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Realism vs. Romance: Aesthetic Distance and Symbolic History in the Novels of James Fenimore Cooper

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REALISM VS. ROMANCE: AESTHETIC DISTANCE AND SYMBOLIC HISTORY IN THE NOVELS OF JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

by
Henry L. Lettermann

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VITA

The author, Henry L. Lettermann, is the son of Henry C. Lettermann and Anna (Gerstacker) Lettermann. He was born February 28, 1932, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

He obtained his elementary education at First Evangelical Lutheran School, Sharpsburg, Pennsylvania, and his secondary education at Concordia High School, River Forest, Illinois, where he graduated in June, 1950.

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Beginning in September, 1956, he taught high school English for three years at Lutheran High School Central, St. Louis, Missouri. During this time he attended summer sessions at The University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, being awarded the Master of Arts degree in English in June, 1959. Since September, 1959, he has been a member of the faculty of Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Illinois, where he presently serves as Associate Professor of English.

His published works include the texts of some fifty children's songs in the Concordia Music Education Series, as well
as numerous texts of hymns, anthems, and carols. He was commissioned to write a poem celebrating the 125th Anniversary of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod which was read publicly, and texts of his hymns have appeared in the Worship Supplement of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and the recent Hymnal of the American Presbyterian Church. He serves as Associate Editor of Motif, a faculty-student literary journal at Concordia Teachers College, and has contributed editorials to Lutheran Education, the longest continuously published educational periodical in America.
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CHAPTER I

ROMANCE VERSUS REALISM: COOPER IN MEDIAS RES

James Fenimore Cooper was infant America's first performer on the stage of Western world literature. He was not the first American to have an international reputation—that distinction probably belongs to Benjamin Franklin, but Franklin was not known primarily as a writer, though he was a good one. Franklin was bigger—he was an ambassador and a diplomat, a scientist who was also a politician, a personality and a world citizen. Nor can Washington Irving claim the distinction, though he was the first American writer to be recognized in England—because works like The Sketch Book (1820) and Bracebridge Hall (1822) were, in fact, very English, though charmingly so.

It was James Fenimore Cooper, for all his reputed woodenness, who first made America come to life in the hearts and imaginations of his countrymen, and found that his countrymen were not to be defined in narrowly nationalistic terms. Even a quick glance at the Cooper bibliography proves, first, that he was very widely read in America before and after his

altercations with the press and his libel suit misadventures, and the lists of translations show that millions of Europeans got their first impressions of America from thrilling to the adventures that they found in the pages of James Fenimore Cooper.  

In 1820 the Englishman Sydney Smith in the Edinburgh Review could ask the patronizingly derisive questions,

In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue? What does the world yet owe to American physicians or surgeons? What new substances have their chemists discovered? or what old ones have they analyzed? What constellations have been discovered by the telescopes of Americans?--What have they done in the mathematics? Who drinks out of American glasses? or eats from American plates? or wears American coats or gowns? or sleeps in American blankets?--Finally, under which of the old tyrannical governments of Europe is every sixth man a slave, whom his fellow-creatures may buy and sell and torture?

But, almost in answer, after Washington Irving's The Sketch Book (1820) came Cooper's The Spy (1821), which was a sensation on both sides of the Atlantic. Cooper went on in

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2 Robert E. Spiller and Philip C. Blackburn, A Descriptive Bibliography of the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper (New York: Bowker, 1934). See also James Fenimore Cooper: A Census of Books to 1861, Warner Barnes, Compiler (Austin, Texas, 1967), which lists the known editions of Cooper's works published in English to 1861. For instance, The Last of the Mohicans, admittedly Cooper's most popular work, was published and re-published 43 different times between 1826 and 1861, 29 of these editions after 1835, when Cooper is thought to be "unpopular." But even Home as Found was issued ten different times in America between 1838 and 1860, and four separate times in England under the title Eve Effingham, 1838-1855.

the immediately following years to add such well-known and endurably popular works as these: The Pioneers (1823), The Pilot (1824), The Last of the Mohicans (1826), The Prairie (1827), and The Red Rover (1828). All of these works deal with aspects of American history and American experience which had never been treated in literature before, and hence struck both the American and European audiences as new and significantly revelatory. It is hard for us, perhaps, to realize the originality of Cooper's accomplishment, but while the following summary may be long, it vividly points up Cooper's significance:

It may shock the modern reader into attention to list some of Cooper's unique achievements. He was the first novelist of the sea. He was the first effective novelist of the frontier. He was the first historian of the American Navy, and still one of the best. He was the first American novelist to conceive of novels in series. He was the first of our writers to make the succession of generations in a single family the theme of fiction, which he did at least three times—for The Pioneers is related to Homeward Bound and Home as Found, as Afloat and Ashore is related to Miles Wallingford, and as Satanstoe and The Chainbearer are related to The Redskins. He was the first American novelist to make the morbidity of the New England conscience the theme of major fiction, which he did in Lionel Lincoln and again in The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish. He wrote the first full-dress social utopia in American fiction, in The Crater, preceding it by the anti-utopia of The Monikins. He was the first to write the international novel, and the first to treat the Tories sympathetically, as in The Spy and The Pilot. He was also the first professional man of letters in American literature, by which I mean that he was the first writer not a newspaper man or a magazinist to produce books commercially, to depend upon income from them, and to standardize the author-publisher-bookseller relationship, as William Charvat has shown. Finally, he was the only American novelist of international stature to take Christianity seriously, both as personal motive and as social force.4

And, indeed, one of the important considerations in dealing with Cooper is to recognize his scope; no simple formulation is adequate to the number and the variety of his works. His obvious accomplishment is Leatherstocking: a writer who creates what becomes an enduring national myth would certainly seem to deserve high rank. But Cooper was also interested in a wide variety of social, moral, and political questions, and was anything but reticent in discussing them, and any formulation which excludes this side of his character and works is less than adequate. To keep both parts of the dichotomy "alive" is the problem; to formulate Cooper's achievement in terms which encompass rather than deny his complexity is the challenge.

Cooper's first biographer, Thomas R. Lounsbury, worked under the considerable handicap that Cooper had forbidden any family cooperation in the writing of a biography, and Susan, his daughter, took his prohibition seriously enough to destroy some of his papers and to have what she considered to be Cooper's more interesting (because revealing) journals and diaries buried with her. It is not surprising, then, to find that there is considerable basis upon which to argue that the picture of Cooper which first emerges is strongly colored by the typical Whig political attitudes which permeated the usual-

5James Fenimore Cooper (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882).

ly hostile newspaper treatment of Cooper and his works during his lifetime. To be fair to Lounsbury, he does insist on Cooper's "sweetness" of character and his not being completely embittered in his later life, but he himself admits that he is hard put under the circumstances to adduce the evidence which supports this view. 8

Whenever Cooper's works were reprinted (as they frequently were), an opportunity for a review of his accomplishment was provided, and a considerable literature of general assessment in the nineteenth century exists. 9 The last and most balanced view on the issues which the nineteenth century found important in Cooper is probably best articulated, however, by W. C. Brownell in his American Prose Masters, published in 1909. 10 These might be called the classic issues in Cooper criticism.

The nineteenth century was not blind to Cooper's faults, the chief of which were Cooper's prolixity and Cooper's improbabilities. It is rather ironic that the most widely known and reprinted piece of Cooper "criticism" in Mark


8 Lounsbury, p. 285.


Twain's "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," a rather exaggerated account of Cooper's improbabilities, in which Mark Twain falls into absurdities of his own. Brownell concedes that Cooper lacks a sense of form, but defends Cooper's characterization of the American Indian and of his supposedly namby-pamby heroines, both points of attack by Cooper's reviewers. Brownell is also sensitive to Cooper's unique treatment of nature as a moral panorama, not as a Wordsworthian pantheistic presence. He praises Cooper for his "largeness" and for his Americanism, and by these means is enabled to see Cooper as whole and integrated, rather than fragmented or dichotomized, as some critics have, both before and since.

But most significantly for this dissertation, Brownell re-emphasizes again and again a romantic-realistic tension in Cooper. "To be one of the great romancers of the world is, in itself, a distinction. But there is more than one kind of romance, and Cooper's has the additional interest of reality." "More than any other writer of 'tales' Cooper fused romance

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11 Originally published in the North American Review, CLIX (1895), 1-12, but very widely reprinted because it is very entertaining. As Warren S. Walker says in James Fenimore Cooper: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962), p. 132, it is "good fun but not to be taken for serious criticism." See also "Fenimore Cooper's Further Literary Offenses," New England Quarterly, XIX (September, 1946), 291-301.


13 p. 11.

14 All of these issues will receive more thorough treatment where they are appropriate in the discussions of particular novels in this and subsequent chapters.
and realism." Or again, "There is a quality in Cooper's romance, however, that gives it as romance an almost unique distinction. I mean its solid alliance with reality." He characterizes Cooper's *The Bravo* as "romance with a thesis," or speaks of romance which is also "criticism of life." Finally, Cooper's world is a microcosm quite worthy to be set by the side of those of the great masters of fiction and, quite as effectively as theirs, mirroring a synthesis of the actual world to which it corresponds, based on a range of experience and framed with imaginative powers equalled by them alone.

W. C. Brownell and John Erskine are perhaps the last completely "serious" critics of Cooper, that is, critics who approach him as adults on an adult level, as opposed to those who read *The Last of the Mohicans* when they were young and are surprised later to find that Cooper is capable of something like the trenchant criticism of *Home as Found*. To them Cooper is one of the giants of American literature; to the critics of the twenties and thirties and to most of us he is a re-discovery. We may re-discover, indeed, that he is a giant, but that is not what we first took him to be, as they did.

The critics of the twenties and thirties certainly did recover Cooper's significance as a social critic. R. E.

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15 Brownell, pp. 6-7, 13-15.
16 Ibid., p. 30.
17 In *Leading American Novelists* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1910) where he says (p. 60) commenting on Harvey Birch in *The Spy*, "The character illustrates at once what has been thought Cooper's most remarkable gift, a perfect blend of romance and realism."
Spiller claims that his *The American in England*, 1926, is the first treatment of Cooper as primarily a social critic. In 1924, Gregory L. Paine submitted his University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation, which was entitled "James Fenimore Cooper as an Interpreter and Critic of America," and Vernon L. Parrington's treatment also emphasizes Cooper's social and political thought. Spiller's interest in Cooper culminates in his landmark biography *Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times* which betrays its emphasis in its title and which is perhaps most instrumental in rekindling twentieth-century interest in Cooper's works. It was followed shortly by John F. Ross's *The Social Criticism of Fenimore Cooper*, which divides Cooper's works into the clearly opposite categories of romance (more or less pure) and works of social criticism.

Ross's treatment of Cooper's social criticism is certainly the most comprehensive and detailed up to his time, and for this it is still quite useful. It also, however, leads him to see Cooper's fundamental fault as a lack of integration.


Cooper's mind is more "composite rather than unified. The story-telling power—the power to create thrilling adventures depending for interest not at all on moral implications—must have been a somewhat isolated element in Cooper's make-up; for he was characteristically puritanical and didactic." He also says,

Yet the difficulties of the problem do not lie in subtlety of thought, for Cooper was plain and direct, but rather in the fact that Cooper's mind was made up of elements never wholly integrated. Had he been only critic or only romancer, he would have been simple enough of analysis to escape being called a "bundle of contradictions." Or, had the critical and romantic elements been integrated, the relationship between them would have been seen clearly and the apparent contradictions would have vanished.

Ross classifies certain of Cooper's works as "pure" romances, notably The Last of the Mohicans, though he never attempts to define an "impure" romance. Indeed, Cooper's early romantic works (up to 1828) including among others The Spy (1821), The Pioneers (1823), and The Pilot (1824) are the product of his "amateurism." In addition, Ross has difficulty explaining Cooper's "regression" in 1840 to 1844, when he wrote the "pure" romances The Pathfinder (1840) and The Deerslayer (1841), among others. "It is difficult to account for this romantic interlude, which seems quite out of place in Cooper's second, or critical period," and he speculates that Cooper needed escape or that, perhaps, uncharacteristically, Cooper had thrown off...

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23 Ibid., p. 20.
24 Parrington, II, 222.
25 Ross, pp. 21-22.
the control of "duty." Though he never positively terms the romances as "frivolous," Ross clearly is more interested in and does use the term "serious" in describing Cooper's later social criticism.

Earlier John Erskine also had contended that Cooper's later work "suffered in quality," but because he is interested in Cooper's romances he contends that with Cooper "more even than most authors a conscious message was fatal to the story." He also, however, has to deal with what he calls Cooper's "incredible detachment" in writing The Pathfinder and The Deer-slayer. On the other hand, Spiller is certainly right in contending in 1931 that the result of the study of Cooper until that time "has been an attitude of apology for the very attainments which he himself believed to be the most vital. . . . His qualities as a social critic have usually been made to appear as faults. His directness and vigor of mind caused an uncompromising attitude which often prevented the immediate effectiveness of his writings, but which tends to increase their permanent value." It is still open to question, however, if Spiller's Representative Selections of 1936 in the "American Writer's Series" is fair to Cooper. Granting that a novelist is difficult to select from, for Spiller to confine the selection to Cooper's critical prose even if it is

26 Ibid., p. 25.
27 Erskine, pp. 107-108.
argued as a necessary corrective, it is also a stringent limitation. 29

Concurrently, an opposite strand in Cooper criticism was evolving which has its first modern exponent in D. H. Lawrence in his Studies in Classic American Literature, 30 where he says of the Leatherstocking Tales, "They form a sort of American Odyssey, with Natty Bumppo for Odysseus." A "yearning myth" or a "wish-fulfillment vision," Deerslayer represents the "true myth" of America. 31 Cooper himself, of course, in the "Preface to the Leatherstocking Tales" which he wrote for the Putnam edition of 1850 (which was the first to issue the tales in the order of the life of Natty Bumppo) makes the judgment, "If anything from the pen of the writer of these romances is at all to outlive himself, it is, unquestionably, the series of 'The Leather-Stocking Tales.'" It is in this preface, too, that Cooper argues, "A leading character in a work of fiction has a fair right to the aid which can be ob-

29 The principal selections are from Notions of the Americans, A Letter to His Countrymen, various of the travel volumes, The American Democrat, and a generous selection of Cooper's prefaces. Except for the prefaces, in addition to the exclusive concentration on Cooper's critical prose, the selection also concentrates very heavily on one decade, 1828-1838. Evidently and perhaps rightly, Spiller felt the prose needed to be more readily available.


tained from a poetical view of the subject. It is in this view, rather than in one more strictly circumstantial, that Leather-Stocking has been drawn." Leatherstocking is presented as a beau-idéeal, with only enough of the "traits derived from the prejudices, tastes, and even the weaknesses of his youth" to preserve what Cooper terms vrai-semblance.

The criticism of Cooper in the 1950's has largely followed Cooper and Lawrence in taking Leatherstocking to be Cooper's greatest accomplishment, defending and interpreting Cooper's conception in symbolic, mythic, or archetypal terms. At the beginning of the decade, Henry Nash Smith is the first to treat Leatherstocking in the wider context of the myth of the Western hero. Richard Chase comments,

Thus to isolate the story of Natty Bumppo from the books in which he appears is to emphasize how easily he becomes a mythic figure, existing, like Don Quixote, apart from any and all books. It was certainly Cooper's intention—vaguely as he may at first have conceived it—to create such a mythic figure.

Brady in 1958 goes even further in asserting,

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It should be evident by now that any mature approach to an assessment of Cooper's essential qualities must be, primarily, neither personal nor stylistic—though, in a very real sense it is possible to speak of Cooper's art—nor sociological—though it is also clear that Cooper's insights into the mainsprings of society are, while limited in their scope, extraordinarily clear. No, Cooper's genius was mythopoetic rather than comic; poetic rather than naturalistic; closer, perhaps, to the conditions of music and painting than to the conditions of fiction, dealing, at its rare purest, in archetypes rather than types.36

By 1959, Marius Bewley argues that Deerslayer is essentially a symbol, and the exclusion of Cooper from the symbolist tradition in American literature37 comes from a too narrow interpretation of that tradition or from a misunderstanding or under-evaluation of Cooper.38 R. W. B. Lewis sees Deerslayer as an important embodiment of the first Adam, the archetypal man, a persistent image in American culture,39 and Cooper's work has been related to the "American dream."40

This overview of some of the highlights of Cooper criticism in the twentieth century is necessary to define the position of this dissertation among these alternative understandings of Cooper. The mythic or archetypal treatment of Cooper is highly sophisticated, challenging and rewarding; it

36 Ibid., p. 82.


is also expansionist, poetic, essentially romantic. "The balloon of experience," Henry James says, "is in fact of course tied to the earth, and under that necessity we swing, thanks to a rope of remarkable length, in the more or less commodious car of the imagination; but it is by the rope we know where we are, and from the moment that cable is cut we are at large and unrelated; we only swing apart from the globe—though remaining as exhilarated, naturally, as we like, especially when all goes well." 41

The tying down to earth of Cooper's commodious car of the imagination is again appropriate though not in quite the limited terms which the critics of the thirties proposed. It is the argument of this dissertation that Cooper lives in medias res, in the midst of things, and any interpretation of him which ignores this is partial, or willful, or misleading. In his best works (which comprise a considerable number) he strives for and achieves a kind of balance or tension between the real and the ideal, the naturalistic and the romantic, which explains the continued critical interest in his accomplishment and his continued relevance to human (especially American) experience.

It is not surprising, then, to find critics who study some part of the Cooper corpus arriving at apparently opposite conclusions. It is Arvid Shulenberger's contention, for instance, after studying Cooper's prefaces that "His career can

be suggestively described, with some over-simplification, as exhibiting a progress from realism to romance."\textsuperscript{42}

In idea the prefaces outline and the novels illustrate, in the first phase, a theory of realism requiring above all the truthful representation of both character and scene; in the second phase, a theory and argument that the prime defect of fiction is its concern with \textit{vrai semblance} or "seemliness" at the expense of truth; and in the third phase, a theory of idealism, directly opposing his early theory and arguing that fiction should present the ideal in character and situation, rather than the literal and particular.\textsuperscript{43}

On the other hand, Thomas Philbrick in his landmark study of Cooper's sea fiction says, "it seems clear, however, that \textit{The Red Rover} and, only to a slightly lesser extent, \textit{The Pilot} and \textit{The Water-Witch} are marked by definite characteristics of the new romanticism, characteristics that are most conveniently labeled Byronic. When, in 1838, Cooper again turned to the sea as the subject of his fiction, he abandoned once and for all the psychology and apparatus of the Byronic hero in favor of more realistic characterization."\textsuperscript{44} For detailed discussion, Philbrick chooses as representative of Cooper's early "extreme romanticism" \textit{The Red Rover} (1828), while \textit{Afloat and Ashore} (1844) "seems the most successful embodiment of his attempt in the middle years of his career to treat nautical materials realistically and to relate them to common human experience

\textsuperscript{42} Cooper's Theory of Fiction: His Prefaces and Their Relation to His Novels (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1955), pp. 33-34.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp. 7-8.

rather than to isolate them in the realm of the glamorous and the exotic." To be fair, both Philbrick and Shulenberger divide Cooper's progress into three phases, and Philbrick's treatment of *The Sea Lions* (1849) as a "symbolic narrative" is not far from Shulenberger's conception of a kind of "ideality" that Cooper himself called in 1850 a "poetical view of the subject."

It is especially instructive to note Robert E. Spiller's fluctuations in his characterization of the achievement of Cooper's novels. Spiller is the twentieth century's foremost critic of Cooper, having written more about him and being concerned with him over a longer period of time than any other. To begin with, in his biography of 1931, he seems content with the traditional division of Cooper's work into romances and novels of purpose. Like Erskine and Ross, he too is concerned with a lack of integration in Cooper: "His interests remain divided in two: a love of action for its own sake and a conviction that a novel should convey a moral ideal along with its capacity for amusement." In contrast to "romance," he uses such terms as "problem novel," "social problem novel," and, of the European novels, "social problem novel with an historical setting." He is also fair enough

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46 The issues raised here receive a fuller treatment in Chapters II and IV of this dissertation.

47 *Penimore Cooper: Critic of His Times*, p. 299.

to say, however, that the "difficulty of reconciling romance with moral or social purpose in fiction worries his readers more than it did Cooper." In 1936 he says, "The attempt on the part of his critics to tie Cooper down to authenticity in his fiction gave him trouble from the earliest days and is still disturbing his ghost." In a separate section of his rather lengthy "Introduction" to the Representative Selections, he considers "The Purpose and Art of the Novel," which locates Cooper more midway between romance and realism. "The elements of historical representation and romantic idealization, which had determined the earlier novels, furnished, the one a realistic approach to the material, the other a moral basis of interpretation suitable to a society in a state of rapid development and of searching self-examination." Also, Spiller uses a new term, "mock history," to describe Cooper's achievement in the Littlepage novels.

After 1936, by his own admission, Spiller felt he had exhausted his interest in Cooper and his ability, at least for the time being, to contribute significantly to the study of Cooper. But in 1951 his interest revives.

But the centenary of the death of this great romancer stirred my conscience. Here was a chance to satisfy another and quite contradictory promise to myself--the promise that someday I would renew my thought on Cooper and try again

49 Ibid., p. 298.
50 Representative Selections, p. lxxx.
51 Ibid., pp. lxxvii-lxxxiii.
52 Ibid., pp. lxxxiii and lxxxi.
to solve a problem I had left unsolved—namely the relationship of his theory and practice of romance to his intense concern for social criticism. My generation had stated the problem more precisely than had Cooper's contemporaries and his first biographers and critics; but we had not solved it.\textsuperscript{53}

Spiller wrestles with the problem again, finally concluding, "But after all the returns are in, will the problem with which I began my remarks and began my work on Cooper be solved at last? I think not."\textsuperscript{54} It is precisely in this middle ground that this dissertation proposes to take its stand, recognizing both the romantic, narrative art of Cooper and his realistic surface and moral commentary. Whether or not the problem is solvable, the inquiry deserves to be pursued, bringing to bear the increasing perspective of time and the expanding horizons of insight into the form of the novel. The fragments of a civilization that Yvor Winters found in Cooper\textsuperscript{55} need to be put back together again, or at least the attempt must be made. Somehow Cooper himself unified these disparities.

Spiller's last word on the subject, in 1965, is, typically, judiciously qualified. "Cooper's achievement goes far beyond romance but stops short of either realism or symbolism; his best work is in the idiom of the literary principles and fashions which were dominant in his own day." But Cooper


\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., pp. 184-185.

strives "to develop an American novel of manners which was to serve as a commentary as well as a record. To provide this extra dimension he applied his romantic theory of the imagination, the raising of literal fact to the level of idealized and generalized truth." The final result is this: "The novels which appeared in the period 1840-44, from The Pathfinder to Satanstoe, vary among themselves but share his achievement of a working balance between the real and the ideal in his art." 56

This complex, working balance needs to be analyzed. That it still eludes us is evidenced in any number of puzzled statements about Cooper by his critics, or in graduate studies which concentrate on limited, hence inevitably simplified, aspects of his achievement. Very early Brownell and Erskine state the balance without really documenting it; the critics of the thirties are especially puzzled by a lack of integration in Cooper that they cannot encompass. "Fenimore Cooper is one of the puzzling figures of his generation. In his substantial character was embodied what may well appear no more than a bundle of contradictions." 57 Cooper is a collection of fragments representing the "ruins of time." 58 Cooper's most recent and perhaps most sympathetic biographer, in his last word on the subject, confesses, "The career of

56 Robert E. Spiller, James Fenimore Cooper, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 48 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), pp. 43-44.

57 Parrington, II, 222.

58 Winters, pp. 198-199.
James Fenimore Cooper consists of a series of paradoxes.  

Cooper never compromised his gifts, and yet one feels that for all of his splendid and varied accomplishment—in fields as different as his sea tales and stories of the forest, his historical novels, his contemporary novels, his political studies and travel books—he did not exploit them to their fullest intensity. He never gathered the truth revealed to him into a single book, as Melville, Hawthorne, and Thoreau gathered so much of their truth.

One possible way out of the impasse is to attempt to escape the limitations of the terminology. If, indeed, Cooper never "gathered the truth revealed to him into a single book," never formulated a vivid overwhelming embodiment of his vision, yet there is a constancy in his view, a moral position, and perhaps even a corresponding consistency in techniques which characterizes his varied experiments. One such possible lead is suggested in the following:

The valuable work of Cooper scholarship in the thirties and forties was to demonstrate that the author of the Leatherstocking stories is a social critic of great value. Inevitably, the interest engendered by this demonstration drew attention from other phases of Cooper's art and thought. The French refer to certain sorts of writers as moralists, and it is to the moralist in Cooper that investigation can next, I believe, profitably turn. Cooper as a moralist is involved in the aesthetic and philosophic currents of his age.

Finally, "Not primitivism, not romanticism, not the influence of the frontier, not even the mere delight of employing his mythopoetic power fundamentally shapes the fictional world of

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60 Ibid., p. 709.
61 Jones, p. 154.
Cooper, but a great religious vision of life . . . a vision at once melancholy and sublime."62

Building on this, Donald A. Ringe in his study of Cooper's novels emphasizes the dense physical reality in Cooper's best work and his ability to use description and narration to embody moral themes.63 Ringe frankly admits his partisanship and quite candidly states his intention to present the case for Cooper, but he is not blind to Cooper's faults, and he is the first to analyze Cooper comprehensively to show Cooper's unity of moral vision. Quite incidentally and without development he introduces one of the critical terms which this dissertation attempts to develop as a useful term in describing and defining Cooper's accomplishment, the term "symbolic history." We have seen repeatedly in this review of Cooper criticism how critical it is in the understanding of Cooper to interpret his "return to romance" in the years 1840-1844. It is precisely at this point, most specifically in contrasting Mercedes of Castile (1840) to The Pathfinder (1840) and The Deerslayer (1841), that Ringe says,

Cooper was not at his best when writing true historical romance. He was always much more successful when dealing with a kind of symbolic history—a fact easily substantiated by turning from the dull Mercedes to the last two Leatherstocking tales which precede and follow it in the Cooper canon: The Pathfinder (1840) and The Deerslayer (1841).64

62 Ibid., pp. 146-147.


64 Ibid., p. 80.
A "kind of symbolic history"--not "true historical romance." When Cooper attempts true historical romance, when he carefully researches his subject and attempts to conform to the facts, the result is inevitably a failure, as in the above mentioned *Mercedes of Castile*, or, to take an example from the beginning of Cooper's career, a work like *Lionel Lincoln* (1825). Another but different instance of over­attention to the facts occurs when the facts are very close to Cooper, coming directly from his experience, as in works like *Home as Found* (1838), which this chapter will analyze, or *The Redskins* (1846), the last and most contemporaneous to Cooper of *The Littlepage Manuscripts*. In both instances the facts are stubborn, they get in the way, they insist on being themselves, and they resist any broadening into mythic, archetypal, idealistic, or universal levels. This is history which never reaches any symbolic or representative level; any vision which would weld these novels into a living, artistic whole is decisively impeded.

On the other hand, less in whole works perhaps than in parts, Cooper on occasion does concentrate so much on romantic, expansive elements in his work as to give them a fatal unreality. It is details like these that Mark Twain fixes upon so effectively. And because Cooper lacks self-consciousness, because at times he is so uncritical or because he depends on his image as the public novelist, he is

65 See especially Chapter II of this dissertation on failures of distance.
sometimes more easily satisfied than his modern critical reader on the plausibility of particular actions. In an otherwise effectively imagined work like *The Spy*, for instance, he is not above having his hero indulge himself in Byronic self-pity which mars the symbolic historicity of the work. 66 In a sense, then, Cooper is a crazy patch-work quilt of strengths and weaknesses: he will at times insist on details which ought to be true to his essentially convincing romantic conceptions but which the modern reader finds difficult to imagine or believe, while in the next paragraph he will introduce a crotchety fact or opinion from his own experience which the modern reader finds to be an intrusion. The point of this dissertation is that Cooper is more or less successful in balancing these strengths and weaknesses, that discriminations can and must be made between his romantic vision and his realistic veracity, that both poles are essential in defining his accomplishment, and that his strengths should not be overlooked because of his weaknesses. When Cooper has control of his materials he is masterful indeed, and he supplies a young America with some of the basic metaphors which it has used, then and since, to define its image of itself. When he is working at this point, Cooper reaches levels of symbolic history which have enduring significance in defining American experience, and, to the extent which one accepts his Christianity, have enduring significance in defining human experience.

For purposes of focus, this study concentrates on deliberately selected novels which cut across one of Cooper's major dichotomies, the land novel versus the sea novel. In addition, since this chapter deals with Cooper in medias res, it seems wise to select from Cooper at mid-career, hence an analysis of Cooper's *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, both published in 1838. There is danger that any selection obviously distorts, hence I have tried to include generous comment on many of Cooper's works, drawing evidence where relevant. There is danger in this, too, because one is tempted to emphasize only the evidence which substantiates one's particular thesis; my analysis of all of the novels attempts also, however, to take cognizance of the particular works as distinctive formulations of a particular time in Cooper's career, and having essential integrity as works of art more or less successfully executed. Finally, care is taken to select for particular analysis novels which are broadly spread across Cooper's rather lengthy career.

As judged by his contemporaries, Cooper's early career was spectacularly successful. In 1826, just before his departure for Europe, Cooper was the distinguished guest at a testimonial dinner given by the Bread and Cheese Club in the city of New York. Charles King's toast is fulsome in its praise, if provincial in its self-congratulation.

To the author of *The Spy* and *The Pioneers* we are indebted, not only for much individual gratification, but for much and enduring national renown. . . . To the works of Mr. Cooper we may in like manner refer as evidence that if fine, vigorous, and original conception, a quick and happy perception, and exquisite delineation of the beauties of nature—a power hardly surpassed of portraying the deep
and strong passions of the human heart—a capacity to excite and to sustain the most breathless interest in the fortunes of those whom he brings upon the scene—if any or all these constitute genius, it may be claimed for him.67

The already usual complimentary comparison to Sir Walter Scott is made, as well as comment on Cooper's success in dealing with "the great events of our revolutionary contest, the wild and peculiar habits of our early settlers, and the deeply interesting, and alas! rapidly vanishing aboriginal race of this continent. . . ." Finally, also, Cooper "has looked with a poet's fancy and a painter's eye upon the grandeur and magnificence of our mountain scenery, the varied tints and glorious sunshine of our autumn skies and woods, our rushing cataracts, and mighty rivers, and forest coeval with nature."

One need only reflect that to the spectacular success of The Spy (1821), his second book, Cooper had added, with only one possible exception, success after success. The first edition of 3500 copies of The Pioneers (1823) had been exhausted by noon on the day of its release.68 His next book, The Pilot (1824), broke significant new ground and invented the genre of the true sea story as opposed to the shore novel involving sailors, as in Smollett and Scott's The Pirate. Any chagrin over English reviewers' objections to Lionel Lincoln

67 King's toast to Cooper, as well as Cooper's reply, are quoted in Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, pp. 92-96. Ironically, in the 1830's, King is one of the Whig editors who is rather less than sympathetic toward Cooper.

68 Niles Weekly Register, February 8, 1823, quoted in Marcel Clavel, Fenimore Cooper and His Critics: American, British and French Criticisms of the Novelist's Early Work (Aix-en-Provence: E. Fourcine, 1938), p. 18.
(1825) was fully satisfied by the success of The Last of the Mohicans (1826), still thought by many to be his best single work. In the years immediately following his departure to Europe, he strengthened his hold on the American and European imagination with The Prairie (1827) and The Red Rover (1828).

Cooper himself always dated the decline of his American popularity to the publication of Notions of the Americans: Picked Up by a Traveling Bachelor. In my own case, I do know that so long as I was praised by England, I stood well at home, and that, from the moment when, by observation and comparison, I was enabled to detect the national malignancy of that country to our own, and to point out some of its sophisms and frauds; I began to lose ground with my own countrymen. This dates from 1828, when I published some observations on the hostility of Great Britain to this nation.

Notions of the Americans attempted to utilize the epistolary travel literature form to answer the growing number of English travelers' unfavorable accounts of America, and it pleased neither the English nor the Americans. Significantly, too, it is the first instance of a growing tendency in Cooper to attempt a work with an overtly didactic purpose, although Notions...

69 James Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper (New York: William Sloan Associates, 1949), p. 43. The opinion is widely held, see also Lounsbury, pp. 53-54; Brady, p. 87; Ringe, p. 42.

70 (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Carey, 1828).

tions also was intended as a compliment to Lafayette by recording his triumphant visit to America of 1824-1825. In addition, Cooper while in France had involved himself at Lafayette's request in what is called the Finance Controversy, publishing a pamphlet that showed that American democracy was not prohibitively expensive, as Lafayette's political enemies charged. Cooper felt he was defending America, but the Whig press at home resented his "meddling," since they felt it endangered American negotiations then in progress to settle maritime claims for damages against France which dated from the War of 1812. Cooper's support of the friends of Polish freedom was similarly resented.

When Cooper turned to European subjects for the novels The Bravo (1831), The Heidenmauer (1832), and The Headsman (1833), some of Cooper's American critics were sure his defection was complete. The New York American (December 3, 1831) reviewed The Bravo calling is "hasty" but "masterly" nonetheless. But after the details of the Finance Controversy became known in America, a new and much less favorable review appeared on June 7, 1832. This is the infamous letter by "Cassio," which Cooper and Samuel F. B. Morse were sure was written by


74 See Waples, pp. 87-91.
one of Cooper's French political enemies. The Heidenmauer was too "political"; obviously Scott had done the Reformation better. The accusation was that Cooper had deserted American subjects in the attempt to reform abuses in European political systems or to please European audiences. Cooper's defense of himself in A Letter to His Countrymen explains his objectives rather differently. Cooper saw that the governments of Europe were in the hands of aristocratic oligarchies, and saw American subservience to European opinion as a real threat to the success of the American democratic experiment. "I determined to attempt a series of tales, in which American opinion should be brought to bear on European facts. . . ." Of The Bravo, specifically, he says,

I had it in view to exhibit the action of a narrow and exclusive system, by a simple and natural exposure of its influence on the familiar interests of life. . . . The nature of the work limited the writer as to time and place, both of which, with their proper accessories, were to be so far respected as to preserve a verisimilitude to received facts, in order that the illusion of the tale should not be destroyed. . . . With these means, and under these limitations, then, the object was to lay bare the wrongs that are endured by the weak, when power is the exclusive property of the strong; the tendency of all exclusion to heartlessness; the irresponsible and ruthless movement of an aristocracy; the manner in which the selfish and wicked profit by its facilities, and in which even the good become the passive instruments of its soulless power.

Cooper himself always felt that The Bravo was one of the most American of his works. In the notes he prepared for

76 (New York: John Wiley, 1834).
Griswold late in his career, he comments, "I was abused as a deserter from my country, and all sorts of silly twaddle was uttered, for laying the scene of this book in Venice. . . .

The Bravo is perhaps, in spirit, the most American book I ever wrote; but thousands in this country, who clamor about such things, do not know American principles when they meet them, unless it may happen to be in a Fourth of July oration."\(^7\)

This is the key, too, to Cooper's objection to the label so popular, especially in France, that he was the American Scott. Scott's romanticizing of the past glorified monarchy and aristocracy, and Cooper chose European subjects precisely to show how one with American principles would treat these times and scenes. With the romantic poets Cooper wanted to be counted on the side of liberty.\(^7\)

Cooper's Letter of 1834 ends in a farewell, a giving up of his career as a novelist. Contrasting the patriotism of The Spy, Cooper says,

It was only at a later day, when I was willing more obviously to substitute American principles for American things, that I was first made to feel how far opinion, according to my poor judgement, still lags in rear of facts. The American who wishes to illustrate and enforce the peculiar principles of his own country, by the agency of polite literature, will, for a long time to come, I fear, find that his constituency, as to all purposes of distinctive thought, is still too much under the influence of foreign theories, to receive him with favor. It is under this conviction that I lay aside my pen.\(^8\)

Cooper feels that democracy is strong enough that it does not

\(^7\)Clavel, p. 394.

\(^7\)Waples, p. 84.

\(^8\)Letter to His Countrymen, p. 98.
need his defense, but confesses he had hoped to be useful to his generation. "Here, the democrat is the conservative, and, thank God, he has something worth preserving." He apologizes for the public nature of his statement, pleading the necessity because of his having been tried in the public press, but

... so far as I stand opposed to that class among you which forms the public of a writer, on points that, however much in error, I honestly believe to be of vital importance to the well being and dignity of the human race, I can only lament that we are separated by so wide a barrier as to render further communion, under our old relations, mutually unsatisfactory.  

It is a little difficult to know how to interpret these statements. If Cooper hoped for a great public outcry of protest against his retirement, he was disappointed. On June 14, 1834, the Evening Post carried a favorable announcement of the Letter, and on June 24 published a defense of Cooper entitled "Mr. Cooper's Politics." (In 1834-1836 William Leggett was acting editor of the Post while William Cullen Bryant was in Europe, though the Post consistently before and after was always one of the usually few journals which treated Cooper sympathetically.)  

On June 26, 1834, Cooper comments on King's and James Watson Webb's reactions: "The latter is vulgar and abusive and contradictory. The former cuts the subject, avoiding all the points at issue, and affecting to laugh at that which he cannot refute."

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81 Ibid., pp. 99-100.
82 Beard, III, 61.
83 Webb was editor of the Whig newspaper, the New York Courier and Enquirer.
84 "To Mrs. Cooper," Beard, III, 46.
The immediate effect is a five year hiatus in the publication of novels by Cooper. He was, however, not idle, publishing the satirical allegory *The Monikins* in 1835, and five volumes of travels in 1836-1838. His "retirement" decision of 1834 was by no means a result of sudden impulse, for while he was in Europe he followed American affairs closely and expected to find changes on his return.\(^85\) As early as November 15, 1831, Cooper was saying he might never return to America, and he wrote to Horatio Greenough, the expatriated American sculptor in July, 1832, "I go home, if home I do go, Master Greenough, to take a near view of myself, and to ascertain whether for the rest of my life I am to have a country or not."\(^86\) Two years later to Greenough he said that he feels "the country has made a sad movement to the rear, in the last seven years."\(^87\) And much later to both William Gilmore Simms and James Kirke Paulding he made the statement that the American artist would be better off if he left America and lived in Europe.\(^88\) Yet he also exhibits a stubborn Americanism. Writ-

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\(^85\) See particularly his frank discussion of his literary fortunes in "To William Dunlap," Paris, November 14, 1832, Beard, II, 358-362.

\(^86\) Beard, II, 268.


\(^88\) "To William Gilmore Simms," January 5, 1834: "If I were even ten years younger, I would go to Europe instantly. There a literary man has at least the same rights as another, and, if known, he enjoys immense advantages. This country is not yet sufficiently civilized for this." Beard, II, 439. This seems to be Cooper's standard advice to fellow literary artists, for twelve years later he is saying the same thing, see "To James Kirke Paulding," May 9, 1846: "If I were fifteen years younger, I would certainly go abroad, and never return." Beard, V, 131-132.
ing to his nephew Richard Cooper from Paris in March, 1833, he says that his family will "not be sorry to turn our faces westward," and reports refusing a Frenchman's offer of marriage to his daughter Susan with the almost haughty "We mean to continue Americans." 89

Very shortly after his return he writes,

I never expected . . . to be thanked for upholding American principles in [the] face of the enemy. The truth will be understood some day, I make no doubt, but short as has been my residence here since our return, I have seen enough to be satisfied that, with the majority of those who affect to lead opinion, anti-American sentiments are in more favor than American. The heart of the nation, however, is sound, or else God knows what would become of us. 90

It seemed to Cooper at this juncture that the power lay in the hands of the people who were most dangerous to the success of the principles of American democracy: an increasing number of powerful Whigs in Congress, increasingly strident Whig editors, and the growing power of a rising mercantile interest which was ruthless in its exploitation. Who would protect the common people from being taken in, from being manipulated by these demagogues? Yet he is impressed by a boatman's "civil, prompt and intelligent answers" to the enquiries he puts to him on one of his trips from New York to Cooperstown, and he concludes, "Every hour I stay at home, convinces me more and more, that society has had a summerset, and that the elite is at the bottom!" 91 Intermittently until Bryant's return in

89 Beard, II, 375.

90 "To John Stuart Skinner," New York, November 15, 1833, Beard, III, 10.

91 "To Mrs. Cooper," June 12, [1834], Beard, III, 42.
1836 Cooper used the pseudonymous newspaper letter to express his political viewpoint on Franco-American relations and on the American constitution, signing himself "A. B. C." In 1837 he involved himself in what is called the Point Controversy which plays a prominent part in *Home as Found*. The most direct statement of his views is couched in a primer which he hoped would be adopted by schools which he published in 1838 entitled *The American Democrat*, which went through three editions in the 20th century and which has been compared favorably to Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. Cooper makes no explanation of his return to fiction in 1838. As early as February 1, 1831, he had proposed a novel to his English publisher, Henry Colburn, with "scenes on the Great Lakes, with Indians intermingled." Much later this became *The Pathfinder* (1840), but his publishers kept suggesting a nautical tale and Cooper kept putting them off to finish *The Headsman* (1833) and *The Monikins* (1835). H. C. Carey of Carey and Lea, Cooper's American publisher, hoped that Cooper would comply with his "engagement with Colburn

92 Beard, III, 63-64.


94 Beard, II, 53.

95 See "To Colburn and Bentley," [Paris 8? August, 1831], Beard, II, 131-132; "To Colburn and Bentley," Paris; March 16, 1832, Beard, II, 253; "To Colburn and Bentley," Paris, June 10, 1832, Beard, II, 256-257; and "To Colburn and Bentley," Paris, October 12, 1832, Beard, II, 354.
and make the next a Nautical Tale." \(^{96}\) It is natural, then, that Cooper would return to a form which the public had always enjoyed and which would please his publishers. But *Homeward Bound* was a nautical tale with a difference; while it was set at sea, its thrust was decidedly critical of American manners.

Nor was it originally Cooper's intention to write a novel which would be set completely at sea and be a great popular success as, say, *The Red Rover* (1828) was. As Cooper defines his purpose in the "Preface" to *Homeward Bound*,

> It was commenced with a sole view to exhibit the present state of society in the United States, through the agency, in part, of a set of characters with different peculiarities, who had freshly arrived from Europe, and to whom the distinctive features of the country would be apt to present themselves with greater force than to those who had never lived beyond the things portrayed. By the original plan, the work was to open at the threshold of the country, or with the arrival of the travellers at Sandy Hook from which point the tale was to have been carried regularly forward to its conclusion. \(^{97}\)

But Cooper confesses his design was altered by "a consultation with others," which is usually interpreted to mean his family.

As a vessel was introduced in the first chapter, the cry was for "more ship," until the work has become "all ship"; it actually closing at, or near, the spot where it was originally intended it should commence. \(^{98}\)

That the account of the "Preface" is essentially true in Cooper's best ingenuous manner is confirmed by a letter Cooper wrote to his close friend, W. B. Shubrick, early in

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\(^{96}\) Note, Beard, II, 254.


\(^{98}\) Ibid.
the writing of *Homeward Bound*. Cooper seems almost boyish:

Now for a secret. The state of things in this country has put another novel in my head. My plan is laid, and the book is already one sixth written. . . . I shall call it 'Homeward Bound, or the things that are.' One volume on board a London packet, another at Templeton. It is a regular novel, and half sea half shore. **This is a secret**, however, though the book is contracted for on the other side.99

The mention of two volumes here is not to be thought of as two novels, as eventually they became. All of Cooper's novels were published in two volumes in America, and in three volumes in England, as was the typical practice of the time. The evolution of the design is further seen when Cooper writes Richard Bentley, his English publisher, two weeks later saying that two of the three volumes of the English release will be set at sea, and one at Templeton.100 Six weeks later he admits to Bentley that all three volumes of the first novel are set at sea, and that another whole novel is necessary to complete the original design.101

This kind of casual evolution of the design of the work is fairly typical of Cooper. The disarming confession of the "Preface" as much as anything, perhaps, has diverted some of Cooper's critics from seeing the two novels as a unit,


100 "To Richard Bentley," October 17, 1837, Beard, III, 298-299. Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley had dissolved their partnership, and henceforth Bentley was Cooper's sole English publisher.

101 "To Richard Bentley," New York, December 6, 1837, Beard, III, 302. By January 21, 1838, the plan as the novels were published is fully formed, see "To Richard Bentley," Beard, III, 305-308.
has diverted them from Cooper's critical viewpoint, which is consistent throughout the two novels. In any case, *Homeward Bound* has been characterized as "one of the best sea novels"\(^{102}\) or as an "excellent sea yarn, marred only by his efforts to stick to his sermon."\(^{103}\) One of the most recent commentators on Cooper characterizes *Homeward Bound* as "scarcely more than an entertaining but dispensable preliminary" to *Home as Found*.\(^ {104}\)

Cooper's contemporaries, if one judges from the reviews, hardly considered *Homeward Bound* to be entertaining. The *North American Review* was brief and ill-tempered.

The recent productions of Mr. Cooper have added nothing to his own reputation, or to the stores of American literature. . . . Professing to be a sturdy republican, he has exhausted his powers of invective upon the manners and characters of his countrymen, who are, taking his own descriptions for truth, ignorant of the first principles of social refinement, and no better than a nation of brutes and savages. Mr. Cooper's works, for the last three or four years, seem to have been written under no higher inspiration than that of spleen. They abound in uncalled-for political disquisitions, filled up with expressions of the bitterest scorn and hatred.\(^ {105}\)

The *North American Review* did not review *Home as Found* at all. The *Southern Literary Messenger* was kinder to Cooper. It published two reviews of *Homeward Bound* and one of

\(^{102}\) Lounsbury, p. 149.


\(^{105}\) Francis Bowen, "Critical Notices, No. 2: *Homeward Bound or the Chase*," *North American Review*, XLVII (October, 1838), 488-489.
Home as Found. The first review of *Homeward Bound* begins enthusiastically, "We welcome the wanderer back once more to the sea--the open, the grand, and stirring sea." Yet, the "work before us is full of direct abuse of the press" and Mr. Cooper should be more grateful for past favors from them. The reviewer remembers *The Red Rover* as one of Cooper's greatest novels, "for then the author was innocent of argument--innocent of the French mania for politics and philosophy," but he is willing to accept *Homeward Bound* as an "evidence of a return to his former realms, and take it as an earnest of repentance for past errors, and amendment for the future." The second review, too, tries to be as favorable as it can. "Mr. Cooper's style is as good in Homeward-Bound as in any of his previous novels--better than in some of them." Yet the plot is "incomplete" and "meager," the dialogue "sometimes too pompous"; if Cooper's marine language has "nervous brevity," he has also "fallen into the error of introducing entirely too much of the technical operations of seamanship into his tale." The reviewer says he will not meddle with Cooper's political opinions, but

We cannot, however, pass in silence one prominent feature of the author's character, which is displayed on almost every page--his want of patriotic feeling. We before knew that he often assumed a querulous tone, when dwelling on the requital which his own services to the nation have met with; but did not imagine that his soul had become so completely warped by brooding over supposed wrongs. . . . If the book had been written purposely to tickle the depraved appetite of those Englishmen, who, the last to acknowledge

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any American book worth reading, are the first to lavish encomiums upon every printed defamation of American character, coming from this side the water, and to deem oracular every prediction unfavorable to American institutions, it could hardly have displayed more illiberal feelings toward that character and those institutions.107

All of the reviews take exception to Cooper's characterization of Steadfast Dodge, the roving editor of the Active Intelligencer, as being obviously exaggerated or libelous of American newspaper editors. They are also quite concerned with Cooper's "powers of invective upon the manners and characters of his countrymen," or his "querulous tone" or his "want of patriotic feeling." Yet they also see that there is basis for seeing Homeward Bound as an exciting adventure story, for it has some of the characteristic elements that Cooper could handle superlatively.

The story begins with the London packet, the Montauk off Portsmouth, where it has stopped to pick up passengers. The Effinghams, Edward and John and Edward's twenty year old daughter Eve, are already on board, and shortly the other passengers join them, including Mr. Sharp and Mr. Blunt, who become important characters in the ensuing action. Mr. Grab and an attorney come aboard looking for Robert Davis whom they suspect is a passenger, who has eloped and who is wanted at the rather flimsy suit of the uncle of the bride and accused of debt, but the passengers all conspire with Captain Truck to conceal him, which unites them and serves to begin to break down the barriers between them. In addition, the cutter of an

107 "Another Review of 'Homeward Bound,'" Southern Literary Messenger, IV (November, 1838), 728-734.
English man-of-war, the Foam, seems anxious to board them, and Captain Truck debates his responsibilities under Vattel, the authority on maritime law, to submit in time of peace to such a search.

To avert an encounter with the Foam, Captain Truck risks the more dangerous passage between the Scilly islands and Land's End. Since the Foam follows, it is evident that the Montauk is being pursued, and since Captain Truck can keep ahead of her only with the wind right over the taffrail, he sails south-southwest toward the Azores. Hoping to anchor at Pico in the Azores, the Montauk is caught in a storm in which in desperation Captain Truck finally has to turn and scud with the wind, and the subsequent stress put on the rigging leads to the Montauk's losing her main mast and her mizzenmast, and she is very nearly wrecked on the coast of Africa. There they find a Danish wreck from which they salvage the materials to rig a jury mast to refit the Montauk, which they do, though not before they lose and regain the ship from a marauding band of Arabs.

There is sufficient action here of an exciting sort to make an interesting adventure novel, especially since it involves elements which Cooper was adept at handling. His description of life at sea, the seamanship involved in handling a sailing vessel, the chase at sea, and the storm and subsequent peril of the vessel are graphically evoked with

108 This is not as great a detour as may at first appear. After all, the Azores are at 38° north latitude; Philadelphia is at 40° north latitude. Eve as well as Paul Blunt and John Effingham feel that being chased enlivens what might otherwise be a dull passage, see Homeward Bound, pp. 106-107.
factual details beyond his critics ability to challenge. But we would badly misrepresent the novel if we did not include the social elements of the story, which seem like interruptions to so many from Homeward Bound's first reviewers on. One of Cooper's more recent commentators characterizes Homeward Bound more promisingly as the invention of "a new setting for the comedy of manners, the ocean liner." Certainly the social aspects of the novel are too pervasive to be ignored.

Cooper announces the potential of the situation very early in his narrative:

The assembling of the passengers of a packet-ship is at all times a matter of interest to the parties concerned. During the western passage in particular, which can never safely be set down at less than a month, there is the prospect of being shut up for the whole of that period, within the narrow compass of a ship, with those whom chance has brought together, influenced by all the accidents and caprices of personal character, and a difference of nations, conditions in life, and education. The Effinghams very closely observe the passengers who come aboard at Portsmouth and prove adept at separating appearances from reality. The man who calls himself Sir George Templemore they know cannot be the English peer that he claims to be because the real Sir George, we find out later, is the man who calls himself Mr. Sharp. With characteristic delicacy, Eve does not ask Mr. Sharp why he is travelling incognito, ascribing it tentatively to mere caprice. Steadfast Dodge,

110 Homeward Bound, p. 17.
111 Ibid., p. 169.
the editor of the *Active Intelligencer*, cultivates the company of the supposed peer, and attempts to ingratiate himself with the Effinghams with what they consider to be typical, obnoxious social climbing. The Effinghams have met Paul Blunt before, and immediately accept him into their circle as a gentleman, though Eve is puzzled and interested because she cannot be certain if he is an Englishman or an American.

Captain Truck on the other hand, shows his lack of polite breeding.

Every American who is not very familiar with the world, appears to possess the mania of introducing. Captain Truck was no exception to the rule; for, while he was perfectly acquainted with a ship, and knew the etiquette of the quarter-deck to a hair, he got into blue water the moment he approached the finesse of deportment. He was exactly of that school of *élégants* who fancy drinking a glass of wine with another, and introducing, are touches of breeding; it being altogether beyond his comprehension that both have especial uses, and are only to be resorted to on especial occasions.\(^{112}\)

Steadfast Dodge is an American democratic leveller of the worst kind. All men are equal in all things especially socially, he believes, and all things should be determined by majority rule. One of his first acts on board the *Montauk* is to propose a vote be taken to find out if the people favor Van Buren or Harrison. He also proposes that a society be formed whose business it would be to ascertain each day the exact position of the ship. "Captain Truck had thrown cold water on the last proposal, however, by adding to it what, among legislators, is called a 'rider'; he having dryly suggested that one of the duties of the said society should be

to ascertain also the practicability of wading across the Atlantic. Dodge feels that it is aristocratic of the Effingham family to seclude themselves in their cabin, and he is not above rifling Eve's cabin when the Effingham family are on the African shore and, finding a letter from John to Eve, he spreads the totally false rumor that they are to be married when they arrive in America. At Captain Truck's "sweethearts and wives" social evening, Dodge supplies most of the amusement unintentionally by reading some of his naive and uninformed reactions to Paris from his private journal.

A perfect illustration of the importance of knowledge of social classes and a nicely discriminated propriety in dealing with them is given in Saunders, the Negro steward. He knows which of the passengers is to be treated with respect, and he is most respectful of all to Captain Truck. In order, he is asked the routine morning questions about the condition of the weather and the disposition of the ship by Mr. Dodge, the supposed Sir George Templemore, Mr. Sharp, Mr. Blunt, and Captain Truck, and it is apparent in the increasing quality of the questions that that particular order was chosen to illustrate the progression from the "know-nothing" to the natural and rightful (because most knowledgeable) leader.

It is only when the voice of the captain is heard from his stateroom, that he [the steward] conceives himself bound to be very particular, though such is the tact of all connected with ships, that they instinctively detect the "know-nothings," who are uniformly treated with an indifference suited to their culpable ignorance. Even the "old salt" on the forecastle has an instinct for a brother

\[113\] Ibid., p. 91.
tar, though a passenger, and a due respect is paid to Neptune in answering his inquiries, while half the time the maiden traveller meets with a grave equivocation, a marvel, or a downright mystification.\textsuperscript{114}

The relationship between the social elements and the adventure story is what has troubled critics from the beginning. Yet the distance between them can easily be exaggerated. The sailing vessel, the storm, the wreck, the adventures with the Arabs all seem rather romantic, even fanciful, and we forget that they are rather close to fact in Cooper's times. At least three narratives of shipwreck and encounter with Arabs on the Barbary coast were published between 1817 and 1820, and widely circulated, and there are enough similarities in them to Homeward Bound to warrant the conclusion that Cooper was acquainted with them. One account by Judah Paddock seems most directly connected, yet "Cooper, one discovers, has by no means merely appropriated this story in mass, and imbedded it, undigested, in his own book, but he has introduced into his novel a very similar tale, highly dramatic, yet quite convincing, because the events if not inevitable, are perfectly plausible in a Barbary Coast setting."\textsuperscript{115}

On the other hand, when the scene shifts from the sea to a social gathering in Captain Truck's cabin, or whole chapters are taken up with lengthy conversations among the Effinghamers, or between Eve and Mr. Sharp or Mr. Blunt, the reader who is interested in the adventure gets impatient. Or if one

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 79.

\textsuperscript{115} Harold H. Scudder, "Cooper and The Barbary Coast," \textit{PMLA} LXII (1947), 784-792. The sentence quoted is from p. 791.
knows the more famous *Home as Found* and then goes back to *Homeward Bound*, one is struck with the degree to which *Homeward Bound* shows the same insistence on social distinctions and some kind of natural aristocracy.

*Home as Found*, of course, has long been recognized as Cooper's most stridently critical novel on American manners. Few people can be indifferent to it and most if not all of Cooper's contemporaries (even some of Cooper's closest friends) reacted very strongly against it. Horatio Greenough's comment is a vivid diplomatic understatement: "I think . . . you lose hold on the American public by rubbing down their shins with brickbats as you do." 116 Samuel F. B. Morse was more direct: "I will say nothing of your *Home as Found*; I will use the frankness to say that I wish you had not written it." 117 The reviewer of the *Southern Literary Messenger* had predicted at the end of his review of *Homeward Bound* that the sequel would be a failure. Of *Home as Found* he says, "Unfortunately for Mr. Cooper, and for the public at large, our prediction has been more signally fulfilled than we anticipated." *Home as Found* is "immeasurably inferior to any of the same author's former novels which we have read." 118 There is some support for Cooper in Democratic newspapers like the *Boston Post* and the *New York Evening Post*, 119 but the Whig attack was so over-

116 Lounsbury, p. 156.
117 *Correspondence*, II, 461.
118 "Home as Found" (Review), *Southern Literary Messenger*, V (March, 1839), 169-178.
119 Waples, p. 222.
whelming that Cooper never regained critical favor in his lifetime, even though his old and some of his new works were relatively popular.

Cooper himself, in the "Preface" to *Home as Found*, recognizes the difficulties he is undertaking.

We believe that no attempt to delineate ordinary American life either on the stage or in the pages of a novel, has been rewarded with success. Even those works in which the desire to illustrate a principle has been the aim, when the picture has been brought within this homely frame, have had to contend with disadvantages that have been commonly found insurmountable. The latter being the intention of this book, the task has been undertaken with a perfect consciousness of all its difficulties, and with scarcely a hope of success. 120

Cooper’s later concession “that the American nation is a great nation, in some particulars the greatest the world ever saw” is not enough to dull the edge of the knife: “We are also equally ready to concede, that it is very far behind most polished nations in various essentials, and chiefly, that it is lamentably in arrears to its own avowed principles.” 121

Cooper’s first biographer (and most critics since) agreed that Cooper hardly succeeded. Of *Home as Found* he says, “From beginning to end it was a blunder. It cannot receive even the negative praise of being a work in which the best of intentions was marred by the worst of taste. Its spirit was a bad spirit throughout.” 122 Early in the twentieth century it was argued that “Not only does it fail to interest as a story, but it betrays a temporary lack of all reason and sense

122 Lounsbury, p. 155.
on Cooper's part. Yet in spite of the unreasonableness that marks almost every criticism of America in both volumes, there is a kind of surface cleverness here and there which must have been exasperating to the subjects of the attack."\textsuperscript{123}

The critics of the thirties had to face the dilemma that the work which best exemplified Cooper's social criticism, which they intended to revive, was one of the least satisfying aesthetically. Ross simply ignores the aesthetic aspects of the problem,\textsuperscript{124} while Spiller is more honest when he says of \textit{Home as Found}, "It is an honest and a thorough piece of work and an invaluable social document, if not a successful example of literary art."\textsuperscript{125}

The most serious charge, first leveled by Cooper's contemporaries, and repeated since, is that in \textit{Home as Found} Cooper "sought to employ the novel for his personal convenience."\textsuperscript{126} The basis for the charge lies in Cooper's using as important incidents in \textit{Home as Found} the details already well known and misrepresented in the Whig press of what is usually called the Point Controversy. Briefly, when Cooper returned to Cooperstown he found that Three-Mile Point, on Lake Otsego, was used generally by the people of Cooperstown as a public park. Cooper's father in his will had specifically provided that the point was to be used generally by the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123}Erskine, pp. 103-105.
\item \textsuperscript{124}Ross, p. 17, 112, and \textit{passim}.
\item \textsuperscript{125}Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, p. 265.
\item \textsuperscript{126}Boynton, p. 292.
\end{itemize}
family until 1850, at which time it was to pass to the possession of the youngest heir bearing Cooper's father's name. Some vandalism on the point, including the destruction of a tree to which Cooper had a particular attachment associated with his father, led him to re-assert the family's right as the legal owners of the point and to publish a "No Trespassing" notice in the *Freeman's Journal*, Cooperstown, July 31, 1837. This caused an "excitement" in the town, and a meeting of citizens (not the most responsible ones Cooper always maintained), and inevitably a series of resolutions, one of which provided for the burning of the works of Cooper that were in the town library. There was no ground for challenging the legality of the Cooper ownership, and the whole matter might have died quietly except that it was picked up and circulated in the Whig press as another reason to attack Cooper and accuse him of arrogance and lack of patriotism and public spirit.\(^{127}\)

It is perfectly obvious that the Templeton originally introduced in *The Pioneers* is Cooperstown (Cooper's fellow townsmen referred to his house as Templeton House), and the Effinghams of the *Home* novels are specifically identified as the descendants of Oliver Effingham and Elizabeth Temple of *The Pioneers*. The description of the prospect from the mountain called the Vision is said to be photographic, and John Effingham's alterations of the house in Templeton correspond

\(^{127}\)For more detailed treatment of the controversy, and Cooper's libel suits, see Ethel R. Outland, *The Effingham Libels on Cooper*, University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 28 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1929), and Waples, *op. cit.*
to Cooper's. The next step is the harder to take: while it is fairly obvious that Edward and John Effingham represent aspects of Cooper himself, the Whig editors of Cooper's time descend to scurrilous depths in attacking Cooper for supposedly praising himself in the characterization of Edward Effingham. Cooper's defense, as published some years later in a series of five letters in the weekly newspaper the Brother Jonathan, is essentially sound but legalistic and unconvincing nonetheless.128

The Point Controversy and the attacks of the Whig press on Home as Found are the occasion for the majority of Cooper's libel suits. Cooper won these suits since the attacks were obviously personal and not literary, and though his defense is sound, it seems to the modern reader often essentially puerile. Cooper argues rightly that an author must use his own experience in creating a work of fiction, but we are not impressed by what seem like very minor changes between Cooper's experience and Edward Effingham's. Not much seems to be proved by showing that Edward Effingham was 50 years old according to Homeward Bound when he disembarked from England, while Cooper himself was 44 years, 16 days; or that the Effinghams had French servants, while the servants Cooper brought with him from Europe were Swiss who only spoke French.129

128 See Beard, IV, No. 655, 212-215; No. 657, 217-224; No. 662, 232-246; No. 670, 252-261; and No. 671, 261-278.

129 Beard, IV, 263-264. Arguments from changes in details like these could be expanded; not all of the details are as petty as these.
The attention in Cooper's time and since to the Point Controversy, the alleged identification of handsome Edward Effingham to Cooper, and the resultant libel suits has often obscured many satirically effective characters and scenes in *Home as Found*. The shift in scene to New York and Templeton allows Cooper to introduce a wide variety of new characters and give a more interestingly modulated picture of American manners. For instance, while Steadfast Dodge continues to play a part in the action, we are able to compare a more complex example of his type in the portrait of Aristabulus Bragg, the Effingham's Templeton lawyer and land agent. As revealed in the version of the Point Controversy in *Home as Found*, he has as much horror of contradicting majority opinion as Dodge, but he has a kind of clever diplomacy and a keen eye for managing to make the best of things in order to get ahead which is far superior to Dodge's. When law, in which he is trained, is a little flat, he becomes a land agent; the first time he sees Eve Effingham he decides that he will make her his wife. Eve has a manuscript prepared for her by her uncle John Effingham describing some of the people she will meet, and John's characterization of Aristabulus, in part is,

This man is an epitome of all that is good and all that is bad in a very large class of his fellow-citizens. He is quick-witted, prompt in action, enterprising in all things in which he has a real stake, and ready to turn not only his hand, but his heart and his principles, to anything that offers an advantage. . . . Such a compound of shrewdness, impudence, common-sense, pretension, humility, cleverness, vulgarity, kindheartedness, duplicity, selfishness, law-honesty, moral fraud and mother wit, mixed up with a smattering of learning and much penetration in practical things, can hardly be described. . . . Mr. Bragg, in short, is purely a creature of circumstances,
his qualities pointing him out for either a member of Congress or a deputy sheriff, offices that he is equally ready to fill.130

When Edward Effingham is distressed to find the village boys playing ball on his lawn in Templeton and sends Bragg to chase them off, Bragg does by cleverly convincing the boys that to play ball among dahlias and roses is somehow "aristocratic," and that it would be more daring to play on the streets, because it is specifically forbidden by village ordinance.131 When Bragg's proposal of marriage to Eve is refused and he realizes he has no chance with Grace Van Cortland, Eve's New York cousin, he quickly transfers his attentions to Annette, Eve's femme de chambre, where he finds greater success.

They were to be married as soon as Annette's month's notice had expired, and then they were to emigrate to the far West, where Mr. Bragg proposed to practise law, or to keep school, or to go to Congress, or to turn trader, or to saw lumber, or, in short, to turn his hand to anything that offered; while Annette was to help along with the menage by making dresses, and teaching French. . . .132

Bragg's "go-aheadism" has its attractive side: "Bragg is a pleasant scamp who, like some impudent but always fundamentally cautious servant in an old comedy, does not know his place. The question of place, however, has become an extremely complicated one in democratic America."133

Cooper's description of New York society is sprightly

130 Home as Found, p. 19.
131 Ibid., pp. 183-184.
132 Ibid., p. 488.
133 Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 123.
and interesting. Successively the Effinghams with Sir George Templemore and Captain Truck pay a call to Mrs. Jarvis, a notorious social climber; to Mrs. Hawker, the leader of New York society and a lady in the best sense; attend a ball at Mrs. Houston's; and, because the rumor is that Captain Truck is an English writer, are invited to a literary soirée at Mrs. Legend's. Mr. and Mrs. Jarvis present an amusing contrast: he is a sensible man of business and a country acquaintance of the Effinghams, but it does not strike him as strange that in New York they move mostly in different social circles. Mrs. Jarvis, on the other hand, would not think of visiting Mrs. Onion, the grocer's wife, but is offended that the Effinghams might not wish to visit her. At the Jarvis's, Steadfast Dodge is the guest of honor, and his "Letters" are gushed over effusively by a Miss Brackett, who has not read them. As might be expected, Mr. Jarvis and Captain Truck get along well, for though their experience is very different, they are both frank and genuine.  

In these social scenes in New York, it is Captain Truck who is out of his element, as before in Homeward Bound on the high seas it was the Effinghams who were out of theirs. Captain Truck has heard of Mrs. Hawker's social reputation, and is almost afraid to visit her because she, he thinks, may ask him to dance a minuet or something, but she shows her real social gentility by accepting him for what he is and making him feel perfectly comfortable. At Mrs. Hawker's they encoun-

134Home as Found, pp. 54-64.
ter Mrs. Bloomfield, a young married woman and a particular friend of Eve's. Mrs. Bloomfield has not been to Europe, but she is intelligent and discriminating nonetheless. She has read one of Steadfast Dodge's "Letters," but she concludes that there is no reason to read more since there is little point in reading Dodge's impressions of Europe when it is quite plain that he does not even understand America.135

At Mrs. Houston's ball they encounter Miss Ring, a young belle of New York society. She is an expert at keeping herself surrounded by young men with adroit conversation and questioning, and thinks it particularly gauche if a young lady should have to walk across a room without the aid of a gentleman's arm. She mistakes Captain Truck for a clergyman, because he has men "under orders," and she is shocked at first but accepts the idea that Truck would smoke a cigar while in the "exercise of his office." "A little reflection reconciled her to the innovation; and the next day, at a dinner party, she was heard defending the usage as a practice that had a precedent in the ancient incense of the altar."136 When she accosts Eve her circle of beaus melts away, and she realizes suddenly that she is in what she considers to be an unsupportably conspicuous position--two ladies conversing in the middle of the room and no gentlemen nearby! She is even less comfortable when Eve coolly walks away at the end of their con-

135 Ibid., p. 69.
136 Ibid., p. 93.
At Mrs. Legend's Captain Truck is lionized—his gray hair and distinguished look seem to provide all the substantiation necessary to the rumor that he is an English writer.

The company is described by Cooper:

We might here very well adopt the Homeric method, and call the roll of heroes and heroines, in what the French would term a catalogue raisonnée; but our limits compel us to be less ambitious, and to adopt a simpler mode of communicating facts. Among the ladies who now figured in the drawing-room of Mrs. Legend, besides Miss Annual were Miss Monthly, Mrs. Economy, S. R. P., Marion, Longinus, Julietta, Herodotus, D. O. V. E., and Mrs. Demonstration; besides many others of less note; together with at least a dozen female Hajjis, whose claims to appear in such society were pretty much dependent on the fact that, having seen pictures and statues abroad, they necessarily must have the means of talking of them at home. The list of men was still more formidable in numbers, if not in talents. At its head stood Steadfast Dodge, Esquire, whose fame as a male Hajji had so far swollen since Mrs. Jarvis réunion, that, for the first time in his life, he now entered one of the better houses of his own country. Then there were the authors of "Lapis Lazuli," "The Aunts," "The Reformed," "The Conformed," "The Transformed," and "The Deformed"; with the editors of The Hebdoman, The Night-Cap, The Chrysalis, The Real Maggot, and The Seek no Further; as also, "Junius," "Junius Brutus," "Lucius Junius Brutus," "Captain Kant," "Florio," the "Author of the History of Billy Linkum Tweedle," the celebrated Pot-tawattamie Prophet, "Single Rhyme," a genius who had prudently rested his fame in verse on a couplet composed of one line; besides divers amateurs and connoisseurs, Hajjis, who must be men of talents, as they had acquired all they knew very much as American Eclipse gained his laurels on the turf; that is to say, by a free use of the whip and spur.

All the little poetasters and literary dilettantes hang on Captain Truck's words and praise his equivocations on questions on Byron and Goethe (questions which he doesn't even

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137 Ibid., pp. 85-86.
138 A "Hajjis" is an American who has been to Europe.
139 Home as Found, pp. 98-99.
understand) as the height of justice and delicacy. His penchant for smoking cigars gets him in trouble again, and though it is socially incorrect, he winds up smoking two at once and retires behind a cloud of smoke with Mr. Pinder, Mr. Pith, and Mr. Gray, new acquaintances of his who are intelligent enough to realize he is not a writer at all and who enjoy the joke on the others. They take Truck off to enjoy a late oyster supper and laugh hugely over the whole thing. 140

In June the Effinghams remove to Templeton in upstate New York, and their New York city friends visit them during the summer. In the Templeton setting Cooper introduces Mr. Howel, a neighbor of about Edward Effingham's age, who gets all of his opinions from reading English periodicals, who takes their word on the character of the emperor of Russia over Edward Effingham's firsthand observation, and who cannot understand Eve's preference of Italy over England. 141 Mr. Howel is balanced by Mr. Wenham, a younger man who is as pro-American as Howel is pro-English. Out on the lake Captain Truck meets the Commodore, a sort of latter day Leatherstocking, who knows all the legends of the neighborhood, and whom Truck finds to be a capital fellow to go fishing with, even if he doesn't understand the intricacies of sailing an ocean-going vessel. Dodge rather unaccountably reappears in Templeton, and his scandal mongering is abetted by a village gossip named Mrs. Abbot, who thinks Eve must speak in broken French,

140 Ibid., pp. 115-116.
141 Ibid., pp. 192-195; also pp. 201-202.
and who is a pious Christian and an outrageous hypocrite. 142

There are other incidents vividly enough imagined or close enough to the truth to make them often referred to, in Cooper's time and in ours. When Edward Effingham arrives at the Wigwam, his house in Templeton, he wants to send a servant to Mr. Lather the village barber to ask him to come to the Wigwam to cut his hair. Aristabulus Bragg takes the errand upon himself, but reports that Mr. Lather declines to come, but he is not above asking at the same time that Mr. Effingham allow him to take down the garden fence of the Wigwam so that he can get through to manure a potato patch he owns. The barber incident Cooper confesses in the Brother Jonathan letters is one of two incidents (the other is the Point Controversy) based directly on his own experience. 143

In connection with the ball playing on the lawn, Bragg's defense is that the boys have "always" played on the lawn, which John Effingham sarcastically defines when he says an American "always" means eighteen months. Parenthetically, one might note that in the resolutions which the citizens of Cooperstown passed on the Point Controversy, they defined their use of the point as from "time immemorial," and Cooper uses the phrase sarcastically in many of his later works, usually defining an American "time immemorial" to mean somewhere around

142 Ibid., pp. 261-266.

143 Beard, IV, 268. It is interesting to note, too, that in point of fact Cooper refused to grant the barber's request, but he made Edward Effingham agree to it. Cooper argued that it would be more in harmony with Edward Effingham's character to do so.
two years.

Parallel to the point incidents but earlier, another local delegation visits Mr. Effingham consisting of Mr. Bragg, Mr. Dodge, and Mr. Gouge. Their mission is to attempt to gain Edward Effingham's support in a plan to remodel the Episcopal village church. The plan is to lower the pulpit, to replace the old highbacked pews, and to raise the floor amphitheatre fashion so that everyone can see the parson and the singers in the gallery. The delegation argues that the church exists for the accommodation of the public, while the Effinghams feel it exists for the worship of God. In connection with the related discussion of European churches, Steadfast Dodge makes the comments which must mark, from Cooper's point of view, the high water mark of equalitarian arrogance when he discusses how he will handle the matter in the columns of the Active Inquirer.

I have many things in reserve, among which I propose to give a few remarks—I dare say they will be very worthless ones—on the impropriety of a rational being's ever kneeling. To my notion, gentlemen and ladies, God never intended an American to kneel.\textsuperscript{144}

The Effinghams discuss the plans after the delegation leaves, and agree "they would oppose the innovation, as irreverent in appearance, unsuited to the retirement and self-abasement that best comported with prayer, and opposed to the delicacy of their own habits. . . ."\textsuperscript{145}

In Cooper's own time, one of the incidents which

\textsuperscript{144} Home as Found, pp. 218-219.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., p. 220.
raised the hackles of the most people was Eve's discussion with Grace Van Cortlandt on the position of the American gentleman over against the titled European. In *Homeward Bound*, Mr. Sharp (that is, the real Sir George Templemore, an English baronet) appears to be romantically interested in Eve, but after they arrive in New York, he gradually becomes more interested in Grace, Eve's cousin and childhood friend. Grace has never before had a titled Englishman for a suitor, and she looks up the Templemore family in a court guide of Eve's and is surprised to find that the title has been in the Templemore family only since 1701, and that both the Effinghams and the Van Cortlandts have been distinguished families rather longer than this. Eve does not have Grace's provincial awe of titles.

She had been accustomed to see her father and John Effingham moving in the best circles of Europe, respected for their information and independence, undistinguished by their manners, admired for their personal appearance, manly, courteous, and of noble bearing and principles, if not set apart from the rest of mankind by an arbitrary rule connected with rank. Rich, and possessing all the habits that properly mark refinement, of gentle extraction, of liberal attainments, walking abroad in the dignity of manhood, and with none between them and the Deity, Eve had learned to regard the gentlemen of her race as the equals in station of any of their European associates, and as the superiors of most, in everything that is essential to true distinction.\(^{146}\)

At this distance one might think that Cooper's American audience would be gratified at this defense of the American gentleman, but in point of fact their reaction was to accuse Cooper of trying to prove that he was as good as a lord. This opinion of Eve's is the basis for James Russell Lowell's

\(^{146}\) Ibid., pp. 209-210.
characterization,

Here's Cooper, who's written six volumes to show
He's as good as a lord: well let's grant that he's
so...[147]

And in the Brother Jonathan letters, Cooper goes out of his
way to show that a baronet is 50th in a list of 65 degrees
of social rank, that is, only 16th above the rank of peasant,
but people believed what they wanted to believe.[148]

And, I suppose, it would be less than fair not to ad-
mit that most readers of the Home novels find Edward Effing-
ham and his daughter Eve insufferably superior. As in his de-
defense in the Brother Jonathan letters, Cooper seems so intent
on exaggerating the vices of America and the virtues of the
Effinghams, that we get a strong impression of his personal
stake in the conduct of the novels. His intention in his own
words finally is personal: the novels "would tell my side of
the transaction [the Point Controversy] in a form that was
likely to last as long, at least, and to circulate as widely,
as the falsehoods. This is the simple history of the concep-
tion of the two novels."[149] Cooper overshot himself; the
form has lasted longer than the falsehood, and Cooper's view
of American manners, even though in many ways just, seems too
often to be merely vindictive.

In addition, despite many effectively imagined inci-
dents, the aesthetic aspects of the novels seem deficient.

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147 "A Fable for Critics," lines 804-805.
148 Beard, IV, 235.
149 Ibid., p. 274.
Home as Found ends with rather elaborately arranged revelations about the true identity of Paul, Eve's suitor. Originally he was Paul Blunt in Homeward Bound, a gentleman traveling incognito by caprice evidently, since the Effinghams had met him before in Europe as Paul Powis, when his knowledge of seamanship had saved them from an accident on a Swiss lake, though the extent of his service to them is not revealed until we are two-thirds of the way through Home as Found. Eve is uncertain of Paul's nationality, which becomes more critical as she becomes more interested in him, because she is determined to marry an American, but the details of his family and background are withheld by our otherwise omniscient narrator for no apparent purpose but to provide suspense. When the Montauk encounters the Foam off Sandy Hook and Captain Ducie of the Foam comes aboard, he not only takes the false Sir George Templemore off with him (it turns out that the impostor is a Mr. Sandon guilty of absconding with 40,000 pounds of public money), but he takes Paul Powis with him too, and we with Eve are left with the impression that, since Captain Ducie speaks of taking criminals, somehow Paul too has some skeleton in the closet. Later, well into Home as Found, we find that Captain Ducie and Paul are cousins, and there was a question between them of the inheriting of an English title, but their differences are amicably settled because Paul is not of lawful issue.

One of the few fatalities in the encounters with the
Arabs in *Homeward Bound* is a Mr. Monday, and his papers and effects are consigned jointly to Paul and John Effingham. Paul's hurried departure from the *Montauk* makes it impossible for them to execute the commission of the departed Mr. Monday, but when they are finally examined by Paul and John Effingham, it turns out that the papers reveal that Paul is the son of a Mildred Warrington who had married a John Assheton. Now Assheton was the maiden name of John Effingham's mother, and after John had been disappointed in the rivalry with his cousin Edward in courting Eve's mother, he had left Templeton and married, hiding himself under his mother's maiden name. But Mildred, finding that John had merely married her under the influence of his disappointment, separated from him and bore Paul without revealing to John that he was a father. All that John hears is that she had died. By these elaborate means it is possible to make out that Paul is really John Effingham's hitherto unknown son and heir. Another creaky device confirms Paul's identity, for a miniature of his mother which was lost to the Arabs turns out to be identical to one which John has of his wife.

Granting that Cooper has good reason for creating a world where there is much deception and confusion between appearance and reality, all these coincidences are too elaborate to be believable. They do enable Cooper to confirm a distinction between Edward and John Effingham, and it is apparent that the distinction is important to Cooper. When they are first introduced in *Homeward Bound*, they are enough alike, perhaps, to explain why some critics lumped them together.
They are brothers' children; they are identical in age and similar in appearance: one difference, at first seemingly small, is that Edward's fortune is in land, John's in corporations. Their manner also is distinct: John has spent more time in America and has grown more cynical, restless, bitter, severe; Edward is more judicial, rooted, and benign. It is probable if not obvious that each represents aspects of Cooper himself. It is interesting that the alterations in the house at Templeton, which correspond to alterations Cooper made in the family residence in Cooperstown, are left in the hands of John, and Edward when he sees them points out immediately that the new castellated roof must be impractical in a country where the winter snowfall is as heavy as it is in Templeton (Cooperstown). Cooper is big enough in this instance at least to poke a little fun at himself, and second guess himself. John's cynicism sounds like the Cooper who would advise any artist to live in Europe if he can, and Edward's loyalty is evident in Cooper's stubborn defense of American democracy and his love of his country. Or John is the Cooper of The Monikins, and Edward the Cooper of The Bravo, trying to show the superiority of American principles.

If the Home novels, with the distinction between the Effinghams and their contrast to the Dodges and the Braggs, the Mrs. Legends and Mrs. Hawkers and Mrs. Bloomfields, best embody Cooper's social thinking at mid-career, Home as Found also supplies the best abstract statement of his ideas at

151 Homeward Bound, pp. 12-13; also pp. 64-65.
mobility and the steady influx from immigration confuse the picture somewhat, and that this period in a sense never ends, since American principles allow considerable mobility also between classes, but ultimately a more stable third stage evolves. Here men of ability and wealth, wealth in land we imagine, are the naturally acknowledged leaders. Cooper's ideal would seem to be agrarian and perhaps nostalgic: the stability he posits at this point seems more closely related to the Federalist past of America than what we see now was to be its industrial future.

Detailed analysis of the Effingham family could show that the reality they stand for in a not overly subtle fashion is a queer combination of Adam's aristocracy, Jefferson's liberal faith in the democratic possibilities of America, with more than a perceptible taint of Hamiltonian snobbishness and financial acuteness. The apparent contradiction of which I have been speaking [the dual role of simultaneously championing America as the true home of political virtue while shuddering more or less obtrusively at her cultural deficiencies] is not merely the result of a desire for Europe on the part of a few talented or eccentric Americans. It is an historical tension at the deepest level of the American sensibility.154

Comments like the preceding suggest why the Home novels are the most fascinating of Cooper's failures. They come to grips intellectually with some of Cooper's most imposing matter, while they fail to find a satisfying aesthetic form. There is so much that is good in them, and so much that is bad. Homeward Bound grafts circumstantial realism onto a rather romantic adventure plot which is tenuously related to the intellectual matter; Home as Found expresses its intellectual matter in many well-imagined incidents while it fails in

154 Bewley, p. 87.
its overall design and lacks a convincing objectivity.

Only some of the most recent criticism has taken the *Home* novels seriously, or has seriously attempted to see them as a unit. One commentator who is interested in Cooper's social theories and his sea novels, indeed who argues that Cooper's social theories are best articulated in his sea novels, still feels that *Homeward Bound* in an incredible melange of mixed intentions and unconscious motivations.¹⁵⁵ He takes the Effinghams to be the heroes (as indeed they are in *Home as Found*), and is shocked to find that in the encounter with the elements in *Homeward Bound* they do not emerge as the natural leaders. Captain Truck and Paul Powis clearly are the heroes of *Homeward Bound*, for they have the gifts and the experience to deal with the difficulties and problems which the events present.

There is no escaping in Cooper this doctrine of "gifts," which ultimately is theological or religious. A man must do what he has a gift for, the gift is God-given, and if a man has the requisite humility he knows it, otherwise he learns it or is taught it by the events and circumstances of his life, assuming he is susceptible to learning. This kind of reverent self-knowledge under God is the highest good to Cooper, and, on the other hand, to be proud or presumptive, to interfere

in that for which one has no gift or experience inevitably leads to disaster, physical and moral. As might be expected, this central concern in Cooper is best exemplified and articulated in the Leatherstocking novels.\textsuperscript{156} Hawkeye, in \textit{The Last of the Mohicans}, is alone among the white men to respect the Indian, for the Indian lives according to his gifts. He believes the white man's gifts are different, and in his Christianity higher, but even scalping is understandable to him and, he argues, not dishonorable in the Indian. In \textit{The Pathfinder} he faces the greatest temptation in the person of Mabel Dunham, but he rightly concludes that his gift is not for the settlement, as he also asserts (later in his life but earlier in Cooper's composition) in the conclusion of \textit{The Pioneers}. Speaking of himself, Leatherstocking says to Oliver Effingham and Elizabeth Temple,

\begin{quote}
Don't fear the Leatherstocking, children: God will see that his days be provided for, and his ind happy. I know you mean all for the best, but our ways doesn't agree. I love the woods, and ye relish the face of man; I eat when hungry and drink when a-dry, and ye keep stated hours and rules; nay, nay, you even over-feed the dogs, lad, from pure kindness; and hounds should be gaunt to run well. The meanest of God's creators be made for some use, and I'm form'd for the wilderness; and, if ye love me, let me go where my soul craves to be ag'in!\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

Actually, \textit{Home as Found} ends on a similar note. One of the things which puzzled Eve when Paul left the \textit{Montauk}

\textsuperscript{156} This dissertation will return to these issues in connection with its discussion of \textit{The Pioneers}, Chapter IV, \textit{The Deerslayer}, Chapter III, and especially in \textit{Afloat and Ashore} and Miles Wallingford, Chapter V.

\textsuperscript{157} \textit{The Pioneers} (New York: W. A. Townsend, 1859), pp. 502-503.
with Captain Ducie was the apparently rude way in which Captain Ducie insisted on entering the boat before Paul. At the time she takes it for a sign of disrespect for Paul, and it fuels her fantasy that perhaps Paul is a criminal or a wanted man. At the very end after they have been happily married she asks Paul for an explanation. He explains and she draws the conclusion:

"The etiquette of a vessel of war is rigid certainly, and wisely so. But what you fancied rudeness, was in truth a compliment. Among us sailors, it is the inferior who goes first into a boat, and who quits it last."

"So much, then for forming a judgment ignorantly! I believe it is always safer to have no opinion, than to form one without a perfect knowledge of all the accompanying circumstances."158

To form a just judgment one needs knowledge or experience, and if one has no knowledge or experience one should be humble enough to form no opinion. One should know one's gifts but one should also recognize one's limitations.

These intimations of a consistent moral position also suggest a way of seeing the relationship between *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*.

Actually the books are contrapuntal. The first novel creates a necessary frame of reference through which we view and judge the significance of the action second. *Homeward Bound* is concerned with an involuntary but significant retreat from civilization; it deals with a closed and orderly society on board ship, with a contest between man and the forces that humble him. *Home as Found* is the return to an open civilization already far on its way toward corruption because it mistakes possession for principles, majority opinion for law and order, change for

158 *Home as Found*, p. 507.
progress. 159

The tests in the conflict between man and the elements in Home­
ward Bound are successfully met by Captain Truck and Paul
Powis because they have knowledge and experience to deal with
them. The civilized Effinghams are not of themselves equipped
to deal with these threats, but they learn the essential kind
of humility that comes of recognizing their limitations. When
they think all is lost, their final dependence is on God as
they prepare for death. The scene has been criticized as sen­
timental,160 and it probably is, but it has at least this the­
matic overtone to justify it.

To attempt to read the novels together has Cooper's
sanction, for he says,

As any one who may happen to take up this novel will very
soon discover that there is other matter which it is nec­
essary to know, it may be as well to tell all such per­
sons, in the commencement, therefore, that their reading
will be bootless, unless they have leisure to turn to the
pages of "Homeward Bound" for their cue. 161

Also, then, after the action with the Arabs is concluded, it
is understandable that the Effinghams especially John "take
over" the action again, for by gifts and training they are bet­
ter fitted than Captain Truck to conduct the burial at sea and
to offer religious consolation to the dying Mr. Monday. In
this light too it is more understandable how Captain Truck

159 Charles O'Donnell, "The Moral Basis of Civiliza­
tion: Cooper's Home Novels," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XVII
(December, 1962), 265.


can be so competent at sea, and almost clownish in New York society.

Cooper later learns to manipulate the confrontation which teaches man the necessity for humility more successfully, as we shall see in the analysis of The Sea Lions and Afloat and Ashore. Yet even in the Home novels we can see that

The initiated have been humbled by the natural forces and have returned--these men have an unlimited respect for the created human order, for the feeling of stability and continuity, for tradition and laws. They have this respect "because they know that perfection is hopeless." They know that progress, at least in the moral sense, is a delusion; they know that belief in human perfectibility is a luxury which man can afford only at the cost of the loss of form, order, tradition, at the loss of self-knowledge and knowledge of human fraility and finiteness.162

The Effinghams are among the initiated, and they have the gifts and experience which should make them the natural leaders in the New York and Templeton societies. Read this way, their conduct in Home as Found is not that of pride, but of self-knowledge.

The reviewer of the Southern Literary Messenger criticized Cooper for not making enough of the New York fire described in Home as Found. Edward and John Effingham take Sir George Templemore to visit Wall Street, and John's estimate must reflect Cooper's:

What you see here, is but a small part of the extravagance that exists; for it pervades the whole community in one shape or another. Extravagant issues of paper money, inconsiderate credits that commence in Europe and extend throughout the land, and false notions as to the value of their possessions, in men who five years since had nothing, has completely destroyed the usual balance of things, and money has got to be so completely

the end of life, that few think of it as a means. . . . All principles are swallowed up in the absorbing desire for gain—national honor, permanent security, the ordinary rules of society, law, the constitution, and everything that is usually so dear to men, are forgotten, or are perverted in order to sustain this unnatural condition of things.163

That evening a fire consumes some 800 buildings and Sir George makes the observation, "Here is a fearful admonition for those who set their hearts on riches. . . . What, indeed are the designs of men, as compared with the will of Providence!"164 John and Edward Effingham agree, but the lesson is lost on the vast majority.

A faint voice was heard from the pulpit, and there was a moment when those who remembered a better state of things began to fancy that principles would once more assert their ascendancy, and that the community would, in a measure, be purified. But this expectation ended in disappointment, the infatuation being too widespread and corrupting to be stopped by even this check. . . .165

O’Donnell’s summary of the moral stance which informs the Home novels is apt:

That Cooper was committed to civilization no one doubts. But he was also committed to a belief in human frailty, human corruptibility, human imperfectibility. Cooper believed in law and order, in the agrarian society, in the natural aristocracy; but these beliefs are not simply the result of a vested interest in land. They were rather the result of a vision of human civilization as a delicate pattern of order created by man; but sometimes civilization, as it develops, weaves before man's eyes the picture of his own greatness, so that he loses the tragic insight, loses the memory of his own perishability, loses the awe of ruin which alone can preserve civilization.166

163 Home as Found, pp. 121-122.
164 Ibid., p. 126.
165 Ibid., p. 128.
166 O'Donnell, pp. 272-273.
These arguments make somewhat better sense out of *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* than the contemporary and subsequent criticism of them do, but it is also fair to recognize that these understandings are more implicit than explicit in the *Home* novels. There are still those times when we are carried away with the romantic adventure of *Homeward Bound*, or all we see is bitter personal bias in the astringent realism of *Home as Found*. We are carried away because Cooper is carried away. For all the vividness of incidents, the main characters are overwhelmed by Cooper's didacticism.

In Cooper, *in medias res*, the form is inadequate to the vision. And paradoxically, because of our distance from these novels, we are in a better position to appreciate them than were Cooper's contemporaries. It is appropriate, then, that this dissertation turn to a consideration of distance, Cooper's distance from his material and our distance from Cooper, to attempt to analyze how our apprehension of Cooper's accomplishment is importantly conditioned by this factor.
CHAPTER II

COOPER AND AESTHETIC DISTANCE

It has already been suggested that Cooper's failure in the *Home* novels and especially in *Home as Found* is a failure of distance. The work lacks objectivity, or to say the same thing another way, it emphasizes Cooper's personal bias. There is a fine line to be drawn here, for no work including the greatest is without bias, nor is any work completely objective. Indeed, we value many works precisely for their bias—where then does Cooper go wrong in *Home as Found*?

Cooper is unable to control the medium in which he works in *Home as Found* to achieve distance or the illusion of distance. "There is this much truth to the demand for objectivity in the author: signs of the real author's untransformed loves and hates are almost always fatal."

The key word in the quotation is "untransformed." Obviously every author works with his own "loves and hates," but if he fails to transform them, they cannot achieve "objectivity" much less "universality." Untransformed, they become at best merely personal idiosyncracies; at worst they become

vindictive slanders which vitiate the aesthetic effect. Poetry, perhaps, can tolerate more of this intense subjectivity, though even in poetry the intensely subjective effect is likely to seem to be either sentimental or questionable in propriety; the novel, which deals with character and incident, is even more conditioned by its readers' apprehensions about "the way things are."

It was Henry James, in the prefaces to the New York edition of his novels, who was one of the first to emphasize the necessity for control and discipline in the form of the novel, while Brander Matthews, for instance, was still speaking of the looseness of the form. 2 James says,

"There was always the difficulty . . . that the simplest truth about a human entity, a situation, a relation, an aspect of life, however small, on behalf of which the claim to charmed attention is made, strains ever, under one's hand, more intensely, most intensely, to justify that claim; strains ever, as it were, toward the utmost or aim of one's meaning or of its own numerous connexions; struggles at each step, and in defiance of one's raised admonitory finger, fully and completely to express itself. Any real art of representation is, I make out, a controlled and guarded acceptance, in fact a perfect economic mastery, of that conflict; the general sense of the expansive, the explosive principle in one's material thoroughly noted, adroitly allowed to flush and colour and animate the disputed value, but with its other appetites and treacheries, its characteristic space-hunger and space-cunning, kept down. 3"

2 "The novelist often fails as a dramatist, because he has the gift of the story-teller only, and not that of the play-maker, but more often still because the writing of fiction has provided him with no experience in working beneath any law other than his own caprice." "An Apology for Technic," North American Review, DLXXXIII (June, 1905), 875.

3 "Preface to 'Daisy Miller,'" The Art of the Novel, pp. 277-278.
James' rejection of improvisation, omniscience, and even first person narrative, and his advocacy of a fine, commanding intelligence as the center of the creation of the effect of a novel might, at first glance, seem very foreign or hostile to an analysis of Cooper. While it is obvious folly to expect Cooper to write a novel with Jamesian artistry, it is still true that to the extent that James' insights into the form are valid, they serve as a ground to examine his predecessor's attempts, if imperfectly, to achieve similar effects and similar validity. Certainly, the "intelligence, discrimination and analytical interest" which James pre-supposes⁴ is validly applied to any artistic work, whether it is contemporary or part of the tradition which makes the form what it was, and what it has become. As T. S. Eliot says, "Some one said: 'The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did,' Precisely, and they are what we know."⁵

And an essential part of the artistic tradition is some concept of distance or control of the form.

Many of the attacks on allegedly non-aesthetic matters like plot and emotional involvement have been based on the modern rediscovery of "aesthetic distance." After an unrestrained binge of romantic emotionalism and literal naturalism, authors began to discover, as the nineteenth century moved to an end, that in removing the various artificialities of earlier literature they had raised more problems than they had solved; it became more and more clear that if the gap between art and reality were ever fully closed, art would be destroyed. But it was not until this century that men began to take seriously

⁴Booth, p. 121.

the possibility that the power of artifice to keep us at a certain distance from reality could be a virtue rather than simply an inevitable obstacle to full realism.

In Cooper's works we are indeed dealing with works which show the "various artificialities of earlier literature," but they also have their own distinct ways of attaining distance, their own artifices, to achieve the balance that convinces us of the reality of the work but which yet maintains the distinction between art and reality.

It is these artifices that this chapter of the dissertation attempts to examine. If a work is "over-distanced," it will seem "improbable, artificial, empty or absurd"; if it is "under-distanced," it will seem "too personal" and "cannot be enjoyed as art." In the rejection of *Home As Found* by Cooper's contemporaries we would seem to have a classic case of the effect of "under-distancing." Neither Cooper nor his audience could properly distance themselves from the work: he was personally involved and they felt threatened. And in the somewhat greater appreciation in more recent times we have, not a sudden accession of critical intelligence, but a gain in distance in the audience by the passing of time which partly at least compensates the lack of distance in the work. Or,

6 Booth, pp. 121-122.

7 Ibid., p. 122. Originally the distinction was articulated by Edward Bullough, see "'Psychial Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology*, V (1912), 87-98, which has been widely reprinted. My page references to Bullough are from the reprint in Frank A. Tillman and Steven M. Cahn, *Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics: From Plato to Wittgenstein* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 397-414.
on the other hand, if one tried to teach, say, *Joseph Andrews* to college sophomores, one becomes aware almost immediately of the necessity of a kind of historical imagination to understand and appreciate a work which without this addition seems simply unreal, inaccessibly remote.

Bullough's original formulations are helpful at this point. He suggests, first of all, that without distance no contemplation of art is possible. The creator must distance himself from his material and the spectator must distance himself from the art object for it to be possible for an aesthetic effect to take place. On the other hand,

It will be readily admitted that a work of Art has the more chance of appealing to us the better it finds us prepared for its particular kind of appeal. Indeed, without some degree of predisposition on our part, it must necessarily remain incomprehensible, and to that extent unappreciated. The success and intensity of its appeal would seem, therefore, to stand in direct proportion to the completeness with which it corresponds with our intellectual and emotional peculiarities and the idiosyncracies of our experience.8

This contradiction is what Bullough calls the "antinomy of distance." "What is therefore, both in appreciation and production, most desirable is the utmost decrease of Distance without its disappearance."9

There exist, therefore, two different sets of conditions affecting the degree of Distance in any given case: those offered by the object and those realised by the subject. In their interplay they afford one of the most extensive explanations for varieties of aesthetic experience, since loss of Distance, whether due to the one or the other, means loss of aesthetic appreciation.10

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8 Bullough, p. 401.
9 Ibid., p. 402.
10 Ibid., p. 403.
The advantage of the term distance over "objectivity" or "detachment" is that it allows, even suggests, the possibility of variability, and allows the detached relationship to remain personal. There are, consequently, "distance-limits," or a range of distance within which the aesthetic operates. For instance, the time-honored advice to the beginning writer is that he must write about what he knows, that is, within the outer distance-limit of what he has felt and seen. Beyond that distance-limit his work has no reality, though this limit can be extended by effort and imagination, as when, say, Stephen Crane writes convincingly about the war he never experienced in *The Red Badge of Courage*. On the other hand, many writers have testified to the cathartic effect of writing about their experience: putting their experience into art enables or enforces a distancing of their emotion which is essentially therapeutic. If the attempt to distance themselves fails, the result fails: we can see that the writer feels deeply but cannot participate in the grounds which create the emotion; the effect is sentimental, or lacking, in our judgment, in propriety. It degenerates into mawkishness, or self-pity, or name calling.

Something of the same can be said for the subject, that is, the reader or audience (as opposed to the object, the work of art). Cooper's contemporaries, for instance, felt personally threatened by *Home as Found* as we do not; it is within the inner-distance limit for them as it is not for us. Or to take another example, the fact of distance enables us to take aesthetic pleasure in Thomas Hardy's poem, "The Man
He Killed," which if it were real would be too painful to contemplate. On the other hand, in my previously cited example, to the college sophomore Joseph Andrews may be so circumstantially remote that it falls for him beyond the outer distance limit of what he recognizes as human relevance. Hopefully, with experience and by means of effort and imagination, his outer distance limit can be extended.

Bullough contends that the concept of distance and the recognition of its variability is more helpful in understanding aesthetic effects than the time-honored dichotomies, subjective-objective, realistic-idealistic, sensual-spiritual, and individual-typical. It certainly would help to explain why our view of the tradition is constantly being modified, and why to a greater or lesser extent our view is different from the view held by the immediate audience. As Eliot says, "the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show." The fact of human experience is that we are in a continually evolving flux of time which inevitably changes if only very slightly yet continuously our vantage point.

In addition, Booth suggests, "distance along one axis is sought for the sake of increasing the reader's involvement on some other axis." For instance, Brecht's "alienation

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11 Ibid., p. 143.
12 Eliot, p. 46.
13 Booth, p. 123.
effect" is a deliberate attempt to minimize the audience's emotional involvement in order to increasingly involve their social judgment.

Every literary work of any power—whether or not its author composed it with his audience in mind—is in fact an elaborate system of controls over the reader's involvement and detachment along various lines of interest. The author is limited only by the range of human interests.14

Booth divides the types of literary interest, the axes along which the reader's involvement or detachment is controlled into three large categories: 1) the intellectual or cognitive, 2) the qualitative or aesthetic, and 3) the practical, which involves our emotional response.15 Roughly these correspond to intellectual, aesthetic, and moral aspects of the work, and interest in any one of them to the exclusion of the others usually results in a work which we do not completely approve.

In any case, for good or ill, we all seem convinced that a novel or play which does justice to our interest in truth, in beauty, and in goodness is superior to even the most successful "novel of ideas," "well-made play," or "sentimental novel"—to name only a selection from the partialities that conventional labels describe.16

But if we are involved richly, along all axises, we are not involved equally, for "the artist must choose, consciously or unconsciously. To write one kind of book is always to some extent a repudiation of other kinds."17 To argue that Cooper in his best work is capable of engaging us on all of these

14 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 133.
17 Ibid., p. 136.
planes is perhaps the major end of this dissertation, and to define the limitations and strengths of his concerns in terms of his control of distance and in view of our lengthening distance from him is the most important means.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of distance is our distance in time from Cooper, and a variety of ridiculous things have been said about Cooper by ignoring it. As has already been suggested, Cooper is more interested in and oriented toward the past than the future, but in at least one notable instance he attempted to forecast the future with surprising success. In Notions of the Americans (1828), Cooper attempted to predict the future population of the United States with the following results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cooper's Estimate</th>
<th>Actual Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>24,000,000</td>
<td>23,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>48,000,000</td>
<td>50,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>100,000,000</td>
<td>106,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What must have seemed visionary to Cooper's contemporaries turned out to be just a little less than the fact.

The more usual case, however, is that the lapse of time or the peculiar circumstances of our time leads or may tempt us to misinterpret Cooper in some material way. In his infamous attack on Cooper in "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," for instance, Mark Twain makes merry over Leatherstocking's ability to hit a nail on the head a hundred yards away with a bullet. But the kind of nailhead Mark Twain has in mind is a modern, machine-made nail, whereas the nail Leatherstocking is

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18 Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 63.
shooting at in *The Pathfinder*, in the wilderness, in the mid-eighteenth century was the old hand-wrought nail with a head almost as big as a modern American penny.19

There is ample precedent in Daniel Boone or any of half a hundred other actual frontier American heroes for many of the feats of Leatherstocking.

The skill of this backwoodsman, and the skill as well as other characteristics attributed by Cooper to the Indians, are frequently derided, but probably with small justice. In any environment certain particular skills will be generally developed, which are foreign to other environments, and the skills required in the wilderness are now far away from us and of their nature we can have but very small understanding. Yet the feats performed in Cooper’s novels with the canoe are of no greater moment than the feats performed daily on our highways with much more dangerous engines, sometimes disastrously, often with success; they are as nothing compared to the daily feats of the army flyer. We should remember, moreover, that if any particular exercise is long practiced with assiduity, there will inevitably arise, once or twice or occasionally more often in a generation, an individual of a skill such as far to surpass the powers of credible description.20

Consequently, both Yvor Winters and Robert E. Spiller emphasize the importance of an historical dimension in understanding Cooper. Winters says, "For any modern American, an act of sympathetic historical imagination is necessary to understand Cooper..."21 Spiller, too, argues that (with the literary historian rather than the modern textual critic) "the reader should try to reconstruct as best he can the point of view of the writer and the circumstances of the writing and, with an understanding of the work in its own context, he should read and evaluate it both as art and as historical

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20 Winters, p. 190.
21 Ibid., p. 182.
And beyond mere details of fact—can one really hunt squirrel not by shooting them directly but by "barking" them, that is, by shooting near them so that the shattered bark stuns them?—there are more complex differences in attitude and prevailing ideology which separate us from Cooper. A convenient example is the issue of Cooper's treatment of the American Indian. Does he emphasize their ferocity for the sake of Gothic terror or does he idealize their virtues to perpetuate the European myth of the noble savage? As is usual in Cooper, the dichotomy of the critic is too stark to encompass the facts.

The original accusation against Cooper was that he over-idealized his Indians. The most often quoted attack is by Lewis Cass: "His Uncas, and his Pawnee Hardheart... have no living prototype in our forest. They may wear leggings and moccasins, and be wrapped in a blanket or a buffalo skin, but they are civilized men, and not Indians." At first glance his objection would seem to be well-founded; as governor of the Michigan territory from 1813 to 1831 he had much more first hand experience with Indians than Cooper. Indeed, he is chiefly responsible for the negotiations over many years involving the cession of Indian lands to the whites in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, concluding

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22 Spiller, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 6.

22 treaties in all. He was also secretary of war in Jackson's cabinet, and an able defender of Jackson's policy of removal as a solution to the Indian problem.\textsuperscript{24} Gradually one begins to realize that Cass lived in a time and under circumstances which would scarcely allow him to concede that the Indian had human as well as savage qualities.

Cooper's defense against Cass' attack appears many years later in "The Preface to the Leatherstocking Tales" which first appeared with Putnam edition of The Deerslayer in 1850.

It has been objected to these books that they give a more favorable picture of the red man than he deserves. The writer apprehends that much of this objection arises from the habits of those who have made it. One of his critics [Cass], on the appearance of the first work in which Indian character was portrayed, objected that its "characters were Indians of the school of Heckewelder, rather than of the school of nature." These words quite probably contain the substance of the true answer to the objection. Heckewelder was an ardent, benevolent missionary, bent on the good of the red men, and seeing in him one who had the soul, reason, and characteristics of a fellow-being. The critic is understood to have been a very distinguished agent of the government, one very familiar with Indians, as they are seen at the councils to treat for the sale of their lands, where little or none of their domestic qualities come in play, and where, indeed, their evil passions are known to have the fullest scope. As just would it be to draw conclusions of the general state of American society from the scenes of the capital, as to suppose that the negotiating of one of these treaties is a fair picture of Indian life.\textsuperscript{25}

Grossman is even more direct: "Now that settlement of their own land had been long since completed, Easterners were beginning to realize that the accounts of the practical settlers


\textsuperscript{25}pp. vii-viii.
were suspect. Their vilification of the Indian was part of the necessary process of settlement, because it made his exter-
mination easier."  

Francis Parkman argues with Cass that "his [Cooper's] Indian characters . . . it must be granted, are for the most part either superficially or falsely drawn; while the long conversations which he puts into their mouths, are as truthless as they are tiresome." He reveals his bias in his comments on *The Last of the Mohicans* where he argues that Uncas "does not at all resemble a genuine Indian," while Magua, the Indian villain in the story, "is a less untruthful portrait." Yet as Yvor Winters points out,

And Parkman, who objects to Cooper's treatment of Indian character, especially in regard to the capacity delineated for heroic action and for love at a higher level than that of physical passion, yet recounts in *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* the case of a young Indian who followed his white mistress back to the edge of the settlements when she had been captured by a marauding band of whites, in order to be with her as long as possible and to hunt for her; and his account of Pontiac himself establishes that remarkable Ottawa not only as a man of genius but as thoroughly capable of heroic action.

More recent historians are divided on the question. One sees Cooper's Indians as divided between the extremes of noble savage vs. savage fiend, and praises the portrait of Chingachgook as the drunken Indian John in *The Pioneers* as the most "honest." Another, probably more fairly, argues,

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27 Parkman, p. 150.
28 Winters, p. 191.
"In the series known as The Leatherstocking Tales Cooper pictured red men both as heroes and villains in what appears to be an honest attempt to depict them as they actually were."30 All of the historians deplore errors of fact which they find in Cooper, obvious offenses: Cooper confounds the Mahican and the Mohegan tribes; he radically distorts the contribution of the neutrality of the Iroquois nations (Cooper's Min­goes) to the colonies during the French and Indian War in fa­vor of the lesser Delawares (an error Cooper inherited from Heckewelder).31 As for the "last" of the Mohicans, "let no man mourn"; there are plenty left in the East and in Wisconsin around Green Bay.32

Most of the historians, at least, are honest enough to cite the limits of their acquaintance with Cooper. Wal­lace admits only a youthful involvement in the Leatherstock­ing Tales,33 while Parkman in 1852 frankly confesses, "we have reference only to those happier offsprings of his genius [which evidently include The Pathfinder (1840) and The Deer­ slayer (1841)] which form the basis of his reputation; for of that numerous progeny which of late years have swarmed from his pen, we have never read one..."34 On the basis of

32Parker, in Cooper: A Re-Appraisal, pp. 81-82.
33Cooper: A Re-Appraisal, p. 63.
34Parkman, p. 149.
this statement it appears that Parkman has cut himself off from a significant quantity of the evidence: Wyandotté in the novel of that name (1843); Smudge in *Afloat and Ashore* (1844); Susquesus in *The Littlepage Manuscripts* (1845-1846); and Scalping Peter who was converted to Christianity in *The Oak Openings* (1848).

Cooper himself, of course, never claimed to be the historian of the Indian. Late in life he disclaimed any particular specialization in his knowledge of Indian history.³⁵ Yet comments like the following also exist. In 1851, George Copway, an Ojibwa chief whose Indian name was Kah-Ge-Ga-Gah-Bowh, asked Cooper to contribute to a journal he proposed to edit entitled *Copway's American Indian* which was designed to increase understanding between whites and Indians. He was no doubt flattering Cooper, yet he must have felt that some basis for his testimony existed in Cooper's works.

Of all the writers of our dear native land, you have done more justice to our down trodden race than any other author. . . . By your books the noble traits of the savage have been presented in their true light. Many times in my travels over England[,] Scotland[,] France and other European countries I have been asked the question "Does Mr. Cooper give a true picture of the American Indians." I have universally [sic] had the pleasure of answering, "yes" --³⁶

Perhaps the earliest positive statement comes from the beginning of this century: "Cooper's view is certainly

³⁵"To Wallace E. Caldwell," January 10, 1849, Beard, V, 401-402.

³⁶Beard, VI, 274-275.
that the Indian is human." Yet the same commentator argues against the charge of idealization mostly by saying that the ideal is so exceptional as hardly to exist in Cooper. "In general he [Cooper] endows the Indian with traits that would be approved as authentic even by the ranchman, the rustler, or the army officer. His Indians are in the main epitomized in Magua." It is certainly true that there are more "bad" Indians than "good" ones in Cooper, yet he is to be credited for recognizing a range of possibilities in Indian character, and some of his more complex portrayals—Wyandotte, Susquesus, and Scalping Peter have been largely ignored. Certainly the charge of excessive idealization would seem to be more justly lodged against someone like the American artist George Catlin, for instance.

It has been charged, as in the previous quotation from Francis Parkman, that the language Cooper ascribes to his Indians is too "poetic" or "eloquent." Possible sources suggested are the King James Bible, or in the European romanticism of Scott, Byron, and Ossian, but more recent study shows that, if anything Cooper is remarkably faithful to his sources.

37Brownell, p. 18.
A comparison of the figurative expressions employed by Cooper in the speeches of his Indian characters with those ascribed to Indian speakers in works known to have been used or accessible to Cooper shows that in this specific aspect of Indian character he neither invented imaginatively nor imitated European writers, but followed his resources with extraordinary fidelity.41

Working from the ten historians mentioned by Susan Cooper, it has been shown that

Of the grand total of seven hundred and forty-one figurative expressions employed in the speeches of Indian characters in the eleven novels of Cooper considered here,42 five hundred and sixty-nine are attributable to the sources examined, while one hundred and seventy-two appear to have been originated by Cooper. Nearly all of the latter closely resemble figures which are present in the sources, and are wholly harmonious with these... Cooper did not, then, indulge his imagination freely and irresponsibly in putting figurative language into the mouths of his Indian characters. Still less did he float passively in the current of a European literary tradition or imitate the language of English Romantic writers. Instead he followed diligently and consistently—faithful always to the spirit and usually to the letter—the most trustworthy firsthand accounts of actual Indian speech which the literature of his time afforded.43

One might, of course, still argue that Cooper's sources romanticized the Indian, though the sources are the best early historians of the Indian, who have firsthand experience, and Cooper's faithfulness to them certainly exonerates him from the charge of inventing his materials. A glance at other historical materials confirms the habits of speech which seem so poetic to white civilized Americans, Dee Brown's Bury My Heart.

42 The works examined are the five Leatherstocking tales, the three novels of the Littlepage Manuscripts (Satans­toe, The Chainbearer, and The Redskins), The Wept of Wish-­ton-Wish, Wyandotte, and The Oak Openings.
43 Frederick, p. 104.
at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West being perhaps the most recent convenient example.

The most comprehensive study of white attitudes toward the Indian within the chronological limits 1609 to 1851 is Roy Harvey Pearce's The Savages of America: A Study of the Indian and the Idea of Civilization. Basically Pearce places Cooper with his contemporaries in his view of the Indian.

We can say, if we wish, that the idea of savagism and the image of the Indian which it supported were articles of belief which had to be subscribed to by Americans who wanted to put their progress into fiction. And we can say, if we wish, that Cooper was the first to fall under this necessity, and thus first to fill out imaginatively the symbol of the Indian as savage.

The idea of savagism, as Pearce defines it, allows for noble and ignoble qualities in Indian character, but argues that in the order of things to Americans the Indian culture is inescapably more primitive and antecedent to European and consequently American "civilization," hence the only choice the Indian has is to adopt white civilization including private property and division of labor or die.

Certainly, though Cooper in The Deerslayer, for instance, argues through Leatherstocking the difference in the "gifts" of the two races, he always has Leatherstocking de-

45 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953).
46 Ibid., pp. 211-212.
47 Ibid., especially pp. 76-104.
fend the superiority of white gifts.

"God made us all, white, black, and red; and, no doubt, had his wise intentions in coloring us differently. Still, he made us, in the main, much the same in feelin's; though I'll not deny that he gave each race its gifts. A white man's gifts are christianized, while a redskin's are more for the wilderness. Thus, it would be a great offense for a white man to scalp the dead; whereas it's a signal virtue for an Indian. Then ag'in, a white man cannot ambush women and children in war, while a redskin may. 'Tis cruel work I'll allow; but for them it's lawful work; while for us, it would be grievous work."

The weakness in Pearce's analysis is that it does not allow for the fact that Cooper was also a critic of American civilization. Another recent commentator suggests,

In the course of his frontier novels, Cooper had all along been disengaging himself from American civilization, as understood by the world into which he was born, in order to create an American civilization worthier of the name, as he had also been disengaging the frontier metaphor from its literal origins, in order to apply it to more significantly ethical and religious situations.

It is not my purpose here to attempt to define the limits of Cooper's vision, though I will deal with the problem again in subsequent chapters. The point here is simply that we are in a better position than Cooper or his contemporaries because of distance in time and continued study to separate and distinguish among the qualities involved in American attitudes toward the Indian, and are therefore able to be more discriminating in assessing Cooper's treatment of them. The great popular success of a work like Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee suggests that perhaps America is more ready

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48. The Deerslayer, p. 36.

to face the truth of its past treatment of the Indian, though
whether it is ready to do him justice is still open to ques-
tion. Retrospectively, we can also recognize a kind of cour-
age in Cooper's insistence on the fact that the Indian indeed
had "gifts," and join him in the melancholy recognition that
the Indian seemingly had to be destroyed for his gifts to be
recognized.

Another area where attitudes are radically changed
from the time of Cooper is his treatment of the Negro. Know-
ing Cooper's beliefs on private property as exposed in the
Littlepage trilogy and his nearly lifelong at least nominal
sympathy toward the Democratic party, we would not expect
Cooper to be an early Abolitionist, or even an agitator for
radical change. Having seen the political bondage in many
countries in Europe, Cooper says,

In one sense, slavery may actually benefit a man, there
being little doubt that the African is, in nearly all
respects, better off in servitude in this country, than
when living in a state of barbarism at home. . . . Amer-
ican slavery is mild, in its general features, and phy-
sical suffering cannot properly be enumerated among its
evils. Neither is it just to lay too heavy stress on
the personal restraints of the system, as it is a ques-
tion whether men feel very keenly, if at all, privations
of the amount of which they know nothing. In these re-
spects the slavery of this country is but one modifica-
tion of the restraints that are imposed on the majority,
even, throughout most of Europe. It is an evil, certain-
ly, but in a comparative sense, not as great an evil as
it is usually imagined.50

In addition, Cooper points out that American slavery
differs from most slavery of the past in that the slave is ra-
cially distinct from the free populace, and he overstates yet

50The American Democrat, pp. 172-173.
foresees the bitter difficulties of the future:

The time must come when American slavery shall cease, and when that day shall arrive, (unless early and effec­tual means are devised to obviate it,) two races will exist in the same region, whose feelings will be embittered by inextinguishable hatred, and who carry on their faces, the respective stamps of their factions. The struggle that will follow, will necessarily be a war of extermination. The evil day may be delayed, but can scarcely be averted.51

The usual Negro in Cooper's fiction is a personal slave or a domestic servant, and he is most often given only the briefest characterization according to Cooper's understanding and experience with members of his class. He is most often ignorant and untrained, even childlike, and given to fits of unexplained laughter. He is capable of loyalty and devotion, but because of his naivete he needs the pro­tection of a benevolent master, which he most often has. He usually has a classical or Shakespearean name, for in­stance, Agamemnon in The Pioneers, or Cupid and Euclid in The Water-Witch. The black domestics constitute a definite­ly distinct component of the microcosm of Willoughby's Pat­ent in Wyandotte; the elder Pliny and the younger Pliny are unswervingly loyal to Captain Willoughby when he is deserted by almost all of the other settlers of the patent. There seems to be considerable affection in Captain Willoughby's nickname for Bess (young Pliny's wife) as "Great Smash, on account of her size, which fell little short of two hundred, estimated in pounds, and a certain facility she possessed in

51 Ibid., p. 173. See also Robert E. Spiller, "Feni­more Cooper's Defense of Slave-owning America," American Historical Review, XXXV (April, 1930), 575-582.
destroying crockery. . . . "52 Desdemona, for similar reasons, but for her lesser size is called "Little Smash." A Negro is capable of considerable shrewdness, as is demonstrated by Saunders, the steward in Homeward Bound, in his judgment of the comparative social status of the white passengers on board the Montauk.53

There are at least two instances of fraternal relationships between the races which anticipate the pairings of Ishmael and Queequeg in Moby Dick and Huck and Jim in Mark Twain. Interestingly, both instances occur in sea novels where men's relationships are defined more in terms of physical and technical competence and less by social restraint: the relationship of Dick Fid and Scipio Africanus in The Red Rover and of Miles Wallingford and Neb in Afloat and Ashore and Miles Wallingford. Jaap has something of the same relationship to Corny Littlepage in Satanstoe, though he is used for a variety of purposes throughout the Littlepage trilogy. Since The Redskins, the third novel of the trilogy, will be treated later in this chapter and Afloat and Ashore and Miles Wallingford constitute the principal subject matter of Chapter V of this dissertation, only a brief comment will be made here. Especially in some of the instances last mentioned, the Negro becomes more than a racial stereotype, and these instances provide the evidence for the following generalization: "Cooper was the first American author to characterize repeated-

53 Homeward Bound, p. 79.
ly, and with some complexity and depth, the American Negro.\textsuperscript{54}

As with the Indian, Cooper clearly considers the Negro to be human, but he does not accord him equality with the white race, usually because of the disadvantages of his primitive culture and his lack of education. Again, as with the Indian, Cooper shows courage in humanizing the Negro to the extent that he does, though to the modern reader his treatment may seem patronizing and chauvinistic.

Viewed from an historical standpoint, however, there is no need to be offended by Cooper's treatment, or to allow it to become an obstacle to our reading of one or another of the novels. Actually, Cooper's attitude is fairly liberal for his time. Yet for some readers it is an obstacle. Commenting on \textit{Afloat and Ashore}, one critic cites as a "major defect" the "affectionate and yet consistently patronizing attitude toward the Wallingford's negro slaves, an attitude which may perhaps be attributed to Miles rather than to Cooper himself but which is nevertheless annoying."\textsuperscript{55} The defect would appear to be in the reader, in his inability to recognize the distance that intervenes between himself and the work. The time and the place of a work or of a man are limitations, certainly, but hardly defects.

There are other areas and issues where our distance from Cooper can be the critical factor. Cooper invented the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotemark[54]\footnote{Kay Seymour House, \textit{Cooper's Americans} (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1965), p. 73.}
\footnotemark[55]\footnote{Dekker, p. 212.}
\end{footnotes}
novel of the sea, but to most modern readers any novel set on a sailing vessel almost by definition is in some sense romantic. The number of people who would be in a position to judge the authenticity of Cooper's seamanship must be constantly shrinking. Cooper's patriotism, his sense of the novelty of the American experiment, his fear that its principles were powerfully threatened by European opinion, and particularly by American subservience to English opinion, his concern about the principles of the founding fathers and, as he conceived it, the drift of America away from those principles—all these involve important readjustments in our thinking about Cooper if we are to understand him adequately. In addition, there is his self-consciousness about a distinc-tively American literature and his relationship to its creation which is rather remote from us.

One other major factor which demands recognition is the attempt to place Cooper in the history of the novel. It sometimes takes an act of conscious memory to realize a kind of remoteness relative to us—not that we intend by this means to gloss over Cooper's weaknesses or mistakes, but we can hope to understand his accomplishment and his limitations more ade-quately. After all, when Cooper began to write, there was no Dickens or George Eliot, no Conrad or Robert Louis Stevenson, much less the twentieth-century development of the genre. Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* appeared in the same year as

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56 Cooper's seamanship is an issue in this dissertation in Chapter III in connection with *The Pilot*. 
the last novel published by Cooper, that is, *The Ways of the Hour*, in 1850, and Melville's *Moby Dick* was not published un­
til the following year. Mark Twain does not achieve recog­
nition until after the Civil War, and William Dean Howells
and Henry James were children when Cooper died in 1851. Coop­
er begins his career as a novelist with virtually no American
precedent except Charles Brockden Brown and Hugh Henry Brack­
enridge's *Modern Chivalry*.

Of course, Richardson, Defoe, and Fielding exist, and
their work has set some of the basic characteristics of the
genre. Most centrally,

The narrative method whereby the novel embodies this cir­
cumstantial view of life may be called its formal realism;
formal, because the term realism does not here refer to
any special literary doctrine or purpose, but only to a
set of narrative procedures which are so commonly found
together in the novel, and so rarely in other literary
genres, that they may be regarded as typical of the form
itself. Formal realism, in fact, is the narrative em­
bodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted
very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form
in general: the premise, or primary convention, that the
novel is a full and authentic report of human experience,
and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its read­
er with such details of the story as the individuality
of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times
and places of their actions, details which are presented
through a more largely referential use of language than
is common in other literary forms.57

More immediate to Cooper is the work of Smollett,
Fanny Burney, and Maria Edgeworth, and most immediate is the
novel of manners of Jane Austen and the great public success
of the Waverly novels of Sir Walter Scott. Cooper's first

"I wonder if we are to have a neighbor in the Deanery soon?" inquired Clara Moseley, addressing herself to a small party assembled in her father's drawing-room, while standing at a window which commanded a distant view of the house in question.

"Oh, yes," replied her brother; "the agent has let it to Mr. Jarvis for a couple of years, and he is to take possession this week." 58

The echo of *Pride and Prejudice* is unmistakable, but considering *Precaution* as a whole, one can debate which novel of Jane Austen's it is most influenced by, 59 but the influence is unmistakable.

The influence of Scott is most obviously seen in the novels which immediately follow *Precaution*. Typically, Scott placed his "wavering hero" in the middle ground between large movements of social and political change, 60 and made his fictitious characters move against a real background which included actual historical personages, which is also a fair description of Cooper's *The Spy*, subtitled "A Tale of the Neutral Ground," and *The Pilot* and *Lionel Lincoln*. With some adaptation, the situation is also descriptive of Leatherstocking, especially as he appears in *The Pioneers* and *The Prairie*. Cooper also, to a greater extent in early novels than in lat-
er ones, accepts the conventions of surprise, hidden identity, discovery of relationships between characters, which is a constant element in the novel back through Scott, the Gothic romances, Smollett, Fielding, Shakespeare in his comedies, and the old romances. Cooper's interest in Shakespeare, particularly, is well documented. In addition, the rise of the middle class and the extension of the reading public especially among women have important effects on the characteristics of the genre, and the new relationship of writers to booksellers rather than to patrons changes materially the circumstances of production and the work habits of the writer.

It is against this background that we must attempt to interpret the statements which Cooper makes about the art of the novel, mostly in his "Prefaces." Cooper has a considerable reputation as a critic of American society, but like many other novelists (Henry James is perhaps the only prominent exception) he has no reputation as a literary critic. Though there is a kind of consistency in his view of the work of fiction as a work of art and of his own artistic method and intention, he emphasizes different aspects of his views at different times. Besides, he often fills his prefaces with a variety of other materials—some are quite entertaining and at least one is witty; often the material in the pre-


face is only tangential to the work; some like Henry James' speak circumstantially about the inception of the story or comment on what Cooper considers to be the original aspects of the work; some of the later ones, for instance the "Pre-face" to *The Deerslayer* previously quoted, are Cooper's comments on critics' earlier attacks; some comment quite directly on social or political issues or American principles.

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine all of Cooper's prefaces in detail. *Precaution* (1820) is Cooper's first published work, but the rather apologetic preface now included with it (which is the only one Cooper wrote for it) was not written until 1839 for the London reprint by Bentley. Cooper's first preface is for the first edition of *The Spy*, New York, Wiley and Halstead, 1821, and the prefaces for *The Spy*, of which there are five in all from 1821-1849, form a convenient representative grouping to show Cooper's major concerns. Cooper's first preface raises the problem of the use of American material for fiction. "There are several reasons why an American, who writes a novel, should choose his own country for the scene of his story, and there are more against it!" It would help if the writer knew his material, but the British only want "Indian manners,"

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63 Shulenberg in his study of the prefaces says there are 57 prefaces at various times for 31 novels (p. 6), though his list at the end of his study lists 32 works, including *The Monikins*, perhaps not classifiable as a novel. He also gives the facts of publication for each of the 57 prefaces (pp. 93-95). Spiller includes 17 of the prefaces (some only in part) in his *Representative Selections*, 1936, pp. 273-325.

64 Quoted in Shulenberg, p. 14.
not "American manners," and the patriotic motive is not enough to guarantee a good sale even in America.

The first preface also introduces what becomes the recurrent warning in the early prefaces not to expect lords, castles, and Gothic mystery. Cooper apologizes to his countrywomen, especially, "by whose opinion it is that we expect to stand or fall," that the Whartons have to stay in a "comfortable, substantial, and unpretending cottage." By far the strongest statement on this subject occurs three years later in the text of The Pilot (1824), when he describes the Abbey St. Ruth in the following terms:

There were divers portentous traditions of cruel separations and blighted loves, which always linger, like cobwebs, around the walls of old houses, to be heard here also, and which, doubtless, in abler hands, might easily have been wrought up into scenes of high interest and delectable pathos. But our humbler efforts must be limited by an attempt to describe man as God has made him, vulgar and unseemly as he may appear to sublimated faculties, to the possessors of which enviable qualifications we desire to say, at once, that we are determined to eschew all things supernaturally refined, as we would the devil.65

While the second preface is a brief reaction to some of the criticism received, chiefly the charge that his portrayal of Washington as Mr. Harper is impious and coarse, the third preface, New York, Wiley and Halstead, 1822, returns to consider at length the problem of the poverty, the flatness of American materials:

Common sense is the characteristic of the American people; it is the foundation of their institutions; it pervades society, bringing the high and the low near to each other; it tempers our religion, yielding the indulgence

to each other's weakness, which should follow the mandates of God; it wears down the asperities of character--but it ruins the beau ideal.

The difficulty is only increased in works of fiction that are founded on the customs of America, when a writer attempts to engraft the scions of the imagination on the stock of history. The plant is too familiar to the senses, and the freshness of the exotic is tarnished by the connexion. This very book will, probably be cited as an instance of the fallacy of this opinion. We wish that we could think so. 'The Spy' was introduced at a happy moment, and the historical incidents were but little known, at the same time that they were capable of deep interest; but, so far as well known characters are concerned, we have been assailed with every variety of criticism, from the cock of a hat to the colour of a horse.66

The problem of grafting "the scions of the imagination on the stock of history" is one of which we shall hear again. The "poverty" of American materials is an issue which perhaps seems strange to the modern reader, but even later in the century both Hawthorne and James had similar feelings and voiced similar complaints. Cooper continues,

Besides the familiarity of the subject, there is a scarcity of events, and a poverty in the accompaniments, that drives an author from the undertaking in despair. In the dark ages of our history, it is true that we hung a few unfortunate women for witches, and suffered some inroads from the Indians; but the active curiosity of the people has transmitted those events with so much accuracy, that there is no opportunity for digression. Then again, notwithstanding that a murder is at all times a serious business, it is much more interesting in a castle than in a corn field. In short, all that glow, which can be given to a tale, through the aid of obscure legends, artificial distinctions, and images connected with the association of the ideas, is not attainable in this land of facts.67

As the Cooper preface shows, the American writer acutely felt

66 Quoted in Shulenberger, pp. 15-16.
67 Ibid.
the lack of a tradition, the lack of society and institutions which preserved differences and stretched back into a shadowy antiquity, the lack of a past, of "obscure legends," of "artificial" (made or contrived by art?) distinctions. American social, political, and economic equality leveled all the interesting and dramatic differences which would create interesting fiction.68

To Cooper's contemporaries, the greatest value of a work of art lay in its suggestiveness, in its ability to arouse a suitable train of associations in the mind of the reader and to impart to him some fundamental truth. This process would obviously be most fruitful when both author and reader were well acquainted with the material used to express the theme, and the theme would most likely be true if it were based upon direct observation and knowledge. . . . Yet the very theory that led American artists to native subjects also induced doubt about their usefulness. There was the danger that the native materials might be too commonplace to be truly suggestive.69

As Cooper says, what few events exist that might be susceptible to engendering fiction are so well known and accurately reported as to be commonplace, or so ordinary as to be incapable of being interesting.

The prefaces to The Spy of 1831 and 1849 are nearly alike; it is the 1849 preface which is commonly reprinted. The 1831 preface is for the London edition by Colburn and Bentley; the 1849 for the Putnam edition published in New York. Evidently by 1831 Cooper felt much less need to com-

68 Cooper maintains this position consistently during the first decade of his writing career. See Beard, I, 44; II, 169-171; and Notions of the Americans, II, 142-143.

69 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 70.
ment on the difficulty of finding suitable American material; the success of *The Spy* and his other early works had indeed refuted his argument of the third preface of 1822. Nor was it necessary to warn his audience about the lack of Gothic elements; by 1831 Cooper had demonstrated sufficient skill in finding American materials which had novelty and suspense to win him wide acclaim. In the place of the previous critical discussion, the prefaces of 1831 and 1849 deal with the inception of the story, the oral and anecdotal background: how a conversation with John Jay had suggested the story to Cooper. In addition, Cooper supplies the incredible but true account of why the characters are hurried off at the end of the story, that is, that the publisher being worried that the story would be too long, Cooper wrote and had set in type and paginated the last chapter, thus obligating himself to write the intervening material to fit the space left. This is probably more revealing of a certain casualness in Cooper's work methods than anything else. Only the 1849 preface has the formulation that he "chose patriotism for his theme."

Probably the most revealing early statement of his aesthetic problem as Cooper saw it occurs in the first preface to *The Pilot*, New York, Wiley, 1823:

> The privileges of the Historian and of the writer of Romances are very different, and it behooves them equally to respect each other's rights. The latter is permitted to garnish a probable fiction, while he is sternly prohibited from dwelling on improbable truths; but it is the duty of the former to record facts as they have occurred, without a reference to consequences, vindicating his in-

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tegrity by his authorities. How far and how well the Author has adhered to this distinction between the prerogatives of truth and fiction, his readers must decide; but he cannot forbear desiring the curious inquirers into our annals to persevere, until they shall find good poetical authority for every material incident in this veritable legend.71

Cooper's distinction between the historian and the literary artist rests upon Aristotle ultimately, and given Cooper's classical education (by our standards) it seems very likely that he was aware of it. Aristotle says,

It is, moreover, evident from what has been said, that it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. . . . The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history; for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.72

Cooper had a considerable interest in history and respect for fact. For instance, he promised his friends in his farewell to the Bread and Cheese Club in 1826 that he would devote his energy to the writing of a history of the United States Navy.

But sir, if there be a man in this community who owes a debt to the Muse of History, it would seem to be the one who has now the honor to address you. No writer of our country has invaded her sacred precincts with greater license or more frequency. Sir, I have not been unmindful of the weight of my transgressions in this particular, and I have long and seriously reflected on the means of presenting an expiatory offering before the altar of the offended Goddess. The apparent tardiness of this repentance ought not to be ascribed to want of diligence or want of inclination, but is merely an additional evidence of the vast disparity which is known to exist be-

71 Shulenberger, p. 20.

72 Poetics, Part IX, translated by S. H. Butcher.
tween truth and its opposite quality. 73

Cooper's intentions were good, but the work was arduous, and he did not actually publish his naval history until thirteen years later. 74 That Cooper's research was scrupulous and the result a fair treatment is attested by the work's continued use to this day as the best naval history of the period it covers. 75 In Cooper's own time, his treatment of the rival claims of Elliott and Perry to the hero's role in the Battle of Lake Erie was a matter of controversy, but when the matter was adjudged too specialized for an ordinary jury, Cooper gained what must have been one of his most satisfying triumphs when, arguing his case personally, he satisfied a panel of judges and was awarded damages against W. L. Stone of the New York Commercial Advertiser. On the eight points at issue, the three judges ruled unanimously for Cooper on five, and favored him 2-1 on the other three. 76

Bryant, in his "Discourse on the Life, Genius, and Writings of J. Fenimore Cooper" says in connection with the naval history, "he gathered his materials with great industry and with a conscientious attention to exactness, for he

73 Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, pp. 95-96.

74 The History of the Navy of the United States of America (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1839).

75 See Walter Muir Whitehall, "Cooper as Naval Historian," in Cooper: A Re-Appraisal, pp. 100-111.

76 See Outland, pp. 52-68. On publications of pamphlets attacking Cooper's interpretation, see Beard, III, 397.
was not a man to take a fact for granted or allow imagination to usurp the place of inquiry."\textsuperscript{77} And Cooper himself in the "Preface" carefully distinguishes "narratives of truth" from "lighter labours," that is, works of fiction: "Some of the greatest writers of the age have impaired the dignity of their works, by permitting the peculiarities of style that have embellished their lighter labours to lessen the severity of manner that more properly distinguishes narratives of truth."\textsuperscript{78}

Cooper did research for many if not most of his works. In many instances his sources are directly alluded to in the works that depend on them, or are mentioned if not discussed in the prefaces. In the first preface to \textit{Lionel Lincoln} Cooper thanks the Bostonians who helped him by supplying information about Boston during the Revolution.\textsuperscript{79} It is also true that in certain cases Cooper felt the failure of a work was that he had been too involved in the history, was too concerned with historical truth. He had not selected a subject which allowed fancy and imagination to make their proper contribution to making the work interesting, to play over the material in terms of probability and possibility, had indeed been inhibited by what was. The preface for the English edition of \textit{Lionel Lincoln}, Bentley, London, 1832, is particular—

\textsuperscript{77}Memorial of James Fenimore Cooper (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1852), p. 60.

\textsuperscript{78}"Preface," History of the Navy, p. ix.

\textsuperscript{79}Shulenberger, p. 24.
ularly interesting. The imagination, he says, should em­
bellish the truth, but in America the truth is so recent and
so well-known that the attempt fails. Cooper continues,
"... there is no blunder more sure to be visited by pun­
ishment, than that which tempts a writer to instruct his
readers when they wish only to be amused. The author has
had these truths forced upon him by experience, and in no
instance more obviously than in the difficulties he encoun­
tered in writing this his only historical tale, and its re­
ception by the world." As late as 1844-1845, in his notes
for Griswold, Cooper says of Lionel Lincoln, "It was strict­
ly an American Historical Novel, a class of which none ever
succeeded." Most critics today would classify almost all
of Cooper's works as historical novels, and it is evident
that when Cooper uses the term "historical" he is interpret­
ing it in a very strict sense.

Yet in the 1832 preface to Lionel Lincoln he prom­
ises he will never attempt this kind of historical novel
again. But he also defends his evocation of the battles of
Lexington and Bunker Hill, and shows that his accuracy ex­
tends to the state of the weather and the phases of the moon.
He also defends his characterization of the idiot, Job Pray,
and the madman, Ralph, as "drawn from life, and with as rigid

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80 Because of its rarity, Shulenberger reprints this
preface in its entirety, pp. 26-27.
82 Clavel, p. 393.
an adherence even to language, as the course of the narrative would allow." Cooper seems never to have recognized that the fault lay in what he would have called the design: the reversals and revelations at the end subvert the original intention.

Old Ralph, the pious patriot who moves at will through the opposing lines, turns out to be Lionel's father; and Job, an idiot boy who is a violent American partisan, is eventually revealed as his half-brother. But when Cooper reveals as well that Ralph is a maniac escaped from his British keeper, the reader is left with the impression that the two most influential patriots in Boston were both insane. Such a conclusion is, of course, far from Cooper's intention, but the melodramatic inversion that comes at the end destroys all the coherence that the book appeared to have.

Shulenberger argues that Cooper's "most important point in the early prefaces is his argument for realism, for literal detail and truth of representation, as opposed to idealization of either character or scene." This, it seems to me, is a misrepresentation because it sounds like realism for realism's sake; for the right or responsibility of the poet or the writer of romance, according to the 1823 preface to *The Pilot* is "to garnish a probable fiction": what makes it probable is its relation to the truth of history, but it is after all fiction, or it is truth "garnished" or to use another favorite word of Cooper's, it is truth "embellished" to make it interesting. A similar and slightly earlier formulation for the same position is the third preface to *The

83 Shulenberger, p. 27.
84 Ringe, *James Fenimore Cooper*, pp. 41-42.
85 Shulenberger, pp. 11-12.
Spy, 1822, where the problem is described as the attempt "to engraft the scions of the imagination on the stock of history."

Shulenberger also speaks of Cooper's "conscious revolt" against the Gothic, and while it seems probable that the offenses against probability in many Gothic novels were as plain to Cooper as they are to us, his complaints about the poverty of American material suggest, if anything, a regret for this lack of atmosphere and "associations" in America. As Cooper's early novels amply illustrate, Cooper hopes to supply this lack of richness by the interest of novelty, by treating materials hitherto not touched in fiction. In this Cooper is not far from some of the basic impulses which created the novel as a form.

Previous literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice the major test of truth: the plots of classical and renaissance epic, for example, were based on past history or fable, and the merits of the author's treatment were judged largely according to a view of literary decorum derived from the accepted models in the genre. This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience--individual experience which is always unique and therefore new. The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well named. 87

Cooper valued originality and invention, and in this respect felt himself rather the superior to Scott, who had from Cooper's point of view so much usable material near at hand. 88

86 Ibid., p. 9.
87 Watt, p. 13.
88 Shulenberger, p. 54.
but Cooper was not averse to a Gothic effect if it could reasonably be worked in, as witness the hanging of the skin­ner in Chapter XXXII of The Spy, the idiot and madman scenes in Lionel Lincoln, or Elizabeth's encounter with the pan­ther in The Pioneers, to mention only a few.

Cooper's typical attitude and practice may be fairly summarized by quoting from his first preface to The Prairie, Philadelphia, Carey, Lea and Carey, 1827:

There is, however, to be found in the following pages an occasional departure from strict historical veracity, which it may be well to mention. In the endless confu­sion of names, customs, opinions, and languages, which exists among the tribes of the West, the Author has paid much more attention to sound and convenience than to litt­eral truth. He has uniformly called the Great Spirit, for instance, the Wahcondah, though he was not ignorant that there were different names for the Being among the nations he has introduced. So, in other matters he has rather adhered to simplicity, than thought to make his narrative strictly correct at the expense of all order and clearness. It was enough for his purpose that the picture should possess the general features of the ori­ginal: in the shading, attitude, and disposition of the figures, a little liberty has been taken. Even this brief explanation would have been spared, did not the Author know that there is a certain class of learned Thebans who are just as fit to read a work of imagina­tion, as they are qualified to write one.89

Fiction, then, doesn't have to be true, but it should seem to be true, and to seem true it must be based on fact, but not confined by fact, that is, the author is free to or­der, manipulate, simplify, impose design or coherence on his materials. That this position, which I have documented at some length from Cooper's early prefaces, is not essentially altered may be argued by reference to what is perhaps Cooper's

89Ibid., p. 30.
best known preface, the "Preface to the Leatherstocking Tales" which Cooper wrote for the Putnam edition of 1850. It is this preface which contains the often quoted "A leading character in a work of fiction has a fair right to the aid which can be obtained from a poetical view of the subject." But both Leatherstocking and the Indians are also defended in terms of their relationship to the real. Speaking of his characterization of Leatherstocking, Cooper says

Had this been done without any of the drawbacks of humanity, the picture would have been, in all probability, more pleasing than just. In order to preserve the vraisemblance, therefore, traits derived from the prejudices, tastes, and even the weaknesses of his youth, have been mixed up with these higher qualities and longings, in a way, it is hoped, to represent a reasonable picture of human nature, without offering to the spectator a "monster of goodness." 90

Cooper denies that Leatherstocking is modeled on any specific individual, but admits he has known several who might qualify.

This is not to imply that there are no shifts in emphasis in Cooper's aesthetics, though his general theory is quite constant. At different times the historian-poet dichotomy reappears under a variety of similar formulations in both the novels themselves and in the prefaces. Sometimes it is the contrast between the real and the ideal, or between the appearance and the reality (that is, the "real" truth which is a higher thing), or manners (the surface reality) which should be connected to principles (the higher truth). There is a growing depth in Cooper and a greater concern with theme,

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90 *The Deerslayer*, p. ix.
design, or moral, especially during and after his European experience. The general tendency is to defend American principles, first in contrast to European ones, and then to define and support them for his American audience. These formulations grow more moral and specifically theological as Cooper grows older.

Cooper's explanation of his purpose and method in *The Bravo* (1831) is made most explicit three years later in *A Letter to His Countrymen*:

I had it in view to exhibit the action of a narrow and exclusive system, by a simple and natural exposure of its influence on the familiar interests of life. The object was not to be attained by an essay, or a commentary, but by one of those popular pictures which find their way into every library; and which, whilst they have attractions for the feeblest intellects, are not often rejected by the strongest. The nature of the work limited the writer as to time and place, both of which, with their proper accessories, were to be so far respected as to preserve a verisimilitude to received facts, in order that the illusion of the tale should not be destroyed. The moral was to be inferred from the events, and it was to be enforced by the common sympathies of our nature. With these means, and under these limitations, then, the object was to lay bare the wrongs that are endured by the weak, when power is the exclusive property of the strong; the tendency of all exclusion to heartlessness; the irresponsible and ruthless movement of an aristocracy; the manner in which the selfish and wicked profit by its facilities, and in which even the good become the passive instruments of its soulless power.91

Yet in the later prefaces Cooper also makes some of his strongest statements about the value of accurate and particular pictures of manners and life.

Everything which can convey to the human mind distinct and accurate impressions of events, social facts, professional peculiarities, or past history, whether of the

higher or more familiar character, is of use. All that is necessary is that the pictures should be true to nature, if not absolutely drawn from living sitters. The knowledge we gain by our looser reading often becomes serviceable in modes and manners little anticipated in the moments when it is acquired.\textsuperscript{92}

The fiction which is based on these accurate impressions can be more effective than history in arriving at truth.

This is the greatest benefit of all light literature in general, it being possible to render that which is purely fictitious even more useful than that which is strictly true, by avoiding extravagances, by portraying with fidelity, and, as our friend Marble might say, by "generalizing" with discretion.\textsuperscript{93}

Cooper's stubborn respect for fact is a strong antidote to his generalizing tendency:

Every chronicle of manners has a certain value. When customs are connected with principles, in their origin, development, or end, such records have a double importance. . . . It is perhaps a fault of your professed historian, to refer too much to philosophical agencies, and too little to those that are humbler. The foundations of great events are often remotely laid in very capricious and uncalculated passions, motives, or impulses. Chance has usually as much to do with the fortunes of states, as with those of individuals; or, if there be calculations connected with them at all, they are the calculations of a power superior to any that exists in man.\textsuperscript{94}

Facts, manners, and customs in themselves have value, but connected with principles their value is doubled, though this instance also shows Cooper's late tendency to make a greater allowance for the theological understanding of the agency of

\textsuperscript{92}"Preface," \textit{Afloat and Ashore} (New York: W. A. Townsend, 1861), pp. v-vi.

\textsuperscript{93}\textit{Ibid.}, p. vi.

God in the affairs of man.

Cooper's defense of the *Home* novels in the *Brother Jonathan* letters was another assertion of his view that there is a basic difference between fiction and fact, and that his critics had confounded the distinction. Certainly, Cooper argues, an author must base his fiction on his own experience, but he must also be free to arrange and order it, to extend it by invention which retains fidelity to fact. "I presume every writer of fiction mixes up more or less of his own experience, in his works. I have done so, in fifty instances. . . ."95 "When a work professes to be fiction, the reader is bound to consider all those parts fiction, which cannot be proved to be otherwise. It is seldom that a work of this nature is met with, that does not contain some reality, and the inference that all is intended to represent facts, because a part does, would come very near giving a death blow to fiction altogether."96

Perhaps the most useful clarification of Cooper's aesthetics and their relationship to his methods of writing is the study of his affinity with the landscape artists of the Hudson Valley school, particularly to Thomas Cole.97

As the records of writing and painting show, the esthetic impulse was mingled with the impulse of the historian to preserve what had been very dear, what was felt to be peculiar, and what was rapidly passing. . . . The dominant sensibility with which these materials were regarded

95Beard, IV, 263.
96Ibid., IV, 253.
97See James F. Beard, Jr., "Cooper and His Artistic Contemporaries," in Cooper: A Re-Appraisal, pp. 112-127.
seems to have contained a peculiar if not unique ambivalence of attitude, whose most extreme representatives, perhaps, are Cooper and Cole. In the works of both men, there is a passion for exactitude of representational detail and, at the same time, a striving towards the harmonization of those details which reaches at times beyond the expressive limits of their media.98

The study of Cooper in these terms helps to interpret Cooper's strong sense of place in his works, as well as it explains his frequent use of the term "picture" in describing his works, and the ordering of his plots as a series of deliberately led up to "pictures," which were in fact widely illustrated by the artists of his time.99

Cooper himself, commenting on Cole in his answer to a letter of inquiry by Louis Legrand Noble, Cole's biographer, says

Nature should be the substratum of all that is poetical. But the superstructure ought to be no servile copy. The poet and the painter are permitted to give the beau idéal of this nature, and he who makes it the most attractive, while he maintains the best likeness, is the highest artist. Such, in my judgment, was Cole's greatest merit.100

As Cooper says, "he who makes it the most attractive, while he maintains the best likeness"—in terms of painting, one who manipulates and arranges light, mass, color, shape, movement, yet retains the naturalness and exactness of the convincing particular—he achieves the beau idéal.

An important American historian in his own right, Cooper differentiated with the utmost care between the order of

98 Ibid., p. 120.


100 January 6, 1849, Beard, Letters and Journals, V, 398.
truth necessary for the historian and that required for imaginative works. Like the painters, he sought to achieve a balance between the generalized fidelity to American experience which would convey an exact sense of its nature and quality and yet embody a religious, patriotic, and ethical idealism which transcended the immediate aspects of that experience. The balance was not an easy one to maintain, and it resulted often in an uneven apprehension of materials... Yet it is within this dual apprehension of reality, which Cooper usually described in the painter's language, that he and his artistic contemporaries evolved their forms. The combination of firm observation and unbounded aspiration gives their sensibility and their art works a texture and universality that we have been most careless to neglect.101

In some circles it is customary to mock Cooper's belief in the beau idéal. Pearce, for instance, discusses Cooper's defense of his Indians in these terms: "Cooper's defense, in the revised edition of The Deerslayer (1850) was that Cass himself had not known Indians at their best and, more important, that he was writing the sort of romance in which effects had to be heightened and colored to register as poetically true."102 Cooper's "romance" with its "heightened" and "colored" effects is treated as though it were a weakly emotional and subjective I-wish-this-were-so kind of thing. Cooper studied facts and always spoke of the beau idéal in terms of the highest respect: to him it represented the attempt to transcend the facts to break through to the more universal truth, the "perfect type." Cooper would agree with Aristotle that poetry, or in Cooper's terms fiction which is poetical, "is a more philosophical and a higher

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102 Pearce, p. 211.
thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.\textsuperscript{103} If, in the twentieth century, we are less convinced than Cooper that truth has its universal aspects, at the very least the apprehension will serve as another measure of our distance from Cooper. Not either, that Cooper is always successful at maintaining the tension between the real and the ideal, the particular and the universal, the organization of art which does not deny the complication of reality.

Nor is Cooper as successful as a critic in defining his forms as Hawthorne, for instance, though criticism is obviously neither Cooper's nor Hawthorne's forte. Hawthorne's distinction between the romance and the novel has a certain clarity to recommend it:

When a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel. The later form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former--while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably, so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart--has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation.\textsuperscript{104}

On the other hand, Cooper (though he sometimes sounds this way and has been interpreted this way) is not finally in Hawthorne's position of having to plead for a kind of special

\textsuperscript{103}Poetics, Part IX.

indulgence for his "romance" because of some kind of felt, but finally intellectually unformulated, value that it is presumed to have. Nor was Cooper historical critic enough to work out the relationship of his form back through Fielding to the tradition of epic and medieval romance as William Gilmore Simms attempted:

The Romance is of loftier origin than the Novel. It approximates the poem. It may be described as an amalgam of the two. It is only with those who are apt to insist upon poetry as verse, and to confound rhyme with poetry, that the resemblance is unapparent. The standards of the Romance . . . are very much those of the epic. It invests individuals with an absorbing interest—it hurries them through crowding and exacting events, in a narrow space of time—it requires the same unities of plan, of purpose, and harmony of parts, and it seeks for its adventures among the wild and wonderful. It does not confine itself to what is known, or even what is probable. It grasps at the possible; and, placing a human agent in hitherto untried situations, it exercises its ingenuity and knowledge which the romancer exhibits in carrying out the details, according to such proprieties as are called for by the circumstances of the story. These proprieties are the standards set up at his starting, and to which he is required religiously to confine himself. 105

The distinction has been debated down to the present. 106 Cooper's inability or unwillingness to rigidly distinguish the novel from the romance may be a strength rather than a weakness. Of the novel and the romance Henry James says, "these clumsy separations appear to me to have been made by critics and readers for their own convenience, and to help them out of some of their occasional queer predicaments, but to have


little reality or interest for the producer. . . ."107

If Cooper's criticism is less than final as a rationale of his accomplishment, the corpus of his practice is as available to us as to his contemporaries, and we have the additional advantage of the practice and criticism of the last 120-150 years. The kind of contemplative detachment which is "built in" to Cooper's theory of the romance-novel seems to mean, first of all, that the story should be set at some distance from Cooper in time. With few exceptions, the typical Cooper story is set from thirty to one hundred years in the past. Only The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish (1829), The Water-Witch (1830), The Heidenmauer (1832), and Mercedes of Castile (1840) are set beyond this limit, and none of the four are considered to be major works in the Cooper canon. On the other hand, there are only five works which are closer than the thirty year limit, that are contemporary to Cooper in time: Homeward Bound and Home as Found (1838), The Redskins (1846), Jack Tier (1848), and The Ways of the Hour (1850). Again the list contains works usually considered outright failures, or works relatively unread and unknown. It is interesting that three of the six last novels published by Cooper have contemporary settings, and the argument might be advanced that Cooper was learning in these last works to deal with the contemporary scene and problems more successfully than he had in the Home novels.

There is also considerable diversity in place in Cooper's novels, though at least half of them have strong connections or are actually set in New York, either in the city or upstate. As might be expected, some of the more remote settings are the least successful. The England of Precaution (1820) never comes alive, nor does the 1492 Spain of Mercedes of Castile (1840) nor the 16th century Germany of The Heidenmauer (1832). On the other hand, four of the five novels of the Leatherstocking series are set in New York, as well as The Spy (1824), the Home novels (1838), Wyandotte (1843), Afloat and Ashore and Miles Wallingford (1844), and the Littlepage trilogy (1845-1846). This list, in contrast, includes nearly everything that is still read of Cooper, with the exception, perhaps, of The Pilot (1824) and The Prairie (1827).

There are also some interesting contrasts between the settings of tales and the Cooper biography. One of Cooper's biographers points out, after describing the excursion Cooper and his family took down the Italian coast in a felucca Cooper hired in the summer of 1829:

A sea story was bound to come out of this experience, and so it did, a dozen years after, in Wing-and-Wing. This is an interesting thing about Cooper, in connection with what has been said of his jog-trot method of work. He wrote right on, for a certain number of hours every morning, all through his stay in Europe. He waited for no mood or inspiration, but took what lay topmost in his mind and fancy. And this was invariably something remote from the actual, in time and place. In France he wrote The Prairie and the Red Rover. In Italy he wrote the King Philip tale [The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish] and the Water-Witch, a sea story placed not in the Mediterranean but in the remembered waters of home. The Pathfinder was based on impressions of the Ontario country derived from his
naval experiences of thirty years before. Other instances could be added. In his Cooperstown years, he set tales in Spain (Mercedes of Castile, 1840), in England (The Two Admirals, 1842), in Italy (the previously mentioned The Wing-and-Wing, 1842), in remote oceans (Afloat and Ashore, 1844, or The Crater, 1847), in Michigan (The Oak Openings, 1848), and in the Antarctic (The Sea Lions, 1849).

A certain distance seemed essential to Cooper to make a tale interesting or to supply a perspective which enables or facilitates the arrangement of meaningful contrasts within the work. The universal is difficult to see in the immediate. The universal which lacks immediacy is unbelievable. It is between these poles that Cooper seeks his compromises: distant in time (usually 30-100 years), but close to some intimately known body of fact or personal experience: the frontier experience as his father lived it, New York history in his own family and his wife's family, or in tales which exploit Cooper's knowledge of seamanship and the mechanics of sailing vessels. In general Cooper is least successful when his tale is remote from him both in time and place, or

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108 Boynton, p. 201.
109 As in The Pioneers (1823), and Satanstoe (1845).
110 As in The Spy (1821), Wyandotte (1843), and Afloat and Ashore (1844).
111 As in The Pilot (1824), The Red Rover (1828), and The Sea Lions (1849).
112 As in The Heidenmauer (1832), and Mercedes of Castile (1840).
when his tale is remote in *neither* time nor place.\(^{113}\)

Beyond the location of a tale in time and place, there are a variety of devices Cooper customarily uses which also impose distance between himself and his material or between himself and his readers. Perhaps the most pervasive is a certain kind of formula for the successful tale from which Cooper never completely frees himself. The remoteness in time and place is one aspect of that formula. As Scott developed the formula, the action centered on some historical event, and often included historical persons, and since the complications proceed more from the characters' relation to that event than from the characters' relation with one another, action is more important than character. In addition, there is always a love interest, and some kind of complication founded on hidden identity or hidden motive.\(^{114}\)

When the reader becomes aware of the real life author pulling the strings to manipulate the action, the illusion is broken and the formula becomes pernicious. This is not identical with using a formula *per se*; it is a contrast between the formula made believable versus the reader's consciousness of the author as a person struggling with the problem of how to make his story "come out"—which he does by brute strength rather than by humanly believable situations and actions.

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\(^{113}\)As in *Home as Found* (1838), *The Redskins* (1846), and *The Ways of the Hour* (1850).

When we are aware of the author as a particular person, distance has broken down, and the illusion of a tale collapses. Cooper manipulates his formula with various success. In both *The Spy* and *The Pilot*, a noted historical character plays an important part in the action: Mr. Harper is George Washington disguised in *The Spy*, and John Paul Jones is the pilot. Perhaps because of considerable adverse criticism in America of his portrayal of Washington, Cooper shies away from this practice rather quickly. Lord Howe plays only a minor part in *Lionel Lincoln*, and other early successful sea novels like *The Red Rover* have no strictly historical characters. *The Pioneers*, the first published of the Leatherstocking series, has a close connection to the Cooper family and to Cooperstown, New York, but it has no strictly historical characters, nor do any of the later novels in the series. There is often some actual history flitting around the margin of a Cooper story (the battle of Fort William Henry in *The Last of the Mohicans*, or Nelson's campaign in the Mediterranean and the execution of Prince Caraccioli in *The Wing-and-Wing*), but after *The Pilot* (1824), Cooper only once in *Mercedes of Castile* (1840), makes an historical person an important element in his story.

Similarly, the love interest can be central or peripheral, integral to the story or almost completely conven-

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116 Shulenberger, p. 15.
tional. In, for instance, Lionel Lincoln or The Heidenmauer, the love interest seems to be included almost completely to gratify the audience, since the main interest in these tales clearly lies elsewhere. On the other hand, two of the Leatherstocking series, The Pathfinder and The Deerslayer, deal centrally with Leatherstocking's encounters with love, and in a variety of other novels of Cooper (The Wing-and-Wing, Wyandotte, Afloat and Ashore and Miles Wallingford, The Sea Lions) the love interest is central or integral to the story. In the Littlepage series, the marriage of Corny Littlepage to Anneke Mordaunt has important consequences in explaining how the Littlepage family acquires their land and in contrasting how that land must be managed, that is leasing vs. outright sale. And at times Cooper grows impatient or even sarcastic with the demands of his audience. In the 1842 preface to The Two Admirals, Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard, Cooper says, "the reader will do us the justice to regard The Two Admirals as a sea story and not as a love story. Our admirals are our heroes; as there are two of them, those who are particularly fastidious on such subjects are quite welcome to term one the heroine, if they see fit."\textsuperscript{117}

Hidden identity is more difficult than hidden motive to make believable, and to the extent that Cooper uses these conventions, the drift of his practice is toward the latter.

Again, the extent to which the device is made believable varies. The revelation in *Home as Found* of John Effingham's past has important thematic implications in distinguishing John Effingham from Edward Effingham (Cooper's agrarian aristocratic ideal versus the mixed and potentially dehumanizing aspects of business and commerce): one must still fault Cooper for the coincidental presence of Mr. Monday and his papers, which is the problem of the mechanics of the revelation, but the revelation has relevance to Cooper's theme.\textsuperscript{118} Actually, it is in surprisingly few instances that Cooper's manipulations of hidden identity or hidden motive strike us as completely false: the feeling that he didn't "play fair" with his reader. This kind of reversal has already been alluded to in the case of *Lionel Lincoln*.

Another flagrant case is *The Headsman* (1833). Sigismund, a mercenary soldier, has fallen in love with Adelheid, the daughter of Baron Melchoir de Willading, and the baron ultimately reconciles himself to the match since Sigismund has excellent personal qualities and has been instrumental in saving the baron's life. But Sigismund supposes himself the son of Balthazar, the headsman (executioner) of Berne, and the office is strictly hereditary, and he feels certain that the match for this reason is impossible. The baron agrees, outraged, and though Adelheid's love is real, the love can only end tragically. So far the plot is probable and well adapted to illustrate Cooper's point that there

\textsuperscript{118} House, pp. 157-163.
is little relationship between inherited position and ability or virtue, but Cooper then arranges an elaborate "rescue" of Sigismund and Adelheid from their predicament. It turns out that Sigismund is the son of Grimaldi, the Doge of Genoa, and that he had been kidnapped as a child. Cooper's concession to his audience to bring about the happy ending has now completely wrecked the novel and subverted the original theme. "Such a dénouement is so much romantic clap-trap, and one wonders how Cooper could seriously have written it." 119

Fortunately, The Headsman is an exception. In The Wing-and-Wing (1842), for instance, though the issues which separate the lovers are somewhat different, they are just as irreconcilable, and here Cooper allows the love to pursue its tragic course. This is the more usual case, for Cooper to adapt the elements of the formula which fit the material and the theme which interest him. And the word formula is somewhat misleading. What seems apparent to us as a formula has become so because of Cooper's and other novelist's use of certain elements that derive partly from the convention they inherit and which they pass on with various admixtures of their own person and time. Cooper in his own time greatly extended the material thought appropriate to fiction: it is another measure of our distance from him if his material seems restricted, capable as being characterized as formulaic. Cooper uses his "formula," then, to control and formulate his new material, to distance himself appropriately from it,

119Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 67.
and only occasionally (and not characteristically) relies so exclusively on conventions as to break that distance, which happens at those points when we become aware, not of the story, but of the storyteller attempting to "manage" his material. And as the examination of the prefaces shows, Cooper's reputation for experimentation and invention has much to do with the material used in fiction, but little to do with the conventions of the form of the novel. And as Cooper matures, he becomes less dependent on the formulaic and conventional elements which he inherits, and more willing to work out his premises in believable human terms.

Within the form, as Cooper understands and develops it, there are various ways to distinguish distance or detachment. Perhaps most obviously, some characters are clearly distanced from the narrator and from us because they are held up to ridicule: these are the so-called "attempts at humor" in Cooper. One way to define this effect is to note the difference between the experienced, trustworthy observer, and the naive, incompetent observer. Once early, in Admiral de Lacey's widow in The Red Rover (1828), and once late, in Mrs. Budd in Jack Tier (1848), Cooper makes fun of a woman who supposes she knows much about sailing vessels and seamanship (also, incidentally, Cooper makes fun of his "lubberly" critics). David Gamut in The Last of the Mohicans and Dr. Obed Bat in The Prairie are similarly incompetent in dealing with the frontier wilderness. Indeed, in The Last of the Mohicans, Leatherstocking alone is competent to survive in the wilderness; even Duncan Heyward, as educated and competent as he would be in the settlements, consistently makes errors
of judgment in dealing with the wilderness and with his In-
dian adversaries. The same sort of contrast exists be-
tween Captain Truck and the Effinghams when they are at sea
(Homeward Bound) and between the Effinghams and Captain
Truck in New York society (Home as Found). Another telling
illustration of this distinction in Cooper is the contrast be-
tween Cap and Jasper Western in The Pathfinder. Cap has ex-
perience as a salt-water sailor, and feels perfectly compe-
tent to command the Scud on Lake Ontario, but the problem is
different, and only Jasper who knows the lake and the weather
is competent to save the vessel from destruction.

These examples are illustrative but not exhaustive.
The point is that by means of these contrasts Cooper is en-
abled to control distance between us and his characters, or
to state the corollary, Cooper is enabled to define a center
of sympathy, a character or a small group of characters that
the reader trusts, that he feels closest to, that he respects.
Cooper does not have the advantage of a fully developed theo-
ry of "point-of-view," and his usual stance is that of the
third person omniscient narrator. Yet clearly that omniscience
is selected or limited, else there would be no suspense. Of
Jane Austen it has been said,

In her novels there is usually one character whose con-
sciousness is tacitly accorded a privileged status, and
whose mental life is rendered more completely than that
of the other characters. In Pride and Prejudice (published
in 1813), for example, the story is told substantially

120 Ibid., p. 44.
121 The Pathfinder (New York: W. A. Townsend, 1860),
p. 258-286.
from the point of view of Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine; but the identification is always qualified by the other role of the narrator acting as dispassionate analyst, and as a result the reader does not lose his critical awareness of the novel as a whole.122

Without claiming either the artistic finish or the verbal felicity of Jane Austen for Cooper, it is still important to recognize that Cooper despite his technical omniscience does clearly establish a center of sympathy, a "point-of-view," that is characteristically shared by a small group of characters. A kind of soft-focus effect results, with the center of sympathy hovering among or between a limited number of characters. Clearly, for instance, our interest in The Pioneers is an aura that hovers over Elizabeth, Leatherstocking, and Judge Temple. In the Home novels, the center exists somewhere between Eve and Edward Effingham. Not even John Effingham or Paul Powis can enter the charmed circle of complete identification. An obvious example of this exclusiveness, of this maintenance of a "point-of-view," is the partial step by step revelation to the reader of Powis' nationality and character. We are uncertain because Eve is uncertain, and only when she knows is the veil dropped for the reader. Though Cooper is not rigorous in maintaining a limited omniscience, and is not above dipping into the mind of any character that engages his attention at any given moment, yet the number of such insights and the weight of attention, the appeal to "self-evident" moral principles, clearly defines a center of interest and sympathy. Characters beyond

122 Watt, p. 297.
this center of sympathy are defined merely by their actions, or by judgments passed on them by the principal characters, which circumstances inevitably confirm.

The "other role" of the narrator alluded to in the comment on Jane Austen is also important in Cooper's use and understanding of the novel as a form. Though Cooper is never as intrusive as say, Fielding, yet he always feels it part of the liberty of his role to comment, on the action and characters directly if warranted, or more generally. The effect is that of the interposing of another personality between us and the action and characters of the story. This personality should be distinguished from the author as a real person: it is an idealized version of himself which he presents to the reader as guide and mentor. Some terms which have been used for this personality are the "implied author" or the author's "second self."

Whether we call this implied author an "official scribe," or adopt the term recently revived by Kathleen Tillotson--the author's "second self"--it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects. However impersonal he may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner--and of course that official scribe will never be neutral toward all values. Our reactions to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work.123

The implied author, then, is the filter through which we see the action and characters, but that personality also defines that view. The implied author is the organizing and controlling intelligence.

123Booth, p. 71.
Our sense of the implied author includes not only the extractable meanings but also the moral and emotional content of each bit of action and suffering of all of the characters. It includes, in short, the intuitive apprehension of a completed artistic whole; the chief value to which this implied author is committed, regardless of what party his creator belongs to in real life, is that which is expressed by the total form.124

Most succinctly, the implied author "chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices."125

That Cooper had some kind of concept of himself as author, some feeling that in his published works he is a personage rather than a person, or to use a common recent term, that he had some kind of "image," with a relationship to a reading public, is most obviously apparent when he feels that the relationship must be broken. In the conclusion of A Letter to His Countrymen, explaining the necessity for a public declaration of his decision to write no more novels, he says,

Had I not been dragged before you rudely, through the persevering hostility of one or two of the journals, this duty to myself would have been silently performed. With the exception of the extract of the letter published by Mr. Morse, this is the only instance, during the many years that we have stood to each other in the relations of author and reader, in which I have ever had occasion to trouble you, either directly or indirectly, with anything personal to myself, and I trust to your kindness to excuse the step I have now taken. What has here been said, has been said frankly, and I hope with a suitable simplicity. So far as you have been indulgent to me, and no one feels its extent more than myself, I thank you with deep sincerity; so far as I stand opposed to that class among you which forms the public of a writer, on points that, however much in error, I honestly believe

124 Ibid., pp. 73-74.
125 Ibid., pp. 74-75.
to be of vital importance to the well being and dignity of the human race, I can only lament that we are separated by so wide a barrier as to render further communion, under our old relations, mutually unsatisfactory.126

It is also apparent in Cooper's defense of the Home novels in the Brother Jonathan letters that he separates the author who appears before the public from the private man who suffers, and it is precisely the unwillingness or the inability of his contemporaries to accept this distinction as adequately observed in those novels which accounts for the storm of vituperation they raised.

And while one insists that the implied author is the sum of the choices he makes in a given instance, and that that implied author is not the same even from work to work, it is still difficult if not impossible to resist attempting cautiously to make some connections and draw some inferences about the implied author from what we know of the life and times of the real man. To what extent is Cooper's style, for instance, especially in the early novels (that style which he deems appropriate for his public "second self"), influenced by his realization that for an American novel to succeed with an American audience it must first be approved by a British critic? It is an irony which would leave Cooper chagrined, I am sure, to find us characterizing his style as that of a formal, proper, perhaps even somewhat stuffy, British gentleman. To some extent also it is "the product both of his militant sense of status and of his defensiveness about status at

126 pp. 99-100.
a time when equalitarianism was the reigning social mood." 

It is generally conceded that Cooper is best with "large effects," and not with choices of particular words, yet it is a revealing commentary on how quickly the situation of American authors changed in the nineteenth century that Mark Twain is not even conscious of the problem in these terms. Through a variety of intermediaries, Cooper's success is the basis for Mark Twain's liberty, though Mark Twain would never have acknowledged it.

The relationship of the implied author to his public is assumed to be one of trust and sympathy, but to what extent does Cooper's status as the first internationally recognized American novelist make him almost careless? If an incident is possible he seems satisfied, and he does not always seem to concern himself with making it probable as well. Is it that very early public success and his superior experience in Europe which encourage a dogmatizing tendency that especially in his middle years encroaches dangerously on his sometimes somewhat precarious artistic instinct? And Cooper's early financial success and his continued economic need encourage a rapidity of production which is detrimental to the art of all but the most precocious. In any case, the interposition of the implied author is another important factor in the experience of a Cooper novel, a way in which he imposes control and distance on his material.

Rather late in his career, seemingly rather accidently, Cooper hit upon another device for emphasizing distance which he uses at least several times with outstanding success. Cooper received a letter dated January 23, 1843, which began:

Excuse the liberty I take in addressing you, but being anxious to know whether you are the Mr. Cooper who in 1806 or 1807 was on board the ship Sterling, Cap. Johnson, bound from New York to London, if so whether you recollect the boy Ned whose life you saved in London dock, on a Sunday, if so it would give me a great deal of pleasure to see you, I am at present at Sailors Snug Harbor, or if you would send me your address in the city, I would like to call upon you.128

It was indeed Cooper's old shipmate, Ned Myers, and Cooper arranged to meet him in New York.129 Cooper was so impressed with the story of Ned's life that he invited him for what turned out to be a five-month visit to Cooperstown. The result of their conversations was a collaboration: Cooper served as editor for the autobiographical *Ned Myers; or, A Life before the Mast*, Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard, 1843. The style of *Ned Myers* is a minor triumph, for Cooper has indeed succeeded in preserving the idioms and intonation of the seaman and in imposing, at the same time, the order and control which are so conspicuously lacking in the narratives of the other literary tars. But if Cooper had modified Ned's discourse, Ned in turn had apparently modified his; in none of Cooper's previous writings is there the clarity of syntax, the precision of diction, and the racy concreteness of metaphor of *Ned Myers*.130

This was not the first time Cooper had used the de-

128 Correspondence, II, 490. A second letter from Ned is given pp. 495-496.
129 Cooper's reply is given in Beard, IV, 383.
130 Philbrick, p. 129.
vice of first person narration, but his use of it for major works of fiction is new, and first person narration was used after Ned Myers in the five novels which follow, and influence the sixth. Afloat and Ashore and Miles Wallingford (1844) are told by the same narrator in the first person. The three novels in the Littlepage Manuscripts, Satans-toe (1845), The Chainbearer (1845), and The Redskins (1846) are narrated respectively by the first, second, and fourth generation male heads of the Littlepage family. In The Crater (1847), Cooper returns to his more usual third person narration, but the "Preface" claims that the material is a "grave matter of fact," and concludes, "It remains only to say that we have endeavored to imitate the simplicity of Captain Wollston's journal, in writing this book, and should any homeliness of style be discovered, we trust it will be imputed to that circumstance."132

Cooper had been engaged in defending the Home novels in the Brother Jonathan in 1841 and 1842, but if he recognized first person narration as a solution to the problem of preventing his audience from identifying the "implied author" with himself personally, the discovery is not recorded. His comments on the device are limited to a few half serious and obviously not to be believed references to himself as editor.

131 A minor magazine piece of 1843 entitled The Autobiography of a Pocket Handkerchief had appeared in Brother Jonathan, and the letters in Notions of the Americans (1828) had used first person narration. There is, of course, ample precedent in English fiction.

While this was true of **Ned Myers**, it was certainly not true of the subsequent volumes. Shulenberger calls the first person narration one of Cooper's "most successful devices," yet "the notable fact in this connection is how little, rather than how significantly, he theorized on a new and important development in his practice."¹³³

As noted before, Cooper's strong suit is not critical speculation on the form of the novel, and if the device served him for a time, it was not a discovery which revolutionized his thinking about the novel. In his last four novels,¹³⁴ he returned to his more usual practice of third person narration and the interposition of an implied author. One might like to claim that the first person device got him out of the problem he had created between himself and his audience in the *Home* novels, but such successful novels as *The Pathfinder* (1840), *The Deerslayer* (1841), *The Two Admirals* (1842), *The Wing-and-Wing* (1842), and *Wyandotte* (1843), all using his usual third person narration intervene. And even the first person device is not sufficient to guarantee the necessary distance, as subsequent analysis in this chapter of *The Redskins* will show. To be fair, one must also confess that all of Cooper's first person narrators show significant likenesses to his usual third person implied author, or, more dangerously in the case of *The Redskins*, to the man himself.

¹³³ p. 59.
¹³⁴ *Jack Tier* (1847), *The Oak Openings* (1848), *The Sea Lions* (1849), and *The Ways of the Hour* (1850).
According to the theory of aesthetic distance, then, the artist fails when he violates either one of two limits: when the subject and treatment are beyond the outer limit of distance where the work loses its human relevance and becomes unreal, or when he violates the inner limit where the work becomes so personally involving that he loses his objectivity, his control of his medium. And as perhaps can best be seen in the case of *Home as Found*, the continuing shift in distance on the part of the audience can subtly shift judgments on "human relevance," "unreal," or "personally involving," and "objectivity" in the previous statement. To exemplify the violation of the outer limit this chapter analyzes *The Water-Witch* (1830), and to exemplify the violation of the inner limit, *The Redskins* (1846). The previously examined *Home* novels are considered, especially in the case of *Home as Found*, to violate the inner distance limit, hence my analysis of *The Redskins* is not as detailed, and since the general movement in selecting the examples is from Cooper's failures to his successes, neither *The Water-Witch* nor *The Redskins* presents as clear a case. Probably *The Headsman* or *Lionel Lincoln* would present clearer cases of Cooper's either remoteness or distraction from the potentially basic human believability of his material as to violate the outer limit of distance, while *Home as Found* is the classic case of the kind of personal involvement, at least to Cooper's contemporaries, which rises to the vindictive.

Cooper himself recognized that he had a problem with *The Water-Witch*. In the "Preface" usually reprinted, Cooper
describes the work as a "comparative failure." It was a "bold attempt" to set the scene on the coast of America, but it was unsuccessful.

The facts of this country are all so recent, and so familiar, that every innovation on them, by means of the imagination, is coldly received, if it be not absolutely frowned upon. Perhaps it would have been safer to have written a work of this character without a reference to any particular locality. The few local allusions that are introduced are not essential to the plot, and might have been dispensed with without lessening the interest of the tale.

Nevertheless, this is probably the most imaginative book ever written by the author. Its fault is in blending too much of the real with the purely ideal. Half-way measures will not do in matters of this sort; and it is always safer to preserve the identity of a book by a fixed and determinate character, than to make the effort to steer between the true and the false.\textsuperscript{135}

Actually, Cooper's diagnosis is quite sound. The novel is a strange mixture, to use Cooper's terms, of "fact" and "imagination." The original reviews of the novel praise the picture of the sea, but criticize what is called the "absurd mummery."\textsuperscript{136} A modern critic characterizes the supernatural machinery as "tediously extravagant,"\textsuperscript{137} while a recurrent characterization is that the novel is related to "comic opera."\textsuperscript{138} Cooper, himself, in the "Preface," describes his subject matter in these terms: "We have had our

\textsuperscript{135}The "Preface" usually reprinted appeared with the English edition, London: Bentley, 1833, see Shulenberger, p. 93. The quotation here is from The Water-Witch (New York: W. A. Townsend, 1860), pp. v-vi.

\textsuperscript{136}Cairns, p. 131.

\textsuperscript{137}Brady, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{138}Winters, p. 196.
Buccaneers on the water, and our Witches on the land, but we believe this is the first occasion on which the rule has been reversed.\textsuperscript{139}

Tom Tiller, the Skimmer of the Seas of the sub-title and the captain of the \textit{Water-Witch}, is a roving adventurer-smuggler engaged in illicit trade with Alderman Myndert Van Beverout of New York city in the year 171-. The Skimmer is a gentleman, and the \textit{Water-Witch} is richly and exotically described, as well as supernaturally elusive. The water-witch is also a feminine sea green goddess, and the crew and captain of the \textit{Water-Witch} profess to be in her service. On board is an image of the goddess, which delivers oracular and mysterious communications to her subjects. In addition, the figurehead of the vessel has an arrangement by means of which her mottos can be changed, and the mottos are equally mysterious and oracular. All this seems frankly supernatural, although Captain Ludlow of her majesty's cruiser \textit{The Coquette} rather thinks the whole is cleverly manipulated by the Skimmer to add to the reputation that the \textit{Water-Witch} already has in the folk tales told among sailors along the North American coast.

There is nothing in the theory of distance which would outlaw the supernatural, or the removal from reality to the point of fantasy. The outside limit is defined as that beyond human relevance. Swift's \textit{Gulliver's Travels}, for instance, is well removed beyond any correspondence to

\textsuperscript{139}The \textit{Water-Witch}, p. v.
ordinary everyday human reality, but for the sake of the shock of moral recognition Swift's radical rearrangements bring us home to essential human weaknesses and vanities. Distance along one plane is sacrificed, indeed becomes the agent, for intimacy on another plane. The fantasy intrigues us as it intrigues children, and only after one bites does one feel the hook.

Especially given Cooper's fascination with the sea, there is nothing to prevent Cooper from apotheosizing the sea as the ultimate arena of the possibility of human freedom. There is enough evidence in character, incident, and tone to justify comments like the following:

In The Water-Witch the celebration of the freedom offered by the sea reaches its apogee. The brigantine becomes the symbol of escape from the oppression and injustice of organized society. Here the brutal elements of the outlaw's life disappear, for, unlike the Rover's gang [in The Red Rover, 1828], the crew of the Water-Witch exist in a community of love and loyalty. Their life is one of change, excitement, and perfect freedom.

The description of the Water-Witch itself, when first sighted by Alida, the Alderman's niece, bears out the impression of its almost supernatural grace and beauty.

No wonder, then, that Alida felt an amazement which was not quite free from superstitious alarm, when, at that hour and in such a scene, she saw a vessel gliding, as it were, unaided by sails or sweeps, out of the thicket that fringed the ocean side of the Cove, into its very centre. . . . The hull was low, graceful in its outlines, dark as the raven's wing, and so modelled as to float on its element like a sea-gull riding the billows. . . . In short, as the vessel had entered the Cove floating with the tide, it was so singularly graceful and fairy-like in form, that Alida at first was fain to

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140Philbrick, pp. 71-72.
discredit her senses, and to believe it no more than some illusion of the fancy.\textsuperscript{141}

The cabin of the \textit{Water-Witch} (Chapter XV), as well as the goods exchanged with the Alderman and the gifts given to Alida all emphasize the fascinatingly exotic attraction of the sea.\textsuperscript{142}

Three of the characters of \textit{The Water-Witch} make a choice at the end of the story, and all of them choose life at sea over life on land. Alida de Barberie, the Alderman's niece, chooses Captain Ludlow of the \textit{Coquette}, much to her uncle's disappointment. Throughout the action he had actively sought to promote the suit of the young Dutchman, Oloff Van Staats, the Patroon of Kinderhook. The particular object of the Skimmer is to have the Alderman recognize and acknowledge as his daughter the young Eudora, who masquerades through most of the action as a young man, the Skimmer's lieutenant, Seadrift. That recognition is achieved, but when the Skimmer is about to leave, she chooses to give up her newly found fortune as the alderman's daughter and the prospect of marriage to the Patroon for a return to life at sea with the Skimmer. In addition, there is a young cabin boy, Zephyr, who has never walked on land, but whose persistent petition to the sea green goddess is that he be permitted to. He is an orphan who has been raised by Eudora and the Skimmer on board the \textit{Water-Witch}, but having walked on land, he chooses

\textsuperscript{141} \textit{The Water-Witch}, pp. 98-99.

\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 175-190.
to return to sea with the Skimmer, even though at the moment he makes his choice it appears that he will be separated from Eudora, whom he dearly loves.\textsuperscript{143}

So far, The Water-Witch appears to be a romantic attempt to evoke the magic of the sea. But there is another side to the story. Cooper has a stubbornly factual mind, and is unwilling to set his story in a never-never land or on the fabled coast of Illyria. The setting is on a very particular North American coast, in the year 171-. The sailing vessel is a particular vessel, sailed in particular ways. When the Skimmer escapes, it is not by magic, but by superior navigation through the treacherous Hell-Gate between Long Island and Randall's Island. "The Manhatteneese will readily comprehend the situation of the two vessels," Cooper says, "but those of our countrymen who live in distant parts of the Union may be glad to have the localities explained."\textsuperscript{144} Whereupon follows a detailed and physiographically accurate description of considerable length with gratuitous contrasts between tonnage of coastwise shipping in colonial times with present commerce.

Or one might contrast two of the narrow escapes of the Water-Witch. Finding the vessel at anchor in the Long Island cove where Alderman Beverout has his country estate, Captain Ludlow attempts to cut the hawser so that the Water-Witch will drift ashore and be beached. Of all the charac-

\textsuperscript{143}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 458-460.
\textsuperscript{144}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 361.
ters, Ludlow least believes all the "mummery" about the sea green goddess aboard the Water-Witch yet his attempt fails:

The bargeman was asked for his knife, and Ludlow himself made the first cut upon the solid and difficult mass. The steel had no sooner touched the compact yarns, than a dazzling glare of light shot into the face of him who held it . . . . Though Ludlow felt, at the instant of this interruption, that he stood in jeopardy of his life, the concern it awakened was momentarily lost in the spectacle before him. The bronzed and unearthly features of the image [the figurehead of the Water-Witch] were brightly illuminated; and, while her eyes looked on him steadily, as if watching his smallest movement, her malign and speaking smile appeared to turn his futile effort into scorn! There was no need to bid the seaman at the oars do his duty. No sooner did he catch the expression of that mysterious face than the skiff whirled away from the spot, like a sea-fowl taking wing under alarm.145

Ludlow and his bargeman, Robert Yarn, escape, but Ludlow gives Yarn a crown to conceal their frightening experience, and it is not entered into the log. Yarn's silence, ironically, simply feeds the superstitious fears already existent in the crew of the Coquette.

Earlier, on another occasion, when Ludlow is pursuing the Water-Witch on a particularly dark and cloudy night, he sees a light which is made out to be the lantern of the Water-Witch, decorated with the green lady's derisively smiling face. Ludlow guides the Coquette into position to attack and lowers his boarding parties, but the grapnels and boarding irons come up empty, and the Coquette passes over the place where the light had been seen without finding the Water-Witch. After more aimless searching at sea, Ludlow returns to the Long Island cove where he finds an "object of unusual

145 Ibid., p. 332.
appearance floating in the bay."

He required no explanation to tell him more of the nature of the artifice by which he had been duped. The nicely-balanced tub, the upright spar, and the extinguished lantern, with the features of the female of the malign smile on his horn faces, reminded him, at once, of the false light by which the Coquette had been lured from her course, on the night she sailed in pursuit of the brigantine.  

The "magical" escape was a clever trick, perfectly possible and completely explainable.

The problem with The Water-Witch is not so much that it includes unbelievable or improbable incidents and effects, as that it shifts and wavers not knowing what it wants to be. At one moment we believe we have the novel in focus at the range of distance of the superstitious, magical, or supernatural. Suddenly an incident or effect is introduced that is so bound up or concerned with fact, that a radical change of focus is required. And if there is confusion along the fact-imagination axis, there is also confusion on the moral axis. Brady, struggling to find something good to say about the novel, says, "A corrupt exquisite is nicely handled; so is a Dutch merchant who spouts a cozy kind of knickerbocker poetry." Presumably the "corrupt exquisite" is Alida, who is described in these terms by Cooper:

A second glance at Alida de Barbérie was scarcely necessary to betray her mixed descent. From her Norman father, a Huguenot of the petite noblesse, she had inherited her raven hair, the large, brilliant, coal-black eyes in which wildness was singularly relieved by sweetness, a classical and faultless profile, and a form which was both taller and more flexible than commonly fell to the lot of the damsels of Holland. From

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146 Ibid., p. 280.
147 Brady, p. 76.
her mother, la belle Barbérie, as the maiden was often playfully termed, had received a skin fair and spotless as the flower of France, and a bloom which rivalled the rich tints of an evening sky in her native land. Some of the embonpoint, for which the sister of the alderman was a little remarkable, had descended also to her fairer daughter. In Alida, however, this peculiarity did not exceed the fulness which became her years, rounding her person and softening the outlines of her form, rather than diminishing its ease and grace. These personal advantages were embellished by a neat but modest travelling habit, a little beaver that was shaded by a cluster of drooping feathers, and a mien that, under the embarrassment of her situation, preserved the happiest medium between modesty and perfect self-possession.148

At the alderman's villa, Alida has her own wing called La Cour des Fées, where Seadrift, the Skimmer's lieutenant, overwhelms her with lavish gifts of exotic fabrics. She has a French servant, and she shares with Seadrift his appreciation of the beauty of the Bay of Naples.149 (Incidentally, from this time on, the debate between the beauty of the Bay of Naples and the utility of New York harbor, and the folly of confusing the two, becomes a recurrent note in Cooper—a shibboleth, an index of sophistication. Cooper seems never to have tired of the issue.) The basis for describing Alida as "corrupt," presumably, is that she disappears from La Cour des Fées in chapter thirteen and does not reappear until chapter twenty-three. At first the Alderman thinks she had eloped with Ludlow, but when he turns up looking for her, it is apparent that she had gone off with Seadrift to the Water-Witch. Both the Alderman and the Patroon, who think of Alida mostly as marketable goods, find her value

148 The Water-Witch, p. 36.
149 Ibid., pp. 291-297.
significantly lessened by this behavior, but when she returns she offers no explanations and even the Alderman is afraid to question her, fearing the worst. So far she might justify the description as a "corrupt exquisite," but in the contortions of the plot in the end, since her interest in Seadrift turns out to be natural womanly sympathy (Seadrift being Eudora, we remember) presumably she is innocent of any impropriety, justifying the comparison to Henry James' Daisy Miller.150 Meanwhile, however, what we took to be an exemplification of freedom in her behavior turns out to be only Cooper's "timid surrender to another solemn institution, female respectability, which he had seemed for a time to be treating with equal lightness."151

But there is more confusion of a greater sort along the moral axis. Throughout The Water-Witch there is a contrast between land and sea, culminating as we saw previously, in the three choices of life at sea by Alida, Eudora (Seadrift), and Zephyr. The Alderman is the chief representative of the "land-ethic." One commentator suggests,

This dollar-centered social ethic, and its consequences for the personality of the individual, are all summed up with massive effectiveness in the worthy Alderman of The Water-Witch; Cooper clearly means him to be the major expression in the novel of the deformed and very imperfect 'land-ethic' which force Cooper out into the ideal world of the sea-frontier for an adequate explication of his ideas.152

150House, p. 44.
151Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 73.
152Zoellner, p. 407.
On the other hand, it is the Skimmer "who becomes the most explicitly developed natural aristocrat of the sea-frontier of the novel."\footnote{Ibid., p. 418.} But if the Alderman is reprehensible for seeing everything in terms of his personal profit, is it any more virtuous to be the seller of smuggled goods than the buyer? But the Skimmer and Seadrift are gentlemen, and the Alderman is devious, crafty, and unprincipled.

Cooper devotes almost one whole chapter to a discussion of the Alderman's philosophy of trade. The Alderman decisively rejects the idea that trade is the exchange of equivalents. His simile is that trade is like a horse race, and "Give your own jockey as little, and your adversary's as much weight as you can, if you wish to win."\footnote{The Water-Witch, p. 303.} The Alderman is disguising his complicity in the smuggling from Ludlow, and he climaxes his discussion by upbraiding Seadrift for tempting Alida to accept the merchandise he has come to display to her. Through the whole discussion, Seadrift is very quiet; contrary to his usual bold air, Cooper speaks of his "subdued manner," and when the Alderman admonishes Seadrift, the smuggler "stood as one rebuked." His only defense, early in the discussion, is that

"We of the contraband do but play at hazard with the authorities. When we pass the gauntlet unharmed, we gain; and when we lose, the servants of the crown find their profit. The stakes are equal, and the game should not be stigmatized as unfair. Would the rulers of the world once remove the unnessary shackles they impose on commerce, our calling would disappear, and the name of free-
trader would then belong to the richest and most esteemed houses."\textsuperscript{155}

It is only a game like playing cards, perhaps. Besides, the authorities invite violation because the laws that regulate trade are unjust. To allow the Alderman to expose his rapacity without discrediting the gentlemanly Seadrift is a tight corner, and Cooper seems to realize it. Perhaps we shouldn't take the corruption of the Alderman too seriously; despite his girth, he is more of a scamp than a rogue. It is suggested that Cooper wrote of the Alderman "ebulliently and deftly and with a humor that precludes rancor."\textsuperscript{156}

But there is another representative of the land-ethic, even more corrupt, in the person of Lord Cornbury, the former governor of New York. When the Alderman encounters him in the first chapter of \textit{The Water-Witch}, he has been imprisoned for debt, but because he is a cousin of Queen Anne's he still has considerable influence, and he is confined under some species of house arrest which allows him a fair amount of freedom. He hints broadly that one who helps a relative of the Queen's would find royal favor, but the Alderman does not offer to assist him. Trying another tack, Lord Cornbury hints that, since he knows that the Alderman favors the suit of the Patroon of Kinderhook and fears Captain Ludlow, for a small matter of two thousand pounds he could arrange to have Captain Ludlow ordered to the Indies.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{155}Ibid., p. 300.
\item \textsuperscript{156}House, p. 94.
\end{itemize}
The Alderman pleads poverty. Of Lord Cornbury, Cooper concludes the chapter:

Foiled in an effort that nothing but his desperate condition, and nearly desperate character, could have induced him to attempt, the degenerate descendant of the virtuous Clarendon walked towards his place of confinement with the step of one who assumed a superiority over his fellows, and yet with a mind so indurated by habitual depravity as to have left it scarcely the trace of a dignified or virtuous quality. 157

One of the "hits" in the Alderman's conversation with Lord Cornbury is that the governor as well as his predecessors had been involved in dealings with lawless buccaneers like the "Skimmer of the Seas," now rumored to be present on the North American coast. In Seadrift's first interview with Alida, his last question is whether Lord Cornbury is still in the province, since he had "unsettled affairs" with him. 158

And when Seadrift is Ludlow's prisoner, the Skimmer arranges an interview with Lord Cornbury. 159 To be fair one should say that the Skimmer appears to be a stranger to him, but the Skimmer leaves two hundred pieces of gold with Lord Cornbury to buy good treatment for Seadrift.

Perhaps this means when on land, do as the landsmen do, but this is not explicitly developed. Indeed, the object of this particular visit of the Water-Witch other than trade as usual is to convince the Alderman to acknowledge his long-separated daughter (Seadrift-Eudora), and to provide her a dowry. Unfortunately this means that Alida's dow-

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ry is halved, although she appears to be rich enough not to care, and besides, the Skimmer supplements Seadrift-Eudora's dowry with what she has a right to from her grandfather, the Skimmer's predecessor. All this is perhaps venial enough, though it seems less so, when Seadrift-Eudora elects to cast her lot with the Skimmer. All these are judgments we feel we are not supposed to make. We are free, indeed we are invited to judge Lord Cornbury and the Alderman, but judgment of the Skimmer, Seadrift, and Alida is to be suspended. Why? Well, Cooper says so, or at least the third person authorial presence in the novel says so, but as always, saying so doesn't make it so. If we are to assume that even the authorial presence in the novel is deliberately unreliable, then Cooper would be perhaps a hundred years ahead of his time.

With the Water-Witch, then, the problem is that distance along a variety of axes is inconsistently maintained, which creates confusion in the mind of the reader. The more one analyzes the story the more unsatisfying it becomes. Perhaps the only way to make sense of the novel is to deny one or another of its conflicting elements. Yvor Winters, who characterizes The Water-Witch as "a minor but original masterpiece, not flawless, perhaps, but still a unit," would seem to be doing so when he describes it in the following terms: "The action of The Water-Witch is extremely unreal, and the unreality, not to say the impossibility of much of it, would be preposterous did Cooper not utilize this very quality. It has the plot, entrances, exits, abductions, and mysteries of a comic opera; and the style is adjusted to the
plot in a manner at once brilliant and meticulous." 160 He is right too, in singling out the rhetorical effects Cooper attempts to aid characterization and atmosphere in The Water-Witch; unfortunately style, diction, and rhetorical effects are slender resources in Cooper's case. One can see the light, fanciful, poetic effect Cooper perhaps aimed at and which appeals to Yvor Winters; one cannot, unfortunately, say that Cooper achieved it. The stubbornly circumstantial and the insistently moral also are elements which cannot be ignored.

The Redskins (1846) presents a failure of distance of a different sort from The Water-Witch, but one quite like Home as Found. The Redskins is the third of the trilogy called The Littlepage Manuscripts, the earlier ones being Satanstoe (1845) and The Chainbearer (1845). Each is narrated by a member of the Littlepage family: Satanstoe by Cornelius (Corny) Littlepage in Colonial times (1758); The Chainbearer by his son, Mordaunt Littlepage in post-Revolutionary times; and The Redskins by Hugh Roger Littlepage, a grandson of Mordaunt's, in times contemporary to Cooper. The Littlepages are landowners in upstate New York, and there seems to be no need here to recapitulate the details of the anti-Rent wars of the 1840's which serve as the background of The Redskins and the occasion of Cooper's interest. 161 It suffices to say that Cooper was on the side of

160 Winters, p. 196.

the landlords and the law, and he felt that the attempt by
the tenants to force the landowners to give up their land
was a naked, unprincipled attempt to assert the force of
the majority over the lawful rights of the minority. Coop­
er's interest in these issues dates back through The Ameri­
can Democrat (1838) to Notions of the Americans (1828).

The trilogy is unified by the presence in all three
novels of the Littlepage family and by the presence of the
loyal Indian, Susquesus, and the family's Negro retainer,
Jaap. More importantly, the novels have unity of theme and
similarity of situation.

It is almost as if the Littlepages are never in complete
control of their lands but must fight to maintain what
they legally possess. Hence, all three novels are linked
by an ever-recurring threat of violent change, symbolized
most clearly by the squatter and the rebellious tenants,
that is forever at war with the principle of continuity
which the Littlepage family tries to establish on the
land. The two elements are in conflict in each of the
three books, with the struggle becoming increasingly vio­

ten as we approach the contemporary scene. Throughout
the whole it provides a kind of dramatic tension from
which the series draws its central unity.162

But although Cooper preserves his distance and creates be­
lievable narrators in Satanstoe and The Chainbearer, when he
approaches the contemporary scene in The Redskins, despite
the interposition of the first person narrator, it is apparent
that the deck is stacked by Cooper's emotional involvement in
the issues of the problem. The novel "loses historical per­
spective."163

162Donald A. Ringe, "Cooper's Littlepage Novels:
Change and Stability in American Society," American Literature,
XXXII (1960), 283.

163Spiller, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 39.
The result is that the novel is almost universally condemned. Cooper's first biographer characterized *The Redskins* as "one of the worst" of Cooper's novels.\(^{164}\) Even an apologist for Cooper can only say that in comparison to the other novels of the trilogy *The Redskins* is "much less pleasing."\(^{165}\) Criticism centers on the tone and character of the narrator, Hugh Roger Littlepage. In a situation reminiscent of *Home as Found*, Hugh and his father's brother, Uncle Ro, have been travelling in Europe "fully five years,\(^{166}\) and recognize the necessity of returning to protect the family's legal rights. Although one may agree that the narrator, to be effective, should have been more disinterested,\(^{167}\) it is hard to see how Cooper could have done so, given the plan of the trilogy, and the liberalizing enlightenment that European experience has for Cooper and consequently for certain of his characters. Cooper himself twice in the course of the narrative feels constrained to apologize for the tone of his narrator.\(^{168}\) In his "Note by the Editor," he says,

> It may be well to add a word on the subject of the tone of this book. It is the language of a man who feels that he has been grievously injured, and who writes with the ardor of youth increased by the sense of wrong. As editors, we have nothing more to do with that than to see, while calling things by their right names, that language too strong for the public taste should not be introduced.

\(^{164}\) Lounsbury, p. 253.

\(^{165}\) Spiller, *Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times*, p. 312.


\(^{167}\) Beard, V, 5.

\(^{168}\) *The Redskins*, p. 133.
into our pages. As to the moral and political principles connected with this matter, we are wholly of the side of the Messrs. Littlepage, though we do not think it necessary to adopt all their phrases—phrases that may be natural to men in their situations, but which would be out of place, perhaps, in the mouths of those who act solely in the capacity of essayists and historians.169

But neither Cooper's audience nor we can accept this "cheap blaming of the narrator."170 It remains true that too much is argued and too little is dramatized in The Redskins. Cooper compounds the problem by emphasizing his arguments with a liberal sprinkling of typographical emphasis, italicizing important words, and having critical sentences and paragraphs set in all capital letters. We have a kind of typographical shrillness which gives the book a frantic almost hysterical quality.

Damaging as all this is, there are some rather good things about The Redskins and some areas where it has been criticized unfairly. Susquesus, the "Upright Onondaga," well over a hundred years of age, has a secret in his past which finally is revealed in The Redskins. Much earlier, he had loved a particular captive maiden, but by the laws of the tribe she belonged to the brave who had captured her, and although Susquesus was a respected chief and the tribe would have condoned his taking her, he had done the ethical thing though it meant in effect his banishing himself.

The Indian's assertion of the principle of self-restraint under generally agreed rules points up the selfish, undisciplined spirit of the tenants; but his presence also

169 Ibid., p. 535.
170 Dekker, p. 234.
is a living rebuke to all white men that the land they squabble over was originally wrenched from the grievously wronged red men.171

Susquesus attains the status of "hero-saint," and with Jaap, the equally ancient Negro, is admitted "among the guardian presences of the continent."172 (And Faulkner is still almost a century away!) It may seem ironic that the real Indian is used to contrast the anti-Rent "Injuns," and thus to defend the proprietors' ownership of their land, but the presence of Susquesus and Jaap does put the whole squabble of ownership into a larger context, and questions even the proprietors' ethics, which is, perhaps, more than Cooper intended.

Cooper's first biographer was one of the commentators who found the events of The Redskins "absurd."173 The charge is most often linked to Cooper's introducing the group of real Plains Indians which contrast the anti-Rent "Injuns." One recent interpreter says, "He [Cooper] has a group of Plains Indians en route to Washington make a wide detour to Ravensnest to pay their respects to the now venerable Susquesus, and while they are there they break up an attack on the manor house made by their false counterparts."174 As a matter of fact, the Indians are returning from Washington,175 and

171 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 126.
172 Brady, p. 80.
174 Walker, p. 98.
175 "Come from setting sun--been to see Great Father, at Washington--go home"--The Redskins, p. 317.
might well have taken the Hudson-Mohawk-Great Lakes route. Groups of Plains Indians in the 1830's and 1840's did go to see the "Great White Father" in Washington, and they were conducted on tours of the principal Eastern cities to show them the white man's invincibility.176 From New York or Boston the logical return route is by the Erie Canal-Great Lakes, in which case the "wide detour" amounts to twenty-five or thirty miles.

Cooper himself, at the time The Redskins was published, has the impression that the novel was fairly successful.

Did I tell you that Redskins is in great favor with the better classes. The praise I have heard of it, has been warm, and is, I doubt not, sincere. Its time is just coming. The common sense of the book tells.177

Though the qualification "with the better classes" may admit that there are those who do not evidently approve of the book, and admitting that the quibble over the Plains Indians is not enough to "save" the novel, and finally, allowing as much as one can for The Redskins and agreeing with a recent description of it as "a vastly underrated book,"178 one must still conclude that it ranks somewhere down the Cooper canon as a popular and artistic success. Even Susquesus, the most interesting character in the book, is rather bent to fit Coop-


177 Beard, V, 166.

178 Brady, p. 80.
er's thesis, not so much in the characterization as in the terms he uses in his dialogue.\textsuperscript{179} There remains the excess of argument, the typographical shrillness, the superiority of tone of the protagonists with European experience much like the elements in \textit{Home as Found} which the American audience found so insulting.

Once again in dealing with his contemporary scene, Cooper finds himself unable to impose the necessary aesthetic distance which would enable him to embody his feeling in a vehicle which would rise above the merely polemic, which would be real and convincing and yet remain personal and deeply felt.

\textsuperscript{179}House, p. 66.
CHAPTER III

THE FACTUALNESS OF COOPER’S ROMANCE

It is the contention of this dissertation that Cooper's distance from us and from his material is a critical concept in our understanding of Cooper’s accomplishment. Cooper "works," or is effective, only at a certain distance; the best of what are usually considered to be his romances are firmly grounded in fact, and what are usually considered to be his realistic novels are works which have significant supra-realistic dimensions, be they mythic, moral, or ideological. Though, as has been shown, Cooper makes a rigid Aristotelian distinction between the historian and the poet-novelist, he does not make a rigid distinction between the romance and the novel, as for instance Hawthorne does. The purpose of this chapter is to show that (moving toward his more successful works) Cooper’s romances have a significant grounding in fact.

Superficial treatment classifies all of Cooper’s works as romances: his characteristic setting is from thirty to one hundred years in the past; his characteristic hero-heroine love plot is "romantic"; his "idealization" is thought to be related more often to the romantic even sentimental I-wish-it-were-so school rather than to the more eighteenth century
generalization upon individuals to arrive at representative types. Though Cooper's early prefaces find him defending his "realism," these early works are among those usually considered by later critics to be typical Cooper "romances." Cooper suffers from the fact that perhaps six of his first eight works are among his most famous: generalizations are based on what might be argued to be experimental, early, if not apprentice, works. The result of generalizing on this basis is to undervalue Cooper's realistic and social-critical side, as the critics of the thirties argued. It is the argument of this dissertation, however, that all of Cooper's work, the early "romances" included, have a strong undergirding in fact. No story of Cooper's is very far from some substantial and to Cooper intimately known body of fact. Usually that body of fact is based on personal experience and family history, and when Cooper felt this experience in a particular area, time, place, or subject to be lacking, he did research to supply the defect.

Cooper's first great success, for instance, was The Spy (1821). Cooper subtitled the volume A Tale of the Neutral Ground which invited comparison to Scott's tales of the

1 Shulenberger, pp. 11-36.
2 The first eight works are in order Precaution (1820), The Spy (1821), The Pioneers (1823), The Pilot (1824), Lionel Lincoln (1825), The Last of the Mohicans (1826), The Prairie (1827), and The Red Rover (1828). Discounting Precaution as obviously inferior apprentice work, all of these with the possible exception of The Pioneers are usually taken to be of predominantly romantic cast, and all of them were quite successful.
"Middle Border," and many critics have been satisfied to dismiss the book as merely an American imitation of Scott. But to do so one must ignore the richly circumstantial background of fact in Cooper's life and experience. The physical setting is intimately known to Cooper since he lived in Westchester County from 1817 on. Cooper's mother-in-law, Elizabeth Floyd DeLancey, lived in the neutral ground in Westchester County until the family (who were loyalists) fled during the Revolution. The Floyds were a family divided by the Revolution just like the Whartons of The Spy: Elizabeth Floyd DeLancey's cousin, Mary Floyd, married Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge (1754-1835), the man who personally directed Washington's secret service in and around New York city.

Several of the older workmen employed on the improvements at Angevine [Cooper's home in Westchester County] had in their youth shouldered muskets in the war of the Revolution, and of course each had his story to tell. Many lesser incidents of the Revolution, now wholly forgotten, were at that day still living facts in the minds of the people, scarcely yet remote enough for the shadowy perspective of history. West Chester was full of such recollections. Several of the yeoman farmers near Angevine became very good neighbors to Mr. Cooper, and, on his invitation, came frequently in the winter evenings to tell their tales fighting the county battles over with fresh interest, aroused by the spirited questions of their host. All, as they drank their glass of cider, picked over their hickory-nuts, or pared their Newtown pippins, had many deeds of violence, more or less flagrant, to relate of cow-boys or skinners.


In addition, Cooper's good friend John Jay had served on the "Committee for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies" during the Revolution, and he is the "official highly placed" that Cooper refers to in the prefaces of 1831 and 1849 as the source of the story of the patriot-spy. Further, among Cooper's wife's relatives was the Lieutenant Colonel James DeLancey who was the commander of "Delancey's Refugees," the Cowboys of The Spy.

It would seem, therefore, that the major sources for Cooper's first American novel were primarily of an oral nature, although it is probable that this vast fund of first-hand knowledge was checked, synthesized, and perhaps even augmented by Cooper's own reading. "We do not absolutely aver," Cooper concluded in the preface of the first edition of The Spy, "that the whole of our tale is true; but we honestly believe that a good portion of it is; and we are very certain, that every passion recorded in the volume before the reader, has and does exist." Surveying the novel as a whole, there would indeed seem to be little doubt as to the general accuracy of the larger historical picture of Revolutionary Westchester which emerges from Cooper's novel.

It is a matter of historical record that Washington used peddlers like Harvey Birch as agents—indeed he preferred them. There are also recorded instances of arrests being allowed for appearance's sake and then being quietly countermanded. The story is so realistic that there was at least one man, Enoch Crosby, who claimed he was the spy of

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5 "Preface," The Spy, pp. v-x.
6 Beard, IV, 494; V, 299-300, 319-321.
7 Pickering, pp. 45-46.
8 Ibid., p. 64.
Cooper's novel, 9 which evidently provoked Cooper's account of the origin of the story in the preface of 1831. In any case, the "activities assigned to his hero, Harvey Birch, were far from being the mere romantic inventions of the author's mind." 10

The Pioneers (1823) has usually been considered as the most realistic of the Leatherstocking Tales, and will be treated in detail in Chapter IV of this dissertation. Lionel Lincoln (1825) was a failure, but not because of its factualness.

In the preparation of it he studied historical authorities, he read state papers, he pored over official documents of all kinds and degrees of dreariness. To have his slightest assertions in accordance with fact, he examined almanacs, and searched for all the contemporary reports as to the condition of the weather. He visited Boston in order to go over in person the ground he was to make the scene of his story. As a result of all this labor he has furnished us an admirable description of the engagement at Concord Bridge, of the running fight of Lexington, and of the battle of Bunker's Hill. 11

The Last of the Mohicans (1826) has a strong association with a particular place, Glen Falls, New York, of which Cooper says in his preface of 1850, "In point of fact, the country which is the scene of the following tale has undergone as little change, since the historical events alluded to had place, as almost any other district of equal extent within the whole


10 Pickering, p. 77.

11 Lounsbury, pp. 49-50.
limits of the United States."\(^\text{12}\) For The Prairie (1827) Coop-
er relied very heavily for knowledge of the setting which he
had never seen on the account of the Long expedition from
Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains published in Philadelphia
in 1823, as well as on published accounts of the Lewis and
Clark expedition.\(^\text{13}\) With The Pilot (1824) and The Red Rover
(1828), it is Cooper's personal knowledge of seamanship which
provides the concrete, circumstantial background. This is
not to say that ultimately these works may not be classified
as romances: it does argue that a fairly considerable body
of realistic, factual matter is involved in each of them.

The Pilot (1824) is an illuminating example. The
story of its origin is well documented by Cooper's daughter
Susan:

One day, at a dinner-party at Mr. Wilkes', the recently
published novel "by the author of Waverly," The Pirate,
was the subject of conversation. Several of the party
insisted that the book could not have been written by a
landsman. Your Grandfather thought differently, and de-
clared that a sailor would have been more accurate, and
made more of the nautical portions of the book. . . .
Your Grandfather declared that a novel where the prin-
cipal events should pass on the Ocean, with ships and
sailors for the machinery, might be made very interesting.
There was a general outcry. . . . Nevertheless at that
very moment the author of The Spy resolved to write a
clearly nautical novel. . . . The Pilot was soon com-
menced, and when published proved brilliantly success-
ful.\(^\text{14}\)


\(^{14}\) Susan Fenimore Cooper, "Small Family Memories," Correspondence, I, 52-53.
Once again Scott was to serve as the "creative irritant"\textsuperscript{15} to Cooper. Referring to the discussion described above, Cooper says in the "Preface" of 1849, "The result of this conversation was a sudden determination to produce a work which, if it had no other merit, might present truer pictures of the ocean and ships than any that are to be found in \textit{The Pirate}."\textsuperscript{16} No work like this had ever been attempted before and Cooper had doubts about whether the sea could be made interesting. He had almost decided to abandon the attempt when he was encouraged by an English gentleman.

Thus encouraged, one more experiment was made, a seaman being selected for the critic. A kinsman, a namesake, and an old messmate of the author, one now in command on a foreign station, was chosen, and a considerable portion of the first volume was read to him. There is no wish to conceal the satisfaction with which the effect on this listener was observed. He treated the whole matter as fact, and his criticisms were strictly professional, and perfectly just. But the interest he betrayed could not be mistaken.\textsuperscript{17}

Cooper doubts that the book will interest "females," since his "aim was to illustrate vessels and the ocean, rather than to draw any pictures of sentiment and love. In this last respect, the book has small claims on the reader's attention, though it is hoped that the story has sufficient interest to relieve the more strictly nautical features of the work."\textsuperscript{18} Perhaps because travel by sailing vessel is now rather remote from us, much criticism has seen \textit{The Pilot}...\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15}Brady, p. 73.
\item \textsuperscript{16}\textit{The Pilot}, p. viii.
\item \textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. x.
\item \textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
as largely romantic, the land as well as the nautical portions, and at least one respected modern critic ranks The Pilot with The Spy, Homeward Bound, and The Two Admirals as "a second rate novel of adventure." 19

As in The Spy, The Pilot introduces as a major character in the action, an actual historical personage: the Mr. Gray of The Pilot was immediately recognized to be based on John Paul Jones. Also (as with the Mr. Harper who is George Washington in The Spy) Mr. Gray as John Paul Jones has never completely satisfied the critics and reviewers of the book from the beginning. 20 Perhaps the work suffers additionally in that Mr. Gray is the pilot of the title, and occupies a more prominent position in the work than Mr. Harper in The Spy. It is obviously beyond the scope of this dissertation to attempt a full scale historical portrait of John Paul Jones, but events would seem to indicate that he was intelligent, resourceful, adventuresome and, as later events indicate, enigmatic and perhaps self-serving. Cooper himself later had reservations about his portrait of Mr. Gray in The Pilot, feeling that he had made him perhaps too ideally patriotic. 21 The usual criticism of Mr. Gray is that he is too "Byronic," a criticism which sounds modern, 22 but

19 Winters, p. 193.
20 See Clavel, pp. 184-196.
21 Susan Fenimore Cooper, The Cooper Gallery; or, Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper (New York: James Miller, 1865), p. 77.
which was first asserted in a review in Colburn's Monthly Magazine in 1824. He does have a way of drifting off into some species of romantic trances at inopportune moments, a characteristic he shares with Captain Heidegger, the title character of The Red Rover (1828). He is gifted and proud, but also alienated from the rest of mankind. That at least some of this is more than merely romantic stereotype might be argued from the difficulties John Paul Jones had in getting along with his superior officers and securing commands of adequate vessels.

There is also basis in Jones' attempt to take the Earl of Selkirk prisoner for some parts at least of the land action of The Pilot.

While cruising . . . in the very heart of the British waters . . . Captain Jones, who was a native of the country, decided to make an attempt to seize the Earl of Selkirk, who had a seat on St. Mary's Isle, near the point where the Dee flows into the channel. A party landed, and got possession of the house, but its master was absent. The officer in charge of the boats so far forgot himself as to bring away a quantity of the family plate, although no other injury was done, or any insult offered. This plate, the value of which did not exceed a hundred pounds, was subsequently purchased of the crew by Captain Jones, and returned to Lady Selkirk, with a letter expressive of his regrets at the occurrence.

The Pilot, like The Spy, may in part have been suggested by

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23 Clavel, p. 220.
24 Cf. The Pilot, Chapter V, pp. 53-55.
25 For instance, see The Red Rover (New York: W. A. Townsend, 1859), Chapters XIX and XX, pp. 313-325, and 333-334.
26 James Fenimore Cooper, The History of the Navy of the United States of America, pp. 95-96.
conversations with John Jay, who was an active participant in the American revolution.27 A letter of John Jay's to Colonel John Laurens, dated Madrid, May 2, 1781, "concerns itself in part with a scheme to capture prisoners on the coasts of Great Britain in order to exchange them for Henry Laurens, John's father, who had been captured by the British while on a diplomatic mission in the fall of 1780."28 Cooper's placing the action "after the events of the revolution had involved the kingdoms of France and Spain, and the republics of Holland, in our quarrel,"29 "in the gloom of a day in December," corresponds remarkably to the facts of Henry Laurens' capture which George III used (since Laurens carried a copy of a treaty of commerce with the Netherlands) as a pretext for his declaration of war against Holland, December 20, 1780. The letter refers to the scheme as one of "retaliation" and considers the possibility of capturing "some ministerial Men of Consequence" which corresponds remarkably to Captain Munson's description of his instructions in The Pilot:

It is known to you all, gentlemen, that the unfortunate question of retaliation has been much agitated between the two governments, our own and that of the enemy. For this reason, and for certain political purposes, it has become an object of solicitude with our commissioners in Paris to obtain a few individuals of character from the enemy, who may be held as a check on their proceedings, while at the same time it brings the evils of war, from our own shores, home to those who have caused it. An

28 Ibid., p. 415.
29 The Pilot, p. 10.
opportunity now offers to put this plan in execution, and I have collected you, in order to consult on the means. 30

Somewhat later, Mr. Griffith, second in command to Captain Munson, discusses the objectives of the mission with Mr. Barnstable, who has command of the Ariel, the schooner which accompanies Captain Munson's larger frigate. Mr. Barnstable speaks first:

"How many of those gentry does he [Captain Munson] wish to line his cabin with?"

"The Pilot has named no less than six, all men of rank and consideration with the enemy. Two of them are peers, two more belong to the Commons house of Parliament, one is a general and the sixth, like ourselves, is a sailor, and holds the rank of Captain. They muster at a hunting-seat near the coast, and believe me, the scheme is not without its plausibility."

"Well, then, there are two apiece for us. You follow the Pilot, if you will; but let me sheer off for this dwelling of Colonel Howard, with my cockswain and boat's crew. I will surprise his house, release the ladies, and on my way back, lay my hands on two of the first lords I fall in with; I suppose, for our business, one is as good as another." 31

The terms of the scheme agree well with the Jay letter, but they also point up another problem with The Pilot. Perhaps because the contemporary audience was so impressed with the nautical portions of the narrative, the common criticism of The Pilot from the beginning was that interest in the narrative flags in the land portions. 32 And certainly

30 Ibid., p. 80.
31 Ibid., p. 96.
32 Clavel, p. 196. Echoes are common down to the present, see for example, Parkman, p. 158; Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 39; and Dekker, p. 113, among others.
the action on land is not as vivid and exciting as the sea portions. But there is a serious and realistic thematic concern in *The Pilot* which is too often ignored or simply lost sight of. The issue is authority and revolution: when is it proper to submit to authority and when is submission to authority an evasion of one's responsibility or an infringement on one's rights? Colonel Howard has brought his wards, Katherine Plowden and Cecelia Howard (also of course the respective sweethearts of Captain Barnstable and Lieutenant Griffith) to England to escape the lawlessness of the American Revolution, and he believes the authority of the English government is unquestionable: all revolt is unethical and improper. The Americans, on the other hand, face a more difficult choice: when and to whom should they submit? They give themselves over to Mr. Gray's knowledge in the most famous scenes in *The Pilot* when he averts the dangers the frigate faces in the navigation of the shoals of the Devil's Grip in Chapter V of *The Pilot*, but as the passage above suggests, they are less successful in disciplining themselves, in subordinating their personal interest to the larger patriotic objectives of their mission. Lieutenant Griffith's expedition ashore, turned aside for personal reasons, only succeeds in alarming the countryside, in the sinking of the *Ariel*, and in the frustration of Captain Munson's and the Pilot's original plan and objective. Some of Cooper's later pessimism about Americans is certainly implicit in this working out of *The Pilot*.

Some serious concern with the thematic threads in *The Pilot* is also essential to placing Long Tom Coffin in the narrative. Taken by some to be the real hero of the work, and almost certainly the most vivid character, Long Tom has more to offer than his picturesque qualities. He had those, of course—he is the archetypal "old salt." His very first words are typical:

"Give me plenty of sea-room, and good canvas, where there is no occasion for pilots at all, sir. For my part, I was born on board of a chebacco-man, and never could see the use of more land than now and then a small island to raise a few vegetables, and to dry your fish; I'm sure the sight of it always makes me feel uncomfortable, unless we have the wind dead off shore."  

Audiences took him to be a kind of sea-going Leatherstocking, and Cooper later regretted that he did not develop the character beyond what he regarded to be merely a "sketch" in *The Pilot*. Like Harvey Birch in *The Spy* or Leatherstocking in *The Pioneers*, Long Tom provides "a moral undercurrent that forms a thematic thread in each book and that serves as a kind of touchstone of principle against which the values of other characters can be tested." His mettle is most profoundly tested in the sinking of the *Ariel*, and when all has been done that can humanly be done, he resigns himself to the will of God. He will remain with the ship to the last, and he will go down with the ship. Superstitious, like a fish

34Clavel, p. 195.  
35The Pilot, p. 20.  
36Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Pages and Pictures*, p. 77.  
38The Pilot, pp. 308-328.
out of water when on land and an easy dupe there of the villain, Dillon, yet he is so heroic and upright in his proper sphere, that one cannot withhold one's admiration of him. He knows his strengths and his limitations, he has humility and self-knowledge, he is resourceful but also recognizes the occasions for resignation. He is "as real as an oak; he is also as romantic as storms and tides."39 The paradox of this statement is the tension which is the essence of this dissertation.

And all of the important characters in the story face a temptation, a trial of their self-discipline, a test of whether they will place their larger objective before their personal desires. It is not, after all, only Lieutenant Griffith and Captain Barnstable who have a potential personal interest to serve. As was true of John Paul Jones, the immediate area ashore is the former home of Mr. Gray, and when ashore he has on two occasions private conversations with Alice Dunscombe, his former sweetheart.40 She is a clergyman's daughter, pious and principled, and though it is evident that they are still in love with one another, her religious principles will not allow her to approve of his rebellion even against injustice, and his political and private principles will not countenance abducting her without her consent. Above all, he will not allow his personal feel-

40 The Pilot, Ch. XIV, pp. 164-177; Ch. XXXI, pp. 409-420.
ings to turn him aside from the objective of his mission. Their parting is tender, but final.

If Long Tom is ever tempted, it is in the encounter with the whale. Technically, it is Captain Barnstable's decision to turn aside when they encounter it on their way back to the Ariel, but it is Long Tom's knowledge and skill which make the capture possible. Their capture of the whale is interrupted by the arrival of the enemy English schooner, the Alacrity, and later when they pass the carcass of the whale being devoured by sharks, it is Long Tom (à la Leatherstocking in The Pioneers) who regrets the waste even while affirming his submission to duty.

As we have already seen, it is the personal self-serving of Lieutenant Griffith and Captain Barnstable that effectively ruin the mission. Cooper is quite explicit.

Notwithstanding the object of their expedition was of a public nature, the feelings which had induced both Griffith and Barnstable to accompany the Pilot with so much willingness, it will easily be seen, were entirely personal. The short intercourse that he had maintained with his associates enabled the mysterious leader of their party to understand the characters of his two principal officers so thoroughly, as to induce him, when he landed, with the purpose of reconnoitring to ascertain whether the objects of his pursuit still held their determination to assemble at the appointed hour, to choose Griffith and Manual as his only associates, leaving Barnstable in command of his own vessel, to await their return, and to cover their retreat.

Near the end of The Pilot, Mr. Gray still tries to make the
best of what remains of their mission, and hopes that the
capture of Colonel Howard may serve to purchase the freedom
of some American held prisoner by the English. Griffith
asks, "But the main object of our expedition?" The Pilot
replies, "'Tis lost . . . sacrificed to more private feelings;
'tis like a hundred others, ended in disappointment, and is
forgotten, sir, forever." Captain Barnstable is willing
to abduct Katherine and Cecelia by force, but Lieutenant
Griffith is more gentlemanly, and when their quarrel reaches
the point that they draw upon one another, Cooper uses the
opportunity to allow Colonel Howard to make the telling com-
ment, "Behold, my dear Cecelia, the natural consequences of
this rebellion! It scatters discord in their ranks; and, by
its damnable levelling principles, destroys all distinction
of rank among themselves; even these rash boys know not
where obedience is due!"

It has been suggested that Captain Barnstable is more
credible than Lieutenant Griffith, though in terms of the
theme Griffith more nearly earns our respect. Barnstable is
called a captain because he commands the Ariel, the schooner
which accompanies the unnamed frigate. Griffith is Captain
Munson's second in command, and actually outranks Barnstable,
as is seen in the fact that Griffith is put in command of the
expedition ashore. Griffith is a more complex character, if

44 Ibid., p. 394.
46 Philbrick, p. 81.
a more gentlemanly one: it is he who must act as a constant restraint on Barnstable's boyish lets-take-the-girls-and-run syndrome. 47 It is Griffith who exercises what Mr. Gray himself commends as prudent suspicion when the unknown pilot first comes aboard and who receives the proofs of Mr. Gray's authority. 48 Again the issue is obedience and authority: Captain Munson demands and would have received explicit obedience of Griffith, but Mr. Gray supplies the proof that ensures and cements Griffith's loyalty.

There is then, thematic integrity which unifies and justifies both the land and the sea portions of The Pilot, though of course, the fame of the work rests more than anything else on the sea elements. There is the escape from the shoals in Chapter V, the encounter between the Ariel and the Alacrity in Chapter XVIII, and the wreck of the Ariel in the "nor'easter" in Chapter XXIV, as well as the quintessence of landlessness in Long Tom, his sea superstitions, his competence with all things related to the sea, his resignation to the God who rules the tempests. The novelty of these elements had a powerful appeal to Cooper's audience and they are an important aspect of the continued appeal of the book. Scott commended it to Maria Edgeworth, 49 and Mary Mitford felt that

47 The Pilot, pp. 96-97.
48 Ibid., pp. 90-91.
49 "I have seen a new work, the Pilot, by the author of the Spy and Pioneer. The hero is the celebrated Paul Jones, whom I well remember advancing above the island of Inchkeith with three small vessels to lay Leith under contribution... However, the novel is a very clever one, and the sea scenes
Long Tom deserved comparison to Parson Adams.\textsuperscript{50} Some early reviews especially in America found it too technical,\textsuperscript{51} but after it was praised in England it was widely successful. Late in his career Cooper specifically claimed originality in the work: "It has been said there is no original literature in America. I confess an inability to find the model for all the sea tales that now so much abound, if it be not the Pilot."\textsuperscript{52} In another place Cooper says that though his intention was to "avoid technicalities, in order to be poetic . . . the subject imperiously required a minuteness of detail to render it intelligible."\textsuperscript{53} The minuteness and intricacy of the description with its unavoidable technical terminology, its "tactile solidity,"\textsuperscript{54} convinces the reader of its reality, even if not all of the terminology is understandable.\textsuperscript{55} One of Cooper's most recent critics says, "His

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and characters in particular are admirably drawn; and I advise you to read it as soon as possible." Letter to Miss Edgeworth, February 24, 1824, quoted in Cairns, pp. 122-123.
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\textsuperscript{50}Mary Mitford to Sir William Elford, March 5, 1824, quoted in Clavel, pp. 222-223.
\textsuperscript{51}Clavel, pp. 184-185.
\textsuperscript{52}Cooper's notes for Rufus Griswold, 1842, in Clavel, p. 397.
\textsuperscript{54}Zoellner, p. 340.
\textsuperscript{55}For a few of his critics, Cooper was not realistic enough, notably Nathaniel Ames, A Mariner's Sketches (Providence: Cory, Marshall and Hammond, 1830). See Charles Anderson, "Cooper's Sea Novels Spurned in the Maintop," Modern Language Notes, LXVI (June, 1951), 388-391, and Warren
achievement in a few passages of *The Pilot* was to combine vivid descriptive prose and technical nautical language so artfully that the latter, not baffling the lay reader too much, actually enhanced the realistic effect of the former.  

These are large effects and relationships which are difficult to adequately exemplify in short quotation, and the reader is referred to the chapters previously cited for exemplification of this factual solidity in *The Pilot*.

The point of this discussion is not to prove that *The Pilot* should necessarily be classified as a "realistic" work. But in *The Pilot*, as in *The Spy*, there are numerous and significant connections with fact which cannot be ignored in assessing its effect. *The Pilot* is thoroughly embedded in the facts of the American Revolution, not only in introducing the historical character of John Paul Jones, but in the political and diplomatic history of the revolution as Cooper knew it from John Jay, one of the participants in that action. The work has too long been regarded merely as a "novel of adventure," when in fact it involves serious thematic concerns which haunted Cooper throughout his career. Cooper has virtually all of the insight here that he showed later in *Home as Found*, but that insight is embodied in a controlled, objective, effectively distanced form which val-

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56 Dekker, p. 114.
idates itself, rather than striking the reader as a case of special pleading. The issues of obedience and rebellion, establishment and revolution, are still very much alive in American democracy. Finally, the whole is suffused in a particular setting which Cooper knew from first-hand experience, and which he evokes in vivid, sensuous, technical and tactile terms.

Many of these same qualities mark all of Cooper's most successful "romances," and some of the same arguments can and I think should be advanced in connection with what is often considered to be quintessential Cooper romance, The Deerslayer (1841). One of the problems in dealing with The Deerslayer is that it is part of a series of five novels, all more or less having Natty Bumppo as hero which Cooper latterly called The Leatherstocking Tales. His daughter, Susan, comments:

Reversing the usual order, when himself a young man, he had first brought the hunter into view at the age of threescore and ten; now, when his own head was growing hoary, he brings Natty before the reader as a youth—he leads us over the first war-path of his hero. And the same lake shores on which that striking figure had first appeared, are again chosen for the closing of the series, as the scene of Natty's earlier prowess in the hunt and in war. 58

57 In order of publication, the novels are The Pioneers (1823), The Last of the Mohicans (1826), The Prairie (1827), The Pathfinder (1840), and The Deerslayer (1841). Arranged according to the chronology of Natty Bumppo's life, as they first were in the Putnam edition of 1850-1851 (Beard, VI, 4-5), the series begins with The Deerslayer, followed in order by The Last of the Mohicans, The Pathfinder, The Pioneers, and The Prairie.

58 Susan Fenimore Cooper, Pages and Pictures, p. 323.
The order of composition might have been a reversal for many writers, but in the context of this dissertation and according to Cooper's penchant for or the necessity of distance of some kind, the order would seem predictable and usual for Cooper. Cooper had introduced Natty in *The Pioneers* as over seventy years old; he had told of Natty's death in *The Prairie*; when Cooper is over fifty he pictures in *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* the young Natty's encounters with love. And *The Deerslayer* is a good example of the late Cooper; more than ever interested in the moral, even theological issues which his plots skillfully raise, but still using many of the conventional devices that had always been his stock in trade. Yet, paradoxically, our judgment of *The Deerslayer* is partly influenced by what we know will be Natty's consequent experience in the other works in the series, which Cooper wrote earlier.

Cooper's first biographer described *The Deerslayer* (and *The Pathfinder*) in words of high praise. "The defects in both of these tales are comparatively slight. They were pure works of art." At the turn of the century *The Deerslayer* was called a "pure romance." Several later commentators, especially those who consider Cooper's more outspoken social criticism in the *Home* novels as an advance or a maturation, are hard put to explain what seems to them to be

59 Lounsbury, p. 240. This is one of the critical judgments which incurred Mark Twain's scorn, see below.

60 Brownell, pp. 15-16.
a "romantic interlude" in 1840 and 1841 when Cooper in real life is engaged most actively in his libel suits—they can only marvel at Cooper's "incredible detachment." Even a very recent critic speaks in terms of "a brief return to romance." But perhaps the most quoted and most often accepted judgment of The Leatherstocking Tales in the order they appeared is D. H. Lawrence's seductive phrase, "a decrescendo of reality, and a crescendo of beauty." He speaks of the "unreality" of the vision; it can only be accepted as "a wish-fulfillment vision, a kind of yearning myth." The Deerslayer may be very beautiful, but it is less "real" than its predecessors in the series.

Less "real," in what sense? The physical setting was intimately known to Cooper, and his acquaintance with it back to the days of his youth and his conversations with his pioneer father are a more than adequate basis for imagining it before the coming of civilization. Cooper's daughter describes in some detail the inception of The Deerslayer:

One pleasant summer evening the author of the Pathfinder was driving along the lake shore in his farm wagon, singing cheerily, as he passed over that quiet, shady road, as he frequently did. . . . His spirited gray eye rested a moment on the water, with that expression of abstracted, poetical thought, ever familiar to those who lived with him; then, turning to the companion at his side—the daughter now writing these lines—he exclaimed: "I must write one more book, dearie, about our little lake!"

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61 The phrase is Erskine's, p. 108. See also Ross, p. 25.


63 Studies in Classic American Literature, pp. 50-51.
Again his eye rested on the water and the banks, with the far-seeing look of one evoking imaginary figures to fill the beautiful scene. A moment of silence followed--his daughter being unwilling to interrupt the train of thought opening before him; a few minutes passed—again he cracked his whip, resumed his song, with some careless chat of little incidents of the hour, and drove homeward. A few days later the first pages of the Deerslayer were written.64

In company with the artists of the Hudson Valley School, Cooper demonstrates his strong association with place, a particular place which provides the impetus for the work and its boundaries.65 And The Deerslayer is celebrated for its description of the lake and the forest which surrounds it.66

Deerslayer's first view of the lake is only the first of a recurrent series of descriptions of the setting which emphasize its beauty and repose.

An exclamation of surprise broke from the lips of Deerslayer, an exclamation that was low and guardedly made, however, for his habits were much more thoughtful and regulated than those of the reckless Hurry, when, on reaching the margin of the lake, he beheld the view that unexpectedly met his gaze. . . . On a level with the point lay a broad sheet of water, so placid and limpid that it resembled a bed of the pure mountain atmosphere, compressed into a setting of hills and woods. . . . But the most striking peculiarities of this scene were its solemn solitude and sweet repose. On all sides, wherever the eye turned, nothing met it but the mirror-like surface of the lake, the placid view of heaven, and the dense setting of woods. So rich and fleecy were the outlines of the forest, that scarce an opening could be seen, the whole visible earth, from the rounded mountain-top to the water's edge, presenting one unvaried hue of unbroken verdure. . . . In a word the hand of man had never yet defaced or deformed any part of this native scene, which

64 Susan Fenimore Cooper, Pages and Pictures, pp. 322-323.
65 Beard, "Cooper and His Artistic Contemporaries," in Cooper: A Re-Appraisal, pp. 112-127.
66 Bewley, p. 91.
lay bathed in sunlight, a glorious picture of affluent forest-grandeur, softened by the balminess of June, and relieved by the beautiful variety afforded by the presence of so broad an expanse of water.67

Perhaps another strong impression of the "unreality" of the setting and incidents of The Deerslayer is based on Mark Twain's comments on it.68 One of the unforgettable spectacles is the six Cooper Indians jumping successively (and five missing) from the overhead sapling for the Hutter ark as it is drawn through the entrance to the lake which is only two feet wider than the width of the ark. The ark, Mark Twain says, is a hundred and forty feet long and sixteen feet wide, and the house on it, ninety feet long. The house consists of two rooms, one the bedroom of Judith and Hetty, the other a parlor. It would take a minute and a half, Twain says, for the ark to pass under the sapling in the branches of which the Indians have hidden themselves. It is a measure of Mark Twain's skill that we accept all these estimates of time and length without reflection. A moment's reflection reveals their extreme exaggeration. A bedroom for Judith and Hetty which is sixteen by forty-five feet? Mark Twain must be thinking of a Mississippi river barge. Judge William Cooper, James Fenimore's father, also describes the kind of ark which was used to navigate rivers of the kind involved here.

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67 The Deerslayer, pp. 32-33.

68 In the widely reprinted "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," originally published in 1895 in the North American Review.
which has none of these lordly dimensions. Only one of
the illustrations by F. O. C. Darley in the 1859-1861 edi-
tion of Cooper's works shows the ark, and only the stern is
partially seen. No clear estimate, therefore, can be made
of the length of the vessel, but its width would seem to be
perhaps half of Twain's estimate of sixteen feet. James
Fenimore Cooper, Cooper's grandson, also comments on how
much more navigable rivers are before the land is cleared than
after.

More closely examined, additional discrepancies be-
tween Twain's account and Cooper's reveal themselves. The
ark according to Cooper is light in construction, and Deers-
slayer warns Hurry Harry and Thomas Hutter of the Indians'
intention. They pull with a will on the hawser which is an-
chored in the lake, with the result that the speed of the
ark is nearly doubled. Mark Twain conveniently omits these
details. Nor are the Indians lurking in the branches wait-
ing to drop on the roof of the ark as Twain describes them.
According to Cooper, the tree overhead is nearly horizontal
having been pressed down by weight of snows, and the Indians
intend to run out along the trunk and leap for the ark. Only
one lands on the ark. Twain says, "It was not much of a fall,

69 A Guide in the Wilderness (Dublin: Gilbert and
Hodges, 1810), reprinted Rochester, New York: G. P. Hum-
phrey, 1897, with an introduction by Cooper's grandson, James
Fenimore Cooper, p. 13.

70 The Deerslayer, p. 101.

yet it knocked him silly. He lay there unconscious." Cooper says the Indian intended to land on the roof of the house, but missed it. "The fall proving so much greater than he had anticipated, he was slightly stunned, and for a moment he remained half bent and unconscious of his situation."72 It seems obvious that Twain is bent on having fun at Cooper's expense, and while he utters pious words about Cooper's "inadequacy as an observer," he is not above a deliberately partial understanding of the Cooper account, revealing his own inadequacy as a reader. And, regrettably, out of such partialities, reading tastes of whole generations sometimes are formed. One might be tempted to talk of Twain's "critical offenses"; then one is ashamed to have taken Twain seriously; then one is chagrined that so many apparently have.73

Is the character of Deerslayer "unreal"? He is inconsistent in his speech, though Twain's phrasing of the charge again reveals his extreme exaggeration for the sake of humorous effect. Twain, speaking of the rules governing "literary art in the domain of romantic fiction," says, "They require that when a personage talks like an illustrated, gilt-edged, tree-calf, hand-tooled, seven dollar Friendship's offering in the beginning of a paragraph, he shall not talk like a Negro minstrel in the end of it. But this rule is flung down and danced upon in the Deerslayer tale." But Deers-

72 The Deerslayer, pp. 80-81.

73 See Walter Sutton, "Cooper as Found--1949," University of Kansas City Review, XVI (Autumn, 1949), 3-10. Sutton regards Twain's charges as "unanswerable."
slyer does speak a recognizable dialect which he shares with Hurry Harry and Ishmael Bush in *The Prairie* among others, and which is much like the dialect Lowell uses in *The Bigelow Papers.*

Cooper himself says, "A leading character in a work of fiction has a fair right to the aid which can be obtained from a poetical view of the subject." But what is more often neglected is that he also says,

> Had this been done without any of the drawbacks of humanity, the picture would have been in all probability, more pleasing than just. In order to preserve the *vraisemblance*, therefore, traits derived from the prejudices, tastes, and even the weaknesses of his youth, have been mixed up with these higher qualities and longings, in a way, it is hoped, to represent a reasonable picture of human nature, without offering to the spectator a "monster of goodness."

If Deerslayer's integrity, humility, and dedication to the truth that he finds in the God of the forest represent an ideal of what American possibilities could be, he is not, nonetheless, by that fact necessarily a "monster of goodness." He has his lapses, and his limitations. He is childlike and naive, much like the feeble-minded Hetty Hunter. He is physically ugly (in contrast to the handsome Hurry Harry), and he is illiterate. There is at least one notable temptation where his vanity overcomes him, when he seizes Killdeer, Hutter's rifle, to shoot a high-flying eagle to

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75 "Preface to the *Leather-Stocking Tales,*" *The Deerslayer*, pp. viii-ix.
demonstrate his prowess purely for its own sake.\textsuperscript{76}

There was, of course, from the beginning, speculation about an historical basis for the character of Leatherstocking. Cooper denies that there is any specific original. "In a physical sense, different individuals known to the writer in early life certainly presented themselves as models, through his recollections; but in a moral sense this man of the forest is purely a creation."\textsuperscript{77} Susan, Cooper's daughter, mentions at least one such model from Cooper's early experience,\textsuperscript{78} and other possibilities, especially Daniel Boone have been suggested.\textsuperscript{79} One of the most significant statements was made by Francis Parkman, the noted nineteenth century American historian. He had considerable first hand experience of the west, which Cooper lacked, and while he castigated Cooper's treatment of Indians, he found Leatherstocking quite believable.

There is something admirably felicitous in the conception of this hybrid offspring of civilization and barbarism, in whom uprightness, kindliness, innate philosophy, and the truest moral perceptions are joined with the wandering instincts and hatred of restraint which stamp the Indian or the Bedouin. Nor is the character in the least unnatural. . . . Men as true, generous,

\textsuperscript{76}\textit{The Deerslayer}, p. 484.

\textsuperscript{77}"Preface to the Leather-Stocking Tales," \textit{The Deerslayer}, pp. viii.

\textsuperscript{78}\textit{Pages and Pictures}, pp. 51-52.

and kindly as Leatherstocking may still be found among the perilous solitudes of the West.\textsuperscript{80}

And the supporting cast in \textit{The Deerslayer}, if anything, are more realistic than in the other Leatherstocking tales, to contrast Deerslayer, but also to set him in a believable context. The complexity of \textit{The Deerslayer} is shown by the fact that the critical conflict is not between black and white alternatives (nor white and red ones); the conflict is between two friends, Deerslayer and Hurry Harry. The novel opens suggestively with these "two men who had lost their way, and were searching in different directions for their path."\textsuperscript{81} "In the long novel that here opens we begin to trace, beyond the pattern of violent physical action, two opposing moral visions of life which are embodied in these two woodsmen."\textsuperscript{82} Hurry Harry is Judith's suitor, and she ultimately proposes to Deerslayer. Hurry Harry is handsome and resourceful, and with Thomas Hutter engages in a strictly legal (even commendable as far as the colonial civil authorities are concerned) scalping of Indians, but he is bloodthirsty to the point of almost scalping Hist, Chingachgook's intended bride. He indiscriminately kills women and children, which is sharply contrasted to Deerslayer's compassion and regret when he first sheds blood of a fellow human being, an

\textsuperscript{80}Parkman, p. 151. This comment is made in a review of Cooper's \textit{Works} in 1851.

\textsuperscript{81}The \textit{Deerslayer}, p. 15. (The sentence is in the fourth paragraph of Chapter I.)

\textsuperscript{82}Bewley, p. 88.
experienced Indian warrior, in Chapter VII of *The Deerslayer*. Hurry Harry has no loyalty except to himself, and he ultimately deserts the Hutter family. It may be extreme to identify him with William Henry Harrison and the Whigs of 1840, but in his hurry to serve himself, in his purely economic motivation, in his lack of dedication to any principle bigger than himself, Cooper criticizes some of the same characteristics in American character as he had in *Home as Found*, but with the distance and control which transforms his personal bias into artistic viability. "Hurry is a portent of how things were to go in America."  

Judith Hutter, too, is one of the most remarkable of Cooper's heroines. She is intelligent, vivacious, and beautiful, of course. She has the presence of mind when that Indian (previously referred to) lies dazed on the afterdeck of the ark to seize the opportunity to push him overboard. She shows delicacy and sensitivity after she inadvertently exposes Deerslayer's illiteracy. It has been suggested that her moral salvation is at stake in her courtship of Deerslayer, and she is the only heroine of Cooper with some kind of moral taint--an often referred to hint of indiscretion in her past. She is known, indeed has a reputation

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83*Dekker*, p. 176.
84*Bewley*, p. 96.
85*The Deerslayer*, p. 81.
87*Dekker*, pp. 183-184.
among the British officers stationed along the Mohawk, and in her last appeal to Deerslayer she asks: "Tell me, then, Deerslayer, if anything light of me, that Harry March has said, may not have influenced your feelings?" Cooper's description of Deerslayer's lack of response leaves us to believe that Deerslayer thinks there was such an indiscretion. But the third person narrator contradicts this: "Judith read his answer in his countenance; and with a heart nearly broken by the consciousness of undeserving, she signed him adieu, and buried herself in the woods."\(^{88}\) Cooper's last comment on her also is somewhat equivocal, for much later there is a report of a "rare beauty" who lives on Sir Robert Warley's paternal estate but does not bear his name: "Whether this was Judith, relapsed into her early failing, or some other victim of the soldier's, Hawkeye never knew, nor would it be pleasant or profitable to inquire."\(^{89}\)

Hetty, Judith's simple-minded sister, is a more difficult character, though Cooper himself judged the portrayal as one of his successes.\(^{90}\) Her simple literal Christianity

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88 *The Deerslayer*, p. 594.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 597. One is reminded of Alida's supposed indiscretion in *The Water-Witch*, but if Cooper there retreats to respectability by revealing that Seadrift is a "female," the possibility of Judith's indiscretion is allowed to stand.

90 *Clavel*, p. 400. Hetty recalls Job Pray in *Lionel Lincoln* except for the great contrast, that she is effectively integrated into the thematic fabric of the novel, while Job, equally vividly portrayed, seems to contradict the theme of *Lionel Lincoln*. 
compares and contrasts effectively with Deerslayer's: one should turn the other cheek, but can one if to do so means that one gives up his life? This is the dilemma which faces Deerslayer in Chapter VII of The Deerslayer, the richly mythic but vividly factual account of Deerslayer's initiation, which has been called "as great an achievement as one will find in American fiction outside of Melville."91 Deerslayer's action, here, is not on that far away edge of idealism, but represents a compromise, which has been called "realistic."92 And even the Indians in The Deerslayer, Chingachgook and Hist, and the Mingo, Rivenoak, have complexity of motivation in their conflicts and do not represent the more simplistic dichotomies of, say, The Last of the Mohicans, written fifteen years earlier.

Finally, however, one adverts to vivid evocation of time and place as the key to the elegaic, compelling tone of The Deerslayer. "The action of The Deerslayer is convincing because the world in which it occurs is created with vividly realized circumstantial detail. It is less mere description than it is the tangible reality of things."93 It is a tangible evocation of a reality that was, and its nostalgia may be romantic. The moral issues which the story raises, however, are not circumscribed by its setting in time, having a relevance to Cooper and his audience, and to readers since.

91 Winters, p. 187.
92 House, p. 320.
93 Bewley, p. 92.
And without this factual, realistic quality, neither The Spy, nor The Pilot, nor The Deerslayer, in fact none of Cooper's best "romances" would be capable of continuing to engage an audience. There is no contention here that Cooper is the predecessor of anti-bellum realism in American literature, except perhaps indirectly; the contention is, however, that Cooper's "romances" are far from frivolous. He is essentially a serious novelist, who makes relevant judgments on American experience, and who deserves to be taken seriously. That tension is apparent in The Deerslayer, where Cooper's last word is this:

We live in a world of transgressions and selfishness, and no pictures that represent us otherwise can be true; though happily for human nature, gleamings of that pure spirit in whose likeness man has been fashioned, are to be seen, relieving its deformities, and mitigating, if not excusing its crimes.  

94 Abcarian, p. 40.
95 The Deerslayer, p. 597.
CHAPTER IV

COOPER'S POETIC REALISM

It may seem incongruous to apply the label realism to any of Cooper's novels, and yet, more than any other, The Pioneers deserves that classification. It was as close to Cooper's personal experience as Home as Found, and more obviously deserves the description of being autobiographical. It was written early in Cooper's career, and he himself characterized it as "written, exclusively, to please myself: so it would be no wonder if it displeased everybody else. . . ." Somewhat later in the same "Preface" Cooper says,

I have already said, that it was mine own humour that suggested this tale; but it is a humour that is deeply connected with feeling. Happier periods, more interesting events, and, possibly, more beauteous scenes, might have been selected, to exemplify my subject; but none of either that would be so dear to me. I wish, therefore, to be judged more by what I have done, than by my sins of omission. I have introduced one battle, but it is not of the most Homeric kind. As for murders, the population of a new country will not admit of such a waste of human life. There might possibly have been one or two hangings, to the manifest advantage of the "settlement;" [sic] but then it would have been out of "keeping" with the humane laws of this compassionate country.3

1 The Pioneers is "the semi-autobiographical story that every serious artist must get out of his system before he knows what he has to say or how to say it." Spiller, James Fenimore Cooper, pp. 15-16.


3 Ibid., p. xxvi.
It is this closeness to Cooper's own early life which gives *The Pioneers* that "haunting quality of something just around the corner from memory." ⁴

Late in his career, after all the controversy over *Home as Found*, Cooper took pains to deny as much as possible any literal identification between himself and his works, but even then he never denied that the physical scene of *The Pioneers* (and *Home as Found*) was real. There can only be one Lake Otsego, one Mt. Vision, one proper source of the Susquehanna River. ⁵ Yet he also insisted that the village and the characters of *The Pioneers* were imaginary—well, mostly imaginary. Certainly the early reviewers in both England and the United States took it to be mostly real, and praised it for this quality, often comparing Cooper to Maria Edgeworth.

The reviewer of the *New York Spectator* was an Otsego man, and he found *The Pioneers* to be "marvelously faithful, both in characters and scenes." ⁶ Reviewers in the *New York American* and the *New York Mirror* concurred, the latter adding that it was hard for him not to believe that Cooper was describing some of his actual acquaintances. Joseph Denny as Oliver Oldschool believed that

In Europe the scenes of this tale may be received as the wild creations of fancy, and the actors as the phantoms of an ingenious imagination; but the American, who has ample evidence of their truth, will recur to them with deep interest and pride, unmingled with a tinge of in-

⁵ Beard, IV, 73.
⁶ Waples, p. 67.
credulity. . . . These individuals will all be found in good keeping; not deformed by caricature nor frittered away by extravagance . . . and they are, as we can testify . . . the very kinds of persons who may be expected to be found in such situations.7

Richard Henry Dana wrote Cooper a congratulatory letter:

"What a full and true description you have given of a newly settled village in a new country."8 Cooper had reason for concluding in his notes for Griswold in the 1840's that though The Pioneers was only "moderately successful" (probably he means financially), yet "criticism has rather favored it."9 Strangely, the editors of the North American Review did not take notice of The Pioneers when it was published, yet in a review of The Last of the Mohicans three years later they took occasion to declare that Mohicans was inferior to Pioneers.10 Parkman, in 1852, concluded that, "of all Cooper's works The Pioneers seems to us most likely to hold a permanent place in literature, for it preserves a vivid reflection of scenes and characters which will soon have passed away."11

And there are many connections with documentable facts, beyond the physical setting. Susan Fenimore Cooper, in her introduction to The Pioneers in 1865, discusses at some length some of these origins. There was a prototype for

7 Portfolio, XV (March, 1823), 230 quoted by Waples, p. 68.
8 Correspondence, I, 90-94.
9 Beard, IV, 342.
11 Parkman, p. 157.
Leatherstocking in a man named Shipman, "who came frequently to offer his game at Judge Cooper's door, and whose rude equipment, dogs, and rifle, had much attraction for the lads of the house," evidently James Fenimore Cooper among them. But Shipman, Susan asserts, has only the "barest resemblance" to Leatherstocking—"in pursuit, something in rude accoutrement, and in the ground over which they both hunted"—otherwise the conception is Cooper's own.\(^{12}\) There is no original for Chingachgook, though passing Indians were fairly frequently seen in Cooperstown, and as late as 1794 a band of considerable size gave rise to an alarm and fear of a possible attack. The village was awakened in the dead of night by the sound of gunfire, but it was only a party of constables returning with a band of counterfeiters which they had taken prisoner, which is perhaps the origin of Richard Jones' absence and return in Chapter XXXII of *The Pioneers*.\(^{13}\) The wolf and the panther were not unknown in Cooperstown, but generally game was growing scarce.\(^{14}\)

Susan also mentions the "starving time" and the herring (of which more later), and the abundance of pigeons. She is emphatic in denying that Mr. Grant, the Episcopal missionary of *The Pioneers*, is modeled after Father Nash of Cooperstown: after all, Father Nash had many children, and

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\(^{12}\) *Pages and Pictures*, pp. 51-52.

\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

\(^{14}\) *Ibid.*, p. 52. Compare *The Pioneers*, Chapter XIX (on the wolf); Chapter XXVIII (on the panther); and Chapter I (on the scarcity of game).
Mr. Grant only one, Louisa, yet Louisa of The Pioneers is the only one surviving of six children. 15 Susan does dwell at length on Colonel Hendrick Frey, who seems to be the original of Major Hartmann of The Pioneers. 16 And some of the horse-play with Monsieur Ebbal as Susan recounts it reveals the same spirit as Kirby's trick on Le Quoi. 17 It is Le Quoi, however, who is most obviously based on an actual model, having the same name and a similar history in The Pioneers as in reality. He is a fugitive French nobleman, former civil governor of Martinique, and he invests his capital in a small country store in Cooperstown. As in The Pioneers, after a few years he makes his peace with the new French government, and returns to his previous associations. 18

In addition, and more importantly, many of the details of the actions and character of Judge Temple in The Pioneers are based on Cooper's knowledge of his father's life, and can be confirmed by reading William Cooper's A Guide in the Wilderness. Like William Cooper, Judge Temple was instrumental in laying out the village and promoting the settlement of the area around Lake Otsego. William Cooper describes his first visit to the area in these terms:

In 1785 I visited the rough and hilly country of Otsego, where there existed not an inhabitant, nor any trace of

15 Pages and Pictures, pp. 54-55, and The Pioneers, Chapter XII.

16 Pages and Pictures, p. 56.

17 Ibid., pp. 56-57, and The Pioneers, Chapter XX.

18 Pages and Pictures, pp. 58-59, and The Pioneers, Chapters VIII and XII. See also the "Introduction," by James Fenimore Cooper (Cooper's grandson), to William Cooper's A Guide in the Wilderness.
a road; I was alone, three hundred miles from home, without bread, meat, or food of any kind; fire and fishing tackle were my only means of subsistence. I caught trout in the brook and roasted them on the ashes. My horse fed on the grass that grew by the edge of the waters. I laid me down to sleep in my watch coat, nothing but the melancholy Wilderness around me. In this way I explored the country, formed my plans of future settlement, and meditated upon the spot where a place of trade or a village should afterwards be established.19

Judge Temple's description of his first observation of the Otsego country is more fulsome, but many of the details recur.

Unimproved and wild as this district now seems to your eyes, what was it when I first entered the hills! . . . The leaves were fallen, and I mounted a tree, and sat for an hour looking on the silent wilderness. Not an opening was to be seen in the boundless forest, except where the lake lay, like a mirror of glass. . . . I had met many deer, gliding through the woods, in my journey; but not the vestige of a man could I trace, during my progress, nor from my elevated observatory. No clearing, no hut, none of the winding roads that are now to be seen, were there, nothing but mountains rising behind mountains, and the valley, with its surface of branches. . . .20

The incidents of the "starving time," the purchase of grain from Pennsylvania, and the arrival of shoals of herring in Lake Otsego are identical in William Cooper's Guide and The Pioneers. Both include the vivid olfactory detail that people of the village were surviving by eating wild leeks, or onions.21 Judge Cooper, like Judge Temple, is interested in potash manufacture, sugar making, and the building of roads and bridges. They both show the same spirit of enterprise, initiative, enthusiasm. With no legal training but a passion for politics, William Cooper was appointed first Judge of the Court of Common

20 The Pioneers, p. 258.
Pleas by Governor George Clinton in 1791, holding office until October, 1800. Cooper comments on Judge Temple's similar appointment:

When the district in which his estates lay, had become sufficiently populous to be set off as a country, Mr. Temple had, according to the custom of the new settlements, been selected to fill its highest judicial station. This might make a Templar smile, but in addition to the apology of necessity, there is ever a dignity in talents and experience, that is commonly sufficient, in any station, for the protection of its possessor. . . . At all events, such was the universal practice of the country and the times; and Judge Temple, so far from ranking among the lowest of his judicial contemporaries in the courts of the new counties, felt himself and was unanimously acknowledged to be, among the first. Indeed, the extent of the likenesses between Judge Cooper and Judge Temple would justify a recent critic's description of *The Pioneers* as Cooper's "filial tribute to the memory of his father." Yet Cooper himself always insisted, that if the place may be real, the characters are imaginary. Cooper commented at length on the Effingham family, which plays such a prominent role in *The Pioneers* and in *Home as Found*, in the five *Brother Jonathan* letters (December, 1841, to April 1842), as well as in an earlier letter (September-October, 1840), intended for but not published by the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*. His comments on *The Pioneers*, when coupled with what is known from other sources on the Cooper family, present an unusually good case to study Cooper's methods as a novelist.

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23 *The Pioneers*, p. 37.
24 Pickering, p. 211.
Basically in the *Brother Jonathan* letters he denies the intention to portray any specific historical persons, while he admits, even champions, the general truth of the work to the people, times, and places portrayed. Cooper says,

The *Pioneers* is announced, in its title page, as a "Descriptive Tale" . . . descriptive as regards general characteristics, usages, and the state of a new country. . . . When a work professes to be fiction, the reader is bound to consider all those parts fiction, which cannot be proved to be otherwise. It is seldom that a work of this nature is met with, that does not contain some reality, and the inference that all is intended to represent facts, because a part does, would come very near giving a death blow to fiction altogether.25

Besides some of the resemblances already noted, Cooper admits that the court-house and the tavern of *The Pioneers* are literally drawn from Cooperstown, as well as a peculiar and distinctive jog in the main street of the town.26 The house of Judge Temple in *The Pioneers* is emphatically not the house of his father; yet Cooper admits he did have a particular, real house in mind.27 But into that house he admits a real room from his father's house, the hallway, described in considerable literal detail.28 And the Academy building described in *The Pioneers* is not that of Cooperstown—it is the Academy of Cherry Valley, a nearby village!29 With char-

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25 *Beard*, IV, 253.


27 *Ibid.*, IV, 258. The charming and revealing detail that in this example of colonial architecture the pediment of the roof upheld the columns is a literal detail of that other unspecified house.


acters Cooper admits only that there are a "few touches" of real characters, but no "distinctive" ones. Most of the similarities between Judge Temple and Judge Cooper are never alluded to, though Cooper confesses that Judge Temple's strong opinion on the preservation of trees, especially the sugar maple, is imitated from Judge Cooper.\(^{30}\) It is interesting that Cooper is considerably more frank, especially about resemblances to his own father, in the footnotes and preface to the 1832 English edition of *The Pioneers*, not reprinted in America until the Putnam edition of 1850. One thing which Cooper is particularly adamant in denying is the supposed likeness between his sister, Hannah, and Elizabeth Temple.\(^{31}\) Cooper goes into considerable detail to show how unlike they are in physical appearance, yet a letter of Hannah's which is extant suggests that her feelings about living in the social wilderness of Cooperstown are similar to Elizabeth Temple's.\(^{32}\)

It is interesting to compare all these denials of likeness by Cooper in the 1840's with some of his earlier statements about *The Pioneers*. Fortunately for Cooper these


\(^{32}\) The letter of Hannah's is quoted by Lyman H. Butterfield, "Cooper's Inheritance: The Otsego Country and Its Founders," in *Cooper: A Re-Appraisal*, p. 25. Elizabeth worries that she will not find a suitable husband; see *The Pioneers*, p. 308.
early statements were not public. To John Murray, his English publisher, he wrote on November 29, 1822:

The yellow fever, has caused a delay in the appearance of the Pioneers, which I greatly regret. . . . I had announced the work as a "descriptive tale" but perhaps have confined myself too much to describing the scenes of my own youth—I know that the present taste is for action and strong excitement, and in this respect am compelled to acknowledge that the two first volumes are deficient, I however am not without hopes that the third will be thought to make amends—If there be any value in truth, the pictures are very faithful, and I can safely challenge a scrutiny in this particular. . . .

As late as 1831, to an English editor interested in the details of his biography, Cooper wrote, "The Pioneers contains a pretty faithful description of Cooperstown in its infancy, as I knew it when a child. It is now much altered, of course." It seems abundantly clear that even in this very early work Cooper is following what he was later to define as a "poetical" view of a subject: the subject to be real and convincing must be near a substantial body of fact intimately known (his boyhood in Cooperstown), but enough distance must be imposed to allow for moral judgment and the aesthetic shaping of the materials. The work then is generally but essentially true, and though one can say that no Judge Temple as he is specifically described in The Pioneers ever existed, yet his kind certainly did, and the portrait is as lively and convincing as Cooper's memory of his father. One side of the dichotomy Cooper phrases very well when he says, "rigid adhesion to

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33 *Beard*, I, 85.
truth . . . destroys the charm of fiction, " but the other side is borne out in Cooper's practice, which shows that to emphasize the charmingly fictitious is to deprive the work of truth, of reality. Both extremes must be avoided if the work is to be aesthetically successful.

Evidence of Cooper's distancing of himself from his material is primarily obvious in the design of the novel, a design which enables him to make several important moral comments and which enables him to give aesthetic form to his materials. In this connection it is important to note several ways in which The Pioneers has been misinterpreted. Again one of D. H. Lawrence's impressionistic statements is misleading. Of The Pioneers he says, "It is a beautiful re­splendent picture of life. Fenimore puts in only the glamour." Yet the book begins with a quarrel and climaxes in a trial. The following is a more accurate observation:

Looked at closely, the episodes of the novel reveal anything but harmony and loving cooperation in the affairs of men. From the opening scene of the dispute over the deer . . . to the final confrontation of Natty and the forces of Judge Temple's law in the penultimate chapter, the novel is infused with a spirit of angry contention, with resentment and boasting, with competition and the jealous assertion of rival claims.

There is conflict between Natty's sense of freedom and the Judge's ideas of civilization, between the self-discipline


36 Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature, p. 55.

which Natty and the Judge share and the villagers' destructiveness, between Remarkable Pettibone and Elizabeth in the Judge's household, between Natty and Billy Kirby in the turkey shoot and when Natty is arrested, between the villagers and the Judge in the tavern scene on civil and religious matters, between Oliver and the Judge in the long suppressed but ultimately revealed dispute over the rightful ownership of the Templeton lands, and others. As Charvat says, "Debate is a significant method in Cooper's fiction,"38 and the characters are significantly grouped in contention on their attitudes toward the use of natural resources.39 Much of Cooper's supposedly late "social criticism" is rather well developed here. In addition the exploitative and contentious self-serving American whom Cooper criticizes is curiously anticipated in some of William Cooper's comments on the differences between Americans and Scotsmen. The acerbity might have been James Fenimore's.

... the odds are, that when the Scotsman buys a cow, he pays ready money, and has her for a lower price; the American pays with his note, gives more, and is often sued for the payment; when this happens, his cause comes to be tried before the squire, and six jurors impanelled. Here much pettifogging skill is displayed; if the defendant has address enough to procure a note, bond or other matter to be offered in set-off he perhaps involves his adversary in costs to the amount of three or four dollars, and gains celebrity for his dexterity and finesse. This cunning talent, which they call outwitting, gives him


such reputation and lead, that he stands fair to be chosen a petty town officer.\textsuperscript{40}

There is the often-expressed opinion from Lounsbury that The Pioneers is the "poorest" of the Leatherstocking Tales because of the realism with which Leatherstocking is portrayed.\textsuperscript{41} This comes at least partly from reading the novels backwards, that is, certainly the Natty of The Last of the Mohicans is more idealized, and that of The Prairie is more mythic, but matters of taste aside, the question is what is Natty's place in The Pioneers? Nor is it completely adequate to say that The Pioneers is merely the "realistic origin" of the myth,\textsuperscript{42} or that "the heroic dimension which will invest the other four books is only implicit in The Pioneers.\textsuperscript{43} Natty does represent the pre-eminent moral ideal in The Pioneers, and his morality is superior to Judge Temple's because it is natural and not dependent on the artificial restraints of rigidly enforced written laws. That Natty has not arrived at the mythic dimensions of the opening scene of The Prairie should not obscure the position he occupies in The Pioneers.\textsuperscript{44}

There are some notable mythic touches in The Pioneers. Billy Kirby, the pioneer axeman, to a great extent is handled

\textsuperscript{40}Guide, pp. 32-33.
\textsuperscript{41}Lounsbury, pp. 53-54. See also Erskine, pp. 66-68.
\textsuperscript{42}Chase, pp. 54-55.
\textsuperscript{43}Brady, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{44}Cf. Bewley, pp. 108-110.
this way. He is large enough (and needs to be) to counterbalance both Judge Temple and Natty. He is Paul Bunyan, before Paul Bunyan ever existed. Cooper says,

For days, weeks, nay months, Billy Kirby would toil, with an ardour that evinced his native spirit, and with an effect that seemed magical, until, his chopping being ended, his stentorian lungs could be heard emitting sounds, as he called his patient oxen, the assistants in his labour, which rung through the hills like the cries of an alarm. He had been often heard, on a mild summer's evening, a long mile across the vale of Templeton; when the echoes from the mountains would take up his cries, until they died away in the feeble sounds from the distant rocks that overhung the lake. His piles, or, to use the language of the country, his logging, ended, with a despatch that could only accompany his dexterity and Herculean strength, the jobber would collect together his implements of labour, light the heaps of timber, and march away, under the blaze of the prostrate forest, like the conqueror of some city, who, having first prevailed over his adversary, places the final torch of destruction, as the finishing blow to his conquest.

The death of Chingachgook in the clap of thunder in the forest fire is such a moment, and Chingachgook is Natty's closest companion. But Natty, despite his superlative marksmanship and his skill in woodcraft, is not given this mythic stature; yet his morality is the test against which all the other characters are measured, including Judge Temple. Closely associated with Natty are Elizabeth Temple (who takes Natty's part against her father and abets his escape) and Oliver Effingham (of whom more later).

45 Davie, p. 134.
46 The Pioneers, p. 208.
48 Ibid., p. 381.
A second important element in the design of the novel is its seasonal structure. At first glance this may seem to be merely an arbitrary way to impose order on a series of charming genre-pictures, as for instance it functions in Washington Irving's **Bracebridge Hall**, or James Thomson's **The Seasons**, a favorite poem of Cooper's. But beyond this, the effects of this seasonal order are to emphasize passage of time or change, and to suggest cycle or evolution, as for instance they do in Thoreau's **Walden**. Both change and cycle are significant in the design of **The Pioneers**.

Briefly, **The Pioneers** begins (Chapter I-XIX) in winter, covering three days from December 24 to December 27; gives three sketches of advancing spring (Chapters XX-XXV); covers the events of three days in July (Chapters XXVI-XL); and concludes in its last chapter on a bracing morning in mid-October. Cooper punctuates each of these changes with deliberate passages of description to emphasize the changing year. After a few paragraphs in Chapter I locate the tale in time and place, Cooper begins,

> It was near the setting of the sun, on a clear cold day in December of that year, when a sleigh was moving slowly up one of the mountains in the district we have described. There was a littering in the atmosphere, as if it were filled with innumerable shining particles, and the noble bay horses that drew the sleigh were covered, in many parts, with a coat of frost. The vapour from their nostrils was seen to issue like smoke; and every

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*It has been shown that Cooper almost certainly had access to an early review copy of Irving's **Bracebridge Hall**, and there are enough similarities in the materials, the country squire, the Christmas scenes, the Indians (gypsies in Irving) to suggest that it may have served as a "creative irritant" to Cooper, cf. Philbrick, "**Pioneers**: Origins and Structure," p. 583.*
object in the view, as well as every arrangement of the travellers, denoted the depth of a winter in the mountains.50

The spring changes are emphasized by describing the period of alternate thaws and frosts (Chapter XX), the condition of the roads (Chapter XXI), and the passing of the ice from the lake (Chapter XXII). The transition to July is less extensive, coming in the concluding four paragraphs of Chapter XXV. The October morning is more deliberately described at the beginning of Chapter XLI:

The events of our tale carry us through the summer; and, after making nearly the circle of the year, we must conclude our labours in the delightful month of October. . . . Let the American reader imagine one of our mildest October mornings, when the sun seems a ball of silvery fire, and the elasticity of the air is felt while it is inhaled; imparting vigour and life to the whole system. The weather, neither too warm, nor too cold, but of that happy temperature which stirs the blood, without bringing the lassitude of spring.51

The description of the seasons is not merely decorative, for there is a direct relationship between the seasonal cycle and the intensity of the human actions, climaxing in the heat and the forest fire at the end of the July section. The dispute between Natty and the Judge over who killed the buck in the opening Winter section is settled more or less amicably, though Oliver is wounded. He also, however, is taken into the Judge's household. The hostility between Elizabeth and Remarkable Pettibone, the Judge's housekeeper, like the hostility between Hiram Doolittle and the Judge in the tavern scene, is largely repressed. In the pigeon hunting and the

50 The Pioneers, p. 15.
51 Ibid., pp. 493-494.
fishing scenes in the Spring, the hostility between the vil-
lagers and nature is brought out into the open and is sharp-
ly contrasted by Natty's moral use of nature, which is su-
perior to the Judge's. In the July section, Hiram and Joth-
am's conviction that Natty is hiding a potentially profitable
mine in his cave leads directly to the loosing of Natty's
hounds by Jotham, who in turn start the buck that Natty ille-
gally kills. Natty is taken and tried and escapes, and the
villagers have more exciting game—a manhunt. Their pursuit
with torches leads plausibly to the forest fire in which old
John Mohegan (Chingachgook) dies, and Natty is brought to bay,
revealing Major Effingham, Oliver's grandfather, concealed in
the cave, and the whole relationship of Oliver to Judge Tem-
ple is revealed. Oliver is shown the Judge's will, which
leaves half of the Judge's possessions to him, as rightful
heir of his father, who had been the Judge's partner before
the Revolution. The brief October scene is suggestive of new
beginnings: by marrying Elizabeth, Oliver will become the
new proprietor; Natty leaves; and the Judge's era of influ-
ence is ended.

An important effect of this reading of the novel is
that it places Oliver in a new light. Many critics have lo-
cated the primary conflict in The Pioneers as that between
Natty and Judge Temple,52 but there then is no resolution:
one of the protagonists, Natty, simply removes himself. Oli-

52 Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 31; Smith, pp.
67-68; House, pp. 269-270.
ver does occupy a mediate position between them; he is Natty's friend who becomes the Judge's secretary. He is the "waver­ing hero," a la Scott. But he is also essentially a passive framing figure who represents the future as Indian John re­presents the past. All the confusion in the novel among the characters over Oliver's supposed Indian blood, which is eventually explained by the revelation that he is, like his father, an adopted Indian, is symbolically appropriate. Oliver is the rightful heir, and he not only legally inherits from Judge Temple, but morally he is Indian John's heir too, and he will have Indian John's and Natty's integrity in deal­ing with nature.

One of Cooper's themes, perhaps the most important, is morally rightful ownership and the establishment of a sta­ble society, which still troubles Americans. One is reminded of the view Cooper articulated in Home as Found fifteen years later. There he classifies the progress of a "new country" into three distinct phases.

At the commencement of a settlement, there is much of that sort of kind feeling and mutual interest which men are apt to manifest toward each other when they are em­barked in an enterprise of common hazards. The distance that is unavoidably inseparable from education, habits, and manners, is lessened by mutual wants and mutual ef­forts; and the gentleman, even while he may maintain his character and station, maintains them with that species of good-fellowship and familiarity that marks the inter­-

53 Davie, p. 104, gives Oliver this position, but finds the characterization "shadowy and unsatisfactory."

54 The Pioneers, pp. 154, 203, 234, are some of the more prominent instances.
course between the officer and the soldier in an arduous campaign.\textsuperscript{55}

The Templeton of \textit{The Pioneers} is clearly in this first stage, and Cooper alludes to \textit{The Pioneers} in \textit{Home as Found} when he says of the Templeton of the 1830's, "the events of the first period we have designated, and which we have imperfectly recorded in another work, were already passing into tradition."

The second stage, as Cooper sees it, is one of social contention.

To this period of fun, toil, neighborly feeling, and adventure succeeds another, in which society begins to marshall itself, and the ordinary passions have sway. Now it is that we see the struggles for place, the heart-burnings and jealousies of contending families, and the influence of mere money. Circumstances have probably established the local superiority of a few beyond all question, and the condition of these serves as a goal for the rest to aim at.\textsuperscript{56}

The second stage is indeterminate in length, and is complicated by the movements of what Cooper calls "birds of passage," people who drift from place to place. One of the profound limitations of Cooper's social views was his inability to foresee the extent of American mobility, social as well as geographic. The second stage, to Cooper, is well illustrated by Templeton as portrayed in the \textit{Home} novels.

Cooper envisions a third, more stable condition of society evolving.

The third and last condition of society in a "new country," is that in which the influence of the particular causes enumerated ceases, and men and things come within the control of more general and regular laws. The effect, of course, is to leave the community in possession

\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Home as Found}, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 188.
of a civilization that conforms to that of the whole re-
gion, be it higher or be it lower, and with the division
into castes that are more or less rigidly maintained, ac-
cording to circumstances.  

By Cooper's standards, American society is still in his sec-
ond stage, and whether the kind of stability he hoped for is
possible or even desirable under American conditions is a
rather moot question. His third stage may be related to the
kind of relative social stability he found in Europe, which,
in contrast to America, has "civilization."

In any case, Oliver as the new proprietor is a po-
tentially better leader than Judge Temple; a new and better
era is forecast for Templeton. Oliver's adequacy to fill this
role has been debated and misunderstood. To begin with, there
is a long tradition of condemning Oliver as merely a conven-
tional love-interest character.  

Some critics are willing
to concede that Elizabeth is well-drawn, but Oliver, who
is respected and recognized by Judge Temple as a gentleman,
is somehow unconvincing. Oliver also has the respect and
friendship of Natty and Old John.

Cooper takes great pains, however, to qualify Oliver for
his future role. He is heir to a long tradition of honor,
of loyalty to established authority, of continuity in re-
ligion and social class. The Effingham line has been a
race of soldiers and is distinguished by its chivalric
idealism and its absolute integrity, qualities that con-
trast sharply with the shrewdness, flexibility, and ex-
pediency of the mercantile world in which Marmaduke Tem-
ple has been schooled. As the son of Edward Effingham,
who had been exiled for his allegiance to the crown in
the Revolution, Oliver has deep roots in the white past

57 Ibid., p. 189.
58 See House, p. 22.
59 Boynton, p. 388; House, p. 39.
of America; and as the grandson of Major Effingham, who had been proclaimed a chief by the Delawares and adopted by Mohegan as a son, he is firmly linked to the Indian past.  

It is Oliver, with Natty and Indian John, who is critically interested in Judge Temple's title and claim of ownership. Surely Oliver's feeling that the Judge has cheated him motivates the "dark" side of his character; he is not merely a Byronic attitudinizing romantic hero like the Skimmer of *The Water-Witch* or Captain Heidegger of *The Red Rover*. And, of course, Oliver is an important character without being a main character. His presence suggests the future, but the novel as a whole is concerned with the present of 1793-1794. If his characterization is a weakness in *The Pioneers*, the reality and the moral significance of the conflict between Natty and the Judge, and the design which projects the human agents against the developments in Nature are its strong points.

Even details of Cooper's descriptions take on symbolic richness, as, for instance, the light around Natty's boat in the fishing scene, one critic notes, takes on "moral reverberations." And several critics have commented on the two eagles who rule the valley much of the winter but who are displaced as the spring season progresses and are followed by the flocks of pigeons. When the little waves gradually increase the opening in the ice of the lake, Cooper comments, "Just as the last sheet of agitated ice was disappearing in

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61 Davie, p. 143.
the distance, the eagles rose, and soared with a wide sweep above the clouds, while the waves tossed their little caps of snow into the air, as if rioting in their release from a thraldom of five months' duration. "62 The juxtaposition of these elements is "an important symbolic reference to two of Cooper's important themes, the meanings of legitimate right and the contest between freedom and authority." 63 This kind of richness in meaning as well as this kind of order and design give the realism of The Pioneers a poetic intensity.

In moving from The Pioneers to The Sea Lions, one passes from one of Cooper's most famous works to one which until very recent times has been almost entirely unappreciated. Melville was one of the few to review the book, and his review was favorable. "Upon the whole, we warmly recommend the Sea Lions; and even those who for fashion's sake than anything else, have of late joined in decrying our national novelist, will in this last work, perhaps, recognise [sic] one of his happiest." 64 He even had a kind word for Cooper's style, calling it "singularly plain, downright, and truthful." The book sold well, at least in America, as Cooper reported, "Stringer has so closely sold the first edition of Sea Lions (5000 copies) that he did not like to give me four copies, begging me to wait for next edition (1000), next week. I am

62 The Pioneers, p. 266.
64 Literary World, IV (1840), 370.
told the book sells very well, and this without the aid of a puff."65

Criticism contemporary to Cooper largely ignored The Sea Lions.66 Lounsbury was offended by the didactic and theological elements in the story. Still, he tries to be fair:

It would be unjust to deny that when in 'The Sea Lions' Cooper abandons his metaphysics and turns to his real business, he creates a powerful story. One may almost be said at times to feel the cold, the desolation, the darkness, and the gloom of an Antarctic winter confronting and overshadowing the spirit. But there can be little that is more tedious than the dry chaff of theological discussion which is here threshed for us over and over again.67

Grossman, Cooper's best biographer, is also in this instance somewhat unsympathetic. In describing The Sea Lions he says that Cooper's growing interest in religion is "a minor but bulky excrescence on a competent story of thrilling adventure in the Antarctic. . . . This time the story has been saved, and it is the theology, or Cooper's view of it, that is spoiled for the reader."68 Another otherwise competent recent critic dismisses it: " . . . not much can be said for

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65 Letter to Mrs. Cooper, 28 April, 1849, Correspondence, II, 612. See also Beard VI, 24, 30. The book did not sell well in England, Bentley reporting 19 May, 1849 that only 400 of 750 copies were sold, and demand had ceased, despite his spending 86 pounds on advertising. Beard, VI, 44, 53-54.

66 Bryant's "Discourse" is at least courteously apologetic about not being able to mention all of Cooper's works. Parkman in the Atlantic Monthly (1852) is less sympathetic: " . . . of that numerous progeny which of late years have swarmed from his pen, we have never read one. . . ." Parkman, p. 149. Hillard in the Atlantic Monthly (1862) does not mention The Sea Lions.

67 Lounsbury, p. 259.

The Sea Lions. . . . It is a Trinitarian tract. . . .\footnote{69}{Brady, p. 81. Brady's essay was published in 1958.}

More recent criticism has shown how thoroughly The Sea Lions is embedded in fact, both in Cooper's life and reading.\footnote{70}{The most competent and thorough discussion of both the realistic and symbolic elements in The Sea Lions is in Thomas Philbrick’s James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction, pp. 209-259.} Cooper's lifelong interest in the sea is a matter of obvious fact, beginning with his own service for five and a half years on sailing vessels. For three years (1819-1821) Cooper was a partner with Charles Dering in ownership of the whaler The Union whose home port was Sag Harbor, the exact time and place of Deacon Pratt's enterprise in The Sea Lions.\footnote{71}{First pointed out by Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, pp. 70-71.}

It was also during these years that Cooper was a reviewer for The Literary and Scientific Repository, and Critical Review, reviewing among other works Thomas Clark's Naval History of the United States, William Scoresby's An Account of the Arctic Regions, and William Edward Parry's Journal of a Voyage for the Discovery of a Northwest Passage.\footnote{72}{These reviews are reprinted in Early Critical Essays (1820-1822), ed. James F. Beard, Jr. (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1955).}

In addition, Philbrick has shown that The Sea Lions is significantly indebted to Benjamin Morrell's A Narrative of Four Voyages (1832) and Edmund Fanning's Voyages Round the World (1833).\footnote{73}{Philbrick, American Sea Fiction, pp. 217-219.} The most immediate source of all was Charles Wilkes' Narrative of the
Cooper refers to Wilkes by name in *The Sea Lions*, and the roster of the crew of Gardiner's *Sea Lion*, the description of the approach to Cape Horn, the account of the passage from the Cape to Sealer's Land and of the sealers' desperate efforts to escape to the north before the onset of winter, all have parallels in the *Narrative*. Time and again, incidental material from the *Narrative* finds its way into the novel in the speeches of Stimson, for the old seaman is made the mouthpiece for Wilkes...

In addition, Philbrick demonstrates quite convincingly that many of the descriptions of the grandeur of the ice are linked in Cooper's mind with his experiences of the Alps. From these sources and others, Cooper is "able to invest his story with an atmosphere of complete verisimilitude, both in locale and in the hardships of the seamen." But a vivid and convincing picture of the Antarctic is not Cooper's only purpose in *The Sea Lions*. Cooper's "Preface" begins

If anything connected with the hardness of the human heart could surprise us, it surely would be the indifference with which men live on, engrossed by their worldly objects, amid the sublime natural phenomena that so eloquently and unceasingly speak to their imaginations, affections, and judgements. So completely is the existence of the individual concentrated in self, and so regardless does he get to be of all without that contracted circle, that it does not probably happen to one man in ten that his thoughts are drawn aside from this intense study of his own immediate wants, wishes, and plans, even once in the twenty-four hours, to contemplate the majesty, mercy, truth, and justice of the Divine Being that has set him,

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74 W. B. Gates, "Cooper's *The Sea Lions* and Wilkes' *Narrative*," *PMLA*, LXV (December, 1950), 1069-1075.
76 Gates, p. 1075.
as an atom, amid the myriads of the hosts of heaven and earth."

Against this moral observation Cooper phrases his purpose: "In this book the design has been to portray man on a novel field of action, and to exhibit his dependence on the hand that does not suffer a sparrow to fall unheeded." But are these purposes integrated, or does the theology become merely an "excrescence" on the scene and action?

As The Sea Lions opens Deacon Pratt has learned from Tom Daggett, an old dying sailor, of the existence of new and fabulously rich sealing islands near the Antarctic circle, and of buried treasure in the West Indies. He commissions Roswell Gardiner, a young captain who is in love with his niece Mary, to outfit a ship named The Sea Lion to seek them. Though Mary returns Roswell's love, she has a religious scruple which makes her hesitant to marry him; he is unable to accept the divinity of Christ. She promises not to marry another during his absence and he sets sail.

Almost immediately he is joined by another vessel, also named The Sea Lion, which has been outfitted by the Dagget clan on Martha's Vineyard, and is commanded by a nephew also named Tom Daggett. The Daggetts have suspicions that Deacon Pratt found out something from Old Tom before he died, and they are determined to share in any discovery. The craft are identical in appearance and performance as well as in name, and much as Gardiner tries, he cannot outsail

77"Preface," The Sea Lions, p. 5.
his unwillingly acquired consort. Daggett attempts to in­
gratiate himself with Roswell, and aids him when Roswell
loses a main mast off Cape Hatteras, but mostly they are
competitors, as they are in the whaling episode off Brazil.

Eventually Roswell manages to elude Daggett off Cape
Horn, and he finds the sealing grounds, but Daggett reappears,
and through a series of accidents and delays mostly occa­
sioned by Daggett, they both get trapped in the Antarctic
for the winter. Daggett's vessel gets crushed in the ice
and he and his men winter in the wreck, while Roswell and
his constant companion, Stephen Stimson, and the others spend
the winter in a storehouse they had built, their Sea Lion
safely anchored in a protected cove. The winter is long and
arduous, but with extraordinary measures of diet and exercise
they survive.

Three things work on Roswell to change him in the long
winter ordeal. One is the pocket Bible Mary Pratt had given
him and made him promise to read. The second is the pious ad­
monition he receives from Stephen Stimson, the man of simple
faith. Neither of these, however, is nearly as important as
the third factor: the overwhelming sublimity of the Antarctic
environment. "The terrific world of Antarctica offers the
sealers a continual demonstration of the divine power working
through nature and of the corallary feebleness of man, a de­
monstration that Cooper does not hesitate to render thoroughly
explicit."78

78 Philbrick, American Sea Fiction, p. 241.
The climax of this development in Roswell occurs in Chapter XXV, very nearly at the end of that long winter's ordeal.

The night was coming in cold and still. It was one of those last efforts of winter in which all the terrible force of the season was concentrated; and it really appeared as if nature, wearied with its struggle to return to a more genial temperature, yielded in despair, and was literally returning backwards through the coldest of her months. The moon was young, but the stars gave forth a brightness that is rarely seen, except in the clear cold nights of a high latitude. Each and all of these sublime emblems of the power of God were twinkling like bright torches glowing in space; and the mind had only to endow each with its probable or known dimensions, its conjectural and reasonable uses, to form a picture of the truest sublimity in which man is made to occupy his real position.79

Man's real position, as Gardiner comes to understand it, is not that in his pride of reason he can claim to comprehend God. God is infinitely powerful and gracious; man stands humbly in awe before God's majesty.

The vault above Roswell was sparkling with orbs floating in space, most of them far more vast than this earth, and each of them doubtless having its present or destined use. . . . Who and what was the Dread Being—dread in his Majesty and Justice, but inexhaustible in Love and Mercy—who used these exceeding means as mere instruments of his pleasure? and what was he himself that he should presume to set up his miserable pride of reason in opposition to a revelation supported by miracles that must be admitted to come through men inspired by the Deity or rejected altogether?80

Roswell's humility, his recognition of his relationship to God, that "dread being," is sharply contrasted to the greed and self-serving of Daggett, and of Deacon Pratt. Originally Roswell had some scruples about accepting the Dea-

79 The Sea Lions, p. 407.
80 Ibid., pp. 410-411.
con's commission, because he has some suspicion that the mission is based on knowledge which the Deacon has immorally extracted or stolen from old Tom Daggett. In the sealing lands Roswell's methods and motives are sharply contrasted to Daggett's, and their crews are contrasted. "Daggett ... is clearly evil, a brutalized hypocrite whose only motive is greed." The sharpness of these contrasts suggests that Cooper is expanding the significance of the narrative "to the point that it borders on allegorical statement."

But at the same time that Cooper contrasts them, he also insists on linking them almost to the point of identity. We have already noted the identity in the names of the vessels and the similarity of their sailing characteristics. Roswell is unable to escape Daggett, though his duty to Deacon Pratt and the success of his mission demand it. Roswell and Daggett precisely parallel each other in the whaling episode, winding up facing each other in identical poses astride the whale. Roswell intends to leave in time to escape the Antarctic winter, but the delays of Daggett prevent him. All these striking and deliberate linkings and identities force us to see them as one: they merge into each other. It is as though Cooper is insisting that all of these possibilities exist in the nature of man, good and evil in both Daggett and Roswell mixed unequally between them, but inextricably bound together.

81 Ibid., pp. 102-105.
82 Philbrick, American Sea Fiction, p. 250.
83 Ibid., p. 212.
There is another striking linkage which is also a contrast. Roswell's "epiphanal hour," the night of his conversion, is interrupted by the faintly heard but desperate cry from the separated Daggett party: their fire has gone out and they are freezing to death. As Roswell and Stimson prepare to attempt to reach Daggett, an endeavor Roswell feels as "the most important undertaking of his whole life," Cooper comments,

The cold continued to increase in intensity, notwithstanding it was the opinion of the most experienced among the men that a thaw, and a great spring thaw, was approaching. It often happens in climates of an exaggerated character that these extremes almost touch each other, as they are said to meet in man.  

The same night that brings spiritual life to Roswell brings death to Daggett (though he does not die immediately). Certainly Cooper knew the Pauline description of the Christian's being baptized into Christ's death and into Christ's resurrection (Romans 6). A death of part of man's nature accompanies his spiritual birth: we are "dead to sin," but "alive in Jesus Christ."

When the thaw sets in, Roswell undertakes the repair of the Sea Lion, using materials from the wreck of Daggett's craft.

If the upper frame that was now got on the Sea Lion was not of a faultless mould, it was securely fastened, and rendered the craft even stronger than it had been originally. Some regard was had to resisting the pressure of ice, and experience had taught all the sealers where the principal defences against the effects of a "nip" ought to be placed. The lines were not perfect, it is true; but this was of less moment, as the bottom of the craft,

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84 The Sea Lions, p. 421.
which alone had any material influence on her sailing, was just as it had come from the hands of the artisan who had originally moulded her.85

As Philbrick points out, "The correspondence between the physical reconstruction of the Sea Lion and the spiritual reconstruction of her master is ingeniously developed."86 Without violating the realistic surface of the narrative, Cooper suggests that the rebuilding of the upperworks which drastically changes the Sea Lion's appearance (Mary Pratt does not recognize the vessel when they return) corresponds to the drastic alteration in Roswell's outlook. The experience which enables them to strengthen the vessel appropriately suggests Gardiner's "many lessons in humility, the most useful of all the lessons that man can receive in connection with the relation that really exists between the Deity and himself,"87 and the undamaged hull to Roswell's best moral impulses, "impulses that had retained their original purity through all the errors into which his intellect had led him."88

The symbolic significance is so inextricably knit with the realistic surface of The Sea Lions that one can easily understand why Melville would write of it approvingly. It is not a narrowly "Trinitarian tract," though Trinitarianism is the issue between Roswell and Mary Pratt. It asks a basic question about whether one can define one's relationship to

85 Ibid., p. 437.
86 Philbrick, American Sea Fiction, p. 256.
87 The Sea Lions, p. 443.
88 Philbrick, American Sea Fiction, p. 257.
the universe in terms which are completely explicable to human reason. Cooper's "answer" is in the negative. If Cooper's rebuke to human egotism and his narrow Christianity are considered to be limitations of his view, they can only be found to be so by those who find no transcendence in human experience. In any case, *The Sea Lions* is a remarkable performance, and a convincing example of the best kind of Cooper's poetic realism.
CHAPTER V

COOPER'S SYMBOLIC HISTORIES

At first glance, the restrictively theological development in *The Sea Lions* may seem to be something new in Cooper; yet the moral conclusions there made explicit had been implicit in Cooper from the beginning. Roswell Gardiner's "conversion," on the basis of his experience in the Antarctic, is the twin to Leatherstocking's reverence for Nature and the God of Nature as he roams the awe-inspiring forests of the North American continent.\(^1\) The self-knowledge and humility which Roswell learns is the same virtue which elevates Mr. Gray (John Paul Jones) in *The Pilot* (1824).\(^2\) Cooper's ability to embody this vision in circumstances from American experience which are vividly believable and symbolically resonant is the burden of this chapter. In analyzing Cooper's *Afloat and Ashore* and *Miles Wallingford* (1844), this chapter will attempt to define the particular kind of "symbolic history" which was Cooper's forte.

Writing to his English publisher January 9, 1844, Cooper described his latest work in progress: "This work is called *Miles Wallingford*. It contains the adventures of a

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\(^1\)See House, pp. 326-327.

\(^2\)This is treated in Chapter II of this dissertation.
young sailor, something in Ned's way, but, [sic] is a pure fiction, has a love story of interest, and embraces the experience of a sea-life, as it existed near fifty years since. By April, 1844, the work has progressed considerably, and Cooper was able to add some important details about the plan of the work and its manner.

When I got about half through with this book, I found I could not complete my subject, or work up the dénouement, without dividing the book into two parts. I know you are averse to this mode of publishing, but I do not think it will be of much moment with this particular book. The second part will not be a sequel, but strictly a continuation of the story, the tale being of double size. I have aimed at causing the interest to increase gradually, and I trust have succeeded as far as I have gone, which is some distance into the second part. There is more fidelity of portraiture of actual American life, apart from frontier scenes, in this book, than in any I have written. Real names are even used where it could be done with propriety.

The work is indeed, a double novel, with Afloat and Ashore ending in the middle of a family excursion on the Hudson in the family schooner, The Wallingford, which is concluded in the beginning of Miles Wallingford. Taken together, the novels follow the career of Miles Wallingford from the time that he goes to sea at age sixteen until his wedding to Lucy Hardinge and his settling on the family estate of Clawbonny in upstate New York. As usual, there are significant

3 Cooper's reference in "something in Ned's way" is a reference to his recently published Ned Myers (1843). Ned was one of Cooper's original shipmates on the Stirling in 1806, and Cooper as editor had helped Ned write an account of his life.

4 Beard, IV, 441.

5 Ibid., IV, 455.
connections with fact which underlie the narrative. Miles Wallingford, the narrator, is approximately contemporary to Cooper himself, and both the sea and land portions have the intensity (more often commented upon in The Pioneers) of fictionalized autobiography. Lucy Hardinge reminded Lounsbury of Susan, Cooper's wife, and another of Cooper's biographers suggests that "we may think of Miles," as Cooper's "fantasy not of being a different person, but of having a different career."

Cooper's life, however, is by no means his only factual source. He notes in his "Preface," "On the subject of the nautical incidents of this book, we have endeavored to be as exact as our authorities will allow." As Philbrick points out, only one specific source is alluded to, Captain Frederick W. Beechey's Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific and Bering Strait (1831). Philbrick also shows, however, Cooper's indebtedness to Richard Cleveland's A Narrative of Voyages and Commercial Enterprises (1842) and Washington Irving's Astoria (1836), as well as other possible sources. On this basis, Philbrick asserts, apparently he intended the novel to perform much the same service for the American merchant marine that his Naval

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6Lounsbury, pp. 249-251. See also Spiller, Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times, p. 59.
7Grossman, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 194.
8"Preface," Afloat and Ashore, p. viii.
9Afloat and Ashore, p. 274.
10Philbrick, American Sea Fiction, pp. 133-140.
History had performed for the United States Navy. If it was to foster a new conception of the American maritime future by acquainting public opinion with the facts of the maritime past, the novel must portray American commercial activity in its most vigorous era, the period of neutral trading that extended from the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars until the imposition of the Embargo in 1807.11

And yet, though the novels are rich in autobiographical and historical materials, they are never dull. Cooper's documentary sources are enlivened and his autobiographical ones are put into focus and controlled by his imposition of first person narration. Miles Wallingford tells his own story, as Ned had in *Ned Myers*, and by obvious necessity the telling is retrospective. And according to Cooper's usual feelings for necessary distancing, he makes his narrator a garrulous old man in his sixties, so that Miles' career can correspond to the period of the height of American maritime activity, and by the same stroke Cooper can make it believable that his narrator be something of a curmudgeon, willing to scatter seemingly gratuitous comments at any instant on all of Cooper's favorite subjects.

The story, too, is not action for its own sake, but a story of the progress and learning Miles undergoes as he matures from an adventure-seeking young man in love with a romantic idea of the sea to one seasoned by hazardous experience both at sea and ashore. This tension between the young man who experiences and the old man who tells the tale makes the story more complex and interesting. Young Miles can question Lucy rather pointedly to find out if she still has the locket

he had given her at their first parting and come to the conclusion that she has lost it, but Old Miles, who relates the story, can reveal at the same time that Lucy conceals the locket, because there has been no open declaration of their love, and that the locket is indeed warmed not only by her remembrance, but by its being worn as close to her heart as physically it could be. More importantly, the Old Miles who relates his earlier experience can interpret it in the light of what he has learned.

What kind of reality does Miles find, and what does he learn by his experiences? In vividly convincing detail Cooper illuminates his progress. That Miles has good physical and mental abilities is clear from the outset as he is the natural leader in the journey down the Hudson which he and Rupert Hardinge undertake to find a berth aboard ship in New York. Miles and Rupert sign aboard the John under Captain Robbins, but Miles is given higher rank and higher wages, and his first duty on the John is to go aloft to loose a fore-top sail, which is reported of Cooper himself in Ned Myers. Miles is alert and eager to learn, and he is sharp-sighted and observant. He is the first to sight the enemy proas (Chapter IV) and the island of Bourbon (Chapter V) after the John founders. The foundering of the John, too, is illuminating, for even an experienced person like Captain Robbins is led astray because he acts upon an inadequate but persistently

12 Afloat and Ashore, pp. 409-410.
13 Ibid., p. 44.
maintained theory he has about the action of ocean currents.14

When the ship sinks, Miles with the mate Marble, Neb and the cook, takes the jolly boat to sail to Bourbon, which is four hundred miles away. Miles has a new and much greater appreciation of the security he always enjoyed at Clawbonny. Both Miles and Neb, Miles' Negro servant-companion, become quite proficient sailors, but Miles learns his first lesson in racial discrimination in the world when Neb rather heroically cuts the ratlin of the enemy's grapnel in the encounter with the proas, but receives much less credit for the act than Miles feels he deserves. The party is rescued by the Tigris, out of Philadelphia, and they must work their way home. Off the French island of Guadeloupe they encounter a French cruiser, and they resist her attempts at boarding, which Miles and others consider the first incident of the quasi-war of 1798-1800. When they reach Cape May off Delaware, Miles and Rupert accompany Captain Robbins in the pilot's boat because he is anxious to get ashore, and in the ensuing change of weather, the Tigris reaches port before they do, and the pilot's boat is swamped. Captain Robbins ironically is lost at sea within sight of the Cape May light.15

This is the first of four voyages in the two novels, and each is replete with believable and enlightening experiences. Miles is learning that appearances are deceiving, that one must be sharply observant at all times, that theories aren't

14 Ibid., pp. 76-77, pp. 82-84.
15 Ibid., pp. 110-111.
much good if they do not conform to fact, that no man has complete control of his own destiny. Nor are the land portions of the narrative merely a respite from dangers at sea. Their relation is reciprocal as Miles grows in sophistication.

The action of the book, therefore, describes Miles’ education in the ways of the world, both afloat and ashore. The shipboard half, with its obvious reversals of fortune, chance, and sudden death, complements the episodes on land, where similar events, though possibly less obvious, are no less certain to occur.16

The novels have epic sweep, ranging over the whole world. Determined to master his craft as a seaman, Miles' second voyage aboard the Crisis takes him to the Pacific Northwest, and to the islands of the Pacific (Afloat and Ashore, Chapters VIII - XX). Along with Captain Williams, Miles dangerously underestimates the cunning of the Indian leader whom they call Smudge, and it costs the captain his life in the conflict for control of the vessel. It is on this second voyage that the mate Moses Marble “comes alive.”17 He had been an old but distant acquaintance of Miles' father, and was first mate aboard the John, and he becomes Miles' mentor as he learns his craft as a sailor, and later with Neb, Miles' closest companion. He is in many ways a typical old salt, like Tom Coffin of The Pilot, who has no ties ashore but who knows and loves the sea and sailing vessels. He succeeds to command after Captain Williams' death, and rashly determines to hang Smudge from the yardarm (Chapter XIV).18 Marble quickly shows

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16 Ringe, James Fenimore Cooper, p. 108.


18 Cooper uses this incident to make a kind of back handed comment on the Somers affair, see Beard, IV, 333-335 and
that he lacks good judgement (Chapters XV-XVIII) and disobeys his owners' instructions. He feels guilty and regrets the hanging of Smudge, and as his remorse grows, he decides to remain behind on a newly-discovered island in the Pacific. Nothing is heard of him again until Miles encounters him at the beginning of the third voyage. He has tried his deserted island, but a lonely asocial life is impossible for him, as it is impossible for Miles himself.\footnote{Cooper also very skillfully handles the love affair between Miles and Lucy Hardinge, making us care for them and integrating this element with his major theme. Again it is a matter of the confusing surfaces of life, the differences between appearance and reality, and the difficulty of reading the communication signals correctly. Cooper's development here is certainly one of his best performances in the novel of manners tradition, bearing comparison to \textit{Pride and Prejudice}, except the point of view is masculine. Miles and Grace Wallingford and Rupert and Lucy Hardinge have grown up together at Clawbonny; yet when the boys first go to sea, the last tender farewells are between Miles and Lucy, and Rupert and Grace. There is not much of an interval between Miles' first and second voyage, but after Miles returns from the second voyage, he realizes that some notable changes have taken place. At Clawbonny in their youth, the Hardinges 405-408, material which Melville also later used in \textit{Billy Budd}.}

were rather dependent on the Wallingfords, but their fortunes rise, and Lucy becomes the particular favorite of rich Mrs. Bradfort, and moves in higher social circles in New York society than Grace or Miles do.20

In addition, Cooper introduces a rival in both cases, and each is deluded about the other's true feelings. In New York Miles finds Lucy in the company of Andrew Drewett, a respectable young man from Lucy's social set in New York. On his return it is also revealed to Grace and Lucy that for some nine months Miles has been in the daily company of Emily Merton and her father, whom he had rescued from a French vessel in the Pacific, and because the Mertons are English, they are lionized in New York society. Rupert had accompanied Miles only on his first voyage, and as he becomes more involved with New York society, he and Miles become progressively more estranged. When he solemnly assures Miles that the sea is not "gentile," Miles assumes that Lucy shares his view. Emily Merton becomes Grace's rival for Rupert's affection. At a dinner at Mrs. Bradfort's, the principals being together, Mrs. Bradfort calls for toasts, and the usage requires that one cannot toast a person who is present. Miles is a little confused, but toasts Emily Merton, and Lucy's toast, left for last, is to Andrew Drewett. As the narrator, Miles comments,

_Had I been more familiar with the world, I should have thought nothing of a thing that was so common; or, did I

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20 Mr. Hardinge and Mrs. Bradfort are sister's children, and as Mr. Hardinge has become her heir-at-law, Mrs. Bradfort takes an interest in Rupert and Lucy, _Afloat and Ashore_, pp. 416-417.
understand human nature better, I might have known that no sensitive and delicate woman would betray a secret that was dear to her, under so idle a form. But I was young, and ready myself to toast the girl I preferred before the universe; and I could not make suitable allowances for difference of sex and temperament. Lucy's toast made me very uncomfortable for the rest of the evening. . . .21

At this point in his development, Miles is not able to be open or completely honest even with his sister Grace.22

When Miles makes his third voyage, in his own ship the Dawn, he is prevailed upon to take some passengers, and their continual gossip, and the news they receive in Europe, keeps the social context of New York fresh in Miles' mind. The gossip is that Mrs. Bradford's fortune will be left to Rupert. When Miles returns he finds instead that it has been left to Lucy, and he feels that now that she is an heiress, the distance between them is even greater.23 He also finds his sister, Grace, in poor health, the victim of disappointed love (Afloat and Ashore, Chapter XXVIII). The Rupert she has loved for years, his head turned in his experience in New York society, has proved vain and false. Grace's health continues to decline to her death (Miles Wallingford, Chapter VII). Cooper has been accused of sentimentality here,24 and perhaps the account is sentimental; yet there are factors which work to justify if not excuse this development. The narrator is an old

21 Afloat and Ashore, p. 372.
22 Ibid., p. 424.
23 Ibid., p. 475.
man recalling his youth, and if Grace is too, too angelic, her idealization by her brother must have been akin to Cooper's own feeling for his long deceased sister Hannah. Structurally, the illness and death of Grace serves other important purposes in Miles' development. Grace has concealed her illness from Lucy, who is in New York, but she comes immediately when she learns the truth. This brings Miles and Lucy into each other's company for a protracted period of time; yet ironically it introduces another obstacle between them, for Lucy feels she is associated with Rupert's dishonor. At the same time, Miles finds that Drewett is Lucy's acknowledged suitor, and certainly Mrs. Drewett (as well as many others) assume that it is only a matter of time before Lucy and Drewett will be married. The gentleman's code which was dear to Cooper's heart operates in all these relations, as well as the social code which makes it unladylike for Lucy to make any bold assertion of her true feelings. Grace's death also brings Miles to a serious confrontation with mortality for the first time, for in all his dangers so far in life at sea, Miles had led what seemed to others to be a charmed life.

Another episode, sometimes considered to be a flaw, which occurs before Grace's death, is Marble's finding and being re-united with his family. This is one of those incidents in Cooper which sometimes exasperate his modern readers, because Cooper is too easily satisfied that the incident is possible. Yet again, thematically, it performs important functions. Like Ned Myers, Marble was a foundling who has no family, (Afloat and Ashore, Chapter XIX), and when in his re-
morse he elects to stay behind on the Pacific island, he tells Miles to tell all his friends that "the man who was once found is now lost." His being humbled by realizing that he is not capable of being a competent captain is similar to Miles' later recognition of his limitations. But Marble rejoins Miles when he realizes he cannot be happy living an isolated life. Early then, in *Miles Wallingford*, Miles, Marble, and Neb take a small boat ashore from the schooner *Wallingford* on the Hudson River, and land in a small cove where they encounter a seventy year old widow who is about to lose her property in a foreclosure. The mortgage has been paid but she has no receipt, and she feels the Lord is punishing her for a long secret sin. In her youth there was a secret marriage and a son given to a friend, but the friend unable to care for it had left it in a basket in a marble yard. In short, Marble has found his mother. "After half a century of separation, the mother and child had thus been thrown together by the agency of an inscrutable Providence!" Yet like Marble's humbling experience, his finding his loved ones anticipates the values Miles eventually discovers, and his being able to save his mother's house from the greedy Van Tassel anticipates Miles' mortgaging and almost losing Clawbonny. Thus these incidents become a part of the quest for roots and values which makes the novels so engaging.

After Grace's death, Miles feels there is little now

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25 *Afloat and Ashore*, p. 332.

to keep him ashore, especially also since he is sure that Lucy belongs to Drewett. In New York, outfitting the Dawn for another voyage, he overhears a conversation in another booth in a coffee house, in which Drewett generously praises Miles to Rupert, saying also that he no longer fears Miles. 27 The fact is that he no longer fears Miles because Lucy has refused him, but of course Miles concludes that it is because Lucy has accepted Drewett. Miles now makes John Wallingford, his cousin from western New York, his heir, and John helps to finance the outfitting of the Dawn, taking as security a mortgage on Clawbonny. Before he leaves New York, Miles writes Lucy an equivocal letter in which he says he will never marry because he believes the woman he loves is beyond his reach. As the narrator comments,

> I will confess that, while writing this, I fancied I was making a sort of half declaration to Lucy, one that might, at least, give her some faint insight into the real state of my heart; and I had a melancholy satisfaction in thinking that the dear girl might, by these means, learn how much I had prized and still did prize her. It was only a week later, while pondering over what I had written, the idea occurred to me that every syllable I had said would apply just as well to Emily Merton as to Lucy Hardinge. 28

And people in New York, Lucy included, are rightly assuming that Emily will marry Rupert, and so the web of misread motives and estrangement continues between Miles and Lucy.

At sea, Miles finds hostilities between England and France are at their height. The Dawn manages to escape the English ship the Leander off the American coast (Chapter XII)

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27 Ibid., p. 167.
28 Ibid., p. 178.
only to be made a prize off the English coast by another English frigate (Chapter XIII). The English seize the ship since part of the cargo is made up of sugar from the French possession of St. Domingo. Miles and Marble regain possession of the vessel (Chapter XIV), only to be made a prize of the French (Chapter XV), on the devious reasoning that any formerly English prize is fair game to the French. In these exchanges the crew is much reduced by impressment, and when the Dawn as a French prize encounters another English frigate, Miles with adroit seamanship and the traditional (for Cooper at least) French bungling, manages to regain possession of the ship and escape the English (Chapter XVII). Miles and Marble confer and decide to attempt to reach Hamburg by sailing through the Irish Channel, but here they encounter a gale (Chapter XXI) and are driven back into the Atlantic. With their reduced crew they are unable to prevent the ship's being damaged, and in the endeavor to clear the Dawn of the wreck of foremast, Miles is separated from Marble and Neb and is left alone on the slowly leaking Dawn. By now he realizes that there is no hope for saving the cargo, and his conduct in the conflict with the English and the French will undoubtedly forfeit his insurance.

Miles now finds himself in the most extreme situation in his life. He manages to eat a little breakfast, after which he says,

When finished, I knelt on the deck, and prayed to God, fervently, asking his divine assistance in my extremity. Why should an old man, whose race is nearly run, hesitate to own, that in the pride of his youth and strength he was made to feel how insufficient we all are for our wants? Yes, I prayed; and I hope in a fitting spirit, for I felt
that this spiritual sustenance did me more good than the material of which I had just before partaken.29

Miles manages to get up a little sail, and he endeavors to regain the wreck of the foremast, where he had last left Marble and Neb. He sounds and finds ten feet of water in the hold of the Dawn, and he realizes that he is powerless to prevent her sinking. His whole investment in the Dawn is lost, and without insurance the mortgage will deprive him of Clawbonny as well. He resolves to go down with the ship.

Sometime before the sunset, I went aloft to take a last look at the ocean. I do not think any desire to prolong my existence carried me up the mast, but there was a lingering wish to look after my mate. The ocean beamed gloriously that eventide, and I fancied that it was faintly reflecting the gracious countenance of its divine Creator, in a smile of beneficent love. I felt my heart soften, as I gazed around me, and I fancied heavenly music was singing the praises of God on the face of the great deep.30

Again he is moved to prayer, and when he rises from prayer he sights the wreckage of the foremast. With hard work he regains it, but finds that Marble has disappeared. "I went and threw myself on the deck, regardless of my own fate, and wept in very bitterness of heart."31 He falls into a deep dreamless sleep, on which he comments retrospectively that that night's rest probably, under God, is what gave him the means of surviving to relate his adventures. Or perhaps the pivotal sentence is what follows, for in the morning when he awakes, "I knelt again, and prayed to that dread Being, with whom, it

29 Ibid., p. 326.
30 Ibid., p. 329.
31 Ibid., p. 332.
now appeared to me, I stood alone, in the centre of the universe."

Immediately thereafter Miles says, "the love of life was renewed within me," and he sets about to make the best of his desperate situation. He makes himself a raft and separates himself from the Dawn, which sinks, and after another day is reunited with Marble and Neb, both of whom he thought had drowned, as they had thought of him. Rescued by an American vessel, Miles returns to New York to face bankruptcy. The mortgage on Clawbonny was to John Wallingford, and when Miles returns he finds John's heir (a man named Daggett) in possession of the estate and at Daggett's suit Miles is imprisoned for debt. Lucy puts up the bail, and finding her not married to Drewett as he had expected, Miles declares his love. When Miles had made John Wallingford his heir the agreement was that John would make Miles his heir, and this will turns up filed with a law firm in New York, and thus Clawbonny is restored and all ends happily.

Like Roswell Gardiner in The Sea Lions and like Leatherstocking, Miles has come to realize the essential (to Cooper) lesson in self-knowledge, to locate one's self in relation to God, which is to realize the limits of one's ability and knowledge. It is not fear but awe of that "dread Being" which imparts the essential humility which links Roswell Gardiner, Miles Wallingford, Leatherstocking—indeed every genuine hero in Cooper. This is the lesson which Edward Effingham has learned, and which gives him, from Cooper's point of

32 Ibid., p. 333.
view, his very real superiority in the *Home* novels, though there Cooper is not successful in articulating the experience, and Effingham's superiority seems to be merely egotistical snobbishness. This moral vision, which is the heart of Cooper, is balanced and extended by the social views embodied in *Afloat and Ashore* and *Miles Wallingford*, where, from the vantage point of true self-knowledge, the hero can justly criticize the vanity and superficiality of his fellow Americans, while at the same time he realizes the complexity of human motives, and the necessity of judging appearance and reality by the test of action. As Miles learns, Marble and Neb and Lucy are truly committed to him, as is John Wallingford. There is reality behind their appearance of concern for him, as there emphatically is not in Rupert, but as confusing as this world is, none of this is completely certain unless it is proved in action.

Aesthetically, this vision is embodied in what Ringe first called "symbolic histories," which this dissertation has attempted to define as a complex balance between what is usually called "realism" and "romanticism." Symbolic history is a term which has within it an essential tension: symbolic allows the imposition of value which is the eternal human proclivity (in Cooper's case based on the values and theology of Christianity); history emphasizes an essential connection with

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33 See Chapter I of this dissertation.
34 Jones, p. 154.
fact, faithfully observed and vividly portrayed. And, with Cooper, distance is an important factor in his success or failure. When he can impose distance he has control of his materials, allowing them their symbolic dimension while insisting on the vividness of their particularity. Cooper's reputation as a "romancer" does him a disservice; Cooper at his best is fact, though it is not fact in the sense that it is literally true. It is fact which is representative, which is substantially true, but which allows Cooper to exemplify his moral vision. This is Cooper's "poetical view" of his subject matter: not poetic in the sense of its being unbelievably ideal; rather poetic in its symbolic intensity.

Some critics have complained that Miles, after he inherits Clawbonny, has no need to go to sea to seek his fortune. Yet he follows the pattern of his father, who had gone to sea before him, and he decides that he should master his chosen profession. Some of Cooper's reverence for his own father probably lies behind these details, just as the naval details are linked to the national history and vibrate with bigger than life intensity. Miles' father had been wounded in the only significant naval action in the Revolutionary War, the engagement between the Trumbell and the Watt, and Miles himself was born on "the very day that Cornwallis capitulated at Yorktown." 36 Throughout his nautical career Miles displays a marvelous affinity with events of great national in-

36 Afloat and Ashore, p. 14.
terest. . . ." Another critic comments on a "legendary" or a "fabulous" quality in Miles' adventures, and at his best Cooper always seems to have this kind of significance, a heightened intensity which is beyond the surface faithfulness and different from the excitement of mere romance. It is this quality which makes his best work invaluable as social documents of American experience, and his moral vision of man in democratic society is moving and relevant even now.

Certainly the Leatherstocking novels have this "feel" to them, as my analysis of The Deerslayer and especially The Pioneers attempted to show. Very early, The Spy and The Pilot have this quality, and the better novels of the 1840's have it, certainly including Afloat and Ashore and Miles Wallingford, as well as Satanstoe, The Chainbearer, and The Sea Lions. In addition, probably another group including at least The Two Admirals, The Wing-and-Wing, Wyandotte, The Crater, and The Oak Openings need serious analysis and re-reading. Even excluding these last, there are in the previous an imposing body of twelve novels that deserve serious consideration and represent a solid body of accomplishment.

Cooper's kind of symbolic history, then, is compellingly circumstantial and actual, and consistently moral. Seen in these terms, many of the dichotomies of Cooper criticism disappear, and Cooper's consistent ability to find images which echo in the American mind is highlighted. One famous

37 Philbrick, American Sea Fiction, p. 133.
38 See especially Chapter IV of this dissertation.
39 See Chapter III of this dissertation.
assessment of Cooper complains, "He never found a wholly adequate symbol. . . . The vision remains scattered and fragmentary, distributed not quite impartially, among his best and poorest works. . . ."\textsuperscript{40} It is true that he never gathered his meaning in one overwhelming symbol or work, as Hawthorne, Melville, or Thoreau did. But in place of this he has given us hundreds of images, actions, characters, and settings which faithfully depict his own times and which make a significant moral statement of values which still circumscribe individual and social choice in America.

If one judges a major novelist by the quantity and the quality of his work across his whole career, Cooper's symbolic histories must surely qualify him—by the richness of his insights, by his dedication to the genre, by the persistence of his images—as America's only major novelist before Henry James.

\textsuperscript{40}Grossman, \textit{James Fenimore Cooper}, p. 264.
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