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REVIEW-ESSAY

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New Explorations of Antebellum Southern Humor

The Frontier Roots of American Realism, by Gretchen Martin. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 136 pp. \$58.95 cloth.

Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South, by John Mayfield. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009. 173 pp. \$65.00 cloth.

THE COMING OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM SPAWNED RENEWED SCHOLARLY activity on the humor of the Old Southwest, evidenced by a flurry of new books on the subject. M. Thomas Inge and my *The Humor of the Old South* (Kentucky, 2001), a collection of essays, started this revival, followed by James H. Justus's magisterial *Fetching the Old Southwest: Humorous Writing from Longstreet to Twain* (Missouri, 2004), the most extensive and definitive treatment of the genre; my *The Legacy of Old Southwest Humor* (LSU, 2006), a collection of new essays by various scholars focusing on modern and contemporary beneficiaries, both from literature and popular culture; and a scholarly edition and recovery project, *C. M. Haile's "Pardon Jones" Letters: Old Southwest Humor from Antebellum Louisiana* (LSU, 2009), which I also edited. Two recent scholarly monographs—Gretchen Martin's *The Frontier Roots of American Realism* and John Mayfield's *Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South*—add significantly to our understanding of antebellum Southern humor.

A volume in Peter Lang Publishing's Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature Series, *The Frontier Roots of American Realism* reaffirms and provides a substantive testament to what Southern humor scholars have generally acknowledged for a long time: the humor of the Old South initiated the foundations for American literary realism, which would come into full flowering after the Civil War. Yet, unlike most others who have recognized in antebellum Southern humor the "roots" of realism, Martin fully develops her claims, examining numerous texts

in detail to show the extent of frontier humor's legacy to postbellum realism. As Martin points out, the editors of newspapers and periodicals, most notably William T. Porter of the *Spirit of the Times*, liberated writers, providing them an outlet for their humorous sketches and tales and encouraging them to "confront life directly . . . , [to] fly under the radar of the moral and secular guards of literary propriety" (3). Moreover, these sketches and tales of proto-realism opened a window to Southern yeoman culture by showcasing "the daily activities and social events of the 'plain folk,' thereby providing access into the language and values of rural communities and feature the plain folk of the antebellum South as a culture worthy of artistic treatment" (4). These humorists also realistically depicted elite Southern culture and the interaction of this society with the yeomen.

Like nearly every other scholar-critic to explore Southern frontier humor in recent years, Martin strongly disclaims Kenneth Lynn's specious thesis of *cordon sanitaire* (*Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*) which posited that the Southwestern humorists established a line or boundary between the Southern elite class and plain folk in their tales and sketches. Using findings from social-cultural historians such as Stephanie McCurry (*Masters of Small Worlds*), David Fischer (*Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America*), and Steven Hahn (*The Roots of Southern Populism*), Martin establishes reliable bases on which to formulate her argument that rather than having a strict demarcation between different social classes, the antebellum Southern social world was actually quite fluid and permeable. The proud yeoman class, Martin argues, "felt equally entitled to the same rights and privileges that the planter enjoyed, regardless of wealth and social status" (7).

Organizing her book into four solid chapters, the first three focusing on Longstreet, Henry Clay Lewis, and George Washington Harris, and the fourth on an array of lesser humorists—Thomas Bangs Thorpe (though usually regarded as a major figure in the genre), Alexander McNutt, Charles F. M. Noland, Hardin Taliaferro, Joseph Field, Thomas Kirkman, Philip January, John S. Robb, and John Winslow—Martin examines the realistic texture, techniques, and stylistics of some of their sketches and tales. Among the realistic strategies she highlights are verbal exchanges between characters (often of different social classes) that feature two levels of discourse, Standard English and the vernacular; actual activities, customs, attitudes, and values of both plain folk and

aristocrats, some of whom interact; and character disclosures, the latter the dominant realistic technique these humorists share. Disclosure, Martin notes, “reveals culture norms by what these characters explain or imply is socially appropriate or inappropriate behavior” (9). “The use of a narratee,” Martin further observes, “facilitates the technique of disclosure because characters are often depicted describing moments of defeat, fear, and foolish behavior to the narrator, either in conversation or epistolary form” (9). And rather than these characters’ open disclosures of sometimes unflattering, humiliating, or embarrassing situations or events, which create a self-deprecating impression, Martin states, “they are not clowning for the narrative lens . . . but are inviting others to laugh with them” (10).

In “Longstreet’s Georgia Plain Folk,” her first chapter, Martin credits Longstreet’s *Georgia Scenes* as laying the groundwork for the Southwest humor genre and planting seeds for the subsequent realistic movement. In enumerating Longstreet’s contribution, Martin argues and supports through a close reading of selected sketches from his book that he

observes the distinction between cavalier honor and backcountry honor, demonstrates the ideological clash between patriarchal authority and backcountry liberty . . . , examines the distinction between town and country notion in terms of gender . . . , [and] employs . . . “disclosure” to depict characters who show no hesitation in describing personal defeat, embarrassment, or foolish behavior. (16)

In addition, Longstreet shows respect for the social culture and mores of backcountry society. In employing two separate narrators, Abram Baldwin and Lyman Hall, both from rural origins, Longstreet shows how these now-genteel characters have their respective identities affected by contact with the plain folk, Baldwin’s seeing rural life as contributing to his development and accepting that he cannot be a part of the rural world anymore (cf. “The Dance”) and Hall’s being deceived by his romantic illusions (cf. “The Fox Hunt”). In one of the most telling sketches, “The ‘Charming Creature’ as a Wife,” Longstreet employs Baldwin to critique the deficiencies in Evelina (the charming creature), whose boarding school education and poor parental guidance have made her inept in so far as knowing how to manage and perform the daily domestic tasks expected of a wife. As Martin explains, this sketch is a “critique of the feminine ideal, particularly cultural practices that privilege the social skills of the elite over practical accomplishments”

(34). Other facets of backcountry social culture that Longstreet realistically treats and Martin closely examines include the “competitive ethos,” “ideal of fair play,” “ideal of self-reliance and mental adroitness,” (41), and strong family bonds in sketches such as “The Fight,” “The Gander Pulling,” “The Turn Out,” and “The Horse Swap.”

The second chapter, “Homespun Honor and Tales that Bear No Shame,” Martin examines various sketches featuring “masculine sociability” (the phrase is Stephanie McCurry’s) as exhibited through character interactions of men of different social classes who gather at such familiar sites of antebellum male camaraderie as campfires, grogeries, riverboats, and country stores; and explores the portrayal of backcountry women. For the former, Martin analyzes some of Alexander McNutt’s Jim and Chunkey sketches and Charles F. M. Noland’s sketches featuring Pete Whetstone and Dan Looney, and the congenial interaction of these yeoman characters with authority figures, an interaction that defies social deference on the part of the plain folk. In sketches such as these, the characters, yeoman and gentleman alike (both having a strong sense of honor), sometimes “appear foolish, illustrating the freedom to provide full disclosure because these moments do not affect their sense of integrity” (65). While Martin also argues that the realism of the frontier sketches “provided an opportunity to feature women in ways that deviate intensely from traditional ideals of femininity” (66), and the sketches “are representative of frontier experiences and demonstrate the proficiency of women in dealing with the practical, day-to-day concerns of life in rural and frontier communities” (67), this is not entirely accurate when applied to the Southern frontier humor genre. Some of the frontier sketches that feature women, such as Henry Clay Lewis’s “A Tight Race Considerin’” and tales featuring women of nearly mythic proportion in the Crockett Almanacs, are often greatly exaggerated and many of the antics and events are hyperbolic and sensationalized. Tales treating the sexuality of women, such as John Winslow’s Billy Warwick epistles, John Robb’s “Nettle Bottom Ball,” and Alexander McNutt’s “A Wedding in Mississippi” do, however, treat realistic concerns; in Robb’s sketch, for example, rural women’s obsession with trendy town attire is ridiculed, and McNutt’s sketch strongly implies that the Governor has had sexual relations with a rural woman and is the father of her son.

Chapters Three and Four focus on the two primary frontier humor precursors of realism: Henry Clay Lewis and George Washington Harris. Whereas Lewis, Martin observes, was forthright and deliberate in the sketches in *Odd Leaves from the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor*, “probing the psychological depth of his narrator [Madison Tensas]. . . [and] was able to free his characters from the corrupting grip of cultural romanticism” (99), Harris, in *Sut Lovingood Yarns*, through the dominant voice of an East Tennessee mountaineer Sut Lovingood, clearly favors the values and traditions of frontier society and privileges Sut’s figurative vernacular manner of self-expression over the genteel and eloquent language of his sounding board, George. Moreover, both Lewis and Harris show the reader class distinctions between country and town, showcasing “different patterns of behavior, codes of morality, and principles of honor and justice” (126). Both Lewis’s Madison Tensas and Harris’s Sut and George give the reader graphic views of life, warts and all. Old Dr. Tensas recounts his experiences in town as well as in the swamp retrospectively, and through him, as Martin astutely points out, Lewis discloses and deconstructs the “dichotomization of class, race, and gender [, showing them to be] misleading and fraught with inaccuracies, and further that cultural romanticism leads to discontentedness with reality, which fosters unrealistic notions and goals” (78). “[C]ommitted to the principle of full disclosure,” Tensas and some of the characters with whom he interacts, from both town and country, “expose themselves . . . [in] ridiculous, fearful, and embarrassing moments,” some of which turn out to be “foolish” and “shameful” (78, 79). For example, as Martin shows, Tensas sometimes reveals both himself and others in a self-deprecating manner, as in “Being Examined for My Degree” when he discloses the vanities and weaknesses of his medical school professors, which he manipulates for his own personal advantage. On other occasions, Tensas fully reveals his own shameful actions, as in “Stealing a Baby,” which Martin demonstrates realistically “illustrates the desperate measures students had to take due to the cultural aversion toward such scientific practices” (88) of securing cadavers for medical training. There are many other realistic disclosures in Lewis’s sketches such as Tensas’s ineptitude in “Cupping on the Sternum” and his misjudgment and misperception of a landlady when he and some of his fellow student-boarders are unsuccessful in attempting to frighten her and teach her a lesson in “The Curious Widow.” In the latter the reader

perceives how these medical students' practical joke goes awry when they act on the basis of an erroneous gender stereotype that women are supposed to be frightened by horrible sights.

The "comfortable familiarity" (106) between Sut Lovingood and George breaks down social hierarchies and allows Sut to disclose fully and graphically what he does, how he does it, and how it makes him feel. Harris's portrayal of Sut represents the pinnacle of realism in the humor of the Old Southwest genre and is the best extended example of backcountry, low-class white portraiture and freedom of vernacular voice in American literature before Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Sut's earthy and free-wheeling vernacular empowers him to describe his perceptions of his experiences with little or no restraint and to expose unsparingly the foolishness, hypocrisy, and deception of authority figures and characters who betray and/or humiliate him. The victims of Sut's vengeance (Martin calls this *lex talons*, a retaliatory payback) include preachers, sheriffs, women, and even his own father. Nor does Sut succumb to the familiar paradigm of sentimentalizing death. In "Well Dad's Dead," Martin argues "Sut . . . distances himself from the pressure to conduct himself according to cultural sentiments of appropriate mourning by announcing his disgust for attitudes toward a corpse that deviate from the regard toward the individual while alive, which he finds disingenuous and hypocritical" (114).

While *The Frontier Roots of American Realism* examines how the humor of the Old South provided some of the strategies and stylistics anticipating the postbellum realistic movement, John Mayfield's *Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South* explores the social functions of humor and its intersections with white Southern manhood and identity. A book in the New Perspectives on the History of the South Series, *Counterfeit Gentlemen* features John Pendleton Kennedy, Longstreet, Johnson Jones Hooper, Joseph Glover Baldwin, Thomas Bangs Thorp, Henry Clay Lewis, and G. W. Harris, who, in their novels, sketches, tales, or essays, represent various and often conflicted images of white Southern manhood and, as Mayfield puts it, "negotiated manhood in [their] special way" (xxi). In doing so, they presented this material to an audience of other men typically of the same social class as themselves; the principal content of this humor, as everybody who has read a sufficient sampling knows, is "centered on 'manly' pursuits. . .

[that] were competitive” (xxi). In drawing a general profile of these seven writers, Mayfield recognizes a common thread: they did not have good relationships with their fathers, none of whom was a particularly good role model in his son’s upbringing or were otherwise absent or separated from their sons. Though Mayfield reveals this connection in his introduction, he does not push his premise to the point of psychobiography. Rather, he cautiously raises several provocative questions: as products of seemingly dysfunctional families and lacking strong father figures in patriarchal culture, he wants to know, “what happens [to sons] when the patriarch is a fool, a lost soul, or a vague memory?” (xxiv). Without the example of the father as mentor and moral guide, where does his son find “alternative role models” (xxiv), especially of manhood? In the remainder of his book Mayfield turns to key biographical reference points in an attempt to provide intriguing explanations.

Early in *Counterfeit Gentlemen* Mayfield advances two potentially controversial and debatable claims likely to raise concerns among scholars of antebellum Southern humor. First is his inclusion of John Pendleton Kennedy as one of the seven writers (see above) who “set the benchmarks for Southern humor” (xx). Yet anyone knowledgeable of the humor of the Old South and of Kennedy’s best known work, *Swallow Barn* (1832), Mayfield’s focus text in the chapter on Kennedy, may question his inclusion. While many readers will find validity in Mayfield’s observations that “Kennedy outlined the Southern country gentleman . . . and that type of manhood depended upon a certain mix of localism, familial honor, and paternalism” (xxv), and that he “took the country gentleman—the manliest of men—tamed him, domesticated him, and feminized him” (7), they will be hard pressed to discover in *Swallow Barn* key elements and characteristics that have come to define the humor of the Old Southwest. Besides the fact that little in Kennedy’s novel resembles the brand of earthy humor and subversive subject matter associated with the antebellum Southern humor genre, Mayfield does mention the single violent incident Kennedy includes: Ned Hazard’s fight with and triumph over Miles Rutherford, the latter a man of defunct gentlemanly qualities, and sees this encounter as a “fairly bloodless indication of an edginess that was to turn much harder, both for young men and for Southern humor” (21). Secondly, unlike Martin in *Frontier Roots*, Mayfield, an historian, puts strong credence in the

long-discredited argument of Kenneth Lynn that the Southwestern humorists were mainly Whigs who abhorred the “democratization of taste and power in Jacksonian America” (xxi) and therefore created a *cordon sanitaire* between their gentlemanly characters and the uncouth plain folk. Virtually every humorist who wrote frontier humor (perhaps Joseph Glover Baldwin being the most notable exception) clearly admired the antics of the plain folk and celebrated their vernacular voices and unrestrained behavior.

Putting aside these two disclaimers, there is still much to be admired in Mayfield’s book. In his first chapter, on *Swallow Barn*, he persuasively argues that this novel “subverts the very concept of patrician manhood” (7) and shows how Frank Meriwether, the patriarch of Swallow Barn, represents an outmoded gentleman and therefore is not an admirable representative of white manliness. Nor is Ned Hazard, his heir apparent who lacks marketable skills and ambition, an exemplary model of manhood. The novel’s best exemplar of manly attributes, Mayfield claims, is the slave Abe, a “stout-hearted, ambiguous [young man] addicted to danger and risk—a black entrepreneur” (23). Yet the chapter on Abe ends indeterminately, since the reader has no way of actually knowing whether Abe and his fellow slaves died at sea in a rescue mission for which they volunteered. But if Abe and the other slaves escape rather than drown, as some critics have contended, then Abe may be perceived differently, as a shrewd trickster. Perhaps a better indication of *Swallow Barn*’s legacy to the Southern humorists who would begin emerging in the mid 1830s is the character type of the “courtroom showman” (16), like Toll Hedges, whose courtroom manner emphasized “style and masquerade” and who anticipates the kinds of lawyers that Baldwin would subsequently show in some of the sketches in *Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi* (1853). Mayfield concludes this chapter by declaring that in *Swallow Barn* Kennedy “fails at man-making” (24) and, therefore, that the novel provides no exemplary candidates of white manliness.

Like Martin, Mayfield devotes a chapter to Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, whose collection of frontier sketches, *Georgia Scenes*, is usually recognized as the book that provided the impetus for the Southern antebellum humor genre and popularized some of its principal features. Whereas Martin, in *Frontier Roots*, focuses on the realistic elements, Mayfield examines the conflicted views of manly identity

Longstreet creates, seeing the humorous incongruity that results from the clash between evangelical and masquerade cultures. Viewing *Georgia Scenes* as a psychobiography, a reflection of Longstreet's divided and conflicted self (he draws on the earlier work of James E. Kibler, Jr. and David Rachels), Mayfield notes that *Georgia Scenes* contains two narrators, "one prissy, one more flexible, as if the author were using his humor to negotiate a position between the gentleman he wanted to be and the antic boy he had once been" (26). Mayfield conjectures that "humor was [Longstreet's] way of compensating" for this conflict and designates him a "Georgia Yankee": "The Georgian in Longstreet's Georgia Yankee was fiercely parochial, staunchly defensive of the South, and keenly concerned with public presentation of self. The Yankee in him, however, gravitated toward restraint, economic independence, and an evangelical's sense of personal reform" (36). That neither side of Longstreet prevails may perhaps reflect the fluidity of culture and the ambivalence concerning what constitutes manliness. In many of the sketches in *Georgia Scenes*, Mayfield argues, Longstreet features various scripts of manliness or faux manliness, the latter a manifestation of masquerade culture. Deception, destabilization, and performative role-playing are prevalent in sketches such as "Georgia Theatrics," "The Character of a Native Georgian," "The Fight," and "The 'Charming Creature' as Wife"; and according to Mayfield, Longstreet deplored masquerade culture. In his final assessment of *Georgia Scenes*, Mayfield asserts that "no other book captured the fluid state of Southern masculinity so well or provided so many alternate models of manly behavior" (46).

In Chapter 3, "Counterfeit Presentments," Mayfield turns to the Deep South, a region, he notes, characterized by "constant motion where tradition had been supplanted by speculation and speculation had gone wild" (49). In Southern humor depicting this region and its people, the humorists—Hooper and Baldwin—"adopted the stance of the slightly astonished by-stander, amused by the wretched excesses around them but nervously trying to resolve some of the incongruities in their surroundings" (51). Manhood was destabilized and "fast thinking and shrewdness . . . were the new mark of manliness" as newcomers discovered the absence of restrictions in the regions of the lower South. Hooper's Simon Suggs, whose working ethic, "it's good to be shifty in a new country," employs "the rules of gentlemanly behavior as

instruments of the con” (55). Categorizing Suggs, a consummate performer who understands the frailties of human nature and who plays the deception game exceptionally well, the latter as a product of masquerade culture, Mayfield shows how others give Suggs identity. Moreover, Suggs, a backwoods picaro, masterfully sustains these imposed identities for his own personal gain or benefit.

In contrast to Longstreet and Hooper, Virginia-born Joseph Glover Baldwin “moved directly and personally into the action, making himself the butt of the joke” (62). And this refined Virginia gentleman even shows himself to be the “fool,” his actions reducing him “to comic helplessness” (62). The disreputable and self-serving lawyers (or “salesmen,” as Mayfield calls them) featured in Baldwin’s *Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi* (the “flush times” designating a market economy characterized by land speculation and the decline of gentleman figures) use the legal system as a “tool of commerce and development” (62).

Chapter 4, “Useful Alloys,” focuses on Thomas Bangs Thorpe, another outsider who migrated to the Gulf South to join the gentleman class. Fascinated with the masculine endeavor of field sports, Thorpe, Mayfield argues, “brought an outsider’s view to Southern masculinity” (68), his intent being to merge the frontier and civilization, “to use the landscape of the frontier South to fuse the purity of the savage and the nobility of the gentleman into a new creation . . . a ‘useful alloy’” (69). In a humorous vein, his attempt to accomplish this is best seen in “The Big Bear of Arkansas,” which is arguably, from a literary perspective, perhaps the most distinguished single text of antebellum Southern humor. Mayfield sees Jim Doggett, the central character, as more than a showman mirroring masquerade culture and a laughing stock who, while engaged in a bowel movement, trips over his pants when the great bear appears before him at this inopportune moment. But there is another side to Doggett, whom Mayfield perceptively points out possesses “qualities of patience, foresight, and . . . doggedness . . . , [qualities that] have . . . more of the market ethic than the sporting about them” (74). Jim is also an entrepreneur, Mayfield contends, who knows “how to stick with it, carry on, and take advantage of luck, even with [his] pants down” (74). By the end of “Big Bear,” Thorpe seems to be suggesting that in Jim Doggett the gentleman figure has been transformed into an incongruous amalgam of buffoon and entrepreneur, thereby diminishing

the image of the frontier gentlemen, reducing him, Mayfield explains, to a figure “not being so gentlemanly after all” (78). Thus Mayfield concludes: in Thorpe’s portrait of Doggett, the Southern gentleman has degenerated (and Thorpe regretted this), becoming a blend of “entrepreneur and . . . show-off (a con man and a salt-river roarer. . .) twisted into the role of planter and patriarch” (78). Predictably, Thorpe’s disillusionment was conveyed most revealingly in a serious novel, *The Master’s Home* (1854).

“Swamp Fevers,” Mayfield’s fifth chapter, examines Henry Clay Lewis, a writer whom Martin in *Frontier Roots* called a pioneer of psychological realism. In fact, Martin and Mayfield both read Lewis’s humorous sketches as psychobiography. In doing so, however, Mayfield sees Lewis and the issues he treats in *Odd Leaves in the Life of a Louisiana Swamp Doctor* in a different light: both “were conditioned by their Southern context and involved a Southern sense of manhood” (86). His only book, *Odd Leaves*, is confessional and, at the same time, “destabilizing,” a revealing disclosure of “a young man’s most interior record of coming of age” (87). Mayfield perceives that Lewis, as physician (not an esteemed or manly vocation in antebellum America),

rode the borderline between patrician and mechanic, between things that are fixed in place and those that can be fixed by reason and skill. This put him in a liminal zone between settled concepts of manly status and a new professionalism whose codes were more akin to market behavior than patrician ones. (86)

Being in this uncertain state created complications for Lewis, who was also troubled by the concomitant “patriarchal decay” that surrounded him and by his “preoccupation with death” (86). Lewis’s persona Madison Tensas, Mayfield observes, assumed the “pose of the ‘obsessive confessor,’” thereby freely exposing his own personal weaknesses and humiliations; such personal disclosures were uncharacteristic of Southern manhood (87). Like the other writers Mayfield discusses in *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, Lewis, through his autobiographical persona Madison Tensas, attempted to negotiate the ambivalent notion of what a man, also a physician, was supposed to be. In explaining Lewis’s own uneasiness and apprehension about his profession, Mayfield aptly states: “he exalts it as noble one moment and ridicules it the next, turns it into a game of barter and bluff, and makes himself a poet on one page and a con man the next” in *Odd Leaves* (92), a book both humorous and dark

that speaks “to the acute sense of anonymity and frustration that rootless young men must have felt on the fringes of Southern respectability” (xxvi).

In contrast to Martin, who finds in G. W. Harris’s *Sut Lovingood* sketches some of the seminal elements of realism, Mayfield perceives Harris to be the “last Old South humorist and the first of the New South” (xxvi) and aptly classifies *Sut* as the “antithesis of the gentleman” (106), that is, a character who “exists outside of respectability” (107). Harris himself, Mayfield points out, criticized evangelical as well as masquerade culture. Establishing Dostoevsky as an interesting contextual referent, Mayfield further posits that Harris underwent a “metamorphosis, [becoming] a Southern version of [the Russian novelist’s] *Underground Man*—a confessional, interiorized, and morally tormented critic” (xxvii). Bold and engaging, Mayfield develops his ideas credibly and creditably, seeing *Sut Lovingood* as an ambivalent character who sits “on the dividing line between good taste and bad habits, between freedom and restraint, between moral order and durn’d foolishness” (108). Even more so than Lewis’s *Madison Tensas*, *Sut* negates his shameful actions, often done in retaliation for some previous injustice or humiliation inflicted on him or on one of his friends. According to Mayfield, *Sut*’s “obsessive confessing liberates him from masquerade culture, [and] simultaneously gives him moral authority to criticize evangelical culture” (110). In adopting his role, *Sut* comes to see the Southern gentleman as defunct and humanity as basically depraved. From this perspective, *Sut* reports graphically and shamelessly many scripts of humiliation, his chief objects of attack being home, family, and church, as seen in “*Sut Lovingood’s Dad, Acting Horse*,” “*Rare Ripe Garden Seed*,” and “*Parson Bullen’s Lizards*.”

With the Civil War and its aftermath, the Old South and its ideals became the New South, and the versions of manhood advanced by Harris and the other humorists Mayfield features were supplanted by new images of Southern manhood—business entrepreneurs and men of industry—, the frontier being replaced by urban attitudes and priorities. According to Mayfield, these changes were not particularly funny, and humor, he notes, shifted from the “subversive” to the “nostalgic in the writers of local color.” Yet this observation is not quite true. Kathryn McKee persuasively argued in her 1996 dissertation, “*Writing in a Different Direction: Women Authors and the Tradition of Southwestern*

Humor, 1875-1910" (University of North Carolina) and in several subsequently published essays, that Southern female local colorists—Mary N. Murfree, Idora McClellan Moore, Sherwood Bonner, and Ruth McEnery Stuart—drew from the rich stylistic and narrative legacy of the humor of the Old South. And the re-emergence of the trickster figure in the Uncle Remus tales of Joel Chandler Harris and the conjure stories of Charles Waddell Chesnutt indicate that subversive humor was alive and well, even in the literature of local color.

Despite a few quibbles, *The Frontier Roots of American Realism* and *Counterfeit Gentlemen* are valuable contributions to the scholarship of antebellum Southern humor. While Martin engages the reader with compelling textual and contextual evidence to situate the seeds of the post-Civil War realistic movement in the antebellum frontier humor genre, accomplishing what no one before her has done so thoroughly and perceptively, Mayfield, partly covering some of the same ground as Martin, effectively combines biography, historiography, and insightful and cogent analysis in pursuing the fertile intersection of humor and the changing notion of male identity in the Old South. Illuminating, ably researched, and confidently and intelligently argued, both books are essential reading not only for students of Southern humor but also for those whose interests are the culture of the Old South and American studies.

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