

“Playing in the Dark” with Longstreet’s *Georgia Scenes* : Critical Reception and Reader Response to Treatments of Race and Gender

by Jessica Wegmann

As late as 1992, in the introduction to his edition of Longstreet’s 1835 *Georgia Scenes*, James E. Kibler, Jr. points to the paradox in how it is “somewhat puzzling that the scholarly world has taken over a century and a half to begin to appreciate the value of *Georgia Scenes*” when this work was so popular in its time and later so frequently anthologized. Kibler, like the great majority of his other critics, continues to treat Longstreet as a realist and hero, emphasizing his undistorted portrayal of the “truths of life,” describing how “the most striking realism . . . comes in making believable characters, so true to human nature that we know them immediately as being of our own experience.” He even goes so far as to say that “*Georgia Scenes* may lay claim to being a (if not *the*) seminal work of our modern literature and, as such, one of the truly important works of its generation” (vii-ix). Yet, while in some instances “striking realism” aptly describes Longstreet’s style and his influence indeed appears to have been pervasive, perhaps it is precisely this critical consideration of Longstreet as hero, as realist, and as conveyer of the “true” character of ante-bellum Georgia, without an in-depth discussion of the outright racism and sexism

in the background of the stories, that has often alienated readers.¹ While at first glance the book may appear to contain little discussion of race relations *per se*,² it does include, subtly submerged in the clever and entertaining wit of the tales, argument for the theories of a paternalistic, God-ordained slavery that Longstreet raised more overtly elsewhere.

Ordained a Methodist minister in 1839, Longstreet became increasingly incensed over the division of the Methodist Church on the slavery issue and later used his position as president of several colleges, as well as his ministry, to spread the view that the African American's proper place, according to the Bible (in particular Paul's Epistle to Timothy), was as subservient to whites. In an attempt to reach a Northern audience as well as a Southern one, he even had published two proslavery pamphlets, *Letters on the Epistle of Paul to Philemon, or the Connection of Apostolical Christianity with Slavery* and, anonymously, *A Voice from the South: Comprising Letters From Georgia to Massachusetts, and to the Southern States*. This same agenda he brings to many of the stories of *Georgia Scenes*, stories in which an African American or a white woman attempts to exert authority and, in each tale, using humor as a vehicle to trivialize, Longstreet subdues them, bringing all back under white patriarchal rule. The modern reader's discomfort with these stories (and the subsequent great wane in their popularity) derives not so much from their racist and sexist message, not so astonishing, after all, in pre-Civil War literature, but rather from the critical treatment of them as pure descriptive realism unaccompanied by discussion of the construction of their didacticism.³ In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison describes how when discussing race, "silence and evasion have historically ruled literary

¹Critics have taken an interest, on the other hand, in the function of socio-economic class and the problematic stereotypes of "poor white trash" in *Georgia Scenes*. See, for instance, Sylvia Jenkins Cook, Shields McIlwaine, Merrill Maguire Skaggs, and Robert D. Jacobs.

²To what extent race remains consigned to the background in the sketches becomes apparent in David Rachels' remark, "readers will notice that the word 'slave' appears only once in the book [and 'slaves' once as well], and it does not refer to African-American slavery. Despite the obvious importance of slavery to Georgia social life, Longstreet discusses it nowhere in *Georgia Scenes*" (xcvii).

³James B. Meriwether, in 1982, similarly notes how Longstreet is "both misunderstood and underrated today . . . because literary critics and literary historians have long tended, and today tend increasingly, to cast him in an inappropriate role" (351). However, Meriwether does not discuss the biases that steer Longstreet's didacticism and may alienate modern readers, but, quite on the contrary, argues that Longstreet should be perceived as a fictional realist and social historian rather than as a Southwestern humorist.

discourse," a matter "further complicated by the fact that the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture" (9-10). Morrison then explains how this very attitude leads to the loss of certain books from the canon:

It is just this concept of literary and scholarly moeurs (which functions smoothly in literary criticism, but neither makes nor receives credible claims in other disciplines) that has terminated the shelf life of some once extremely well-regarded American authors and blocked access to remarkable insights in their works (10).⁴

Only when criticism can get beyond the embarrassment of the racist, sexist perspective presented in Longstreet's stories, to a frank understanding of how its very constructedness betrays an attempt to sublimate differing ideologies contemporary to Longstreet's, can critics discover a space in which this literature may be more widely and more productively read and studied in academia.

Longstreet's specifically didactic purpose in treating race relations that at first glance appear to exist only as a background to the tales first becomes evident in the collection's second story, "The Dance." Dead Billy Porter, the violinist eulogized in this story, is the one black character in the whole collection portrayed as praiseworthy. William Snipes describes the narrator Baldwin here as "a reflective man . . . recalling with affection and respect the dead Negro fiddler" (279), and this certainly provides the impression Longstreet would like to give the reader of his portrayal of Baldwin. However, it is important to look at what constitutes "respect" and how its definition may vary with differing value systems.

Billy Porter is, according to the narrator, Baldwin, "a negro fellow of much harmless wit and humour." He comes immediately when he hears the white people require some music. For their entertainment, he jokes about his own drinking, and he calls himself by the rather demeaning endearment "*pretty Billy*" that the white "ladies" have given him. In fact, Billy is so entertaining that the

⁴Eric Lott, treating blackface minstrelsy prior to the Civil War, similarly notes a scholarly reluctance to deal in depth with racist material, but also stresses the importance of doing just this:

So officially repugnant now are the attitudes responsible for blackface joking that the tendency has been simply to condemn the attitudes themselves—a suspiciously respectable move, and an easy one at that—rather than to investigate the ways in which racist entertainment was once fun, and still is to much of the Caucasian population of the United States. It will hardly do to nod toward ideology as a sufficient explanation for such pleasure, as though it were inherently enjoyable to have one's prejudices confirmed, or indeed as though cultural products were mere reiterations of ideology (141-42).

squire finds it "impossible to give [Baldwin] his attention for half an hour after Billy arrived" (13). Apparently, Longstreet wishes to present this "Happy Ducky" or Sambo stereotype as the ideal for the African American in relation to whites since he goes out of his way to lavish Billy with praise the narrator no doubt considers sincere but that seems instead to the modern reader condescending:

Poor Billy! 'his harp is now hung upon the willow;' and I would not blush to offer a tear to his memory, for his name is associated with some of the happiest scenes of my life, and he sleeps with many a dear friend, who used to join me in provoking his wit and in laughing at his eccentricities (13).

That Baldwin then feels the need to finish this eulogy, praising the deceased only for his servitude and capacity to play the fool, with an apology for dwelling so much on the memory of a black man, further illuminates his anticipation of his contemporary reader's reaction—or, more precisely, of the reaction he would like to anticipate from his reader. Thus he constructs an assumed audience, one that would be critical of his stance on race relations as too liberal, without even acknowledging the possibility of anyone finding this eulogy degrading. The voice of those to whom he later will address his proslavery pamphlets is written out of existence in the argument of this story.

In another story from the collection, "The Character of a Native Georgian," Longstreet similarly writes into the text the appropriate response to the possibility of African-American equality (or of an African American being honored by whites) when Ned Brace pretends to understand an elaborate funeral procession as being for a black man.⁵ In this second example where a black man appears (or Ned Brace pretends he appears) to be in the position of being praised, again interestingly this occurs only when he is safely dead. Blackface minstrelsy as a comic form of entertainment starting in the 1830s (just around the time of Longstreet's first publication of his *Georgia Scenes*) provides an interesting analogy for how humor functions in this story. As with the minstrel, a white man adopting the characteristics of his fantasized perception of the black man or woman (and, as Lott demonstrates, thus playing with the taboos against miscegenation and homosexuality), the humor of Longstreet's great comic character, Ned Brace, comes from his subversion of traditional social values and roles. This subversion occurs in "The Character

⁵Discussing the character of Ned Brace, Kimball King mentions that "Ned's racism is, of course, one of his most unattractive traits to the modern reader" (67-68).

of a Native Georgian" when he overturns the codes of hospitality by refusing to join the fireside conversation in the inn and then ignores all table manners with a perfectly-feigned innocence, shockingly taking tea and coffee at the same time and mashing all his food up together before he eats it. All of his pranks, in fact, involve his acting in a way completely unsuitable to the role of the white, upper-class gentleman that he is. Ned plays upon the hierarchy of race in this story when, having joined "with great solemnity" a funeral procession to stand beside a very short man who provides a "ludicrously striking contrast" to his great height, Ned feigns deafness and pretends to hear incorrectly the man's identification of the dead person. Instead of "Mr. Noah Bills," he pretends to hear "Mrs. Noel's Bill" (a slave's name), and then, affecting great indignation that "white persons pay such respect to niggers in Savannah" (46-47), he stalks off.

Eric Lott in *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* explains that "the black mask offered a way to play with collective fears of a degraded and threatening—and male—Other while at the same time maintaining some symbolic control over them" (25). In "Character of a Native Georgian" too, Longstreet has Ned Brace, in a sense, place a "black mask" upon the deceased for the benefit of an audience, the members of the funeral procession, and thus helps them work through the "collective fears" of possible black authority by turning this image into a comic performance, not unlike a minstrel show. The mourners who hear the exchange between Ned Brace and the short man are overcome with laughter, a reaction demonstrating clearly how Longstreet presumes such a dramatic reversal of accepted roles with whites showing tribute and honor to a black man (even if it is supposedly only in the mind of one deluded man) should affect his reader. From their cultural perspective, this reversal of roles seems astonishing and ludicrous, but also comic because, and only because, the possibility of whites treating a black man with honor and respect occurs at a safe triple remove: only in the mind of one deluded man and after the black man is dead, supposedly disapproved of by this deluded man, and with Ned Brace not even truly deluded but only pretending to be as a joke. The fearful possibility of black equality is raised in a very safe context only to be safely dismissed as hysterically funny.

In "The Turf," while moralizing upon the vices associated with horse racing, Longstreet also comments in passing upon the theme of a benevolent subservience of slave to master, illustrating the foolishness of African Americans who attempt to take any other position in race relations.⁶ Although the older black groom leading the horse does not play the fool to cater to his

white audience like Billy Porter from "The Dance," Hall uses his distanced position as narrator to transform the black man's dignity into foolishness. Certainly Hall's words are not without irony when he describes the groom:

he was a gentleman who, upon that day at least, was to be approached only with the most profound respect. His step was martial, his eye looked directly forward, and his countenance plainly indicated that he had many deep things shut up in his brain, which the world had long been trying to pry into, in vain (153-54).

Hall does not consider the information he wishes to obtain from the man as any "thing" particularly "deep"; rather he emphasizes that he poses a question "which all who had read the morning's Chronicle could have answered" (154). The groom then also makes a grand production of keeping secret the name of his horse and likewise preventing the rider, Bill, from revealing it, all because of a superstition that such a revelation would bring bad luck. In this way, Hall hyperbolizes the groom's idea of his own importance and position in relation to whites, making him into a caricature and an amusing fool, only, unlike Billy Porter, unconscious of his buffoonery. A young African-American boy, however, immediately fills in to provide Hall with the horse's name, to (in Hall's words) "relieve" the white man (although not from "charity" but rather because of a desire to impress Hall with his knowledge). This proper subservient attitude Hall rewards by giving the boy "twelve and a half cents" (155). Yet, still Longstreet does not wish to depict the boy as a source of superior information and so undermines his authority by turning him into a caricature when, with ironical graveness, Hall terms the "pert little blackamoor" (154) his "Mentor" (155), when the boy mistakes the horse's name "Eclipse" for a derivative of "clip"—saying, "he look to me like he could clip it too" (155)—and when the reader discovers the dramatic irony that the boy, apparently so wise, has just placed his bet on the very horse whose owner has decided to throw the first race.

⁶Kimball King provides one of few passing references to race relations in this story: "'The Turf' also provides Hall with the opportunity to vent his paternalistic feelings about Negroes. 'Uppity' black people are as offensive to him as are whites who feel no responsibility toward the humbler Negroes. A certain plantation ideal of each man in his place is implied" (84). Similarly, John Donald Wade observes that this story provides "paradoxically an indication of Longstreet's immeasurable scorn of the negro 'out of his place' and his corresponding scorn of people who deny the negro the common rights of humanity" (*Augustus* 182). However, more frequently critics ignore completely the dynamics of race relations in this story.

Longstreet's careful construction of what he considers correct social hierarchy and exclusion of all other viewpoints continues in his two stories concerning women and proper domestic arrangements, "The 'Charming Creature' as a Wife" and "The Mother and Her Child." Here instruction on the place of African-American slaves, a crucial part of the household in Longstreet's society, becomes incorporated into his primary didactic purpose of teaching a lesson on the proper position of white women.⁷ Again in these stories critical treatment may have caused problems with reader reception. In passing, John Donald Wade perceptively addresses the misogyny of "The Charming Creature":

Incidentally it shows the extremely narrow range of life granted women in early Georgia. Clearly the thing one had to do was to be a fainting, thoughtless imbecile before marriage, and a sturdy, calculating phenomenon of wit and wisdom after marriage. If you could not do these things you were badly off indeed. If you failed of the first you got no husband, and if you failed of the second you ran your husband crazy. But this was the ideal. (*Augustus* 176).

Kenneth S. Lynn briefly notes the racism of "The 'Charming Creature,'" explaining, "the moral of this tall tale [is] abundantly clear. The Negro [is] an animal which had to be kept in close rein" (103). However, more frequently editors and critics neglect to raise these issues in discussion of the stories or simply precede them with an introduction depicting the whole collection as "realism." Snipes even endorses one of Longstreet's portrayals of women, describing the narrator Baldwin as "a kindly and perceptive man {for} his idealized portrait of his brother's wife in 'A [sic] 'Charming Creature' as a Wife'" (280). Similarly, in the 1964 anthology, *Humor of the Old Southwest* (a passage reprinted in the 1975 second edition and in the 1994 third edition) the editors completely ignore the misogyny and racism, explaining how "for the gentle reader there was the sentimentalism and didacticism in the serious narrative 'The Charming Creature as a Wife' and in the genteelly humorous 'The Mother and Her Child'" (Cohen and Dillingham, 1st and 2nd eds., 28; 3rd ed., 30). I would contend that the two impulses raised by Wade and Lynn (Longstreet's desire to present the proper place for African Americans, on the one hand, and for women, on the other) merge in "The 'Charming Creature'"

⁷John Mayfield discusses the misogyny throughout *Georgia Scenes*, remarking that "Longstreet's women are usually one-dimensional caricatures, utterly devoid of the subtleties of his men," citing passages portraying women in "The Dance" and "The Fight," as well as in "The Charming Creature" (582).

as well as in "The Mother and Her Child" and that any discussion or introduction of these two stories should address these aspects of Longstreet's didacticism.

In "The 'Charming Creature' as a Wife," Longstreet reveals the dangers at the same time both of the woman not allowing herself to be guided by her husband and of the slave not remaining under strict control of the master. The narrator Baldwin describes how George Baldwin (his nephew) falls for the charms of, and marries, the beautiful, overdressed, popular, and much admired, Miss Evelina Caroline Smith, daughter of "a wealthy, unlettered merchant, who, rather by good luck than good management, had amassed a fortune of about fifty thousand dollars" (84). However, this young woman, "pronounced" by society "*a charming creature*" (86), makes a terrible wife because (from George's and the narrator's perspective) "she could not see what was the use of her getting up so [early in the morning], just to set about doing nothing" with servants already doing all the housework (104); because she shockingly wishes to preserve her female friendships after her marriage; because she complains "I'm sick and tired of hearing you talk of 'my mother' this, and 'my mother' that" (103); and because she protests the caresses and familiarities of her husband's friends, who threaten her new position as wife. (One insists that his own daughter would have made her new husband a much better match and another suggests a "swap of wives"). Particularly, though, her husband objects to her treatment of the slaves, when she refuses to suspect them of stealing, when she does not feel the need to oversee their every move, and when she attempts to treat them with respect.

Yet, should Evelina's objections to her husband's way of life have appeared possibly relevant to a contemporary audience, Longstreet has already undermined them by discrediting Evelina's voice in advance. From the very opening of the story, he presents George's mother as the ideal woman, setting her up so that she will later function as a direct foil for Evelina. Baldwin describes in painstaking detail how George's mother arranges her domestic affairs: "she would tell you, with astonishing accuracy, how many pounds of cured bacon you might expect from a given weight of fresh pork; how many quarts of cream a given quantity of milk would yield, [etc.] . . ." (82-83), values that many modern readers may fail to see as the "idealized portrait" of a woman given by "a kindly and perceptive" narrator (Snipes 280). Baldwin then emphasizes how smoothly the relations between the races run when the ideal woman performs her appropriate domestic role with such care:

she scolded less and whipped less than any mistress of a family I ever saw. The reason is obvious. Everything under her care went on with

perfect system. To each servant was allotted his or her respective duties, and to each was assigned the time in which those duties were to be performed. . . . She laid no plans to detect her servants in theft, but she took great pains to convince them that they could not pilfer without detection. . . . After all this, she exposed her servants to as few temptations as possible. She never sent them to the larder unattended if she could help it; and never placed them under the watch of children. (83)

With these moral guidelines for female conduct and for the benevolent paternalistic control of slaves established so early on, Longstreet encourages the reader to see immediately Evelina's mistake later in the narrative when she insists upon giving aunt Clary the keys to the larder and even silences George, embarrassed that the slaves will be hurt by hearing his suspicions that they might steal (83).

Early in the story, Longstreet also has Baldwin explain at length the bad character of Evelina's parents: "To the poor [her father] was haughty, supercilious, and arrogant, and, not unfrequently, wantonly insolent; to the rich he was friendly, kind, or obsequious, as their purses equalled or overmeasured his own. His wife was even below himself in moral stature; proud, loquacious, silly" (84-85). He then details the great lengths to which the parents go to spoil their daughter and to make her "an accomplished hypocrite" (85). Throughout the courtship, narrator Baldwin dwells upon Evelina's falseness, her coquetry, her laziness, and her tricks in ensnaring the hardworking George. Thus while Evelina's words later in the story voice a valid perspective on race and gender relations (no doubt a perspective held by some of Longstreet's contemporaries), by the time Evelina is allowed to express her views in the narrative, Longstreet has already carefully discredited any authority she may otherwise have had. The opposition to Longstreet's argument, the perspective that would allow for more equality and respect between blacks and whites as well as between men and women, because it comes from the mouth of a "Charming Creature" already thus defined, is easily overturned by George's patriarchal logic. When Evelina wishes to fulfill her prior promise to a woman friend before fulfilling hers to George (to wait to get married until Morgiana could come to the wedding), this pact proves to be but the silly "school-girl pledge" George has termed it when she finds out that the friend already "rightly" gave in to her own husband and father and ignored the pledge she had made to Evelina. Yet, while the narrative expects Evelina to give up all other ties at her marriage without objection, Baldwin then greatly

condemns her when she interferes between George and his coarse friends and even when she demands to take precedence over his horse (94).

Moreover, Longstreet constructs the debate itself between husband and wife over the treatment of slaves with its didactic purpose in mind: George has a logical answer to contradict every point his wife makes, and the story sets up her dialogue and actions only so that they can be taken apart. When she defends her calling Clary "aunt" and her treating slaves with kindness by explaining how she "can't see any great harm in treating aged people with respect, even though their skins are black," George reminds her of her cold treatment of Mr. Dawson (George's friend who criticized Evelina and insisted his own daughter would have been a better wife) who George "should think was entitled to as much respect as an infernal black wench." (104). From the time Evelina first gives aunt Clary the keys to the larder, George gets the last words with, "Very well . . . we'll see," words that Longstreet then validates when the narrative progresses with meals served improperly cooked, when the servants do, indeed, appear to be stealing, and, in the end, George dies, leaving his wife an impoverished widow, all because, the story's last line tells us, she was a "Charming Creature."

Just as in "The 'Charming Creature' as a Wife," in "The Mother and her Child" happy paternalistic slavery and harmony cannot prevail with the woman in charge until the father of the family takes control and sagaciously intervenes. Baldwin's supposed purpose he describes as to outline "whence comes the gibberish which is almost invariably used by mothers and nurses to infants?"; however, he never even begins to probe the provenance of this adult "baby-talk." Rather, the humor of the scene, as Snipes rightly points out, comes in the contrast (and quick alternation back and forth) between the mother, Mrs. Slang's, affectionate "gibberish" to the baby, and the angry impatience and profanity in her normal speech when she addresses the slave, Rose (Snipes 286). Mrs. Slang too it appears could learn a lesson from George Baldwin's mother, repository of all feminine virtue, in "The 'Charming Creature.'" She cannot even discover what troubles her own child so she impatiently blames Rose, beating her out of frustration, with the beatings also disturbingly portrayed as slapstick comic overreactions on the part of Rose, who rushes about trying to avoid the blows before they come. Thus the benevolent master/servant relationship is again overturned because of Mrs. Slang's lack of ability in regulating domestic affairs. After Mrs. Slang has expended a whole three pages in sweet "gibberish" alternating with violence and profanity, without moving one step closer to the discovery of her child's malaise, her husband steps in. With calm, patriarchal logic, he

conducts an examination of the child from head to foot and instantly discovers and resolves the problem: a feather in the child's ear that causes it to cry. His authority immediately restores the peace of the household, including the kind and paternalistic ideal master/slave relationship Longstreet advocates since "the Cause removed, the child soon changed its tears to smiles, greatly to the delight of all, and to none more than to Rose" (133).

With Longstreet's manipulation of reader response and specific didactic purpose unacknowledged, critics, students, and teachers may feel uncomfortable studying these stories, especially with descriptions such as that of "The 'Charming Creature' as a Wife" as a "serious narrative" full of "sentimentalism." Likewise, they may find the humor of "The Mother and Her Child" anything but "genteel" (Cohen and Dillingham, 3rd ed., 30). With African-American characters in the background of his stories, Longstreet presents his view on the proper position of white over black in "The Dance"; raises only to dismiss the possibility of black equality in "The Character of a Native Georgian" and "The Turf"; and belittles the authority of both African Americans and of white women in "The 'Charming Creature' as a Wife" and "The Mother and Her Child," showing how when either wife or slave attempts to subvert the hierarchy of white male superiority, all lose and become miserable. Yet, on account of its wit, humor, and distinct regional style, *Georgia Scenes* was an extraordinarily popular book, providing Longstreet with a much larger audience for his racist views than did his two proslavery pamphlets. Kibler describes how quickly the 1835 edition of 3950 sold, leading to a second New York Harper edition in 1840, of which Kibler explains, "the work was so successful that reprints of this edition appeared annually until 1860 and then about every four years from 1870 to 1897" (215).⁸ Greatly influential on a number of later writers, including Faulkner and Twain, Longstreet even came to be considered a regional hero, as evinced by his inclusion in Howard Odum's 1925 book *Southern Pioneers*, along with such other figures as Woodrow Wilson and, ironically, Booker T. Washington.⁹ Wade, author of the laudatory essay on him in this book, writes of his affiliation with all Americans and with Southerners in particular, "he was of us, for us, with us" (119). Individual stories have also been frequently anthologized. V. L. O. Chittick, in 1946, explains that *Georgia Scenes* is "of all the tall tale volumes that are the work of a single author . . . the

⁸See also King on the enormous popularity of *Georgia Scenes*. King explains, "the immediate success that followed the publication of *Georgia Scenes* far exceeded the author's expectations of popularity and initiated a series of literary influences that have continued to the present day" (91).

only one still in considerable demand" (310).

However, publication and readership has dropped off significantly, and (until quite recently) increasingly, since the turn of the century, with *Georgia Scenes* out of print entirely from 1897 until 1957. Kibler's introduction precedes "a photo-offset of the corrupt Harper's text of 1840," the only published edition other than the original one of 1835, and Kibler comments upon the great need for a new edition of this text, so corrupt in both its editions (216).¹⁰ Moreover, most recent anthologies, while they continue to include generally one or two sketches from *Georgia Scenes*, tend to avoid the Longstreet stories dealing with race and gender altogether.¹¹ This selection may result, as Keith Newlin contends, in part from the mistaken interest in Longstreet solely as Southwestern humorist. Newlin lists "Georgia Theatrics," "The Fight," "The Gander Pulling," "The Horse Swap," and "The Character of a Native Georgian" as subject of criticism and standard choice for anthologies, claiming this popularity arises from their similarity "to subsequent frontier sketches" (21). David Rachels further suggests that the popularity of the sketches narrated by Hall (generally focusing on men) over those narrated by Baldwin (focusing on women) demonstrates how for many critics "only the masculine half of early Georgia has been

¹⁰Robert B. Downs also includes *Georgia Scenes* as one of only five novels (all others are non-fiction works) in his 1977 *Books that Changed the South*, commenting that "the books selected for discussion and critical analysis were chosen for their historical effect" (xiii). Downs picks a number of works discussing race relations and describes race as "a tragic theme running through the history of the South for three hundred fifty years" (xiv), but he does not discuss how this theme functions in *Georgia Scenes*, no doubt because Longstreet's treatments of race are more subtle and in the background than they are in many of the other works Downs treats. Yet, might not their very subtlety render them more powerful where the reader does not expect them, but looks instead only for comic amusement?

¹¹Rachels' 1996 dissertation, currently forthcoming from the University of Georgia Press as *Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's Georgia Scenes Completed: A Scholarly Text*, provides this greatly needed new critical edition, as well as a table outlining the publication of *Georgia Scenes* (cxxxii).

¹²For instance, editors of the 1994 Norton Anthology present Longstreet as an early realist and chose "The Horse Swap," a story influential on later writers (and particularly important as a source for a passage in Faulkner's *The Hamlet*), and the interesting "A Sage Conversation," a story in which the idea of homosexuality is raised but evaded (since the purpose of the story becomes only to solve the riddle). In this last sketch, Ned Brace plays a trick on some older women by mentioning in passing two men who are "married," live together, and have children, and then eavesdrops with narrator Baldwin to hear how the women rationalize this phenomenon.

worth remembering" (lxxxv).¹² Because of their domestic focus and setting, the stories concerning women, generally also, of necessity, include slaves as characters as well. Could not, then, the avoidance of these tales result also in part from the discomfort of critics (and perhaps also of later authors seeking sources for their writing) with humor used as a vehicle for racist and sexist portrayals?

Because Longstreet had in mind when it came to race and gender the explicit purpose of eliminating from the stories the possibility of the very perspective on these issues that has now come to be dominant, it is particularly important that critics, teachers, editors, and anthologizers address directly how he constructed the narratives to argue his position on race and gender. Perhaps, in some regards Longstreet's humor does reveal, as Kibler and other critics would have it, the "truths of life." Yet, if characters such as the two narrators, Baldwin and Hall, are indeed so believable, "so true to human nature that we know them immediately as being of our own experience," modern readers may be disturbed rather than delighted at the similarity. Certainly we may wish to presume that the depictions of Billy Porter, the foolish blacks of "The Turf," Evelina, George's mother, the thieving slaves of "The 'Charming Creature,'" Mrs. Slang, and Rose reflect Longstreet's particular didactic agenda rather than some neutral descriptive realism.¹³

The American Tradition (1990) likewise provides "The Horse Swap," and George McMichael's *MacMillan Anthology of American Literature* (1989) provides "The Fight," both typical choices for anthologies. Cleanth Brooks's *American Literature: The Makers and the Making* (1973) includes the less common "The Gander Pulling." *Humor of the Old Southwest*, discussed above for its remarks on "The 'Charming Creature' as a Wife" and "The Mother and Her Child," does not choose to include these two stories either, but selects instead "The Horse Swap," "The Fight," and "The Shooting Match."

¹²See Rachels for a more thorough discussion of reasons given by critics for the popularity of certain sketches over others (lxxxiv-lxxxvi).

¹³An earlier version of this paper was read at the *Society for the Study of Southern Literature 1996 Conference*. Richmond, Virginia, 12 Apr. 1996.

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