RE-SCRIPTING SOUTHERN POETIC DISCOURSE IN WHITMAN'S "LONGINGS FOR HOME"

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Critics have underscored what M. Wynn Thomas terms the "conciliatory discourse" in Whitman's 1860 treatment of the South.[1] While a conciliatory dimension unquestionably characterizes some of the verses composed for the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, the poet's treatment of the South in that volume is complex and merits further critical attention. In particular, the 1860 poem "Longings for Home" (later retitled "O Magnet-South") has been read by Thomas and others as a fraternal celebration of Southern culture at a time when the nation's seams were unraveling.[2] My essay interprets the poem not as an evasion of the problem of slavery, but as a deconstruction of Southern poetic discourse. Whitman impersonates the voice of a Southerner praising his homeland. Similar regionalist praise poems circulated widely in the late 1850s, and played a major role in constructing the South's pre-war imagined community—a community which made the formation of the Confederacy possible.

The first section of my paper will examine Southern pastoral verse and its relationship to Southern nationalist discourse. In what follows, I will consider the way in which Whitman's "Longings for Home" enters into a dialogue with and critiques that genre. Finally, I will suggest that we may read Whitman's verses as palimpsestic; they only signify fully if they are seen as writing *over* Southern pastoral poetry. To aid my discussion of palimpsestic writing, I draw on Silviano Santiago's notion of "the space in-between," first elaborated to describe Latin American writers' critiques of European precursor texts.

Space does not permit an extended theoretical examination of pastoral's myriad forms, but it is necessary to define as precisely as possible the kind of pastoral verse to which I am referring. Terry Gifford has grouped pastoral into three broad categories. The first is the specific literary genre perhaps best encapsulated by Leo Marx's formulation, "no shepherd, no pastoral."[3] Secondly, Gifford notes "a broader use of 'pastoral' to refer . . . to any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban" (2). As Lucinda MacKethan observes, this form of pastoral hinges on the association of rural space with an idea of innocence, which is posited in contradistinction

to the wider world's paradise lost.[4] It is to this second category that the Southern pastoral tradition belongs, yet it is also worth stressing that Gifford's third definition is relevant to the argument of this paper: "a sceptical use of the term—'pastoral' as pejorative, implying that the pastoral vision is too simplified and thus an idealisation of the reality of life in the country" (2).

Despite pastoral's diverse (yet overlapping) variety, Greg Garrard has shown that recognizable currents run through the genre from its inception in the *Idylls* of Theocritus. From its beginnings, pastoral has been defined by its contraries, both spatial (the bustle of town life and the terrors of nature's wilds) and temporal (the corrupted present in contrast with an idealized past).[5] As Garrard shows, moreover, pastoral has often been invoked to hyperbolically celebrate "the landed estate or ordered, productive countryside generally" (38). As he writes, "classical pastoral was disposed . . . to distort or mystify social and environmental history" for ideological ends (39)—a point which also bears upon my discussion of the specifically Southern pastoral tradition.

Although the long critical history of pastoral extends back to Theocritus and Virgil, in American letters, Leo Marx's 1964 study *The Machine in the Garden* famously argued that "the pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery."[6] More recently, critics have examined the pastoral mode as a defining feature of Southern literary discourse. For example, in *A Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature*, Lucinda MacHethan notes that the pastoral mode involves "some aspect or image of the South" that "operates . . . as an idealization of order" (6). That idealization played a vital role in collective understandings of Southern identity, particularly after 1820. Thus, as John Grammer writes in *Pastoral and Politics in the Old South*:

> the process of constructing an idea of the South was essentially a literary one. . . . Like America itself, the South was written into existence, first by the pamphleteers of the Virginia Company, who promised economic opportunity and easy living to Englishmen who could be induced to leave their native land, and later by American statesmen on whom it slowly dawned that the tobacco-growing and slaveholding section of the country had developed its own set of political and economic interests. By the time of the Missouri crisis of 1819-1820, it was becoming common for Americans to refer to that section as "the South."[7]

Grammer's book traces a lineage of Southern pastoral prose writing, from John Taylor in the early nineteenth century to Joseph Glover Baldwin at midcentury. As Laura Barge observes in "Changing Forms of the Pastoral in Southern Poetry," most studies of Southern pastoral, like Grammer's, have concentrated on prose, although poetry—popularized through both periodical circulation and full volumes—was also crucial

in shaping the South's imagined community before the Civil War.[8]

Grammer argues that the Southern pastoral tradition is inextricable from what he terms "pastoral republicanism" (6). As he contends, in the years following the American Revolution, republicanism became the prevailing ideology in both North and South but assumed distinctive forms in each region. Republicanism "had what amounted to a theory of entropy, a belief that republican societies generally tended toward tyranny and that only a virtuous citizenry . . . could interrupt that tendency" (8). Northern and Southern pastoral republicanism evolved in divergent ways linked to developing notions of virtue that were shaped by each region's burgeoning literary and civic cultures. While the republican strain evidenced in New England's literary culture was "inflected by the great Puritan myth of the City on a Hill" (Grammer, 9), Southern republicanism gradually coalesced into a celebration of Southern agrarian culture. Thus, pastoral became an essential component in the shaping of a distinctly Southern identity, a set of ideas and images upon which white Southern writers could construct a notion of essential Southernness. As Grammer observes, the Southern pastoral mythos "encountered one great obstacle" in that the coercive nature of slavery appeared at odds with the ideal of agrarian serenity (12).

Of course, the pastoral vision pertains not only to conceptions of Southernness; it is a major ideological construct in the American artistic landscape broadly writ. The image of an Arcadian America—even when it is described as a vanishing one—figures prominently in the works of myriad Northern artists. (The writings of Henry David Thoreau and the paintings of the Hudson River School come to mind.) Moreover, American pastoral—rather than a Southern or Northern version of it—is the central focus of what is arguably the most influential scholarly study of American writing on the pastoral ideal—Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*. That volume underscores the significance of Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* for the agrarian ideal subsequently developed by writers North and South. However, two points are worth making with regard to variations of pastoral in American letters. For one, the writer whom Marx identifies with the first full expression of the American pastoral mythos is a Southern writer, arguably one writing both as an American and as a Southerner. Secondly, as Lawrence Buell argues in *The Environmental Imagination*, modern versions of pastoral, in both Europe and its former colonies, have reworked the genre "in the service of local, regional, and national particularism," thus opening up "the possibility of reducing the land to a highly selective ideological construct."[9]

Thus, although the pastoral genre in American literature is not necessarily Southern, one can identify a Southern pastoral tradition—one that developed its own features, which celebrated the particular beauty of the Southern landscape. As Barge writes, "in Southern lit-

erature nothing surpasses the importance of the land, the landscape, the homestead, the rural place, the plantation, the garden. These terms coalesce in the motif of the pastoral, a motif that reverberates through Southern fiction and poetry" (30). Of course, Southern pastoral has much in common with other pastoral traditions (not only American ones, it is important to note). However, Southern pastoral poetry, in its construction of a particularly Southern Arcadia, evokes Southern scenes and locales, foregrounding the idea of a regional homeland. One could cite, for example, William Gilmore Simms's 1838 volume *Southern Passages and Pictures*, or Alexander Beaufort Meeks's 1857 book *Songs and Poems of the South*. The latter volume reprints Meeks's 1838 poem "Land of the South," in which the speaker proudly proclaims: "Land of the South!—imperial land! / How proud thy mountains rise! / How sweet thy scenes on every hand! / How fair thy covering skies!"[10]

Barge identifies William Gilmore Simms as one of the first important Southern pastoral poets (30). As Mashahiro Nakamura notes, "the Southern genius loci was of particular concern to Simms. . . . Simms advocated the development of Southern literature as a literary nationalist."[11] In the poems of *Southern Passages and Pictures*, such as "Cottage Life," Simms celebrates the South for its rural tranquility, connected—the poet suggests—to virtuousness: "It is a quiet picture of delight, / This humble cottage, hiding from the sun, In the thick woods."[12] The poem goes on to celebrate a life "In calm seclusion from the bustling world, / Untroubled by the doubt and the despair, / The intrusion, and the coil of crowded life" (21). The implicit threat of the "crowded life" to which Simms alludes is one of the features on which pastoral poetry has traditionally depended. As MacHethan notes, pastoral invokes "not so much the state of innocence itself but the larger world's loss of it" (6). Thus, pastoral depends on an ironic disjuncture between the utopian image of rural virtue and the disruptive outside reality—a reality envisioned either as encroaching or as already having destroyed the imagined paradise of bucolic serenity.

Simms's "Changes of Home" depicts the latter scenario. Here Simms paints a more complex picture of the Southern landscape. In this poem, the speaker evokes an imagined community through the possessive pronoun "ours" used to describe the land:

Well may we sing her beauties, this pleasant land of ours,
Her sunny smiles, her golden fruits, and all her world of flow'rs;
The young birds of her forest groves, the blue folds of her sky,
And all those airs of gentleness, that never seem to fly;
They wind about our forms at noon, they woo us in the shade,
When panting, from the summer's heats, the woodman seeks the glade;
They win us with a song of love, they cheer us with a dream,

That gilds our passing thoughts of life, as sunlight does the stream;
And well would they persuade us now, in moments all too dear,
That, sinful though our hearts may be, we have our Eden here. (90)

A few lines later, the speaker's Edenic vision is undercut by a lament that "our sons are gentle now no more and all the land is curst" (91). The curse is never specifically defined. However, Simms suggests that although the South retains its natural charms, there is some unmentioned force eating away at it, so that "though our skies are bright, and our sun looks down as then— / Ah me! the thought is sad I feel, we shall never smile again" (92).[13] Simms's vision of a South whose essence is glorious, but whose character has become tainted, suggests that even some Southern pastoral poets felt an uneasiness regarding the idyllic representations often painted in their verses. Simms's at times elegiac version of pastoral complicates the idealized present that many Southern poets chose to depict.[14]

In the years leading up to the Confederate secession, a more explicitly nationalist strain is apparent in much Southern pastoral poetry. Thus Maria Gertrude Buchanan's 1859 "Virginia: An Ode," published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the most prominent Southern periodical in the antebellum period: "Virginia! in the diadem / Which circles young COLUMBIA'S brow, / Thou shin'st the most resplendent gem; / And ever hast thou shone as now!"[15] Buchanan celebrates her home state with patriotic fervor heightened by her evocation of the natural wonders of the state, synthesized with the praise of a young woman—the eponymous Virginia. Buchanan's speaker muses:

And when, allured by thy bright charms,
Man braved the ocean's dire alarms,—
His breast with hope and ardour glowing—
With magic power, thy beauty's spell
Upon his wayward spirit fell!
He looked upon thy Rivers flowing
Amid such scenes of loveliness,
Before them paled the sunny gleams
Which light the youthful Poet's dreams,
When LOVE clothes *Nature* with the dress
  Of his own warm imaginings. (333)

Most notably, the poem's rapturous depiction of Virginia's landscape contains a striking elision. Buchanan's speaker reflects that:

As History gazes on the page
That bears thy lovely name,
As noonday is the tablet fair,

She sees no blackened records there
To dye her cheek with shame. (334)

Blackness in the poem figures as moral taint. But it also—unintentionally, I believe—suggests the moral evil of the slave system, and the black population the poet seeks to erase from the state's putatively unblemished historical record.

The anonymous poem "My Native Southern Land," published in the February 1860 issue of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, also resounds with regionalist pride:

I love thee—dearly love thee—thou glorious Southern land,
With all thy varied scenery of mountain, vale and strand;
Thy rushing rivers, grand and free, that pour their ceaseless tide,
And the gold and purple tracery that makes the sunsets' pride.[16]

The speaker of this poem continues, a little further on, to criticize Northern disapproval of Southern ways: "Those who should our brothers be, despise us and deride, / And those who should be first to cheer—have been the first to chide" (145).

Whitman took seriously the notion that South and North were linked by fraternal bonds, and his preoccupation is apparent in the 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Many readers—myself included—consider this edition the one in which Whitman transformed an empathetic identification with African Americans—apparent in the 1855 edition—into a disquieting sympathy for the Southern ethos, particularly in the long poem "Chants Democratic." In Martin Klammer's words, "beginning . . . in 1856, Whitman appears to retreat from his commitment to placing the experience of African Americans and slavery at the center of the poet's vision and concern."[17] And as Jason Stacy writes, the 1855 edition was characterized by "celebrations of African American dignity and antipathy toward the institution of slavery," while "the 1860 edition dealt with slavery in a surprisingly muted way."[18] Stacy and Klammer, along with Thomas and others, suggest that Whitman's fear about the Union's disintegration overrode his concern for the specific plight of African Americans. Thus, as Stacy asserts:

By complicating slavery's moral status, Whitman opened up troubling spaces between his empathy for African Americans, his enmity toward slavery, and his few romanticized scenes of the antebellum South. Perhaps in an attempt to make his book universally American on the eve of the Civil War, Whitman meant to offer a nuanced place for slavery. . . . Perhaps he thought that with enough words, *Leaves of Grass* could unite the nation, even if it meant muting his distaste for the South's slave economy. (xlvi-xlvii)

In particular, Stacy cites the following lines from "Chants Democratic," which seem to offer an aestheticized depiction of Southern plantation life: "In Virginia, the planter's son returning after a long absence, joyfully welcom'd and kiss'd by the aged mulatto nurse."[19] Klammer—rightly, I think—describes these lines as part of Whitman's 1860 "cheerful plantation romance" (114).

While I do not wish to offer apologetics for Whitman's less-than-militant treatment of the South and slavery in the 1860 edition, I propose a reading of the 1860 poem "Longings for Home" that views Whitman as engaged in more than "conciliatory discourse." Instead, I argue, the idea of this poem is to deconstruct the idyllic vision of Southern pastoral, exposing an elision of the evils of slavery from Southern poetic representations. Whitman's aim, then, is to underscore Southern hypocrisy.

Whitman's knowledge of the Southern pastoral tradition is evidenced in his familiarity with Simms's work. For example, Whitman wrote an 1847 review of Simms's *Views and Reviews*, and in a jotting makes reference to an 1857 article published on Simms in *The United States Magazine*.[20] It is likely Whitman was also cognizant of some of the poetry published in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, judging by the circulation of that periodical among a Northern readership. Indeed, as Eric Fettmann has noted, "despite its professed ambition to rally 'Southern talents and Southern public spirit around the drooping and well-nigh prostrate banner of Southern literature,' the *Messenger* never did seem to catch on among Southern readers, although it was widely read and respected by Northern writers."[21]

"Longings for Home" adopts a discourse similar to that of the Southern pastoral republican mode, as the poet speaks in the voice of a Southerner: "O Magnet-South! O glistening, perfumed South! My South!" (*LG* 1860, 389). The South in "Longings for Home" is a locus of sensuality—a "glistening, perfumed" feast for the senses. As Andrew Hudgins writes, "the South traditionally represents the sensuality of the body," and Whitman draws on this stereotype when he writes, "O quick mettle, rich blood, impulse, and love! Good and evil! O all dear to me!" (*LG* 1860, 389).[22] The notion that the South reconciles "good and evil"—that the two are somehow balanced in a harmonious totality—would appear to lend credence to those critics who see the poem as manifesting a conciliatory discourse. And indeed, much of "Longings for Home" takes the form of a Whitmanian catalogue of the natural splendors of the South. Whitman does not focus on any one particular region, but instead provides a panoramic survey of Southern geography, flora and fauna. Near the midpoint of the poem, however, there is a distinct shift in tone, when Whitman describes the Southern swampland. Whitman writes: "The piney odor and the gloom—the awful natural

stillness, (Here in these dense swamps the freebooter carries his gun, and the fugitive slave has his concealed hut;)" (*LG* 1860, 390). It is on these lines that I would like to concentrate, for I think they represent an attempt on Whitman's part to undercut the idealized Southern pastoral mood he set previously. The awful, gloomy motionlessness here is not tranquility. The swampland is "dense," in contrast to the wide-open spaces usually evoked in Southern pastoral. Whitman images the South as a place of tension in these lines. The gun-toting freebooter is in close proximity to the hiding slave. The term "freebooter" was often associated with illegal slave-smuggling, and therefore evokes the slave-catcher's endeavor—particularly resonant in the climate of the heated debates between Northerners and Southerners over the continued existence of the Fugitive Slave Act.[23]

The parentheses are also particularly significant. One could, of course, argue that, like most parentheses, they indicate an idea of lesser importance, or an irrelevant digression. However, I argue that the parentheses here, placed as they are near the middle of the poem, are used to signify something that the South has repressed. Whitman's use of the parenthesis is thus ironic. The fugitive slave, or more broadly, the problem of slavery, is precisely what is *not* an irrelevant digression, but rather, what lies at the heart of Southern identity. Southern pastoral poets often strove to keep blackness, and the moral quagmire of the peculiar institution, outside of Southern pastoral discourse, as Buchanan attempted to do in her verses. For Whitman, however, the figures of the freebooter and the fugitive slave represent what cannot be suppressed from representation. In fact, the freebooter and slave in the parenthesis are the only human figures in Whitman's entire panorama of the South: they are figured as the essence of the South's human geography, as a microcosm of Southern society.

A comparable use of parenthesis is apparent in Henry Timrod's famous poem "The Cotton Boll," a paean to Southern agrarian culture first published on September 3, 1860.[24] As the poem begins, Timrod's speaker relaxes in the shade of a pine tree, contemplating the titular cotton boll: "(By dusky fingers brought this morning here / And shown with boastful smiles)."[25] Contemplation of the boll's fibers unraveling leads the speaker to reflect that "A veil seems lifted, and for miles and miles / The landscape broadens on my sight" (96). The boll evokes the plantation that produced it, and more broadly, the South's "sacred fields of peace" which must be protected from the "crimson flood" of the impending Civil War (99). In Timrod's poem, the parenthesis contains the figure of a slave, but that slave is not imaged as a human being. Rather, the synecdoche of the "dusky fingers" and "boastful smiles" is meant to aestheticize the means of production, in no way jeopardizing

the idealized, pastoral vision the speaker has upon contemplating the cotton boll. The parenthesis in "The Cotton Boll" contains what appears an almost trifling observation. The hands and smiles delivering the cotton boll to the speaker are mere bodily fragments described as facilitating the speaker's reflections. Might Timrod's use of parenthesis in "The Cotton Boll" have been a response to Whitman, who himself was responding to the tradition of Southern pastoral poetry?

In any case, for Whitman the tension between the slave and the freebooter is extended onto the natural landscape of the poem as well. Thus, Whitman proceeds to present unsettling images of the swamp's fauna: "O the strange fascination of these half-known, half- impassable swamps, infested by reptiles, resounding with the bellow of the alligator, the sad noises of the night-owl and the wild-cat, and the whirr of the rattlesnake" (*LG* 1860, 390). Anthony Wilson argues that in these lines Whitman "extolled the charms of the specifically Southern swamp before the Civil War."[26] Evidently, this reading hinges on the "strange fascination" Whitman's speaker articulates with regard to the portentous murkiness of the swampland. However, to be fascinated by something is different from being charmed by it. Whitman's speaker appears mesmerized by the swamp's danger and mystery; but the images suggest a threatening, terrifying space near the center of a seemingly ideal, tranquil landscape. The dangers of the swampland amplify the sense of danger surrounding the fugitive slave—who must make his home in a den of potential predators. Although I would argue that Wilson's gloss misinterprets the swamp interlude in "Longings for Home," his book *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture* provides an appropriate theoretical lens through which Whitman's manipulation of the Southern swamp motif may be viewed. As Wilson notes, the swamp traditionally represented "the always present but always denied underside of the myth of pastoral Eden that defined the antebellum South" (ix).

In Wilson's assessment, the swamp represents that which may not be assimilated in the Southern pastoral mythos. Whereas the bucolic ideal depends on a vision of order, the swamp's murky identity epitomizes a resistance to organization and classification. As Wilson writes, "in the South . . . the swamp remained more than anything else a physical reminder of the barrier between the actual and the ideal, an obstacle to the creation of an idealized agrarian society" (xiii). Wilson delineates the way in which swamps have been represented in Southern writing from the antebellum period to the present day. As he shows, swampland was traditionally considered too moist for agricultural exploitation, and was thus outside the pastoral ideal of tamed nature. Whenever possible, farmers would reclaim swamps, turning them into arable fields. Yet tam-

ing the Southern swamps *in toto* proved unfeasible; they persisted as a physical reminder of undomesticated nature. In another sense, swamps connoted wildness for the white genteel imagination because of their associations with fugitive slaves and others living outside of the law. Yet swamps' characteristic quality as nature divorced from dominant cultural institutions held a very different valence for fugitives. In Tynes Cowan's words, "as the image of the slave in the swamp seared itself into the white mind (producing great anxiety even if mixed with a tinge of thrill), why couldn't the same image have promoted resistance, pride, and hope among the servile population?"[27] The variegated associations swamps held in the imaginations of antebellum Southerners—and Northern onlookers—denote swampland as a space of indeterminacy. The very definition of "swamp," as Wilson shows, is rather muddy. As John V. Dennis writes, "*swamp* is a word that resists precise definition. Sometimes defined as a tree-studded wetland and other times as a tract of wet, spongy land saturated and often partially or intermittently covered with water, a swamp is not always easily separated from a marsh."[28]

Whitman's poem plays with the ambiguity of the swamp motif.[29] His swamp is "half-known, half-impassible"—it is a space that resists easy characterization. For the swamp in Whitman's poem is a figure full of contradictions: seemingly extraneous, it is close to the center of the poet's imagined Southern homeland. His swamp represents both welcome home and terrifying wilderness, the strength of human resilience and the nadir of human (and animal) ravenousness. It is a miniature of all the speaker views as good and evil in the Southern landscape. Yet the dominant image of the swamp in "Longings for Home" is a foreboding one. Most importantly, the swamp represents something capable of undermining the rigid dichotomy Southern writers have set up between what they construct as civilization and savagery. In it, the putatively white speaker, who otherwise exalts Southernness in the poem, uses the term "freebooter," a term connoting rapaciousness and illicitness, to describe the only other presumably white figure in the poem. The freebooter's status as representative of the (white) South is ambiguous. Is Whitman suggesting that the freebooter is the epitome of what the white South represents? Or is he an outlier, an anomalous instantiation of savagery within an otherwise bucolic environment? The slave is an even more perplexing figure. He is both an outlaw ("fugitive") and the only representation in the poem of human domesticity. Yet he lives in a "hut" rather than a home, perhaps suggesting a degree of savagery, and his hut is "concealed." This last adjective is one of the swamp interlude's most semantically loaded words. (Is the concealment indicative of fugitive heroism, or is the slave figured as an offender?) If we read Whitman's speaker as an antebellum Southern pastoral poet,

then the slave should be seen as a lawbreaker. But if we read the text as a Northern subversion, then the slave is endowed with a heroic dimension. In any case, the slave is clearly the single most significant human figure in the poem, for he is the only one who unequivocally makes his home in the South. It is he who is also longing for home; though he has a dwelling place, it is a precarious one rather than a true domicile. Together, the freebooter and the slave are a disturbing pair—the opposite of the adhesive union Whitman envisaged.

It is important to note that poets of the Southern pastoral tradition did sometimes portray swamps in their verses, and that the swamplands in their poems also contrasted with the idyllic vision of the Southern landscape. However, in such poems—for example, Simms's 1838 "The Edge of the Swamp"—the swamp is generally figured as a space indicative of nature's—and escaped slaves'—supposed savagery. Unlike Whitman, Simms does not suggest the savagery of the slaveholding system. Instead, Simms draws a stark boundary between the nightmarish, forbidding vision of the swamp and the realm of Southern civilization. The denizens—both human and bestial—of Simms's idealized South steer clear of the swamp's degenerate terrain:

Wondering and vex'd, the pluméd citizen
Flies, with an hurried effort, to the shore,
Seeking his kindred flow'rs: —but seeks in vain—
Nothing of genial growth may there be seen,
Nothing of beautiful! Wild, ragged trees,
That look like felon specters—fetid shrubs,
That taint the gloomy atmosphere—dusk shades,
That gather, half a cloud, and half a fiend
In aspect, lurking on the swamp's wild edge,—
Gloom with their sternness and forbidding frowns
The general prospect. The sad butterfly,
Waving his lacker'd wings, darts quickly on,
And, by his free flight, counsels us to speed,
For better lodgings, and a scene more sweet,
Than these drear borders offer us to-night. (19-20)[30]

Simms's swamp is a hideout for fiendish fugitives and for savage flora and fauna, a space in which one shouldn't linger, physically or imaginatively. Yet the swamp described here is not difficult to avoid; one need only "speed / For better lodgings." Whereas Simms's swamp is an easily eluded monstrosity on the edge of more wholesome environs, Whitman places the swamp at the center of Southern geography and identity. Simms's swampland is a far cry from the images of picturesque rustic simplicity that characterize the other poems of his 1838 volume *Southern Passages and Pictures*—poems such as "Cottage Life," "Evening

by the Seashore," and "Morning in the Forest." In Wilson's words, "the swamp and the myth of the plantation South have always been at odds" (3). Near as the swamp's terrors are, they are kept safely behind the edges of Southern communal experience. Even Simms's "dusk shades"—if they are supposed to be runaway slaves—are not part of the Southern community, but rather demonic images of otherness. By contrast, "Longings for Home" inserts the swampland into the more scenic pastoral images of the South, accentuating the swamp's place within the larger Southern landscape, and emphasizing the slave's place within the Southern populace.

The multivalent evocation of the swampland in "Longings for Home" also distinguishes it from overtly abolitionist midcentury poems, which tend to celebrate the swamp as a refuge for fugitive slaves. For example, Longfellow's 1842 "The Slave in the Dismal Swamp" mounts a forceful critique of the economic and cultural system capable of exiling a human being to live, in Longfellow's words, "like a wild beast in his lair":

All things above were bright and fair,
  All things were glad and free;
Lithe squirrels darted here and there,
And wild birds filled the echoing air
  With songs of Liberty!

On him alone was the doom of pain,
  From the morning of his birth;
On him alone the curse of Cain
Fell, like a flail on the garnered grain,
  And struck him to the earth![31]

Whitman's poem has a very different aim—to invite a rereading of the Southern pastoral mythos, in its own terms, only to unravel that collective fiction through the image of the swamp. In "Longings for Home," the swamp is conceived as a murky, in-between space whose very impenetrability precludes straightforward interpretation. It is not a hideaway for fiendish fugitives (as Simms renders it).

After the swamp interlude in "Longings for Home," Whitman returns to pastoral imagery in the remainder of the poem, yet the verses ring ironic and hollow:

The mocking-bird, the American mimic, singing all the forenoon—singing through the moon-lit night,
The humming-bird, the wild-turkey, the raccoon, the opossum;
A Tennessee corn-field—the tall, graceful, long-leaved corn—slender, flapping, bright green, with tassels—with beautiful ears, each well-sheathed in its husk,

An Arkansas prairie—a sleeping lake, or still bayou;
O my heart! O tender and fierce pangs—I can stand them not—I will depart;
O to be a Virginian, where I grew up! O to be a Carolinian!
O longings irrepressible! O I will go back to old Tennessee, and never wander more!
(*LG* 1860, 390)

I read Whitman's lines not only as ironic, but as palimpsestic. While ostensibly written in the mold of Southern pastoral, they critique that tradition of verse-making. Whitman's poem is an aggressive resignification of the Southern pastoral mode. My understanding of "Longings for Home" is indebted to Silviano Santiago's injunction that the critic should "highlight the elements of the (second) work that establish its difference."[32] Although Santiago developed this approach in order to rethink the notion of European writers' influence on Latin American literature, I believe it is applicable to other kinds of writings in which the author is in some way "re-scripting" a precursor text. Santiago characterizes Latin-American writers' use of European texts as a technique (often involving parody or pastiche) for subverting the notion of European cultural supremacy. As he writes, "the second text organizes itself on the basis of its silent, treacherous meditation on the first, while the reader, now transformed into its author, labors to unearth the limitations, weaknesses, and gaps to be found in the original model" (33). I would argue that Whitman's poem may be thought of in similar terms, wherein the speaker assumes the guise of a Southerner only to subvert a Southern poetic convention. What could be taken as a parenthetical aside in Whitman's text actually deconstructs the original discourse, the pastoral ideal.

Thus, although Thomas suggests that "the only black person mentioned is carefully set in a picturesque context designed to counteract and neutralize the political significance of the description" (101), I would suggest that this parenthetical line is the single most crucial line of the poem. The paired and disconcerting figures of the slave and freebooter suggest that the troubling subject matter Southern poets have suppressed in their verses cannot be obscured and is, in fact, at the center of the South's collective psyche. Whitman brings into his verses the violence of the South. The poem treats the difficulty that Southern writers had in dealing with the obscenity of slavery. At the same time, Whitman endeavors not to make a banal spectacle of quotidian violence. His poem attempts not to attack Southern discourses on slavery directly, but to unravel their illusion of pastoral tranquility from within.

However, if Whitman sought to deconstruct Southern discourse in a way that would substantively move the Southern slaveholding establishment, he was mistaken. As Harold Aspiz notes, in July 1860 the *Southern Literary Messenger* reprinted "Longings for Home," caustically introduced by the journal's new editor, George Bagby, a humorist,

lecturer, and vociferous proponent of Southern secession (best remembered for his 1877 essay "The Old Virginia Gentleman," a celebration of antebellum Virginia plantation culture).[33] Bagby writes:

> The pantheism of Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson, pervades and pollutes the entire literature of the North. It is nowhere more apparent than in that clumsy romance, "The Marble Faun." It culminates in the spasmodic idiocy of Walt Whitman. The smart scribblers who compose the better part of the Northern literati, are all becoming infected with the new leprosy—Whitmansy. This latest "representative man" of the North has his imitators by the hundred, admirers by the thousand, and an organ—the slang-whanging paper called *The Saturday Press.* A specimen of the twangling-jack style of Whitman is given below. Take a pair of frog-legs, put a tongue to every toe of both legs, and place the legs under a galvanic battery—and you have the utterings of Whitman. In the following slosh ["Longings for Home"], Whitman says he "grew up" in Virginia. We should feel mean if this statement were anything else than a Whitmaniacal license, accent on the first vowel in license. Here is the sample of his obnubilate, incoherent, convulsive flub-drub.[34]

Bagby derides Whitman's style as utterly non-Southern, and as offensive in its prosodic eccentricity, its semantic ambiguity, and its plainly spurious pretense to genuine Southernness. But perhaps this is part of Whitman's intention—to use the preposterousness of his own adopted Southern identity to expose the sentimental Southern pastoral identity as a sham.

Twentieth-century critics have also critiqued "Longings for Home." For example, Hudgins calls the poem "one of Whitman's most inept, with little or nothing to recommend it"; he points to a "strained quality of Whitman's identification with the South." Hudgins views Whitman's praise of Manhattan as exuding a tone of effortlessness—compared to the "forced love of 'O Magnet-South.'" This "strained quality" may be due in part to the poet's relative lack of direct experience of the South (despite his three-month sojourn to New Orleans in 1848). Hudgins also suggests that the artificiality of Whitman's voice derives from his vision of "the South as exotic, alien, foreign—something he has not assimilated" (95). The lack of a natural-sounding tone may also be due to Whitman's working method. As C. Carroll Hollis has shown, Whitman drew much of the descriptive detail in the poem from a set of notes likely penned in 1857-1858, which he entitled "The States and Their Resources," and whose contents derived in large part, Hollis contends, from "the 1850 Census or some comparable work."[35] These notes were used as source material not only for "Longings for Home," but for other poems such as "Starting from Paumanok" and "Our Old Feuillage" (Hollis, 146). From the notes Whitman culled place names, recited in the sometimes strained manner to which Hudgins alludes. I contend that Whitman underscores precisely that artificiality of description. For

the poem suggests that Southern writers' descriptions of the South are, likewise, artificial and strained—that they are drawn not from observed fact but from a stock-house of ready images.

A more problematic point of inquiry concerns how the slave and freebooter in "Longings for Home" complicate our understanding of Whitman's thorny views on race and slavery. Although a sustained treatment of this topic is beyond the scope of the present essay, I will close with a few remarks on it. One must first acknowledge that, in the words of George Hutchinson and David Drews, "Whitman in person largely, though confusedly and idiosyncratically, internalized typical white racial attitudes of his time, place, and class."[36] As previously mentioned, I concur in large part with those critics who argue that Whitman's post-1855 verse often, in Martin Klammer's words, represented an "overall retrenchment" of his earlier sympathy for blacks (Klammer, 161:4n). And there is ample evidence of Whitman's later-life prejudice toward blacks, such as his 1888 remark to Horace Traubel that "the nigger, like the Injun, will be eliminated."[37] Both his verse and the recollections of those who knew him substantiate that Whitman was capable of articulating highly regressive views on race.

At the same time, two points are worth stressing. First, despite an undeniable and recurring racist dimension in Whitman's poems, prose, and recorded conversation, he was also able, in poems like "I Sing the Body Electric"—and also possibly in later poems like "Longings for Home"—to extend his language of sympathetic identification to embrace compassion for people of African descent. What else could explain why, in Hutchinson's and Drews's words, "African-American readers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries greatly admired Whitman's poetic treatment of their people; they did not find in *Leaves of Grass* the condescension and exoticism they found in virtually all other white literature with black characters" (568)?

Secondly, as Traubel suggests in his 1902 article "Walt Whitman as Both Radical and Conservative," it is a vain pursuit to attempt to isolate an essential ideology in Whitman; instead, "we have after all to go to the all-round Whitman and the book to get at Whitman's full proportions. And it would be hard to get rid of either the radicalism or conservatism, whether of the orbic person or the written scripture of that personality. . . . I have even heard him speak kindly of the Mormons, and every day as well do abstract justice to the negro."[38] As Traubel recalls, "Whitman would say whimsically that he knew he could be quoted against as well as for all the best ideas" (6). The mercurial nature of Whitman's political views does not expiate the unambiguously prejudiced opinions he was capable of expressing. However, I would argue that his poems—or sometimes sections of longer poems—need to be assessed individually

in terms of their ideological matrices. Any search for Whitman's "true" views on race is a moot one. As Klammer argues, "any real understanding of Whitman's writing about blacks and slavery must be understood in light of a close reading of the particular historical context at any given moment in Whitman's career" (162). Even more than this, I think critics must remember that Whitman was capable of voicing different ideological positions during any one period of his life. In 1860 he was voicing anti-slavery views alongside patently racist sentiments, "conciliatory discourse" alongside a critique of Southern social codes. Thus, although in "Chants Democratic" Whitman adopts a similar "Southern" perspective—intoning "O South! O longings for my dear home!"—the South, in that poem, possesses no insinuation of iniquity (*LG* 1860, 107).[39] The speaker simply yearns for the "soft and sunny airs" of his "dear home" (*LG* 1860, 107). In "Longings for Home," however, which appears in the same edition, the speaker's representation of the Southern swamp resounds very differently. Such is the inconsistency of this most frustratingly self-contradictory of American writers.

My aim in this essay has not been to re-script or recuperate Whitman's views toward the South or the institution of slavery in the years just preceding the Civil War. Instead, I hope to have shown that the poet's treatment of the South in the 1860 edition is more complex and critical than is often thought. Whitman's critique is embedded—to again borrow Santiago's phraseology—between "submission to the code and aggression, obedience and rebellion, assimilation and expression" (38). Although not an abolitionist text, "Longings for Home" does not adhere to the Southern pastoral tradition. Instead, Whitman's poem seeks to expose the fiction of the idealized Southern homeland, and to show that Southern pastoral writers—even those who never strayed geographically from the South—were longing for a home that never existed.

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NOTES

1 M. Wynn Thomas, *Transatlantic Connections: Whitman U.S., Whitman U.K.* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 101.

2 In Thomas's words, the poem offers a "paean of praise for the southern landscape, a striking example of what has . . . been termed Whitman's pre-war rhetoric of conciliation" (Thomas, 158).

3 Quoted in Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1. Leo Marx's description originally appears in his article "Pastoralism in America," *Ideology and Classic American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 45.

4 Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady: Time and Place in Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 6.

5 Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (Oxon: Routledge, 2004), 35.

6 Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

7 John M. Grammer, *Pastoral and Politics in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 2-3.

8 Laura Barge, "Changing Forms of the Pastoral in Southern Poetry," *The Southern Literary Journal* 26 (Fall 1993), 30.

9 Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 32.

10 Alexander Beaufort Meeks, *Songs and Poems of the South* (Mobile: S.H. Goetzel & Company, 1857), 243.

11 Masahiro Nakamura, *Visions of Order in William Gilmore Simms: Southern Conservatism and the Other American Romance* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 4.

12 William Gilmore Simms, *Southern Passages and Pictures* (New York: G. Adlard, 1838), 20.

13 As Anthony Wilson notes, an "air of nostalgia for a better, more noble society . . . permeates all of Simms's novels." See Anthony Wilson, *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 50.

14 As Greg Garrard notes, "we can set out three orientations of pastoral in terms of time: the *elegy* looks back to a vanished past with a sense of nostalgia; the *idyll* celebrates a bountiful present; the *utopia* looks forward to a redeemed future" (Garrard, 37).

15 Maria Buchanan, "Virginia: An Ode," *The Southern Literary Messenger* 29 (November 1859), 333.

16 "My Native Southern Land," *The Southern Literary Messenger* 30 (February 1860), 145.

17 Martin Klammer, *Whitman, Slavery, and the Emergence of Leaves of Grass* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 160.

18 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass, 1860: The 150th Anniversary Facsimile Edition*, ed. Jason Stacy (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), xlvi.

19 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Thayer & Eldridge, 1860), 162. Hereafter, *LG* 1860. Available on the *Walt Whitman Archive* (www.whitmanarchive.org).

20 Walt Whitman, *Notebooks and Unpublished Prose Manuscripts*, ed. Edward F. Grier (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 5:1732.

21 Eric Fettmann, "Southern Literary Messenger," *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War*, ed. David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 1833.

22 Andrew Hudgins, "Walt Whitman and the South," *The Southern Literary Journal* 15 (Fall 1982), 95.

23 As Ernest Obadele-Starks notes, in the mid-nineteenth century the term "freebooter" was synonymous with "filibuster," and described U.S. adventurers who "collaborated with American and foreign slave smugglers to preserve the foreign slave trade through the invasion and conquest of foreign lands." See Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Freebooters and Smugglers: The Foreign Slave Trade in the United States after 1808* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 145.

24 Walter Brian Cisco, *Henry Timrod: A Biography* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 69.

25 Henry Timrod, *The Collected Poems of Henry Timrod: A Variorum Edition*, ed. Edd Winfield Parks and Aileen Wells Parks (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1965), 95.

26 Anthony Wilson, *Shadow and Shelter: The Swamp in Southern Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), xv.

27 Tynes Cowan, "The Slave in the Swamp: Affects of Uncultivated Regions on Plantation Life," *Keep Your Head to the Sky: Interpreting African American Home Ground*, ed. Grey Gundaker (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 194.

28 John V. Dennis, *The Great Cypress Swamps* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 1.

29 M. Jimmie Killingsworth has also noted Whitman's invocation of the swamp as a space of ambiguity. As he notes in *Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004), the swamp setting of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" suggests the murky indefiniteness of the speaker's seemingly transformative vision. In Killingsworth's words, "the swamp presents a dangerous ecology, because in effect it is the place where the great continental island is half-dissolved in the sea beneath the ground, so the generating tension between self and other, between individual and collective, between life and death is erased (or held in suspension)" (121).

30 By 1853 Simms had significantly revised and expanded these concluding lines, intensifying the horror of the swamp:

Wondering and vex'd, the pluméd citizen
Flies with an eager terror to the banks,
Seeking more genial natures, —but in vain.
Here are no gardens such as he desires,
No innocent flowers of beauty, no delights
Of sweetness free from taint. The genial growth
He loves, finds here no harbor. Fetid shrubs,
That scent the gloomy atmosphere, offend
His pure patrician fancies. On the trees,
That look like felon spectres, he beholds
No blossoming beauties; and for smiling heavens,
That flutter his wings with breezes of pure balm,
He nothing sees but sadness—aspects dread,
That gather frowning, cloud and fiend in one,
As if in combat, fiercely to defend
Their empire from the intrusive wing and beam.
The example of the butterfly be ours.
He spreads his lacquer'd wings above the trees,
And speeds with free flight, warning us to seek

For a more genial home, and couch more sweet
Than these drear borders offer us to-night.

See William Gilmore Simms, *Poems: Descriptive, Dramatic, Legendary, and Contemplative* (New York: Redfield, 1853), 2:203.

31 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Complete Writings of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), 1:105.

32 Silviano Santiago, *The Space In-Between: Essays on Latin American Culture*, ed. Ana Lúcia Gazzola (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 31.

33 Harold Aspiz, "Whitman in *The Southern Literary Messenger*," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 1 (June 1983), 44.

34 George William Bagby, "Editor's Table," *The Southern Literary Messenger* 31 (July 1860), 74.

35 C. Carroll Hollis, "Names in *Leaves of Grass*," *Names* 5 (September 1957), 145.

36 George Hutchinson and David Drews, "Racial Attitudes," *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, ed. J. R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Garland, 1998), 567.

37 Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (various publishers, 1906-1996), 2:283. On the other hand, unraveling Whitman's antebellum thinking on race is more complex. For example, Klammer writes that "Whitman scholars are . . . familiar with his later prose writings and statements that appear, at times, to apologize for slavery and to disavow any humane commitment to slaves" (161). Yet the evidence Klammer cites of Whitman's late 1850s retreat from an earlier radicalism is drawn from articles Whitman supposedly wrote for the *Brooklyn Daily Times* during the period. These articles were collected in the 1932 volume *I Sit and Look Out: Editorials from the Brooklyn Daily Times*, edited by Emory Holloway and Vernolian Schwarz. However, as Jerome Loving has more recently pointed out, Whitman's authorship of many of these articles is questionable. Loving writes: "Since the publication of *I Sit and Look Out* . . . biographers have accepted [Holloway and Schwarz's] claim that Whitman was the editor of the paper, while generally ignoring the facts that (1) the empirical evidence for such a claim is almost nonexistent, and (2) most of the editorials are politically conservative at a time when Whitman was radicalizing American poetry in theme as well as manner." See Loving, *Walt Whitman: The Song of Himself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 227.

38 Horace Traubel, "Walt Whitman as Both Radical and Conservative," *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art* (July 12, 1902), 6. Traubel's article was published in response to an anonymously penned article, "Walt Whitman as a Conservative," which quotes Charles Eldridge's reminiscence that "Of the Negro race [Whitman] had a poor opinion." See "Walt Whitman as a Conservative," *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art* (June 7, 1902), 9.

39 Interestingly, there was such an insinuation in the manuscript version of "Chants Democratic." Whitman chose to excise the following passages, presumably in order to adopt a more conciliatory tone in that poem: "The slave approaching sulkily—he wears an iron necklace and prong—he has raw sores on his shoulders, / The runaway, steering his course by the north star—the pack of negro-dogs chained in couples pursuing." See *Whitman's Manuscripts: Leaves of Grass (1860): A Parallel Text*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 130.