was ‘to help convert the world to Christ – the world, and not simply Africans, real or imagined’” (92). Furthermore, “Despite the inclusion of ‘African’ in the organization’s name, Tanner insisted that the church was ‘simply a Methodist Episcopal Church, organized largely of ‘Americans’ by ‘Africans’ and for ‘Africans.’ He declared that the AME Church was not a ‘race church’ but rather a place where the ‘doctrine of the Negro’s humanity’ could be fully realized” (92).

As evidenced by her mulatto protagonists, Harper focuses less on ancestry or biological conceptions of race than on the shared African-American experience: the horrors of dislocation. For this reason, she redirects the focus to a new shared experience, that of Christianity and national redemption. To do so, Harper knows that she must address the gross hypocrisy of white southern Christianity by exposing that duplicity. However, she also uses the same Scriptures as evidence of African Americans as a community now made low but later to be triumphant, indeed the embodiment of true equality and redemption. Iola’s sermon
to the *conversazione* speaks of her having found biblical support for this sacred calling (Ernest 9-21). Therefore, rather than discarding American Christianity, African Americans, in John Ernest’s words, sought its “liberation.” Consequently, Harper does not only work to free African Americans from a theology defined by the “Other.” She also seeks to incorporate African Americans into a more broadly defined mainstream theology. She achieves this end by liberating the mainstream from the narrow purviews of white southern preachers like E.W. Warren, who argued for the Christian doctrine of slavery. Harper’s ultimate goal is to use this liberated Christian theology to achieve unity, integration, and full citizenship for African Americans. The result is a unique theology, which retains some elements of traditional white Christianity and creates new, complex, and sometimes contradictory notions of African-American identity (Ernest 270-282).

*Iola Leroy* acknowledges that many late-nineteenth-century, white Americans, North and South, have become imaginatively wearied by the South’s race questions. Therefore, Harper presents her African-American characters as able to withstand that weariness through cultural openness. Cultural openness’ potential invigorates many of the ex-slaves whom Harper depicts. When Iola’s white father tells his racist and languorous brother (Iola’s uncle) about his plans to marry Iola’s mother, Marie, Iola’s uncle responds, “But has not society the right to guard the purity of its blood by the rigid exclusion of an alien race?” (Harper 52). Iola’s father rejoins, “Excluding it! How?” (52). Iola’s uncle concludes, “By debarring it from social intercourse” (52). In contrast, Iola’s mother, Marie, wants to combat segregation, and this potential “aroused all of her energies” (58). That “stimulus of hope” “brightened her
To further this end, the novel makes numerous mentions of “wide-awake” men and women, referring to those who are culturally open, those who concern themselves with the truth of their beliefs and opinions rather than with what they are politically (167, Michaels 113).

Iola is clearly characterized as a “wide-awake” woman (167). In her impassioned speech during the conversazione, she represents a movement away from the “toil-worn” days, bending “beneath their heavy burdens,” and emblematizes the potential of “a religion replete with life and glowing with love,” staving off the imaginative weariness caused by the “virus of slavery” (196, 197). When an acquaintance says to Iola, “[Y]our devotion to study and work is too intense,” Iola responds that she wants to “spend [her] leisure time in study” (205). Like her author, Iola’s purpose is to “awaken in the hearts of our countrymen a stronger sense of justice and a more Christ-like humanity in behalf of those whom the fortunes of war threw, homeless, ignorant and poor, upon the threshold of a new era” (215). For Harper, no longer do these men and women need to believe that the only way to achieve humanization is through labor. They do not need to think that their categories of identity

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35 Iola’s father, Eugene, says to his brother about the institution of slavery, “[Y]ou cannot deny that the circumstances it creates, and the temptations it affords, are sapping our strength and undermining our character” (Harper 55).

36 When the freedmen and women, who are Robert’s friends, band together to form their own community, Robert notes “the hum of industry” but also “the cheerful voices” and “the merry laughter” (Harper 117). He notes again the community’s “thrift and industry” but also the “garden filled with beautiful flowers, clambering vines, and rustic adornments” (117). Still, Robert wants the former slave Aunt Linda not to focus so much on “scratchin’ too hard” to get a living and more on reading (119).

Later, Iola too wants to work but, she says, only “to win for myself a place in the fields of labor” and not to be “idle” (158 emphasis mine, 160). Eventually, Iola finds a job in the North. However, Iola does not work merely for production’s sake but to effect change from which she can profit in a variety of ways (her brother, Harry, a civil-rights activist, does the same) (178, 213-214).
are produced by their labor relations. Finally, these men and women should not feel that they must reject cultural openness in order to maintain stultifying ethnic and racial hierarchies.

For Iola, the social-justice movement engendered by her African-American church community further deconstructs these hierarchies (Montgomery 308-309). She makes her worldview clear when she tells Uncle Daniel, “[T]he moral aspect of the nation would be changed if it would learn at the same cross to subordinate the spirit of caste to the spirit of Christ” (Harper 129). In other words, Iola does not encourage her community members merely to focus on the escapist theology that the white southern patriarchy has imposed on them. Rather, Iola encourages her community to focus on the human Christ, his suffering, and the redemptive possibilities of that suffering. In encouraging her community to look to the Calvary event, to Christ as human, Iola presents a new story as the middle way between a centered system (Christianity) and chaos. She offers a helpful way for her community to accept indeterminacy while moving forward with their lives.

This development of new, vital metaphors is what Iola attempts in her speech in the *conversazione*. There, she presents the human Christ, the one who was “spit upon by the mob, smitten and mocked by the rabble,” as the ex-slave community’s communal body (Harper 195). The human Christ views his suffering as redemptive. When Iola talks about Christ’s being “despised and rejected of men,” “beaten and bruised,” “spit upon,” “smitten

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37 The former slave John Salters realizes this shift, when he declares that he will go by his own name, except for when receiving his military bounty (Harper 130).

38 In fact, Harper presents the American Civil War as a baptism for the land. She writes, “The lost cause went down in blood and tears, and on the brows of a ransomed people God poured the chrism of a new era, and they stood a race newly anointed with freedom” (105).
and mocked,” she talks about a Christ who, by taking the moral high ground, caused his enemies to lose their moral force. This redemptive suffering, which Iola presents to her community, is not for cowards. It is not acquiescence. Iola says that she will never “recognize any religion as His which despises the least of His brethren” (195). However, this redemptive suffering is also not about defeating or humiliating an opponent, as made clear by Iola and Robert’s embrace of their education at white institutions. Rather, redemptive suffering is directed at the forces of evil rather than the person committing the evil. In Iola Leroy’s case, these forces of evil are ignorance and economic disparity, which Iola seeks to combat by teaching and Robert, by selling land reasonably to those of lower classes (213-214; Ansbro 143).

I want to state again that these approaches that Iola and Robert offer to the “southern question” are not about acquiescence. They are about practical responses to racism – breaking the cycle of violence and adhering to the moral force of Christ’s love ethic – which Iola and Robert have learned from the painful truths that they have experienced. When Iola gives her speech, it is the only sustained monologue that she has in the novel. It is delivered when she feels that her heart “is full” (Harper 194). Iola does not have to pause to consider her words. Her words are there, informed by her experience in the physical world, spoken by the voice at the leading edge of her. Her words are fervent, to the point, and right. She does not try to engage in revisionist history, forgetting what whites have done to her and her family. Instead, Iola speaks her truth, the “tones of her voice” “like benedictions”: “blessings carried into practical effect” (195, OED 2012). Iola’s voice, born from her unique, individual experience, speaks her truth for her as her most genuine and vital response to the world.
Like Harper’s characters in *Iola Leroy*, neither of the protagonists in Texan minister Sutton E. Griggs’ 1899 *Imperium in Imperio* – neither Belton Piedmont nor Bernard Belgrave – represents the definitive equal-rights movement in the South during and following Reconstruction. Rather, these protagonists symbolize the tensions within that movement. Nevertheless, in the novel, it is the poor, dark-skinned African American, Belton, who shows the potential ability to translate an ethical ideal into a practical reality. That ethical ideal is, translated theologically, the kingdom of God on earth. As the president of Belton’s university says, “The Kingdom of God is within us” (Griggs 48). The question becomes, “How does one build and invigorate the kingdom of God in the world?”

As characterized by Griggs, Belton Piedmont’s ideal is a communitarian one of a human community. To achieve this end, Belton has to be, and is, an intriguing blend of the idealist and realist. He is an extension of the Christian ministry learned from his college education. In reading *Imperium in Imperio* (which is “credited with having a potentially wider readership than either [Paul Laurence] Dunbar or [Charles] Chesnutt, because” Griggs “was willing to sell his work directly to the public”), one should understand that Belton sees himself first and foremost as a southern preacher (Verdelle xii). As a child, Belton witnesses “the manner in which the preacher stirred up the people,” and he “decided that he, too, would like to become a preacher” (Griggs 19).

Despite harbingers of events to come during the post-Reconstruction era, Belton’s family is not among those southern migrants who travel north. Perhaps because of a southern sense of place (Belton at one point declares, “I love the South”), despite their oppression, Belton’s mother determinedly enrolls him in a southern school for African Americans, although taught by a white man (Griggs 168). Belton, though, has questions about
segregation and cultural oppression. He becomes fixated on the American Revolution and “the story of rebellion against the yoke” of English oppressors (25). He struggles with the American dilemma, a country born in freedom but which subjugates many of its citizens. At twenty, Belton delivers his high-school graduation address, speaking on, of all topics, “The Contribution of the Anglo-Saxon to the Cause of Human Liberty” (27). Therefore, Belton has no choice but to dwell on the subject of race, and he continues to feel oppression long after that school address. He even loses out on the award for the speech because the judges “don’t like to see nigger blood triumph over any Anglo-Saxon blood” (29). Belton feels the same impulses of anger that his friend Bernard does. As a result of his poverty during and following Reconstruction, Belton sees how whites also suffer economically. “The Anglo-Saxon race is divided into two hostile camps – labor and capital […] Let us thank God that we are not in the struggle,” Belton says (Griggs 157). But he witnesses too how they still see themselves as better than African Americans. Indeed, at a young age, Belton observes the importance in American society of capitalism and economic determinism. As a result, following his high-school graduation, Belton enrolls in Stowe University, an African-American institution in Nashville; there, he becomes an intellectual activist.

Belton’s university education gives him the chance to work with other students to agitate against racism. Through this social-justice work, he comes to see the United States’ goal as freedom but the South’s goal as un-freedom; nevertheless, he continues to seek truth from a multiplicity of sources. In fact, Belton has many options after his schooling and could go north, but again he remains in the South because of his southern sense of place: “On her soil I was born; on her bosom I was reared; into her arms I hope to fall in death” (154). As well, the university president’s directive to Belton’s graduating class is to give back to the
community from which one came: “Do not go forth into the world to demand favors of the world, but go forth to give unto the world” (49).

Having determined to remain in the South, Belton sees that, if he is to continue to agitate for change, he needs to do so through an African-American institution. He works through several schools but ultimately chooses to effect change from the Imperium in Imperio as its Speaker. The Imperium is “a secret, all-black Congress of which both Belton and Bernard are members. The Imperium in Imperio, literally a state within a state, is ‘another government, complete in every detail, exercising the sovereign right of life and death over its subjects,’ ‘a compact government exercising all the functions of a nation’” (Karafilis 127). Maria Karafilis explains, “The Imperium has its own judiciary for settling intra-group disputes, maintains an army, elects one representative to its unicameral Congress for every 50,000 ‘citizens,’ passes laws and debates legislation, and follows a Constitution modeled after that of the United States” (127). Lastly, the “Imperium, established at the time of the American Revolution to address the needs and protect the rights of African Americans, is modeled after the US Congress and debates legislation concurrently with that official institution” (127-128). Belton influences his childhood classmate, Bernard, to join the Imperium and to serve as its president. Bernard keeps this position even after Belton learns that he and Bernard differ in their socio-political beliefs. Bernard is militant and separatist.

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39Coleman writes, “Given White supremacy’s omnipresence in Black life, it should not be surprising that Griggs would create a world where Blacks build whole communities that exist beyond the knowledge or influence of White America. Such a world, of course, was fantastic. The fact that racial inequities and racism in Griggs’s world encroach upon his fantasy world also should not be surprising. Significantly, the Imperium becomes more than a response to the rote hypocrisy of a nation that took pride in its egalitarianism and sense of fair play while crushing its Black citizens beneath its heel; it provided a portrait of what Black life might have become […] Creating a safe place for Black life and self-expression was one of the Black writer’s greatest contributions. The Imperium in Imperio was just such a place” (56).
Belton is liberal and conciliatory. Belton follows Booker T. Washington’s directive, “Cast down your bucket where you are.” All the same, he wants to correct the “New South,” which still participates in the same old Jim Crow system (Ansbro 25; Griggs 41).

Thus, Belton looks to turn the social fervor of his university into social action. He does so by organizing a student protest against the university faculty, who eat in a segregated lunchroom. There, the lone African-American faculty member, and vice-president of the faculty, eats separately from his colleagues (Griggs 44). Belton’s planned protest sweeps “the students away from the lethargic harbor in which they had been anchored, and they were eager for action” (45). During student devotional exercises, where faculty and students gather, Belton leaves a note on the president’s lectern, announcing the students’ demands: the African-American faculty member must be allowed to eat with his white colleagues (45). When the president attempts to ignore the note and conduct the service as planned, the students display protest signs that signal that they will not be ignored (46).

Here, like Lieutenant Robert Johnson and Iola Leroy, Belton becomes part of the social-justice movement as engendered by an African-American church community, specifically the National Baptist Convention (NBC). The National Baptist Convention was the African-American branch of the Baptist tradition, which later “grew to be the largest black religious formation in the country” (Harvey 391). Griggs served as corresponding secretary for the convention (Coleman 21-23). The NBC also commissioned Griggs, a Baptist minister within it, to write a novel in response to white-supremacist Thomas F. Dixon, Jr.’s bestselling and hideously racist novel *The Leopard’s Spots* (though the convention eventually had to default on its funding promises) (Coleman 21-23). The National Baptist Convention began in early nineteenth-century, northern, African-American religious
circles from a passionate concern for African Americans, a classless society, and a positive, vigorous challenge to the Christian church. It advocated for causes such as universal healthcare, a job and income for every American family, federal expenditures to enhance deprived areas, and federalization or nationalization of basic industries (Hudson & Corrigan 220-223). Bill Leonard writes of the NBC’s first elected president, Elias C. Morris: “In a presidential address to the National Baptist Convention in Nashville in 1899, Morris observed, ‘This Society entertains no ill will toward any other Christian organization in the world. It seeks to be on friendly terms with all, and the charge that this organization means to draw the color line, and thereby create prejudice in “Negro” Christians against “white” Christians, is without foundation. We admit, however, that practically, not constitutionally, the color line has been drawn by the establishment of churches and schools’” (Morris quoted in Leonard 273). Leonard concludes that Morris (much like Belton) “did not hesitate to speak out in behalf of civil rights. He often warned the white majority that blacks would not wait forever to reserve the rights to which they were entitled under American law” (273).

Like Morris at times, especially in his closing speech before the Imperium, Belton invests in Booker T. Washington’s concept of passive acceptance, alternately making excuses for whites’ hideous and violent past behaviors or seeking for African Americans to prove their worth to whites. At one point, Belton pleads for the leniency of his Imperium brethren toward whites’ actions:

If David were alive to-day and the ruler of an enlightened kingdom, he would be impeached forthwith, fined for adultery, imprisoned for bigamy, and hanged for murder […] If Abraham were here to-day he would be expelled from any church that had any regard for decency […] When slavery was introduced into America, it was the universal practice of mankind to enslave. Knowing how quick we all are to heed the universal voice of mankind, we should be lenient toward others who are thus tempted to fall. (Griggs 154)
Belton even proposes a resolution before the Imperium: “That we spend four years in endeavors to impress the Anglo-Saxon that he has a New Negro on his hands” (163). At other times, and again like Morris, Belton believes in agitation: “Resolved: That we earnestly strive to convince the Anglo-Saxon that we are now thoroughly wedded to the doctrine of Patrick Henry: ‘Give me liberty or give me death.’ Let us teach the Anglo-Saxon that we arrived at the stage of development as a people, where we prefer to die in honor rather than live in disgrace” (Griggs 163). In this way, Belton serves as a connecting link between the theological traditions of slave preachers, whose focus was often “‘to promote [Christian] morality and religion,’” and contemporary social-justice movements, which looked to condemn Christian hypocrisy (Raboteau 165, 291). Ultimately like Morris, Belton works as an activist theologian, applying the Gospel and biblical revelation to public policy (Hudson & Corrigan 223). In this way, he looks to channel the variety of African Americans’ spiritual energies into what he sees as more practical directions. Griggs acknowledges this end in his 1902 novel *Unfettered*. He writes: “In the days of slavery the Negro felt that his lot in this world was a rather hopeless one […] Thenceforth his mind rested not on earth. The death bed, the funeral, the grave, the world to come, received the wealth of his spiritual energies. As a natural result the bearings of religion on this present life were lightly passed over, lethargic conditions ensued and the spirit of wise prevision was in large measure absent. The morbid dwelling of the mind of the Negro on anticipated worlds must be discountenanced; a more rounded view of religion inculcated” (Griggs 169).

In contrast, Belton’s childhood classmate, Bernard Belgrave, argues for separatism. Bernard contends that African Americans must create a separate nation because African Americans and whites can never live together. Indeed, Bernard makes strong arguments for
separatism. He says that, in order to be a citizen of America, one has to seek recognition of white male society. He declares,

Like lean, hungry dogs, we must crouch beneath our master’s table and snap eagerly at the crumbs that fall. If in our scramble for these crumbs we make too much noise, we are violently kicked and driven out of doors, where, in the sleet and snow, we must whimper and whine until late the next morning when the cook opens the door and we can then crouch down in the corner of the kitchen. (148)

Therefore, Bernard does not believe in integration and does not want to be involved in the fight for it. Bernard considers African Americans, like Belton, who try to integrate foolish. “I know the Anglo-Saxon race,” Bernard says to Belton. “He will never admit you to equality with him” (169). For Bernard, separatism is the best and only way to end exhausting white brutality against African Americans. He feels that nonviolence will not work because whites are hypocritical, noting,

When in 1619 our forefathers landed on the American shore, the music of welcome with which they were greeted, was the clanking of iron chains ready to fetter them; the crack of the whip to be used to plow furrows in their backs; and the yelp of the bloodhound who was to bury his fangs deep into their flesh, in case they sought for liberty. Such was the music with which the Anglo-Saxon came down to the shore to extend a hearty welcome to the forlorn children of night, brought from a benighted heathen land to a community of Christians! (141)

Bernard contends that whites do not accept Belton or any other African American as one of their citizens; otherwise, they would treat African Americans better. Whites do not want to protect African Americans, Bernard says, as evidenced by the repeal following

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40 An incident, in which a white Louisiana preacher invites Belton to his home, then feigns not to know him, supports Bernard’s contention (Griggs 103). Coleman writes, “Whites in the region begin to take notice of [Belton’s] ignorance of local customs and become incensed when he visits an extremely liberal White church in New Orleans and takes a seat in the middle of the congregation […] Griggs uses this scene to recount the crux of what Black leaders were against when forging allies in the White community […] Even the church, which of course is also a public space, was not neutral ground. During the service, [Belton] makes the potentially fatal error of trying to help a young White woman find her place in a hymnal. This double outrage (sitting next to a white woman and then condescending to help her find her place in the text) ends in a macabre lynching where Belton is hung and shot in the head at point-blank range [but does not die]” (53).
Reconstruction of many southern laws against racial discrimination. Bernard feels that whites will never do anything for African Americans. Consequently, he is exhausted by politics because white laws remain hypocritical:

Whereas, the history of our treatment by the Anglo-Saxon race is but the history of oppression, and whereas, our patient endurance of evil has not served to decrease this cruelty, but seems rather to increase it; and whereas, the ballot box, the means of peaceful revolution is denied us, therefore; Be it Resolved: That the hour for wreaking vengeance for our multiplied wrongs has come. (152)

Finally, Bernard is suspicious of African Americans who depend on white liberals. White liberals, Bernard feels, are not much different from white conservatives. Rather, they control “structured” African-American society. As a result, Bernard is more apt to trust an African American who is hated by whites.

In many ways, Bernard represents a growing, wearying rift in the late-nineteenth-century National Baptist Convention. The NBC ultimately leaned more toward separatism while the newly formed Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention believed in the practicality of more conciliatory approaches. Leonard writes that Georgia pastor Emmanuel K. Love announced at a National Baptist Convention meeting, “I am a loyal Baptist and a loyal Negro. I will stand or fall, live or die, with my race and denomination…It is just as reasonable and fair for Negroes to want [organizations] to themselves…It never was true anywhere, and perhaps never will be, that a Negro can enjoy every right in an institution controlled by white men that white men can enjoy. There is not as bright and glorious a future before a Negro in a white institution as there is for him in his own” (274). Bernard echoes these very sentiments in his speeches before the Imperium.

Belton, however, rejects Bernard’s ideas as impractical and unrealistic (Griggs 168). Belton argues that African Americans have put down roots in the United States and are not
going to leave en masse. Further, Belton finds such separatism dangerous. He agrees with the need for African Americans to claim racial pride, and he agrees with African-American separatists’ rejection of an endless “patient endurance of evil” (Griggs 152). Nevertheless, Belton argues that African Americans need to live alongside Anglo-Saxons for economic assistance, and he thus rejects the notions of violence posited by Bernard. Finally, Belton contends that, if Americans could embrace a social-justice movement based on church teachings, they could give up their exhausting racism.

Belton focuses on God so greatly because he sees God as having a central place in American life. However, Belton also sees a great need to interpret and clarify God. Belton understands God as a personality, an infinite personality, extending far beyond the finite personalities of humankind. But God is personal, not impersonal, and is a co-sufferer in the cause for freedom, equality, and justice (Montgomery 307). Belton points to the Exodus event (interestingly, a focus within the African Methodist Episcopal tradition) as a time when God actively entered history, evidence that God is not apathetic to human affairs. Evil arises from the misuse of human freedom, Belton argues, and he strongly believes in God’s immanence. Additionally, Belton contends that people need to believe that God is alive in their lives and not live as if God does not exist; otherwise, they will succumb to their imaginative weariness to follow old laws, old rules of behavior. For Belton, God represents the highest form of love, in which one actively loves one’s enemies unselfishly, disinterestedly, and unconditionally. He says, “I loved the race to which I belonged and the flag that floated over me; and, being unable to see those objects of my love engage in mortal combat, I went to my God” (Griggs 173). This active, unconditional love has the potential to lead to forgiveness, reconciliation, and sustaining community, he posits. Belton believes that
love can positively change anyone, if one prioritizes God and others above self. Thus, Belton focuses on unconditional love, which minimizes the focus on self-love. Bernard criticizes Belton for this belief because Bernard does not believe that there is enough focus on the invigorating self-love of his race. Bernard’s question for Belton is, “How can the African-American culture love others when it does not love itself?” Belton’s attention, however, is on the dignity and worth of all human personality. From the Bible, Belton learns the value of imago Dei, all people created in the image of God (Hudson & Corrigan 239). The Imperium member who tells Belton’s tale asks at the novel’s end, “When will all races and classes of men learn that men made in the image of God will not be the slaves of another image?” (Griggs 177). Ultimately, through Belton’s story, the narrator posits that to oppress any person is to oppress God.

Belton, like Bernard, eventually comes to believe that active rejection of the “patient endurance of evil” is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good (Griggs 152). Therefore, and as evidenced by his citation of Patrick Henry, Belton argues for noncooperation with unjust laws. He shows a willingness to break segregation laws and court injunctions as well as a readiness to go to jail (which he does when refusing to pay a bill at a de facto “whites only” restaurant) (98-99). If the law supports segregation, Belton is willing to break it – but he wants to give the dominant culture a chance to realize their mistakes first. If a law does not square with God’s law, Belton says, it is not a law at all – but he wants to allow the dominant culture to recognize that law’s worthlessness before engaging in agitation. It is impossible to overcome injustice only with moral suasion, Belton acknowledges; some resistance is needed – but only after giving moral suasion time to prove its worth. Belton’s ultimate moral argument against violence is that it is contrary to God’s
love ethic; his pragmatic argument is that violence only begets more exhausting violence: “The lesson for [one] to learn is that passion is ever a blind guide and the more violent the more blind,” he says (Griggs 159). But Belton is not quick enough to act against what peace-studies scholars call a “negative peace,” where exhausting oppression is allowed to continue. In other words, Belton is for pressure-less acquiescence or nonviolent nonresistance up to a point (Ansbro 119). That point would come after Belton’s proposed “four years in endeavors to impress the Anglo-Saxon that he has a New Negro on his hands and must surrender what belongs to him,” including, first and foremost, the vote (163).

Yet it is not that Belton will practice passive accommodationism for four full years. In that time, he will agitate to “secure our rights and privileges.” He will “let [the Anglo-Saxon] know that patience has a limit; that strength brings confidence; that faith in God will demand the exercise of our own right arm; that hope and despair are each equipped with swords, the latter more dreadful than the former.” Belton is willing to agitate for a positive peace – but only after negative peacemakers have been given further opportunity to right themselves. He concludes, “Before we make a forward move, let us pull the veil from before the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon that he may see the New Negro standing before him humbly, but firmly demanding every right granted him by his maker and wrested from him by man” (Griggs 163). Belton believes that nonviolent resistance is not for cowards; it is an active resistance. “Such is the proposition which I present,” he says. “It is primarily pacific: yet it is firm and unyielding. It courts a peaceable adjustment, yet it does not shirk war, if war is forced” (Griggs 164).

Like Lieutenant Robert Johnson and Iola Leroy, Belton’s resistance does not seek to defeat or humiliate an opponent but actively to make her/him a friend. Further, his attacks are
directed against forces of evil rather than the person committing the evil: hate the sin, love the sinner; attack the system that produced the person, not the person. Finally, Belton’s nonviolent resistance shows an active willingness to accept suffering without retaliation. Similar to Iola Leroy’s hermeneutic, Belton believes that, by taking the moral high ground, one causes one’s enemy to lose her/his moral force. In this way, suffering and love become invigorating and redemptive (Ansbro 143).

Toward the end of his life, however, Belton realizes the difficulty of achieving shared power and how those in power have trouble giving it over. When Belton talks of shared power, many of his contemporaries abandon him. And, in fact, after meeting with Bernard on this point, Bernard secretly orders Belton killed. Bernard’s execution order results in the Imperium’s dissolution. The novel’s narrator, the Imperium’s Secretary of State, characterizes the causes of this exhaustion as Bernard’s increasing militancy and fanaticism, the emergence of alternative approaches to the American dilemma, the politics of post-Reconstruction, and the growing rift between African Americans (Griggs 175-177).

To an extent, though ineffably more violent, the Imperium’s exhaustion reflects that of the National Baptist Convention. As noted, Leonard writes, “Unity was difficult to sustain […] Other African American Baptists, who feared that the NBC was too separatist in its sentiments, met in 1897 to found the Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention […] North Carolina pastor Calvin S. Brown urged the new board to confront the realities of race. He insisted that black Baptists were weak while white Baptists were strong, and commented, ‘We are a nonentity in politics while they rule with iron. Destiny has shaped the situation, and I must accept it’” (274). Maffly-Kipp concludes, “It would be difficult to overestimate the level of competition for members among these groups, especially in the first few decades
after the war. Driven by Northern black and white missionaries and local leaders, all of whom were determined to rescue the ex-slaves using their own understandings of true religion, the Reconstruction South became a battleground for the souls of the race […] If the driving question of these narratives before the war had been explaining racial separation from white churches, the compelling question in the postbellum era focused on understanding the increasing religious divisions among African Americans” (84).

Throughout Imperium in Imperio, a variety of characters work to “revitalize” the African-American community through a multiplicity of philosophies and strategies (Griggs 118). Dr. Lovejoy directs his students, though perhaps toward a self-serving purpose as a white man, “Carry fresh, warm, invigorating blood in your veins to inject into the veins of the world. This is far safer and nobler than sticking the lance into the swollen veins of the world, to draw forth its putrid blood for your own use” (49). The novel suggests that a social-justice movement based on the original National Baptist Convention’s teachings is the solution to politicizing social principles and the struggle for a moral- or virtue-based society. It posits that one must confront civil rights directly, not practice passive acquiescence or benign neglect, and do so by rejecting the “patient endurance of evil,” engaging in civil disobedience, and participating in redemptive suffering, not defensive or aggressive violence (152). Though Griggs presents the multifarious other sides of the American dilemma well, and though scholars like Robert E. Fleming argue otherwise, in the end Griggs comes down on Belton’s side, on the side of the social, political, and economic empowerment of African Americans through God’s love ethic (73-77). Griggs’ later novels suggest a change in his thinking – indeed, imply his giving up on nonviolence, albeit temporarily – but in Imperium in Imperio, he offers a regulative ideal in the form of Belton Piedmont.
Consequently, more exists to Belton than simply talk. As noted, he participates in nonviolent resistance. Griggs operated in much the same way, not joining the more conciliatory Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Convention but also not advocating for separatism. He did so to the extent that some within the National Baptist Convention labeled him the “‘Negro Apostle’ to the white race” (Coleman 25). However, for Griggs, the object was not to defeat an opponent. Rather, it was to have the freedom to express the truth of his individual opinions and beliefs. For this reason, his primary concern lay with developing a publication house that would print African-American literature, a goal shared by the National Baptist Convention. This shared dedication led, in 1896, to an NBC publishing house, which became independent in 1898 (Leonard 274). Leonard writes, “Religious leaders such as W.B. Johnson believed that segregationist statutes demanded a forthright response from the African American community. Johnson insisted that the caricature of the ‘patient, humble Negro’ of earlier eras would be overcome by a ‘countless army of strong men, who know their rights and will contend for them’” (274). Griggs has Belton echo this claim. He says in the novel, “Let us pull the veil from before the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon that he may see the New Negro standing before him humbly, but firmly demanding every right granted him by his maker and wrested from him by man” (Griggs 163). Belton’s ethos thus becomes to collect facts to determine if injustice exists, attempt negotiation, but finally confront the unjust system through nonviolent direct action.

As Belton collects facts about the evil system with which he is faced, he is astonished by what he finds: “He found out that the white man was utterly ignorant of the nature of the Negro of to-day with whom he has to deal. And more than that, he was not bothering his brain thinking about the Negro” (Griggs 92). Finnie D. Coleman concludes, “Griggs
understood that dissemblance could not maintain such a system. Tremendous psychic energy is expended in a moral economy where one imagines that the only purpose that Blacks have is to serve and, more important, that this is a natural and just state of affairs” (51).

As I have repeatedly witnessed in nineteenth-century white southern authors’ novels, actively justifying the color line does exact a “tremendous psychic energy.” Whether willfully naïve or ardently optimistic, Harper and Griggs offer their respective African-American church community’s social-justice movements as well as cultural openness – within and without their denominations and communities – as practical means to dismantle that color line. They offer these approaches as ways to revitalize the imaginatively worn-down American South. Having witnessed the vitriol that cultural openness in America can cause – George Washington Cable is our harrowing example – the question becomes whether race-based solidarities, even those fictionally created as witnessed in Griggs’ penultimate novel, The Hindered Hand, can effect imaginative ambitions more forcefully.
Like *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), Sutton E. Griggs’ 1905 *The Hindered Hand* features two distinct characters, one mulatto and one “dark-skinned.” The former, Earl, is militant and separatist. The latter, Ensal, is accommodationist. *The Hindered Hand*, however, is much more violent than Griggs’ earlier works. Perhaps because of its bleak outlook and violence, *The Hindered Hand* did not sell nearly as well as those earlier novels. By the book’s end, the more accommodating Ensal questions his nonviolent and non-separatist tactics, so exhausted is he by America’s race questions. Conceivably because of this exhaustion, the novel ultimately embraces its graphic violence and more resignedly confines itself to separatist philosophies than any prior Griggs’ work. As such, it represents the bleakest outlook on the race questions of any novel studied herein: the exhaustion of African-American trust in white Americans, and the wearied resignation to leave America en masse. Not surprisingly then, Griggs later nonfiction works strike a far different tone, as this one tired not only Griggs’ small readership but Griggs’ financial backers and Griggs himself.

Why then did Griggs anomalously write the darker, separationist *The Hindered Hand*? Finnie D. Coleman illuminates the 1877 election’s significance in this development. The election became a compromise in which Republicans agreed to withdraw federal troops from the South in exchange for granting Democrat Rutherford B. Hayes his margin-thin
victory. Following this arrangement, the National Baptist Convention witnessed a rise in African-American caricatures in white literature. The NBC believed that even educated whites were now using these stereotypes to justify southern whites’ renewed ignorant and violent behaviors toward African Americans. Consequently, the NBC sought to establish a publishing arm that would counter, even neutralize, the hideousness and violence of these renewed white-imposed stereotypes. Whether the countertypes to these stereotypes were realistic or mythical did not matter to the convention. At a convention meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1903, the NBC commissioned Griggs to write a novel in direct response to white-supremacist Thomas F. Dixon, Jr.’s The Leopard’s Spots. Flattered by this unprecedented contract and glad to have the financial backing, Griggs emerged from a long literary sabbatical to accept his charge. The NBC promised Griggs the financial support of 2.5 million members from 17,200 churches nationwide. Following the convention, Griggs went to work on his darkest, most moving novel yet (Coleman 22-23).

As Coleman notes, The Hindered Hand is Griggs’ most accomplished novel, in both a technical and aesthetic sense. The plot is more sophisticated than Griggs’ earlier works, and the story supplies a more profound emotional impact. Still, its publication almost ruined Griggs. The monies from the NBC never materialized, causing Griggs to invest, and lose, his personal savings and available credit. The NBC never even offered to cover the principal expenditures for the novel’s writing. Compounding this devastating loss, African-American audiences did not buy the book, resulting in Griggs’ emotional and financial exhaustion. Remarkably however, even with these justified causes for his imaginative weariness, Griggs abandoned neither his activism nor his publishing career. He would look back at The Hindered Hand as a project which invigorated him in its writing but devastated him in its
reception (Coleman 23). For these reasons, I analyze the novel for the strategies Griggs intended for his African-American community’s imaginative rejuvenation. Specifically, I look at how these approaches reflected his ambitions – or perhaps, more accurately, those ambitions he erroneously associated with his NBC audience – and how nonfiction served as the ultimate source of his imaginative renewal.

Like Belton Piedmont, the protagonist from Griggs’ successful 1899 novel, *Imperium in Imperio*, Ensal in *The Hindered Hand* is a creative theological thinker. His rhetoric and practices are thoroughly invigorated by a belief in an immanent God intervening and participating in the events of history. Like Belton, Ensal places God in the center of his thought. He reads culture and history in the light of this divine activity. “Ensal, the Christ has bidden you, you say, to preach his Gospel to every creature,” Earl notes (Griggs 140). Therefore, and as suggested by Finnie D. Coleman, Ensal does not refer to himself as a black ethicist. Rather, he views himself as a clergyman, interpreting God with or in light of the civil-rights struggle. “I believe in the existence of one great superior Intelligence whom the Christians know as the God of heaven. I believe that this great being accords to men free moral agency, but gathers up all that we do and shapes it to his ‘one far off divine event,’” Ensal says (197).

Naturally then, Ensal rejects his friend Earl’s violent and separatist strategies. After Earl learns of two of his friends being lynched, he plots to occupy the Mississippi state capitol to direct attention to southern African Americans’ plight. Ensal refuses this plan’s violence, regardless of whether it is defensive or aggressive. Ensal strongly believes that black freedom cannot be separated from the freedom of other oppressed people, whether white or black. Instead, Ensal directs his community to persuade “American civilization to
accord you your place in your own right, to the end that the world may have an example of alien races living side by side administering the general government together and meting out justice and fair play to all” (198).

Like Griggs’ earlier protagonist, Ensal skillfully interprets the Gospel for the present time. He relates it to the poor and the oppressed. Further, he addresses uniquely American concerns, but he does not limit his theology to the problems of one group of people. Ensal believes in God’s immanence and activity in history, God as the creator and sustainer of life, and in the personal God of love and freedom. Therefore, for Ensal, all systems of oppression are immoral (not of God) and do not adhere to the priority and essentiality of agape love (the highest, most vital form of love). Ensal resolutely believes in the social nature of human existence, the interdependency between all human beings.

Hence, we come to see Ensal as an intellectual and, at best, ambivalent about Earl’s violent, separatist approach. One gets the impression that Ensal sees himself in the African-American preaching tradition, indeed even in the prophetic preaching role discussed in the Bible, in which inspired speaking, prediction, and social criticism are blended (Frick 326-328, 346-356). Additionally, like Belton Piedmont, Ensal sees these roles in relation to his African-American church community, the National Baptist Convention, of which Griggs was a minister. In line with that movement, Ensal believes in confronting evil through prayer and mass publications, publishing African-American literature being the National Baptist Convention’s foremost objective (Leonard 274).

Nevertheless, in the novel’s first half, Ensal’s philosophy never rises above the passive acceptance of white power. Rather, he echoes Booker T. Washington’s progressive accommodationism. This movement proposed to give up the demand for civil rights, political
power, and higher liberal-arts education (Ansbro 25). It sought to achieve these goals through “pressure-less persuasion,” proving oneself through exemplary conduct (25). Though Ensal’s ethos eventually suggests something beyond this philosophy, we do not see the realization of that goal. As Ensal proclaims, “The Negroes do the cooking for the whites, nurse their babies, and our mothers hover about the bedside of their dying. This they do while their hearts are yearning for a better day for themselves and their kind. But the racial honor is above being tainted [by violent agitation]. Let the Anglo-Saxon crush us if he will” (Griggs 217-218).

As a result of his rejection of Earl’s violent, separatist tactics, Ensal and Earl clash. Earl disdains Ensal’s belief in exemplary conduct and proving oneself through economic self-uplift. “If the white people of the South permitted you to preach the Gospel to them, you would have some basis for the hope that you would be contributing your due share to the work of altering these untoward conditions,” Earl scoffs. “Since they deny you your way of reaching them, come and go our way” (Griggs 140). Earl agrees that labor and self-reliance are important. However, he argues that they must be coupled with agitation and active resistance to evil. Earl wants to confront the system, and he wants to do so violently.

Unlike those of Bernard Belgrave in *Imperium in Imperio*, Earl’s arguments prove so convincing that, ultimately, they begin to persuade Ensal. Different from that of Belton Piedmont of the earlier novel, Ensal’s “faith in God and the Constitution is shaken” by the lynching of his friends, “the complexities of miscegenation,” and “Earl’s call to militancy.” In fact, by the novel’s end, Ensal considers Africa “as a place of refuge, a homeland to which desperate people can return if every other political plan fails.” Finally, in due course, Ensal becomes no longer certain “of a rational, nonviolent solution to racial problems.”
Accordingly, as Arlene Elder notes, Ensal “leaves America for Africa, not as a cultural missionary, but as an expatriate eager to escape a country that never accepted him” (Elder 93).

In the end, like Earl, Ensal, having had his trust in white Americans exhausted, comes to believe in Africa as a separate nation for African Americans. He ultimately accepts that blacks and whites can never live together. No longer does this plan seem impractical and unrealistic, as it does in Imperium in Imperio. No longer does Griggs’ novel suggest that African Americans have put down roots in the United States and thus are not going to leave en masse. Rather, Griggs suggests, African Americans might not leave for Africa physically, but they can go there imaginatively, spiritually, culturally, and intellectually. Ensal no longer finds separatism dangerous. He agrees with the need for African Americans to claim their racial pride. Further, he advocates for their right to confront an evil system and holds to the conviction that African Americans’ plight cannot be separated from Africans’ plight. At last, Ensal no longer precludes the notions of violence posited by his black-nationalist friend.

Additionally, Earl’s friend and compatriot, Gus Martin, whose heritage is both African American and Native American, suggests that violence exists in the guilty consciences of white society and that whites will wake up one day scared by this violence. Accordingly, Gus posits, if whites inflict violence upon African Americans, as most certainly is the case in the novel, it is African Americans’ right to defend themselves to the maximum potential. Gus does, holing himself up in a makeshift fort from which he shoots at approaching whites. Gus does not believe in integration. He does not want to be involved in the fight to integrate. Gus believes that African Americans who try to integrate are foolish and allow themselves to be bested. The conclusion, again unlike that in Imperium in Imperio,
is that staying and struggling nonviolently against oppression in America is a futile and thus
eexhausting effort. Earl and Gus Martin, and eventually Ensal, therefore no longer feel the
need to struggle only as a nonviolent, integrationist movement.

This is not to say that Griggs ultimately devolves into violent rhetoric, far from it. In
his recorded sermons, Griggs preaches “to promote a temperate, middle-class approach,”
particularly speaking on Micah 4:3: “‘They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their
spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they
learn war anymore’” (Tracy 165, Griggs quoted in Tracy 161). In The Hindered Hand
however, much more so than in Imperium in Imperio, Griggs presents violence as a plausible,
invigorating, imaginatively goading alternative to Ensal’s earlier proffered, less-militant
measures. Late in the novel, Earl declares, “I shall yet burst a bomb in the Southland,” and he
looks to “sublime battling” to call obstreperous attention to the current conditions of the
African American in the South (Griggs 254, 255).

Those current conditions of the southern African American cause Earl’s mulatto wife,
Eunice, to suffer a “mental breakdown” and “sheer exhaustion” because of “the Southern
situation which has borne tremendously upon her” (255, 296). We are told that Eunice, along
with the “whole region of country,” “is affected by a sort of sociological hysteria” and
evinces “more and more pathological manifestations as a result of the strain upon the people”
(255). Earl’s initial response is, “by the energy and persistence of [his] grant of blood,” to
cause the nation to “rest neither day nor night until this shadow is lifted from [his] soul”
(257). This decision to act for his wife causes Earl to feel “ceaseless, tireless energy” (271).
In the end, Earl does not resort to violence; nevertheless, from Gus Martin’s example, he
conceives of it as a rejuvenating prospect, as “the half-slave, the political slave, made timid
by an environment that tends to crush his spirit and dwarf his energies” imagines becoming “a menace” (Griggs Orion 266).

As he did in *Imperium in Imperio* with Bernard Belgrave, Griggs relates Earl’s simmering violence to his being a mulatto. Specifically, Griggs links Earl’s violence to his white blood, his “grant of blood from Europe,” “the blood of some of the mightiest captains of the English speaking people […] coursing through his veins” (257, 141). Griggs holds the same to be true for Gus Martin’s Native-American blood, which “stirred” Gus to violent action (Griggs Orion 107). Both of these delineations result in part from Griggs’ refutation of amalgamation and miscegenation as essential to the civil-rights effort. Still, where in *Imperium in Imperio* Griggs highlighted the connection between Anglo-Saxons and violence to denigrate a violent civil-rights approach, in *The Hindered Hand*, graphically delineated violence serves a far different role: invigorating alternative.

For instance, at the book’s conclusion, Ensal makes an impassioned statement to a liberal white southerner, Mr. Maul:

> The bonds of personal friendship which have served to keep things quiet in the South when circumstances seemed most forbidding are being snapped asunder. The sullen hatred of the Negroes engendered by the rabid utterances and violent conduct of the radicals among the whites is pregnant with harm to the South, and tends to summon to a resurrection the entombed savagery of some members of the race. (Griggs 287)

The coupling of New Testament imagery with violent rhetoric conveys Ensal’s disdain for violence while recognizing its festering in his community. Ensal rejects the idea that all whites are racist. He suggests that racial violence can be eliminated if the American South embraces certain ideals: rejection of the convict-lease system, increased state funds for rural African-American schools, and a qualification-free vote (287). Above all, Ensal wants the white lawyer, Mr. Maul, a potentially progressive politician, to address issues of race and not
simply class. In other words, Ensal wants Mr. Maul to transcend his race. To make his case, Ensal is reluctant to advance violence as an alternative, yet he is more likely to do so when white southern radicalism is at its peak in southern African-American communities. In the end, both Earl and Ensal see physical violence as non-productive, but both keep it alive in the imaginations of certain white southerners. However, even with this alternative vivid in the minds’ eyes of southern whites and African Americans, Ensal remains wary and weary of white liberals’ acting as architects of structured African-American society. This development is due in large part to Eunice’s “fit of despondency,” in which she, despite Mr. Maul’s agreement to do his part, “vehemently denies that anything will ever change” (Elder 92, Griggs 298). As a result, in the novel’s final chapter, Ensal sets out “for Africa to provide a home for the American Negro should the demented Eunice prove to be a wiser prophet than the […] irrepressible Earl” (Griggs 298).

Ultimately, Ensal adopts Eunice’s perspective. Griggs seemingly does too, privileging Ensal’s new, exhausted worldview by including it at the novel’s conclusion. For Ensal, even white liberals, who say that they are for integration in principle, are against it in practice. Therefore, with a far different philosophy and much altered tone from his earlier works, Griggs suggests that, to be a part of “an awakened race,” African Americans need complete separation from the American system (Orion 263).

Coleman explains that, following the poor financial reception of The Hindered Hand, Griggs’ renewed social fervor came from his audience’s surprising appreciation of his political pamphlets. In fact, these pamphlets were so well read and received that, in 1909, W.E.B. Du Bois invited Griggs to attend the Niagara conference on race relations in Oberlin, Ohio. Rejuvenated by the success of his nonfiction works, Griggs began writing his fifth
novel, *Pointing the Way*, which would be realistic and clearly political. Griggs had learned from his pamphlets’ achievements that readers responded to the straightforwardness of the genre. He could directly engage complex questions about race without fretting about imaginatively constructing a perception that the reader would understand with precision. Nevertheless, Griggs still held firmly to the belief that fiction could engage readers’ ideas and imaginations in ways not achievable with nonfiction. He also continued to believe that he could reach an even wider audience with fiction. Most importantly, Griggs believed that, in his earlier novels, he had introduced liberal, even borderline extreme, ideas to an audience that was, by and large, conservative. In his fourth novel, he would acknowledge that conservatism by railing against those who saw amalgamation and miscegenation as the answers to the race questions and, in doing so, would test the limits of his readers’ conservatism (Coleman 23-24).

As Coleman notes, Griggs’ fifth novel, *Pointing the Way*, was more widely read than his previous novels but not for reasons which Griggs had foreseen. White leaders in the North and South purchased the book, believing it a responsible and reasonable response to the race questions. Unfortunately, despite these readers’ interpretations, Griggs had not intended it to be an endorsement of Booker T. Washington’s passive acceptance. Rather, he had advocated for a brief waiting period for whites to prove themselves before African Americans actively engaged in nonviolent resistance. This resistance would take the form of breaking segregation laws, ignoring court injunctions, and readily going to jail. The misinterpretation and undervaluing of the novel caused Griggs to turn once and for all to his political tracts, where he could make his messages and motivations clear. In 1910, Griggs collected all of his political writings and published them as *Wisdom’s Call*. This collection
was by far Griggs’ most successful publication, to the point that it was revised and expanded the following year. Griggs also published *Beyond the End: The Sequel to Wisdom’s Call* the same year. Reenergized by his nonfiction writing, Griggs found further renewed energy in his NBC church communities. In 1913, the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, asked him to become pastor, and Griggs accepted (Coleman 24).

Coleman illuminates that moving to Tabernacle meant that Griggs had to oversee his publishing company, Orion, located in Nashville, from Memphis. After he had experienced difficulty having *Imperium in Imperio* published by a white press, Griggs eventually had that work published by the African-American owned-and-operated press, Editor Publishing Company, in Cincinnati, Ohio. Every novel after *Imperium* though, Griggs published with the company he had founded. Even relatively successful African-American novelists like Charles Chesnutt had trouble selling their works through white presses, Griggs had realized. White presses simply did not provide the marketing systems and returns to scale in the same ways they offered to white authors. Therefore, free speech for African-American authors became a much more costly proposition unless they published with an African-American publishing company like Orion. This was the service that Griggs sought to offer to aspiring African-American writers like him. Additionally, while in Memphis, Griggs founded the National Public Welfare League to publish his nonfiction works, specifically his political tracts. There, he published *The Story of My Struggles* (1914), which included a call for more African-American publishing houses. With the National Public Welfare League, Griggs printed and distributed his tracts for the next eight years. He continued to build its infrastructure while also developing that of Tabernacle Baptist in Memphis (Coleman 24).
Still, at Tabernacle, Griggs became the recipient of open criticism, not only from African-American communities at large but from those within the NBC. Because of the political and cultural changes brought about by the Harlem Renaissance, Griggs was now criticized as not respecting the spirit and integrity of the New Negro, of not being outspoken enough for African Americans’ dignity and against segregation laws. Once more, the complexities of Griggs’ fiction, which had caused others to misinterpret and undervalue it, returned to haunt him. Griggs felt embarrassed by others’ criticism of him as the “African-American apostle to the white race.” Coleman illuminates, ironically, it was Griggs who had introduced the term “New Negro” into his writings twenty-five years before Alain Locke’s essay did. Furthermore as Coleman notes, Griggs remained true to the spirit of the term, regularly featuring protagonists who spoke for the dignity of African Americans and against segregation laws. Even more confusing to Griggs was the disconnect between the criticisms that had been first leveled at him, for the militancy depicted in *Imperium in Imperio* via Bernard, and the “Negro apostle” claims directed at him later, following *Pointing the Way*. These later criticisms of his assumed accommodationism pained Griggs, as reflected in his later nonfiction works and indeed in the earlier tonal shift of *The Hindered Hand*. It was not long before seminarians in Tennessee began to turn on him (Coleman 25).

Randolph Meade Walker writes that, in the early 1930s, Griggs returned to his father’s former church, Hopewell Baptist, in Denison, Texas (31). Soon thereafter, with the cooperation of the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention, Griggs began plans for the National Civic and Religious Institute in Houston. Griggs’ plan for this institute was one that he had expressed years earlier in his 1902 novel, *Unfettered*. Though he was unable to see this institute realized, dying in 1933 from pneumonia before its
completion, its purposes, as laid out in the nonfiction addendum to *Unfettered* (though named after the protagonist, “Dorlan’s Plan”), were pursued by the National Baptist Convention, the Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention, and the American Baptist Theological Seminary. These purposes were to create viable, taxable, African-American-owned businesses so that the southern states would not provide rural-school funding as if from charity; to provide night schools for African Americans; and to eliminate the crop-lien system in which southern farmers were charged exorbitant interest rates on their lands. In these ways, Griggs’ imaginative ambitions were at long last realized – decades after he had first expressed them clearly in a nonfiction section included in a novel (Coleman 27). The misinterpretation and undervaluing of the novel, which had caused Griggs to turn once and for all to his political tracts, had also led him to learn that nonfiction was where he could make his messages and motivations clear. In this way, finally, he could articulate his imaginative ambitions without his readers erecting imaginative partitions to segregate themselves off from that to which they felt indifferent or in opposition.

Invigorated imaginative ambition does, however, raise its Hydra head in a southern American novel of great consequence in the early twentieth century: Thomas F. Dixon, Jr.’s 1902 *The Leopard’s Spots: A Romance of the White Man’s Burden, 1865-1900*. Far from espousing socially conscious opposition, however, the novel advocates bare-knuckled rebellion. It clings to the Confederate hope to revivify white male supremacy. Dixon achieves this goal through a militant white-supremacist agenda, graphically delineated violence, and, his most important weapon, rhetoric. The result is a novel read by tens of thousands well into the twentieth century. In his autobiography, Dixon claims that *The Leopard’s Spots*’ “sales reached a hundred thousand copies before the first semi-annual
report of royalties reached me” (365). Walter Hines Page of the New York publishing house, Doubleday, Page, and Company, which published the novel, “praised [Dixon’s] work as a great achievement” (362). In addition to Dixon’s later novel, 1905’s *The Clansman, The Leopard’s Spots* inspired the film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). That film led directly to the Ku Klux Klan’s rebirth in the South. Thus, this may be the only southern American novel that fully realizes its imaginative ambitions. That the novel is hideously racist makes one feel miserable and lost.

Thomas F. Dixon, Jr. is the fulcrum between southern novelists’ shift from fiction to nonfiction. Based on changes in Southern Baptist preaching styles, he shaped his novels to be direct addresses rather than strictly fiction. He adopted the new Southern Baptist preaching style of trading emotionalism for prosaic delivery. With this delivery, he explicitly told his white readers that they would have a place in the bourgeois world of the New South. The tone is much more optimistic, and more expressly conveyed, than in prior southern novels studied herein. In this way, Dixon is, in Scott Romine’s words, a “rhetorical genius” (140). His novels also represent the rejuvenation of southern novelists’ imaginative energies. Seemingly because of his style’s success, Cable, Griggs, and Chesnutt turned to writing speeches, political tracts, and columns, respectively. Importantly, more than anything genuinely religious, Dixon emulated the new Southern Baptist style for its rejuvenation of white southern rhetoric.

Into this separatist, contentious, and reinvigorated context, Thomas F. Dixon, Jr. introduces John Durham. Durham is a Southern Baptist preacher who, in *The Leopard’s Spots*, creates the Ku Klux Klan in Hambright, North Carolina. He also serves as Dixon’s mouthpiece. Speciously, throughout *The Leopard’s Spots*, middle-class whites like Durham
insist on their lack of hatred for African Americans. They even attempt, unsuccessfully, to stop a lynch mob. But Durham, as does Dixon, employs rhetoric as his weapon of choice against African Americans. It is a tool that proves as violent as any available. Dixon acknowledges this violent power of rhetoric in an 1899 sermon in which he discusses an orator’s ability to “brighten or darken” “the gloom of the logic of despair” (Dixon 123).

Nevertheless, in his unpublished autobiography, Dixon claims that, with The Leopard’s Spots, he did not “set out to discuss theories but to make a merciless record of facts.” He continues, “Into the writing of The Leopard’s Spots, my first novel, had gone more than ten years of reading and preparation and this period of work had been preceded by a quarter of a century of living its scenes.” Because of his lived experience, Dixon believed, “If I could put on paper the thing that burned within me it would destroy Sectionalism and reunite the nation.” He concludes, “It was a high ambition. And I put into it every energy. What the world would think of it I couldn’t tell. It was a deed of the soul. It was written under a resistless compulsion” (360). Ultimately though, Dixon concedes his awareness of his rhetorical strategy to reach his audience of disempowered white southern men. Of special significance, he writes, “I had made no effort to write literature. I had no ambition to shine as a verbal gymnast. It has always seemed to me a waste of time to do such work. Every generation writes its own literature. My sole purpose in writing was to reach and influence with my argument the minds of millions. I had a message and wrote it as vividly and simply as I knew how” (360-361).

Dixon’s unique combination of emotionalism and prosaic delivery receives some context from Paul Harvey’s article, “The Ideal of Professionalism and the White Southern Baptist Ministry, 1870-1920.” Though Dixon spent most of his preaching career on lecture
circuits throughout the nation, the Southern Baptist preaching tradition shaped his rhetoric. Harvey illuminates the struggle, at the turn of the twentieth century, that white Southern Baptist preachers faced when trying to engender decorum and respect in a rural and impoverished South. For instance, Harvey writes, in the antebellum era, clerics were more broadly characterized than considered experts. Expectations for a successful antebellum white southern minister consisted of his having a genteel background, connections to landed wealth, and a pulpit in an urban environment. Even then, those ministers met with resistance from citizens of rural communities. These denizens wanted nothing more from their minister than for him to be hardworking, self-educated, and to practice “a primitivist and democratic evangelism.” Indeed, these communities resisted denominational outreach of any kind. These early patterns continued into the early twentieth century with rural white southern church communities much more likely to listen to evangelical folk-preachers than “gentlemen-theologians” (102).

However, after Reconstruction, both rural and more urbanized white southern Christians began to coalesce again around the notion of white supremacy. This unity led to a consideration of bourgeois ideals, such as a diversified economy, as the “salvation” from the South’s “addiction to a cotton economy and a backward emotionalism in religious expression.” White Southern Baptist ministers thus began to appropriate (ironically from white northern churches) the more nuanced language of decorum. They emphasized personal restraint in emotion and new conceptions of manhood that evinced these middle-class ideals. This appropriation was toward the end of “white southern cultural self-determination,” a theme Dixon adopted in both his sermons and fiction (Harvey 103).
Without question, white Southern Baptist preachers today are still associated with the folk-preacher exhorters, and many are still around. But Harvey explains that the period between 1870 and 1920 saw a dramatic change in white Southern Baptist life and sermon-delivery style. The white Southern Baptist preacher of this period moved from the austerity of Calvinism to optimistic evangelism. Again, this move is ironically associated with white northern churches whose liberalism Southern Baptists decried at the time. Nonetheless, despite this fact and the ire of the older Southern Baptist folk-preacher exhorters, many white Southern Baptist preachers began to assure their congregants of a place in “the bourgeois social world” of the New South. Antebellum white southern preachers had been far more pessimistic about millennial expectations. In contrast, post-Reconstruction white Southern Baptist preachers took much more optimistically to popular evangelism. White northern churches moved from evangelism to moderate theology or the Social Gospel movement (or, in the cases of white northern conservatives, to “intellectual fundamentalism”). Meanwhile, white Southern Baptist preachers began to see the merits of reviving evangelism. These preachers saw that the revivals of the northern itinerant preacher Dwight Moody did not lead to the political extremism associated with the First and Second Great Awakenings. Therefore, these white Southern Baptists began to view renewed evangelism, tempered by the aforementioned middle-class ideals of prosaic delivery and restrained emotion, as a bastion of conservatism in a time seen as anarchical. These Baptists saw this new evangelism as the means for white southern cultural self-determination (Harvey 108-109, 103).

In *The Leopard’s Spots*, Dixon certainly operates by this more nuanced conservatism. As Harvey notes, turn-of-the-twentieth century Southern Baptist preachers combined the “tactics of emotionalism” with a more “prosaic method” of delivery to speak directly to the
white rural southerner who strove to be more. The success of this strategy is seen in how it was employed by not only educated Southern Baptist ministers but countryside preachers as well (111). It success is also evinced by the great popularity of The Leopard’s Spots.

In The Leopard’s Spots, Dixon reintroduces a litany of names – epithets – that he and other white supremacists associate with African Americans. These names operate as signifiers offered from the novel’s outset: a “Beast to be feared and guarded,” “a rattlesnake,” “apes,” “black devils,” “menace,” “blight,” “Black Death,” “simple-hearted children of nature,” “some of whom are but fifty years removed from the savagery of African jungles,” “specimens” of the abolitionists’ “menagerie,” “baboon,” “a scourge,” “a mule,” participants “in a drunken orgie,” perpetuators of “African barbarism,” “a black storm,” “brutes,” “black cattle,” “pollute[r,s],” “the black mob,” “the roving criminal,” “the sentimental pet of the nation,” “our only orphan, chronic, [and] incapable,” rapists, murderers, “animal,” “incompetent and insolent,” and “the human donkey” (Dixon 5, 28, 29, 32, 33, 40, 46, 50, 59, 80, 89, 94, 96, 98, 127, 140, 151, 197, 202, 244, 264, 379, 386, 415, 440, 464). With these nauseating terms, Dixon seeks to re-narrow the social construction of African Americans. He hopes to do so by specifying the names by which he and others may interpolate African-American subjectivity. But he also wants to obfuscate the layers of meaning attached to these linguistic markers. The terms are contradictory, limiting, and impose a deep violence on African-American perspectives by stripping away African Americans’ sense of being.

Critical theorist Hortense Spillers illuminates that, to achieve this narrow construction, white supremacists like Dixon revivify and perpetuate a syntax in which African Americans are not distinguished from animals (MB 79). The goal of this syntax is to indicate a shift in origins for African-American subjectivity (MB 68). Dixon hopes that
African Americans’ sense of subjectivity becomes defined at this point of “rupture,” Spillers’ term for the moment of collective social and cultural wounding. His objective is that this cultural fiction will reconstruct dominant myths and effectively devastate African-American experience (MB 68). With his wounding rhetoric, Dixon’s ultimate end is to divorce African Americans from their awareness of their bodies, which, after all, are ontologically free. He hopes that African Americans will dwell instead on their having once been the subjects of a capitalist economy, their “social deaths,” and their erasure and concealment (MB 67). As Spillers suggests with her theoretical work, Dixon’s intent is not bodily wounds but written markings, a symbolic violence (MB 67). His belief is that these wearying feelings of “wounded-ness” will transfer from one generation of African Americans to another. This transfer will not occur as biology but as discourse and narrative (MB 67). After all, as Spillers posits, the body of a slave’s grandchild can start anew, but what about the body of her/his history? (Spillers interview).

So, as evidenced by his awareness of rhetoric’s power – Dixon writes in the novel of how “thoughts are things” and how it “is possible to kill the human body with an idea” – Dixon belies a shrewd understanding that bodies can be discursively produced and shaped through competing discourses (18, 340). Pain and trauma become transmitted through dominant discourses, fictions, which create “imaginary black subjects” and deny humanity (Henderson 4-5). Unlike later white supremacists, though, Dixon is present during Reconstruction, at the supposed healing of the southern African-American community’s “wounds,” to use Carol Henderson’s term for the scene of an original violation (8). According to Henderson, this “wound” should heal over as a “scar/mark,” where African Americans might re-envision their wounds as sites of self-ownership and empowerment (8).
But if slavery is the original site of wounding, post-Reconstruction is the site where the scar is opened anew. It is the site where authors like Dixon prevent southern African Americans from retracing the contours of their wounds and advancing the argument of healing (Henderson 9).

By imposing his writing and speaking of the African-African body, Dixon seeks to prevent the African-American communal body from healing. Consequently, African-American writers like Sutton E. Griggs become manipulated to stave off these attacks, as Griggs does against *The Leopard’s Spots* in a lengthy passage in *The Hindered Hand*, rather than using their writing as catharsis. Rather than being able to “recoup the African American body through a literary evocation of its physical trauma” and “reclaiming the essence of a selfhood fragmented under the weight of the dominant culture’s gaze,” Griggs ultimately feels that he must direct attention away from African-American bodies by focusing on white dialect (Henderson 7). As a result, many of his characters, and perhaps the author too, are denied interiority (Henderson 4). Dixon’s longed-for result is thus a revivified master narrative in which African Americans endure split subjectivity (Henderson 7). Writing for Dixon becomes a form of “grafting,” to use Romine’s term, in which the body is an inscribed surface of events and not simply what is manifest (135). Dixon trusts that his master narrative wounds and imprints the African-American body and that this master-race discourse will create new “subjects.”

Elaine Scarry articulates in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* that giving verbal expression to pain is difficult, and there are political consequences to this lack of express-ability (14). With *The Leopard’s Spots*, Dixon appears acutely aware of the inexpressible pain that he creates with his rhetoric. Indeed, he writes at several points
in the novel of “the mystery of pain” (18, 340). Dixon seems to understand that verbal violence can unmake, or exhaust, a civilization (Scarry 14). Specifically, Dixon appears intent on exhausting the African-American imagination as a positive or creative response to pain. This imagination, as Scarry illuminates, is a response that would help to make and sustain a community (164). To overcome the lack of “sharability,” Scarry suggests, one must use the language of similes and metaphors, analogies (164, 15, 22). However, as she reminds us, pain resists language, objectifies its subject, and devastates interiority (4, 6). Only with language is subjectivity reborn (Scarry 6).

This formulation raises the question of whether moments of African-American intervention can occur in “stolen places,” where African Americans steal away from the white gaze (Hartman 66-67). May we entertain the possibility of reforming the self outside of “scenes of subjection”? (66-67). Obviously, Dixon believes the contrary. For Dixon, bodies are imprinted with social meaning. In his 1889 book, *Living Problems in Religion and Social Science*, he writes,

The rising generation of the South never knew the negro as a slave and does not hate him because his skin is black. Why, then, do the young men, as well as the old men, stand as a unit in the determination that the negro shall not as yet control the local governments? Simply because they know that he does not represent the wealth, virtue, and intelligence of the community, and because they know that negro supremacy in State or county means bankruptcy, ruin, disgrace, and corruption. (250)

Accordingly, for Dixon, the marked African-American body secures the health of his region, “secures whiteness” (King 31, Hartman 99). In other words, when blackness becomes a metaphor, becomes only discursive, that syntax overrides African-American subjectivity (King 31). This proposal further depends on our understanding of Saidiya Hartman’s argument, that the body is often discursively produced. If we accept this knowledge, then we must recognize that weariness can be transmitted through dominant discourses, fictions,
which create “imaginary subjects” and deny humanity (Hartman 81). Thus, when Dixon feeds images to his white readers, he asks them not to respond. He only asks them to perpetuate those images, consciously or not, because the readers are so used to them (King 31). His purpose is for his readers to become so desensitized to this discourse that they do not think about the individual lives lived (King 31).

But what Dixon most terrifyingly grasps, and employs, is that trauma causes a rupture of the mind’s experience of time, that there is a sense of belatedness to the experience, where one cannot reach the origin (Caruth 17). This is the trouble with narrating trauma. One is always belatedly narrating through the rupture (17-18). Therefore, the discourse of trauma becomes one of unspeakable, untranslatable discourse (17-18). In other words, Dixon’s work suggests, we can never fully know trauma because we can never fully get to its referent (28-29). Dixon’s innovation is to provide tropes that are ways of registering the referent’s impact (77-90). In this way, he creates new forms of bondage for African Americans. The new bonds re-inscribe the original violation of slavery, the original site of African-American trauma (Spillers 68-69). His highest hope is that the “body of history,” again to use Spillers’ words, is coded in memory and “passed down in some symbolic and discursive and narratological sense” (Spillers interview).

Above all, Dixon looks to create exhausting trauma with shock value, a trauma that, in Greg Forter’s terms, delivers a piercing blow to the African-American mind (259). Victims of this trauma try to master the originary moment of trauma but cannot because they cannot process it (Forter 259). The Leopard’s Spots mimics this “cognitive indigestibility,” to use Forter’s phrase, by performing and enacting the trauma (260). The text itself performs this experience of “traumatic disruption” (260). In this way, and as Forter theorizes, Dixon
conflates the “historical moment” of violence and his own wearying blows to the African-American mind (259). By not making his rhetoric seem strange or new, Dixon hopes that his readers will not make the distinctions between the historical trauma and his revivified racism (Forter 260). Therefore, the two traumas appear related (259-260).

Toward this end, Dixon has one character declare:

I always hated a nigger since I was knee-high. My daddy and my mommy hated ‘em before me. Somehow, we always felt like they was crowdin’ us to death on them big plantations, and the little ones, too. And then I had to leave my wife and baby and fight four years, all on account of their stinkin’ hides, that never done nothin’ for me except make it harder to live. (28-29)

With this temporally conflationary rhetoric, Dixon “naturalizes” social trauma and originary violence. He does so by obfuscating the relationship between this reopening of African-American wounds and their origins (Forter 260). Consequently, Dixon’s readers, he hopes, will not consider the ways in which they are implicated in the replication of trauma (260-262). They will not dwell on the modes by which they re-imprint social trauma on “the Other’s” psyche and the means by which they perpetuate that trauma (260-262). In his 1902 novel, Unfettered, Sutton E. Griggs has a white character summarize the process: “What we practice in the South is racial hypnotism. We erect signs everywhere, notifying the darkey of his inferiority. To be effective this work must be co-operated in by practically the whole body of white men. That’s why we object to any white man’s attempt to disabuse the Negro’s mind of this sense of inferiority” (Griggs 24). Griggs concludes, “There are the respective mental traits produced by daily exercise of power and by daily submission to power. The ideas, and sentiments, and modes of behavior, perpetually repeated, generate on the one side an inherited fitness for command, and on the other side an inherited fitness for obedience;
with the result that, in course of time, there arises on both sides the belief that the established relations of classes are the natural ones” (25).

This process seems a horrifyingly effective one; still, can moments of African-American intervention in this process occur in “stolen places,” where African Americans steal away from the white gaze, as witnessed in the very fact of Sutton E. Griggs’ publications? (Hartman 66-67). May we entertain the possibility of reforming the self outside of scenes of subjection? Saidiya Hartman considers this alternative. In her scholarly work, she takes standard scenes, such as slave auctions and minstrel shows, and reinterprets them to create new narratives in the “stolen places.” She does so in order to rediscover African-American subjectivity, for instance slaves’ pretending to enjoy plantation mistress’ Bible classes, though in truth these African Americans rolled their eyes at such teachings as they left to practice a mélange of Christianity and other, pagan religions (Dawson 89-90, Hahn 231). Hartman concedes though that the work of reforming the self is the work of the later scholar, who may discern pains not recognized by those who experienced them firsthand (51). So, the question arises again, “Is agency possible in the historical moment?”

In *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok spend three chapters, Chapters Nine, Ten, and Eleven, working out the notion of the “transgenerational phantom” (140). The “phantom” is the unconscious haunting of a secret in parents passed on to the unconscious of their child (140). The child carries what is buried in the unconscious of her/his ancestors through what Abraham and Torok call the “phantom” effect (140). According to Abraham and Torok, often this “passing down” occurs through words (175-177). This theory might then suggest that, if one generation worked through its trauma, in the vein of Hartman, by reinterpreting it to create new narratives, the
“working through” could be passed on and the trauma would fade (175-177). Of course, in order for this fading to occur, the patient has to understand how the trauma worked in her/his ancestors, and, as we know by now, so often trauma proves unsayable (179). This lack of articulation enacts consequences like the “transgenerational phantom,” where the parent is often insensible even of having passed down her/his trauma’s effects to her/his child’s unconscious mind (179).

We witness this inexpressibility in Dixon’s novel when, following the example and dictates of the imposing John Durham, few in Hambright, white or African American, ever “touched on politics, no matter what the event.” They do not do so because, according to Durham, “These things were but passing events,” though clearly their power is felt in the very anxiety of discussing them. Instead of political debate, “When [John Durham] ascended the pulpit he was the Messenger of Eternity. He spoke of God, of truth, of righteousness, of judgment, the same yesterday, to-day and forever” (39). In this fashion, Durham suggests that evangelical conversionism should compel his parishioners only to white southern cultural self-determination.

As suggested by Jean Wyatt’s Risking Difference: Identification, Race, and Community, for Dixon, the difficulties of white cultural self-determination are rooted in difference (1-18). The antebellum South’s powerful surge of white supremacy did not only grow exhausted from abolitionism and Union warfare. It also suffered from its inability to exhaust difference within its culture. Therefore, Dixon imagines white supremacy incorporating this criticism and becoming rejuvenated by it, generating a wider white-supremacist community. He imagines a time when, “Every discordant element of the old South’s furious political passions was now melted into harmonious unity” (161). Toward this
end, he recognizes that the introduction of difference into the white-supremacist community resulted in the enervation of this group’s strength. White supremacy found itself trapped between a consistent ethos and the tempering of that ethos with discussions of difference. In other words, every time white supremacists asserted their identity, they were countered with claims of excluding poor whites. Thus, the introduction of difference resulted in white supremacy’s enervation, not energy.

Dixon recognized that this enervation did not have to be. To him, difference undermined white community, drained its imaginative energies, and weakened its political vigor. Dixon’s achievement is in his recognition that partial recognition could energize his community. This recognition allows for a connection through difference by not seeing difference as enervating. For Dixon, the solution to the dichotomy of difference and unity lay in recognizing what the other does not have rather than what he/she does have. This lack becomes evident by the following truth: Following the war, because of soil exhaustion, mismanagement of resources, and rampant speculation against them, many once-powerful planters were radically reduced in economic stature, to the level of many of those who had fought the war for them. Making this partial recognition the foundation for white supremacy, Dixon posits difference as feeding that community. Difference is no longer a means for noting one’s own lack but others’. When poor whites saw the post-Reconstruction planter as wanting, it diminished their own sense of insecurity. Dixon writes, “We feared the gulf between the rich and the poor had become impassable, and we saw the millionaire’s son take his place in the ranks with the working-men […] Once more we showed the world that classes and clothes are but then disguises that hide the eternal childhood of the soul” (410).
However, this acceptance requires its own stores of imaginative energies. For Dixon, this need for imaginative energy is easily resolved, for Dixon does not wish to associate with poor whites in a meaningful way. Rather, he only focuses on rhetoric. His desire to recognize poor whites’ needs only exists in the realm of the rhetorical. It does not seek genuine exchange. Instead, it simply wants to rejuvenate paternalistic rhetoric, designed to revivify wealthy white patriarchy, not exceed its imaginative boundaries. Dixon all but admits as much when he has a rhetorician in the novel declare, “When words fail we are deeply moved” (216). Neither Dixon’s nor his rhetorician’s words fail.

What depresses white-supremacist southern writers like Dixon is the potential loss of identity, white male Protestant supremacy, “that imperious aristocracy of the South that only slavery could nourish” (Dixon 80). As Dixon’s preacher-protagonist, John Durham, says, “It is my work to maintain the racial absolutism of the Anglo-Saxon in the South, politically, socially, economically” (336). In the end, Dixon wants only for white America to be “one homogenous mass” (413). Dixon’s imaginative advance is to ignore the “tremendous psychic energy” used to justify the color line and focus instead on the invigoration felt by white southerners at concretizing the color line. As a character in Dixon’s work says, “I am tired of the Negro. I don’t want to solve him” (339).

Indeed, Dixon’s agenda, as it is in the works of William Gilmore Simms, Hentz, and Evans in the antebellum and wartime years before him, is as follows: to combat the depressive effects of a rapidly changing nation on the white wealthy southern male. As witnessed in Dixon’s characterization of white southern men as “worn and dispirited,” “faint and worn out,” and experiencing “a sense of utter exhaustion,” hypos causes white southern men not to be men (4, 27, 120). While the southern African-American male, as depicted in
early scenes of Griggs’ *Imperium in Imperio*, moved from abjectness to emancipation to uplift, white southern men during Reconstruction were being regulated by depression and resentment. As a result, Dixon attempts in his post-Reconstruction novels to find redemption for the white southern male by fictionally replicating a political “coup,” in which the white southern male is politically re-empowered through his disempowerment. For example, in *The Leopard’s Spots*, the southern Democrats fall from power only to be replaced by the more genteel, educated, but vigorous white supremacist, Charlie Gaston, in whom, Dixon notes, “There’s a wealth of deep tenderness and manly power” (257).

In the novel, Charlie Gaston combines traits of strength and gentility. However, he is not a shrinking violet. Rather, he rejects the overly genteel behavior of his northern contemporaries, and he asserts himself for public examination. He actualizes that sense of self in public, not private. And he still attracts attention to himself while paying attention to others. All of these are behaviors at odds with the overtly genteel man of the early-twentieth-century northern city (Kasson 117). In contrast, the white southern gentleman allows himself to be affected by mores, but he also allows his mores to affect those around him. In this way, as the preeminent southern man-of-letters William Gilmore Simms writes, the white southern gentleman is a “man of refinement and manners” but also a man who displays “vigor and power,” whose “mental energies” are not “emasculated,” and who exhibits “the virtues of that manhood which is the secret of safety in all communities” (Simms quoted in Mayfield 477).

Therefore, Dixon presents a counter-narrative of white uplift to the real political narrative of a downward turn in white masculinity. He notes, “A few things like this will be the trumpet of the God of our fathers that will call the sleeping manhood of the Anglo-Saxon
race to life again” (128). Of course, it helps these white wealthy southern men that, in reality, the African-American male, as represented by Ensal in Griggs’ *The Hindered Hand*, is once again subjugated during the post-Reconstruction era and weighted down by the memory of slavery. That memory is resurrected, in part, by Dixon’s novels. Then it is no wonder that Dixon referred to his rhetorical revivification of white southern masculinity as the “new Fourth of July” of “the new national manhood” (Dixon *DS* 37, 38).
CONCLUSION
THE NON-FICTIONALIZING OF IMAGINATIVE ENERGIES: GEORGE WASHINGTON CABLE AND THE WAR AGAINST WEARINESS (1883-1918)

An example of the imaginative energy required to dismantle the nineteenth-century southern American color line is seen in Louisianan social-problem novelist George Washington Cable’s 1880 book, *The Grandissimes*. Cable’s white Pennsylvanian protagonist, Joseph Frowenfeld, must decide whether or not to conform to his new home’s, New Orleans’, slave institution. The novel’s narrator asks, “Was the immigrant growing wise, or weak, that he remained silent?” (Cable CH 74). The narrator then discusses the “balance” between “indolence” and “indignation.” Many in the novel find “ease better than exactitude, the trouble of thinking great, the agony of deciding harrowing, and the alternative of smiling cynically and being liberal so much easier – and the warm weather coming on with a rapidity wearying to contemplate” (Cable 226-227).

With passages like these, Cable makes achingly clear how much easier moral reproach is than moral struggle. He is a master at delineating the difficulties of seeking “Divine Justice” in a world that advocates for “Expediency” (319-320). He also describes well the challenges of explaining Divine Justice to those who desire “the unity of family” above all (319-320). In *The Grandissimes*, Frowenfeld, Cable’s alter ego, does not want Expediency (Holditch xx). He wants Divine Justice. However, he does not know how to achieve it in this world. This world of “Expediency” and “cherishing the unity of family”
allows for, as the Creole protagonist Honoré Grandissime says, the tree of “our dead father’s mistakes” to “drop another rotten apple” (Cable 322-323). Cable perhaps best articulates the struggle between Divine Justice and Expediency when he writes, “There may be men who take every moral height at a dash; but to the most of us there must come moments when our wills can but just rise and walk in their sleep. Those who in such moments wait for clear views find, when the issue is past, that they were only yielding to the devil’s chloroform” (353).41

Hence, as observed, many southern writers, wearied by fiction’s seeming futility in addressing the race questions, ultimately moved to writing nonfiction during the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction years in an attempt not to “rise and walk in their sleep.” A former Confederate soldier who, after the war, witnessed and denounced the gross social inequality entrenched by the southern convict-lease system, Cable, a newspaper journalist turned fiction writer, understood what had led to the nadir of race relations in the post-Reconstruction era. Witnessing the moral stagnation encouraged by conventional beliefs, convictions which he had seen his social-problem fiction fail to disillusion, Cable adopted an imaginative Social Christianity philosophy, arguing against the teaching of strict religious dogmas. Such beliefs, tentatively expressed in an 1883 novel entitled Dr. Sevier, led to Cable’s fleeing New Orleans with his family for more hospitable environs in Massachusetts; there, he began writing more directly polemical nonfiction. For Cable, his sacred Christian myth was not true; it was “truer than true” and did not need to be obscured

41 In his 1842 novel, Beauchampe, William Gilmore Simms makes a similar observation: “The strongest of us, in the most earnest periods of our lives, move very much as the winds blow. It may hurt our vanity, but will do our real interests no harm to declare, that individual man is mostly, after all, only a sort of moral vane on the world’s housetop. If you find him stationary for any length of time be sure it is less from principle than rust” (111).
by the recondite religious laws of men. Finding great interest in applying the biblical principles of love and justice to the transformation of the social order, Cable believed this philosophy the best approach to the race questions, as he held firmly that people needed God in their lives and would live better lives as a result; however, most white American Protestants, he contended, were too fixated on their insular religious worlds to look outside, to solve the inequities between the races when it came to higher education, the availability of industries to all, and the sharing of political power. Instead, white American Protestants preferred to look inside, to study the self. As a result, they lacked imaginative vigor, always languishing back into self-involvement, toward which Cable believed people naturally drift, what he called the “bilge-water” of the “average religion.” He expressed these thoughts and more in a publication entitled “Cobwebs in the Church”: “O how the people need to be taught what has been so criminally neglected through all these centuries of religious teaching – not dogmas or views, but right methods of thought and inquiry; intellectual humility and integrity.” Such incisive lines point to the fact that Cable’s own imaginative fervor was most trenchantly and inexhaustibly expressed in nonfiction. As his biographer Arlin Turner notes, the development of Cable’s personal doctrine did not cease with fiction, and his later, nonfiction writings meditate profoundly on “beauty and joy, love and unselfishness, brotherhood and humanity as the essentials of life” (George Washington Cable, manuscript for “Cobwebs in the Church,” Box 105, Folder 3; Turner 279).

Cable in fact realized that reading nonfiction works on public policies and American history had prompted him to his life of humanitarianism and recognized, at the same time, that such adult education was wanting in America. He himself had been an autodidact and had participated in a debate society on his own as a young man, engaged in (on his part)
rational exchanges about the race questions in print and person following the war, and with his family studied newspapers, classic works of literature, and the Bible. From these experiences, and the energies expended toward them, he knew that most adults did not have the energy reserves after a long day’s work to dedicate to self-education; he therefore wrote “The Busy Man’s Bible,” which began as a presentation to his Sunday school class in Northampton, the community to which Cable fled after vitriolic southern responses to Dr. Sevier. Beginning with the supposition that his readers were wearied after long days on the job, Cable explained to them how to replenish their imaginative energies via short periods of study, namely of the Bible but also of newspapers, magazines, and literature, suggesting fifteen minutes’ worth of study daily and an hour on Sundays. He posited that this time primarily be spent in silent contemplation of the texts, not in reading commentaries (Turner 279-280).

And Cable followed his own advice. He was adamant about his routine, times for work and times for rest. For instance, as so often vexed his platform-speaking partner, Mark Twain, Cable refused to travel on the Sabbath, feeling that doing so would only be toward the end of financial gain or his own pleasure. In fact, the first time Cable traveled on a Sunday was September 30, 1888. His manager had committed a scheduling error, forcing Cable to travel on the Sabbath to reach his speaking engagement on a Monday out West; nevertheless, Cable preferred not to work or travel on those days, delighting in Sundays as spaces of meditation. He would, of course, travel to church; he would then return home for hours of quiet contemplation. Most often, he gauged a Sunday’s effectiveness by how he felt within (Turner 277).
Turner writes, “There had been no time, apparently, when Cable’s religion was not primarily humanitarian and only secondarily a matter of dogma.” When Cable spoke to the Sunday School Association in New Orleans on April 4, 1881, he reflected on the parable of the good Samaritan, which spoke directly to the southern historical context in a way rarely heard in southern churches. In the late 1880s, a Northampton newspaper informed that Cable’s Sunday School class had been suspended because his lessons had grown “‘too liberalizing.’” Cable dismissed the declaration; nevertheless, the local preachers were incensed by his having dismissed theological concerns in his lesson plans. A member of Cable’s Sunday school class wrote of him: “‘He sets traditions at naught; he tramples on conventionality. He sees with his own eyes, thinks with his own mind and decides with his own judgment.’” As if to prove this point about the vigor of his imaginative energies, at a Yale Divinity School address, Cable posited that “we look to the Bible for principles, not rules; that teaching the Bible should be a process of showing an individual what he can believe rather than trying to force him to believe what he cannot” (Turner 277-278); accordingly, Cable was not content to channel his energies into fiction writing but into the larger program of Social Christianity. His renewed energy appears to have stemmed from that social program, allowing him to transcend the imaginative weariness he had experienced writing fiction. For Cable, this real-world work especially provided “‘spiritual refreshment’” and the best of which, “My Politics,” “The Negro Question in America,” “The Silent South,” “The Convict Lease System,” and “The Freedman’s Case in Equity,” inspired the likes of Charles Chesnutt and Booker T. Washington. In truth, these works reinvigorated, in part, Chesnutt’s and Washington’s own integral civil-rights activism (Cable quoted in Turner 185-186, Rubin 269-270).
On March 4, 1889, Chesnutt wrote Cable, an acquaintance at the time, on advice for future work. Chesnutt writes: “[M]y object in writing to you is to inquire your opinion as to the wisdom or rashness of my adopting literature as a means of support” (Charles Chesnutt, letter to George W. Cable, Tulane University Louisiana Research Collection, Box 17, Folder 8, March 4, 1889). He continues:

I am also impelled to this step by a deep and growing interest in the discussion and settlement of the Southern question, and all other questions which affect the happiness of the millions of colored people in this country. But life is short, and any active part that one would take in this matter ought to be begun, it seems to me, while something of the vigor and hopefulness of youth remains. (Charles Chesnutt, letter to George W. Cable, Tulane University Louisiana Research Collection, Box 17, Folder 8, March 4, 1889)

Chesnutt closes:

It seems to me that there is a growing demand for literature dealing with the Negro, and for information concerning subjects with which he is in any manner connected […] it seems to me that in these subjects there is a vast field for literary work, and that the time is propitious for it; and it seems to me a field in which a writer who was connected with these people by ties of blood and still stronger ties of sympathy, could be facile princeps, other things being equal; or in which such a writer of very ordinary powers could at least earn a livelihood. (Charles Chesnutt, letter to George W. Cable, Tulane University Louisiana Research Collection, Box 17, Folder 8, March 4, 1889)

Despite Cable’s help, Chesnutt struggled to be published. In a May 24, 1889, letter to Cable, he shares his thoughts as to why: “The North American Review, after keeping my essay on the Negro Question an unconscionably long time under the circumstances, has returned it with the usual polite regrets. I fear the public, as represented by the editors of the leading magazines, is not absolutely yearning for an opportunity to read the utterances of obscure colored writers upon the subject of the Negro’s rights; a little of it I suspect goes a long way” (Charles Chesnutt, letter to George W. Cable, Box 17, Folder 8, May 24, 1889). He then acerbically notes: “I see from the papers that the chapter of Southern outrages is not yet complete, but the work of intimidating voters and killing prominent negroes on trumped-
up charges, the true character of which is not discovered until after the killing, still goes merrily on” (Box 17, Folder 8). Then, in a September 9, 1889, letter to Cable, Chesnutt documents “the shootings in Mississippi and Louisiana, the whippings in Georgia, and the burning at the stake in Kentucky, not to mention such trifles as burning postmasters in effigy” (Charles Chesnutt, letter to George W. Cable, Box 17, Folder 8, September 9, 1889). He adds, “If things keep on at this rate much longer, I shall be compelled to believe, with Judge [Albion] Tourgee, that serious and widespread race troubles in the South are not improbable in the near future” (Box 17, Folder 8). “Such conflicts would probably result to the injury of the negroes,” he writes and appends perhaps somewhat naively, “but as sure as there is a heaven and an earth the white people of the South are sowing a crop from which they will reap an abundant harvest of hatred; the plant has already attained a vigorous growth, and what its fruit will be none can tell” (Box 17, Folder 8). Despite his discouragement in publication and these regional events, Chesnutt concludes to Cable, “I hope, however, to still do what I can in the good cause of human rights, and am not likely to grow lukewarm in it, for if no nobler motive inspired me, my own interests and those of many who are dear to me are largely at stake. But I hope still to find opportunities, and I shall write and speak and act as occasion may require” (Charles Chesnutt, letter to George W. Cable, Box 17, Folder 8, May 3, 1889).

Frustration at southern racism which only seemed to be increasing prompted The House behind the Cedars (1901), the first-published and most personal Chesnutt novel, and the first outside reading of which, using the title “Rena Walden,” he allowed Cable: “I take the liberty of enclosing you the Ms. of a story, entitled ‘Rena Walden.’ If it is not asking too much of you, will you kindly read it, and tell me what you think the chance would be of its
acceptance by the Century? [...] While I haven’t the ‘nerve’ to ask for suggestions from you, yet any that you might have time to make on that or any other point would be gratefully appreciated” (Charles Chesnutt, letter to George W. Cable, Box 17, Folder 8, September 9, 1889). Cable responded, and, in an October 4, 1889, letter, Chesnutt writes, “I cannot properly express my thanks to you for your wise and kindly criticism of ‘Rena Walden.’ Every suggestion is to the point, and I had purposely dodged some of the additional work necessary – because it was hard, and because I wanted to keep the story within a certain length. I suppose, however, it is a species of willful murder to kill a story for lack of words” (Charles Chesnutt, letter to George W. Cable, Box 17, Folder 8, October 4, 1889).

After receiving some further discouraging news from Richard Watson Gilder of The Century Magazine about the novel’s publication chances, Chesnutt despairs. But on June 17, 1890, Cable responds with encouraging advice:

My dear Mr. Chesnutt:

While your letter is still warm and I have just finished reading, I hasten to say that in your own mind not to me or anyone else, but in your own resolution – you must take back your proposition “to drop the attempt at realism and try to make your characters like other folks.” You must not let yourself for a moment consent “to please the editors” as publishers but only as faithful critics and never let anything go to the public – which is all too easily pleased – until you have pleased and satisfied yourself. This is the way to the top of the ladder, or at least the way for each man to reach the top of his own ladder and it is amazing how quickly that kind of faithfulness will carry one to it. I am delighted to see by your letter how much good Gilder’s lines have already done you. You will make an enormous improvement in Rena Walden if you will keep clearly in the reader’s sight your own fully implied (rather than asserted) recognition of the “brutality, lack of mellowness, lack of spontaneous imaginative life, lack of outlook,” of the people of the story, with the things you have named as having caused them.

In other words you must make the story of Rena Walden very much more what it is already rather than less. You must charge through the smoke and slaughter not retreat.

Goodbye till next time. (George W. Cable, letter to Charles Chesnutt, Box 17, Folder 9, June 17, 1890)
Cable encourages Chesnutt to do as Cable did: to look outward in order to apply his imaginative energies. Only in this way, Cable suggests, will Chesnutt feel that he is truly effecting changes to injustices and not merely seeking to satisfy his ego. This is Cable’s advice to Chesnutt for maintaining his imaginative fervor, by not dwelling on the complexities and ambiguities of his desire for approval but by focusing on the world as it is. Cable advocates not sacrificing the “real” life for the writing life; in this way, he hopes that Chesnutt will not sacrifice his ethical ambitions either (Rubin 133, 149-150).

Chesnutt’s novel was ultimately published and sold well, though not as well as Chesnutt had hoped. The seeming futility of battling the southern perception of race through fiction perhaps most influenced his final novel, *The Colonel’s Dream*, published in 1905. Very few read, much less bought, the book. Chesnutt’s ethical ambition, which he made clear in his letters to Cable, as well as on the novel’s dedication page, “to bring the forces of enlightenment to bear upon the vexed problems which harass the South,” was an ambition like that of the novel’s protagonist: doomed.

*The Colonel’s Dream* is the story of a well-to-do businessman, Colonel Henry French, who returns to his southern hometown of Clarendon with his son, Phil. They return south because of French’s New York doctor’s orders for rest. Soon, however, so taken is French by his birthplace that he decides to stay beyond the three-month window. Before long, he becomes aware of the gothic undercurrents of Clarendon: the seeming objectivity of race interests in the South, not much improved over class interests, and the perpetuation of the convict-lease system by one William Fetters. In many ways like Cable and Chesnutt himself, French seeks to dismantle the convict-lease system, improve funding for rural schools, and remove obstacles to the African-American vote, but, again like Cable and
Chesnutt, French misjudges the entrenched white southern belief in the inequality between the races. Only after time, does he realize that no “silent South,” no contingent of forward-thinking southern whites, exists. Regardless of how hard French works, the town of Clarendon will not yield to economic and social changes.

Appropriate for his last attempt to use fiction to realize his imaginative ambitions, Chesnutt’s final novel to be published during his lifetime ends with the wearied tableau of a southern town: “The pigs and the loafers – leaner pigs and lazier loafers – still sleep in the shade, when the pound keeper and the constable are not active. The limpid water of the creek still murmurs down the slope and ripples over the stone foundation of what was to have been the new dam, while the birds have nested for some years in the vines that soon overgrew the unfinished walls of the colonel’s cotton mill. White men go their way, and black men theirs, and these ways grow wider apart, and no one knows the outcome” (309). Here, Chesnutt delineates the imaginative weariness caused by the race questions, the “tremendous psychic energy,” to use Finnie D. Coleman’s words, expended to justify the color line (51).

Therefore, like Cable and ultimately Chesnutt himself, French experiences imaginative weariness at fighting the tide of white southerners who have been reinvigorated by said color line. Indeed, so wearied was Chesnutt by the defeat of his own imaginative ambitions in fiction, he returned to his stenography firm at the beginning of the new century, where he participated in nonfiction agitation. This agitation had included Cable’s Open Letter Club, designed to increase awareness about the race questions in the South by publishing “open letters” in southern newspapers.

With his second major nonfiction work, “The Future American” (1900), which includes ideas and phrases born from the Open Letter Club, Chesnutt posed several important
questions more forcefully than he did in his novels: Who has a right to another’s history, and how and why do we measure intelligence? Part of Chesnutt’s purpose in writing “The Future American” is to lay out charges against bad science, contending that past science should not be accepted because it promotes racial hierarchies. Chesnutt thus has a clear mission with his nonfiction work, one he had perhaps seen compromised by his fiction-writing editors like Richard Watson Gilder. With “The Future American,” Chesnutt suggests that, if science supports the status quo, one should be deeply wary of it: “Before putting forward any theory upon the subject, it may be well enough to remark that recent scientific research has swept away many hoary anthropological fallacies” (282). As part of his argument, Chesnutt calls out fallacious science, such as phrenology:

It has been demonstrated that the shape or size of the head has little or nothing to do with the civilization or average intelligence of a race; that language, so recently lauded as an infallible test of racial origin is of absolutely no value in this connection, its distribution being dependent upon other conditions than race. (282)

Chesnutt does not, however, see science simply as politics by another name; rather, he has his own mission and politics: he believes in good science, by which he means science that clarifies; thus, he wants to show in detail how these scientists went wrong, either by socially constructing their questions or force-fitting data:

To illustrate the change of opinion and the growth of liberality in scientific circles, imagine the reception which would have been accorded to this proposition, if laid down by an American writer fifty or sixty years ago: “The European races, as a whole, show signs of a secondary or derived origin; certain characteristics, especially the texture of the hair, lead us to class them as intermediate between the extreme primary types of the Asiatic and Negro races respectively.” This is put forward by the author, not as a mere hypothesis, but as a proposition fairly susceptible of proof, and is supported by an elaborate argument based upon microscopical comparisons, to which numerous authorities are cited. (283)

(In fact, to provide a literary example of the above, Chesnutt cites Cable’s *The Grandissimes* and the mixed-race character of Honore Grandissime, f.m.c.) (289). These status-quo
scientists, Chesnutt argues, are, in a way, atavists, trying to make material fit with prior ideas; good scientists learn not to do so: “Greater emphasis has been placed upon environment as a factor in ethnic development, and what has been called ‘the vulgar theory of race,’ as accounting for progress and culture, has been relegated to the limbo of exploded dogmas” (283). Finally, Chesnutt contends, we need to understand the larger expectations in which science takes place yet not make cultural contexts an excuse for the inflexibility of past scientists (283).

Nevertheless, Chesnutt struggles to answer the question of why the belief in a firm and immutable correlation between inherited racial and ethnic characteristics and intelligence is so persistent. Ultimately, he posits that it is an attempt to explain, without having to consider social causes, why certain ethnic groups struggle to succeed in the United States; it is an American and European rationale and ideology: people make their own luck. “If [these theories] come from Northern or European sources, it is likely to be weakened by lack of knowledge,” he writes; “if from Southern sources, it is sure to be colored by prejudices” (285). In fact, Chesnutt implies, to southern whites, this is the scariest revelation of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species*: the lack of a grand design and the emphasis on chance. Correlations between ethnic characteristics and intelligence help to give white Americans a sense of order (which would, unbeknownst to Chesnutt at the time, eventually result in 1920s eugenic sterilization laws and the 1914 immigration-restriction law) (Gould 187).

Articles like “The Future American” and “What is a White Man?” (1889) caught the attention of civil-rights activists like W.E.B. Du Bois in ways that Chesnutt’s fiction did not. Realizing that his “marginal but still utopian faith in the efficacy of fiction as an agent of social change” was largely exhausted, and the “failure of any possibility of instrumental
reform” via “the fading of his utopian hopes for race fiction,” Chesnutt turned to writing for the NAACP, working especially as an essayist for the NAACP’s official magazine, The Crisis (Wilson 180). Ideas from “What is a White Man?” “The Future American,” “Race Prejudice: Its Causes and Its Cures,” and “The Disenfranchisement of the Negro” made their way into The Crisis, reaching an audience primed to process and share Chesnutt’s forward-thinking ideas. Chesnutt adhered to Cable’s advice to “charge through the smoke and slaughter not retreat” but ultimately did so through nonfiction, like Cable rejecting the genre that had made him known and turning to more direct activism.

In addition to his written communications with Chesnutt, a fair amount of correspondence between Cable and Booker T. Washington is extant, which highlights the impact this direct communication had on Cable’s ethos in ways more powerful than previously recognized by scholars. In it, Cable seeks information from Washington about the crop-lien system, a method by which poor farmers, of which there were many in the post-Reconstruction South, could ascertain credit by borrowing against the anticipated harvest but which generally exhausted the farmer’s finances, his land, and his family (Booker T. Washington, letter to George W. Cable, Tulane University Louisiana Research Collection, Box 75, Folder 4, October 8, 1889). Washington notes, “5/6 of the colored farmers mortgage their crops every year” (Box 75, Folder 4). Times occurred when the anticipated harvest did not cover the credit. “After a merchant has ‘run’ a farmer for 5 or 6 years and he does not ‘pay out’ or decides to try mortgaging with another merchant the first merchant in such cases usually ‘cleans up’ the farmer,” Washington writes, “that is takes everything, mules, cows, plows, chickens, fodder – everything except wife and children” (Booker T. Washington, letter to George W. Cable, Box 75, Folder 4, October 8, 1889). “It is not very often that the
merchant furnishing the supplies owns the land,” he adds. “This in most cases is rented from a different party. So you see that the 2 parties, farmer and merchant, who have the most contact with the land, have no interest in it except to get all they can out of it’” (Box 75, Folder 4). Washington concludes,

The result of all this is seen in the “general run down” condition of 4/5 of the farms in Alabama – houses unpainted – fences tumbling down, animals poorly cared for, and the land growing poorer every year. Many of the colored farmers have almost given up hope and do just enough work to secure their “advances” […] I feel safe in saying that all classes – merchants, landowners and farmers – are fast becoming thoroughly sick of the practice […] I call your attention specially to what the Montgomery Advertiser says under the caption: “The Mortgage Nightmare.” (Booker T. Washington, letter to George W. Cable, Box 75, Folder 4, October 8, 1889)

In a letter to Washington prior to February 1, 1889, Cable notes this trend, and he requests information from Washington specifically about the migration of African-American workers from Alabama, where the crop-lien system was in place, to California, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana (Booker T. Washington, letter to George W. Cable, Tulane University Louisiana Research Collection, Box 75, Folder 4, February 1 and 20, 1889). Washington writes, “As to the cause, I feel quite sure it is to be found in the fact that the colored people are tired working hard all the year and getting nothing for it” (Box 75, Folder 4, February 1, 1889). In a January 9, 1891, letter, Washington shares information with Cable about Alabama’s lack of public-school-building funds, a result, in part, of the crop-lien system’s failings (Booker T. Washington, letter to George W. Cable, Tulane University Louisiana Research Collection, Box 75, Folder 4). The gathering of provisions was left to the people, meaning that African Americans especially were being forced to hold classes in churches (Box 75, Folder 4). Washington writes, “I am sure I will be inside of the truth when I say that the property owned by the State and used for the benefit of the colored people is valued at less than $200.00” (Box 75, Folder 4).
The sharing of information and/or requests for information suggests a sympathetic bond between Cable and Washington. In a December 21, 1885, letter to a friend, Washington writes: “It’s very encouraging to know that such friends as Mr. Cable and others are so interested in the Southern work. Mr. Cable has certainly proven his friendship for us in a manly way. If a few more Southern people would come out boldly as Mr. Cable has it would help matters much. There are many in the South who think as Mr. Cable does but have not the moral courage to express their sentiments” (Booker T. Washington, letter to Mr. Frederick C. Jones, Box 75, Folder 4, December 21, 1885). When Cable tries but fails to secure an invitation for Washington to the Lake Mohonk Conference, a discussion of southern race relations, Washington is dismayed.42 He writes, “I do not think I can be called a sensitive man, but the disposition on the part of many of our friends to consult about the Negro instead of with – to work for him instead of with him is rather trying and perplexing at times” (Booker T. Washington, letter to George W. Cable, Box 75, Folder 4, April 7, 1890). Washington predicts, “The action of the movers in this conference I confess, I cannot understand and cannot see but that the exclusion of colored men will in a large degree cripple the influence of any deliverance the conference may make” (Box 75, Folder 4). Nevertheless, for Cable’s thinking of Washington for the conference, Washington writes, “Were it possible for any actions of yours to increase my respect and love for you your positions in this matter would certainly do so many fold” (Box 75, Folder 4).

Despite this bond, as Philip Butcher illuminates, Cable did speak out against Washington’s philosophy of progressive accommodationism, though never mentioning Washington by name. Cable was steadfastly against Washington’s “pull-yourself-up-by-the-

42 In an April 15, 1890, letter, Charles Chesnutt also expresses interest in the conference (Charles W. Chesnutt, letter to George W. Cable, Box 17, Folder 9).
bootstraps” mentality and believed that proving oneself worthy of equality with whites reduced one to being a slave again. On December 21, 1885, Washington writes to a white friend, “We are very grateful to you for the help and shall try by hard work to prove ourselves worthy of your confidence” (Booker T. Washington, letter to Mr. Frederick C. Jones, Box 75, Folder 4). Cable adamantly refuted the notion of giving up the demand for civil rights, political power, and higher liberal-arts education to win over the white community through Washington’s notion of “pressure-less persuasion” (Butcher 468).

Cable continued his campaign for African-American civil rights in a speech entitled “The South’s First Needs” delivered in Northampton before the American Missionary Association on October 21-23, 1890. This speech was based on one given earlier in the year, on May 16, under the patronage of Howard University. It was later printed in January in the American Missionary as “What the Negro Must Learn” and distributed as a pamphlet at the association’s Bible House in New York. As Turner notes, the original title was the most accurate, as Cable was really asking for funding to support his southern campaign further. That campaign posited the need for African Americans’ civil, economic, and intellectual rights as precursors to spiritual improvement. Cable said forthrightly, in a manner clearly alluding to what he believed were Booker T. Washington’s concessions, that, if African Americans were to give up their full citizenship, “‘consent to be not Africans, but only Africans in America,’” and become educated only to be “‘better laborers and servants,’” they could certainly achieve those goals; however, he wrote, if they did and “‘if ever the colored race in the South should become satisfied with a debased civil and political status exclusively their own, they would stand, one great, dark, melancholy proof that they never deserved to be anything but slaves’” (Turner 258, quoted in Turner 258).
Cable seemingly did not fully understand the pressures and hostility Booker T. Washington faced. From the inception of his term as president of Tuskegee Institute, Washington faced antagonism, especially from presidents of other African-American industrial schools. William Paterson, a white president of an African-American school in Montgomery, wrote in 1903 in *The Washington Post* of “‘Booker the Crafty’” as “‘a shrewd darkey’” trying to impose his own desired African-American state appointments and who only taught “‘soft-handed Negro dudes and loafers.’” As Robert J. Norrell reveals, William Hooper Councill, president of a state-funded agricultural and mechanical school in Huntsville, exceeded Washington, and in fact Paterson himself, in courting white favor:

“‘God bless the white woman! I know she wants me hung when I assault or insult her and she is right! I tell you negro men you had better let that white lady alone for she is the goddess of all virtue and purity, whose station is away up among the stars.’” A renewed surge of intellectual racism also prevented Washington from explicitly pursuing civil, economic, and intellectual rights. Norrell writes that, in 1900, Charles Carroll published in various newspapers *The Negro a Beast*, reviving the notion of African Americans as a distinct species. In 1901, William P. Calhoun published *The Caucasian and The Negro In the United States. They Must Separate. If Not, Then Extermination. A Proposed Solution: Colonization*. Further, in publications as diverse as the *Independent*, the *North American Review*, and *Forum*, Thomas Nelson Page, southern politicians, and other so-called “race experts” relentlessly published articles on African Americans’ degeneracy and criminality, the rationalization of disenfranchisement and lynching, and the denial of political rights. This is not to mention Thomas F. Dixon, Jr.’s *The Leopard’s Spots* published only a year after Washington’s *Up from Slavery* – and by the same publishing house – and which far outsold
Washington’s work. *The Leopard’s Spots* was followed in 1905 by Dixon’s *The Clansman*, an even more popular novel (Norrell 100, quoted in Norrell 100).

Scholars have long argued that, as a result, Cable without qualification viewed Washington’s efforts on behalf of southern African Americans as failures, but, in his 1895 novel, *John March, Southerner*, Cable does acknowledge the challenges faced by Washington. In that work, Cable introduces the character of Cornelius Leggett, a former slave turned avaricious politician, not unlike William Hooper Council. So incisive is Cable’s characterization of Leggett that he was harshly criticized for creating a figure of minstrelsy, for presenting in fiction a negative portrayal of a Reconstruction-era African American that seemed just the stereotype he had earlier sought to undercut. As later scholars like Arlin Turner and Louis Rubin have noted, Leggett is much more complicated than a reductive archetype, however. In his presentation of the character, Cable shows his understanding of the obstacles confronting Washington in ways perhaps not appreciated by more recent Cable scholars.

Where there is no denying Leggett as a figure of minstrelsy, *John March, Southerner* reveals that Cable had an advanced view of this archetype. Leggett is promiscuous, adulterous, a blackmailer, and an embezzler, but the real scandal over his portrayal results from white characters’ need to find, impose, and police a unitary African-American character, a self more real or authentic than others – and by “authentic,” these white figures meant “that which serves powerful interests.” Leggett, it is true, perpetuates minstrel stereotypes, but he panders in order to raise money for African-American schools, specifically the industrial school in Cable’s invented southern setting of Suez, Dixie. Leggett takes public monies for private use and exploits the land around him but does so not merely
to appropriate black stereotypes; rather, often, he does so paradoxically to advance African-American culture. In other words, there is something authentic, not merely theatrical, in his characterization. He says to John March,

Yass, sah, faw of co’se ev’y man got his axe to grime. I got mine. You got yo’s, ain’t you? – Well, o’ co’se. I respec’ you faw it! Yass, seh; but right there the question arise, is it a public axe? An’ if so, is it a good one? aw is it a private axe? aw is it both? Of co’se, ef a man got a good public axe to grime, he espec’ – and you espec’ him – to bring his private axe along an’ git hit grime at the same junction. Thass natchul. Thass all right an’ pufficly corrosive. On’y we must take tu’ns tunnin’ the grime-stone. You grime my axe, I grime yo’s. How does that strack you, Mr. March? […] No, seh! White man ain’t eveh goin’ to lif hisseff up by holdin’ niggeh down, an’ that’s the pyo chaotic truth; now, ain’t it? (Cable DAS 120-121)

As Leggett makes defiantly clear, his minstrelsy – and his crimes – is an appropriation of much larger crimes committed by whites against African Americans. To balance the scales, to take his turn grinding his public/private axe, Leggett manipulates the market. He uses his ill-begotten monies in part to influence federal appointments of state judiciaries, who are for free election laws, anti-lynching legislation, and education reform. Leggett says,

Ef you wants to make a rich country, you ain’t got to make it a white man’s country, naw a black man’s country, naw yet mix the races an’ make it a yaller man’s country, much less a yaller woman’s; no, seh! But the whole effulgence is jess this: you got to make it a po’ man’s country! Now, you accentuate yo’ reflections on that, seh!! – Seh? […] I means a country what’s good faw a po’ man, an’ [it] cayn’t eveh be that ‘ithout schoolhouses, seh! But thass what me an’ you can make it, Mr. March. Why, thass the hence an’ the whence that my constituents an’ coefficients calls me Schoolhouse Leggett. (Cable DAS 121-122)

In the end then, Cable, for all of Leggett’s minstrelsy vernacular, is less interested in how Leggett says what he does but in how it is perceived. What Cable reveals is a cultural palimpsest, in which African-American leaders must constitute and reconstitute themselves in order to expand public education and popular government for African-American citizens. Cable indeed might have backed out of the debate altogether if he had not seen figures like Washington being hemmed in by changing southern state laws, which sought to
curtail African-American education. He had seen gradualism defeated before, but now its enemy took its starkest, most hideous form. Therefore, he began work on a draft on his way home from the 1888 Forefathers’ Day address in Cleveland, Ohio. He revisited this draft a dozen times, hoping to publish it in a magazine or use it as a preface for a new edition of The Silent South. His editor, Richard Watson Gilder, asked him to hold it, however, for posthumous publication, and regrettably Cable did. In it, Cable ultimately revealed some of his most profound thinking about race in the South, thoughts which took into account the difficulties encountered by Washington and other African-American industrial-school leaders (Turner 267). In concluding that essay, Cable wrote,

I dedicate my powers of public speech and my pen to the elucidation of that question – not of party exigency but of political ethics – on which I am best qualified to speak & write, to which as a native Louisianan & an ‘ex-Confederate’ I am duty bound, and which is still, I believe, the most serious & urgent question before the nation: a peaceable Renaissance of the Southern States upon the political foundations laid by the nation’s fathers, northern and southern. (quoted in Turner 268)

To the dismay of many of his white peers, Cable applied his renewed dedication to African-American education by inviting, as mentioned, Washington to the planned Lake Mohonk Negro Conference of 1890. Ex-President Rutherford B. Hayes proposed the conference after the 1889 Mohonk Indian Conference, where Hayes had advocated that the work be extended to African Americans. A Quaker, Albert K. Smiley, immediately agreed to host the suggested meeting at his lake resort the following June. That June, 100 people, all white, attended. Prior to the gathering, Cable, adamant that African-American leaders be present, issued an invitation to Washington (Harlan 41). Cable wrote:

Dear Sir: I hold the invitation of Mr A.K. Smiley, proprietor of the Lake Mohonk Mountain House, Ulster County, N.Y., to attend a large and important conference of educators of the Negro race, similar to the I believe very successful Indian Conference lately closed at that place. The Negro Conference is projected for June 4, 5, 6, 1890. Ex-President Hayes is expected to preside […] In answer I am today
mailing the letter a copy of which please find enclosed. Is it too much for me to hope that in case Mr Smiley should extend his invitation to you, you will accept it. Hoping to hear from you early, I beg to remain, Yours truly  G.W. Cable

When Smiley failed to issue an invitation to Washington, the Tuskegee president was disappointed and Cable, incensed. His outrage was given voice by the civil-rights leader Timothy Thomas Fortune, who, at Washington’s behest, conveyed to the public that Cable had boycotted the conference because no African American had been invited. Dr. Lyman Abbott, a conference member, had explained the absence of African Americans by saying, “A patient is not invited to the consultation of the doctors on his case.” Fortune, in relaying Cable’s boycott, retorted, “Let Dr LYMAN ABBOTT bite upon that fact” (Harlan 70, Fortune quoted in Harlan 70).

Shortly thereafter Cable’s personal motto became “Stoop low, lift gently, raise high,” a maxim he ultimately applied to his support of the Okolona Industrial College in Mississippi. In 1903, Cable contributed to the poor industrial school, the president of which was Wallace A. Battle, a graduate of Berea College. While fundraising in the East, Battle visited Cable, and Cable soon became a trustee for Okolona in 1905. He had Battle speak at churches in Northampton, and Cable himself spoke on behalf of the college in Springfield, Massachusetts. Cable often visited the school on his trips South, acted as surety for the school’s indebtedness, and worked as a spokesperson for the school in the local presses. In the last twenty years of his life, Cable offered Okolona not only his financial support but his experience in advocating for African-American schools throughout the South as well. Upon Cable’s death, Battle wrote to inquire about Cable’s family and added, “Here at this school we have learned to love him and regard him as one of the great souls of America” (Turner 340, quoted in Turner 357).
This period – between the Forefathers’ Day manuscript and the advocacy for Okolona – was one in which Cable began to drift away from social-problem-novel writing toward nonfiction. Indeed, his penultimate social-problem novel, *John March, Southerner*, can be read more as direct commentary than well-crafted fiction (Butcher 469). Perhaps due to his exasperation – not at Washington’s alleged passive-acceptance strategies but at the whites who forced industrial-school leaders to cater to their whims – Cable tried more directly to state his positions in that novel, as he had done in the above-quoted 1890 speech and a similar, and even more well received, Atlanta address in 1895. Perhaps also for this reason, Cable stopped writing social-problem fiction shortly thereafter as well.

We could look at Washington as having inspired Cable in this way and others. Washington provided information to Cable about the crop-lien system, southern African-American schooling, and the movements of southern African-American laborers, which Cable used in his nonfiction works. In the same vein, in the 1910s, Washington began to shift his views from progressive accommodationism to direct agitation. Washington became especially outspoken during this period against Jim Crow laws, lynching, and the 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation*, based on Thomas F. Dixon, Jr.’s novels, *The Leopard’s Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905) (Willard 658-659). Furthermore, through direct political confrontation, Washington stopped the passage of the 1914 Immigration Act, which threatened to block further immigration of Africans to the United States (658). In the intervening years between his correspondence with Cable and this shift in philosophy, Washington had come to witness these potential horrors as well as the specter of eugenics, and he recognized as Cable had, in part because of their correspondence, that different modes
of expression were necessary if the American South in 1915 were to be more morally courageous than during post-Reconstruction (658-659).

Hence, more than being inspired by fiction, these men were rejuvenated by their unequivocal and direct communication with one another. It was a correspondence that ultimately pushed both to define their beliefs in the refusal to support evil systems, institutions, and governments and realize their views that, in an unjust government, the proper place for a moral/just person is agitating against that government. Because of this communication, each committed to a belief in a creative minority, which serves and transforms the state by resisting its injustice, and the sacred rights of the individual conscience. Correspondence such as theirs, in addition to addresses, newspaper columns, pamphlets, and sermons, caused these writers to further reject the passive acceptance of evil and to engage even more vigorously in direct, political confrontation. As a result, in accretive ways, they achieved changes in their respective communities.

Nevertheless, I want to conclude by evaluating Cable’s fiction, especially because nonfiction would not be the final genre by which he would write to the South on issues of inequality in education and industry. In 1918, Cable wrote his last novel, Lovers of Louisiana, in which he addressed the race questions in fiction more explicitly than he had done in years, often through direct address, a form which his later polemical novels often took, showing the tension between his fiction-writing and nonfiction proclivities. Cable had returned from his banishment from New Orleans for visits, and, as Rubin notes, Cable “repaid her with what coin he always had to offer: fiction in which, as best he could, he gave an image to the life, the problems, and the aspirations of New Orleans” (Rubin 268). The novel is set in 1914 and 1915 and revisits the themes that had concerned Cable for the
majority of his life: the fair and equitable treatment of all American citizens (Rubin 265). Cable’s return to grappling with these interests occurs in the scene in which the novel’s protagonist addresses an African-American audience. “I can hope for no whole-hearted acceptance of what I have to say unless while I bear in mind that you are colored you kindly forget that I am white,” he declares (Cable 106). Of course, Cable’s mouthpiece cannot hope for his audience to do what he asks, but he illuminates an important theme throughout Cable’s oeuvre: if we concern ourselves too much with what we are politically, we forfeit the truth of our individual opinions and beliefs.

As James Robert Payne explains in his article, “A (White) Boy is Being Beaten,” Cable expresses this same motif in 1895’s *John March, Southerner*. In that novel set during Reconstruction, the freedman Cornelius Leggett whips a planter’s eight-year-old son, who is John March. Leggett does so to enact revenge for a pastor-turned-Confederate-major’s having done so to him. Major Garnet whips Leggett because Leggett proclaims that the war “‘done put us all on a sawt of equality.’” To put Leggett “in his place” then, Garnet whips him. To do the same to John March (to remind March that he will never be a slave-owner like his father or Garnet was), Leggett whips him. As Payne makes clear, Leggett uses the same whip in the same way as Major Garnet did (Payne 241-243, Cable quoted in Payne 241).

With this powerful scene, Cable suggests that intergenerational memory is real. John March suffers for Cornelius Leggett’s suffering. However, with this same scene, Cable also posits that, if we continue to equate the political with the ontological, we relinquish our individual beliefs. In his brief depiction of John March as a slave, Cable suggests that
concern with identity and difference is a concern with what we are politically; such concerns are literally non-interpretable and inexhaustible (Michaels 113).

As Payne shows again, the motif recurs in Cable’s penultimate novel, *Gideon’s Band* (1914). In this work, southerners Hugh Courteney and Ramsey Hayle take a steamer trip up the Mississippi River. On this trip, Hugh reveals to Ramsey that his uncle’s slave, Phyllis, “‘used to flog [Hugh] cruelly’” when Hugh was a child. Phyllis declares, “‘[H]aving herself once got the lash, she was only paying interest on it through [Hugh].’” In fact, Phyllis refers to Hugh as “‘her little white slave.’” Here again, Cable acknowledges that memory can feel as real as body parts. He does so by having Hugh vividly recount his story as an adult, even after years of having repressed it. But by having Hugh, like John March, treated as a “‘little white slave,’” Cable also suggests once more that privileging identity politics leads to endless and inexhaustible interpretation (Cable quoted in Payne 244).

Cable’s ultimate desire then with his writing, fiction or non-, is to invest the material world with a metaphysical dimension. From the aforementioned scene, we learn that extreme weariness can cause one to know one’s self. We witness this truth in Hugh’s empathetic suffering. When he tells his story to Ramsey, he realizes, “‘The fact that [Hugh] was almost of the exact age of [Phyllis’] own lost offspring had forever goaded her’” (Payne 244, Cable quoted in Payne 244). Phyllis lost her child in a failed escape attempt. Additionally, Hugh realizes that, following her beating of him, Phyllis had tried to engage in empathetic suffering with Hugh: “‘[W]ith each maltreatment, she had told [Hugh] again her whole heart’s burden, outermost wrong, innermost rage’” (Payne 244, Cable quoted in Payne 244). The scene demonstrates that, whether physically or psychically, memories of weariness are powerful
and real; the difference we make between the body and the psyche is artificial. As Hugh says, those times had “worn her, body and soul” (Cable 211).

Accordingly, Cable views slavery as a collective wound. This wound needs to be countered with a healing narrative. In this way, the wound may have a double meaning. The wound may be a sign of regeneration; indeed, the wound may be a site for rejuvenation. We witness this truth in the earlier scene. The narrator conveys that Hugh’s telling Ramsey his story “was a great moment in both lives” (Payne 244, Cable quoted in Payne 244). Additionally, it caused Hugh at last to “feel tender to [Phyllis]” (Payne 245). Sharing the story is not easy for Hugh. He must break through the “reticence and gravity” he has developed over the years (Payne 245). Sharing the story involves great weariness and inner rupture; however, this is how all new lives begin, Cable suggests. New lives begin with imaginative, empathetic interactions with one another.

For Cable, these imaginative, empathetic interactions should occur within the church. As evidenced by his frustration with the conservatism of most white Protestant churches, his sharing a Sunday School room with an African-American Sunday School class, and his correspondence with African-American church leaders, Cable (like Chesnutt and Washington) saw African-American reform communities as universal sites for communion and thus invigoration. In fact, Cable believed that white churches should emulate those African-American reform communities, for they represented the true church. Cable opposed denominational divisions. Rather, he favored a federation of churches. Indeed, he felt that “great” churches had been based on previous centuries’ superstitions; consequently, they dismissed the great minds who wrestled with pressing contemporary issues. These excommunicated ideas left the “great” churches with de-contextualized ideas and not living
facts on which to build new communities (George Washington Cable, an address delivered to
the N.O. Sunday School Association, Box 105, Folder 3, April 4, 1881). For Cable, the true
church should seek to abolish the convict-lease system. It should eliminate the crop-lien
system as well, which affected poor white as well as African-American farmers. Finally, it
should secure equal civil and political rights for all, regardless of sex, creed, race, class, and
national origin, and obtain equal funding for rural public schools. In Cable’s mind, these
reforms should be achieved by white church communities emulating African-American
reform communities, like the NAACP and some industrial colleges (George Washington
Cable, manuscript for The Freedman’s Case in Equity, Box 99, Folder 3).

To make this point clearest, in an April 4, 1881, address to the New Orleans Sunday
School Association, Cable speaks on the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan. In the
parable, an injured man (in Cable’s eyes, the man is likely Jewish) is helped by a Samaritan
(Samaritans having been a group opposed to Jews and vice-versa) while being ignored by a
priest and a Levite. Cable asks,

Does this finish the story? No. The parable stands among all the rest as peculiarly the
unfinished parable, so left by the divine art of the Savior who calls upon each and all
of us to finish it in our hearts […] [W]e shall ask, What did the wounded man do?
And the hope will rise that he lived ever after on the assumption that if a Samaritan
could do this he could do likewise to a Samaritan. (Box 105, Folder 3)

Cable emphasizes that not only did the Samaritan have compassion on the fallen man; the
Samaritan “went to him.” The Samaritan had the “Christian bone and sinew to go traveling
along roads that are haunted by real or imaginary dangers” (Box 105, Folder 3). “The fold is
not the place to look for lost sheep,” Cable notes (Box 105, Folder 3). Then, Cable makes a
direct comparison between the Samaritan and African-American reform communities, and
between the injured Jewish man and his audience, by telling a real-world version of the
parable, in which the Samaritan is “part negro.” Cable pointedly asks of his audience, “Have you never tried to paraphrase the teachings of Christ by clothing them in the garb of our modern every-day life? How often [we] get new lights by this method” (Box 105, Folder 3).

In this address to the New Orleans Sunday School Association, Cable suggests that, although Social Christians imagine a world in which African Americans are essential to community, often these activists do not allow African Americans much subjectivity; rather, once an African American is believed to have been recognized (as might have seemed the case if Cable had equated the injured man to an African American), activists feel satisfied. As critical theorist Kelly Oliver makes clear, however, true witnessing of another person’s experience involves a listening to and believing of testimony. Witnessing moves beyond the binary understandings of recognition to interpersonal relations. Cable suggests that, if recognition is that which connects us to and alienates us from others, then witnessing is an act of loving response, which bridges us to others; therefore, in his Sunday School Association address, he posits that the space between bodies is not empty: it is filled with imaginative, empathetic energies and affect. Imagining space this way makes witnessing an act of rejuvenating connection, not wearying alienation (Oliver 2-23).

Such witnessing does, however, require energy. Cable acknowledges this fact with his description of the Samaritan’s wearying journey to the inn. To realize the imaginative, ethical, and social transformation Cable seeks, the Samaritan must be vigilant to understand the Jewish man’s world beyond the mere recognition of his plight. The Samaritan thus sees beyond the merely visible, and he looks past the visual variations that hinder connection not only to remember the Jewish man’s testimony, in order to relay it to the innkeeper, but to believe it. In this way, Cable suggests, the Samaritan comes to believe in a radical and
unfixed subjectivity, and such a belief requires faith. In relating the Jewish man’s tale, the Samaritan manifests this faith, which Cable characterizes as a giving over – but a giving over which is a choice. The Samaritan has recognized the flux of subjectivity; consequently, he has realized that people fundamentally need one another, that living together in the world is not merely a wearying reality.

Thus, in his final novel, *Lovers of Louisiana*, Cable’s character, a Scotsman, Mr. Murray, operates as a biblical prophet, combining moments of inspired speaking, prediction, and social criticism. When the novel’s Creole banker, Alphone Durel, declares to Mr. Murray that the race question is “the deadest question in Ammerica!” Mr. Murray responds, “No, Mr. Durel, it isn’t dead, it’s merely ‘possuming. I say it wi’ no vaunting, but wi’ dread. Ye may crack its bones and never get a whimper, yet ‘tis but ‘possuming. Lorrd! Ye can’t neglect it to death; the neglect of all America can’t kill it. It’s in the womb o’ the future and bigger than Asia, Africa, and America combined. Ye’ll do well to be friendly wi’ its friends and treat it kindly while it’s youn and tractable” (223). George Washington Cable well knew the results of neglect caused by imaginative weariness; nevertheless, when he became wearied himself, rather than succumb to it, he found new modes of expression to renew his imaginative energies. In this way, he presents a powerful model within white southern culture for lasting imaginative zeal in the twenty-first century.
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