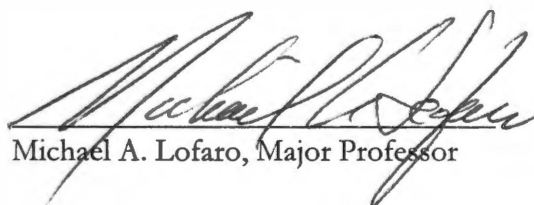


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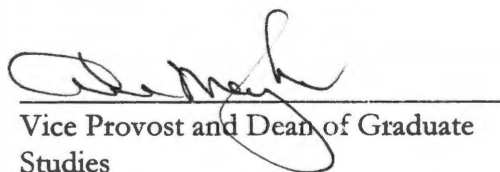
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Steven P. Harthorn entitled "James Fenimore Cooper, Professional Authorship, and the American Literary Marketplace, 1838-1851." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


Michael A. Lofaro, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:


Allison R. Ensor
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Acceptance for the Council:


Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate
Studies

Thesis
2005b
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James Fenimore Cooper, Professional Authorship, and the American Literary Marketplace, 1838-1851

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Steven P. Harthorn
December 2005

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Dedication

*To my wife, Cathy,
and
my kids, Edward and Caroline.*

Acknowledgments

The process of writing is a trying one for me partly because I cannot get down on paper half of what I want to say. Nowhere is that more the case than in trying to convey the great debts of gratitude I owe to people who have taken an interest in my project and supported it.

The members of my dissertation committee have provided me with years of abundant, unfailing encouragement and aid that extend well beyond the thoughtful direction, helpful insight, sharp editing, cheering enthusiasm, and remarkable patience they have contributed to this project. I benefited immensely from the tireless generosity of my director, Dr. Michael A. Lofaro. He applied for every research assistantship possible, steered fellowship information my way, wrote sterling letters of recommendation, cut through knotty problems with decisive good sense, reviewed chapters with uncommon speed and thoroughness, and prescribed Marx Brothers comedies when necessary. Dr. Mary E. Papke and Dr. Allison R. Ensor provided sound advice and glowing recommendations, made me feel welcome on a faculty search committee, and contributed a good deal of wit to my years here. Dr. Papke's great store of professional knowledge proved timely on a number of occasions, and Dr. Ensor's Mark Twain seminar gave me ideas about how I would like to teach Cooper. My acquaintance with Dr. E. Wayne Cutler is shorter, but his cordiality is so warm that even upon first meeting him I felt as if I had known him a long time. He brought a deep knowledge of the period and a sense of perspective to this project, both of which are greatly appreciated, as well as sailing anecdotes that were greatly enjoyed.

The American Antiquarian Society provided fellowship support in the form of a Stephen Botein Memorial Fellowship for 2002-2003, allowing me to spend more than a month's time at their beautiful facilities, researching their extensive collection of Cooper manuscripts and editions as well as publishers' records and advertisements, newspapers, and other print and manuscript sources relating to the book trade and broader social environment of Cooper's day. Special thanks are due to Caroline F. Sloat, Director of Scholarly Programs; Thomas G. Knowles, Curator of Manuscripts; Marie E. Lamoureux, Head of Readers' Services; and John B. Hensch, Vice-President for Collections and Programs.

I also owe thanks to the helpful staff at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton University, and the Special Collections at Temple University. Manuscripts and other unpublished materials from their collections, as well as those from the American Antiquarian Society, are quoted with the permission of these institutions.

The Graduate School at the University of Tennessee granted me a Herman E. Spivey Memorial Fellowship in 2002-2003, providing a generous stipend, fee waiver, and release time to pursue my studies. The Department of English provided abundant financial support in a number of ways. A John B. Emperor Dissertation Fellowship and a Durant da Ponte American Literature Fellowship, both awarded for Spring 2002, provided course release time and covered a good portion of my travel expenses for research in the archives mentioned above. The travel support provided by the Department's John C. Hodges funds helped me attend Cooper conferences regularly. In addition, a number of teaching, research, and editorial assistantships enriched my experiences.

Whenever I needed to talk over an esoteric Cooper matter with someone, Hugh C. MacDougall, founder and Secretary-Treasurer of the James Fenimore Cooper Society, was the person to whom I usually turned first. I owe him gratitude for his advice, always cheerfully contributed, but he especially deserves thanks for his leadership. If Hugh, a retired diplomat, had not taken pains to establish the Society in 1989, develop and oversee its website, organize and chair panels, encourage outreach, and a hundred other things, Cooper scholarship would lack a good deal of the vibrancy, relevance, and collegiality that currently distinguish it.

There are also a number of people who have provided the indispensable support that allowed me to complete this project. Dr. Lynn Champion, Director of Academic Outreach for the College of Arts and Sciences, and Shelley Gentry were enthusiastic advocates during my two years of working with them as Coordinator of Service Learning for the College of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Ethan Robey and Dr. Sara Crosby provided positive energy during my stay at the American Antiquarian Society. Dr. Lauren Todd Taylor and Dr. Mercy Cannon commiserated and celebrated weekly with me over lunches while all of us toiled at our dissertations. My parents, Steven W. and Linda Harthorn, kept me cheered with emails,

calls, visits, and the occasional rhubarb pie; Dad kept my mind sharp with frequent exchanges on the works of Harrington, Richardson, and others of equally fine caliber. My son Edward undertook his own short story collections and dissertations about rocks to show his support for my efforts, and my daughter Caroline, born in the middle of this project, never failed to brighten every day with her affection. My wife Cathy patiently and lovingly endured short and long absences from home, picked me up in Hellertown, Pennsylvania, when my car failed to complete its return trip from the American Antiquarian Society, put up with piles of Cooper books around the house, and made celebrations out of the experiences around us. It is to my family that this project is dedicated.

Abstract

This dissertation is a primary-source-intensive literary history that makes use of publishers' records, correspondence, manuscript evidence, and literary works to study how James Fenimore Cooper refashioned his career as a professional author during its last major phase, approximately 1838 to 1851, to adapt to changing conditions he faced in the literary marketplace and to confront challenges—both externally- and self-imposed—to his status and reputation.

Chapter One, "The Tortured Profession of Authorship: Novelist Again," narrates Cooper's return to fiction in 1837-38, considering the professional issues confronting him at the time, such as economic uncertainties, constraints of the typical two-volume format, and alienation from the contemporary literary scene. Cooper's arguments about the nature of fiction, as well as his positions on the proper ethics of authorship, are also treated. Chapter Two, "Seamanship and Authorship: *The History of the Navy to Afloat and Ashore*," examines how Cooper's role as an expert on nautical matters contributed to his understanding of his profession as an author, especially in light of his *History of the Navy of the United States* and the ensuing controversy it stirred in certain quarters. Cooper's other nautical works of the early 1840s are considered, with an in-depth discussion of his first-person double novel *Afloat and Ashore* as a point of convergence for many of his concerns about authorship. Chapter Three, "The Commercial Instinct: Leatherstocking Revived," considers Cooper's deliberate efforts to restore his commercial viability by reasserting his artistic powers, reviving his most famous character, Natty Bumppo, in *The Pathfinder* and again in *The Deerslayer*. Cooper's failed attempt to create a "standard work" out of the Columbus story, *Mercedes of Castile*, and his never-realized plans of adding a sixth Leatherstocking tale are also investigated. Chapter Four, "Periodical Publication: Cooper and *Graham's Magazine*," treats Cooper's experiment in magazine writing, establishing factual foundations on a part of Cooper's career that has heretofore received little attention. His serialized novella *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* receives special consideration for its reflections of Cooper's attitudes on the work and rewards (or lack thereof) of authorship. Finally, Chapter Five, "Publishing Realignments: Cheap Literature and Cooper's Late Career," details Cooper's accommodations to the cheap paperback publishing craze of 1841-43, his separation from

publishers Lea & Blanchard, his venture in self-publishing with *Afloat and Ashore*, and his subsequent publishing alliances with Burgess, Stringer & Co. and George Palmer Putnam. Taken together, the findings uncovered through these investigations suggest that the second half of Cooper's career, long treated by many critics as one of decline and retreat, be reconsidered as one of reconsolidation and engagement.

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Introduction

Whisked to international fame by his innovative, patriotic tales *The Spy* (1821), *The Pioneers* (1823), and *The Pilot* (1824), James Fenimore Cooper became America's first novelist to gain a wide readership at the national and international levels, sustaining his fame with novels such as *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), and *The Red Rover* (1827). In establishing himself on the literary scene, he was, like his contemporary (and sometime rival) Washington Irving, as much a commercial pioneer as a literary one, and his remarkable success allowed him to transform what began as a gentlemanly pastime into a profession, one that would last three decades and see Cooper publish more than thirty novels and about a dozen non-fiction works. This profession was not always a happy one, however, and it is with what is perhaps Cooper's most unhappy moment that this study commences: his decision in 1833-34 to lay down his pen, abandoning his writing career—a decision that obviously had a much different outcome from what he had anticipated at the time, for he would find himself writing for the rest of his life.

This dissertation is a study of how James Fenimore Cooper refashioned his career as a professional author during its last major phase, approximately 1838 to 1851, to adapt to changing conditions he faced in the literary marketplace and to confront challenges—both externally- and self-imposed—to his status and reputation. It is a primary-source-intensive literary history that makes use of publishers' records, correspondence, manuscript evidence, and literary works to explore how Cooper's vision of professional authorship was shaped by new publishing techniques, a changing market for literature, and his own evolving worldview.

This second half of Cooper's career is examined with an eye toward his concerns about his profession and his attempt to engage the literary marketplace in various ways. Chapter One, "The Tortured Profession of Authorship: Novelist Again," analyzes Cooper's return to fiction in 1837-38 with his paired novels *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, with consideration of the professional issues confronting him at the time, such as economic uncertainties, constraints of the typical two-volume format, and alienation from the contemporary literary scene. Cooper's arguments about the nature of fiction stemming from the reception of these works, as well as his positions on the proper ethics of authorship, also

receive treatment here. Chapter Two, "Seamanship and Authorship: *The History of the Navy to Afloat and Ashore*," examines the contribution of Cooper's role as an expert on nautical matters to his understanding of his profession as an author, especially in light of his *History of the Navy of the United States* and the ensuing controversy it stirred in certain quarters.

Cooper's other nautical works of the early 1840s are considered, with an in-depth discussion of his first-person double novel *Afloat and Ashore* as a point of convergence for many of his concerns about authorship. Chapter Three, "The Commercial Instinct: Leatherstocking Revived," considers Cooper's deliberate attempts to reassert his famed artistic powers in fiction geared toward commercial viability, reviving his most famous character, Natty Bumppo, in *The Pathfinder* and again *The Deerslayer*. Cooper's failed attempt to create a "standard work" out of the Columbus story, *Mercedes of Castile*, and his never-realized plans of adding a sixth Leatherstocking tale to his famed series are also investigated. Chapter Four, "Periodical Publication: Cooper and *Graham's Magazine*," treats Cooper's experiment with new paradigms in writing for *Graham's Magazine*, establishing factual foundations on a part of Cooper's career that has heretofore received little attention. His serialized novella *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* receives special consideration for its reflections of Cooper's attitudes on the work and rewards (or lack thereof) of authorship. Finally, Chapter Five, "Publishing Realignment: Cheap Literature and Cooper's Late Career," details Cooper's accommodations to the cheap paperback publishing craze of 1841-43, his separation from publishers Lea & Blanchard, his venture in self-publishing with *Afloat and Ashore*, and his subsequent publishing alliances with Burgess, Stringer & Co. and George Palmer Putnam. Taken together, the findings uncovered during these investigations suggest that the second half of Cooper's career, long treated by many critics as one of decline and retreat, is instead one of reconsolidation and engagement and worthy of continued critical and cultural reconsideration.

Studies about authorship and the literary marketplace have either suffered or benefited, depending upon one's point of view, from a certain looseness in defining these terms. Marketplace studies may involve hard numbers—facts and figures about sales, costs and profits, incomes, market demographics, and a host of other quantifiables that figure into the economic life of a literary work in its process of conception, negotiation, composition, printing, and especially publishing, distribution, and consumption. Such scholarship makes

its appearance most frequently in studies of publishing houses or the publishing industry, or in the historical introductions to modern scholarly texts of literary works.¹ More frequently, however, studies of the literary marketplace display a more generalized thematic interest in demographic and especially economic issues, suggestive of an author's attitudes toward his or her public, or the inevitable compromises between producing art and making a living—something along the lines, perhaps, of what Michael Gilmore describes as “Ambivalence toward the exchange process.”² Discussions of authorship readily intersect with those of the literary marketplace, for explorations of the nature of literary commerce often raise questions about the nature of the parties involved. Here again, definitions are quite elastic.

“Authorship” may refer quite factually to an author's professional practices, or may delve more theoretically into matters of how an author viewed his or her vocation as a writer. In the latter sense, literary texts are sought out as vehicles by which authors communicated their feelings about their professions—writers “writing about being writers,” as R. Jackson Wilson expresses it.³ The drawback of such loose terminology is that scholarly works in these fields sometimes promise more than they can deliver, carrying the air of a study in the history of the book while actually being dominated by literary criticism or explication. The advantage, however, is that such openness of definition fosters a wide range of discussion on what are, after all, closely related issues, showing how richly the commercial and professional aspects of authorship influence the meaning of literary works.

If this study does little to resolve these definitional issues, and even profits to some degree from the unresolved state of the terminology by engaging a range of interrelated topics, it does provide an analysis that is grounded solidly in the available primary source

¹ Works such as David Kaser's *Messrs. Carey & Lea of Philadelphia: A Study in the History of the Booktrade* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1957), John Tebbel's *A History of Book Publishing in the United States* (New York: Bowker, 1972), and Michael Winship's *American Literary Publishing in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: The Business of Ticknor and Fields* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1995) come to mind in the former instance, for example; in the latter, editions such as the Northwestern Newberry series “The Writings of Herman Melville” or the ongoing “Writings of James Fenimore Cooper” series.

² Michael Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985).

³ R. Jackson Wilson, *Figures of Speech: American Writers and the Literary Marketplace, from Benjamin Franklin to Emily Dickinson* (1987; Baltimore, John Hopkins UP, 1990): 9.

material, thereby preventing the concepts of professional authorship and the literary marketplace from becoming mere literary tropes divorced from their external stimuli. The goal in each chapter is to establish a clear analytical narrative of literary history, with ventures into thematic explication of Cooper's works themselves where warranted. Taking cues from the available evidence has led to heavier emphasis being placed upon some aspects of the author/publisher/public continuum than others, with Cooper's relations with publishers—his intermediaries in reaching the reading public—tending to receive the major share of consideration. Despite this incomplete and perhaps opportunistic approach, ample groundwork is thus laid for future scholarship.

Several compelling reasons suggest the value of studying Cooper amid this period and context using these methods. First, Cooper studies in particular have much to gain from a more detailed telling of the story of Cooper's publishing career, particularly that of his later years. Since the 1970s, great advances have been made through the publication of "The Writings of James Fenimore Cooper," better known as the "Cooper Edition," a series of scholarly critical editions of Cooper's works, complete with explanatory and textual notes, a comprehensive textual apparatus, and, most notably, historical introductions tracing the origins, negotiations, composition, printing, publication, and reception of the individual works. The materials provided by these editions give an unprecedented, unparalleled look into Cooper's authorial methods and professional practices, suggesting, in addition, the milieu from which the works emerged as well as the reactions they received. As can be imagined, however, proceeding through all of Cooper's works, nearly fifty in all, represents a monumental task, especially considering the exhaustive detail of the textual scholarship involved; thus the edition remains far from complete. Between 1980 and 1991, seventeen of these editions appeared, covering six non-fiction works (*Notions of the Americans* and five books of European travel memoirs) and eleven novels, including the complete series of Leatherstocking tales. Following the 1989 death of the dean of Cooper scholarship and editor-in-chief of the series, James F. Beard, the series was soon dropped by its publishers and left to a decade's hiatus, resuming again in 2002 with a long-awaited edition of *The Spy* and proceeding with a new work about every two years, the double-length novel *Afloat and Ashore* appearing in 2004. The bulk of Cooper's novels await similar treatment, prioritized according to the availability of manuscript materials, making it likely that some works will

not appear for well over a decade, if not longer. Then, too, whereas Cooper's first decade of authorship is well represented in the series—eight out of his first ten works—coverage is more scattered for his later career, accounting for only six of his seventeen book-length works published from 1840 on. These facts suggest the timely value of a study such as this. The investigations undertaken for some works here parallel in many ways the approach used for the historical introductions to the Cooper Edition, although here the focus upon the entire range of his later work allows for a much wider scope of inquiry and freer range of observation. Many of the findings here should prove useful as building blocks for historical introductions for future installments in the Cooper Edition series; the chief concern, however, is to make detailed knowledge of Cooper's later career more immediately available.

Second, despite Cooper's indisputably major status in American literature, far more significant in his own day than Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, and others, Cooper has been almost entirely left out of discussions of authorship and the literary marketplace that have become increasingly popular. Considering the scholarly richness of many of these studies, the omission is puzzling and disappointing. One finds these studies given over heavily to Hawthorne and Melville, two authors who could not help but work heavily under Cooper's shadow. Michael T. Gilmore explicitly limits his study *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* to four New England writers: Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville; Michael Newbury, in *Figuring Authorship in Antebellum America*, similarly concentrates on Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau. R. Jackson Wilson, in *Figures of Speech: American Writers and the Literary Marketplace, from Benjamin Franklin to Emily Dickinson*, discussed Franklin, Irving, William Lloyd Garrison, Emerson, Dickinson (hardly an author steeped in the marketplace), and Whitman. Jerome Loving, in *Lost in the Customhouse: Authorship in the American Renaissance* examines not only Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, and Thoreau but also Irving and Poe in his treatment of antebellum authors: his chief mention of Cooper is to suggest that Cooper's characters are interesting mostly on sociological grounds rather than literary ones as Irving's are.⁴ Despite titles that hint at broad treatments of authorship or the literary marketplace, then, few critical works even mention the period's best-known author.

⁴ Jerome Loving, *Lost in the Customhouse: Authorship in the American Renaissance* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1993) 9-10.

Where Cooper is treated at all, it is often inaccurately, unfavorably, or simplistically. Charles Madison, devoting two pages to Cooper in a section on Irving and Cooper in *Irving to Irving: Author-Publisher Relations 1800-1974*, discusses some of Cooper's publishing arrangements of the 1820s with commendable accuracy, but compares some of Cooper's dealings unfavorably with Irving's by labeling Cooper "neither of a generous nor genial nature," and in closing rushes Cooper off the stage with the following characterization:

After 1829 Cooper became tendentious in his writing—*The Deerslayer* excepted—and his books ceased to appeal widely to readers of fiction. Moreover, his political conservatism during the rise of Jacksonian liberalism and his contentious character tended to alienate his erstwhile admirers. His books ceased to be profitable, and Carey and Lea lost interest in them.⁵

As shall be seen, Cooper still had considerable appeal in the 1840s, published a number of non-contentious works, and continued to generate respectable profits for himself and his publishers. Similarly, William Charvat's influential 1951 essay "Cooper as Professional Author," written for effect as an oral presentation rather than for exactness as a piece of written scholarship, is a frustrating mix of penetrating insights and needless exaggerations, interesting anecdotes and poor documentation. While correctly suggesting the outlines of Cooper's distinctive place in the history of American authorship, Charvat works with a broad brush and perpetuates overwrought stereotypes about Cooper's brashness, haste, and egotism. In the light of the great strides Cooper scholarship has made since the 1960s, such limitations compromise the value of Charvat's study for present-day use, despite obvious merits. Even today, it is hard for Cooper scholars to avoid falling into some of the stereotypes about Cooper's later years that have persisted since Thomas Lounsbury published the first book-length biography of Cooper in 1882, arguing that Cooper's later years largely were ones of bitterness and retreat. Taken collectively, the body of scholarship represented by the works mentioned above suggests that Cooper's profile remains too low and his vast canon often defies effective study for the non-specialist. A study such as this one is necessary to meet that need and fill gaps in the existing body of scholarship. Rather than trying to provide a comparative study with Hawthorne, Melville, and other writers of

⁵ Charles A. Madison, *Irving to Irving: Author-Publisher Relations 1800-1974* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1974) 7-8.

the 1850s, thus risking an anachronistic impression of Cooper as a mere predecessor to those supposedly more developed authors when the situation was quite the opposite, this study will proceed under the conviction that concentrating on what Cooper did will provide the best basis for accurate comparisons in the future.

Third, the period itself offers fascinating enticements for study, and the record of Cooper's prominent role in the publishing world of his day invites exploration. Although the 1830s and 1840s have long been a popular era with historians, thanks to their contentious politics, rapidly developing market economy, and pronounced social changes, they often remain overlooked by literary scholars, despite gradual increases in awareness. Scholarship of American literature during the antebellum period has long shown a bias of coverage favoring the 1820s as the time of the birth of a viable American literature and especially the 1850s as the period of its maturation. The 1830s and 1840s largely have been overlooked, perhaps because of a perceived lack of distinctiveness, newness, or quality in the literature of the period. Despite the relative unfamiliarity of the literature, however, the rapid changes in the literary marketplace of the 1830s and 1840s make the period a prime candidate for study, interesting for many of the same reasons historians have engaged it. The era brought about more changes in publishing technologies and methods than any age for centuries before, and perhaps any after until the advent of computers. With such a chaotic frenzy of innovation and change, the literary marketplace of the 1830s and 1840s existed in a state of great fluctuation, much like the early automotive industry of the early 1900s, or the Internet startups of the 1990s. Great opportunities and great risks were to be had, sometimes all in the same package. Cooper, standing at the head of antebellum American novelists, supported himself almost entirely by his pen over the course of a career spanning three decades. This feat was unmatched by his major rivals of the time, Irving and Paulding, who relied on patronage or political appointments at times. Cooper, publishing at least a book a year, and engaging heartily in negotiations about the prices and formats of his works, is uniquely situated for study during this period of swift evolution.

When Cooper set out to publish his first novel, *Precaution*, in 1820, the publishing industry in the United States was still in its infancy, and the prospects of making a good return, much less a good living, from novel-writing seemed dim. Publishing was still a local or regional, rather than national, industry. Distribution was hampered by unreliable

transportation networks, particularly inland, where roads were prone to be treacherous and muddy, rivers liable to seasonal flooding and freezing. Printing was done on hand presses not greatly changed since Gutenberg's day. Paper was expensive to make and of inferior quality to that of Great Britain; so, too, with American ink. Bookbinding was undertaken on a book-by-book basis using leather as the primary covering. Type was typically set by hand, used for an edition (and perhaps retained for a short while afterward if the work seemed likely to sell out), and broken up to be used on other jobs, causing many works to be out of print shortly after their appearance. Although stereotyping, a method of reproducing blocks of type to make more permanent, easily-stored "plates" (thus freeing up standing type), had been introduced around 1813, the process was not yet in widespread use. These high costs of production, combined with the usual retail markups, made books an expensive commodity—a luxury often reserved for the wealthier classes. Then, too, there were other dissuading factors: a largely rural population, limited (though respectable) literacy rates, and tendencies among some readers to seek "useful" literature and scorn novels as wasteful of time or morally corrupt.

If these barriers were not significant enough, American authors found themselves at a competitive disadvantage in their own country because of a lack of international copyright. Publishers could publish British or continental works, often desired because of their presumed cultural superiority, without paying a cent of royalty to the authors, leaving American authors at a distinct disadvantage, since the cost of their copyright royalties added to the prices of their works and thus kept them out of the market. Thanks to the peculiarities of British copyright law, it was at least possible for a well-connected American to earn money from a British sale, since for some time anyone could take out a British copyright on a work provided that it was published in Britain before it appeared anywhere else. But since the reverse was not true, American authors were still at a disadvantage in their home market. Publishers balked at paying copyright fees to authors in addition to shouldering all the risks upfront, preferring to work on the basis of divided profits when they even offered to pay at all. In such a climate, only a handful of publishers were willing to take the risks of publishing copyright American literature, some doing so more as a patriotic duty than as a sound business case. Cooper's first venture with *Precaution* saw him risking his own capital, reaping the profits for himself, and paying what was essentially a royalty to his

publisher, A. T. Goodrich, for his services—quite the opposite of what has become the usual working relationship between author and publisher.⁶

By 1838, when Cooper resumed writing fiction after his four-year hiatus, the publishing scene had changed significantly, even as a few noteworthy elements remained unchanged. The reading public, for one, was larger, not only because the population itself had expanded (especially with the help of immigration), but also because literacy rates increased, thanks to improved public education efforts and the greater spread of print materials in culture. Transportation infrastructure had improved with the construction of canals and railroads, extending publishers' reach to new markets and greatly improving the speed and reliability of commercial traffic. Steamboats plied the navigable rivers in increasing numbers, too. Seasons still had their way, of course; Cooper's own novel *The Pathfinder* would be delayed in early 1840 until rivers were sufficiently free from ice. Paper and ink became cheaper and better, partly thanks to the influence of trade fairs where prizes would be given for superior materials. Cloth book bindings were introduced around 1830 as a cost-cutting measure and quickly caught on; by the 1840s, this cheaper format would itself be challenged by the paperbound volume as publishers competed for the lowest prices. Printing technology made the greatest leaps forward: as mechanized presses such as the cylinder press replaced hand presses for mass production, speed increased dramatically while costs decreased. As a result, newspapers could be published frequently to reach mass audiences at a low cost—even going as low as a penny an issue as competition set in. During the politically charged 1830s under the presidencies of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, the Whigs would prove particularly savvy in turning the mass-market possibilities of newspapers to advantage in partisan matters, albeit often at the expense of journalistic standards. Periodicals proliferated, too, in a great variety of specialties, among which were the literary monthlies that brought together short fiction, poetry, serialized novels, essays, and book reviews—all available to readers through the mail at a lower price than books could be sent. Befitting the daredevil speculation so rampant at the time, many new magazines started with ambitious plans but disappeared soon after their appearances,

⁶ See also William Charvat, "The Conditions of Authorship in 1820," in *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1968) 29-48.

too short on capital or on subscribers who would actually pay. Book publishing benefited greatly from the adoption of stereotyping: for a work projected to sell well, the greater initial investment would pay off through the ability to print additional copies from the plates when needed, minimizing the chances that a publisher would be stuck with large numbers of unsold copies on hand.

Despite all these advances, the inducements for authorship remained few. One state of affairs was decidedly unchanged: there was still no international copyright, despite regular agitations by groups of American writers who would stand to benefit from it. As cheap book publishing came into vogue in the early 1840s, fierce competition to sell books at the lowest possible price would erode the sums paid to authors; pirated novels from overseas remained the commodity of choice. The periodicals provided a venue where the short story would come of its own as a characteristically American genre, but until about 1840, few paid well enough for an author to earn a living wage; many magazine proprietors viewed it as reward enough for an author to see his or her name in print. To these ongoing unfavorable conditions must be added recurring bouts of hard times for publishers, starting in 1834 with a series of bankruptcies in the trade during the financial crises that followed President Jackson's removal of funds from the Bank of the United States in 1833. The Panic of 1837 led to additional trouble in many states, as did a further financial crisis that caused several states to default on or to repudiate their debts in 1841-1842. Considering all these strenuous conditions, it becomes clear that not only Cooper but any American novelist faced some significant difficulties in the literary marketplace even twenty years after Sydney Smith's famous challenge of "Who reads an American novel?" had been answered. Many of these difficulties, as well as those that Cooper imposed upon himself through choices he made in his literary career, will become apparent in the chapters that follow.

Chapter One

The Tortured Profession of Authorship: Novelist Again

Works:

Homeward Bound; or, The Chase. A Tale of the Sea. By the Author of "The Pilot," "The Spy," Etc. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 4 August 1838.

Home as Found. By the Author of Homeward Bound, The Pioneers, &c. &c. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 15 November 1838.

[Review of *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* By J.G. Lockhart.] "Literary Notices." *The Knickerbocker Magazine* 12 (October 1838): 349-66.

"I am nearly half through with my last romance, for the pen and I have quarreled. The country is getting to be too big for men of my caliber. I must give way to my betters, of which it would seem to be full, but their talk . . . Thank God, I am nearly done with them. You must not be surprised if you hear of my sailing a sloop between Cape Cod and New-York ere long. Let it pass."¹ Thus James Fenimore Cooper forecast his "retirement" from writing in a letter to his close friend, the sculptor Horatio Greenough, in January 1833, while working on what was supposed to be his thirteenth and final novel, *The Headsman*. Shortly before publication, the exasperated author wrote once again to Greenough: "The quill and I are divorced, and you cannot conceive the degree of freedom I could almost say of happiness I feel, at having got my neck out of the halter. I could write forever -- or as long as God pleased -- for a *nation* that was a *nation* -- but Heaven help us! Mr. Greenough, we are but indifferent gentlemen at the best. The tales are done. There are a few half finished manuscripts on other subjects to finish, and I turn sailor again -- or something else --"²

¹ JFC to Horatio Greenough, 19 January 1833, in *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, ed. James Franklin Beard, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1964-68) 2:368.

² JFC to Greenough, 13 June 1833: *Letters and Journals* 2:384.

Cooper carried out this plan publicly in his 1834 pamphlet *A Letter to His Countrymen*, by J. Fenimore-Cooper, taking the unusual step in the age of “anonymous” authorship of directly addressing himself to his readers in order to defend his previous actions and writings, to warn his countrymen of their excessive reliance on foreign opinion, and to announce, after these lengthy arguments, that “I lay aside my pen,” presumably retiring from writing.³

As it turns out, however, Cooper never did retire, and his career as an author was only half done. The “few half finished manuscripts” he described to Greenough turned out to be a novel-like allegorical satire, *The Monikins* (1835), and a series of five travel memoirs reflecting his observations during seven years in Europe. By the middle of 1837, he was nearly finished with these projects and was meditating something new, but not the change of career he had projected to Greenough. “A freak has gotten into my head to write a novel again,” he wrote to his English publisher Richard Bentley on 6 July 1837. “I do not know yet whether it will be done, or not, but if I do it will be something like ‘Templeton in 1837.’ This may not be the name, but it gives the idea.”⁴ This “freak” would eventually become the double novel *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, published in 1838, which restored Cooper to a career as a novelist after a hiatus of four years. Cooper would go on to publish fifteen more novels as well as several non-fiction works of history, biography, and analysis, making his last thirteen years of writing (1838-51) more prolific, though far less profitable, than his first thirteen (1820-33).

Perhaps because Cooper never did follow through on his plan to retire, his decision has never been fully appreciated as the significant moment it was in the progress of American literature. More than any other writer of his era, Cooper is identified as an innovator, a creator of many “firsts” in American literature. Among these firsts is his financial success as America’s first professional novelist. No other American author save Washington Irving reaped the returns Cooper did on creative work, and unlike Irving, who took up diplomatic duties overseas, Cooper relied almost wholly on his pen for his support. Between 1826, when he entered into an agreement with the Philadelphia publishers Carey & Lea to buy the copyright of *The Last of the Mohicans* for \$5000, and 1833, when he published

³ *A Letter to His Countrymen*, By J. Fenimore-Cooper (New-York: John Wiley, 1834) 98.

⁴ JFC to Richard Bentley, 6 July 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:269.

The Headsman, Cooper pulled in no less than \$4500 for each of his next seven new novels. As well, he received smaller but still substantial payments for copyrights for some of his earlier novels and for his *Notions of the Americans* (1828). And this was only the return from America: in England, his earnings (for instance, £600 for *The Bravo* in 1830—about \$2850⁵) were likewise respectable. Sums from other countries on the continent occasionally trickled in, but Cooper considered these trifling and seldom worth the time and trouble to pursue them regularly. In other words, money was not the issue for Cooper. The market for native literature in America—at least for fiction—could support an author like Cooper, though he was certainly the exception rather than the rule.

What motivated Cooper instead was a sense of frustration at what he perceived to be an ever-widening divide between his sensibilities and those of his countrymen, particularly over political philosophies concerning republican government but extending to cultural attitudes, manners, and even the proper function of an artist/entertainer in America. Cooper had left for Europe in 1826, when John Quincy Adams was president, and returned in November 1833, the first year of Andrew Jackson's second term. During these years of great social and political shifts in America, Cooper could only observe from afar, through correspondence with friends and accounts in newspapers. Amid the cultural attainments of Europe, Cooper found his own country lacking, particularly in light of the "leveling influences" its democratic social structure had upon refined taste. America had little of the civilized grandeur of European scenery, architecture, or learning, yet Cooper became convinced that because of their provincialism and blind patriotism Americans insisted upon their "things," to use Cooper's term, being as good as European ones. At the same time, Cooper in Europe found himself mingling in elite circles in a culture more stratified than America's—something that did not bother him in and of itself except for the fact that many of these Europeans entertained suspicions and prejudices against America and its republican form of government. These political tensions became especially noticeable in France, where questions of republicanism versus monarchy had already been fought out in the French

⁵ This and all subsequent dollars/pounds conversions are calculated according to historical exchange rate data at Lawrence H. Officer, "Exchange rate between the United States dollar and the British pound, 1791-2000." Economic History Services, EH.Net, 2001. URL: <http://www.eh.net/hmit/exchangerates/pound.php>.

Revolution, and where the subsequent attempts of monarchists to shut out proponents of republicanism, including Cooper's close friend (and well-known Revolutionary War hero) the Marquis de Lafayette, became particularly aggressive.

Faced with these forces, and being uniquely situated to observe both European and American practices, Cooper had felt patriotically and moralistically compelled as a prominent American in Europe to take a stance in writing for republicanism. Though always alert to political matters, and never one to shy away from exploring patriotic themes (as he had done practically from the start with *The Spy*), Cooper entered more directly into discussions of political philosophy in his writing. Turning away from novel writing temporarily in 1828, he wrote a lengthy series of epistolary essays purporting to be the casual observations of a European count traveling with a club of bachelors in America, entitled *Notions of the Americans, Picked Up by a Travelling Bachelor*. With these imaginary letters he intended to provide an answer to the superficial accounts of America provided by European travelers in memoirs not unlike those that Fanny Trollope and Charles Dickens would write in the years to come. Backing up his remembered knowledge of the northeastern United States with statistical information, Cooper used the persona of the count to give the air of impartiality to his comments on his native land, which were largely salutary. Even more unusual than the fact that Cooper was writing several volumes of "travels" in America while living in Europe was his introduction of the first idealized self-portrait to appear in his writings, an American acquaintance of the count named John Cadwallader. Having encountered Cadwallader on the road between Moscow and Warsaw, the count is so taken by this "calm, reasoning American," taciturn and weary with the selfishness of Europe yet "so fresh, so original in his way of treating things," that he decides to travel with his new American friend back to the United States.⁶ During their "travels" the count, aided by Cadwallader, observes American manners, customs, history, scenery, and so forth, noting statistics and making constant comparisons to Europe. Cooper painted optimistic pictures of America in order to counter the disparaging portrayals that European travelers—whose books were also being read in America—had drawn.

⁶ James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans, Picked Up by a Travelling Bachelor* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Carey, 1828) 3.

This was a risky move for Cooper, the kind of risk his amiable and popular fellow author Washington Irving, also living in Europe at the time and writing for the aristocratic *Quarterly Review*, would never have taken. Cooper could have predicted that the cause involved considerable hazard in Europe, but he did not anticipate that his efforts to defend his country would be met with indifference and even suspicion in his homeland. Already before its publication, Carey & Lea had expressed doubts about the salability of *Notions*, offering a mere \$1500 at a time when they were paying \$5000 apiece for his novels. By contrast his deal with Colburn in England was a much more generous £400 (nearly \$2000). Reviews of the work were mixed, too, often praising the “useful information” the work provided but objecting to either Cooper’s undertaking of non-fiction work of a political nature or his use of a fictitious narrator and characters in an otherwise fact-oriented work.

Hurt but undeterred, Cooper remained engaged in the political realm but shifted to a new style of novel-writing, designed to meet European novelists on their own terms—and turf—and to explore the principles that underlay American and European systems of governing. Cooper’s art had already changed during his stay in Europe, evincing among other things, for instance, his greater willingness to experiment and a deeper appreciation for the poetry and symbolism in his stories. He credits his contacts with “certain literary men” on the continent for his motive to “experiment” in his 1829 novel *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish* with producing “a familiar poem, rather than a common work of fiction.”⁷ Likewise, in his 1830 novel *The Water-Witch*, he intermixed the aura of supernatural mystery and his usual minuteness in describing locale—“the real with the purely ideal.” Twenty years later, in writing a new preface for the edition published by George Palmer Putnam, he could recognize the book as a “comparative failure” but still claim it as “a bold attempt” and “the most imaginative book ever written by the author.”⁸ Up to this point, all of his works save his first, *Precaution* (1820), had deliberately maintained American settings and American characters, making them instantly recognizable to the common reader as “American” novels.

⁷ From the revised preface Cooper prepared for the Bentley “Standard Novels” edition of *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish*, entitled in Britain *The Borderers; or The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish. A Tale* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833) vii.

⁸ *The Water-Witch; or, The Skimmer of the Seas. A Tale* (New York: George P. Putnam & Co., 1852) v.

In his next work, *The Bravo* (1831), however, as well as the two that followed, *The Heidenmauer* (1832) and *The Headsman* (1833), Cooper turned away from American “things”—its scenery, customs, characters—to examine more minutely the foundations of American *principles*. In doing so he directed his gaze at Europe, setting the scenes of *The Bravo* in the “republic” of Venice rather than in America, hoping to show Europeans the dangers of their governments and by extension to warn Americans about the potential for aristocracy—in this case commercial oligarchy rather than hereditary nobility—to take root in their own. *The Bravo* was a thesis novel, warning against concentration of power in a few hands.

Cooper’s new path at first won him accolades at home. Critics approved of the tale and the republican values Cooper was promoting, and *The Bravo* became a critical success as well as a strong seller—so much so that Cooper abandoned a plan for his next book, set on Lake Ontario “with Indians intermingled” (eventually to become *The Pathfinder* nine years later) to write *The Heidenmauer*, another European tale.⁹ At one point his plan included some half a dozen European novels, if his letter to friend Peter Augustus Jay is any guide:

I have just published one book [*The Bravo*] and am already printing another [*Heidenmauer*]. I have shifted my ground to Europe, where, if nothing unlooked for arises, I propose laying the scene of half a dozen more tales. I do not know how you will like this transformation at home, but here, it appears to answer very well.¹⁰

But something “unlooked for” did arise, causing Cooper to abandon the series—and, for a time, his career as a novelist—after three novels.

Living in Paris from 1830-32 and keeping close association with Lafayette, Cooper was drawn into the French “Finance Controversy,” an argument over whether or not republican forms of government such as the United States had were cheaper than European systems. Though he wished to stay out of French internal affairs, he could not resist the importuning of Lafayette, who was then the most powerful republican in France, to respond to an article in *Revue Britannique* which had purported to demonstrate that the American form of government was more expensive than that in nearly every other country, not less so as

⁹ JFC to Henry Colburn, 1 Feb 1831: *Letters and Journals* 2:52; JFC to Colburn and Bentley, 8? Aug 1831: *Letters and Journals* 2:131-32.

¹⁰ JFC to Peter Augustus Jay, 2 Jan 1832: *Letters and Journals* 2:175.

Cooper had tried to show in *Notions of the Americans*.¹¹ Much as Cooper had set out to correct travelers' misconceptions of the United States in *Notions*, in his *Letter of J. Fenimore Cooper, to Gen. Lafayette* he entered into a detailed statistical refutation.¹² This letter soon became a source of controversy in the French government, leading Cooper, with few public allies in the press to back him, into a series of follow-up letters to vindicate his statements. Worst of all was the fact that some American critics resented Cooper's involvement at all in the internal affairs of a foreign country, and editors who were once Cooper's personal friends, such as Charles King of the *New-York American* and William Stone of the *Commercial Advertiser*, turned to sometimes ruthless attacks. On 7 June 1832, eight months after *The Bravo* had appeared in print, a "review" of the work appeared in the *New-York American*, under the signature of "Cassio." Abusive of the novelist as well as his writings, the piece, as James Beard summarizes, accused Cooper of "unintelligibility, self-imitation, mercenary motives, plagiarism, barrenness, and other literary sins."¹³ Upon being shown the article by an agitated Samuel F.B. Morse, Cooper opined that it must have been written by a Frenchman as revenge for his role in the Finance Controversy, particularly because the writer had quoted a French edition of *The Bravo* and had used what Cooper considered stylistic oddities in his English. Penning a letter to Morse on 2 April 1833 that Morse, in a misguided attempt to defend his friend, then published in the *Albany Daily Advertiser*, Cooper boasted that "I detected its French origin before twenty lines were read."¹⁴ Eventually, however, it was revealed that the author of the piece was no Frenchman but indeed an American (Edward Sherman Gould, who was at that time the Paris correspondent of the *American*). The "Cassio" incident proved to be a major embarrassment for Cooper, causing him to suffer ridicule not just in the review but in his handling of the "conspiracy" behind it. Over a year later, in his *Letter to His Countrymen*, Cooper was still explaining himself. Cooper

¹¹ *Revue Britannique* n.s. 6 (June 1831): 272-324.

¹² *Letter of J. Fenimore Cooper, to Gen. Lafayette, on the expenditure of the United States of America* (Paris, Baudry's Foreign Library, 1831).

¹³ *Letters and Journals* 2:305.

¹⁴ JFC to Samuel F.B. Morse, 2 April 1833: *Letters and Journals* 2:376; published excerpts in *Albany Daily Advertiser* for 4 June 1833.

thus became a target of opportunity, a symbol of arrogance, aristocratic (i.e., elitist) attitudes, and hypersensitivity.

In his business dealings Cooper was becoming frustrated, too. Carey & Lea, always tremulous about the large amounts they ventured on Cooper works, were discouraged with his European novels, perhaps reflecting some of the criticism then in circulation (Henry Carey, like many literary publishers, had Whig sympathies). Cooper's earnings per novel had dropped from \$5000 with *The Water-Witch* to \$4500 with *The Bravo*, a sum that remained steady through the European series. Despite the unqualified success of *The Bravo* against Carey & Lea's doubts, they expressed hesitation about his next novel, *The Heidenmauer* (1832), worried about bad conditions in the book trade, the quality of the story, and even the title—"that detestable name wh. no one can pronounce."¹⁵ Carey & Lea delayed publishing until September, supposedly to await more favorable conditions for sales. Whether or not Carey & Lea had created their own self-fulfilling prophecy from the start, they announced the following to Cooper on 8 October 1832:

The book is published, but we are sorry to say that it has failed – and failed more completely, we think, than any book you have written – The times are against it, but it was very much against itself, as you will perhaps be satisfied, should you ever read it over – It has not the interest that is to be desired & it has too much politics.—

Had it possessed the interest of many of your books it would have triumphed over the times, but wanting it, they have triumphed over it, as we feared would be the case – So strong was our impression that such would be the case, that we would very gladly have sold out at cost, or below it, before publication --¹⁶

Letters such as this raised Cooper's already healthy distrust of publishers, causing him to confide to William Dunlap in November 1832, "My booksellers have been cutting me down gradually these four years, and they have lately written me such a letter, as they would not have written to a man, who had a cordial, or even a respectable support from the public."¹⁷ Cooper also fretted about his lack of control over the marketing of his novels in America,

¹⁵ Carey & Lea to JFC, 23 March 1832: *Letters and Journals* 2:151.

¹⁶ Carey & Lea to JFC, 8 October 1832: *Letters and Journals* 2:361-62.

¹⁷ JFC to William Dunlap, 14 November 1832: *Letters and Journals* 2:360.

expressing alarm at the possibility of Carey & Lea publishing excerpts from his letters or advance chapters of his novels in newspapers, and displaying annoyance upon reading unsubstantiated rumors in the *New-York Commercial Advertiser* that “booksellers quarrel for his custom,” implying a mercenary spirit.¹⁸ Such deteriorating relations prompted Cooper to write, clearly ironically, “I begin to distrust my ability to please gentlemen so exquisitely critical, though the moral is, that while you like nothing I do, of late, you do nothing yourselves!”¹⁹

With the foundations of his career crumbling, or appearing to crumble, Cooper was ready by the middle of 1832 to return to America to lay his uncertainties to rest, for better or worse. As he explained to Greenough,

I go home, if home I do go, to take a near view for myself, and to ascertain whether for the rest of my life I am to have a country or not. The decision will be prompt, free from all humbug, and final. It is time that we understand one another. I am tired of wasting life, means, and comfort in behalf of those who return abuse for services, and who show so much greater reverence for fraud and selfishness than for anything else. I can never change my principles except on conviction, but I should be a very dog to fawn on those who spurn me. I am heart-sick and will say no more on the ungrateful subject.²⁰

When he and his family finally made their belated return to America in November 1833 (two years later than he had originally planned), however, the solution was not so simple. His feelings upon arriving “home” were mixed, but mostly inclined toward the negative: society had changed, his circle of friends had shrunk, and he returned a controversial figure rather than a celebrated artist. A mere ten days after arriving home he had concluded 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

¹⁸ JFC to Carey & Lea, 6 November 1831, 30 December 1831: *Letters and Journals* 2:149, 170; JFC to Samuel Carter Hall, 14 August 1831: *Letters and Journals* 2:133-34; JFC to Carey & Lea, 6 November 1831: *Letters and Journals* 2:149-50.

¹⁹ JFC to Carey & Lea, 30 December 1831: *Letters and Journals* 2:170.

²⁰ JFC to Horatio Greenough, 14? July 1832: *Letters and Journals* 2:268.

become of us.”²¹ Claiming that he remained in America for the sake of his family, Cooper stayed in New York while seeking out a more permanent residence, eventually purchasing the mansion his father had built in Cooperstown, Otsego Hall, remodeling it in the Gothic style to suit his tastes, and establishing his family there by May 1836, never going overseas again. Professionally, he planned to publish “a little work, of an entirely new kind”—eventually *The Monikins*—which would “probably be the last of my labour in the way of an author,” and then move on. To what, Cooper never seemed to be certain; he would not seek office or political appointment (denying rumors of the “Bank press” to the contrary),²² and as a gentleman of his social stature and age (forty-four), his options were few.

While the Cooper family was still in New York, the attacks by “Cassio” resumed once again in December 1833, prompting Cooper to abandon his plan to slip silently away from authorship and instead to justify himself in print. Originally intending to publish his renunciation of authorship in one of the daily newspapers, the work eventually grew to become a pamphlet of over a hundred pages, its “hastily written” body supplemented by sixteen pages of postscript notes, corrections, and amplifications—Cooper holding a conversation with himself, as it were. After some delay, ostensibly due to conditions in the trade, *A Letter to His Countrymen*, by J. Fenimore Cooper appeared in June 1834, published by John Wiley, son of Cooper’s old publisher Charles Wiley. Those who wished to discover Cooper’s views were put in the position of having to pay for it, a move that no doubt gave credence to Whig caricatures of Cooper as mercenary in his business dealings. The letter itself makes public, in a more deliberate manner, many of the complaints he had voiced in his correspondence. Robert Spiller, with only slight hyperbole, ascribes Cooper’s motivation to his overidentification with republican principles: “Like Milton, he had always identified himself wholly with the cause he served. Any comment, whether praise or blame, upon his writing was a comment upon the principles to which he held. . . . He must defend himself in

²¹ JFC to John Stuart Skinner, 15 November 1833: *Letters and Journals* 3:10.

²² See JFC to William Cullen Bryant and William Leggett for the New York *Evening Post*, 12 June 1834, *Letters and Journals* 3:37-38, for instance, or the *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer* for 25 June 1834.

order to defend his country from herself.”²³ Under the thesis that America’s “practice of deferring to foreign opinion is dangerous to the institutions of the country,” Cooper not only complained of how British parliamentary precedents were being invoked in Congress (to justify the censure of Jackson for removing funds from the Bank of the United States) but also exhaustively detailed his ill-treatment over *The Bravo* (including as “ancillary data” that American critics were being influenced by politically-motivated hostility toward him in Europe).²⁴ In laying aside his pen, he attributed his disappointed hopes of being “useful in my generation” to the failure of his countrymen to achieve mental and intellectual independence: “I have felt a severe mortification that I am to break down on the question of distinctive American thought.”²⁵ Had he stuck to the vigorous tone of his letters, he would have produced a more readable tract; as it stands, the piece is stiff and lawyerish, and its emphasis on minutiae belies the “suitable simplicity” he sought in his tone.²⁶ Unfortunately for Cooper, his attempts at a dignified tone, as well as the elaborate explanations to justify himself, only confirmed his egotism in the minds of his opponents. The predictable result, as James Beard states, was that “Cooper’s remarkable naïveté in coupling personal and partisan political issues invited the Whig editors to argue their political points by smearing the author.”²⁷ For the rest of the decade Cooper would become a stock figure for self-important ineptness in the more polemical papers of the Whig press.

The close of *A Letter to His Countrymen*, with its sixteen pages of postscript following the hundred-page farewell, is a suitable emblem for the next four years of his career. No clear direction suggested itself, but Cooper continued to add footnotes to his supposedly finished career, still writing in a vein of social observation and criticism. He continued work on the “few half-finished manuscripts on other subjects” he had mentioned to Greenough,

²³ Robert E. Spiller, *Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times* (1931. New York: Russell & Russell, 1963) 226.

²⁴ *Letters and Journals* 3:7.

²⁵ *Letter to His Countrymen* 99.

²⁶ *Letter to His Countrymen* 100.

²⁷ *Letters and Journals* 3:7.

publishing *The Monikins* in July 1835, an allegorical satire he had started in 1832, and then a series of five travel memoirs based on his journals and recollections from seven years abroad: *Sketches of Switzerland* and *Sketches of Switzerland, Part Second* (the Rhine) in May and October 1836, *Gleanings in Europe* (France) and *Gleanings of Europe: England* in March and September 1837, and *Gleanings in Europe: Italy* in May 1838. From December 1834 to February 1836, Cooper also contributed letters on current events to New York's *The Evening Post* under the pseudonym "A.B.C.," becoming, as it were, a prototype of the syndicated columnist. Free from many of the constraints of his existing reputation, he could enjoy a more candid approach to the issues, and his letters were often reprinted in other papers.²⁸ Other projects were also kept in motion, most notably research for his naval history of the United States that he had started in the 1820s but also a "little book for schools" on American government and manners, *The American Democrat*, and eventually a local history of Cooperstown, *The Chronicles of Cooperstown*, both published by H. & E. Phinney in Cooperstown in 1838. Meanwhile, he dabbled in other investments, including a purchase of land in Kalamazoo County, Michigan, and oversaw the renovations to his house that Morse had masterminded.

By the time he arrived at his "freak" notion of writing another novel in mid-1837, it had become clear that apart from *The Monikins* none of these other projects he had completed since the *Letter to His Countrymen* would add much to either his income or his reputation. He had sold *The Monikins* for a respectable sum--\$2500 from Carey & Lea (now Carey, Lea, & Blanchard) and £550 (about \$2650) from Bentley²⁹--but both publishers reported heavy losses on their investments, the work being almost universally panned, in part due to Bentley's insistence that the work "make the usual number of volumes" of a

²⁸ See *Letters and Journals* 3:61-64.

²⁹ A small memorandum book of Cooper's notes a receipt of \$3500 for *The Monikins*; Carey and Lea's cost books, however, state that \$2500 was paid for copyright. How Cooper arrives at his figure is unclear. See ZA Cooper 31, "Memorandum Book of J. Fenimore Cooper, 1835," Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; and *The Cost Book of Carey and Lea, 1825-1838*, Ed. David Kaser (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1963) 173 (entry #496).

regular novel but mainly because of its unorthodox nature and the reputation of its author.³⁰ The work soon became a sore point for both publishers, with Carey, Lea, & Blanchard complaining of losses of \$2600 on the work and Bentley, who already felt deceived about the nature of the work, stipulating a deduction of £100 should Cooper's next work also fail to sell.³¹ With the travel books, Cooper could also report no greater success. Despite *Switzerland's* gaining some currency as a guidebook and *Italy's* earning praise for its relative freedom from politics, the series was a critical failure, with *England* coming under particularly hostile fire for the gossipy, damning portrayals of "society" life it contained. His negotiating power rapidly declined, sparked by the heavy losses on *The Monikins*: from his American publishers he received \$1000 for both parts of *Switzerland*, \$750 for *France* and *England*, and only \$200 for *Italy*, the firm initially having "no inducement to take Italy as a speculation" considering the difficult times and the losses they had sustained on the previous volumes.³² Bentley was more forgiving, allowing Cooper £200 (roughly \$975-\$1025) for each of the two volumes on *Switzerland* as well as for *France* and *Italy*, and £300 (roughly \$1450-\$1500) for *England*, but he, too, was glad to hear of the end of the travel series. "I am glad to hear," he wrote on 13 May 1837, "that with 'Italy' you intend to close your Sketches of travel, inasmuch as though the consideration hitherto paid to you is very modest, the publication, as I have already mentioned, is unattended by profit."³³

Such statements have often led to the assumption that these publishers, who had once reaped healthy profits from their dealings with Cooper, were "indulgent" in keeping him, operating at a net loss out of respect for his earlier reputation and gratitude for the early

³⁰ Bentley to JFC, 28 March 1835: *Letters and Journals* 3:60.

³¹ David Kaser, *Messrs. Carey & Lea of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1957) 82; Bentley to JFC, 15 October 1835: *Letters and Journals* 3:172.

³² Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 13 September 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:290. Kaser suggests that Cooper received nothing for Italy, but Lea & Blanchard's cost books show \$200 to "Author" for "Italy." (Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania). Kaser makes many similar inexplicable errors and omissions, apparently having forgotten that Carey, Lea, & Blanchard was superseded by Lea & Blanchard upon Henry Carey's retirement in 1838.

³³ Bentley to JFC, 13 May 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:262.

rewards their partnership had brought. Although such a case could plausibly be argued for Bentley by the end of Cooper's career, such was hardly the case for Carey, Lea, & Blanchard. Scholars focusing on each new book that Cooper published have inadvertently created the impression of a linear progression of one-time literary performances, as if once a book were published it quickly disappeared from the scene.³⁴ They have tended to overlook the fact that he had considerable literary property in his old books, which were still popular with the public—perhaps even more so than some of his more recent ones. For these valuable properties Cooper often showed very little concern, not fully realizing even late in his life how profitable they could be. In 1827 he had struck a bargain with Carey & Lea for rights to five of his old books—*The Spy*, *The Pioneers*, *The Pilot*, *Lionel Lincoln*, and *The Last of the Mohicans*—wherein they could reprint as they saw fit for the remainder of the copyright period for the books. For this he had received \$2500, or \$500 for each book. In 1836 he renewed this agreement, granting Carey, Lea, & Blanchard rights to “re-print and publish” these books “until you shall receive a written notice – from me to the contrary –” an agreement that would last until August 1844 (shortly after his connection with the firm ended) for all except *Mohicans*, which was erased from the agreement in September 1841, “it having been included by mistake.”³⁵ Nothing indicates a payment to Cooper for these rights; perhaps in light of losses suffered on *The Monikins*, he had granted these rights to the firm as a concession, but it is difficult to be certain. Unlike most of their new publications, the reprints were not entered into the firm's cost books, so their true value to the company is still very much a mystery. Whatever the case, though, these copyrights could not have been attended with much loss to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard. New imprints appearing between 1826

³⁴ For instance, Thomas Lounsbury, *James Fenimore Cooper* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1883); James Grossman, *James Fenimore Cooper: A Biographical and Critical Study* (New York: Sloane, 1949); Donald Ringe, *James Fenimore Cooper* (Boston: Twayne, 1962, 1988); or Robert Emmet Long, *James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: Continuum, 1990). Though hardly scholarship in the strict sense, Susan Fenimore Cooper's *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper, with Notes by Susan Fenimore Cooper* (New York: W.A. Townsend, 1861) could also be included here. Undoubtedly these works are all of high value as criticism; it is simply that their interpretive focus, often on the works themselves, tends to obscure some of the professional realities of Cooper's career.

³⁵ JFC to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 18 July 1836, with amendment, 18 September 1841: *Letters and Journals* 3:229-30.

and 1838 were plentiful, as the table in Appendix A demonstrates (*See Appendix A*). Even *The Heidenmauer* was being issued in “A new edition” in 1835, only three years after Carey, Lea, & Blanchard had bemoaned its failure. Certainly the mere existence of these imprints does not always indicate a new printing: occasionally a new title page graced unsold copies of older editions. But many of the “new editions” issued between 1833 and 1836 did represent new impressions. Further highlighting the Carey firm’s profit potential on these reprints is the fact that despite Cooper’s own contract with Bentley to revise, correct, and provide new prefaces for many of his novels to be included in the “Bentley’s Standard Novels” series (with compensation of £50 a book), the American publishers opted not to buy rights to these revised editions but continued to reprint from their existing—and sometimes corrupt—stereotype plates. Indeed, until George Palmer Putnam’s 1850 publication of a new author’s revised edition, *The Last of the Mohicans* continued to be reprinted from its original 1826 plates.³⁶ Overall, the frequency of these reissues taken together suggests that whatever losses might have amounted with *The Monikins* and the travel books, the publishing relationship with Cooper still had a substantial potential for profit.

The lack of any reprints save *Last of the Mohicans* and *The Water-Witch* for 1834 is noteworthy, for it reflects one of the first of the many famines in the trade that would typify the 1830s. President Jackson’s withdrawal of deposits from the Bank of the United States in September 1833 had slowly caused repercussions in the economy and the book industry, with the folding of New York’s Collins & Hannay in February 1834 marking the first of many bankruptcies. Carey, Lea, and Blanchard were more financially robust than most firms, but they also had substantial credit extended to many of the bankrupt firms, including Collins & Hannay.³⁷ Unwilling to risk too much in such a market, the Carey firm halted most of their new publications: some seventy titles that had been announced were never published, as David Kaser notes.³⁸ Richard H. Gassan further points out that some sixty out

³⁶ Stringer & Townsend stretched the tired, nearly worn-out plates even further, reprinting some editions off them through the 1850s, and the firm’s successors used them even into the 1870s.

³⁷ Kaser, *Messrs. Carey & Lea*, 55-56.

³⁸ Kaser, *Messrs. Carey & Lea*, 56.

of 129 cost book entries for 1833-1834 show no binding costs, suggesting that they were left printed and unsold till business improved.³⁹ By 1835, more normal conditions returned, as the profusion of Cooper reprints reinforces. The timing of Cooper's "retirement" had saved him from some of these fluctuations, but the dismal mood in the book trade would not be shaken easily. Financial panics during the next several years, particularly that of 1837, kept the industry on edge, with money being difficult to come by and credit being a risky thing to extend. In such a climate, Cooper's non-fiction travels were easily outpaced by reprints of his older works. The travels, though printed in tiny editions of 1000 or 750 copies, never sold well enough to be reprinted. Carey's firm issued no new reprints of Cooper's novels in 1837 either. It is no wonder, then, that Cooper would report to Bentley in his proposal for his germinal "Templeton in 1837" that "Carey is at me constantly" for a novel, for fiction was one of the few things that continued to sell with some regularity.⁴⁰ Nothing else on his agenda was likely to be attended with substantial profit, save possibly his long-awaited *History of the Navy*, and that only in America.

With an apparent lack of clear plans after the *History of the Navy* (eventually to appear in 1839) and the other smaller projects on Cooper's agenda (*The American Democrat* and the revised edition of *Precaution*), one can hardly help but wonder how much of a "freak" his idea for a new work of fiction really was. Certainly his plan for the book itself was new, but a postscript of a letter to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard from 8 September 1837 gives an impression that a new novel project may have been forthcoming even if it had followed a different plan: "I am in a half negotiation with Bentley for a novel, and have sold him the Naval History. We differ as to subject, mine being a whim of my own, which has seized upon me suddenly, and he being a little [surly?] about the sea – By the way, what do you say to the Naval History?"⁴¹ The difference only "as to subject," rather than the yes or no question of

³⁹ Richard H. Gassan, "Carey & Lea, Printer and Publisher: Seasonal Variations in its Business Cycle, 1833-1836," *From Revolution to Reconstruction: An .HTML Project* (University of Groningen, Netherlands, 1994-2003). URL: http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/E/carey_lea/carey01.htm.

⁴⁰ JFC to Bentley, 6 July 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:269.

⁴¹ JFC to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 8 September 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:289.

whether to write a novel or not, seems to suggest an inevitable return—Cooper with his mind made up, but unsure of how to proceed, given his previous bridge-burning and the “disgust” he needed to overcome.⁴² Possibly, of course, Cooper may have had reason to talk up the proceedings to raise Carey’s interest, since at that time their relations had sunk to a low point due to the failure of the travel series, and Bentley’s support for a new work would carry great weight in swaying his American publishers. Ultimately, the deals Cooper struck showed Bentley to be the more impressed: he agreed to £500, nearly the old rate for Cooper’s novels, while the Philadelphia firm made its original bargain for the book at \$1550 for 3250 copies, with arrangements for further editions if necessary, a deal that failed to meet Cooper’s expectations, as he told his wife: “I have made an arrangement with Carey, for the New-Book. It is not what I hoped for, though, in the end, it may do better.”⁴³ What followed from these agreements was a work that soon evolved to something quite unlike what his publishers—and even perhaps Cooper himself—had expected, stretching the ordinary format of the novel so much that it became two books, *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*. The constraints of the typical novel were becoming increasingly inadequate for Cooper’s new purposes as a novelist.

That Cooper should return to fiction with social observation and criticism in mind is hardly surprising from a thematic point of view, given the course of his career earlier in the 1830s, yet it is remarkable considering the financial and critical rebukes his social observations had earned him. His stated plan for the book as expressed in the preface to *Homeward Bound* (written after it was clear that one book could not handle the job) suggests a good deal of continuity with the travel literature that immediately preceded it:

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

⁴² JFC to Bentley, 6 July 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:269.

⁴³ Bentley to JFC, 5 August 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:270; Cost Books, Lea & Blanchard, 30 July 1838 (Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania); JFC to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 25 August 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:335; JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 7 December 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:303.

with greater force, than to those who had never lived beyond the influence of the things portrayed. (1:iii)⁴⁴

With his attention focused this time toward his own country, getting his audience to read and buy such a book naturally presented a challenge. Americans had bought European books critical of American institutions and manners, such as Fanny Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* out of curiosity about what opinions someone from the "mother country" had about her colonial cousins, and Cooper had earlier tried his own pseudo-travel narrative (*Notions of the Americans*) as well as direct address—neither with much success. His European trilogy had advocated American principles by extension but had done so through romantic story lines and settings. The question remained unanswered as to whether or not Americans would buy the new type of book he was writing, one that would contain an "international" theme and portray American society as it existed in the present. How could Cooper structure such a story to make it interesting?

The development of the tale shows that Cooper himself did not have all the answers even as he began work on the tale. A very linear writer who usually worked with only a minimum of outlines or notes for his stories, he had occasionally gotten himself into binds earlier in his career while writing new types of novels then without existing parallels. With both *The Spy* and *The Pilot*, he had nearly abandoned the books in despair of ever finishing them before finally working out a way to proceed. In instances like these the now-established customs and expectations of the novel format—two volumes in America, three in England—became a burden on the spirit of experimentation Cooper so often showed. In order to assure his publisher that *The Spy* would not extend to an excessive length, for instance, he had written and set in print the final chapter before writing many of the preceding ones. Bentley's own stipulation that *The Monikins* be a work of the "usual number of volumes" and "of a nature to be considered as one of your works of fiction"⁴⁵ essentially ruined Cooper's plan for a short, succinct satire, as his daughter Susan Fenimore Cooper recalls:

⁴⁴ Citations are from the first edition, *Homeward Bound; or, The Chase. A Tale of the Sea*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea and Blanchard, 1838) 1:iii.

⁴⁵ Bentley to JFC, 28 March 1835: *Letters and Journals* 3:60.

But, as a complete work, the book was scarcely successful; it was too long, the vein of irony was often too complicated, while the blending of the humorous story of Sir John and his lady-love, introduced to give the volumes something of the character of a regular novel, was clearly an error. . . . “The Monikins” is one of those books which prove that publishers may sometimes mistake their own interests. It would have been the author’s wish to write a single volume, exclusively filled with his Monikin people. . . ; something approaching to the regular novel in size and plot was required of him, in order to attract, if possible, the general reader. The attempt to combine both objects proved, as might have been foreseen, an error.⁴⁶

The problem with the *Home* novels stems, in part, not from any particular stipulations that his publishers had imposed upon him in advance but, rather, from false expectations he had created in selling his proposal for the book and unseen difficulties in adapting his new approach to the ordinary limits of the novel as he wrote his story.

For his main characters, Cooper reached back to his second novel, *The Pioneers*, which had already been the genesis of three of his most famous books in bringing before the world Natty Bumppo, the old hunter. But for the *Home* novel, Cooper explored an alternative sequel. Much as *The Pioneers* had presented a slice of frontier life in Templeton (a fictionalized version of Cooperstown), rather than a tale of adventure as Cooper had subsequently developed in *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Prairie*, the new *Home* novel would bring Templeton to the present day in an attempt to show how America and Americans had changed in the four decades that intervened between the settings of the two tales. For his main cast, then, he created descendants of the nominal “hero” of *The Pioneers*, Oliver Effingham (a.k.a. Oliver Edwards), who had married Judge Marmaduke Temple’s daughter Elizabeth at the close of that novel: Edward Effingham, a graying widower of fifty; his daughter Eve, a young woman of eighteen, and his cousin John, who shares Edward’s birthday, age, and appearance but not his mild temperament. These characters would be brought back to Templeton after a stay of fourteen years in Europe, evoking implicit comparisons with the well-known frontier setting of *The Pioneers*.

Bentley, however, had predicated his offer for the tale on the assumption that it would contain some adventure: should the novel be “a tale of the sea, or of the back-woods,

⁴⁶ Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper, with Notes by Susan Fenimore Cooper* (New York: W.A. Townsend, 1861) 323.

I would venture, notwithstanding the disastrous nature of the times, to offer you (supposing the work to be of the usual extent) the sum of Five Hundred Pounds for the copyright in England.”⁴⁷ Templeton in 1837 was hardly the backwoods, and given Cooper’s cast of genteel protagonists the option of dragging them through the forests was essentially out of the question. America in 1837 had little of the wild character of the frontier in its eastern settlements. The sea, however, was still full of wildness and adventure, and Cooper, as the “father” of the sea novel, was perhaps even more famous in his own time for his nautical romances than for his forest ones. Thus, instead of beginning his tale on American soil, Cooper begins his tale as the Effinghams and the rest of the cast are about to embark upon their voyage home to America, boarding the American packet ship *Montauk*, skippered by one Captain Truck. Cooper’s decision to begin his novel this way seems calculated to meet Bentley’s expectations, and perhaps also to raise the interest of readers and to draw them into the story before dropping the full weight of his thesis upon them (a plan he would continue to follow in his Littlepage Trilogy of novels in 1845-46, culminating in the didactic *The Redskins*).⁴⁸

Certainly his plan to include both ship and shore elements had a great deal of potential, as his 1844 double-novel *Afloat and Ashore* (in many ways a revisiting of the “American gentleman” themes of the *Home* novels) would demonstrate more artfully. Setting part of the story aboard ship would allow Cooper to display in the two Effingham men and in Paul Blunt that combination of American values, European grace, and nautical acumen which, in his view, constituted the ingredients for the ideal gentleman. Edward Effingham’s exterior denotes equal ease on ship or land, so much so that “several of the seamen swore he was a man-of-war’s man in disguise” (1:8). The nautical knowledge of Eve’s eventual suitor, Paul Blunt/Powis, earns him the respect of Captain Truck (1:103) and his heroics in the upcoming action would show better than any parlor scene could that he is a man of action and suited to Eve’s hand. The device of a ship also would bring together in close proximity

⁴⁷ Bentley to JFC, 5 August 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:269-70.

⁴⁸ One wonders if this plan for the book is a little too much like the “advantage obtained under false pretences” for which he would criticize Sir Walter Scott in the review of Lockhart’s *Memoirs* (*Knickerbocker* 12 [October 1838]: 351).

classes of society normally not likely to associate to any great degree. *Homeward Bound* is perhaps the first major novel to treat the ship as a microcosm of society, a theme later convincingly developed by Melville. Here Cooper brings together with the Effinghams characters of good breeding, such as the mysterious Mr. Sharp (later revealed to be Sir George Templemore, an Englishman, using a pseudonym upon finding out that an imposter is on board) and Mr. Blunt (Paul Powis, who turns out to be of American extraction), as well as lower-class characters such as the alcoholic Mr. Monday, the imposter Sir George Templemore, the Yankee reporter Steadfast Dodge, and others. Melville later would explore in *Moby Dick* the more “cosmic” sense of the microcosm, but here Cooper’s interests are nowhere as lofty. It is, indeed, “people-watching” that dominates Cooper’s concern in both parts of the *Home* tales. Conveniently, the boarding of the ship gives Cooper an opportunity to introduce the other characters of the book through an almost Chaucerian procession, with the Effinghams, from their cabin, commenting upon each group as it boards.

The most important of these characters to Cooper’s satirical aims is Steadfast Dodge, a newspaper journalist from New England, editor of the “Active Inquirer,” and extreme democrat. In him Cooper blends two of his dearest prejudices, that against newspapermen and that against New Englanders, to create a caricature of the “press-ocracy” (1:196, 214) that Cooper felt was attempting to dictate in America. The name Steadfast Dodge itself conveys the lack of consistency that Cooper saw from this class, whose only real constant, he felt, was certainty of avoiding the truth in the drive for personal and partisan gain. Dodge’s chief aim is popularity; desiring to be a “man of the people” (1:88), he has no sense of individuality in terms of having distinctive opinions of his own. Yet his quest for popularity gives him an ambition (or, as Eve more aptly notes, “a pretension that mistakes itself for ambition,” 1:194) that will stop at nothing, as long as his own neck is not on the line. He is nosy: Cooper compares him on several occasions to the Inquisition (1:78, 170), and he snoops in the staterooms to read the Effinghams’ letters (1:211). The public, after all, has a right to know. Full of provincial ignorance and prejudices, he attempts to portray his own biases as public sentiment, even going so far as to suggest to Captain Truck that the course he has chosen for the ship is “monstrous unpopular” (1:86). To such an ultra-democrat, polls and committees are his addiction. At one point he is polling the passengers on their preferences of Van Buren versus Harrison (1:79); at others, he proposes putting

Truck's decisions to a committee vote. Despite his leveling devotion to democracy, however, he butters up people of influence, such as the imposter Sir George Templemore (who is really no nobleman at all), and blindly admires English ways. He dislikes the Effinghams, Mr. Sharp (the real Sir George Templemore), and Mr. Blunt (Paul Powis), however, because they do not condescend to participate in his schemes. They are, to Dodge, too "purse-proud and grand" (1:86) because they value their privacy, live with refined habits, fail to see that "one man is as good as another" (1:95), and do not condescend to participate in his schemes. The action of the story shows Dodge to be a coward as well; apart from his bravery in attacking political minorities, at "the instant party-drill ceased to be of value, Steadfast's valour oozed out of his composition" (1:89).

Dodge is often thwarted in his feckless scheming by the unflappable Captain Truck, himself a New England man but one who knows his craft and knows his position in society. Confident in his command, and in his knowledge of international maritime law as set forth by "Vattel,"⁴⁹ Truck decides to flee a British revenue cutter seeking to board the *Montauk* as she departs Portsmouth to search for an English defaulter, on the grounds that such a search would be a belligerent act. From this Cooper builds the adventure of the story. Cooper, up to this point in his career, had never set a novel so near the present day, and the challenges of finding suitable motivations for adventure, particularly in a time of peace, were considerable to him. Indeed, most of Cooper's other tales with a contemporary setting (most notably *The Redskins* and *The Ways of the Hour*) show weaker plots, longer digressions, and more chattiness among the characters; the exception, *Jack Tier*, leaves the dubious implication that the only contemporary adventure to be had lay in the hands of those who were up to no good. Cooper's handling of the story starts out advantageously: plot and dialogue blend in balanced proportions. But with the pace established, he could not so easily get his ship and characters across the ocean to America. Soon after Truck evades the British cutter and gets fairly out to sea, the British cruiser, the *Foam*, is spotted in the distance giving chase to the *Montauk*. Unable to discern the motive for the chase (they would hardly bother for the sake of a defaulter), Truck again decides to run. The *Foam*, however, is not so easily

⁴⁹ Emerich de Vattel (1714-67), author of *Droit des gens*, 1758 (tr. *Law of Nations*, 1760), a standard work on international law.

outrun, and depending upon conditions, one ship has only slight advantage over the other. Making the best of his packet-ship's capabilities, Truck changes course, gets caught in the gale, and loses his pursuer—and the masts of his ship. By now they are off the western coast of Africa, where, after meeting an American ship that agrees to take most of the *Montauk's* steerage passengers, Truck decides to put ashore near a Danish wreck whose masts are intact to refit his ship. Here, perhaps inspired by Captain James Riley's *Sufferings in Africa* (a best-seller reprinted several times after appearing in 1817), Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* (Tyler's only novel, for which Cooper expressed his admiration), or his own research on the Barbary Wars of 1801-05 for his *History of the Navy*, Cooper brings his characters into contact with a hostile party of Arabs. By this time, the story, like the *Montauk* itself, has gone off course. The "sea" half of the work had grown so long that Cooper could no longer do justice to the "shore" parts of it within the usual physical constraints of the novel.

Cooper's "official" explanation of the situation appears in his preface to *Homeward Bound*, most likely written after that novel was completed:

By the original plan, the work was to open at the threshold of the country, or with the arrival of the travelers at Sandy Hook, from which point the tale was to have been carried regularly forward to its conclusion. But a consultation with others has left little more of this plan than the hatter's friends left of the sign [referring to "Franklin's well-known apologue of the hatter and his sign"]. 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. Owing to this diversion from the author's design—a design that lay at the bottom of all his projects—a necessity has been created of running the tale through two separate works, or of making a hurried and insufficient conclusion. The former scheme has, consequently, been adopted.

It is hoped that the interest of the narrative will not be essentially diminished by this arrangement. (1:iii)

Likewise in the preface to *Home as Found* he pleads, "We are fully aware of the disadvantage of dividing the interest of a tale in this manner; but in the present instance, the separation has been produced by circumstances over which the writer had very little control" (1:iii)⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Citations from *Home as Found* are from the first edition, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1838) 1:iii.

These explanations may or may not be partial or wholesale falsehoods, but they do seem to run counter to what can be established as facts about the composition of the book.

Cooper's seminal notion of "Templeton in 1837" as he first proposed it to Bentley may very well have been to start the story "at the threshold of the country," but his first revelations about the tale to someone outside his family, expressed in a letter to his best friend Captain William Branford Shubrick on 2 October 1837, suggest that no such plan was followed once he commenced writing but, rather, that an equal division between sea and land settings was intended:

Now for a secret. The state of things in this country has put another novel into my head. My plan is laid, and the book is already one sixth written. I think it will be done in November – 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. As yet I have mentioned the name to no one but my wife and yourself. You may tell it to yours, who will tell it to Mary, who will tell it to sixteen more, and I shall save something in advertisements. If it stop with Mary [Shubrick's daughter], however, I shall not complain.⁵¹

The language there—"My plan is laid"; "One volume on board a London Packet, another at *Templeton*"; "half sea half shore"—render his later claim shaky. Besides Cooper's barely concealed glee about the "secret" nature of his communication, the letter reveals a vague bravado about how this "half sea half shore" division would work out on paper.

Cooper's preface also gives the impression in his preface that "others" are responsible for the hijacking of the narrative, yet apart from Bentley's interest in having Cooper write another sea story, no surviving documents give any indication that such was the case. As it was, Cooper kept having to break the news to Bentley about the nautical elements taking over the work. By the time he sent the first third of the book to Bentley (English novels typically being published in three volumes versus two in America) on 17 October, the book had already become two-thirds nautical:

Dear Sir,

By the packet of the 24th I send to your address, care of Roskell, Ogden & co Liverpool, the manuscript of vol. I. of

⁵¹ JFC to William Branford Shubrick, 2 October 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:294.

Homeward Bound
or
Afloat and Ashore,
by the

Author of the *Pilot* and the *Pioneers*

...Two Volumes of Homeward Bound will be at sea, the third at the Templeton of the Pioneers, at the present day. The volume you will receive is merely introductory, but the next, I think will be a little exciting.⁵²

Likewise he reported to Shubrick in an update of 8 November that

Homeward Bound is half done, and one volume has gone to England. It will be a little *rum* in the last vol -- scene at Templeton: the two first volumes are nautical and rather interesting though quite in a new way. Not in the least like either of the others, or as little so as comports with the sea I think. The girls [his daughters], who have copied it for me, rather like it.⁵³

By now, however, with two-thirds of the novel at sea, there was no way to do justice in the remaining third to his plans ashore. In terms of the dramatic unity of the story, it would hardly do to tack on a much more sedate story on land after his sea adventure as a sort of drawn-out *denouement* to the tale; better to save the “shore” portion for another work. He knew from experience that Bentley preferred works of the standard British three-volume size (equivalent to the American two-volume), which had become a fixture of lending libraries in England, so adding a fourth volume was not an option that Cooper entertained, and he did not propose the idea to Bentley, seeing as how the work was to be “of the usual extent.” The length and unnecessary plot complexities of the remainder of the Arab siege suggest that Cooper was drawing it out to fill the requisite number of pages. A month later, as he sent Bentley the second volume, he reported how his plans had undergone further change as the nautical adventure took over the work, nevertheless painting a rosy picture of things, and keeping mum about his plans for the Templeton part of the story:

When I wrote you before, I thought this book would be part sea and part shore — In advancing I find it necessary to make it nearly all sea, so that I wish you to omit in the title “Afloat and Ashore,” and merely preserve

⁵² JFC to Bentley, 17 October 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:298.

⁵³ JFC to Shubrick, 8 November 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:299-300.

“Homeward Bound.” We are just coming to the strong scenes, which I hope will satisfy you --”⁵⁴

Bentley had long been expressing interest in a nautical work from Cooper’s pen, and Cooper’s letter maintained an impression that the work had become just that. But by 21 January 1838, he was forced to show his plan for the continuation of the story at Templeton, a plan which would involve an entire additional book:

You will find that contrary to my original intentions, <that> this book is all sea. I found it impossible to do my plot justice in the narrow limits I had left myself and it is necessary to continue the tale in another work to be put to press immediately. The Preface will explain the plan -- I hope this division of the subject will not essentially affect the sale of *Homeward Bound*, as the adventures of the ship terminate in it, and I think when the continuation, which I shall call, “At Home,” or by some such name, appears the two works will sustain each other. There is a pretty good plot, and an excellent opportunity to develop it in the continuation -- If, however, it should be found that the separation of the subject, is likely to affect the sale of “*Homeward Bound*” I will make a deduction on the price of the continuation. I shall assume that you will take the latter, and send you a volume, in about a month. My own opinion is that the continuation will be better liked in England than in America, as I do not spare the follies and peculiarities of this country -- You have had many caricatures of our society, and my aim is to give a true picture, *conte qui conte*.

Bentley, faced with the alternatives of publishing only half a tale or accepting Cooper’s presumptuous “offer,” had little choice but to contract for the continuation, which would be called *Home as Found* in the United States, renamed *Eve Effingham; or Home* by Bentley for England. His reply indicated his “regret” that *Homeward Bound* would not be completed in one work, requiring a “continuation”; his experience with sequels showing that they did not sell as well as the first part, usually justifying a smaller printing and a deduction in payment. “In this respect,” he continued, “you have been so considerate as to anticipate me by being prepared to make a deduction in the price of the continuation,” namely, £100 from the price he had received for *Homeward Bound*. In an effort to give Cooper the benefit of the doubt “should the Work be more successful than sequels generally are,” Bentley offered to print

⁵⁴ JFC to Bentley, 6 December 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:302. Cooper would recycle his discarded subtitle, of course, six years later for his main title of his four-volume story of Miles Wallingford, *Afloat and Ashore*.

the same size edition as for *Homeward Bound* and pay Cooper the £100 difference "should the impression go off."⁵⁵

Cooper worried, however, that Carey, Lea, & Blanchard might not take the sequel at all, telling his wife in a letter of 25 May 1838 that "I think my connection with Carey draws near a close. I do not expect that he will publish either *Home-As-Found*, or the *Naval History*."⁵⁶ It was difficult enough to get them to take *Homeward Bound* considering their unhappiness over the travel series, and with all that had gone wrong with Cooper's planning things did not look good for the *Home as Found*. Carey, Lea, and Blanchard also had to endure frustrating delays in publication for *Homeward Bound* as well as on *Italy*. They had planned to save time and produce a more accurate edition by printing from Bentley's sheets rather than from the manuscript, yet the sheets failed to show up at the expected time. "This delay we fear will make sad work,"⁵⁷ the firm wrote to Cooper on 29 March, and the first set of sheets did not arrive until 22 May, over a week after Bentley had already published. Finally publishing their edition of *Homeward Bound* on 4 August 1838, some three months after Bentley's, the Philadelphia publishers did not anticipate a large sale, especially knowing how much change the plan for the work had undergone. Consequently, they seem to have settled no bargain for *Home as Found*. Cooper had reported on 13 April that "'Home as Found' is about half ready, and I must soon know whether you print it or not," but no offers were forthcoming over the course of the next three months, leaving Cooper in limbo.⁵⁸ But on 10 August 1838, a mere six days after *Homeward Bound* was published, their position had changed:

It is now nearly two weeks since "*Homeward Bound*" has been issued & there is a reasonable prospect of the edition going off. Under this expectation we are now ready, if you have not disposed of the continuation, to take it on the same terms. Viz, of course to print from the London

⁵⁵ Richard Bentley to JFC, 22 February 1838: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵⁶ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 25 May 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:326.

⁵⁷ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 29 March 1838: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵⁸ JFC to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 13 April 1838: *Letters and Journals* 6:326.

edition, which can be ordered[?] out by return of the Great Western sailing on the 16th. The difference of cost in printing from that on the M.S. is material.⁵⁹

Cooper's original reply of 14 August is unlocated, but probably contained inquiries about the fate of *Homeward Bound* and the payment of some notes due him. Following up on their letter of a week earlier, with more urgency, they proposed terms in hopes of striking a quick bargain:

Dear Sir,

We have your letter of 14th in & are very glad to be able to inform you that we have only about 250 copies of "Homeward Bound" on hand & from the present state of orders we are satisfied that more will sell. It would not, however, answer us to engage the same number of copies as before & a less number would not admit of the same pay per copy & to sustain the composition. We would therefore suggest what you may refuse, but that which we are satisfied would prove most to your interest, that is to permit us to stereotype "Homeward Bound" at once & if done instantly we will take 2000 copies & pay you one thousand dollars for them, from which will be deducted the Bill for stereotyping. The plates of course to be yours. We accept your offer for "Home as Found" but do not send you our notes believing that it is your interest to stereotype this work also. If you agree with us in this idea we will print 4000 copies from the plates & pay you two thousand dollars less the cost of stereotyping. The plates & copyright of course yours.

If you think as favorably of this as we do it need not interfere with these notes which you now demand as they can be sent at once. These are our suggestions & we know them to be sound, but fear that you will not agree with us. It is for you to choose. But, bear in mind that you can then command the market to its full extent & the result may be to place more in your pocket than an absolute sale of the copy right.

As we are now to publish the new book it must be a quick operation & it would perhaps be best to print from the M.S. as it ought to appear without much delay. Pray send it at once & we will decide in regard to this.⁶⁰

The proposed stereotyping of both works demonstrated the publishers' anticipation of healthy sales for the works beyond the editions printed—something that had not been in

⁵⁹ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 10 August 1838: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁶⁰ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 18 August 1838: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

evidence for the initial agreement of *Homeward Bound* (nor, apparently, for any of the European travel series). Cooper, hoping to make his income from the works as predictable as possible, haggled with Carey's firm over the terms of the agreement. He objected to the provision that he absorb the stereotyping expenses (which could sometimes run to greater costs than expected, particularly if corrections needed to be made), and suggested slightly different terms for the use of the copyright. With these details ironed out, Carey, Lea, & Blanchard laid out the final terms in a letter of 1 September, to which Cooper acquiesced in his own letter on the same day, agreeing to allow Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to stereotype both works at their expense and to print the 2000 more *Homeward Bound* and 4000 *Home as Found*. For these Cooper would receive \$800 and \$1800, respectively, paid in notes as was their custom. An allowance to print further copies within the next two years was also agreed upon, the publishers originally stating a payment of \$500 for every 1000 copies above the stipulated printings, but amending their proposal in a postscript, probably at Cooper's insistence, to a payment per copy of fifty cents—a wise move on Cooper's part to avoid loopholes whereby the publishers might issue a lower number of copies.⁶¹ Cooper's bargaining to have the stereotyping done at the publishers' expense proved wise: by sacrificing \$200 on his sale price for each book he was able to avoid paying stereotype bills of \$430.56 and \$480.54, respectively, out of his own pocket.⁶²

Lea & Blanchard's (Henry Carey's retirement was announced on 1 October 1838) new urgency to get the sequel out can be seen in their publishing the American edition of the work nearly two weeks before Bentley issued his in England (Lea & Blanchard on 15 November, Bentley on 28 November). What the publishers ended up with in *Home as Found*, however, was a vastly different book from *Homeward Bound*. Most of the characters remain, with a few new players thrown in—most notably Aristabulus Bragg, a lawyer born in western

⁶¹ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 1 September 1838: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; JFC to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1 September 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:336.

⁶² Lea & Blanchard Cost Books, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The price Cooper received for these books was no longer substantially higher than what other authors received. John Pendleton Kennedy (famed for his *Horseshoe Robinson*), for instance, received \$1850 for 4000 copies of *Rob of the Bowl* around this time, the cost books show.

Massachusetts who, with his speculating, his contempt of tradition, and his crude manners, embodies the bragging “go-a-head-ism” (1:25) of Americans, as his name suggests. Brought from the microcosm of the ship into the larger world, characters are no longer thrown together by chance and necessity. Yet somehow one finds Dodge turning up at the Effingham home in Templeton—with little explanation of why they keep putting up with him.⁶³ With the adventure at sea over, no subsequent plot emerges with sufficient strength to provide “interest” to the narrative; instead, the work is more episodic, like *The Pioneers*. Like that book, the nominal plot concerns a mystery of identity, here that of Paul Blunt, now Paul Powis, who at the end of *Homeward Bound* was removed from the *Montauk* by Captain Ducie of the *Foam*—the same British cruiser that had pursued them on the other side of the Atlantic. Eventually it is revealed that Paul Powis is really Paul Effingham, John’s son from a secret marriage that even Edward Effingham did not know about. By the end of the story, too, Paul has successfully courted Eve. Little else in the way of plot guides the work, with the main lines of the story being fictionalized versions of some of Cooper’s own experiences upon returning to America. The first seven chapters take place in New York City, with visits to old friends, society galas, and the stock exchange. Then comes a trip up the Hudson River and west to Templeton, where Edward Effingham’s house, originally built for Marmaduke Temple in *The Pioneers*, has been refurbished in the gothic style under his cousin’s supervision, albeit not with complete success (Cooper had his own house remodeled with assistance from Samuel Morse, also with mixed results, most notably a castellated roof that accumulated ice in winter). The Effinghams find in New York that they are labeled as “Hajjis” on account of their “pilgrimage” to Paris, and in Templeton that their property rights matter but little to the people of the town, many of whom are migratory New Englanders who are ultimately just passing through on their way west.

In one telling incident, the Effinghams find that townspeople have trespassed on and vandalized a family picnic ground, Fishing Point, causing Edward Effingham to post a notice in the local newspaper, which prompts an outcry among the so-called leaders of the town

⁶³ The reviewer for the *Southern Literary Messenger* notes along the same lines that “The latter person [Dodge] seems gifted with ubiquity” and cannot understand how Dodge and Bragg, despite their repulsiveness, are still tolerated—even invited—by Mr. Effingham into the company of his family.

who claim that the public owns the spot. An article by Dodge spreads word of the battle throughout the region, and even the proof of title the Effinghams can produce does little to lessen the hysteria of their opponents. This episode is but a thinly disguised version of Cooper's experience with a plot of family land at Three Mile Point on Lake Otsego. When Cooper gave notice that the public was no longer to trespass on Three Mile Point, newspaper editors in the region, and eventually Thurlow Weed in Albany, denounced him, triggering the first wave of Cooper's numerous lawsuits for libel.⁶⁴

Another noteworthy chapter in the book seems much less connected to actual events but demonstrates Cooper's attitude toward the *litterati* and trends in literature at the time. Before leaving for Europe, Cooper was at the center of New York literary life, as a frequent socialite at Wiley's bookstore and as the leading member of the "Bread and Cheese" club. But upon his return to America he avoided most literary connections. Perhaps the dominance of Whigs in the New York literary circle had something to do with it, but there was also the fact that he had heard few of his fellow authors standing up for him while he attempted to defend America overseas. Whatever his motivations, Cooper turns a satirical eye to the literary scene with the suggestion that few real literary talents exist in America, at least in what passes for the literate circles. In chapter six of the novel, Cooper takes his characters to a literary *soirée* of one Mrs. Legend, "a lady of what was called a literary turn" (1:92) who fancies herself the lynchpin of New York literate society. At a prior gala elsewhere, a naïve young woman had assumed that Captain Truck was an Anglican clergyman, so that by the time Mrs. Legend's ball comes around gossip has further inflated Truck's reputation to make him a prominent English writer, the "Hon. And Rev. Mr. Truck, a gentleman traveling in our country, from whose liberality and just views, an account of our society was to be expected that should, at last, do justice to our national character" (1:93). Consequently, every literary aspirant of modest talent turns out for this "rally of literature" to meet the supposed Englishman. Cooper's catalogue of them leaves few contemporary genres untouched:

⁶⁴ See Ethel Outland, *The "Effingham" Libels on Cooper: A Documentary History of the Libel Suits of James Fenimore Cooper; Centering Around the Three Mile Point Controversy and the Novel HOME AS FOUND, 1837-1845* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1929).

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 raisonné*, 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's *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 Hebdomad," "The Night Cap," "The Chrysalis," "The Real Maggot," and "The Seek no Further"; as also, "Junius," "Junius Brutus," "Lucius Junius Brutus," "Captain Kant,"⁶⁵ "Florio,"⁶⁶ the 'Author of "The History of Billy Linkum Tweedle', the celebrated Pottawattamie 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. (1:94-95)

The Effinghams, however, have heard of none of these writers in this inbred crowd, even though "most of them had been so laboriously employed in puffing each other into celebrity, for many weary years" (1:99). Among such a crowd, Truck becomes the center of fawning adulation. They sigh in longing over his supposed Englishness, and debate whether his head is "Byronic" or really more "Shakespearian," with "a little of Milton about the forehead" (1:98). None of them can actually name anything he may have written. Truck

⁶⁵ Perhaps meant to signify Charles King of the *New-York American*. "He was never known to publish a falsehood, and of his foreign correspondence, in particular, he is so exceedingly careful, that he assures me he has every word of it written under his own eye," says Mrs. Legend (86). John Effingham says he has a "newspaper mind, as he reduces everything in nature or art to news" (87).

⁶⁶ Perhaps "Cassio": he worships the English or, rather, what he thinks to be English. When John Effingham is asked if he knows Florio, he replies, "If I do, it must indeed be by accident" (87).

finds himself in a “category”—his term for a hot spot—as he is badgered by the crowd for his insights, and as soon as he can, he escapes to a corner of the room where three authors of true talent, Mr. Pindar, Mr. Pith, and Mr. Gray, are assembled. These modest and insightful men quickly discern the mistaken identity, and they aid the frazzled captain in procuring a light for his cigar. Attracted by the scent, the crowd soon besieges Truck again, admiring his unusual manners. By now Truck is “fairly badgered into impudence,” and he spouts off noncommittal or nonsensical answers to equally nonsensical questions with as much certitude as if he were issuing an order aboard ship:

“Do you think, Mr. Truck,” asked D.O.V.E., that the profane songs of Little have more pathos than the sacred songs of Moore; or that the sacred songs of Moore have more sentiment than the profane songs of Little?”

“A good deal of both, marm, and something to spare. I think there is little in one, and more in another.” (1:107-08)

“Is Gatty (Goethe) really dead?” inquired Longinus, “or is it the account we have had to that effect, merely the physical apotheosis of his mighty soul?”

“Dead, marm—stone dead—dead as a door-nail,” returned the captain, who saw a relief in killing as many as possible. (1:110)

Truck’s answers, of course, are taken as gospel by his admirers, until the crowd suddenly thins out. Steadfast Dodge, envious of the attention Truck was receiving, had “let the cat out of the bag” (1:111). Cooper’s satiric take on the gullible New York literary circle ends with a baiting comment on the fictional nature of the whole thing: “As for the literary *soirée*, the most profound silence has been maintained concerning it, neither of the wits there assembled having seen fit to celebrate it in rhyme, and Florio having actually torn up an impromptu for the occasion, that he had been all the previous day writing” (1:112).

With such satire as this, Cooper could anticipate that the book would not be a success with the critics. On the day the novel was issued, Cooper cherished no great expectations: “Home As Found is published, and will not take, of course, though no one has yet read it,” he wrote to his wife.⁶⁷ The reviews would justify his prediction.

⁶⁷ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 15 November 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:349.

A new novel by Cooper after so many years' absence was significant news, and *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* were widely reviewed. Cooper's enemies naturally used the occasion of the books' appearance to renew their attacks, but even these reviews are not without insight into the literary character of the book and the critical acumen of the period. Almost unanimously, critics expressed distaste for Cooper's introduction of social commentary in a work of fiction. Yet reviews of *Homeward Bound* also show some reviewers eager to accept Cooper back on his old terms. Cooper, of course, was working under new ones, and *Home as Found* quickly erased whatever positive sentiments the critics had earlier expressed.

The serious, rather than politically motivated, reviews of *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* confirm that the two-part structure of the story caused many readers initially to underestimate the extent of Cooper's social purposes for the tale. Reviews of *Homeward Bound* are often marked with gratitude for Cooper's return to fiction and admiration for his talent for the sea tale. Substantial portions of the reviewing class expressed themselves ready to forgive Cooper his "sins" of the past years on account of his still considerable powers as a storyteller. Generally disliking the social criticisms that permeate the work, many critics nevertheless tolerated these as remnants of Cooper's unpleasant phase, as if they were only digressionary distractions from the story rather than central to Cooper's theme. The reviewer for *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* welcomes Cooper with the "advice of a well wisher" to "*never leave the ship, unless you wish a ramble in the woods of your native land--you have done yourself no credit by your recent wanderings in foreign parts,*" continuing with praise for another novel from his pen:

We are truly rejoiced once more to see the author of the *Pilot* on his old cruising ground. As some atonement for the jaundiced sermonisings lately inflicted upon the faithful public, he has given us another "Tale of the Sea"--a story replete with wholesome excitement, and abounding with those minute and vivid descriptions which have gained Mr. Cooper a name pre-eminent in the ranks of imaginative writers.

Whereas Cooper's nonfiction works are so filled with prejudice as to be scarcely believable, Cooper's fictions are so life-like as to "impart the charm of actual truth." The reviewer for *Burton's* goes so far as to recommend *Homeward Bound* as "one of the very best books of the

day.”⁶⁸ Another reviewer in the *Journal of Belles Lettres* (probably Fitzgerald Tasistro) opines that although *Homeward Bound* “partakes largely of his former errors and faults as well as beauties,” many readers “must have pardoned Mr. Cooper his recent sins of publishing, for the pleasure they have received from his thrilling scenes and incidents in ‘Homeward Bound.’” For the reviewer’s part, “We always pardon a man recently returned from abroad if he is a little savage on manners and things in general,” although there are some doubts as to whether Cooper will let up, as he seems to have a “*heart scald* of some kind.” Nevertheless, Cooper is “again so happy in his sea scenes that the reader is continually tempted to forgive him, and to exclaim that he is ‘as good as ever.’” The reviewer’s final assessment is that “with all its faults ‘Homeward Bound’ is not a bad sea novel; the conclusion we shall be as ready to devour as we have been eager to hurry through the commencement. It will be a real kindness not to delay the publication of whatever is to follow.”⁶⁹

The *Southern Literary Messenger* contains two reviews, the first welcoming “the wanderer back once more to the sea—the open, the grand, and stirring sea.” Cooper, to the reviewer, is “the very embodiment of mental fortitude, and he is only at home when he is in the voiceless solitudes of the lands or seas.”⁷⁰ The other review, prefaced by a long essay on the proper style to be used in a novel, also commends Cooper’s return to fiction, expressing relief that he has returned to his proper sphere: “When we first heard that ‘Homeward Bound—A Tale of the Sea,’ was in press, we hailed with delight the novelist’s return to his own good ship and ancient cruising ground; for, with many others, we had lamented his late rover life, and thought that he was gaining neither honor nor gold thereby.” The reviewer also expresses “impatience” for the sequel.⁷¹ Even the anti-Cooper *New-York American* pleads for more of the kind of writing Cooper had formerly produced:

⁶⁸ *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* 3 (September 1838): 216.

⁶⁹ Review of *Homeward Bound*, *The Journal of Belles Lettres* 12.7 (14 August 1838): n.p.

⁷⁰ “Homeward Bound—Or the Chase; A Tale of the Sea.” [Review], *Southern Literary Messenger* 4 (November 1838): 724.

⁷¹ “Another Review of ‘Homeward Bound.’” *Southern Literary Messenger* 4 (November 1838): 728.

We certainly concur in the cry of 'more ship,' for, upon the ocean, Mr. Cooper always produces something worthy of his reputation; and were we of the council, we should earnestly advise that the promised sequel, if it must come, instead of being devoted to an exhibition of the present state of society in the United States, should content itself with the return voyage of the Montauk.⁷²

Two weeks later, the *American* reprinted a portion of a review of *Homeward Bound* from the *Alexandria Gazette* (which had, in turn, reprinted the review from the *American* mentioned above). It criticized the *American* for being "hardly severe enough. . . . Apart from the sea scenes, the book is intolerably dull and uninteresting. Some parts of it are laughably ridiculous—others Monnikinish—which may be made to mean heavy as lead." But the reviewer goes on to admit that "Cooper is, nevertheless, at home, on the sea." His problem lies in thinking that he is "a great political economist" and "moreover, a moral philosopher—and he would fain weave his disquisitions on these subjects into his novels. He makes a great mistake. He spoils his books—and does not advance his theories." In concluding, the reviewer expresses, like many others, the hope that Cooper will return to his old grounds: "Cooper is a man of talents, and might put his powers to use and profit. His *Spy*, *Pioneers*, *Pilot*, &c. proves that he has many of the requisite qualifications for a Novelist. Why will he not walk in the path he, at first, marked out for himself. His ambition might then be satisfied."⁷³

The *North American Review*, reliably anti-Cooper for years, did not have even the ambivalence of most other critiques. The reviewer, most likely Francis Bowen, claims that *Homeward Bound*, like the rest of Cooper's recent works, has "added nothing to his own reputation, or to the stores of American literature." Cooper's powers of description are virtually the only positive: "Nothing redeems it from utter and deplorable dulness, save a few descriptive passages, and two or three animated actions." The socio-political "outbreaks" in Cooper's recent books might be expected from "a ruthless partisan, careless of truth in aiming at the reputation of an opponent whom he wishes to ruin," but the "poet and the man of letters, sitting apart, 'in the still air of delightful studies,' ought to be wholly exempt"

⁷² *New-York American* (Semi-Weekly Edition), 18 August 1838: 2 (col. 2).

⁷³ *New-York American* (Semi-Weekly Edition), 1 September 1838: 2 (col. 5).

from them.⁷⁴ Less severe is *The Knickerbocker*, a less partisan journal, which begins by noting the brisk sales of the work:

These volumes have already passed to a second edition, and the publishers have found it necessary to stereotype the work, in order to supply the increasing demand. Moreover, many of the most spirited passages, which could be separated from the context, and preserve their interest, have been extensively copied in the journals of the day.

The reviewer disapproves of Cooper's using the novel as "a vehicle for the expression of private opinion, or promulgation of prejudice, against his own country, her institutions, manners, customs, etc.," yet defends Cooper against the denunciation he has suffered in recent years:

Is this the man, we cannot help asking ourselves, who is now denounced, in respectable periodicals, as 'a writer without talent, above the ordinary level, and his scenes as conveying to a stranger no permanent impression?' The celebrity of which we have been speaking, was deserved. . . Even the faults of his productions are preferable to the tame insipidities and corrupt morals of most modern novels. . . What though, at times, our Homer not only nods but snores? . . . Are not the 'Spy,' the 'Pioneers,' the 'Pilot,' and 'Lionel Lincoln' his, also? Who can forget them? Is there not in all these fine original productions enough of good to lessen present animosity, and to atone for much that has been brought against our author?

The reviewer recommends, then, that the total sweep of Cooper's career be considered in the present assessments. And as to the proper response to the new books, the reviewer takes a decidedly market-oriented approach: "Let the silent disapprobation of public opinion, if need be, correct misplaced dalliance with unprofitable or interdicted subjects. Books that are not read, are not sold, and books that are not sold, are not written."⁷⁵

Reviewers found much to fault with Cooper's abilities to draw appealing characters (though Captain Truck generally wins favorable remarks), with comments directed most often at his rendering of Eve Effingham and particularly Steadfast Dodge. Eve is criticized as "a pompous absurdity" and "a mere doll, born in America and sent to Europe to be

⁷⁴ [Francis Bowen] Review of *Homeward Bound*, *North American Review* 47 (October 1838): 488-89.

⁷⁵ Review of *The Homeward Bound: or, The Chase*, "Literary Notices," *The Knickerbocker* 12 (September 1838): 263-67.

dressed.”⁷⁶ She proves that “Mr. Cooper is ignorant of those delicate conceptions of feminine character, that should distinguish a novel writer; and she moves before our eyes the artificial boarding-school girl, ripened through the tortuous avenues of affectation, into the cold and stately patroness of prudery.”⁷⁷

Dodge, however, receives special contempt from the reviewers, particularly as Cooper’s satire hits closely to home for many of them. “Mr. Dodge, the traveling editor of the *Active Inquirer*, is an extravagant fiction—certainly the original can exist nowhere but in Mr. Cooper’s brain, teeming as it does with all sorts of horrid visions of American editors,” states the *New-York American*.⁷⁸ To the reviewer at *The Journal of Belles Lettres*, the exaggerated difference between Dodge—“a poor, sniveling, ignorant, Yankee editor”—and the exclusive Effinghams shows Cooper’s “derangement,” since Cooper “takes the best and the worst of two opposite classes, and puts in the keeping of the latter the American character”; Dodge is “a broad caricature, though, as in caricatures generally, there may be a likeness.”⁷⁹ The reviewer for *The Knickerbocker*, noting that Dodge is meant to stand for the entire “editorial fraternity” in America, exclaims, “Now what a sweep is here! There are no reservations, whatever. . . Such wholesale caricaturing will work Mr. Cooper ‘much annoy,’ and his reputation no little harm.”⁸⁰ The *Southern Literary Messenger* claims in its first review that Dodge “is made to utter as much nonsense as should gratify Mr. Cooper’s spleen for the balance of his life. . . Now we are willing to wager a box of segars with Mr. Cooper, that there is no man in America, particularly no American editor, who could utter sentiments so perfectly ridiculous, as those attributed to that unfortunate representative of our calling,

⁷⁶ *New-York American* (Semi-Weekly Edition), 18 August 1838: 2 (col. 2); Review of *Homeward Bound*, *The Journal of Belles Lettres* 12.7 (14 August 1838): n.p.

⁷⁷ “Homeward Bound—Or the Chase; A Tale of the Sea.” [Review], *Southern Literary Messenger* 4 (November 1838): 725.

⁷⁸ *New-York American* (Semi-Weekly Edition), 18 August 1838: 2 (col. 2).

⁷⁹ Review of *Homeward Bound*, *The Journal of Belles Lettres* 12.7 (14 August 1838): n.p.

⁸⁰ Review of *The Homeward Bound: or, The Chase*, “Literary Notices,” *The Knickerbocker* 12 (September 1838): 263-67.

brother Dodge!”⁸¹ In the second review in that periodical, the critic goes so far as to bring up the idea of libel:

Mr. Dodge is not only a caricature, but a gross libel on the newspaper editors of our country; not because there are none of that profession equally despicable, but because he is held up as a fair representative of the whole class, and the author’s declared object is the correct delineation of the state of American society.⁸²

The notion of “libel” was certainly on other reviewers’ minds too, whether or not Cooper’s early libel suits were spurring their thoughts on the matter. The reviewer for *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* writes that “If any other author had conceived such a character as Dodge, he would have been denounced by Mr. Cooper himself as a libeller of the United States and the prerogatives of its citizens.”⁸³ The *Burton’s* reviewer, moreover, thinks that Cooper “unconsciously satirizes himself” in the character of Dodge when Dodge is shown reading excerpts from his “travels” to passengers aboard the *Montauk*. The *New York Review*, however, sees little to fear in Cooper’s drawing of Dodge, wounding as it is: “still the press has nothing to fear from the shafts sped from our author’s bow, so long as they are aimed at such a man of straw as he has here shot at.”⁸⁴

In all these reviews, one can see the trouble that would be brewing for Cooper with *Home as Found*. Reviewers consistently disapproved of the social themes of the book, both in terms of the specific criticisms involved and in terms of their suitability to be included in a novel. The aims of fiction were recreational, to “amuse and occupy our hours of leisure,” according to *The North American Review*.⁸⁵ As the *Southern Literary Messenger* would express the matter,

⁸¹ “Homeward Bound—Or the Chase; A Tale of the Sea.” [Review], *Southern Literary Messenger* 4 (November 1838): 726.

⁸² “Another Review of ‘Homeward Bound.’” *Southern Literary Messenger* 4 (November 1838): 733.

⁸³ *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* 3 (September 1838): 216.

⁸⁴ “Cooper’s Last Works” [Review of *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*], *New York Review* 3 (January 1839): 212.

⁸⁵ *North American Review* 47 (October 1838): 488.

The great majority of readers seek in a novel, as their principal and almost exclusive object, light and agreeable entertainment. Works of fiction that do not afford this, no matter what merit they may possess otherwise, are usually thrown aside as insipid and worthless. Such food is sought for, not as a means of nourishment, but for the piquancy of its flavor. Whatever, then, may be the favorite object with which a writer composes a novel, certainly his first and chief aim should be to make the story interesting—the plot and incident should receive primary attention.⁸⁶

Almost by accident, Cooper had followed to some degree the guidelines stated by the *Messenger*: in *Homeward Bound* he had maintained a plot with sufficient adventure to keep his former successes as a storyteller before the reader. Cooper himself seemed surprised at the success of the story: “The Book has a goodish name in this part of the world, much better than I anticipated, I confess,” he wrote to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard three weeks after the book appeared. Had Cooper maintained a sense of adventure in his sequel, his social criticisms might have been better received, but to most reviewers, *Home as Found* presented all of the “bad” Cooper and none of the good.

The publication of *Home as Found* almost completely erased the welcome Cooper had received upon returning to novel-writing. Reviewers often express a feeling of betrayal, bitter in their disappointment at the turn the story had taken. The substitution of a more *Pioneers*-like loose and episodic plot in *Home as Found* for the adventure of *Homeward Bound* quickly made Cooper’s real aims apparent, and its setting on American soil rather than in the romantic world aboard ship or on the coast of Africa made Cooper’s critiques hit home with much more force than they had in the previous work. In *Homeward Bound* much of Cooper’s criticism of America, when not coming from the mouths of the Effinghams or the narrator, had been concentrated in Steadfast Dodge, but in *Home as Found* it becomes more widespread and hits on other recognizable types. One can only speculate on how Cooper’s fortunes might have been different had he been able to unify the tale better, both in its structure and in its publication. It seems apparent enough, though, that whatever good the two-part structure of the *Home* tale did him at the start, the concentration of his domestic criticism in *Home as Found* brought him considerably more ill-will than it would have had the work been published outright as a unified whole.

⁸⁶ “Home as Found.” [Review], *Southern Literary Messenger* 5 (March 1839): 169.

One of the kindest of the reviews, that of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, agrees with Cooper that America is comparatively barren of materials for a “*Roman de Société*.”

Nevertheless, Cooper makes too much use of dialogue and opinion to carry the story:

Instead of endeavoring to throw the fascination of romance around his opinions, he has attempted to make the latter supply the interest which his story lacks. No *Roman de Société* ever written, however well it may have illustrated particular social manners and customs, has owed success chiefly, or in any great degree, to this excellence. Indeed, had Mr. Cooper made his original purpose collateral to that of producing a finished tale, however he had failed as to the former, he might nevertheless have given entire satisfaction to a reader contemplating only an agreeable recreation.

The reviewer constantly remarks Cooper’s “exceedingly loose and unfinished” construction and “awkwardly constructed, diffuse and inflated sentences.” Cooper’s plot is as bad as anything “put forth by the most infantile magazine or newspaper contributor that the public forbearance has emboldened.” The reviewer also finds Cooper to be too liberal a Christian, and objects to his introduction of “polemic theology of a particular sect” into a work of fiction. Cooper is advised to exclude religious discussion from his fiction, or at least to remember that “trifling levity” and “sarcasm and ridicule” are unfit weapons for “ecclesiastical warfare.”⁸⁷

The *New York Review* differs from Cooper’s polemical Whig enemies in attributing Cooper’s supposed maliciousness to “a bursting out of superabundant bile” rather than the venting of his spleen the Whigs inevitably reference. The reviewer forgoes “literary criticism” of the work to consider the moral issues involved: “the literary offenses seemed to be so completely merged in the moral one, as to be undeserving of notice.” Cooper’s great sin is giving, under “the convenient disguise of the characters of a novel,” a picture of his own country “more falsely colored than was ever drawn by any foreign hireling.” As he is a countryman, and carries a literary reputation, his criticisms fall more heavily than if any ordinary American had made them. Claiming to be a friend “to our country, to justice, and

⁸⁷ “Home as Found.” [Review], *Southern Literary Messenger* 5 (March 1839): 169-75.

to letters," the reviewer leaves *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* wishing "that Mr. Cooper had not written them."⁸⁸

The *Albany Evening Journal*, under the guidance of Thurlow Weed, whom Cooper had already threatened with a libel suit over comments he had made about Cooper relevant to the "Three-Mile Point" incident in Cooperstown, also noticed the book. Weed maintains the forms of the typical review while resorting to outright mockery in his comments:

There may be those among the readers of the Evening Journal who struggled through the pages of "Homeward Bound," in obedience to some feeling as prompts the Antiquary to visit a time-worn shrine, not for what *it is*, but for what it *has been*, not to admire its present ruin, but to ponder over its past magnificence. Should the same motive urge them to a repetition of the experiment, spite of dear bought experience, they will be at a loss to discover in "Home as Found" the faintest trace of Mr. Cooper's former powers, and will be forced to draw largely upon their imaginations to realize the fact that the author of the Spy, the Pioneers, and the Prairie, is identical with the splenetic and self-conceited hack who has elaborated such dull drivel.

On the literary qualities of the book, Weed pronounces "The plot, what there is of it, is bungling and improbable, and the *aliases* of the Hero are quite too numerous for the most accomplished pickpocket in the land." He ascribes Cooper's motive for writing the book as "an opportunity of wreaking his vengeance upon those who had offended his dignity, in a field all his own." The work shows above all, according to Weed, that Cooper's skills as a novelist are exhausted: "the fire of his genius is extinct: peace to its ashes!"⁸⁹

These critiques were mild, however, compared to those Cooper received at the hands of partisan Whig journalists. Reviews like the ones above hinted at or openly suggested a want of patriotism, moral judgment, or good character, but ventured nothing blatantly false in terms of factual information about Cooper or his novels. What turned the tide for Cooper was when supposed literary criticism of his work went beyond simply questioning his character to include promulgation of deliberate falsehoods about him or his writings. A review by James Watson Webb in the *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer* for 22

⁸⁸ "Cooper's Last Works" [Review of *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*], *New York Review* 3 (January 1839): 209-221.

⁸⁹ [Thurlow Weed], Review of *Home as Found*, *Albany Evening Journal*, 22 November 1838: 2 (col. 4).

November 1838 set things in motion. Webb, who had been briefly acquainted with Cooper in boyhood, had recently returned from Europe himself, and he viewed Cooper's efforts in *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* to be attempts by Cooper to gain more money overseas. That this can be proven false today, given the constantly downward slide of Cooper's earnings from England, mattered little at the time; Cooper had no wish to draw specifics of his income into the public sphere. Cooper refuted many of Webb's other charges with little difficulty too, but one charge was harder to shake: that his character Edward Effingham was little more than a vain self-portrait. Although Cooper would eventually win on even that point in a court of law, the attribution, once made, had staying power.

It is difficult to capture the flavor of Webb's commentary in summary, filled as it is with the animated language of condemnation. Although other Whigs who picked up on the cause, particularly Park Benjamin, expressed their ridicule of Cooper with a sense of humor, as if delighting in denigrating him, Webb's remarks carry the full weight of serious resentment. His charges against Cooper are as follows:

Let any candid person read attentively "Homeward Bound," and "Home as Found," and he cannot fail to arrive at the conclusion, that the leading purposes of the author, were, *first*, to create a market for his works in England, in imitation of other *hireling* writers; *secondly*, to give vent to his spleen against his countrymen for not hailing his return as they did that of Washington Irving; and *thirdly*, to produce the impression abroad that he is in the descendant of a long line of noble ancestors, and in point of antiquity of family, not only far above his countrymen, but the equal to the noblest blood in England.⁹⁰

Webb attributes commercial motives to Cooper's criticism of America in *Home as Found*, claiming that by destroying the character of his country in literature, he could earn more money from his English editions. According to Webb, then, Cooper is a traitor to his country and should leave it:

We may, and do know him as a base minded caitiff, who has traduced his country for filthy lucre and from low born *spleen*; but time only, can render harmless abroad, the envenomed barb of the *slanderer*, who is in fact a traitor to national pride and national character. . . we ask as a duty incumbent upon all Americans, that they may be universally read in this country at least; and

⁹⁰ [James Watson Webb], Review of *Home as Found*, *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer*, 22 November 1838.

then there will ascend to *Heaven* one universal prayer, that the *viper* so long nursed in our bosom, may shortly leave our shores never again to disgrace with his presence a land to which he has proved an ingrate, and to which he has been anything but a reputable, useful, or even harmless citizen.

In addition, if his motives to gain favor with the English do not offer enough reason to condemn him, Cooper has domestic motives for the reckless cruelty of *Home as Found*, according to Webb:

Another object of this selfish book is to enable Mr. Cooper to abuse the public for having laughed at his political address to the people in behalf of General Jackson, when he hoped to be appointed Secretary of the Navy; and also to explain the nature of his recent quarrel with the villagers in regard to a certain Point of Land in Lake Otsego, and to villify and traduce Lockhart, whom he declares to be "*inherently a knave*," for having reviewed as he did, Mr. C.'s work on England.

Most offensive of all to Webb, however, is Cooper's supposed attempt to create for himself the air of nobility about him by embodying himself in the novel as the character Edward Effingham. Webb worries that European readers, not having access to factual information about Cooper, will glean improper assumptions about Cooper's personal nature. He takes pains, at the expense of facts, to demonstrate Cooper's low origins and high aspirations. Although it is supposedly "well known that he has named his place and dates all his letters from "*Temple Hall*," Cooper's father, who rose from humble beginnings to become a Congressman and one of the largest landholders in the state of New York, was only, according to Webb's selective emphasis, "a highly respectable WHEEL-WRIGHT of *New Jersey*, who has frequently been heard to declare that he was proud of his occupation and only regretted that while he labored at it, he was unable to manufacture as good *wagons* as his brothers in the trade."⁹¹

Cooper's portrayal of himself as Edward Effingham, therefore, bespeaks the highest vanity to Webb. He lists various instances of Cooper's using flattering adjectives to describe Effingham: "At page 130 of vol. I he speaks of himself as 'the mild and thoughtful Mr.

⁹¹ See Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Knopf, 1995) for a thorough study of William Cooper's real character.

Effingham!” and so forth. After giving these specific examples, he recapitulates them collectively:

What we have extracted, is with a view to demonstrate the justice of the apparently harsh terms we have used toward this “handsome,” “thoughtful,” “mild,” “Philosophical,” “upright,” “clear-headed,” “just minded,” and “liberal” Gentleman, whose “courtesy and mild refinement” are so self-evident, and who is so “simple, direct, and full of truth,” that he has published two volumes to prevent the public’s forgetting it.⁹²

Cooper’s supposed portrayal of himself as Edward Effingham was too good to resist, and other allies of Webb’s soon picked up on the notion.

Park Benjamin, then on the editorial staff of the *New-Yorker*, is acknowledged to have written the “review” of *Home as Found* which appears in the edition for 1 December 1838.

Practically disclaiming the real role of the reviewer from the start, Benjamin writes,

After many vigorous struggles to read “Home as Found,” with any thing like that particularity which is necessary for a criticism, we gave up the attempt in downright despair. It is duller even than “Homeward Bound;” and he who could go deliberately through the whole series of four volumes, would be regarded with no less wonder than that remarkable individual who is pointed at by the boys in Broadway “as the man what read the Monikins.”

But Benjamin takes a different view from Webb on the question of Cooper’s writing to earn more in England, stating that Cooper’s contempt falls wherever he may happen to be.

Benjamin portrays Cooper as supposing that he alone would be the proper teacher to instruct on European and American morals, an idea which strikes Benjamin as the height of folly. Cooper, he rants, must be crazy:

We differ from Mr. Webb in the opinion that Mr. Cooper’s object in villifying his own country and lauding Europe was to make his works saleable in London. Mr. Cooper is too fond of pouring out his bile and venting his spleen, to wait for a motive to induce his course of conduct or writing. When in England, he blackguarded the English; now that he is at home, he blackguards his own countrymen. He is as proud of blackguarding as a fishwoman is of Billingsgate. It is as natural to him as snarling to a tom-cat or growling to a bull-dog. Finding that people would not buy his books of “Gleanings”—which he put forth as outlets for his pent-up indignation—he resorted to his old trick of novel-making, and took advantage of those forms

⁹² [James Watson Webb], Review of *Home as Found*, *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer*, 22 November 1838.

of literature, under which he had become popular with the American public, to asperse, villify, and abuse that public. But he has not sown the wind without reaping the whirlwind. He is the common mark of scorn and contempt of every well-informed American. The superlative dolt! Did he suppose that no intelligent Englishman had every moved in our circle of good society, so that his lying caricatures would not be trampled under foot? *Quem Deum vult perdere, prius dementat*. If this adage be true, and Mr. Cooper be not near his ruin, he is the craziest loon that was ever suffered to roam at large without whip and keeper. We respectfully hint to his friends the necessity of an early application to the benevolent Director of the Insane Hospital.

Further, despite these minor shades of difference with Webb, Benjamin agrees wholeheartedly with the idea that Cooper portrays himself in Edward Effingham: "Mr. Webb charges Mr. Cooper with making himself the hero of his tale under the name Mr. Effingham; and the charge is irrefragably maintained."⁹³

Cooper's response to Webb and Benjamin would sooner (in Webb's case) or later (in Benjamin's case) take the form of legal action, and others would become involved too, based upon their comments either on Cooper or the lawsuits. In the meantime, the "Effingham" attribution made its rounds to critics in other areas. In Philadelphia, the reviewer at *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* obviously had been paying attention to Webb's review, for he addresses the matter of Cooper's supposed courting of favor among Europeans, as Webb had charged:

We believe he has no intention of rendering America and Americans ridiculous in the eyes of Europeans, for the sake of currying favor with the Europeans, but we positively do believe that Mr. Cooper's jaundiced views will not allow him to speak well of any country in the world, except it presents a comparison degrading to the land under repudiation by the universal defamer.

Nor does the reviewer agree with the charge of "anti-nationality" against Cooper, for "From some physical defect, or some deeply seated disease which has produced mental obscuration of the most dense description, Mr. Cooper has, within these last few years, found fault with all creation, excepting his own immaculate self."⁹⁴

⁹³ [Park Benjamin], "Mr. Cooper's Last Novel." *New-Yorker* 6 (1 December 1838): 173.

⁹⁴ "The New American Novels," *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* 4 (January 1839): 66.

The review of *Home as Found* in the *Southern Literary Messenger* also shows signs of influence:

“Mr. Cooper has been charged with attempting a portraiture of himself, in the character of Mr. Edward Effingham. . . . There is scarcely any popular novelist who has not borne the same accusation, and perhaps there has been some ground for it wherever it has been made. . . . But Mr. Cooper has given stronger ground for the charge. . . . He has introduced into the narrative well-known scenes in his own private history, and has embodied in his delineation of Mr. Effingham many of his before-expressed opinions on various subjects, and even his peculiar feelings and prejudices.”

But given that most novels “are partially founded on fact,” the reviewer “cannot see why Mr. Cooper may not embellish or illustrate his narrative, by describing scenes in his own life, and yet have no intention to bring himself before his readers,” though it may be imprudent to do so.⁹⁵

“Fact” would indeed become the key issue for Cooper in fighting his opponents. Cooper, in New York at the time of Webb’s “review” of *Home as Found*, fired off his first response to Webb’s opening salvo in a letter to the New York *Evening Post* that same day, denying the allegations and setting the stage for his future proceedings:

Mr. Editor —

The Courier & Enquirer of this morning, in a pretended review of *Home as Found*, contains a series of libellous falsehoods of a personal nature. . .

It is not true that I call my house ‘Temple Hall,’ or Templeton Hall, any more than it is true that I have endeavored to delineate myself in any character of any book I ever wrote. The scene of *Home as Found*, is transferred to the Templeton of the Pioneers, in order to show the difference which half a century has made in the appearance and usages of an American village. The house in which I live was originally called ‘Otsego Hall,’ a name that was early lost in the American term of ‘Mansion House.’ On my return from Europe, I found the name changed by the inhabitants to Templeton Hall, with a connection too obvious to need explanation. It is hardly necessary to say that such a name was unpleasant to me, and I caused the old name of Otsego Hall to be revived, in order to get rid of it.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ “Home as Found.” [Review], *Southern Literary Messenger* 5 (March 1839): 172.

⁹⁶ JFC to William Cullen Bryant for *The Evening Post*, 22 November 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:350-51.

Cooper refuted claims that he wrote *Home as Found* to get a higher price in England (“I never wrote any thing with a view to higher or lower prices”), that he hoped to become Secretary of the Navy, that Webb had known him since youth, and that he had once said there were “not three ladies in America.” Ending on an ominous note, Cooper concludes, “As the libels of the article will be made the subject of a legal investigation, I shall say no more.” Amusingly, Cooper did say more two days later; he had consulted his memory and could confirm that, indeed, he had not made the “three ladies” comment, or if he had, it was in “no *serious* conversation,” but only in “some moment of levity or of pleasantry.” Cooper had become so cautious of the motives of his enemies at this point that he wished “to guard myself against the effects of even that quibble.” And by this point, he had already given instructions “to prosecute for the grossest of these libels.”⁹⁷ Cooper would settle the matter in a court of law by suing Webb and, eventually, Benjamin, William Leete Stone (of the *New York Commercial Advertiser*), Horace Greeley (of the *New York Tribune*), and Thurlow Weed, among others, for libel.

Revelant as his famous libel suits are to Cooper’s career and his sense of authorship, the complete course of them is too complicated to recount here. Fortunately, despite the need for further scholarship in this area, several works have provided detailed accounts. Ethel Outland’s *The “Effingham” Libels on Cooper*, which appeared in 1929, is the first thorough consideration of Cooper’s legal battles.⁹⁸ Although Outland is a little too zealous in claiming that Cooper was instrumental in laying the foundations for America’s libel laws, relying on “testimony” from a contemporary legal expert, she provides a study that is objective in tone and rich with excerpts from the primary sources. Another secondary work, Dorothea Waples’s 1938 book *The Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper*, gives comparatively little information about the libel suits but a good deal about the political battles that inspired them. Her argument suffers from excessive partisanship, evident both in her denigrating

⁹⁷ JFC to William Cullen Bryant for *The Evening Post*, 24 November 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:352-53.

⁹⁸ Ethel R. Outland, *The “Effingham” Libels on Cooper: A Documentary History of the Libel Suits of James Fenimore Cooper; Centering Around the Three Mile Point Controversy and the Novel HOME AS FOUND, 1837-1845* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1929).

Cooper's Whig opponents and in her making Cooper a party Democrat—something he certainly was not, though his sympathies usually lay in that direction at the time.⁹⁹

Although discerning whether either side's real motives were predominantly based upon principle or self-interest would be difficult, both sides certainly saw larger issues at stake. For the reviewers, the matter was portrayed as a stand for the freedom of inquiry necessary to conduct a proper review of a book when that book called for a sharper than usual critical eye. As Park Benjamin states, the issue is one of the respective "immunities" of authors and critics:

Does an author fairly subject himself to personal criticism by submitting a work to the public? Not necessarily, we are inclined to believe. But if he makes his work the channel of disparaging remarks upon others—whether individuals or in masses—is not the case essentially altered? . . . If he made his works the vehicle and engine of his personal resentments, would not personal feeling be expected to enter somewhat into the criticism which they could hardly fail to call forth?¹⁰⁰

One of Cooper's own perspectives on the matter can be seen in a letter to the editors of the *Journal of Commerce* dated 15 June 1840:

Has not the author of a book the same right to obtrude on the public his private opinion concerning the private affairs of his fellow citizens, as the editors of newspapers? Or have the latter, in your estimation, acquired rights by the long and gross abuses that they have practiced, in connection with this subject that are peculiar to themselves?¹⁰¹

The relationship of authors to their critics up to this point in American literature had largely been dictated by critics, who lay down the "proper" principles of fiction, poetry, and so forth, that American authors ought to follow. Cooper had often flaunted those principles but had never violated them with such a vengeance as he did with *Home as Found*. Now, as an author, he wished to pin down the specifics of the relationship with more certainty.

⁹⁹ Dorothy Waples, *The Whig Myth of James Fenimore Cooper* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1938) 1.

¹⁰⁰ *New Yorker* 6 (23 February 1839): 361.

¹⁰¹ JFC to David Hale and Gerald Hallock, for *The New Journal of Commerce and Gazette*, 15 June 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:45.

The lawsuits transferred the question of what was properly considered a “review” and what were a reviewer’s rights and privileges to a court of law, causing a great outcry among Cooper’s opponents, who viewed the move as a cowardly one indicative of the failure of his powers as a writer. The lawsuits had implications for creative authorship too, for in order to win his “Effingham” lawsuits he needed to demonstrate, among other things, that he was *not* the Mr. Effingham of *Home as Found*. And from this came broader questions, to be settled, it seemed, in a court of law rather than in literary circles: did an author have the right in a work of fiction to draw upon whatever he wished? And what exactly constitutes a fiction?

Almost every reader and critic of *Homeward Bound* and particularly *Home as Found* admits to the basic truth of the claim made by Cooper’s Whig enemies that in Mr. Edward Effingham, Cooper intended an idealized self-portrait. The resemblances in circumstance, thought, and self-image are too numerous to miss. But to be fair, Edward Effingham is only one part of Cooper’s complicated self-portraiture in these novels. Cooper had mentioned, in proposing the tale to Bentley, that he “had some disgust to overcome” in reconciling himself to the idea of writing another novel. He seems to portray much of that disgust through Edward Effingham’s cousin John Effingham. In the *Home* tales, Cooper creates two characters that are virtually *doppelgangers*, representing his own divided character toward his own country, Edward Effingham embodying the optimistic Cooper, John Effingham the pessimistic.

Edward Effingham and John Effingham are noted from the beginning of the book to be so nearly alike as to practically be twins. Their similarities are uncanny:

Edward and John Effingham were brothers’ children; were born on the same day; had passionately loved the same woman, who had preferred the first-named, and died soon after Eve was born; had, notwithstanding this collision in feeling, remained sincere friends, and this the more so, probably, from a mutual and natural sympathy in their common loss; had lived much together at home, and travelled much together abroad, and were now about to return in company to the land of their birth, after what might be termed an absence of twelve years; though both had visited America for short

periods in the intervals,-John not less than five times.

There was a strong family likeness between the cousins, their persons and even features being almost identical; though it was scarcely possible for two human beings to leave more opposite impressions on mere casual spectators when seen separately. Both were tall, of commanding presence, and handsome; while one was winning in appearance,- and the other, if not positively forbidding, at least distant and repulsive. The noble outline of face in Edward Effingham had got to be cold severity in that of John; the aquiline nose of the latter, seeming to possess an eagle-like and hostile curvature,-his compressed lip, sarcastic and cold expression, and the fine classical chin, a feature in which so many of the Saxon race fail, a haughty scorn that caused strangers usually to avoid him. (*Homeward Bound*, 1:10)

The two men are a study in opposites in some respects, John usually coming out on the dark side: Edward Effingham gets his wealth from his hereditary estate and is relatively free from the world of commerce, whereas John has inherited a commercial fortune of much greater value, yet owns nary a scrap of land (*Homeward Bound*, 1:11). Cooper himself was the son of one of New York's most powerful land holders, but the death of his father and brothers, the press of widows and orphans, and a plummeting market in land values stripped away most of Cooper's fortunes in the decade previous to his becoming an author. Returning to Otsego Hall, he had begun to renew his pursuit of the country gentleman-farmer lifestyle, purchasing a mountainside farm he called "The Chalet," though he never tried his luck in trusting to the farm alone for his support. Like John Effingham, too, he had gained much through his commercial, professional status as an author, a pursuit which, if it made him more money, also brought him more vexation, not unlike that displayed by John Effingham. John is the more variable one, given to "caustic" remarks or "growling" in sarcasm, whereas for Edward, sarcasm with much bite is "quite unusual for him" (*Homeward Bound*, 1:16). Edward Effingham has lived in "intellectual retirement" free from the strife of the world, amiable and virtually unflappable, and, if not sophisticated, at least correct: "and while hundreds were keener, abler in exposition of subtleties, or more imposing with the masses, few were often as right" (*Homeward Bound*, 1:56). John Effingham, on the other hand, possesses "an intellect much more acute and vigorous than that of his cousin," but also "passions less under control, a will more stubborn, and prejudices that often neutralized his reason" (*Homeward Bound*, 1:56). As a younger man "he had plunged into the vortex of monied speculation" and had "entered warmly and blindly into all the factions and

irreconcilable principles of party,” getting himself entangled in the errors “with which faction unavoidably poisons the mind” (*Homeward Bound*, 1:56). John Effingham is not without his good qualities, of course; Paul Blunt finds him to be “so different from what report and his own fancy had pictured” (*Homeward Bound*, 1:129), and he, more than anyone, becomes the father Paul never knew (long before finding out, at the end of *Home as Found*, that he really *is* Paul’s father). John simply tells the truth in a more caustic manner that renders him less transparent to the casual observer or foe.

Through these renderings of Edward and John Effingham (often repeated with variation throughout the two books), Cooper creates, as it were, a reflection of his own “split personality” in regard to his own career and his feelings toward his native land. Cooper’s life, despite all its successes, was one of losses that stripped him of what should have been an easy life as the youngest son of a wealthy landholder. Edward Effingham seems a portrait of what Cooper might have been and what he still attempted to be in his ideals. He would perhaps be less keen but morally more correct. Yet the realities, the unhealed wounds, and the predilection for sharper words seems to speak to the Cooper who has “plunged into the vortex” of professional authorship, becoming a sophisticated artist, active and engaged in the world, at the expense of his peace and good nature. How intentionally Cooper created these reflections of himself would be difficult to gauge, but with the substantial likeness of *John Effingham* to himself, one can see why Cooper would take stronger objection to the attribution of Edward Effingham to his character. These are also not the only likenesses to Cooper in the book.

Much as Edward Effingham’s calmness and facility aboard ship cause several of the crew to swear, as previously noted, that “he was a man-of-war’s-man in disguise” (*Homeward Bound*, 1:7), Paul Blunt also possesses a good deal of the proper sense of perception Cooper would emphasize as necessary to a good gentleman. “We must call on you for assistance,” says Eve to Paul, toward the end of *Homeward Bound*, “for we are all so lubberly that none of us can see that which we so earnestly desire” (*Homeward Bound*, 2:208). Like Cooper, who resigned from the US Navy shortly after his marriage, most likely due to the influence of the De Lancey family, his in-laws, Paul has been “induced” to resign because of conditions set by his guardian (*Home as Found*, 2:59). Other characters, too, speak for Cooper in smaller ways: Mr. Jarvis, one of the few true gentlemen remaining in New York in *Home as Found*,

speaks up for Cooper's republican principles: "But a republic does not necessarily infer equality of condition, or even equality of rights—it meaning merely the substitution of the right of the commonwealth for that of a prince" (*Home as Found*, 1: 52-53). And certainly, as this description shows, Captain Truck has a little of Cooper's spirit:

John Truck sailed his own ship; was civil to his passengers from habit as well as policy; knew that every vessel must have a captain; believed mankind to be little better than asses, took his own observations, and cared not a straw for those of his mates; was never more bent on following his own views than when all hands grumbled and opposed him; was daring by nature, decided from use and long self-reliance, and was every way a man fitted to steer his bark through the trackless ways of life, as well as those of the ocean.
(*Homeward Bound*, 1: 89-90)

Characterizations such as these, along with Cooper's heroine Eve, who always offers the proper womanly sentiment *a la* Cooper's sense of etiquette, prompts the review for the *New-York American* to write:

Could the characters of the *Homeward Bound*, after springing from Mr. Cooper's brain, become independent of him in thought and language, and give us really the impressions made upon minds thus constituted, by persons and scenes in America, we should willingly attend to their accounts; but however much they were intended by Mr. Cooper to differ in their organization, they are all mere satellites in everything relating to America, and only vary in reflecting more or less strongly Mr. Cooper's inveterate prejudices against his native land.¹⁰²

In *Home as Found*, of course, Cooper also used as material for his story lightly fictionalized versions of events or places in his own life. In *The Pioneers* his fictional Templeton corresponded to the real-life Cooperstown, and many have suggested that Marmaduke Temple portrays some of the characteristics of the author's father, William Cooper. Cooper had admitted to Samuel Carter Hall in March 1831 that he did intend Templeton to resemble Cooperstown, whatever his later positions might be: "The Pioneers contains a pretty faithful description of Cooperstown in its infancy, and as I knew it when a child. It is now much altered, of course."¹⁰³ In *Home as Found* the topography was essentially the same and easily identifiable as being Cooper's home and hometown. "Fishing-Point" in *Home as Found*

¹⁰² *New-York American* (Semi-Weekly), 18 August 1838: 2.

¹⁰³ JFC to Samuel Carter Hall, 8-11? March 1831: *Letters and Journals* 2:59.

equals Three-Mile Point on Lake Otsego; the Effingham home, “The Wigwam,” resembles Otsego Hall, complete with its partially successful gothic renovations.

Cooper had objected in his letter to the *Evening Post* in response to Webb that he did not, as Webb had charged, call his home “Temple Hall,” or “Templeton Hall,”¹⁰⁴ but the actual name mattered little to Park Benjamin: “The fact of his not calling his ‘Otsego Hall’ or ‘Mansion House,’ ‘Templeton Hall,’ is quite immaterial. If the scene as described can be fixed there, it is enough to substantiate the charge—even if the elegant, accomplished, refined owner should have chosen to call it ‘Adonis Hall,’ out of compliment to his own charms and graces.”¹⁰⁵ To Benjamin, in other words, it mattered little whether Cooper meant the *actual* item or something based upon it. To Cooper, however, it made a great deal of difference. According to the strict and very narrow limits he marked out for fiction at this point in his career, circumstantial similarities between an author and materials in his works of fiction did not prove a deliberate likeness. If he said that Edward Effingham was not him, and the facts did not correspond, it did not matter how much resemblance in attitudes, opinions, and other circumstances might exist. Cooper would not accept the “political” truth that circumstantial appearances create the supposed reality, at least not as it affected an individual such as himself. The charge persisting throughout the libel suits among the Whig editors who complained about them was that, if the reviewers had indeed libeled Cooper, it was because Cooper had libeled America equally as much—the problem being that Cooper could escape any sort of legal prosecution by them on account of there being no real individual singled out in his writing. In the preface to *Homeward Bound* Cooper had toyed with readers about the “truthfulness” of the scenes he presents, inviting readers to find the log-book of the *Montauk*, and, if it should be found to contain a single sentence to controvert any one of our statements or facts, a frank recantation shall be made” (1:iv). In his legal suits he took the same approach, demanding recantation where editors actually *had* controverted the “facts” about Cooper. Meanwhile, Cooper, according to his views of

¹⁰⁴ JFC to William Cullen Bryant for *The Evening Post*, 22 November 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:350-51.

¹⁰⁵ [Park Benjamin], “Mr. Cooper’s Last Novel,” *New-Yorker* 6 (1 December 1838): 173.

fiction and the prerogatives of creative authorship, could build and populate his own fictional worlds as he pleased.

The American Antiquarian Society preserves four pages (nearly legal-size) of manuscript notes, entitled “Questions,” that Cooper drafted for one of his Effingham lawsuits.¹⁰⁶ Although they are undated, they clearly relate to the Webb case, since they mention his name several times as well as matters that Webb had brought up in his “review” of *Home as Found*. Written in Cooper’s hand, they are designed to be used by his lawyer, nephew Richard Cooper, in questioning the author upon the witness stand. They occasionally contain parenthetical instructions as to how the discourse will proceed. From the start, they are designed to show that Mr. Cooper was not Mr. Effingham:

Are you the author of these books?
 How old are you?
 When did you go to Europe?
 When did you return?
 How long did you stay abroad?
 How old were you the day you sailed from Europe?

Cooper then moves on to *The Pioneers*, presumably to establish it as a fictional work: “Did you mean to describe the village of Cooperstown in *The Pioneers*? Did you mean to describe your father’s house, in the House of Judge Temple?” All this leads to the more relevant matter of the Effinghams:

Did you mean to describe yourself in Edward Effingham?
 Did you describe your daughter in Eve Effingham?
 [inserted] How many daughters have you?
 What are the points of resemblance between you and Edward Effingham?
 What are the points of dissemblance between you and Edward Effingham?

Likewise, resemblances of various secondary and minor characters to living individuals are disclaimed:

Was Aristabulus Bragg drawn from any particular individual?
 Was Steadfast Dodge drawn from any particular character?

Cooper also writes questions designed to disprove Webb’s charge that Cooper was claiming to be noble:

¹⁰⁶ “Questions,” “Effingham” Libel Suit: James Fenimore Cooper Papers, Box 1, Folder 12, American Antiquarian Society.

Do you represent the *Effinghams* any where as noble?
 Have you ever represented yourself as noble?
 Any of your family as noble?
 Is a baronet noble?

He addresses the original purpose for writing the book as relevant to the case, presumably to answer Webb's claim that he had written for profit in England:

Why did you take the characters of H. as F. to the Templeton of the
 Pioneers?
 Which object had you in view in writing *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*?
 Did you insert a word in that book in order to make the book sell in
 England?

About midway through the questioning, Cooper gets to the meat, as far as it concerns principles of fiction. Asking about the similarities and differences between the real Three-Mile-Point incident and the fictitious one in *Home as Found*, the questions continue:

Why did you make them so nearly alike?
 Why did you make them differ at all?
 Is it usual for authors of works of Fiction to introduce real events into their
 works?
 Is it usual for them to introduce incidents connected with their own
 experience?
 Can you cite any instances to that effect?
 (Here the answer will cite Goldsmith and Walter Scott.)
 Were Goldsmith and Scott ridiculed for doing this?
 Is Goldsmith represented to have been a handsome man?
 Did you ever know[?] of his having been called The "Handsome Mr.
 Goldsmith" on account of the coincidences between his own history
 and that of George Wilmot of The Vicar of Wakefield? Did you ever
 meet with any personal ridicule on account of the coincidence in *She
 Stoops to Conquer*?
 Have you ever connected with your fictions, events, or opinions, that are
 connected with your own personal experience?
 Any in *Homeward Bound*, or *Home as Found*?

In bringing up his own dealings with his publishers, Cooper plans to be asked about the sums he was paid for his *Notions of the Americans* and for a novel, and their preference for fiction over other types of work, implying that *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* were not particularly marketable books: "Which did your publishers in both countries prefer to have you write?"

Cooper's questions are too numerous to cover in full, but as can be seen from these excerpts, Cooper was, by arguing technical point after technical point, hoping to demonstrate that Webb's accusations were false and that his own motives were within the bounds of propriety for a writer of fiction. All fiction writers, he implies here, make use of their personal histories and opinions in creating their stories, yet only he is being victimized for doing so. Cooper also seems eager in these questions to demonstrate that he was not seeking to find a lucrative market in criticizing America and that his professional practices are sound. Showing Cooper's response under fire for his socially active approach to authorship, the libel suits represent just one way in which Cooper was redefining not just the prerogatives of fiction but also the professional ethic that guided the literary artist beyond the mere "vortex" of greed.

As if Cooper had not stirred up enough controversy in the past decade, he also decided that the reputation of the most famous author of his time (till Dickens came along) should be taken down a peg or two. In between the publication of *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, or, as the *Southern Literary Messenger* more wryly states, "as a sort of interlude between the parts of his *Roman de Société*," Cooper published in *The Knickerbocker* for October 1838 a review of J.G. Lockhart's much-anticipated biography of Sir Walter Scott, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* It was a review which, among other things, brought forward questions about the ethics of Sir Walter and, by extension, the ethics of authorship generally. In the three decades of Cooper's career, his middle years in the 1830s usually have been noted as the time when Cooper was actively laying out his social philosophy, stimulated as he was by his experiences during and after his stay in Europe. But it was also a time when Cooper was making his most comprehensive statements to date about his philosophy of authorship, particularly in defining the ethical code that would distinguish the true professional literary artist from those who would advance their careers through either questionable art or questionable professional practices.

Chief among the irritants that stirred him to such statements were the Whig polemicists, who had gone beyond his politics to attack his art and his person. He had made

a partial defense of his conduct as an author in *A Letter to His Countrymen*, making an exhaustively detailed effort to prove his correctness in contrast to the false and partisan motives of “Cassio” and others in the Whig press. Among his defenses was the protest that he had entered into the disputes he was involved in with “clean hands.” He had not maintained secret connections with journals that reviewed his works; he had not used undue influence provided by his literary reputation to secure diplomatic appointments (he had at the beginning of his travels carried a largely symbolic consulship to Lyons, France, as a means of facilitating his movements, but this position carried no authority or pay). His *Letter*, however, had not had its effect; Whig attacks had not disappeared, and Cooper’s critical popularity had declined as a result of standing up for his principles against those who, in his view, cultivated appearances for the sake of power. Cooper had, by his retirement, essentially conceded the battlefield, but the ridicule—personal and professional—did not cease. Thus Cooper set out in the late 1830s to straighten matters that he felt had been twisted by wily manipulators of public opinion, who elevated people and things convenient to their causes and attacked those who would advocated differing views—specifically, the truth. Cooper attempted to place his own practices beyond question, setting an example against his rivals and passing on to posterity a more wholesome model of professional literary activity than had been provided by the press or even by his fellow authors.

Perhaps the clearest documentation of Cooper’s ethic of authorship during this period comes not from one of his novels, but from this aforementioned review of Lockhart’s *Memoirs* of Scott. The review is an unusual production for Cooper, who had done little in this line after authoring a few reviews in the earliest years of his writing career. That Cooper should undertake a review at this point in his career is noteworthy: his sensitivity—perhaps excessive—about his standing in relation to, and inevitably in comparison with, his widely acclaimed predecessor speaks to his larger insecurities about his status as a professional author and a public figure, particularly as he was setting before the world a pair of books that departed substantially from the Scott-like romances that had made his fame.

Cooper’s attitude toward Scott, who had died in 1832, had previously been one of cordial respect tinged with a dose of artistic rivalry. Cooper had, after all, made many of his early successes by one-upping Scott’s romances in *The Spy* and *The Pilot*, pointing specifically

in a preface to the latter work to Scott's overrated *vraisemblance* in portraying movements of ships at sea as the primary inspiration for the book. Cooper was sensitive to implications that he was merely an American imitator of the Scottish master: he disavowed the idea of rivalry and cringed at being labeled "The American Scott," as he explains in a letter to Samuel Carter Hall in 1831:

In a note you call me the 'rival' of Sir Walter Scott -- Now the idea of rivalry with him never crossed my brain. I have always spoken, written, and thought of Sir Walter Scott (as a writer) just as I should think and speak of Shakspeare [sic] -- with high admiration of his talent, but with no silly reserve, as if I thought my own position rendered it necessary that I should use more delicacy than other men. What I like I say I like, and it is most that he has written, and what I do not like, I say I do not like. . . .

If there is a term that gives me more disgust than any other, it is to be called, as some on the continent *advertise me*, the "American Walter Scott." It is offensive to a gentleman to be nicknamed at all, and there is a pretension in the title, which offends me more than all the abusive reviews that were ever written.¹⁰⁷

Despite this tension, however, Cooper's limited contacts with the man himself had been friendly. Cooper had even offered, in November 1826, to undertake a legal plan to secure payment for Scott's works published in America, since under the existing system of piracy any money offered to British authors was left to the "generosity" of publishers, though Scott eventually substituted his own plan instead, with Cooper to vouch for it.¹⁰⁸ The few meetings these two had in Europe had been friendly as well.

The publication of Scott's official biography, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, by his son-in-law J.G. Lockhart in 1837, turned Cooper's view decidedly to the negative. Lockhart, editor of the London *Quarterly Review*, was no favorite of Cooper or of many other authors, for that matter. He carried a reputation as a fierce and reckless reviewer and, what was worse in Cooper's eyes, wrote for a periodical that was staunchly Tory in its politics and, in his view, anti-American. The *Quarterly Review* had printed a long and scathing review of *Gleanings in Europe: England*, dissecting Cooper's book with ridicule. Although

¹⁰⁷ JFC to Samuel Carter Hall, 21 May 1831: *Letters and Journals* 2:83.

¹⁰⁸ See *Letters and Journals* 3:319 for an overview of the related correspondence and Cooper's summary of the plan.

Cooper did not think so, Lockhart had written the piece; in a moment worthy of the “Cassio” incident, Cooper had even tried to demonstrate through internal evidence that Lockhart could not possibly have written the piece.¹⁰⁹ Lockhart had dismissed *England* as having “nothing solid but its ignorance, and nothing deep but its malice”; its subject was not England but Cooper, an “*autobiography of excoriated vanity*.” Lockhart mocked the elaborate parsing of English manners and the supposed affronts Cooper had received in England, setting down as Cooper’s main characteristic his “endeavour to make his *personal* distastes *national* grievances.” His imagery was most unflattering:

We now and then read in the newspapers of some unhappy brewer’s workman falling into a vat of hot wash, from which he escapes alive indeed, but with the loss of every particle of skin on his body. This is a very accurate image of the state of Mr. Cooper’s mind: a scalding vanity has stripped it of every inch of epidermis. He winces at every breeze—writhes and groans under the gentlest touches of good nature or sympathy—and the ordinary contacts of society drive him to absolute frenzy.¹¹⁰

It is difficult to deny the basic truth of charges, however severe the language may be. In England Cooper never escaped feelings of awkwardness and discomfort in the complex social circles to which his celebrity status admitted him. His visits were short, and he spent much more of his time in France, where his friendship with Lafayette gave him a firmer standing. To be ridiculed in the manner of the review hit a sore spot for Cooper. It was, he told Horatio Greenough, “a feeble piece of blackguardism,” but attempting an answer would be useless, for “what can an honest man gain by a contest with a professional liar?”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ JFC to Lewis Gaylord Clark and Willis Gaylord Clark for *The Knickerbocker*, [April?] 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:320-24. Cooper offers his supposed proof as an opportunity “to rebuke the provincial credulity of a very presuming, and yet a very ignorant, portion of the American reading public” (3:321). By his calculations, Frederick Marryat, a rival sea novelist, was the likely author. See also JFC to Horatio Greenough, 31 June 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:329, wherein Cooper also explains why the author of the review could not have been Lockhart.

¹¹⁰ [J.G. Lockhart], Review of *England, with Sketches of Society in the Metropolis* [English title of *Gleanings in Europe: England*], *London Quarterly Review* 59 (October 1837): 327-61.

¹¹¹ JFC to Horatio Greenough, 31 June 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:329.

Scott had ordered his biography before his death, appointing Lockhart for the task of writing it. Among the materials Scott had transmitted to Lockhart were his diaries, from which Lockhart had included passages in the biography. Naturally, when the *Memoirs* of Scott came out, Cooper sought out allusions to himself--and found them. A pair of entries for 3 & 6 November 1826 documented Cooper's first visit with Scott. In his original diary entry for 3 November, Scott had written, in part, "Visited Princess Galitzin, and also Cooper, the American novelist. This man, who has shown so much genius, has a good deal of the manner, or want of manner, peculiar to his countrymen," referring to Cooper's lack of the studied mannerisms that typified Europeans. Yet, in the *Memoirs*, the entry referred instead to Cooper's "manners, or want of manners." James Beard considers the alteration likely to be an accidental one; perhaps Lockhart saw what he was already predisposed to think about Cooper.¹¹² However the error crept in, it was not corrected until 1890, so Cooper never knew what Scott's original entry actually said. He was left with an impression that Scott thought him lacking in manners—a disapproving judgment—rather than the more neutral assessment that he was without guile. Though Cooper obviously was hurt by this discovery, he feigned indifference in a letter he penned to Lewis and Gaylord Clark of *The Knickerbocker* to explain the allusions to himself in the *Memoirs*. "On the subject of manners," he wrote, "I have very little to say. Sir Walter Scott struck me as having national peculiarities of this sort, and it is not surprising that the feeling should be reciprocal."¹¹³ Perhaps Scott had attached more importance to "civilities," or perhaps, Cooper theorized, he disliked Cooper's offer to help secure a return on his books in America. Either way, it was a rejection for Cooper; Scott had substituted his own plan instead, which failed (perhaps Cooper is implying that his own might have worked). The publication of passages from Scott's diary, particularly when they alluded to him, was disturbing: things that had taken place in a supposed atmosphere of confidence became exposed before the world. Whether they were embarrassing or not, Cooper disliked such exposure. He had already given Carey

¹¹²*Letters and Journals* 3:318 (Cooper's excerpt from the *Memoirs*); *Letters and Journals* 3:323.

¹¹³ JFC to Lewis Gaylord Clark and Willis Gaylord Clark, for *The Knickerbocker*, [April?] 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:318.

instructions not to publish excerpts from his letters, wanting to avoid the “quackery of drawing attention to myself in that manner.”¹¹⁴

Whether or not any of these particular incidents stirred Cooper to write the review is unclear, but according to Dorothy Waples, it was Cooper who approached Lewis Gaylord Clark of *The Knickerbocker* with a request to publish the review.¹¹⁵ Cooper was at least wise enough by this point to anticipate that his review would be controversial, seeing as “admiration of Scott’s talents is so general and profound.” The rationale, he explains, is the need to expose truth where delusion reigns, on a number of fronts. Lockhart’s work, Cooper explained, paraded Scott’s failings (“not to use a harsher term”) before the world in a way that would call upon the public to “venerate a name that, in a moral sense, owes its extraordinary exaltation to some of the most barefaced violations of the laws of rectitude, that ever distinguished the charlatanism of literature” (349-50).

Since Scott had ordered his biography and transferred the materials for writing it to Lockhart, he was not entitled to the protection usually afforded to the dead. “The very fact of designating a biographer,” Cooper writes, “unless in extraordinary instances, infers something very like a fraud upon the public, as it is usually placing one who should possess the impartiality of a judge, in the position of an advocate, and leaves but faint hopes of a frank and fair exhibition of the truth” (350). Cooper also objects to publication of Scott’s diary entries and other materials which “reflect injuriously, and in many instances unjustly, on third persons,” (namely Cooper himself, though he does not mention it) with Scott knowing full well that his diaries would be published after his death.

Furthermore, Scott’s establishment of the *Quarterly Review* was based on a deception whereby it would profess impartiality but secretly scheme to promote Tory political ends. Scott had wished to counter the Whig *Edinburgh Review* but did not want to take it on directly, preferring instead to create a work with the appearance of neutrality. To Cooper, this sort of act constitutes an “advantage obtained under false pretences” (351); instead, “The fair and honest course would have been, to assail the political opinions of the Edinburgh directly, trusting to reason and facts for success” (352). The *Quarterly* is

¹¹⁴ JFC to Carey & Lea, 6 November 1831: *Letters and Journals* 2:149.

¹¹⁵ Waples 182.

additionally loathsome, to Cooper, for promoting aristocratic dogmas and for substituting temporary political expedients for true principle. "All this was worthy of a Grub-street hack," Cooper declares.

But a still worse practice in the *Quarterly Review* was Scott's reviewing of his own works. Self-reviewing was a "gross system of fraud that is practiced on the world by some of its greatest names, and has all the air of truth about it" (356), something that works directly against its express purpose. "A review, on its face, professes to be, as far as it goes, an impartial judgment, made up by an impartial judge," writes Cooper; if writers were to write all their own reviews, who could trust them? Cooper is annoyed to find Lockhart nowhere as strict as he ought to be: "Mr. Lockhart evidently considers the practices of regular reviewers as very innocent things" (356). Cooper did not. A review could make or break the fortunes of a book, and in his own case, with the "Cassio" incident particularly, his own reputation had suffered as the result of what were little better than literary pranks.

Finally, the use of pre-arranged codes in letters of introduction when Scott was to limit his civilities offended Cooper because it was "treachery, cloaked in the garb of friendship" (351). Such letters, by which Scott might spare himself from constantly being called on, preserved the appearance of goodwill on their face and were transmitted by unknowing parties innocent of the deception. Scott and those who conspired with him in these lies placed popularity above honesty, for an honest letter that carried its meaning on its face "might have lost both the parties a supporter!" (351). The fact that Scott had condoned such practices of questionable character was, in Cooper's view, becoming a justification for others to do the same. Scott's example, and Lockhart's book, are "dangerous to the young," and Cooper fears that "we are not to be surprised if we find the young and inexperienced following in footsteps that are made to appear hallowed" (349).

The common root of all these charges is an assertion by Cooper of a lack of candor and honesty on the part of Scott—a calculating instinct geared toward fame and popularity. Not one of Scott's "mystifications" was found to be in his error; they all worked for his own benefit. The fact that these sorts of practice might not be unusual was no defense in Cooper's view. Sir Walter had been acclaimed for his "*uncommon*," not his common, qualities, and such dishonesty was "unworthy of a man of high literary fame" (351). Cooper's emphasis here is significant. With literary reputation and accomplishment he

conceived there to exist a code of personal ethics that required the author to rise above the ordinary every bit as much as the art that the author produced. In commenting upon Cooper's review, the *Southern Literary Messenger* dryly interpreted Cooper's view as follows:

Mr. Cooper appears to imagine that, if any stain upon Scott's moral character can be detected, it must appear doubly dark on account of his literary fame. Literary men, he seems to think—but how his opinion has been formed, the reader will be at a loss to divine—are usually so much superior to others, in point of moral worth and probity that, like angels, if they slip, they must fall into the deepest hell of infamy. Perhaps the reader will feel the same difficulty that we do, in understanding why a literary man is more culpable than any other of equally good moral training, both having committed the same offence.¹¹⁶

The reviewer, however, overlooks the obvious public dimension of literary figures. Only a few months earlier, this same periodical, and probably this same reviewer, in reviewing *Homeward Bound* provided his own answer to “why a literary man is more culpable”:

Why did he turn abruptly to the dogmas and the doubts of the politician? Why leave the marble pavement of the temple to riot on the sanded floor of the miserable beer-shop? These are questions pertinent to his fame, and which we have a right to ask. Mr. Cooper's reputation is identified with the literary character of the country, for he has stamped the genius of American naval and descriptive romance upon the age, and he has opened a way of fiction that many have pursued with varied success. Mr. Cooper is the author of the peculiar marine style that has often delighted us in the “*Red Rover*,” and when we opened “*Homeward Bound*,” we felt assured from this title alone that he would preserve his reputation. Standing at the fountainhead of American fiction, he should have felt like a brave knight, with buckler on, and lance in rest, ready to assert the purity of his ladye-love, or in other and plainer phrase, to have kept up to the mark of his former achievements. We had a right to expect this at his hands; for doubtless, he agrees with us in the opinion that romance, with moral ends, is a vast engine of activity upon an imaginative people, (who always have their peculiar sympathies to be affected by a peculiar school of writers,) for it stirs up their blood and fills their big veins with a noble enthusiasm, leading directly to the fruition of honor, liberty and law. We cannot stop here to lay before the reader the reasons that have conducted us to this opinion. To those who wield the attributes of this power, appertain many hopes that no lips have yet

¹¹⁶ “Home as Found” [Review], *Southern Literary Messenger* 5 (March 1839): 176.

expressed, but which many hearts, studious of philosophic results, have felt.¹¹⁷

The language here speaks of authors as a public property, indeed even granting the public “rights” to certain expectations of their authors. Authors carry the identity of the nation; they are leaders, even warriors for their country, wielding their moral and aesthetic powers as weapons for good or evil, in the language of the reviewer. Particularly in a republic, where public opinion could have direct influence upon the governance of the nation, authors had great power to affect discourse. Far from distancing himself from this sort of approach, which is not unlike the customer-oriented approach to much business today, Cooper—in the review of Scott, at least—embraced this view. If Scott had “*professed*” his aims in establishing the *Quarterly Review* as “another tribunal of taste, sound principles, and just criticism in literature,” then the reading public should be allowed to insist that the content of the periodical comply: “This was what the world had a perfect right to expect, and a perfect right to insist upon” (351). If authors and their property were public property, in a sense, and leaders of that public, Cooper insisted that they were to be moral like any other leader. If they were professional, then they should have a professional code of ethics.

As American literature had begun to emerge in the previous decades, much discussion had taken place over the moral value of creative literature, particularly fiction. The preoccupation, for those both for and against it, was on consumption first, and then upon the production of literature that would produce the desired moral effect when consumed. What moral effects would literature have upon the reader? Could a novel convey a proper moral tone, and, if so, how could it do so? As one of the first American authors of creative literature to gain a widespread reputation, Cooper had seen his novels reviewed constantly under such paradigms. But, as his assessment of Scott exemplifies, he was also asking different questions about what lay behind the production of art. It was not enough to create a wholesome moral effect in a literary work. The author behind the work needed to have credibility as a moral authority by maintaining a personal ethic that promoted honesty above all else.

¹¹⁷ “Homeward Bound—Or the Chase; A Tale of the Sea” [Review], *Southern Literary Messenger* 4 (November 1838): 724.

Cooper was not exactly breaking new ground here in terms of the thesis itself. Years before readers and critics alike had fretted over how to square Byron's power and wit as an author with his scandalous private life as a man, never fully reaching a satisfactory moral conclusion; Scott, by comparison, had reflected little of Byron's controversial character on his surface. However, Cooper's statements were coming not from a consumer of literature but from a producer of it. As one of the first American authors to gain a widespread reputation, he wished to show that his fame as a deliberately American author was established on different terms than those of his more famous predecessor: he had sacrificed, in his view, much of the romance of European scenery, the grandiosity of the great fleets of the naval powers, and even the promise of larger financial returns, all to remain loyal to his native land. If his readers would escape their reliance on foreign opinion and read beneath the surface, they would see in Scott and others a true display of compromised principles that pointed to the corrupted aristocratic ethic of Europe. As an author who almost excessively identified his own interests with those of his country, Cooper had determined that the proper ethical stance of the American author was to be one of guileless truth. Rejecting the notions of a subjective standard of truth, Cooper insisted on objectivity. Truth, if made apparent, would carry its own weight; attention to "facts" would resolve uncertainty, if people were receptive to them.

Cooper had implied, then, his own truthfulness and forthrightness in distinction to Scott's predominating quality of "seemliness." In his writings, Scott could "direct the imagination of the reader," or give "a pleasing exhibition of manners and customs, without any moral aim" (363), very much unlike Cooper at this time, who viewed the thesis novel as nearly a moral necessity. Scott enveloped everything he did with the appearance of "tact" and grace, the *vraisemblance* in his novels in keeping with the seemliness of his life (364). Whereas Scott's "studied kindnesses" had won him great admiration, false though he was, Cooper hints that his own perceived slide in popularity comes from his forthright honesty. Scott "paid the penalty of popularity, by being compelled to feign that which he did not feel, say that which he did not think, and do that which he did not desire" (366). By contrast, Cooper indirectly suggests, he has paid the price of truth by being unpopular.

Cooper's review was not entirely negative. He praised Scott as "a man of a century, as respects talents," and credits Scott for raising the novel to "the dignity of the epic" (363-

64), for instance. With the unfavorable view dominating, though, reaction to the review was predictably harsh. Two months later, under the auspices of fair play, *The Knickerbocker* printed a responding essay, “A Reply to the Attack on Sir Walter Scott, in the Knickerbocker for October.” The anonymous author, devoting page after page to excerpts of the review, finds Cooper guilty of setting an unreachable standard for authors—“nothing short of perfection.”¹¹⁸ Thurlow Weed in the *Albany Evening Journal* makes reference to “the late atrocious attack, said to be *his* [i.e., Cooper’s], upon the pure fame and imperishable works of Walter Scott,” an “assault upon a dead brother-novelist” written with “extreme and malignant virulence.”¹¹⁹ Cooper himself reported a friend’s assessment of the book, delighting in the “honesty” of the review:

Barnard tells me the review makes a great sensation, a thing I could have foretold, for the honesty of it, is a great novelty in this country. He tells me it has made an impression, and that the better portion of the community is settling down into common sense on the subject. Tant mieux pour elle —¹²⁰

The *Southern Literary Messenger* appends a discussion of it to an already unfavorable review of *Home as Found*, calling the review “an article. . . written by Mr. Cooper under the galling consciousness of his own literary wane.”¹²¹ The author objects to Cooper’s project on grounds of tact: “It is always in bad taste for an author to set about decrying the character and productions of a fellow-author, laboring in the same field of literature as himself.”¹²² But Cooper had long since given up the idea of a club-like fraternity existing among authors: keeping that reserve would prevent truth.

Despite the complaints about Cooper’s appropriateness, the reviewer of the *Southern Literary Messenger* essentially concedes most of the ethical points that Cooper discusses. Of Scott’s bias in reviews for the *Quarterly Review*, the reviewer admits, “From other evidence, however, we believe it may be shown, that Scott probably did consider strict impartiality, in

¹¹⁸ *Knickerbocker* 12 (December 1838): 508-520.

¹¹⁹ *Albany Evening Journal*, 22 November 1838: 2.

¹²⁰ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 10 November 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:344.

¹²¹ “Home as Found” [review], *Southern Literary Messenger* 5 (March 1839): 176.

¹²² *Southern Literary Messenger* 5 (March 1839): 176.

reviewing, rather a matter of policy than of conscience” (177). Of Scott’s self-reviewing, another concession is made: “By far the most reprehensible action, on which Mr. Cooper comments, was Scott’s reviewing himself. The species of reviewing is said to be, at present, very common in Britain. If so, Scott’s example has, probably, done mischief; for we doubt whether the practice was as common, at the time when he committed the sin” (177). This was indeed verging on Cooper’s argument that Scott’s examples were “dangerous to the young.” And of Scott’s scheme of marking letters of introduction, the reviewer thinks Cooper too harsh in his judgment, given the artificiality of English society, yet acknowledges that “we agree with him in considering it an inexcusable deceit” (177). Whatever infamy Cooper was acquiring through his review of Scott, he was at least successful in making points of conduct a topic of conversation among the literati.

Cooper was also vindicated by publication of a pamphlet entitled *Refutation of the Misstatements and Calumnies Contained in Mr. Lockhart’s Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart., Respecting the Messrs. Ballantynes*, by the trustees and son of James Ballantyne, Scott’s late publisher.¹²³ Written to contradict Lockhart’s claims that Scott’s financial ruin in his late years was caused by the incompetence of the Ballantynes, the book showed, through a presentation of accounts and other detailed evidence, that the reverse was actually true; namely, that Scott’s own insatiable wants, particularly in real estate and lavish hospitality, had devoured all the capital of the Ballantyne firm, which served as something of a front for Scott’s money. The estates Scott had bought were unassailable by creditors, but Ballantyne was ruined. The pamphlet revealed that Lockhart had ignored proof of Scott’s true culpability, all the while courting the dying James Ballantyne for materials for the *Memoirs*. *The Knickerbocker* ran a brief review of the American reprint of this pamphlet in their November 1838 issue. Their certainty of its truth was firm: “We venture to say, however, that not a single reader will rise from the perusal of this clear, succinct, and in all respects well-written pamphlet, without an entire conviction, that the energies of two upright and confiding men were devoted to the prosecution of a business which would have been eminently successful, but for Sir Walter

¹²³ *Refutation of the Misstatements and Calumnies Contained in Mr. Lockhart’s Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart., Respecting the Messrs. Ballantyne* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1838; Boston: J. Munroe and Co., 1838).

Scott's ambition to become a landed proprietor, and to 'endow a family,' before he had the means of effecting either, upon any sound foundation."¹²⁴

The timely appearance of the Ballantyne pamphlet silenced at least one of Cooper's critics on the Scott matter. Charles King of the *New-York American* had intended to publish a denunciation of Cooper's review but had deferred because of other pressing matters. In the meantime, the pamphlet reached him, and the proofs were convincing. Cooper was considerably amused by the conversion of his one-time friend, as he reports to Shubrick:

Here is a good thing with my friend Charley King. I have been reviewing Lockhart, and say that he was not a proper man to write Scott's Life, on account of his habits, love of mystification, and predilection for fibbing &c &c. Well, Charley blusters, calls the review lamentable, and promises to notice it, in a proper way. Yesterday I was told I was to get it, Charley having lain by, merely on account of the election. Alas, Charley comes out, in a small voice, last night, and announces that he has been reading a pamphlet of young Ballantyne, who *proves*, (figures can't lie) that Scott ruined Ballantynes, and that Mr. Lockhart is shown to be a man unworthy to have been charged with the important task of writing his father in Law's biography; or, in other words, just what I have been pronounced him to be, on internal evidence that had escaped Charley's sagacity! Now nothing is plainer than the fact, that if Lockhart is a scamp for treating the Ballantynes as he has, Scott was a bigger, as he knew all along the injustice the world was doing them on his account, and yet who put on an air of magnanimous forgiveness of the wrong they had done him! Mark my words — Posterity will regard Scott as I have written him down.¹²⁵

Left with such damning evidence, most of Cooper's critics dropped the matter, although the charge would again surface when he published *The Pathfinder* that in his portrayal of the Scottish Lieutenant Muir, Cooper was again ridiculing Sir Walter, some eight years after his death.

The review of Scott, then, set down Cooper's view of an ethic of authorship which emphasized the author as a public figure active in, rather than removed or distant from, a national and even international public discourse. Since in a republic the virtue of citizens would prove the true governing force of the nation, the truth and personal ethics of those moderating that discourse would be a vital concern. Recognizing a wide-ranging influence

¹²⁴ "The Messrs. Ballantynes and Mr. Lockhart." *Knickerbocker* 12 (November 1838): 467.

¹²⁵ JFC to Shubrick, 12 November 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:347.

of authorship that extended beyond mere celebrity, Cooper sought to hold authors culpable as much for personal behavior as for the moral content of his or her writings, with transparency as to their motives. Indeed, without proper precautions, the habits of authors, like those of newspaper journalists, would establish precedents for the worse and contribute to the unsettling of the foundations of republican government. Cooper's convictions on these points held firm long after the review of Scott, finding their way into even some of his most commercially-oriented works, as shall be seen in Chapter Three. As in the essay on Scott, Cooper would continue to conflate public and personal concerns, continuing to suggest through his fiction his own role as a nearly prophetic voice of truth and pondering the potential fate of truth and truth-tellers in society. This sustained theme, however, was only part of the broader conflation of public and personal concerns that affected Cooper's vision of professional authorship. Long considered an authority on nautical matters following his pioneering invention of the sea novel early in his career, Cooper would nevertheless find his reputation challenged after publishing what was supposed to be a non-controversial work, his 1839 *History of the Navy of the United States*. As Chapter Two will show, these and other developments in the realm of nautical literature would affect Cooper's role in the marketplace and his vision of authorship nearly as much as the social controversies he was more overtly addressing in his works of the 1830s.

Chapter Two

Seamanship and Authorship: *The History of the Navy to Afloat and Ashore*

Works:

The History of the Navy of the United States of America. By J. Fenimore Cooper. 2 vols.
Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, successors to Carey & Co., 10 May 1839.

-----, *Second Edition, with Corrections.* 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1840.

-----: *Abridged in One Volume,* By J. Fenimore Cooper. Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1841.

The Two Admirals. A Tale. By the Author of "The Pilot," "Red Rover," "Water-Witch," "Homeward Bound," &c. &c. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 22 April 1842.

The Wing-and-Wing, or Le Feu-Follet; A Tale, By the Author of "The Pilot," "Red Rover," "Two Admirals," "Homeward Bound," &c. &c. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 23 November 1842.

Ned Myers; or, A Life before the Mast. Edited by J. Fenimore Cooper. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 9[?] November 1843.

Afloat and Ashore; or the Adventures of Miles Wallingford. By the Author of "The Two Admirals," "Pilot," "Wing and Wing," "Red Rover," "Water-Witch," &c. 4 vols. Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 8 June (Vols. I & II), 11 October (Vols. III & IV) 1844.

Although Cooper is known today primarily as an author of frontier and forest, during his lifetime he was at least as well known and as highly regarded as the father of the sea novel. He had pioneered the genre in late 1823 with *The Pilot*, a tale undertaken, like so many of his works, as an exercise in literary one-upmanship. Spurred on by hearing an acquaintance praise the nautical scenes in Sir Walter Scott's *The Pirate* (1822) as proof of Scott's knowledge of ships and sea, Cooper determined to go beyond the veneer of mere *vraisemblance* that characterized Scott's work to write a story that could withstand the scrutiny of the true sailor. With *The Pilot* the characteristics of the new genre emerged: Susan Fenimore Cooper captures many of its leading qualities by describing the sea novel as a work

“with the scene laid on the ocean, whose machinery should be ships and the waves, whose principal characters should be seamen, acting and talking as such”; the work “might be written with perfect professional accuracy, and yet possess equal interest with a similar book connected with the land.”¹ More than that, though, Cooper’s novel transcended earlier treatments of the sea and sailors—most notably by Smollett—by combining abundant technical detail as to the working of the ship, a seriousness and respectfulness about the profession of sailor that avoided excessive satire or sentimentalization, and a treatment of the sea not merely as a backdrop for action but as an integral, often sublime part of the fabric of existence.² Never completely satisfied with how *The Pilot* turned out, Cooper twice revisited the sea novel during his first decade of authorship, scoring a decided success with *The Red Rover* in 1827 but meeting a more mixed reaction to 1830’s *The Water-Witch*, an experimental novel which perhaps carried the romantic element too far with its appeals to gothic-like supernaturalism. These works, particularly *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover*, established themselves with critics and the reading public as the standards by which nautical literature would be judged, retaining their fame throughout Cooper’s career. Cooper’s most productive period of achievement in nautical literature, however, was still to come in the late 1830s and throughout much of the 1840s.

As Thomas Philbrick ably demonstrated several decades ago in his pioneering study *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*, Cooper’s innovation with the sea novel opened the way for what could aptly be termed a flood of nautical writing in the literary marketplace. Cooper had given the reading public a treatment of the sea that was at once both more romantic in its conception and more realistic in its details than almost anything in the past; accordingly, writers thus inspired to get in on the new craze for nautical literature faced pressures to provide ever more fantastic adventures and more accurate treatments of life at sea if they were to outdo Cooper and secure their own reputations. Thus some works distilled the adventure from Cooper’s template to emphasize the more

¹ Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: W.A. Townsend, 1861) 73.

² See Chapter One of Thomas Philbrick’s *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1961) 1-41, for a more thorough treatment of nautical elements in literature before Cooper.

fabulous, swashbuckling aspects of the sea while others dwelled upon the more technical, prosaic, day-to-day details of seafaring life.

Cooper's nationalistic treatment of the United States Navy in *The Pilot* spurred a number of sea-sketches on naval life, which lent themselves particularly well to the publication format of literary magazines, and by the time his romanticized, Byronic pirate Captain Heidegger appeared in *The Red Rover* in 1827, other domestic authors had also begun seizing on the adventurous possibilities presented by the frequent piracy that plagued merchant shipping during the decade. Although a number of novels appeared, many anonymously authored, most previewed the kind of subliterate conventions that later would become the staple of dime novels like those by Joseph Holt Ingraham or Maturin Murray Ballou: the "plotless succession of lurid episodes" and "the debasement of the Byronic hero by sensational exaggeration" among them.³ A few, such as Joseph C. Hart's *Miriam Coffin* (1834), aspired to greater artistry; Hart's book, with its romantic treatment of the lowly profession of whaling and its subplot of a voyage foredoomed by prophecy (in a ship containing a crewman named Starbuck), would prove to be a significant source for Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851).⁴

Cooper's influence was felt more strongly in the rapidly growing field of short-story writing, particularly as literary periodicals and gift books proliferated during the 1830s. Nathaniel Ames, whose *A Mariner's Sketches* (1830) received mention by Richard Henry Dana, Jr., in *Two Years before the Mast* as the only previous work to present a factual portrayal of nautical life from a common sailor's point of view, wrote many pieces but suffered from a style considered either "hasty and desultory" or "inept," depending on whether Dana's or Philbrick's words are to be preferred.⁵ Such was also the case for John Gould, another

³ Philbrick, *Sea Fiction*, 91. See Philbrick, *Sea Fiction*, 90-100 for a discussion of early American sea novels between about 1820-1835.

⁴ [Joseph C. Hart,] *Miriam Coffin; or, The Whale Fishermen* (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1834; 2nd ed., New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835).

⁵ Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *Two Years before the Mast* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1840); Philbrick, *Sea Fiction*, 105. Ames's *A Mariner's Sketches* was published in Providence by Cory, Marshall, and Hammond in 1830; he also published *Nautical Reminiscences* (Providence: Marshall, 1832) and a collection of five sea stories, *An Old Sailor's Yarns* (New York: George Dearborn, 1835).

prolific writer of the period, but William Leggett, an ex-naval officer who became acquainted with Cooper (during his tenure as the columnist "A.B.C.") while serving with William Cullen Bryant at the *New-York Evening Post* from 1829-36, produced short stories that nearly rivaled Cooper's nautical achievements in the novel. These stories, originally published in magazines and gift books, were collected in his *Tales and Sketches* (1829) and *Naval Sketches* (1834), the latter of which apparently sold well enough to justify a second edition.⁶ In addition to these authors, nearly every well-known American author of the period attempted some kind of nautical tale: Washington Irving, William Gilmore Simms, Robert Montgomery Bird, James Kirke Paulding, and William Leete Stone, among others.⁷

From overseas, Cooper received his stoutest competition from Frederick Marryat, another sailor turned author who achieved popular success with *Frank Mildmay* (1829) and *The King's Own* (1830), following up with novels such as *Jacob Faithful* and *Peter Simple* (both 1834) and his most famous work, *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1836). Another ex-officer, Michael Scott, made a name for himself with *Tom Cringle's Log* (1829), published serially, as would be the case with many of Marryat's works. These tales (and others of their ilk), of course, were eagerly pirated by American book, magazine, and newspaper publishers. The result of this proliferation of nautical tales was that by the mid-1830s, the literary marketplace was nearly saturated by them; a jaded reviewer for *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* summed up the state of nautical writing in 1837 by writing, "In a word, we are tired of nautical tales; the sea is positively worn out; and ships afire, mutinies, sea-fights, fogs, and floggings, are considerably below par. Novelty is a thing to be desired, but not expected in maritime delineations."⁸ Greater realism, greater adventure, or greater art were required for continued distinction in the field.

If *The Pilot* had transformed the literary market for nautical writing, it had also transformed Cooper's profession as an author. Before *The Pilot*, few signs would have

⁶ [William Leggett,] *Tales and Sketches. By a Country Schoolmaster* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1829); *Naval Stories* (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1834; 2nd Ed., 1835).

⁷ See Philbrick, *Sea Fiction*, 103-04.

⁸ [Review of *The Scourge of the Ocean; a Story of the Atlantic, by an Officer of the U.S. Navy*], "Review of New Books," *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* 1 (1837): 288.

alerted the reading public that the author of *Precaution*, *The Spy*, and *The Pioneers* had prior nautical experience, and even less would have indicated the value he placed upon this experience. Perhaps, indeed, *The Pilot* served as a means by which Cooper himself could integrate his nautical past with his authorial present. As a youth of sixteen who had been expelled from Yale before completing his course of study, Cooper had run away from his father's home in Cooperstown to become a sailor, eventually, with the aid of family friends, securing a berth aboard the merchant ship *Stirling*.⁹ The *Stirling's* voyage, between August 1806 and September 1807, taught young Cooper seamanship and gave him his first taste of European life during stops in London and Spain. Cooper's intention was not to remain in the merchant service, however; upon his return to America, he secured a commission as a midshipman in the United States Navy in 1808, serving briefly aboard the bomb-ketch *Vesuvius* in New York harbor before departing to service at Oswego on Lake Ontario, where he assisted in overseeing construction of the brig *Oneida* under the command of Lt. Melancthon Woolsey, a future subject of one of his naval biographies for *Graham's Magazine* (see Chapter Four).

By November 1809 he was back in New York, serving aboard the USS *Wasp* under the command of Lt. James Lawrence, but in the capacity of a recruiting officer. No doubt disappointed with the lack of interesting duty (he had tried, unsuccessfully, to find a Europe-bound ship to transfer to), and faced with increasing responsibilities following the death of his father in December 1809, Cooper left the Navy on a one-year furlough in May 1810, never to return once he married Susan DeLancey on New Year's Day, 1811. At that time, he could not have predicted the great naval activity that would occur during the War of 1812, yet even during the war he never rejoined the service, possibly because of opposition to his naval career among the DeLancey family. Following his marriage, he attempted to lead the life of a gentleman farmer, yet by 1819 his nautical interests began to reveal themselves again, for by April of that year he had purchased a controlling interest in a whale

⁹ For more on young James Cooper's (the "Fenimore" was added in 1826 to preserve his mother's family name) running away to sea, see Alan Taylor, "James Fenimore Cooper Goes to Sea: Two Unpublished Letters by a Family Friend," *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1993): 43-54, and *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Knopf, 1995), as well as Wayne Franklin, "Cooper as Passenger," *The American Neptune* 57.4 (Fall 1997): 351-57.

ship, the *Union* of Sag Harbor. The considerable expense to outfit the ship for its voyages was financed through a complex web of land sales and mortgages that would eventually result in legal entanglements, and after profits from the voyages apparently proved less lucrative than Cooper had expected, he extricated himself by selling off his shares of the *Union* sometime around the first half of 1823.¹⁰

In addition to these life experiences, other more literary suggestions of Cooper's nautical interests preceded *The Pilot* as well. Between 1820 and 1822, while he was still in the earliest stages of his new and indeterminate occupation as a writer, Cooper contributed six anonymous review articles to a fledgling periodical, *The Literary and Scientific Repository, and Critical Review*, run by an old messmate, Charles Kitchell Gardner. Three of these articles were of a nautical nature: reviews of the *Naval History of the United States* by Thomas Clark, *An Account of the Arctic Regions* by William Scoresby, and *Journal of a Voyage of Discovery* by William Edward Parry.¹¹ Cooper would return to Scoresby, Parry, and other accounts of Arctic and Antarctic exploration nearly three decades later when writing *The Sea Lions*; his review of Clark's *History*, though, is perhaps the most noteworthy of these reviews, for the faults Cooper found with this first attempt to narrate the history of America's navy (Clark relied too much on the untrustworthy testimony of privateers, Cooper thought) would inspire Cooper's own interest in setting down a definitively factual and impartial record. Indeed, throughout much of his review, Cooper goes beyond mere criticism of Clark's faults to undertake narration of his own, interspersing his narration with arguments about naval policy and the relative merits of different warships.¹² However prophetic of Cooper's future

¹⁰ For an excellent discussion of Cooper's finances during the years between his marriage and his initial venture into authorship, including his involvement with the *Union*, see James H. Pickering, "Fenimore Cooper as Country Gentleman: A New Glimpse of Cooper's Westchester Years," *New York History* LXXII (July 1991): 299-318. A letter dated 16 March 1823 from Cooper's co-investor, Charles T. Dering, includes an account statement with charges as recent as February of that year.

¹¹ *The Literary and Scientific Repository, and Critical Review* 2 (January 1821): 20-37; 3 (July 1821): 1-23; 4 (January 1822): 55-86.

¹² For a more thorough treatment of Cooper's review, see Robert D. Madison's introduction to his reprinted edition of Cooper's abridged *Naval History*: James Fenimore Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America: A Facsimile Reproduction of the 1841 Edition with*

interests this and the other reviews would prove, though, their anonymous character and limited circulation (the *Repository* failed after four volumes) would render them nearly invisible to the reading public that consumed Cooper's early novels. More visible was Cooper's inclusion, among the large and varied cast of characters in *The Pioneers*, of an ex-sailor Benjamin Penguillan, or Ben Pump, who serves as a steward and *majordomo* in Judge Marmaduke Temple's household. Invested with the arcane terminology and salty worldview of his trade, Ben Pump clearly demonstrates Cooper's nautical experience and interest, yet remains more a caricature of a seaman *a la* Smollett than a truly serious attempt to treat the profession of sailor. Much as Cooper would follow up his mildly clownish characterization of Natty Bumppo in *The Pioneers* with a more heroic treatment of the hunter in his prime condition and native element in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), in *The Pilot* he would treat the sailor in his own element as a brave and skilled professional.

Such an evolution aptly parallels, in some senses, the transformation Cooper's own public persona as an author would undergo with the publication of his sea novels. He became widely regarded as one of the nation's foremost experts on nautical affairs, so much so in the public eye that rumors occasionally circulated (especially from Whig opponents intent upon exposing Cooper's supposedly "mercenary" nature) that he was jockeying for an appointment to become Secretary of the Navy—insinuations that Cooper vehemently denied, publicly and privately.¹³ The fact that fellow author James Kirke Paulding served in that capacity in the Van Buren administration from 1838-41 suggests how plausible these rumors might have seemed to some, yet Cooper refused to use his literary fame as an author as a means to secure political favors (he resented, for instance, the way Washington Irving had done exactly that). He did, however, take his role as a national authority on nautical matters seriously. In matters of Indian lore, he would only make coy, playful pretenses to expertise despite the air of knowing that his Leatherstocking tales provided, seldom taking on an active role in Native American affairs. When it came to nautical affairs, however,

an Historical Introduction and Notes by R.D. Madison. Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1988.

¹³ See, for instance, JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 1 July 1836, in *Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, ed. James Franklin Beard, 6 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1960-68) 3:223; or JFC to Horatio Greenough, 31 June 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:328.

especially naval ones, he strove to make material contributions to the store of knowledge and advocated vigorously for a powerful navy as being in the nation's best interests. Apropos of his role as naval expert, he continued to write non-fiction analytical pieces on naval matters, as he had first done in Gardiner's *Repository*, including a discussion of the navy that made up one of his "letters" by fictitious Europeans on various social topics in *Notions of the Americans* (1828).¹⁴ More significantly, Cooper, perhaps inspired to yet another one of his cases of one-upmanship by his review of Clark's problematic attempt at a naval history, began during the first half of the 1820s to collect materials toward his own definitive history of the United States Navy. Already by June 1825 he was jokingly referring to it in a letter to his closest friend, Captain William Branford Shubrick, as "the immortal history" for the way it would immortalize the "idlers" in the service.¹⁵ In a more formal setting at the farewell dinner given him by his Bread and Cheese Club in May 1826 before his departure for Europe, he spoke of it again at some length, expressing his intentions to record "the deeds and sufferings of a class of men to which this nation owes a debt of lasting gratitude."¹⁶ But during his seven years in Europe from 1826-33, few materials for his research were accessible, and the project was laid aside.¹⁷

After Cooper's return to America in November 1833 and his subsequent would-be renunciation of his pen in *A Letter to His Countrymen* (1834), non-fiction writing dominated his literary efforts (the allegorical satire *The Monikins* excepted). In addition to his five volumes of European travels, contemplated before his "retirement" from authorship, and his series of "A.B.C." letters for the New York *Evening Post*, Cooper once again turned his

¹⁴ Letter XXII, "To the Baron Von Kemperfelt, &c. &c.," *Notions of the Americans: Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1828; Albany, SUNY P, 1991) 313-36. *Notions* contained many other references to nautical matters as well; see Madison, "Introduction," xix-xxii for a thorough treatment of these pieces.

¹⁵ JFC to Capt. William Branford Shubrick, USN, 15 June 1825, *Letters and Journals* 1:120.

¹⁶ From the report on the farewell banquet appearing in the *New York American* on 30 May 1826: *Letters and Journals* 1:141.

¹⁷ "I have not forgotten the Naval History," he wrote to Shubrick from Paris on 20 September 1830, "though it gets on but slowly, on account of the impossibility of finding Documents here." *Letters and Journals* 2:26.

attention to nautical affairs. Though he never did carry out his half-serious intention to “become sailor again” upon giving up his pen (just as he never really did renounce authorship), the role of nautical expert remained integral to his professional self, standing with his newer role as a social critic as one of the prominent features of his unsettled and temporary post-novelist career. Indeed, it seems no accident that when Cooper did resume writing fiction in the experiment that would become *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, he attempted to marry these two roles that so dominated his approach at that time. In 1836 he contributed two pieces to a short-lived new periodical *The Naval Magazine*. “Comparative Resources of the American Navy” led off the first issue, and a follow-up piece, “Hints on Manning the Navy” appeared in the second—both pieces bringing to print ideas and arguments Cooper had contemplated since at least 1830.¹⁸ Around the same time, he was introducing one of his “A.B.C.” letters to the New York *Evening Post* by decrying America’s neglect of its navy as a sign of national weakness in foreign policy.¹⁹ And the projected naval history, though set aside, was not forgotten; in November 1835, Captain Shubrick was asking Cooper, “How comes on the History of the Navy?”²⁰

With fiction out of the picture for Cooper at least temporarily, the naval history fit well within the parameters he had delineated for himself in his post-“retirement” career, being both a work of nonfiction and a project started before his supposed renunciation of

¹⁸ “Comparative Resources of the American Navy,” *The Naval Magazine* 1 (January 1836): 19-33; “Hints on Manning the Navy,” *The Naval Magazine* 1 (March 1836): 176-91 (also published separately as a pamphlet). See JFC to Shubrick, 20 September 1830, for an early mention of ideas similar to those appearing in the *Naval Magazine* articles: *Letters and Journals* 2:26. Cooper also discusses, in a letter to his British publishers Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley ca. March 1831, his intention to publish, as a pamphlet of some 20-30 octavo pages, a letter to the president regarding U.S. naval policy: *Letters and Journals* 2:58. It is worth noting that, contrary to his earlier anonymous authorship of nautical articles in Gardiner’s *Repository*, Cooper writes, “it is my intention to put my name on it.” The pamphlet was not published in the form Cooper mentions, but its substance did appear in the two *Naval Magazine* articles. See Madison, “Introduction,” xxiii-xxviii for a discussion of Cooper’s arguments in the *Naval Magazine* articles.

¹⁹ JFC to William Cullen Bryant and Charles Mason, for *The Evening Post*, [16? January 1836]: *Letters and Journals* 3:190-91.

²⁰ William Branford Shubrick to JFC, 12 November 1835: *Letters and Journals* 3:180.

authorship. Then, too, history carried with it an air of acceptability, objectivity, and seriousness that the often rakish reputation of novels (and novelists) lacked, making it a genre well-suited to Cooper's more sober, "fact"-oriented post-Europe mentality. With his series of travel sketches winding down, the naval history could finally get the attention Cooper had long intended to give it, and the failure of the travel books in the literary marketplace no doubt quickened his resolve to set to work on it. But clearly this kind of work would be new ground for Cooper in a number of respects: the genre of historical writing would demand different methods and disciplines, and it would appeal, perhaps, to different readers. Since the naval history would be longer than his typical novels, accommodations would have to be made in the physical size of the text, which would necessarily affect the price at which it could be sold. Then, too, the tendency of the reading public to consider histories of greater moral value than novels could also come into play.

Uncertainties about some of these variables may inform one of Cooper's early attempts to secure an offer for the naval history, appearing in a letter to his British publisher Richard Bentley in April 1837. Undoubtedly disappointed at the premature failure of his travel series, Cooper trolled for a bite from Bentley on the naval history without mentioning specific terms for a bargain:

I do not know whether I shall continue these [travel] sketches any further. Probably not. The Naval History will be ready I think by autumn, as it is a work I have had in hand for years. It will be about as large as three volumes of *Novel*, *American Editions*, or perhaps four *English*. I should like to hear from you on the subject.²¹

Bentley, with his losses on the travel books fresh in his mind, was no more sanguine about the prospects of success for the naval history in Britain: "I feel convinced that, however extensively popular such a work might be in your country, the interest here would be limited principally to professional men. My edition therefore could but be small."²² Offering nevertheless to pay Cooper £400 (about \$2000 in 1837 dollars) for the first edition, Bentley proposed to make it more appealing to British readers by including portraits of America's best-known naval heroes, a move that would take the book upmarket. Perhaps disappointed

²¹ JFC to Richard Bentley, 14 April 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:262.

²² Richard Bentley to JFC, 13 May 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:262.

in the figure his open-ended inquiry had provoked, Cooper took pains to mention in a follow-up letter, “I did intend to ask £600 for the Naval History, but as you have not done very well by the travels, you shall have it at £400.”²³ Cooper remained convinced—perhaps out of his own notions of the persuasiveness of truth—that an audience for his history existed in Britain, but ultimately Bentley’s prophecies, self-fulfilling or not, would prove true, making Bentley the loser of some £600 and casting a shadow over Cooper’s future negotiations.

In America, prospects for such a work naturally seemed much more promising, given its focus on American concerns, and Cooper hoped to realize good returns on his history. American historical writing was coming of its own in the literary marketplace, headed by such noteworthy figures as George Bancroft and William Hickling Prescott. With a broad appeal, partially due to its perceived qualities of patriotism and moral worth, history could be made to sell; indeed, its aura of value often allowed it to be sold in more “premium” formats than those of popular literature, allowing for such luxuries as illustrations and fine leather bindings. Publishing history could prove profitable for authors as well as their publishers: around 1839, the year that Cooper’s *History of the Navy* eventually was published, George Bancroft was reaping royalties of some \$200-\$500 a month from Little, Brown and Company, his American publishers, for the first two volumes of his *History of the United States* alone—still receiving a remarkable \$4250 in royalties from worldwide sales of the book in 1841, when a third volume had been added to the series.²⁴ William Hickling Prescott’s 1838 contract with the same firm for *The History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella* called for Prescott to receive \$2975 (\$1.75 per copy) for rights to publish 1700 copies of the book, which had already gone through two editions with the American Stationers’ Company before that firm failed in the economic upheavals of 1837. Prescott exercised tight control over the terms, ensuring the continued premium quality of his work by including stipulations in the contract that the firm use paper “worth six dollars a ream” and bind the books “in every way

²³ JFC to Bentley, 6 July 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:269.

²⁴ Russel B. Nye, *George Bancroft: Brahmin Rebel* (New York: Knopf, 1944) 120-21.

equal to the first edition of said History,” with Prescott himself the sole judge of quality.²⁵ Though these figures do not quite match the large sums Cooper had received at the peak of his fame in the 1820s, they represent more durable numbers bespeaking a faith by both author and publisher in the lasting sales of the works beyond their first appearances in the marketplace—Cooper, by contrast, often receiving little for subsequent editions of his novels, despite evidence that they continued to sell. Assuredly, these sums were much greater than the meager returns Cooper was realizing on his European travel series.

Though Cooper anticipated a good income from his naval history and showed awareness of the potential for history to be profitable in the long term, he began his negotiations for the naval history at a position of severe disadvantage. Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, Cooper’s American publishers, had been even less hopeful about the European travel series than Bentley, with the amounts they offered steadily decreasing as each succeeding volume confirmed the unpopularity of the series (whether this was entirely Cooper’s fault or partially theirs, however, is a matter worthy of consideration). Indeed, when Cooper in June 1837 first sought terms for what would turn out to be the last volume of the series, *Gleanings in Europe: Italy*, the publishers resisted contracting for the work at all, so convinced were they of its undesirability despite Cooper’s attempts to write a work free of “politics.”²⁶ Accordingly, Cooper’s response was a series of maneuvers and near-bluffs designed to give a rose-colored view of the situation. The story he told Bentley about the then-unsettled fate of *Italy* in America was not one of refusal to publish on account of the work itself, but a caution attributable to bad times (which, admittedly, were dismal): “such is the state of things, the Messrs Carey dare not publish just yet.”²⁷ Likewise, after what appears to have been a failed attempt to shop around for more lucrative publishing deals elsewhere, Cooper again blamed economic conditions and attempted to make his return to

²⁵ C. Harvey Gardiner, *Prescott and His Publishers* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1959) 54-55, 285.

²⁶ “Carey declines publishing,” Cooper reported to his wife, “but, I think, will take the book when it returns [from being printed in England].” JFC to Mrs. Cooper, [29 June 1837]: *Letters and Journals* 3:266.

²⁷ JFC to Bentley, 6 July 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:269.

Carey's firm look like a favor to *them* rather than the reverse: "I found things so bad in New-York that I did not print *Italy*, but sent the manuscript to Bentley, who is to return me the sheets, as the book goes through the press. . . . As the entire series makes a complete work, I suppose you would like to have it."²⁸ The publishers aptly replied, "We do not know what to say of *Italy*," shying away from taking it as a speculation but offering, instead, to undertake a small edition of 750 copies and divide any profits with Cooper—surely not what Cooper had envisioned to be the result of his maneuverings.²⁹

Such gamesmanship would affect Cooper's early negotiations with his Philadelphia publishers for the naval history, too (as well as those for *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, which ended up delaying the naval history by more than a year once Cooper had proposed returning to fiction in late 1837). With Bentley's offer of £400 for the naval history in hand, as well as a tentative offer for what would become *Homeward Bound*, Cooper could cryptically—and seemingly casually—report to Carey's firm in a postscript, "I am in a half negotiation with Bentley for a novel, and have sold him the Naval History. We differ as to subject, mine being a whim of my own, which has seized upon me suddenly, and he being a little [surly?] about the sea --- By the way, what do you say to the Naval History?"³⁰ Like Bentley, Carey, Lea, & Blanchard expressed a desire to know the size and scope of the edition, but unlike him, they shrewdly declined making a blind offer: "Pray tell us," they responded, "what size your naval History will be, when it will be ready, & what you expect from it? Will it embrace the whole of the period from the commencement of the Revolution to the present time?"³¹ There the matter remained, apparently unsettled for a substantial part of 1838 while *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* pushed the naval history farther back; affairs were still in such a dubious state in May 1838 that Cooper confided to his wife, "I think my connection with Carey draws near a close. I do not expect that he will publish

²⁸ JFC to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 8 September 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:289.

²⁹ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 13 September 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:289-90. The cost books of Lea & Blanchard show that Cooper received \$200 for *Italy*. Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁰ JFC to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 8 September 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:289.

³¹ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 13 September 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:290.

either *Home-as-Found*, or the *Naval History*.”³² It would be November 1838 before a contract for the work was finally made, once *Homeward Bound* and its unplanned continuation, *Home as Found*, were out of the way and enjoying respectable sales, if not good press.

The long gestation period for the *History of the Navy*, with its numerous interruptions and delays, largely can be attributed to the new demands it imposed on Cooper as an author, faced with the discipline of writing history rather than the relative freedom of fiction. To his credit, Cooper understood well the duties of the historian to conduct thorough research and to render his narrative in a fair and objective manner, and his stated concerns for accuracy and completeness often figured prominently in his reasons for repeatedly holding the book back. Indeed, it is interesting to speculate how much the *Home* novels served as placeholders for Cooper while he conducted still more research and rebuilt his reputation with Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to a point where he could command better terms in his contract for the *History*. Whereas a novel could be written in Cooperstown as easily as in New York or Philadelphia, a history could not; the logistics of gathering source materials for a history that would encompass great geographical spaces and chronological spans would prove formidable. At one point in late 1837, as he contemplated moving his family to Philadelphia or some other city to “pass the heel of winter,” he asked Shubrick what prospects of lodging might offer themselves in Baltimore, where Shubrick was then stationed. Returning to the theme with some urgency later in his letter, Cooper reveals that professional as well as personal motives spur his interest: “Seriously will you let me know if I can get into decent lodgings in Baltimore at a reasonable price? I am anxious to get the *Naval Annals* off my hands and can only do it where I have access to authorities.”³³ His plans for travel dashed by his wife’s falling ill, delaying progress on the *History*, Cooper was telling Shubrick again in January 1838 that he still hoped “to get authorities” by spring, something he accomplished at least partially by a trip to New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington in March 1838, retracing his steps for similar purposes in November of the same year.³⁴ The “authorities” he sought

³² JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 25 May 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:326.

³³ JFC to Shubrick, 2 October 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:294-95.

³⁴ JFC to Shubrick, 21 January 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:304.

were not just documentary ones; he also sought out information through personal interviews, sometimes from men with first-hand experiences of the events he wished to narrate. Thus during his November 1838 trip to Washington, for instance, he interviewed former naval officers James Barron, David Porter, and Isaac Chauncey; in another instance, seeking information about a Revolution-era warship, the *South Carolina*, he begged Shubrick to come to his aid: “Cannot you write to some one in Carolina, and get her history, and any other fact, connected with the naval history of that state?”³⁵ A former president, John Quincy Adams, was even pumped for information, with Cooper presenting him a list of questions about such matters as the issuing of commissions by Benjamin Franklin in Europe, the use of a uniform flag prior to 1777, and the fates of several vessels and officers. Cooper notes in his letter that while he is “daily making discoveries,” he has also encountered “much difficulty in obtaining authentic facts during the war of the revolution.”³⁶

Indeed, such was the continual nature of his research that the finding of new “authorities” prompted him to rewrite the first part of the book after he had already written it and prepared it for print. “I am pressed in a way of which you have no notion,” he apologized to Captain William Compton Bolton in declining a dinner invitation in December 1838. “*All the early part of my book* has to be written over again, in consequence of the discovery of new authorities, with the printers on my heels.”³⁷ The naval history, then, rightly could be termed Cooper’s most collaborative work, and it would remain so even after the first edition was put before the public, as letters poured in from readers—many of them sailors themselves—contributing minor corrections or supplementary information. Surely this was a departure from the kind of writing Cooper had grown accustomed to, and it proved taxing and hectic, prompting his daughter Susan to tell her brother Paul (who was away at school), “Father has to work very hard at his Naval History, he is almost constantly

³⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, [15 November 1838]: *Letters and Journals* 3:349; JFC to Shubrick, [12 November 1838]: *Letters and Journals* 3:345-46.

³⁶ JFC to John Quincy Adams, 19 December 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:362.

³⁷ JFC to Captain William Compton Bolton, USN, [18] December [1838]: *Letters and Journals* 3:361.

writing, or reading, to collect facts.”³⁸ Or, as Cooper himself would state it, “I have never worked half as hard in my life.”³⁹

Much of the stress under which Cooper labored was a direct result of the terms of his contract with Lea & Blanchard (Carey had since retired), which was finally drawn up and signed on 20 November 1838—quite some time after Cooper had reached his informal agreement with Bentley over the price of the *History*. The timing of the contract coincided closely with the publication of *Home as Found*, which was issued only five days earlier on 15 November, leaving nothing else of consequence on Cooper’s table. Given the hostile reception that *Home as Found* would soon receive from the Whig-dominated press, Cooper’s timing in firming up the deal before external circumstances intervened was probably fortunate. The terms of the contract itself suggest a good deal of back-and-forth bargaining, with both sides gaining important concessions. Cooper would receive \$2750 (not quite ninety-two cents per copy) for a first edition of 3000 copies, allowing Lea & Blanchard the option of printing an additional edition of at least 2000 copies within two years, for which Cooper would receive seventy cents per copy (or a minimum of \$1400). Further attention to future possibilities shows in another clause stipulating that Cooper could not abridge the work, or even announce the abridgement of the work, during the two-year period unless Lea & Blanchard declined republication after their edition(s) were sold out. The size and price of the work were also negotiated: the work would comprise two octavo volumes (his novels were typically in the smaller, cheaper 12mo format) of about four hundred pages each, with the trade price (to booksellers) not to exceed \$3.50 a copy (retail price was typically \$4.00 to \$4.50). Furthermore, Cooper was required to supply manuscript quickly and regularly, for printing would commence “in about two weeks” from the contract date and would “go on until the whole is done which is to be by the first of April 1839.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Susan Fenimore Cooper to Paul Fenimore Cooper, 19 December 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:357.

³⁹ JFC to James De Peyster Ogden, 30 January 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:366.

⁴⁰ Contract for “The Naval History of the United States,” 20 November 1838, Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The tight time limitations and space restrictions had noticeable effects on both process and product. Although Cooper may have had some early portions of the work written before he signed the memorandum of agreement with Lea & Blanchard, it is clear that the bulk of the writing remained to be done. The fast pace at which he was to supply manuscript between December 1838 and April 1839 demanded constant writing, which had to be done while some of his research queries were still outstanding. For instance, replying on 11 January 1839 to John Fanning Watson, a Philadelphia annalist who had supplied information in answer to a prior inquiry, Cooper writes, "I had discovered many of your facts, and they stand in the book already. A few come too late, and of some I can yet avail myself. I say too late, as we are printing, and the proper time to introduce them has passed."⁴¹ Cooper's decision to rewrite the first part of the book on account of newly discovered "authorities," made sometime around mid-December 1838, further added to the pressure, although Lea & Blanchard at least did give permit Cooper to make the changes. At whose ultimate cost is unclear: the firm's cost books note an unusually large bill for alterations in the final product, some 318 hours at a cost of \$95.40.⁴² By the end of January 1839, that crisis fortunately had passed, and Cooper could report significant progress to Ogden:

Some new and minute information reached me about the war of the revolution, and I cancelled more than half of the first volume, re-wrote it, and have now got 348 pages out of 400 printed. As we get off 12 pages a day, I shall be ready to send vol. 1 in all next week [to Bentley].⁴³

The remainder of the pre-publication process, though doubtlessly hectic, seems to have been attended by no further drastic measures. One casualty of Cooper's method of planning and composing the *History*, however, was that portion of his planned account which would treat the times after the War of 1812. Because Cooper's contract had imposed limitations on

⁴¹ JFC to John Fanning Watson, 11 January 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:364.

⁴² Cooper's first mention of having to rewrite the first part of his book occurs in his letter to William Compton Bolton, [18 December 1838]: *Letters and Journals* 3:361; cost of alterations is recorded in the cost books of Lea & Blanchard, Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁴³ JFC to James De Peyster Ogden, 30 January 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:366.

space so the publishers could avoid having the book grow too large in size—and cost—he was obliged to close his second volume with a brief chapter mentioning only a few occurrences after peace was reached with England in 1815, such as some hostilities in the Mediterranean with Algiers and the succeeding peacetime buildup of the Navy. Resolving to continue his narrative by adding a third volume at a later date, Cooper published the *History* as it stood. Though he undertook some writing toward the third volume, he abandoned it to work on his 1840 novel *Mercedes of Castile* (see Chapter Three), and it remained incomplete during his lifetime.⁴⁴

Despite these challenges, Cooper was confident in the overall quality of his history, particularly for the qualities of objectivity and impartiality he felt distinguished the work. “I think this book will [not] disappoint you, as, if I know myself, impartiality will form its great feature,” he assured Bentley (with some egotism) as early as December 1837.⁴⁵ Bentley, fully aware of the tweaking Cooper had given the British in his travel memoir *Gleanings in Europe: England* only months before, might have had reason to worry about his author’s treatment of America’s former enemy in an American book about a branch of the American military. Again in July 1838 Cooper affirmed his intention to deal fairly—an intention tied, interestingly enough, with the commercial prospects of the book in England: “There is one point on which I wish you to be fully assured, as it might possibly affect your determination as to the number to be printed—it is a liberal work as regards our enemies.”⁴⁶ The British

⁴⁴ Portions of it, however, appeared in a posthumous edition published by George Palmer Putnam in 1853, which included a continuation “from the author’s manuscripts and other authentic sources” to the time of its publication.

⁴⁵ JFC to Bentley, 6 December 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:302.

⁴⁶ JFC to Bentley, 25 July 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:333. British reviewers tended to be less favorable to the book than their American counterparts, often accusing Cooper of anti-British bias. Two reviews, in particular, came to Cooper’s attention. One, in the *Edinburgh Review* 71 (April 1840), compared Cooper’s work to William James’s *Naval History of Great Britain, from the Declaration of War by France in 1793 to the Accession of George IV* (1837), prompting a reply from Cooper, “The *Edinburgh Review* on James’s *Naval Occurrences* and Cooper’s *Naval History*” in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 10 (May & June 1842): 411-35, 515-41. The other, a savage attack Cooper saw excerpted in *The United States Service Journal and Naval and Military Magazine* (November & December 1839, 311-22, 433-50), called the work “erroneous in every instance, false in every statement, and its author “incapable of one generous—one manly thought,” causing Cooper to tell Bentley that he

were but one of the potentially competing audiences to be considered; factions in the American public and even in the U.S. Navy itself rendered the task of sorting out and writing “truth” all the more difficult, particularly since pressure to report certain events in certain ways sometimes came from people who Cooper knew personally. The *History*, Cooper and others knew, would set precedent and give an official quality to the deeds reported within, which rendered it an object of interest to parties with stakes in potentially controversial issues.

One particularly tenacious controversy that Cooper could not sidestep altogether revolved around an event that had taken place a quarter of a century earlier: the Battle of Lake Erie, fought between American and British vessels on 10 September 1813, during the War of 1812. In that battle, the Americans, under the direction of Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry, emerged victorious, but only after Perry’s own flagship the *Lawrence* had undergone so severe a punishment that in order to continue the fight he was obliged to leave the ship by boat to be rowed to her sister ship, the *Niagara*, skippered by the second-in-command, Commandant Jesse Duncan Elliott. Taking command of the *Niagara*, Perry, aided by a fresh wind, charged the British line and secured the victory, shortly thereafter immortalizing the battle and his own fame with his succinct dispatch to General William Henry Harrison, which began with the now-famous line, “We have met the enemy and they are ours.”⁴⁷

At issue in the quarter-century of controversy that followed was the character of Elliott’s conduct during the battle. In his pre-battle preparations, Perry had issued two potentially conflicting commands: to maintain the line of battle (the sailing order of the vessels) and to engage each vessel’s designated adversary in close action. When fighting commenced, Perry sailed ahead to engage the HMS *Detroit* in close action, taking advantage

had “half a mind to make the fellow appear what he is, a fool,” (*Letters and Journals* 4:28), though no such reply materialized.

⁴⁷ This summary of the battle is bare-bones, at best. A vast number of studies of the battle have been published, including historically significant ones such as Theodore Roosevelt’s *The Naval War of 1812* (New York, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1882) and Alfred Thayer Mahan’s *Sea Power and its Relation to the War of 1812* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1905). The best recent treatment of the battle is David Curtis Skaggs & Gerard T. Altoff, *A Signal Victory: The Lake Erie Campaign, 1812-1813* (Annapolis: Naval Institute P, 1997).

of the Americans' advantage in short-range weaponry, while Elliott, positioned behind the smaller, slow-sailing vessel *Caledonia*, remained distant from his designated foe, the *Queen Charlotte*, enabling that vessel to assist the *Detroit* against the *Lawrence*. Elliott held back for over two hours of the fighting, finally passing by the *Caledonia* to engage the British in close action after it was obvious that the *Lawrence* was a battered wreck. After the victory, questions immediately began to surface about the motives for Elliott's conduct: was it cowardice? Was he hoping to see Perry killed so that he could secure the victory himself? Or was he merely trying to follow the orders he had been given by maintaining his order in the line of battle?

Perry, in his official report, expressed no direct criticism of Elliott, mentioning on the contrary how Elliott "evinced his characteristic bravery" and how he was "enabled" to bring the *Niagara* "gallantly into close action," but what remained unsaid left questions about whether Perry's praise was genuine or whether condemnation was expressed between the lines, merely shielding Elliott from official censure by sharing credit generously. Congress followed Perry's official line in commemorating the battle by ordering gold medals to be minted bearing the likenesses of Perry and Elliott, an unusual instance of honoring the second-in-command as well as the commander. Elliott, however, resented that in popular estimation Perry was given sole credit for the victory while he was ridiculed; launching a crusade against the Perrys that would smolder for years, Elliott sought to have his name cleared by a naval court of inquiry in April 1815. Perry, for his part, reacted to Elliott's post-war agitation by eventually retracting his former praise (saying that he had written it to preserve harmony in the service and protect Elliott's career) and proffering court-martial charges against him. These, however, were never pursued by officials, and uncertainty remained (and still remains) over whether or not Perry had retracted them before embarking in 1819 on a diplomatic mission to South America, where he met an early death from disease.

The dispute did not end there but was continued—often in print—by camps loyal to each side. In 1821, pro-Perry documents related to the controversy, including copies of the charges leveled against Elliott, were published in a pamphlet entitled *Documents in Relation to the Differences which Subsisted between the Late Commodore O.H. Perry and Captain J.D. Elliott*; Perry's younger brother, Matthew Calbraith Perry, also a naval officer, republished these

documents with additions in 1834 in an attempt to guard his late brother's reputation against accusations leveled publicly by the pro-Elliott camp.⁴⁸ Also in 1834, Elliott himself authored an anonymous review challenging this pamphlet, and the next year, Russell Jarvis, writing as "A Citizen of New York," published a lengthy pro-Elliott book, *A Biographical Notice of Com. Jesse D. Elliott*.⁴⁹

The controversy was anything but settled by the time Cooper took up his task of trying to craft a fair and tactful account of the matter. Complicating the matter further were regional and political biases that came into play: Oliver Hazard Perry had been a New Englander from Rhode Island, and his reputation enjoyed strong support from that strongly Whig area as well as from many Whigs elsewhere. Elliott came from Pennsylvania (he was born in Maryland) and was the staunchest of pro-Jackson Democrats, going so far during his tenure as commander of the Boston Naval Yard as to have the figurehead on "Old Ironsides," the *USS Constitution*, replaced with a likeness of Andrew Jackson, to the great irritation of New England Whigs.⁵⁰ Though a member of no political party himself, Cooper could hardly jump into the fray with clean hands: his general sympathies were known to lie with the Democrats, and he was also known to harbor prejudices against New England, as evidenced only shortly before by his unflattering portrayal of Steadfast Dodge in the *Home* novels. Then, too, there was a less-than-subtle attempt by Matthew Calbraith Perry to ensure that Cooper would portray the Battle of Lake Erie in the "correct"—that is, pro-Perry—way. Cooper and Matthew Perry were old, if not close, acquaintances who had long

⁴⁸ *Documents in Relation to the Differences which Subsisted between the Late Commodore O.H. Perry and Captain J.D. Elliott* (Washington, 1821; Boston, 1834).

⁴⁹ [Jesse Duncan Elliott], *A Review of a Pamphlet Purporting to be Documents in Relation to the Differences which Subsisted between the Late Commodore Oliver H. Perry and Captain Jesse D. Elliott; by A Citizen of Massachusetts* (Boston: H.H. & J. Brewster, 1834); [Russell Jarvis], *A Biographical Notice of Com. Jesse D. Elliott; Containing a Review of the Controversy Between Him and the Late Commodore Perry, and a History of the Figure-Head of the U.S. Frigate Constitution. By a Citizen of New York*. (Philadelphia: Printed for the author, 1835).

⁵⁰ A band of angry Whigs took revenge into their own hands, however, sawing off the wooden head and, according to Elliott, holding "bacchanalian reveries" over it.

been on cordial terms.⁵¹ But having caught wind through a mutual friend, Captain Thomas Holdup Stevens, that Cooper's work on the *History* had progressed to the point where he would soon be writing about Lake Erie, Perry sent Cooper some documents in his possession along with a letter unintentionally betraying apprehension about how the author would handle his subject—an apprehension which spoke to the authoritative qualities with which the *History* (and perhaps history in general) was already invested. In his letter, Perry reported how Stevens (a strong Perry supporter) fretted under the impression that Cooper had received “false information” on the battle, leading him “to suppose that the machinations and falsehoods of others had diverted your [Cooper's] mind from the true merits of the battle.” Imparting Stevens's worries to “his warm and kind hearted zeal for the memory of my brother,” Perry used Stevens as a foil to play down his own similar fears that Cooper might be influenced toward Elliott:

I think differently from my friend. . . . It appears to me, that I know you well enough to satisfy myself that you never could be influenced by such reports, that you are too intimately acquainted with naval matters to be deceived as to the evolution of vessels, their means of getting into action, or of keeping clear of the shot of an enemy; and can judge as well as others, of the influence of the same wind upon all alike, and can estimate the preponderating evidence undeniably standing against the *Niagara* until Commodore Perry assumed command of her, and to this fact all, excepting those belonging to that vessel, bear ample testimony; and that their opinions are corroborated by the British officers, who could have been influenced by no personal views.⁵²

If Cooper wrote Perry a reply, it remains unlocated, but Perry was bound to be disappointed by anything short of wholesale praise for the conduct of his late brother and condemnation of Elliott's.

Cooper's methods, however, and perhaps traces of sympathy for Elliott's plight (given his own sensitivity to denunciation at the hands of New Englanders and Whigs),

⁵¹ In July 1824 Perry and his fellow officers at the New York Navy Yard held a dinner in Cooper's honor, Perry being one of four officers delegated to extend the invitation. Cooper was also a member of the United States Naval Lyceum that Perry had taken the lead in founding in 1833, and, as mentioned earlier, he contributed the lead article for the first issue of the *Naval Magazine* in 1836—a periodical that had Perry on its editorial board.

⁵² Matthew Calbraith Perry to JFC, 13 March 1839: *The Correspondence of James Fenimore-Cooper*, ed. James Fenimore Cooper (grandson of the novelist) (New Haven: Yale UP, 1922) 386-87.

made him hesitant to introduce into his account material against Elliott that was ultimately unproven. Indeed, he had criticized Thomas Clark's earlier attempt at a naval history because of its reliance on hearsay testimony of privateers, which he felt lacked the weight of official truth. He was also laboring under the assumption that certain naval exploits and officers had been given less than their due, hoping to revive, for instance, the reputation of Commodore Isaac Chauncey (who, incidentally, as Perry's superior during his command on Lake Erie, had not always been pleased with him), or hoping to illustrate that the fairly obscure Battle of Plattsburgh Bay, rather than the famous Battle of Lake Erie, should be celebrated as the greatest of American naval exploits during the War of 1812. Perhaps he considered Elliott another of these underdogs, but his own public and private correspondence denies any conscious intention of boosting Elliott's reputation. Sorting through the mass of conflicting letters, affidavits, and other documents related to the controversy, Cooper found the testimony "so contradictory that I will defy any man to make head or tail of it," as he told James De Peyster Ogden shortly after the book was published.⁵³

Without a thorough knowledge of the characters and motivations of the various witnesses involved, Cooper found it safer to steer clear of the bickering. "What had a historian to do with petty quarrels of those engaged," he told Ogden, and likewise, explaining his rationale at greater length to Shubrick, he noted:

Now, I could not insert the testimony of one side, and omit the other. Had I given both, besides laying a very pitiful exhibition of contractions before the world, I should have taken up a large portion of the work with statements that are not sufficiently substantiated, and which in their nature are unfit for history, besides discrediting a service that I desired to illustrate, as far as I was able.⁵⁴

Privately, he confided to Shubrick his own opinion that Elliott perhaps had remained in his station too long but could have been called down to battle by his commander had he been "shy" about engaging. But in the account he published in the *History*, Cooper tried to take

⁵³ JFC to Ogden, 11 June 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:386.

⁵⁴ JFC to Ogden, 11 June 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:386; JFC to Shubrick, 14 June 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:388.

the high road by dispensing praise as broadly as possible and largely deferring to official documents when possible, avoiding mention of the subsequent controversies altogether—an approach that he repeatedly called “cautious,” deeming it the most neutral and impartial possible under the circumstances.⁵⁵ Thus, for example, he concludes his account by noting with unusual brevity:

For his conduct in battle, Capt. Perry received a gold medal from Congress. Capt. Elliott also received a gold medal. Rewards were bestowed on the officers and men generally, and the nation has long considered this action one of its proudest achievements on the water.⁵⁶

Surely Cooper was not, as Samuel Eliot Morison has alleged, deliberately throwing “a few barbs into the Perry clan” or indulging in “snide remarks about the Commodore”—at least not yet.⁵⁷ But for Perry supporters, who were so inclined to see Oliver Hazard Perry’s official commendation of Elliott as damnation through faint praise, anything other than unequivocal statements about where the “true merits of the battle” lay had the potential to be considered an attempt to detract from their hero’s glory. Almost predictably, this would prove to be the case soon after the *History of the Navy* was published in May 1839, and before long Cooper was embroiled in yet another controversy over “truth” that would last for half a decade into the mid-1840s, affecting his reputation, professional outlook, and perhaps even some of the commercial prospects for the *History*.

⁵⁵ Cooper makes this approach clear in a letter to the Cooperstown *Freeman’s Journal*, 2 July 1839: “It was my intention to avoid the controverted points, to relate as many of the facts as could be done, keeping this end in view, and to respect official documents, as far as circumstances would allow.” Cooper rejected the other options of including all testimony, which he felt would consume too much space and lower the history to the level of a controversial pamphlet, or confining himself strictly to official matter, which would have resulted in an account even more favorable to Elliott than his own. *Letters and Journals* 3:407–08.

⁵⁶ James Fenimore Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1839) 2:404.

⁵⁷ Samuel Eliot Morison, “Old Bruin” *Commodore Matthew C. Perry, 1774–1858* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967) 142. Morison severely distorts the context of his quotations, claiming, for instance, that Cooper writes of Perry, “An officer seldom went into action worse, or got out of it better.” In fact, Cooper merely quotes this statement in order to refute it, arguing instead that Perry’s line of battle was “highly judicious” and his plan was laid “with skill and judgment” (*History* 2:402).

Bringing a substantial work of history to market close on the heels of the controversial *Home as Found* was a move of considerable risk for Cooper, potentially for good or for bad. The *History* might redeem some of the reputation Cooper had lost with some of his audiences through his overt social criticisms, but there was the possibility that readers might avoid the history altogether, mistrusting the ability of its author to write objectively. Edgar Allan Poe, reviewing the work in his characteristic fashion, admirably sums up the landscape from a partisan point of view, sparing no strong words for Cooper:

In appearing before the public with this History of our Navy, Mr. Cooper has had two serious difficulties to surmount—one of prejudice, and one of exaggerated anticipation. It cannot be denied that, for many years past, he has been rapidly sinking in the estimation of his countrymen, and indeed of all right minded persons. Even his firmest friends were becoming ashamed of the universality of his cynicism; and his enemies, ceasing in a measure from open hostility, have been well content to abide the apparently inevitable self-ruin which his own unconquerable ill temper was so speedily bringing about. A flashy succession of ill-conceived and miserably executed literary productions, each more silly than its predecessor, and wherein the only thing noticeable was the peevishness of the writer, the only thing amusing his self-conceit—had taught the public to suspect even a radical taint in the intellect, an absolute and irreparable mental leprosy, rendering it a question whether he ever would or could again accomplish any thing which should be worthy the attention of people not positively rabid. In this state of affairs, it was not at all wonderful that the announcement of a Naval History of the United States, by the author of the attack upon Sir Walter Scott, was received with apathy and general distrust—with a feeling very different indeed from that which would have agitated the whole reading world at a similar announcement during the golden days of the celebrated novelist, and once exceedingly popular man.⁵⁸

The *Army and Navy Chronicle* similarly notes the existence of these apprehensions that the work would be permeated by Cooper's "jaundiced views," but the reviewer finds (like Poe) that "expectation has been agreeably disappointed."⁵⁹ The darker side of Poe's assessment certainly held true in the case of the anti-Cooper *New-York American*, which anticipated the

⁵⁸ "Review of New Books," *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* 5 (July 1839): 56. Poe's claim of "exaggerated anticipation" brings up another risk Cooper ran: that admirers of his sea novels would expect the same kind of well-managed excitement from his history—something which, Poe explains, the disordered nature of historical events defies.

⁵⁹ "Cooper's Naval History of the United States," *The Army and Navy Chronicle* 8 (6 June 1839): 361.

publication of the *History* by predicting, "It will, we presume, by embittered and spoiled, like all the recent writings of the author, by the splenetic effusions of a 'mind diseased.'"⁶⁰

How widespread this sentiment was in reality is more difficult to gauge; it is clear, however, that among critics at least, the appearance of the book was deemed a landmark event worthy of anticipation, for it was reviewed widely and prominently, often being accorded the lead review in periodicals' roundups of new publications. The reviewer for *The Corsair* heralded it as the most important American historical work in years: "Since Washington Irving wrote the *Life of Columbus*, this is the most valuable work that has come from the pen of an American author. No portion of our history demanded a more immediate attention than the exploits of our gallant Navy, and before the actors or those who knew them had passed away from among us."⁶¹ Similarly, *The Expositor* hailed it as a positive statement of America's potential for serious literature, saying that the *History* would "do much to silence common cant about the fugitive nature of our modern literature. . . . It is long since we have witnessed the appearance of a work more likely to command lasting applause, or more deserving to form a concomitant part of the true and permanent library of America, and we may say of Europe." The unusually sympathetic reviewer, lambasting Cooper's usual detractors for "the imbecility of their opposition, and the despicable inveteracy with which they have persecuted him," goes on to claim that "None, however, but the merest bigots of partisanship can affect to doubt that this work will ever remain a splendid monument of knowledge, skill in composition, and excellence in style."⁶² Despite the pre-publication vitriol of the *New-York American*, that paper, too, echoed the opinion that the work would stand on its merits: "We think it will sustain the interest its annunciation has excited, and that upon the whole—although not calculated to add to the author's reputation, so far as mere writing or style is concerned—it will remain a standard work of the country."⁶³ Confirming the value of the *History* as a standard work, the reviewer for the

⁶⁰ *New-York American*, 10 May 1839: 3.

⁶¹ "New Publications," *The Corsair* 1 (25 May 1839): 168-69.

⁶² "Reviews," *The Expositor* 1 (1 June 1839): 277.

⁶³ *New-York American*, 21 May 1839: 2.

Journal of Belles Lettres goes so far as to prescribe that “Every packet ship between Europe and the United States, the library of every ship of our navy, of every navy yard, asylum, and hospital, should be supplied with this book.”⁶⁴ This advice was followed by Secretary of the Navy James Kirke Paulding, who approved the *History* and Cooper’s nautical novels for issue in ships’ libraries.⁶⁵

Particularly noteworthy is the nearly universal acclaim for Cooper’s fitness for the task of writing a naval history. “There is no man, perhaps, more capable of writing a history of our Navy, than Mr. Cooper,” wrote the reviewer for the *Ladies’ Companion*; likewise, according to *The Corsair*, “This important service could not have fallen into better hands.”⁶⁶ In its first notice of the work, the *Army and Navy Chronicle*, lacking time to undertake its own review, ran opinions from two Philadelphian papers of opposite politics, the *Pennsylvanian* and the *North American* (not to be confused with the *North American Review*), the former stating, “probably no other man in the Union combined so many qualifications for rendering the work what it should be, as Mr. Cooper, who has the experience of a seaman, and a power of nautical description which has never been surpassed,” and the latter concurring, “Bred a sailor, it may readily be presumed that Mr. Cooper has entered with spirit upon his task, and the bias of his mind has eminently fitted him for accomplishing it.”⁶⁷ The *Expositor*, in expressing similar views, attributes Cooper’s suitability for the task to slightly different qualifications, noting not just the “extensive stores of information” possessed by him but also “a stronger and more reverential feeling for the glories of the past than is shared by any contemporary writer.”⁶⁸ As for those “stores of information,” Cooper’s research and seamanship conveyed such a sense of solidity to some reviewers that the book’s reliability was taken as a matter of course. The Whig *New-Yorker*, which usually missed few

⁶⁴ “Editor’s Table,” *The Journal of Belles Lettres* 13.22 (28 May 1839): [n.p.].

⁶⁵ James Kirke Paulding to JFC, 20 May 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:381.

⁶⁶ “Literary Review,” *Ladies’ Companion* 11 (June 1839): 97; “New Publications,” *The Corsair* 1 (25 May 1839): 169.

⁶⁷ “Cooper’s Naval History,” *The Army and Navy Chronicle* 8 (16 May 1839): 317.

⁶⁸ “Reviews,” *The Expositor* 1 (1 June 1839): 277.

opportunities to poke at Cooper, nevertheless could state after a quick perusal of the book, "It is a highly creditable production—and, undoubtedly, implicit dependence may be placed upon its statements. This opinion we are enabled to form from simply looking through the work."⁶⁹ From the combined force of these reviews, it is clear that, apart from a couple of significant exceptions (still to be discussed), Poe could say of Cooper and his *History* with a great degree of accuracy: "That *he*, in preference to any one, should have written the Naval History of the United States, is a matter about which there is little difference of opinion."⁷⁰ Such affirmations suggest that the *History* would indeed go far in restoring some of the reputation Cooper had lost in many quarters through his social critiques of the 1830s.

Among the mass of reviewers, complaints about the *History* were few and minor. Several bemoaned the lack of any index or table of textual aids in a book that would be likely to be used as a reference work: "There are no indices—no marginal references, chronological or otherwise—not even a running particular title to each page," objected the *New-Yorker*, a sentiment echoed in the *Knickerbocker* and the *Journal of Belles Lettres*.⁷¹ Cooper's style, which was made deliberately plainer than the poetic description he was famous for in order to suit the dignity and gravity of history, was a matter of displeasure among some—Poe taking Cooper to task for his unclear grammar, and the *New-York American* complaining of "unnecessary and uninviting plainness" as well as "the uncalled-for introduction of sea-phrases." To the contrary, the reviewer for *The Corsair* found the nautical terms "appropriate and easy to be comprehended" and the descriptions "vivid"; most other reviewers found Cooper's style well-suited to the task at hand.⁷² Although Cooper's introduction, containing arguments about contemporary naval policy, was in general highly praised, the *Expositor's* unusually pro-Cooper writer thought that the arguments within would prove to be more fodder for Cooper's Whig antagonists, while the *New-York American* took exception

⁶⁹ *New Yorker* 7 (18 May 1839): 141.

⁷⁰ "Review of New Books," *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* 5 (July 1839): 56.

⁷¹ *New Yorker* 7 (18 May 1839): 141; "Literary Notices," *Knickerbocker* 13 (June 1839): 538; "Editor's Table," *The Journal of Belles Lettres* 13.22 (28 May 1839): [n.p.].

⁷² "New Publications," *The Corsair* 1 (25 May 1839): 169.

(correctly, as history demonstrates) to Cooper's claim that steam power would have little significant influence on naval warfare. And a few commentators faulted Cooper for failing to include episodes of nautical history that were considered locally important (something Cooper would receive considerable personal correspondence about as well). One letter-writer to the *Journal of Belles Lettres*, "Currente Calamo," was so incensed by Cooper's supposed oversights in narrating the events of the revolution that he accused Cooper of deliberate manipulation for marketplace advantage: "On the whole it seems to me that the history of the revolution was but a minor concern with Mr. Cooper, made out as a book scheme, to gain more readers to other and more congenial topics."⁷³ In response, another correspondent defended Cooper's prerogative to limit his history, adding, "Though Mr. Cooper does stand, as it were, in a literary pillory, I do not think it becomes every man to hurl an offensive missile, or to magnify trifling errors by constantly shouting them into the ears of the public."⁷⁴

Soon enough, a few of Cooper's more severe critics as well as Cooper himself would be engaged in these very acts over the *History of the Navy*, in a contest that saw each side maneuvering to "magnify trifling errors by constantly shouting them into the ears of the public" and to "hurl an offensive missile" at the other. Ironically, the controversy revolved around Cooper's attempt to be non-controversial in his account of the Battle of Lake Erie. If the bulk of the reviewers of the *History* had confirmed Cooper's status as the nation's eminent nautical expert, the three most visible American critics opposing it struck directly at the heart of Cooper's reputation by suggesting that he was in fact unfit for the task he had undertaken. The first attack was made by Dr. William Alexander Duer, the president of Columbia College and a one-time member of Cooper's New York "Bread and Cheese" club in the 1820s, who published anonymously a vicious four-part "review" of the work in William Leete Stone's *New-York Commercial Advertiser*. While his harsh critique of the *History* itself rested entirely on the matter of Lake Erie, his disparagement of the book's author was much wider ranging, going so far as to accuse Cooper of conspiratorially ordering his

⁷³ "Editor's Table," *The Journal of Belles Lettres* 13.23 (5 June 1839): [n.p.].

⁷⁴ "Editor's Table: Communication. To the Editor of Waldie's Journal of Belles Lettres," *The Journal of Belles Lettres* 13.25 (18 June 1839): [n.p.].

publishers not to send a review copy of the *History* to the *Commercial Advertiser* (an allegation that both Cooper and Lea & Blanchard denied). Linking the *History* with *Home as Found*, Duer portrays Cooper's supposed perversion of history for base purposes as another manifestation of a vain, deranged, and reckless character:

With all our experience of the waywardness, inconsistency and love of paradox which had distinguished the author of "Home as Found," we could hardly persuade ourselves that he had become so utterly regardless of justice and propriety as a man, so callous to the perceptions of good taste as a writer—so insensible to his obligations and responsibility as a historian, and so reckless of his character as a public candidate for literary distinction and immortal fame, as to forego and disregard the opportunity of retrieving, in some degree, the reputation and standing which he must have been conscious of having lost. We were certainly not prepared to find that the infatuation of vanity or the madness of passion could lead him to pervert such an opportunity, to the low and paltry purpose of bolstering up the character of a political partizan—an official sycophant—and to degrade the name of object of history, in a work claiming by its title to be national in its design. . . .⁷⁵

The second "attack," if it can even be called that, came a few months later in the form of a lengthy pamphlet entitled *The Battle of Lake Erie with Notices of Commodore Elliott's Conduct in that Engagement*, written by Tristram Burges, a lawyer, professor, and former Whig congressman from Rhode Island.⁷⁶ The core of the pamphlet was the text of a lecture Burges had delivered in 1836 to the Rhode Island Historical Society, claiming the battle as properly belonging to the annals of that state and especially criticizing Elliott's conduct during and after the fighting. The lecture, along with ancillary documents relating to the Perry/Elliott controversy, was published in fall 1839 at the urging of Perry family and friends, who felt the need to have something in print to answer Cooper's supposed slights.⁷⁷ Though the pamphlet clearly showed its disputational nature in its materials and format—

⁷⁵ *New-York Commercial Advertiser*, 8 June 1839.

⁷⁶ Tristram Burges, *The Battle of Lake Erie with Notices of Commodore Elliott's Conduct in that Engagement* (Providence: Brown and Cady; Boston: B.B. Musey; Philadelphia: Wm. Marshall & Co., 1839).

⁷⁷ The Perrys had hoped a person they had commissioned to write an official biography of Oliver Hazard Perry would be ready to publish, but that not being the case, Burges's lecture was urged forward as the next best thing.

many of its arguments clearly were intended to contradict much of what Cooper had written—most references to Cooper and his account are implied rather than stated. Burges vaguely alludes in his preface to the publication of the *History of the Navy* as an “event of a public character” that spurred him to publish. The closest he gets to mentioning Cooper or the naval history specifically comes in the endnotes to his lecture, where he brings up “a late publication, purporting to be a Naval History,” and accuses its writer of “a strange obliquity of purpose, or of understanding.”⁷⁸ Compared to Duer, this was mild indeed.

The third attack came nearly contemporaneously with Burges’s pamphlet in a lengthy critique of the *History* in the *North American Review*. The author of the piece was Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, a navy lieutenant (commander in 1841) who had a number of interesting connections to the controversy. He was, for one, related by marriage to the Perry clan, being the brother-in-law of Matthew C. Perry, who had married his sister. He was also William Duer’s nephew by marriage. Apparently acquainted at least somewhat with Cooper, Mackenzie was something of a natural rival, sharing a number of striking coincidental similarities despite obvious differences in age, politics, and temperament. Oddly enough, both had changed their names to honor their mothers’ lineages, Cooper adding “Fenimore” in 1826 and Alexander Slidell adding “Mackenzie” in 1838. Mackenzie’s literary aspirations had steered him to write pieces of naval punditry as well as memoirs of travel: he contributed the lead article to the second (and last) volume of the short-lived *Naval Magazine* (Cooper led off the first) and had already published *A Year in Spain, by a Young American* (1829), *Popular Essays on Naval Subjects* (1833), *The American in England* (1835), and *Spain Revisited* (1836), with more to follow in the 1840s. The press, noting the obvious parallels, was quick to juxtapose the two authors, to Cooper’s disadvantage. In reviewing Cooper’s *Gleanings in Europe: England; By an American*, the British *Quarterly Review* brought up Mackenzie’s “good faith” and “good manners” toward the British as displayed in his *American in England* in contrast to Cooper’s “vanity or malice” and “rancorous triviality.”⁷⁹ Comparing the same two books, the *American Monthly Magazine* insinuated that resemblances between the two titles were an effort on Cooper’s part to manipulate sales, creating confusion that would “operate much to

⁷⁸ Burges vi, 65-66.

⁷⁹ *Quarterly Review* 59 (October 1837): 329.

Mr. Slidell's disadvantage," causing Cooper's work to be accidentally purchased by readers seeking out Mackenzie's book: "No two works can be more totally dissimilar, and we trust that the public will not suffer itself to be imposed upon by the similarity of the titles."⁸⁰ Both these articles saw wide reprinting in Whig-leaning periodicals, feeding an impression that Mackenzie was a worthy Whig rival to topple Cooper. If the press was keen on seeking out these comparisons, Cooper himself was not immune to his own sense of competition. Reporting disappointing sales of his first travel memoir, *Sketches of Switzerland*, to his wife in July 1836, he nonetheless took heart at his relative advantage over Mackenzie's *Spain Revisited*: "The Sketches have not sold very well, but stand very fair. About twice as many have sold as of Slidell's book, but they are puffing away at him, might and main."⁸¹ Despite Cooper's usual one-upmanship, nothing indicates any sense of pre-existing animosity between the two men before the Lake Erie controversy.

Mackenzie's lengthy thirty-five-page essay in the *North American Review* is in the main seemingly favorable to Cooper's *History*. He praises Cooper "commendable diligence" in research and approves Cooper's "sufficient clearness and vivacity" in narration (432)—language which hardly seems that of a ringing endorsement, but positive enough.⁸² Objecting to some of Cooper's pet ideas and his "constant and awkward use of sea-phrases," Mackenzie nevertheless finds the battle narratives "almost always nervous and striking" and the criticisms "generally just and discriminating," the work overall possessing "liberality, talent, and ingenuity" (450). He also praises Cooper's introduction for its cogent arguments about naval policy, using the occasion to wax eloquent about his own views of naval education, the manning of the navy, and other relevant issues for the final thirteen pages of the essay. Setting aside this lengthy digression and the nine or so pages Mackenzie fills with extended excerpts, nearly the entirety of what remains is devoted to his critique of Cooper's

⁸⁰ *American Monthly Magazine* 4 n.s. (October 1837): 391.

⁸¹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 10 July 1836: *Letters and Journals* 3:228. Despite the temporary advantage, Mackenzie's work would prove more long-lived, going through some three editions.

⁸² [Alexander Slidell Mackenzie], Review of *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*, *North American Review* 49 (October 1839): 432-67. For convenience, page citations for specific quotations are listed parenthetically.

account of Lake Erie. Mackenzie clearly interprets Cooper's efforts to hold back on anything controversial about the battle as a deliberate effort to *be* controversial. Mackenzie does not view Cooper's account as a mere difference of interpretation or even simply a flawed account of the facts. He assigns subversive motives readily: Cooper seems "to have labored to convey an unfair impression of the relative exertions of Commodore Perry and Captain Elliott," according to Mackenzie, who goes on to speak of "The controversy, which he [Cooper] thus brings up." Therefore, Mackenzie excuses his own involvement in the controversy by claiming it is "not of our seeking" but is "forced upon whoever undertakes to comment upon Mr. Cooper's book"; he professes to be duty-bound out of "critical honesty" to counter the "gross misrepresentations" of Cooper lest they pass unchallenged into "accredited history" (438).

It is unnecessary to delve into the minutiae of Mackenzie's arguments, many of which do deal with fair differences of opinion regarding the interpretation of available evidence. Some of Mackenzie's complaints, though, are more about style than substance, occasionally bordering on the petty. For instance, he faults Cooper for failing "to commend the seamanlike skill, ingenuity, and great despatch" of Perry's pre-battle efforts to get his vessels over a sandbar, when in other cases Cooper had shown "a lively perception of the merit displayed" and praised it accordingly (438-39). Similarly he criticizes Cooper's attempt at a cautious and neutral account as being "written with a very different spirit from that, with which he eulogizes other victories, far less suited to excite the enthusiasm of an American" (447). When Cooper mentions popular objections to Perry's mode of attack but refutes those to show that Perry used sound seamanship and tactics, Mackenzie finds Cooper's arguments short on "zeal" (447). Mackenzie sees nearly everywhere evidence of "an indisposition...to commend and highly estimate the merits of Commodore Perry" (438) and "an intention to disparage Commodore Perry, for the benefit of Captain Elliott," leading him to charge Cooper with subjecting history to "unjust perversion, to serve the temporary interests of persons or parties" (450)--the very thing Cooper had hoped to rid his account of by writing it the way he did.

The appearance of these three criticisms was not unexpected by Cooper. He responded to Duer's savage attacks in the *Commercial Advertiser* by suing the editor of that paper, William Leete Stone, for libel, but not before sending off two long letters to the

Cooperstown *Freeman's Journal* to justify his approach and methods in print: "I was not recording the quarrels of the Navy, but its deeds."⁸³ After it became clear that the complexities of the nautical and legal issues were more than an ordinary jury could be expected to handle, the case was submitted by mutual consent to arbitration of lawyers with nautical knowledge, and Cooper was eventually vindicated for his account and his motives as a historian while Stone was found delinquent of his duties as a reviewer.⁸⁴ As for Burges's pamphlet, Cooper saw it as "bombastical, silly, and absurd" from the start, almost beneath notice.⁸⁵ He drafted a letter of refutation intended for newspaper publication, but apparently it was either never sent or never published.⁸⁶ He found neither Burges nor Mackenzie "personally abusive," but thought the latter "superficial and jesuitical," exhibiting "any thing but honesty or talent," adding, "This review, alone, satisfies me as to the man's character. He wants candor, and a sense of right."⁸⁷ Despite the annoyance, Cooper lent Mackenzie's critique scarcely more weight than Burges's at first, thinking it would attract little attention. "The book stands its ground," he told his wife.⁸⁸

Though he planned to provide a comprehensive answer to these critics in a pamphlet,⁸⁹ his libel suit against Stone prevented him from operating freely since facts

⁸³ JFC to John Holmes Prentiss, for the Cooperstown *Freeman's Journal*, 2 July 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:407. The letters appeared in the paper on 2 & 8 July. Why Cooper sent them to the local paper, instead of the *Commercial Advertiser* or another New York paper such as Bryant's *Evening Post*, is an interesting question; perhaps he trusted the *Freeman's Journal* to print his letter in its entirety, without excessive editorializing, or perhaps he expected that the letters would be circulated more widely through reprinting in other newspapers, as was commonly practiced.

⁸⁴ Thomas Lounsbury's account of this matter holds up well despite its age: *James Fenimore Cooper* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1883) 214-21. See also James F. Beard's discussions in *Letters and Journals* 4:281-82, 295-96, 299-300.

⁸⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 19 October [1839]: *Letters and Journals* 3:437.

⁸⁶ JFC to an Unidentified Editor, 3 March 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:19-24.

⁸⁷ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 19 October [1839]: *Letters and Journals* 3:437.

⁸⁸ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 19 December 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:451.

⁸⁹ James F. Beard describes earlier unpublished drafts Cooper intended to publish in newspapers before his plans evolved; see *Letters and Journals* 4:49.

material to the case might need to be introduced. Mackenzie, however, was not silent, bringing out a biography of Perry undertaken at the request of the late Commodore's son, who desired a "full account" to counteract Cooper's attempt "to diminish that admiration with which the people of the United States have been accustomed to regard the memory of Perry."⁹⁰ Mackenzie portrayed the battle and its hero with the kind of romantic extravagance he had found so lacking in Cooper's plain telling: patriotism is uppermost, motive and character are freely assigned, emotions imagined, and the beauty of dying heroes artistically portrayed. Cooper's perceived errors and biases are the subject for frequent comment, and insinuations of a Cooper-Elliott alliance are often made. Mackenzie expressed confidence that his account would "set the question between these two officers [Perry and Elliott] effectually at rest."⁹¹

Naturally, this would not be the case. The result was predictable: an escalating war of words over Lake Erie that saw each side become more entrenched and more likely to engage in *ad hominem* rhetoric against the other—the quest to preserve honor competing with, and often triumphing over, the quest to preserve truth.⁹² A sample of Cooper's determination can be seen in this paragraph written to Shubrick in January 1840:

By the way, I understand Mr. Slidell has been reviewing me in the North American. As might be expected it is all pig tail—or Lake Erie. I think he will feel a paragraph in the Preface of the new edition—if he do not, he must have little sensibility, as its truth is very biting. I am reserving myself for his biography of Perry, when I'll try my hand at reviewing. Rely on it, if they ever draw me out fully on the Lake Erie affair, they'll regret it. I wish to avoid it, but they must not press too hard.⁹³

⁹⁰ Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, *The Life of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1840) iii. (Hereafter cited as: *Life of Perry* (1840)).

⁹¹ *Life of Perry* (1840) vii.

⁹² The complicated details of these exchanges need not be related in full here. For more comprehensive reviews of the controversy, see David Curtiss Skaggs, "Aiming at the Truth: James Fenimore Cooper and the Battle of Lake Erie," *Journal of Military History* 59 (April 1995): 237-55, and Hugh Egan, "Enabling and Disabling the Lake Erie Discussion: James Fenimore Cooper and Alexander Slidell Mackenzie Respond to the Perry-Elliott Controversy," *American Neptune* 57 (Fall 1997): 343-50.

⁹³ JFC to Shubrick, 6 January 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:9.

The bluster Cooper displays in these words leaves one wondering how much he really did wish to avoid being drawn out once the controversy was engaged. Because of his pending libel suit against Stone, Cooper did not try his hand at reviewing, but being “unwilling that Mr. Mackenzie’s statements and logic should go entirely unnoticed,” sent a letter to William Cullen Bryant’s *Evening Post* (published 29 March 1841) discussing some “samples” of the errors in fact and logic in Mackenzie’s biography.⁹⁴ A week after that letter appeared, Mackenzie rebutted with one of his own, some portions of it copied verbatim from his Perry biography including this attempt to link Elliott and Cooper unflatteringly:

Such is the absurdity in which these two gentlemen are involved; Captain Elliott by endeavoring to extricate himself from the hopeless perplexities of his position, Mr. Cooper from not understanding enough of the subject to be aware of it, and betrayed by his partiality.⁹⁵

This attack on Cooper’s seamanship was not accidental, and certainly not so on its second repetition, for immediately afterward Mackenzie pretends to retract his statement, serving instead to cast further doubt upon the depth of Cooper’s knowledge:

Perhaps I ought now to apologise for this disparaging opinion of Mr. Cooper’s tactical knowledge; for his remarks on my note evince no little familiarity with naval tactics; whether forming part of his standing stock of information or laboriously acquired for the occasion, I have no means of knowing.

Mackenzie closes, too, with barbs about Cooper’s vanity and even sanity, inviting him to “pause for a moment modestly to consider” whether popular opinion on the subject might be right after all, and expressing hope that Cooper’s former genius might be “released from party tramellings and the visitations of wounded pride” to “return once more to a condition of health and soberness.”⁹⁶

To complicate matters further, a new wrinkle was added to the rivalry in December 1842, when Mackenzie himself became a subject of controversy for his actions as commander aboard the training brig *USS Somers*, where three members of his crew—

⁹⁴ *The [New York] Evening Post*, 29 March 1841; also in *Letters and Journals* 4:134-40.

⁹⁵ *The [New York] Evening Post*, 7 April 1841; original is in *Life of Perry* (1840) 29.

⁹⁶ *The [New York] Evening Post*, 7 April 1841.

including a midshipman, Philip Spencer, who was son of Secretary of War John C. Spencer—were executed for mutiny without trial, despite the fact that no overtly mutinous acts occurred. Though Mackenzie was tried in a naval court-martial and acquitted of charges of wrongdoing (some called it a foregone conclusion), the affair and its aftermath were deeply controversial and long remembered (Herman Melville alluded to the hangings in *White-Jacket* and used them as inspiration for *Billy Budd*; his cousin, Guert Gansevoort, was first lieutenant aboard the ship). Some commentators went so far as to blame the romanticized portrayal of pirate life in Cooper's *Red Rover* and *Water-Witch* for providing the bad moral influence that led to young Spencer's wild fantasies of mutiny. On first hearing about the hangings Cooper was inclined to support Mackenzie, but when more facts emerged he became convinced of Mackenzie's wrongdoing. Taking the view that the Lake Erie controversy and the *Somers* incident revealed the same peculiar modes of thinking, Cooper became one of Mackenzie's harshest critics, convinced, even, that the court-martial was a mere official whitewash to preserve character. The ironies of making such an argument, so contrary to that which he had made in Elliott's case in the Lake Erie controversy, did not stop Cooper from writing an exhaustive eighty-page review of the case, which he published along with a transcript of the trial and other related documents in 1844.⁹⁷ Relevant as this case may be, its details are too numerous and complex to justify treatment here; indeed, so naturally fascinating is the case that it has been the subject for several book-length treatments as well as a number of excellent smaller ones.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ *Proceedings of the Naval Court Martial in the Case of Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, A Commander in the Navy of the United States, &c. Including the Charges and Specifications of Charges, Preferred against Him by the Secretary of the Navy. To Which Is Annexed, An Elaborate Review, By James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: Henry G. Langley, 1844).

⁹⁸ See especially Philip McFarland, *Sea Dangers: The Affair of the Somers* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985); Buckner Melton, *A Hanging Offense: The Strange Affair of the Warship Somers* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Harrison Hayford, ed., *The Somers Mutiny Affair* (A book of primary source materials; New York: Prentice-Hall, 1959); Frederic F. Van De Water, *The Captain Called it Mutiny* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1954). All of these books discuss Cooper's role in the controversy. Hugh Egan has three eloquently insightful discussions: his introduction to a facsimile edition of *Proceedings of the Naval Court Martial in the Case of Alexander Slidell Mackenzie* (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1992); his article "The Mackenzie Court-Martial Trial: Cooper's Secret Correspondence with William H. Norris," *Studies in the American Renaissance* 14 (1991): 149-158; and his dissertation,

In May and June 1843, Cooper responded to Mackenzie's *Evening Post* and *Life of Perry* arguments at greater length in a two-part biographical sketch of Perry published in *Graham's Magazine* as part of his series of naval biographies, devoting some fifty-eight pages (out of eighty-six) to Lake Erie.⁹⁹ The next month he finally published his comprehensive rebuttal in his 118-page pamphlet, *The Battle of Lake Erie, or Answers to Messrs. Burges, Duer, and Mackenzie*. Compared to the calm neutrality of the *History of the Navy*, the pamphlet is aggressive and one-sided, showing the polarization that had taken place over the course of the controversy. Historian David Curtiss Skaggs has noted the ironies in Cooper's approach here: in addition to becoming "drawn into a defense of Elliott which he never intended," Cooper violated his own maxims of sound historiography:

What is tragic about Cooper's interpretation in his *Battle of Lake Erie* pamphlet is that he ended up being guilty of the same historical crimes for which he indicts, and literarily convicts, his opponents. . . . His charges against Burges, Duer, and Mackenzie included: (1) distortion and misuse of evidence; (2) failure to disclose all evidence to the reader; (3) contradiction of the best evidence in the case when it conflicted with the author's conclusions; and (4) using ad hominem arguments. Each might also be leveled against Cooper, especially in his writings following the Whig critiques.¹⁰⁰

Appearing in his opening remarks as an "avenging angel, sounding a note of biblical portentousness," as Hugh Egan has so aptly described,¹⁰¹ Cooper—much like Mackenzie in 1839—defends his tactics on the grounds that he did not start the fight:

The writer has not sought this discussion. It has been forced on him by his assailants, who must now face the consequences. For years the writer has submitted in comparative silence to a gross injustice, in connection to this matter, not from any want of confidence in the justice of his case or any ability to defend himself, but, because he "bided his time," knowing, when that should arrive, he had truth to fall back upon. . . . The day of reckoning

"Gentleman-Sailors: The First-Person Narratives of Dana, Cooper, and Melville" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Iowa, 1983).

⁹⁹ "Oliver Hazard Perry," *Graham's Magazine* 22 (May & June 1843): 265-78, 337-48. This biography was later republished in Cooper's *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers* (1846).

¹⁰⁰ Skaggs 247.

¹⁰¹ Egan, "Enabling and Disabling," 199.

has come at length, and the judgment of men will infallibly follow. For the issue, the writer has no fears. Let intelligent men do him the justice to read, and honest men the justice to decide; this is all he asks, or desires.¹⁰²

Cooper's appeal to the persuasiveness of "truth" and the authority of "the judgment of men," so much at odds with his dark view of popular opinion, is noteworthy here; no doubt his notions of "honest" and "intelligent men" could be very selectively defined. More apt, perhaps, is Cooper's observation later that "every man in the least acquainted with human nature, must see that, in a question of opinions, circumstances. . . may very well influence the mind, without the party himself being conscious by what his judgment is swayed."¹⁰³

Accordingly, in reporting to his wife on the distribution of the pamphlet, Cooper could note, "My pamphlet tells, wherever it is read. The circulation is not large, but it goes into the right hands."¹⁰⁴ The "right hands" included at least some Democrat reviewers, some of whom found Cooper's arguments incontrovertible. The *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, despite regretting Cooper's introduction of disparaging remarks against Mackenzie (he alluded to the *Somers* incident to show that Mackenzie was "a man of prejudice and denunciation"), opined:

This controversy may now be considered at an end. Mr. Cooper has performed an operation analogous to that of the Niagara in the battle itself. He has not come into "close action" till rather late in the day, perhaps, but after he has once fairly entered the enemy's line, scarce more than a single broadside of his heavy metal has been necessary to settle the question.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² *The Battle of Lake Erie, or Answers to Messrs. Burges, Duer, and Mackenzie. By J. Fenimore Cooper* (Cooperstown: H. & E. Phinney, 1843) [iii].

¹⁰³ *Battle of Lake Erie* 8.

¹⁰⁴ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 22 September 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:412. Cooper's distribution of the pamphlet may have been aimed, consciously or not, toward audiences he would be most likely to respect. Reporting from Philadelphia to Mrs. Cooper, he writes, "I have sold 1300 of my pamphlet here, and 1000 more will secure me from loss, which is all I want" (22 July [1843]: *Letters and Journals* 4:398), suggesting a concentration in his usual bases, Philadelphia and New York, and leaving one to wonder how much he hoped to infiltrate New England with his arguments—though it is known that he sent booksellers Tappan & Dennet of Boston several hundred copies to sell—with a total lack of success (*Letters and Journals* 5:92-93).

¹⁰⁵ *Battle of Lake Erie* 8; "New Books of the Month," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 13 (September 1843): 330. Cooper would tell his wife, "The Democratic Magazine

The *Southern Quarterly Review*, calling Cooper's reply "a conclusive one," offers this not entirely flattering analysis:

Mr. Cooper is an ugly customer to deal with, in the way of controversy. His nature is disputatious in the extreme; his temperament earnest; his self-esteem not easily disturbed; and he addresses himself to the task before him, not only with the conviction that he himself is right, but with a determination to leave nothing undone which shall prove that his opponent is wrong. In the present case, he has gone to work with all the coolness of the historian, and all the adroitness of the logician; and, we are free to say, he makes mincemeat of his enemies.¹⁰⁶

The usual Whig critics, on the other hand, seem to have ignored Cooper's pamphlet, whether accidentally or deliberately. Cooper suspected a conspiracy: "I fancy the plan is to be silent on the subject of my pamphlet."¹⁰⁷

Mackenzie fired the final shots in a new fifth edition of his Perry biography, arguing stridently against Cooper's latest statements in a fifty-seven page appendix, written in November 1843. Here Mackenzie charged Cooper with the very thing he had been guilty of back in 1839: making mountains out of molehills to serve personal causes. "He has made the alleged detection of a very small number of errors in the *Life of Perry*, only one of which I concede may be indeed an error, the pretext for unmeasured vituperation," he complained.¹⁰⁸ Returning the favor, Mackenzie replied with a round denunciation of Cooper's character as a nautical expert and as a professional author. He accuses Cooper of jealousy, unoriginality, and prejudice. He dredges up an earlier pamphlet, *A Letter to His Countrymen*, complete with Cooper's abandoned vow to give up writing, as an illustration of Cooper's lack of honesty and patriotism as well as his vain, self-interested "monomania"

has a good article on the pamphlet. It commences with the subject, it says, has long been in dispute, until Cooper, like Perry in the battle itself, bears down with his heavy metal, and settles the matter at once." JFC to Mrs. Cooper, [11] September 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:401-02.

¹⁰⁶ *Southern Quarterly Review* 4 (October 1843): 512.

¹⁰⁷ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 17 September 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:409.

¹⁰⁸ "Appendix to the Fifth Edition," Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, *The Life of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry*, Fifth Ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844) 308.

(326-27). He mocks his litigious tendencies, echoing the oft-repeated Whig claim that Cooper's libel suits were motivated by personal gain:

Mr. Cooper may well plume himself on his sagacity in defining the law of libel so as to calumniate without stint within its limits, while he uses it so profitably against those who, in attempting to defend their country and its inhabitants against his calumnies, have not such an exact and calculating perception as he has as to the limits within which safety is to be found. He had better keep to this work, which he certainly understands and profitably practises. . . . (286)

Mackenzie blasts Cooper's early exit from the navy, suggesting that Cooper himself suffered from a lack of bravery and duty: his "peculiar notions of chivalry, when himself an officer in the American navy, indicated the near approach of war with England as a fit season for abandoning the service" (276). To complete the damnation, Mackenzie takes aim at Cooper's seamanship itself, going far beyond the insinuations of his *Life of Perry* and his *Evening Post* letter to strike openly at the core of his opponent's professional identity:

It may be remarked, however, of his seamanship, that it is quite effective when it is exercising its appropriate functions, and assisting him in his character as a novelist. By crossing the ocean a few times, sufficient notion is obtained of the sea and ships to convey a picturesque impression. Nautical slang and the jargon of the forecabin are readily caught. But when Mr. Cooper attempts to exhibit himself as a nice nautical critic, it is not strange that he should be betrayed into gross blunders of seamanship, which the writer feels some compunction in exposing. He is aware that this is no inconsiderable offence. To make manifest Mr. Cooper's want of fairness, of justice, of good taste, or of decency, might be forgiven; but to detect his ignorance of seamanship is to touch him to the quick—to wound incurably that vanity which, however excessive on most subjects, has its strongest hold afloat. (289)

This was a judgment about Cooper's abilities as a nautical expert quite different from the nearly unanimous opinion among reviewers of the *History of the Navy* that Cooper was eminently qualified—even the most qualified—to write such a work. Other Whigs were quick to pick up on this mode of attack, if they had not already. The *New-York American*, giving one of the relatively few notices of Cooper's "Elaborate Review" of the Mackenzie case, pronounced a similar verdict: "His practical nautical skill, we suppose equal, and no more than equal, to that of any other intelligent youth, who, having made in his boyhood two or three cruises, had subsequently followed an entirely different career."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ "Review of the Week," *New-York American* 20 July 1844: 2.

Cooper worked on a reply to Mackenzie's thorough dressing-down: "I am now answering M'Kenzie's answer to my pamphlet," he wrote Shubrick in October 1844. "I shall not leave him much character. His *frauds* exceed those of Duer. He will regret ever making his attack, for I prove him not only a dunce, but something very near a knave."¹¹⁰ This reply, however, was never published.¹¹¹ Shubrick's observations in turn may well have provided the motivation for Cooper to abandon his effort: "I have not seen McKenzies answer to your pamphlet, but he is so used up in the Review of the trial and the pamphlet that I should think he would feel no inclination to prolong the battle; he must be proof against tomahawks and scalping knives."¹¹²

Perhaps Shubrick recognized what Cooper did not: further fighting would have little effect—the damage had been done long ago on both sides. Mackenzie, for his part, was tarnished (at least in some quarters) by the *Somers* incident in much the same way as Elliott had been tarnished by the Battle of Lake Erie. Cooper, once again, had his reputation raked over the coals nearly as thoroughly as it had been for *Home as Found*. His public stature as an expert on nautical matters was undermined, then overtly attacked, by a rival who could claim a professional career as a naval officer, something that Cooper, with only a few years at sea, could not easily compete with, no matter how many friends he might have in the service. Mackenzie had remarked dismissively that Cooper's seamanship was convincing enough "in his character as a novelist," allowing him to "convey a picturesque impression" of the sea and ships. But this seems almost to hint at a call for reconsideration of Cooper's authority even in that realm, begging the question: was Cooper's seamanship even good enough for fiction? Mackenzie was fingering Cooper as a poseur, an amateur with pretensions to expertise he could not really claim. Cooper found not just his role as "a nice nautical critic"

¹¹⁰ JFC to Shubrick, 27 October 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:481. With sentiments like these, it is almost surprising that Cooper did not undertake a libel suit against Mackenzie, as he had against Stone, who had published Duer's attack. Possibly Cooper recognized his own rhetorical excesses would compromise his credibility, or perhaps he was simply burned out with the legal system after half a decade's worth of court cases.

¹¹¹ A manuscript draft of a reply, 62 leaves long (not seen), is held in the collection of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹¹² Shubrick to JFC, 1 November 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:482.

but also his larger professional vision of authorship confronted. He could not compete with career officers for sheer length of service or experience afloat. What, then, made his perspective unique and valuable—perhaps even better? Between 1840 and 1844, while the controversy raged, Cooper—consciously or not—increasingly took stock of his own foundations, re-examining the way his nautical experience, his subsequent life as a gentleman, and his profession as a writer shaped his niche in the world and contributed to a distinct kind of outlook on it. In 1844 he would formulate his own response in *Afloat and Ashore*, but not before encountering other events that would provide similar (though more friendly) challenges to his professional vision.

If the controversy over the Battle of Lake Erie would affect Cooper's conceptions of authorship, another more materialistic question about the effects of the controversy is relevant as well: did it affect sales of his *History* in the marketplace? After all, a good portion of the controversy was confined to pamphlets and newspapers, and despite the widespread tendency to reprint articles from New York in local papers nationwide, one has to wonder how far the word of the controversy spread and how much attention was paid to it. With Cooper's pamphlet failing to circulate as well as expected, one also has to wonder how balanced a view of the controversy the public received. Writing to William Gilmore Simms on 5 January 1844, Cooper would note the limited reach of his arguments:

As for the Lake Erie affair, it was an easy task to show the rascality employed against me; but cui bono? Few persons read my pamphlet, and I am still vituperated as the falsifier of history. The coarsest calumny that has been published against me, in connection with this affair has appeared since the explanations have been made. Unable to answer any thing, it runs into abuse and accuses me of being *hired by Elliott*! The edition of the pamphlet is mostly on hand, and will probably never sell. I am afraid the habit of hearing so many lies is making our people indifferent to the truth. Calumny, in particular, has a savour about it that pleases most persons, and they prefer it to a vindication however conclusive.¹¹³

¹¹³ JFC to William Gilmore Simms, 5 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:437-38.

To Richard Henry Dana (father of the author of *Two Years before the Mast*) he offered anecdotal evidence to support his claim that New England, in particular, was hostile to his views:

Just before he quitted Boston, my son applied at Tappan's to learn the fate of the pamphlet. He was told, and a little coarsely I should judge by his account, that not a copy had been sold; that the people of Boston had made up their minds on the merits of the matter in discussion, and that they did not wish to read any thing about it.¹¹⁴

It seems likely, then, that for much of the reading public the Whig version of events would be the prevalent one. Even so, would the perceived "defect" in the *History's* treatment of Lake Erie be enough to make book buyers shy away from it, especially in the early stages of the controversy before the most heated polemic set in?

Cooper certainly seemed to think that the fuss over Lake Erie gutted sales of the book. In his letter to Simms he would complain:

Then the evil to my own book is irreparable. No work ever sold better or faster than the naval history, until the lies about the Battle of Lake Erie were published, and, from that moment, the sale dragged. I am a loser of several thousands by the book. You know enough of books to understand this is a wrong which can not be repaired. The labour of years is lost to me.¹¹⁵

This view, like some of Cooper's other retrospective analyses around the time, may be affected by some mild revisionism. A similar judgment of the book is displayed in his letter to Rufus W. Griswold (writing for *Graham's Magazine*) giving an overview of his career, saying that although the work "was pretty well received" it was not profitable: it was "much belied, and the lies injured both book and author, in a way that no subsequent reparations ever can or will repair."¹¹⁶ Cooper would even blame the controversy for the abandonment of his plan to continue the naval history in a third volume:

I did intend to write a third volume of the History in question. . . . But the abuse, calumny, and pecuniary sacrifices—sacrifices that I am little able to bear—that accompanied the publication of the two first volumes of the work,

¹¹⁴ JFC to Richard Henry Dana, 30 October 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:92-93.

¹¹⁵ JFC to William Gilmore Simms, 5 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:438.

¹¹⁶ JFC to Rufus W. Griswold, [10-18 January 1843?]: *Letters and Journals* 4:343.

have long since induced me to abandon the idea, and to turn my attention to other subjects.¹¹⁷

Clearly the controversy dissuaded him from continuing his labors on the third volume at least for some time.¹¹⁸ His original reason for abandoning it, however, was to write *Mercedes of Castile*, as is shown in his letter of 19 October 1839 to Mrs. Cooper: "I have cut out new work, and shall not write the third volume of the history, immediately, if I ever write it."¹¹⁹ Such a discrepancy, understandable as it is, gives reason to consider how much the controversy over Lake Erie really did cut into the commercial prospects of the *History*.

Sales of the first edition of the *History*, if they do not quite bear out Cooper's claim that "No work ever sold better or faster," seem healthy enough, especially considering the premium retail price of around \$4.00-4.50.¹²⁰ By 21 July 1839, two months after the work's publication, Cooper could report two-thirds of the edition already in the hands of booksellers, if not the public itself: "About 2000 copies of the History have been sold, and new orders are beginning to come in. On the whole, the sale is good, though Lea does not think a new edition will be required this some time."¹²¹ Despite Lea's caution, the firm contracted for a revised second edition of 2000 copies (as part of a package deal involving *The Pathfinder*) just a few days later, and by late September the continued sales of the nearly depleted first edition inspired Cooper to predict strong prospects for the long-term returns from the work: "Lea & Blanchard have about 250 copies of first edition on hand, and we begin to print [the second edition] tomorrow. . . . The History, first and last, will make me

¹¹⁷ JFC to John Beauchamp Jones, for *The Madisonian* [Washington, D.C.], 4 February 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:356.

¹¹⁸ He renewed his attention to it near the end of his life, and some portions were printed in an expanded version by George Palmer Putnam in 1853: *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*. By J. Fenimore Cooper, 3 vols. in 1 (New York: G.P. Putnam and Co., 1853).

¹¹⁹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 19 October [1839]: *Letters and Journals* 3:436.

¹²⁰ See JFC to Abel Parker Upshur, 8 September 1841: *Letters and Journals* 4:172.

¹²¹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 21 July 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:418.

from \$10,000 to \$15,000—with the third volume quite the latter I think.”¹²² Things got even better in early October 1839, when Lea & Blanchard proposed upping the size of the edition, going so far during their negotiations as to suggest adding another 1000 copies, leading Cooper again to optimistic musings:

The novel [*Pathfinder*] and history are both in press. The latter is doing very well, and my publishers told me this morning that it might still be made worth a large sum of money to me. They value it, as a selling book, very high. They have proposed, this morning, to print 3000 copies, second edition, instead of 2000, which, if I accept, will be \$700 more in my pocket. With this sum, I shall have netted already, \$6000 for my last winter’s work. . . . The Naval History, in short, is the best hit I have made, and I now give a months time to rendering it more complete, and perfect.¹²³

Lea & Blanchard ultimately settled on an edition of 2500 copies, as their cost books confirm, the edition being printed in January 1840 and appearing that spring.¹²⁴ The timing was good, for around Christmas 1839 Cooper could report to his wife that only “About a hundred copies remain on hand, of the old edition, but there are few in the stores. We shall sell the second the next year.”¹²⁵ The first edition, then, seems to have suffered no lack of sales, and with the sale of the second to Lea & Blanchard, Cooper had already made \$4500 of the projected \$10,000-15,000 he thought it would make him “first and last” (adding the £400 from Bentley would bring his total to about \$6500).

Gauging the success of the second edition is not as easy, as Cooper’s mentions of it after its appearance are few and Lea & Blanchard’s records for it are sparse. Judging by the fact that a third edition was not issued until 1847 (this time by local publishers H. & E. Phinney, with some versions appearing under the Lea & Blanchard imprint), sales appear to

¹²² Contract for “The Path Finder, or Inland Sea” and second edition of *The History of the Navy of the United States*, 24 July 1839: Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; JFC to Mrs. Cooper, [27 September 1839]: *Letters and Journals* 3:427.

¹²³ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 5 October 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:430.

¹²⁴ Lea & Blanchard cost books, Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Lea & Blanchard estimated their cost per copy at \$1.83 for the second edition, compared to \$2.16 for the first.

¹²⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, [23? December 1839]: *Letters and Journals* 3:452.

have been much more leisurely. In February 1840, Lea & Blanchard, after conducting their new year's reckoning of their records, could report slow sales and a few of the first edition left on hand—"The History moves but slow—we have in the house & in the hands of others, about 145 copies"—prompting them, apparently, to delay slightly their publication of the second.¹²⁶ Bad times and the usual difficulties in distribution during winter months played their role too, for at the same time the firm was withholding publication of *The Pathfinder* until navigation was freed up. When it did appear, Lea & Blanchard did their part to publicize the new edition, granting it lead status in their 1840 catalog with a full-page advertisement and advertising it on the paper covers of its cheap edition of Cooper's novels issued during and after 1842.¹²⁷ The edition itself also showed that attention was being paid to marketplace concerns, being equipped with an index, for instance, in answer to those critics who had lamented the absence of one. Compared to the first edition, though, the second did not have newness on its side, and after its first year in print, ran into competition from Cooper's own abridged edition, which sold at a much cheaper price. In late 1842 more competition to both versions of the *History* appeared in the form of *The Book of the Navy*, a book combining naval history (based on official accounts) with naval anecdotes, songs, and illustrations, all geared toward a popular audience by its author, "Professor" John Frost. Sales of Frost's work, which inevitably invited comparison to Cooper's, were brisk enough that the first edition sold out within three weeks, according to *Godey's Lady's Book*.¹²⁸ With all of these possibilities it is impossible to tell how much influence the Lake Erie controversy had any significant effect on the second edition of the *History*.

¹²⁶ Lea & Blanchard to JFC, 11 February 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:14.

¹²⁷ *Catalogue of Books, Published by Lea & Blanchard, Philadelphia, and for Sale by _____, 1840* [Bookseller's catalog]: [3]. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

¹²⁸ John Frost, *The Book of the Navy: comprising a General History of the American Marine; and particular Accounts of all the most celebrated Naval Battles, from the Declaration of Independence to the present time. Compiled from the best authorities* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1842). Reviewed in *Godey's Lady's Book* 25 (October and November 1842): 203, 249. Rufus W. Griswold would report about the book from Philadelphia on 9 September 1842: "A volume entitled 'The Book of the Navy,' patched up of every description of material, has just been published by one 'Professor' John Frost, of this city. . . . His book is handsomely printed, and it is said to take the place of your abridged History. Of course it is very loudly puffed in all the journals." MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Cooper's abridged edition of 1841 offers unique opportunities to find out more about the sale of the work, albeit only for a period some time after the edition initially appeared, thanks to surviving account records. The idea of publishing a shorter version of his history, to make it available to a wider audience for a lower price, is one that Cooper had long entertained (as is demonstrated by his original contract with Lea & Blanchard, which prohibited him from abridging the work or announcing an abridgement during their two years of exclusive rights to the book). This abridgement, he thought, would be key to realizing a continuing income from the *History*. "When abridged, it will be worth \$500 a year to me, for the next twenty eight years," he confidently predicted already in 1839.¹²⁹

Apparently unsuccessful in negotiating with Lea & Blanchard in June 1841, Cooper went to New York to discuss terms with a bookseller, who agreed to take it if John C. Spencer, Superintendent of Public Schools—and later Secretary of War when his son Philip was hanged on the *Somers* by Mackenzie—would approve it for the District School Library series, issued by Harper & Brothers. Inclusion in such a series would have guaranteed a wide circulation, but—as he would tell it, at least—Cooper refused to sell the work "on conditions so humiliating to a free-man," making plans instead to publish the work in Philadelphia on his own account before making arrangements with Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co. Making these alternate arrangements was wise, for much to his vexation he would later find out that Spencer had rejected the idea of including the abridged *History* on account of its "controversial" nature—and what is worse, had accepted Mackenzie's decidedly argumentative *Life of Perry*:

He [Spencer] declined putting the Naval History into the District School Library on the ground that the *book was controversial on the subject of the Battle of Lake Erie, and he had uniformly declined admitting any controversial works*. . . . it is the *want* of controversy in the History, that has made the clamor about it—my abstaining from accusing Elliott &c. But the d——d scoundrel had actually put McKenzie's *Life of Perry*, which is *all* controversy, which avows itself to be controversy in its preface and controversy on the Battle of Lake Erie, too, several months before he wrote that letter! I pledge you my honor to these facts.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 19 October [1839]: *Letters and Journals* 3:437.

¹³⁰ JFC to Capt. David Conner, USN, 7 November 1841: *Letters and Journals* 4:186.

To the great glee of Mackenzie, Cooper would grouse about the apparent conspiracy in *The Battle of Lake Erie*:

He [the writer] has seen his own work condemned, and, so far as the public authorities were concerned, excluded from the District School Libraries, and all on account of its supposed frauds in relation to the Battle of Lake Erie; while, on the other hand, he has heard Capt. Mackenzie's Biography of Perry lauded from one end of the Union to the other, and preferred to that place in the libraries mentioned, from which his own work has been excluded.¹³¹

If the District School Library was not meant to be, neither was an offer Cooper made to the Department of the Navy (before signing with Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co.) to provide copies of the abridged edition at cost to be issued aboard ships.¹³² How he settled on Thomas, Cowperthwait, & Co. is not clear; they were, at any rate, not far from Cooper's usual habitat in Philadelphia. The firm, not a large one, was primarily known for its schoolbooks, religious publications, and geographical works, so the abridged *History* at least was not a bad fit for their offerings. If the muddled state of the contracts and correspondence between the two parties is any indication, the working relationship was not a smooth one. Before signing with the firm, Cooper had contracted with John Fagan, his usual stereotyper, to have the work stereotyped and 3000 copies in sheets printed, receiving a bill for \$572.39 on 17 September 1841.¹³³ The next day, he signed with Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., the contract initially calling for the publishers to pay \$500 for the three thousand copies in sheets Cooper had already had printed, as well as \$1030 in a six-month's note; additionally, the publishers could print from Cooper's plates further impressions of at

¹³¹ *Battle of Lake Erie* iii-iv.

¹³² Previously, the large edition had been approved for libraries at naval yards and aboard ships, but purchases had been made at retail. Cooper offered the book at \$0.80 for 100 copies, \$0.75 for 250, or \$0.70 for 500. See JFC to Abel Parker Upshur, 8 September 1841: *Letters and Journals* 4:172; and JFC to David Conner, 7 November 1841: *Letters and Journals* 4:186.

¹³³ John Fagan, bill for stereotyping abridged *History of the Navy*: MS, Cooper collection (ZA Cooper 625: accounts with Publishers & Printers), Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Whether or not the 3000 copies were already printed at the time of his signing with Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co. is unclear. The firm's letter of 21 September 1843 suggests not, since it is mentioned that 2250 copies had been printed, with 750 yet to be done.

least 1000 copies, paying twenty cents a copy for the privilege and binding themselves to “use due diligence in circulating” the work.¹³⁴ The contract was amended that same day, however, so that the publishers would give Cooper \$572.39—the amount of his bill from Fagan—and “pay themselves the paper makers for the three thousand copies above mentioned.” Whether this was in addition to the \$500 cash and \$1030 note, or in place of one or the other or both, is not specified. Presumably Cooper knew what was going on and was content with it, for that same day he told his wife that he had made “a fair bargain.”¹³⁵

Sales of the edition seem to have started slow. Both Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co. and Cooper complained of the dismal mood permeating the market in 1842. Visiting Philadelphia in February, Cooper noted foreboding conditions: “This is going to be the hardest summer we have had in years. Every body is poor, feels poor, talks poor. Books sell very heavily [that is, slowly], though near 2000 of Naval History have gone off.” Remaining optimistic of his long-term prospects, he would reiterate, “That book’s sale remains to come,” but no longer did he think it worth \$500 a year: “It ought to produce me \$200 or 300 a year for eight and twenty years to come, and probably will.”¹³⁶ The publishers, however, lamented that “business is completely at a stand and [with] no prospect of any change within a reasonable time” during the “present deranged state of the monetary affairs of this country,” adding more specifically that “The Naval History suffers in common with stock generally, very few copies having been called for since we saw you.”¹³⁷ They did not mention the minor place they gave the book in their 1842 broadside advertisement, where

¹³⁴ “Original Contract with Thomas, Cowperthwait,” in James Fenimore Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America: A Facsimile Reproduction of the 1841 Edition with an Historical Introduction and Notes by R.D. Madison*. Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1988: 467-68 (original in collection of U.S. Naval Academy Museum, Annapolis, MD).

¹³⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 17 September 1841: *Letters and Journals* 4:174.

¹³⁶ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 5 February [1842]: *Letters and Journals* 4:231. It is possible that Cooper is referring to sales of the Second Edition rather than the Abridged, or some combination of the two. On the interpretation of “heavy” sales as “slow” sales, see Bentley to JFC, 18 June 1845 (*Letters and Journals* 5:20), wherein he states pessimistically about sequels, “Continuations I have always found to be heavy in sale.”

¹³⁷ Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co. to JFC, 4 March 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

the work is merely listed amid a list of other works in the “Miscellaneous” section.¹³⁸ A year later, when Cooper inquired about sales and proposed negotiation of a new contract, the firm temporarily declined, reporting “1180 copies yet to be disposed of” to complete the edition and assuring the author, “We are using our best endeavors to make the book sell, by sending it through the country with our agents, and by offering it freely on trade to our Booksellers.”¹³⁹ By late 1845 about 650 copies remained on hand; although an unknown party asked Cooper (through stereotyper John Fagan) to name a price for copyright and plates, Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co. were retained.¹⁴⁰ The contract was renewed after some uncomfortable bargaining, Cooper seeking \$1000 upfront, the firm first offering \$500 but settling on \$600 for the right to print from Cooper’s plates for ten years.¹⁴¹ The publishers were also allowed to take some liberty with format and add illustrations, if desired. Since the contract makes no mention of the sum Cooper would receive, it seems probable that the firm was allowed an unlimited number of copies for their \$600 payment to Cooper. If this was the case, here was truly an instance where Cooper himself, rather than any real or

¹³⁸ *Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co.’s advertising sheet. : Valuable school books, published by Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., Philadelphia, and for sale by the book-sellers generally throughout the United States.* [Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1842]: [4]; BDSDS. 1842 F, American Antiquarian Society.

¹³⁹ Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co. to JFC, 21 September 1843: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁴⁰ See John Fagan to JFC, 18 October 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:87. Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co. printed another impression of the *History* in 1845, but whether this constituted the remainder of the original 3000 or an additional 1000 copies is unclear.

¹⁴¹ Memorandum of agreement between J. Fenimore Cooper, Joseph M. Thomas, Hulings Cowperthwait, and Charles Desilver, 8 December 1845; MS, American Antiquarian Society. At one point in the negotiations, John Fagan, acting as an occasional go-between, described the firm as “reluctant to close the bargain, whilst something like an imputation or a threat has been thrown out.” The precise nature of the disagreement is unclear, but Fagan advised a “frank conversation” with the publishers, adding, “They say they feel satisfied they can explain every appearance of tardiness or omission on their part to your entire satisfaction.” See John Fagan to JFC, 6 December 1845; MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. For other correspondence relating to the 1845 negotiations, see John Fagan to JFC, 2 December 1845 (MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University), JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 3 December, 9 December 1845 (*Letters and Journals* 5:105, 108).

imagined literary enemies, cost him his long-term earnings on the *History*. While the publishers issued their slightly revised version of the *History* in 1846 and added new impressions in 1847 and 1848, Cooper quite possibly was left only with the “few hundreds” earned from the sale.

A surviving account book from Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co. makes it possible to get a fascinating glimpse of sales of Cooper’s abridged *History of the Navy* over a six-year period spanning from November 1846 through October 1852. This period covers at least some sales of the firm’s 1846 edition and all of their 1847 and 1848 impressions, possibly representing sales made by traveling representatives of the company. The account book includes a record of each trade sale made, noting the date, the name and often the locality of the bookseller, the titles and quantities of books ordered, and their unit and extended prices. Further on, a list of returns of unsold copies appears in similar format (see appendix for the compiled entries). The abridged *History* is often entered as “Cooper’s History” or sometimes “Naval Hist.” The raw numbers themselves are illuminating. From 6 November–31 December 1846, 660 copies were ordered—numbers that indicate strong sales for that year following the firm’s reissue of the *History*. 1847 was another strong year, with 1085 copies ordered. The next several years show a decline in orders: 334 for 1848, 81 in 1849, 43 in 1850, 41 in 1851, and 54 in 1852 (through October 28). Adding these together makes a total of 2298 orders between 6 November 1846 and 28 October 1852. Returns for 1846–47 are unknown, since the listing commences with June 1848, ending in October 1852 like the list of orders. During that period, a total of 369 returns were made: 65 in 1848, 144 in 1849, 98 in 1850, 17 in 1851, and 45 in 1852 (it should be noted that returns do not always correspond with the orders for the year, some being made some time after the original order was placed). These figures suggest that sales of the *History* were certainly strong enough to justify the additional impressions. The drop in sales in 1849 seems to correspond to declining interest in the book by the publishers: their advertising broadside of 1849 includes testimonials about their schoolbooks but makes no mention of the *History*.¹⁴²

¹⁴² *Valuable school books, published by Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., Philadelphia, and for sale by booksellers generally throughout the United States*. [Philadelphia: Published by Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., 1849?]; BDSDS. 1842 F, American Antiquarian Society.

What is more enlightening than the raw numbers provided by this account book, though, is the information that can be gleaned about *where* the abridged *History* sold during these years. As might be expected from the firm's Philadelphia location, sales in Pennsylvania and New York make a strong showing, with large cities and smaller towns well represented. The midwest of today makes a few appearances, with sales to LaFayette and Evansville in Indiana; Lima, Zanesville, Sandusky, Lancaster, and possibly Fulton and Columbus in Ohio; St. Louis and Louisiana in Missouri. Seemingly more surprising is the book's popularity in the South. Entries appear from places such as Globesport, West Point, Louisville, Maysville, Covington, Harrodsburg, Mills Point, Barbourville, and London in Kentucky; Nashville, Clarksville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville in Tennessee; Greensboro and Selma in Alabama; Raleigh and Wilmington in North Carolina; Charleston in South Carolina; Macon and Augusta in Georgia; New Orleans in Louisiana; possibly Vicksburg and Natchez in Mississippi; and Harpers Ferry, Richmond, Newbern, Petersburg, Madison, Salem, Leesburg, and Lynchburg in Virginia. It should be noted that some cities listed in the account book have ambiguous names if their states are not specified.

Notably absent on the list is much of the New England region. The *History* seems to have made inroads into Connecticut, racking up sales in New Haven, New London, Norwich, Litchfield and Lyme. It also gained a handful of buyers in Rhode Island at Providence and Westerly, a possible sale in Portland, Maine, and possibly a few sales in Burlington, Vermont, and Randolph, Massachusetts, though no state names are listed to know with certainty (similarly, in some cases where Augusta is not specifically listed as Augusta, Georgia, it is possible that Augusta, Maine, is intended). Whatever the case with the few ambiguous listings, New England's showing is small. Boston, a significant market, seems absent entirely.

Does this suggest, then, that Cooper's suspicions were true—that New England had made up its mind against him and his books, particularly his *History*? It is tempting, given Cooper's anecdotal assertions, to conclude that this is the case, and certainly the possibility remains; but ultimately the evidence fails to be conclusive that it is necessarily so. The records raise as many questions as they initially appear to answer—though they are good questions to raise toward further study. Did Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co. lack representation in New England? Did they have reciprocal arrangements with other

booksellers not recorded in this account book?¹⁴³ Did New Englanders perhaps prefer to buy the unabridged edition if and when they bought Cooper's *History* at all? Did the *History* in either form sell well in New England before the Lake Erie controversy took hold? Did competitors' works, such as Mackenzie's *Life of Perry* or Frost's *Book of the Navy* enjoy noticeably higher sales in the region? To understand what these records mean for the reception of Cooper's *History* in the marketplace with more certainty, more contextual data needs to be uncovered.

As a small step in that direction, a copy of an account of Lea & Blanchard with booksellers Redding & Co. of Boston might shed a little light. If this firm is any indication, Cooper suffered no great lack of customers for his novels around Boston. In November 1842, the firm ordered 150 copies of *The Wing-and-Wing*, following up two more orders of fifty copies apiece within the next month. Also in December 1842, the firm ordered some 500 copies of *The Two Admirals* as well as 500 of *The Spy*. January 1843 saw 500 copies each of *The Pathfinder* and *The Red Rover*, though 400 of the latter were later returned. *The Deerslayer*, *Mercedes of Castile*, *The Heidenmauer*, *Precaution*, *The Bravo*, *The Pilot*, and even two orders for *Home as Found* appear in the firm's orders from January to May 1843. Orders for Cooper's novels appear in nearly every order placed by the firm, suggesting a continuing strong readership for Cooper's novels in the cultural center of New England. Lea & Blanchard's unabridged edition of the *History*, however, was not in demand by Redding & Co., suggesting that it did not gain the same acceptance Cooper's novels did.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps cost was a factor—Redding & Co.'s offerings tending toward cheap books—or perhaps prejudice against the *History* was as Cooper imagined it. Perhaps some other factor came into play. Whatever the case, these records, incomplete as they are, are worthy of further study, not just for what they say about Cooper's works, but for what they suggest about regional tastes in literature more generally. As for the fate of the *History* (and Cooper's other writings) in

¹⁴³ Around this time, the firm's name appeared on title pages with such Boston firms as James Munroe & Co., David H. Williams, Thomas Groom & Co., Saxton, Pierce & Co., Saxton & Kelt, Benjamin B. Massey, Little & Brown, Phillips & Samson, Otis, Broaders & Co., James B. Dow, Crocker & Brewster, and possibly others.

¹⁴⁴ Carey, Lea & Blanchard, Copies of Accounts, 1826-46; Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

New England in the aftermath of the Lake Erie controversy, it certainly seems understandable that Cooper would draw the conclusions he did, given the evidence available, even if the true reasons for the book's lack of success lay elsewhere.

The *History of the Navy* never turned out to be the continuing source of income Cooper thought it would, particularly in its abridged version. Yet, all told, it was not a bad "investment" for him either. It brought him more income than any of his novels of the time, nearly as much as his great successes of the 1820s, and exposed him to new market segments and audiences. It allowed him to contribute his patriotic labors to a cause he still identified with greatly. It secured for him in many quarters a reputation as a serious historian, and even where that reputation was in dispute, gave him the opportunity to argue for the freedom of historians to render their interpretations of events independent of the meddling of special interests. The *History* withstood controversy to remain the definitive work on the Navy for some time to come. One reviewer, greeting a new edition (Putnam's three-volumes-in-one or 1853) a decade and a half after the first had appeared, said of it:

It is the only work, on this highly interesting arm of the national service, which deserves the name of a history. It must, for all time, maintain this ascendancy. No writer can be found more competent to the task. . . . This judgment has not been disturbed, and cannot be disturbed. His history is the best of our naval monuments.¹⁴⁵

If that view was too optimistic, it remains true that the *History* can still be read today without suffering greatly in comparison to its successors.

The Battle of Lake Erie controversy was not the only challenge to Cooper's stature as a nautical expert to emerge around the turn of the decade. To critics and readers jaded by the formulaic sameness nautical literature had fallen into, a refreshing new direction was provided in September 1840, when Harper & Brothers published *Two Years before the Mast*, by Richard Henry Dana, Jr., of Boston, son of Cooper's friend, the poet and lawyer of the same name.

¹⁴⁵ "Critical Notices," *Southern Literary Review* 9 (January 1854): 264-65.

No career sailor, young Dana had left Harvard halfway through his studies in 1833 because measles had weakened his eyes. He thought a voyage at sea a good way to restore his health and vision, and in 1834 he signed on with the merchant brig *Pilgrim* not as an officer but as a common sailor. The voyage took him round Cape Horn to California, still an infant locale for American trade, where he worked ashore for several months before securing a return passage aboard the *Alert*, which brought him back to Boston two years after he had left. Renewed in mind and body, he completed his studies at Harvard, graduating at the head of his class, and went on to practice law in Boston, specializing to some degree in maritime matters thanks to his experience at sea.

Two Years before the Mast is the account of his voyage, and by design Dana hoped to deconstruct some of the popular mythology of nautical life that had arisen as a result of Cooper's romantic portrayals of the sea in *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover*, as well as the flood of nautical sketches and romances that followed. Attempting to justify his own entrance into what was by then a crowded field, Dana specifically mentioned Cooper's pioneering role in popularizing literature of the sea: "Since Mr. Cooper's *Pilot* and *Red Rover*, there have been so many stories of sea-life written, that I should really think it unjustifiable in me to add one to the number without being able to give reasons in some measure warranting me in so doing." Dana's justification, however, was that (with the exception of Ames's "hasty and desultory" *A Mariner's Sketches*) all prior accounts of life at sea had been written by naval officers or passengers rather than common seamen, especially of the merchant service. Though these books might be entertaining and accurate in their own way, Dana argued, the privileged positions and limited associations of an author of this sort, gone to sea "as a gentleman, 'with his gloves on,'" could hardly see life at sea in the same way as the common sailor would. What was lacking, Dana felt, were works written from the perspective of the ordinary seaman showing what sea life was really like, "by one who has been of them, and can know what their life really is. *A voice from the fore-castle* has hardly yet been heard."

Although Robert Lucid has shown that Dana's book was hardly the literary first that Dana thought it was,¹⁴⁶ *Two Years before the Mast* was an attempt to provide new perspective

¹⁴⁶ Robert Francis Lucid, "The Composition, Reception, Reputation, and Influence of *Two Years before the Mast*" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1958) 174-76.

through just such a narrative—"to present the life of a common sailor at sea as it really is,-- the light and the dark together." Based on journals he kept daily, the work is written in the first person, with an attempt to preserve something like a log-book, diary-like format, eschewing romantic descriptions and other literary flights of fancy in favor of generally straightforward reporting of what he experienced. Such narration fit well with Dana's purposes for the book, which he presented to the world in hopes of raising awareness of the "real condition" of sailors, calling attention to their treatment and habits in hopes of promoting their "religious and moral improvement" as well as diminishing "the hardships of their daily life."¹⁴⁷ His reform-mindedness is reflected in his final chapter, which dispenses with narrative in favor of an essay on what could be done to improve the lot of sailors. Here, too, Dana often emphasizes how new understanding and new approaches, rather than any specific piece of legislation, might work the most good for this specialized group of men. Dana's project, then, is filled with efforts to replace old views with new, more realistic and enlightened ones, making the debunking (albeit mildly) of the romantic views of the sea popularized by Cooper central to his task, even if (as Thomas Philbrick has noted) Cooper was seldom guilty himself of the excessive romanticism or sentimentalism many of his imitators displayed.¹⁴⁸

Although Dana himself made next to nothing from the book (he left arrangements for publication in the hands of his father and William Cullen Bryant and was subsequently outmaneuvered by the wily Harper brothers), *Two Years before the Mast* was a runaway success.¹⁴⁹ Several editions were quick to sell, and Dana himself became a celebrity. First-person sailor narratives became the vogue for the decade to come as old tars came out of the woodwork to tell their stories of every variety of nautical profession. If they often lacked the literary ability and argumentative coherence of Dana, they could, at least, sometimes outdo him in the sheer quantity of their nautical experience. Some of the more noteworthy titles to appear were *A Green Hand's First Cruise*, *Roughed Out from the Log-Book of Memory of Twenty-Five*

¹⁴⁷ Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *Two Years before the Mast* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1840) 3-5.

¹⁴⁸ Philbrick, *Sea Fiction*, 120.

¹⁴⁹ See Lucid for a detailed account of the book's publication and reception.

Years Standing by “A Younger” (1841), *Incidents of a Whaling Voyage* by Francis Allyn Olmstead (1841), *A Narrative of Voyages and Commercial Enterprises* by Richard Jeffrey Cleveland (1842), *Thirty Years from Home, or A Voice from the Main Deck* by Samuel Leech (1843), *Twenty Years before the Mast* by Nicholas Isaacs (1845), *Forty Years at Sea* by William Nevins (1845), and *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* by J. Ross Browne (1846). As Thomas Philbrick has aptly noted, “Within five years of its date, Dana’s complaint that ‘a voice from the forecastle has hardly yet been heard’ was more than satisfied.”¹⁵⁰

Cooper knew about Dana’s book shortly after it appeared, but it may have been some time before he had his hands on a copy of it. Richard Henry Dana, Sr., an old acquaintance of Cooper’s, wrote the novelist on 23 September 1840—a few day’s after the publication of *Two Years before the Mast*—to say that he was sending a copy of his son’s “little matter-o’-fact volume.”¹⁵¹ The letter was then entrusted to William Cullen Bryant, who was supposed to have the Harpers forward the book, but neither the letter nor the book reached Cooper for over a year (was the Harpers’ tardiness intentional?). Responding at last on 15 October 1841, Cooper explained that Bryant had given him the letter only the day before, saying that “the Messrs Harper *ought* to have sent me a copy of your son’s work, long since.” The letter was a cordial one, full of praise for the book: “The work has at once put the youngster down in the midst of us—where he will probably remain long after we are gone,” he noted with prophetic accuracy. Cooper took some joy in describing how a friend took *him* for the author of *Two Years*:

The book has been known to me, since its appearance, and, I do not know whether your son will be inclined to take it as a compliment or not, it was first introduced to me by a question from Jos. R. Ingersoll, who wished to know if Dana were not a *nom de guerre* I had taken to write a sea narrative. He did not suppose the book fiction, but *truth* barbecued a little.¹⁵²

The story was good enough to bear repeating four years later: “I do not know whether the compliment is to me, or to himself, but many persons asked me if I had not written his

¹⁵⁰ Philbrick, *Sea Fiction*, 120.

¹⁵¹ Richard Henry Dana (Sr.) to JFC, 23 September 1840: *Correspondence* 2:422.

¹⁵² JFC to Richard Henry Dana (Sr.), 15 October 1841: *Letters and Journals* 4:181.

book, when it first appeared.”¹⁵³ One can sense Cooper’s competitive instinct at work, despite what seems to be genuine cordiality and admiration. Though his response to Dana’s *Two Years* was not immediate, it hardly seems surprising that when in early 1843 opportunity unexpectedly presented itself in the form of a long-forgotten, worn-out former shipmate named Ned Myers, Cooper would trump Dana’s two years before the mast with a narrative of a *life* before the mast, serving up to the public “*truth* barbecued a little” in the story of Ned’s life.

Neither Dana’s book nor the Lake Erie controversy, however, had a significant influence on Cooper’s next two nautical novels, *The Two Admirals* and *The Wing-and-Wing*, both published in 1842. It is tempting, perhaps, to see a few nods toward his competition here and there, such as a recasting of Lake Erie in the climax of *The Two Admirals*, when second-in-command Admiral Richard Bluewater brings his ships into action in a late but timely matter to save his friend, the rash Admiral Gervaise Oakes, who has charged rashly into action against a French fleet without waiting for Bluewater, partly because he wishes to put his friend’s divided loyalties to the test (Bluewater favors the cause of the Young Pretender, whom the French are aiding in an attempt to reclaim a kingdom in England that, arguably, is legitimately his). But overall, both books exhibit much of the same spirit of revived commercialism that permeates *The Pathfinder*, *Mercedes of Castile*, and *The Deerslayer* (see Chapter Three), albeit with a touch more defiance than in those earlier books.

The lengths to which Cooper would go to accommodate commercial interests is well illustrated in the transformation *The Two Admirals* would undergo. Work on the *History of the Navy* had heightened Cooper’s already high awareness of the “poetry” of ships, particularly the intricate workings of fleets (something America’s naval history as yet lacked), and as early as February 1839 he was writing Bentley to propose a new experimental tale, one entirely devoid of human characters:

¹⁵³ JFC to Richard Henry Dana (Sr.), 30 October 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:94.

I have had a plan for years, of writing a book, a tale, in which *ships* should be the only actors. What do you think of such a scheme. Of one volume, I feel sure—perhaps of two. I should like to hear your idea of such a thing. Vessels of all sorts of rig, to have no animal life about them. I confess a strong desire to attempt it.

Acknowledging that the story would make for a “queer book,” Cooper nonetheless urged his “boyish impatience to be at it.”¹⁵⁴ Bentley, however, while expressing reluctance to interfere with Cooper’s nautical genius, expressed doubts over whether the subject could be invested “with sufficient interest for readers generally,” particularly if it did not fit the usual format for novels: “If the subject will not bear the usual number of volumes, however, I feel persuaded that that circumstance alone will go far against its success in a commercial view of the matter, as it might not be regarded exactly as a story, but in the light of a sort of essay.”¹⁵⁵ Bentley succeeded in persuading Cooper to undertake instead his tale of the inland seas which would become *The Pathfinder*; but after that work and when *Mercedes of Castile*, and *The Deerslayer* were off his hands, Cooper once again returned to his pet idea, bluntly announcing to Bentley on 28 June 1841, “I am writing the Sea Story, all ships and no men.” Despite admitting that “It is impossible to make any one understand it,” Cooper felt confident that this experiment, like *The Pilot*, would prove successful, “the most extraordinary work of our time, *in its way*,” adding, “This you will say, it may well be, for it will stand alone. However, time will show.”¹⁵⁶ Apparently, time showed sooner than expected, for less than two weeks later Cooper wrote Bentley again with a modified plan, perhaps suggested either by his own struggles with the form or by further conversation about the book with Lea & Blanchard. “My plan has been to write a work in which no human characters are introduced, letting the ships act for themselves, but this has no favor with you publishers and I have come to the conclusion to write an ordinary tale,” he explained in part on 10 July 1841.¹⁵⁷ This Cooper largely did, as Donald Ringe explains

¹⁵⁴ JFC to Bentley, 5 February 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:369.

¹⁵⁵ Bentley to JFC, 6 April 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:370.

¹⁵⁶ JFC to Bentley, 28 June 1841; *Letters and Journals* 4:162.

¹⁵⁷ JFC to Bentley, 10 July 1841; *Letters and Journals* 4:164.

thoroughly in his introduction to the modern critical edition of *The Two Admirals*, turning his unpeopled tale into a powerful story of friendship, loyalty, and legitimacy.¹⁵⁸ Notably, since America had no fleets (or Admirals), he was obliged to shift his setting to Britain in 1745, a potentially risky move given the reception of his European trilogy of 1831-33 but one that could be explained away by the fact that Americans could well claim the history of Britain during the colonial years as their own. To illustrate the point, Cooper included an American character, Wycherly Wychemcombe, who turns out to be an heir to the estate and title of a nobleman of the same name in a subplot inspired to some degree by Samuel Warren's *Ten Thousand a Year*, piratically serialized in numerous American newspapers and periodicals during the preceding two years.

Despite the accommodations, however, Cooper could not resist tweaking his public and his publishers in his preface to the work. He asserted his own right as an author to set his tales where he pleased, deriding, with some mischievousness, the "provincial prejudice" of those who demanded that American fiction portray American scenes: "We would openly and loudly condemn the maudlin patriotism that is sensitive about the honor of cats and dogs" (3).¹⁵⁹ He made light of his seeming departure from the conventions of romance by encouraging his readers to "regard the TWO ADMIRALS as a *sea*-story, and not as a *love*-story," yet by flippantly suggesting that "those who are particularly fastidious on such subjects, are quite welcome to term one [of the admirals] the heroine, if they see fit," he teases readers into looking at the work as a reinvention of the very same conventions he forswears (5).¹⁶⁰ And, in another possible nod to the Lake Erie controversy with its arguments over how the honors of victory should be allotted, Cooper leaves to his readers in America and England the task of determining "what portion of the fame earned by Oakes and Bluewater shall

¹⁵⁸ Donald A. Ringe, "Historical Introduction," in James Fenimore Cooper, *The Two Admirals: A Tale* (Albany: SUNY P, 1990) xiii-xlii.

¹⁵⁹ Page citations are from the modern critical "Cooper Edition" from SUNY Press mentioned above.

¹⁶⁰ Male bonds and domestic relations form major themes in the work; "I loved him like a brother!" the aged Oakes says of his late friend Bluewater years after the fight in which the latter was mortally wounded.

properly fall to the share of each" (4). Mocking the overzealousness of those who demand absolute historical fidelity in a fiction, he provides a curious set of instructions:

By applying to our domestic publishers, Lea & Blanchard of Philadelphia, the American can obtain all the evidence we possess on the subject and, for the convenience of the English, Mr. Richard Bentley, of New-Burlington Street, London, is furnished with duplicates of every particle of authority on which this legend is founded. We beg the gentlemen connected with these two great publishing houses, not to be backward, or reluctant on the occasion; but to communicate freely whatever they may happen to know, to all applicants; and more especially to the critics, a class of writers who, in general, are singularly assisted by the aid of a little knowledge of the subjects on which they treat. (4-5)

Did Cooper ever provide such documentation? It seems doubtful, and his language suggests that his tongue was planted firmly in his cheek. Though the publishers do not seem to have put any objections to this passage in writing, one wonders how amused they were by this little joke.

The Wing-and-Wing would see Cooper becoming even more insistent on his prerogatives as an author, despite its intentional appeal for wide circulation (Cooper's experiment of selling a large printing of the work at a cheap rate is discussed in Chapter Five). Like *The Two Admirals*, this book would also employ a foreign setting and a token American character—though the complex New Hampshire sailor Ithuel Bolt is a much different character than the wooden stock hero Wycherly Wychemcombe typifies, much different, too, from predecessors Long Tom Coffin of *The Pilot*, Dick Fid of *The Red Rover*, or Tom Tiller of *The Water-Witch*. Lacking the deep loyalty to sea and vessel that distinguishes these earlier tars, Ithuel Bolt is cold, cunning, prejudiced, and driven by revenge against the British, who had impressed him into their navy. If Dana had wished to strip some of the romance away from the profession of sailor, Ithuel Bolt fully embodies this tendency in Cooper. The rest of the work, however, strikes an almost oppositional quality to the straightforwardness Dana advocated, surpassing even *The Water-Witch* in the romanticism of its scenery. Indeed, Cooper defends the artistic quality of his nautical work in his preface, writing that "A ship, alone, in the solitude of the ocean, is an object for reflection, and a

source of poetical, as well as of moral feeling” (1 iv).¹⁶¹ Cooper grew more bold in his choice of settings, eliminating all pretense of using times and places Americans could call their own, to indulge his own love of Mediterranean Italy, where the action of the story takes place (much of it around the scenic bay of Naples), circa 1799 during the Napoleonic wars between Britain and France.

Further ambivalence about the commercial appeal of the work abounds. If *The Two Admirals* had been decidedly favorable to the British, *The Wing-and-Wing* seems designed to counteract that tendency by portraying episodes that did not reflect well on Britain’s naval glory. Bentley sensed this from the start, responding to Cooper’s typically vague outline of the story with hesitation: “Should your new work bearing, as I suppose it does from the period and place selected, upon a peculiar part of Nelson’s career be treated in a manner likely to excite unpleasant feelings in the English reader, I can only expect a limited sale.” Then, too, Bentley found Cooper’s running title, *Le Feu Follet* (“The Little Folly,” as Raoul Yvard’s ship is named), not particularly “taking,” since it “conveys no distinct idea to the ordinary reader so as to stimulate his curiosity.”¹⁶² In the plot of the novel itself, Cooper also displayed his waywardness. While making the love story between Raoul Yvard and Ghita Caraccioli more central to his plot, more meaningful to his themes, and more powerful in its execution than in almost any other of his prior novels, Cooper nonetheless “kills off” the atheist Raoul at the end of the story, unconverted to the Catholic faith of Ghita even on his deathbed—a move that contributes greatly to the moral profundity of the work but would no doubt defy more conventional expectation of a happier ending. Three readers known to be disappointed in this way were William Branford Shubrick’s wife and two nieces: “They think it was quite wrong in you to kill Sir Smees [an alias of Raoul Yvard], that he should have been converted and married to Ghita—You must settle that point with

¹⁶¹ Citations from *The Wing-and-Wing* are from the first edition, in two volumes (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1842).

¹⁶² Bentley to JFC, 8 July 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Such fears suggest that despite Cooper’s assertions later in the 1840s that he wrote largely for publication in England, he was not really writing with English readers in mind, unless, perhaps, it was to set them straight on the “truth” about Nelson. Bentley would title his version *The Jack O’Lantern; (Le Feu Follet;) or, The Privateer*.

them.”¹⁶³ To this Cooper cheekily replied, “As for marrying Ghita to that atheistical scamp, Raoul, the ladies must excuse me. I preferred killing him, and putting her in a convent!”¹⁶⁴

Although neither of these books initially sold as well as Cooper or his publishers had hoped (*The Two Admirals*, in particular, suffered from a severe downturn in the book market), the positive critical reception both met suggested that the genre of nautical fiction was not as exhausted as some critics had complained; nor was Dana’s influence so pervasive as to wipe out the desire for more fanciful and romantic treatments of the sea. In reviewing *The Two Admirals*, *Graham’s Magazine* said that Cooper “has re-asserted his right to the rank of the first living American novelist. . . . In his line he is without a rival here or in Europe.”¹⁶⁵ The *Knickerbocker* similarly welcomed Cooper to “the ‘salt sea-field,’ in which he has neither living superior or equal,” praising, too, his rejection of “that maudlin patriotism that holds that works of fiction must be written solely in reference to the country of one’s birth,” as well as expressing approbation for the author’s hints that America adopt fleets and admirals.¹⁶⁶ The often taciturn *Ladies’ Companion*, relieved to see Cooper “eschewing ‘Home’ matters, and private prejudices,” having “benefitted by the critical ordeal through which he has passed,” saw the tale as evidence that “his genius is still fresh and vigorous, and in ‘every inch’ a master of a nautical subject.”¹⁶⁷ If the reviewer at *Godey’s Lady’s Book* found the opening chapters marred by too much “tedious and uninteresting dialogue,” he or she nevertheless felt that the remaining chapters “fully compensate for the dulness of the commencement,” being “graphic, spirited, and striking; full of incident and admirable description.”¹⁶⁸ The *Southern Literary Messenger*, which had withheld commendation from *The Deerslayer*, delighted in Cooper’s return “to an element, upon which he has spent a considerable portion of his life, and upon which he is evidently so much at home”—a telling overestimation of Cooper’s

¹⁶³ Shubrick to JFC, 6 December 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:329.

¹⁶⁴ JFC to Shubrick, 17 December 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:328.

¹⁶⁵ *Graham’s Magazine* 20 (June 1842): 356.

¹⁶⁶ “Literary Notices,” *Knickerbocker* 19 (June 1842): 586-87.

¹⁶⁷ “Literary Review,” *Ladies’ Companion* 17 (May 1842): 67.

¹⁶⁸ “Editor’s Book Table,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 24 (June 1842): 344.

true nautical experience, bespeaking the popular image that prevailed among at least a portion of the reading public. “The work is a *capital* thing,” the reviewer concluded. “There is a youth sitting at the table on which we write, literally devouring it.”¹⁶⁹

Most extraordinarily, Cooper’s genius in *The Two Admirals* was praised even by some of the Whig opponents being sued by him. Park Benjamin wrote without apparent irony in *The New World*, “We have seldom derived more sincere gratification in the reading of fiction than from this novel. It is delightful.” The narrative he found “full of interest, told without affectation, lively, spirited, graceful”; the characters “drawn with such force, that they leave a life-like impression on the mind.” In short, “Mr. Cooper is, we are fully satisfied, a man of a high order of genius.” So great was his approval of the book that Benjamin offered a sort of apology for the earlier harsh treatment he had given *The Deerslayer*, offering as his excuse that he was “perfectly sick and tired of Indians. We detest them, war-paint, feathers, tomahawk, and wampum.”¹⁷⁰ Another litigant, James Watson Webb, approved of the book, and yet another, Thurlow Weed, became so entranced by it that he seized every available free moment during his libel trial to read it. Reacting distrustfully to praise from this unexpected quarter, Cooper told his wife, “All this is part of a system of tactics, but the book is decidedly successful.”¹⁷¹ Perhaps Cooper’s impression had an element of truth to it, yet Weed’s admiration, at least, seems genuine, for he would later record in his *Autobiography*, “I commenced reading it in the cars [on the way to his trial], and became so charmed with it that I took it with me into the court-room, and occupied every interval that my attention could be withdrawn from the trial in its perusal.”¹⁷²

The Wing-and-Wing met with nearly equal enthusiasm, even though it was quite different from *The Two Admirals* in nature. Despite modern critical judgments that the work

¹⁶⁹ “Notices of New Works,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 8 (May 1842): 361-62.

¹⁷⁰ “The Literary World,” *The New World* 4 (April 30, 1842): 288.

¹⁷¹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 14 May 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:288.

¹⁷² Thurlow Weed, *The Autobiography of Thurlow Weed*, ed. Harriet A. Weed (Boston, 1884) 1:527.

borrowed a good deal of its inspiration from *The Water-Witch*,¹⁷³ reviewers often commented upon the freshness and originality of the story. The *New-York Mirror*, noticing Cooper's prefatory remark about the book being his seventh sea tale, remarked that "it is imbued with all the thrilling interest which made the very first so universally popular."¹⁷⁴ Likewise, the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* spoke of how the book's setting gave it "an air of variety and novelty. . . as though it were not the seventh progeny of the same prolific source."¹⁷⁵ *Godey's*, noting that Cooper's genius "luxuriates in a genial clime" on the sea, saw the book as proof that he had "lost none of his power to interest and amuse the public. . . [;] the vigor of his pen promises long continued increase to his fame and usefulness."¹⁷⁶ And the reviewer for *Graham's* (possibly Rufus W. Griswold), despite receiving the novel too late to provide an extended review, spoke highly of the book's merits, going so far as to "predict for it a sale equal to that of 'The Spy,' or 'The Red Rover.'"¹⁷⁷ Most reviewers found the incidents exciting, the scenery inspiring, and the characters strikingly portrayed, despite some disagreement over the rendering of Ghita, apropos of the usual discussions about Cooper's defects in drawing female characters. The *Ladies' Companion* called the story "a faithful transcript of a historical epoch, fraught with events of the most exciting character." Raoul is "a masterly conception," the historical figures "graphic, faithful, and life-like," leading the reviewer to conclude, "No one can rise from the perusal of this work without being

¹⁷³ Indeed, George Dekker has recently suggested that *The Water-Witch*, despite being set in the waters around New York, owes much of its geographical inspiration to the Bay of Naples (where a good portion of *The Wing-and-Wing* takes place), as Cooper was in Italy when he wrote the story; "Romantic Tourism, Fictionality, and *The Water-Witch*," presented to the James Fenimore Cooper panel at the 11th Annual Conference of the American Literature Association, 27 May 2000.

¹⁷⁴ "Literary Notices," *The New-York Mirror: A Weekly Gazette of Literature and the Fine Arts* (3 December 1842): 391.

¹⁷⁵ "New Books of the Month," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 11 (December 1842): 665.

¹⁷⁶ "Editors' Book Table," *Godey's Lady's Book* 26 (January 1843): 59.

¹⁷⁷ *Graham's Magazine* 21 (December 1842): 342.

delighted and instructed.”¹⁷⁸ The *Northern Light* praised not only Cooper’s “great aptitude in depicting natural objects,” but also his “complete mastery over that ingenious and complex machine—a ship, and the science of her navigation.”¹⁷⁹ Even the short notice in Park Benjamin’s *New World* was favorable, calling the book “a capital story, made out of very slender materials, and therein exhibiting the extraordinary genius of the author,” and adding, “The sea descriptions are animating, and the scenery of the shores washed by the Mediterranean, pictured with a glowing pencil.”¹⁸⁰

Although this sampling of prominent reviews cannot speak for the critical reception of these two books in every region (some Whig editors, in fact, chose to ignore Cooper’s works altogether), what the reviews say and what they leave unsaid is noteworthy. Nowhere is Cooper censured for setting his novels somewhere other than America, illustrating how much the views of American critics (and readers) had expanded since the early 1830s, stretched by a taste for pirated European fare, a wider selection of American authors and subjects, and perhaps even Cooper’s own strictures against provincialism. Nowhere does the controversy over the Battle of Lake Erie appear as a stain on Cooper’s nautical fiction, suggesting that however much the reputation of the *History* and its author were harmed by the dispute, his abilities as an artist were strong enough to persuade even skeptics and enemies. And nowhere does Cooper’s now-“old-fashioned” brand of nautical writing receive unflattering comparison to the newer format of Dana’s *Two Years before the Mast*, implying that a desire for romantic fictional treatments of the sea remained current even as more prosaic factual narratives supplemented their sometimes idealized visions. Perhaps the warm words of praise for these two novels reflect the nascent spirit of something Herman Melville would utter a few years later, when realistic narratives of the sea had deluged the literary marketplace: “But of late years there have been revealed so many plain, matter-of-fact details connected with nautical life, that, at the present day, the poetry of salt water is

¹⁷⁸ “Literary Review,” *Ladies’ Companion* 18 (January 1843): 153.

¹⁷⁹ “Literary Notices,” *The Northern Light* 2.9 (December 1842): 148.

¹⁸⁰ *The New World* (3 December 1842): 367.

very much on the wane.”¹⁸¹ *The Two Admirals* and *The Wing-and-Wing* confirmed Cooper’s abilities as a nautical artist, and Cooper very likely could have continued writing “the poetry of salt water” in this way for some time to come had events not intervened that would give him a new, more matter-of-fact direction.

Around the end of January 1843, Cooper received a letter that unexpectedly recalled his earliest nautical experiences nearly thirty years prior. It was from Edward R. “Ned” Myers, an old shipmate from the *Stirling*, on which Cooper had made his first voyage 1806-07. While Cooper had gone on to become a naval officer, gentleman, and famous author, Ned had never escaped the drudgery of the common sailor, leading a morally aimless life filled with drunkenness and questionable judgment. Only after an accident left him unfit for sailing did Ned re-examine his life, renounce drink, and actively accept religion. Efforts to reestablish old ties from his early days led him to seek out a long-lost sister as well as Captain Johnston of the *Stirling*, whom he visited in Maine, where a discussion about old times and shipmates spurred Ned’s curiosity about whether the famous novelist and naval historian was the same Cooper he had once known. Writing from Sailors’ Snug Harbor on Staten Island, a sort of retirement home for old sailors, Ned inquired:

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 the Sailors Snug Harbor, or if you would send me your address in the city, I would like to call upon you.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ [Review of J. Ross Browne’s *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* and John Codman’s *Sailor’s Life and Sailor’s Yarns*]; *The Literary World* 1 (1847): 105.

¹⁸² Edward R. Myers to JFC, 23 January 1843: *Correspondence* 2:490.

Cooper replied a few days later, “I am your old ship-mate, Ned,” agreeing to a visit during one of his trips to New York.¹⁸³ The two met in April, and that summer, Cooper invited Ned to stay with him at his home in Cooperstown, to “pass a few weeks there,” as Ned reports. The “few weeks” eventually stretched to five months as Cooper listened to Ned recount his past while “knocking about” Lake Otsego “in a good stout boat” (231), the novelist becoming increasingly aware that Ned’s story would make for a fascinating book—not a fictional one, but a factual narrative, told from a first-person perspective, as Dana’s work had been.

Accordingly, this unlikely pair of literary collaborators set to work on a narrative, Cooper serving as Ned’s “editor” and working to preserve as much of the substance and feel of Ned’s yarns as possible. Significantly, Cooper recognized the appeal of Ned’s artless qualities as a storyteller. If Dana had attempted to give an account of a sailor’s life in straightforward, ordinary language, he nevertheless could not avoid filtering his experiences through his own educated views and telling about them through his educated habits of speech. Ned, on the other hand, was a sailor through and through and could not help talking like one. In his preface to the finished work, Cooper explains his editorial intentions: “In this book, the writer has endeavored to adhere as closely to the very language of his subject, as circumstances will at all allow; and in many places he feels confident that no art of his own could, in any respect, improve it” (vi). That is not to say, however, that every word on the page is Ned’s. Ned the narrator assigns Cooper the role of putting his facts in their “proper form” (1), and while Cooper credits Ned with being in “every way entitled to speak for himself,” he admits to occasionally interposing “his own greater knowledge of the world between Ned’s more limited experience and the narrative” where he felt Ned to have been “deceived by appearances, or misled by ignorance” (v-vi). Indeed, the question of how the work was composed is an interesting one: it seems unlikely that Cooper would record every word precisely as Ned dictated, and manuscript evidence of outline notes and interlinear additions suggests that mental reconstruction after the fact played a greater role than might

¹⁸³ Cooper’s letter is unlocated; the reply is related by Ned (through Cooper) in *Ned Myers, or A Life before the Mast* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1843) 230.

at first be imagined.¹⁸⁴ Still, if Cooper was occasionally more ghostwriter than editor, the final product has the feel of being more Ned's than Cooper's in its language and outlook, marking a noticeable departure from anything Cooper had written before. "I wish it understood, that this is literally my own story, logged by my old shipmate," Ned the narrator reaffirms in closing.

The novelty of their undertaking was not lost on Cooper in his attempts to sell the book. In proposing it to Bentley, he promoted the "entirely new character" of the work-in-progress: "*This is real biography*, intended to represent the experience, wrecks, battles, escapes, and career of a seaman who has been in all sorts of vessels, from a man of war to a smuggler of opium in China." Reiterating the distinctive nature of the book, Cooper added later, "I shall put nothing down that I do not believe to be strictly fact. Remember, there must be no mistake on this head." He proposed to call the work "Ned Myers, or the life of a tar," a title that gives less of an overt nod to Dana than the one he eventually chose, *Ned Myers, or, A Life before the Mast*. Uncertain as to whether the book would make the usual three British volumes or only two, Cooper nevertheless expected to receive the usual novel price, "as I think it will sell even better."¹⁸⁵ For his part, Bentley expressed little confidence in the experiment, balking at paying £350 for a book not of the usual size and even shying away from Cooper's lower demand of £300, adjusted due to the book's shorter length.¹⁸⁶ To Bentley's complaints about the size of the book, Cooper would later reply, "I was writing truth, and did not feel justified in spinning out the facts, and as to any comments of my own they would have impaired the identity of the whole affair. I was forced to stop, when Ned

¹⁸⁴ Hugh Egan's "Gentlemen-Sailors," 158-62, discusses both pieces of evidence briefly in his insightful examination of the joint authorship of *Ned Myers*. See also his "Cooper's Career in the First Person," *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art*, 13 (2001): 41-45.

¹⁸⁵ JFC to Bentley, 18 July 1843; *Letters and Journals* 4:391-92.

¹⁸⁶ Negotiations over the book were fraught with confusion when Cooper drew £200 "for the balance" over the £100 he had been advanced even though Bentley had not agreed to his price. The publisher later published the work on joint account, crediting Cooper two-thirds of the profits. See Bentley to JFC, 30 October 1843 and 18 February 1844 (MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University), as well as Beard's discussion in *Letters and Journals* 4:415.

had no more to say.”¹⁸⁷ Lea & Blanchard also seemed difficult to impress with the book’s value. Cooper found them unwilling to meet his terms, leading him to contemplate printing for himself (a move he would undertake with his next book, *Afloat and Ashore*), but he finally succeeded in selling ten thousand copies of the book for \$1000, “cash in pocket,” not with Lea & Blanchard, but with Carey & Hart (the Carey of that firm being Edward, brother of Henry Carey). “This, with the English sale, will make good business,” Cooper told his wife, adding, “I shall give Ned a handsome fee.”¹⁸⁸ Inexplicably, the contract was transferred to Lea & Blanchard a day later, and it was they who published it sometime around 9 November 1843.¹⁸⁹

Cooper felt sure of a wide sale of *Ned Myers*. His hopes were only partially realized. Overseas, Bentley, failing to take Cooper’s advice to publish in a cheap “popular form” to sell widely, would report such dismal sales of the work that Cooper would demand a full account. Out of an initial printing of 750 (which Cooper thought exceedingly small), with another 250 copies struck off before the type was broken up, Bentley still had some 470 copies left on hand at the time of his reckoning. Bentley suggested that British readers found the work unoriginal, following as it did after *Two Years before the Mast*: “Generally speaking the opinion of the press has been unfavourable, Dana’s work which preceded it being considered to possess more interest.”¹⁹⁰ As London’s *The Athenaeum* concurs, “compared with young Dana’s book, this can rank but as second in the marine library.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ JFC to Bentley, 9 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:440.

¹⁸⁸ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 17 September 1843, 22 September 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:409, 412.

¹⁸⁹ Memorandum of Agreement for “Ned Myers; or a Life before the Mast,” 22 September 1843. Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁹⁰ See JFC to Bentley, [25 September 1843], 9 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:415, 440; and Bentley to JFC, 18 February 1844, 21 May 1844 (MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University), partially published in *Letters and Journals* 4:442, 457.

¹⁹¹ *The Athenaeum: Journal of Literature, Science, and the Fine Arts* (25 November 1843): 1039. On the other hand, a quite favorable review appeared in *The Spectator* 16 (18 November 1843): 1094-95.

In America, results were mixed. James Hart, in *The Popular Book*, speaks of *Ned Myers* as “a momentary favorite, selling 10,000 copies in a year.”¹⁹² How Hart arrives at this figure is unclear. Cooper himself had difficulty finding out how the work was faring, his spirits rising and falling with each piece of news about it. Though Shubrick thought it well-received in Baltimore, Cooper distrusted the report because publicity for the book seemed sparse from his vantage point:

I am inclined to think you are mistaken as to the circulation of *Ned Myers*. It may have gone off pretty well at Baltimore, but I see no signs of any movement in New York, nor do I hear any thing from Philadelphia. Baltimore is only a secondary market for a book, the place yielding very little to authors I believe; less than any town of its size in America, I think I have been told. I can not even see an advertisement in a New York paper. In long lists of other works, *Ned* is not even named. I know that many of the New York booksellers are afraid to touch my works, on account of the press of that righteous and enlightened emporium.¹⁹³

Worse still, Shubrick observed that some of the advertisements he had seen were mistaken as to the nature of the book: “it is to be regretted I think that the book is advertised in some of the papers as ‘a novel.’ There are many persons who would read it as a statement of facts who would not read it as a novel.”¹⁹⁴ And on 11 December 1843, a month after the book’s appearance, Lea & Blanchard, forwarding a hundred copies to a Cooperstown bookseller in care of Cooper, wrote, “We should be glad to have a few more such orders from your corner of the world as we find that *Ned*’s speed is not 14 knots per hour.”¹⁹⁵ Despite the glum outlook, by 9 January 1844 Cooper was chastising Bentley for his comparatively puny edition by boasting, “Thousands and thousands of copies have already sold in this country, and I have never doubted it would be a largely selling work.”¹⁹⁶ Yet a few days later on 14 January

¹⁹² James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America’s Literary Taste* (New York: Oxford UP, 1950) 82.

¹⁹³ JFC to Shubrick, 9 December 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:428-29.

¹⁹⁴ Shubrick to JFC, 23 November 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:431.

¹⁹⁵ Lea & Blanchard to JFC, 11 December 1843; MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁹⁶ JFC to Bentley, 9 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:440.

he was again fearing the worst: "I am afraid 'Ned' has not done much after all. No one I meet, appears to know anything of it, and, you know, these people wait to be told what to do, say, or think by the newspapers. The last have maintained a dead silence."¹⁹⁷ Visiting Philadelphia shortly thereafter cured some of his gloom. He could trace 3000 copies sold by three houses there, extrapolating that perhaps 4000 had sold in that city alone.¹⁹⁸ If the edition did not sell out within the first year, as Hart suggested, it very likely had sold within two, for in 1845 the book reappeared under the Burgess & Stringer imprint, thanks to a contract clause that allowed Cooper to publish elsewhere if the publishers failed to resupply the market once the initial ten thousand copies sold.¹⁹⁹

Among critics, Cooper's role as "editor" was viewed with suspicion, and Ned's story itself sometimes dismissed as uninteresting. It was clear that few understood or valued Cooper's aims for the work. Having Cooper's name attached to the book no doubt was a mixed blessing (as Shubrick noted), but then again, if a true "voice from the forecastle" was supposedly a thing to be desired, the reception of *Ned Myers* also shows that the appetite of critics for such a thing was limited. The *Ladies' Companion* said only that "This is a commonplace affair, sold for three shillings, York currency, and scarcely worth the attention bestowed upon it by its distinguished editor."²⁰⁰ The *Southern Literary Messenger* considered Ned's life of questionable morality and his story of unquestionable dullness "light enough to

¹⁹⁷ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 14 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 6:332.

¹⁹⁸ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 18 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:443.

¹⁹⁹ Memorandum of Agreement for "Ned Myers; or a Life before the Mast," 22 September 1843. Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. A copy of *Ned Myers* with an 1845 Burgess & Stringer imprint is held in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society; confusingly, though, Lea & Blanchard continued to list it in booksellers' trade catalogs after their rights to it had expired: the 1847 *American Bookseller's Complete Reference Trade List* shows it (at \$0.20) as well as the Naval History, which had been transferred in 1846 to H. & E. Phinney (who list their new edition in their entry). Perhaps the copies Lea & Blanchard listed were leftovers or returns. Burgess & Stringer are not listed. See *The American Bookseller's Complete Reference Trade List, and Alphabetical Catalogue of Books Published in This Country*. . . (Claremont, N.H., Simeon Ide, 1847), in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society.

²⁰⁰ "Editors' Table," *Ladies' Companion* 20 (January 1844): 155.

buoy him up like a swimmer's cork." The reviewer mocks how often Cooper refers to himself as the editor throughout the work: "Don't forget to honor the Editor. Oh! no." Of the book's potential for reputation, the reviewer concludes, "we hardly think that Ned will eclipse Mr. Dana."²⁰¹ The *New World* printed its own short notice as well as a longer review submitted by "a valued correspondent. The former notes that "Ned's autobiography is marked by none of the features which characterize Mr. Cooper's original works; but the sale will doubtless be influenced favorably or unfavorably, as the case may be, by the shadow of his mighty name." The "valued correspondent," taking issue with Cooper's claim that most men's lives would be rendered interesting were the events faithfully told, counterargues that the stories of few men were worth telling: "the mere outside circumstances of any individual can be as little instructive as an inventory of the different kind of clothes he may have worn during a long life would be." Despite finding only two or three of Ned's incidents worth repeating, the reviewer praises *Ned Myers* as "unquestionably, the most readable of all his sea stories," because "it is true and perfectly natural," with a few incidents "related with great simplicity, liveliness, and precision, that strike us infinitely superior to anything in the *Pilot* or *Red Rover*." In comparison to Dana's work, *Ned Myers* "has an infinitely greater variety of incidents" but "is not near so entertaining as that admirable narrative"; it "may become famous, or it may not." Concluding the otherwise even-handed review with a barb, the "valued correspondent" pleads good intentions, begging Cooper's pardon for any "jagged points upon which an indictment can be hung" and asking to be "spared the mortification of a prosecution."²⁰²

The most perceptive review of *Ned Myers*, attributed to Edgar Allan Poe, appeared in the pages of *Graham's Magazine*. Like others, Poe meditates on the suspicious look of Cooper's role as "editor," noting the fashion of authors to speak of themselves in this capacity and including a sly reference to his own attempt at sea fiction: "In the same manner 'Arthur Gordon Pym'—another series of sea adventures, purporting to be *edited* only by Mr. Poe, was in reality his own composition—the supposititious hero having existed in imagination alone." Nevertheless, Poe is convinced that Cooper is in earnest. "The

²⁰¹ "Editor's Table," *Southern Literary Messenger* 9 (December 1843): 757-58.

²⁰² "The Literary World," *The New World* (25 November 1843): 792-93.

narrative is strictly *true*,” he says, and by general readers “it will be more relished than even the late work of Mr. R. H. Dana, entitled, we believe, ‘A Year Before the Mast.’ It is Poe, better than anyone else, who understands and delineates the essential difference in character between Dana’s narrative and Ned’s:

In Mr. Dana’s case we had the commentaries (often profound and philosophical) of an educated man, upon the vicissitudes of the ordinary seaman. With a view to the improvement of his health he shipped as a common sailor, and took upon himself, voluntarily, all the privations and troubles inseparable from such a life. Still, it *was* voluntary, and, at any moment, might have been relinquished, if found insupportable. Ned Myers, on the other hand, gives us, through Mr. Cooper, the involuntary and inevitable trials of the uncultivated Jack Tar, with *his* reflections and comments—perhaps neither profound nor philosophical—but striking and deeply entertaining from their freshness, naturalness and *naïveté*.

Delighting especially in the “*homeliness*” of the sea-faring existence the book portrays, Poe pronounces, “We have not read a book more to our taste for some years. . . . If we mistake not, it will be the most popular book of the season. Echoing Cooper’s own comment that in many places no art of his own could improve upon Ned’s narrative, Poe takes into account the book’s exemption from the usual literary qualities: “We can only recommend it, cordially, to our readers—as it is not of a character to call for any thing in the way of critical comment.”²⁰³

Whatever the book’s popular and critical reception, *Ned Myers* was an important book for Cooper artistically and professionally. The process of speaking for someone other than himself, using the language appropriate to Ned’s different class and habits, would have a tremendous effect on his subsequent fiction. Modern critics, particularly Thomas Philbrick and Hugh Egan, have pointed out how Cooper would use this experience in first-person narration to good effect in *Afloat and Ashore* and the Littlepage trilogy—*Satanstoe*, *The Chainbearer*, and *The Redskins*.²⁰⁴ Even *The Crater*, which followed, used a style of third-person narration not far removed from the first-person style of these books.

²⁰³ [Edgar Allan Poe], “Review of New Books,” *Graham’s Magazine* 24 (January 1844): 46.

²⁰⁴ See Philbrick, *Sea Fiction*, 130-65; Hugh Egan, “Cooper’s Career in the First Person.”

Apart from these long-term effects, *Ned Myers* also provided a small measure of vindication for Cooper against his literary rivals. If Cooper's own seamanship had been called into question, both in fiction and in fact, Ned's story—which came about because one part of it was Cooper's story, too—established Cooper's nautical credentials without requiring him to go to lengthy self-justifications. Mackenzie, even before his blistering attack in the appendix to his *Life of Perry* in 1844, had insinuated that Cooper lacked the nautical knowledge to make accurate judgments about the movements of vessels. Dana had criticized prior sea literature for being written from the privileged perspectives of officers and passengers, those who went to sea “with their gloves on.” In *Ned Myers*, however, Cooper's own pre-navy experience as a common sailor figures prominently in Ned's account of his experience on the *Stirling*, putting Cooper the “editor” in the strange predicament of writing of himself in the third person from another's point of view. As a cabin-boy to Captain Johnson of the *Sterling*, Ned recounts when Cooper joined the crew, accompanied by the consignee of the ship and another merchant, possibly leading Ned to mistake him for a passenger or another potential cabin-boy at first. But, Ned notes, “He never came into the cabin, but was immediately employed forward, in such service as he was able to perform. It was afterwards understood that he was destined for the navy” (23). The implication is clear: if Cooper's higher social position was obvious, it did not exempt him from the labors common to sailors. Ned humorously recalls the first awkward struggle he and Cooper have with a sail, as well as their foibles in attempting to transport a pot of pitch they had been boiling ashore back to the ship through the pounding surf (24, 29-30). He relates how Cooper served as a sort of tour guide for the men while on leave in London (26, 34), and describes how several members of the crew were seized by the British, on land and at sea, to be impressed into their navy, leaving the *Stirling* severely short-handed at some points. Cooper's close companion “Philadelphia Bill” was among the unlucky ones (32-33). Passages like these show, better than anything Cooper wrote by himself, the warmth and spirit in his character.

A few other incidents demonstrate how Cooper's bravery, seamanship, and cleverness were proved under duress. Navigating through thick weather at night, the *Stirling* nearly collides with a British warship, barely avoiding catastrophe thanks to Cooper's quick action: “The captain ordered our helm hard up, and yelled for Cooper to bring up the cabin

lantern. The youngster made one leap down the ladder, just scraping the steps with his heels, and was in the mizzen rigging with the light, in half a minute. That saved us" (28). (Here one gets the sense that the "editor" Cooper is supplying detail—would Ned have known if Cooper were "just scraping the steps with his heels"?). In another incident, Ned attempts to steal a sixpence fastened around the neck of a dog wandering near the docks. Upon catching it and returning to the ship, Ned falls in the water and nearly drowns before Cooper makes a timely intervention:

I could not swim a stroke; and I sang out, lustily, for help. As good luck would have it, Cooper came on board at that precise instant; and, hearing my outcry, he sprang down between the ships, and rescued me from drowning. I thought I was gone; and my condition made an impression on me that never will be lost. Had not Cooper accidentally appeared, just as he did, Ned Myers's yarn would have ended with this paragraph. I ought to add, that the sixpence got clear, the dog swimming away with it. (34)

As Ned reflects, the accident "attached me to Cooper more than common, and made me more desirous than ever to cruise in his company" (33). Such a statement seems an accurate description of what Ned's narrative does for Cooper the editor and author, humanizing him and showing his early competence as a sailor trusted by captain and crew (one gets the sense that Dana, by contrast, is never fully absorbed into the comradeship of his shipmates).

Ironically, Robert Emmet Long has observed that the frustrating thing about *Ned Myers* is that "Ned is never completely defined as a person." Ned speaks little of his motivations and displays little in the way of self-examination; Cooper does not explore what lies beneath Ned's self-destructive behavior or his feelings of disgust, making his experiences instead "the occasion wholly of a misspent morality in which a misspent life is finally redeemed by an acceptance of the Gospel."²⁰⁵ No doubt these deficiencies might prove disappointing to the modern reader, but of course, it is this very lack of philosophical qualities that Cooper wished to portray in Ned's own narration, as it sets Ned apart from more reflective, self-conscious tale-tellers (such as Dana), making him what he is—the type, in essence, of the average tar, living in the moment, heedless of future or past. It is clear, however, that Cooper's chance reunion with Ned Myers provided the opportunity for him to view himself and his profession from a distance, contrasting his fate with that of his old

²⁰⁵ Robert Emmet Long, *James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: Continuum, 1990) 140-41.

shipmate and reflecting on the course of his own career as sailor/gentleman/author. Cooper never would write a memoir of his own life as he had done with Ned's, probably for the better, for his self-consciously public persona was too often stiff and dignified, fastidious about small points of honor. But, playing to his strengths, he meditated imaginatively through fiction using the new appreciation for first-person perspective he had gained through the writing of *Ned Myers*. So copious were his own reflections that the result, his 1844 novel *Afloat and Ashore*, would become one of his longest books—twice the usual length of his novels—and one of his most complex.

If Cooper's previous works had taught him anything, it was that readers were all too likely to take fiction as fact—to seek out real counterparts for his characters and judge the merits of his works on their factual accuracy. Such was the mania to identify a real-life prototype for Harvey Birch, the hero of his first successful novel, *The Spy*, that a number of aspirants stepped forward to claim the honor—H.L. Barnum going so far as to publish *The Spy Unmasked*, contending that one Enoch Crosby was the original. More notoriously, the obvious similarities between Cooper and Edward Effingham, described with so much stiff dignity in *Home as Found*, had proven easy pickings for critics eager to find signs of Cooper's vanity. But with the publication of *Ned Myers*, he found the situation surprisingly reversed: what was emphatically billed as fact had been received by some as fiction, thanks to widespread overuse of coy framing devices by story writers, including Cooper himself. With the reception that book received, Cooper humorously gave up the matter, prefacing his new novel, *Afloat and Ashore*, by stating, "The writer has published so much truth which the world has insisted was fiction, and so much fiction which has been received as truth, that, in the present instance, he is resolved to say nothing on the subject."²⁰⁶

Afloat and Ashore was an attempt to bring the methods and style of *Ned Myers* to bear on a work of fiction. Cooper had been promising Bentley a new nautical work, perhaps one

²⁰⁶ *Afloat and Ashore; or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 1844) 1:iii.

connected with the “work of fiction on a great scale, on which I think I shall hang my hat, for posterity” that he had mentioned as early as 1842, but no details were provided.²⁰⁷ Not long after *Ned Myers* was published, though, he had settled on a plan:

This work is called Miles Wallingford. It contains the adventures of a young sailor, *something* in Ned’s way, but, 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. Time, during the war between America and France, in 1798, and scenes Madagascar, North West Coast of America and the islands of the Pacific, with adventures with the natives.²⁰⁸

As ideas, incidents, and thematic complexity grew, so did the book, prompting Cooper to continue it in another set of volumes, greatly to the annoyance of Richard Bentley since Cooper charged extra for the continuation (publishing for himself in America, he had no other strictures hanging over him, as discussed in Chapter Five).

It seems no mistake that Cooper took his eventual title for Miles Wallingford’s story, *Afloat and Ashore*, from a discarded subtitle he had considered using for *Homeward Bound*.²⁰⁹ In many respects, *Afloat and Ashore* is a recasting of the concepts of *Homeward Bound* as Cooper originally planned it, bringing the world of sea and ships to bear upon the world of town and society. Cooper’s struggles with integrating thesis and method in *Homeward Bound* had produced awkward results, with the continuation, *Home as Found*, having little in common with the first part of the story except its characters and a few remnants of the plot. By contrast, *Afloat and Ashore*, while hardly tight-knit in its plot, is much superior in integrating concerns of land and sea, alternating incident throughout the work in a way that brings them increasingly to bear upon each other. As a result, characters acting amid their surroundings possess a sense of motivation often lacking in the set-pieces of the *Home* novels.

In another respect, too, Cooper escapes the problems of the *Home* novels. He had been roasted by critics for making the fictional characters, scenes, and incidents too close to

²⁰⁷ JFC to Bentley, 27 May 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:292; see also 22 September 1842 (4:315), 2 June 1843 (4:388), 25 September 1843 (4:415).

²⁰⁸ JFC to Bentley, 9 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:441.

²⁰⁹ See JFC to Bentley, 17 October 1837: *Letters and Journals* 3:298.

fact, most notoriously in the flattering self-portrait he was thought to have painted of himself in Edward Effingham, dignified to the point of woodenness through Cooper's third-person delineations. Cooper's narrow definition of fiction based on arguments about the shallow differences between him and his characters rang hollow, since his attitudes as author were so evident. In *Afloat and Ashore*, however, Cooper hit upon a more happy means of storytelling, basing Miles loosely on himself—both as old narrator of sixty (Cooper was fifty-four) and as the young lad of the story. One would think that narrating from a point of view even closer to his alter ego would only increase the problem, but the limited, thoughtful perspective of Miles, concerned with the mundane as well as the profound, provides, as it did in *Ned Myers*, a more humanizing effect—a psychological richness missing from the *Home* novels. One can identify with Miles's concerns, sense his motivations, laugh at his good humor, and bear his crankiness about new ways as the cantankerousness of an old man. Old Miles, as narrator, displays much of the bravado Cooper himself exuded, yet avoids accountability; at one point in the narrative, he explains that, as an old man, "vanity no longer has any of that influence over me which it might be supposed to possess over one of more juvenile hopes and feelings. . . . [:] I relate facts, without reference to their effect on myself" (2:79).²¹⁰ Courting deliberate outrageousness occasionally, Miles goes so far at one point as to refer to "A writer of this country, one Mr. Cooper," during a lengthy digression on American cookery, pointing out how Cooper's views trump the arguments of Frederick Marryat and concluding, "I suspect this Mr. Cooper knows quite as well what he is about, when writing of America, as any European" (3:83-84). Throwing caution to the wind, Cooper would carry this spirit into the rest of the narrative, infusing it with an everyday realism and going so far as to incorporate factual details undisguised. The book practically became a compendium of whatever was on Cooper's mind at the time, drawing upon a number of written sources and making allusions to a number of contemporary events and

²¹⁰ Then again, Miles, like Cooper himself, has complicated attitudes about what people may think about him: "There are men so strong in principle, as well as intellect, I do suppose, that they can be content with the approbation of their own consciences, and who can smile at the praises or censure of the world alike; but I confess to a strong sympathy with the commendation of my fellow-creatures, and as strong a distaste of their disapprobation" (2:104). Is Cooper, as Miles, admitting to this sensitivity? Or is Miles obliquely pointing to Cooper as one such strongly principled person?

issues, including the *Somers* mutiny. As Thomas and Marianne Philbrick have extensively and expertly detailed the sources Cooper used, the experiences on which he drew, and the events to which he referred, it would be superfluous to discuss such matters here.²¹¹ Cooper would tell Bentley: “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.”²¹² Suffice it to say, the freedom of Cooper’s new mode of writing fiction proved stimulating, and as a result it is difficult to overrate *Afloat and Ashore* as a point of convergence for many of Cooper’s concerns in the 1840s.

Afloat and Ashore is not a novel of manners in the way that *Home as Found* is. Still, it is, like that earlier book, a novel about the kind of nuanced understandings and worldviews that underlie outward actions and provide their motivation. Both books are, in a sense, about acquiring and maintaining proper perspectives on the world—not too extreme in any one direction but “just right.” In the early 1840s, Cooper had found his own perspectives boxed in, including his professional vision of himself as an author and nautical expert. The most polemic of his Whig critics had gotten plenty of mileage out of ridiculing him as “Mr. Effingham” the aloof aristocrat. Though milder, Dana had implied that he had not given a true picture of the sea, perhaps because of his privileged view, and Mackenzie and others had insinuated that Cooper lacked the nautical expertise a career officer would have, causing him to fail to see the true state of things (as Mackenzie saw them, at least). With the ghosts of careers that might have been appearing before him in the persons of Ned Myers and William Branford Shubrick, Cooper could hardly escape the fact that, for all his expertise, he was no professional sailor. On the other hand, J. G. Lockhart, in a review of *Gleanings in Europe: England* that Cooper certainly read, had snidely suggested that Cooper disliked British aristocratic society because he could not compete with its polish—he was too much a sailor to understand the finer points of life:

²¹¹ See the Historical Introduction and Explanatory notes in James Fenimore Cooper, *Afloat and Ashore; or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford*, Edited, with an Historical Introduction, by Thomas and Marianne Philbrick (New York: AMS, 2004). See also Philbrick, *Sea Fiction*, 132-45, as well as Thomas Philbrick, “Fact and Fiction: Uses of Maritime History in Cooper’s *Afloat and Ashore*,” *The American Neptune* 57 (Fall 1997): 315-321.

²¹² JFC to Bentley, 16 April 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:455.

Knowing nothing of Mr. Cooper personally, we cannot tell what subordinate accidents may have inflamed his susceptibility to so extravagant a degree, but its first germ is, we think, obvious enough. Mr. Cooper, as he himself, with some circumlocution, confesses, entered early the merchant service as a common seaman—and there spent the most important years of his life. This was no very promising school for the literature, manners, or morals of ‘the author of the *Pilot*.’ We know not when he emerged into a higher course of life; but he evidently has had a late and scanty acquaintance with polished society.²¹³

How much Cooper truly took these matters to heart can be debated, but his letters and writings make it clear that he was not immune to criticism of certain types. He had earlier tried to show in the *Home* novels that the kind of experience he had acquired was just the right sort for an American gentleman to have, and that much of the gentleman’s value to society rested in the kind of *perspective* he contributed to it. Nearly all the significant characters in the *Home* novels serve as foils for the Effinghams by illustrating excess in one direction or another. Aristabulus Bragg highlights the great American mania for money; Grace Van Cortlandt, the limits of provincialism. Sir George Templemore represents decadent European minor nobility, illustrating that the true qualities of a gentleman do not come from mere circumstances of birth, title, or fortune (though good parentage and good fortune do figure into Cooper’s model), nor from a polished demeanor of “seemliness.” Steadfast Dodge, the ultra-democrat, shows that nothing is gained by excessive social leveling; nor is a knowledge of the world gained through the mere motions of travel, which Dodge undertakes without gaining a true appreciation of culture. Even Captain Truck, among the most sympathetic of characters, shows the limits of thorough-going seamanship, becoming a caricature on land despite his unquestioned expertise at sea. Not entirely successfully in the *Home* novels, Cooper advocates a kind of cultural fluency underpinned by solid character. The process of cultivation he suggests is involved and complicated, and he does not always make it clear what is entailed. He implies, though, that experience at sea contributes greatly to instilling the discipline, ingenuity, and perspective that should distinguish the American gentleman. The character Paul Blunt/Powis/Effingham, who

²¹³ [J.G. Lockhart, Review of *Gleanings in Europe: England*], *Quarterly Review* 59 (October 1837): 327.

eventually wins Eve Effingham's hand, is Cooper's clearest illustration of this ideal—a man of action and ability no matter what the setting.²¹⁴

Cooper's aims in *Afloat and Ashore* are not all that different, but his treatment of them gives the story a decidedly different direction. The sea becomes much more central to his concerns, and being the realm of action that it is, it gives Miles Wallingford a sense of purpose often missing from the Effinghams, who seemingly have little to do. And whereas *Homeward Bound* presents Paul Powis as a pre-formed individual, *Afloat and Ashore* portrays the formation of Miles Wallingford's character through intertwined experiences on land and at sea. Significantly, issues of profession and professional choice figure prominently in Miles's development, proving the catalyst for much of the process of "enlightenment" Thomas Philbrick describes in his excellent discussion of the novel in *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*.²¹⁵ Wayne Franklin has noted of Cooper's approach to the sea in general that "Cooper found most fertile the fact that he was familiar with the sailor's world without being wholly of it—in some sense, he enjoyed an artist's ideal liminality."²¹⁶ *Afloat and Ashore* embodies this idea well. It becomes clear that Cooper wishes to frame Miles's path in life—including the career he forged for himself—as a middle ground between different possibilities, and it is Miles's decision to occupy this middle ground, negotiating between different social spheres, that gives him his unique, empowering outlook and fluency. If Ned Myers's narrative displays a relative lack of interest in self-examination, *Afloat and Ashore* is full of concern with it; none of Cooper's prior novels deals so thoroughly with the development of mature perception. That this should be a dominant theme of *Afloat and Ashore* is suggested immediately by Cooper's epigraph for the work, a line from Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*: "Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits."

²¹⁴ Immense amounts have been written on Cooper's ideas about the American gentleman. A few starting points are Donald Darnell, *James Fenimore Cooper: Novelist of Manners* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1993) and John P. McWilliams, Jr., *Political Justice in a Republic: James Fenimore Cooper's America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1972).

²¹⁵ Philbrick, *Sea Fiction*, 160-61, 162-64.

²¹⁶ Wayne Franklin, "Cooper as Passenger," *American Neptune* 57 (Fall 1997): 356.

Miles Wallingford is the son of a landowner of respectable estate. As such, he has no real need to take up a profession of any sort, even after being orphaned in boyhood after his father meets an accidental death and his mother dies not long afterward of a broken heart. Entrusted to the care of a family friend, Rev. Mr. Hardinge, Miles and his sister Grace grow up along with the Hardinge children, Rupert and Lucy. Although his father and mother left no orders about what Miles should become upon growing up, it is assumed that he will attend Yale and read law, even if he does not practice it; Rupert, in turn, is to become a clergyman like his father (few other professional options for gentlemen exist in this era). The boys have other ideas, however. Miles's father, Captain Wallingford, had enjoyed a career at sea before marrying and settling to his estate, and Miles decides that he, too, would like to be a sailor—law is certainly not for him. Rupert, filled with romantic notions, dreading the clerical life, and having none of the landed security Miles has, also wishes to go to sea. Upon finding Mr. Hardinge unfavorable to their wishes, the boys run away, accompanied by Miles's slave Ned, and join the merchant vessel *John* as regular seamen. Though the two boys start out in circumstances so similar, it quickly becomes apparent once the ship is underway that Miles is more suited for the sea. He shows skill aloft and blossoms under his exertions, becoming a quick favorite of the chief mate, Moses Marble, who will accompany Miles through most of his subsequent adventures. Rupert, who had been "so forward in all the preliminaries of our adventure," does not distinguish himself, and is employed as the captain's secretary. "He'll blacken more writing paper this v'y'age, I reckon, than he'll tar down riggin'," Marble tells Miles (54). As the story progresses, the two formerly close companions grow farther and farther apart, Rupert quitting the sea immediately after returning home and aspiring to the indulgent, dandified life of a city "gentleman," while Miles continues as a sailor, rising quickly in his experience and rank until in time he finds it possible to buy his own ship, the *Dawn*.

Miles's return to New York and his purchase of the *Dawn* precipitates a discussion between him and the much-changed Rupert over the wisdom of his career decision. Rupert chides Miles for sticking with something so boyish and ungenteel. "We were both precipitate in the choice of a profession—I retired in time, but you persevere," Rupert coolly tells Miles, adding later, "Nature intended me for something better. . . . I wish, Miles, you had come to the study of the law, at the time you went to sea. You would have been, by this

time, at the bar, and would have had a definite position in society" (2:115). Rupert continues his casual belittling by informing Miles that the three most "suitable" professions for a gentleman are "divinity, law, and physic"; possibly a military career might suit, too, but "the army and navy are nothing" (115). He suggests, too, that his opinion is shared by Emily Merton, a potential love-interest for both young men, whom Miles saved from an accident in London (along with her father, Major Merton). Emily has "regretted" Miles's choice of professions "again and again," according to Rupert, who adds, "You know as well as I do, Miles, to be a sailor, other than in a navy, is not a *genteel* profession" (2:116). Miles finds Rupert's emphasis ludicrous and cannot help breaking out in a fit of laughter at this "infinitely droll" and "somewhat silly" characterization: "the idea of attaching any considerations of *gentility* to my noble, manly, *daring* profession, sounded so absurd, I could not avoid laughing" (2:116). Rupert, however, is undaunted. He deflates Miles's status as a landowner as well by explaining condescendingly how he told Emily Merton that Clawbonny was a mere *farm* rather than an *estate*—the insinuation being that, on land, Miles was even more of a mere tradesman than at sea, being in neither case the decadent gentleman of easy, ready money Rupert idolizes (Miles ought to have his fortune in stocks, according to Rupert). Miles is at risk, then, of being pigeonholed by his profession: as Rupert tells it, Emily "quite worships" Miles "*as a sailor*," thinking him "a sort of merchant-captain Nelson, or Blake, or Truxton, and all that sort of thing" (2:117). More mortifying for Miles, Rupert even suggests that Miles's true love interest, Lucy Hardinge, shares a similar view, leading him to become "greatly afraid that Lucy, through [rich, well-connected aunt] Mrs. Bradfort's influence, and her town associations, might have learned to regard me as Captain Wallingford, of the merchant-service, and the son of another Captain Wallingford of the same line in life" (2:119).²¹⁷

Despite these attempts to influence his choice and the insecurities they produce, Miles perseveres willingly in his profession, even though the sea proves no kind master to

²¹⁷ Miles subsequently takes heart at a later point in the narrative when he receives four letters, three addressed to "Captain Wallingford" but one from Lucy addressed to "Miles Wallingford, Esquire," leading Miles to observe, "To me it seemed to say that *she* recognised me as one of her own class, let Rupert, and his light associates, think of me as they might" (3:155-56).

him. It is a dangerous place, filled with storms, pirates, and the belligerent powers of France and England, who are at war with each other. Miles's ship is captured and cleverly retaken without bloodshed enough times that these parts of the story practically become a humorous guide on how to conduct a mutiny (with an eye toward Mackenzie's paranoid fears of danger aboard the *Somers*). The British constantly harass merchant shipping and impress most of Miles's crew into their navy, and the ravages of the French and British in the English Channel eventually leave the *Dawn* with only four hands aboard (Miles, Marble, Neb, and the cook, Diogenes), a precarious situation that eventually results in the sinking of the *Dawn* and the cargo Miles had purchased by mortgaging Clawbonny with his cousin, John Wallingford, leaving Miles seemingly bereft of everything on land as well as at sea.

Miles's relationship to the sea and his profession on it, then, is complex. The sea is a realm of chance and danger, but also of freedom and opportunity. Voyages at sea remove him for long periods of time from the bonds of society and home, yet at sea he meets with companionship in Marble that can only be outdone by the ties of marriage and family. Most importantly, in becoming a sailor, Miles learns the proper place of both resourceful self-determination and humble submission. While these complexities serve as catalyst for much of the process of "enlightenment" that Philbrick discusses, it should be noted that Miles's professional choices seldom partake of the quality of "delusion" Philbrick ascribes to Miles's pre-enlightenment state. In Philbrick's view, Miles Wallingford's career at sea becomes a kind of escape, a way to flee from uncomfortable realities ashore: Miles comes to learn that "the attempt to run away to sea is futile," ultimately settling down in "semiseclusion" at his ancestral estate of Clawbonny. Such emphasis on Miles's supposed need to flee reality tends to imply something unsound in Miles's professional choices throughout much of the story, as if they are part and parcel of his "delusion." Although they have undeniable consequences—one, the obstacle to marriage a nautical career presents, perhaps insurmountable—they are seldom delusional, as Cooper often takes pains to illustrate. In running away to sea, Miles's *carpe diem* insistence on determining his own identity outweighs any flight from an unpleasant reality: he wishes to avoid a destiny chosen for him merely as a matter of course. Miles chooses the sea as a means of engaging the world, and he perseveres in his career knowingly, despite its risks and sacrifices. What is more, he derives a significant part of his worldview from it and refuses to demean it, even if others do. If he "might be

said to take Clawbonny with him as he sails,” as Hugh Egan has noted,²¹⁸ never losing sight of his origins, instincts, and “gentlemanliness,” he nevertheless carries little apprehension of “falling” into the sailor’s life, professionally or morally, such as Dana had exhibited. Such apprehension had led Dana to exercise one of the gentleman-sailor’s “handy escape clauses” (as Wayne Franklin aptly calls them) by pulling strings to catch an earlier vessel home, fearing that if his voyage stretched another year, he would be “sailor for life.”²¹⁹ With Miles, on the other hand, if there is some danger that he will be seen as akin to his friend Marble (a professional yet unrefined sailor modeled loosely after Ned Myers), there is little danger that he will *become* like Marble. Whatever external pressures cause uncertainty for Miles, he retains throughout *Afloat and Ashore* an essential, if not complete, sense of his identity: neither wholly self-made man of action (in the American model) nor predestined, home-keeping gentleman of contemplation; neither wholly driven by money and ambition, nor entirely exempt from it. He gives up the sea only because his love for Lucy outweighs his devotion to his profession—a phenomenon Marble eventually gives in to as well, when he finds he is no longer alone in the world after discovering his long-lost mother and an adorable niece, Kitty. When Miles does settle down to his beloved Clawbonny with his bride and household, his appreciation for it is a richer one because it is a matter of choice for him: having seen the world, he understands his advantages and priorities.

Cooper’s fictional handling of Miles Wallingford’s career concerns point to larger issues of self-determination relevant to his own life and profession. Although Miles’s experience varies considerably in its particulars from Cooper’s own (despite the use of numerous autobiographical details), nearly every reader of *Afloat and Ashore* acknowledges the difficulty of separating the attitudes of its narrator and its author. If Cooper’s narrative is a projection of a career that might have been had he remained a merchant sailor, it is also a

²¹⁸ Egan, “Gentlemen-Sailors,” 184-85.

²¹⁹ Franklin, “Cooper as Passenger,” 351. Franklin and Hugh Egan, in his “Gentlemen-Sailors,” have written insightfully about how Cooper, Dana, and Melville carried their gentlemanly status with them to sea even as they served as common sailors, knowing they had “handy escape clauses” to save them from suffering the kind of grim fate Ned Myers did. Hugh Egan’s discussion of Dana’s dilemma is especially illuminating: “Gentlemen-Sailors,” 59-72.

meditation upon the career that he actually had pursued. Although Cooper, like Wallingford at the end of his tale, had given up the sea to marry and settle down to a life of country gentleman, he found the result little like the “happily ever after” ending of his novel. In undertaking authorship, however—perhaps as rashly as Miles decides to undertake running away to sea—he dove into what was widely considered a dubious undertaking, making it a profession to an extent that no other American author had (and ultimately contributing greatly to its respectability).

If Miles Wallingford’s complicated, nuanced attitudes are difficult enough to delineate, Cooper’s own are even harder to distill from a narrative that absorbs him on so many levels. On the one hand, *Afloat and Ashore* can be examined as a reflection of Cooper’s attitudes about his nautical past. It is clear that Cooper looked back upon his youthful career as a sailor with fondness, entertaining a romantic view of the sea that prevailed even through the more matter-of-fact, *Ned Myers*-influenced approach to Miles’s narrative. Miles seldom presents life at sea as one of boredom, toil, and deprivation; if the sea is increasingly a realm of chance, serving Miles with disaster after disaster that he must either bear or overcome, it is still largely a realm of action and opportunity. Cooper also hints at reasons for abandoning his nautical career: as in his own life, the ties of marriage prove stronger than a nautical career for Miles (Miles also comments in passing that in navies “superiors did all the thinking” (4:61), despite the fact that Cooper in his other writings usually speaks in praise of this hierarchical structure). Surely, too, one can find reflections of Cooper’s financial uncertainty as owner of the whale ship *Union* in Miles’s own vicissitudes as a ship-owner.

On the other hand, it becomes clear in *Afloat and Ashore* that discussions about profession are about more than just a career at sea. Despite the obvious fallacy of reading *Afloat and Ashore* as a veiled autobiography, it is difficult to avoid connecting Cooper’s concerns as a professional author with those of his character Miles Wallingford as a professional sailor. In many ways it seems that Cooper forges a definite, if anxious and anxiety-ridden link between the sea as a realm of chance and the literary marketplace. Thomas Philbrick notes, for instance, how an “economic stratum” underlies the story, driving Miles’s actions and unifying his land and sea concerns:

In no other novel of Cooper’s do incidents, situations, and dialogue so incessantly turn on issues that are in some way or other financial in nature. . . .

Insofar as *Afloat and Ashore* is a sea novel, it is the first one of Cooper's in which ships are put up for sale, used as collateral, salvaged, insured, condemned—treated, in short, as economic instruments rather than as expressions of their commander's will, vehicles of personal freedom, or objects of aesthetic admiration.²²⁰

Although Philbrick may overestimate the degree to which Cooper strips the sea of its romantic treatment, it is certainly the case that any romance that accompanies ships is at least qualified by, or perhaps competing with, their economic roles. The treatment resembles that which Cooper sometimes accorded his own literary works in negotiating a living from them, such as when, in haggling with Henry Colburn over a price for *The Prairie*, he set aside questions of pure artistry to dwell on the commodity value of his writings: "It is necessary to speak of these works, now, as mere articles of trade."²²¹ If creative works of literature are, like ships, "expressions of their commander's will, vehicles of personal freedom, or objects of aesthetic admiration," they nevertheless must make their way in a marketplace dominated by purely economic concerns—something which the preceding years had made abundantly clear to Cooper. Although *Afloat and Ashore* may not be as thoroughgoing a critique of materialism as his 1843 piece *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* for *Graham's Magazine* (see Chapter Four), Cooper's ambiguity about commerce is ever-present. Although Miles himself, like the other characters of the novel, is steeped in economic concerns (indeed, bettering his fortune is one result he hopes to accomplish by running away to sea), he becomes anxious about them only when all depends on his professional exertions after he puts Clawbonny on the line to finance a cargo for the *Dawn*, which must sail on an unpredictable ocean full of risks—an anxiety that seems to reflect on Cooper's own worries about depending on his own creative exertions and their reception in a literary marketplace marked by its unpredictability.

Then, too, issues about the social value of Miles's profession bear on Cooper's own career as professional author. Having defied the more "genteel" professions, Miles finds

²²⁰ Philbrick, "Fact and Fiction," 320; Thomas & Marianne Philbrick, "Historical Introduction," in *Afloat and Ashore; or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford*, by James Fenimore Cooper, Edited, with an Historical Introduction, by Thomas and Marianne Philbrick (New York: AMS, 2004) xxx.

²²¹ JFC to Henry Colburn, 17 October 1826: *Letters and Journals* 1:165.

himself at risk of being pigeonholed as a mere sailor, esteemed for his professional skill but accorded little more in the way of social standing, being a sort of servant to the “passenger” classes. That Cooper considered authors of creative literature (as well as other artists) similarly regarded by the public is made clear in a remark Miles makes:

I acknowledge that little or no consideration is yet given among us to any of the more intellectual pursuits, the great bulk of the nation regarding literary men, artists, even professional men, as so many public servants, that are to be used like any other servants, respecting them and their labors only as they can contribute to the great stock of national wealth and renown. (3:171)

In another passage, Cooper alludes more directly to his own prior reception by an unreliable public:

As for myself, I can safely say, that in scarce a circumstance of my life that has brought me the least under the cognizance of the public have I ever been judged justly. In various instances have I been praised for acts that were either totally without merit, or, at least, the particular merit imputed to them; while I have been even persecuted for deeds that deserved praise. (3:79)

Like Miles, however, Cooper seems to take a stand for the dignity and relevance of his profession, and ultimately looks even beyond that to the merit of the individual author. The sea may be filled with good or bad sailors, as Miles’s experience shows; the literary world may foster writers of sound artistic and moral qualities or hacks. As he does with Miles’s own profession as sailor, Cooper delineates the social position and role of his career as a nuanced one, informed by experiences of a number of spheres and, what is more important, a proper sense of perspective—something like the “artist’s ideal liminality” that Wayne Franklin suggests, but perhaps with closer engagement, more depth of understanding, than the safe distance that term implies. Rupert is never a true sailor, despite having gone to sea; Marble is never a gentleman, despite coming into an estate of his own. Cooper implies that when those qualities of sound perspective (and perhaps “instinct”) are formed, the quantity of experience becomes secondary—something that allows him to stand quite confidently as a nautical expert, for instance, despite not having a lifelong career at sea like Shubrick (to name a friendly example) or Mackenzie (a hostile one). Crucial, too, to Cooper’s exploration of authorship in *Afloat and Ashore* is the sense of intentionality that is so vital to Miles’s appreciation of his profession. Miles chooses to persevere in his career at sea (without fear of the consequences of “falling” into it permanently); he does not so much “retreat” to

Clawbonny to live a life of “semiseclusion” but chooses to embrace his ancestral home as a bedrock for his interaction with the world. Despite complaints over the years to friends and fellow authors about the lack of reward and security of authorship compared to other possible careers, in *Afloat and Ashore* Cooper conveys an impression that the shape of his own career, if partially left up to the uncertainty of the literary marketplace, is also to a great degree a matter of choice—his perseverance in writing what he thought important to write. For both Miles and Cooper, it is the potential loss of choice, freedom, and self-determination that often seems most threatening. In a novel that would eventually be self-published by Cooper, such a theme seems relevant indeed. Cooper would discover through his short venture as publisher, however, something Miles, too, would come to appreciate: that the benefits of self-determination are often mixed.

In *Afloat and Ashore*, then, Cooper explores authorship in a way that speaks to the many challenges confronting his profession and professional self-image in the early 1840s. Cooper’s attempt to show that the kind of outlook he had was “just right” results in a surprisingly complex work that highlights the ingenuity of his imagination, blending personal experiences and attitudes with fiction and history to develop his themes.

Afloat and Ashore was not the last nautical story Cooper would write. In 1846 he would write “The Islets of the Gulf,” a contemporary story of smuggling off the Florida Keys during the Mexican War, for *Graham’s Magazine*, later publishing it in book form as *Jack Tier*. In 1847 he would publish *The Crater*, part *Robinson Crusoe*-like shipwreck story, part Utopian social critique. And in 1849 he brought forth his last sea novel, *The Sea Lions*, a symbolism-laden tale of material greed and religious conversion set chiefly in the bitter cold of an Antarctic winter.²²² Although none of these stories was written in the first person like *Afloat and Ashore*, all display a style of omniscient third-person narration close to the thoughts of the protagonists—all of whom, like Miles Wallingford, undergo a significant personal development in the course of the narrative. As in *Afloat and Ashore*, this personal focus serves in part to make the arcane realm of seamanship more accessible, with Cooper himself taking more pains to explain nautical jargon or to let readers in on morsels of

²²² Philbrick’s *Sea Fiction* gives thoughtful interpretations of these works, particularly *The Crater* and *The Sea Lions*; Donald Ringe also addresses them well in his article “Cooper’s Last Novels, 1847-1850,” *PMLA* 75 (1960): 583-90.

nautical humor, rather than using his knowledge of the sea as a way to set himself and the sea apart from his readers. Whether or not Cooper's reputation as a nautical expert had been diminished in any way by this time, he no longer pursued this status as fervently as he had in the 1830s and first half of the 1840s—perhaps turned away by dissatisfaction with the Navy, as Robert Madison has suggested,²²³ or perhaps simply moving on to other aspirations after the culmination of so many of his efforts in the field. Although he once again renewed work on the third volume of the *History of the Navy* toward the end of his life, he died before finishing it, leaving it to his heirs to see it continued to the present by another hand and published.

During his own lifetime, Cooper's reputation as an author of the sea often equaled, and sometimes surpassed, his reputation as an author of the forest and frontier. If *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover* were the works critics long after mentioned as the ones that established this reputation in the 1820s, it was his large and varied body of nautical writing in the 1830s and 1840s that cemented his status not simply as a literary "first" but as the consummate artist and expert in the field. Ironically, for all his productions and all his conflation of seamanship and authorship in his professional self-image, it would be on a much smaller body of writing—two novels—and on a subject much less close to his heart that Cooper would secure for himself an even more prominent and permanent reputation, similarly reclaiming supremacy as a literary artist of the frontier by reviving his most famous literary creation, Natty Bumppo, in a phase of his career geared toward re-establishing his commercial presence in the literary marketplace.

²²³ Robert D. Madison, "Cooper, Bancroft, and the Voorhees Court Martial," *James Fenimore Cooper Society Miscellaneous Papers*, No. 6 (August 1995).

Chapter Three

The Commercial Instinct: Leatherstocking Revived

Works:

Precaution. A Novel. By the author of the "Spy," "Pioneer," &c. &c. A new edition, revised by the author. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, successors to Carey & Co., July 1839.

The Pathfinder: Or, The Inland Sea. By the author of "The Pioneers," "Last of the Mohicans," "Prairie," &c. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 14 March 1840.

Mercedes of Castile: Or, The Voyage to Cathay. By the author of "The Bravo," "The Headsman," "The Last of the Mohicans," &c. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 5 November 1840.

The Deerslayer: Or, The First War-Path. A Tale. By the author of "The Last of the Mohicans," "The Pathfinder," "The Pioneers," and "The Prairie." 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 27 August 1841.

Wyandotté, or The Hutted Knoll. A tale, by the author of "The Pathfinder," "Deerslayer," "Last of the Mohicans," "Pioneers," "Prairie," &c, &c. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 5 September 1843.

By about the middle of 1839, with the two volumes of the *History of the Navy* off his hands, James Fenimore Cooper was looking for new directions for his relaunched career. Neither of the new fields he had explored—in the social double-novel *Homeward Bound/Home as Found* (1838) and in the scholarly *History*—had entirely lived up to his expectations. The financial returns, if not what Cooper had hoped, were respectable enough considering the times, and he still entertained hopes that the Naval History would provide a steady income in the long term, particularly if his projected third volume (which never saw light during his lifetime) and his abridged edition (which did) were added. But artistically and commercially these new directions left him relatively little in the way of future options for a sustained career. His series of Naval Biographies for *Graham's Magazine* (1842-45) and his later novels *The Redskins* (1846) and *The Ways of the Hour* (1850) show that Cooper never

abandoned the new roles he had taken on in the late 1830s, but writing history to his exacting standards involved exhaustive research that reaped relatively small returns for the effort expended, and writing novels of social criticism embroiled him with critics who would take pains to undermine his character as well as the sales of his books. Neither of his primary publishers, Lea & Blanchard in America and Richard Bentley in England, showed much interest in these directions since the audience for such books would be limited. Isaac Lea stated the case directly to Cooper regarding the novel of social criticism in a letter of 17 August 1839: "I certainly believe that you sacrificed your interest in writing 'Home as Found' for 4 or 5000 Copies would be the most we should calculate to sell of such a work, while quite double that number of a novel such as you had been in the habit of writing would ultimately be sure of selling."¹ By the time Cooper had received this letter, he may have arrived already at a similar conclusion, for he was well on his way toward writing a new novel resembling the kind he had been "in the habit of writing" before his retirement, *The Pathfinder* (1840), which initiated a period in which Cooper would direct his attention toward more commercially viable productions.

Cooper was at a crossroads, and his uncertainty about the direction of his career in the late 1830s becomes apparent from the number of old projects he finally was clearing away from his writing agenda around this time. The Naval History had been more than a decade in the making, and although he did not consider it fully completed as published in its two-volume format, it was nevertheless before the world and no longer in full command of his attention. Shortly after publishing the Naval History, Cooper wrapped up another project he had been procrastinating about for some time, a new edition of *Precaution*, his first novel. Originally published in an edition of 1000 copies in 1820 by A.T. Goodrich of New York, the work had been badly printed, Cooper at that time being a mere novice as an author and exercising relatively little control over the production process. As Cooper acknowledged in the preface to his new edition, "Perhaps no novel of our times was worse printed than the first edition of this work. More than a hundred periods were placed in the middle of sentences, and perhaps five times that number were omitted in places where they

¹ Isaac Lea to JFC, 17 August 1839: in *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, ed. James F. Beard, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1960-68) 3:421.

ought to have been inserted. It is scarcely necessary to add, that passages were rendered obscure, and that entire paragraphs were unintelligible” (1:iii-iv)² Though the work had become something of a minor hit in England when reprinted by Henry Colburn in 1821 (with corrections by a proofreader), it had not been reprinted in the United States and was not part of the 1826 purchase of Cooper’s copyrights by Carey & Lea. Cooper had considered the work an immature production and felt some embarrassment about its imitative qualities, as it used an English setting and copied English novels of manners typical of the late 1810s. Why was he reprinting it now?

A look at the chronology suggests that Cooper initially may have seen a deal for *Precaution* as a filler project to keep his pot boiling while he settled on a new course of action post-*Letter to His Countrymen*, one that would give him an opportunity to correct a work that had become a minor source of embarrassment to him. Wording in a letter of 9 February 1834 to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard implies that Cooper had already broached the subject of a new edition on a previous occasion. In seeking an agreement for *The Monikins* (1835), Cooper raises the prospects of a bargain for several of his old copyrights as well as for *Precaution*: “Do you wish to do anything with *Precaution*, and you know the copy right of *Spy* will soon be mine again. It dates from Dec -- 1821, and will be up Dec. 1835 -- *Pioneers*, *Pilot*, and *Lionel* follow, year after year. Are they worth anything?”³ Facing particularly hard times in the market following the Hannay & Collins bankruptcy of 1834, the publishers were in no mood to strike a bargain:

As regards the other books we can only say at this moment that it appears somewhat doub[t]ful whether any right or any book whatever will be worth any thing in Dec. 1835, if we are to continue to have such an old rascal as Andrew Jackson for President. --

² “Preface to the New Edition,” *Precaution. A Novel. By the author of the “Spy,” “Pioneer,” &c. &c. A new edition, revised by the author*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, successors to Carey & Co., 1839).

³ JFC to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 9 Feb 183[4]: *Letters and Journals* 3:30.

In times like these when the whole state of Penn. wd. hardly command \$500 in the N.Y. market, what ought a copyright to bring? As you are a good mathematician, make a calculation --⁴

Unfortunately, no record of the bargain settled upon has been located, but it is unlikely that the terms were favorable to Cooper. Around the same time, Henry Carey had written Cooper to request an extension on one of the notes coming due for *The Headsman*, pointing out that the failure of three booksellers had greatly strained the firm's reserves (though Carey assured Cooper that his notes and the firm were safe, the latter being valued around "a little less than \$250,000").⁵ A long delay before a settlement was reached also suggests the publisher's hesitancy to go forward. Some two years later, Cooper penned a short letter granting use of his copyrights of *Precaution* and other early works:

Gentlemen,

I authorize you to re-print and publish The Spy, Pioneers, Precaution, <Last of Mohicans> Pilot & Lionel Lincoln, until you shall receive a written notice -- from me to the contrary --⁶

About the issue of payment for these rights, the document unfortunately says nothing.

Although the deal was concluded, the book was not forthcoming. Questions about Cooper's progress (or lack thereof) in preparing the new edition become an almost constant footnote in the infrequent correspondence between Cooper and the Philadelphia firm, lending an almost comical aspect to Cooper's procrastination. In a postscript of a letter dated 5 September 1836, the publishers ask, "Pray what are you doing with *Precaution*? We

⁴ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 12 February 1834: *Letters and Journals* 3:31. The "mathematician" barb may refer to Cooper's statistical analyses in *Notions of the Americans* and *Letter to Gen. Lafayette*.

⁵ Henry Carey to JFC, 20 February 1834: *Letters and Journals* 3:33. See also JFC to Carey, 12 February 1834: *Letters and Journals* 3:32-33.

⁶ JFC to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 18 July 1836. The erasure of *Last of the Mohicans* is accounted for by a later amendment to the letter: "The Last of the Mohicans erased by me this 18th day of September 1841 in Phila. it having been included by mistake—" The written notice ending Lea & Blanchard's authorization to reprint these works came in an undated note, signed by both Cooper and Lea & Blanchard, which set 27 August 1844 as the termination date.

should like to have it soon.”⁷ On 13 September 1837 they asked again, as well as on 17 April 1838, when they inquired, “Have you got *Precaution* ready yet? We should be glad to have it as soon as you can give it to us conveniently.”⁸ Cooper had not affirmed any progress by 10 May 1838, prompting another query: “Pray have you had courage [as?] to go through ‘*Precaution*,’ when it’s ready we might print a small edition?”⁹ Perhaps this was enough to stir Cooper to partial action, for by 10 August the firm had printed the first volume and awaited the second: “Pray have you not forgotten the second vol of ‘*Precaution*.’ The printer has finished Vol 1st & waits for the other.”¹⁰ Again, on 13 September 1838, the publishers expressed a wish to get the entire work in print, along with *Home as Found*, asking Cooper “to oblige us by having it ready.”¹¹

Cooper’s British publisher, Richard Bentley, was also interested in the work, having seen “an announcement lately of a new and revised Edition of ‘*Precaution*’ by your publisher in America” and expressing a wish to include it with Cooper’s other novels in his “Standard Novels” series.¹² Cooper, still not finished with the revision, sent Bentley the work free of charge, perhaps with some hope of relieving Bentley of the losses he had complained about with Cooper’s books of European travels. “I have been revising *Precaution*,” he wrote on 3 October 1838, “which was infamously printed originally, and have mad[e] a better if not a good book of it. . . . I send you a copy (or part of one, the Messrs Carey being instructed to

⁷ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 5 September 1836: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁸ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 17 April 1838, MS: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁹ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 10 May 1838, MS: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁰ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 10 August 1838, MS: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹¹ Carey, Lea, & Blanchard to JFC, 13 September 1838, MS: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹² Richard Bentley to JFC, 21 August 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:338.

send the remainder) with permission to do what you please with it.”¹³ Judging by these terms, it seems probable that the consideration Cooper had received from Carey in America was not substantial.

The new edition of *Precaution* was finally issued sometime around the beginning of July 1839—ascertaining specifics is difficult due to the publishers’ tendency not to record reprints in the firm’s cost books. The work stands distinct from the numerous other Cooper reprints that Carey, Lea, and Blanchard—by then just Lea and Blanchard—were publishing around the same time in two significant ways which speak to Cooper’s conscientiousness as an author and critic as well as Lea & Blanchard’s desire to return Cooper to more “mainstream” novel-writing.

First, unlike the other reprints, which retained the older texts of Cooper’s works even after many had been revised for the Bentley’s Standard Novels series, *Precaution* received thorough correction by the author. Except for revisions Cooper made to *The Spy* in the early 1820s as it underwent a rapid succession of new editions (which, not being stereotyped, required new setting of type anyway),¹⁴ most of Cooper’s works in America were republished nearly untouched, preserving whatever compositorial misreadings, typographical errors, and defects of style that had made their way into print. Cooper’s revised edition of *Precaution* highlights his attention to issues of style and typographical quality in his work. As he admitted in the new preface, the major defects in the conception and construction of the book could not be remedied without radically changing the novel and requiring “more labor than would produce an entirely new work” (iv). But at least jarring typographical errors and stylistic deficiencies could be repaired without drastic measures: punctuation could be rendered sensible, phrases could be turned a little nicer, and better word choices could be employed.

¹³ JFC to Bentley, 3 October 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:338. *Precaution* was reissued as “No. 74” of the Bentley’s Standard Novels series in July 1839.

¹⁴ See Lance Schachterle, “Cooper Revises the First Great American Novel,” Paper presented at the Cooper Panel of the 1990 Conference of the American Literature Association; published online at the James Fenimore Cooper Society website: <http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/articles/ala/1990ala-schachterle.html>.

What Cooper was doing in this revision was essentially a decades-late correction of the “proof”-like text of the first edition. His strategies for revising manuscripts and proof sheets for his other novels were essentially similar. To be sure, Cooper seldom, if ever, conducted the kind of radical textual surgery demanded by later generations of authors, particularly Twain and Howells; nor did the literary conventions that held sway when Cooper became a professional author demand it. Relatively linear writing styles, deference to the “genius” of authors, and fairly rigid conventions (in England, at least) concerning the proper size of a novel, among other factors, discouraged extensive tampering. For his time, Cooper was a conscientious editor, if not always the most careful stylist. He particularly valued typographical quality, displaying a suitably American mechanic-like interest in the quality of the physical product of his labors and often complaining about the sloppiness of American printers compared to their British counterparts (whoever read proof for Bentley’s edition of *The Headsman*, for instance, certainly impressed Cooper, who praised him on a number of occasions even five years later, writing in one letter that “Such a proof reader as we had on *The Headsman* is a treasure.”¹⁵ Though Cooper’s habit of reading proof without manuscript at hand allowed some discrepancies to creep into his works, and though the rush of deadlines frequently caused his proofreading to be hurried, his hands-on attention to the process went well beyond the involvement of many authors. Lea & Blanchard’s cost books frequently show entries for alterations to the type, which added to the cost of a work (but which Cooper continued to do even after he started paying for stereotype plates). If such a practice was not unusual, neither was it common for novels to receive this degree of care—suggesting that Cooper viewed his art as more than mere entertainment. His willingness to invest these efforts into correcting and improving *Precaution* despite the probability of small remuneration for it speaks well for his seriousness about his profession.

Second, the new edition of *Precaution* is distinctive because it received the kind of marketing attention generally accorded to new works. Given its limited original circulation and its non-appearance for nearly two decades, it would essentially be a new work to much of the reading public in America. As noted, Bentley had learned of the new edition through an announcement that it was in progress (presently unlocated)—an unusual step to take for a

¹⁵ JFC to Richard Bentley, 21 January 1838: *Letters and Journals* 3:306.

new edition of an already-published fictional work. When it appeared, review copies were sent to many of the leading literary periodicals. Perhaps Lea and Blanchard wished to sooth the seething reception of *Home as Found* by causing reviewers to reflect on other aspects of Cooper's career productions. Although the book was not reviewed on the large scale that the *History of the Navy* had been when published shortly before in May 1839, *Precaution* occasioned several short notices. The reviews are nearly unanimous in recommending the work as a curiosity, a footnote to what Cooper had since achieved, rather than as a valuable work in its own right, though in that respect several of the reviews show a surprising amount of positive regard for its qualities. That of the "Editor's Book Table" in *Godey's Lady's Book*, is characteristic:

...It has been revised and retouched by the author; defects of manner corrected, and some other improvements made; but it is still in no wise remarkable. It has none of the characteristic traits which in his subsequent productions so eminently distinguished Mr. Cooper--none of the fire and fervour--the brilliance of description--the vivid portraiture of character, and the strong power of grouping, which the 'Spy' and the 'Rover,' and others of that class, exhibit. It is, however, interesting as the first production of one who has since attained so proud an elevation in literature; and except as compared with his other works, would be entitled to no little praise for its intrinsic merits.¹⁶

Less forgiving is *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, in a review written by Edgar Allan Poe:

This, the first of Mr. Cooper's novels in point of time, is beyond all question the last in point of quality--yet it may be read with pleasure, and will and should be read by all our literary people, as a matter of simple curiosity, and in view of what the author of the "Spy" has since so happily accomplished. . . [;] the public must acknowledge their indebtedness to Messieurs Lea and Blanchard for the present edition. We cannot forbear saying, however, that had we been Mr. Cooper--had we been Alexander instead of Diogenes--we should *not* have again thrust the book upon the attention of the public, but, putting it quietly behind the fire, have endeavored, with all our might and main, to forget that so great a mass of trash ever existed.¹⁷

Shorter reviews in magazines such as *The Expositor* and *The Ladies' Companion* express similar sentiments, the editor for *The Expositor* stating, "If not equal in strength, splendor of

¹⁶ *Godey's Lady's Book* 19 (August 1839): 96.

¹⁷ *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* 5 (1839): 117-118.

conception, and versatility of powers, to some of Cooper's other productions, 'Precaution' is at least vastly superior to the common standard of novels, which it is our special privilege to notice week after week.¹⁸ The reviewer for *The Ladies' Companion*, with typical non-committal brevity, considers the novel "interesting" and "shadowed by the unavoidable deficiencies of a first attempt," but shrugs off elaborate criticism as "supererogatory" since *Precaution* is "merely a reprint, having long been before the public."¹⁹ These reviews demonstrate, at least, the extent to which Cooper had become typecast in literary circles as an author of forest and sea. They may also hint that the reissue of a forgotten first novel betrayed the kind of literary desperation that Cooper's Whig enemies had been insinuating, the feeble efforts to capitalize on former glories by an author whose powers were on the wane. Still, *Precaution* at least had sound moral qualities in its favor, and more importantly, it was free from the kinds of "controversial" social criticisms that had made the *Home* novels so unpopular with critics.

Precaution, at any rate, would not be any more likely than *Home as Found* to sell in the quantities that Lea & Blanchard desired. What Cooper needed, as Isaac Lea reminded him, was a novel of the type he once had been "in the habit of writing,"²⁰ namely, a romance of the forest or of the sea, the two realms of fiction in which he long had been held the master. Cooper in the 1830s seemed often indifferent, sometimes hostile to the demands of the marketplace, but with his reputation under attack by enemies and his marketability in

¹⁸ *Expositor* 1 (29 June 1839): 331.

¹⁹ *Ladies' Companion* 11 (August 1839): 197. These reviews, taken together, are fairly echoed in the comments of Cooper's own daughter Susan in her introduction to an excerpt of *Precaution* in *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: W.A. Townsend, 1861), a sampler of chapters from many of his novels as well as engravings and reminiscences by Susan Fenimore Cooper. She writes of the first edition, with all its typographical oddities, as a "curiosity," and includes an excerpt from the story so that "the reader may be enabled to compare the passage with other pages which are to follow, than from any particular merit of its own" (22).

²⁰ Isaac Lea to JFC, 17 August 1839; *Letters and Journals* 1:421.

question by his publishers, he seemed to understand the desirability of scoring a commercial hit. His new project, eventually to become *The Pathfinder*, would thoroughly deliver on expectations. It would not only combine the forest and nautical settings readers admired but also would revive Cooper's best-known character, Natty Bumppo, the frontiersman first introduced in 1823 in *The Pioneers* as an old hunter of seventy, revisited in 1826 in *Last of the Mohicans* as the scout "Hawkeye" in the prime of manhood, and laid to rest in 1827 in *The Prairie* as an even older trapper in his eighties wandering the barren western plains. This last work, portraying the death of the aged Natty in its final chapters, had seemed to spell the end of Cooper's dealings with the character. But in reviving Natty Bumppo for *The Pathfinder* and again in *The Deerslayer*, Cooper would demonstrate his continued relevance not just as a social critic or a historian but as an artist and popular entertainer. He would also attempt to demonstrate to his publishers his continued commercial viability after his failures in the literary marketplace during the 1830s.

Cooper's first three Leatherstocking tales had tapped into an already strong current of interest in the frontier and spawned their own sub-genre, the frontier novel, with a host of imitators both good and bad taking to the field. The market for frontier literature was anything but stagnant between *The Prairie* in 1827 (or his *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish* in 1829) and *The Pathfinder* in 1840. Both Washington Irving and William Cullen Bryant followed Cooper's lead in selecting the western prairie as a subject for literary treatment (though unlike Cooper, they wrote after seeing it with their own eyes), Irving in *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835) and Bryant in "The Prairies" (1832).²¹ Timothy Flint published several frontier novels including *The Shoshonee Valley* in 1830, but is perhaps better remembered for his romantic treatment of Daniel Boone in his *Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone*, appearing in 1833.²² That same year, two more significant biographical treatments of frontier figures appeared: the *Life of Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak, or Black Hawk*, and *The Life and Adventures of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee*, better known under its subsequent title when reprinted by the

²¹ Washington Irving, *A Tour on the Prairies* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1835); William Cullen Bryant, "The Prairies," *Poems* (Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalf, 1834).

²² Timothy Flint, *The Shoshonee Valley; A Romance* (Cincinnati: E.H. Flint, 1830); *Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone, the First Settler of Kentucky* (Cincinnati: N. and G. Guilford, 1833).

Harper brothers in New York as *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett of West Tennessee*—to which Crockett himself responded in his autobiographical *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*.²³ The versatile James Kirke Paulding, often known for his novels, had dramatized the frontier legend of Crockett in his 1831 play *The Lion of the West*, while Dr. Robert Montgomery Bird, an eminent dramatist, branched out in the mid-1830s to write historical novels, scoring one of his greatest hits with his frontier story *Nick of the Woods* in 1837, which depicted Native Americans as barbaric and debased in deliberate contrast to what was seen as Cooper's too idealistic treatments.²⁴ Significantly, this work was published by Cooper's own publisher, Carey, Lea, & Blanchard of Philadelphia, as was another popular frontier/Revolution novel, *Horse Shoe Robinson* (1835), written by John Pendleton Kennedy of Baltimore.²⁵ The *New-Yorker*, in greeting Bird's *Nick of the Woods*, proclaimed:

In truth, we have been rarely betrayed into enthusiasm by an American novel since Washington Irving abandoned the realm of imagination for topographical and historical researches, and Cooper descended from his high estate as author of *The Pilot* and *The Red Rover*, to the middling of *The Bravo* and the *Headsmen of Berne*, and thence into that lowest of all lower deeps, *The Monikins*. Perhaps *Horse Shoe Robinson* is the only masculine performance (indigenous) which has robbed us of sleep for the last five years.²⁶

In 1835 the *Southern Literary Messenger* had predicted that as novelists Kennedy and Bird would “prove themselves worthy successors to Cooper and Irving (so far as the latter may

²³ *Life of Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak, or Black Hawk* (Cincinnati, [J.B. Patterson]: 1833); [Matthew St. Clair Clarke,] *The Life and Adventures of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee* (Cincinnati, 1833); *Sketches and Eccentricities of Col. David Crockett of West Tennessee* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833); David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1834).

²⁴ Robert Montgomery Bird, *Nick of the Woods, or, The Jibbenainosay. A Tale of Kentucky* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1837).

²⁵ John Pendleton Kennedy, *Horse Shoe Robinson: A Tale of the Tory Ascendancy* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1835).

²⁶ “Nick of the Woods, or the Jibbenainosay” [Review], *The New-Yorker* 3 (March 1837): 4.

be considered a novel writer,) when the mantles fall from their shoulders.”²⁷ As early as 1832 after Kennedy’s first success with *Swallow Barn*, Henry Carey appealed to Kennedy as his firm’s main hope when it appeared he would lose his two brightest stars: “Irving will write little—Cooper says he will write no more—and I fear we shall shortly see our lights extinguished, unless you take & keep the field.”²⁸ During the 1830s Kennedy rose in his publishers’ commercial estimation while Cooper was falling, receiving \$1200 in 1835 for 3000 copies of *Horse Shoe Robinson*, which quickly sold out several editions, and \$1850 by 1838 for 4000 copies of *Rob of the Bowl*.²⁹ Kennedy was not the only prominent Southerner in the field: William Gilmore Simms published *Guy Rivers* in 1834 and quickly rose to prominence as one of the best of the new wave of novelists with border romances such as *The Yemassee* (1835) and *Richard Hurdis* (1838).³⁰ “Who wrote Richard Hurdis?” the reviewer for Philadelphia’s *The Casket* inquired in a review of Simms’s follow up effort, *Border Beagles*, in 1840; “Whoever he is we admire his talents. A better description of western life—a tale more startling in its incidents, a series of characters more varied and interesting have not appeared, for some years, from the pen of an American writer.”³¹ Though the field was dominated by men, women writers were not absent: Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Sedgwick had pioneered the frontier novel nearly contemporaneously with Cooper in the 1820s with *Hobomok* (1824) and *Hope Leslie* (1827), respectively, and in 1839 Caroline Kirkland’s narrative of frontier life in Michigan, *A New Home: Who’ll Follow?* (published

²⁷ “Editorial Remarks,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 1 (May 1835): 531.

²⁸ Henry Carey to John Pendleton Kennedy, 1832; quoted by J.V. Ridgely in *John Pendleton Kennedy* (New York: Twayne, 1966) 65, from manuscript in Correspondence with Publishers, John Pendleton Kennedy Papers, Peabody Institute Library.

²⁹ Ridgely 67, 96; Cost Books, Lea & Blanchard, Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁰ William Gilmore Simms, *Guy Rivers: A Tale of Georgia* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834); *Richard Hurdis; or, The Avenger of Blood. A Tale of Alabama* (Philadelphia: E.L. Carey & A. Hart, 1838).

³¹ “Review of New Books,” *The Casket* 17 (September 1840): 192.

under the pseudonym of Mrs. Mary Clavers) appeared to warm acclaim.³² In short, by 1839 Cooper had plenty of competition to contend with, much of it of good quality.

It is worth mentioning here, though it requires a jump ahead chronologically from the main narrative to a point in time after the appearance of *The Pathfinder*, that Cooper's highly partisan Whig enemies in the press actively sought to install one of their "own" as a replacement for Cooper as the nation's premiere frontier novelist. The appearance of Charles Fenno Hoffman's *Greyslaer* in July 1840 provided just such an occasion for the attempt. Park Benjamin of the *New-York Evening Signal* and the massive weekly *The New World* hailed *Greyslaer* as a work that would "maintain itself against *all* odds" in the crowded field of American novels, winning "a rich harvest of fame" for its author and achieving lasting success. "Had it appeared simultaneously with THE SPY," Benjamin writes, "it would have swept that over-estimated book into oblivion; and HOFFMAN, not COOPER, would stand first among American novelists. As it is, time will accomplish what adventitious circumstances have delayed."³³ Though not overtly partisan, the reviewer for the Philadelphia literary journal *The Casket* similarly evoked comparison between the two authors, giving Hoffman a place only slightly lower:

Had *Greyslaer* appeared twenty years ago, it would have been hailed with the same rapture with which the *Spy* was received, and Hoffman would have been what Cooper is now. If followed up, however, by other romances of equal merit, we see no reason why the younger author should not even yet rival the older one. To surpass him on the ocean, or in the forest is impossible.³⁴

Sensing puffery, the *Ladies' Companion* humorously chided fellow reviewers for their eagerness to praise what was in many respects a squarely average work, mocking the "inflated encomiums" lavished upon *Greyslaer*: "The unanimity with which praise has been bestowed upon Mr. Charles Fenno Hoffman's work proves conclusively, that not *one* out of

³² Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok: A Tale of Early Times* (Boston: Cummings, Hillard & Co., 1824); Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in the Massachusetts* (New York: White, Gallaher and White, 1827); Caroline Matilda Kirkland, *A New Home—Who'll Follow? Or, Glimpses of Western Life* (New York: C.S. Francis, 1839).

³³ "Mr. Hoffman's Romance," *The New World* 1 (11 July 1840): 94.

³⁴ "Review of New Books," *The Casket* 17 (August 1840): 96.

every hundred of the reviewers ever perused '*Greyslaer*, a romance of the Mohawk,' for the purpose of forming an impartial opinion of its merits." Had reviewers "devoted on hour to the duty of the critic," they would not have classed Hoffman with Edward Bulwer, G.P.R. James, Scott, Irving, or Cooper—"impressions so utterly at variance with common sense and honest intentions."³⁵ Contemporary enthusiasm notwithstanding, after quick initial sales *Greyslaer* quickly sunk into oblivion. But such efforts to mount a challenge to Cooper's supremacy in the field of the frontier novel only highlight further why the timing of *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* was so crucial to his continued literary standing.

Like the new edition of *Precaution*, Cooper's new project, which would become *The Pathfinder*, was not an entirely new idea, although the introduction of Natty Bumppo into the work likely was. As the author notes in his preface to the 1840 first edition:

The plan of this tale suggested itself to the writer, many years since, though the details are altogether of recent invention. The idea of associating seamen and savages, in incidents that might be supposed characteristic of the Great Lakes, having been mentioned to a publisher, the latter obtained something like a pledge from the author to carry out the design, at some future day, which pledge is now tardily and imperfectly redeemed.³⁶

Specifically, the publisher mentioned in this passage was Henry Colburn (later succeeded by his partner Richard Bentley), who actually had obtained more than "something like a pledge" from Cooper in the form of a genuine agreement going back as far as 1831. In a letter of 1 February 1831, Cooper had proposed to Colburn a sale of his next two novels, one a "Venetian Tale" which was to become *The Bravo*, and the other a "Lake-marine story" concerning "Lake Ontario, with scenes on the Great Lakes, with Indians intermingled."³⁷ Colburn and Bentley agreed to purchase the two books for a total of £1300. *The Bravo*, already in progress, was delivered during that year, slowed somewhat by Cooper's revisions of his earlier novels for the *Standard Novels* series. But around August 1831, Cooper was

³⁵ "Literary Review," *The Ladies' Companion* 13 (August 1840): 207.

³⁶ *The Pathfinder; or, The Inland Sea*, Edited with an Historical Introduction by Richard Dilworth Rust (Albany: SUNY P, 1981) 1. Unless noted otherwise, all citations for *The Pathfinder* are taken from this edition (part of the "Writings of James Fenimore Cooper" series of scholarly editions) and are noted parenthetically in the text.

³⁷ JFC to Henry Colburn, 1 February 1831: *Letters and Journals* 2:53.

angling for another novel: "What do you say to a Swiss tale? Shall I edge one in, before Lake Ontario? If you like the idea, I think I can give you one for the spring, and Lake Ontario for the autumn."³⁸ Cooper's publishers indulged him, the proposed Swiss tale evolving into a German one that would become *The Heidenmauer* (1832). The Lake Ontario story was pushed back further. Proposing a new tale after *The Heidenmauer* (eventually to become *The Monikins*, 1835), Cooper admitted the publishers' "perfect right to the Lake Ontario affair should you wish it," but soon after begged that "Whatever may be your decision on the subject of the tale of Ontario, I am now so far advanced on the other work as to make it desirable that you permit me to finish it."³⁹ Setting aside *The Monikins*, Cooper once again resumed his idea of a Swiss tale in late 1832, proposing "'The Headsman of Berne' an idea that has seized me with such force, that there is no resisting it." Once again, "Lake Ontario must lie over, unless you insist."⁴⁰ And by 1833, when *The Headsman* was going to press, Cooper had announced that it would be the last of his series of tales. The Lake Ontario story seemed doomed never to appear.

Throughout the 1830s, however, Bentley continued to gently prod Cooper with suggestions that he resume his pen as a novelist and write another tale. On 30 May 1836, for instance, he alluded to the prior proposal Cooper had made:

When I had last the pleasure of seeing you, you may recollect, that in our conversation the subject of another naval work of fiction from your pen was alluded to — the scene of which you had proposed to lay on the American lakes. May I be allowed to say, if you contemplate another novel, and are not yet decided as to the subject, that the public here, and as I have reason to know, your admirers in Europe generally, would be highly gratified by another Story of the Sea from you.⁴¹

Likewise, on 19 September 1836, Bentley wrote, "I look forward with much interest to the realization of the rumour, current among your friends here, that you are engaged in writing a

³⁸ JFC to Colburn & Bentley, [8? August 1831]: *Letters and Journals* 2:131-32.

³⁹ JFC to Colburn & Bentley, 18 May 1832, 10 June 1832: *Letters and Journals* 2:253, 256.

⁴⁰ JFC to Colburn & Bentley, 12 October 1832: *Letters and Journals* 2:354.

⁴¹ Bentley to JFC, 30 May 1836: *Letters and Journals* 3:222.

new naval novel.”⁴² To these entreaties to re-enter the realm of fiction-writing, however, Cooper responded with *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*, not exactly what Bentley had in mind. His further plans seemed to express no intention to follow Bentley’s pleas and pick up the great lakes story. Sending off a portion of the Naval History to Britain, Cooper in his accompanying letter proposed to Bentley his idea for a tale “in which *ships* would be the only actors”—the germ for what eventually evolved into *The Two Admirals* (1842).⁴³ Bentley, no doubt horrified by such a strange scheme, tactfully offered a counterproposal:

I wish I could persuade you to undertake a naval story on your own inland Seas. -- The late unfortunate war gave rise to many gallant encounters on your lakes, which wrought up into a story could scarcely fail to be interesting to readers on both sides of the water. It would unite pictures of the border country, and possess a fresh interest. Do me the favor again to think of this, which I believe I previously had the pleasure of proposing to you.⁴⁴

Cooper’s readiness in complying suggests an underlying consciousness of the previous agreements he had made for the work and the procrastination he had indulged for so long in avoiding it:

Your idea has been followed, and I have got to work on a nautico-lake-savage-romance -- The scene is on Lake Ontario, the Niagara River, the cataract &c &c &c. This book, in all probability will be completed and printed, in all October. I have some idea of visiting the falls of Niagara, which are about three days journey from me, or I should get through sooner. I have not absolutely decided on the name, though I have thought of the Inland Sea. As this name may be changed, however, it is better not to announce.⁴⁵

With a promise in hand, Bentley was more forthcoming about the commercial nature of his interests in the book:

It is with much pleasure I hear that you have done me the favor to adopt a suggestion I ventured to throw out with regard to a Romance founded on the almost inland Seas of America. Had this been done instead of your travelling

⁴² Bentley to JFC, 19 September 1836: *Letters and Journals* 3:222.

⁴³ JFC to Bentley, 5 February 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:369.

⁴⁴ Bentley to JFC, 6 April 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:370.

⁴⁵ JFC to Bentley, 18 June 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:393.

Sketches your English publisher would have been able to give you a better account of affairs. All these works (without one exception) have fallen short of their expenses.⁴⁶

The Naval History, too, had proven a money-loser to the tune of £600.⁴⁷ As Bentley hinted, if Cooper had had no plans to resume his former role as a commercially viable novelist, the future of the Bentley-Cooper relationship looked grim. But a tale such as the Lake Ontario story would not only return Cooper to the more mainstream marketplace for fiction; merging his two pillars of strength, the sea and the frontier, potentially would make for a powerful exhibit of his continued relevance in the literary marketplace.

Surprisingly, though, despite these prospects and Cooper's initial progress on the book, financial negotiations with Bentley were delayed until well after Cooper had made his arrangements for publishing the novel in America, as Bentley was holding out for a reduction in the price he offered for the novel in light of his earlier losses. Seeking a way to maximize his own returns, Cooper in October 1839 proposed an arrangement whereby Bentley would buy the rights of *The Pathfinder* and his next book, on the subject of Columbus, for a price of £1000. Bentley agreed but still insisted upon exacting an abatement of £200 (approximately \$1000, in 1839-40 US dollars) from the £500 (approximately \$2500) price of *The Pathfinder*. This worked out to about half of what Cooper had made per novel in England prior to his 1834 "retirement" from fiction.

Cooper ought to have stood in a slightly better position to bargain with Lea & Blanchard. Inasmuch as their investment in the travel series was small compared to Bentley's, their losses had not been as great. *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* demonstrated sales that were healthy enough to call for stereotype editions despite the initial reluctance his publishers showed, and the *History of the Navy* faced better prospects of short-

⁴⁶ Bentley to JFC, 24 July 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:394.

⁴⁷ "You will regret to hear that the publication in England of the Naval History of the United States has been attended with very serious loss to me. No less a sum than £600! with little or no chance of this loss being reduced. You will remember that I ventured to give my opinion on this matter, that it was not likely on various accounts, to become popular here, however emphatically treated. It is a painful subject, from which our English readers turn away." Bentley to JFC, 24 July 1839; MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

and long-term sales in its native land than it did in England for Bentley. But upon journeying to Philadelphia in late July 1839, Cooper discovered that selling the new novel would not be easy, despite evidence that public sentiment there favored him in his battles with the press. "Times are hard," he reported to Mrs. Cooper on 21 July, "but I hope to effect my business, and be home this week."⁴⁸ Lea & Blanchard had sold some 2000 copies (out of 3000 printed) of the *History of the Navy*, Cooper reported, but were resisting contracting for a new edition even though prospects of the first edition selling out were good. Cooper saw the need for some improvisation to effect both objects of his business trip: a sale of the new novel and the revised second edition of the *History*. "I am making my present arrangement, in a new way," he told his wife, "and shall do something, though what I cannot yet tell."⁴⁹ Within a few days, however, he had settled on a plan, which was actually a package deal for the two books.

The contract Cooper signed with Lea & Blanchard demonstrates that despite Isaac Lea's claim around this time that he could easily sell eight to ten thousand copies of a novel such as Cooper previously "had been in the habit of writing," the firm acted much more conservatively when it came time to buy the rights to the work and set the size of the first edition. The terms of the contract illustrate the contortions Cooper had to perform to squeeze maximum advantage out of a work of fiction. Cooper's eagerness to have a second edition of the *History of the Navy* led to concessions in the price of *The Pathfinder*. The original contract for the *History* had set the terms of a second edition at seventy cents per copy with a required minimum of 2000 copies (the first edition was 3000 copies for \$2750, or 91 2/3 cents per copy), meaning that a second edition would cost Lea & Blanchard at least \$1400 for payments to Cooper alone.⁵⁰ No doubt the firm balked at such an investment when their first edition had not yet sold out; the second edition also contained substantial revisions and would not be simply a reimpression of the first. This hesitancy about the Naval History must have been at least partly responsible for the firm's offering what was the lowest

⁴⁸ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 21 July 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:419.

⁴⁹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 21 July 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:419.

⁵⁰ Contract for *History of the Navy*; MS, Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

amount they had ever paid Cooper for any of his works of fiction. In the package deal for the two works, Cooper and his publishers arranged matters so that the copyright would be leased, as had been done with the *Naval History*, instead of bought outright—a deal which resulted in a lower initial lump sum but would perhaps pay off in the long run if further editions were required. Cooper would secure the copyright and grant Lea & Blanchard the right of publishing an edition of 5000 copies of *The Pathfinder*, with a “privilege” of exclusive sale for two years from the date of publication. Cooper’s compensation for the two works together was \$3600 (less than he had received for any one of his novels between 1826 and 1833). As had become common in his dealings, Cooper agreed to be paid in notes payable at four, six, nine, twelve, and fifteen months, as well as \$1000 in cash, softening the initial blow to his publishers.⁵¹ Of this \$3600, only \$2200 was earmarked for the new novel, which was to be published in an edition of only 5000 copies (44 cents per copy, as the firm’s cost books confirm⁵²)—hardly a sign of confidence in the work’s being a better seller than *Home as Found*. Perhaps his publishers’ uncertainty over whether Cooper actually would write—or even could write anymore—the book he had proposed, rather than another fictionalized social critique, played a role in setting the initial stakes in the book so low. The intention to center the work around Natty Bumppo, as announced by the new title named in the contract, “The Path Finder, or Inland Sea,” at least may have alleviated their worries somewhat.

It is noteworthy that neither Cooper’s nor Bentley’s initial letters about the work that would become *The Pathfinder* reflect plans that closely resemble the ultimate product. As Cooper himself affirms in his preface to the first edition, “The plan of this tale suggested itself to the writer, many years since, though the details are altogether of recent invention” (2). Except for the setting on the great lakes and a mixing of sailors and savages, the content

⁵¹ Contract for “The Path Finder, or Inland Sea”; and cost books, Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵² Naturally, proportion must be kept in mind; the costs for the second edition of the *History* worked out to \$1.83 per copy (better than the \$2.16 of the first edition); those for *The Pathfinder* were only \$0.89. As the firm’s cost books note, at a selling price of \$1.50 per copy, “3000 copies will pay all costs & 5000 copies make 1500 dollars & plates clear.” Cost book, Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

was vague and far from settled. Bentley's letter, speaking of a "naval story on your own inland Seas" based upon "many gallant encounters on your lakes" during the "late unfortunate war" would seem to suggest a more recent setting for the tale, sometime during the war of 1812, rather than during the "War of '56" (better known as the French and Indian War).⁵³ Cooper's initial planning for the work, as portrayed in his letter to Bentley, involved "the Niagara river, the cataract &c &c &c," going so far as to entertain a notion of "visiting the falls of Niagara" for research or inspiration.⁵⁴ Neither of these foreshadowings of the work contains any hint of the prominence of Natty Bumppo in the tale, suggesting that Cooper's original 1831 proposal of the work to Colburn & Bentley, and probably even Cooper's initial ideas in planning the work, contained nothing that would cause the tale to take its place as part of the Leatherstocking series. And Cooper's only other frontier romance between *The Prairie* in 1827 and *The Pathfinder* in 1840, *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish* of 1829, dealt with seventeenth-century Puritan settlers in Connecticut and contained no direct connection to the Leatherstocking series, only evocative ties through the introduction of a historical Native American character named Uncas, who shared a name common to Mohican chiefs with the well-known character in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Cooper's constant procrastinating with the tale suggests that apart from the general setting he had little idea initially of how to make the story work out.

Sometime between Cooper's letter to Bentley on 18 June 1839 and his contract with Lea & Blanchard on 24 July, Natty Bumppo became part of the story's fabric, as evidenced by the new title entered in the contract, "The Path Finder, or Inland Sea."⁵⁵ Unfortunately, exact details about the when and why of Natty's "resurrection" for the story remain largely a matter of speculation (though, indeed, the subject has received too little attention from most previous critics). Cooper says in his 1840 preface to the novel only that "the present experiment has been so long delayed, quite as much from doubts of its success, as from any

⁵³ Letters and Journals 3:370.

⁵⁴ In the story, the falls are never seen but roar in the distance as Jasper Western's vessel *Scud* reconnoiters the French fort at Niagara.

⁵⁵ Contract for "The Path Finder, or Inland Sea," 24 July 1839; MS, Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

other cause,” citing worries about a “risk of fatiguing the reader with sameness” by maintaining the same character through four separate works (1). Nothing in these words establishes with any certainty any previous plans to combine a revival of Natty’s character with the “nautico-lake-savage romance” that had spent years in gestation. Even in its final form, *The Pathfinder* in several portions suggests origins in the “nautico-lake-savage romance” that have little to do with Natty; strip away his presence, and the outlines of a more “conventional” romance along the lines of Cooper’s nautical tales emerges. The secondary hero of the tale, Jasper Western (originally given the name “Harry Harbor” in the manuscript⁵⁶), easily resembles the more traditional romantic hero of Cooper sea tales such as Wilder of *The Red Rover*, and he comes to the forefront early in the story when he confidently navigates a canoe through nearly impassable rapids as well as later when he retakes command of his boat, the *Scud*, just in time to save it from running aground during a gale. Indeed, during much of the *Scud*’s voyage about Lake Ontario, Natty is virtually irrelevant—just another of the passengers. Such aspects heighten the impression that Natty’s arrival to the planning of the story was a late one. Given his first statements upon taking up the task of writing the story, Cooper’s decision to pair Natty Bumppo with the Lake Ontario story very likely seems to have occurred amid the initial challenges of planning the structure of the book and making a business case for its sale to Lea & Blanchard amid marketplace conditions that had grown increasingly unfavorable to him. Whatever the case, Cooper’s decision to bring Natty “back to life,” so to speak, would have substantial impact upon the framework of the novel and particularly on its marketability.

Bringing back “an old friend, under new circumstances” was not without risk, as the doubts expressed in Cooper’s preface (quoted above) acknowledge. Already in 1831 critic and would-be rival Charles Sealsfield had complained in the *New-York Mirror* of the way Cooper had attempted to capitalize on his success with *The Pioneers* by bringing back the aged Natty Bumppo in *The Prairie*, investing the character with “increased garrulity” and qualities that become “heavy and tedious by repetition.” Sealsfield interprets Natty’s death in the last

⁵⁶ See “A Note on the Manuscript” in the Cooper Edition of *The Pathfinder* (Albany: SUNY P, 1981) 485, and Richard D. Rust, “On the Trail of a Craftsman,” in *James Fenimore Cooper: New Historical and Literary Contexts*, ed. W.M. Verhoven (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993) 178.

pages of *The Prairie* as a recognition on Cooper's part that the character should die a natural death lest the author "be tempted to murder him by inches in a future work."⁵⁷ The nearly iconic status Natty had already attained raised the possibility that further tampering with his character after his supposed demise would bore or even offend readers, or give Cooper a look of desperation, potential criticisms that he attempts to head off in his preface by citing "an interest in the individual in question, that falls little short of reality" (1). Whether or not Cooper's professed hesitations were made genuinely or archly, it is clear that he hoped the work would, to say the least, "be found not to lessen his favor with the public" (1). Such expression of hope in public favor after his defiance in the 1830s speaks to Cooper's commercial aims for the book—the public, rather than professional critics, being Cooper's habitual yardstick for the merit of his works. Commercially as well as artistically, reviving Leatherstocking provided a number of convenient solutions for Cooper in demonstrating his continued relevance as a literary artist. With Natty Bumppo added to his story, *The Pathfinder* would become a sort of do-everything book for Cooper. Combining frontier and nautical adventure with an unexpected revival of his most famous character would put the world on notice that Cooper could write an artistic, entertaining novel of the type he once had been "in the habit of writing."

The title of *The Pathfinder*, like that of the work to follow, *The Deerslayer*, suggests Cooper's consciousness of the celebrity of his famous frontiersman and his increasing interest in capitalizing on it by further developing the character. Unlike the titles of previous tales in the Leatherstocking series, which focus on a community (*The Pioneers*), a setting (*The Prairie*), or the poignant doom of an Indian race (*The Last of the Mohicans*), *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* take their names from the *sobriquet* given to Natty in each story, suggesting his centrality in the tales. Indeed, Cooper uses Natty's *sobriquets* as a means of introducing Natty in *The Pathfinder*, blending the now-familiar names given him in *The Last of the Mohicans* (set just before *The Pathfinder* in the chronology of Natty's life) with his new appellation,

⁵⁷ Charles Sealsfield [Karl Postl], "The Works of the Author of *The Spy*," *New-York Mirror* 8 (1831): 252-54; excerpts reprinted in George Dekker and John P. McWilliams, eds., *James Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) 165.

“Pathfinder,” in such a way as to simulate a nearly seamless transition between the two works. As Natty says:

“I’m a man well known in these parts, and perhaps one of my names may have reached your ears. By the Frenchers, and the red-skins on the other side of the Big Lakes, I am called la Longue Carabine; by the Mohicans, a just-minded and upright tribe, what is left of them, Hawk Eye; while the troops and rangers along this side of the water call me Pathfinder, inasmuch as I have never been known to miss one end of the trail, when there was a Mingo, or a friend, who stood in need of me, at the other.” (18)

Natty’s consciousness of being “well known in these parts” might just as well apply to his literary currency in the marketplace as in the world of the tale itself. Throughout the story, too, echoes of earlier tales appear: the slaughter of the British soldiers and Jennie (one soldier’s wife) at the garrison in the Thousand Islands recalls the massacre outside of Fort Henry in *Last of the Mohicans*, albeit lacking much of the latter’s vividness and thematic power. Likewise, *The Pathfinder* contains a shooting match reminiscent of the turkey shoot in *The Pioneers*, with Natty juxtaposed in both stories to a younger protégé (Oliver Edwards in *The Pioneers*, Jasper Western in *The Pathfinder*) less experienced in the art of marksmanship but nervously eager to present the prize to the woman he admires (Elizabeth Temple in *The Pioneers* and Mabel Dunham in *The Pathfinder*).

Cooper’s interest in developing Natty’s character causes some of the purported features of the “nautico-lake-savage romance” to recede to the background. “As for the union of Indians and sailors,” he wrote Richard Bentley in November 1839, “we shall not make much of them, though there is a hit or two in the last volume. The probabilities are too much in the way.”⁵⁸ Although there are still “Indians intermingled” in the work, Cooper downplays their role, going so far as to note in the preface that “The Indian character has so little variety, that it has been my object to avoid dwelling on it too much of the present occasion. Its association with the sailor, too, it is feared, will be found to have more novelty than interest” (1). Indeed, relative to a work such as *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pathfinder* contains few probing questions about the collision of Native American and European races. Chingachgook appears prominently in a few scenes, but is largely a shadow to Natty and is absent on scouting missions for a good portion of the book. The only other Indian

⁵⁸ JFC to Richard Bentley, 12 November 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:443.

characters to receive much attention are Arrowhead, a treacherous Tuscarora, and his wife, Dew of June, but Arrowhead displays little of the complexity that marks the earlier character Magua in *The Last of the Mohicans*; as in *The Prairie*, it is Natty's interactions among the white characters of the novel that are most pertinent to the story. Significantly, the only Indian character developed to much extent is not one of the heroic male characters of the novel but Dew of June—one of several aspects of *The Pathfinder* that suggest its more sentimental quality in comparison to its predecessors. D.H. Lawrence's famously broad-brushed critique of the Leatherstocking tales in *Studies in Classic American Literature* (an essay, like many of Poe's pieces of criticism, that is perhaps as much about the critic as the work criticized) is not far off the mark in noting that the Leatherstocking series in its order of composition follows "a *decrecendo* of reality," which Lawrence attributes to an increasing mythologization of the frontier and the Indian—Cooper's beating a retreat, as it were, from the concerns of his present day, to dwell in a world of wish-fulfillment.⁵⁹ The limits of this claim are certainly open to debate, but part of what may account for Cooper's "*decrecendo* of reality" is Cooper's increasing emphasis on the character of Natty himself, invested with an increasingly sentimental treatment as the series proceeds. Cooper had already taken steps in this direction in *The Prairie*: there, too, the Indian characters become less distinctively delineated, more like set pieces. The melodramatic, drawn-out death and burial of Natty Bumppo near the end of the story stands out as a scene particularly crafted to evoke nostalgia and sympathy. Cooper's "commercialization" of Natty, then, may have as much to do with the makeup of the later tales as any intentional aims for mythologizing the frontier.

Cooper always had been open to the influence of sentimentalism, as is evidenced by the fact that his first novel, *Precaution*, was an imitation of the kind of English sentimental fiction written by the likes of Jane Austen or Amelia Opie, so much so that some readers, as Cooper boasted, were convinced that the tale was written by an English woman rather than by an American gentleman. Similarly, his abortive series of four "American" tales—"Imagination," "Heart," "Manner," and "Manner and Matter,"—were to be domestic tales along the lines of *Precaution*, albeit with an American setting; when "Imagination" and "Heart" were published by Charles Wiley as *Tales for Fifteen* in 1823 (Cooper gave the tales to

⁵⁹ D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923; New York: Viking, 1964) 50.

Wiley in an attempt to assist him out of economic difficulties), the title page bore the pseudonym “Jane Morgan.” Cooper was well aware, then, of the customary gendering of the literary marketplace, both from a production and a consumption standpoint, with its assumption that female readers, who comprised a sizeable chunk of the market for fiction, preferred sentimental, often domestic content; as his use of “Jane Morgan” shows, he also conceived certain distinctions between a masculine and a feminine type of writing. Concessions to a female readership, then, can be found in most of his novels, most notably in the traditional form of the “love plot”: even in *The Pilot*, a work born out of a desire to write about ships and the sea with a technical accuracy that an experienced seaman could respect, Cooper has his genteel male characters spending a good deal of their time on land and in the company of women. His letters often refer to the love plots in his novels as being written for the interest of the ladies, and with a household full of women—a wife and four grown daughters besides himself and his son—often acting as his first readers, he could hardly forget to take feminine perspectives into account.

Yet Natty Bumppo had never been portrayed as a typical hero, the kind who might become involved in a love plot. In two of the first three Leatherstocking tales, *The Pioneers* and *The Prairie*, the love plots concern other characters besides Natty Bumppo, who, of course, is much too old to be a serious candidate for courtship anyway (he is about seventy in *The Pioneers*, around eighty-five in *The Prairie*). Natty instead acts as a sort of mediator, “always the bridesmaid and never the bride,” lending support to budding couples such as one might typically expect to figure in a love plot: Oliver Edwards Effingham and Elizabeth Temple in *The Pioneers*, or Paul Hover and Ellen Wade in *The Prairie*. And *The Last of the Mohicans*, the only previous tale exhibiting Natty at a youngish age, contains little in the way of a love plot at all, despite the marriage of Duncan Heyward and Alice Munro (their grandson later to appear as Captain Duncan Uncas Middleton in *The Prairie*) and the tragically-ended relationship between Uncas and Cora Munro that has received considerable attention from critics interested in the racial dimensions of the novel. Indeed, in the preface of the first edition to *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper disclaimed, albeit coyly, any intentions of indulging the kinds of romanticism suitable for things like love plots, especially warning away those of “the more imaginative sex,” whose views of the world “are usually limited by the four walls of a comfortable drawing room,” under the pretense that the story’s lack of

“imaginary and romantic” properties would be too “shocking” for them.⁶⁰ At any rate, in all three of these tales, Natty Bumppo, like Cooper’s other famous heroes, Harvey Birch of *The Spy* and Long Tom Coffin of *The Pilot*, was drawn at too low a social class, and lived too ascetic and single-minded a lifestyle, to be considered a serious candidate for courtship. Or so it seemed until *The Pathfinder*, wherein Cooper understood the sentimental interest he might generate by casting so unlikely a character as a suitor. Putting Natty in this position would fundamentally alter his role, making him fulfill the more traditional definition of a hero as the male romantic lead in a work. Indeed, as George Dekker points out, “*The Pathfinder* (1840) is the only Leatherstocking tale in which Natty Bumppo at all resembles the wavering hero of a Scott novel,” albeit loosely, in having to choose between his unorthodox, unencumbered life as a frontiersman or the more conventional, propertied trappings of civilization matrimony would require.⁶¹

Such a shift would also cause a great deal of rationalization about characters’ standing in the social order—Mabel Dunham’s low birth but high education, for instance, renders her fit for the relatively refined Jasper (he knows French, after all) without placing her so high as to render Natty’s suit utterly improbable. Natty is, after all, low-born and uncultured, but elevated high above his station by his high moral conduct; in his odd position he frets and worries over his suitability for Mabel and for married life in general. As a result, Natty loses some of his edginess and nearly abandons his role as a critic of society and progress. Apart from the effect such a change causes in the story itself, the portrayal of Leatherstocking in love in *The Pathfinder* retroactively flavors the previous installments of the series, deflecting Natty’s discontent away from external forces such as society’s wasteful ways, toward an internal hurt. The reviewer for *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* was at least one person who sought out this kind of psychological angle: “the unsuccessful termination of his course of wooing accounts for the melancholy tinge that is apparent in all his various scenes

⁶⁰ *The Last of the Mohicans; A Narrative of 1757*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey & I. Lea, 1826) 1:[iii], xi.

⁶¹ George Dekker, *James Fenimore Cooper, The Novelist* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967) 161.

of life.”⁶² Undoubtedly, though, whatever the loss in Natty’s prophetic power, Cooper’s portrayal of him in such unusual straits proved more pleasing than otherwise to most critics, whose sentimental bones were surprised and tickled by the development. “For the first time, we find him in love!” exclaimed the reviewer for the *Ladies’ Companion*, no less enthusiastically than the reviewer for *The New-Yorker* (probably Horace Greeley), who, after affirming that the best qualities of Natty from past Leatherstocking tales are present in *The Pathfinder*, adds, “But we have more than this; we have Leatherstocking in love!”⁶³ Even more rapturous was the critic who appraised the novel in the *New-York Review*: “Natty in love! and most admirably is he drawn. He is just what he should be in love, just what nobody but he could be. The conception and the execution are perfect. . . instinct with a pathos, a moral beauty and sublimity, equally touching and ennobling in its effect upon our mind.”⁶⁴

What was most noticeably absent from *The Pathfinder* was “politics,” the social criticism of the kinds that appeared in his European trilogy, his travel novels, and most blatantly in *Home as Found*. It was certain that, at least to most critics, the lack of politics in *The Pathfinder* was a welcome change, indicating that Cooper had returned to his senses and encouraging hopes that he would remain on his true course. The *Southern Literary Messenger* is typical in congratulating Cooper—and the public—upon “his return to his old ground of romance,” stating, “We welcome Mr. Cooper back to his old ground. . . . We are proud of Mr. Cooper. We are sorry for what we deem his deviations from his true course as a novelist.”⁶⁵ In *The Casket*, a reviewer proclaims, after affirming that the book fully merited the praise given it, “We hail it as an omen that Mr. Cooper will hereafter forego his satires and be, as he once was, the lord of the prairie, storm, and sea,” and, apparently not satisfied with this admonition, adds in closing, “As Mr. Cooper has again entered the magic circle whence he has derived all his fame, we hope that he will leave it no more, but win for

⁶² *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* 6 (April 1840): 200.

⁶³ “Literary Review,” *Ladies’ Companion* 12 (April 1840): 296; “Mr. Cooper’s New Work,” *New-Yorker* 8 (14 March 1840): 413.

⁶⁴ *New-York Review* 6 (April 1840): 480.

⁶⁵ “Notices of New Works,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 6 (March 1840): 229.

himself even fresher laurels.”⁶⁶ *The Knickerbocker* likewise contains a hopeful directive that “abandoning abstract disquisitions, or a censorious portraiture of manners and politics of civilized nations, he would liberate his genius in the spheres where it must shine; upon the trackless ocean, and along our leafy land.”⁶⁷ The usually terse *Ladies’ Companion*, which in its earlier reviews of *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found* curiously contained no expressed objections to the social commentary in those works, retroactively expressed regret for Cooper’s earlier course while granting forgiveness because of the merit of *The Pathfinder*:

It is, we may truly say, a relief to us in our capacity of critics, to find Mr. Cooper returned, and luxuriating in what may be termed his proper sphere. The tenor of his late works has imposed the unpleasant task of condemnation, while the feelings have been those of mingled wonder and pity at what has appeared almost mental aberration. But he has resumed his old “trail,” and given us now, as though regenerated and reinvigorated, a novel of great merit and interest; and since he has voluntarily returned to himself, we can forget the past at once.⁶⁸

The *New-York Review*, more extreme in its condemnation and rapturous in its praise, similarly bestows forgiveness upon Cooper for his supposed waywardness, writing, “We hail the reappearance of Mr. Cooper in his old and true sphere, with deeper regret than ever that he should so long have been unfaithful to his proper vocation.” *The Pathfinder*, in the critic’s words, is “a true work of genius. . . . Nothing can be finer”; the work is “unequalled by any thing in Scott or any modern writer.” Part of its success, the critic reveals, is that *The Pathfinder* contains “scarcely a trace of the false feeling and disgusting self-obtrusion of his [Cooper’s] two or three last productions; on the contrary, the person of the author is lost in his work, nearly as much so as Shakespeare in any of his creations.”⁶⁹ And the vehemently Whig *New-Yorker*, a regular attacker of Cooper, dispenses unusual praise for the novel and offers a mildly revisionist excuse for its earlier condemnation:

⁶⁶ “Review of New Books,” *The Casket* 16 (April 1840): 192.

⁶⁷ [Review of *The Pathfinder: Or the Inland Sea*], *Knickerbocker* 15 (April 1840): 345.

⁶⁸ “Literary Review,” *The Ladies’ Companion* 12 (April 1840): 296.

⁶⁹ [Review of *The Pathfinder: of the Inland Sea*], *New-York Review* 6 (April 1840): 479-80.

No man has been a greater favorite with his countryman than Mr. Cooper, so long as he condescended to amuse them; but the moment he placed himself in the ungrateful light of an instructor his interest in their affections began to diminish. The school-boy never loves the pedagogue while under the dominion of his ferule, however gratefully he may feel toward him in after life; and that great school-boy, the Public, has the same impatience of wholesome discipline—the same nervous dislike of the man who undertakes the part of a *Magister Morum*. We are glad to think that the offence of the great American *Didaskolos* will be forgotten, now that he has laid aside his scroll of “demerits,” hung up his “taws” [a leather lash used by schoolmasters for punishment], and come out once more to play with his scholars.⁷⁰

Even the most savage review of the novel, written by Park Benjamin for the New York *Evening Signal*, echoes the common assessment of these other critics:

[T]he Pathfinder has one merit; though, indeed, it is but a negative one. The book does *not* contain the mass of political, philosophical and philological ravings which have spoiled many of the author’s preceding works: nor is it filled with declamatory abuse of all foreign and domestic relations and institutions.

Indeed. . . the Pathfinder is what it professes to be, an honest and unadulterated romance: *wanting*, certainly, in most of the qualities that constitute excellence; yet not interlarded and overloaded with those absurd, extraneous, irrelevant *Cooperisms* by means of which the author has honestly endeavored to revolutionize the world, and has fairly succeeded in making himself the laughing stock of “his countrymen.” Of this latter fact, we believe, he is now aware: his critics have not labored in vain to teach him so much; and we congratulate him and them on his present tacit

⁷⁰ “Mr. Cooper’s New Work,” *New-Yorker* 8 (14 March 1840): 413. In a second review the following week, a critic signed as “G.” writes less charitably that “Mr. Cooper, having schooled and warred against the world for mistaking the bent of his genius to his heart’s content, has at length desisted; and as Mahomet, when the mountain would not come to him, exhibited his contempt of such stupid obstinacy by going to the mountain; so our author, perceiving that his contemporaries will not reverence him as a Junius, a Chesterfield, or an Admirable Crichton, but persist in regarding him as the author of some excellent sea-pieces and many lamentable failures in other departments of literature, has resolved for once to humor their perversity and show that ‘even in the ashes’ of his former sources and scenes of triumph ‘glow the wonted fires.’ His success, if not brilliant in this instance, is at least respectable.” “Mr. Cooper’s New Work,” *New-Yorker* 9 (21 March 1840): 2.

acknowledgement of the justice of their strictures, and the practical results of trying to do better.⁷¹

Notwithstanding Benjamin's bile, these reviews taken together point to the dilemma that Cooper's earlier social satires had posed to critics. Certainly there were legitimate aesthetic issues to consider in the question of whether polite literature should contain such open critiques of manners or society, or whether the author's own prejudices should become so prominent in a work. But social satire also unsettled the mediating position of critics and challenged their supposedly neutral status, putting them on the defensive about their worth. *The Pathfinder* eliminated many of these challenges and returned evaluation to the realm of the artistic rather than the political. In the case of the Whig critics, who stood to lose most by Cooper's earlier fictional offensives, a Cooper book without politics was a victory in itself, a sign (so it seemed) that he had backed down while critics held the field.

That is not to say, however, that Cooper wrote a book totally devoid of commentary about the literary battles that inspired his "political" bent. He did make serious efforts to keep the novel unencumbered by the kinds of social strictures that had upset literary decorum in *Home as Found*, but the strife he had faced over the past decade was bound to bubble to the surface in some form or another. In *The Pathfinder*, however, Cooper buries his attitudes in the fabric of the tale, without resorting to obvious self-portraiture. Park Benjamin, the polemical Whig editor of *The Evening Signal* and *The New World*, was certainly looking eagerly for hidden allusions when he reviewed the book but found them in unlikely places. In his review of *The Pathfinder* for *The Evening Signal*, he accused Cooper of making "a childish attempt to cast odium on a Scotchman, *as such*, in the Quarter Master—which outpouring of the amiable Effingham's bile is owing, probably, to the presumption of those who have incontinently presumed to place the real Scott *on a par* with the American Scott!"⁷² The "Quarter Master" Benjamin is referring to is the character Lieutenant David Muir, the quartermaster of the 55th Regiment, who is revealed as a traitor by story's end. In claiming

⁷¹ "The Pathfinder, by James F. Cooper." *The [New-York] Evening Signal*, 19 March 1840. The passage is mildly edited to remove typographical errors, replacing "authors's" with "author's," "it is" with "is it," "laborod" with "labored."

⁷² "The Pathfinder, by James F. Cooper." *The [New-York] Evening Signal*, 19 March 1840. A similar, slightly expanded review appears in *The New World* for 21 March 1840.

that Cooper's portrayal of Muir represents an attack on Sir Walter Scott, however, Benjamin overlooks that nearly the entire 55th Regiment is Scotch, including the commander, Major Duncan.⁷³

Benjamin might have been able to find more plausible allusion to Cooper's personal and professional concerns in Chapter XIII, where Cooper deals with the subject of distrust with significant emphasis that seems to reflect his view of the role critics played in destroying his reputation in the 1830s, particularly in the matter of the "Cassio" review of *The Bravo* which had precipitated so many unfortunate events for Cooper. In that chapter, Sergeant Dunham is called to a conference with Major "Lundie" Duncan before embarking with a party of men aboard Jasper Western's vessel *Scud* to garrison a British outpost in the Thousand Islands, at the mouth of Lake Ontario. Lundie brings to Dunham's attention an anonymous, unsigned letter he has recently received that, surprisingly, warns of the possibility of treachery by Jasper Western. As becomes obvious later, the letter is written by Lieutenant Muir, who fancies himself a suitor for Mabel Dunham's hand in rivalry with Jasper despite being a three-time widower nearly as old as Mabel's father, and who had shortly before lost out to Jasper and Natty in the shooting match. The letter assembles various circumstances that render Jasper "suspicious" in his connections to the French on the other side of Lake Ontario, particularly Jasper's French nickname "Eau Douce," his knowledge of the French language, and his spending the better part of his boyhood on the other side of the lake (192). Dunham assures Lundie that Jasper has "not a drop" of French blood in his veins, being the son of an "old comrade" of his, and points out that Jasper was raised by "a real English seaman" who was required to look to the French side of Lake Ontario for Jasper's nautical education only because the British lacked ports on the lake (192-193). Lundie himself had noted earlier in the conversation that "This Jasper behaved well, too, when I gave him the command of the *Scud*; no lad could have conducted himself more loyally, or better" (193), yet his distrust, once awakened, cannot be assuaged. Rather, it finds further confirmation in Lundie's own prejudices:

"I should put more faith in the lad, if he did'n't speak French! . . . It's a d----d lingo, and never did any one good—at least no British subject; for I suppose

⁷³ In contrast to Benjamin, London's *Literary Gazette* [24 (29 February 1840): 133] found the officers of the 55th "sketched in an amusing way."

the French themselves must talk together, in some language or other. I should have much more faith in this Jasper, did he know nothing of their language.” (194)

That Natty Bumppo should be Jasper’s friend, and that Sgt. Dunham should express himself willing to “risk my life on his [Jasper’s] truth,” is but a faint consolation for Lundie: “I like your confidence; it speaks well for the fellow, but that infernal letter! — There is such an air of truth about it” (195). Wishing to relieve Jasper of his duty, but having no other sailor to take his place (the salt-water seaman Charles Cap knows nothing of Lake Ontario), Lundie gives his approval for the mission to proceed, with Jasper still in command of the *Scud* but under the sharp watch of Dunham. Before sending the sergeant off, Lundie laments, “Of all wretched sensations, Dunham, distrust, where one is compelled to confide, is the most painful” (196).

Cooper certainly does not intend an autobiographical portrait in Jasper Western, but his handling of this scene betrays traces of his lingering feelings about how Americans, particularly critics, had treated him during and after his stay in Europe between 1826 and 1833 (as discussed in Chapter One). Unlike Washington Irving, whose reputation in the press for amiability was enhanced, if anything, by his seventeen-year European stay, Cooper had found himself portrayed as tainted by his seven years’ absence. He had found his patriotism called into question for “meddling” in European affairs by employing his pen to write such works as *Notions of the Americans* (1828), or for abandoning American soil as a setting for his novels in order to write his European tales *The Bravo* (1831), *The Heidenmauer* (1832), and *The Headsman* (1833), all of which were designed to illustrate the dangers of European aristocracy. The attacks had ventured further into the personal realm, branding as “aristocratic” Cooper’s habits, tastes, and even his household management, such as his decision to give his children European educations. Worst of all was the fact that many of these attacks were lobbed from under the cover of anonymity and in the columns of newspapers and reviews, media seemingly endowed with an air of fairness, objectivity, and public service but in reality slanted for personal and partisan advantage. Most embarrassing for Cooper was the “Cassio” review of *The Bravo*, which caused him public embarrassment atop the already scathing ridicule in the article.

Fittingly, then, in *The Pathfinder* Lundie's innate distrust of anything French reflects Cooper's own critique of Americans, displayed most prominently in the *Home* novels, as being prejudicially provincial, ignorantly insisting upon the mere surface of American "things" rather than placing value upon American principles. Like the characters in *Home as Found* who out of a mixture of envy and suspicion dismissively brand as "*haaji*" those who had made the "pilgrimage" to Europe, Lundie is quick to seize upon Jasper's knowledge of the "d----d lingo" of the French as a sign of tainted loyalty. Furthermore, Cooper gives emphasis to the anonymous nature of the letter by which Lundie gets his so-called evidence and the corruptive power such writing wreaks upon any who treat it as credible. Lundie's distrust, once awakened, colors not only his present outlook but also his past recollections, and even Sergeant Dunham, who protests the idea of giving any credence to anonymous communications, is influenced, leaving the meeting determined to keep a closer eye on Jasper.⁷⁴ The damage has been done, eventually leading to Dunham's removal of Jasper from command of the *Scud* and confinement below deck. Cooper himself, upon returning to America in 1833 and feeling confirmed in his belief that his audiences had been turned against him (since few spoke out publicly in his defense), considered himself a victim of a similar process. Notably, at the conclusion of the scene he adds authorial commentary:

Duncan of Lundie had said no more than the truth, when he spoke of the painful nature of distrust. Of all the feelings of the human mind, it is that which is the most treacherous in its workings, the most insidious in its approaches, and the least at the command of a generous temperament. While doubt exists, every thing may be suspected, the thoughts having no definite facts to set bounds to their wanderings, and distrust once admitted it is impossible to say to what extent conjecture may lead, or whither credulity may follow. That which had previously seemed innocent, assumes the hue of guilt, as soon as this uneasy tenant has taken possession of the thoughts, and nothing is said, or done, without being subjected to the colourings and disfigurations of jealousy and apprehension. (197)

⁷⁴ "It is not to be supposed, then, that Serjeant Dunham, after he had parted from his commanding officer, was likely to forget the injunctions he had received. He thought highly of Jasper, in general; but distrust had been insinuated between his former confidence and the obligations of duty; and, as he now felt that everything depended on his own vigilance, by the time the boat reached the side of the *Scud*, he was in a proper humour to let no suspicious circumstance go unheeded, or any unusual movement in the young sailor pass without its comment" (197).

Such reflections would hardly seem out of place in *Home as Found*, where themes of corruption were notably in the forefront and might have formed the stuff of chapters; here in *The Pathfinder*, with characters and setting at a safe distance in time and place from their author, Cooper communicates his theme in a less obviously self-referential way—subtly enough, indeed, that critics like Benjamin were left sniffing and scrounging to find Cooper’s “hidden” agendas in the book.

With “politics” subdued and no unpleasant surprises such as sequels to contend with, Cooper’s American publishers seem to have realized once the bulk of the novel was in their hands that *The Pathfinder* would fulfill their expectations. Eager to market the return of the “classic” Cooper, Lea & Blanchard nonetheless worried about the timing of the novel’s release. Despite having it ready by the end of 1839, a combination of bad economic conditions and the seasonal obstacles in transportation caused them to hold back the work until better conditions prevailed.⁷⁵ Cooper explained to Bentley on 4 January 1840 that the “state of the times. . . has disinclined Lea & Blanchard to print. They do not intend to publish before the middle of March; or until the ice leaves our rivers; perhaps not until near April.”⁷⁶ Similarly, he explained to James De Peyster Ogden that “Lea & Co, have two books of mine *printed*, that they intend to keep back until March, on account of the times.”⁷⁷ When ready, Lea & Blanchard primed the marketplace with a good deal of pre-publication promotion, announcing the work and distributing review copies widely. One of the earliest reviews, appearing in the formerly hostile *New Yorker* on the 14 March 1840, the same day *The Pathfinder* was published, alludes to the sensation already awaiting the book upon its release thanks to early publicity: “It is long since a forthcoming work has excited so much interest in anticipation as this novel—long especially since a new production from Mr. Cooper’s pen was heralded with the same partial expectation; for the mere announcement of

⁷⁵ “The monied affairs of this town are in a sad state,” Cooper reported to his wife from Philadelphia on Christmas, 1839, also noting that boats were running only as far as Poughkeepsie on the Hudson River; *Letters and Journals* 3:455.

⁷⁶ JFC to Richard Bentley, 4 January 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:5.

⁷⁷ JFC to James De Peyster Ogden, 14 January 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:11. The delay caused Cooper some uneasiness about his cash flow since his notes from Lea & Blanchard were dated from the day of publication.

its character, some months since, revived instantly much of his somewhat faded popularity.”⁷⁸ Similarly, the reviewer for Philadelphia’s *The Casket* notes, “This long expected work has at length made its appearance, and fully merits the encomiums bestowed upon it by those who had the good fortune to peruse it before publication.”⁷⁹ Park Benjamin, by contrast, sensing the likely popularity of the book, hoped to downplay expectations:

There was a time when the above announcement [of Cooper’s name] on the title-page of a book, or at the head of an advertisement would, in theatrical parlance, *draw*; but that time has passed away. . . . It is a pity for the remnants of Mr. Cooper’s reputation that this book should have been written. It is also to be regretted that his publishers were at the expense of securing its copy-right and casting for it stereotype plates: there is not enough of enterprise even in America to interfere with the former; nor of *gullibility* to reimburse the latter.⁸⁰

Most critics, however, were quick to notice the happy convergence of Cooper’s most marketable qualities in the nautical and forest settings: “*Sailors*, Indians and hunters are so grouped together that every tract of novel-writing in which Mr. Cooper has been hitherto most successful is combined in one complete fiction, one striking effort of his best powers as an author,” gushes the *New-Yorker*.⁸¹ The reviewer for *The Casket* observes, “Some passages in it equal the finest ones in the *Last of the Mohicans*, and others do not suffer in comparison with like ones in the *Pilot* or *Red Rover*.” Natty Bumppo’s revival, of course, was most welcome, signifying the return of an “old friend.”⁸²

The work sold relatively well: *Godey’s Lady’s Book* for May 1840 states that “The sales of this work have been very numerous,”⁸³ and two months after its publication Cooper could

⁷⁸ “Mr. Cooper’s New Work,” *The New-Yorker* 8 (14 March 1840): 413. Rufus W. Griswold was probably the reviewer.

⁷⁹ “Review of New Books,” *The Casket* 16 (April 1840): 192.

⁸⁰ “The Pathfinder, by James F. Cooper.” *The [New-York] Evening Signal*, 19 March 1840, and *The New World*, 21 March 1840.

⁸¹ “Mr. Cooper’s New Work,” *New-Yorker* 8 (14 March 1840): 413.

⁸² “Review of New Books,” *The Casket* 16 (April 1840): 192.

⁸³ “Editor’s Book Table,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 20 (May 1840): 239.

boast to his wife, "Lea has sold near 4000 of *Pathfinder*. It has great success, in the worst of times — Indeed, it is the only thing that does sell. The opposition reviews are laughed at. They have done me no harm, and themselves a great deal."⁸⁴ That same month *The Knickerbocker* cites the novel's strong sales and its dooming effect on Cooper's detractors, suggesting where the real measure of success could be found:

Violent extremes have violent ends, and in their violence die, may be said (though the parody be something strained,) of Mr. Cooper's recent critics. 'The *Pathfinder*' has thus early passed on to a second edition, despite the effects of ultra critiques, which declare, on the one hand, that the work is equal to anything Scott ever wrote! — and on the other, that it is utterly unreadable! Meantime, it should seem, the public read, and judge for themselves; and thus Mr. Cooper is 'saved' alike from his friends and enemies.⁸⁵

Admiration for the work was long-lasting, at least in literary circles. As late as January and March of 1841, *The Knickerbocker* and Bryant's *Evening Post* reprinted an approving review of the novel by French novelist Honore de Balzac,⁸⁶ and among other fellow authors, the work inspired praise from Washington Irving, Rufus W. Griswold, and Francis Parkman well into the next decade. Though *The Pathfinder* is probably the least-considered Leatherstocking tale today because it lacks the gravity of social insight offered by the other works in the series, in its own day it was recognized as a tale told well, combining the most renowned of Cooper's artistic talents in one story.

Although *The Pathfinder* provided an ample vindication of Cooper's artistic reputation and his continued commercial relevance, his next novel dampened much of the momentum he had gained. *Mercedes of Castile*, a novel based on Christopher Columbus's discovery of the new world, would prove an utter failure, both commercially and artistically, despite Cooper's

⁸⁴ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 14 [May] 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:34.

⁸⁵ "Editor's Table," *Knickerbocker* 15 (May 1840): 449.

⁸⁶ "Literary Notices," *Knickerbocker* 17 (January 1841): 72-77; *The [New York] Evening Post*, 26 March 1841.

high hopes for it. The book is nearly forgotten today, deservedly so from a literary standpoint. Donald Ringe writes that “*Mercedes of Castile* (1840), a slow-paced story of the discovery of America, must be quickly passed over as the worst mature novel that he wrote.”⁸⁷ As far back as 1860 Cooper’s own daughter Susan passed over it in her anthology *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper*, the only other novel left out up to that point in Cooper’s career is *The Heidenmauer* (for reasons that are less clear). Even three years after the book was published, Cooper himself, in recounting his successes and failures to *Graham’s Magazine* editor Rufus W. Griswold, had some difficulty in summing up the book’s failure; in a sentence rife with cancellations, he writes, “Mercedes failed; <and> <simply> <principally> <because> the story was too familiar.”⁸⁸ As Robert Madison has noted, “It didn’t sound like he really knew what happened.”⁸⁹ Whatever literary failures justify the novel’s critical neglect, however, *Mercedes of Castile* is nevertheless interesting as an artifact of Cooper’s career as a professional author. A would-be blockbuster that flopped, *Mercedes* reveals some of Cooper’s worst authorial instincts emerging between a pair of novels that demonstrate some of his best.

In October 1839, while at work on *The Pathfinder*, Cooper set about making his arrangements for the tale that would follow. His deal with Lea & Blanchard had been concluded several months before in July, but he had still not concluded his negotiations with Richard Bentley, whose offered price, as previously noted, was lower than Cooper had anticipated on account of losses he had suffered on the series of European travels and especially the costly English edition of *The History of the Navy*. Working in Philadelphia on seeing the second edition of the *History of the Navy* and the first volume of *The Pathfinder* through the press, Cooper forwarded sheets for the first part of *The Pathfinder* and notified Bentley about his newest project. Hoping to secure a better price for the British edition of *The Pathfinder* by bundling it in a package deal, Cooper talked up his seminal plan for the next book:

⁸⁷ Donald R. Ringe, *James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: Twayne, 1962) 80.

⁸⁸ JFC to Rufus W. Griswold, [10-18 January?] 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:345.

⁸⁹ Robert D. Madison, “Cooper’s Columbus,” *James Fenimore Cooper: His Country and His Art* 5 (1985): 76.

I like the idea of Columbus, which is a subject I have thought of, and which I feel a disposition to undertake. Such a book, however, must be better than common; written with care, and a little in the 'Ercles vein.'⁹⁰ It must also be O.P.⁹¹ If you will give £1000 for the *Pathfinder* and the Columbus -- name not decided -- £500 each, I will engage to send you the last, in readiness for next June, which I believe is your market day -- wind and weather permitting. I really like the subject, and have an ambition to touch the heroics. Let me hear from you, as soon as convenient on the subject.⁹²

With the proposal just in the mail, Cooper was already adjusting his plans to accommodate the new project, and he reported to his wife just a day later that "I have cut out new work, and shall not write the third volume of the history, immediately, if I ever write it."⁹³

Cooper's prediction came true; the third volume of the *Naval History* was not published. Bentley accepted the offer (albeit with a £200 abatement on *The Pathfinder*, as discussed above, not quite to Cooper's satisfaction), confirming the direction Cooper had chosen.⁹⁴ Lea & Blanchard, however, struck no bargain with Cooper until 18 May 1840, perhaps out of a desire to first see how *The Pathfinder* would fare in the marketplace, ultimately agreeing to pay Cooper \$2500 for 5000 copies and exclusive rights to the novel for two years.⁹⁵

As can be seen from Cooper's proposal, the new novel, then unnamed but eventually entitled *Mercedes of Castile*, was grounded in the same revived spirit of commercialism that led him to revive Natty Bumppo in *The Pathfinder*. A work dealing with subjects as major as

⁹⁰ "Ercles vein": "a rousing, somewhat bombastic manner of public speaking or writing. In William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act I, scene 2), 'Ercles' vein' is Bottom's expression for the style of speech he considers appropriate to the character of 'Ercles,' i.e., Hercules." "Ercles vein," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2004.

⁹¹ "O.P.": uncertain; perhaps "optimus": "the best."

⁹² JFC to Bentley, 18 October 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:433-34.

⁹³ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 19 October 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:436.

⁹⁴ Richard Bentley to JFC, 8 November 1839: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁹⁵ Contract for "_____ being on the subject of the voyage of Columbus to America" [*Mercedes of Castile*], 18 May 1840: MS, Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Columbus and his discovery of America could hardly be considered a low-profile effort, and Cooper would be treading upon familiar territory, particularly after the appearance of Washington Irving's then-definitive four-volume *Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* in 1828. Retelling such a well-known tale would require an expert touch to be true to the demands of both history and romance. Cooper, fresh from the *History of the Navy* and at work on *The Pathfinder*, thought that he was just the person to provide those touches, and his aims for the work were accordingly high. "Such a book ought to be better than common; more accurately written, and more carefully elaborated," he repeated to Bentley. "[M]y desire is to make of the Columbus a high wrought and standard fiction -- to rest my credit on it. I think I can produce something that will take its place among the standard works of the language, and I feel a disposition to try my hand on this book."⁹⁶

Why he would attempt to write a story featuring Columbus—a historical person about whom virtually everybody knew—right after writing a novel about Natty Bumppo, a character of his own creation, is an intriguing question. Apparently the idea of a novel dealing with the voyages of Columbus had been mentioned by Bentley at some earlier time (not located in surviving correspondence), for in reiterating his desire to undertake the story in a letter of 12 November 1839 Cooper speaks of it as "one on your own subject, Columbus," and later, on 23 March 1840, he similarly tells James De Peyster Ogden that "I am writing a tale on Columbus' voyage, at Bentley's suggestion, and I think it will hit."⁹⁷ But the immediate catalyst for undertaking it was Cooper's own reading of William Hickling Prescott's *A History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella*, published in 1838: "The last subject [Columbus] is one I have often thought of, and reading Prescott's capital work on Ferdinand and Isabella [has] excited a desire to treat it."⁹⁸

If his imagination was inspired by such outside reading, his competitive instinct was also stimulated, for certainly an element of one-upsmanship must be acknowledged in the creation of *Mercedes*. Cooper recognized the familiarity of the Columbus story and the

⁹⁶ JFC to Bentley, 12 November 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:443.

⁹⁷ JFC to Bentley, 12 November 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:443; JFC to James De Peyster Ogden, 23 March 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:26.

⁹⁸ JFC to Bentley, 12 November 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:443.

challenge of making it interesting anew, but he felt confident that applying the kinds of historical and nautical knowledge that he had used for *The History of the Navy* would produce both a fresher and a more accurate historical picture than had yet been provided in any single work. "The subject is trite, but minute knowledge can give it freshness and interest," he told Ogden.⁹⁹ Using supplemental sources such as Prescott's *Ferdinand and Isabella* and Samuel Kettell's translation of Columbus's journal,¹⁰⁰ he hoped to give the novel more historical fidelity than his main source, Washington Irving's *Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, had offered, particularly in the nautical details. At one point about midway or later in the novel's composition, he wrote as follows to his best friend, Commodore William Branford Shubrick:

I am getting out a book called Mercedes of Castile. . . . Columbus appears in it, and the voyage is given at some length, and without Irving's blunders. *He* makes the distance between Ferro, which is in 18° long. I believe and St. Salvador, which is 72 w. long. or which 54° of log. asunder 700 leagues. The degrees are about 60 English miles each, and of course the distance between the places is about 1100 leagues. But he knows nothing of such matters.¹⁰¹

Applying his expertise to the technical aspects of the book would produce not just a more accurate work but a more masculine one, too, appealing to what was perceived to be the more scientific and mechanical interests of a male audience. Cooper also felt confident that he could surpass any former telling of the Columbus story in capturing the romantic flavor of the endeavor. Irving and Prescott, to be sure, wrote their histories with ample flair for capturing the pioneering quality of Columbus's undertaking and the momentousness of the obstacles he had to overcome, but, of course, in a romance Cooper could take more creative liberties to embellish actual events and characters. One thing in the historical Columbus narrative was lacking to complete its romantic appeal, particularly to feminine readers as they were then envisaged: a compelling love story. "There must be a love story, of course,"

⁹⁹ JFC to James De Peyster Ogden, 23 March 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:26.

¹⁰⁰ *Personal Narrative of the First Voyage of Columbus to America*, trans. Samuel Kettell (Boston, T.B. Wait and Son, 1827).

¹⁰¹ JFC to William Branford Shubrick, 2 August 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:53.

Cooper told Bentley in one of his early proposals for the work.¹⁰² Since Columbus could not be involved in any such doings directly, Cooper created fictional characters to fulfill his intention: Don Luis de Bobadilla, a brave young nobleman with perhaps too strong a taste for adventure, and Mercedes de Valverde, an orphaned niece and ward of Beatriz de Bobadilla, a close companion of Queen Isabella who also happens to be Luis's aunt. Luis, like Beatriz and Mercedes, becomes captivated by Columbus's bold project, and to overcome the ladies' misgivings about his suitability for Mercedes, it is decided that Luis will join the voyage to cure him of his impetuous "roving" nature. The logic of this cure is puzzling, but supposedly the voyage will allow Luis to demonstrate dedication and to show his religious devotion by helping to bring Christianity to the heathens. To keep a low profile on the voyage, Luis assumes a pseudonym, Pedro de Muños—a name Cooper pulled from among Columbus's real crewmen to give a factual air to the introduction of fictional characters to the work.¹⁰³

The plan for the novel seemed workable, even promising, yet the enacting of it proved disastrous. In his attempt to outdo his sources in producing a more accurate historical account, Cooper could never distance himself sufficiently from them.¹⁰⁴

Borrowing heavily from Prescott in the first chapters of the story, Cooper attempted to create a more vivid account of the courtship and marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella, circa 1469, than the one that Irving had included in his work to set the tone for the age. However relevant such an opening might have been in Irving's history, in Cooper's novel it is woefully out of place, occupying a full three chapters that have little to do with the rest of the story, set in 1492. At the end of this exhausting prelude to the story proper, Cooper virtually admits the waste of space: "The main incidents of our tale will now transport us to this era [1492], and to this scene; all that has been related, as yet, being merely introductory matter,

¹⁰² JFC to Richard Bentley, 12 November 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:444.

¹⁰³ Donald M. Goodfellow, "The Sources of *Mercedes of Castile*," *American Literature* 12 (1940): 324-25.

¹⁰⁴ See Goodfellow 318-28 for a detailed discussion of Cooper's use of source material.

to prepare the reader for the events that are to follow" (1:52).¹⁰⁵ And ironically, for all his bluster about Irving's incompetence in the handling of nautical details in the work, Cooper could do little else than depend upon Irving's narrative for many parts of the story, for he was far outside his area of expertise in dealing with pre-modern Spain, and nobody else had told the Columbus story as definitively as had Irving. As Cooper tried to distinguish his narrative from Irving's, he found himself, as Robert Madison says, "scratching, digging, trying to find the unnoticed fact, the overlooked detail—anything that would give Cooper's narrative more detail—and therefore, Cooper supposed, more interest—than Irving's account." Trying to improve upon the nautical details, "Cooper not only scooped up every detail of weather from Samuel Kettell's translation of the journal Las Casas had transcribed hundreds of years before, he also plundered Kettell's own explanatory notes for 'different' facts."¹⁰⁶ What Cooper failed to recognize is that such pedantic historical nitpicking was not the stuff of an exciting tale. The result of his misplaced attempts to provide "freshness and interest" through "minute knowledge" is that the story, particularly in its details of the voyage itself, is "source-bound" (to use Thomas Philbrick's term).¹⁰⁷ In 1824 Cooper had attempted, in *Lionel Lincoln*, to write a minutely accurate historical novel dealing with the Revolutionary War in Boston. Although its portrayal of the Battle of Bunker Hill was acclaimed in some circles as the definitive narrative on the subject, the novel as a whole had been a failure, too constrained by Cooper's attempts to stick to fact to allow a stirring tale to develop. The failure of that book had prompted Cooper to abandon a projected series of similar historical novels ("Legends of the Thirteen Republics") dealing with each of the thirteen colonies, causing him to focus on freer, more romantic fiction (*The Last of the Mohicans* was his next book). In *Mercedes of Castile*, Cooper once again became an awkward slave to fact. As Philbrick writes, "In no other novel are Cooper's powers of invention so circumscribed by fact, for none is so dominated by the character and deeds of a historical

¹⁰⁵ Citations are taken from the first edition, *Mercedes of Castile: or, the Voyage to Cathay. By the Author of "The Bravo," "The Headsman," "The Last of the Mohicans," &c.*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1840).

¹⁰⁶ Madison 80.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1961) 126.

figure.”¹⁰⁸ Donald Ringe adds, “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.”¹⁰⁹

Significant other flaws accompany this central problem. In transmuting the Columbus story from history to novel, Cooper was left to rely on dialogue for much of the “newness” of the work since well-known facts dictated so much of the action. Robert Madison shows that much of the supplementary source material Cooper integrated into the novel was introduced as dialogue, and he argues convincingly that Cooper’s excessive reliance on conversation, at the expense of the kind of narrative and descriptive powers Cooper was justly famous for, forms the dominant handicap of the work. “*Mercedes* ought to be regarded as an experiment in dialogue,” he contends; “All those facts that *could* bog down a novel, are integrated into dialogue which *does* *Mercedes of Castile* is a kind of play, but a play without action.”¹¹⁰

Mercedes also suffers in its pacing, in ways that seem to have affected the delivery of the story. The irrelevance of the opening chapters insinuates that Cooper conceived of the story on a grand scale yet never in the early stages of composition realistically considered how everything would fit into the traditional confines of the novel format.¹¹¹ Adding new characters, dialogue, descriptive passages, and additional historical and nautical information to the already substantial tomes of Irving and Prescott would take a tremendous amount of space, but Cooper seems not to have come fully to grips with this problem until well into the story. Already in January 1840 he was alerting Bentley that the novel’s projected high quality would call for more time than originally proposed: “I am afraid June will be a little too soon for the Columbus, as I wish that to be a work of some character. August would come nearer the mark.” But by the time he was nearly a third of the way finished with the book, he still

¹⁰⁸ Philbrick 126.

¹⁰⁹ Ringe 80.

¹¹⁰ Madison 78-79.

¹¹¹ JFC to Richard Bentley, 4 January 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:6.

had not gotten Columbus out to sea.¹¹² Writing to Bentley in March 1840, he exuded confidence: “The first volume of Columbus (this is not the name) is done. It brings the story down to the commencement of the voyage, and, is, I think a good opening. The love-story dove-tails well.”¹¹³ Around halfway through the book’s composition, though, Cooper began to take steps, consciously or not, to lower expectations gently while maintaining the appearance of optimism. In June 1840, drawing on Bentley for £100 against the second volume (of three British) even though he had not finished it, Cooper expressed his current estimation of the project in terms that did not bode well for what he had already composed: “I think the book promises very well. Its character depends on the last volume.”¹¹⁴ Sometime after that, he seems to have fallen into a slump, perhaps partially caused by recognition of the log-style sameness the section covering the voyage was taking on.¹¹⁵ On 15 October, Lea & Blanchard, worried that delay might cause the book to be published too late in winter, when the closing of navigation in some parts of the country could harm sales, chided Cooper for his lack of progress:

We are quite disappointed in not hearing from you with more M.S. The time is passing away without making the progress we calculated on & we fear that the Season will get by unless you make an exertion to put the remainder of the M.S. in our hands –

Fortunately, though the publishers could not have known it, that same day Cooper reported fresh confidence to his wife—inspired, perhaps, by a short cruise at sea with Commodore Shubrick on the *USS Macedonian*: “I have revised [or revived] my manuscript, and am now

¹¹² See Madison 79-84 for a consideration of the novel’s structure.

¹¹³ JFC to Richard Bentley, 30 March 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:27.

¹¹⁴ JFC to Richard Bentley, 6 June 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:42. It would not be until 29 August that Cooper would send Bentley “not quite half” of the work as it was going through the press in Philadelphia.

¹¹⁵ Writing to his wife on 10 October about his having to delay plans for a cruise afloat with Shubrick, Cooper dryly added, “When you write to Paul [their son, away at college] give my love to him — I cannot send him a journal of a cruise, so he must read Mercedes to make amends.” JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 10 October 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:90.

finishing the book afloat.”¹¹⁶ And indeed, the later parts of the novel are where the best action occur and where Cooper’s love plot again comes into play: Luis’s faithfulness to Mercedes is put to the test by his admiration for a beautiful native, Ozema, who combines a resemblance to Mercedes that is startling (Luis exclaims “Mercedes!” upon first seeing her) with a natural freedom that obviously charms him. If anything, Cooper was correct in his forecast to Bentley that the last installment of the novel would prove the best, but coming so late in the story, it seems rushed and insufficient to revive sagging interest.

Characterization suffers, too. As London’s *Athenaeum* would complain, Cooper “avoided, as much as possible, the thousand accessory personages connected with the scheme of the Genoese discoverer” and concentrated most of his attention on already well-known figures, particularly Columbus. Apart from Luis, Mercedes, and Ozema, the only other really memorable new character Cooper introduced into the book was a common sailor, Sancho Mundo, who follows the model established by Long Tom Coffin in *The Pilot* and Dick Fid in *The Red Rover* of the thorough sea-dog. Whereas Cooper often excelled with characters of a lower social status, his high-born ones were often panned for their woodenness, and in *Mercedes* nearly the entire cast consisted of nobility (either by birthright, or, in Columbus’s case, by the dignity of his calling). Cooper knew little about courtly life in fifteenth-century Spain, and relying on supplemental support from Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* and Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* would hardly seem a recipe for success. The courtly scenes of the novel are stiff, formal, and often unmistakably “Victorian” in their properness. As had been the case with his introduction of other thinly-veiled historical characters in his fiction, George Washington in *The Spy* and John Paul Jones in *The Pilot*, Cooper’s treatment of Columbus is overly dignified and wooden, setting what Donald Ringe aptly calls “a tone of pompous solemnity from which the book never really emerges.”¹¹⁷

While Cooper’s fixation on, and failings with, the character of Columbus may have much to do with his excessive dependence on historical sources, a further cause is his investing too much of himself in his portrayal of Columbus as a voice of “truth.” Just two years earlier, in his review of J.G. Lockhart’s *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*, Cooper had criticized

¹¹⁶ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 15 October 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:91.

¹¹⁷ Ringe 80.

Scott for his excessive “seemliness” which caused him to compromise truth to maintain popularity, even to the extent of propagating fraudulent personal and professional practices (see Chapter One).¹¹⁸ By contrast, Cooper had implicitly held up his own devotion to truth, implying that he himself had paid the price of upholding it by being unpopular. Fittingly, then, in *Columbus*, the visionary explorer who appears nearly a madman to those unwilling to believe in him, Cooper seems to find a reflection of his own self-image as an author: a pioneer, ahead of his age, and unappreciated. Here, indeed, Cooper departs from his sources with regularity to tap into his own sensibilities. For instance, lacking many specifics of Columbus’s physical description, Cooper instead brings Columbus on the scene surrounded by a dignified moral aura reminiscent of that surrounding the Effinghams in *Home as Found*: upon first seeing Columbus from a distance, Luis perceives him as “a man of very grave and reverend appearance, though of simple deportment” (1:57); the friar who pointed out Columbus to Luis, Father Pedro, similarly observes in Columbus “a loftiness in his dignified countenance that one is not accustomed to meet in those who are unused to power” (1:57). Queen Isabella’s reflections later in the story confirm similar qualities, intended to reflect Cooper’s own uniquely elevated position as an American author intent on guileless truth, particularly in contrast to Scott’s “seemliness”:

The queen was deeply impressed with the air of lofty truth that elevated the thoughts and manners of the speaker. . . . Columbus had not the finish of manner that is fancied courts only can bestow, and which it would be more just to refer to lives devoted to habits of pleasing; but the character of the man shone through the exterior, and, in his case, all that artificial training could supply fell short of the noble aspect of nature, sustained by high aspirations. To a commanding person, and a gravity that was heightened by the loftiness of his purposes, Columbus added the sober earnestness of a deeply-seated and all-pervading enthusiasm, which threw the grace of truth and probity on what he said and did. No quality of his mind was more apparent than its sense of right, as right was then considered in connection with the opinions of the age. . . . (1:134)

Cooper may pay homage here to the Quaker heritage of his father, William Cooper, by lending Columbus the honest air of a Quaker enthusiast. Elsewhere Columbus reflects Cooper’s ideals in maintaining a self-respect “not to be lessened by clamour,” appreciating

¹¹⁸ [Review of *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* By J.G. Lockhart.] “Literary Notices.” *The Knickerbocker Magazine* 12 (October 1838): 349-66.

“ignorance and narrowness of views too justly to suffer them to change his own high purposes” (1:110). Cooper’s own frustrated aspirations of having his vision appreciated by any besides “a few of the more liberal and enlightened minds of the nation” are perhaps clearest in a passage where Columbus, temporarily dismissed from the Spanish court after seven years of unsuccessful solicitation, finds his hopes dashed:

He had thought his motives understood, his character appreciated, and his high objects felt; but now he found himself still regarded as a visionary projector, his intentions distrusted, and his promised services despised. In a word, the bright expectations that had cheered his toil for years, had vanished in a day, and the disappointment was all the greater for the brief but delusive hopes produced by his recent favour. (1:121)

Still, Columbus/Cooper refuses to undervalue himself or his ideas; perhaps idealistically recasting the author-publisher relationship, Cooper has one minor character, Luis de St. Angel, voice the opinion that “the character of the man, and the value of his intentions, may be appreciated by the price he setteth on his own services” (1:124). Columbus’s steadfastness causes the wise Queen Isabella to remark to her advisers, “We must be neither harsh nor hasty with this Genoese. . . He hath the virtues of devoutness and fair-dealing, and these are qualities that sovereigns learn to prize. His demands, no doubt, have become somewhat exaggerated by long brooding, in his thoughts, on a favorite and great scheme; but kind words and reason may yet lead him to more moderation” (1:107). Such words seem to point to an acknowledgement on Cooper’s part of his own high-spiritedness in the 1830s but also express a hope that Cooper’s own habits of “fair-dealing” may be appreciated in a way that will once again restore him to the favor of his countrymen.

In Columbus’s success, Cooper finds the triumph of visionary steadfastness that loosely parallels his own initial success as an author but far surpasses anything he received in his campaign for “truth.” Columbus returns to honor, glory, and rewards of greater resources for undertaking his further explorations—and, what is more important, a vindication of his ideas, soon to revolutionize the world. Yet Cooper is also keen to show that success will not be allowed to stand. At the conclusion of the story, Columbus speaks to Luis of how his further voyages will be made even more hazardous by men seeking actively to undermine his reputation:

"I go forth from Spain, on a far more perilous adventure than that in which thou wert my companion. Then I sailed concealed in contempt, and veiled from human eyes by ignorance and pity; now, have I left the old world, followed by malignancy and envy. These facts am I too old not to have seen, and foreseen. In my absence, many will be busy with my name. Even they who now shout at my heels, will become my calumniators, revenging themselves for past adulation by present detraction. The sovereigns will be beset with lies, and any disappointment in the degree of success will be distorted into crimes. . . On ye, then, do I greatly rely, not for favours, but for the interest of truth and justice." (2:226)

Such a passage calls to mind Charles King, once a member of Cooper's "Bread and Cheese" club in the 1820s but later one of his chief detractors in the 1830s as editor of the *New-York American*; doubtless Cooper had others, particularly critics, in mind as well. What would remain to be seen, particularly in the libel suits that were beginning to heat up as Cooper composed and published the novel, was whether or not Cooper would be vindicated in the court of law—of which result he felt confident—and the court of public opinion—about which he was not as sanguine. What stands out as most interesting in Cooper's portrayal of authorial concerns in *Columbus* is the audacity of his identification with one of history's major figures, which hints at either (or perhaps both) Cooper's grand vision for his vocation as an author or the hubris that seemed to afflict him at the time he wrote *Mercedes*.

A prime example of such hubris lies in Cooper's vacillation over the title for the work. From the start he used "Columbus" as a working title but had no intention of going with such an obvious name. "I do not intend to call the new book 'Columbus,' he declared to Bentley on 12 November 1839, "There must be a love story, of course, and that will affect the name. I only intend that the voyage shall be a leading point in the work. Do not therefore announce in any way as 'Columbus.' Perhaps it will be better to say nothing about it, yet, as we have *Pathfinder* on hand of the success of which I have pretty strong hopes."¹¹⁹ Several months into the composition of the story, he still had made no decision about what to call it, appealing to Bentley for advice on 30 March 1840: "Write me immediately, and suggest a name for the *Columbus*. I cannot please myself, and am willing to hear counsel."¹²⁰ Bentley, in his reply of 11 June, stated his preference for something

¹¹⁹ JFC to Bentley, 12 November 1839: *Letters and Journals* 3:444-45.

¹²⁰ JFC to Bentley, 30 March 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:28.

straightforward: "The title originally proposed to you by me still appears to be the best -- Columbus, a Romance of the New World."¹²¹ In the meantime, Cooper signed his contract with Lea & Blanchard on 18 May without settling the matter, leaving the document to describe "a novel. . . called _____ being on the subject of the Voyage of Columbus to America."¹²² By 6 June, he had formed some notions of a title on his own: "I have not yet quite determined on the name, but think it will be 'Mercedes de Valverde, or the Voyage to Cathay.' The sheets, however, will bring you the title."¹²³ Bentley's advice to keep "Columbus" as the title went unheeded; forwarding proof copy on 29 August, Cooper wrote, "I send you not quite half of Mercedes of Castile. . . . I wish you to keep my name, as the story is connected with it."¹²⁴ *Mercedes of Castile*, however, was not an appealing title to Cooper's publishers. Both Bentley and Lea & Blanchard tried to display the name of Columbus as prominently as possible (the spine of the first American edition reads "Mercedes: A Romance of the Days of Columbus"), though they ultimately followed Cooper's wishes. Apparently seeing Bentley's pre-publication advertising, Cooper complained to his wife on 28 October, "Bentley has changed the name to Christopher Columbus, or, Mercedes of Castile, a miserable misnomer, and a pure catch penny. Lea & B---- had done the same thing, but I have put a stop to the proceeding, and told them I shall hold them responsible for the copy right, if any mistake occurs. These booksellers have no souls."¹²⁵ But as Bentley later would sardonically remind Cooper, *Mercedes of Castile; or, The Voyage to Cathay* gave little indication of the book's character, particularly since in the middle portions of the work the title character never appears. "It was unfortunate that you *enjoined*

¹²¹ Bentley to JFC, 11 June 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:29.

¹²² Contract for "_____ being on the subject of the voyage of Columbus to America" [*Mercedes of Castile*], 18 May 1840: MS, Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹²³ JFC to Bentley, 6 June 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:42.

¹²⁴ JFC to Bentley, 29 August 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:61.

¹²⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 28 October 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:96.

me to preserve *your* title, which gave no interest of an extraordinary kind to the work,” Bentley wrote early in 1841, already finding the novel a failure in Great Britain.¹²⁶

Cooper’s predictions that he would make a “standard work” out of his Columbus story also came back to haunt him. Despite adequate pre-publication advertisement,¹²⁷ *Mercedes* failed to sell. The contract for the work had given Lea & Blanchard the option of publishing additional copies beyond the initial five thousand at the rate of forty cents per copy to Cooper, and had included an unusual provision for the rights to revert to Cooper within the two years stipulated if Lea & Blanchard did not “keep the market supplied by printing other editions.”¹²⁸ Such safeguards of Cooper’s rights turned out to be entirely unnecessary. Sales proved so dismal that three months after the publication of *Mercedes*, Lea & Blanchard felt the need to discuss the matter at length with Cooper in their letter of 9 February 1841:

Dear Sir,

We have been collecting all our a/c sales for this past year & find so few of *Mercedes* to have sold that we have thought it proper to address you on the subject.

In a mercantile point of view the book has proved a total failure. Nothing that we have undertaken of yours having more completely failed. We printed four thousand copies & of these the sales do not exceed 15 or 1800 copies in all. Every where we find, in place of being able to draw for the money, that the work is on hand. One house in Boston to whom we sent

¹²⁶ Bentley to JFC, 7 January 1841: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹²⁷ As early as August 1840, three months before publication, Philadelphia’s *The Casket* [17 (August 1840): 96] announced the novel: “*Mercedes of Castile, or a voyage to Cathay—by J.F. Cooper*, is the title of a new novel now in press in this city, and to be shortly published by Messrs. Lea & Blanchard. Whatever Mr. Cooper writes is generally written well. Amid the grandeur of the ocean storm, or the silence of the wilderness, surrounded by the raging mountain billows, or enveloped by ruthless savages, he walks unequalled, ‘the thunderer of the scene.’” And an excerpt of the novel appeared in an unlikely venue, Horace Greeley’s *The New-Yorker*, on 21 November 1840, the newspaper “having been favored by the publishers with a copy of the work in advance of its public appearance.”

¹²⁸ Contract for “_____ being on the subject of the voyage of Columbus to America” [*Mercedes of Castile*], 18 May 1840: MS, Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

80 copies returns us a sale of 10 copies & many others in nearly as bad a proportion--few have sold over half the quantity sent.

In distributing a work, we expect, usually, the first distribution to *sell at once*, & then to secure orders for second supplies. In this case we have received no second orders.

Now under the circumstances of this state of the sale of this work & the fact that we stated to you our disappointment in the character of the work before publication it being different from what you stated previously to finishing it, we would ask you if this heavy loss should fall entirely upon us. By our agreement we have no rights to call upon you; but we think you will allow that the loss is to [sic] much for us to take entirely.

We would suggest to your consideration the remitting of the copy money on the 1000 copies not printed. Even then we shall have to work hard to get the money invested in the work returned to us.¹²⁹

Whether or not Cooper returned the requested copy money—some \$500—for the thousand copies not printed remains a mystery. His response on 18 February is unlocated, but referred to in Lea & Blanchard's letter of 24 February 1841, wherein they write, cryptically, "We have yours of the 19th in'st. [instant] & note what you say. When you shall be here we can discuss the matter of your letter & see what 'category' as your captain w'd say we shall be in."¹³⁰ Also unclear is the matter of which features caused Lea & Blanchard to express "disappointment in the character of the work before publication" (though the fact that it was "different from what [Cooper] stated previously to finishing it" is clear enough), since shortly before the book was published, Cooper had commented on Lea's approval of it in a letter to his wife: "I am glad you like Mercedes. Lea has read it, and likes it too. You think very much the same about it."¹³¹ Reconciling these conflicting testimonies would be no easy matter. What is clear, though, is that through his overconfidence Cooper damaged his own credibility with his publishers. Bentley's report from London was similar: by 6 March 1841 he could confirm that he would "incur a positive loss, as the demand has quite ceased";

¹²⁹ Lea & Blanchard to JFC, 9 February 1841: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. To break even, Lea & Blanchard needed to sell more than three thousand copies of *Mercedes*.

¹³⁰ Lea & Blanchard to JFC, 24 February 1841: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. The "'category'" reference is to Captain Truck of *Homeward Bound/Home as Found*, who habitually uses the term as a synonym for "predicament."

¹³¹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 28 October 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:96.

consequently, his offer for Cooper's next novel dropped from £500 to £300.¹³² To be sure, blaming Cooper alone for the novel's failure would be to discount other potential extenuating circumstances, such as the relatively high cost of the book as prices for literature began the precipitous drop that would hit bottom around 1843, or the poor conditions in the marketplace that stifled most new publications in general.

One thing that must have struck Cooper, though, was that the failure of the book in the marketplace could not be pinned on the mischief of critics—his own artistic failure, rather than a conspiracy of his enemies, was largely to blame. Considering the book's faults, especially to the reader of today, contemporary criticism of *Mercedes of Castile* was surprisingly even-handed. Certainly there were those who excoriated the work, some out of more than just literary motives. Park Benjamin of the *New World* resorted to ridicule without any pretension of having read the book—a foretaste of the new direction of Cooper's enemies who, despite their bravado, would begin to feel the real effects of his libel suits and seek a safer path to obliterating Cooper's career by ignoring him. Declaring the book unreadable, Benjamin claims he is unable to judge the book's merits but facetiously adds:

Yet, by way of avoiding a libel-suit, we may say, hypothetically, that Mercedes of Castile, under certain circumstances, might be (or may be) the most bold, graphic and original effort of its bold, graphic and original author; abounding, perhaps, in striking scenes, and filled with profound philosophy; not indeed exceeding in poetical beauty the most triumphant achievement of Walter Scott, yet certainly surpassing in speed and bottom the triumphant epic of Blue Beard.¹³³

In another number, Benjamin refers to the novel as “dull, heavy, stupid, tedious, leaden, dry, spun-out stuff” and in a postscript clarifies for a supposed “correspondent” that “Mercedes of Castile” is not the Spanish term for “Castille Soap Merchant.”¹³⁴ With at least some degree of true critical acumen, James Watson Webb of the *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer* dismisses the book as a “paraphrase”—“nothing more or less than a compilation

¹³² Bentley to JFC, 6 March 1841, 5 March 1841: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹³³ *The New World* (Quarto Edition) 1 (12 December 1840): 447.

¹³⁴ *The New World* (Quarto Edition) 1 (5 December 1840): 429.

from 'Irving's Columbus' and 'Prescott's Ferdinand and Isabella,' with a ridiculous love story of some fifty pages interwoven with it. . . . [T]here is not a boy of sixteen in any of our Colleges who with these great works before him, could not have executed the task better than has Mr. Cooper." Webb also calls attention to the discrepancy between the two different titles printed on the title page and spine label, making allegations of mercenary salesmanship: "The publishers, or whoever put the *taking title* on the outside of the books, knew their *real value*, and felt the necessity of a sale before the contents of the work had been made public."¹³⁵ The reviewer for the *New-York American*, probably Charles King, makes a similar claim: "The merits of this work, beyond what it may be worth to its author in account current with his publisher—are null."¹³⁶ Likewise the reviewer for the *Ladies' Companion* accuses Cooper of bringing in the love story merely "to make out the requisite number of pages in the construction of the two volumes." To the reviewer, *Mercedes* is "the worst production that has yet appeared from the pen of this writer," with characters that fatigue readers by "talking an infinite deal of nothing."¹³⁷

Many reviews, however, were less severe. Horace Greeley of the *New-Yorker*, usually one of Cooper's more caustic foes, evaluated the work with uncharacteristic calmness, expressing admiration for Cooper's portrayal of Mercedes, calling Ozema's death near the end of the story a scene of "deep and mournful interest," and pronouncing that "The novel is very readable, and could only have been written by a man of ability." Nevertheless, Greeley expresses doubt that *Mercedes* would suffice to revive Cooper's reputation and maintains that Cooper never excelled in "drawing the portraits of really great men," though he wryly adds, "Perhaps, however, the character of Mr. Effingham, in one of his later works, is so illustrious an exception, as completely to nullify our general rule."¹³⁸ Objecting also to Cooper's preface which makes fun of the superficiality of some critics, Greeley derides

¹³⁵ "New Books," *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer*, 2 December 1840. "Of all the novels in which Mr. Cooper has not introduced himself and family," Webb adds, "this is the most vapid, stale, and worthless. He should have denominated it '*History caricatured*.'"

¹³⁶ *New-York American*, 29 November 1840.

¹³⁷ "Literary Review," *Ladies' Companion* 14 (January 1841): 148.

¹³⁸ *New-Yorker* 10 (28 November 1840): 173.

Cooper's feigned indifference to criticism by reminding readers of Cooper's sensitivity, as evidenced by his recent legal actions. In contrast to Greeley's preferences for Cooper's fictional embellishments, the reviewer for the *New York Review* favored the factual aspects of the novel. Noting Cooper's predicament in trying to invest the "too grand" Columbus story with both the accuracy of a history and the vigor of a romance, the reviewer concludes, "All of it that is romance is artificial, incongruous, and feeble; and all that is purely historical is lucid, spirited, and interesting."¹³⁹ Edgar Allan Poe, writing for *Graham's Magazine*, expressed a similarly mixed opinion, calling *Mercedes* "invaluable" as a history but "well nigh worthless" as a novel. Though Poe amply credits Cooper for educating the public (especially those otherwise unacquainted with the Columbus story) by "producing the most popular, detailed, readable history of that voyage which has yet seen the light," when called upon to judge the work as romance rather than history he proclaims it "if possible, the worst *novel* ever penned by Mr. Cooper." Faulting Cooper's pacing, from the unnecessary introductory chapters to the excessive emphasis on the voyage itself, Poe preaches characteristically that "The interest of a romance should continue. . . throughout the whole story."¹⁴⁰ A few reviewers expressed less qualified praise for the novel. *Mercedes* was praised in *Godey's Lady's Book* as "one of the best novels he has yet produced," its plot "managed with much skill" and its characters "conceived and drawn with great ability of portraiture."¹⁴¹ The *New-York Mirror* singled out the novel before its publication as one of "but three publications which are likely to cause the least excitement" in the sleepy literary world.¹⁴² A few weeks later, its reviewer declared that "Mr. Cooper's new book is every way worthy of him," demonstrating his "vigour and power of description" without displaying his occasional "petulant and fault-finding spirit." Confidently, but incorrectly, the reviewer predicted the novel's commercial triumph: "The book will be in everybody's hands, and every body must like it. . . . We have spoken of Mr. Cooper in the language of unqualified praise, and a critic who can find any thing to blame in

¹³⁹ *New York Review* 8 (January 1841): 271.

¹⁴⁰ [Edgar Allan Poe,] "Review of New Books," *Graham's Magazine* 18 (January 1841): 47-48.

¹⁴¹ "Editors' Book Table," *Godey's Lady's Book* 22 (January 1841): 47.

¹⁴² *The New-York Mirror*, 14 November 1840: 167.

these volumes, must be keener sighted than we are.”¹⁴³ It is easy to imagine that a reception like this was what Cooper had in mind when he first thought of writing his Columbus story.

Interestingly, the reviewer for *Arcturus*, probably Evert Duyckinck, used *Mercedes* as the occasion for a treatise on the obsolescence of this historical novel as a genre. “The Romance of History is an exhausted vein of writing from which the ore has long disappeared,” the reviewer opens, going on to note how the success of Sir Walter Scott spawned a host of imitators and made the historical novel more a literary fashion than an art form. Their production became mechanical, commonplace:

Romances were written to order: the annals of all nations were ransacked to furnish a plot and story; no country was spared; not even our own forest land, which must give up its buried Indians: no events were too sacred; the most venerable themes were subjected to the grave ridicule of being paraded in a motley carnival dress of cast-off finery. History and fiction were both degraded.¹⁴⁴

With contemporary histories living up to high standards, the reviewer writes, “Truth is now better than fiction,” and since the world need not depend on novels for their knowledge of the past, “history is better learned from other sources,” especially since “facts must be altered or suppressed to suit the demands of the story.” Regarding *Mercedes* itself, the reviewer expresses “regret” that Cooper “should have chosen a subject which can receive so little aid from fancy, and one so likely to obscure the powers of the novelist, as the discovery of America. Washington Irving’s perfect, pure narrative will always remain the only true romantic history of that event to the English reader.” Apart from a surface awareness of Cooper’s subject, though, it is unlikely that the reviewer actually read the novel, preferring instead to lay out a summary of Cooper’s virtues and demerits as an author, under the excuse that “The literary merits and defects of Mr. Cooper have been long settled; between himself and his enemies, his good and bad points have been set before the public so often that we seem to know them by instinct, and can, at a glance, when a new Precaution novel appears, refer to the good parts, the indifferent, and the bad.”¹⁴⁵ Such sentiments, not uncommon

¹⁴³ “Literary Notices,” *The New-York Mirror*, 5 December 1840: 191.

¹⁴⁴ “Mr. Cooper” [Review of *Mercedes of Castile*], *Arcturus* 1.2 (January 1841): 90.

¹⁴⁵ *Arcturus* 1.2 (January 1841): 91-92.

among critics, suggest the degree to which Cooper would have to labor to continue to distinguish himself in an evolving field in order to inspire fresh interest in his writings.

Mercedes of Castile, then, proves itself to be a more significant milestone in Cooper's career than its qualitative standing in the canon of his writings would seem to suggest. Its failure in the marketplace despite Cooper's confident predictions undermined his credibility in already shaky relationships with his publishers. It proved, too, that Cooper's instincts about popular artistry at this time were far from foolproof, revealing, perhaps, remnants of the mental distance between himself and his countrymen he had complained of years earlier in *A Letter to His Countrymen*. Though overtly commercial in its origins and orientation, *Mercedes* nonetheless bore many of the stamps of the more "controversial" Cooper of the *Home* novels and the Effingham libel suits, such as a narrowed conception of fiction, a distrust of some manifestations of public opinion, and a heightened sense of self-investment in his protagonists. None of these features single-handedly need have doomed the novel; but combined together with Cooper's own sometimes arrogant commercial miscalculations, there were too many factors mitigating against the novel for it to succeed. But although Cooper's Columbus story failed and quickly faded away, his interest in defining the ethic of American authorship by portraying visionary voices of "truth" like that of Columbus would be longer lasting, again figuring prominently in his next novel, the well-received fifth Leatherstocking tale *The Deerslayer, or The First War-Path* (1841).

When Cooper began work on *The Deerslayer*, he would have had no way of knowing for certain how completely *Mercedes of Castile* would fail commercially, but his decision to revisit the character of Natty Bumppo once more may have been a reflection of the mental exhaustion his struggles with *Mercedes* produced. The new novel offered a safe retreat to a franchise with known marketability after an unrewarding experiment in new directions. According to his daughter Susan, *The Deerslayer* had its genesis in summer 1840, when Cooper, out for a drive with her and in the midst of singing "an electioneering song of the party opposed to his own," caught an especially scenic glimpse of Lake Otsego: "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!’”¹⁴⁶ In her account the first pages of the new Natty Bumppo story were written “A few days later,” placing the initial stages of composition in the midst of his work on *Mercedes of Castile*. Most likely, the real work on it was not undertaken until *Mercedes* was nearly out of the way, since Cooper makes no mention of it in his correspondence until 10 November 1840, when he wrote Bentley to propose a book “which will be ready early in the spring,” containing “the *early* life of Leatherstocking—a period that is only wanting to fill up his career.”¹⁴⁷ Prompting Cooper’s revelation of his plan was his intention to draw a much-needed advance of £150 to cover a recent purchase of real estate in Cooperstown—something which might have been accomplished sooner, perhaps, had his writing been further along.¹⁴⁸

Cooper’s intention to add a fifth installment to the Leatherstocking series treating the youthful days of Natty Bumppo had been presaged by at least a few members of his audience, stimulated in their hopes of further adventures, no doubt, by Natty’s revival in *The Pathfinder*. In appraising that novel, the reviewer for *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* comments, “Leatherstocking’s career is now perfect; unless Mr. Cooper should give us another antecedent history, and develope [sic] the passages of his hero’s juvenility.”¹⁴⁹ And around May or June 1841, as he was readying the novel for publication, Cooper received an anonymous letter from England whose writer expressed hopes that Cooper would write

¹⁴⁶ Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper* (1861; Secaucus, NJ: Castle Books, 1980) 378-79. A slightly different version, similar as to details, is given in her introduction to the “Household Edition” of *The Deerslayer* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1882).

¹⁴⁷ JFC to Richard Bentley, 10 November 1840: *Letters and Journals* 4:102.

¹⁴⁸ As James F. Beard points out, autumn 1840 was a busy time for Cooper as he managed libel suits in progress and in preparation, purchased real estate, supervised the completion of his Otsego Hall renovations, and finished the writing and publication of *Mercedes of Castile*; “Historical Introduction,” James Fenimore Cooper, *The Deerslayer, or, The First War-Path* (Albany: SUNY P, 1987) xxix. Citations from *The Deerslayer* are taken from this edition and noted parenthetically.

¹⁴⁹ *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine* 6 (April 1840): 200.

more novels “about Indians, and the Scout, and about his Prior Career, and about the Mohicans, in the times, when their tribe was in its best days.” As the letter writer assured him, “There are many People who are anxiously awaiting some more of your interesting Tales to appear,” emphasizing in a postscript that “Any thing about Indians will be read with Pleasure.”¹⁵⁰ Another Englishman, Cooper’s publisher Richard Bentley, was less optimistic; upon hearing Cooper’s proposal for a fifth Leatherstocking tale, he responded, “With regard to the new book, I almost fear with whatever ability you may treat it, that it will be considered, like most *sequels*, not with the same favor as an original conception.” Citing in the same letter the poor sales of *Mercedes of Castile* and reminding Cooper of his great losses on the *History of the Navy*, Bentley set his offer for the new work at £300 (about \$1500), expressing some hope that the new novel, “being on the ground where you have earned for yourself such great reputation, may be received here with more favour than Mercedes has hitherto met with.”¹⁵¹

Clearly the failure of *Mercedes* had taken away much of the potential bargaining power Cooper had gained with *The Pathfinder*. As a result, when he finally negotiated a deal with Lea & Blanchard for the yet-untitled *Deerslayer* on 2 April 1841, it was only with thrusts and parries of mutual concessions—most of them on his part—that he managed to equal the \$2500 he had been paid for *Mercedes*. The terms of the contract for “Natty Bumbo [sic] or the first war path” gave Lea & Blanchard the right to print and publish the novel for three years, paying an additional forty cents per copy for any additional copies beyond the original five thousand—a fairly standard arrangement in the pattern of Cooper’s previous few novels. But a major concession on Cooper’s part was allowing Lea & Blanchard rights to reprint several of his other works for the same three years: *The Pathfinder*, *Mercedes of Castile*, *Homeward Bound*, *Home as Found*, *The Spy*, *The Pioneers*, *Precaution*, *Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pilot*, and *Lionel Lincoln*—nearly all those works for which Lea & Blanchard did not already possess outright ownership of the copyright. Perhaps this arrangement was Cooper’s solution to the publishers’ losses on *Mercedes of Castile*, proposed as an alternative to repaying the \$500 Lea &

¹⁵⁰ Anonymous to JFC, “England — April” [1841]: Beard, “Historical Introduction,” xliii.

¹⁵¹ Bentley to JFC, 7 January 1841: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Blanchard had requested. If so, Cooper would seem to have bartered, Esau-like, his future earning potential on these works for the surety of a present payoff. One perquisite Cooper did gain from the deal, however, was an unusual one: Lea & Blanchard were obligated to deliver “for the private use of Mr Cooper, one of each new work that may be published by L&B” during the three-year period.¹⁵² Glad at least to have money in his pockets to meet upcoming payments on his Cooperstown real estate speculation, the author reported to Mrs. Cooper that same day, “I have got notes enough to help me a great deal in the June payment, and it is a great relief to my mind.”¹⁵³

James F. Beard’s thorough discussion of the creation, publication, and reception of *The Deerslayer* in his “Historical Introduction” to the scholarly “Cooper Edition” of the work renders further amplification only sporadically necessary here.¹⁵⁴ Happily, as Beard explains in detail, *The Deerslayer* met with nearly universal critical acclaim and commercial success in the marketplace, soon passing to additional editions in both the United States and Great Britain. To be sure, Cooper revisited many of the same commercially-oriented formulas that had worked so well in *The Pathfinder*. Much as *The Pathfinder* portrayed Natty contemplating marriage, *The Deerslayer* also involved the possibilities of romance—the difference this time being, as Cooper explained at one point to Richard Bentley, that in the former work Natty “*was in love*,” while in the new work he “*is beloved*,” namely by Judith Hutter, probably Cooper’s best-drawn female character.¹⁵⁵ Cooper’s sentimental intentions for the work can be seen in the same letter wherein he contemplates different possibilities for the title of the

¹⁵² Contract for “Natty Bumbo [sic] or the first war path,” 2 April 1841: MS, Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁵³ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 2 April 1841: *Letters and Journals* 4:140.

¹⁵⁴ Beard, “Historical Introduction,” xix-lviii.

¹⁵⁵ JFC to Richard Bentley, 31 January 1841: *Letters and Journals* 4:112. Cooper himself considered the mentally-deficient Hetty Hutter better drawn—“requiring more finesse to execute, and a greater familiarity with human nature to conceive,” as he explained to reader Thomas W. Field, who had been so struck with Judith’s character that he sent Cooper a poem titled after her. Apparently the views of most readers Cooper met coincided with Field’s, for Cooper admitted regarding his preference for Hetty, “but I find no one of my own way of thinking.” See JFC to Thomas W. Field, 17 August 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:308-09.

work, two of which are taken from the leading female characters: “As for a name, I have thought of — ‘Judith and Esther, or, the Girls of the Glimmerglass.’ — ‘Wah!-Ta-Wah!, or, Hist!-Oh!-Hist!’ ‘The Deerslayer, or a Legend of the Glimmerglass.’ &c &c. In some respects I prefer the last — But as the book comes on, I shall decide.” Wisely, Cooper avoided repeating the costly errors he had made in *The Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish* and *Mercedes of Castile*—namely, titling the book after an off-putting “Indian”-sounding name or after characters whose roles are actually secondary to that of the main character. As in *The Pathfinder*, too, Cooper again took pains to ensure that no “politics” appeared on the surface of the novel, seemingly with lasting success, for *The Deerslayer* often has been viewed, following D.H. Lawrence’s aforementioned continuum, as the Leatherstocking tale most removed from reality. James F. Beard compares it to “pre-Scott pastoral romances” of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, perhaps too great a stretch back in time but nearer the mark as to its similarities to the pastoral.¹⁵⁶ Like that form, which often uses an idealized world as a venue for subtle, veiled criticism of the real world, including allusions to real persons and issues, *The Deerslayer* is itself a fascinatingly complex recasting of Cooper’s own environment—here removed from direct association with Cooper by its poetic appellation “The Glimmerglass”—wherein stylized, almost archetypal characters in an idealized natural setting contend with each other through words almost as much as through deeds.

Cooper’s idea of setting the novel on Lake Otsego was a bold one in light of his treatment of the same locale only three years earlier in *Home as Found*, wherein his own experiences, including his confrontation with townspeople over their trespassing at Three Mile Point (a family property of which Cooper was the trustee) had been too thinly veiled as fiction. Of course, since both *The Deerslayer* and *Home as Found* were descendants of the same novel, *The Pioneers*, Cooper had ample justification for setting another tale there, and perhaps the notion of asserting his claims not just legally but also poetically had some appeal. Notably, in light of the mockery he had suffered over *Home as Found* and the effect it had of narrowing his professed definitions of fiction, it is interesting to see in *The Deerslayer* how Cooper takes pains to disclaim any resemblance between his fictional characters and real individuals. Although in his preface to the first edition he perseveres in the coy game of

¹⁵⁶ Beard, “Historical Introduction,” xxxiii-xxxiv.

mystification about the accuracy of the incidents in the tale, he bluntly emphasizes that his characters “are fictitious, as a matter of course” (2). In typically cheeky fashion, Cooper tweaks potential readers who search too hard for fact in fictional works, setting up a distinction between two types of readers: those who are “exceedingly imaginative in all matters of fact, and as literal as a school-boy’s translation, in every thing that relates to poetry,” and those who, by contrast, are “addicted to taking things as they are offered, and of understanding them as they are meant” (2, 3). To the former group, much the larger of the two and more difficult to please, Cooper directs a disclaimer: “For the benefit of all such persons, it is explicitly stated, that Judith Hutter is Judith Hutter, and not Judith any one else; and, generally, that wherever a coincidence may occur in a christian name, or in the colour of hair, nothing more is meant than can properly be inferred from a coincidence in a christian name, or in the colour of hair” (2). For the benefit of both author and reader, Cooper suggests that this class of readers “try the experiment of reading works of the imagination as if they were intended for matters of fact. Such a plan might possibly enable them to believe in the possibility of fiction” (3). Conversely, Cooper advises the other group simply to “commence at chapter first, and to read consecutively, just as far as the occupation may prove agreeable to themselves, and not a page beyond it,” with enjoyment and edification as the goals. “Should any of this class reach the end of the book,” he continues, “and fancy the time spent in the perusal not entirely thrown away, the circumstance will afford its author sincere gratification” (3).

If Cooper was revisiting scenery and offering disclaimers that harkened back to the controversies of 1838 despite the work’s demonstrably commercial orientation, it may not be surprising that *The Deerslayer* reveals another lingering theme from that same contentious period. As he had done in *Mercedes of Castile*, Cooper maintains an interest in the importance of “truth” over “seemliness” that recalls his critique of Scott published in *The Knickerbocker* between the appearances of *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*. This interest manifests itself most notably in his heightened emphasis on Natty Bumppo as an unswervable voice of truth. Assuredly, honesty and integrity always had been a hallmark of Natty’s character, but in none of the other Leatherstocking tales does Cooper place so much emphasis upon it. In *The Pathfinder*, for instance, where the term “truth” is occasionally applied to Natty, it is usually listed without particular stress in conjunction with other complementary qualities:

Charles Cap finds Natty's reasoning on one point of contention to possess "the force of truth, faith, and probability," and Mabel Dunham on another occasion declares that Natty's "truth, honesty, simplicity, justice, and courage are scarcely equalled by any of earth" (26, 270). Whereas in *The Pathfinder* Natty is first described as having "an open honesty, a total absence of guile in his face" (18), in *The Deerslayer* Cooper amplifies the introductory depiction of Natty's countenance:

This expression was simply that of guileless truth, sustained by an earnestness of purpose, and a sincerity of feeling, that rendered it remarkable. At times this air of integrity seemed to be so simple as to awaken the suspicion of a want of the usual means to discriminate between artifice and truth, but few came into contact with the man, without losing this distrust in respect for his opinions and motives. (21)

This description establishes Natty's role in the novel, suggesting how he will differ from Hetty Hutter, who is utterly honest yet lacks the "usual means" of separating truth and falsehood, and Judith Hutter, who is often quite competent in her faculties of perception but addicted to artifice out of what James Beard calls an "ineradicable strain of deceit or duplicity."¹⁵⁷ By contrast, Natty's devotion to truth is inextinguishable and nearly compulsive; in the final chapter Cooper writes that "Truth was the Deerslayer's polar star. He ever kept it in view, and it was nearly impossible for him to avoid uttering it, even when prudence demanded silence" (545). It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Cooper saw much of himself in these descriptions; indeed, the line about Natty's "opinions and motives" being appreciated by those who met him is similar in substance to what many of Cooper's acquaintances said about him.

Cooper's treatment of the Effinghams in the *Home* novels amply illustrated the importance Cooper attached to the role of a dignified manner in communicating and upholding truth (despite his being out of touch with how some elements of the public might receive it), and, accordingly, Natty appears in *The Deerslayer* with a truthfulness that is unflappably calm, so much so that it often inspires agitation in those who have the most to fear from it. Judith Hutter, herself the partial victim of men's duplicity, appreciates the value of Natty's truthfulness yet also finds it a source of great mortification: "It is a hard thing to

¹⁵⁷ Beard, "Historical Introduction," xxxv.

fear truth, Hetty,' she said, 'and yet do I more dread Deerslayer's truth, than any enemy! One cannot tamper with such truth -- so much honesty -- such obstinate uprightness!"' (313-14). She herself, of course, has much to fear from the truth because of her lapses in moral judgment and her questionable background. Even more telling in light of Cooper's views of the author as social critic and conscience is an exchange between Deerslayer and "Hurry"-Harry March, a character often interpreted as representative of the "Go-Ahead" spirit of Whiggism (embodied most famously in the Davy Crockett of the Crockett Almanacs).¹⁵⁸ When early in the story Natty challenges Hurry's boast that he would kill any husband Judith Hutter potentially may have taken in his absence by suggesting that he would "put the Colony" on Hurry's trail, Hurry quickly boils in rage:

"You! — Half-grown, venison hunting bantling! You, dare to think of informing against Hurry-Harry in so much as a matter touching a mink, or a woodchuck!"

"I would dare to speak truth, Hurry, consarning you, or any man that ever lived."

March looked at his companion, for a moment, in silent amazement; then seizing him by the throat, with both hands, he shook his comparatively slight frame, with a violence that menaced the dislocation of some of the bones. Nor was this done jocularly, for anger flashed from the giant's eyes, and there were certain signs, that seemed to threaten much more earnestness than the occasion would appear to call for. Whatever might be the real intention of March, and it was probable there was none settled in his mind, it is certain that he was unusually aroused, and most men who found themselves throttled by one of a mould so gigantic, in such a mood, and in a solitude so deep and helpless, would have felt intimidated, and tempted to yield even the right. Not so, however, with Deerslayer. His countenance remained unmoved; his hand did not shake, and his answer was given in a voice that did not resort to the artifice of louder tones, even, by way of proving its owner's resolution.

"You may shake, Hurry, until you bring down the mountain," he said quietly, "but nothing beside truth will you shake from me." (28-29)

Natty's steadfastness causes Hurry to back off, commenting that quarreling about an "idee" would be more apropos of city lawyers: "They tell me, Deerslayer, much ill blood grows out of ideas, among the people in the lower countries, and that they sometimes get to extremities

¹⁵⁸ George Dekker writes, for instance, "Cooper's conception of the character was almost certainly influenced by the Whig election campaign of 1840. . . . Hurry is an 1840 Whig—a man with a frank Western manner but with the conscience of a cut-throat city man" (176).

upon them" (30).

Deerslayer's honest demeanor prevails in his dealings with his Indian foes. Cooper portrays the Indians as subtle and wily in the rhetorical arts, particularly the Iroquois chief Rivenoak, who stands in contrast to the steadfastly true Natty. One perhaps can see veiled allusions to Whig editors or others practiced in "seemliness" in statements such as this:

Next to arms, eloquence offers the great avenue to popular favor, whether it be in savage or civilized life, and Rivenoak had succeeded, as so many have succeeded, before him, quite as much by rendering fallacies acceptable to his listeners, as by any profound or learned expositions of truth, or the accuracy of his logic. (489)

Yet Natty shows the inherent superiority that comes from a true and guileless character. On one occasion, when negotiating ransom for the captured Hurry-Harry and Tom Hutter, the usually unruffled Rivenoak becomes "a little warm" in the discussion as a result of Natty meeting "all the arguments and prevarication of his subtle opponent with his own cool directness of manner, and unmoved love of truth" (245). Natty's self-assurance becomes all the more powerful on the occasions when he becomes a captive of the Indians. During his first captivity, he is taunted by the screaming of an old woman of the tribe, an "exasperated and semi-poetic fury" who hurls insulting epithets at him. The passage depicting Natty's response tells as much about Cooper's torturous self-restraint as an editor as it does about Natty's as a character, as seen by comparing what Cooper wrote in the manuscript to what ultimately appeared in print:

Deerslayer ~~smiled as indifferently, on~~^{^looked upon} these impotent attempts to arouse him, as ^{^indifferently as} as a gentleman in our own state of society, regards the vituperative terms of any blackguard ~~who may happen to control~~<sup>^in news-
securious newspaper</sup> ~~a press, the one party feeling~~^{^the one party feeling} that the tongue of an old ^{^woman} could never injure a warrior, and the other knowing that ~~severality~~^{^mendacity} and ~~falsehood~~^{^vulgarity in the end} can only ^{^permanently} affect those who resort to their ~~youth,~~^{^use}¹⁵⁹

Later in the same passage, Cooper writes:

The old woman withdrew, but the hunter well understood that he was to be the subject of all her means of annoyance, if not of positive injury, so long as he remained in the power of his enemies, for, ~~editor or old woman,~~ nothing

¹⁵⁹ See Beard, "Historical Introduction," xxix and "Emendations," 627, in the SUNY P scholarly edition of *The Deerslayer*.

rankles so deeply as the consciousness that an attempt to irritate has been met ~~only~~ by contempt. . . .¹⁶⁰

If other passages in the story merely suggest Cooper's intentions to subtly criticize Whig newspaper editors, these passages confirm it.

Interestingly in light of these self-referential elements, it is Deerslayer's very commitment to truth that places him squarely in the hands of his enemies. In the story, Natty faces the temptation to go back on a pledge to return to his Indian captors, who have released him on furlough because of his reputation for honesty, with the condition that he return for his eventual torture and death. Despite entreaties from Judith, Natty returns and is soon bound for torture. One can hardly escape the conclusion that here, too, Cooper is idealistically recasting how his own commitment to truth, particularly during his years in Europe, played into the designs of Whig editors and caused him to be, in essence, bound for rhetorical torture upon his return to America. Deerslayer's response in the face of manipulation by his foes is unswerving. Yet it is clear that his honesty nearly dooms him. When Judith Hutter's ridiculous attempt at deceiving the Indians by dressing up in a formal dress and posing as European royalty fails, Natty's case seems to be a lost one as the Indians prepare to torture him to death. He is saved only by the timely arrival of British troops (fetched by Hurry-Harry) at the Indian camp. The indiscriminately bloody rout of Indians that follows is troubling not only for its brutality in the context of the story itself but also for what it suggests about Cooper's treatment of "truth" in the novel. Certainly in comparison to *Mercedes of Castile* Cooper offers a resolution that is even more unsettled and ambiguous. Natty is saved, but not by his own truth; he nearly becomes a martyr for his honesty. Despite a happy ending to the story, Cooper leaves us with a *deus ex machina* that seems to cast doubt upon the real efficacy of truth in a society Cooper often portrayed as being too easily swayed by hostile rhetoric. Perhaps, if nothing else, the unsettled resolution of *The Deerslayer* forecasts the direction of Cooper's later career, wherein he shifted his attention to truth away from the author himself to look for his eventual vindication not at the hands of critics or readers but at those of a higher power.

In *The Deerslayer*, then, Cooper succeeded in insinuating the larger moral issues his

¹⁶⁰ "Emendations" 627.

professional tribulations raised without being glaringly obvious as to his motives. By burying allusion to his own authorial concerns in the fabric of the story, he avoided the kind of controversy that had marked him as a risky bet with publishers and readers. He also satisfied the public's desire for additional treatments of Natty Bumppo's character. With *The Deerslayer* Cooper regained much of the critical momentum he had won in *The Pathfinder* and squandered in *Mercedes of Castile*. He went on to follow up this success with two acclaimed sea novels, *The Two Admirals* and *The Wing-and-Wing* (both 1842) that further strengthened his position as a powerful artist restating his supremacy of forest and sea.

Surprisingly, given Cooper's commercial and critical successes with *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer*, no additional installments in the Leatherstocking series were forthcoming from his pen despite nearly ten more years of activity as an author after their appearance. As the Leatherstocking tales stand today in the order of their publication, the fifth tale, *The Deerslayer*, concludes the series. Already in his 1841 Preface to *The Deerslayer*, Cooper writes, "The Leather-Stocking Tales,' form now something like a drama in five acts; complete as to material and design, though quite probably very incomplete as to execution" (1)—language that would seem clearly to affirm that the fifth treatment of Natty would be the last.¹⁶¹ Again, in his 1850 "Preface to the Leather-Stocking Tales" for the revised Putnam edition, he writes of *The Deerslayer* as "completing the series as it now stands" (5).

Yet shortly after Cooper's death and in the half-century that followed, several people, most with close and credible connections to Cooper himself, put forward a tantalizing possibility—that Cooper was contemplating a sixth tale in the series, perhaps filling in the long gap in Natty's career between *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Pathfinder* (both set during the French and Indian War, ca. 1757-58) and *The Pioneers* (set in post-Revolution America, ca. 1794) by portraying Natty's exploits during the Revolutionary War. Present-day knowledge about this potential but never-realized development in Cooper's career is scarce, tending to

¹⁶¹ Lea & Blanchard quickly followed up *The Deerslayer* with the publication of a collected set of the Leatherstocking Tales in early 1842 (Cost Books, Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

exist in a state of vague anecdotal awareness where it exists at all, and not discussed at length in print. Nobody has assembled the surviving evidence to piece together a complete story of what happened to Cooper's contemplated sixth Leatherstocking tale. Why Cooper, who presumably would have had much to gain commercially by capitalizing further on the revived celebrity of Natty Bumppo, never published such a tale is a fascinating literary mystery. Though many of its details must as a matter of course remain unsolved, the knowledge that can be gained about it says much about Cooper's decision-making processes as an author, providing a glimpse of a significant path *not* followed in his career.

The first published allusion to Cooper's plan for a sixth Leatherstocking tale comes from Cooper's well-known contemporary William Cullen Bryant. Bryant, a poet and longtime editor of the Democratic New York *Evening Post*, maintained long and cordial, if not particularly frequent or intimate, connections with Cooper, publishing Cooper's "A.B.C." letters during the 1830s and often acting as a virtually solitary voice of support for Cooper when the Whig papers were attacking him. In his "Discourse on the Life and Genius of Cooper," the keynote speech at a memorial service held in Cooper's honor on 25 February 1852, Bryant made the following remarks:

"He was contemplating, I have since been told, another Leatherstocking tale, deeming that he had not yet exhausted the character, and those who consider what new resources it yielded him in the *Pathfinder* and the *Deerslayer*, will readily conclude that he was not mistaken."¹⁶²

Bryant's words come second hand ("I have since been told"), perhaps from the Cooper family, Rufus W. Griswold, or any of the other friends and associates of Cooper who organized the memorial service in his memory. Details, unfortunately, are few in his brief allusion to the tale.

The second source, a personal reminiscence of Cooper by his friend George Washington Greene, treats the matter in more detail. Greene (1811-1883) had first met Cooper at General Lafayette's house in Paris and renewed his acquaintance during Cooper's later years in America. His comments about the unwritten Leatherstocking tale appear in his book *Biographical Studies*, published in 1860, but internal evidence within his reminiscence of

¹⁶² William Cullen Bryant, "Discourse on the Life and Genius of Cooper," *Memorial of James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1852) 68.

Cooper (such as reference to the ongoing efforts to organize the Cooper memorial) suggests a date of composition circa late 1851 or early 1852, shortly after Cooper's death. He gives the following account:

I have always regretted that I did not make a memorandum of my last conversation with Cooper. It was at Putnam's that I met him -- just after the appearance of the first volume of the new edition of his works; an edition which, with that of Mr. Irving's, would, to all who know the history of them, have been sufficient to associate the publisher's name with the annals of American literature, even if he had given no other proofs of his right to a place there. Cooper was in excellent spirits, though the disease which not long afterwards assumed so fatal a form, was just beginning to make itself felt. We walked out together, and, after a short stroll, went to his rooms at the Globe, and sat down to talk. I had never found him so free before upon the subject that interested me most -- his own works and his literary habits. He talked about "Leather Stocking" -- confessed freely his partiality for that exquisite creation of his happiest moments, and told how glad he had been to revive him again. "I meant," said he, "when I brought him on the stage anew, to have added one more scene and introduced him in the Revolution; but I thought that the public had had enough of him, and never ventured it." I tried to persuade him that the public interest had been excited, rather than satiated, by this resuscitation of their old favorite, and that the great questions of that great period would suggest things to the earnest, single-hearted woodsman, which, combined with the interest of the real historical characters that might be introduced, would afford him, perhaps, fuller scope than he had ever yet had for the development of his original conception. Washington and Natty Bumpo [*sic*]; another revolutionary battle, described like Lexington and Bunker Hill; and some scene that belongs to real history engraved in our memories by the same graphic power which has consecrated so many that owe their existence, as well as their interest, to the imagination of the poet. "I have thought a good deal about it," said he, "and perhaps I may do it yet." But the works he had already in hand claimed his immediate attention, and before he found himself free for new labors, the progress of his disease had become too rapid to leave much room for other thoughts than those with which his mind, naturally inclined to devotion, had long been familiar.¹⁶³

Greene's account is not an ideal piece of evidence: as he himself admits, he must rely on memory recorded some time after the fact. Also, the tone of the piece tends toward the flattering. Yet there is much of interest here, particularly as it purports to relate first-hand

¹⁶³ George Washington Greene, "Personal Recollections of Cooper," *Biographical Studies* (New York: Putnam, 1860).

Cooper's own thoughts about the tale, if not his exact words. Greene's account names the Revolution as the proposed setting, and places Cooper's latest contemplation of the tale near the end of his life, attributing the non-appearance of the tale to Cooper's declining health and prior obligations. Bryant's brief remarks would seem to corroborate this chronology. But Greene's account adds another chronological wrinkle through its purported quotation from Cooper himself about the possibility of an earlier contemplation of the work, one which was to have taken place around the time when he "brought [Natty] on the stage anew" but which was abandoned when Cooper calculated that "the public had had enough" of Natty.

The third account appears nearly forty years after Bryant's and Greene's statements, as part of a letter to the editors of the literary periodical *The Critic* in September 1889, the centennial anniversary of Cooper's birth. The writer of the letter is O.B. Bunce—probably Oliver Bell Bunce (1828-90), who, in addition to being an avid Cooper enthusiast, was also writer of at least three novels himself, putting out one of them, *Life before Him*, in 1860 with W.A. Townsend, publisher of the well-known "Darley edition" of Cooper's writings and one half of the firm Stringer & Townsend, who published Cooper's later novels. Writing in response to a retrospective article on Cooper by Brander Matthews, Bunce offers the following testimony:

There is one noticeable gap in the Leatherstocking series that must have been remarked by all readers of those books. This is that while Natty Bumppo figures in the series before and after the War of the Revolution, yet he is not carried through that memorable period. Natty Bumppo in the Revolution would stand, if Cooper had not forgotten his skill, an entrancing figure, and great is the pity that the world has it not. I happen to know that Cooper had at one time contemplated a volume that should supply this missing link in his old hero's life. About 1840 Cooper's works passed into the hands of Stringer and Townsend, a popular publishing firm of that period. I am informed by a member of that firm that shortly after this transfer Cooper went to his publishers and proposed a Revolutionary story with Bumppo for the hero. But his new publishers strangely enough discouraged it. "I shall never forget," said my informant, in telling me this story, "the shadow that came over Mr. Cooper's face on finding his plan was not approved." The reason for discouraging the project was the apprehension that if unsuccessful the new volume would prove an injury to a series that stood as it was at a high pecuniary value. I, for one, can but think it a great pity that a publisher's

overcaution should have prevented the production of a romance that could scarcely have failed to prove a delightful accession to American letters.¹⁶⁴

Bunce's account squares with Greene's in placing Natty Bumppo in the American Revolution but offers a very different explanation for Cooper's not writing the tale, ascribing the decision against it to Cooper's publishers rather than Cooper's own sense that the public had "had enough" of Natty. Unfortunately, the round date Bunce names—"About 1840"—is an impossible one in light of the other details in his account. Cooper did not quit publishing with Lea & Blanchard until 1844, and the firm of Burgess, Stringer, & Co.--predecessors of Stringer & Townsend-- did not exist before 9 December 1843.¹⁶⁵ Stringer & Townsend, however, did make several transactions with Lea & Blanchard for copyrights to Cooper's tales, purchasing in 1849 the rights to the Leatherstocking tales along with those for nine other works that Cooper had disposed of to Lea & Blanchard.¹⁶⁶ Given these realities, Bunce's 1840 date cannot stand alongside his claim of having first-hand information from a member of the Stringer & Townsend firm, casting an air of doubt over his ability to recall dates and perhaps over the reliability of the rest of his details. Perhaps *The Critic* simply misread his date.

Fortunately, a fourth piece of evidence supports Bunce's story, if not his chronology, by providing the very piece of testimony by "a member of" Stringer & Townsend to which he refers. On 8 December 1895 *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* published an article on the aged William Adeo Townsend (1814-1899), co-partner of the firms Burgess, Stringer, & Co. and Stringer & Townsend, containing passages from the publisher's autobiographical reminiscences (present location unknown). Townsend's role in publishing Cooper's novels is given a prominent role in the article, and his own words convey an anecdote about the contemplated sixth Leatherstocking tale that unmistakably resembles the account given by Bunce, albeit with more precise detail and chronology:

¹⁶⁴ O.B. Bunce, "To the Editors of The Critic," *The Critic* 12 (14 September 1889): 126-27.

¹⁶⁵ Contract forming Burgess, Stringer, & Co., 9 December 1843; James Stringer Papers (MSS PP 034), Special Collections, Temple University.

¹⁶⁶ Contract for stereotype plates and copyrights of various Cooper works, 21 September 1849; Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

About nine months prior to his death Cooper called on us to obtain our views of his purpose to compose a sixth tale to the series, which should introduce Leather Stocking in scenes of the revolution. We discouraged him. He appeared much surprised and disappointed, and at once abandoned the project. Still, the series was a perfect one as it was left. The life of Leather Stocking was now a complete drama in five acts, beginning with the first warpath in the *Deerslayer*, followed by his activity and his love experience in the 'Last of the Mohicans' and the 'Pathfinder,' and his old age and death in 'The Pioneers' and 'The Prairie.'¹⁶⁷

In calling the series “a complete drama in five acts,” Townsend uses language similar to Cooper’s own in his 1841 preface to *The Deerslayer*, both publisher (as the article attests) and author shared a fondness for drama (or perhaps Townsend had Cooper’s words before him when writing his memoir).

If Townsend’s statement is reliable, a date somewhere around late 1850 can be assigned for this late contemplation of a sixth Leatherstocking tale, making his 1850 statement about *The Deerslayer*’s “completing the series *as it now stands*” (emphasis added) take on a more ambiguous, open-ended look, if indeed he was contemplating an addition to the series around the same time or shortly after writing these words. George Washington Greene’s meeting with Cooper, wherein the novelist hinted “perhaps I may do it yet,” must have occurred sometime before he presented his idea to Stringer & Townsend—say sometime around mid- to late- 1850. Interestingly, Greene writes that his interview with Cooper took place “at [George Palmer] Putnam’s,” Cooper’s other publisher at the time, whereas the accounts of Bunce and Townsend have Cooper stopping in at Stringer & Townsend to discuss his idea. By 1850 Putnam was publishing Cooper’s new works,¹⁶⁸ so why Cooper would be seeking the views of Stringer & Townsend on the proposal is not clear. At any rate, considering Stringer & Townsend’s investment of considerable capital—

¹⁶⁷ “Published Cooper’s Works: William Adeed Townsend and His Interesting Reminiscences,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 8 December 1895: 21. Credit is due to Hugh MacDougall, Founder and Secretary-Treasurer of the James Fenimore Cooper Society, for finding and forwarding this article following an inquiry I made about potential additional references to the unwritten sixth Leatherstocking tale.

¹⁶⁸ *The Ways of the Hour* appeared on 10 April 1850, and Putnam had made arrangements with Cooper to publish his non-fiction *The Towns of Manhattan*, unfinished at the time of Cooper’s death, the majority of the completed portion subsequently lost to fire while in press.

\$2100—for copyrights to Cooper's tales, their possible reluctance to meddle with the existing series is understandable. Misgivings about Cooper's artistic direction also may have come into play; as Townsend hints in another part of his reminiscences: "The didactic element in his nature had now gained complete mastery over the artistic." Quite possibly, too, signs of Cooper's declining health might have made any bargaining for a new work of fiction a risky proposition.

Unfortunately, in his surviving correspondence Cooper is mum about his plans for adding to the Leatherstocking series. If Cooper's plans proceeded far enough that he actually started writing a story, no partially written manuscript has been found to verify this or to show how far he actually got before abandoning the project. There is, however, one fascinating piece of manuscript evidence, previously undiscussed, that speaks to Cooper's plans for a sixth Leatherstocking tale. Held in the collections of the American Antiquarian Society, the document is a small half-sheet of manuscript notes in Cooper's hand, containing ideas for a new work of fiction. Such scraps are uncommon Cooper artifacts since the author did not work from written outlines in planning his works. As his daughter Susan writes, "He never prepared a sketch, or notes of any kind, while writing a work of fiction. A vague outline once drawn in his own mind, the filling up seemed to follow without effort; he frequently planned the details of the different chapters while walking to and fro in the long hall of the house, or, sailor-fashion, on the 'quarter-deck' in the grounds."¹⁶⁹ Miss Cooper's views are partisan ones, to be sure—one can point to *Mercedes of Castile* or a number of other works to demonstrate that the "filling up" did not always seem to follow "without effort"—yet surviving documents seem to back her claim that Cooper seldom committed his plans to paper. These circumstances make practically any surviving notes relating to Cooper's planning process valuable sources of information about Cooper's creative processes, and ones relating to the Leatherstocking tales must be considered especially worthy of attention, given the prominence of the series both in the Cooper canon and the canon of American literature.

The document reads as follows:

¹⁶⁹ Susan Fenimore Cooper, Introduction to the "Household Edition," *The Crater* (New York and Cambridge: Houghton, Mifflin, & Co., 1884) xiii-xiv.

Hints for the New Book--
 A clergyman of simplicity, and divided loyalty—"He can preach ten times as
 well as I."
 Two political zealots, *who convert each other*--
 Leatherstocking listening and at a loss to decide.
 Connect the girl with these two disputants; one might be the father, and the
 other the priest.
 An Irish immigrant, with Pott for a model.¹⁷⁰

The title, "Hints for the New Book," as well as the directions to "connect" the "girl" with as-yet unfinalized characters ("one might be the father...") imply that these jottings were written in the early stages of planning for a new work of fiction, which, by the unmistakable reference to Leatherstocking, would seem to be a Leatherstocking tale. Yet from the details mentioned, the "New Book" Cooper is planning here does not correspond even loosely to any of the five existing tales in the Leatherstocking series. In light of the later testimonies of Bryant, Greene, Bunce, and Townsend, it seems reasonable to conclude that these manuscript notes do indeed verify Cooper's contemplation of another tale in the Leatherstocking series.

But when? Locating the source of the "Pott" Cooper refers to as a model for an Irish immigrant character would potentially be a great help in dating the document, but so far Cooper's source remains elusive. At any rate, though, these notes seem more characteristic of Cooper's later work than of his novels of the 1820s, with social and religious touches such as a clergyman of "simplicity" and "political zealots" who convert each other. A few possibilities for the date can be narrowed down based on the existing evidence. One, of course, is that these notes are the germ of the idea that Cooper presented to Stringer & Townsend in late 1850 but soon abandoned after the publishers' rejection. It is hard to discount this possibility entirely, but the testimony of George Washington Greene, together with an existing work in the Cooper canon, suggest a more plausible alternative. Recall that Greene's account actually mentions two different times when Cooper thought about adding a tale of Natty Bumppo during the Revolution to the existing series. Greene has Cooper not only uttering "perhaps I may do it yet" circa late 1850 but also recollecting an earlier

¹⁷⁰ James Fenimore Cooper Manuscript Collection (Box 1, Folder 30), American Antiquarian Society.

intention sometime around the time *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* made their appearances: “‘I meant,’ said [Cooper], ‘when I brought [Natty] on the stage anew, to have added one more scene and introduced him in the Revolution; but I thought that the public had had enough of him, and never ventured it.’” Such a remark would suggest that Cooper’s contemplation of a sixth Leatherstocking tale as documented in the “Hints for the New Book” occurred sometime around 1841, when *The Deerslayer* was published, or in the next few years that followed. But it may be possible to be even more precise, setting a cutoff date around late 1842 or early 1843, because by that time, Cooper seems to have begun transforming his idea for a sixth Leatherstocking tale as outlined in the “Hints for the New Book” into a frontier novel, one that would be published but would not involve Natty Bumppo at all.

On 5 September 1843, Lea & Blanchard published a Cooper novel called *Wyandotté, or The Hutted Knoll*. Except for its preliminary chapters, which describe the founding of a wilderness settlement near Unadilla Creek in central New York by the retired British Captain Hugh Willoughby in 1864-65, the novel is set during the Revolutionary War. Willoughby’s settlement, the “hutted knoll” of the story’s subtitle, is populated with a number of souls, including Willoughby’s chaplain from his military days, Reverend Mr. Jedediah Woods. Although the quotation “He can preach ten times as well as I” never appears in *Wyandotté*, Woods does enjoy a reputation for sound preaching and could be well enough suited to be a priest of “simplicity.” As for the “divided loyalty” mentioned in the “Hints,” when news of the impending Revolution reaches the wilderness settlement, Woods finds himself at odds with Captain Willoughby, the former supporting the cause of the Americans while the latter holds firm for the rights of Great Britain. This very difference causes the friends to engage in a series of friendly but increasingly spirited discussions about the relative merits—politically and theologically—of colonists and king. Both men—Cooper often calls them “disputants” as in the “Hints” before their mutual conversions (67, 78, 79)¹⁷¹—advance arguments so persuasive to the other that, amazingly, they find themselves leaning toward the other side, until at last Captain Willoughby finds himself siding with the Americans while

¹⁷¹ Page citations from the “Cooper Edition” approved by the Center for Scholarly Editions: *Wyandotté, or The Hutted Knoll. A Tale*, Eds. Thomas and Marianne Philbrick (Albany: SUNY P, 1982).

Reverend Woods transforms into a staunch loyalist. As Mrs. Willoughby explains to her son, British Major Robert Willoughby (recently returned from duty in New England), regarding Reverend Woods and Captain Willoughby as they warmly debate, “They have been arguing about the right of parliament to tax the colonies, I believe, my dear, and *overpersuaded* each other, that’s all. It *is* odd, Robert, that Mr. Woods should convert your father” (78). Here, indeed, are “Two political zealots, *who convert each other—*” as the “Hints” suggest. As for Cooper’s instructions to “Connect the girl with these two disputants; one might be the father, and the other the priest,” *Wyandotté* follows the plan here as well, albeit with a twist. Captain Willoughby has a natural daughter, Beulah, in addition to his natural son, Robert, but the main “girl” of *Wyandotté* is Maud Meredith, an orphan who has lived with the Willoughbys since childhood and who is treated as a full member of the family by all. Maud, however, remains conscious of the difference, which allows for the unusual development of a love plot involving her and Robert Willoughby as the story develops. Finally, Cooper’s idea of “An Irish immigrant, with Pott for a model” finds its counterpart in *Wyandotté* in the character of Mike (originally Pat) O’Hearn, a hearty and loyal County Leitrim man who serves in the Willoughby household. It would be helpful if the “Pott” that serves as Cooper’s model could be identified, but as of yet no positive identification can be made. Cooper may be referring to a literary character or perhaps to a local townsman.

With all these similarities, it seems appropriate to conclude that the nascent idea for a Leatherstocking tale documented in the “Hints for the New Book” eventually became transformed into *Wyandotté*. Such a connection not only clears up part of the mystery surrounding the sixth Leatherstocking tale (at least Cooper’s earlier contemplation of one) but also sheds light on some of the obscurity clouding the origins of *Wyandotté*. As Thomas Philbrick has noted in his Historical Introduction to the recent scholarly “Cooper Edition” of the work, the reasons why Cooper wrote *Wyandotté* have been unclear, for “Border life in the early phases of the American Revolution was not, one would think, an inevitable subject for the novelist in 1843, and nothing in his correspondence or in his daughter Susan’s accounts of his literary career explains the origins of *Wyandotté*” (xvi). Philbrick mentions various theories, such as James H. Pickering’s claim that *Wyandotté* was a response to the “naively patriotic tone” of *The Life of Joseph Brant* (1838) by William Leete Stone, whom Cooper was suing for libel, or that *Wyandotté*’s theme was inspired by its summer publication,

which would coincide with the pending completion of the Bunker Hill monument in June 1843 (xvi-xvii). As Philbrick himself notes, neither of these conjectures is very satisfactory. But a connection between *Wyandotté* and the “Hints for the New Book” gives Cooper a clearer motive for writing a tale of “Border Life in the early phases of the American Revolution.” As O.B. Bunce suggests, the Leatherstocking series as it stands leaves a “noticeable gap” in the career of Natty Bumppo by lacking a tale of his exploits during the Revolution, making it natural for Cooper to be contemplating a story to fill that gap. If he were indeed contemplating such a tale, perhaps around the time he sent Richard Bentley the vague notice that “I shall commence a new work in a few days, several subjects suggesting themselves” in September 1842,¹⁷² it seems more likely, if not “inevitable,” that the subject of “Border life in the early phases of the American Revolution” would be on Cooper’s mind.

There is still, of course, the matter of what to make of “Leatherstocking listening and at a loss to decide”—the one line of the “Hints for the New Book” with little to no direct correlative in *Wyandotté*—in light of what apparently happened to the story. Why did Cooper write *Wyandotté* rather than a sixth Leatherstocking tale? According to Greene’s reconstructed conversation, Cooper recalled giving up on the idea of a sixth treatment of Natty Bumppo because he “thought that the public had had enough of him”—an explanation that sounds plausible and satisfactory enough given Cooper’s dissatisfactions at the time and the doubts he had already expressed in 1841 about *The Deerslayer*, but strange given the critical and commercial success that greeted both *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer*. It is difficult to imagine that Cooper could have believed a frontier romance without Natty Bumppo would be a better seller than one containing him. Conceivably other factors, particularly artistic ones, could have played a role in Cooper’s decision to abandon the project. One possibility is that Cooper found himself constrained by a small but significant detail from his first Leatherstocking tale, *The Pioneers*, wherein Natty Bumppo is revealed to be the lifelong servant (and, in old age, guardian) of Colonel Effingham, a loyalist. It is easy to see how this association would create an awkward situation for Cooper. During the French and Indian War described in *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Pathfinder*, or during the

¹⁷² JFC to Richard Bentley, 22 September 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:315. Of course, Cooper just as well may be referring to any number of other ideas.

“Old French War” era of *The Deerslayer*, Natty’s loyalties could easily be mixed without being divided. That is, he could be at once both a loyal British subject and an independent-minded American colonist without having to choose one side to the exclusion of the other. In the post-Revolution America of *The Pioneers* and *The Prairie*, issues of sovereignty likewise become nearly moot. But placing Natty Bumppo directly in the Revolution would force Cooper’s hand, requiring Natty to take a position and, in keeping with his character, to expound upon his reasons for doing so. Certainly Cooper was capable of handling this delicate task, careful as he was about handling the Revolution with nuance in *The Spy*, but perhaps he deemed the experiment too likely to meet with criticism no matter what position Natty might take.¹⁷³ Or perhaps it was simply too complicated to bring together a girl and her father, a priest, Leatherstocking, and an Irish immigrant in the way Cooper had originally envisioned (Cooper could hardly write in a love plot involving Natty, for instance, so another male lead would be required). *Wyandotté* also was written during a period of intense activity for Cooper—libel suits and other literary endeavors forming only a portion of it¹⁷⁴—raising the issue of whether Cooper’s schedule gave him the time he desired to devote the extra attention required for a sequel involving Leatherstocking.

Although it is probably impossible to know fully the reasons why Cooper’s idea for a sixth Leatherstocking tale turned into *Wyandotté*, or what plans for Natty crossed his mind in 1850 when he once again considered adding to the series, his “Hints for the New Book” suggest the flexibility and fertility of his creative processes. If *Wyandotté* was Plan B for Cooper, it surely did not suffer artistically because of it. Cooper was remarkably capable of pulling together wide ranges of materials from both books and life to create dramatic, stirring narratives out of his flashes of inspiration—the final product sometimes quite different from the original plan.

As it was, *Wyandotté* received relatively little fanfare in the literary world upon its publication, marking the end, in a sense, to this phase of Cooper’s commercial renaissance,

¹⁷³ In *Wyandotté*, Robert Willoughby, the character most likely filling something resembling the role Cooper originally envisioned for Natty Bumppo, retains his position in the British Army.

¹⁷⁴ See Thomas and Marianne Philbrick, “Historical Introduction,” *Wyandotté, or The Huttet Knoll. A Tale* (Albany: SUNY P, 1982) xv-xvi.

as shall be discussed further in Chapter Five. The second of Cooper's novels issued in an "experiment" of cheaper, higher-volume publishing with Lea & Blanchard (after 1842's *The Wing-and-Wing*), *Wyandotté* helped usher in, through no apparent fault of its own, an era of even lower payments to Cooper and a slide to less prominent status in the literary world, despite artistry that often remained undiminished. It is safe to say, however, that works such as *The Pathfinder* and *The Deerslayer* kept these forces at bay temporarily, announcing a strong revival of his career artistically even if the corresponding commercial rewards were not as great. Although the days of the \$4500 payment for a novel were over, Cooper was still, even at this point in his career, nearly the only novelist in America who could secure a reliable and ample living for himself by his pen. Up to this point, he could proudly turn down such humble alternatives as writing for magazines or gift books, setting his own course with a surprising degree of freedom. Such would not continue to be the case, as rampant competition for cheap literature bottomed out what was already a depressed literary marketplace, and, as the next chapters will show, Cooper would have to look for new ways to maintain control over his writings and make them profitable.

Chapter Four

Periodical Publication: Cooper and *Graham's Magazine*

Works:

American Naval Biographies ("Sketches of Naval Men"). *Graham's Magazine* 21-26 (1842-45):

"Richard Somers," October 1842.

"William Bainbridge," November 1842.

"Richard Dale," December 1842.

"Oliver Hazard Perry," May and June, 1843.

"John Paul Jones," July and August 1843.

"John Shaw," March 1844.

"John Barry," June 1844.

"John Templer Shubrick," December 1844.

"Melancthon Taylor Woolsey," January 1845.

"Edward Preble," May and June 1845.

Published in book form, revised, as *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers*. By J. Fenimore Cooper. *Author of The Spy, The Pilot, etc.* 2 vols. Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1846. Also 2 vols. Auburn: Derby & Jackson, 1846.

Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief. *Graham's Magazine* 22 (January-April 1843).

Also published in its entirety as an extra number of *Brother Jonathan*, 22 March 1843, as *Le Mouchoir: An Autobiographical Romance*.

The Islets of the Gulf; or, Rose Budd. *Graham's Magazine* 29-32 (November 1846-March 1848)

Published in book form on 21 March 1848 as *Jack Tier; or the Florida Reef*. By the author of "The Pilot," "Red Rover," "Two Admirals," "Wing-and-Wing," "Miles Wallingford," etc. 2 vols. New York: Burgess, Stringer & Co., 1848.

James Fenimore Cooper is usually known as a novelist, sometimes as a historian, but seldom as a writer of magazine pieces. Despite a number of biographies and critical studies of Cooper over the years, none has adequately assessed his contribution to periodical literature. Cooper's most significant contributions appeared in *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* during a six-year period between 1842 and 1848. Surprisingly, little has

been written about this publishing relationship, often leading to confusion of titles and dates when discussing the works involved. This chapter will provide a brief history of Cooper's involvement with *Graham's Magazine*, with several goals in mind. Chief among them is to pin down specific dates and documents relevant to the composition and publication of the works Cooper published in *Graham's*, so as to lay a foundation for future studies. Other goals are to discover the character of Cooper's contributions to *Graham's* and to explore how this writing related to his primary career as novelist. After a general discussion of why and how Cooper became involved with *Graham's*, specific consideration of the significance of the individual works will follow.

In the "Editor's Table" column of its August 1842 issue, *Graham's Magazine* announced the addition of James Fenimore Cooper to its already prestigious list of authors:

TO READERS AND CORRESPONDENTS.--It affords us great pleasure to state that the publisher of this magazine has entered into engagements with JAMES FENIMORE COOPER, the most popular of our country's authors, by which we shall be enabled to present, in every number, after that for September, an article from his pen. Mr. COOPER has never before been connected with any periodical. His works are so familiar to every reader in the old or the new world, that it is unnecessary to speak at length of the increase in interest and value our magazine will derive from his contributions.

Thus commenced a publishing relationship that was to last nearly six years with little interruption, remaining steady and amiable even as Cooper shifted his primary book publishing alliances. During these six years, Cooper would publish three works in *Graham's*, each of decidedly different character: a series of biographical sketches of naval officers prominent in America's short naval history (later expanded and published in book form by Carey and Hart as *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers* in 1846); *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*, a serialized novella of social observation narrated in the first "person"--if a piece of cloth can be labeled as such--by an embroidered linen handkerchief; and a sea story, *The Islets of the Gulf; or, Rose Budd*, which eventually grew to the length of a typical Cooper novel and was published in book form as *Jack Tier*.¹

¹ Since the difference in titles between the serial and book forms of these works can easily cause confusion, it may be wise to note the system of terminology used here. Typically, scholars indiscriminately tend to use the titles of these works in book form even when referring to their appearance in *Graham's*—thus *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers*

That Cooper's connection with *Graham's* has been largely forgotten—perhaps mentioned in passing but scarcely discussed in much depth—suggests the status “magazine writing” has held with critics then and now. Rarely have biographers and critics devoted more than a page to either the naval sketches or the *Autobiography*, leaving *Jack Tier* (essentially a “regular” Cooper novel) as the only one to receive any significant press—and that usually without much consideration of its origins in *Graham's*. Even that work suffers in comparison to almost every other Cooper sea novel, enduring criticisms that many of its plot devices are rehashed from *The Red Rover* or *The Water-Witch* (revealing a strangely resilient nineteenth-century emphasis on the “incidents” of novels). Certainly, too, the non-fiction nature of the naval sketches renders them less appealing to literary scholars, and following on the heels of the *History of the Navy* as they do, with subject matter less ambitious and less groundbreaking, they command far less attention than even that neglected historical masterpiece. In terms of reprinting, too, these works have been largely forgotten: only *Jack Tier* has seen some reprinting, and even it has been out of print since the first quarter of the twentieth century. The “nonstandard” character of the other two works—nonfiction sketches and a novelette—has excluded them from the collected editions of Cooper's novels. The exclusion of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* from these editions, despite the inclusion of other short works such as *Precaution* and sometimes *Ned Myers*, is especially puzzling, and lends support to the conclusion that throughout the last century and a half the status of this work as a “magazine piece” renders its lasting literary value lower than any of Cooper's typical works of fiction.² At any rate, it seems sufficiently obvious that these

for the naval biographies or *Jack Tier* for *The Islets of the Gulf*. Since the initial appearance of these works in *Graham's* is significant here, a closer distinction may be more useful. Thus *The Islets of the Gulf* will be used unless specifically referring to the book version, *Jack Tier*, likewise “naval sketches” or *Graham's* sometime title “Sketches of Naval Men” versus the book form *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers*. Thankfully amid all this confusion, *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* tends to be the preferred title for this work to this day, and will be used here except when referring to the pirated *Brother Jonathan* text, *Le Mouchoir*.

² No reprints of *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers* have appeared since Cooper's lifetime. *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* appeared in a pirated version as an “extra” number of *Brother Jonathan* magazine on March 22, 1843 under the title of *Le Mouchoir, an Autobiographical Romance*. Apart from contemporary editions in Britain, France, and Germany, no others followed until 1897, when a limited scholarly edition of 500 copies, edited by Walter Lee Brown, was issued (Evanston, Ill.: Golden Booke Press). Brown's

writings for *Graham's*, produced during a decade of Cooper's career already labeled as one of artistic decline and frantic production bordering on hackwork, seem to epitomize the lengths to which Cooper would go to keep his pot boiling in the mid-1840s.

Such conclusions would not be entirely wrong, but to take them at face value is to overlook a successful experimental phase in Cooper's writing career, underestimate Cooper's continuing literary celebrity, and misunderstand Cooper's changing view of his profession as author during the 1840s. It is true, perhaps, that in more prosperous times earlier in his career Cooper would likely have considered magazine engagements of the sort he entered into with *Graham's* as beneath the dignity of a prominent novelist. Throughout his career Cooper was pestered with requests to submit articles to various periodicals and gift annuals, much as he was approached with propositions to "work up" readers' and acquaintances' ideas, locales, and memoirs into proper literary works. He invariably turned down these entreaties, usually politely, preferring to maintain his own independence. But that is not to say that Cooper had avoided periodicals entirely before contracting with *Graham's*.

Graham's claim that Cooper had "never before been connected with any periodical" was true in the main, in that Cooper had never contracted to furnish original fiction or history in a periodical on a regular basis for pay,³ but the venture with *Graham's* was not

annotated text, established in consultation with the original manuscript and all textual variants, bears the distinction of being the first scholarly critical edition of any Cooper work, nearly three quarters of a century in advance of any other. Another edition, also limited to 500 copies, was privately printed in 1949 as a *festschrift* in honor of Gregory Lansing Paine, using the *Graham's* text without annotation. As for *The Islets of the Gulf*, after appearing in book form as *Jack Tier, or, the Florida Reef* in 1848 (English title: *Captain Spike*), it was regularly included in sets of Cooper's works until these sets went out of print in the first quarter of the twentieth century. See Robert E. Spiller and Philip C. Blackburn, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper* (1930; New York: Burt Franklin, 1968) for details.

³ He may have received payment for his article "The Edinburgh Review on James's *Naval Occurrences* and Cooper's *Naval History*," published in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* for May & June 1842. Cooper is possibly referring to this piece in his letter to Mrs. Cooper, 22 March 1842, in which he writes, "I think I have made a better arrang[e]ment with my naval answers than giving them to the Boston Notion. I have some prospect of receiving \$300 for them" (*Letters and Journals* 4:251). Also, *Letters and Journals* (4:286) notes that John Louis O'Sullivan, the founder of the magazine, had often asked Cooper to contribute articles for pay. No presently known evidence either confirms or denies that Cooper was paid for this piece; the \$300 figure does seem high.

Cooper's first experience with periodicals. In fact, Cooper's involvement with periodicals extends almost to the beginning of his career as a writer and continued intermittently throughout it. In 1820-1822, while still in doubt as to whether his first experiments with authorship would succeed, Cooper bolstered his new self-image as a literary man by contributing lengthy anonymous book reviews to *The Literary and Scientific Repository*, on topics that included naval history, trade, and polar exploration (themes which would reappear in his own works).⁴ In 1827, 1831, and 1832, while in Europe, he submitted socially-oriented pieces to European periodicals: a brief article on "Slavery in the United States" in the *Revue Encyclopedique*, a review of F. de Roos's *Personal Narrative of Travels in the United States and Canada in 1826* in *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine*, and a brief allegorical satire in French, "Point de Bateaux a Vapeur," in *Le Livre des Cent-et-Un*, respectively.⁵ Back in the United States after 1833, Cooper contributed two pieces to the new *Naval Magazine*: "Comparative Resources of the American Navy" and "Hints on Manning the Navy."⁶ In 1838 he submitted his controversial review of J.G. Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott* to *Knickerbocker Magazine*, and in 1842 he responded to the *Edinburgh Review's* attack on his *Naval History* with a lengthy two-part rebuttal in *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*.⁷ Also in 1842 the new paper *Brother Jonathan* printed a "Lost Chapter" of *Home as Found*, which was really no lost chapter at all but a satirical, talky "debate" between characters of the

⁴ Cooper's known reviews of this era are collected and reprinted in facsimile by James Franklin Beard in *Early Critical Essays, 1820-22* (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1955).

⁵ ["Slavery in the United States,"] *Revue Encyclopedique* 34 (April 1827): 239-43; ["America,"] [A review of F. de Roos, *Personal Narrative of Travels in the United States and Canada in 1826*. . .], *Colburn's New Monthly Magazine* 32 (October 1831): 297-311; "Point de Bateaux a Vapeur," *Paris, ou Le Livre des Cent-et-Un* 9 (1832): 221-50. The latter piece was translated into English, with some portions of the French text omitted, as "No Steamboats—A Vision," appearing in *The American Ladies' Magazine* 7 (1834): 71-79.

⁶ *The Naval Magazine* 1 (January 1836): 19-33; 1 (March 1836): 176-91.

⁷ [Review of J.G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*], *Knickerbocker Magazine* 12 (October 1838): 349-66; "The *Edinburgh Review* on James's *Naval Occurrences* and Cooper's *Naval History*," *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 10 (May and June 1842): 411-35, 515-41.

novel on social topics.⁸ After 1842, his relationship with *Graham's* was indeed exclusive, and he submitted no pieces to other American periodicals during his lifetime (only sending his *Graham's* material to Richard Bentley for publication in his *Miscellany*). So Cooper's connections with periodicals—not to mention his numerous letters to the *New York Evening Post* and other newspapers—was a longstanding “extracurricular” activity for him. Looking over this assortment of articles, one can observe that Cooper's contributions to periodicals often occurred at crucial periods in his career: when establishing himself as an author or launching new phases of authorship, or building his credibility as an expert on nautical or social affairs. Periodicals, then, were instrumental in trying out and establishing Cooper's public persona before the nation. His articles defined his thought more specifically than his fiction, and placed him before the public as more than an artist. Unlike his contributions to newspapers, wherein he was often inclined to express his opinions and chronicle his battles with the Whig press with bold self-assertion, most of Cooper's magazine articles reveal a more detached, distant perspective proper to undertakings of a more literary, less personal nature. For much of his career, periodicals were a direct outlet to the public, more spontaneous than pamphlets and more dignified than newspaper submissions, and better suited to topical remarks (such as his comments about Scott) which would not likely command a pamphlet or be saleable as independent works.

In this light one can see how Cooper's venture with *Graham* was a departure—though not wholly so—from his previous experience with publication in periodicals. Yet why embark upon his venture when he did, and why with *Graham*? Existing documentary evidence on the commencement of Cooper's relationship with *Graham's Magazine* is sketchy, but it would seem that the connection was partly the product of fortuitous circumstances, converging when Cooper was casting about for new ways to make his literary endeavors more profitable and George Graham was seeking to attract America's most popular and respected authors to his increasingly popular magazine.

George Rex Graham (1813-1894) of Philadelphia rose from humble beginnings to become the most prominent periodical publisher of the 1840s. Taught the trade of a cabinetmaker in his youth, Graham managed to study law and become admitted to the bar

⁸ *Brother Jonathan* 1 (January 1, 1842): 19-22.

before turning his interests to the literary world. In addition to his strong ambition, Graham possessed a good eye for marketable talent, and understood better than anybody else in the periodicals business that paying generously for good work and famous names would produce generous returns.

Graham founded his famous *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* by combining two Philadelphia magazines, Aitkison's *The Casket* and Burton's *Gentleman's Magazine*. Graham had purchased *The Casket*, a popular but unassuming monthly owned by the founders of the *Saturday Evening Post*, in May 1839, when he was twenty-six years old. By 1840 he had changed its format to resemble the larger *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, and in November 1840 bought *Burton's* and merged it with *The Casket* to form the new *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* (*The Casket and Gentleman's United*).⁹ The rise of *Graham's* popularity was astronomical: in the space of the first year, subscriptions shot up from an estimated 5500-8000 (depending on whose estimate) to a claimed 25,000. By March 1842 Graham was advertising 40,000.¹⁰

The formula of his success was nothing revolutionary in terms of content. Like *Godey's Lady's Book* (Graham's chief competitor) and other other monthlies of its type, *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* had the usual assortment of poems, tales, biographical or historical essays, book reviews, gossip editor's column, music, and illustrations, including art and fashion plates. Compared to *Godey's*, *Graham's* sought an audience more balanced between men and women, catering to male as well as female moral sensibilities, securing more male authors as contributors, and including masculine features such as sporting sketches on hunting or fishing. This masculine content was used to good effect in keeping William Cullen Bryant away from *Godey's* and secure with *Graham's* exclusively when *Godey's* strategy of "giving one number each year for *men*, and eleven

⁹ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850* (New York: Appleton, 1930) 545. The full title of the magazine for the first two years of its existence was *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* (*The Casket and Gentleman's United*). *Embracing Every Department of Literature: Embellished with Engravings, Fashions, and Music, Arranged for the Piano-Forte, Harp, and Guitar*.

¹⁰ Mott 552; *Graham's* 20 (March 1842): 154.

numbers for milliners” was pointed out to him.¹¹ But what really stood out in *Graham’s* case was the quality of the magazine’s features. By “quality” it should not be assumed that the content was always of the finest literary character: the stories were often on the sentimental or sensational sides, the poetry occasionally overwrought. As Joy Bayless noted with a fair degree of accuracy, “Philosophical discussions, controversial matter, and other subjects requiring too much mental effort on the part of the reader were not admitted.”¹² But Graham avoided excesses in trashiness and sentimentality, and kept his standards consistently good by securing famous names and admired talent, almost all American at that. Unlike operators of other periodicals who reprinted (i.e., pirated) all the British material they wanted free of charge, due to lack of international copyright, Graham believed that audiences would pay to read a periodical filled entirely with works of native authors. He also calculated that by paying authors well, he could attract the most prestigious roster of authors and artists in America to his magazine, giving him a distinct edge in advertising. Thus by December 1842 the magazine could boast of a “corps of contributors” that included:

WILLIAM C. BRYANT and RICHARD H. DANA [Sr.], the first American poets, and the equals of any now living in the world; JAMES FENIMORE COOPER, the greatest of living novelists; CHARLES F. HOFFMAN, one of the most admired poets and prose writers of our country; ELIZABETH B. BARRETT, the truest female poet who has written in the English language; J.H. MANCUR, the author of “Henri Quatre;” GEORGE H. COLTON, the author of “Tecumseh;” H.T. TUCKERMAN, the author of “Isabelle, or Sicily,” etc.; the author of “A New Home” and “Forest Life,” who under the name of “Mary Clavers [Caroline Kirkland],” has won a reputation second to that of none of the writers of her sex in America; Mrs. E.F. ELLET, the well known author of “The Characters of Schiller,” etc.; Mrs. SEBA [i.e., Elizabeth Oakes] SMITH, whose elegant and truthful compositions are as universally admired as they are read, and several others, whom we have not now space to mention. All these, with our favorite old writers, Professor LONGFELLOW, GEORGE HILL, EDGAR A. POE, Mrs. EMBURY, Mrs. STEPHENS, and others, we shall retain for our succeeding volumes.¹³

¹¹ Joy Bayless, *Rufus W. Griswold: Poe’s Literary Executor* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1943) 56 (Rufus W. Griswold to William Cullen Bryant, 17 December 1843).

¹² Bayless 53.

¹³ *Graham’s Magazine* 21 (December 1842): 344.

Likewise he could name James Kirke Paulding, Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Russell Lowell, Mrs. Lydia Sigourney, Willis Gaylord Clark, Nathaniel Parker Willis, Henry William Herbert (“Frank Forester”), and Joseph C. Neal among his list of authors. Graham took pains to remind his readers of the prestigious company they enjoyed, bragging in the pages of the issue for July 1844 that “The contributions of Henry W. Longfellow, W.C. Bryant, J.K. Paulding, James Fenimore Cooper, and of a host more of the *best* American writers, may now be found, almost all of them, in ‘Graham’ *exclusively*.”¹⁴

Graham also made sure that the magazine was attractive visually, unlike the homely *Casket* that had preceded *Graham’s*. The pages were printed well with good, legible type. For the illustrations, he contracted for original steel and copper engravings for each number, defying the usual habits of relying on woodcuts or engravings first run elsewhere. Prominent artisans such as John Sartain (who later started his own *Union Magazine of Literature and Art*), A.L. Dick, and W.E. Tucker contributed their work; as Frank Mott notes, Sartain modestly attributed the magazine’s success to the pictures.¹⁵

Glancing at rates of payment to contributors before and after Graham emerged on the scene makes it obvious why men and women of talent sought out engagements in *Graham’s Magazine*. One to two dollars a page for prose (double for poetry), of print small or smaller, was the approximate norm before Graham—with payment not always reliably timely. Many submissions received no pay whatever. An exceptional publication like *The Knickerbocker* might pay up to five dollars a page for some articles, but nothing for others.¹⁶ Graham’s rates were not standardized, but started around four dollars a page (approximately 1000 words) and went up to ten or twelve for more famous writers. Hawthorne made five dollars a page in 1842, and Poe, never in Graham’s highest esteem, made four or five, which was still slightly better than the three dollars per page he was paid at *Burton’s*.¹⁷ Catharine Maria Sedgwick was retained at the rate of ten dollars a page (matching the rate she was paid

¹⁴ *Graham’s Magazine* 26 (July 1844): 48.

¹⁵ Mott 547.

¹⁶ Mott 505-06.

¹⁷ Mott 506-07.

at *Godey's*, with less exertion required on her part).¹⁸ For poems Graham paid anywhere from around ten to fifty dollars each; Lowell went from ten to thirty dollars a poem between 1842 and 1845, and Longfellow from twenty-five to fifty; for Longfellow's "The Spanish Student," Graham paid \$150.00.¹⁹ Bryant was offered fifty dollars a poem or six hundred dollars a year for a poem a month.²⁰ This was, as Mott notes, "almost a 'living wage' indeed."²¹ What is perhaps most amazing about Graham's generous program is how successfully it improved Graham's bottom line: in the first year of *Graham's* he cleared an estimated \$15,000 profit.²² His wealth complemented his genial personality, making him a splendid entertainer and a great favorite among authors.

As Graham's scheme proved practical, competitors such as *Godey's* began increasing the amounts they paid to authors, and it began to be something of a contest among periodicals to boast of the sums paid to American authors--though the amounts they claimed to pay and the amounts they actually paid were sometimes quite different. High circulation was paramount to the continued health of magazines offering good pay to authors; Sartain's *Union Magazine*, for instance, folded under the weight of the payments, despite paying about two-thirds the rate Graham was paying.²³ As a rule, though, low pay remained the norm for most contributors to periodicals, making *Graham's* stand out all the more for its liberality.

Such financial generosity was undoubtedly one of the key enticements for James Fenimore Cooper to join the top ranks of contributors to *Graham's*. The chief problem he faced in his writing enterprises was diminishing financial return for his effort. In 1842, when Cooper first signed on with *Graham's*, the market for books was in particularly bad shape, prompting him to comment to his wife, "The times are dull to a degree almost unknown,

¹⁸ Bayless 60.

¹⁹ Mott 506-07.

²⁰ Bayless 55.

²¹ Mott 506-07; Bayless 56.

²² Bayless 53.

²³ Mott 510.

and literary property suffers with all other.”²⁴ A sagging economy and (even more lamentable to booksellers) a boom in demand and competition for cheap literature had dropped the bottom out of the book market. Cooper’s publishers Lea & Blanchard, in common with most other booksellers, complained on 18 May 1842 that “In the wretched & uncertain state of business there is really no inducement to enter into new engagements just now of any kind...indeed no period has ever been like it since we have been in business.”²⁵ In such an environment Cooper was eager to try out new strategies to meet the new demands for cheap literature and keep his writing career financially viable. Hoping to at least eke out a profit through a high volume of sales, in keeping with the high demand for cheap literature, Cooper tried an “experiment” in his negotiations to induce Lea & Blanchard to publish *The Wing-and-Wing* (the novel over which they were balking in the letter quoted above) in higher numbers at a cheap rate. From \$2000 for an edition of 5000 books for *The Two Admirals*, published earlier in the year, his contract for *The Wing-and-Wing* fell to \$1000 for an edition of 10,000, with Cooper supplying the stereotype plates (at a cost of about \$450) and receiving bonuses if additional numbers were printed.²⁶ With such low returns on a novel that could be expected to sell reasonably well, Cooper hardly could have anticipated much from publication of non-fiction naval biographies. For Cooper, then, the prospect of receiving ten dollars a page for material on which booksellers might not cheerfully take a risk would have had great appeal. Ten dollars a page (twice what Nathaniel Hawthorne was paid, but no more than Catharine Sedgwick received), though not as lucrative as his most successful bargains with publishers, was a decent return for his effort—another “experiment” that would prove beneficial to him. No doubt if he had driven harder bargains with Graham, he could have negotiated for more money, but Cooper had his eye on other means of making his writing for Graham pay.

Cooper was shrewd enough to foresee that if he negotiated his terms of copyright advantageously with Graham he would be able to make money twice, or even thrice, on his

²⁴ *Letters and Journals* 4:251.

²⁵ *Letters and Journals* 4:290.

²⁶ Contracts for both works are held in the Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

productions for the magazine. By stipulating in his contract that he was free to sell the work to whomever he pleased after its final number appeared in *Graham's*, Cooper could resell the work in book form to his publishers (assuming correctly that the market would improve from its bottomed-out state of mid-1842). Although the resulting work would not have the attraction of a new work, and would likely not command as great a price or as large a sale, Cooper would stand to make good money off the resulting double sales: \$1500, it turns out, from his naval sketches (\$1000 from *Graham's*, \$500 from Carey & Hart for *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers*), and two to three times that for *Islets of the Gulf*, thanks in part to his still-respectable £350 (about \$1650-1700 in 1846 dollars) from his British publisher Richard Bentley. Cooper was careful to specify that he could publish his pieces simultaneously overseas (he had *Bentley's Miscellany* in mind), provided that they did not appear in advance of their issuance in *Graham's*. This arrangement never did work out substantially to his advantage. Although Cooper offered all three of his magazine pieces to Bentley, he only succeeded in striking a deal for *The Islets of the Gulf*, arrangements for the other two works being frustrated by logistical problems and other complications, as shall be seen.

As much as economics undoubtedly influenced Cooper to start writing for *Graham's Magazine*, other significant intangible factors should not be underestimated. Certainly Graham's personality, and especially that of his editor at the time, Rufus W. Griswold, proved influential in securing Cooper's confidence. Cooper placed a great deal of value on trustworthiness in his friendships and business relationships, and likewise appreciated the appearance of candor in his associates. With the departure of his friend Henry Carey from his publishing firm Carey, Lea, & Blanchard in 1838, Cooper's rapport with the remaining partners Lea & Blanchard declined along with his fortunes. His relations with the smaller, less competent Burgess, Stringer & Co. were much more cheerful, despite that firm's frequent cash flow problems and less aggressive marketing. From all indications, his relationship with Graham, while not distinguished by any particular closeness, was cordial. Graham understood Cooper's prominent status as an author and public figure and granted him considerable latitude in selecting his subject matter and in negotiating the size of the final literary product. It is well to remember that despite the hits his reputation had taken at the hands of the Whig press, Cooper retained considerable literary celebrity at the time he

began to write for *Graham's*. Unlike authors such as Hawthorne or Stowe, whose writing for periodicals served as apprenticeships of sorts to successful careers later as novelists, Cooper had already achieved success before turning his pen to periodicals and remained the best-known novelist in the country. Fresh from successes with *The Pathfinder*, *The Deerslayer*, and *The Two Admirals*, Cooper's only real problems were battling with hostile newspapermen and not getting paid enough for his work. Graham seemed to understand, at least at first, that he was adding a famous name to his roster of stars more than he was buying any specifically "marketable" kinds of writing from Cooper. By the time of *The Isles of the Gulf*, which Cooper may have undertaken at a suggestion of Graham, Graham had figured out how to coax out of the ungovernable Cooper the kind of writing popular readers would most enjoy from his pen: adventures with skillful handling of scene and incident, devoid of much direct confrontation on controversial social issues.

The role of Graham's sometime editor Rufus W. Griswold cannot be ignored, for he was chiefly responsible for recruiting Cooper as a contributor and nurturing his loyalty. Griswold, fresh with success for his anthology *The Poets and Poetry of America*, had been sought out by Graham only a day after Graham had received a copy of the book from its publishers, Carey & Hart. Seeking a replacement for the volatile Edgar Allan Poe, who had been literary editor for *Graham's* until the beginning of April 1842, Graham offered Griswold a \$1000 per annum salary and had him settled into his new editorial position at the magazine (as well as at *The Saturday Evening Post*, which Graham also owned) by the middle or end of May 1842. Leaving behind a wife and children in New York, Griswold took lodgings in Philadelphia and immediately began seeking out the best literary talent for contributions to the magazine, per Graham's directives. Ingratiating and ambitious, Griswold was far more suited to this sort of recruitment than Poe, who looked down upon the magazine's catering to popular tastes. He succeeded in recruiting many literary giants: Bryant, Longfellow, Sedgwick, Maria Brooks, Holmes, Hawthorne, Charles Fenno Hoffman, Henry William Herbert ("Frank Forester"), Elizabeth Oakes Smith, and others.²⁷ Cooper was also a high priority, and Griswold lost no time in seeking him out.

²⁷ Bayless 55-62.

There were more than a few ironies in this pursuit. Only three years earlier, in 1839, he had been a partner with Park Benjamin (later a defendant in a Cooper libel suit) publishing a penny daily in New York called the *Evening Tattler*, as well as the *New York Evening Signal*. Benjamin was a rabid Whig, and the *Signal* displayed constant animosity toward Cooper. The *Tattler* for 23 July 1839 cast odium upon Cooper for his libel suits, alleging that “Perhaps there never was another who has rendered himself more generally odious to his contemporaries” since “he is the branded libeller of his own countrymen and countrywomen.”²⁸ Cooper could not have been ignorant of Griswold’s connection with Benjamin. Furthermore, Griswold had contributed indirectly to Cooper’s financial slump by forming another paper with Benjamin, the famous mammoth weekly *Brother Jonathan*, the “largest folio sheet in the world.”²⁹ Although both Griswold and Benjamin soon left the paper—Benjamin forming the archrival *New World*—they had stirred up a cutthroat market for cheap literature. In the early 1840s, *Brother Jonathan* and the *New World* aggressively marketed cheap paperback novels (usually pirated from overseas), sold through the mail as “extra” numbers of the paper in order to circumvent the higher postal rates for books and magazines. These papers were responsible for a good part of the cutthroat competition for cheap books that had bottomed out the market in 1842 and 1843, leaving both mainline publishers and authors to cast about for ways to keep afloat.

Griswold, however, was not paralyzed by these ironies, and whatever his initial feelings about Cooper, he wasted little time in contacting him. It is not clear how Cooper and Griswold established their initial contacts, but we do know that Griswold had met Cooper at Saunderson’s hotel before August 1842, probably on 29–30 June, when Cooper stayed there during a visit to Philadelphia. Saunderson’s was not Cooper’s usual stop, his normal preference being Head’s Tavern, but he changed his environs during his visits to the city on 29–30 June 1842 and in late September to early October 1842. He mentions the place, but not by name, in a letter to William P. Barton on 30 June. Apologizing for not making it farther up the street to pay Barton a visit, Cooper writes, “I turned into this house, as I came up Chestnut Street, fagged and hot, and like my quarters well enough. It is clean,

²⁸ *Evening Tattler* [New York] 23 July 1839; Bayless 30.

²⁹ *Evening Tattler* [New York] 11 July 1839.

cool for Philadelphia, and has a tolerable *restaurant*, which, by the way, is well attended.”³⁰ Later letters from his September-October visit list the place by name, and Cooper’s stay there is confirmed by Griswold’s mention of “when I saw you at Sanderson’s hotel” in his letter of 6 August 1842.³¹ Exactly what transpired during that meeting, besides some discussion of Washington Irving Griswold alludes to, is a mystery, but evidently both men made good impressions on each other. By 11 July, Cooper was sending Griswold manuscript for his first installment of naval biography in *Graham’s*, and the two started a lasting, if not particularly close, friendship.

Griswold’s eagerness to court Cooper’s favor extended even to his absorbing some of Cooper’s biases. In a letter of 6 August 1842, he attempted to change some of Cooper’s unfavorable views of Washington Irving’s career, passing on remarks from Bryant about how Irving had praised Cooper as a writer and man of the highest order. Cooper, however, was not impressed, asserting that “A published eulogy of myself from Irving’s pen could not change my opinion of his career.”³² His quarrel was not with Irving’s writings, but with Irving’s “meannesses” of ethics—namely, his duplicity in politics and publishing, including the way Irving, like Scott, allegedly arranged to get paid to write reviews of his own works for publication. Griswold made this allegation himself in *Graham’s*, condemning Scott for “puffing” his own works and claiming that “Washington Irving has done the same thing, in writing laudatory notices of his work for the reviews, and, like Scott, received pay for whitewashing himself.”³³ When Irving’s nephew Pierre demanded specific proof (Irving himself was in Madrid at the time), Griswold “attempted to shift the blame to a ‘Mr. E.,’ an Englishman, ‘with whom his acquaintance was limited to a single interview.’”³⁴ Considering that Cooper was often ridiculed by the Whigs as “the handsome Mr. Effingham” and

³⁰ JFC to William P. Barton, 30 June 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:300.

³¹ Rufus W. Griswold to JFC, 6 August 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

³² JFC to Griswold, 7 August 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:305-07.

³³ *Graham’s Magazine* 21 (October 1842): 219; Bayless 62.

³⁴ Bayless 63. See Pierre M. Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1864) 3:265.

derided as “aristocratic,” and that Griswold probably had seen Cooper only once at this point, the identity of Cooper as Griswold’s “Mr. E.” seems likely. Despite there being some slight substance to Cooper’s allegations, Griswold was swayed enough by Pierre Irving’s explanations to issue a lukewarm apology in the December 1842 issue of *Graham’s*.

Cooper even helped Griswold search for a house in Philadelphia, in order that the young man’s family might be able to join him. Griswold alludes to this fact in a letter of 22 November 1842 before reporting an event that drastically changed his life:

You may remember that you accompanied me while last in the city on a walk in search of a dwelling house. I was weary of living alone, and anxious to remove my family to Philadelphia. I subsequently succeeded in finding a place that suited me, but I have now no use for it. On the 7th instant I left my wife in the enjoyment of health—on the 9th I was summoned by a messenger to her funeral. God help me—She was my all in the world.³⁵

Cooper’s response is in keeping with the mindset of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* and his other late novels, in pointing to the frailness and vanity of humankind:

The papers had apprised me of your great loss, and awakened my sincere sympathy. You must console yourself with the reflection that all who die in a good frame of mind, escape from a bad world, to enjoy a better in quitting this. The heart, however, is a poor philosopher, and time does much more than reason, or even religion, with most of us, in such distress. I remembered our walk, when I read the announcement, and got a lesson in the vanity of our wishes.³⁶

After a lengthy and hysterical grief, which included a visitation to his wife’s tomb that rivals anything in Poe’s fictions, Griswold gradually re-assimilated to everyday life, but in moving on to new things he eventually left behind his position as associate editor at *Graham’s*. His resignation was announced in the October 1843 issue.

Despite quitting his editorial duties, Griswold did not sever his connection with Graham. He continued to write pieces and solicit contributions to the magazine, going so far as to serve as a witness for Cooper and Graham on a contract for additional naval biographies (see below). One particularly noteworthy piece he contributed to the magazine during this time was a biographical sketch of Cooper that appeared in *Graham’s* for August

³⁵ Griswold to JFC, 22 November 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:322.

³⁶ JFC to Griswold, 26 November 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:321.

1844, complete with an engraved portrait. Cooper trusted Griswold enough to let him write this biographical notice despite his claim to be “averse to all biographies of living men, as well as to the parade of publishing portraits, busts, &c.”³⁷ Griswold’s biography was essentially a mildly worked-over version of notes he had taken during a visit with Cooper and a letter that Cooper had sent to him reviewing the history of the publication and reception of his works.³⁸ The debt to the notes is obvious. Where Cooper points to *The Pilot* as being at first “doubtfully received at home,” considered a failure “Until we heard from England,” Griswold similarly states that “The success of *The Pilot* was at first a little doubtful in this country; but England gave it a reputation which it still maintains.” Where Cooper claims that “the views of New York Society in this book [*Notions of the Americans*, 1828], and those given in *Home as Found*, are identical, so far as they go,” Griswold dutifully notes, “I may observe in passing, that the opinions expressed of New York society in *Home as Found* are identical with those in *Notions of the Americans*.”³⁹ Griswold’s gift, it can be seen, is his ability to transmute the frank but sometimes cranky (and slightly revisionist) directness of Cooper’s assessments into decorous statements of sympathy with the author. The criticisms Griswold introduces into the piece are expressed with suitable mildness and vagueness, leaving an overwhelmingly positive appraisal of Cooper’s career. Noting how Cooper and Bryant are outsold by more “puerile” popular authors, Griswold’s conclusion to the piece serves as an admonition to Americans to appreciate their true native artists. Although the effects of this biographical sketch would be difficult to measure, Griswold undoubtedly performed a service for Cooper in offering a review of his career that laid out many of the novelist’s major complaints about his audiences in America in a way that these audiences would find easy to stomach. Griswold would continue to bolster Cooper’s career

³⁷ JFC to John Louis O’Sullivan, 29 April 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:286.

³⁸ Two letters on this subject survive, the one sent to Griswold around 27 May 1844 (in response to a letter from Griswold requesting his “notes” for the sketch) probably being a loose reconstruction from memory of an earlier version Cooper probably wrote circa January 1843. Beard explains the situation admirably in *Letters and Journals* 4:462.

³⁹ JFC to Rufus W. Griswold, [27 May-June? 1844]: *Letters and Journals* 4:460, 461; Rufus W. Griswold, “Our Contributors.—No. XIII. James Fenimore Cooper.” *Graham’s Magazine* 26 [25] (August 1844): 91, 92.

even after the novelist died, heading up a committee for a memorial service of Cooper in early 1852. Given their mutually beneficial relationship, it is certain that Griswold played a key role in securing Cooper's place in American literature as well as his place in *Graham's*.

Besides the influences of personalities, the rapid rise in the fortunes and circulation of *Graham's Magazine* may have been another intangible influence on Cooper's decision to contribute. In 1842-3, his new novels were being published in first editions typically around 10,000-12,500 copies. Graham's circulation, even if we factor in some inflation in the claimed numbers, was easily more than double and later even triple that figure, and included a good distribution of men and women in many parts of the country. With *Graham's* immense circulation, then, it is possible that more people read *Autobiography of a Pocket Handkerchief* or *Islets of the Gulf* than many of his other late novels upon their first publications, and almost certainly more people saw Cooper's "Sketches of Naval Men" than had read his more substantial *History of the Navy*. It is true that in many cases reprintings of his novels caused them to catch up and surpass the magazine circulation over time. It would likewise be difficult to estimate how many people who subscribed to *Graham's Magazine* or picked up a copy actually read any of Cooper's pieces. Still, Cooper's connection with *Graham's* certainly placed his writings into the hands of new audiences. No doubt at least a few readers first encountered Cooper in the character of a naval biographer rather than as a novelist when his American naval biographies began to appear in the magazine in late 1842.

First from Cooper's pen for *Graham's* was a series of short biographies of famous naval officers from the early maritime history of the United States, from the Revolutionary War through the War of 1812. These pieces were outgrowths of the brief biographical notices Cooper had included in his *History of the Navy* in 1839, and likely the project was one that Cooper had long entertained. But the disappointing sales of his *Naval History* after its attacks by critics put further historical work on the back burner; after exploring avenues of re-launching his career as a historian, Cooper had returned with much acclaim to his most famous character Natty Bumppo in *The Pathfinder* (1840) and *The Deerslayer* (1841), and from there to nautical works. It is between *The Two Admirals* and *The Wing-and-Wing* (both 1842)

that he apparently resolved to pursue his project of naval biographies in earnest. His first definite intentions appear in a letter to Mrs. Cooper from Philadelphia on 18 March 1842, wherein he writes, "I have delayed writing in the hope of being home to-morrow, but a plan for a new book of Naval Biographies, detains me for authorities—I shall not probably be home before Wednesday or Thursday of next week"⁴⁰ Ironically, this was right during the midst of national financial crisis; only a paragraph later, Cooper mentions the resumption of payments at the Philadelphia banks as a "forerunner of better times," but in New York a few days later was forced to admit that "times are dull to a degree almost unknown, and literary property suffers with all other."⁴¹ Negotiations and writing of *The Wing-and-Wing* demanded Cooper's primary attentions during the next few months, and his letters do not mention the biographies again until 27 May, when he wrote to Bentley to propose a deal for *The Wing-and-Wing*. Cooper had not yet struck a bargain for the biographies, and at this stage his plan for the work in America clearly was to publish it in a cheap edition as a book, not as magazine pieces:

I have had a new *biographical* Naval Work in progress, which I will also send you in sheets. I hardly think you will publish it, after the bad success with the History, but you may do so, scot free, if you please. At all events, some of the biographies, all of which will be shortish, might serve you in the way of your magazines. My emoluments from this work, will come from an extended sale in this country, in a cheap form.⁴²

This was before his "experiment" of publishing *The Wing-and-Wing* on the cheap plan and before his contact with *Graham's*. Cooper's optimism about cheap publishing continued for several years despite the lower returns, but the opportunity of making money twice on them, publishing in *Graham's* and then reselling them later to be published in book form, was good enough to cause Cooper to alter his plans. In a way, his wish to make "an extended sale in this country" was fulfilled by the immense circulation of *Graham's*, much higher than the edition would have sold on its own. In book form, the work was never popular enough to merit further editions or reprints after Cooper's death.

⁴⁰ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 18 March 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:250.

⁴¹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 18 March, 22 March 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:250, 251.

⁴² JFC to Richard Bentley, 27 May 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:292.

Cooper's offer of the biographies to Bentley for free is noteworthy. Bentley had complained for years about the losses he sustained through his publication of Cooper's *History of the Navy* in Britain (a fancier and more expensive edition than its American counterpart), and Cooper may have wished to compensate. His ulterior motive, however, was likely the opportunity to reach British audiences with accurate materials about America's nautical history—the same motive that prompted him to choose the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* for his “*The Edinburgh Review* on James's *Naval Occurrences* and Cooper's *Naval History*,” noted above, since it was an American magazine that circulated overseas.⁴³ Cooper's purposes for this work, then, both home and abroad, were more patriotic than commercial; such had been the case with many of his other non-fiction nautical writings too. As it turned out, Cooper never reached his British audiences with these naval biographies. Despite Bentley's expressions of thanks for the “friendly offer” and hopes to “make it severally in my Miscellany,” no copy reached him. Cooper had promised sheets in his letter of 22 September 1842, but Bentley on 29 November replied that “no portion” of it had yet reached him.⁴⁴ The naval biographies never appeared in *Bentley's Miscellany*.

It is difficult to determine exactly how Cooper's plan turned from book to magazine publication. Perhaps his correspondence with Bentley about the *Miscellany* turned his thoughts in that direction. Possibly, too, as James Beard conjectures, Graham or *Brother Jonathan* may have expressed some interest in his “naval answers” (in response to either the *Edinburgh Review* or, more likely, his opponents in the Lake Erie controversy, Messrs. Duer, Burges, & Mackenzie), and Cooper may have followed up that lead with a proposal for the biographies to Graham.⁴⁵ Whatever the case, by July he had met Rufus W. Griswold at Sanderson's Hotel and struck his bargain with Graham to supply the biographies (apparently approximately five to ten were planned) for \$10 a page. On the 11th he sent Griswold manuscript for his first installment, the biography of Richard Somers. The logistics of

⁴³ JFC to John Louis O'Sullivan, 29 April 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:286.

⁴⁴ Richard Bentley to JFC, 8 July 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; JFC to Bentley, 22 September 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:315; Bentley to JFC, 29 November 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁴⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 22 March 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:251; see Beard's note on 252.

getting manuscript from Cooperstown to Griswold in Philadelphia were awkward at best, going to Wiley & Putnam in New York, then to Lea & Blanchard in Philadelphia, who would deliver it to Griswold.⁴⁶ Cooper hoped to make the September issue of *Graham's*, but Griswold, sending the proof sheets to Cooper on 6 August, explained that the immense circulation of the magazine required greater lead times:

The edition of our magazine is so large that we have to complete each number from four to five weeks before the first day of the month for which it is issued. This will account for the non-appearance of your article in September. We have to give one more "fashion plate" also, and I wished to have the last one out before your articles were commenced. Among the contributors to the October number, beside yourself, are Bryant, Longfellow, Hoffman, and the clever authoress of "A New Home—Who'll follow?"⁴⁷

"Somers," then, appeared in October, with the biography of William Bainbridge to follow in November. Despite Cooper's idea of "American Naval Biographies" as the "heading" for the series, the biographies carried no series title at all until late in the series, when "Sketches of Naval Men" headed the biographies starting with that of John Barry in the June 1844 issue (Somer's biography appearing simply as "Richard Somers. By J. Fenimore Cooper, author of "The Spy," "The Pioneers," etc.>"). Cooper was at least satisfied with the printing; after directing Griswold to send him proofs "on *good* paper," he followed up with praise that the proof was "extremely well printed"—high praise indeed from Cooper, who from the beginning of his career complained about the indignities his works suffered in the hands of compositors.⁴⁸

After Somers and Bainbridge, Cooper planned to send Griswold his biography of Oliver Hazard Perry, but the controversy in which Cooper had become embroiled over his account of the Battle of Lake Erie in the *History of the Navy*, particularly with Capt. Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, caused the introduction of arguments into his piece and made it significantly longer. Writing to Griswold on 7 August 1842, Cooper hoped to capitalize on

⁴⁶ See JFC to Griswold, 11 July 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:301.

⁴⁷ Rufus W. Griswold to JFC, 6 August 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁴⁸ JFC to Rufus W. Griswold, 11 July 1842, 7 August 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:301, 305.

the high profile the controversy had taken:

Bainbridge is ready, and I only wait for an opportunity to send it. Perry is also ready, but I can not let you have him, unless he counts for two. I have given a critical analysis of his battle, and the biography will make three or four and twenty of your pages. Decatur and Jones were to count double, but not Perry. If you choose to take the latter on those terms, I will send it.⁴⁹

Graham, apparently content merely to have secured Cooper as a contributor, was easily swayed on the matter, as Griswold replied on 23 August:

Although Mr. Graham, with whom I have conversed on the subject, would prefer having as many complete biographies as possible, he is, on the whole, rather indifferent on that point, and you will therefore send such ones as may be most conveniently prepared. The interest excited by recent events concerning Perry perhaps will render his the most interesting memoir that could now be given. Of course, if you send it, it will be counted as *two* articles.⁵⁰

But Graham's agreement to accept Cooper's biography of Perry to publish in two parts created another problem: the lack of a "complete" (that is, self-contained in one issue) biography for the December issue. Griswold wrote on 9 September that "For the next number—that for December—we shall want a complete biography, as it is desirable to have no articles continued from one volume to another. For the January number send anything you please."⁵¹ Cooper may not have had any such "complete" biographies ready. In Philadelphia in late September and early October, he managed to complete, if not compose in its entirety, a biography of Commodore Richard Dale (in addition to striking a bargain for *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*).⁵² Writing to Mrs. Cooper from Saunderson's hotel in

⁴⁹ JFC to Rufus W. Griswold, 7 August 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:305-06.

⁵⁰ Rufus W. Griswold to JFC, 23 August 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵¹ Rufus W. Griswold to JFC, 9 September 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵² If written in its entirety, Cooper may have been carrying a copy of Mackenzie's *Life of Paul Jones* (Boston, 1841), since he quotes and refutes several of Mackenzie's claims in a footnote. Since Cooper presumably read proof for the Dale biography while in Philadelphia, the possibility of the footnote being a later addition seems remote. The manuscript of the Dale biography has not yet been examined for signs of whether Cooper composed parts of it

Philadelphia on 2 October, he reports:

When I got here I found I had a great deal to do, or a very little. It has resulted in the first—and I have done a great deal. I have written a biography of Dale, and it is printed. So I am in *type*, already, for November and December. January, Feb. and March we shall come out in the Autobiography, and then will follow, Perry, already written, in April and May.

With the *Autobiography* stretching to an additional issue, as described below, “Perry” did not appear until the May and June issues, closing out that semi-annual volume (*Graham’s* volumes started in January and July). Certainly Cooper’s sketch of Perry was a definite exception to Joy Bayless’s claim about that in *Graham’s Magazine* “Philosophical discussions, controversial matter, and other subjects requiring too much mental effort on the part of the reader were not admitted.”⁵³ Although less technical and less combative than his other publications on the Battle of Lake Erie controversy, Cooper did not hesitate to lay out his reasoning in refuting what he felt were partisan claims by Mackenzie, a relative of Perry’s through marriage. Cooper went so far as to include diagrams with his piece, which he claimed would “cost little, and add much to the interest of the biography.” Despite the extra cost and trouble the diagrams must have brought Graham, and despite the technical and controversial nature of the sketch, Griswold’s assessment that the recent controversy over the Battle of Lake Erie would arouse interest was probably correct. Even though scholars have given priority to Cooper’s ultimate word on the subject, his pamphlet “The Battle of Lake Erie” (also published in 1843), his biographical sketch of Perry in *Graham’s* probably reached more readers.

After “Perry” Cooper followed up with another two-part biography, this time of John Paul Jones. As Cooper had often lamented the introduction of a fictionalized Jones as Mr. Gray in *The Pilot*, he undoubtedly wished to create a truer, less glamorized portrait of the Revolutionary hero. Again he argues with Mackenzie (as well as the *Edinburgh Review*) in lengthy footnotes, but he also praises the “industry of his [Jones’s] biographers” for rescuing Jones’s reputation from the suspicions that clouded it well into the nineteenth century.

before his trip to Philadelphia. For Cooper’s agreement for *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* on 24 September, see below.

⁵³ Bayless 53.

Cooper's effort here attempts to show how weaknesses in Jones's character were compensated by abilities that never stood in question.

After "Jones" appeared in July and August of 1843, the series of biographies became more sporadic. No further biographies appeared in that volume of *Graham's*, or indeed until halfway through the next, when a short biography of John Shaw appeared in the March 1844 issue. The Shaw biography seems to be something of a one-off effort; although separated only a few months from the biographies that followed, it does not fall under the contract for those later works. Cooper may have submitted it to fulfill the remainder of his original contract, or he may have negotiated a separate price for it. Its date of publication places it nearest to the double novel *Afloat and Ashore* in the Cooper canon, and it is likely that Cooper borrowed incident from Shaw's biography for a scene in his novel. In the Shaw biography, Cooper briefly describes a nighttime attack by Malay prows during a calm in the Straits of Banca near Borneo; that incident is dramatized in *Afloat and Ashore* when the ship *John* is ambushed by "proas" in a foggy calm near the Straits of Sunda, near Sumatra.⁵⁴ Shaw's early adventure on the China voyage gave Cooper, who had never sailed in the Pacific, credible events to dramatize. The Shaw biography, then, serves as a valuable reminder of how Cooper's non-fiction writing, including these "magazine" pieces, are not too distant from the main canon of his fiction.

In April of 1844, only days after Lea & Blanchard had rejected the terms he offered for *Afloat and Ashore*, causing him to cast around for a publisher, Cooper struck a new deal with Graham for five more naval biographies. The terms, as Cooper reported to his wife, were the same as those for the original series, and with no sale for *Afloat and Ashore* in the works, the timing was fortunate for Cooper, who likely sought this deal with Graham as a means to alleviate his problem with selling the novel. Writing from Philadelphia on 9 April, right after signing a contract with Graham, Cooper explained:

I have delayed writing so as to have it in my power to tell you something definite. . . I have not sold the novel, nor do I expect to, but I have sold five more biographies, at the old price, and touched the money.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ "John Shaw," *Graham's Magazine* 24 (March 1844): 109; *Afloat and Ashore* (Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 1844) 59-63.

⁵⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 9 April 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:448.

Cooper's copy of the contract, written in his own hand, signed by himself and Graham, and witnessed by Griswold (who by now had left his editorial position but kept some ties with *Graham's*), survives. Dated the same day as the above letter to Mrs. Cooper, it provides the details of Cooper's bargain:

J. Fenimore Cooper binds himself, in the penalty of Five Hundred Dollars, to furnish Geo. R. Graham, five more naval biographies, similar in character to those already written, within the next twelve months, for which biographies the said Graham has paid \$250 in cash, and given his note for the same sum, at six months from this date.

It is understood between the parties that the Copy Right of said biographies shall be the property of said Cooper, who will have a full property in the same after the several biographies shall be published in *Graham's Magazine*.⁵⁶

Below, in Griswold's hand, is penned a brief memo: "*Mem.* Let Mr Graham have one of the biographies *early*." With lead times for the magazine running four to five weeks, as Griswold had told Cooper in 1842, such reminders were necessary. Cooper evidently complied, for the first installment of this second series, a biography of John Barry, appeared in the June 1844 issue of *Graham's*, which presumably would have gone to print around late April or early May.

This new series introduced some minor alterations in format: from here forward, the biographies appeared under the series title "Sketches of Naval Men," with a copyright notice dated 1839 beneath.⁵⁷ The date of this copyright notice is puzzling. Although Cooper had included material on Barry and the other officers of this second series of biographies in his 1839 *History of the Navy of the United States*, he did not simply reprint it here. In fact, the biography for Barry includes a correction to his earlier narration of events in the *History*,

⁵⁶ Contract with George Rex Graham, 9 April 1844: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵⁷ The complete heading: "Sketches of Naval Men. By J. Fenimore Cooper, author of 'The Pioneers,' 'Red Rover,' Etc. [Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1839, by J. Fenimore Cooper, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States, in and for the Northern District of New York.]"

demonstrating that the sketch for *Graham's* could not have been written in 1839.⁵⁸ Likewise, Cooper notes in a letter from Philadelphia to his wife on 14 April 1844 that "I am writing a biography, with papers lent me, and must finish it here"⁵⁹—almost certainly "Barry." The best that can be inferred from the inclusion of this 1839 date is that Cooper wished to protect the copyright for these works under the guise of publishing them as if they were covered by the copyright for the *History*. He had not taken out copyright for some of the sketches (as a letter from Carey & Hart indicates),⁶⁰ and perhaps if, as described below, his *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* had indeed become subject to pirating, he may have had good reason to take this precaution. Since "Shaw" appeared only a few months earlier, though, without this copyright notice, hopes of finding a definite answer are elusive.

After "Barry," another lengthy interlude followed until a biography for John Templer Shubrick, brother of Cooper's best friend William Branford Shubrick, appeared in December 1844. A sketch of Melancthon Taylor Woolsey came out a month later in the new volume of *Graham's*, this sketch being noteworthy for its autobiographical content, since Cooper was stationed under Woolsey in 1808-09 while building a fleet at Oswego on Lake Ontario. The final installment for this series, a sketch of Commodore Edward Preble, was another lengthy two-part work, occupying both the May and June issues for 1845. Cooper had originally promised the late Commodore's nephew George Henry Preble that the sketch would not appear in *Graham's*: "It is not my intention to put the biography of Com. Preble into

⁵⁸ In the first and second editions (1839 and 1840) of the *History of the Navy*, as well as in the abridged edition of 1841, Cooper had claimed that John Barry's brig *Lexington* had been the first regular cruiser to get to sea under the new American government during the Revolution (103-04, 1839 ed.). In the sketch for *Graham's*, however, Cooper makes a correction: "The distinction has been claimed equally for Hopkins and Barry, and in the Naval History we were disposed to accord the latter the precedence. After an examination of his own private papers, however, we see strong reasons for thinking it must have been Com. Hopkins [Commander-in-Chief for the new American fleet, who had sailed a month before Barry]" (268). The posthumously published edition of 1856 (New York: Stringer & Townsend) reiterates this correction (508).

⁵⁹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 14 [April] 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:454.

⁶⁰ "...so as to secure to us a Copy right on those which you omitted to take out a Copy right for originally." Carey & Hart to JFC, 15 March 1845: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Graham's; it will be reserved for the large work, in common with most of those [which] have a freshness and importance."⁶¹ However, Cooper may have had to change his plans in order to meet the terms of his contract. By getting manuscript for this last biography to Graham during or before April (leaving enough lead time for the June issue), Cooper fulfilled his contractual obligation to supply the biographies within twelve months of his agreement of 9 April 1844—assuming, at least, that “Preble,” like “Perry” and “Jones,” counted as two. One can only guess at George Henry Preble's reaction to this change of plans.

From here the series fizzled out, even though it was clear that Cooper had further plans in mind. His letter of 7 August 1842 to Griswold, quoted above, refers to a sketch of Captain Stephen Decatur which was “to count double,” but the sketch never appeared in *Graham's*.⁶² Similarly, the American Antiquarian Society holds manuscript pages of a biography for Captain Joshua Barney, also never printed.⁶³ In addition, Cooper had planned to add to the series a more unusual sort of biography, one of the USS *Constitution*, or “Old Ironsides.” This work finally did appear in print, but not until after Cooper's death, when his daughter Susan edited the unfinished manuscript and published it in *Putnam's Monthly* for May and June 1853.⁶⁴ Cooper had evidently attempted to make a deal with Graham in April 1846 for another series of five biographies, for on 1 April of that year he wrote to Mrs. Cooper from the Globe Hotel in New York: “As I wish to press a bargain with Graham of Philadelphia, I shall stay here until Friday evening and be at home on Saturday—*possibly* a day earlier.”⁶⁵ James F. Beard has suggested that “Cooper probably wished to negotiate for the serialization of *Jack Tier*, which appeared in installments in *Graham's Magazine* from November 1846 to March 1848.”⁶⁶ This hypothesis is probably valid in part, but a deal for

⁶¹ JFC to George Henry Preble, USN, 27 January 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:348.

⁶² JFC to Rufus W. Griswold, 7 August 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:305-06..

⁶³ James Fenimore Cooper MSS Collection, American Antiquarian Society. Box 1, Folder 29 (MS on Naval Matters) and Folder 30A (Naval Episode).

⁶⁴ “Old Ironsides,” *Putnam's Monthly* 1 (May, June 1853): 473-87, 594-607.

⁶⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 1 April 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:128.

⁶⁶ *Letters and Journals* 5:128.

additional naval biographies also seemed to figure into the bargaining. Graham, unable to meet Cooper in New York as planned because of "The sudden & serious illness of Mrs. Graham," wrote to Cooper at the Globe on 3 April with a proposal, "That I release you from writing for *the present*, the five naval sketches & surrender the obligation you gave me" in exchange for a ten-part novel to run in *Graham's*, the first part "to be delivered by the 10th of May." Graham continued by stating, "I shall have no objection to purchase the Naval Byographies [sic] after the Novel is run through the work, but it would be scarcely fair, to ask me to wait that long, after having paid for them, do you think it would?"⁶⁷ Thus anticipating and rejecting a possible counter-offer by Cooper, Graham likely relieved himself of the obligation to follow through on an earlier purchase of another continuation of the series, substituting a more marketable piece of fiction instead and putting the naval biographies indefinitely on hold. Cooper never did publish more biographies with *Graham's* after serializing *The Islets of the Gulf*, possibly due to Graham's temporary loss of control over his magazine, or possibly due to waning interest on either his or Graham's part.

Cooper did, however, pursue publication of his biographies in book form. As he neared the end of his second series with *Graham's*, he negotiated with Carey & Hart of Philadelphia to purchase the rights to reprint the biographies. He must have stopped in at their office, just down Chestnut Street from Graham, on Friday, 14 March 1845, for on Saturday the 15th, Abraham Hart penned this reply for the firm:

We accept the offer made us yesterday. (The refusal of which you gave us till Monday) viz To sell to us the Entire Copy right to reprint the fifteen numbers of Naval Biography now printed in "Graham's Magazine" for the sum of Five Hundred Dollars, you to retouch them (not to rewrite them) so as to secure to us a Copyright on those which you omitted to take out a Copy right for originally.

The "Biographies" will be published by us in two Vols. (one of them as soon as you furnish us with corrected proofs to print from) and on the day of publication of the 1st Vol. we are to pay you one half the above named sum (\$250) in cash, and as soon as the last Biography is published in "Graham's Magazine" we are to publish Vol 2d. & on the day of publication of Vol 2, we are to pay you the remaining sum of Two Hundred & Fifty Dollars.

⁶⁷ Graham to JFC, 3 April 1846: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Please acknowledge the rec't of this letter by return of Mail, & at your leisure be kind enough to write us the few lines of Preface that you promised the writer[.]⁶⁸

Cooper's reply of 17 March acceded to the proposal, promising also to retouch four of five biographies "in time to deliver them in all next month." A memorandum accompanying this letter itemizes them specifically: "Will sell the right to reprint the fifteen numbers of Naval Biographies for \$500—Mr. C— to retouch but not to rewrite them. | Somers—1 . No. | Bainbridge 1.— | Perry—2 | Jones—2 | Shaw—1 | Dale—1 | Preble—2 | Woolsey 1 | Shubrick 1 | Barry 1 | and four numbers to be written."⁶⁹ How Cooper accounted exactly for the "fifteen numbers" is not clear: by counting each piece listed, and adding the four unwritten numbers mentioned, the total is fourteen; by considering the ones and twos by the pieces to represent (as they seem to do) the number of issues they filled in *Graham's*, adding the four unwritten pieces would make a total of seventeen. Whatever the method of computing these numbers, Cooper planned his biography of "Old Ironsides" to be among the unwritten pieces, for on 13 September 1845 Hart⁷⁰ wrote to check on its progress. He also complained about Cooper's slow progress in "retouching" the works—evidence that Cooper's priorities lay elsewhere at the time (probably with his Littlepage novel *The Chainbearer*):

We have been waiting a long time for the "Biography of Old Ironsides" which you promised should be sent us, & it has not yet been received & we are very anxious to bring out Vol. 1. —also the corrected Biography of "Paul Jones" and "Dale".

We also sent you upwards of Six Weeks ago the reduced Diagram of Tripoli Harbour with the original for you to mark on it if the shoals were as you directed them drawn—but have not rec'd any reply.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Carey & Hart to JFC, 15 March 1842: *Letters and Journals* 5:18.

⁶⁹ JFC to Carey & Hart, 17 March 1842: *Letters and Journals* 5:17-18.

⁷⁰ Carey had died on 16 June 1845. Cooper conveys his sympathies in his letter of 17 September, "having no notion he was so low": *Letters and Journals* 5:54.

⁷¹ Carey & Hart to JFC, 13 September 1845: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Defending himself, Cooper explained that he never received a letter or any such materials, and was under the impression that “Old Ironsides” would be included in the second volume of the work. It took him nearly till November, though, to send off corrected copy of “Paul Jones” and “Perry,” and he still begged for delay on “Old Ironsides”:

As for Old Ironsides, it will be impossible for me to do justice to the subject I find, without going to Washington. You must give me time, for your own sake—Can we not fill a second volume without it, and put it in a third? But we shall see each other so soon it is not worth while to discuss by letters.⁷²

Plans for a third volume may have gotten underway, but it never appeared. Volume 1 of the book, titled *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers*, appeared March 1846, with Volume 2 following in May. Slightly revised and corrected from the biographies in *Graham's*, the volumes contained all of the sketches except for that of Barry. Since that sketch was last on Cooper's memorandum quoted above, it is possible that the Barry sketch was set aside for the proposed third volume. The sketches in Volumes 1 and 2 appeared in the order Cooper had revised them: Bainbridge, Somers, Shaw, Shubrick, and Preble in Volume 1, and Jones, Woolsey, Perry, and Dale in Volume 2.

The two volumes bound in purple cloth sold for \$1.50, and included portraits of the subjects. Another edition was published in black cloth with no illustrations. Derby & Jackson of Auburn, New York, also sold the volumes under their imprint, printed from the Carey & Hart plates. After Cooper's death, Hart sold the plates to Henry Phinney (Cooper's son-in-law since 1849), but no subsequent printings followed. Abraham Hart did write to Cooper's son Paul on 3 November 1852 to confirm that the copyright to “Old Ironsides” was also included in the bargain with Phinney, clearing the way for the appearance of that sketch in *Putnam's Monthly* in 1853.⁷³

Reviews of *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers* were few, but strikingly uniform in their praise for a Cooper work. *Graham's* undertook a brief notice of the first volume--favorable of course--beginning with the propagandistic claim that the original

⁷² JFC to Carey & Hart, 1 November 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:95.

⁷³ Abraham Hart to Paul Fenimore Cooper, 3 November 1852: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

appearance of the biographies in *Graham's* "attracted so much attention as to induce the author to issue them in a volume, with such enlargements and corrections as he has since found opportunity to make."⁷⁴ The *Knickerbocker* contained passing remarks calling the work "clearly and attractively written," and the *Southern Literary Messenger* published separate reviews for each of the volumes, stating in the second one that "It is presumed other volumes will follow" and hoping that "the life of Isaac Hull may form part of one of the volumes."⁷⁵ Even a Whig journal, *The American Review*, praised Cooper's handling of the material, even though it stuck to the Whig party line in rejecting Cooper's arguments about the Battle of Lake Erie in "Perry":

Of all our writers, so far, Mr. Cooper is confessedly the best suited to arrange them in sketches, or history. . . The sketches are written in that strong, clear, equable narrative style which is Mr. Cooper's *forte*. We do not receive the whole of his version of Perry's career, but we commend the whole volume to our readers as quite as well worthy of their attention as the trashy novelettes of the day.⁷⁶

This last sentence may be dubious praise, indeed. Despite a lack of penetrating insights in any of these reviews to suggest that the reviewers read the book thoroughly, the uniform statements of approval demonstrate something of the credibility Cooper had built as a historian and expert on nautical matters.

Despite Graham's later grouching that Cooper had cost him a good deal of money but never attracted new subscribers,⁷⁷ numerous letters from readers survive to indicate that people were paying attention to them. From New Orleans, Thomas D. Day wrote on 29 June 1846 that "I have read with much pleasure and satisfaction your lives of the naval officers of our country," going on to say that he wanted Cooper to add that of his

⁷⁴ *Graham's Magazine* 28 (May 1846): 240.

⁷⁵ *Knickerbocker* 27 (June 1846): 564; *Southern Literary Messenger* 12 (Mar, July 1846): 190, 453.

⁷⁶ *The American Review: A Whig Journal of Politics, Literature, Art and Science* 3 (June 1846): 673-74.

⁷⁷ Mott 507.

grandfather, Captain Elisha Hinman.⁷⁸ Finding this wish unfulfilled, Day wrote again from St. Louis on 30 April 1847, wishing to correct a claim in Cooper's *History of the Navy* by providing an anecdote of his paternal grandfather, Captain William Day.⁷⁹ Cooper's sketch of Oliver Hazard Perry received attention, as Cooper and Griswold had anticipated. Mackenzie certainly read it, since he mentions it in his appendix to the fifth edition of *The Life of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry*,⁸⁰ but that would be expected since he was a party to the dispute. Another reader to comment on the Perry sketch was one Daniel Dobbins of Erie, Pennsylvania, who served on the Great Lakes before and during the war of 1812—indeed, for a time, engaged in the same activity of fleet-building that occupied Cooper during his brief service at Oswego on Lake Ontario in 1808-09. Dobbins writes on 11 May 1843, shortly after the appearance of the first half of "Perry" but before the second, to express his support for Cooper's portrayal and to offer documents relevant to military actions on the Great Lakes:

Dr Sir—Having read your Naval history, as also the Biography of Com Perry by Capt. A.S. Mackenzie, the Biography of Capt Jesse D Elliot by a Citizen of N. York, and the commencement of your life of Perry in the May Number of Grahams Magazine, I would beg leave to say, none of them are entirely free from errors; but I must say, you have treated 'matters & things' with much the most candour. As the great object of the historian is to get at the true facts, I have taken the liberty to make you an offer, which I hope you will receive in good feeling.

⁷⁸ Thomas D. Day to JFC, 29 June 1846: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁷⁹ "It becomes me not to intrude upon your notice in this manner, but claiming you as I do as a sort of public property, an American author, as a part and parcel of American literature in which we all have an interest, at the same time respectfully apologizing for the freedom.

In your first edition of Naval History of the U.S. vol 1 page 91 (I think) you remark in a note at the bottom of the page that only one instance was known of an officers leaving the British Navy in consequence of the revolution[.] I beg leave to relate another instance, that of my paternal Granfather Capt William Day, the circumstances of which I will relate if I may thus trespass upon your patience so far. . . ." Thomas D. Day to JFC, 30 April 1847: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁸⁰ Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, *The Life of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry*, 5th Ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845) 281, 288, etc.

I commenced building the fleet at this place in the winter of 1812-13 [&] served as a sailing master under Camas [?] Chauncey, Perry, Elliot [sic] Sinclair & Baxter during the war, and under Deacon and Budd since, and resigned in 1826:--have lived in the country 43 years, and navigated the Lakes 38; so you see I must of course have a tolerable knowledge of all the transactions connected with the War on the Lakes, except the particulars of the affairs of the 10th Sept'r 1813, as I was ordered down to this place with the Sch'r Ohio, to take up stores, and additional armament for the fleet, and did not arrive at Put in Bay, until after the action.

Now sir, should you wish it, I can give you some information on the subject, and can show you some *falsehoods* shared [?] by even *Com. Perry himself* as per Capt. Mackenzie's book.⁸¹

This letter not only attests to the wide reach of *Graham's Magazine* but also calls attention to the distinctions between Cooper's roles as novelist and historian. Whereas one could hardly argue with many of the prerogatives of fiction, in writing biography Cooper's attention to fact becomes the paramount concern. As a "sort of public property," as Thomas Day had labeled him, Cooper was open to challenge by readers who felt free to contribute their corrections to his historical narrative. Though slightly defensive in his reply that "I never flattered myself with having written a history without errors," Cooper promised Dobbins a copy of his pamphlet "The Battle of Lake Erie," recounted his own history on the Lakes, and accepted Dobbins's offer for materials, which were subsequently sent.⁸²

Cooper's acceptance of material from Dobbins points to one other noteworthy aspect of the Naval Biographies: their collaborative nature. Although his novels were largely the products of his private writing time, for the biographies (as for the Naval History) he actively sought out materials to fill gaps in his knowledge. Usually these gaps consisted of scraps of personal information—names, dates, or minor details. As early as July 1842, Cooper employed Griswold to seek out details for the Somers biography: the name of one of Somers's sisters, and the date of Somers's birth. To get this information, Griswold had to interview Somers's sister, Mrs. Keen, whose memory was so bad that Cooper feared she had forgotten her

⁸¹ Daniel Dobbins to JFC, 11 May 1843: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁸² JFC to Daniel Dobbins, 20 May 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:384.

own name.⁸³ Cooper had been unsuccessful in securing much information on a previous visit, but Griswold was successful in securing a family register with the desired information.⁸⁴ After all this trouble, however, the biography ran in *Graham's* without benefit of the corrections.⁸⁵ Cooper relied on collaboration for other biographies as well: for that of John Templer Shubrick, he had the best of sources, that officer's brother and Cooper's best friend, Commodore William Branford Shubrick. Writing to his friend on 4 September 1842, Cooper thanks him for his assistance and acknowledges the collaboration required for such a project:

My Dear Shubrick,

Yours received, with the facts concerning your brother. I am getting on fast with the biographies, but want a vast deal of aid.⁸⁶

The dangers and the rewards of this method of writing are summed up best in a letter Cooper wrote to George Henry Preble. George Henry Preble was himself working on a genealogical work including biography of his late uncle the Commodore, and had written Cooper on 4 September 1842 to correct an error about Commodore Preble in Cooper's *History of the Navy*. In response, Cooper on 9 September thanked him for the corrections, described his biographical project, and requested further communications between them:

Your letter reached me this evening, and I feel much obliged to you for the attention. The short biographical notices in the Naval History formed no part of the original design, and were introduced somewhat hurriedly, as the book went through the press. The design principally was to show the materials of which the service was formed. They have been all struck from subsequent editions. That of Com. Preble was taken principally from a flow[e]ry and worthless book, that contains some six or eight other

⁸³ See JFC to Griswold, 11 July 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:301-02.

⁸⁴ See Griswold to JFC, 6 August 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; and JFC to Griswold, 7 August 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:305-07.

⁸⁵ Griswold reported that Somers's parents had four children, but the biography reports only three; Somers's birthdate is estimated to have been in 1779, rather than listed as 15 September 1778 as Griswold had ascertained. *Graham's Magazine* 21 (October 1842): 157, 158.

⁸⁶ JFC to William Branford Shubrick, 4 September 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:310.

sketches. I thought it might be trusted for a few facts, and I soon after ascertained that most of even these facts were wrong.

I am glad, however, to open a communication with some member of your family for the following reasons. I am now collecting materials for a large work on Naval Biographies, and have even written several of the lives. A few of them will appear, monthly after Oct. next, in Graham's Magazine, though their ultimate destination will be a book in two vol. Octavo. You will find that of Somers, in the October number. Bainbridge will follow, and then Perry and Paul Jones. I have had serious thoughts of coming to Portland [whence G.H. Preble had written] expressly to obtain the facts in relation to Com. Preble, but your letter may put me on a new track.

Of course I do not expect any gentleman who has been at work on so interesting a subject to abandon it on account of my intended work. It is probable we shall not interfere with each other, as my sketch will necessarily be confined to some forty or fifty pages. Any facts I learn will be cheerfully communicated, and I should be grateful to obtain all I can; particularly as to the birth, family, and early career of my subject. I ought to have known the duty on which Com. Preble died, as I belonged to the *Vesuvius* myself, in 1808, and we had a tradition in her to that effect. But the difficulty of collecting a mass of *minute facts* is most discouraging. In the case of Somers, I relied on his sister for *the members of his family*, and she actually mislead [sic] me, though I discovered the error in time to correct it in proof. She forgot one sister altogether!

Repeating my thanks for the information sent, will you permit me to invite all your family to aid me with such information as they possess. The disease of which the Commodore died, and any circumstances connected with that event would be particularly useful.⁸⁷

Cooper later wrote Preble to thank him for supplying extensive material, saying that "Information of precisely this nature, was just what I wanted" and requesting that Preble, a naval officer himself, induce other officers to write him "in reference to any officer who is dead," citing a plan to write "notices of most of those who have had any standing in the service, including, in a few instances, midshipmen."⁸⁸ Undoubtedly, the "difficulty of collecting a mass of *minute facts*" caught up with Cooper before his project was realized, thwarted in part by the logistical burdens of corresponding and collaborating with others.

The "Sketches of Naval Men" for *Graham's*, then, may have ultimately convinced Cooper that novel writing was, at his age, still an easier career path to pursue, but still the

⁸⁷ JFC to George Henry Preble, 9 September 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:312-13.

⁸⁸ JFC to George Henry Preble, 27 January 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:348.

series was a moderate success for him. The complex publishing history of the sketches demonstrates the flexibility Cooper enjoyed once his commitment to Graham was secure. Graham clearly valued the status that came with having the names of Cooper, Bryant, Longfellow, and many of America's other literary giants all displayed on the title page of his magazine, and he made no harsh demands as to the specific content he required from his star authors. The sketches placed Cooper before a large public as a serious and credible historian and likely helped to keep up interest in *Graham's Magazine* among male readers. Finally, they were easily as successful in a pecuniary sense as any of his novels between late 1842 and 1846—more so than many, if English receipts are ignored. Although Cooper had written many pieces about naval matters for free or even at risk of loss as a service to his country, the naval sketches were profitable for him (albeit occasionally more troublesome to write than he had reckoned), demonstrating that with proper backing he could reach wide audiences and still get paid well. Although he still recognized the supremacy of the book as a lasting medium, his moderate success with *Graham's* could have only added to his existing suspicions that booksellers were duplicitous and unwilling to compensate well the true producers of literary art. Cooper would give vent to these suspicions in his next piece for *Graham's*, his short fiction *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*.

Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief, a story set in Paris and New York in 1830-32 and narrated by a fine linen handkerchief, was Cooper's first serialized piece of fiction, planned from the start to appear in parts. Cooper seems to have had his initial inspiration to write the story sometime around late August or early September 1842. Writing to Bentley on 22 September, he remarks, "A thought flashed on my mind the other day, for a short magazine story, and I think I shall write it. It will be called 'The Auto-Biography of a Pocket Handkerchief.' Do you want such a thing for your miscellany? If so how shall it be sent, and on what terms?"⁸⁹ Within a week of writing Bentley he had struck a deal with Graham, as he reported to his wife on 29 September: "I have sold the Autobiography to Graham, 50

⁸⁹ JFC to Richard Bentley, 22 September 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:315.

pages for \$500. I shall finish it as soon as *Le Feu-Follet* [*The Wing-and-Wing*] is off my hands—but, I must come home to write the three last chapters.”⁹⁰ The specific terms Cooper and Graham negotiated in their memorandum of 24 September 1842 called for Cooper to furnish manuscript “of a tale to be called ‘*Autobiography of a Pocket Handkerchief*,’ to be published in *Graham’s Magazine*, in numbers, of from twelve to sixteen pages each, and to consist of not less than two and not more than four numbers.” Cooper was to deliver the first number “in time to appear in the magazine for February 1843, and the succeeding numbers in intervals of one month.” For this, he was to be paid ten dollars per *Graham’s* page. The two parties further agreed to suspend publication of “certain naval biographies already contracted for” during the appearance of the tale in *Graham’s*.⁹¹

Certainly these were good terms for Cooper considering the amount of time he figured the work would take to write. He intended it to be the product of a couple of weeks, telling his wife on 2 October that he would be at leisure to “concoct” anything new “after about a fortnight’s work on the autobiography.”⁹² His confidence was premature. Occupied with seeing *The Wing-and-Wing* and some of the naval biographies through the press, and delayed by unforeseen difficulties in the writing of the work, the *Autobiography* took longer than Cooper had expected. By 22 November Griswold had not yet received the second number, reminding Cooper, “We should like to have the second chapter as soon as may be, as the February number is already partly in the hands of the printers.”⁹³ On the 26th Cooper bluffed for more time, putting a positive spin on the situation: “The second part of the Tale is nearly done—so near, it might be sent on Tuesday. I shall keep it, however, *unless directed otherwise*, until next week when I shall carry it to Albany, and send it to Wiley & Putnam, to save postage. You can write me again, if you wish a different disposition.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 29 September 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:316.

⁹¹ Memorandum of Agreement between George R. Graham and J. Fenimore Cooper, 24 September 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁹² JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 2 October 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:318.

⁹³ Griswold to JFC, 22 November 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁹⁴ JFC to Griswold, 26 November 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:322.

One is naturally led to suspect stalling tactics in Cooper's proposed arrangement to hold the manuscript an extra week. Cooper's delay may have come from alterations in his plans for the work. On the last page of manuscript of the first installment sent to Griswold, Cooper includes a short note to Griswold which mentions a divergence from some previously settled ideas:

Dear Sir,

I send the copy by mail, for want of a private opportunity. It is so expensive, however, as not to be continued. Let me have early proofs, and by no means print without them.

Yours truly,

J. Fenimore Cooper

Rev. Mr. Griswold.

I shall bring Adrienne on the scene again, and have a little altered the plan to do so.

How Cooper's new plan differed from his original is unknown, but the story eventually ended up somewhat longer than originally intended. During October he wrote to his wife the work would appear in January, February, and March, that the naval biographies would resume in April, clearly suggesting three installments for *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*.⁹⁵ But at the end of the second installment of manuscript, Cooper wrote, "(to be continued)" while *Graham's* printed "[Conclusion in our next.]" (167). Instead of only three installments, the work took four, causing *Graham* to announce the conclusion of the work again at the end of the third installment (wherein both Cooper's manuscript and *Graham's* agree in stating "(To be concluded in our next.)"). Despite all of these delays and alterations, the finished work appeared pretty much according to schedule, leading off the January 1843 issue of *Graham's*. It was continued in the February, March, and April numbers.

Around the time that the final number in the April issue was being prepared for distribution, a pirated version of the work appeared in New York. *Brother Jonathan* had obtained the work and printed it as one of their "Extra" numbers on 22 March 1843, giving it the title *Le Mouchoir: An Autobiographical Romance*.⁹⁶ How this happened is not entirely clear.

⁹⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 2 October 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:318.

⁹⁶ *Le Mouchoir: An Autobiographical Romance*. By J. Fenimore Cooper, Esq. Author of "The Spy," "The Pilot," "Home as Found," "Wing-and-Wing," "The Two Admirals, &c. Brother Jonathan, Extra Sheet. Number XXII. Wilson & Company, Publishers. New York, March 22, 1843.

Griswold wrote Cooper on 3 April 1843: "Doubtless you have seen the pirated edition of the 'Autobiography.' The sheets of our April number were obtained by some means in advance of this publication, and Wilson & Co. issued the story two days before Graham's copies were in New York."⁹⁷ Griswold makes no further speculation about how the accident occurs. Nor do we know Cooper's reaction: no response to the intelligence Griswold related exists in his surviving correspondence. Were one to play detective, certainly neither Cooper nor Griswold would be easy to clear entirely as suspects. Griswold had created the *Brother Jonathan* with Park Benjamin, serving with him as co-editor of the gargantuan weekly; Cooper had made previous submissions in the form of letters and his "Lost Chapter" of *Home as Found*. Whatever secrets may be imagined, it does seem unusual for the litigious Cooper that no lawsuits emerged from this incident. Apart from an abundance of misprints revealing the haste of the compositors, the *Brother Jonathan* text makes several minor innovations upon the original *Graham's* text, chief among which is the introduction of chapter divisions, eighteen in all, where the original had none.⁹⁸ It is this version that Bentley discovered in London and used as the basis for his own publication of the work as *The French Governess; or, The Embroidered Handkerchief*. When Cooper had inquired of Bentley whether he might be interested in the piece for his *Bentley's Miscellany*, Bentley had replied that he would be eager to receive short pieces of 8-10 pages for his *Miscellany*, for the rate of 12 Guineas for 16 printed pages. As was often the case, he suggested that Cooper's title was "somewhat open to objection."⁹⁹ The transaction apparently was never completed. With the version in *Brother Jonathan* already in print, Bentley's chance to secure copyright in England was lost, and he apparently reprinted the work *gratis*, no record surviving that Cooper ever received a

⁹⁷ Rufus W. Griswold to JFC, 3 Apr 1843: MS, American Antiquarian Society.

⁹⁸ The *Brother Jonathan* version could not have been composed from the manuscript, as the variants noted in Walter Lee Brown's critical edition reveal (Evanston, Ill.: The Golden Booke Press, 1897). Whereas the manuscript and *Graham's* versions often differ from the *Brother Jonathan* text, in no case does the *Brother Jonathan* version agree with the manuscript while differing from *Graham's*.

⁹⁹ Bentley to JFC, 29 Nov 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:315.

dime for it.¹⁰⁰ Judging by Griswold's inquiry to Cooper on 22 November 1842, it is questionable whether Bentley had ever received any sheets directly from *Graham's* anyway: "I forgot whether you wished to have proofs of 'The Autobiography of a Pocket Handkerchief' sent to you for transmission to Bentley. If you desire it I will forward any number that may be needed."¹⁰¹ Again, on record at least, Cooper seems to have expressed little in reaction.

Still more drama surrounds the publication of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*. Some controversy arose over whether Cooper was really the author. During a visit to Philadelphia, he stopped in at Carey & Hart and heard of the rumor from Abraham Hart. In a letter to his wife from Philadelphia on 26 November 1845, he reports, "[Abraham] Hart [of Carey & Hart] told me that Pocket Handkerchief was ascribed to one of my daughters, and this book [*Elinor Wyllys*] to the same person. I gave the prescribed answer, and carried matters off well."¹⁰² On 30 November he followed up: "I have given the quietus to the Pocket Handkerchief story, by saying firmly that I wrote the tale myself, and would not have allowed my name to be affixed to any thing I had not written."¹⁰³ Exactly who was responsible for the conjecture is unclear, but apparently, since he had a "prescribed answer" ready, Cooper was not totally surprised to hear the rumor that *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* was written by the author of *Elinor Wyllys* and "The Lumley Autograph." These two pieces, a novel and a short story, were from the pen of Susan Fenimore Cooper, Cooper's eldest daughter; Cooper was acting as Susan's agent to get the works published. In his letter of 30 November, he mentions both pieces in close proximity to his mention of *Pocket-Handkerchief*: "Elinor will be published in a few days"; "I have spoken to Graham about the Autograph, and he has asked for the manuscript to look it over. I shall ask at

¹⁰⁰ At this time Bentley could secure Copyright on foreign work such as Cooper's provided that it appeared in England before publication elsewhere. This arrangement, which was struck down in the courts in 1848, did not ordinarily pose any significant danger to Cooper's U.S. copyright interests.

¹⁰¹ Griswold to JFC, 22 November 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁰² JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 26 November 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:99.

¹⁰³ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 30 November 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:102.

least, \$25 for it, and I think he may take it.”¹⁰⁴ As it turns out, *Elinor Wyllys* was being published by Carey and Hart, who were also contracting for Cooper’s own *Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers*. “The Lumley Autograph” was less fortunate: despite shopping the story around to Graham and Bentley, Cooper found no buyer. Trying again in 1850, he offered the story to Graham “as an old acquaintance, for fifty dollars.”¹⁰⁵ The story finally appeared in *Graham’s* in January and February 1851.¹⁰⁶ Strangely enough, Cooper’s name does appear in the copyright application for *Elinor Wyllys* as “Author,” as opposed to the entry he made for Susan’s 1850 work *Rural Hours* as “Proprietor,” leading some to speculate his involvement in the authorship of that book, for which he supplied a preface.¹⁰⁷ The notion that Susan could have had some collaborative involvement in *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* is tantalizing enough, especially since we are left to wonder what Cooper means by his “prescribed answer,” but plausible as it may seem, no evidence exists that her influence on the work extended beyond the usual feedback Cooper sought from family members. Barring any unforeseen revelations, all of the existing evidence, both within and without the text, points to the conclusion that James Fenimore Cooper was indeed the author of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*.

Given the contrast of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* from Cooper’s usual body of fiction, especially its amateurish use of a “juvenile literary form” (as James Grossman calls the first-person narrative by an inanimate object),¹⁰⁸ it is easy to understand why someone might have entertained doubts about the story’s authorship. But there are plenty of elements in the story that are indubitably typical of Cooper. His typical digressions on the fallacies of popular opinion are present (26-27, 139, etc.), and references to Thomas Cole (147), Sir

¹⁰⁴ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 30 November 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:102.

¹⁰⁵ JFC to Graham, 14 September 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:214.

¹⁰⁶ *Graham’s Magazine* 38 (January and February 1851): 31-36; 97-101.

¹⁰⁷ “The right whereof he claims as Author”: Copyright certificate for *Elinor Wyllys*, Northern District of New York, 21 October 1845. Cooper MSS Collection (Box 5, Misc. business papers), American Antiquarian Society; Copyright certificate for *Rural Hours*, 22 June 1850. Cooper MSS Collection (Box 5, Misc. business papers), American Antiquarian Society.

¹⁰⁸ James Grossman, *James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: Sloane, 1949) 170.

Walter Scott(170), and other figures are consistent in character with Cooper's remarks about them elsewhere. Jabs against editors and Yankees appear (58, 108-110, 214). One even finds names that would reappear in later works: the character Betts Shoreham shares a name with seaman Bob Betts of *The Crater* (1847); Julia Monson lends her surname to Miss Mary Monson of *The Ways of the Hour*. On a larger scale, it is easy to find echoes of past methods in the way he handles his social satire, and manifestations of themes such as the omnipotence of God, the necessity for contentment, and others that would take on greater significance in his later fiction. It is perhaps surprising to discover so many connections in so minor a work. Indeed, *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*, though of little lasting literary merit, is an important transition piece for Cooper that provides a fascinating look at how his attitudes of authorship were changing in 1842 and 1843, revealing his growing frustration with the processes by which intellectual and artistic property became subservient to the whims of the marketplace.

The title of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* (despite Richard Bentley's opinion of it) immediately points to a feature of this work that departs from the norm of almost all of Cooper's previous fictions. The work uses a first-"person" point of view, being narrated by a fancy linen handkerchief, of the type "used more for show than for blow," as Warren Walker quaintly expresses it.¹⁰⁹ This work was only the second in which Cooper used the first person; the first was his 1835 satire *The Monikins*, an allegorical fantasy that has often been called Swiftian in its satirical methods. Robert Spiller has described *The Monikins* as being in "the mock-realistic tradition of Swift and Defoe," with its long opening discourse on the birth and upbringing of the narrator, and its descriptions of absurd things with scientific minuteness.¹¹⁰ A similar description could easily apply to *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*. In fact, the experimental *Monikins*, with its unlikely cast of talking manikin-monkeys, stands in many respects as the *Autobiography's* closest relative among Cooper's other writings, with their unlikely characters, improbable happenings, and pointed social

¹⁰⁹ Warren S. Walker, *Plots and Characters in the Fiction of James Fenimore Cooper* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1978) 130.

¹¹⁰ Robert E. Spiller, *Fenimore Cooper: Critic of His Times* (1931; New York: Russell & Russell, 1963) 238.

satires. As in *The Monikins*, Cooper's "mock-realism" often bogs him down in details, digressions, and sermons (thankfully, Cooper was under no pressure with the *Autobiography* as he was with *The Monikins* to pad the work to the standard three-volume length deemed indispensable in Britain).

If the use of the first-person was unusual for Cooper's fiction up to this point, his use of an inanimate object as narrator is perhaps even more remarkable. Cooper's telling of the tale through an embroidered linen handkerchief as his narrator may have been, as Grossman says, an indulgence in a "juvenile" literary form; his interest in ascribing human characteristics and sentient thought to objects and making them characters in his books, however, was not new. Recall his proposal to Bentley for what was eventually to become *The Two Admirals*: a story with only ships as characters—no men—each ship exhibiting its own unique characteristics. Cooper viewed his concept as a sort of rule-breaking, avant-garde innovation, and in the case of ships one can see the poetic truth he hints at: ships (like cars today, perhaps) do take on their own "personalities" and are rendered more interesting by their distinctiveness. But a pocket-handkerchief is another matter; certainly it is hard, at times, to take the piece seriously when his narrator intrudes. Although never known for his expertise with the "light touch," Cooper certainly invites playfulness. He makes little effort to explain away the improbabilities of his narrator, leaving readers to wonder how a handkerchief might have "a certain heaviness about the brain" (107) or possess "vegetable clairvoyance" that allows the handkerchief to share the experiences of its plant ancestors (14) or to know what is happening in remote portions of a house (182).¹¹¹ Cooper may have been employing such silly, "juvenile" first-person narration as a means to distance his authorial voice from the material and allow deliberate outrageousness. By making a material object both the teller of the tale and the temporary center of interest for certain of the characters of the tale, Cooper could more effectively construct his critique of rampant materialism in America.

¹¹¹ Page references are from Walter Lee Brown's critical text of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* (Evanston, IL: Golden Booke Press, 1897). The manuscript for this work is currently held in the collection of the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA; Brown's edition establishes the *Graham's* printing as the base text and notes significant variants with the MS, *Brother Jonathan*, and Bentley texts.

The story itself, as divided into its four installments in *Graham's*, can be summed up briefly as follows. The story opens with a long discourse on the origins and opinions of the handkerchief, explaining, by means of its "hereditary mesmerism" or "vegetable *clairvoyance*" (14) its evolution from flax to fine linen cambric. Along the way, the narrator, while still flax in the fields of Normandy, absorbs from a "distinguished astronomer" who sat in the field healthy instruction on the vastness of the universe, the power of the Creator, and the necessity for contentment (14-23). Taking readers through the processes of harvesting, processing, weaving, and bleaching, the handkerchief explains how portions of the finished bolt of cambric absorbed divergent political prejudices, some pro-Bourbon "legitimist" and some pro-revolutionary "liberal" views before the French "July Revolution" of 1830. The handkerchief narrator, as it turns out, comes from the "*center gauche*" or center left of the cloth, being relatively free of blind partisan sentiment (26-28). It is with various sentiments, then, that the pieces of cloth contemplate their futures, some hoping to become the property of royalty, others horrified at the thought of deferring to rank and station. The handkerchief narrator is excited to find that it is to be purchased by Adrienne de la Rocheaimard, an orphaned granddaughter of a Vicomtesse, and decorated with fine antique lace as a gift for the Dauphine, who had established a pension for the Vicomtesse in compensation for the loss of her estate during the French Revolution. Before the transaction occurs, though, the "July Revolution" of 1830 dethrones the Bourbons once again, eliminating the Vicomtesse's pension and plunging her and Adrienne into poverty.

To make ends meet, the Vicomtesse sells off items from her *trousseau*, but this can only last so long, especially since goods were commanding only about a twentieth of the value they had before the revolution. Succumbing to old age and misfortune, the vicomtesse falls ill, and Adrienne takes a position as a seamstress for a millener to support her grandmother. Here, as well as in her attempts to dispose of some of her own valuables, Adrienne's innocence and lack of experience with the wily arts of commerce cause her to be exploited mercilessly. The milliner pays Adrienne a mere fifteen *sous* a day, despite reaping greater profits from Adrienne's superior skill. As her fortunes sink, Adrienne in desperation resolves upon a plan to purchase the fine cambric (the handkerchief narrator) to embroider and sell for profit, rather than as a gift as originally planned. Pages are dedicated to describing Adrienne's selfless dedication to her work as she subsists upon her last morsels of

bread and water in order to provide small comforts for her dying grandmother. Just as she completes her exquisite masterpiece, the vicomtesse dies. Lacking any money to provide a decent burial, Adrienne sells the handkerchief to Desiree, a *commisionnaire* (commission agent) who offers to make the funeral arrangements and purchase the handkerchief for forty-five *francs*—about ten dollars, according to Cooper (122), and far less than the value it should have commanded.

Here the first and longest installment ends. Cooper made but small concession to the serial form of the story, a one-sentence paragraph stating: “The manner in which *Desiree* disposed of me shall be related in another number” (98). Cooper evidently tinkered with ways to end this first installment, writing and then erasing a different sentence: “I saw Adrienne no more, for *Desiree* soon disposed of me, in the manner I shall presently relate.” Following, he wrote “(To be continued),” a clear indication that the divisions in the story were directed by Cooper from the start.

As it turns out in the second installment, Desiree does not immediately dispose of the pocket-handkerchief, as Cooper had originally planned, but holds it for “some two or three years” as a “species of *corps de reserve*” (99), patient to reap her profits.¹¹² Eventually she crosses paths with a flashy Yankee, Colonel Silky, and sells the handkerchief to him for five napoleons, or a hundred *francs*—a profit of fifty five *francs*, but far less than the 155 *francs* she had hoped to receive. The “Colonel,” in turn, smuggles the handkerchief on his person duty-free into America to place it for sale in a shop on Broadway, of which he is a sleeping partner. Embroidered handkerchiefs are the current rage of fashion among the extravagant young ladies of New York, particularly the *nouveau riche*, with particular attention given to the price one’s handkerchief commands (“One doesn’t like to have such a thing *too* low,” 123). It is not long, then, before Bobbinet, the shop owner, resells the handkerchief for one hundred dollars—a figure which makes it “the highest-priced handkerchief, by twenty dollars, that ever crossed the Atlantic ocean” (124), and indeed, the first “three-figure” handkerchief in America. The buyer is Eudisia Halfacre, daughter of a fervent land speculator whose wealth, on paper at least, is estimated in the millions. Just as Eudisia is

¹¹² Warren Walker incorrectly states that Desiree “immediately” resells the handkerchief. Walker 131.

displaying her prize at a fancy party, news flutters across the room that Jackson's removal of funds from the Bank of the United States has caused panic in the financial market. With her father now facing bankruptcy, Eudisia can hardly keep such an extravagant ornament, and the pocket-handkerchief finds itself once again in the shop of Bobbinet, having been sold back for fifty dollars.

In the third number, another owner, Miss Julia Monson, comes to possess the pocket-handkerchief. She also pays "*only*" 100 dollars for it, a discount for "regular customers" from the \$120 the store *ought* to ask "in justice to ourselves" (172). Even as she heads home from the shop, though, Julia is already half-embarrassed about her purchase. She resolves not to show the handkerchief to the family's French governess, Mademoiselle Hennequin, partly out of recognition of the governess's superior taste, but mostly out of jealousy and shame, for Julia admires the same young man, Betts Shoreham, whose attentions are directed at the less attractive governess. During one of Betts Shoreham's visits to the Monson household, Julia is horrified when Betts and her father (ignorant of Julia's purchase) decry the reckless extravagance of paying even \$75 for a single handkerchief. What is worse for Julia, in a subsequent visit by Betts she interrupts a private conversation between Betts and Mademoiselle Hennequin, and leaves the room flustered and embarrassed, leaving her pocket-handkerchief behind. Mademoiselle Hennequin, seeing the handkerchief for the first time, is strangely affected. While nothing of this mystery is revealed at first, Julia is courted by the mercenary Tom Thurston, who hopes to secure himself a fortune and a bride.

The fourth number brings matters to their conclusion and, despite the humor and excitement in its pages, can be summed up quickly. Tom Thurston's gamble fails when Mr. Monson, in a humorous game of brinksmanship, suggests that Julia's fortune will match Tom's contribution dollar-for-dollar. As to the mystery of Mademoiselle Hennequin and the pocket-handkerchief, it is easy enough to guess that this young French woman is none other than Adrienne, who, encountering her own creation before her very eyes, is overcome with sorrowful recollections. How the pocket-handkerchief's "vegetable *clairvoyance*" failed to recognize Adrienne immediately is accounted to the passage of time and its "poor memory" (227), but as Hugh MacDougall has properly pointed out, "the heroine-handkerchief's protracted failure to recognize her maker, when she has proved so sensitive to her

surroundings in every other fashion, is simply unbelievable.”¹¹³ Betts and Adrienne, who turn out to be distant cousins, marry, and Julia returns the handkerchief to its creator, although Betts pays her \$125 in order that Adrienne may truly call the work her own—indeed, her “friend” (254).

Critics who have given *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* a passing moment or two of notice have correctly observed that the work is a tart critique of materialism. George Dekker and Robert Emmet Long barely break the sentence mark in their mentions of the work, Dekker calling it “anti-Whig” and “an attack on the commercial values of New York Society”; Long “a satire of wealth and vulgarity in New York.”¹¹⁴ Hugh MacDougall, a staunch defender of this underdog piece, states that “‘Autobiography’ is clever social satire—exposing with equal vigor those who exploited the poor in Paris, and those who lived only to make and display their wealth in America. It presents a vivid picture of an era of wide-open and unrestrained economic expansion, in which traditional cultural values bowed before the growing might of the ‘almighty dollar.’”¹¹⁵ James Grossman, who offers the most extensive critique of the work, wisely highlights Cooper’s use of “hard facts and figures” in the story, including account statements, in demonstrating that “The process of turning human labor into profitable merchandise is as brutally impersonal in Cooper as in Marx.”¹¹⁶ These claims are founded upon good reason, as the overall purpose of the story is to satirize the avarice, ambition, and vanity of certain kinds of people, particularly the upwardly mobile in America. Cooper’s interests here are undeniably commercial; the world he satirizes one of commodification. But within this broad sweep Cooper suggests an element much closer to

¹¹³ Hugh C. MacDougall, Introduction to online text of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*, James Fenimore Cooper Society Website. URL: <http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/texts/pocket.html>.

¹¹⁴ George Dekker, *James Fenimore Cooper: The Novelist* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) 150; Robert Emmet Long, *James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: Continuum, 1990) 139.

¹¹⁵ MacDougall, “Autobiography of a Pocket Handkerchief.” Originally printed in the Cooperstown, NY *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 July 2002 as part of the series “The Cooper Bookshelf”; republished on James Fenimore Cooper Society Website. URL: <http://external.oneonta.edu/cooper/journal.html>.

¹¹⁶ Grossman 172.

his avocation as author: what is the status of taste, of true craftsmanship, of *art*, in a world like this?

Although the portions of the tale which are set in America and contain the most social satire are perhaps the most appealing to the modern critic, it is the story of the handkerchief's embroidering by poor Adrienne in the first number that attracts attention to Cooper's concerns as an author, suggesting his attitudes about the state of his current literary ventures. This portion of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* gives an unusually conspicuous place to the process of artistic production. The pocket-handkerchief figures in the story as a painstakingly crafted, highly wrought piece of work--nigh unto a work of art. As such, it is often made to suggest or parallel Cooper's sentiments toward artistic production and the accompanying passage of such work into the marketplace, becoming a symbol not unlike the mechanical butterfly in Hawthorne's "The Artist of the Beautiful." Cooper has less allegorical flair, of course;¹¹⁷ and it is doubtful whether the handkerchief can be said to have true allegorical value anyway. Thus it cannot be said that the pocket-handkerchief equals, say, a novel, but is more generally suggestive of a finely crafted work, not quite "art" in its purest sense but exhibiting the taste and skill that characterize artistic productions.

Cooper also endows this section of the story with a good deal of pathos that could be easily dismissed as one of Cooper's literary excesses were it not for its connection to the embroidering of the handkerchief. Hugh MacDougall is probably correct in observing that from a standpoint of sentiment, "the telling of Adrienne's sad plight in Paris becomes a bit overwrought,"¹¹⁸ yet this pathos may indicate Cooper's identification with the plight of his artist, Adrienne. Cooper's sympathy may have also influenced his decision to use the first-person narrator, in order to distance himself from exposing too much direct authorial point of view (as he had hazarded to do in *Home as Found*). Parallels to Cooper's own career are too numerous to ignore, and, as demonstrated below, the elements here fit together to

¹¹⁷ Although in some of his late novels, particularly *The Crater* and *The Sea Lions*, he would develop allegory with reasonable amounts of sophistication, most of his allegories up to this point were fairly heavy-handed and obvious.

¹¹⁸ MacDougall, "Introduction."

provide stimulating insights into Cooper's frustrations with his work since returning to America, especially during the hard times during which the story was written.

It is fitting that Cooper's first tale for *Graham's* portrays a person driven to produce artistry out of a sense of material necessity. Cooper himself, as has been noted above, began his connection to *Graham's* during a period of unprecedented low returns for his work—sinking, in the space of a single year, 1842, from \$2000 from Lea & Blanchard for rights for 5000 copies of *The Two Admirals* to only \$1000 for 10000 copies of *Wing-and-Wing*.¹¹⁹ In the past, Cooper had the leverage to negotiate perquisites such as free copies of every new book that Lea & Blanchard published (part of the agreement for *The Deerslayer*)¹²⁰; by 1844, he could not even secure a satisfactory contract for *Afloat and Ashore*. At the same time, his British publisher Richard Bentley was reducing the size of his editions and the amount of his payments to Cooper. These developments caused Cooper to distrust the candor of his publishers. Bentley's proclamations that the market for fiction was depressed became a virtually constant chorus from the 1830s on, and in America at Lea & Blanchard, after a series of failed travel books, a set of controversial social novels, and the departure of his friend Henry Carey from the firm, he no longer enjoyed the welcome reception at the firm that he once did, even though his newest Leatherstocking tales and *The Two Admirals* were popular books. After Carey's departure, Cooper's correspondence with Isaac Lea becomes merely businesslike, and William Blanchard, never renowned for his talent, seems to have been no great favorite of Cooper, who wryly remarked in one letter that "If little Blanchard scolded his printers half as much as he scolds me, your books wouldn't be so damnably printed."¹²¹ Although some of the troubles in 1842 were out of Lea & Blanchard's hands due to the troubled economy, sufficient grounds for Cooper's doubt can be found in Washington Irving's comment to George Palmer Putnam that Lea & Blanchard had let all of

¹¹⁹ Contracts for both works are preserved in the Lea & Febiger papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

¹²⁰ Manuscript contract for "The First War-Path" (later known as *The Deerslayer*), Lea & Febiger papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹²¹ JFC to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard, 1 April 1838: *Letters and Journals* 6:325.

his old books go out of print, having nearly persuaded him they were “defunct.”¹²² Cooper’s sense that he is being exploited, undervalued and underpaid for his superior work, finds vent in *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*. The work, then, serves as an admonition that creative work of superior ability and taste must be recognized, respected, and remunerated properly, according to its true value as art.

Adrienne, despite her original wish to embroider a fine linen handkerchief with antique lace as a gift to the Dauphine, is reduced by political and economic forces outside of her control to taking up the same project as a means of support. Cooper is keen to emphasize Adrienne’s superior skill, which places her so far above the everyday seamstress, that the two can hardly be considered to occupy the same sphere. Such skill gives her knowledge of and control over her art: “Adrienne was unusually skillful with the needle, and her taste had been so highly cultivated, as to make her a perfect mistress of all the proprieties of patterns” (71-2). Yet the work Adrienne undertakes is physically and emotionally draining. She works “not only until her fingers and body ached, but, until her very heart ached” (83). As she nears completion of the embroidered pocket-handkerchief, she finds her happiness not what she had anticipated, merely because “hope had exhausted her spirit” (85). When she finally does complete the handkerchief in a morning of frantic labor¹²³, she suddenly throws it down and bursts into hysterical sobs and tears (88). Her work is so exhausting not only because of the demands placed upon her by external circumstances but also because her artistic standards are still high. Despite turning her attention to profits, her pattern is still the one she prepared for the Dauphine, and Cooper states throughout the book that the work is better than the ordinary glitz that adorns other handkerchiefs. The good taste of Adrienne’s design, Cooper suggests, compensates for the otherwise extravagant character of the embroidered-handkerchief genre: “They were not simple, vulgar, unmeaning ornaments, such as uncultivated tastes seize upon with avidity, on account of their florid appearance; but well-devised drawings, that were replete with taste

¹²² *The Complete Works of Washington Irving: Letters, Volume IV, 1846-1859*, Eds. Ralph M. Aderman, Herbert L. Klienfield, and Jennifer S. Banks (Boston: Twayne, 1982) 344.

¹²³ Cooper, incidentally, did most of his writing in the morning hours.

and thought, and afforded some apology for the otherwise senseless luxury contemplated, by aiding and refining the imagination, and cultivating the intellect" (72).

The parallels to fiction-writing here are difficult to overlook: Cooper's own involvement in novel-writing, a genre often attacked for its frivolity and negative influence on character, is redeemed by its ingenuity and positive influence on character. Certainly one does not normally credit pocket-handkerchiefs with the abilities of "refining the imagination" or "cultivating the intellect," yet Cooper seems to be deliberately emphasizing such qualities not for their own sakes, but as a broader statement about the possibilities of the creative artist—the reasons, indeed, that they should be valued by society and compensated accordingly. One noteworthy element here, too, is Cooper's emphasis on the physical and emotional costs to the artist who creates such exceptional work. Although Cooper's confidence in his abilities as an author has often been noted, Cooper was more close-lipped about the real difficulties and doubts he faced during the creative process. Despite evidence that many of his books, including his very successful *The Spy* and *The Pilot*, hung in the balance while he figured out how to finish the innovative works he had started without a great degree of planning, Cooper in his correspondence usually puts on a brave face. His frequent comments to his family about his health, though, are easily observed, as he became more engrossed with ailments as he progressed through his fifties during the 1840s. In *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*, Cooper seems to be hinting that authorship takes its toll both physically and mentally, and that this cost, however intangible it is, should also be accounted for in the compensation a creator receives for his or her work.

In the story, though, Adrienne, despite her obvious skill, is ruthlessly exploited by the calculating milliner, "paid merely as a common sewing-girl, though her neatness, skill and taste might well have entitled her to double wages" (73). As Cooper notes, "Those who live on the frivolities of mankind, or, what is the same thing, their luxuries, have two sets of victims to plunder—the consumer, and the real producer, or the operative" (73). Threats of exploitation surround the very production of the masterpiece Adrienne has been contemplating and continue throughout the work, as people unassociated with the actual creation of art seize every advantage to profit from it. Once again Cooper includes details relevant to his own work as an author. As Adrienne discovers she is being paid less than the milliner's other seamstresses despite the greater profit her work brings, she gently attempts

to resolve the situation. The milliner recognizes what a prize she has in Adrienne, and, as Cooper explains, has two alternatives: "to offer a higher price, or to undervalue the services she was so fearful of losing. Her practiced policy, as well as her selfishness, counseled her to try the latter expedient first" (82). The milliner, scolding Adrienne for her impertinence, threatens to let her go if she will not work for twelve *sous*, then, out of seeming generosity, offers to let her continue at fifteen, although Adrienne is taking home more work than ever (82-83). The handkerchief narrator, though superior understanding, recognizes the situation for what it is—one of the "artifices of the selfish and calculating, one of their most familiar frauds being to conceal from the skillful their own success, lest it should command a price in proportion to its claims" (81). Adrienne, by failing to assert her worth at this moment, is putting her future well-being in jeopardy, causing the narrator to interject, "Poor child! Little did she think that she was establishing precedents against herself, by which further and destructive exertions might be required" (83-4). The fear of losing *all* of her income keeps her in a virtual state of indenture.

At the very moment when Adrienne finishes the handkerchief in an outpouring of emotion, commercial rapacity intrudes again, this time in the person of Desiree, the *commissionnaire*. Desiree had kept abreast of the progress of the handkerchief by bribing the girl of the house, and under the pretence of inquiring about the apartment, comes to see Adrienne. Desiree, like the milliner, undervalues Adrienne's work in hope of obtaining it cheaply, shaming Adrienne for the price she paid for the lace and giving low estimations of the time required to make such an exquisite piece: "Ten for the handkerchief, twenty for the lace, and fifteen for the work make forty-five francs—*parole d'honneur*, it does come to a pretty price for a handkerchief. *Si*, we must ask forty-five francs for it and then we can always abate the five francs, and take two napoleons" (91). For the cambric fabric alone, Adrienne had paid twenty-eight francs. After her grandmother dies that evening, Adrienne is induced to take Desiree's price just to cover funeral expenses.

In the ensuing trades, people with no connection to the creation of the handkerchief connive to profit from Adrienne's artistry. Desiree receives from Colonel Silky more than double what she paid; Silky, in turn, profits hugely from the sale of the handkerchief by his partner, the shopkeeper Bobbinet. Cooper takes every opportunity to expose the ruthless cunning of such dealers. Bobbinet, in his private account book, even attempts to increase

his enormous profit by scrimping on a twenty-five cent charge and selling the pattern for later reproduction:

Super-extraordinary Pocket-Handkerchief, French cambric, trimmed and worked, in ac. With Bobbinet & Gull.

Dr.

To money paid first cost—francs 100—at 5.25...	\$19.04 65/100
--	----------------

To interest on same for...	
----------------------------	--

To portion of passage money...	.04
--------------------------------	-----

To portorage...	.00 ¼
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To washing and making up...	.25
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(*Mem.* See if a deduction cannot be made from this charge.)

Cr.

By cash for allowing Miss Thimble to copy pattern, not to be worked until our article is sold...	1.00
---	------

By cash for sale, &c....

These account statements are not unlike those exchanged between Cooper and his publishers, printers, and stereotypers, or those entered into the cost books of Lea & Blanchard. The provision for copying the pattern, “not to be worked until our article is sold,” is particularly striking for its similarity to terms that would be struck with publishers. The marketing tactics used by shopowners, the milliner, Bobbinet & Co., and others in the tale also smack of tactics used by publishers: to undervalue the work to its author and complain about poor prospects in the marketplace, but once the work is securely in hand and the producer paid, to hyperbolically and cunningly promote it and reap the profits. Cooper also risked suffering in the same way, since he had long ago abandoned publishing on the shares system (splitting risks and profits with his publishers) in favor of the more certain income of a fixed payment for sale or lease of his copyrights. It must be said, however, that when looking at the situation with more objective hindsight, Cooper fared relatively well during these times and negotiated better terms than most. His critiques, then, must be seen as the exaggerations they are; it is unlikely even, given the satirical tenor of the book, that Cooper intended the facts and figures to stand as entirely realistic representations of commerce in America.

Nevertheless, such critiques offer sufficient insight into *where* Cooper places the blame for the low appreciation of artistic productions during the early 1840s: on scheming,

profit-worshipping middlemen and indeed even, as the later portions of the book suggest, on the mass public, who through its susceptibility to fashion, hysteria, and greed fails to seek true refinement, taste, and value. Cooper, unlike Hawthorne, identifies no “scribbling women” as the cause for his languishing fortunes, nor does he, like Melville, look with suspicion at industrialism as a root cause for trouble. Just as astutely as these two authors, though (and several years earlier, when arguably the crunch in publishing was at its worst), Cooper identifies the “cupidity of trade” (91) and its accompanying “great game of brag” (256) as the great impediment to true artistry in America. Hardly revolutionary in this observation, Cooper is nonetheless daring enough to confront his readers with it in the pages of one of America’s most popular monthly magazines.¹²⁴ Whether or not readers responded to either the story or the social criticisms within, though, is a mystery. No reviews of the work are known,¹²⁵ and no correspondence has been found to suggest any particular reactions to the work. Cooper never attempted an experiment similar to *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* again, and seldom mentioned it again. Around the time the last installment appeared in *Graham’s*, Cooper, met his old shipmate from 1806, Ned Myers, and subsequently developed a much more successful approach to using first person narration that would see him through several novels. By the time he agreed to write another piece of fiction for *Graham’s* three years later, neither he nor Graham apparently wished a repeat of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*, and the resulting work, *The Islets of the Gulf*, looked very much like a regular Cooper novel.

¹²⁴ Given this critique of human greed and pride, it is hardly surprising that Cooper’s sermons on human insignificance and Christian humility, contained in the awkward digressions in *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*, would recur in almost all of Cooper’s novels that followed.

¹²⁵ Littrell’s *The Living Age* reprinted from *The Foreign and Quarterly Review* an article purporting to be a “review” of four novels, including Bentley’s British edition of the *Autobiography, The French Governess*. No mention of the work actually appears in the article, however, the reviewer merely using the occasion for an unfavorable evaluation of Cooper’s career.

The Islets of the Gulf; or, Rose Budd is a sea story set in New York and the Dry Tortugas of Florida during the Mexican War, circa 1846. In it, the hero Harry Mulford, a first mate on the brigantine *Molly Swash* comes to discover that his captain, Stephen Spike, is really a smuggler engaged in selling gunpowder to the Mexicans. He also finds that the grizzly old Spike has designs on a young woman on board, Rose Budd, who is traveling with her aunt and servant as a means of restoring her health. While Spike attempts to elude a government sloop suspicious about his movements, Mulford tries to elude Spike and make Rose safe—falling in love in the process, of course. Mulford and Rose are aided by Jack Tier, a short, dumpy little cabin steward who knows Spike of old and has decidedly conflicting emotions about him. Brutality and grotesqueness abound in the work, and after a climactic boat chase in which Captain Spike tries in vain to lighten his boat by coldly dumping overboard crew and passengers (Rose's aunt among them), the mortally wounded Spike is told the secret of Jack's true identity as Spike's long-abandoned wife, Mary, or Molly, Swash.

Islets of the Gulf was Cooper's fulfillment of a request by Graham in April 1846 for a new serialized novel to run through ten numbers of his magazine. Graham was clearly losing his enthusiasm for Cooper's ongoing series of naval biographies, which, as he later complained several years later, never attracted new subscribers to the magazine.¹²⁶ Wishing to put his famous novelist to better use, he proposed a suspension of the biographies while Cooper wrote a new nautical tale. His specifications reveal his characteristic interest in suiting the popular taste: "I should like the novel to be a sea story full of incident, and I think *character*—for a *little love* "goes a great way" in making a magazine sketch attractive & popular with the readers of the lighter magazine."¹²⁷

Despite expressing a wish in his proposal to receive the first part of the tale by 10 May (a mere month later), the two parties did not actually sign a contract for the work until 3 June, with Cooper agreeing to supply the first installment of five numbers (averaging ten *Graham's Magazine* pages apiece) ninety days thereafter, the remaining five in 180 days. Cooper further agreed not to republish the tale in America until it had appeared in its

¹²⁶ *Graham's Magazine* 43 (November 1853): 552.

¹²⁷ Graham to JFC, 3 April 1846: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

entirety in *Graham's* (or December 31, 1848—whichever came first), the copyright remaining in his name. He could, however, sell the tale for publication outside the country before that time, provided that no part of the tale should appear elsewhere before it appeared in *Graham's*.¹²⁸ While negotiations were underway, Cooper contacted Bentley to see if he might be interested in purchasing, bluffing (most likely) that other offers from Europe awaited if Bentley did not accept. As a hint to offer a good price, perhaps, Cooper sought sympathy for his plight: "For a remunerating price, I am ready to give as strong a nautical tale, as any body going, but the publishers pay so little now, as almost to induce me to turn to some other pursuit. I do not like change, but shall be driven to something of the sort, without an increase of price. I can not write a book for the sum I receive, and do justice to any one."¹²⁹ The way Cooper links the potential quality of his work to its price point is interesting for the way he turns the question into a matter of willpower on both sides. In one sense his argument is valid, in an odd sort of way, for his career: his most acclaimed works tended to be those produced when he was receiving huge sums for his work: *Mohicans*, *Prairie*, and *Red Rover* especially. Perhaps, Cooper hints, he can return to those days again if given suitable rewards for his art. Conversely, the statement also saddles Bentley with some of the blame for the commercial failure of most of his 1840s novels in England, his pay not being significant enough to ensure a work of success. Cooper is, of course, overlooking many of the commercial failures of his own causing which might have been prevented had he taken his publishers' advice (on matters even as simple as titles). Cooper's manipulations notwithstanding, Bentley cleverly turned Cooper's words to his own advantage, converting Cooper's implied threats into implied promises for a good novel, responding that "I gather from your letter that you mean to make this 'a strong nautical tale.'"¹³⁰

Cooper's negotiations with Bentley did end up having a good deal of influence on its final form and scope. Bentley had always been averse to accepting novels that did not conform to the traditional "triple-decker" three-volume format common in Britain. Short

¹²⁸ Contract with George R. Graham & Co., Philadelphia, 3 June 1846: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (YCAL MSS MISC Group 450, F-2).

¹²⁹ JFC to Bentley, 28 May 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:148.

¹³⁰ Bentley to JFC, 25 June 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:158.

works such as *Ned Myers* and works with “continuations” such as *Homeward Bound/Home as Found* or *Afloat and Ashore* were sources of worry for Bentley, and he provisionally advanced on Cooper’s new nautical tale with the understanding that it would be “of the usual extent of your other novels, that is, of such amount as to make three fair volumes.”¹³¹ Although Cooper had irritated Bentley numerous times by ignoring Bentley’s admonitions but still seeking full price, in his negotiations for *The Islets of the Gulf* (for which Bentley adopted the title *Captain Spike*) Cooper anticipated Bentley by proposing two-thirds their usual recent rate, since the work would be about two-thirds the size of one of Cooper’s regular novels. Still, Cooper hoped for a chance to expand the work to the usual size, and included a proposal that Bentley pay the full price if he could get Graham to agree to the expansion: “I am willing to extend the story to three volumes, and think I can make a better story by so doing, but I do not know whether he [Graham] wishes such a change, or not. I propose therefore, that you pay me one third less than £350, for the tale as now settled, or the £350, if I can effect a change with Graham, in the length of the story.”¹³²

While in Philadelphia between 30 August and 3 September 1846, Cooper probably wished to discuss with Graham the possibility of extending his story. He may have missed Graham entirely, since Graham was traveling and not due back until 2 September, or, if he did see Graham, no decision was reached. Instead, Cooper received a letter from someone at the magazine office (not Graham himself) instructing him to stick with the original plan: “On conferring [sic] with Mr Graham we have come to the conclusion that we would prefer the Sea Story should be the length agreed upon. You will therefore please finish it the *short road*.”¹³³ Likewise, as he forwarded proof to Bentley on 22 September, Cooper remarked, “The story will be in ten parts, and for the short price, of course. It is nearly written, and I will take care of your rights.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Bentley to JFC, 25 June 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:158.

¹³² JFC to Bentley, 20 July 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:156.

¹³³ Geo. R. Graham & Co. to JFC, 16 September 1846: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹³⁴ JFC to Bentley, 22 September 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:169.

Shortly thereafter, though, Cooper apparently gained the leverage he needed to renegotiate, but not through circumstances he would have anticipated. On 6 November 1846, Graham wrote with some urgency:

I am sorry to say we have met with an accident with the MS of the *Islets of the Gulf*". In moving my office from 89 to 129 Chestnut St, it has *been lost* or mislaced[sic], and after four days of patient search, I have advertised it, with a hope that if dropped by the porter in the street it can yet be recovered.

Now as the January part should be in type *now*--how shall we get along. Can you write me out four or five pages so as to give a *part*--if only a short one-- in that number. Delay is impossible, and as I *reprint* for the benefit of new subscribers, the two past parts, we could get along with a short one for January. In the mean while I hope the missing MS will be recovered

Please write me by return mail
Yours truly / Geo R Graham¹³⁵

Six days later, the missing pages of manuscript still had not turned up, forcing Graham once again to request that Cooper rewrite those parts which had been lost:

After the most patient search we have come to the deliberate conclusion that, that [sic] the MS has either been stolen or is irrecoverably lost. We have advertised it extensively in the city papers but have heard nothing of it, and the January part should now be in type we are very much embarrassed about it.

Will you do us the favor of writing off *at once* from your notes, 4 or 5 pages in the January number. we will pay you for your trouble whatever is fair and right to not disappoint us in this, as we rely very much upon the *effect* of this novel, in inducing a renewal of subscriptions for the new year. Should anything be heard of the MS I will write you by the first mail, but I have given it up.¹³⁶

Traveling to Philadelphia around 25 November-4 December, Cooper most likely obliged Graham's request, announcing to his wife the vague information that "The manuscript is gone, and an agreement is on the tapis that I find to my liking. It will give me a \$1000 at no great trouble." Quite possibly the "agreement" Cooper referred to was that in which he

¹³⁵ Graham to JFC, 6 November 1846: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹³⁶ Graham to JFC, 12 November 1846: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

consented to rewrite three lost portions of the manuscript and extend the publication of *The Islets of the Gulf* to fifteen numbers (subsequently becoming seventeen through subdivision of the last two parts). An undated, unsigned copy of the agreement—possibly a rough draft—survives.¹³⁷ According to the terms stated there, Cooper was to receive \$500 from Graham for extending the tale; the extra £116 2/3 he would receive from Bentley, presuming an exchange rate of around \$4.82 per British pound sterling, would add roughly another \$562 to the total, thereby approximating Cooper's off-the-cuff estimate of a thousand dollars.¹³⁸

Cooper reported the change of plans to Bentley on 27 March 1847:

The story has been finished for some time, and, by a new arrangement with Mr. Graham it will make a full book. This will entitle me to the £350. . . Now, Mr. Graham has been desirous of having seventeen numbers, instead of fifteen, which would make one of my ordinary tales, as to length. To this I have consented, cutting two of the last parts into four. . . I think the succeeding chapters of this story will have interest. Graham had three parts stolen in manuscript, and I have been obliged to rewrite them. This has impaired their interest, for one never writes as well, on such subjects, as at the first heat.¹³⁹

Cooper did rewrite the missing parts, but of course there is no easy way to tell today how much their interest was “impaired” by the rewriting. The January 1847 issue of *Graham's*

¹³⁷ Memorandum of Agreement with George R Graham to extend *Rose Budd* to 15 numbers [n.d., 1846-47?] (MS, American Antiquarian Society, Cooper Papers, Box 5, Folder 22):

In consideration of Five Hundred dollars to him in hand paid, by the said G.R. Graham & Co, the said Cooper binds himself, his heirs and assigns to extend the said tale of *Rose Budd*, to fifteen numbers, or to five additional numbers of the same average length as the ten numbers previously contracted for, and also to rewrite Parts IV & V, the manuscript of which has been delivered to said Graham & Co and lost; the said five additional numbers to be sold to Graham & Co, on the same terms and for the same use, as the ten numbers previously agreed for; it being understood however that Graham & Co may subdivide the matter, at their pleasure, in such a way as to extend the publication of the tale in their magazine so far as to include the <magazine> publication for March 1848, within its limits.

¹³⁸ Lawrence H. Officer, “Exchange rate between the United States dollar and the British pound, 1791-2000,” Economic History Services, EH.Net, 2001. URL: <http://www.eh.net/hmit/exchangerates/pound.php>.

¹³⁹ JFC to Bentley, 27 March 1847: *Letters and Journals* 5:198-99.

appeared in the format Graham had mentioned in his letter of 6 November 1846, with the first and second numbers reprinted “for the benefit of new subscribers” and the newly rewritten third number.¹⁴⁰ The rewritten fourth and fifth numbers appeared in subsequent months, and publication suffered no more dramatic turns throughout the run of the story, in America at least.¹⁴¹ The last two numbers, as the contract had provided, were split to make four, perhaps so as to extend the climax and denouement of the tale into a new volume of the magazine without ending it in a January issue.

The regular divisions in the story show how Cooper had become more seasoned to magazine writing since *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*, which had consisted of four numbers of decidedly unequal size. Cooper approached the writing of *Islets of the Gulf* much as he would his regular novels. He included an epigraph, or “motto,” as he called them, at the opening of each number, as well as one under the title of the work, just as he would include them at the beginnings of chapters and on the title pages of his novels. *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* has neither of these features. Although his installments were longer than his normal chapters, Cooper merely doubled their length (except for the last numbers). Thus, when published in book form as *Jack Tier*, the seventeen (really fifteen) numbers corresponded closely in length to the usual thirty or thirty-one chapters in many of Cooper’s novels. His adherence to his novelistic practices may have been behind the story’s expansion from the ten original numbers; as *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief* had shown, Cooper struggled in his attempt to write a shorter story, and he may have found himself

¹⁴⁰ This third installment contains a feature that sets it apart from virtually all of Cooper’s U.S.-published fiction. A comical woodcut, entitled “Josh educating a Pig,” appears opposite text from the reprinted Part I, from which the image is loosely based. It depicts the ship’s old, black “cabin boy,” Josh, demonstrating how he keeps the livestock from taking over the aft portions of the ship by pouring boiling water on a pig as Jack Tier and Mulford(?) look on. How or why this image came to be included is a mystery. No other illustrations accompany any of the other parts of the story. *Graham’s Magazine* 30 (January 1847): [54], 55.

¹⁴¹ In England, Bentley suffered some temporary anxiety when some proof sheets did not reach him as anticipated, fearing that they were lost in an American packet ship recently sunk at sea, but later wrote to report that he had “needlessly alarmed” himself. Bentley had reason to worry: if *Graham’s* preceded him in publishing, he would lose his copyright for the work. See Bentley to JFC, 4 December 1847 and 11 March 1848.

falling back into his normal habits when envisioning the scope and size of the work. It would certainly not be the first time a Cooper novel grew beyond its bounds. Certainly the fact that he completed the novel long before portions of it were due suggests his acquired competence in producing a fiction of his usual size. Thus he could, while traveling on business in Detroit in October 1847, direct his son Paul to take the next installment of manuscript for the story—in the family’s “Big Bible,” as usual, and send it on to Graham.¹⁴² Cooper was not scribbling out each number in Dickensian fashion, rushing to meet each monthly deadline.

That is not to say, however, that Cooper made no concessions to the story’s serial publication. He paid particular attention to the endings of his chapters. Thomas Philbrick has claimed that Cooper’s technique of ending on a suspenseful note resembles conventions similar to those employed by magazine writers Charles Peterson and William Clark, who had earlier contributed sea stories to *Graham’s*.¹⁴³ Thus he ends the first installment with the starring ship of the story, the brig *Molly Swash*, striking the Pot Rock off of New York, even though in the second number it turns out that no damage was done.¹⁴⁴ At other times Cooper ends on a note of particular irony, such as in the penultimate chapter when the dying Captain Spike shrinks with disgust upon discovering that the short, dumpy tar Jack Tier is really his long-ago abandoned wife, Mary—or Molly--Swash. An even more distinctive feature appears at the very beginning of the story. *Islets of the Gulf* has perhaps the best opening of any Cooper novel. It is the only work of his to open *in media res* with conversation (“D’YE hear there, Mr. Mulford?”), immediately immersing readers in the action of the story. The opening, like the setting of the work, takes on a decidedly modern character, again in contrast to the desultory eighteenth-century style prerequisites of *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*.

¹⁴² JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 20 October 1847: *Letters and Journals* 5:243.

¹⁴³ Thomas Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962) 203.

¹⁴⁴ *Graham’s Magazine* 29 (November, December 1846): 215, 277.

Undoubtedly with the adaptations required for magazine publication some side effects would occur. Thomas Philbrick has singled out what he considers to be the most unfortunate consequences Cooper's method of publishing the tale:

One other effect of serial publication on *Jack Tier* is the slipshod finish of the narrative. Although Cooper's novels are never impeccable in their details, *Jack Tier* contains more than its share of inconsistent and tautological passages: Spike's boatswain, for example, is variously named Rove (p.36), Clench (p. 72), and Strand (p. 463); the reader is first told that Spike knows the name of a certain naval officer (p. 127), but later in the narrative it appears that he does not (p. 178); a bag of gold has been stowed aboard a schooner first by Mulford (p. 321) and then by Jack (p. 439); Cooper's phobia against "Hurl Gate" as a bowdlerized version of "Hell Gate" manifests itself twice in the novel (pp. 35, 81-82); and two tedious, nearly identical, and entirely unnecessary explanations of the method of determining longitude are supplied (pp. 94-99, 223-227).¹⁴⁵

These claims deserve some attention, since they highlight Cooper's method (or lack thereof) of composing and publishing the work. It is true that Cooper was never foolproof with names, and he sometimes forgot minor details such as the stowing of the gold cited above. But it is worthwhile to note that in several of Philbrick's comparisons of inconsistencies, one of the passages cited falls within the three numbers (Chapters 3, 4, & 5) that Cooper was obligated to rewrite: the assignment of the name Clench to the boatswain, the mention of Spike's knowing the officer's name, the second reference to "Hurl Gate," and the first discussion of longitude. It is possible that Cooper introduced errors not present in his original telling of the story when forced to rewrite from memory. Then, too, Philbrick may be overstating his case on the last two examples he cites. In both cases, Cooper clearly states that it is the *second* time these matters have come up: Mrs. Budd's "Hurl Gate" as a recurring example of her ignorant know-it-all-ism; the explanation of measuring longitude with chronometers as an example of the difficulty in getting women to understand technical matters. Indeed, this last example seems to be introduced by Cooper as a sort of education (complete with review) of *his* female audience in *Graham's*.

Many of these textual "problems," then, can be dismissed as either purposeful (if not wholly satisfying) authorial inclusions or as accidental mishaps from either the composition

¹⁴⁵ Philbrick 318. Page numbers Philbrick cites are from the Townsend "Darley" edition.

or the editing process. Cooper did write his fiction in a fairly linear fashion from beginning to end. What he wrote at the “first heat” was essentially his finished product, to be edited mildly for style and conciseness (Twain advocates will doubtlessly find this difficult to believe), turned over to printers or stereotypers, and corrected again at the proof stage.¹⁴⁶ The structure of *Islets of the Gulf* compliments that writing style, adopting, as Philbrick notes, a more straightforward and simplified plot than some other of his novels.¹⁴⁷ Still, beyond the first couple of installments at least, he did not compose the piece in monthly parts, serial fashion, but finished the work and merely submitted it in pieces. This method would have distinct repercussions on the editing process: no longer would Cooper be able to read proof sheets for half or all of the work together, or in the space of a day or two. Instead, sheets would be available by the chapter as each new issue of *Graham's* was set in type. Being unable to read and edit his text with much continuity, Cooper may have allowed more errors to slip past him, although there is little to suggest that *Islets of the Gulf* is outrageously error-prone.

Much can also be learned about Cooper intentions for *Islets of the Gulf* by examining portions of the manuscript that survive. The American Antiquarian Society holds two surviving fragments in its collection, manuscript pages 1-6 and 17-32.¹⁴⁸ A detailed textual study is certainly beyond the scope of this work, but in this case the first page of manuscript reveals several interesting details about the story. The *Molly Swash* was almost a schooner instead of a brigantine: before the first line was out, Cooper had changed “Capt. Stephen Spike, of the schooner” to “Capt. Stephen Spike, of the small, half-rigged brig-” and then just “Capt. Stephen Spike of the half-rigged brig-.” These details were changed before Cooper composed the next line, because that line starts with “antine,” the continuation of

¹⁴⁶ For some of his novels Cooper employed an amanuensis, particularly while in Europe where for a time his nephew William transposed Cooper's manuscripts into a much more readable hand for European printers. During the 1840s, however, Cooper submitted manuscripts to printers in his own hand, placing special confidence in his stereotyper John Fagan of Philadelphia.

¹⁴⁷ Philbrick 203.

¹⁴⁸ Manuscript pages of *Rose Budd (Jack Tier)*, Cooper MS Collection (Box 1, Folder 22), American Antiquarian Society.

his amended description of the craft. Such indecision over ships would matter little to most landmen, but for Cooper the character of the ship would have much influence over the character of the story. A schooner might offer a truer reflection of the vehicles actually used by smugglers, but a brigantine would be a more “classic” ship for smugglers, calling to mind the mystical brigantine *Water-Witch* from Cooper’s 1830 romance of that name. Scholars have frequently noted how this story, though its bleak, almost naturalistic portrayal of Stephen Spike’s depravity, stands as something of an antidote to the romantic, Byronic pirates of *The Red Rover* and *The Water-Witch*.¹⁴⁹ Choosing a brigantine rather than a schooner reinforces the suggestion that Cooper’s project was more anti-romance than realism, even though he never entirely sheds the aura of romance that surrounds adventure of the sea.

Another set of early changes in the manuscript subtly reshapes first impressions of Harry Mulford, the upstanding hero of the work. In one place, “During the three months I’ve been with them” is changed to “During the twelve months I have been with them,” and in another, “May I ask” becomes “May I enquire.” The effect of both of these changes is to make Mulford more formal, respectable, and gentlemanly—and unfortunately for Cooper, more like the typical “wooden” heroes in Cooper romances that critics were so fond of mocking. The change in Mulford’s duration with the ship may have come about as a way to make his moral dilemma more plausible; after only three months on a ship one would not be expected to have developed a strong sense of loyalty to the vessel, whereas in twelve months a sailor could grow fond of his ship yet still remain unacquainted with the illegal dealings of his master. These alterations undertaken early in the progress of the work reveal Cooper undergoing the initial process of decision-making that would permanently affect the character of the work, however his plans for it may have changed as his writing progressed.

In the main, then, Cooper was true to Graham’s request to supply a work with a good deal of love and adventure—one, too, without too much “controversial matter.” Cooper attained this latter quality by keeping a greater authorial distance from the material. To some this approach might suggest hackwork, but it could also be an indication of Cooper’s awareness of what kind of material Graham was seeking. Situated as it is after

¹⁴⁹ See Grossman 225-26; Philbrick 203-05; Donald Ringe, *James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: Twayne, 1962) 131-32.

Afloat and Ashore and the Littlepage Trilogy, and right before *The Crater* (which was written while *Islets of the Gulf* was appearing in *Graham's*), *The Islets of the Gulf* is striking for its lack of anything substantially self-referential. There is no first-person (or, in the case of *The Crater*, first-person-like) narration; no references to anything of note in Cooper's past or even anything that was particularly vexing him in the present (his usual gripes about "Hurl Gate" notwithstanding). But Cooper did set the novel in the present, and in that sense the work is connected not only to its nautical predecessors *The Red Rover* and *The Water-Witch*, as has often been noted, but also to social predecessors such as *Homeward Bound*. Unlike that book, though, *The Islets of the Gulf* is not a "society" novel; Cooper was not struggling with an experimental novel of manners here. Nor is it really much of a commentary on military matters. Despite Cooper's great relish in analyzing the Mexican War, armchair-quarterback fashion, in his letters to his best friend Commodore William Branford Shubrick, he manages to distance himself from issues surrounding the war more easily than from issues close to home (particularly those involving property) in other books. Cooper treats the leading Mexican character of the novel, Señor Montefalderon, with respect and dignity as a good man who has been forced into awkward circumstances by his country. In his later preface to *Jack Tier* Cooper writes that he considers the Mexican people (as opposed to the Mexican government) "mild, amiable, and disposed to be on friendly terms with us."¹⁵⁰ Like the setting of the work itself, in relatively "neutral ground," (or waters really), Cooper occupies the fringes of the war without becoming directly engaged in polemical efforts for or against it. With such distance, *Islets of the Gulf* is a fairly self-contained work, and probably his most successful handling of present-day settings, if not his most ambitious.

In another sense, though, *Islets of the Gulf* seems calculated to disturb the sensibilities of typical magazine readers, especially women. The atmosphere of the novel is bleak and harsh from the start. All is flawed: Spike's brig, while beautiful and fast, is too old to be insured; his crew, except for Mulford, is composed entirely of sober, middle-aged men. Mrs. Budd is smug in her nautical malapropism and fancied importance. Mulford carries too much pride in his profession until he is brought low by disaster. The heroine Rose is ailing, and she proves herself susceptible to much of her aunt's ignorance. As the novel progresses,

¹⁵⁰ *Jack Tier; or, The Florida Reef* (New York: Burgess, Stringer, & Co., 1848) 1:iv.

Spike's self-centered depravity is all the more confirmed, the end of the story displaying his full brutality and inability to repent. The gruesome death of Mrs. Budd, whose hands are cut off while she clings to the side of Spike's boat, and the loathsome revelation that Jack Tier is Molly Swash after twenty years of seafaring life disguised as a man, are incidents designed to shake readers' expectations, both moral and literary, through their "unnatural" character—the very word some reviewers used to describe the denouement of the work. These scenes are correctly noted for their powerful moral implications, as manifestations of Cooper's themes of divine omnipotence and human insignificance,¹⁵¹ but they have literary implications too as subtle assertions of Cooper's control of the narrative as author.

As *Islets of the Gulf* was nearing the end of its run in *Graham's*, Cooper was preparing the work for publication in book form with Burgess & Stringer in New York. Instead of keeping *The Islets of the Gulf* as his title, or even "Rose Budd," as he preferred to call the story himself, Cooper changed the title of the book version to *Jack Tier; or, The Florida Reef*. His preface states his supposed reasoning for the change:

This work has already appeared in *Graham's Magazine*, under the title of "Rose Budd." The change of name is solely the act of the author, and arises from a conviction that the appellation given in this publication is more appropriate than the one laid aside. The necessity of writing to a name, instead of getting it from the incidents of the book itself, has been the cause of this departure from the ordinary rules.¹⁵²

Note that these lines do not say *who* created the "necessity of writing to a name." The construction used here gives the impression that Cooper was given a title specification—say from *Graham*, for instance—and obligated to write a story around it. The first page of the manuscript, however, renders Cooper's claim suspect. The title itself—and consequently the name of the heroine—underwent a change before Cooper had even reached the second page. He had originally considered naming his heroine "Ruby Blossom," entering that name as the title at the beginning of the first page. Canceling that, however, he changed to "Rose

¹⁵¹ e.g., Ringe 132-34, Philbrick 209.

¹⁵² *Jack Tier* iii.

Budd” before reaching page two, where “Rose Budd” is entered as the running title.¹⁵³ This change would be an insignificant curiosity in itself were it not for Cooper’s claim. He seems to have had freedom to choose whatever name he wished for his heroine. As writing proceeded, perhaps he did become constrained by the provisional title of the work, but the evidence would suggest that this constraint was likely one of his own imposition. His continued reference to the story as “Rose Budd,” rather than *Islets of the Gulf* (the primary title for its publication in *Graham’s*) also hints at a self-imposed “necessity of writing to a name.” At least one can understand his desire to remove the emphasis on Rose, the traditional heroine, and place it on Jack Tier/Molly Swash, the subversive heroine, since the real climaxes of the book emphasize physical and moral ugliness. The multiplicity of titles for the book, though, prompted needling from at least one reviewer:

As this novel has already appeared by monthly instalments [sic] in *Graham’s Magazine*, under the title of “Rose Budd,” most of our readers will recognise here an old friend under a new name. It would seem to be a troublesome matter to decide upon the most appropriate appellation for the work. At the moment of writing this we perceive that it is advertised in London by the title of Captain Spike; and although the unprincipled captain has no claim upon our sympathies, and we begin to look upon him with dislike and mistrust at an early stage of the story, we are disposed to think that either he or his vessel has the strongest claim to the honor.¹⁵⁴

With its new title, the book was published by Burgess, Stringer & Co. on 21 March 1848, selling in two volumes with cheap brown paper covers for twenty-five cents a volume, or in cloth for 75 cents per volume. Exact details of Cooper’s arrangements for this book with his publishers are not known—records for the firm being scarce—but most likely on terms similar to those he had settled for *Satanstoe* and *The Chainbearer* (both 1845), namely, a first edition of approximately 3500-3600 copies for around \$1050, with stereotyping to be undertaken at his cost and the price of additional editions to be negotiated.¹⁵⁵ A stereotyping

¹⁵³ Manuscript pages of “Rose Budd” (*Jack Tier*), Cooper MS Collection (Box 1, Folder 22), American Antiquarian Society.

¹⁵⁴ *The Literary World* 3 (April 1848): 189.

¹⁵⁵ See JFC to James Kirke Paulding, 9 May 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:131; and JFC to Mrs C., 3 October 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:73.

bill from John Fagan does survive, placing Cooper's expenses at \$349.29.¹⁵⁶ Cooper's profit from the first edition, then, was probably around \$700—less than half of what he had received from Graham for the piece. When adding these book profits to his \$1800 profit from *Graham's*, however,¹⁵⁷ along with the much more respectable £350 he received from Bentley (about \$1650-1700 in 1846 dollars), Cooper's earnings look much more, making it perhaps one of the more lucrative novels of his late career.

Cooper was pleasantly surprised by the success of the book too. He had not anticipated much from a work that had already appeared in print in a popular magazine, going so far as to tell Bentley not to worry about the closeness of publication dates between *Captain Spike* and *The Bee Hunter* (Bentley's titles for *Jack Tier* and *The Oak Openings*, respectively): "Burgess & Stringer have the same reasons for wishing to keep back 'The Oak Openings' as you, they publishing *Spike* early in March; but I do not think that a book which has gone through a magazine can greatly harm a new work."¹⁵⁸ By 1 April 1848, however, he was reporting success of the work—as well as his opinion of it relative to *The Crater*—to his wife, in a letter that unfortunately does little flattery to either his or Griswold's critical acumen:

By the way, I hear that *Jack Tier* takes unusually well. Griswold told me, yesterday, that it was thought one of the very best of my books. I do not so regard it, certainly, but condensed I dare say it reads off smoothly enough. *The Crater* is worth two of it. It is selling well. I have bought *Now and Then* [by Samuel Warren], but Griswold says that people are disappointed in it. Something *Eyre* [i.e., *Jane Eyre*] is much talked of, but he puts the *Bachelor of the Albany* [by Marmion W. Savage] among the very best books of the season. Or as he politely expressed it, after *Jack Tier*, *The Bachelor* comes next. I should think there is nothing in common between them.¹⁵⁹

Critics, however, had mixed reviews. *Godey's*, with subtle tweaking of its rival publication, anticipated "a ready sale" for the novel, its prior publication in *Graham's* not preventing "its

¹⁵⁶ John Fagan, Bill to J. Fenimore Cooper for stereotyping "Jack Tier": MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁵⁷ *Graham's Magazine* 43 (November 1853): 552.

¹⁵⁸ JFC to Bentley, 10 February 1848: *Letters and Journals* 5:280.

¹⁵⁹ *Letters and Journals* 5:330.

being sought for by those not familiar with that work.” The reviewer objects that “The progress and denouement of the tale are improbable and unnatural, a fault not often to be found in Cooper’s writings.”¹⁶⁰ The reviewer for *The Literary World* praised Cooper’s portrayal of Captain Spike and his brig, but dismissed the rest of the cast as “non-entities” and the plot as “reminding the reader strongly of the Water-Witch, as the same game of hide-and-seek is carried on throughout.”¹⁶¹ A British reviewer in *The Spectator* said Cooper was showing clear signs of “exhaustion,” but blamed some of the flaws of “structure and stuffing” in the work to its magazine publication, claiming that “scenes have the air of being planned for separate exhibition.”¹⁶² Other reviews of the novel seem to be few and far between, suggesting not only a weak distribution of review copies by Burgess & Stringer but also a critical indifference toward a work appearing as “an old friend under a new name.”¹⁶³

After *The Islets of the Gulf* Cooper’s connection with *Graham’s* ended. Cooper never resumed the series of naval biographies for *Graham*, and never published another piece in his magazine (although he did get his daughter Susan’s “The Lumley Autograph” published there in 1851). The magazine changed hands after *Graham’s* financial failure in 1848, attributed to excessive living and poor business decisions. From Philadelphia on 21 July 1848, Cooper’s stereotyper John Fagan inquired in a P.S., “Have you heard of the failure of *Graham* of this city? He is utterly ruined by profuse living and stock speculations. But I presume that he paid you all, some time since.”¹⁶⁴ *Graham* published a notice of his misfortunes in the October 1848 issue, stating that as a result of forgetting his “own true

¹⁶⁰ *Godey’s Magazine and Lady’s Book* 36 (June 1848): 366.

¹⁶¹ *The Literary World* 3 (April 1848): 189.

¹⁶² *The Spectator* 21 (25 March 1848): 302.

¹⁶³ *The Literary World* 3 (April 1848): 189.

¹⁶⁴ Fagan to JFC, 21 July 1848: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

interests” he had lost his “proprietary interest in this Magazine,” but would stay on as an editor (his “first love”) under a “liberal arrangement” from the present publishers.¹⁶⁵

Graham was eventually able to regain control of his magazine in 1850, but by then neglect, the passage of time, and stiff competition from other publications such as the new *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* made the magazine a difficult enterprise. A letter of Graham's from 25 October 1853 shows how serious the threat from the Harpers had become; writing to George Palmer Putnam (another former Cooper publisher) to congratulate him on the success of his new periodical, Graham writes: “The success of ‘Putnam's Monthly’ is the salvation of ‘Graham’ for it will stop the prevailing opinion in the trade and among the public that Harper is to swallow us all.”¹⁶⁶ Such close combat from a man who had dominated America's periodical field a decade before indicated that Graham's time had indeed passed.¹⁶⁷ Working his way down in the world from there, Graham would die in obscurity nearly fifty years after his heyday of the mid-1840s, being supported in his old age, ironically, by a man who had once stood in awe of Graham while sweeping sidewalks as a boy.¹⁶⁸

Of Cooper's legacy as a contributor to *Graham's Magazine*, a few assessments can be made. Although Spiller and Blackburn's claim that Cooper's writing for *Graham's* was “a vain effort to adapt his ability to the requirements of the literary monthly magazines”¹⁶⁹ goes too far in its condemnation, it is true that Cooper never became a magazine writer in the typical sense. As a latecomer to periodical publication, already established as a prominent author, Cooper entirely bypassed a growing genre of short-story or “tale” writing that served as “bread and butter” for many of the succeeding generations of authors. Unlike most of

¹⁶⁵ “Editor's Table,” *Graham's Magazine* 33 (October 1848): 240.

¹⁶⁶ GRG to GPP, 25 October 1853: MS, George Palmer Putnam MSS Coll. (Box 2, folder 7), Princeton University Library.

¹⁶⁷ Graham also opined that his unfavorable review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as “a BAD BOOK” speeded his magazine's decline. See Mott 553-54.

¹⁶⁸ Mott 554.

¹⁶⁹ Robert E. Spiller and Philip C. Blackburn, *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1930, 1968) 8.

the authors of this period still studied today (Hawthorne, Irving, Melville, Poe, Sedgwick, Simms, and Stowe among them), Cooper wrote no short stories for periodical publication.¹⁷⁰ This fact has become surprisingly relevant to Cooper's lasting reputation and continued study today. In an age of fat anthologies with small selections for any individual author, Cooper is more and more often encountered only in excerpts, having little in the way of complete short tales that are illustrative of his characteristics. But at least Cooper was spared the oblivion destined for many of the celebrated tale-writers of his day. To be sure, Cooper's career never rested on his contributions to periodicals, including *Graham's*, since he was known as a novelist from the start and never abandoned this primary career while contributing magazine pieces. During the six years with *Graham's*, for which he wrote three works, he published numerous other works, including *Wyandotté* (1843), *Ned Myers* (1843), *Afloat and Ashore* (1844), *Satanstoe* (1845), *The Chainbearer* (1845), *The Redskins* (1846), and *The Crater* (1847), as well as shorter productions such as his pamphlet "The Battle of Lake Erie" (1843) and his "Elaborate Review" of the Mackenzie court-martial (1844). *Graham's* never took precedence over Cooper's other interests, particularly his novels, which he conceived as grander artistic ventures than his smaller-scale experiments for the magazine.

The findings discussed in this chapter suggest that Cooper succeeded in adapting his writing and his sense of authorship to fit the new realities of his situation with *Graham's* much more successfully than Spiller and Blackburn's claim would suggest, yet was still never quite certain of how to handle writing for a large and popular periodical. The naval biographies were successful enough as adaptations to the norms of periodical publishing: self-contained in one or two numbers, they required no great continuity, and Cooper could negotiate to extend the series at will. *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*, with its strange narrator, unequal section divisions, unintended lengthiness, and awkward plotting, represents Cooper's attempt to truly experiment with the possibilities of a new fictional form, free from the usual bounds of a novel. It was an experiment that only partially succeeded, never

¹⁷⁰ He wrote one short story, "The Lake Gun," for publication in a miscellany, *The Parthenon*, in 1850. His early tales "Imagination" and "Heart," published in 1824 by Charles Wiley as "Tales for Fifteen," were reprinted by Boston publisher George Roberts—after much searching to find a copy of the book—in his *Boston Notion* (30 January 1841 and 13 & 20 March 1841, respectively) and *Roberts' Semi-Monthly Magazine* (1 & 15 February 1841, 1 & 15 April 1841, respectively).

attaining any lasting importance in his view or, apparently, those of his readers, even though it does contain themes close to Cooper's heart. By the time of *Islets of the Gulf*, Cooper had figured out how to adapt more conventionally novelistic material to the episodic installment format of the magazine—a retreat from the experimental course, but one with more certain success. Even here, though, his surprise at the success of *Jack Tier* suggests that he was at a loss for feedback from his initial publication of the work in *Graham's*, and also uncertain as to how periodical publication would affect sales of his books. In his surviving correspondence Cooper himself rarely discusses the reception of his pieces for *Graham's*, no doubt because he had no way of knowing, as he had with his novels, what the initial sales and critiques of the pieces were. For Cooper, always writing to a public rather than a *coterie*, this new method of reaching wide audiences must have come as something of a mixed blessing.

On the whole, though, Cooper's six-year venture with *Graham's Magazine* ranks as one of the happier developments in the last decade of his career. In exchange for letting his famous name be used to bolster the prestige of Graham's literary corps, Cooper was given reasonable pay—indeed, for *Islets of the Gulf*, the highest sum Graham had paid for a single work.¹⁷¹ As the diversity of the works covered here demonstrates, he was given considerable flexibility to negotiate the size and character of his work without suffering indignity from publishers over experiments that did not prove profitable. Although George Graham's appreciation of Cooper was apparently proportional to the novelist's usefulness for selling his magazine, Cooper did have a genuine advocate in Rufus Griswold during and after the young editor's tenure with *Graham's Magazine*, a circumstance which played some part in the revival of respect for Cooper's achievements among those who had denigrated them in the 1830s and early 1840s. Promoted in the most prominent monthly magazine of the day, Cooper reached wide new audiences through his connection with *Graham's*. Despite initially failing to capitalize artistically on this opportunity with works that would capture the fancy of the reading public, Cooper did succeed in making his venture with *Graham's Magazine* a creative outlet and a financial success during difficult years for book publishing in America.

¹⁷¹ *Graham's Magazine* 43 (November 1853): 552.

Chapter Five

Publishing Realalignments: Cheap Literature and Cooper's Late Career

Works:

The Wing-and-Wing, or Le Feu-Follet; A Tale, By the Author of "The Pilot," "Red Rover," "Two Admirals," "Homeward Bound," &c. &c. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 23 November 1842.

Wyandotté, or The Huttet Knoll. A tale, by the author of "The Pathfinder," "Deerslayer," "Last of the Mohicans," "Pioneers," "Prairie," &c. &c. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 5 September 1843.

Ned Myers; or, A Life before the Mast. Edited by J. Fenimore Cooper. Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 9[?] November 1843.

Afloat and Ashore; or the Adventures of Miles Wallingford. By the Author of "The Two Admirals," "Pilot," "Wing and Wing," "Red Rover," "Water-Witch," &c. 4 vols. Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 8 June (Vols. I & II), December (Vols. III & IV) 1844.

Satanstoe; or, The Littlepage Manuscripts. A Tale of the Colony. By the Author of "Miles Wallingford," "The Pathfinder," &c. 2 vols. New York: Published by Burgess, Stringer & Co., between 4 and 10 July 1845.

The Chainbearer; or, The Littlepage Manuscripts. Edited by the Author of "Satanstoe," "Spy," "Pathfinder," "Two Admirals," etc. 2 vols. New York: Published by Burgess, Stringer & Co., 19 November 1845.

The Redskins; or, Indian and Injun: Being the Conclusion of the Littlepage Manuscripts. By the Author of "The Pathfinder," "Deerslayer," "Two Admirals," etc. 2 vols. New York: Published by Burgess & Stringer, July 1846.

The Crater; or, Vulcan's Peak. A Tale of the Pacific. By the Author of "Miles Wallingford," "The Red Rover," "The Pilot," etc., etc. 2 vols. New York: Published by Burgess, Stringer & Co., 12 October 1847.

Jack Tier; or The Florida Reef. By the Author of "The Pilot," "Red Rover," "Two Admirals," "Wing-and-Wing," "Miles Wallingford," etc. 2 vols. New York: Published by Burgess, Stringer & Co., 21 March 1848.

The Oak Openings; or, The Bee-Hunter. By the Author of "The Pioneers," "The Last of the Mohicans," "Pathfinder," "Deerslayer," etc., etc. 2 vols. New York: Published by Burgess, Stringer & Co., 24 August 1848.

The Sea-Lions; or, The Lost Sealers. By the Author of "The Crater," etc. 2 vols. New York: Stringer & Townsend, 222 Broadway, 10 April 1849.

The Ways of the Hour; A Tale. By the Author of "The Spy," "The Red Rover," &c., &c. New York: George P. Putnam, 155 Broadway, 10 April 1850.

The same poor economic conditions that led James Fenimore Cooper to experiment with magazine writing for *Graham's Magazine* in 1842 led him to experiment with new arrangements for publishing his novels. His intended commercial renaissance, so well begun with *The Pathfinder*, was stalling. The country, for one, was still in the throes of hard times that saw several states default on their debts in 1841-1842, Pennsylvania, where Lea & Blanchard were located, eventually defaulting in August 1842.¹ Undoubtedly these conditions affected booksellers. Arriving in Philadelphia on 30 January 1842 and writing his wife the next day, Cooper reported (perhaps after talking with his stereotyper, John Fagan), "Things are bad here, but not as bad as report makes them. My publishers seem in good spirits, and the trade seems to go on. Printers doing rather more work than common."² Less than a week later, however, his tune had changed: "This is going to be the hardest summer we have had in years. Every body is poor, feels poor, talks poor. Books sell very heavily [slowly]."³ By March 22 (a few days after Philadelphia banks had resumed business), he would inform her, "The times are dull to a degree almost unknown, and literary property suffers with all other," and by May, he found himself looking into rumors, fortunately

¹ See John Joseph Wallis, Richard E. Sylla, and Arthur Grinath III, "Sovereign Debt and Repudiation: The Emerging-Market Debt Crisis in the U.S. States, 1839-1843," NBER Working Paper No. 10753 (National Bureau of Economic Research, September 2004).

² JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 31 January 1842: in *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, ed. James Franklin Beard, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1964-68) 4:228.

³ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 5 February [1842]: *Letters and Journals* 4:231.

erroneous, that his own publishers faced imminent failure.⁴ Conditions in early 1842 seemed to be in such a distressed state that Lea & Blanchard planned on printing only a relatively small edition of Cooper's new novel, *The Two Admirals*, despite the fact that the work was written to suit popular tastes and played upon his known strengths as a sea novelist. "They print only 3000 of the Admirals," Cooper told his wife. "I like the book, though I doubt its very great success."⁵ At least Cooper could count on his \$2000 from Lea & Blanchard and an additional £400 (about \$1900) from his British publisher Richard Bentley.⁶ As it turns out, Lea & Blanchard, perhaps recognizing that they could make no money by printing so few copies, decided to print 5000 copies of *The Two Admirals* by the time it appeared in April 1842, but their confidence was not great.⁷

When it soon came time for Cooper to negotiate for his next novel, *The Wing-and-Wing, or, Le Feu-Follet*, already well under way, he found himself practically no better off than he had been in 1837, when Carey, Lea & Blanchard initially declined to publish *Gleanings in Europe: Italy* on account of bad times and poor sales of his travel series. Writing from New York on 15 May 1842, a few weeks after *The Two Admirals* had appeared, Cooper wanted to know if Lea & Blanchard wished to purchase rights to *The Wing-and-Wing*. "I wish you to write me here [at the Globe Hotel in New York], that I may ascertain whether it is worth my while to go to Philadelphia, or not—I have not offered the book as yet, to any one else, but must soon dispose of it."⁸ The publishers replied:

We yesterday rec'd yours of 15th ins[tant] regarding the new novel.
In the wretched & uncertain state of business there is really no inducement

⁴ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 22 March, 13 May 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:251, 287.

⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 5 February [1842]: *Letters and Journals* 4:231.

⁶ Contract for "The Two Admirals," 18 September 1841: Lea & Febiger Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Bentley initially sought to print 1000 copies for £300 and pay Cooper for additional runs, but agreed to an edition of 1250 copies for £400—which would prove too many. See Donald A. Ringe, "Historical Introduction," *The Two Admirals: A Tale* (Albany: SUNY P, 1990) xxvi.

⁷ The contract contained no stipulations about the number of copies Lea & Blanchard could or should print during their three-year period.

⁸ JFC to Lea & Blanchard, 15 May 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:289.

to enter into new engagements just now of any kind. We cannot get paid in many quarters for the books we have sold, & we have no inclination to add to such deferred debts which must be done by new publications—our indulgence now to our debtors is very extensive and likely to be increased—We mention these facts to show you the condition of the trade, & the necessity of prudence. We have never seen a moment when we deemed that virtue more necessary. As yet we cannot tell what the “Two Admirals” will do—the prospect is certainly not very promising—indeed no period has ever been like it since we have been in business.

Our opinion is that it would be better to let the matter remain over two or three months by which time you will have the novel finished & the clouds which now hang over the business may break away & shew us a little sunshine. You would then negotiate more advantageously with those you may select. As regards ourselves we certainly hope to be, by that time, in better spirits to enter into new enterprises, at present we have very little disposition to do so.⁹

Turned down by his usual publishers, Cooper stayed in New York to investigate alternatives. “I shall remain here, to make arrangements about *Le Feu-Follet*, and be home about the 1st June,” he told Mrs. Cooper, but apparently nothing suitable materialized there, for the book remained unsold for months, just as Lea & Blanchard had suggested it should.¹⁰

By September, business in general was once again picking up (“Things are decidedly—very decidedly—improving here,” Cooper noted from Philadelphia), and Cooper struck a bargain with Lea & Blanchard for *The Wing-and-Wing*—one quite different, however, from his earlier contracts.¹¹ A day after signing a memorandum of agreement on 28 September 1842, he told his wife, “I have sold [*Le Feu-Follet*], on a cheap plan, to L & B It is an experiment.”¹²

The experimental “cheap plan” to which Cooper referred was a new strategy to engage head-on a segment of the market that was robust and coming on strong. A craze for cheap literature was sweeping the country, ushering in the nation’s first great wave of mass-market paperback publishing. Neither the paperbound book nor the attempt to reach a

⁹ Lea & Blanchard to JFC, 18 May 1842: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (partially published in *Letters and Journals* 4:290).

¹⁰ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 21 May 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:291.

¹¹ JFC to Daniel Dewey Barnard, 30 September 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:317.

¹² JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 29 [September] 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:316.

mass audience was an entirely new phenomenon: pamphlets, chapbooks, tracts, almanacs, and other ephemeral literature had long been sold in a paperbound format, and publishers had tried a number of ideas to make their offerings more affordable, such as introducing cloth bindings instead of the traditional leather, or issuing “libraries” of smaller-format works geared toward popular education.¹³ Still, the technological innovations and drastic social and market evolutions of the 1830s, combined with the public's appetite for fiction, created a ripe environment for new schemes, perhaps befitting the daredevil speculation of the times. As is often the case with such breakthroughs, the impetus came not from established publishers like the Harpers or Carey, Lea & Blanchard, but from more nimble quarters. Seeing a niche for literature below the magazines that were already peddling fiction, essays, and poetry (much of it pirated from overseas), Park Benjamin and Rufus W. Griswold (already introduced in these pages) soon applied newspaper techniques to book publishing. They established the weekly *Brother Jonathan* with the support of Wilson & Company of New York in July 1839, printing pirated British serial fiction, smattered with a few news items here and there, on mammoth sheets of newsprint. Thus attired as a newspaper, the *Brother Jonathan* could be sent through the mail at a much lower rate than books or magazines—a ploy that proved immediately successful. They also did a brisk business hawking them in the streets, again taking their cue from newspapers. Fired from the *Brother Jonathan* when its ownership changed hands, the duo applied the same techniques to a new story-paper, the *New World*, founded in June 1840 with the backing of Jonas Winchester (Griswold soon left to pursue other opportunities, including *Graham's Magazine*). The two papers would compete blow for blow over the next few years, spurring fierce competition in the publishing world that would virtually prove its undoing. Seeking to satisfy readers who preferred reading a book all at once to waiting out a serial, the *New World* began publishing complete novels without covers, calling them “supplements” so as to sell them through the mail at the cheaper newspaper postage rate. Their first “extra” of this sort, volume one of Charles Lever's *Charles O'Malley*, sold for fifty cents. Not to be outdone, *Brother Jonathan* issued their own version and sold it for twenty-five cents. Soon, other

¹³ John Tebbel describes these efforts more thoroughly in *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Volume I: The Creation of an Industry, 1630-1865* (New York and London: R.R. Bowker, 1972) 240-42.

newspapers such as the Boston *Notion* got in on the act, fanning the flames of the ongoing price wars.

Mainline publishers were alarmed by these developments, to say the least. The so-called “courtesy of the trade” regarding the reprinting of foreign works, whereby the first publisher to issue a work would supposedly be accorded exclusive dominion over it, was always dubious in practice, but the cheap “supplement” publishers soon flaunted their disregard for it openly, particularly when the big houses tried to rein them in. A *New World* extra for April 1843 excused the paper’s own aggressiveness by relating how the Harpers, in a “piece of trickery,” had reneged on a \$300 deal to supply copy of Bulwer’s *Zanoni* to them, whereupon the *New World* “took the liberty to act independently in the matter.” Righteously contrasting themselves to the “old publishers” in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, the editors praised their own efforts to bring literature to the public at an affordable price, painting their mainstream opposition as being complacent and greedy at the public’s expense. Faced with the prospect of losing profit and market share altogether, book publishers had jumped into the fray, but the *New World* blasted their imitators as “servile” and “foolish.” They ridiculed how one publisher, Appleton & Co. of New York, tore the covers off of slow-selling cloth-bound books to pump them into the cheap system, and they mocked how Harper’s used worn-out stereotype plates for some of their cheap editions. Most damningly, they derided the “old” publishers’ newfound interest in promoting popular literature, remarking on how their opponents “suddenly manifested a wonderful regard for the reading public, and published their books at about one fourth of the sums formerly asked.” At another point, the editors asked rhetorically, “why are all these works now issued at a cheap rate for the first time? Was not the public, ten and twenty years ago, as much in want of knowledge as at present? How comes it that ‘the Great Revolution in Publication,’ with which these publishers now herald their books, was never begun till within the past year?”¹⁴ Although the *New World* undoubtedly was not run with as pure motives as its editors implied, there was a good deal of sense in these questions.

An apt testimonial to the powerful role price could play in moving books—whether the “supplements” the *New World* praised or the slow-selling remainders they ridiculed—is

¹⁴ “The Book-Publishers and the New World Press,” *New World* Extra Series, April 1843.

provided by Cornelius Mathews, editor of the short-lived *Arcturus* magazine and author of a number of unorthodox works of fiction. In a letter to publisher George Palmer Putnam dated 10 November 1843, he recounts publication figures for several of his works.

Discussing his 1840 novel *Behemoth: A Legend of the Mound-Builders*, he contrasts the rate of its initial sale under the “old” system to the subsequent disposal of the remainder on the cheap system: “The edition was 1000—of which 3 or 400 copies were disposed of at the time of publication, and the remainder of the edition subsequently in one of the flurries of the pamphlet Era, was put in crimson-paper covers, at a low price, and sold *in one or two hours*.” Another of his works, *The Career of Puffer Hopkins*, was published serially in *Arcturus* in 1841, then in an edition of 400 copies published by Appleton. In November 1842, Wilson & Co. issued it as one of the extras “from the Press of the Brother Jonathan” in an edition of 12,000 copies, which was, Mathews boasts, “disposed of immediately, & is, as far as I am informed, the largest immediate sale ever attained by an original work of fiction in this country.”¹⁵

Predictably, once newspapers and book publishers entered the cheap publishing game, the price wars became even more intense and the market became glutted. By early 1843, the height of the craze, some volumes could be had for as little as six cents apiece, with others selling from 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ cents to 37 $\frac{1}{2}$ cents.¹⁶ The absurdly low prices were not sustainable for long, and when in April 1843 the Postmaster General’s office ruled that extras would be charged as periodicals rather than newspapers, one of the significant advantages of the story-paper extras vanished. *The New World* put on a brave face, claiming that they would be scarcely affected by this “arbitrary and absurd exercise of power” because people would willingly pay the extra postage for their works, which would still be cheaper than the competition’s. “[M]oreover,” they added, “we can very easily afford to take the additional postage from the price of each sheet.”¹⁷ Their pockets proved not so deep, however; while the *New World* outlasted the *Brother Jonathan*, which folded in January 1844, it

¹⁵ Cornelius Mathews to George Palmer Putnam, 10 November 1843: MS, George Palmer Putnam Collection, Princeton University Library.

¹⁶ Tebbel 243-44.

¹⁷ “The Book-Publishers and the New World Press,” *New World Extra Series*, April 1843.

did not fare much better, disappearing in May 1845.¹⁸ The more capital-rich book publishers survived, prices stabilized somewhat (fifty cents for two volumes of a novel was a common price), and cheap literature became a regular part of the publishing business, embracing American-authored works as well as their pirated British counterparts.

Publishers were not the only ones who displayed anxiety about the effects of cheap literature upon the literary marketplace. Among critics, the issue was a contentious one. Many acknowledged the great benefits of making books more affordable to the public, praising the potential of cheap literature to increase literacy, make knowledge accessible to common citizens, and foster a greater sense of social equity and opportunity. Others, however, came to quite the opposite conclusion about the effects of cheap literature upon tastes or the social and moral value of the material, recoiling in horror at the commonplace, sometimes trashy novels dished out to the masses by the thousands. In an article reprinted by the *New World*, a writer for the *Brooklyn Daily News*, who admits to being convinced of cheap publishing “almost against our will,” weighs the matter of whether the “public mind” is “debased by the trash issuing from the press daily,” but concludes that, in the main, the offerings are probably less trashy than those of circulating libraries—the only other avenue for accessing books for many citizens—which were under no such condemnation. The writer argues,

. . . while willing to admit that much has issued from the ‘*cheap literature press*’ that it would have been wise to withhold, we cannot refrain from the remark that, in few, very few circulating libraries would such works as “The Bible in Spain,” “Liebig’s Agricultural Chemistry,” “Letters of Mary, Queen of Scots,” “Memoirs of the Queens of France,” “Letters from the Baltic,” or the “Chronicles of Sir John Froissart” be found.¹⁹

Other critics took issue with the format of the works themselves, printed as they often were with small or worn-out type, hastily composed and printed on cheap paper, with flimsy paper wrappers taking the place of sturdier cloth or leather bindings. Apprehensions about excessive eyestrain were uttered, sometimes in the columns of publications with minuscule

¹⁸ Tebbel 245.

¹⁹ “Cheap Literature” [reprinted from *Brooklyn Daily News*], *New World* (quarto edition), 15 July 1843.

type themselves. Misgivings expressed about the pamphlet-like appearance of the works suggest fears that literature itself would be lowered. Such worries about the degradation of the physical product were felt even before the frantic paperback revolution of 1841-43 broke out; the following 1839 literary notice of a volume in a cheap “library” series illustrates well the moral overtones some people attached to the material qualities of the book itself:

Colman’s Dramatic Library—Tortosa, the Userer.—Mr. Colman has introduced into New York somewhat of the Boston style of publishing books. It is full time that a stop should be put to the deteriorating system of making *cheap*—the proper word is *low-priced*—books. Books printed on brown paper, with worn-out type, carelessly read, and slovenly worked, sell as high in proportion to their expense of production, as such books as appear from Mr. Colman’s or the Boston booksellers’ establishments. In reality they are dearer, for one or two readings will so disfigure them as to make them not worth further care.²⁰

In light of the apprehensions expressed by some critics about the degrading quality of cheap publishing, it is worthwhile to consider how much cheap literature had the potential to diminish the roles of critics themselves. Consumers viewing the book as a large-ticket purchase would be all the more likely to value guidance in making their selections, but if the book became a more disposable commodity, consumers potentially would be that much more willing to risk an impulse purchase, having less of their wages at stake in the decision. Then, too, the distribution methods used by the purveyors of supplements bypassed the traditional structures familiar to booksellers and critics alike.

One other concern manifested itself during the cheap paperback publishing boom. The lack of international copyright had long been a hobby horse of some critics, who renewed their arguments from time to time, but the ruthless competition and drastic price drops that the early 1840s ushered in brought the matter vigorously to the forefront once again. “Courtesy of the trade” had gone by the wayside, and the penny-pinching price wars made the additional expense of copyright payments for native authors more difficult to justify. In lowering the value of literary property, how were native authors to make any money? Efforts to enlist the aid of prominent authors in petitioning Congress to pass international copyright agreements made their rounds, and Cooper himself responded to

²⁰ *Journal of Belles Lettres* 13.25 (18 June 1839): [n.p.].

several letters on the subject around this time: one a published one by Charles Dickens erroneously listing him as a signer of one such petition, and another from Cornelius Mathews, acting as corresponding secretary for the American Copy-right Club, inviting him to accept his unanimous election to be a member of the club. In both cases, Cooper supported the general idea of protecting literary property through domestic copyright laws on the principle of “common honesty” but disliked the idea of America being bound by any “*international* legislation” on such matters, believing that “this country is, almost invariably, a loser when it submits its interests to any foreign interests.” He also declined any direct associations with organized petitioning efforts underway, citing in his letter to Mathews his “determination not to mingle with anything in the country more than I can help,” no doubt formed from his experiences over the previous decade. “I ask nothing from the American public, and I owe them nothing,” he insisted; “I wish to keep the account square.” Nonetheless, without taking an active role Cooper acknowledged that copyright was a matter of expediency as well as morality, especially given the realities of the current literary scene: “Unless we have a copy right law, there will be no such thing as American Literature, in a year or two. At present very few writers are left. With a copy right law; we shall have not only a Literature of our own, but Literature of an improved quality.”²¹

If this statement conveys Cooper's uneasiness about the effects of cheap literature after he had had some experience with it, he betrayed few such qualms upon entering into the new enterprise in 1842. Although he would eventually acknowledge the eroding effects of cheap literature on the incomes of authors, he would never display the contempt for mass-market literature that a writer like Nathaniel Hawthorne would express.²² Exactly who provided the impetus for the “experiment” with *Wing-and-Wing* is not entirely clear, but Cooper was expressing enthusiasm for the format already in late May, 1842, when he told Bentley about his plan to write “a new *biographical* Naval Work” (eventually to become his

²¹ JFC to William Cullen Bryant and Parke Godwin, for the New York *Evening Post*, 6 August 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:302-05; JFC to Cornelius Mathews, 25 September 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:413-14.

²² Writing to James Kirke Paulding on 9 May 1846, Cooper would observe, “The cheap literature has destroyed the value of nearly all literary property, and after five and twenty years of hard work, I find myself comparatively a poor man”; *Letters and Journals* 5:131.

series for *Graham's*) and offered them free of charge to make up for Bentley's bad luck with the *History of the Navy*. "My emoluments from this work," he noted, "will come from an extended sale in this country, in a cheap form."²³ On the other hand, Lea & Blanchard were not overly slow in issuing their own cheap works. Although John Tebbel names Harper & Brothers as the first large publisher to engage the cheap literature craze in 1843, Lea & Blanchard was already issuing works in 1842.²⁴ A cheap set of the Leatherstocking Tales the firm issued in 1841 or early 1842, logged in their cost book four pages before their entry for *The Two Admirals* in April 1842, was undoubtedly cloth-bound; however, an entry on the same page as *The Two Admirals* listing 500 copies of *The Pilot* for a series of "Cooper Sea Tales" shows costs for covers consistent with the firm's subsequent paperback offerings.²⁵ Although the firm seldom listed reprints in their cost books, this particular listing was present because the firm wished to keep track of "Cost of Works in Nos." In an attempt to cash in on the popularity of novels published serially in parts, *a la* Dickens, and benefit from the lower postage rates allowed for periodicals, the firm marketed a number of Cooper's novels in this guise, the Sea Tales apparently being among the earliest. Although Lea & Blanchard's cost book entry suggests that the tales would be issued in four numbers, some copies examined show that before long the firm merely trotted out their old two-volume editions from stereotype plates, slapped on new covers, and called them periodicals. The series embraced *The Pilot*, *The Red Rover*, *The Water-Witch*, and *Homeward Bound*, along with *The Two Admirals* (perhaps a sign of the latter's slow sales in clothbound format), appearing under Lea & Blanchard's own imprint as well as that of Saxton & Pierce of Boston. A border on the front wrapper of the 1842 Saxton & Pierce imprint advertises the series as "Now publishing, at the small cost of twenty-five cents each" and "To be completed in

²³ JFC to Richard Bentley, 27 May 1842: *Letters and Journals* 4:292.

²⁴ Tebbel 243.

²⁵ Cost Books, Lea & Blanchard; Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

twenty weekly numbers, for five dollars,” suggesting the four-part format.²⁶ By the beginning of 1843 the series had grown to encompass all of Cooper's novels and “The Travelling Bachelor” (*Notions of the Americans*) in the two-volume “parts” format, the volumes supposedly appearing weekly, selling for twenty-five cents per volume, or fifty for the entire work. The publisher's imprints on samples viewed list a number of associate booksellers: Burgess & Zieber in Philadelphia, James Stringer “and others” in New York, Redding & Co. in Boston, N. Hickman & W. Taylor in Baltimore, Robinson & Jones in Cincinnati, “and all Booksellers and News Agents in the United States.”²⁷ Elsewhere on the wrappers, advertisements appear: a more extensive one for Cooper's novels, dated December 1842, mentions how the series will be “well printed, on good paper and with legible type, and in a form suitable for convenient reading, and done up in a coloured wrapper.” The volumes would be suitable for binding. Costs for periodical-rate postage are given: 1 ½ cent per sheet for 100 miles or less, 2 ½ cents for over 100 miles—most volumes consisting of the equivalent of nine to ten printed sheets. Other advertisements promote similar editions of Charles Dickens, Tobias Smollett, and Henry Fielding, with prices running from twenty-five to fifty cents. Some of the Dickens novels even had woodcuts.

To reap profits on cheap editions, publishers needed to sell more copies to make up for the smaller profit margin on each copy. As the writer for the *Brooklyn Daily News* explains about the story-paper supplements:

Under the new plan, instead of 2500 copies being struck off, it is no uncommon occurrence for 25,000, or even 50,000 copies to be printed, and the aggregate profit, though very small on each book, amounts to more in the total than under the former mode; and hence, the publisher is enabled to offer a higher price to an author than heretofore; and as all these works are

²⁶ *Sea Tales, by the Author of The Spy. Embracing The Pilot; The Red Rover; The Water Witch; Homeward Bound; and A New Story, The Two Admirals* (Boston: Saxton & Pierce, 133 Washington St., 1842) front wrapper. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

²⁷ *The Two Admirals. A Tale, in Two Volumes. Vol. I. Being One of the Novels and Tales of J. Fenimore Cooper, Now Publishing in Weekly Parts. . .* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1843) front wrapper. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society. *The Wing-and-Wing. A Tale of the Sea, in Two Volumes. Vol. I. Being One of the Novels and Tales of J. Fenimore Cooper, Now Publishing in Weekly Parts. . .* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1843) front wrapper. Author's personal collection.

issued on the *cash* plan, the publisher is secure from loss by non-payment of purchasers, and though small, his profits are realized.²⁸

There were key elements missing from this model when it came to Cooper's deal with Lea & Blanchard for *The Wing-and-Wing* and subsequent works, however. Lea & Blanchard did not do all their business on the “*cash* plan,” as their previously quoted complaints about deferral of debts and the “indulgence” of their debtors amply illustrate. Nor did they intend to publish an edition of 50,000 or even 25,000 copies right away, meaning that they would not be “enabled to offer a higher price” to Cooper than heretofore—in fact, quite the opposite was the case.

The terms of the contract called for Cooper to supply stereotype plates at his expense to Lea & Blanchard, allowing them exclusive privileges to print and publish the work in the United States for three years, in return for being paid notes worth \$1000. The initial edition would be 10,000 copies; for any additional quantities, Lea & Blanchard would have to pay Cooper 7 ½ cents per copy, printing no less than 1000 copies at a time. The trade price of the novel was not to exceed forty-five cents per copy. In the event that Lea & Blanchard declined publishing more after the first 10,000 sold, the rights of publication would revert to Cooper.²⁹ Compared to the terms for *The Two Admirals*, these terms gave Cooper only half as much money for an edition twice as large. Moreover, whereas Lea & Blanchard had paid for stereotyping *The Two Admirals* (but retained ownership of the plates), Cooper had to cover the cost for *The Wing-and-Wing*—a sum typically totaling around \$450. Cooper's own initial profit would thus total only a little over \$500, or only about a quarter of what he had received for *The Two Admirals*. By comparison, around this same time Cooper concluded a bargain with *Graham's Magazine* that gave him \$500 for a much smaller work, his serialized novella *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*. Everything depended, then, on a widespread sale of *The Wing-and-Wing*. A sale of 20,000 would bring in an additional \$750; the fabled sale of 50,000 would put \$3000 more in his pocket. Clearly, terms like these stood

²⁸ “Cheap Literature” [reprinted from Brooklyn Daily News], *New World* (quarto edition), 15 July 1843.

²⁹ Contract for “Le Feu Follet” [*The Wing-and-Wing*], 28 September 1842: MS, Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

practically no chance of bringing Cooper back to his lucrative days of \$4500 or more per book; even the lesser sums of a few years prior seemed unlikely.

However uncertain the financial prospects for the work may have seemed, at least many critics appreciated Cooper's new commercial venture. In addition to the favorable remarks many made on the story itself (see Chapter Two), reviewers expressed approbation for the book's innovative format. "The idea of putting forth copyright novels at less than half price is not a bad one," drolly noted the reviewer for *Godey's Lady's Book*.³⁰ *Graham's Magazine* (admittedly no longer an entirely neutral party with Cooper contributing pieces to it) was more exuberant in its praise: "We are pleased to learn that the publishers have fixed the price of *Wing-and-Wing* at half a dollar—lower by fifty per cent at least than an American novel was ever sold for before. For this reason, as well as on account of its remarkable merit, we predict for it a sale equal to that of "The Spy," or "The Red Rover."³¹ Likewise, the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* enthused:

This is the first time that one of Cooper's novels has been published in the present mode, at only *fifty cents* for the two volumes, and is a very good consequence of the new system of cheap publications recently come into vogue. This price permits it to be printed with a satisfactory degree of neatness for a work of this description, and we doubt not that a larger return of profit, to both publisher and author, is to be reaped from that mode of publication, than from the old fashion of thrice or four times the present price.³²

The critic's prediction would prove too optimistic. Cooper's correspondence suggests that he hoped for a sale of about 20,000 copies, but that hope went unfulfilled. In January 1843 he reported to Mrs. Cooper:

Wing-And-Wing has only done so so. It is well received, but the sales but little exceed one half of what they ought to be. About twelve thousand copies have been sent off. I consider the experiment a failure, though we may sell five thousand more. The season is against us. We should have done

³⁰ "Editors' Book Table," *Godey's Lady's Book* 26 (January 1843): 59.

³¹ *Graham's Magazine* 21 (December 1842): 342.

³² "New Books of the Month," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 11 (December 1842): 666.

better, in the summer. I shall touch about \$500 here, this time. It is better than nothing, but not half what I expected to receive.³³

James F. Beard concludes that the Lea & Blanchard published 12,500 copies, paying Cooper \$1187.50—a figure that, if correct, points to net earnings of about \$700-750 for his work.³⁴

Despite the disappointing financial returns, Cooper did not abandon cheap publishing. In 1843, he contracted for *Wyandotté* and *Ned Myers* (initially sold to Carey & Hart but immediately transferred to Lea & Blanchard) on almost exactly the same terms as for *The Wing-and-Wing*, the only noteworthy difference being that with *Wyandotté* Lea & Blanchard were to print 12,000 copies for \$1200 instead of 10,000 for \$1000.³⁵ Cooper was, perhaps, stuck in the same rut as Adrienne in *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*: having lowered his terms once, he was vulnerable, and he could not very easily raise them again. At the same time, though, one could find him preaching the virtues of mass-market publishing to Richard Bentley. Offering unsolicited advice about how to market *Ned Myers* in England, Cooper wrote in September 1843, “I think you ought to get this book out in a popular form, though you know your own market. Lea publishes ten thousand copies, at low novel price—not the lowest—but like my last tales here or a little higher.”³⁶ When Bentley reported slow sales, Cooper faulted his high prices and small (750 copy) edition: “Thousands and thousands of copies have already sold in this country, and I have never doubted it would be a largely selling work. It needs a cheap edition to make returns of such a book.”³⁷ Cooper would continue to publish most of his works in the cheap format for nearly all the rest of his career, even when he had more liberty to choose the format for himself.

³³ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 10 January [1843]: *Letters and Journals* 4:339.

³⁴ *Letters and Journals* 4:436.

³⁵ Contract for “*Wyandotte or the Hutted Knoll*,” 6 June 1843: MS, Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. See Thomas and Marianne Philbrick's Historical Introduction in the scholarly Cooper Edition of *Wyandotté* (Albany: SUNY P, 1982) for a more complete discussion of the book's reception.

³⁶ JFC to Bentley, 25 September 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:415.

³⁷ JFC to Bentley, 9 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:440.

Even so, Cooper was becoming increasingly distrustful of publishers. Overseas, Bentley was printing smaller and smaller editions but still claiming that they were not selling: 1250 copies each of *The Two Admirals* and *The Wing-and-Wing* had proved too many, as had 1000 of *Wyandotté*. Bentley had printed a mere 750 of *Ned Myers*, striking off another 250 before the type was broken up, but the sale was so dismal that he still had 470 copies left on hand at the end of January 1844. Cooper's disbelief about the sales of *Ned Myers* was so great that he demanded a statement of the account—it hardly seemed possible that a work by a prominent author and issued by a leading publisher could fare so poorly.³⁸ In America, the state of his publishing affairs made him even more wary. With his earnings from cheap publication riding upon the extended sale of his books, it was essential that his publishers honestly state the number of books printed and sold. Since they controlled the stereotype plates during the agreed period, there was no way for Cooper to know for sure whether or not they were printing additional copies without telling him. On one trip to Philadelphia in early 1844, he thought he had uncovered signs of discrepancies, as he reported to his wife:

I have been busy among the trade, and have learned a great deal. I have been giving Lea & Blanchard from \$1500 to \$2000 a year.

To my surprise Wyandotté has sold better than "Ned," though the last has done well. I can trace 3000 copies sold here, by three houses. I suppose 4000 may have sold in this city [New York]. They tell me Wing and Wing and Two Admirals continue *to sell*—I have not had a cent for either, this long time. I am afraid all booksellers are rascals. In future, I act for myself.³⁹

³⁸ See JFC to Bentley, 9 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:440; as well as Bentley to JFC, 10 February 1844: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. For reasons too complicated to detail here, Bentley had published *Ned Myers* on the shares system, granting Cooper 2/3 of whatever profit might come from the book. Cooper had always avoided publishing on shares, in part because it would force him to rely on the publisher's word about the costs and sales of works. Publishers also were crafty about labeling various items on their side as costs and thus diminishing their payments to authors. In response to an earlier statement of accounts from Bentley, for instance, Cooper wrote on 22 September 1842, "Your manner of calculating the returns is different from what I had supposed, but I dare say it is suited to the times" (*Letters and Journals* 4:314-15). Many of Herman Melville's financial woes after *Typee* were directly related to his publishing on shares with the Harpers.

³⁹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 18 January 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:443.

It is difficult to determine how Cooper arrived at the “\$1500 to \$2000 a year” figure, on which he unfortunately did not elaborate further. Lea & Blanchard owned the copyrights of several of Cooper’s older works, and Cooper had authorized Lea & Blanchard to reprint many of the ones he held.⁴⁰ Possibly some of his recent works such as the *Home* novels could have been the source of contention, since Lea & Blanchard were including those in their cheap edition of Cooper’s Novels and Tales, but again, it is hard to know for sure. As for his complaint about *The Wing-and-Wing* and *The Two Admirals* continuing to sell without his receiving a cent, he conceivably could have had a reason for concern with the former, but the latter had been sold to Lea & Blanchard on terms that contained no stipulations about the number of works the publishers could print during their three-year lease period.

Lea & Blanchard’s haphazard and sometimes non-existent recordkeeping for reprints hardly helps matters. There is little reason to suspect them of any sort of large-scale conspiracy, in any event, particularly when correspondence, such as the following passage from a letter of 19 February 1843, survives to show that the firm paid at least a reasonable amount of attention to their prior arrangements:

In our issue of the *cheap edition* of the Novels & Tales we propose that the “Deerslayer” shall follow “Home as Found” & we may want two hundred fifty copies more than we have a right to print -- As we sell this edition at 30 or 35 cents per copy we can make neither our own fortune nor yours by it, but it will only cost a sheet of paper & postage to tell us how much you will charge us for the privilege of issuing the 250 in the cheap form. . . .

[Postscript in left margin:] * If this does not sell better than some others of the Tales which we have issued in this cheap form we shall not require any more than we have now already on hand.⁴¹

To be sure, one letter does not prove that this attention was consistent. Without exhaustively piecing together the firm’s accounts, it is difficult to uncover anything much more conclusive. The evidence as it stands, though, seems to suggest that general

⁴⁰ Cooper’s letter of 18 July 1836 to Carey, Lea, & Blanchard authorized them to reprint *The Spy*, *Pioneers*, *Precaution*, *Pilot*, *Lionel Lincoln* (for a while *Last of the Mohicans* was also on the list) until they received written notice from Cooper to the contrary. Cooper later set 27 August 1844 as the termination date.

⁴¹ Lea & Blanchard to JFC, 19 February 1843: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

misunderstandings were probably a greater factor than any specific misdeeds in inspiring mistrust.

It was easy to see that the business relationship between the two parties, though seldom partaking of anything like hostility, had been deteriorating for some time. Even well before the 1838 retirement of Henry Charles Carey, the member of the firm who sought a strong presence for the firm in fiction and who related best with Cooper, there had been plenty of tension. Carey had left the firm in a position of strength, but within a few years it became increasingly clear that New York and the Harpers were gradually gaining the ascendancy in publishing while Lea & Blanchard, perhaps less ambitious than the gifted Carey, were becoming less interested in maintaining their lead in native literary offerings. Lea's interests lie in conchology, where he earned a distinguished reputation, whereas Blanchard, by most accounts, seemed to have few distinguishing qualities at all. By the end of the decade, the firm would find its specialty in medical publications, and their last major holdings of Cooper copyrights and plates would be sold off in 1849.

These shifts, gradual as they may have been, deserve mention because too often critics have maintained too static and too simplistic impressions of Cooper's publishers when discussing the development of Cooper's career during this era. A fable of patronage has arisen, perhaps inadvertently, portraying the polite, patient, and indulgent publisher sustaining the aging, tempestuous artist. For instance, James F. Beard writes of how the prices Cooper received for his novels "dropped sharply though gradually during the 1830's because of the unpopularity of his writings, though indulgent publishers had sustained him—often without profit or at an actual loss to themselves."⁴² While true enough for the first editions of a few of Cooper's works, taken together Cooper's writings were far from unprofitable, since reprints amply repaid the firm's initial investments over time. Indeed, when the firm published its cheap paperback "Novels & Tales" series in 1843, it could remain fairly competitive with pirated British reprints precisely because for many of the books they either owned the copyrights and plates outright or had Cooper's permission to use them. Only some books of this series required royalties, and even those books still could be published with some profit.

⁴² *Letters and Journals* 4:435.

For another example, consider this passage from William Charvat's essay "Cooper as Professional Author," discussing the character of Cooper's relationship with Carey & Lea:

During their bargaining for *The Last of the Mohicans*, they [Carey & Lea] wrote Cooper, "when an author makes an arrangement with us, he is never disposed to leave us. We have had within six months, applications from seven authors, all of reputation, who are disgusted with their publishers."

This statement represents the dawn of the modern author publisher relationship in America—a relation based on the conviction that there is no monetary or legal substitute for mutual confidence. For seventeen years the Careys patiently demonstrated to Cooper that they were doing everything a publisher could possibly do for an author, that they valued their association with him, but that they must be guided not only by his interests but their own, and by intelligent trade practice. Their surviving letters to him are models of candor, tact, sympathy, firmness, and humorous indulgence.

They needed all of these qualities, for Cooper was something of a spoiled child.⁴³

There is no need to deny the sometimes difficult nature of Cooper as a businessman or the uncommercial qualities of some of his works to argue that the need for patience and indulgence went both ways. If Carey & Lea's boast about their good care of authors was true in 1826, when Cooper joined them, it was already less so by 1832 and only marginally so from the late 1830s on, particularly after the firm became Lea & Blanchard. When Cooper's novels fared poorly in the marketplace, Carey, Lea & Blanchard in its various iterations seldom failed to remind him that they had warned him of their misgivings in the first place, rather than making much more than token gestures to exert themselves further to make the book sell. They protested how some slow-selling works did not repay them for their time and capital (even seeking a partial refund in the case of *Mercedes of Castile*), yet eventually recovered that and more through their rights to reprint, which in some cases may very well have been gained as concessions from Cooper to mollify their complaints. When the firm encountered cash flow problems amid the rash of bookseller bankruptcies in 1834, Cooper was asked by Henry Carey to extend the terms of notes the firm had paid him for *The Headsman*, at a time when the only project Cooper had on the horizon was *The Monikins*,

⁴³ William Charvat, "Cooper as Professional Author," *New York History* (Special Issue -- *James Fenimore Cooper: A Re-Appraisal*) 35 (October 1954) 508.

about which the firm proved cagey in hazarding a bid.⁴⁴ Cooper had well-founded doubts about whether the firm would take several of his books at all: they had initially turned down or declined to make an offer for *Italy*, *Home as Found*, *The Wing-and-Wing*, and possibly the abridged *History of the Navy*. In September 1843 he was uncertain as to whether or not Lea & Blanchard would purchase *Ned Myers*, telling his wife nearly a week after arriving in Philadelphia to negotiate, “Lea & Blanchard do not come into my terms, and I may be obliged to print myself.”⁴⁵ Although he was able to secure terms for that book, his outlook would soon prove prophetic. All this is to suggest, without intending to cast undue aspersion on Carey, Lea & Blanchard in its various iterations, that if Cooper was sometimes a “spoiled child” in his business dealings, the motives of his publishers were rarely altruistic either. Theirs was a business relationship founded on negotiation above all else—one that was usually mutually respectful, often friendly, but seldom disinterested.

Cooper was not the only author to encounter bad luck at the hands of Lea & Blanchard in the early 1840s. Edgar Allan Poe found himself turned away entirely for a second book with the firm in 1841 after his *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* failed to remunerate the publishers—this despite the fact that in both cases all profits would go to the publishers, Poe’s only compensation being twenty copies of each book for “distribution to friends.”⁴⁶ William Gilmore Simms received late in 1841 this tellingly pessimistic report about the fate of two of his works: “‘Confession’ is a total failure, the ‘Kinsman’ will do better. We do not see much hope in the future for the American writer in light literature—as a matter of profit it might be abandoned.”⁴⁷ And in 1842 Washington Irving, after some complicated back-and-forth to negotiate new terms for his old works, which Lea &

⁴⁴ See JFC to Henry Charles Carey, 12 February 1834: *Letters and Journals* 3:32-33.

⁴⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 17 September 1843: *Letters and Journals* 4:409.

⁴⁶ See Edgar Allan Poe to Lea & Blanchard, 13 August 1841, and Lea & Blanchard to Poe, 17[?] August 1841: *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Volume XVII: Poe and His Friends; Letters Relating to Poe*, Ed. James A. Harrison (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1902) 101-02.

⁴⁷ Lea & Blanchard to William Gilmore Simms, 16 December 1841: in Earl L. Bradsher, *Mathew Carey, Editor, Author and Publisher: A Study in American Literary Development* (New York: Columbia UP, 1912) 93.

Blanchard had been allowed to reprint for an annual fee of \$1150 under a contract that would soon expire, found himself without a publisher after no satisfactory terms could be agreed upon, leaving him stuck in Madrid in a diplomatic post with his “home resources” in America “drying up.”⁴⁸ When at the end of the decade he found his reputation and income revived through the enterprising efforts of George Palmer Putnam, the supposedly “amiable” Irving would tell Putnam, “You had confidence in the continued vitality of my writings when my mousing Philadelphia publishers had suffered them to mould in their hands and had almost persuaded me they were defunct.”⁴⁹ Clearly, Lea & Blanchard did not hold the same high opinion of American literature as they once had held: by the 1850s, fiction would largely disappear from their offerings. Cooper, perhaps more shrewd than his literary peers, had managed to weather the economic depression of the early 1840s and much of the 1841-43 cheap publishing craze, but the determination of both author and publisher to work together was growing thin.

Exactly what Cooper meant when he wrote “In future, I act for myself” to Mrs. Cooper in January 1844 is difficult to tell. Thomas and Marianne Philbrick suggest that he only meant to change his terms with Lea & Blanchard so as to control the printing himself (in addition to the usual stereotyping), thus eliminating the possibility that the firm could covertly print and sell extra copies.⁵⁰ There is a good deal of sense to this explanation, but it is not altogether clear that this is the case. At any rate, around the beginning of April, when Cooper sought to make a bargain for his next book, *Afloat and Ashore*, he still made his first

⁴⁸ Washington Irving, *The Complete Works of Washington Irving: Letters, Volume III, 1839-1848*, Eds. Ralph M. Aderman, Herbert L. Klienfield, and Jennifer S. Banks (Boston: Twayne, 1982) 186-87, 189-91, 323.

⁴⁹ Washington Irving to George Palmer Putnam, 27 December 1852: MS, George Palmer Putnam Collection, Princeton University Library. The letter is published in *Letters, Volume IV* of *The Complete Works of Washington Irving*, but the editors take their text from various facsimiles of the letter that have “my mousing publishers” expurgated. J.C. Derby’s *Fifty Years among Authors, Books and Publishers* (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co, 1884) 308 prints the letter with a less offensive “my former publishers” replacing the decidedly unamiable remark.

⁵⁰ Thomas & Marianne Philbrick, “Historical Introduction,” in *Afloat and Ashore; or, The Adventures of Miles Wallingford*, by James Fenimore Cooper, Edited, with an Historical Introduction, by Thomas and Marianne Philbrick (New York: AMS, 2004) xxx-xxi.

proposals to Lea & Blanchard. The letter in which he did so remains unlocated, so the exact details of the terms and tone of his negotiation are not fully discernable, but a slightly later letter of Cooper to an unidentified publisher contains what Cooper claims are the same terms:

7500 copies, off my plates, at \$1500 -- \$300 down, balance in 6 mos. note.
Retail price 75 cents -- two volumes usual size, or for the same sum 5000
copies, bound, at \$1 retail.⁵¹

In the surviving letter, Cooper adds that he is “willing to divide profits with a publisher” under the proposed terms, an unusual enough statement for him to make, but probably referring to royalties for additional copies. He also claims that the terms are essentially those for *Ned Myers*, but that was not really the case. He considered it so because *Ned Myers* was a single volume selling at 37 ½ cents whereas the new book in two volumes would double that, selling for seventy-five cents—a higher retail price than the fifty cents per copy of his previous cheap-edition two-volume works, *The Wing-and-Wing* and *Wyandotté*. His own earnings would also be greater, with Cooper probably forecasting around \$1000 net from the initial sale minus the cost of stereotyping. Note that from the terms listed here, at least, it is not clear whether he intended to undertake the printing himself; the two different retail prices he names correspond to the paperbound and clothbound versions, but do not specifically mention whether he is to provide the copies.

Unless there was other objectionable matter in the missing letter that somehow affected the tone of the proceedings (a possibility hard to discount entirely in Cooper’s case), Cooper’s proposal seems a fair enough first move in haggling for a deal. In return, however, he received the following from Lea & Blanchard:

In answer to yours we have to express our regret that we cannot meet your proposition in relation to your new novel “Afloat & Ashore.” We would have been glad to have met your wishes not only as a matter of business but from our long relations as publishers for you. The result, however, of the experience of the publication of your late works, would not justify the experiment, we think, in the way you propose.

The sum named is certainly not more than you ought to have & we do not see that how you could well write for less. Should you nevertheless determine to make any changes in your terms, we should be glad to continue

⁵¹ JFC to an Unidentified Publisher, [6-9? April 1844]: *Letters and Journals* 4:447.

to issue your works with any prospect of a remuneration for our time & capital.⁵²

James F. Beard characterizes this letter as being written “in an exceedingly polite, regretful manner,” but the tone seems more ambiguous as to whether the regret was deeply felt—the last sentence, indeed, may convey an almost snide quality.⁵³ Despite Lea & Blanchard’s expressed willingness to issue his works “with any prospect of a remuneration for our time & capital,” they give no indication as to what those terms might be—no counteroffer (as they had at least given Irving at first in 1842) or discussion of where they found Cooper’s proposal most amiss. Beard suggests that Cooper could have saved himself some trouble by “swallowing his pride and lowering his terms,” but clearly, Cooper had determined from his findings “among the trade,” whether soundly based or not, that he should not be the party to give in this time. Instead of returning to Lea & Blanchard with a counteroffer, he determined to try other publishers, and failing that, to undertake printing and publishing the novel himself. Writing to another publisher who remains unidentified, Cooper proposed the terms mentioned above, “Messrs. Lea & Blanchard having declined them.” Here he confirms, “I intend to print and publish myself if you decline the offer . . . I have made all my calculations, and shall not lower my terms.”⁵⁴ This last-ditch negotiation met with no success, for by 9 April he would tell Mrs. Cooper, “I have not sold the novel, nor do I expect to.”⁵⁵

Cooper had thus arrived at another crossroads in his career. Just as *Afloat and Ashore* would prove an important point of convergence for a wide range of Cooper’s thematic, social, and authorial concerns, it would become equally significant as a milestone in his long

⁵² Lea & Blanchard to JFC, 6 April 1844: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵³ *Letters and Journals* 4:448.

⁵⁴ JFC to an Unidentified Publisher, [6-9? April 1844]: *Letters and Journals* 4:447-48. Quite possibly the publisher was based in New York, since Cooper writes that he is not very “tenacious” about the \$300 down yet prefers not “sending to New York for it.” Possibly, too, the firm traded under a single name, as the letter is addressed, “Dear Sir” rather than “Sirs.”

⁵⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 9 April 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:448.

history of publishing. After seventeen years with the same primary publisher, Cooper now found himself about as independent as it was possible to be in the publishing world.

Whereas with any of his other books he could finish writing the story, read and correct proofs, then send it on its way, having little to do with the actual publishing process, with *Afloat and Ashore* he would have to see the book through all its processes from the initial typesetting to final delivery to retailers, potentially a daunting task. As Thomas and Marianne Philbrick provide such a thorough discussion of the book's publication and sales, including detailed figures of Cooper's costs and earnings, in their Historical Introduction to the recent scholarly edition of the novel, the reader is referred there for primary reference, leaving only a few words of summary and supplement to be added here.⁵⁶

Fortunately, Cooper was not entirely uninitiated in many of the tasks he would need to oversee. Since 1838 he had relied upon John Fagan of Philadelphia to set type and stereotype his works, developing a cordial and loyal relationship as Cooper saw numerous books through the press. Fagan was utterly dependable, with a fine reputation and a keen eye for detail, so for *Afloat and Ashore* Cooper hired him to take charge of the physical production of the book, including its printing, binding, and shipping to distributors. Cooper would thus be relatively free to handle the business side of the process, which he likewise simplified to some degree by contracting with the firms of Wiley & Putnam in New York and Carey & Hart in Philadelphia to serve as distributors, leaving him more time to contact booksellers in other markets. His experience in distributing minor works such as *The Battle of Lake Erie* a year before at least gave him some knowledge of that part of the trade.

Still, for all his good planning, the process was still taxingly complex. Surviving bills testify to the fact that Cooper could never step away from any part of the process for too long, always having accounts to oversee, bills to pay, and proceeds to chase.⁵⁷ Then, too, many of his labors met with big demands and small returns: in response to an unlocated letter of Cooper's seeking orders for the book, Redding & Co. of Boston stated their

⁵⁶ Thomas & Marianne Philbrick, "Historical Introduction," xxx-xxv.

⁵⁷ The New York State Historical Association in Cooperstown holds most of these documents, which are discussed in Thomas & Marianne Philbrick, "Historical Introduction," xxi-xxv.

preference to deal with Cooper's agents in New York, though if Cooper had "a disposition to deal with us, and only us in this city, sending to this city before you issue in New York we will take 75 copies (it being a higher price work than we usually deal in) & make our early order for all we can sell now, by our advertizing, noticing with the Editors &c."⁵⁸ Some regions, no doubt, would not see any copies of the book. He would also be responsible for intervening to keep these sorts of exclusive publishing agreements in force. Thus, it was Cooper's duty to set things aright when he received complaints such as this one from Abraham Hart of Carey & Hart:

When you left this City you requested me to publish your Book in this City on Saturday, & said you would also arrange to have it done in same manner in N. York C. You also stated to me that you had not sold any copies to any persons in this city besides Carey & Hart.-- We were therefore much surprised to find it advertised for sale here at retail this morning by Lieber, Berford &c, the latter at 50 cts per copy retail-- & offering it on loan at 6 ¼ cts per Vol-- they must have obtained them from Burgess Stringer & Co or Wiley & Putnam, New York -- as the latter gentleman announce them as published for the author & for sale to the Trade *that day, in Thursday afternoon's* "Commercial Advertiser" and we know that 100 copies were at their agents store in this City this morning (*tho' not to be sold by him 'till Saturday*)

We have advertised it for tomorrow & have not offered a Copy for sale at retail yet.-- I send you this morning's "U. States Gazette," containing the Different advertisements.⁵⁹

Cooper also met with resistance from some booksellers because he had undertaken publishing for himself. Fagan would note from Philadelphia how "some of the venders here have took especial pains to injure the sale," reflecting, "I hope these gentlemen will come to acknowledge that after all, they are not the *whole* public."⁶⁰ Finally, there was the usual opposition in the Whig-dominated press with which to contend. With these formidable obstacles confronting him along with the anxieties of risking his own capital in the

⁵⁸ Redding & Co. to JFC, 27 May 1844: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵⁹ Abraham Hart to JFC, 7 June 1844: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁶⁰ John Fagan to JFC, 15 July 1844: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

unpredictable, sometimes hostile literary marketplace, it is hardly surprising that Cooper would dwell on the dark side of things in a letter to his best friend Commodore Shubrick just over a week before the first part of *Afloat and Ashore* was due to be published:

The book-trade is in such a condition now, that booksellers will take no risk, unless they can reap all the profits, and publishing for myself, I have the combination of the trade, as well as of the newspapers to resist. I question if a copy gets south of Philadelphia, at all. . . . As for profit, I shall not make more than enough to pay my travelling expenses, if as much, on this side of the Atlantic. So much for American policy!⁶¹

Fortunately, despite Cooper's jitters the book sold better than expected, and Cooper was soon beaming to his wife and Shubrick with the good news. Enough copies of Part One sold that he had another 1000 printed, which proved to be more than necessary, but as far as potential problems went, this was a minor one, since money was coming in. Cooper's experiment in self-publishing proved successful financially. Thomas and Marianne Philbrick conservatively estimate Cooper's net profit to be around \$1750, based on the lowest trade price of fifty cents Cooper had given some booksellers.⁶² Some booksellers paid sixty cents, however, which means that Cooper's profits likely could have been even higher. No matter what the actual figure, it seems evident enough that Cooper did better than the \$500 or so he was getting paid by Lea & Blanchard not long before. Still, there was always the possibility that he had been lucky this time around: would future books do as well, and could he sustain the exhausting logistical challenges repeatedly? Cooper seems to have determined that it was not worth the trouble or the risk. Already by the time the second half of *Afloat and Ashore* came out in October 1844, he found himself relying more and more on the firm of Burgess, Stringer & Co., a recently formed publishing house specializing in cheap publications that had impressed Cooper with their ability to sell a large number of copies of *Afloat and Ashore*. Already on some copies of volumes III and IV of that novel, the firm's name would appear on the title page imprint: instead of "Philadelphia: Published for the Author," it would read, "New York: Published for the Author: and for Sale by Burgess, Stringer & Co., 222 Broadway, 1844." When Cooper set about issuing his next novel, *Satanstoe*, in 1845, he

⁶¹ JFC to William Branford Shubrick, 30 May 1844: *Letters and Journals* 4:462-63.

⁶² Thomas and Marianne Philbrick, "Historical Introduction," xxiv.

would turn to the company to serve as his publishers, opening a new arrangement that would survive until the end of his career and play a key role in shaping his literary legacy in the decades to follow.

The years 1845-1849 mark a period of relative quiet and stability in Cooper's career after the storms of the early 1840s. The contentious crises springing from the *Home* novels and the *History of the Navy* were largely past; the libel suits, Lake Erie and *Somers* controversies mostly subsided. The economy was improving, the excesses of the cheap publishing craze had been toned down, and the days of wrangling over terms for new books with Lea & Blanchard were over, as were the stresses of his experiment in self-publication.

Then, too, the intense political partisanship that had permeated the Jackson-Van Buren era so thoroughly, most notably in the rhetorical hysterics leading up to the election of 1840, had also mellowed somewhat. Many of Cooper's Whig critics had decided long ago to wage a campaign of silence against him and his works, and the relative paucity of reviews of Cooper's new books during this period can be at least partially attributed to that campaign's ongoing success. Others, however, found that as time went by and new issues sprang up, Cooper was not as distant from them as they might have imagined previously.

Thus, for instance, when Cooper took to critiquing the so-called "Anti-Rent Wars" of the early- to mid-1840s in New York through his Littlepage Trilogy (*Satanstoe*, *The Chainbearer*, and *The Redskins*, 1845-46), he might have expected to find himself walking a minefield. Siding with the elite landed families who maintained the last remnants of a vaguely feudal system of landholding and condemning the subversive (or revolutionary) acts of the comparatively poor farmers who fought to repudiate generations-old lease payments for their lands surely would have been ample fodder for critics half a decade earlier. But Whigs themselves were sharply divided about the issue, as were Democrats.

Accordingly, one finds Cooper, upon the 1846 publication of *The Redskins* (a thesis novel at least as strident as *Home as Found*), in the strange predicament of being the subject of a gushing review in *The American Review: A Whig Journal of Politics, Literature, Art and Science*, of all places. The reviewer expresses delight that Cooper was "applying his talents and energies

to the exposure and censure of that evil condition of things which is at once the danger and disgrace of our state," using the novel format to advantage, "for men will read novels who will not read pamphlets and disquisitions and essays." The fact that Cooper's "story is entirely subordinated to his moral" is not a cause for reproach but praise, as is Cooper's effort to "enlighten popular views, and expose popular fallacies." In one of the few nods to the prevalent opinion among Whigs, the critic notes, "The work exhibits throughout much of one of the last qualities many of our readers might be disposed to give Mr. Cooper credit for—strong common sense." Any minor fault of the book "vanishes before our admiration of the unflinching resoluteness with which he has achieved his great task—that of telling his countrymen *the truth* on subjects of vital importance, respecting which most erroneous ideas are prevalent." Three and a half pages of excerpts illustrating Cooper's sagacity conclude this rapturous review.⁶³ It is striking that many of the points on which the critic praises Cooper so lavishly are precisely those that critics of *Home as Found* faulted as blasphemous to the purposes of the novel and illustrative of the author's vanity.

As if things could not get better, from the other side of the aisle a Democratic critic for the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* also expressed his delight in the book and in Cooper's social purpose, hoping that in the future Cooper would take up "some important question upon which there is still a wider difference of opinion: for we feel assured that if he should then display but half the ability and soundness of reasoning that he has evinced in the discussion of this, he might render an infinitely greater service to the community."⁶⁴ Perhaps fortunately, there were still a few adherents to the old critiques, such as Charles A. Dana of Brook Farm, who complained in the transcendental *Harbinger* (a Burgess, Stringer & Co. publication, strangely enough) that whatever bits of truth occasionally surface, Cooper's all-pervading dogmatism on any and all subjects "reminds us

⁶³ "Cooper's 'Indian and Ingin,'" *The American Review: A Whig Journal of Politics, Literature, Art and Science* 4 (September 1846): 276-81.

⁶⁴ "Notices of New Books," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 19 (September 1846): 237.

of a grain of common sense triturated, to use a term of homœopathy, in a mountain of vanity and arrogance.”⁶⁵

If changing political realities were inspiring a reassessment of Cooper in some quarters, so too was Cooper’s own spiritual evolution affecting his reception among readers and critics. Cooper came to take a wider view of “truth” than he had during his “fact”-obsessed 1830s, embracing a spiritual view that quite often set religious truths against the received wisdom of the world. Although many of Cooper’s earlier novels had religious themes that showed Cooper’s long-time engagement with Christianity and the moral complexities associated with religious belief, several of his late novels—*The Crater* (1847), *The Oak Openings* (1848), and *The Sea Lions* (1849)—adopted more blatant personal conversion themes, with the latter two, taking on almost tract-like qualities at times. More artistically, Cooper set out to create in some of these late works (*The Crater*, *Jack Tier* (1846–48), and *The Sea Lions* in particular) a portrayal of the natural world as an expression of divine will, powerful, unfathomable yet sometimes benevolent, in which people would come to understand their cosmic insignificance as “mites among millions of other mites” as a means to spiritual renewal.⁶⁶ The occasional heavy-handedness of his religious themes certainly alienated some critics; Herman Melville was one. Reviewing the Antarctic tale *The Sea Lions* for *The Literary World* in April 1849, he satirized Cooper’s preachy sailor Stephen Stimson, the chief religious mouthpiece of the story:

Then we have one Stimson, an old Kennebunk boatsteerer, and Professor of Theology, who, wintering on an iceberg, discourses most unctuously upon various dogmas. This honest old worthy may possibly be recognized for an old acquaintance by readers of Cooper’s novels. But who would have dreamt of his turning up at the South Pole?⁶⁷

Likewise, the reviewer for the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* found *Oak Openings*, the novel which arguably sacrifices the most artistically to its religious theme, “as dull as many ‘tracts’ equally moral sometime happen to be,” especially since “The book begins with

⁶⁵ [Charles A. Dana, Review of *The Redskins; or Indian & Ingin. . .*], *Harbinger* 3 (1 August 1846): 123.

⁶⁶ *The Crater; or Vulcan’s Peak* (1847; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1962) 459.

⁶⁷ [Herman Melville, Review of *The Sea Lions*], *The Literary World* 5 (April 1849): 370.

a downright temperance lecture.”⁶⁸ Yet *Godey's Lady's Book* called it “one of Cooper's best,” judging it “much freer from faults in style and taste than many of his earlier works.”⁶⁹

Although there is nothing particularly partisan about a religious theme, it is noteworthy and perhaps a little ironic that Cooper's late novels often won approval of Whig reviewers while occasionally distancing Democratic ones.

If all these developments contributed to the relative stability of Cooper's late career, certainly at least a small place must be reserved for Cooper's American publishers, chiefly Burgess, Stringer & Co. and its post-1848 iteration, Stringer & Townsend, but also George Palmer Putnam. Neither of these publishers made Cooper's fortune, but they at least gave Cooper a measure of security and kept his works actively in circulation, sparing him from the kind of constant book-to-book humiliation that had characterized his late dealings with Lea & Blanchard.

Relatively little is known about Burgess, Stringer & Co. or Stringer & Townsend. No history of the company has been written, apart from brief reference entries. No well-known and copious collections of records exist to document their history, as is the case with the Carey and Putnam firms, both still viable today. If materials such as cost books, account books, or contracts for the company still exist, they remain unlocated, uncataloged, or unpublicized. However, a small collection of papers relating to James Stringer, one of the partners in the firm, does survive, held in the Special Collections of Temple University Library. They seem to have received little, if any, attention until now, but unfortunately, they shed only a little additional light.

The firm of Burgess, Stringer & Co. was formed on 9 December 1843, when Wesley F. Burgess (formerly of Burgess & Zeiber of Philadelphia), James Stringer (in business at 155 Broadway in New York), and William A. Townsend joined together to form a new company, replacing what must have been a very short-lived former one, Burgess and Stringer.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁸ “Notices of New Works,” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 23 (November 1848): 373.

⁶⁹ *Godey's Magazine and Lady's Book* 38 (February 1849): 152.

⁷⁰ Lea & Blanchard's 1843 cheap edition of Cooper's *Novels and Tales* lists Burgess & Zeiber and James Stringer on the imprint, suggesting that the firm Burgess and Stringer lasted less than a year.

term of the contract was five years. Each of the partners contributed two thousand dollars to the joint stock; Burgess and Stringer would also invest their entire present inventory of books, periodicals, and other articles, totaling some \$4054.24. Other former accounts of the late Burgess and Stringer firm were assumed into the new corporation, to the tune of \$4593.30 payable to the company and \$3846.34 owed by it.⁷¹ Compared to Lea & Blanchard, whose assets usually totaled over \$250,000, this was a small company indeed.

Both Stringer and Burgess had been active in cheap publishing before their merger, appearing separately on some cover imprints of Lea & Blanchard's 1843 paperback editions of Cooper's Novels and Tales, which both sold in their shops. Cheap publishing would continue to be the staple of the new Burgess, Stringer & Co., but the firm also had ambitions of enhancing their prestige. Throughout the 1840s they courted a number of the better-known American authors; some of the better-known include Epes Sargent, Henry William Herbert (better known as "Frank Forester"), "Harry Franco" (Charles F. Briggs), Joseph Holt Ingraham, "Jonathan Slick" (Ann S. Stephens), and William Gilmore Simms. Cooper's own connection with the firm probably came about because of their noteworthy exertions in selling copies of *Afloat and Ashore*.

Whatever the company's strengths, sound cash flow management apparently was not always one of them. There was no lack of trying to pinch pennies; John Fagan would find them fastidious over a few extra dollars in shipping costs:

It seems the rail-road people charged Burgess & Stringer \$11.00 or so, for carrying that lot of plates; and B. & S. intimated that I sh'd have sent them by sea. I thought of that mode, but rejected it on acc't of the certain risk and the possible long delay.⁷²

At times, though, one gets the sense of the business being run by robbing Peter to pay Paul, clearly overextended and without deep reserves. Of the surviving letters to Cooper from the publishers, a good number of them are written with the sole purpose of asking Cooper to extend the terms on notes they had paid him. The litany of requests during one period in

⁷¹ Contract forming Burgess, Stringer & Co., 9 December 1843: MS, James Stringer Papers, Special Collections, Temple University Library.

⁷² John Fagan to JFC, 7 July 1846: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

1847-48 takes on a humorous regularity, one that almost gives the impression that it is Cooper who is the venture capitalist, not Burgess, Stringer & Co.:

3 May 1848:

We have so much money to pay this month and next, that we are compelled to ask you to withdraw three of our notes given for "Oak Openings" if we were able we would not ask you to extend the time on these, but just now it is absolutely necessary-- If you cannot withdraw the one due the 10th inst. be so good as to send us the money to meet it and You will greatly oblige.

11 May 1848:

Your favor of the 8th inst[ant] containing d[ra]ft on the Merchants Bank for \$300. came to hand this day for which we are much obliged-- we paid the Note yesterday but having so much more to pay besides, it left us very short indeed, so that we are somewhat releived[sic] by your attention to our request. Enclosed we send you our note for same amount at 90 days.

Next month we have two more of your Notes coming due one on a/c of Jack Tier which shall be paid--the other on a/c of Oak Openings we may have to ask same indulgence for, however we will do the best we can and let you know in time should it be necessary.

It is rather singular nearly all we owe of any amount came due in May & June after which we shall be very easy indeed, not having much to pay.

10 June 1848:

We have this day paid the last Note due on "Jack Tier" and on the 21st inst there is one due on "Oak Openings" as it will be inconvenient to meet this we should be obliged if you would send us the money to take it up, and we will send you another note in return at such time as you specify.

15 July 1848:

The note that comes due July 21. \$300. will be inconvenient for us to pay, will you please advise us what to do with it and oblige.

To top things off, Stringer & Townsend would write on 29 August 1850 to ask for yet another extension of a note, closing the request by saying, "we are sorry to be obliged *for the first time* to ask the renewal of a note" (emphasis added).⁷³ As if confirming that old habits die hard, a passage in a letter written some twenty years later by James Stringer to his brother in California has a familiar ring to it:

⁷³ Burgess, Stringer & Co. to JFC, 3 May, 11 May, 10 June, 15 July 1848; Stringer & Townsend to JFC, 29 August 1850: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

What you tell me about being burned out so often I knew years ago but when you came to speak of your being in California 18 years it carried my memory back to the time when I took from my wife the few hundred dollars she had begun to accumulate in a savings bank against the day of need or misfortune and gave to you to go to California with &c and which if I had not done would have amounted by accumulated interest to over \$2500. up to this time and just now would have saved me from anxiety and mortification in having payments to make which I cannot meet until I get money from some sources and you may depend on it I must be much straitened just now to write thus, surely you could raise me a few hundred dollars even one would be acceptable, with William James' help who is doing so large a business can you not do something immediately, this morning I've been dunned about money matters and I'll confess it makes me nervous do not wonder then that I write a strong letter under the excitement.⁷⁴

A copy of his brother's reply, duplicated by letterpress, is too smudged to be wholly legible but clear enough in the tenor of its opening: "This morning I took from the P.O. this letter, which on reading, was [illegible] and offensive I therefore return it to you, [illegible] when your excitement subsides will reply to all civil missives." Further fragmentary bits such as "suffice it to say I enjoy an untarnished reputation" confirm the unenthusiastic reaction James Stringer's request for money brought.⁷⁵ Fortunately for the publishers, Cooper was more indulgent.

Inasmuch as little is known about the firm itself, relatively little also is known about the terms under which Cooper published with Burgess, Stringer & Co. None of Cooper's contracts seems to have survived, and what can be reconstructed of the main features of the agreements is only fragmentary, puzzled together through bits and pieces of evidence in letters or the occasional mention of an edition's size in a review. Cooper's letters to the firm seem to have vanished just like the firm's records, and the publishers, for their part, shrewdly left their negotiating to be done in person, as shown by their letter of 15 March 1847, when they avoided committing terms to paper: "In preference to making you any offer for your New Book, by letter, we will wait untill you come to New York, when we shall be able most

⁷⁴ James Stringer to W. Stringer, 6 August 1867: James Stringer Papers, Special Collections, Temple University Library.

⁷⁵ W. Stringer to James Stringer, 29 August 1867: James Stringer Papers, Special Collections, Temple University Library.

likely to agree upon terms, about the publication of same. We shall say nothing about it until we see you.”⁷⁶

His first negotiation, at least, was clear enough. In what was clearly a joyful state after meeting with offers better than anything Lea & Blanchard had given him recently, particularly on his old works, he wrote to Mrs. Cooper on 5 March 1845 to share the good news:

I have discovered that the old books are worth something, and have actually sold the right to print 250 copies of each for \$200. These books are likely to produce me two or three hundred a year, in future. I have been offered to day \$1200 *in cash* for the right to print these books, *Afloat and Ashore* included, for the next ten years. I have offered to accept at *five* years, and there we stand at present. I have sold an edition *entire* of the New book [*Satanstoe*], 3500 copies, for \$1050. This is \$100 better than what L & B gave me for 10,000 copies.⁷⁷

Three days later he reported the deal done, with a “full edition” of *Satanstoe* sold and the “old books” disposed under slightly different terms, Cooper receiving \$1000 in cash for use of copyrights and plates for an unknown number of years or copies, without including *Afloat and Ashore* as previously proposed. The “old books” Cooper mentions are ones that he had regained from Lea & Blanchard in a swap of copyrights and plates that occurred on 20 November 1844, a few months after Lea & Blanchard’s reprinting rights for several works had expired.⁷⁸ Cooper had transferred to Lea & Blanchard all his rights to *Pioneers*, *Deerslayer*, *Pathfinder*, *Precaution*, *Lionel Lincoln*, *Home as Found*, and *Wyandotté*, also providing the stereotype plates for the latter two novels. Since Lea & Blanchard already owned plates and rights for *Mohicans* and *Prairie*, they would thus control all five of the Leatherstocking tales, as well as his other wilderness novels. For his part, Cooper had regained copyrights to his European travels (no plates had been made), the plates and copyrights to *Water-Witch* and

⁷⁶ Burgess, Stringer & Co. to JFC, 15 March 1847: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁷⁷ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 5 March 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:12-13.

⁷⁸ Cooper had notified Lea & Blanchard on 19 January 1844 that the rights he had granted them in July 1836 to reprint *The Spy*, *Pioneers*, *Pilot*, *Precaution*, and *Lionel Lincoln* would terminate on 27 August 1844: MS, Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Red Rover (which the publishers had owned outright) and the stereotype plates to *Pilot*, *Two Admirals*, *Mercedes of Castile*, and *Spy*.⁷⁹ Once *Wing-and-Wing* and *Ned Myers* reverted to him, Cooper would thus control all of his sea tales, since he also owned *Homeward Bound*. Burgess, Stringer & Co. apparently bought this entire batch of works, minus the copyrights to the travel volumes, for they lost no time in getting out a “New and Beautiful Edition” of Cooper’s sea tales in 1845, also issuing “A New and Uniform” edition of his “Standard Novels”—namely, the ones they possessed—which included the sea tales plus *The Spy*, *Home as Found*, *Precaution*, *Lionel Lincoln*, and *Wyandotté* (the latter four apparently leased from Lea & Blanchard). *Mercedes of Castile* was absent. Any of these works could be had for fifty cents in paperback, or “handsomely bound” for seventy-five. *Ned Myers*, the oddball, sold in paperback for 37 ½ cents.⁸⁰

Only two other of Cooper’s agreements with Burgess, Stringer & Co. can be discerned with much detail: those for his next two books, *The Chainbearer* (1845) and *The Redskins* (1846), the final two books in his Littlepage trilogy. The information comes courtesy of a letter Cooper wrote to James Kirke Paulding on 9 May 1846. Paulding, now retired, planned on resuming his pen, “both as a resource for Killing Time, and making the Pot Boil.” Lamenting how he had in the past fallen “prey to the Bookselling craft” and had “made a good many bad bargains,” Paulding wrote to see if he could avail himself of some of Cooper’s “experience and sagacity in future.” Specifically, Burgess, Stringer & Co. had told him that they would publish his works on the same terms as Cooper’s, but did not tell him what those terms were. Therefore, he inquired confidentially if Cooper might divulge the terms to him, if he were at liberty to do so.⁸¹ Cooper complied, writing in part:

My last bargain with B. & S. was a complicated one, including the use of plates of no less than three old books, besides the new one. The price paid was \$1500. The two preceding books, however, sold each an edition of 3500 for \$1050, the plates at my cost. I do not think the three last books will nett

⁷⁹ Contract for transfer of various copyrights and stereotype plates, 20 November 1844: MS, Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁸⁰ Advertisement on front inside cover of *The Chainbearer; or The Littlepage Manuscripts*, Vol. 1 (New York: Burgess, Stringer & Co, 1845).

⁸¹ James Kirke Paulding to JFC, 4 May 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:132.

me much more than \$500 a book. B & S. say they have not sold the first editions of *Satanstoe* and *Chainbearer*.⁸²

Cooper expressed his belief that Paulding might do better, since he himself was “unpopular with the country, generally” and had the press “in a solid phalanx” against him. Whether or not Cooper’s advice did help Paulding strike a better bargain is unclear, but in any event, after a short time Paulding became disgruntled with the firm, feeling disinclined to remain loyal when it came time to offer a new work through the agency of a friend: “Had they not declined all further negociation on the subject in so careless a style, I should have held myself bound to offer the work to them on the old footing, but as it is, I don’t think I owe them the compliment.” Showing his contempt of publishers in general, he urged his correspondent, William Wilson, when among the various “Philistines” that comprised the booksellers of New York, to “Screw as much out of those rogues as you can, as I contemplate some great agricultural experiments next Spring,” but warned Wilson not to deal with the Harpers, since they had turned down his novel *The Old Continental*.⁸³

As for Cooper’s own bargains for new books with Burgess, Stringer, & Co., a few other details can be pieced together. Whereas the first editions for *Satanstoe* and *Chainbearer* totaled some 3500 copies each, some, if not many, of the rest were larger. *The Redskins* apparently saw a first edition of 5000 copies, quickly sold out, and progressed to another edition, according to the *Knickerbocker*.

The first edition (five thousand copies) of Mr. Cooper's last work, “*The Redskins, or Indian and Injin*,” was entirely exhausted before our last number, announcing its current publication, had reached its destination. This is an un-lying “figury-fact,” which literally “speaks volumes” in the author's favor.⁸⁴

These are surprisingly strong sales for what was a highly polemical work of social criticism, widely felt today to be not just the weakest of the Littlepage trilogy but one of Cooper’s weakest novels altogether. As mentioned earlier, a good portion of the reading public must

⁸² JFC to James Kirke Paulding, 9 May 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:131.

⁸³ James Kirke Paulding to William Wilson, 17 December 1848: *The Letters of James Kirke Paulding*, ed. Ralph M. Aderman (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1962): 491.

⁸⁴ “Editor’s Table,” *Knickerbocker* 28 (September 1846): 274.

have found *this* instance of Cooper's look at current events refreshing, unlike the earlier *Home* novels (or perhaps the title made less informed book buyers think they were getting another frontier tale). From Philadelphia, Cooper would report, "Redskins is in great favour 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."⁸⁵

At least one other book quickly exhausted a first edition of 5000 copies (far from an ambitious number anymore). *The Sea Lions* (1849), his last new novel with the firm (by that time just Stringer & Townsend), proved a fair seller, quite probably helped along by its exciting Antarctic setting. "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," Cooper would boast to his wife.⁸⁶ Other novels proved slower sellers: "Burgess has sold about 2500 of *Chainbearer*," Cooper wrote a week after its publication, "But sale of all such books, if copyright, is heavy [slow]."⁸⁷ Whereas he had thought that the edition of 3600 copies of *Satanstoe* was nearly sold out, with Burgess "negotiating for more," he would later report to Paulding that neither that book nor *Chainbearer* had yet sold out their first editions.⁸⁸

Fleeting figures like these make it difficult to get a true sense of Cooper's continued relevance in the marketplace or of Burgess, Stringer & Co.'s reach in placing him before a wide reading public. Clearly they were not as well established as Lea & Blanchard, but they did possess a similar network of correspondent firms specializing in cheap publications—the same, more or less, as that used by Lea & Blanchard. One area in which they apparently did not show the sophistication of Cooper's former publishers, though, was in their pre-publication distribution of review copies. Lea & Blanchard were one of the most successful firms in this regard, adept at other advance publicity, too, such as in sending out teaser

⁸⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 30 August 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:166.

⁸⁶ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 28 April 1849: *Letters and Journals* 6:24.

⁸⁷ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 26 November 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:99.

⁸⁸ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 3 October 1845: *Letters and Journals* 5:73; JFC to Paulding, 9 May 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:131.

chapters or excerpts to be published in newspapers. If the relative scarceness of reviews of Cooper's later works is a partial indicator, Burgess & Stringer were far less accomplished. One could point to the firm's small size and specialization in cheap publishing as possible factors, or to Cooper's own claims that the press had taken to ignoring him, no doubt with some basis in truth. It is noteworthy, however, that George Palmer Putnam, despite having little capital, would subsequently have much greater success in landing reviews.

Whatever Burgess, Stringer & Co.'s shortcomings, Cooper seemed cognizant enough of the fact that he was settling for a reasonably comfortable mediocrity. If the money was not good, it was at least on par with what major houses would give him, and his arrangements with Messrs. Burgess, Stringer, and Townsend were convenient. The partners, though shrewd, apparently had candor enough to suit Cooper, for the existing evidence brings few suggestions of possible friction or rascality to light. The firm had also maintained interest in most of Cooper's older works, something to which Lea & Blanchard had only nominally attended, and when in 1849 Lea & Blanchard put their remaining holdings of Cooper copyrights, plates, and unsold volumes up for sale, Stringer & Townsend bought them for \$2100.⁸⁹ In June 1850, the firm also bought the remaining rights and plates that Cooper held for a sum of \$3500. With these two investments, they hazarded a considerable portion of their capital but gained control over nearly all of Cooper's fiction. Despite incurring short-term financial pressures as a result, the investment would turn out to be a good one, producing for them edition after edition for the decade to come and beyond, without having to pay copyright money to the Cooper heirs for most of the works.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Contract dated 21 September 1849 between Lea & Blanchard and Stringer & Townsend covering purchase by latter of certain stock and stereotype plates of Cooper novels; Copy of transfer of copyright to Stringer & Townsend dated 9 September 1850: MSS, Lea & Febiger Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁹⁰ Not long after their purchase, Stringer & Townsend wrote on 29 August 1850 (MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University) to ask for a renewal of one of their notes, explaining:

“When we purchased the stereotype plates we feared at the time that we were doing wrong if any payments had to be made this year and our present condition fully verifies our fears.

Despite Cooper's generally sound business acumen in negotiating for his works throughout his career, he made his most serious errors in judgment toward the end, when he sold rights and plates of his old books without retaining any ownership himself. In his letter to Paulding, he mentioned how, if he were employed in some other career, "in trade, or in traveling as an agent for a manufacturer of pins," he would have been better off, and his children financially independent.⁹¹ Yet, by selling off the very means by which his heirs could reap the harvest of his literary labors, he rendered his own hopes for his children nearly impossible. James F. Beard is quite correct in arguing that "In his modesty and his eagerness to bargain for a few hundred or a few thousand dollars, Cooper colossally underestimated the value of his literary property and permitted Stringer and Townsend to gain control."⁹² But at least Stringer & Townsend had given him some measure of hope about the value of his old works, unlike Lea & Blanchard. In truth, few publishers had thought over the possibilities thoroughly. In fiction, fashions had long favored new writing, the latest stories. The cheap publishing craze had caused some attention to be paid to older works, as publishers looked to get something—anything—in print at a low cost to meet the demand, but few had conceived of a premium niche for classic American literature. Indeed, the idea that some of the famous works of the previous decades might be considered classic was still a novelty to some.

George Palmer Putnam of New York, did see new possibilities, however. Shortly after ending his partnership with John Wiley in March 1848 and starting his own company (setting up shop a few doors down at 155 Broadway, where James Stringer had once located), he embarked on a long-considered plan to get Washington Irving to publish a new revised edition of his works in a standard form. Putnam was convinced that a market existed for good-quality, handsome but not lavish hardbound editions of American literature, printed on good paper with good type and ink. Unlike the almost ephemeral

"Considering what we have done the past two years in buying out Mr. Burgess and in making other investments prudence would have dictated a refusal of any investment however good it may eventually be."

⁹¹ JFC to Paulding, 9 May 1846: *Letters and Journals* 5:131.

⁹² *Letters and Journals* 6:6.

quality of the paperbacks the earlier part of the decade had ushered in, these would be books suitable for display in a library or home. Irving was a perfect first candidate for Putnam's project because many of his works had gone out of print after he failed to reach a suitable arrangement with Lea & Blanchard in 1842. That risk-averse firm resisted Irving's ideas of reviving his works in a fine form early in 1848, and Putnam, in the right place at the right time, soon won Irving over to his project. The terms of their agreement were noteworthy, and accurate summarized by Putnam biographer Ezra Greenspan:

The contract authorized Putnam to reprint all of Irving's old works, each one revised by the author, for five years in a uniform duodecimo series as well as alternative formats. In addition, Putnam was to have the exclusive right to Irving's new works. In return, Putnam was to assume all production expenses and to pay Irving a 12 ½-percent royalty on the retail price of all books sold; furthermore, he was to insure Irving's interest against failure by guaranteeing him minimal revenues ranging on a sliding scale from \$1,000 the first year to \$2,000 for the last three years.⁹³

These were generally excellent terms for an author. The author needed to make no large upfront investment of capital in stereotype plates, and in turn was bound for a reasonable amount of time to the publisher for his time and investment. The guaranteed minimum revenue was humane and ensured exertion on the part of the publisher, and the royalties, if not the highest in themselves, were certainly fair given the other terms. Although the venture was launched with no certainty of success, Irving and Putnam were soon reaping significant rewards from it, selling an amazing 7000 copies of the *Sketch Book* within four months of its appearance. Pierre Irving, the author's nephew, states that between 1848 and 1857, some 350,000 volumes had been sold, earning Washington Irving about \$80,000, or an average of \$9000 a year.⁹⁴ A grateful Washington Irving would later credit Putnam for the revival: "That these dealings have been profitable is mainly owing to your sagacity and enterprise."⁹⁵

⁹³ Ezra Greenspan, *George Palmer Putnam: Representative American Publisher* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2000) 217.

⁹⁴ Pierre M. Irving, *The Life and Letters of Washington Irving, Volume IV* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1864) 50, 237-38.

⁹⁵ Washington Irving to George Palmer Putnam, 27 December 1852: MS, George Palmer Putnam Collection, Princeton University Library; published in Washington Irving, *The*

It was Putnam's ambition to add a number of other prominent American authors to his list, issuing their works in the handsome uniform fashion of the Irving edition. Cooper was his next choice, seemingly a natural one given Cooper's literary status and his natural pairing with Irving as one of the two "giants" of American literature among the reading public, and in February 1849 he approached Cooper during one of his visits to New York to present his proposals. Cooper by this time in his career, of course, was sufficiently jaded by the well-meaning advice that literati, acquaintances, and readers had freely dispensed about subjects he might turn his pen to next or enterprises (usually of a decidedly unremunerative character) that might enhance his reputation, if not make his fortune. Putnam's proposed terms were enough to stir his interest, but he remained wary, as is evident in his reflections to Mrs. Cooper:

Putnam wishes to try a handsome edition of my works, on the same terms as he publishes the books of Irving. I doubt the success, but he is willing to incur the risk, giving me a pretty fair per centage on the retail price. I may enter into the scheme. I shall do something with the books if I live another year. He also wishes to publish my New York book [the seeds of either his novel *The Ways of the Hour* or his history of New York City, *The Towns of Manhattan*], but I doubt his being able to pay for it. He has not much capital.⁹⁶

In hindsight, it is easy enough to fault Cooper for his skepticism, knowing what an immense windfall the partnership brought Irving, but given the very different professional realities of Cooper's career it is easy to see why he entertained doubts about Putnam's venture and the terms he proposed. To him, being paid a cut of the retail price was better than working on the shares system of dividing profits after costs, since a publisher might tamper with the number of copies printed or designate any number of things as "costs" to diminish the payment to the author, but it was still suspect, demanding scrupulous honesty from the publisher just as dividing profits would.⁹⁷ Letting the publisher make the stereotype plates,

Complete Works of Washington Irving: Letters, Volume IV, 1849-1858, Eds. Ralph M. Aderman, Herbert L. Klienfield, and Jennifer S. Banks (Boston: Twayne, 1982): 344.

⁹⁶ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 27 February 1849: *Letters and Journals* 6:9.

⁹⁷ Only a few months later, Cooper would express anew his objections to dividing profits, something that Bentley had proposed to do for *The Ways of the Hour* in light of poor sales of Cooper's recent novels in England. "One has no guarantee that the stipulated number are

as Putnam was doing for Irving, would further increase the odds of a publisher sneaking off extra printings, and besides, Cooper had grown used to getting them made himself with Fagan, whose keen proofreading he valued immensely.

The capital situation was also a concern. Cooper had also seen his early publisher Charles Wiley (father of Putnam's ex-partner John Wiley) struggle because of a lack of capital, and this was no time in his career to be bailing out sinking publishers. This same lack of capital, perhaps, is why Stringer & Townsend rather than Putnam were seen by Cooper as the strongest potential contenders to buy the remaining rights and plates to his old works he owned. Putnam had certainly approached Cooper with his plans for the new edition well before Cooper negotiated his large sale to Stringer & Townsend; he likely could have attempted to purchase the rights and plates Lea & Blanchard were selling off in 1849 as well, had he possessed the means. Indeed, although Cooper has been faulted by James F. Beard for not entrusting more of his literary properties to Putnam, it is apparent enough that Putnam had not fully considered how he might handle the tremendous logistical challenges of consolidating and overseeing Cooper's large corpus of works, well over thirty in all, with copyrights in various hands and many works still in print.⁹⁸ Those logistical and legal complications crippled the series from the start.

With all these factors to consider, it is hardly surprising that the terms of the contracts Cooper made with Putnam would differ significantly from the model Putnam had established with Irving. A draft of a contract Putnam sent Cooper for review on 3 March 1849, covering his unnamed new work of fiction soon to become *The Ways of the Hour*, is a case in point, showing compromises between Cooper's usual preferences and Putnam's. Cooper, rather than Putnam, would provide stereotype plates, although the letter that accompanies the contract makes plain that Putnam will reimburse for their cost. The plates must be "made from new type, and in a style similar in form & equal in execution to those of the 'Sketch Book' published by said Putnam." Putnam would be granted the right to

not printed," he said, going on to discuss an allegation by British consul Thomas Grattan that Bentley was underreporting his sales by half. JFC to Putnam, 23 July 1849: *Letters and Journals* 6:55-56.

⁹⁸ *Letters and Journals* 6:6.

print from them for two years, in whatever quantities necessary, except that he could not keep more than 500 copies on hand when the term ended. Cooper would publish no other work of fiction elsewhere for four months before and four months after the new work was published, and he would not publish the new work in any other form. The plates would revert to Cooper at the end of the two years. As for payment, Cooper would receive notes totaling \$1000, plus twenty-five cents a copy for each copy beyond the first 4000, with accounts to be examined each February and August.⁹⁹ If these were substantially the terms Cooper and Putnam adopted, they represented small but significant improvements over his probable terms with Stringer & Townsend. Being reimbursed for the plates would allow Cooper to have his \$1000 free and clear, and if the work sold well the royalties were quite generous.

As for the old books, Cooper and Putnam agreed to start with *The Spy* and proceed from there if success warranted it, with *The Pilot*, *The Red Rover*, and *The Water-Witch* being the next projected volumes in the series. They reached a suitable arrangement on 5 March 1849, which Cooper explains adequately in a letter his wife summarizing his recent dealings:

I have also made an arrangement with Stringer & co, that gives me control of my books, the cheap editions they publish excepted, and have agreed with Mr. Putnam, a very respectable though not a very rich publisher, for a fine edition of the *Spy*. He thinks he can sell some 3000 copies. As there never has been a decent edition in the country, I am willing to try. I chose to own the plates, which will cost me near \$400, but which will be good at the end of two years. I am to have '25 a copy or \$750 on 3000 copies. This would give me the plates, and near \$400 of benefit. I do not think there is much risk, and am willing to try. . . . All with whom I converse appear to think a fine edition, well advertised, will sell and that extensively. The sale of Irving's books had altogether stopped, but several thousands will go off, and have indeed gone off, under this new plan. Each tale will sell for a dollar, bound in one vol. and printed on very fine paper.¹⁰⁰

For the new editions of the old books, Cooper was to revise the text and provide new prefaces. Since he had already done so for some of his earlier works for the Bentley "Standard Novels" series, he ordered Fagan to retrieve copies of the relevant corrected

⁹⁹ Memorandum of Agreement for [*The Ways of the Hour*], __ March 1849: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁰⁰ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 6 March 1849: *Letters and Journals* 6:12.

British editions that Isaac Lea kept in his office; “Tell Lea to make me a present of the books, in order to do the thing handsomely,” he whimsically added, caught up in the spirit of the undertaking.¹⁰¹ Cooper would lightly retouch the text and expand the preface of the “Standard Novels” text of *The Spy*, doing likewise for the others. The terms were a matter of ongoing negotiation as the series appeared: a contract of 10 December 1849 set payment to Cooper at \$500, again publishing from his plates, and an undated 1849 note by Cooper, penned on a whim yet very specific as to terms, laid out a complicated proposal for the funding of various stereotype plates for an edition of six sea tales (including, oddly enough, *The Spy*, as well as *Pilot*, *Red Rover*, and three others, probably *Water-Witch*, *Two Admirals*, and *Wing-and-Wing*), with Cooper to receive \$100 copyright money per book and to regain his plates on 1 January 1853.¹⁰²

Whether these terms were adopted is unclear, but it can be seen readily how the series quickly grew complicated for Putnam. The short duration of Putnam’s right to publish, a mere three years with no retention of the plates afterward, must have dampened his enthusiasm as well, since there would be little long-term benefit to his investment. Had he acquired just one of the batches of Cooper copyrights and plates that were up for sale by Cooper and Lea & Blanchard in 1849-50, his position to realize lasting benefits from an edition would have been much greater, especially since he could have prevented what proved to be the greatest discouragement to his edition, competition from Stringer & Townsend’s editions.

Even as Stringer & Townsend had negotiated with Cooper to grant him (and thereby Putnam) control over copyrights for fine editions, they retained their rights to continue publishing their works as they had done from the start, in cheap editions. During the 1840s it was possible to buy copies of Burgess, Stringer & Co.’s or Stringer & Townsend’s cheap editions in two forms: in paper wrappers for fifty cents, or “handsomely bound” for seventy-five. Upon acquiring the rights and plates to Cooper’s works, Stringer & Townsend published their own uniform set, still at the bound price of seventy-five cents per book,

¹⁰¹ JFC to Fagan, 5 March 1849: *Letters and Journals* 6:11.

¹⁰² “Proposal for Sea Tales,” undated letter, JFC to Putnam; in George Haven Putnam, *George Palmer Putnam: A Memoir* (New York: Putnam, 1912): 143-44.

though supposedly on superior paper.¹⁰³ Although their set used the old stereotype plates and followed the older two-volume-in-one format, it was much more complete than Putnam's partial offering, almost immediately available, and cheaper. When Putnam saw that the firm was advertising these sets, even going so far as to emphasize their quality rather than their low price, he appealed to Cooper to alleviate what was obviously a matter of great distress for him:

The new adv't of our friends Stringer & Townsend conveys an impression which is decidedly injurious to the interests of the *revised* ed'ns of "Pilot," "Spy" "Red Rover" &c. The spirit of our arrangement & in fact the words of the agreement implied that no other ed'ns were to be allowed except the *cheap* ed'ns as *then* published --i.e. in *paper* at 50 cts. But when they advertise "*New*" editions on "*Superior Paper*," "2 vols in one at 75 cts" --the public certainly infer that a direct *rivalry* exists between the two ed'ns, & that theirs is *similar* to mine though *much cheaper*. I do not, of course, object to them advertising complete "Sets in cloth at \$24," but I think you will agree with me that the present adv't is not quite right. Mr. Townsend admitted this, on my calling his attention to it, & promised to withdraw it--or rather to alter it-- but now, on second thought, he declines to do it-- & therefore I mention it, hoping you will sustain my view of the case.¹⁰⁴

What Cooper did to mediate the situation, if anything, is unknown, but Putnam obviously realized that if there was to be competition between him and Stringer & Townsend, he was in a contest he could not win. By September 1850, if not sooner, he decided to bring the series to a close once volumes already under contract were published. Accordingly, on 30 September Cooper informed his wife, "I have just made a little bargain for \$150, which will probably be the last money I shall ever receive for my old works. It is for the prefaces to three of the Tales [probably *Wing-and-Wing*, *Two Admirals*, and *Water-Witch*]." ¹⁰⁵ Putnam, at any rate, had already gathered the most marketable of Cooper's tales, so he avoided being

¹⁰³ Inspection of a number of volumes of early Stringer & Townsend collected editions in the American Antiquarian Society collection and elsewhere reveal a great variety in quality of paper, sometimes even within the same work. Unsold remainders apparently made their way into the sets as well.

¹⁰⁴ George Palmer Putnam to JFC, 17 April 1850: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹⁰⁵ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 30 September 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:226.

dragged down by slow sellers. As published between May 1849 and May 1851, Putnam's edition of Cooper's novels consisted of *The Spy*, *The Pilot*, *The Red Rover*, *The Ways of the Hour*, *The Deerslayer*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Pioneers*, *The Prairie*, *The Wing-and-Wing*, *The Two Admirals*, and *The Water-Witch*. One more work, a history of New York called *The Towns of Manhattan*, was uncompleted at the time of Cooper's death on 14 September 1851 (a day before his 62nd birthday). Parts of it were going through the press when a fire ravaged the shop, destroying all but the proof sheets to his introduction and a few other fragments. Although Cooper's daughter Susan Fenimore Cooper resolved to complete it according to her father's plans, it never came to fruition.¹⁰⁶

Whatever disappointments were connected with Putnam's attempt to publish his edition of Cooper's writings, the relationship between the publisher and author was generally cordial and filled with mutual esteem. For his part, Putnam treated Cooper's writing as something worthwhile from an intellectual and artistic standpoint, not just as a commodity of trade. When Cooper submitted *The Ways of the Hour*—essentially a thesis novel designed to expose the easily corruptible nature of the jury system and of human perception, and hence likely to prove limited in its appeal, if not downright controversial—Putnam showed his engagement with Cooper's topic and looked for the marketing angle of a possibly difficult-to-market book:

The "Ways of the Hour" seems to me likely to impress the "thinking" public with the striking picture it exhibits of the loose administration of the courts. The recent trial at Boston was certainly conducted somewhat differently from that in "Dukes County" [the setting of the tale]—but I sh'd think the coincidence & analogy would excite a good deal of interest. I enclose a clip from Commercial Advertiser on the Webster trial, which perhaps you would like to see.¹⁰⁷

Starting from a position of cautiousness, Cooper grew to appreciate Putnam's judgment and ability. He went so far as to seek Putnam's opinion about titles he was considering for his novel—a privilege, no doubt, that his other publishers might have appreciated. He sought

¹⁰⁶ See James F. Beard, "The First History of Greater New York," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 37 (April 1953): 109-45.

¹⁰⁷ George Palmer Putnam to JFC, 4 April 1850: MS, Cooper Collection, American Antiquarian Society.

Putnam's knowledge of the British book trade in a dispute with Bentley over *The Ways of the Hour*, wherein Putnam advised Cooper that no better price than Bentley's was likely to offer and intervened through an agent to restore the connection Cooper had broken so as to spare Cooper the indignity. But nowhere was Putnam's genius so thoroughly praised as when he published *Rural Hours*, a book of meditations on nature by Cooper's daughter Susan, to great success in July 1850. Although Cooper had taken an interest in his daughter's writing and had negotiated a contract for the book in her behalf, he had been unsure of its reception, but upon discovering the book's popularity and acclaim, his correspondence became a litany of rapture, relating the praise esteemed persons gave the book and affirming that his daughter's reputation should quite overshadow his. A good share of his enthusiasm was directed toward Putnam, who knew how to issue the book in proper form, given its refined simplicity and gentle character. Among Putnam's several editions, designed to engage readers at a number of price points, was a fine edition selling at a remarkable seven dollars—an edition Cooper predicted would be "*the presentation volume of the season.*"¹⁰⁸

Although nothing so lavish attended the publication of James Fenimore Cooper's own works with Putnam, the neat appearance of the volumes and Putnam's sagacity in promoting them made them a sort of calling card, a statement that affirmed the gradual reassessment of Cooper that was already quietly underway. Cooper's works had always been popular enough to keep in the public eye, perhaps so much so as to be taken for granted, but Putnam's edition put the stamp of "classic" on them. Aggressively distributing review copies, Putnam made sure that his editions would be given the high profile accorded to new works. Critics had occasion to reflect upon the achievement of Cooper's career and remember the qualities that made him so popular in the first place.

Welcoming *The Spy*, the critic for the Whig *American Review* opens, "This novel has delighted one generation, and will continue to be read by their descendents with equal delight; it has never lost its hold on the public mind."¹⁰⁹ Similar judgments of trans-generational longevity abound. The reviewer for *Graham's Magazine*, hoping for "another term of popularity" for *The Red Rover* in its "cheap and elegant form," recollects the stir the

¹⁰⁸ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 19 September 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:218.

¹⁰⁹ "Critical Notices," *The American Review: A Whig Journal* n.s. 3 (June 1849): 648.

novel's original publication excited: "The rush on the circulating libraries was continued for a couple of months, and even boys were considered behind the age, unless they had read it."¹¹⁰ In a review of *The Pilot*, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, expressing confidence that the work would be valued by young readers, also praises the format of the work as an aid to older readers: "We know of many old gentlemen, too, who have declared their intention of reviving their early impressions of Mr. Cooper by reading over his first and best writings, now that they can do so, without fatiguing the eyesight, in the fair, clear print of Mr. Putnam's library copies."¹¹¹ And Herman Melville, musing how *The Red Rover* might be more appropriately attired in "a flaming suit of red morocco" or a jet-black binding with a red streak or "a square of blood-colored bunting," points out how the work's popularity has rendered any elaborate criticism at present unnecessary. With a bit of condescension, he concludes: "Long ago, and far inland, we read it in our uncritical days, and enjoyed it as much as thousands of the rising generation will, when supplied with such an entertaining volume in such agreeable type."¹¹²

Notably, few critics brought up the qualities in Cooper that were found so disagreeable a decade earlier. The reviewer for *Holden's Dollar Magazine*, apparently a critical predecessor of Mark Twain, discourses at length about how Cooper's characters in *The Deerslayer* "do not talk as they should" and withholds judgment on whether Cooper should be considered a "novelist of high rank," doubting whether *The Deerslayer* will secure itself "a classical niche in the twentieth century."¹¹³ Still, the reviewer says nothing about Cooper's controversial character or works. On the other hand, a reviewer for *The Literary World* brings up quite openly the "fashion of late years to quarrel with Cooper," on account of the "element of combativeness in the great novelist's character, which has been pretty fully developed." The reviewer's intention, however, is not to disparage Cooper, but to defend

¹¹⁰ *Graham's Magazine* 36 (May 1850): 348.

¹¹¹ "Notices of New Works," *Southern Literary Messenger* 15 (December 1849): 763.

¹¹² "A Thought on Book-Binding" [Review of *The Red Rover*], *The Literary World* 6 (16 March 1850): 277.

¹¹³ "Holden's Review," *Holden's Dollar Magazine* 6 (December 1850): 757. The complaints are reminiscent of those Twain makes in "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" (1895).

him. Cooper's misfortune, he claims, was to utter his truths in the present, rather than leaving them to be discovered after his death:

He has indulged in contemporary history, and he has paid the penalty. But if high motives could atone for so grave an offence, he might well hope to be excused. There never was a more thorough-hearted American than he; one who felt more deeply the dignity of Republican citizenship, or who sustained it more worthily.

In light of the beating Cooper's reputation had taken, the reviewer sees the new series as a corrective:

We trust that Mr. Putnam is going to set all this right by bringing out all of Cooper's works together, in that elegant and tasteful style which he understands so well. We shall then see if there is any work, or series of works, in which American character appears so well as a whole, and yet is drawn so fearlessly, and with such masterly skill.¹¹⁴

Even some reviews of *The Ways of the Hour*, the only new novel to appear in the Putnam series, display a respect for Cooper's courage that was missing from the reviews of years past, notwithstanding some continued distaste for many of Cooper's lugubrious social pronouncements. Park Benjamin finds the main faults of the novel in its "tedious story" full of "gross caricatures," but concedes, "Of course, no one will deny Mr. Cooper's right to argue this question [of the merits of the jury system in a democracy] with all the strength of which he is capable. Every liberal man could rejoice in a vigorous statement of his objections to what has been considered an indispensable foundation of popular liberty."¹¹⁵ And *Graham's Magazine* develops the strong-medicine theme more strongly:

Mr. Cooper is a philanthropist of a peculiar kind. He makes an inventory of popular errors and vices, some of them thoroughly inwoven in the affections or manners of the people, and then daringly drives at them with the whole might of his pen. We honor his courage, and sympathize with his hatred of cant, even when we are disposed to doubt his judgment, and to regret his fretful way of presenting his opinions. Opposition seems to have deepened some of his dislikes into antipathies, and a man with antipathies is always unreasonable even in his assaults upon errors and vice. There is one thing, however, for which Mr. Cooper cannot be too highly

¹¹⁴ "The New Edition of Cooper," *The Literary World* 5 (May 1849): 393.

¹¹⁵ [Park Benjamin], "Letters from New York," *Southern Literary Messenger* 16 (May 1850): 318.

praised, and that is, his keen perception of the real faults which, in a democracy, should come under the lash of the moralist and the satirist.¹¹⁶

If these words do not represent outright praise for what is at best a mediocre story artistically, despite its great conceptual merit, they at least acknowledge the validity of many of the prerogatives Cooper had claimed for authors.

If critics could be more relaxed about his notoriety as a social critic, Cooper himself found the subject worthy of greater levity as well. Receiving an invitation from the New York Typographical Society to attend their annual celebration of Benjamin Franklin's birthday on 17 January 1850, Cooper replied with his regrets in a chatty letter intended to be read at the event in his absence. Waxing eloquent about his own long connections with printing, he jokingly points out the even more advanced age of two of his literary peers, pretending to hesitate about retracting his statement in a rambling, seemingly self-effacing interjection:

Man and boy, my connexion with your craft has now lasted quite half a century. Commencing as a caprice, the accidents of life have caused it to become a very serious occupation. Amateur and writer, I have got to be so familiar with types as to regard them as old friends. Mr. Irving and Mr. Paulding, a few years my senior—though I do not know that I should tell this, as one is a bachelor and the other a widower, but my pen is always getting me into scrapes for telling the truth, the quality of all others that must be the most anti-republican, as it is certainly the most unpopular—but Irving and Paulding may have known more [printer's] devils than have fallen to my share. . . .¹¹⁷

Cooper became, in fact, something of a socialite again in 1850, taking extended trips to New York, where he spent time with old friends, attended plays, saw Jenny Lind perform, sat in on a séance of the Fox sisters (known for their famous “knockings”), and gossiped cheerfully in his letters to home. He was pleasantly surprised to find himself the recipient of friendly nods, greetings, and looks of acknowledgement. Upon telegraphing to check if a hotel room was available in New York, complimentary messages poured in from a number

¹¹⁶ *Graham's Magazine* 36 (June 1850): 416-17.

¹¹⁷ JFC to John G. Clayton, Charles McDevitt, and Robert Bonner, 5 January 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:107-08.

of offices, with Utica wiring, "Our compliments to J. F. C., and hope that he is as much pleased with what we write, as we have been with what he has written."¹¹⁸

All this time in New York was supposed to be work-related, and, if it was not always employed in that capacity, Cooper nevertheless pursued new directions as an author, worth a brief mention here. After having novel after novel of his adapted to the stage, Cooper himself tried his pen at writing a play. The result, *Upside Down; or, Philosophy in Petticoats*, was no adaptation of his prior work, but a light satirical comedy on "Fourierism, Socialism, and the lax notions existing among us on the subject of the marriage tie," according to one of the few sources of information about the play, a review in the newspaper *The Albion*.¹¹⁹ Cooper was probably encouraged to try his hand at drama by his acquaintance James Henry Hackett, a well-known actor most famous for his portrayals of Falstaff.¹²⁰ Plunging into the role of dramatist with his characteristic zeal, Cooper could hardly resist putting on a few dramatic airs himself when inviting Hackett to read a draft of the play at his hotel, the Broadway House, where he had been temporarily assigned to an attic room instead of his normal accommodations. Addressing his letter as being from "*Sky Parlor*, Broadway House, May 15th 1850," he penned a chatty little annotation above, reading, "Broadway House, Corner of Park Place, old 'Mechanic's Hall': take a pilot, by all means, and fancy yourself 'Elisha [sic] ascending to Heaven,' and if you can get a little of Job, so much the better -- Well—" ¹²¹ Apparently Hackett liked the play well enough, for Cooper next read it to the well-known actor and producer William Burton, who offered \$500 plus opportunities for royalties. He wished to announce the work with Cooper's name, but Cooper disliked the notion, fearing that it would prejudice audiences, and besides, he told Mrs. Cooper, "I do not like selling my name." Declining the offer for the present, Cooper later accepted a check from Burton, amount uncertain. Burton starred as the main character, Mr. Lovel, a "rich old bachelor of

¹¹⁸ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 21 March 1851: *Letters and Journals* 6:264.

¹¹⁹ [Review of *Upside Down*], *The Albion*, 22 June 1850.

¹²⁰ The American Antiquarian Society preserves two pages of an identified play or dialogue that may represent an earlier or later attempt at a drama. Some of the character names are unusual, such as "Mohair," Gridiron," and "Mystery."

¹²¹ JFC to James Henry Hackett, 15 May 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:172.

66” and another of Cooper's self-portraits. Other *dramatis personae*, as described by Cooper, included Lovel's nephew Francis, “a devotee of the new philosophy”; Dr. McSocial, “an adventurer who sets up for a philosopher”; Sophy McSocial, the doctor's sister; and Emily Warrington, “Old Lovel's ward and engaged to Francis.”¹²²

The play opened on 18 June 1850 at Burton's Chambers Street Theatre. Hackett reported the house “only moderately filled” the first night, but the performance went well enough: “The first act told exceedingly well — the second began well but grew heavy towards the close, & the third act dragged very heavily until the denouement at the conclusion surprised the attentive into *warm applause*, which awoke & carried along with them in *expression*, those who had lapsed into indifference respecting the result.”¹²³ Reading between the lines of Hackett's exquisitely tactful account, it is clear that the play was not a success. *The Albion* pointed to the play's satire being “too exclusive,” the “continued ringing of changes on one subject” proving wearisome; in addition, “The characters, too, are all the time talking, without incident, motives, or action; and the few incidents and situations that do occur, are repeated.”¹²⁴ The play ran for three more nights, then was withdrawn when Burton's receipts fell below \$100. Cooper, who had gone home and missed all performances, perhaps out of nervousness at putting one of his productions to such an immediate test of popularity, received his account of the play's fate from Hackett. Cooper tried to laugh the matter off, but mustered a less dramatic flair than before. “Well, it is something to know how a man feels when he is damned!” he wrote. “I can't say it makes as much difference as I expected, but leaves me in a very *acquiescent* condition. The will of the people must be regarded.” With dark humor he joked, “I take it for granted it was all bad taste in the public, neglect in the players, and anybody's fault but mine.”¹²⁵ Cooper blamed the attaching of his name to the play for the poor attendance, noting the “*concerted plan*” of

¹²² JFC's descriptions of the characters in his letter to James Henry Hackett, 12 April 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:166.

¹²³ James Henry Hackett to JFC, 28 June 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:199.

¹²⁴ [Review of *Upside Down*], *The Albion*, 22 June 1850.

¹²⁵ JFC to James Henry Hackett, 30 June 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:197-98.

the Whigs to ignore him. Hackett had told Cooper that whatever the play's popularity, Burton "did not regret the bargain, which made him yr. acquaintance & notable as a manager 'encouraging *Amer.* dramatic productions.'" Cooper, however, offered a refund: "If you see Mr. Burton, tell him he shall not be left in the lurch. I will take back my comedy, repay him his money, and try my luck elsewhere, at some other time." Nothing indicates that this was done, however, and at any rate, his experiment in drama was not repeated.¹²⁶

Cooper also dashed off an allegorical short story, "The Lake Gun," to be included in a miscellany, *The Parthenon*, published by George W. Wood. Although he undoubtedly would have turned down this sort of writing in the past, he was now less protective of his reputation, and the money was good for the effort involved. A note to Mrs. Cooper tells his earnings and attitude: "I am finishing off the 'Lake Gun' which earns the \$100, that lies untouched in my trunk. I should like to work at this rate, the year round. I believe this miscellaneous writing pays the best, just now."¹²⁷

Another prospect had the potential for much greater returns. On 11 December 1849, H.E. Robins & Co. of Hartford, Connecticut, wrote Cooper to ask whether he would "feel at liberty" to undertake a nautical work of about five hundred pages (roughly the size of his existing novels), to be sold by subscription.¹²⁸ Cooper met with a representative of the firm sometime before 8 February 1850, when he reported that the matter "may lead to something very useful," and negotiations extended for some time.¹²⁹ On 17 February Cooper was sanguine about the prospects, believing he had "a bargain with the Hartford men on the tapis" and thinking it likely he could get a price he had not seen in years: "The Hartford affair, if it come to any thing, and I have just got a rather promising letter on the subject, will give a good, old fashioned price at home, and give me time to look about

¹²⁶ Only one scene from the play is preserved in W.E. Burton, "Socialism. A Scene from a Comedy," *The Cyclopaedia of Wit and Humor* (New York: Appleton, 1858) 1:297-99.

¹²⁷ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 25 November 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:239.

¹²⁸ H.E. Robins & Co. to JFC, 11 December 1849: MS, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

¹²⁹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 8 February 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:128.

me.”¹³⁰ A few days later he reported himself “deep in the Hartford negotiations” but uncertain as to the result. His terms were “\$3000, prompt pay, in addition to some future rights,” an amount that would indeed be “a prodigious accession.” He affirmed that the publishers “do not object to prompt pay, and are prepared for a liberal price,” but did not yet know what they would say to the specific sum.¹³¹ A few days later, however, he learned the probably predictable outcome: the deal had fallen through, supposedly over the amount of the down payment (editions were sometimes undertaken on subscription when upfront capital was lacking, so perhaps this was the case here).¹³² Apologizing to his wife for the disappointment, Cooper explained, “it would have been very useless and unwise for me to have given six months of severe labour with an uncertainty of remuneration.”

Although Cooper vowed to watch for new opportunities or “make them, if they do not offer,” his career had essentially reached its end. His revived idea of undertaking a sixth Leatherstocking tale met with discouragement from Stringer & Townsend, as discussed previously. He signed a contract with Putnam for *The Towns of Manhattan* in November 1850 and completed a number of chapters, but ill health soon closed in, to the point where he had to dictate his compositions. One last piece for Putnam was finished around June or July 1851, an article entitled “American and European Scenery Compared,” for a presentation book Putnam was preparing, *The Home Book of the Picturesque: or American Scenery, Art, and Literature*. He continued to dictate parts of *The Towns of Manhattan* well into August 1851; in one of his last known letters, written entirely in his daughter Charlotte’s hand, he offered Bentley a letter on copyright law even as he was announcing that his daughter Susan would be managing her own literary affairs. For a person who began a career on a whim, to whom “The mere mechanical drudgery of writing was irksome,” he kept to his task with remarkable doggedness.¹³³ His health, however, failed fast as August closed; a beloved nineteen-month-

¹³⁰ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 17 February 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:136.

¹³¹ JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 20 February 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:140.

¹³² JFC to Mrs. Cooper, 23 February 1850: *Letters and Journals* 6:142.

¹³³ Susan Fenimore Cooper, *Pages and Pictures from the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper, with Notes by Susan Fenimore Cooper* (New York: W.A. Townsend, 1861) 18.

old grandson died on 8 September; and James Fenimore Cooper passed away on 14 September 1851, a day before his sixty-second birthday.

Cooper died just as the publishing industry was entering a phase of relative prosperity and realizing the possibilities of a truly national market. The reading public was larger, thanks to population increases (including a swell of immigration) and advances in literacy, and the expansion of railroads nationwide constantly brought new markets into reach, so that larger, and hence more profitable editions could be sold. In December 1850, George Palmer Putnam published what has been labeled the first true “best seller” in America, the novel *The Wide, Wide World*, written by Susan Warner under the pseudonym of “Elizabeth Wetherell.” Within two years the book went through some fourteen editions. Its success was rivaled by that of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852, which sold an amazing 305,000 copies in its first year, despite having already appeared in serial form in the periodical *The National Era*. Stowe’s publisher, John P. Jewett of Boston, also scored a hit with Maria Susanna Cummins’s *The Lamplighter* in 1854, selling 40,000 copies within the first month.¹³⁴ Philadelphia publisher Theophilus B. Peterson struck gold with E.D.E.N. Southworth and Ann S. Stephens. The remarkable popularity of these and other women authors and the domestic fiction that tended to be associated with them would lead the comparatively stagnant Nathaniel Hawthorne (who sold only 10,800 copies of *The Scarlet Letter* in five years) to utter his famous protest about America being “given over to a d----d mob of scribbling women.”¹³⁵ Successes were not limited to women, of course; the still-active Washington Irving, as previously noted, lived to realize tremendous earnings from his association with Putnam.

Cooper’s own works would circulate in numbers that would have been incredible during his lifetime, as Stringer & Townsend issued edition after edition during the 1850s. Their “New Edition” was a thirty-three volume (thirty-four when *The Ways of the Hour* was added in 1855) set consisting of all of Cooper’s novels, plus *Travelling Bachelor* (*Notions of the*

¹³⁴ Tebbel 427-28.

¹³⁵ Charvat, “Melville and the Common Reader,” *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870: The Papers of William Charvat* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1968) 262; Nathaniel Hawthorne to William D. Ticknor, 1855: *The Letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Vol. 17*, Centenary Ed. (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1984) 304.

Americans) and *Ned Myers*. It was uniform in size, printed from their accumulation of Cooper's old stereotype plates and bound two volumes in one, initially maintaining separate pagination and title pages for the two volumes but soon changing to continuous pagination under a single title page. Although Stringer & Townsend already had several of the individual volumes in print in 1849 or earlier, the set itself started to appear in 1850 (to the dismay of George Palmer Putnam), making its reappearance in 1852, 1854, 1855, and 1858; after the breakup of Stringer & Townsend in that year, it continued to appear under the imprint of W.A. Townsend until 1861, J.G. Gregory until the mid-1860s, and Hurd & Houghton well into the 1870s. By that time, the stereotype plates—some as old as the originals for *Last of the Mohicans* in 1826—were quite worn out. Another edition resembling the "New Edition" was the "People's Edition," which appeared in 1857 with new covers so labeled; a new edition of the abridged *History of the Navy*, continued to 1856, was also available with the "People's Edition" covers but apparently not included with all sets.¹³⁶ Stringer & Townsend also issued smaller sets of Cooper's Sea Tales (ten volumes) and Leatherstocking Tales (five volumes) during the 1850s, and also continued to issue cheap volumes in paper wrappers until at least 1852.

By about 1853-54, Putnam's rights to Cooper's works expired and Stringer & Townsend acquired the rights to the works Cooper had published through him, both the revised novels and *The Ways of the Hour*. Stringer & Townsend incorporated these in a new fine edition, the "Choice Edition" of 1856, printed in crown octavo format from new stereotype plates and billed as a "Revised and Corrected Series. With New Notes, Introductions, Etc." The novels Cooper had revised for Putnam sported the new prefaces he had written for them.

The plates for the "Choice Edition" edition (or perhaps duplicates made from the same forms, as was sometimes done) would form the basis of the finest edition of Cooper's works yet issued: the "Darley" edition published by W.A. Townsend in 1859-61. This edition is so nicknamed because it was illustrated with exquisite steel and wood engravings designed by Felix Octavius Carr Darley, widely regarded as the finest illustrator of the day.

¹³⁶ Cooper's daughter, Caroline Martha Phinney, owned the copyright to both versions of the *History of the Navy*.

The edition was published by subscription only, with a volume appearing each month, at the cost of \$1.50 per volume—an excellent value indeed, considering that the still handsome yet comparatively plain Putnam edition sold for \$1.25. A broadside Townsend issued to advertise the edition superbly exhibits the publisher's attention not only to the execution of the edition, but also to the promotion of Cooper's status as a "Great National Author." The broadside promises that "In elegance of execution. . . this edition of Cooper shall excel any publication heretofore issued in this country," with the details of the format elaborated as follows:

This edition will contain all the latest improvements and revisions, and will be printed from the most perfectly formed type, in Crown Octavo, on beautiful cream-tinted calendared paper, manufactured expressly for this edition, and elegantly bound in embossed cloth, with beveled edges, and stamped in gilt upon the side and back, from new and appropriate designs.¹³⁷

The illustrations were promoted as being "engraved in a style of great costliness" by "the most distinguished engravers in the country." Recognizing the power of dollars to denote quality where words fail, Townsend makes certain the cost of the illustrations will not go unnoted:

The entire series of engravings in this edition, all after drawings by DARLEY, will number nearly FIVE HUNDRED, the aggregate cost of which will exceed
TWENTY THOUSAND DOLLARS.

Truly, this seems a touch worthy of the "three-figure handkerchief" in *Autobiography of a Pocket-Handkerchief*.

The national character of Cooper's works is emphasized: the edition will be a "SPLENDID NATIONAL EDITION" as well as a "NATIONAL LITERARY ENTERPRISE, combining the productions of a GREAT NATIONAL AUTHOR with those of a GREAT NATIONAL ARTIST, and issued with commensurate elegance." Cooper is called the "great American Novelist," and in keeping with the elegance of the edition is praised not for the fine finish of his prose, but of his imagination:

To Americans the name of COOPER is endeared as being the creator of a distinctly original class of fiction, so strictly national in its character, and so

¹³⁷ "Splendid Illustrated Edition of Cooper's Novels, Issued in a Style of Unsurpassed Elegance. . . ." [Advertising Broadside] (New York: W. A. Townsend & Co., [1858]: [1].

finished in the vividness of its execution, as to have ranked its author as the proud compeer of the highest names in European literature. 'In all zones of the globe, and by men of every kindred and tongue,' his delightful TALES AND ROMANCES have been read with enthusiastic admiration."

Such words represent well the status of "classics" that Cooper's novels had attained within a decade after his death.

Townsend's broadside also gives attention to the marketing of the edition, offering an interesting proposal "WHEREBY ANY POSTMASTER, TEACHER, CLERGYMAN, AND OTHERS, CAN OBTAIN A SET OF THIS VALUABLE WORK FREE OF COST" by securing five subscribers and remitting the money monthly. The availability of a prospectus, containing samples of the type, paper, and illustrations, to special agents and canvassers is also mentioned. Notably, a biographical sketch of Cooper on the back side of the broadside, reprinted from *Allibone's Critical Dictionary of Authors of Literature*, speaks to the success that Stringer & Townsend had already encountered in the years leading up to this new edition: "The average sale of the novels by Messrs. Stringer & Townsend for the last fourteen years—1845-58—has been fully 50,000 vols. per annum."

The edition was widely hailed on its appearance. The *North American Review*, seldom unguardedly friendly to Cooper in prior days, called it "more than beautiful,—it is magnificent, splendid, worthy of any superlative epithet that may be employed to characterize it," further noting how recent years have "thrown the materials of these tales into a semi-mythical background, and given them the prestige of antiquity, while the genius which alone confers literary immortality could never before have been appreciated as it now is."¹³⁸ The appearance of the edition prompted a lengthy biographical sketch in a subsequent number, and in noticing a new installment of volumes in the series some months later, the *North American* reminded readers of the edition's "unsurpassed beauty in everything that depends on the taste, judgment, and generosity of the publishers," adding that the stories themselves, like wine, "improve with keeping," and grow in interest and in their historical

¹³⁸ [Review of *The Pioneers*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Red Rover*, *The Spy*, and *Wyandotté*], *The North American Review* 89 (July 1859): 279.

value, as the times and events to which they relate fade from the memory of the living.”¹³⁹ The *Atlantic Monthly*, judging the edition “creditable to the publishers” and likely to be remunerative, observed that “his [Cooper’s] works, after years of criticism and competition, still hold their place, on both continents, among the most delightful novels in the language.”¹⁴⁰ The *New Englander and Yale Review* proclaimed that the new edition, “in everything that pertains to the art of typography, is all that admirers of these productions of our greatest American novelist can ask,” being “in every way worthy of his genius and fame.”¹⁴¹

As reviews such as these indicate, the “Darley” edition coincided with and is perhaps indicative of what can probably be considered the high point of Cooper’s reputation in the United States, extending from approximately the middle or end of the 1850s to around 1870. The “Darley” edition, like the Stringer & Townsend “New Edition” that also remained in print, passed into the hands of J. G. Gregory when W. A. Townsend went out of business in mid-1861 (like many publishers during the Civil War), then into the hands of Hurd & Houghton (forerunners of the well-known Houghton Mifflin) in the mid-1860s, enjoying a run until about the end of the decade. In the 1870s, Houghton’s Riverside Press would issue the “Household Edition” of Cooper’s works, which contained no illustrations but did have new introductions to many of the works written by Susan Fenimore Cooper. From there, Cooper’s works, no longer covered by any copyright, would diffuse through the literary marketplace, still appearing now and then in a fine edition (D. Appleton & Co. issued reprints of the “Darley” edition, for instance), but more widely available in cheaper editions. By the end of the century, a half-century after his death, Cooper was available from a host of publishers, his books widely marketed as literature for boys—brought down, no doubt, through the force of the sheer numbers of imitative, lurid dime novels that formulaically distilled the adventure out of Cooper’s once unique forest and sea romances. Even this diminution kept his works before the public, however, and it was not until the 1910s or

¹³⁹ [Review of *The Sea Lions*, *The Monikins*, *Satanstoe*, and *Home as Found*], *The North American Review* 91 (July 1860): 278.

¹⁴⁰ “The Novels of James Fenimore Cooper,” *Atlantic Monthly* 4 (September 1859): 394-95.

¹⁴¹ “Cooper’s Novels,” *New Englander and Yale Review* 19 (October 1861): 952-53.

perhaps the 1920s that complete collected editions of Cooper's works faded from the market.

It seems clear, then, that Cooper's literary prospects and reputation, both during his life and afterward, were closely connected to the physical format his works took. Although Cooper probably could have wished for better returns from the cheap paperback editions of his writings during the 1840s, in the long run his legacy may have benefited from the wider circulation and easier attainability those editions had with the reading public. When the finer editions of George Palmer Putnam, Stringer & Townsend, and W. A. Townsend appeared, Cooper's works had a ready audience eager to bestow upon his writings the treasured status befitting the quality of the books. As for Cooper's vision of professional authorship during this late period of his career, undoubtedly too little has been said, the interests of space and time calling for only a brief overview. That omission is all the more lamentable considering that Cooper's later years are still but little understood, despite the remarkable variety and vitality of the works Cooper produced during his last half-decade. Were the records of Burgess, Stringer & Co. to be found, should they even still exist, it would most certainly provide a wealth of new insights into the business side of Cooper's professional career, but even lacking those, there is ample cause for exploring other aspects of his approach to his vocation, particularly how his increasingly religious views came to bear upon it. It is clear, at any rate, that the last half decade of Cooper's career in the 1840s bore few of the stresses of controversy that the first half of the decade had seen. Outlasting his foes, Cooper also outlasted the many trials he met with in the literary marketplace, finally getting to see the first glimpses of how, in the words of Herman Melville, "a grateful posterity will take the best care of Fenimore Cooper."¹⁴²

¹⁴² Herman Melville to Rufus W. Griswold, for the Cooper Memorial Committee, 20 February 1852: *Memorial of James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: Putnam, 1852): 30.

Epilogue

The detailed examination of Cooper's later period makes abundantly clear that he deserves a place of prominence in studies of the literary marketplace and professional authorship at least as high as those currently bestowed upon Hawthorne and Melville, who have attracted the most attention in this regard. In the second half of his career, Cooper's self-propagated renaissance demonstrated an extraordinary sense of tenaciousness, adaptability and engagement in the literary marketplace that few contemporary authors could match. Such qualities demand a reassessment of the stereotypical views that his late career was chiefly tendentious, egotistical, unsuccessful, or at best uninteresting. He proved himself a steadier professional than nearly all his major rivals, producing regularly and maintaining the ability to sustain himself through book publishing at a time when many writers turned out of necessity rather than choice to magazine writing, or relied on political appointments, patronage, editorial work, or other employment to make a living.

If Melville and Hawthorne attract attention because of their anxieties about the demands of the marketplace and the effects of those demands on literary art, certainly Cooper displays his own complex but different views that merit considerably more attention than they have received. Without attempting to do justice to this complex issue, it will suffice to observe here that Cooper felt less of a dichotomy between those forces than did Hawthorne or Melville, in part because he saw his role as author as a distinctly active public one that called for engagement. If he found himself occasionally fighting the constrictions of the traditional novel format or reluctantly turning away from experiments his publishers distrusted, he acknowledged a certain amount of concession as the price of being read. If his complaints about popular opinion that permeate his writings from the 1830s on create a seeming impression of disdain for the masses, it is nevertheless apparent that his complaints remained so prevalent because he never divested himself of the view that the reading public, not critics, would serve as the truest judges of the merits of his work. For Cooper, the fact that a work was "well received" by interested readers often satisfied him as much as any sales figures. At the same time, Cooper entertained a strong distrust of popular opinion because it was easily corrupted and tyrannical when in that corrupted state. Without a doubt, there is a

degree of nuance here that merits consideration every bit as serious as that given to supposedly more sophisticated writers such as Hawthorne, Melville, and Thoreau.

A second, less obvious and less positive conclusion is that the underpinnings of current knowledge on the publishing history and the literary marketplace remain dangerously thin. Even the best histories on book publishing, such as John Tebbel's *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, base a surprising amount of their information about this period on other secondary rather than primary sources, leading to a body of assumed information that is not always verified or even easily verifiable. The scattered, unpublished state of archival records, where many of the facts and figures about publishing still remain, render attempts to make comparative studies difficult, and relatively few scholarly publications are available to remedy this handicap. What is more troublesome is that many supposed marketplace studies of authors make little use of primary source documents, if only so that authors may simply verify others' conclusions for themselves. Often, as has been the case in this study, inspection of the same facts and documents others have discussed leads to quite different conclusions about the literary history behind them. Undoubtedly, there is ample need for scholarship in the history of the book, especially since such scholarship can prove so useful in evaluating the careers of authors.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in an era where scholarship has so heavily and profitably invested in the concept of the merit of cultural work in reevaluating the popular publications of antebellum women novelists, it now also seems appropriate that such a model move beyond gender and be applied to the most popular of all pre-Civil War American novelists—James Fenimore Cooper.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Cooper Reprints with Carey & Lea; Carey, Lea, & Carey; Carey, Lea, & Blanchard; 1826-1838

Year Reprint Issued	Title of Book and Year of Original Publication												
	Spy (1821)	Pioneers (1823)	Pilot (1824)	Lionel Lincoln (1825)	Last of the Mohicans (1826)	Prairie (1827)	Red Rover (1827-28)	Notions of the Americans (1828)	Wept of Wish-Ton-Wish (1829)	Water-Witch (1831)	Bravo (1831)	Heidenmauer (1832)	Headsman (1833)
1826					2E								
1827	5E	4E	3E	2E	3E								
1828		5E		3E	3E								
1829	6E 7E W	6E W	5E* W	4E W	4E W	X W	2E W		W				
1830													
1831	W	W	W	5E W	4E W	W	2E W		X W	W	W		
1832		X	5E	5E	4E		X	X	X				
1833	7E								X	X	X		
1834					4E					X			
1835		NE	NE		NE†	NE		NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE
1836	NE W	NE W	NE W	NE W	NE W	X, W	NE W	NE W	NE W	NE W	NE W	W	NE, W
1837													
1838	NE W	NE W	W	NE W	NE W	W	W	NE W	NE W	NE W	NE W	W	NE W

Key: 2E, 3E, 4E, etc. = Edition number (Second, Third, Fourth, etc.) stated on title page. X = Reprint, no specific edition indicated. NE = "A new edition." W = Issued as part of multi-volume set, entitled "Cooper's Novels," "Novels and Tales," or similar on spine; uncertain as to specific edition status of each individual work in set. May overlap with other editions noted.

* No stated Fourth Edition of *The Pilot* seems to exist, perhaps suggesting multiple impressions of the Third Edition.

† Spiller and Blackburn incorrectly list the Third Edition, rather than the "New Edition," as being reprinted in 1835, 1836, 1838, 1839, and 1841.

Sources: Spiller, Robert E., and Blackburn, Phillip C., *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Writings of James Fenimore Cooper* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1934); *Bibliography of American Literature*, Vol. 2, comp. Jacob Blanck (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957); *The Cost Book of Carey and Lea, 1825-1838*, ed. David Kaser (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1963); American Antiquarian Society Online Catalog (<http://catalog.mwa.org>); Lyle Henry Wright, *American Fiction: A Contribution toward a Bibliography*, 2nd rev. ed. (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1969).

Notes: 1. In addition to the Carey reprints, Justin Carpenter in New York and P.N. Wood in Baltimore issued several reprints in 1834, including some as a multi-volume "Cooper's Works" set.

2. The American Antiquarian Society catalog also suggests a possible 1833 issue of a "Novels and Tales" set, identical in content to the 1836 set. An 1828 set is also suggested, but its existence seems more speculative.

Appendix B

Orders for the Abridged *History of the Navy*, November 1846-October 1852

Thomas, Cowperthwait & Co., account book, 1846-56. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

Orders:

Date	To	Quantity	Unit Price	Extended Price
1846	Nov 6 myself [prob. Cowp.]	2	\$1.00	\$2.00
	9 H R Gillmore Zanes'lle	10		10.00
	9 E. Ray Norwich Ct	12		12.00
	10 Del. To John G Daws[?]	1		1.00
	10 James P Avery Vicksg	20		20.00
	11 J T Mott[?] Yardesley[?]	98		98.00
	11 H Robinson Globesport Ky[?]	15		15.00
	13 Wm G Latimer Meredosia[?]	75		75.00
	14 H Bill Rochester NY	15		15.00
	17 Gad[?] Smith Nashville	11		11.00
	17 Stephen Allen Norwich Ct	12		12.00
	19 Wm H Sears Carlisle Pa	12		12.00
	19 J R Griffin Hillsborough[?]	50		50.00
	21 W A Browning Clarksville Tenn	8		8.00
	23 O H Histland Alton	50		50.00
	24 C F[?] McCrackan Cum'd	6		6.00
	25 James A Bill Louisiana Mo	75		75.00
	Dec 7 myself	2		2.00
	11 G Smith Nashville	50		50.00
	12 C A Copp[?] Augusta	50		50.00
	14 WH Hall	2		2.00
	15 John G Ransom NO	6		6.00
	22 Avery Bill Jr Eams'g	30		30.00
	22 G Campbell	8		8.00
	22 O H Histland Greenville	20		20.00
	30 Wm H Miner N London Ct	20		20.00
1847	Jan 8 Bowen Ray & Dorrance Syracuse	20		20.00
	11 H M Norsham[?]	2		2.00
	12 M D Dodson Pottsville	24		24.00
	21 R F[?] Martin Phila	3		3.00
	22 S Allen Norwich	10		10.00
	25 W H Sears Chambersburg	11		11.00
	25 J H Clark Gettysburg	3		3.00
	30 C T McCracken Somerset	6		6.00
	30 myself	7		7.00
	Feb 5 AG West Uniontown	1		1.00
	6 H Robinson Evansville	16		16.00

Date	To	Quantity	Unit Price	Extended Price
	6 H Robinson W Point	8		8.00
	10 H Robinson Louisville	20		20.00
	11 J B Avery Vicksburg	35		35.00
	11 Peter B Ross Randolph	20		20.00
	19 Wm M Meredith Harrisburg	1		1.00
	23 H Saunders Edinburgh	25		25.00
Mar	4 Amasa B Cone Sunbury	25		25.00
	5 C W Sprague UnionTown	1		1.00
	12 John R Griffin Henderson	20		20.00
	15 Junius Marrin NY	2		2.00
	20 AR Caulkins Maysville	10		10.00
	17 A B Cone[?] Williams pt	12		12.00
	24 James B Avery Vicksburg	40		40.00
	31 A G West Union Town	25		25.00
Apr	3 Thomas T Hopping NO	25		25.00
	14 W H Sears Gettys	12		12.00
	13 Junius Marrin Lima	50		50.00
May	15 A R Caulkins Maysville	20		20.00
	17 J M Clark Gettysburg	2		2.00
	19 J G Drew [?] N York	1	.50	0.50
	(folded—not bound)			
Jun	1 A B Cone Augusta	2	1.00	2.00
	4 A Bill Jr Covington	10		10.00
	11 H Saunders Edingburg[sic]	15		15.00
	19 James B Avery Buffalo	10		10.00
	28 Wm H Sears Elkton	14		14.00
Aug	3 A M Smith Cuba NY	12		12.00
	6 A Bill Jr LaFayette Ind	4		4.00
	8 J Beckwith Greenport LI	4		4.00
	9 J M Clark Lancaster PA	6		6.00
	12 myself	1		1.00
	13 himself	1		1.00
Sep	1 J A Geer Norwich Ct	1		1.00
	8 J B Avery Buffalo NY	12		12.00
	27 J Beckwith Greenport	6		6.00
Oct	3 Julius Taylor N London	2		2.00
	6 J S Clark Philadelphia	2		2.00
	6 William T Latimer N London	1		1.00
	12 myself	1		1.00
	7 J B Avery 2a Philadelphia	3		3.00
	8 H A Forsythe Va[?]	1		1.00
	15 WA Browning Nashville	15		15.00
	19 myself	1		1.00
	19 HM Northam Providence	3		3.00
	21 J Hock Kutztown Pa	5		5.00
	30 J Lord Philadelphia	4		4.00
	22 Holt Warner & Kay	12		12.00
	4 Beckwith's & Marrin[?]	7		7.00

Date	To	Quantity	Unit Price	Extended Price
1848	Nov	1	J Beckwith Greenport LI	18.00
		6	J Marrin Harrodsburg Ky	25.00
		2	J L Tinker Albany NY	5.00
		2	H Robinson MillsPoint Ky	50.00
		9	Griffin & Co	8.00
		10	Wm H Sears Albion[?] NY	50.00
		10	Wm H Sears Elmira NY	20.00
		17	J Taylor Lyndonview NY	50.00
		17	M Witt Lancaster Ohio	5.00
		18	JA Bill Towanda Pa	18.00
		27	JR Griffin Wilmington	30.00
	Dec	1	WT Holt Selma Ala	18.00
		11	Edward Bill Nashville	25.00
		11	[Wm J Latimer?]	2.00
		20	John R Griffin Goldsborough	50.00
		23	J Beckwith Hampstead LI	24.00
		31	Wm T Holt Selma Ala	75.00
	Jan	6	C L Morley New York	15.00
		18	Gad Smith Knoxville	25.00
		31	Jervis[?] Marvin Greens'e	25.00
	Feb	22	R M Champion	1.00
		22	G Smith Knoxville	20.00
	Mar	27	R S Marner[?] Borne[?] Geo	11.00
	Apr	6	James Hagerian[?] Henderson	5.00
		8	J B Ashcraft Lynchburg	1.00
		15	G[?]R Marrin	2.00
		20	James B Ashcraft Lynch'g	10.00
		20	Levi McElroy Gettysburg	1.00
		21	F A Steubner[?] Richmond Va	1.00
		21	John Beckwith Greenport L.I.	6.00
		24	J.M Clark Mercer Pa	2.00
		25	Robert Cone New York	5.00
		26	sent to Wilmington N. Car'a	35.00
		27	Packer Clark & Burrows N. York	4.00
		28	sent to Petersburg Va	10.00
	May	8	J B Ashcraft Pittsylvania	20.00
		15	A S Clark New York	2.00
		18	RT Martin Nyork	1.00
		25	J R Plank Jr Fulton O	12.00
	Jun	15	Jas B Ashcraft Pittsylvania	10.00
		29	John Beckwith Greenport	6.00
	Jul	7	William H. Miner—New London	2.00
		19	J E Potter Abingdon	3.00
		24	JohnBeckwith Gport	8.00
	Aug	7	Crissey[?] & Markley	3.00
		18	John Beckwith Greenport	4.00
	Sep	4	sent to me at Lyme Ct	10.00
		7	H Robinson Norwich	3.00

Date	To	Quantity	Unit Price	Extended Price
1849	8 J R Ashcraft Fannville[?]	8		8.00
	19 R J Williams	1		1.00
	19 H G Johnson	1		1.00
	22 J S Clark	1		1.00
	30 J E Potter Jonesville	1		1.00
	30 James M Abraham Lewis'g	6		6.00
	30 J M Abraham Lewisburg	11		11.00
	Oct 5 C N & J M Woodward	2		2.00
	9 A G West Unionton	1		1.00
	9 L W Lee Norwich	5		5.00
	12 J W Hubbard Nutbush	1		1.00
	23 Wm Pankey St Louis, Mo	1		1.00
	23 D Lawrence Newbern Va	3		3.00
	24 Parker & Beckwith NY	2		2.00
	27 B W Fields NY	8		8.00
	Nov 10 S P Williams N Hallstead[?]	2		2.00
	17 A B Cone Sandusky	5		5.00
	18 J P Arnold	4		4.00
	Dec 15 J R Griffin Harpers Ferry	3		3.00
	26 EE Markham Sandy Point	5		5.00
	Jan 10 J M Woodward Lin'l[?]	5		5.00
	15 O[D?]B Reeves Portland	1		1.00
	15 S B Stammard Morristown	5		5.00
	23 J R Griffin Charleston	5		5.00
	Feb 15 R T Williams Madison Va	5		5.00
	19 A T Moir Patrick Ct Aba[?]	1		1.00
	20 E E Markham Carters[?] Ct[?]	5		5.00
	24 D Lowman Salem Va	5		5.00
	Mar 10 George Wakeman Religh	6		6.00
	Apr 10 J R Arnold Burlington	24		24.00
	14 J R Griffin Leesburg Va	2		2.00
	Nov 7 E W Hale Ralston Pa	1		1.00
	Dec 7 D Strong Washington DC	2		2.00
1850	4? S D[?] Millet	2		2.00
	28 C W Seleman London Ky	12		12.00
	Jan 30 Miller & Burlock	1		1.00
	Feb 7 Fred'k Fosdick Lynchburg Va	1		1.00
	Mar 1 N Arnold Cheraw[?] S.C	6		6.00
	2 Miller & Burlock	6		6.00
	20 B W Field New Haven	16		16.00
	Apr 1 Nelson Arnold Cheraw [?]	4		4.00
	May 13 E E Markham Richmond	3		3.00
	27 myself Salem NY	1		1.00
	Jun 5 F E Ingham Clarksburg	1		1.00
	15 J W Crary[?] Augusta	2		2.00
	Aug 23 J A Cassidy Parkersbg	1		1.00
	25 A Bill Jr Norwich	2		2.00
	Dec 4 John S Markman Columbia	1		1.00

Date		To	Quantity	Unit Price	Extended Price
1851	Jan	27 J Wall Litchfield Ct	2		2.00
		30 J E Potter Augusta Ga	1		1.00
		10 J S Markman Columbia	1		1.00
	Feb	10 James A Bill Macon	5		1.00
		3 J S Markman Columbia	3		3.00
		18 John E Potter Augusta Ga	1		1.00
		28 O W Hibbe Providence	2		2.00
	Mar	31 A G West Southfield Pa	1		1.00
	May	19 Robt B Gardner Englishtown	2		2.00
	Jun	28 R B Gardner W Fremont[?]	2		2.00
	Aug	12 J & P Meguiar Chattanooga	6		6.00
	Oct	4 John E Potter Westerly RI	1		1.00
		8 R M Champion	2		2.00
		29 J E Potter NY	6		6.00
1852	Nov	18 John E Potter Columbus	8		8.00
	Dec	23 R B Gardner Capville[?]	1		1.00
	Jan	8 E E Markman Pittsburg	5		5.00
		9 C A Tiffany Natchez	20		20.00
		12 R B Gardner Capville[?]	2		2.00
		20 J A Bill Natchez	10		
	Feb	2 Chas A Tiffany Gibson	6		6.00
	Mar	24 J E Potter Savannah	5		5.00
	Sep	25 John E Potter Greensboro Ala	1		1.00
	Oct	28 John E Potter Barbourville	5		5.00

Returns:

Date		To	Quantity	Unit Price	Extended Price
1848	Jun	15 Wm T Holt	58	1.00	58.00
	Jul	29 Jonas Hock	4		4.00
	Aug	24 R T[?] Martin	1		1.00
		24 J Franklin	2		2.00
1849	Jan	30 R D Cones	1		1.00
		30 J R Planks[?]	1		1.00
		18 H M Northam	1		1.00
		6 S T Williams	1		1.00
		15 W H Sears	68		68.00
	Feb	14 J G Ransom	6		6.00
	Apr	11 S R[?] Stannard[?]	2		2.00
	May	21 John Beckwith	2		2.00
		31 R T Williams	1		1.00
		31 J R Griffin	1		1.00
	Jul	8 N S Foster	1		1.00
	Sep	10 R P & A R[?] Caulkins	1		1.00
		30 J Marvin	30		30.00
1850	Oct	22 J Taylor	28		28.00
	Feb	23 D Strong	1		1.00
	Jul	15 E C Palmer	5		5.00

Date		To	Quantity	Unit Price	Extended Price
		30 N Arnold Jr Cheraw[?]	4		4.00
	Aug	14 Wm L Latimer	52		52.00
	Sep	13 W H Brown	7		7.00
		13 W H Brown	13		13.00
	Oct	31 [blank—Poss. Potter]	4		4.00
	Nov	29 [blank—Poss. Potter]	12		12.00
1851	Apr	30 B W Field	2		2.00
		11 James A Bill	5		5.00
	Jun[?]	15 J A Bill	8		8.00
	Aug	25 R B Gardner	2		2.00
1852	Apr	22 C N Woodward	2		2.00
	Jun	30 J & P Meguiar	30		30.00
	Jul	30 P[illegible--Clement?]	3		3.00
	n.d	R B Gardner	1		1.00
	[ca				
	Oct]	Coleman	5		5.00
	Oct	4 C.E.W. Baldwin	4		4.00

Vita

Steven P. Harthorn was born in Holland, Michigan, in 1972. He attended Holland Christian Schools, graduating from Holland Christian High School in June 1990. He entered Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in August 1990, where in May 1994, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and English. He then entered the Master's program in English at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in August 1994, receiving a Master of Arts degree in December 1996. His M.A. thesis was "Kingship in the Poetry of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*." In August 1997 he entered the Ph.D. program in English at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He completed his degree requirements in July 2005, graduating in December. He is an active member of the James Fenimore Cooper Society.

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