

“The Wonderful Works of Omnipotency” T. Addison Richards and the Aura of the Romantic Southern Landscape

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A prolific author, Thomas Addison Richards (1820-1900) employed a highly effusive vocabulary in his descriptions of the American South. Influenced by literary and pictorial Romanticism, Richards promoted the region's landscape through both text and image, an intersection of literature and art that would be a recurring theme throughout his professional career. In the years between 1842 and 1857, Richards issued at least five major volumes, all of which sought to elevate the status of southern scenery. Notable among these is *Georgia Illustrated* (Figure 1), published by Richards in 1842 in collaboration with his brother, William; *The Orion*, a monthly periodical published briefly between 1842 and 1844; and, in 1857, *Appleton's Illustrated Handbook of American Travel* (Figures 2 and 3)—the nation's first comprehensive travel guide.¹

In nearly all of his literary endeavors, Richards articulated a passion for the southern landscape. From 1835 to 1844, while living in the South, Richards often escaped to the northern counties of Georgia to engage in what he referred to as his “search for the picturesque.”² From these excursions, he acquired an intimate knowledge of the region's natural landmarks—from its picturesque mountains and waterfalls to its serene lakes, peaceful rivers, and rolling valleys.

Richards's travels contributed significantly to his vision as author and artist. Upon returning from his sketching trips, he would enlist specific landmarks as the focal points for his books and essays. In many instances, Richards's travels throughout the South contributed to the vocabulary—both visual and verbal—with which he sought to romanticize the region.

In his introduction to *Appleton's Illustrated Hand-Book* (1857), Richards outlines both the physical and psychological benefits of travel.³ He was, however, hardly the first American artist or writer to equate nature and well-being. As early as the 1820s, Americans were beginning to recognize the benefits of landscape tourism. Hastened by revolutionary modes of transportation—namely the steamboat, canals and, in the 1830s, the railroad—tourism was the logical consequence of an increasingly consumer-oriented culture. It evolved into an important recreational activity that allowed middle-class Americans to transcend the anxieties and social restrictions of everyday life.⁴ Through his contributions to landscape literature, Richards not only promoted travel but also provided a visual and verbal surrogate for actual tourism.

Beyond its capacity for diversion, tourism provided the means by which America would invent its cultural identity.⁵ Coinciding with this growth in the tourist industry, especially in the Northeast, was an increase in the proliferation of landscape literature and landscape imagery. Authors and artists would self-consciously participate in this construction of American culture, praising such sites as Mount Holyoke, Mount Washington, the Catskill Mountains, and Niagara Falls as so-called “attractions.”⁶ Literature, in the form of Romantic narratives by authors such as Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, and James Fenimore Cooper and imagery, in the form of Hudson River School landscape paintings, both endorsed and promoted tourism in the North.⁷

According to James T. Callow, art and literature often overlapped in its promotion of the natural landscape. In *Kin-*

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¹ Thomas Addison Richards, *Tallulah and Jocassee, or, Romances of Southern Landscape and Other Tales* (Charleston: Walker, Richards & Co., 1852); *The Romance of American Landscape* (New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1854); *Appleton's Illustrated Hand-Book of American Travel* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1857); William Carey Richards and T. Addison Richards, *Georgia Illustrated, In a Series of Views Embracing Natural Scenery and Public Edifices* (Penfield, Georgia: W. & W. C. Richards, 1842); William Carey Richards, ed., and T. Addison Richards, *The Orion* (Penfield, Georgia: William Richards, 1842-1844).

² Thomas Addison Richards, “The Fine Arts: Painting,” *Augusta Mirror* 2 (December 28, 1839) 82.

³ Richards, *Hand-Book*, vi.

⁴ John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth-Century* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989) 6.

⁵ According to John Sears, the eighteenth-century aesthetic principles of the beautiful, sublime, and picturesque as well as the works of Romantic writers Wordsworth, Scott, and Byron, had “identified culture and landscape so closely with each other that they seemed almost identical.” Sears 3-5.

⁶ Alan Wallach, “Making a Picture of Mount Holyoke,” *American Iconology*, ed. David C. Miller (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993) 81.

⁷ In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the term *Knickerbocker* came to signify almost any author working in New York.

dred Spirits, his seminal text on the subject, he ventures that “[authors] and... painters frequently saw nature through each other’s eyes and sometimes forgot to distinguish between the pen and the brush.”⁸ Using seemingly analogous methods, authors and artists proclaimed nature’s religious, therapeutic, and didactic values. Motivated by nationalism and romanticism, authors and artists promoted the landscape as an authentic form of recreation.⁹

Northern developments in landscape tourism—perpetuated through Romantic literature and glorified depictions of rural scenery—present a stark contrast to similar developments in the South. In the antebellum period, when the majority of magazine articles and their accompanying illustrations focused almost solely on the northern landscape, Richards was one of the few painters who aggressively promoted southern subjects.¹⁰ In his writings, Richards described the southern landscape using an ostensibly romantic vocabulary—that is sentimental, praiseworthy, and highly visual. In his articles, essays, and short stories, he retained the expressive language of Bryant, Irving, and Cooper; however, in terms of content, he concentrated almost solely on southern history, southern traditions, and above all, southern scenery. He adopted a writing style that promoted southern locales as worthy and attractive tourist destinations, while, simultaneously, entreating a broad demographic of readers.

At a very early age, Richards strove to give “clearer definition to a specifically Southern identity.”¹¹ The reasons for Richards’s affections for the South are many, though it is obvious that through his essays, travelogues and drawings from the 1840s and 1850s, he contributed to a growing awareness—in both the North and the South—that the South (and Georgia especially) was a unique place, well-deserving of the attention of authors, artists, and tourists.

In an 1853 essay aptly titled “Landscape of the South,” Richards reiterated a theme established eleven years earlier in *Georgia Illustrated*—when he, along with his brother, first attempted to bring Georgia, and the entire South, into the national eye. With baroque language, Richards affirmed the article’s objective—to promote southern scenery through art and literature. He laments that:

...little has been said, either in picture or story, of the natural scenery of the Southern States; so inadequately is its beauty known

abroad or appreciated at home. This ignorance is not likely to be enlightened by the reports of tourists led hastily by business errands over highways which happen for the most part to traverse the least interesting regions...neither will the indifference pass away in the censurable blindness which overlooks the near in its reverence for the remote.¹²

In addition to praising the beauty of the southern landscape, Richards seems to reproach contemporary authors and artists for neglecting the region.¹³ *Georgia Illustrated*, then, was an attempt to instruct readers—who might be prospective tourists—as well as colleagues on not only the singularity of the South but also its potential as a subject for books and paintings.

Thus, in the nineteenth century, artists—perhaps to an even greater extent than authors—turned their attention towards landscape. The southern region, though replete with natural landmarks, had heretofore been entirely disregarded or at the very best casually overlooked by northern authors and artists.¹⁴ In an article from December 1858, the editor of the New York-based *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* spoke of these underrepresented areas of America. He advised that after having focused for so long on the “White Mountains, the Hudson [River], Lake George, the Catskills, [and] the St. Lawrence [River],” American artists should redirect their sights and their brushes to

...the “hills” of Tennessee, South Carolina, Virginia, and Ohio—...all these remain almost strangers to us, chiefly because our painters have not made them subjects of pious study, and our authors have not sung their praises. We shall not know our country until these recognized interpreters reveal to us the excellence of our native possessions.¹⁵

O. J. Victor, the author of this excerpt, recalls Richards’s own endeavors, in the early 1840s, to promote the southern landscape and to encourage fellow authors and artists to make the South the subject of pious study. The article, written sixteen years after the publication of *Georgia Illustrated* and the first issue of *The Orion*, similarly concentrates on the southern

⁸ James T. Callow, *Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807-1855* (Chapel Hill: The U of NC Press, 1967) 145.

⁹ Wallach 81.

¹⁰ Angela Miller, *Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993) 235.

¹¹ Bruce Chambers, *Art and Artists of the South: The Robert P. Coggins Collection* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1984) 13.

¹² Thomas Addison Richards, “Landscape of the South,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 6 (May 1853): 721.

¹³ One interesting exception to this is the wealth of abolitionist literature produced in the 1850s by northern authors. Of particular relevance to this paper is Frederick Law Olmsted’s *The Slave States* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1959). Composed as a travel narrative, this text follows the author’s excursions throughout the South in the 1850s. It is an informative source on the manners and customs of the southern states, supplemented by Olmsted’s own observations and opinions on slavery.

¹⁴ In the antebellum period, the so-called “Old South” was comprised of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas.

¹⁵ O. J. Victor, ed., “Character in Scenery: Its Relation to the National Mind,” *Cosmopolitan Art Journal* 3 (December 1858): 9.

United States, though it does contain a curious omission. Victor peculiarly fails to note the state of Georgia in his enumeration of the country’s often overlooked regions. Perhaps Richards, a renowned apologist for the South by the late 1850s, had already carved out a niche in both describing and depicting the natural landmarks of his adopted home.

By the late 1850s, Richards had written of the picturesque qualities of the Georgia landscape numerous times. Through his writings and illustrations, Richards attempted to cultivate an appreciation for the South and for Georgia especially. Employing natural scenery as the distinctive elements of his drawings, books and essays, Richards introduced Georgia into the mainstream discourses on landscape tourism and Romanticism in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Richards’s allegiance to the South and his interest in promoting the southern landscape would fuel his professional ambitions for the next fifteen years.

In March 1842, while living in Penfield, Georgia, the Richards brothers published the second of their major literary collaborations. Issued monthly, *The Orion* magazine followed in the tradition of combining text and image as well as in drawing attention to the southern landscape (Figure 4).¹⁶ Richards’s illustrations for *The Orion* were engraved using the latest in reproductive technology, which in turn bestowed a certain cultural sophistication upon the otherwise rural outpost of Penfield. The scope and literary character of *The Orion* were expressly stated in recurring advertisements for the magazine, revealing the overall mission of the periodical (Figures 5 and 6). In the words of William Carey Richards, the artist’s brother, the overriding purpose of the magazine was to advance and refine “the intellectual taste and habit in the South.”¹⁷ Therefore, at the same time that Thomas Addison Richards was refining his own literary style, *The Orion* was attempting to enhance the intellectual culture of the South and the intellectual character of its mainly southern audience.

Throughout *The Orion*’s brief term of publication, Richards contributed several original works of art and literature. In addition to several serialized works of prose, he supplied tasteful depictions of southern landmarks. One of the highlights of the magazine, illustrations were included from the inaugural issue, for which Richards composed a sympathetic version of *Tallulah Falls* (Figure 7).¹⁸

Located in the mountains of northeast Georgia, Tallulah Falls was a favorite subject of Richards. In this, his very first embellishment for *The Orion*, the falls occupy a large portion of the picture plane; centrally located, they flow diagonally from left to right and are flanked on either side by trees and cliffs. The former, jutting out above the falls and to the left,

are reminiscent of Claudian framing devices. Both, however, serve to stabilize the composition, forming a parenthetical enclosure around the falls. Ultimately, these elements serve both to frame and highlight Tallulah Falls, certainly the image’s most noteworthy feature, so that the falls appear to emerge from a background of atmospheric haze; behind them, water and landscape coalesce into a picturesque vista.

In the foreground of the picture stand two Native Americans, a male and female, the former drawing back his bow and the latter kneeling in quiet observation. The function of these figures is twofold: they serve as demarcations of scale—that is, they emphasize the comparative grandeur of the falls amid the landscape—and, appropriately for a region steeped in Native American folklore, they reinforce the romantic connotations attached to the landmark. Indeed, as a form of natural theatre, encounters between tourists and Native Americans surely offered an exotic and thrilling counterpoint to an otherwise innocuous recreational activity. Moreover, their leisurely comportment bespeaks a peaceful coexistence between man and nature, and we, as witnesses of the scene, are summoned to partake in the multi-sensory experience the falls afford. Although nearly engulfed by the bucolic backwoods of northern Georgia, these figures act as surrogates for the viewer’s participation in the retreat.

Well-documented as a popular nineteenth-century tourist destination, the falls rush violently past the figures, who have come to bask in the presence of their monumental aura. In the foreground are the vestiges of gnarled trees, America’s natural ruins. Functioning as arboreal *repoussoir* figures, the trees, in light of their suggestive placement within the composition, not only demonstrate Richards’s familiarity with the conventions of landscape painting, but perhaps more importantly, they suffuse the work with an air of romantic nostalgia.

In drawing attention to America’s natural landmarks, Richards is responding to the contemporary interest in recreational tourism. Richards summarized his feelings towards the phenomenon in the June 1842 edition of *The Orion*. Speaking of the “eminently beautiful” views of his adopted homeland, he declared that “no one need go [beyond] the mountainous parts of Georgia and South Carolina for the noble and picturesque in scenery.”¹⁹ Though perhaps suggesting a certain equivalency between southern and northern landscapes, Richards, this discussion would argue, is emphasizing a *need* to travel, a *need* for landscape tourism in the South. This rang especially true for Richards, the consummate author-artist, whose responsibility it was to supply illustrations and remarks for a southern periodical. Indeed, this was a task that required an intimate knowledge of the natural environs of the South,

¹⁶ Throughout its publication history, the magazine went through numerous title changes. Volumes 1-2 were entitled *The Orion, a Monthly Magazine of Literature, Science, and Art*; Volume 3, *The Orion, a Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art*; and Volume 4, *The Orion; or Southern Monthly, a Magazine of Original Literature and Art*.

¹⁷ William Carey Richards, ed., *The Orion, a Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art* I (July 1842): 247.

¹⁸ Almost without exception Richards’s illustrations appeared in every issue of *The Orion*. Two plates for the March 1844 issue had been damaged and had to be postponed until the next issue. The images included in this essay are, then, merely a sampling of Richards’s pictorial contributions to the magazine.

¹⁹ William Carey Richards, *The Orion* I (June 1842): 186.

and, appropriately, it was through travel that Richards had acquainted himself with the southern countryside.

Similarly, for the November 1843 issue of *The Orion*, Richards produced a view of the Falls of Eastatoia, located near the town of Clayton, in the county of Rabun, in the extreme northeast of Georgia (Figure 8). As was his custom, Richards preceded the illustration with a literary sketch that copiously described the character of the site. The sketches, both visual and literal, were the result of a trip that Richards had taken to the area during the summer of 1841. As in his rendition of Tallulah, Richards positions the falls centrally within the composition. They dominate the surrounding landscape in a fashion that approximates eighteenth-century conceptions of the sublime, with water crashing tumultuously into the jagged rocks below. A deer, standing just steps away from the bottom of the falls, returns the viewer's gaze. The rural character of the site is thus emphasized not only by the wildlife present but also by the dense forest that surrounds the falls on three sides.

In the extensively annotated sketch of his visit to the falls, Richards recounts his approach and overall impression of the site:

With each succeeding step, the cascades broke upon the eye in growing effect and beauty. At length, after clambering down rugged cliffs; over, between and under huge masses of rock, we stood by the wild basin of the great fall, from which our present view was taken. The effect here is grand and startling in the extreme. From a great height [*sic*] the waters are precipitated over walls of alternately projecting and receding rocks, momentarily caught in the their descent upon the point of some jutting mass, and dashed furiously from their course. The surface of the rocks at the summit of this fall, varies much from the horizontal, yet so great is the impetus gained by the water in its previous descent, that it is urged over every part. At your feet huge rocks are scattered in the wildest confusion, many of which have, doubtless, fallen from the stratas above. The effect, in this wild glen, of a thunder-storm—an event of daily occurrence—is truly sublime. It was our delight to witness the lightning flashing upon the waters, and to listen to the countless echoes of the thunder's

voice, and lastly, to admire the enchantment of the shifting rainbow, as it trembled on the restless spray.²⁰

Richards employs a highly visual language to create a dramatic and sensationalized account of Eastatoia. His overtly praiseworthy tone demonstrates an almost contagious affection for the falls and reveals his familiarity with English philosopher Edmund Burke's characterization of the sublime.²¹ Burke's definition and the tradition of the sublime in eighteenth and nineteenth-century art and literature were not lost on Richards whose effusive description of awe-inspiring grandeur, immensity, and seemingly irresistible power sets the Falls of Eastatoia into context. Whereas Burke considered phenomena that generate fear and terror (a viewer's recognition of peril) to be a defining feature of the sublime in art, Richards's emphasis on the "truly sublime"—i.e. the thunderous torrent of the falls experienced during a storm—invokes language that stresses wild, overwhelming beauty in order to elevate the site from mere southern landmark to regional tourist attraction. To this end, he includes in his sketch directions to the site and references to such incidentals as lodging and logistics.²²

In *The Orion*, Richards ultimately established the foundations for his later career, during which he would not only explore but exploit the American landscape as a tourist paradise. Very early in his career Richards secured his reputation as a prolific author and artist. In part, it was his contributions to *The Orion*—both literary and pictorial—that provided the evidence in support of this title. His subsequent contributions include *Tallulah and Jocassee* (1852), *The Romance of American Landscape* (1854), and *Appleton's Illustrated Hand-Book of American Travel* (1857). In each, Richards persists in his preoccupation with landscape tourism, ultimately selling the landscape to his readers by romancing it.

Richards merged southern landscape and romantic tradition to evoke an idyllic vision of the region's natural scenery, which he marketed to prospective tourists through his numerous literary contributions. His books and essays as well as the illustrations within them are best viewed in light of the complex social, political, and cultural dynamics of the antebellum period in America. Ultimately, Richards's response to the landscape was tempered by the following factors: contemporary developments in tourism, the influence of Romanticism on nineteenth-century art and literature, the progressively contentious relationship between the North and the South, and his respective (and oftentimes conflicting) allegiances to each region. Each of these influences shaped Richards's approach

²⁰ T. Addison Richards, "The Falls of Eastatoia," *The Orion* (November 1843): 98.

²¹ For Burke's analysis of the aesthetic category of the sublime, see his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1757).

²² Though vague, Richards locates the Falls of Eastatoia in the county of Rabun, in north-central Georgia, near the village of Clayton and twelve miles from the falls of Tallulah. He mentions a residence in the Valley of the Tennessee, which was located in close proximity to the falls. See Richards, "The Falls of the Eastatoia," 97.

to both writing about and representing the landscape of the South.

Richards’s investment in elevating the status of the southern landscape was the logical consequence of his personal and professional connections to the region. Early on, as a young man in Penfield, Richards embarked upon an ambitious campaign to promote the natural scenery of Georgia and South Carolina—a type of zealous promotion that would encourage, if not initiate, the desire among middle-class Americans to seek the physical, psychological, spiritual, and recreational benefits of travel.

Throughout his life, Richards was a dynamic figure who consistently produced works of landscape literature and landscape imagery. Best remembered for his contributions to the latter, his role as author has largely gone unnoticed. This discussion endeavors to highlight some of Richards’s more noteworthy *literary* contributions and the illustrations which

complement them as expressions of the artist’s passion for the southern American landscape. His combination of text and image displays not only his talent as an artist, in the broadest sense of the word, but also his high, almost reverential affection for the natural environment.

Indeed, in his role as author, Richards composed overtly positive portraits of the southern landscape, which, again, scholars have either ignored entirely to this point, or, at best, relegated to mere footnotes in the history of antebellum landscape literature. This essay reveals that an equally illustrative body of written work supplemented his artistic contributions. Richards cultivated the consummate author-artist persona; never completely independent of one another, these roles defined both his personal and professional life.

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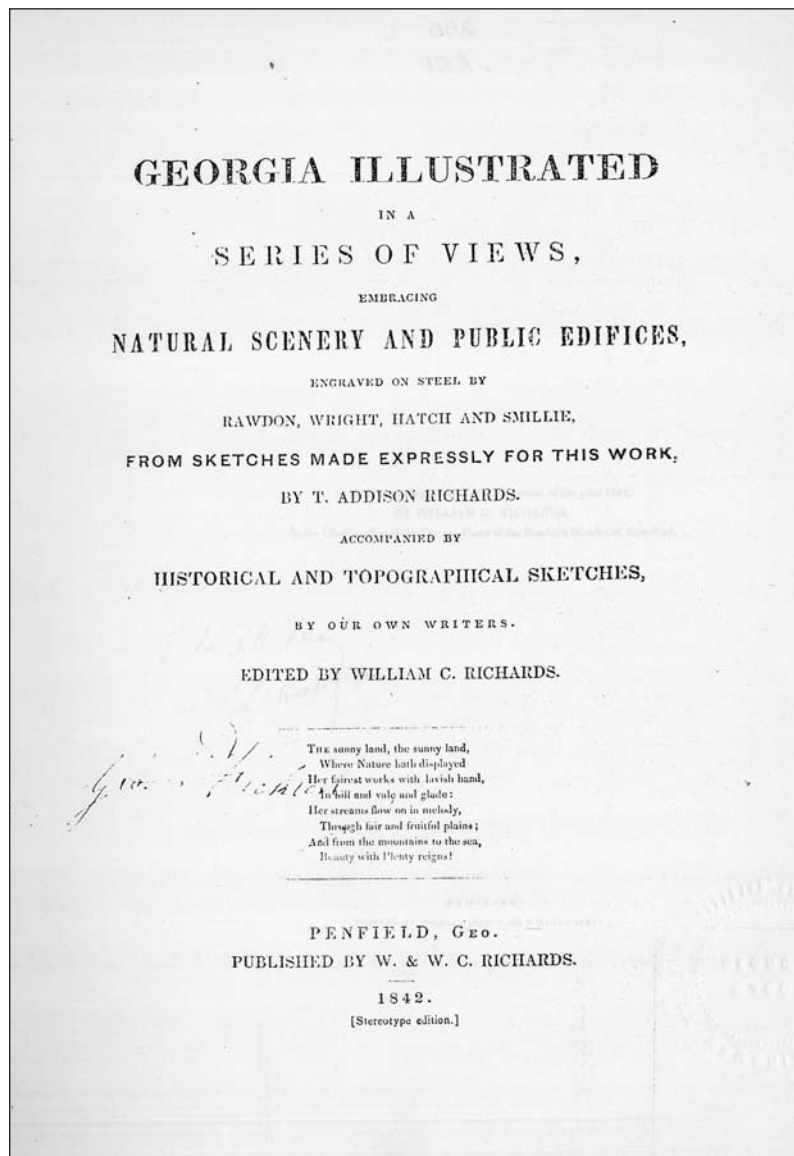
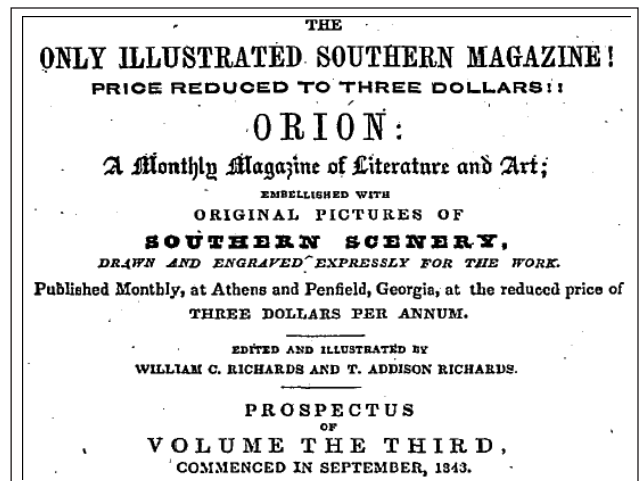
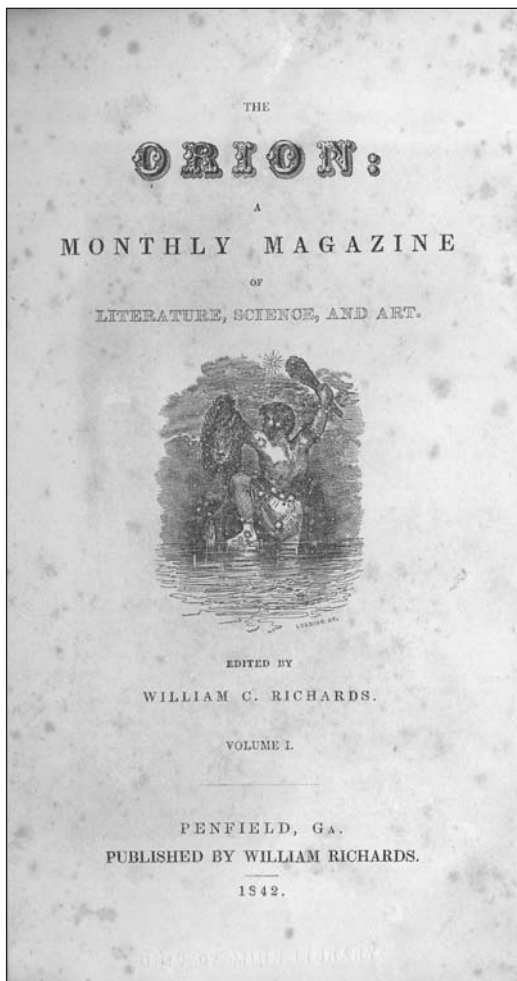
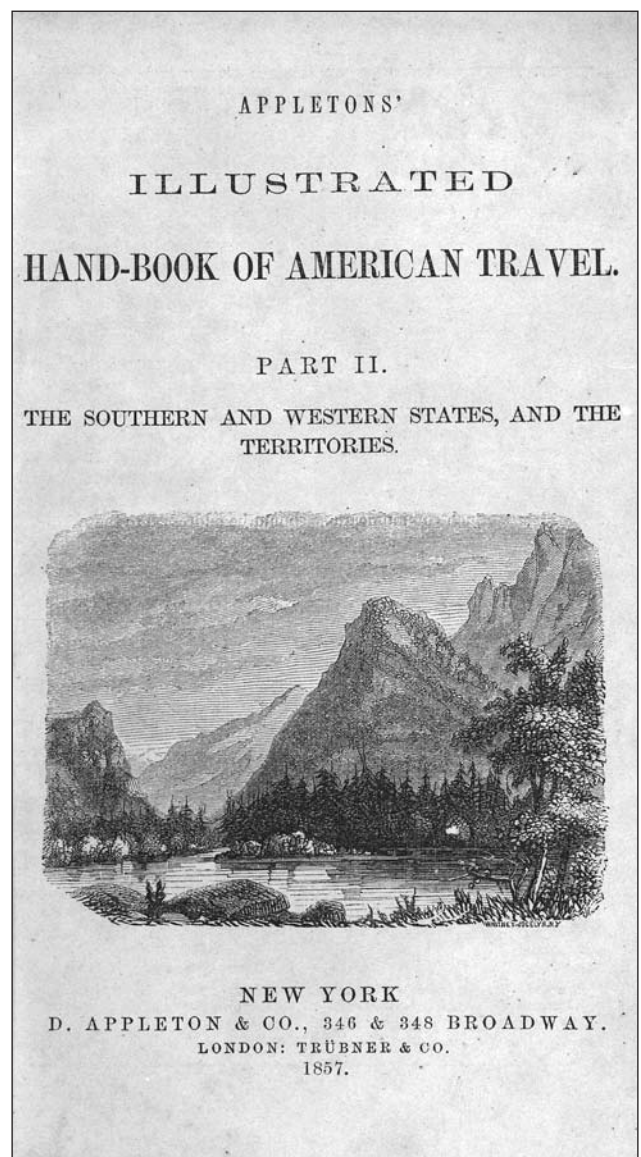
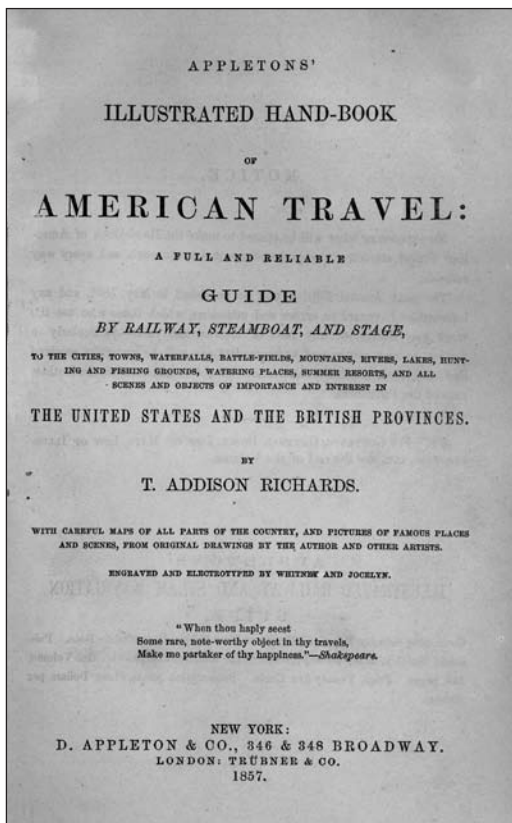


Figure 1. Title Page, *Georgia Illustrated* (Penfield, GA), 1842.



[above left] Figure 2. Title Page, *Appleton's Illustrated Handbook of American Travel* (New York), 1857. [above right] Figure 3. Frontispiece, *Appleton's Illustrated Handbook of American Travel, Part II: The Southern and Western States, and the Territories* (New York), 1857. [left] Figure 4. Title Page, *The Orion: A Monthly Magazine of Literature, Science, and Art* (Penfield, GA), March 1842. [above] Figure 5. Advertisement for *The Orion* (September 1843).

THE LITERARY CHARACTER OF ORION.
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Figure 6. Quality Assurance Statement, *The Orion*, 1842-1844 (most issues).



Figure 7. T. Addison Richards, *Tallulah Falls, Georgia, The Orion* (March 1842), lithotint. Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library / University of Georgia.



Figure 8. T. Addison Richards, *The Falls of Eastatoia, Georgia, The Orion* (November 1843), lithotint.